Invisible Landscapes:

Landscape, Memory and Time in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*.

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CKXMEG002

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Art in Literature, Language and Modernity.

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2007

Compulsory Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 26 November 2007.

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my incredible husband, Anthony Robin Cawood, for his support, keen observations, love and laughter during the writing process of this thesis. Thank you to my family for their prayers and continual encouragements to 'persevere'. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Carrol Clarkson, for her patience, encouragement and constructive criticism. I am indebted to her willingness to read final drafts in limited time. Finally, I would like to thank my 'editors': Jo-ann Cook and Iain Cook, who were on call until the final minute and who may have strained their eyes on my behalf.

Abstract:

The eponymous protagonist of *Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald's final prose novel, is haunted by landscapes of loss. Both Austerlitz and the narrator are acutely aware of the signs of destruction and of the invisible histories of loss in the landscapes through which they travel. Through the gaze of both these characters Sebald exposes the haunted wasteland of post-war Europe and describes the sites of many of the atrocities of the Holocaust. While much has been written about Sebald's use of landscape and his emphasis on memory, there is very little research to date that has taken a phenomenological approach to Sebald's texts. There are specific affinities, for example, between the musings of the protagonist and the narrator of Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception. This dissertation explores the implications of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology as an approach to Sebald's *Austerlitz*, by showing that while phenomenology provides a valuable conceptual framework through which to engage the novel, there are aspects of this phenomenological approach which Sebald's work, in its narrative form, is able to extend beyond the boundaries of philosophical discourse. The central argument is that Austerlitz's perception of architectural sites is inextricably linked to aspects of memory and narrative. This dissertation first explores the thematic concerns of the outworking of traumatic memory in the spaces of architecture, in the subjective experience of time, and in the act of perception; after which it examines how Sebald's narrative technique creates a text-scape which implicates its reader's gaze.

Introduction

". . . and Věra said that every time we reached the page which described the snow falling through the branches of the trees, soon to shroud the entire forest floor, I would look up at her and ask: But if it's all white, how do the squirrels know where they've buried their hoard? . . . Those were your very words, the question which constantly troubled you. How indeed do the squirrels know, what do we know ourselves, how do we remember, and what is it we find in the end?"
(Sebald 287)

At the outset of their second conversation, which takes place on the banks of the river Schelde in Antwerp, Austerlitz describes to the narrator a scene of a painting by Lucas van Valckenborch in which the people of Antwerp are skating on the frozen Schelde. Austerlitz is haunted by a tiny scene in the corner of the painting in which a woman has fallen on the ice:

> Looking at the river now, thinking of that painting and its tiny figures, said Austerlitz, I feel as if the moment depicted by Lucas van Valckenborch had never come to an end, as if the canary-yellow lady had only just fallen over or swooned, as if the black velvet hood had only this moment dropped away from her head, *as if the little accident, which no doubt goes unnoticed by most of its viewers, were always happening over and over again, and nothing and no one could ever remedy it*. (emphasis mine, Sebald 16)

Austerlitz's unusual awareness of this misfortune on the margin of the painting reveals the sensitivity towards trauma and suffering which shapes his perceptual experience. He acknowledges that his gaze activates what, as he says, 'no doubt goes unnoticed by most' and yet is, for some reason, of great importance for him – even haunting his present view of the Schelde. This excerpt, therefore, in its focus on both

the personal experience of perception and the arresting of the time of a traumatic event, encapsulates the preoccupations of this dissertation.

While much has been written about Sebald's use of landscape and his emphasis on memory, there is very little research to date that has considered the importance of a phenomenological approach to Sebald's texts. Those who focus on Sebald's concern with memory and narratives of trauma primarily rely on Freudian and post-Freudian discourse in their critical engagements[1]. Other critics who explore Sebald's unique use of the visual and the verbal, specifically his use of photographs throughout his oeuvre, focus on readings orientated towards visual cultural studies and metaphysical representations[2]. Martin Swales' work on Sebald, however, does note the importance of phenomenology in German novelistic discourse. Long and Whitehead refer to Swales' work: "Swales points out that German writers of the nineteenth century tended to read the phenomenological world as a cipher through which intimations of the metaphysical reveal themselves to the attentive observer" ("Introduction" 10). While there are elements of this German genre within Sebald's work, I would like to argue that Sebald's depictions of the phenomenological world are personal and historical rather than metaphysical.

Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of critical engagement with regard to the relationship between architecture and memory in Sebald's prose – specifically in *Austerlitz*. Russell J.A. Kilbourn has written an interesting paper on the representation of memory in the visual spaces of both architecture and cinema in *Austerlitz*; however, his approach relies on Augustinian and other pre-modern readings of architectural spaces, as well as poststructuralist and Freudian discourse. Kilbourn

[1] For Freudian and post-Freudian analyses of memory and trauma in Sebald's work, see Duttlinger and Zilcosky.
[2] For discussions on the landscape as representation, see Beck, Bond, and Ward; for visual and cultural studies, see Kilbourn.

briefly mentions what he terms Austerlitz's "phenomenology of time," yet his focus is not on phenomenology, but on the spatio-visual representation of the technological aspects of the novel (photography and more importantly, cinema).

This dissertation explores the implications of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology as an approach to Sebald's *Austerlitz*, by showing that while phenomenology provides a valuable conceptual framework through which to engage the novel, there are aspects of this phenomenological approach which Sebald's work, in its narrative form, is able to extend beyond the boundaries of philosophical discourse. The central argument of this dissertation is that Austerlitz's perception of architectural sites is inextricably linked to aspects of memory and narrative. Therefore, I wish to explore how Austerlitz engages with the ghostly reminders of his past which are hidden from him in the landscape. Austerlitz is haunted by a past he cannot remember – it is invisible and yet it dominates all of his experiences. He spends his life following inexplicable promptings without being able to understand them. It is only much later in his life, when he begins to discover concrete traces of his forgotten (and now destroyed) past, that his repressed memories are restored and he is able to read the significance in the signs he had been following his entire life.

In my phenomenological approach I rely primarily on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty as it creates a helpful framework through which to speak about Austerlitz's troubled experiences of space and time. As an existential phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is premised on the importance of the body of the subject as the vehicle through which the act of perception occurs. What I would like to propose is that Austerlitz carries in his body the very traumatic memories which he has attempted to repress. Therefore it is Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relationship between time and trauma and his discussion of the

visible and the invisible in the act of perception which help us to understand the haunting that Austerlitz experiences. Because Austerlitz's body carries within it memories and significances which are incomprehensible to him, his experiences of time and perception have a disconcerting effect upon him. He is bombarded by visible signs which are activated by his body and yet their invisible significance, as a result of the suppression of his memories, seems inaccessible. This disaggregation between the visible and the invisible leaves Austerlitz feeling troubled in all his engagements with the landscapes which surround him. He suffers mental and emotional breakdowns and yet he cannot avoid these haunting experiences.

There are certain frameworks which Sebald himself sets up in the novel. These are presented to us through the private musings of the narrator and the seemingly impersonal, yet poignantly intimate, conversations between Austerlitz and the narrator. Austerlitz speaks in depth about the architectural history of sites and the nature of time; the narrator explores the relations between darkness and perception. It appears that Sebald creates such topics to introduce his readers to the character of Austerlitz, as all these subjects shape Austerlitz's experiences of landscape and memory. What we, as readers, discover is that from the start these conversations have been shaped by personal narrative.

This dissertation comprises four chapters: three thematic and one formal. The first three consider a phenomenological approach to thematic aspects of the novel: the outworking of traumatic memory in the spaces of architecture, in the subjective experience of time and in the act of perception. The final chapter acts as a coda which reveals the correlation between the thematic and formal characteristics of the novel: it examines how Sebald's narrative technique creates a text-scape which implicates its reader's gaze.

In the first chapter, I explore how theories of the relationship between architecture and memory provide a framework through which to discuss how Austerlitz's study of architecture performs the function of remembering: both the past lives of others and the way in which these are connected with his own past. I discuss how architecture works as both a space for memory, and as a signifier of the forgotten. It is therefore through Austerlitz's discussions of architectural history that he subconsciously reveals the buried pasts with which his own narrative is entwined.

Through Austerlitz's discussions of the nature of time, we begin to understand that his experience of memory is deeply affected by a split sense of traumatic time. In the second chapter I discuss how Austerlitz's phenomenology of time resonates with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Merleau-Ponty explores the ways in which the subjective experience of time is affected by trauma. He argues that traumatic events result in the subject experiencing a double-time in which the past becomes imposed on each new present. This is Austerlitz's experience of time, although the past which he continually experiences is hidden from him.

In the third chapter I move from a discussion on time to explore the themes of the gaze and visual perception. Here Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the relationship between the visible and the invisible in any act of perception is instrumental in my investigation of Austerlitz's disturbing experiences of perception. As a result of the trauma of his past, Austerlitz is doubly haunted by both the repressed memory of his childhood and the dead past of the life which he should have lived in Prague. He is acutely aware that there is an invisible world surrounding him which he experiences the effects of and yet is unable to uncover. He often describes this as feeling that a shadow is following him, or something invisible is brushing him. Austerlitz's gaze activates a landscape which is pregnant with invisible significance. Everything he

sees points silently towards his destroyed and buried past, and the irony of the situation is that Austerlitz is unable to *see* the significance in his landscapes. Austerlitz looks to history to learn about the invisible past of each site to which he feels drawn. He becomes an expert in reading the landscape, and yet he is unable to understand the personal significance in his perceptions. Therefore all his readings leave Austerlitz feeling that something is still hidden from his gaze. It is only when the 'self-censorship' of his mind begins to lift and he discovers the traces of his forgotten past and impossible future, that he is finally able to read his personal meaning in the landscape.

It is through this journey of repression and discovery that Austerlitz and those who read his narrative begin to understand the importance of engaging with and reading landscapes. In my concluding chapter I look at the ways in which Sebald's narrative technique creates a reading of a text which is rich with landscape and objects through which we, as readers, may engage with our own invisible significances. Sebald chooses to give his reader the fragments: objects, landscapes, histories, animals, photographs and diagrams, rather than an explanatory story or linear narrative. Sebald's narrative technique is similar to his story of Austerlitz: we are presented with the fragments and coerced into viewing them through our own significances and memories. I would like to argue that the novel itself is a landscape of fragments waiting to be perceived and lived through the bodies of its readers. As Martin Swales puts it: "[Sebald] gives us the circumstances: the sayable things that surround the centre of pain, the material traces of the psychological condition of blight, deprivation and hurt . . . He gives us the rings caused by destruction and deprivation, rather than the haemorraging centre" ("Intertext" 86).

Sebald's text-scape of fragments avoids a single interpretation. This brings me to the epigraph, where Austerlitz, prior to the traumatic separation from his parents, is haunted by questions of epistemology and memory. As a young boy, Austerlitz is troubled by the way in which, at the onset of winter, the falling snow covers all topographical markers, leaving a blank landscape in which the squirrels, which he loves to watch, must somehow find their hidden stores of food. When the adult Austerlitz is reunited with his childhood nanny, Věra Ryšanová, she reminds him of his fascination with the squirrels and the picture book of the changing seasons which he repeatedly asked for:

> Věra said that every time we reached the page which described the snow falling through the branches of the trees, soon to shroud the entire forest floor, I would look up at her and ask: But if it's all white, how do the squirrels know where they've buried their hoard? . . . Those were your very words, the question which constantly troubled you. How indeed do the squirrels know, what do we know ourselves, how do we remember, and what is it we find in the end? (Sebald 287)

This preoccupation with how we know and remember haunts Austerlitz's entire life: first through his studies of architectural history, and later in his quest to uncover both his own forgotten past and those of his parents. However, just as Austerlitz is never able ultimately to know the story of his life in a linear and concrete progression, so those who read Sebald's work are continually prompted to re-work their own memories as they are activated in the landscape of the text.

Chapter One:

Architecture and Memory

"Austerlitz spoke at length about the marks of pain which, as he said he well knew, trace countless fine lines through history. In his studies of railway architecture . . . he could never quite shake off thoughts of the agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places, although such ideas were not part of architectural history proper. Yet, he said, it is often out mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity."

(Sebald 16-17)

On first meeting Jacques Austerlitz, the narrator is impressed by the way in which Austerlitz's study of architectural history is intertwined with that of memory: "From the first I was astonished by the way Austerlitz put his ideas together as he talked . . . and the way in which, in his mind, the passing on of his knowledge seemed to become a gradual approach to a kind of historical metaphysic, bringing remembered events back to life" (Sebald 14). Austerlitz's life is dedicated to the study of the architectural history of the capitalist era. However, in his study of architecture, Austerlitz focuses on revealing the layers of history and human emotion that accumulate on a site over time. What we find, through the course of Austerlitz's and the narrator's seemingly impersonal conversations, is that Austerlitz's obsession with the spaces of architecture is ultimately an obsession with memory, specifically his own memories. While Austerlitz's studies manifest his desire to remember, for the majority of his life, his urge to remember is directed into remembering histories which seem disconnected from his own.

