

# KINDERTRANSPORT, CAMPS AND THE HOLOCAUST IN *AUSTERLITZ*

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Abstract: This article develops an historical analysis of *Austerlitz*. Rather than tracking the (few) errors in historical narratives that the writer Sebald left in his text, it aims at considering the material used by the author to develop the story of Jacques Austerlitz. Through a complex game of ‘correspondences’, from train station to train station across Western Europe, Sebald gives his own vision of Kindertransport’s memory in the United Kingdom and of Holocaust memory and writing in general. Consistent with the declarations he made in several interviews, that it is in his view impossible to describe directly life in the camps and ghettos, he uses certain marginal aspects of Nazi persecution to build a powerful narrative of facts and memory. For example, he ends his story in Austerlitz, a satellite camp of Drancy for Jews, which was installed in warehouses in the heart of Paris. This camp was never described by historians before my own book – co-authored with Ms Sarah Gensburger – *Nazi Labor Camps in Paris. Austerlitz, Léviton, Bassano, July 1943–August 1944*. My article will try to show how a Holocaust historian can read Sebald’s writing, as an indirect approach to his difficult subject-matter.

The memory of the Holocaust seems to have taken some time to form in Britain, longer at any rate than in continental Europe or the United States.<sup>2</sup> While a detailed study of how Holocaust memory in the United Kingdom developed has yet to be undertaken, it should be noted that an official day of commemoration (Holocaust Memorial Day) was only instituted in 2000 – the first being held in 2001 – on the initiative of the then Prime Minister Tony Blair. It is true that London, and more specifically the Public Relations department of the War Office, was instrumental in revealing the horrors of the concentration camps through the dissemination on a massive scale of the images taken at Bergen Belsen in April 1945 as part of a deliberate, politicised campaign.<sup>3</sup> However, it is also clear that the memory of the Holocaust, which is only “globalised” in a very superficial sense,<sup>4</sup> has taken on certain particular forms in Britain. It has, in particular, become associated with one recently constructed “lieu de mémoire”, that of the Kindertransport, the 10,000 German, Austrian and Czech children sent off without their parents to England, where they were provisionally settled from the summer of 1938 onwards. This “hapax” in the history of the Shoah (in the sense that it is a unique event), insofar as it constitutes a successful collective rescue, is at the

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<sup>2</sup> On the subject of Holocaust commemoration see also: T. Kushner, *The Holocaust and Liberal Imagination. A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> On the impact of the images of Bergen Belsen, see: S. Bargett, D. Cesarani, *Belsen 1945. New Historical Perspectives* (London, Portland Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, IWM, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, see: J.-M. Dreyfus, M. Stoetzler, “Holocaust memory in the twenty-first century: between national reshaping and globalisation”, in C. Gelbin, S. Gilman, eds., “Jews in an age of globalisation”, guest edited issue of *European Review of History—Revue européenne d’histoire*, Vol. 18, No. 1, February 2011, 69–78.

heart of the approach to the representation of the destruction of the Jews in Europe taken by W. G. Sebald in his novel *Austerlitz*.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I will seek to analyse the use made by Sebald of certain chapters from the Holocaust in this, his last book, a major work which develops many themes previously introduced in earlier texts. The objective of this attempt to read *Austerlitz* through the eyes of a historian of the Holocaust is obviously not to point out the errors made by Sebald. As a writer, he has produced a work of fiction, and it would be quite inappropriate, and indeed pointless, to pick out every last inaccuracy in his text. It is far more useful to examine Sebald's use of historical facts, what he has chosen to pick out from the vast mass of information now available on the Holocaust, and to see how he has worked this material into a narrative. This confrontation between a work of fiction and historical writing can only make sense insofar as it establishes a dialogue between these two narrative registers.<sup>6</sup> Nor will I seek to pass judgement on the historical veracity of Sebald's characters, although it is perhaps appropriate, nonetheless, to consider their plausibility. The writer's staggering erudition warrants the asking of such questions, as he cannot be accused of (or excused for) concealing certain references.

The memory of the Kindertransport has only come to the fore recently. Its developing presence has come out of the efforts of children saved by the scheme who have lived their adult lives and are now well into retirement. In 1988, a first call was sent out by a small group of them, under the auspices of the important Jewish survivors' organisation, the Association of Jewish Refugees, which was created in 1941.<sup>7</sup> The first gathering of these Austrian and German Jewish children, now British citizens, was duly organised, allowing them to exchange memories and shared experiences. It was here that the creation, or rather recreation, of a collective identity seems to have occurred, along with the establishment of a "tribute of memory" to British society, which was gratefully accepted. It is true that the narrative thus constituted was one of gratitude towards a liberal society, glossing over a host of problems encountered by the children and adolescents who made up the convoys. After all, the operation, which refused to accept parents, consequently also manufactured orphans on a vast scale.<sup>8</sup> Then there were the children taken in by devout Christian families and converted virtually by force. This was the case for Susi Bechhöfer, whose story became the subject of a BBC documentary. Sebald drew heavily on her narrative in *Austerlitz*, to the point that Ms Bechhöfer for a while considered taking legal action. This tribute of memory eventually led to the inauguration of a plaque in the Palace of Westminster, in order to thank those MPs who had let the children in,<sup>9</sup> as well as the construction of monuments at the entrance to London's Liverpool Street Station, where the majority of the children first

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<sup>5</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of recent developments regarding the questioning of the relations between fictional and historical writing in a French context, see: "Savoirs de la littérature", *Les Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, Nr 65–2 (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See the organisation's website: <http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindertransport>