What I wish to discuss in this chapter is the link between architecture and memory and the way in which Austerlitz's study of architectural history is driven by his subconscious desire to remember his own past. For Austerlitz, architecture acts as

a mnemonic space, a compensatory memory, and as a means through which he is able to speak about loss – initially the loss of others, which, in turn, is revealed to be the story of his own past. I rely on the works of Sébastien Marot and Frances Yates to inform my theoretical approach to architecture and memory; and, in dialogue with Russell J.A. Kilbourn's paper on architecture in *Austerlitz*, I discuss the ways in which architecture acts as both a signifier of Austerlitz's personal memories and a space in which his suppressed memories eventually surface.

A Mnemonic Space

In his book, *Sub-urbanism and the Art of Memory*, Sébastien Marot argues that the practice of memory has long been linked with the concept of architecture. Marot refers to the work of memory theorist Frances Yates who traces the practice of memory back to its Grecian origins. Greek orators used imagined architectural structures to aid them in remembering their speeches. Yates writes: "Few people know that the Greeks, who invented many arts, invented an art of memory . . . this art seeks to memorize through the technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory" (Yates, "Art" xi). Taking this historical approach to memory as his cue, Marot seeks to show how place and memory are, more often than not, intertwined; and, from this premise, he continues to explain how architecture, as a way of investing meaning into a place, works as a site for the practice of memory.

Marot proposes that this connection between architecture and memory can be extended to show that architecture's significance is primarily invisible: it acts as a catalyst for memory[3]. He refers to a lecture given by Yates: "Yates herself addressed

[3] In his discussions of the act of perception, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between the visible and the invisible, arguing that the invisible is the underlying meaning/significance with which the perceiver resonates in the visible. While I discuss this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in more depth in chapter three, here, the significance of the invisible is interchangeable with memory. Merleau-Ponty

the possible relevance of her research to contemporary architects: 'So I leave you with the thought that buildings may be less solid than they seem existing invisibly in the mind of the architect before they are born; remembered invisibly down the ages in the memories of the generations'[4]" (Marot 11). Thus, according to Yates, the importance of architecture extends beyond its structural components to the minds of those who conceive, perceive and remember it. In this way architecture forms a kind of language which is first in the mind of the person and then in the building as a signifier which is read by others who, in turn, carry the image of its 'name' in their minds[5].

As architecture works as a space for memory, Kilbourn argues that it is as Austerlitz "moves through the uncanny spaces of memory" (153), that his own suppressed memories inevitably surface. Like Marot, Kilbourn uses the work of Yates to trace the link between architecture and memory, focusing particularly on the way in which Greek orators *imagined* architectural spaces to aid them in remembering their speeches (144). Kilbourn therefore argues that:

> Austerlitz's experience is predicated on the transformation of concrete built space, through narrative description, into the exteriorised space in which memory operates. This transformation temporarily effaces the gap between Austerlitz's past and present, as he is suddenly granted

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would argue that it is because the visible components of architectural structures have the capacity to carry invisible significance, that they therefore work as a space in which memories are triggered.

[4] This quote from Yates appears in a footnote in Marot's work. The reference is taken from Yates, Frances. "Architecture and the Art of Memory." *AA Quarterly*. 12.4. (1980)

[5] In her paper, "The Remains of the Name," Carrol Clarkson proposes that "to name a landscape is to mark sites of human significance on indifferent ground" (17). Clarkson argues that the landscape is 'indifferent' and therefore any names it is given are a result of the significance that the namer invests in it. Clarkson's argument opens a conversation about naming which is useful to this paper. If naming a site is investing human presence into that site, then I would like to propose that architecture performs a similar function as a signifier: architecture is a way of naming, or marking human significance upon the landscape. Where Clarkson proposes that names carry traces of human history and significance, I would like to offer that architecture acts in a similar way. Architecture often attests to the human presence which had, at one time, been significantly part of the landscape.

> entry to a space whose historical existence he had long since ceased to be aware . . . for Austerlitz . . . architecture becomes the *literal mnemonic* space, the operation of which is recounted in a narrative whose meaning cannot be divorced from its textual status. (144)

Architecture, therefore, with its undeniable connection to that of memory, aids Austerlitz in his quest to remember. For most of his life, Austerlitz cannot explain his fascination with architecture; it is only occasionally, in moments of clarity, that he is able to see that his studies hold significant personal meaning.

The mysterious importance of the architecture which Austerlitz studies is hinted at through his belief that large buildings suggest their own ruin. Although Austerlitz has avoided all knowledge of the history of the twentieth century, and that of Germany in particular, the very buildings that he studies point towards destruction: both their own ruination and the destruction of the society that built them. Austerlitz explains the sense of dread which he feels before such large buildings: "At the most we gaze at [them] in wonder, a kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror, for somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins" (Sebald 23-24). Kilbourn writes that "such imposing architectural edifices serve the ironic function of abetting rather than dispelling Austerlitz's repression of this specific aspect of Europe's recent past" (147). Therefore, although Austerlitz subconsciously restricts his historical studies to the nineteenth century, in his encounters with these seemingly terrifying buildings, he is faced with their narratives of the historical devastation he seeks to avoid; however, he is only able to see this in retrospect: "in fact the whole history of the architecture and civilization of the bourgeois age, the subject of my research, pointed in the direction

of the catastrophic events already casting their shadows before them at the time" (Sebald 197). The tangible space of these outsized structures creates a mnemonic space in which Austerlitz, against his control, begins to read, and therefore remember, the very history he subconsciously avoids.

A Compensatory Memory

Marot argues that architecture serves as a supporting kind of memory: "the memory of places . . . serves as a framework and a support medium. It is a memory that 'helps another memory'" (12). Marot observes that the past of a site or place is determined by the past that it has in the minds of those who remember it. He writes:

> The idea that there may exist, between the past of the city and the past of the mind, not only a relationship of formal analogy but almost a form of consubstantiality. This holds particularly as one enlarges the concept of the city to the entire set of its representations (toponymic, oral, written, painted, filmic), through which a good deal of its past lives on, continuing to affect our perception of urban reality. (28)

Thus, it seems that the image of a building or site which is invisible, but present in the mind of those remembering it, is more significant than the architecture itself; it is what the architecture names or signifies that is important.

Austerlitz's study of architectural history becomes what he later explains as a "substitute or compensatory memory" (Sebald 198). Although he finds himself driven to the exploration of architectural history by a force which he feels compelled to obey, Austerlitz is unable to justify these urges. However, the fact that his studies have grown from what he originally thought was merely a student's fascination to a

life-long project, betrays the all-consuming way in which the study of architecture has infiltrated his life:

> His investigations . . . had long outstripped their original purpose as a project for a dissertation, proliferating in his hands into endless preliminary sketches for a study, based entirely on his own views, of the family likeness between all these buildings. Why he had embarked on such a wide field, said Austerlitz, he did not know . . . But then again, it was also true that he was still obeying an impulse which he himself, to this day, did not really understand, but which was somehow linked to his early fascination with the idea of a network such as that of the entire railway system. (44-45)

Austerlitz's only explanation for his attraction to the study of architecture is therefore based on his belief that architecture points towards something greater than itself: a complex system in which everything forms part of an overall design.

This notion of a greater network is connected with the currents of human emotion, and especially the traces of suffering, that Austerlitz uncovers in his study of architectural history. He instinctively understands that all his inexplicable promptings and desires, the buildings he studies and the ruins they become, are somehow part of the study of architecture – a study which, as we saw, he feels has grown beyond his control. This brings me to the epigraph, where Austerlitz explains that his study of architectural history – his involvement in this network – itself is like an outsized building, which carries a sense of impending disaster:

> Austerlitz spoke at length about the marks of pain which, as he said he well knew, trace countless fine lines through history. In his studies of railway architecture . . . he could never quite shake off thoughts of the

> agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places, although such ideas were not part of architectural history proper. Yet, he said, it is often our mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity. (16-17)

As a compensatory memory, Austerlitz's study of architectural history is similar to that of an outsized building, which ironically reveals its insecurity in its very magnitude.

There are two other passages where Austerlitz alludes to this greater design of a network: both of which are based on natural patterning. He describes the plans of Liverpool Street and Broad Street stations as resembling the somatic system[6] of "muscles and sinews in an anatomical atlas" (186); and, later in the novel, when he returns to the Seminar Garden in Prague, Austerlitz perceives a correlation between the invisible pain which he senses in the city and the natural organization of the roots of a tree. His description echoes the epigraph:

> I sat on a bench . . . looking out over the buildings of the Lesser Quarter and the River Vltava at the panorama of the city, which seemed to be veined with the curving cracks and rifts of past time, like the varnish on a painting. A little later, said Austerlitz, I discovered another such pattern created by no discernable law in the entwined roots of a chestnut tree clinging to a steep slope through which Věra had told me, said Austerlitz, I liked to climb as a child. (230-231)

The layers of history which he uncovers in each site, and the eventual ruination of the buildings he studies, speak of his invisible resonance with all that is melancholy and

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[6] This reminds me of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh, which, he explains, acts as the vehicle through which the body and the world perceive and understand each other. The flesh is, for Merleau-Ponty, the implication of the perceiver in the perception of the world (*Visible* 140-142).

ultimately point towards the greatest pain of the history of the Holocaust – a history which he refuses to acknowledge, and yet which is undeniably his own.

What we come to understand, through the course of the novel, is that Austerlitz's study of architectural history acts as compensatory memory which temporarily fulfils his desire to remember. Rather than remembering his own past – which, as I will later discuss, seems to be a complex problem of his wilful disremembering and the inability to remember – Austerlitz devotes his life to remembering the past lives of others. However, this study of the lives of others is carefully constrained to a certain time period, and avoids all acknowledgement of both the history and landscape of Germany. When Austerlitz explores the past significance of a site or an architectural structure, he subconsciously restricts his investigations to pre-twentieth century history. It is as if he, unbeknownst to himself, has created strategic gaps in his knowledge: both of the history of the Holocaust and the geography of Germany, which he later describes as "blank spaces in my otherwise well-developed sense of topography" (278). Austerlitz's mind is therefore enacting, unbeknownst to himself, a process of disremembering, or, put another way by J.M. Coetzee[7]: "Landscape hides its historical past from the eye; similarly, *the mind protects its equanimity by forgetting* or repressing what it does not wish to remember" (emphasis mine 84). Thus, through his study of architecture, Austerlitz subconsciously seeks to fulfil his desires to remember, by remembering the histories of others and repressing his own. He is aware that there is an invisible significance in

[7] These words of Coetzee's refer to the work of South African artist William Kentridge. Kentridge's work offers an interesting artistic representation of the relationship between landscape and memory through his focus of revealing the layering of history and significance in sites. Staci Boris comments that for Kentridge, the landscape takes on the "role as a reservoir of memory and history—personal, political and collective"(31). Kentridge's work renders time visible through naming the layers of the past in the space of the work of art: the art names the invisible layers through revealing them simultaneously. There are interesting connections between Kentridge's work and the work of architecture Georges Descombes (whom I discuss in this chapter). Both artist and architect seek to reveal layers of time in a single space, a practice which reflects Austerlitz's experience of time, as I discuss it in chapter three.

architecture and that, through studying history, he is able to reveal this implicit meaning, and yet the history of his own loss (his separation from his parents and their subsequent deaths) remains hidden.

Architecture Speaks of Loss

Marot looks to the work of architect Georges Descombes to illustrate the signifying aspect of architecture. Descombes' work focuses on the loss of the landscape and seeks to speak of that loss through structural design. Descombes' architectural projects, therefore, are a way of architecturally 'naming' what has been lost. Marot explains:

> Descombes' landscape evokes the sense of loss and disappearance most powerfully through a topographic sensibility. The surface of the land, inscribed with the history of its alteration, becomes the map and the historical record of this place . . . Descombes describes it as 'sedimentary accumulation of traces.' The aesthetic of revealing – 'revealing imperceptible forces', as Descombes put it, sustains a tension between what is and what was, between what is present and what has been lost. (Marot 74).

Thus, architecture acts to name what is invisible: to reveal what has been lost or what is hidden.

Descombes uses architecture to speak about (or name) the past of the site while altering that site with its present naming. This is because his architectural projects are designed to replace what was once present while still naming what has been lost. Marot proposes that Descombes' projects do so through their emphasis on the layers of a site; he refers to one of Descombes' designs (a park) which "succeeds

in locating beneath this single, univocal layer of the present other planes – other levels of memory and culture that, by stimulating the visitor to conceive and link different, ambivalent readings of that place, restore it to a certain depth and breadth" (Marot 85). Descombes designs the park to cause its visitors to conceive of the different levels of the history of the site and link them in their minds – therefore revealing the layers of time in one site through one architectural project.

In a way similar to Descombes' architectural work, Austerlitz, through his study of architectural history, seeks to reveal the layers of historical significance which have been lost in a site or buried beneath a building. The narrator describes this as Austerlitz's historical metaphysic: "bringing remembered events back to life" (Sebald 14). Austerlitz's study of architecture is therefore not so much about the structures of buildings per se, but about their historical significance and the memories that form a part of that significance.

In his descriptions of the structural designs and sites of Liverpool Street and Broad Street stations, Austerlitz speaks of the layers of history which have inscribed an accumulation of invisible memory on the site. He tells the narrator about the different inhabitants and buildings which had been on the site of the station over the years: the marshes, which were replaced by the park, and later by the priory of St Mary of Bethlehem and Bedlam, the asylum; the slum area which was built on the graveyards and bleachfields and the forced removal of the slum inhabitants before the station was built (182-186). In describing these sites, therefore, Austerlitz focuses on remembering what has been lost, rather than the present architectural structures:

> The little river Wellbrook, the ditches and ponds, the crakes and snipe and herons, the elms and mulberry trees, Paul Pindar's deer park, the inmates of Bedlam and the starving paupers of Angel Alley, Peter

> Street, Sweet Apple Court and Swan Yard had all gone, and gone now too are the millions and millions of people who passed through Broadgate and Liverpool Street stations day in, day out, for an entire century. (186- 188)

In speaking about the histories of these stations, Austerlitz uncovers the human presence which has been an integral part of the site throughout the centuries. This human history is more important to Austerlitz than the structures of the stations themselves; and therefore, through placing an emphasis on what has been lost in the site, Austerlitz brings to life the invisible past of the stations.

Similarly, once Austerlitz has faced the history of the twentieth century and the destruction of the Holocaust, he describes how the grotesque new library in Paris has concealed the layers of the past which the present society would rather forget. Austerlitz is both disturbed and repulsed by the structure of the library, itself a large building like many which he has studied:

> the hideous, outsize building, the monumental dimensions of which were evidently inspired by the late President's wish to perpetuate his memory whilst, perhaps because it had to serve this purpose, it was so conceived that it is, as I realized on my first visit, said Austerlitz, both in its outer appearance and inner constitution unwelcoming if not inimical to human beings, and runs counter, on principle, one might say, to the requirements of any true reader. (386)

Austerlitz experiences a heightened sense of concealment in the library, whose systems, "consist[ing] entirely of obstructions" (393), seem purposed to deter all quest for knowledge. It is only once Austerlitz knows what the library's seemingly impenetrable structure conceals, that he is able to understand the nature of its

obstructive system. One of the librarians, Henri Lemoine, takes Austerlitz up to the eighteenth floor of one of the library's towers and from this vantage point, describes some of the history of the site:

> Sometimes, so Lemoine told me, said Austerlitz, he felt the current of time streaming round his temples and brow when he was up here, but perhaps, he added, that is only a reflex of the awareness formed in my mind over the years of the various layers which have been superimposed on each other to form the carapace of the city. Thus, on the waste land between the marshalling yard of the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Pont Tolbiac where this Babylonian library now rises, there stood until the end of the war an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews in Paris . . . (400-401)

Lemoine explains how all the personal belongings of the Jews interned at Drancy were categorized and organized by the Germans at the Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot and the majority of the plunder was sent off to "the ruined cities of the Reich" (403). Lemoine feels as if the building of the library upon this site was possibly an attempt to cover the memory of the storage depot. Yet, as he tells Austerlitz, his memories of the place will always affect his reading of the significance which he associates with the obscenely grotesque library: "for the fact is that the whole affair is buried in the most literal sense beneath the foundations of our pharaonic President's Grande Bibliothèque . . ."(403).

Interestingly, the site of the library holds layers of both collective and personal significance for Austerlitz, the most obvious of which is the name of the warehouses which once stood on the site: the Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot. This name acts as

an obvious signifier for the way in which the architecture that Austerlitz is drawn to reveals a history which is at once personal and collective: it is history of the Holocaust which includes his separation from his parents on the kindertransport, and their subsequent persecution. Just as the name of the storage depot signifies the terrible acts committed against the Jews on a national level, on a personal level it signifies the internment and death of Austerlitz's parents and the destruction which has become his own past. Even before Austerlitz was aware of this past, he felt himself strangely moved on this site where he and Marie, many years before, had stumbled across a travelling circus and listened to haunting music played by the circus performers. Austerlitz draws the narrator's attention to the correlation between these sites: "the new Bibliothèque Nationale bearing the name of the French President now stands on what over the years had become the increasingly dilapidated area on the left bank of the Seine, where he and Marie de Verneuil had once attended that unforgettable circus performance" (385). Therefore, through using his own understanding of the history of the site and the information he learns from Lemoine, Austerlitz reveals the invisible history of the library and describes the layers of emotional and political significance which have formed the ground beneath the monstrosity of the library itself.

"Without speaking of herself, she revealed her inner being"

The ways in which Austerlitz's study of architecture acts as a both a compensatory memory and a space in which he is able to remember are evident when his suppressed memories surface. Directly after Austerlitz recollects his memory of his past in the ruins of Liverpool Street station, he falls into a prolonged sleep in which he dreams of architectural structures: "In that sleep . . . I was at the innermost

heart of a star-shaped fortress, a dungeon entirely cut off from the outside world, and I had to try finding my way into the open, passing down long, low passages which led me through all the buildings I had ever visited and described" (196). It seems Austerlitz's mind responds to the release of a suppressed memory by pointing to all the buildings which have acted as both a compensatory and an exteriorized form of memory throughout his life.

Thus, in his studies and discussions of architectural history, Austerlitz reveals both his own history, and the larger one of which his story is a part, through the language of architecture. His conversations with the narrator, while seemingly impersonal, expose his inner being. Austerlitz himself is able to read Marie's personal narrative in their initial impersonal conversation, a conversation about the architectural history of a paper-mill:

> You are surrounded by a quiet twilight there, said Marie, you see the light of day outside through cracks in the slatted blinds, you hear water running gently over the weir, and the heavy turning of the mill wheel, and you wish for nothing more but eternal peace. Everything Marie meant to me from then on, said Austerlitz, was summed up in this tale of the paper-mill in which, *without speaking of herself, she revealed her inner being to me*. (emphasis mine 367)

Ironically, while Austerlitz is aware of the ways in which, through their conversations, other people disclose their inner beings, it is only later that he realizes how his own study and discussion of architecture have revealed his inner being. Only once he has faced the historical tragedy of the persecution of his nation in the Holocaust, can Austerlitz understand that his studies of architecture have always been the study of the collective network of which he is a part and therefore, through

speaking of architecture, he has revealed both his own memories and their place within the greater the memory of the Holocaust.

Chapter Two:

Past Time; Haunted Present

"If Newton really thought that time was a river like the Thames, then where is its source and into what sea does it finally flow? Every river, as we know, must have banks on both sides, so where, seen in those terms, where are the banks of time? What would be this river's qualities, qualities perhaps corresponding to those of water, which is fluid, rather heavy, and translucent?"
(Sebald 142)

"If time is similar to a river, it flows from the past towards the present and the future. The present is the consequence of the past, and the future of the present. But this often repeated metaphor is extremely confused."
(Merleau-Ponty Phenomenology 411)

Introduction: Trauma and Time

Trauma, "in its most general definition," writes Cathy Caruth, "describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). Caruth explains how the experience of trauma necessarily affects the subject's experience of time. She argues that this is a result of the essence of belatedness which occurs in trauma: "Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-92). The medical and psychoanalytic definition of trauma as a "wound inflicted . . . upon the mind" (3), seems to take the connection between time and trauma into account. Caruth explains that for Freud, this wound of the mind is

"the breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world" (4). It is this effect of trauma on the subject's experience of time which I wish to discuss in this section.

In *Austerlitz*, Sebald discusses his ideas on time through the eponymous character of Jacques Austerlitz and the anonymous narrator. Interestingly, it seems that Austerlitz's subjective experience of time needs to be understood before he is able to recount his narrative to the narrator: the nature of time is discussed between them before Austerlitz's story is told. This is because, throughout Austerlitz's narrative, the questions that haunt him about the laws governing the past and the nature of time and memory are questions that result from his own traumatic experience. The underlying ground for these questions is Austerlitz's experience of the past as more present than the present. There are hints that this might be the case with the narrator as well and we see, throughout the novel, that both Austerlitz and the narrator are acutely aware of time.

For both Merleau-Ponty and Sebald, time does not exist as a fixed or linear progression, but rather, time is located in the subject and called into question by memory. Both philosopher and novelist argue that those who have undergone a certain degree of trauma are more sensitized to time: they experience a double-time, or layering of time, in which the past memory of the traumatic experience continues to haunt each new present. Each present is experienced as a dual-present: the past as continual vivid present, and the present as overshadowed by the vivid and continual past-present. In this section I will demonstrate how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of time in *The Phenomenology of Perception* resonates with Sebald's phenomenology of time seen through the character of Austerlitz: time, as a form of significance, is located in the subject who invests it in landscapes and objects accordingly. Both Merleau-Ponty and Sebald distinguish between artificial, or objective, constructions

of time and personal, or subjective, experiences of time; and, interestingly, to highlight the subjectivity of time, both explore the haunting of the past that occurs in the subject's experiences of trauma and repression.

Time is Someone

In his explanation on the nature of time, Merleau-Ponty draws a distinction between what he terms 'constituted' time and 'personal' time. Constituted time is our objective, or artificial, notion of time. He writes: "Constituted time, the series of possible relations in terms of before and after, is not time itself but the ultimate recording of time, the result of its *passage*, which objective thinking always presupposes yet never manages to fasten on to" (*Phenomenology* 415). Our inability to lay hold of constituted time occurs because this 'time' is not a personal time: it is not based in the subject. Merleau-Ponty reveals the futility of constituted time: "[it] is a setting distinct from me and unchanging, in which nothing either elapses or happens" (*Phenomenology* 415). In constituted time there is no subject to whom events may happen, and therefore no events ever occur. Constituted time, as a result, is a barren form of time as it is an artificial and meaningless construction.

In contrast to artificial or constituted time, Merleau-Ponty describes personal time as inherently subjective: "a dimension of our being" (*Phenomenology* 415). Personal time cannot exist without the subject – or rather, as he puts it, time *is* the subject. For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the concepts of time and the subject are interchangeable: "We must understand *time as the subject and the subject as time*" (emphasis mine *Phenomenology* 422). He emphasises that there is an undeniably intimate relationship between time and the subject (*Phenomenology* 410). This intimacy results from the subject's inhabiting of time: "My body takes possession of

time, it brings into existence a past and a future for a present; it is not a thing, but creates time instead of submitting to it" (*Phenomenology* 240). Time, therefore, is something which is lived or enacted through the body of the subject.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty claims that time is a form of significance: "time and significance are but one thing" (*Phenomenology* 426). The subject brings this significance to situations and creates them as past, present or future. Merleau-Ponty explains this through the image of a table that has accumulated marks from his use of it over time: "this table bears traces of my past life, for I have carved my initials on it and spilt ink on it. But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past; they are present; and in so far as I find in them signs of some 'previous' event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because *I carry this particular significance within myself*" (emphasis mine *Phenomenology* 413). The subject's sense of time is derived from within himself or herself; although an object (the ink spot) is eternally present, the subject brings ideas of the past to it in the present. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the subject's experience of time is similar to his or her experience of objects, which have "meaning for us only because [they are] 'what we are'" (*Phenomenology* 430).

Like Merleau-Ponty, Austerlitz also distinguishes between artificial constructions of time and subjective experiences of time. Austerlitz views the modern notion of time, which regarded time as a supreme ruler, as an unnatural construction. The enormous clock in Antwerp central station, seen as the personification of the nineteenth-century conception of time, overshadows their first conversation. In his explanations of the architectural history of the station, Austerlitz speaks of how the moderns revered time as a superior deity. He draws the narrator's attention to the huge clock's place above the other modern 'deities' of "mining, industry, transport,

trade and capital . . . [thus] reign[ing] supreme over these emblems" (Sebald 13). The narrator also describes how time's dominance is seen in its significant position in the station: "The movements of all the travellers could be surveyed from the central position occupied by the clock in Antwerp Station, and conversely all travellers had to look up at the clock and were obliged to adjust their activities to its demands" (13-14). For both Austerlitz and the narrator this modern conception of time appears extremely brutal. The narrator describes the violence they feel as they observe the movements of the large clock positioned as:

> the dominating feature of the buffet, with a hand some six feet long . . . During the pauses in our conversations we both noticed what an endless length of time went by before another minute had passed, and how alarming seemed the movement of that hand, which resembled the sword of justice, even though we were expecting it every time it jerked forward, slicing off the next one-sixtieth of an hour from the future and coming to a halt with such a menacing quiver that one's heart almost stopped. (8-9)

Both Austerlitz and the narrator feel an inherent aversion to this conception of time, as it could not be further from their experience. They therefore perceive it as a 'menacing' and violent usurper, reinforcing the idea that this notion of time is unnatural.

In a long monologue on the nature of time, Austerlitz focuses primarily on what time is not, in order to reveal its subjective nature. He remarks to the narrator that time is "by far the most artificial of all our inventions, and . . . being bound to the planet turning on its own axis [is] no less arbitrary than would be, say, a calculation based on the growth of trees or the duration required for a piece of limestone to

disintegrate . . ." (141-142). This subjective approach explains some of Austerlitz's fundamental questions about the nature of time which he asks in the midst of his monologue: "In what way do objects immersed in time differ from those left untouched by it? . . .Why does time stand eternally still and motionless in one place and rush headlong by in another?" (Sebald 142-143). These experiences of the fluidity of time are, according to Austerlitz, intrinsically subjective.

Merleau-Ponty contrasts our notions of time as something progressive, or linear, to a subjective time which is incarnate: "time *is* someone" (*Phenomenology* 422). He argues that it is in this "true time . . . [where we] learn the nature of flux and transience itself" (*Phenomenology* 415). True, or personal, time is not linear, "but a network of intentionalities" (*Phenomenology* 417). It follows that time is not something progressive which rules over subjectivities, as was seen in Austerlitz's description of the modern construction of time; rather, according to Merleau-Ponty, "the passage of one present to the next is not a thing which I conceive, nor do I see it as an onlooker, I perform it: I am myself time, a time which 'abides' and does not 'flow' or 'change'" (*Phenomenology* 421). For Merleau-Ponty, this true "time, in our primordial experience of it, is not for us a system of objective positions, through which we pass, but a mobile setting which moves away from us, like the landscape seen through a railway carriage window" (*Phenomenology* 419-420). Because time and the subject are one, time moves as the subject moves.

Time, therefore, is necessarily understood only in relation to the standpoint of the observer. Merleau-Ponty writes that the notion of "change presupposes a certain position which I take up and from which I see things in procession before me: there are no events without someone to whom they happen and whose finite perspective is the basis of their individuality. Time presupposes a view of time" (*Phenomenology*

411). Any understanding of events occurring, or the 'passing' of time, necessarily requires a subject to which these events occur; it is the subject who is aware of, or determines, their occurrence. In the following example Merleau-Ponty explains how time is measured by the observer:

> If the observer sits in a boat and is carried by the current, we may say that he is moving downstream towards his future, but the future lies in the new landscapes which await him at the estuary, and the course of time is no longer the stream itself: it is the landscape as it rolls by for the moving observer. Time is, therefore, not a real process, nor an actual succession that I am content to record. It arrives from *my* relation to things. Within things themselves, the future and the past are in a kind of eternal state of pre-existence and survival . . . what is past or future for me is present in the world. (*Phenomenology* 412)

Time, therefore, is created by the movements of the observer; the objects and landscapes are always present, or static. Those landscapes or things which are never encountered by the observer, or those events which never happen to someone, are never allocated a sense of time: they are time-less, or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, pre-existent.

This brings me to the epigraphs, where both Austerlitz and Merleau-Ponty refute the metaphoric description of time as a river. This metaphor describes the flow of time as progressive or linear: the river flows from source to mouth. While Merleau-Ponty disregards the metaphor as being "extremely confused" (*Phenomenology* 411), Austerlitz turns the metaphor inside out, revealing the irregular and unquantifiable properties of time. He asks: "if Newton really thought that time was a river like the Thames, then where is its source and into what sea does it finally flow? . . . What

would be this river's qualities, qualities perhaps corresponding to those of water, which is fluid, rather heavy and translucent?" (Sebald 142). Through these questions, Austerlitz illustrates that it is not the direction of the river that is important, but rather its qualities. He continues to explain, through rhetorical questions, that time is therefore not linear but irregular:

> And is not human life in many parts of the earth governed to this day less by time than by weather, and thus by an unquantifiable dimension which disregards linear regularity, does not progress constantly forward but moves in eddies, is marked by episodes of congestion and irruption, recurs in ever-changing form, and evolves in no one knows what direction? (143)

These descriptions are aligned more with the qualities of water than with the direction of its flow. Austerlitz believes time's movements to be erratic and incalculable. He argues against the exactness of the solar constructions by which time is said to be measured, remarking that: "the solar day which we take as our guideline does not provide any precise measurement" (142). He contends that time is not globally synchronized: "Could we not claim . . . that time itself has been non-concurrent over the centuries and the millennia? It is not so long ago, after all, that it began spreading out over everything" (143). This spreading of time would seem to be connected to the modern notions and constructions of time, which Austerlitz queries though his discussion in Antwerp station. He explains to the narrator that "until the railway timetables were synchronized the clocks of Lille and Liege did not keep the same time as the clocks of Ghent and Antwerp, and not until they were all standardized around the middle of the nineteenth century did time truly reign supreme" (14).

Therefore, through his factual remarks and rhetorical questions, Austerlitz continually shows that any objective construction of time is always artificial.

Double-Time: Trauma and Repression

Where Merleau-Ponty's thought on time becomes specifically pertinent to my discussion is in his analysis of the memory of trauma where he explores both subjects who have experienced physical trauma, such as losing a limb, and those who have experienced psychological or emotional trauma. Merleau-Ponty describes the rift that occurs in the subject's experience of time as a result of the repression of a traumatic experience. Repression, says Merleau-Ponty, occurs when a subject enters "upon a certain course of action . . . [and encounters] on this course some barrier, and since he has the strength neither to surmount the obstacle nor to abandon the enterprise, he remains imprisoned in the attempt and uses up his strength indefinitely renewing it in spirit" (*Phenomenology* 83). Monika Langer explains that in cases such as these, "the subject remains emotionally involved in a particular past experience to such a degree that it imposes itself on the actual present" (34). The memory of the traumatic event overpowers the subject's experience of time.

In these instances of repression the subject continually carries his or her past experiences with him or her, never allowing its rightful progression from present to past. Langer terms this a "*haunting* of the present by a particular past experience" (emphasis mine, 33). She argues that, according to Merleau-Ponty, this haunting "is possible because we all carry our past with us insofar as its structures have become 'sedimented' in our habitual body" (Langer 33). This haunting occurs because time "does not close up on traumatic experience," but rather, "the subject remains open to

the same impossible future" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology* 83). It is this openness to impossibility which causes the subject's unnatural experience of haunted time.

Merleau-Ponty further explains that trauma causes the subject to experience a splitting or layering of time; time is simultaneously experienced on two levels: impersonal and personal. "Impersonal time continues its course, but personal time is arrested" (*Phenomenology* 83). He argues that when this layering occurs, personal time haunts impersonal time:

> One present among all presents thus acquires an exceptional value; it displaces the others and deprives them of their value as authentic presents. We continue to be the person who once [experienced trauma] . . . New perceptions, new emotions even, replace the old ones, but this process of renewal touches only the content of our experience and not its structure. (*Phenomenology* 83)

Here, the 'content' of which Merleau-Ponty speaks would be impersonal time, and the 'structure,' true or personal time. These two experiences of time are concurrent and yet the arresting of personal time always outweighs the experience of impersonal time.

It is important to note that, for Merleau-Ponty, this experience of an arrested personal time is not the same as that of continuous memory[8]. He argues that although the past is continually experienced, it is experienced as a true present. For Merleau-Ponty, memories are not analogous with the experience of the true present; rather, memories distance us from our experience of the past. He writes: "this fixation [of trauma with the past] does not merge into memory; it even excludes memory in so far

[8] Merleau-Ponty's use the term 'memory' differs to how I use the term in this paper. For Merleau-Ponty, memory is associated with empirical notions of perception that he positions himself against. Memory, for Merleau-Ponty, is a recollection of the past that is more like a picture of the past then a true experience of the past in the present.

as the latter spreads out in front of us, like a picture, a former experience, whereas this past which remains our true present does not leave us but remains constantly hidden behind our gaze instead of being displayed before it" (*Phenomenology* 83). The nature of the traumatic experience is the antithesis of memory: "it is of its essence to survive only as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality. I forgo my constant power of providing myself with 'worlds' in the interest of one of them, and for that very reason this privileged world loses its substance and eventually becomes no more than a *certain dread*" (*Phenomenology* 83). In this way, the traumatic event haunts the subject's present, overpowering all experiences of time and slowly fermenting into a continual experience of one event that finally abstracts into stagnation.

It is clear that throughout the novel Austerlitz experiences a form of the 'certain dread' that Merleau-Ponty speaks of. This is because Austerlitz's experience of time is a result of his personal trauma. Theorists on Sebald have referred to the way in which he writes about the subject's experience of trauma: Long and Whitehead refer to trauma in Sebald's works, explaining that "trauma brings about a rupture in memory, it breaks continuity with the past and it places identity in question" (Long and Whitehead "Introduction" 8), and Wilfried Wilms remarks that "Sebald shares the observation that the traumatic event causes a rupture or block, that it dislocates the modes and boundaries of our understanding" (182). These continual references to a 'rupture' resonate with the Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the arresting of personal time causing a divide between personal and impersonal time. We see this ruptured time in the way in which Austerlitz's experience of trauma has caused him to turn away from the experience of time in the world (Sebald 174). It is only later in the novel, when he returns to Wilsonova station – the very site where his personal trauma

began – that he is able to recognise the impact it has had on his experience of time. Austerlitz explains that in Wilsonova station it seemed to him "as if time had stood still since the day when [he] first left Prague" (310). He realises that on that day his personal time was, as Merleau-Ponty explained, 'arrested'. Thus Austerlitz's experience of layered time is a result of his personal trauma. As a result his experience of the past is more real and vivid than anything else and is dominantly present in all other presents.

This subjective experience of trauma and time is most clearly seen in Austerlitz's assertion that it is possible to be, as he describes it, "outside of time" (143). However, as Austerlitz equates time with the modern construction, here he means that it is possible to be outside of this modern notion of time. Austerlitz explains that this dislocation from time occurs in the dead, dying and sick, as well as those who have experienced trauma:

> Even in a metropolis ruled by time like London . . . it is still possible to be outside time, a state of affairs which until recently was almost as common in backward and forgotten areas of our own country as it used to be in the undiscovered continents overseas. The dead are outside time, and dying and all the sick at home or in hospitals, and they are not the only ones, for a certain degree of personal misfortune is enough to cut us off from the past and the future. (143)

What we come to discover, through the course of the novel, is that Austerlitz's personal trauma has caused his experience of this disassociation from time that he speaks of. In his initial monologue he hints at this, yet at the time neither he nor the narrator is aware that he is speaking of himself. Without understanding it, he explains his own repression of time evidenced in his lack of personal watches or clocks:

> I have never owned a clock of any kind, a bedside alarm or a pocket watch, let alone a wristwatch. A clock has always struck me as something ridiculous, a thoroughly mendacious object, perhaps because I have always resisted the power of time out of some internal compulsion which I myself have never understood, keeping myself apart from so-called current events in the hope, as I now think, said Austerlitz, that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely I shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously . . .(143-144)

Similarly, in his description of Iver Grove, Austerlitz's experience of time standing still reveals his innermost desire: for the past to be a continuous present. He describes the billiard room which had been closed up for centuries: "it was as if time, which usually runs so irrevocably away, had stood still here, as if the years behind us were still to come . . . sealed away for so long from the flow of the hours and days and the succession of generations" (152). Austerlitz instinctively understands the timelessness of this room. His experience is just as Merleau-Ponty explained: his trauma has caused his past to become a continuous present that, in turn, becomes the dominant time in all his experiences.

This double-time of Austerlitz's becomes apparent to the narrator, who, later in the novel, explains that "for Austerlitz certain moments had no beginning or end, while on the other hand his whole life had sometimes seemed to him a blank point without duration" (165). Austerlitz does, however, come to understand his own layering of time and, later in the novel, he explains his perpetual fascination with the things of the past:

> Such ideas infallibly come to me in places which have more of the past about them than the present. For instance, if I am walking through the city and look into one of those quiet courtyards where nothing has changed for decades, I feel, almost physically, the current of time slowing down in the gravitational field of oblivion. It seems to me then as if all the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last, just as when we have accepted an invitation we duly arrive in a certain house at a given time. And might it not be . . . that we also have appointments to keep in the past, in what has gone before and is for the most part extinguished, and must go there in search of places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak? (359-360)

Austerlitz feels as if all the moments in his life occupy the same space because he is carrying all the moments of his life with him. He has not let go of the past, but carries it with him into each new instance of the present. Time, therefore, for Austerlitz, is continually experienced as layered and he is always more drawn to the past in every instance of the present.

Haunted Time

Austerlitz's experiences of the past haunting his present cause his ideas of time to become intertwined with his ideas of death and the afterlife. This is because the past which haunts him is a dead past: the life that he was supposed to have lived in Prague with his parents has been destroyed and his parents are, most probably, both dead. In this way, the haunting of Austerlitz's past assumes another layer of meaning.

He is haunted by a traumatic event, but he is also haunted by the death of his parents and the destruction of the life that he feels he should have lived.

As a little boy, Austerlitz's haunted present causes him to develop an interest in ghosts. He is drawn to Evan the blacksmith because Evan willingly speaks about such things. He tells the narrator about his conversations with Evan:

> Evan told tales of the dead who had been struck down by fate untimely, who knew they had been cheated of what was due to them and tried to return to life. If you had an eye for them they were to be seen quite often, said Evan. At first glance they seemed to be normal people, but when you looked more closely their faces would blur or flicker slightly at the edges. And they were usually a little shorter than they had been in life, for the experience of death, said Evan, diminishes us, just as a piece of linen shrinks when you first wash it. (74-75)

It seems as if Austerlitz has experienced a similar fate to the ghosts which Evan speaks of. He too has received an untimely blow from fate and feels cheated of the life which was due to him. And yet, while he is aware of his own past haunting him, for most of his life he is not aware of its reasons. Rather he experiences the haunting as a continual uneasiness and a magnified awareness of the world of the dead. Austerlitz experiences Evan's tales to be true when he watches the minister's wife on her death bed: "the dying women opened her eyes wide and would not move her glance from the weak light filtering through the window panes . . . Gwendolyn's body seemed to shrink a little, reminding me of what Evan had told me" (90).

Austerlitz repeats the picture of the dying having wide-open eyes in his childhood imaginings of the dead in the lake of Llanwyddn. This man-made lake

covers the site of Elias's childhood village and Austerlitz imagines that it had swallowed up the rest of the villagers, leaving Elias as the sole survivor of the tragedy: "I imagined all the others – his parents, his brothers and sisters, his relations, their neighbours, all the other villagers – still down in the depths, sitting in their houses and walking along the road, but unable to speak and with their eyes opened far too wide" (72). What is uncanny in this description of Austerlitz's is his obvious projection of his suppressed emotion onto Elias's past. Yet, at the time, its correlation to his life as a lone survivor of the horrors which his parents experienced is hidden from him.

Austerlitz's experiences of haunting cause him to be sceptical as to the nature of the divide between the living and the dead. As a result, Austerlitz experiences the world of the dead as almost tangibly present. Again it is in his conversations with Evan where he feels his often incomprehensible urges and experiences are given some explanation: "it was certainly Evan, said Austerlitz, who once told me that nothing but a piece of silk . . . separates us from the next world" (76). Austerlitz uses Evan's ideas to explain his continual feeling of haunting: "It is a fact that through all the years I spent in the manse in Bala I never shook off the feeling that something very obvious, very manifest in itself was hidden from me. Sometimes it was as if I were in a dream and trying to perceive reality; then again I felt as if an invisible twin brother were walking beside me, the reverse of a shadow, so to speak" (76). Many years later, when Austerlitz reads novels by Balzac, he feels that the author is re-confirming his experience. He tells the narrator that "the more melodramatic aspects of [the novel] . . . reinforced the suspicion I had always entertained that the border between life and death is less impermeable than we commonly think" (395). It is because Austerlitz has experienced a layering of the past and the present on a personal level, that he is

able to extend this experience to that of the 'past' world of the afterlife, and the 'present' world of the living. These two worlds, for Austerlitz, are layered over each other and occupy the same space.

Haunted Memories

While Austerlitz is aware of the effects of his experience of time, he is unable to explain their cause. In this way Austerlitz is a perfect example of a subject whose repression of a traumatic event results in the uncanny. Long and Whitehead explain that "for Freud, the uncanny represents something which has long been familiar to us but which has been repressed from consciousness, something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" ("Introduction" 7) and therefore they explain that "for Sebald, trauma is inescapably bound up with repetition, and his narratives both retrace the past and explore the inescapability of the past in the present . . . More broadly, he demonstrates that contemporary Europe is unhomely, haunted by the spectres of the past and especially by the traumatic history of the Holocaust" ("Introduction" 8). Austerlitz is continually confronted with things which haunt him: they remind him of something which he cannot remember. Austerlitz is therefore repeatedly haunted by the unknown: a type of haunting which is particularly disturbing. He speaks about how all recollections of his past were buried in the depths of his mind during the first few months of his 'new' life in Bala. When he finally does begin to remember in Liverpool Street station, and again when he is reunited with Věra, he speaks about how the images and memories of the past had been "deeply buried and locked away within me" (Sebald 221).

When Austerlitz realises the effect of repression throughout his life, he refers to it as a form of censorship which he exercised unknowingly. He explains to the narrator that the destructive effect of this repression on his life:

> this self-censorship of my mind, this constant suppression of the memories surfacing in me . . . demanded ever greater efforts and finally, and unavoidably, led to the almost total paralysis of my linguistic faculties, the destruction of all my notes and sketches, my endless nocturnal peregrinations through London, and the hallucinations which plagued me with increasing frequency up to the point of my nervous breakdown in the summer of 1992. (198)

The weight of Austerlitz's suppressed memories eventually causes him to collapse in a mental breakdown. A similar experience occurs when he uncovers a memory from his traumatic past for the first time: the memory of being met by the Eliases in Liverpool Street station. He cannot cope with the return of this memory and he falls into a deep, yet disturbed, sleep for over 24 hours. While his body is asleep, many memories and their signs which he has been following his whole life begin to surface:

> in the middle of these dreams, said Austerlitz, somewhere behind his eyes, he had felt these overwhelming immediate images forcing their way out of him, but once he had woken he could recall scarcely any of them even in outline. I realized then, he said, how little practice I had in using my memory, and conversely how hard I must have always tried to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related in any way to my unknown past. (197)

Austerlitz explains the effect of repression as his inability to use his memory. He develops a form of non-memory in which he struggles not to remember anything of

his past. Instead, he fills his mind with facts about architectural history and other studies. And yet even these histories and facts, the very things which he attempts to use as a buffer between his present self and his traumatic past, only serve as uncanny signs of that past.

Conclusion

When we understand that Austerlitz's present is haunted by his past, and that the experience of this past is more real than that of the present, we begin to understand some of the degree of terror which grips Austerlitz through most of his life. While it is helpful to understand Austerlitz's experience of time through Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the split that occurs between personal and impersonal time, it is clear that in some instances, Austerlitz's experience of time is more complicated. Austerlitz does not know about his past: he has successfully repressed all memory of it. Therefore, when he experiences double-time it is extremely disorientating for him as he does not understand the past which he continually experiences. At the time he believes he is a madman, or that something is not right with the world, and yet he cannot quite put his finger on exactly what it is. As opposed to a patient with a phantom limb, as Merleau-Ponty describes, or one who undergoes psychoanalysis for a trauma which she or he cannot get over, Austerlitz experiences the presence of his past, but both the experience of the past, and its cause, are hidden from him. Therefore, Austerlitz attempts to deny the existence of time. He tells the narrator:

> It does not seem to me . . . that we understand the laws governing the return of the past, but I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher

> form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like, and the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead, that only occasionally, and in certain lights, and atmospheric conditions, do we appear in their field of vision. (261)

Thus, for Austerlitz, the subjective nature of time results in his uncertainty that time even exists at all. For Austerlitz, the existence of time is inconsequential; rather he is interested in our perspective on the world.

Chapter Three:

Perception: Reading the Landscape

"I tried to explain to her and to myself what incomprehensible feelings had been weighing on me over the last few days; how I kept thinking, like a madman, that there were mysterious signs and portents all around me here; how it even seemed to me as if the silent façades of the buildings knew something ominous about me."

(Sebald 304)

Gazing through Darkness:

In *Austerlitz*, the themes of darkness and the gaze are central to the novel's preoccupation with memory and trauma. Images of penetrating the darkness frame the novel, both the in opening scene of the Antwerp Nocturama where the narrator notices the exceptionally large and inquiring eyes of the captive animals whose lives are lived in darkness, and in the closing scene where the narrator refers to Dan Jacobson's account of staring into the dark abyss of the disused mine at Kimberly, which he relates to the forgotten past of his family[9]. In both these accounts, darkness symbolises the impenetrability of the past and the shroud of unknowing that surrounds those whose lives are captive to suppressed memories. These images of darkness are used throughout the novel to symbolise Austerlitz's attempts to shed light on the buried memories of his past. The little racoon the narrator studies for some time in the Nocturama, a creature distressed by its captivity, foreshadows the narrator's introduction to Austerlitz, a character of seriousness, who arrived in Wales as a young boy, sent by his mother on a kindertransport to escape the persecution of the Jews, and spends his life continuously mulling over the same things but never

[9] Jacobson, Dan. *Heshel's Kingdom*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1998

managing to explain their significance. The racoon's obsessive washing of a piece of apple remains imprinted in the narrator's memory:

> I watched it for a long time as it sat beside a little stream with a serious expression on its face, washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing, which went far beyond any reasonable thoroughness, would help it to escape the unreal world in which it had arrived, so to speak, through no fault of its own. (Sebald 2-3)

As Austerlitz describes his life in the manse in Wales as "some kind of captivity" (62), the correlation between these animals, troubled by their imprisonment, and that of Austerlitz, suffering from displacement and trauma, is clear.

Furthermore, the eyes of the animals in the Nocturama are likened to those who seek to penetrate the darkness and mysteries of life. The narrator relates how "several of them had strikingly large eyes, and the fixed inquiring gaze found in certain painters and philosophers who seek to penetrate the darkness which surrounds us purely by means of looking and thinking" (3). Two caption-less photographs, showing the eyes of two men, are placed within the text following the narrator's observations. Carolin Duttlinger focuses on Sebald's use of photography in her work. She writes: "the concepts of the gaze, darkness and visual perception are central to the novel as a whole, where the protagonist's reflections on memory, identity, architecture and history are inextricably linked to questions of vision and perception" (Duttlinger 156-157). While there is an obvious correlation between Sebald's use of photography throughout the novel and this discussion of perception, I confine my discussion of photography to my final chapter.

Considering the importance of the gaze in *Austerlitz*, I would like to propose that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception offers a helpful conceptual framework through which to speak about the acts of perception that Austerlitz performs and which are, as he often feels, performed on him through objects in the landscape. The distinction Merleau-Ponty draws between the visible and the invisible provides insight into the confusion which Austerlitz experiences in perception. Merleau-Ponty proposes that we only perceive objects to be visible which carry an invisible or abstract significance for us. This invisible significance is the personal importance which embodied perceivers bring to those things which they perceive. Such is the case for Austerlitz: all that draws his attention in his perceptual field is charged with personal significance. However, his experiences of the visible are disconcerting as the invisible significances with which they resonate are repressed from his consciousness, or as he says, "deeply buried and locked away within me" (Sebald 221). This results in Austerlitz's experience of perception being haunted or troubled. As I discussed in chapter two, Austerlitz endeavours to make sense of these disturbances by studying the histories of the sites he is attracted to. Yet his historical study of these sites does not reveal his personal reading of them, it simply continues to dislocate him: the layers of significance all point towards something hidden. However, it appears that even when Austerlitz learns of his past life in Prague, which helps him to understand his emotional responses to the invisible, his perceptual field, as a result of his trauma, still remains partially enveloped in darkness and unknowing.

On Reading: Visible and Invisible

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body and the act of perception allows for a discussion of what I would like to describe as a "reading" of landscape texts through

the act of perception. He draws a distinction between the visible, that which is perceived, and the invisible, that which is the underlying idea driving the visible. The idea, says Merleau-Ponty, "is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being" (*Visible* 151). It seems that we are able to view the visible because it relates to something invisible that holds importance for us. An idea, or significance, that we carry in our bodies resonates with the invisible history of the landscape, thus opening the visible up for us to perceive. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Joy and sadness, vivacity and obtuseness are data of introspection, and when we invest landscapes or other people with these states, it is because we have observed in ourselves the coincidence between these internal perceptions and the external signs associated with them by the accidents of our constitution" (*Phenomenology* 24). When the invisible is revealed, it is because we decode its presence behind the visible. In this way, reading of objects or landscapes involves a reading about the invisible through the visible: the act of perception reveals our ideas.

Merleau-Ponty clearly states that we, in our bodies, bring meaning to objects – our significance causes them to become visible for us. He proposes that we relate to, and view, objects because "[we] carry this particular significance within [ourselves]" (*Phenomenology* 413). Carrol Clarkson explains this process as "the body activat[ing] what is invisible" ("Visible and Invisible" 90). Thus our ideas, or our grasp of the invisible, reveal a specifically charged world to us: this is our landscape – what we are able to see as a result of our bodies acting as vehicles of perception. Since it is the invisible quality of something which causes it to be visible, it is the presence of the invisible that gives meaning to the visible. Dreyfus and Dreyfus explain that "whatever appears suggests in its very appearance something more which does not

appear, which is concealed. For this reason the figure can be said to have meaning since . . . it refers *beyond* what is immediately given" (emphasis mine xi). Therefore it is the viewer who brings his or her significance to the landscape and views it accordingly. Yet, if, as Merleau-Ponty argues, the perceiver and the perceived simultaneously shape and are shaped by one another, then we must speak of the simultaneous reading that occurs between the viewer and the invisible.

While we possess and are possessed by the visible; Merleau-Ponty argues that we cannot possess the invisible. He explains that the invisible, or the ideas behind the visible, elude our grasp: "Each time we want to get at it [the idea] immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explication does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second vision of it, a more manageable derivative" (*Visible* 150). Because we may only interact with the invisible as it presents itself in space and time through the visible, each view of the visible is enacted in new coordinates of space and time and therefore each reading is unique.

The act of perception, therefore, becomes a form of reading: we bring our significance to the landscapes and objects and they act as signifiers of the invisible. We read in them the language of the invisible, which, in turn, is still translated through our personal meaning. "Just as the function of words is to name," writes Merleau-Ponty, "that is, to grasp the nature of what appears to us in a confused way and to place before us a recognizable object . . . forgetting the viscous, equivocal appearance, we go through them straight to the things they present" (*Sense* 17). Likewise, through perception we transform objects and landscapes into signifiers: names through which we signify the invisible. This naming is analogous, Merleau-Ponty argues, to the act of painting; he writes: "The painter recaptures and converts

into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things" (*Sense* 17-18). Similarly, those who view the landscape create visible objects in their field of vision that activate and name the invisible significances of the landscape. Therefore, without the observer, the invisibles of the landscape would remain concealed.

Trauma and Un-knowing

Here I would like to explore the way in which the experience of trauma complicates Merleau-Ponty's notions of perception. Cathy Caruth suggests that the experience of trauma is doubled in that the survivor of trauma not only experiences the trauma of the event, but also the trauma of surviving the event. She explains: "the story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on life . . . at the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). In her discussion on the effects of trauma, Caruth explains that paradoxically, those who survive traumatic experiences are unable to comprehend their perceptions of both the event and its repetitions:

> Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event – which *remain unavailable to the*

> *consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight* – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends *beyond* what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (emphasis mine 91-92)

The impact of trauma on the vision or gaze of the subject, Caruth argues, is always experienced as an inability to know. These subjects are faced with visible occurrences that they are unable to comprehend, and yet their inability to understand does not prevent these visions from reoccurring within their perceptual fields. This experience of not knowing is precisely what Austerlitz experiences throughout his interactions with landscapes, buildings and objects. His experience of trauma has resulted in a belatedness and an inability to know the past as it visibly presents itself to him. The experiences of trauma and of not knowing therefore affect his visual perceptions.

Disturbing Visibles

Within the context of both Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, and Caruth's explanation of the un-knowing that occurs in those who have experienced trauma, I would like to propose that Austerlitz's reading of the landscapes around him is both emotionally and visually disturbing. Through his body Austerlitz activates specifically charged landscapes and yet the significance of these landscapes is hidden from him as a result of his 'un-knowing'. Thus, it would seem that Austerlitz is caught between his body, which carries his traumatic past continually with it and views the landscape accordingly, and the repression of his mind: the inability to know the significance of the visible as it presents itself to him. Austerlitz's perceptual experiences therefore differ from Merleau-Ponty's explanation in that when Austerlitz

activates the visible, he is able to see it without necessarily comprehending its underlying meaning. As a result, Austerlitz's perceptual reading of the landscape haunts him: he cannot interpret the significance of the visible and yet, as Caruth argues, its visibility repeatedly presents itself to him.

Throughout his narrative, Austerlitz frequently explains to the narrator how although he is drawn to places by urges which mystify him, he is aware that there is something significant behind these impulses. Austerlitz reads the importance of these places in the strong emotional responses which he experiences in them. Interestingly, Austerlitz's emotions are most often engaged in the sites of railway stations. As a student in Paris, Austerlitz finds himself continually drawn to the railway stations, where he often sits for some time. He explains his emotional response to these stations: "he had quite often found himself in the grip of dangerous and entirely incomprehensible currents of emotion in the Parisian railway stations, which, he said, he regarded as places marked by both blissful happiness and profound misfortune" (Sebald 45). Similarly, years later in England, Austerlitz spends many hours in Liverpool Street station where his heart is moved by something indiscernible. During his nervous breakdown, in which he beings to walk the streets of London at night, Austerlitz is often "irresistibly drawn" (180) to Liverpool Street station. He obeys these urges and is surprised by his strong emotional response to the site:

> Whenever I got out at Liverpool Street station . . . I would stay there at least a couple of hours, sitting on a bench with other passengers who were already tired in the early morning, or standing somewhere, leaning on a handrail and feeling that constant wrenching inside me, a kind of heartache which, as I was beginning to sense, was caused by the vortex of past time. (181-182)

What Austerlitz fails to understand at the time is that his emotional response to the history of the suffering which he reads in this site, is a personal response. He attempts to explain the heartache he feels, without recognizing that his own life is linked to these narratives of pain: "I often wondered whether the pain and suffering accumulated on this site over the centuries had ever really ebbed away, or whether they might not still, as I sometimes thought when I felt a cool breath of air on my forehead, be sensed as we pass through them on our way through the station halls and up and down the flights of steps" (183). As I discussed in chapter two, Austerlitz explores the history of the site in order to understand the feelings which his body reads in these stations: he uses his knowledge of architectural history as a compensatory memory, or, here, as a way in which to explain his emotional response.

Interestingly, it is through his studies of architecture, and railway architecture in particular, that Austerlitz is unwittingly naming his past through his reading of the landscape. His research persistently points him to the histories and narratives of suffering which he does not realize are inextricably bound up in his own story of pain. Austerlitz is following the patterns of suffering without seeing that his own life is imbricated within the wider narrative of the persecution of the Holocaust. The very fact that the sites of initial trauma in his life were in railway stations is itself telling enough: both the separation from his mother and nursery maid in Wilsonova station, and the traumatic experience of being met by foreign foster parents in Liverpool Street station. Austerlitz's own explanation of his choice of study is ominously revealing: "in his studies of railway architecture . . . he could never quite shake off thoughts of the agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places, although such ideas were not part of architectural history proper" (16-17). Austerlitz could not explain his own reading of the railway stations more clearly: it is his own 'agony of

leave-taking' and his own 'fear of foreign places' which he brings to these sites. His reading of railway stations is precisely what his body activates in these places; and yet, he is unable to understand the personal significance his emotions betray.

As a result, Austerlitz experience of the visible is uncannily disturbing. He feels troubled by his inability to read the meaning in the landscapes which surround him. When he visits Marienbad with Marie, some years before he discovers traces of his personal history in Prague and learns of the Holocaust, Austerlitz feels haunted by the landscapes of the spa. Even as they approach the town, Austerlitz's body reveals a landscape which produces a sense of unease within him. He recounts to the narrator: "as we approached Marienbad . . . darkness had fallen, and I remember . . . that a slight sense of disquiet brushed me as we . . . slid into the town, which was sparsely illuminated" (291-292). This sense of anxiety is only heightened as the light of day offers more visibility and Austerlitz is faced with an uncanny landscape. The following morning, when Austerlitz looks out of the hotel window at the buildings of the town he correctly reads their invisible promptings to remember, and yet he does not understand he is reading them: "At some time in the past, I thought, I must have made a mistake, and now I am living the wrong life" (298). Later, when Austerlitz walks through the town with Marie, he feels haunted by something invisible:

> On a walk through the deserted town . . . I kept feeling as if someone else were walking beside me, or as if something had brushed against me. Every new view that opened out before us as we turned a corner, every façade, every flight of steps looked to me both familiar and utterly alien. I felt that the decrepit state of these once magnificent buildings, with their broken gutters, walls blackened by rainwater, crumbling plaster revealing the coarse masonry beneath it, windows

> boarded up or clad with corrugated iron, precisely reflected my own state of mind, which I could not explain either to myself or to Marie. (298-299)

Austerlitz is aware that something in the surrounding buildings of the town resonates with his emotions, and yet this leaves him in a state of confusion. He cannot comprehend how he could feel that this entirely new landscape is familiar, and he does not understand what it is within this landscape which he feels he should remember.

Austerlitz attempts to describe his uncanny experiences in Marienbad as trying to read a well-known name and yet being unable to do so. His inability to decipher what he believes should be obvious causes Austerlitz to feel intense emotion: "I tried to explain that something or other unknown wrenched my heart here in Marienbad, something very obvious like an ordinary name or a term which one cannot remember for the sake of anyone or anything in the world" (300)[10]. Austerlitz is aware that it is his inability to remember that causes his continual unease in Marienbad, however, what he cannot determine is what it is which he feels he should remember.

As a result Austerlitz feels as if the landscape is reading him. He is aware that there are signs in the landscape of Marienbad which disturb him, and therefore he feels as if these signs are able to read something in him which he himself cannot interpret. This brings me to the epigraph, where Austerlitz describes this feeling of being read as bordering on madness: "I tried to explain to her and to myself what incomprehensible feelings had been weighing on me over the last few days; how I kept thinking, like a madman, that there were mysterious signs and portents all around

[10] This echoes my discussion in chapter two, where I proposed that architecture acts as a form of naming and therefore that the reading of landscapes and buildings if a reading of the signifiers present in the architecture.

me here; how it even seemed to me as if the silent façades of the buildings knew something ominous about me" (304). It is only once Austerlitz has uncovered traces of his past that he begins to understand this disturbing feeling of being remembered. When he retraces his journey on the kindertransport, Austerlitz disembarks at Pilsen and takes a photograph of the station's architecture, which he feels remembers him[11]:

> All I remember of Pilsen, where we stopped for some time, said Austerlitz, is that I went out on the platform to photograph the capital of a cast-iron column which had touched some chord of recognition in me. What made me uneasy at the sight of it, however, was not the question of whether the complex form of the capital, now covered with a puce-tinged encrustation, had really impressed itself on my mind when I passed through Pilsen with the children's transport in the summer of 1939, but the idea, ridiculous in itself, that this cast-iron column, which with its scaly surface seemed almost to approach the nature of a living being, might remember me and was, if I may so put it . . . a witness to what I could no longer recollect for myself. (311)

Here Austerlitz states clearly that he believes that the objects in the landscape perform some sort of remembering for him. Where he is unable to remember, he believes that those objects and landscape with which he resonates, those which he is drawn to, remember for him.

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[11] Premised on his belief in the intersubjectivity of perception, which he describes as a dialogue, Merleau-Ponty argues that those things which we perceive, or gaze upon, in turn gaze back at us. He writes that: "the vision he [the seer] exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself *looked at* by the things, my activity is equally passivity . . . so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and is seen" (emphasis mine *Visible* 139). Therefore, in the act of perception, Merleau-Ponty says that there is always a simultaneous exchange of the gaze: both see and are seen. However, in Austerlitz's case, while he feels himself being looked at or remembered by the things, he is unable to understand his own gaze and therefore he does not feel this sense of reciprocity in the act of perception which Merleau-Ponty describes. Until Austerlitz understands the fundamental narcissism in his own gaze, he experiences the intersubjectivity of perception as a dialogue in which he is not able to fully participate.

Encountering the Invisible

After he is re-united with Věra, and hears her descriptions of his childhood, Austerlitz understands his emotional responses to different sites in retrospect. The sensations that he experienced in the landscapes of Europe, and the incomprehensible ways in which his actions were often inspired by these emotions, were caused by the past that was buried within him. Austerlitz describes how, during his student days in Paris, he used to "walk through the empty Sunday streets taking hundreds of *banlieu*-photographs, as I called them, pictures which in their very emptiness, as I realised only later, reflected my orphaned frame of mind" (370). The emptiness of the content of these photographs reveals Austerlitz's lack of familial ties; yet, it is only once he discovers his true family and learns about their destruction, that Austerlitz is able to understand the personal significance of these 'orphaned' photographs.

The invisible meaning of the architecture that Austerlitz has studied his entire life is simultaneously revealed with his recollection of a suppressed memory. Visions of architecture frame the return of Austerlitz's memory of his arrival in Liverpool Street station as a child. When he enters the Ladies' Waiting Rom, Austerlitz sees labyrinth-like architecture:

> From time to time, and just for a split second, I saw huge halls open up, with rows of pillars and colonnades leading far into the distance, with vaults and brickworks arches bearing on them many-storeyed structures, with flights of stone steps, wooden stairways and ladders, all leading the eye on and on . . . (190)

These architectural structures act as a catalyst for Austerlitz's repressed memories: first he remembers episodes in his past which he has not suppressed, followed by a

vision of his four-year-old self being met by the Eliases. In recounting this poignant event in his life, Austerlitz explains:

> In the middle of this vision . . . I could not stop wondering whether it was a ruin or a building in the process of construction that I had entered . . . in any case, the crucial point was . . . the scraps of memory beginning to drift through the outlying regions of my mind . . . memories like this came back to me in the disused Ladies' Waiting-Room of Liverpool Street station, memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, all interlocking like the labyrinthine vaults I saw in the dusty grey light, and which seemed to go on and on for ever. In fact, I felt, said Austerlitz, that the waiting-room where I stood as if dazed contained all the hours of my past life, all the suppressed and extinguished fears and wishes I had ever entertained . . . (191-193)

Austerlitz understands the connection between the labyrinth-like structure which he perceives and the seemingly disconnected episodes and memories of his life: they all form a network through which he re-discovers his past. Once this initial memory surfaces, Austerlitz's mind returns to all the signs which have told his story all along. On returning home from the station he falls into a deep, prolonged sleep in which it seems he is presented with the invisible significance of all the landscapes, buildings and objects which have haunted him his entire life:

> In that sleep . . . I was at the innermost heart of a star-shaped fortress, a dungeon entirely cut off from the outside world, and I had to try finding my way into the open, passing down long, low passages which led me through all the buildings I had ever visited and described. It

> was a nightmarish, never-ending dream, with its main plot interrupted several times by other episodes . . . in the middle of these dreams, said Austerlitz, somewhere behind his eyes, he had felt these overwhelming immediate images forcing their way out of him, but once he had woken he could recall scarcely any of them even in outline. (196-197)

In retrospect, Austerlitz is able to correctly read these visible signs, and yet, while in the dream he feels as if things inside him are surfacing – the most obvious interpretation of these being his repressed memories – on waking, however, Austerlitz is unable to remember.

Austerlitz finds himself caught between the knowledge of his traumatic past and the suppression mechanisms that he has, as a response to this trauma, cultivated his entire life. On waking from the dream he is finally aware of the effects of the 'self-censorship' which he has performed throughout his life. He explains: "I realised then . . . how little practice I had in using my memory, and conversely how hard I must always have tried to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related in any way to my unknown past . . ." (197). Austerlitz's trauma therefore complicates his perceptual experience; as a result of the layers of avoidance and repression which govern his memory, he cannot fully read the visible.

However, despite these complications, once Austerlitz has some knowledge of his past history, his engagements with landscapes become personal. Terezín fortress, which Austerlitz visits after he has been re-united with Věra, becomes one of the first significantly charged landscapes which he is able to read on a personal level. His readings occur in both minute detail, such as the correlation between the "octofoil mosaic" (213) in the entrance hall of "Number Twelve Šporkova" (213) where

Austerlitz lived in Prague, and the star-shaped ground plan of the fortress, and in greater resonances with the objects of Terezín Bazaar and the Ghetto Museum.

Austerlitz reads the objects in the window of the Terezín Bazaar with the understanding that his body, like the objects which he perceives, has escaped the destruction of the Nazi persecution. Austerlitz perceives his own shadow in amongst the objects in the window display:

> It was a long time before I could tear myself away from staring at the hundreds of different objects, my forehead pressed against the cold window, as if one of them or their relationship with each other must provide an unequivocal answer to the many questions I found it impossible to ask in my mind . . . what, I asked myself, said Austerlitz, might be the significance of the river never rising from any source, never flowing out into any sea but always back into itself, what was the meaning of . . . the squirrel forever perched in the same position, or of the ivory-coloured porcelain group of a hero on horseback turning to look back . . . in order to raise up with his outstretched left arm an innocent girl already bereft of her last hope, and to save her from a cruel fate not revealed to the observer? They were all as timeless as that moment of rescue, perpetuated but for ever just occurring, these ornaments, utensils and mementoes stranded in the Terezín bazaar, objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction, so that I could now see my own faint image barely perceptible among them. (274-277)

Austerlitz is able to read the history of the trauma in the objects on display because he understands them, as Merleau-Ponty argued, through his own bodily experiences.

Furthermore, in Terezín's Ghetto Museum, Austerlitz perceives the human presence in the cultural objects which he sees. He describes how the collection of personal items, manufactured goods and the official lists and figures together tell the story of the terrifying victimization of the internees of the ghetto: "I saw pieces of luggage brought to Terezín by the internees from Prague and Pilsen . . . and countless other places; the items such as handbags, belt buckles, clothes brushes and combs which they had made in the various workshops . . . I saw balance sheets, registers of the dead, lists of every imaginable kind . . ." (279-280). Austerlitz is haunted by the human presence of these cultural objects. As Merleau-Ponty says, "In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath the veil of anonymity. *Someone* uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of the cultural world could be verified" (*Phenomenology* 348). These objects have specific significance for Austerlitz, as it is in this museum that he finally faces the history of the Holocaust that he had, until now, excluded from his perceptual field:

> having for the first time acquired some idea of the history of the persecution which my avoidance system had kept from me for so long, and which now, in this place, surrounded me on all sides. I studied the maps of the Greater German Reich and its protectorates, which had never before been more than blank spaces in my otherwise well-developed sense of topography, I traced the railways lines running through them . . . and learned of the deliberate wastage and discarding of the work-slaves themselves, of the origins and places of death of the

> victims, the routes by which they were taken to what destinations, what names they had borne in life and what they and their guards looked like. (Sebald 278-279)

Austerlitz's reading of these objects occurs both through his own body and through the importance which the museum ascribes to them. Because the objects are situated within a museum, their history has already been written; they therefore act as a way of revealing to Austerlitz the history he had long repressed.

However, although Austerlitz is confronted with the harsh realities of the Holocaust through the mediation of the museum, and through his understanding of his own body and its history, there remains an element of the un-known in his experience of the visible. Even in their undeniable presentation of human history, the objects in the museum elude his understanding: "I understood it all now, and yet I did not understand it, for every detail that was revealed to me as I went through the museum from room to room and back again, ignorant as I feared I had been through my own fault, far exceeded my comprehension" (279). This brings me back to Caruth's assertion that those who experience a degree of trauma are faced with the paradoxical experience of seeing without comprehending: "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (91). In the museum, Austerlitz sees objects that attest to the violence of the Holocaust, and yet he feels unable to fully grasp what he sees. On returning from Terezín, Austerlitz spends the night plagued by an endless succession images:

> . . . whether I kept my eyes wide open or closed, all through the night I saw pictures from Terezín and the Ghetto Museum, the bricks of the fortification walls, the display window of the Bazaar, the endless lists of names, a leather suitcase bearing a double sticker from the Hotels

> Bristol in Salzburg and Vienna, the closed gates I had photographed, the grass growing between the cobblestones, a pile of briquettes outside a cellar entrance, the squirrels' glass eye and the two forlorn figures of Agáta and Věra pulling the laden toboggan through the driving snow to the Trade Fair building at Holešovice. Only towards morning did I sleep briefly, but even then, in the deepest unconsciousness, the flow of pictures did not cease but instead condensed into a nightmare . . . (Sebald 283-284)

As Caruth suggested, these images repeatedly present themselves to Austerlitz, despite his knowledge of his own history, and continue to haunt him both consciously and subconsciously.

Thus, even when Austerlitz begins to understand the invisible significance that he, in his body, brought to the landscapes and objects which he has studied, the traumatic nature of his history refuses full disclosure. After he returns from Bohemia, Austerlitz suffers a nervous breakdown under the strain of the simultaneous knowledge and incomprehension of the root of his trauma. He admits to the narrator:

> . . . it was obviously of little use that I had discovered the sources of my distress and, looking back over all the past years, could now see myself with the utmost clarity as that child suddenly cast out of his familiar surroundings: reason was powerless against the sense of rejection and annihilation which I had always suppressed, and which was now breaking through the walls of its confinement. (Sebald 322)

As he begins to encounter the invisible, Austerlitz's experience of the visible becomes further confused. He experiences acute attacks of anxiety in which his vision is clouded: "everything I looked at was veiled by a black mist" (323). Ironically, rather

than bringing clarity and cohesion to his perceptual experience, Austerlitz's encounters with the invisible (his traumatic history) further confuse and fragment his vision: " . . . once, after a long and painful contraction, I actually visualized myself being broken up from within, so that parts of my body were scattered over a dark and distant terrain" (323).

Chapter Four:

Conclusion: Text-scapes

". . . the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on."

(Sebald 30-31)

This concluding chapter works as a coda: it shifts to focus on the formal aspects of the novel, while still considering their correlation to the themes explored in the previous chapters. Sebald's text is itself a form of landscape: his narrative technique, with its emphasis on the visual in conjunction with the verbal, presents its readers with a textual landscape (or text-scape) to be perceived. Sebald's unique use of photographs in his work creates a visual text that requires personal reading. While the photographs are generally placed at significant parts of the text, they have no captions or explicit explanations. The reader must engage with these visual aspects of the text through their own perception and understanding of the text. In this chapter I explore the way in which Sebald's novel presents its readers with a textual landscape through which they are invited to perceive and remember. First I explore the metaphorical nature of Austerlitz's table of photographs, after which I examine how Sebald's formal technique mirrors the thematic concerns of the novel: it provides a textual space for memory, a subjective experience of time, and passes on the responsibility to the reader both to *see* and to remember.

Puzzle Pieces

One of the most telling passages in Sebald's *Austerlitz* occurs when the narrator, on his first visit to the protagonist's home in Alderney street, learns of the way in which Austerlitz seeks to piece together and understand the fragments of his own story. On showing his guest the front room of his house, which is bare, except for an ottoman and a table, and painted entirely in shades of grey, Austerlitz describes a game that he plays with the photographs he has taken and collected throughout his life:

> The front room, into which Austerlitz took me first, had nothing in it but a large table, also varnished matt grey, with several dozen photographs lying on it, most of them dating quite a long way back and rather worn at the edges. Some of the pictures were already familiar to me, so to speak: pictures of empty Belgium landscapes, stations and metro viaducts in Paris, the palm house in the Jardin des Plantes, various moths and other night-flying insects, ornate dovecotes, Gerald Fitzpatrick on the airfield near Quy, a number of heavy doors and gateways. Austerlitz told me that he sometimes sat here for hours, laying out these photographs or others from his collection the wrong way up, as if playing a game of patience, and that then, one by one, he turned them over, always with a new sense of surprise at what he saw, pushing the pictures back and forth and over each other, arranging them in an order depending on their family resemblances, or withdrawing them from the game until either there was nothing left but the grey table top, or he felt exhausted by the constant effort of thinking and remembering and had to rest on the ottoman. (Sebald 167-168)

The game which Austerlitz plays with these photographs is similar to piecing together a puzzle. However, unlike puzzle pieces, the photographs, in their square or rectangular shapes, resist fitting into one another; each piece can be placed anywhere on the table and may be arranged alongside any other piece. As Austerlitz's puzzle has no pre-determined form, his photographic game of inferences is never-ending.

The significance of this game of photographs lies in its metaphoric depiction of Austerlitz's life. The black and white photographs provide a record of all the sites and buildings that Austerlitz has studied and visited, the people who have influenced his life and other things which he feels himself irresistibly drawn to, such as animals and insects. By re-arranging these images, Austerlitz once again seeks to discover the meaning behind the invisible promptings that have governed his life. There is a clear connection between these photographs and their ability to both reveal and preserve memories. Therefore, through reorganizing these photographs, Austerlitz both relives his memories and seeks to uncover the hidden meaning of his trauma. Long and Whitehead refer to this photographic game: "In his description of Austerlitz's scrutiny of photographs, Sebald deliberately evokes the concept of working through, suggesting that the photograph preserves an event to which the subject can only later attach meaning" ("Intro" 14). Yet, they point out that just as Austerlitz's game with the photographs resists a final arrangement or answer, so Sebald

> undermines the possibility of working through by emphasising the precariousness and the transience of both photograph and memory . . . Sebald repeatedly emphasises the aporia of traumatic experience. Although photographs can aid a moment of recollection, this memory will inevitably turn out to be fleeting and will rapidly fade into the surrounding darkness. ("Introduction" 14)

Thus, Austerlitz's frequent repositioning of the photographs continually reveals new perspectives and new readings of his trauma.

Furthermore, the photographic game acts as a metaphor for the structure of the novel as a whole. Sebald's text works in a similar way to the table of photographs. There are many photographs (87 in total) scattered through the body of the text, and these are juxtaposed with fragmentary descriptions of buildings, people, animals, places etc. All these images – both literal and textual –provide the reader with a table upon which to work through and reveal both their perceived meaning in Austerlitz's story as well as their own memories and personal significances which they bring to these images.

A Space for Memory

Most critics who have written about Sebald refer to his use of photographs, pointing out that the relationship between photography and memory is evident in all of Sebald's texts. Sebald himself, in an interview with Maya Jaggi where they discussed his use of photography, emphasised the importance of memory in literature: "The moral backbone of literature is about that whole question of memory . . . Without memories, there wouldn't be any writing: the specific weight an image or phrase needs to get across to the reader can only come from things remembered . . ." (Jaggi). Sebald's use of photographs in *Austerlitz* is in keeping with the hybrid genre of his entire oeuvre. Where architecture, as I discussed in chapter two, works as the mnemonic space in which Austerlitz discovers many of his own memories, the photographs in *Austerlitz*, and the text which surrounds them, become the space in which these memories are preserved. Kilbourn explains this shift from architecture to text, through referring to Augustine's understanding of the text as a site for memory:

"for Augustine the written and read text itself inevitably replaces architecture as the metaphor for memory"(144). Therefore, the photographs and the text of *Austerlitz* create a new mnemonic space.

Austerlitz is aware of the relationship between photographs and memory. Although he is strictly speaking an architectural historian, Austerlitz is also a prolific photographer. He explains his fascination with developing photographs: "In my photographic work I was always especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long" (Sebald 109). Carolin Duttlinger has argued that this passage is not so much about the relationship between photography and memory, but the inability to remember:

> it is the latency and transience of the photographic image, rather than its permanence and stability, which serve as a model for the process of memory, as the images of neither photography nor memory can be grasped and arrested, and are hence both prone to disappearance, photography is thus figured as a model not for the permanence of memory but for the phenomenon of forgetting. (158)

However, it is this inability to remember which causes Austerlitz to continually seek knowledge through repeatedly viewing his photographs.

Austerlitz feels that photographs have a memory of their own, and possibly remember for him in ways similar to his experience with the architectural structure of Pilsen station as I discussed in chapter three[12]. When Austerlitz is confronted with the two photographs (one of himself dressed as a pageboy, and the other of a theatre

[12] Chapter three, 57

stage) which Věra shows him, he experiences this uncanny feeling of being remembered; his feelings are described in the words of Věra, who spoke, as he recounts to the narrator,

> of the mysterious quality peculiar to such photographs when they surface from oblivion. One has the impression, she said, of something stirring in them, as if one caught small sighs of despair . . . as if the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us had played in their former lives. (Sebald 258)

These two photographs haunt Austerlitz. He is speechless and emotionally numb when confronted with a photograph of himself of which he has no recollection. Elinor Shaffer offers a helpful explanation of Austerlitz's response, commenting that "photographs as deployed by Sebald . . . have this ominous quality of ruling over and containing the experience of our dead selves to which we have no more access, and for those who did not directly experience their own history the objectified forms of it are the more menacing and the more precious" (51). Austerlitz translates his emotional response to these photographs into feeling a moral obligation to his dead self: "I examined every detail [of the photograph] . . . and in doing so I always felt the piercing, inquiring gaze of the page boy who had come to demand his dues, who was waiting in the grey light of dawn on the empty field for me to accept the challenge and avert the misfortune lying ahead of him" (Sebald 260). Although there is nothing the older Austerlitz may do to prevent the misfortune which befell his younger self, Austerlitz does understand his responsibility to remember, and pass on, the story of the pageboy in this photograph.

In order for their memories to be preserved, photographs need to be accompanied with narration. J.J. Long argues that photography should not be considered as a primary form of memory, but "as a kind of belated symptom of familial and collective history that needs to be mediated through a process of narration in order to become knowable and communicable" ("History" 127). Austerlitz, therefore, in both telling his story, and handing over his photographs to the narrator, places the narrator in the position to best communicate his history. In their final meeting, Austerlitz gives his house keys to the narrator: "he gave me the key to his house in Alderney Street. I could stay there whenever I liked, he said, and study the black and white photographs which, one day, would be all that was left of his life" (Sebald 408). As readers, we are led to believe that the photographs in the text are from the collection which Austerlitz entrusts to the narrator. However, some of these photographs are most probably the work of the narrator himself as they are placed in sections of the text where the narrator recounts his own descriptions and perceptions: the photographs of Breendonk fortress, the fire in Lucerne station and the barbed-wire view from the narrator's hotel in Astridsplein.

Telling Time

The sense of time portrayed in the novel mirrors Austerlitz's experience of time as I discussed it in chapter two: narrative time is personal time. Amir Eshel has argued that Sebald's works create their own sense of time which is not linear or bound to standardized clock-time: "if clocks tell time, Sebald's narratives tell what wanes, what transpires in time. Just as clocks count time – in English, 'to count' denotes 'to tell,' 'to account,' 'to reckon' . . . – his work does not simply count off times gone, but creates its own mode of counting, of accounting for, its own time"

(91). This approach to time is subjective; its progress is unsystematic and, as Austerlitz mused in the Greenwich observation room, it "stand[s] eternally still and motionless in one place, and rush[es] headlong by in another . . . [it] moves in eddies, is marked by episodes of congestion and irruption, recurs in ever-changing form, and evolves in no one-knows what direction" (Sebald 142-143). This is the reader's experience of time in the novel: it moves in haphazard arrangements. There are vast gaps of time, even decades, between Austerlitz and the narrator's chance and scheduled meetings, and yet, for the most part, these spaces of time seem inconsequential and are often not even referred to by either interlocutor: "without wasting any words on the coincidence of our meeting again after all this time, Austerlitz took up the conversation that evening in the bar of the Great Eastern Hotel more or less where it had last been broken off" (56-57). The way in which Austerlitz resumes his narrative evidences his disregard for the space of time that has passed between their meetings. It is as if their encounters occur on a single plane of time for Austerlitz and may be paused and resumed regardless of whether a single day or two decades of 'standardized', or impersonal, time have passed in the interim.

Austerlitz's personal sense of time is evident in his unsystematic narrative. His conversations with the narrator disregard a linear approach: the retelling of the past occurs in amongst present musings. The narrator often points to this erratic flow of Austerlitz's narrative, commenting after a long digression with temporal markers such as " . . . continued Austerlitz, who had drifted for some time in his memories . . ." (163), or bridging long pauses in conversation with short comments such as "— I believe, Austerlitz went on after some time . . ." (110). Austerlitz's narrative often moves in a circular fashion, creating endless digressions on subjects, such as the life and death of moths, or the structure of a certain fortress, which, although these break

the linear progression of his narrative, serve the greater function of adding to its overall meaning.

The layering of time which Austerlitz experiences is revealed in the ways in which his narrative conflates the past and the present. Often the shadow of the tragic future infiltrates Austerlitz's telling of the past. For instance, before he describes his friendship with Gerald Fitzpatrick, Austerlitz makes reference to Gerald's untimely death. As we are introduced to Gerald, we discover that his death reminds Austerlitz of the story of the homing pigeon who managed to find her way home, despite having broken her wing (Sebald 110). Similarly, Austerlitz recounts the disintegration of his relationship with Marie de Verneuil in Marienbad before he describes the initial stages of their friendship in Paris. Therefore, the sense of layered time which occurs in both these accounts – the reader is confronted with the destruction of the future superimposed on the present telling – echoes Austerlitz's experience of the past layering over all his present encounters.

Furthermore, the inconclusive nature of Austerlitz's narrative opposes a linear construction of time. Martin Swales argues that this inconclusiveness is a characteristic of all Sebald's texts and is a necessary part of their narrative technique which avoids explanations: "inconclusiveness is compounded by the unmistakable refusal on the part of the text to psychologise or explain, to fill in emotional or cognitive gaps" ("Intertext" 84). We know that Austerlitz is in search of traces of his father, and yet there is no mention of the outcome of this search. Austerlitz's narrative ends abruptly, with a description of the graveyard next to his house, followed by the narrator's description of his second visit to Breendonk fortress. Nothing more is offered and the text seems incomplete. Eshel argues that Sebald's prose constitute a "poetics of suspension," which he explains as being "a poetics that suspends notions

of chronology, succession, comprehension, and closure – a poetics that rather than depicting and commenting on the historical event in time, constitutes an event, becomes the writing of a different, a literary time" (74). This narrative, or literary time, therefore, in its avoidance of linearity and completion, aligns itself with a subjective experience of time similar to that of Austerlitz.

Passing On

As Austerlitz's narrative is mediated through a narrator, it becomes more than just his own biography: it is combined with the personal narrative of the narrator. There are many similarities between Austerlitz and the narrator which cause the distinction between their narratives to become even further confused. Very little is explained about the narrator—there is no mention of his name or occupation—which adds to the lack of distinction between the narrator and Austerlitz. The narrator's own reflections often echo those of Austerlitz, leaving readers often confused as to who is speaking, or whose memories belong to whom. For instance, the opening sentence of the novel could easily be the words of Austerlitz himself, and yet they are the narrator's: "In the second half of the 1960s I travelled repeatedly from England to Belgium *partly for study purposes, partly for reasons which were never entirely clear to me*, staying sometimes for just one or two days, sometimes for several weeks" (emphasis mine, Sebald 1). It is in resonances such as these, that the reader finds him/herself unable to discern when the words of the narrator end and where Austerlitz's begin. This uncertainty is furthered in the text's lack of any punctuation indicating speech: there are no quotation marks, and only occasionally are the words of the narrator and those of Austerlitz separated by a dash. Often the narrator mediates up to three voices at a time in refrains such as "Věra continued, said

Austerlitz" (246). In addition, there are very few paragraph breaks throughout the novel, causing the narratives to merge into one another.

Interestingly, the narrator, through the passing on of his knowledge, combined with Austerlitz's narrative, performs what he terms as Austerlitz's "historical metaphysic, bringing remembered events back to life" (14). Like Austerlitz, the narrator is driven – most probably also in inexplicable ways – to revealing and remembering histories which have been lost, or uncovering what has been hidden. The epigraph, for example, refers to the narrator's realization that many memories and histories need to be remembered:

> . . . the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on. (30-31)

It is this 'passing on' which the narrator seeks to accomplish, both through recounting Austerlitz's narrative and through the fragments of his own musings which are scattered throughout the novel. He continues, from this passage, to give an example of the history of objects that need to be remembered:

> Histories, for instance, like those of the straw mattresses which lay, shadow-like, on the stacked plank beds and which had become thinner and shorter because the chaff in them disintegrated over the years, shrunken – and now, in writing this, I do remember that such an idea occurred to me at the time – as if they were the mortal frames of those who once lay there in that darkness. (31)

The correlation here is between Austerlitz's belief, inspired by Evan, that the dead are somewhat shrivelled by the experience of death, and the narrator's description of the mattresses, which symbolize those who slept on them and perished in the death camps, being slightly shorter. Stefanie Harris has commented on the way in which the narrator of *The Emigrants* performs a similar function of remembering histories: "the work [*The Emigrants*] is thus as much a story of the narrator and his attempt to write these stories as it is a telling of the stories themselves. That is, the work is an interrogation of how these histories are to be represented and told" (380). This observation of Harris' applies to the narrator in *Austerlitz*, whose story is told through what he chooses to pass on.

Reading and Remembering

In its invocation to its readers to remember, Sebald's *Austerlitz* presents a text-scape of fragments that require reading. These fragments, in their fragility – like those of the shrunken mattresses in Breendonk fortress – create a sense of temporality that arrests the reader's gaze. It is therefore the perception, or reading, of this landscape of fragments in the novel that prompts its readers to remember. John Beck, in writing about the similar literary style of another of Sebald's texts, *The Rings of Saturn*, discusses what he terms Sebald's stylistic "textual sediment" (77). The sediment, as Beck explains, is created out of traces of what has been forgotten, or the past of the landscape: "representational traces . . . of realities now 'vanished forever'"(77). In *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald focuses on the way in which industry and man's intervention in the landscape have destroyed what it once was, leaving only traces – whereas in *Austerlitz*, this textual sediment comprises of the traces which point towards the collective tragedy of the Holocaust and the residual marks of destruction

which are hidden. As a result of this obvious correlation between the 'textual sediment' of *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn*, I would like to propose that Beck's explanation of the resultant responsibility of the reader when faced with such texts is the same for both these works. Beck writes that the text of *The Rings of Saturn*:

> insists upon reading as the necessary condition for understanding what has been lost. While nothing appears to be safe from violence . . . the text still persists in its conviction that there is a kind of melancholy necessity to the interpretative pattern-making that makes it the most serious business of the culture. The reading of textual remains, however, is never put forward explicitly as a way of preventing a repetition of past calamities. Nevertheless, the failure or refusal to read the signs of the past is seen as a denial of responsibility and the wilful ignorance of a debased culture. (78)

There are clear similarities between *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn*, as Beck describes it: both texts focus on the responsibility of the reader to engage with the history and 'textual remains' that they present.

The most obvious way in which Sebald creates this 'textual sedimentation' is through his intentional blend of genres. Long and Whitehead refer to this as Sebald's hybrid genre:

> None of [Sebald's] works [are] easy to categorize in terms of genre; each mixes biography, and autobiography, history and fiction, travelogue and documentary . . . Sebald's works are informed by a profound ethical and political seriousness. They evince an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of European cultural, social and political

> history . . . and an enduring concern with what is arguably the defining historical event of recent times: the Holocaust. ("Introduction" 4)

This collection of genres produces a text that is rich in fragments: musings, recollections, historical accounts, descriptions of architecture, photographs and diagrams. The text brings together a collection of traces that act as signs of the greater story which first Austerlitz, and then the narrator, read in them. Following from this, the readers of the text encounter these same fragments and are invited to engage with them at a textual level.

The primary way in which the reader is invited to 'read' his or her own significance in the text-scape is through the lack of interpretation provided in the text. It is because neither Austerlitz, nor the narrator explain – or are able to explain, as Swales has argued – the correlations between the fragmentary accounts in the novel, that their interpretation is left open to the reader of the text ("Intertext" 85). For Swales, Sebald's lack of explanation in his texts is his way of speaking about the horrors of the Holocaust without degrading its memory in trite or sensational narratives. He explains:

> A number of commentators have suggested that the only true commemoration of the horrors let loose on our world by the twentieth-century history . . .above all the Holocaust, is silence, because silence acknowledges the gap left by that scale of absence, by so much dying. But silence, while it could be eloquent in this way as a conduit of loss, is also, by definition, a negation of eloquence. It could also betoken indifference . . . Sebald's prose . . . negotiates this dilemma by using words to imply the necessity of silence, to circumscribe silence and make it eloquent. (Swales "Intertext" 87)

Sebald's works, therefore, refuse to be silent in their attempt to remember these histories. I refer to Swales' profound description:

> What Sebald gives us essentially is . . . the circumstantial account of places, buildings, personas, all of them marked by the archaeology of human suffering . . . He avoids confessional overtness because at the heart of that overtness would be the scream that would be neither aesthetically nor morally endurable. Hence that recurrent lament in Sebald's prose that he never quite manages to say what he wants to say. He can talk round about it: about the causes and consequences of pain, about its signs and traces. But the pain itself, for the most part, is implied and not said. ("Intertext" 86)

It is the way in which Sebald's works navigate their way between revealing and revering through their lack of explanation, which is their strength.

Sebald's text, therefore, performs a double-telling: it narrates Austerlitz's story while taking its readers on a similar journey through its textual landscape. Those who read Sebald's *Austerlitz* must necessarily engage with the protagonist's story of trauma and align themselves with the role of the narrator as listener. Without a listener, or a reader, Austerlitz's story cannot be told. This is because, as Richard Kearney has argued, all narrative is inherently dialogic. Kearney writes: "Life is always *on the way* to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story" (133). Austerlitz' preoccupations with the stories of others – evidenced in his studies of architectural history – have made him aware of the importance of telling his own story. He understands his need for an attentive listener to whom he can pass on the fragments of his narrative. "Storytelling," writes Kearney, "may be said to *humanise* time by transforming it from an impersonal

passing of fragmented moments into a pattern, a plot, a *mythos*" (4). This narrative act, similar to that of perception, transforms fragments and landscapes through 'humanising' them: through investing them with human presence. Thus, Sebald's text passes on the story of Austerlitz to its readers; however, as Austerlitz's story is incomplete and fragmented in many ways, those who read it are called both to bear the weight of listeners and engage with his story on a personal perceptual level as readers.

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