<sup>8</sup> On the Kindertransport, see: W. Benz, C. Curio, A. Hammel, eds., *Die Kindertransporte 1938/39. Rettung und Integration* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003); C. Berth, *Die Kindertransporte nach Großbritannien 1938/39. Exilerfahrungen im Spiegel lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews* (Hamburg/Munich: Dölling & Galitz, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> The text on the plaque reads: "In deep gratitude to the People and Parliament of the United Kingdom for saving the lives of 10,000 Jewish and other children who fled to this country from Nazi persecution on the Kindertransport 1938–1939".

arrived. Two monuments were in fact constructed, the first of which was a “conceptual” vitrine piece containing objects which had belonged to refugee children. This was replaced in 2006 by a realist bronze sculpted group by the Israeli sculptor Frank Meisner. This station in the heart of London, in the heart of the City, this “lieu de mémoire” (site of memory), then, is also where Jacques Austerlitz meets the novel’s narrator and where, amidst the faded splendour of the station’s Great Eastern Hotel, he recounts part of his tale to him.<sup>10</sup> It is also the site of the first re-emergence of Austerlitz’s memories, as he begins to recall his earlier life.

For *Austerlitz*, probably the most narrative of all Sebald’s novels, is the story of a child of the Kindertransport, Jacques Austerlitz, who, tormented by his lack of memories, wanders across Europe, meeting the narrator, who both is and is not Sebald, along the way. Austerlitz is a specialist in the history of nineteenth-century European architecture, a subject which, we learn in passing, he has taught for thirty years following a period of study in France.<sup>11</sup> “As far as I was concerned the world ended in the late nineteenth century. I dared go no further than that, although 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.”<sup>12</sup> This last sentence is, in fact, the only time in the entire book that an attempt is made to formulate an explanation for the European catastrophe and the Holocaust, and one is left with the impression – reading the huge scholarship that has recently been produced on his writings – that everything is to be found in Sebald’s works; everything, that is, except political science! The travels of Jacques Austerlitz, which could be plotted on a map, lead him into North-West and Central Europe: the easternmost point visited by Jacques Austerlitz is the town and fortress of Terezin, in Bohemia.<sup>13</sup> In a series of almost spiritualist “revelations”, he recovers his childhood memories and the narrative of his life. The pivotal moment comes with his arrival, after a night of wandering the streets of London, at Liverpool Street Station, where he hears the voices of European immigrants: “Memories like this came back to me in the disused Ladies’ Waiting-Room of Liverpool Street station...”<sup>14</sup>

The buildings of nineteenth-century Europe are imprisoning structures, imposing masses which seem to merge into a single place of confinement, prefiguring other, far more terrible buildings constructed in the twentieth century. In an interesting instance of “morphing”, Jacques Austerlitz begins to conflate them all, mixing up everything from archive buildings to psychiatric hospitals, as can be seen in his description of the Prague City Archives, where he is searching for documents relating to his parents:

The entire building, from the outside more like a mansion house than anything else, therefore consists of four wings, each not much more than three metres deep, set around the courtyard in an almost Illusionist manner and without any corridors or passages in them (...) And it was not just of a prison that the archives building in the Karmelitska reminded me, said Austerlitz ; it also suggested a monastery, a riding school, an opera house and a lunatic asylum...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Austerlitz*, 119.

<sup>11</sup> *Austerlitz*, 170.

<sup>12</sup> *Austerlitz*, 197.

<sup>13</sup> *Austerlitz*, 261 and following.

<sup>14</sup> *Austerlitz*, 192.

<sup>15</sup> *Austerlitz*, 204–205.

In Sebald's description, the places of the construction of the Nation in the nineteenth century (barracks, archives, administrative buildings, hospitals) become places of imprisonment. In parallel to this, the spaces of bourgeois leisure come to evoke the camps. This is particularly true of spa towns, such as Theresienbad, with its "beautiful gardens, promenades, boarding houses and villas"<sup>16</sup> which were in fact used as a lure to trick Jews who were told they would be resettled there. Likewise, the description of a visit to Marienbad given by Marie de Verneuil, a mysterious young French woman whom Austerlitz meets in the old Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, tells how "the mineral waters and particularly the so-called Auschowitz Springs had gained a great reputation for curing the obesity then so common among the middle classes, as well as digestive disturbances, sluggishness of the intestinal canal and other stoppages of the lower abdomen..."<sup>17</sup> (the list of complaints continues for over half a page). Oddly, these physical symptoms are attributed to a fear of a loss of social standing: "the anxiety for the security of their social position constantly steering within them".<sup>18</sup> Here too, bourgeois society in its entirety leads towards the source of the waters of Auschowitz (and, the reader understands, towards Auschwitz).

Jacques Austerlitz's wanderings across Europe take him from station to station, from Liverpool Street to Antwerp Centraal station, from Wilson Station in Prague to the gare d'Austerlitz in Paris,<sup>19</sup> in a network of literary interrelations, of associations, to use the term employed in psychoanalysis. Antwerp Centraal Station, for instance, immediately makes him think of Lucerne station in Switzerland, destroyed in a fire – illustrated by a photograph in the book – which has clear echoes of Kristallnacht, the night of 9 November 1938 during which members of the SA systematically burned down the synagogues in German towns. Yet the "Night of Broken Glass" is not referred to specifically in the book. The protagonist's wanderings are also a journey from fortress to fortress, although one involves a striking and artful reversal of terms. For Europe's fortresses were constructed – with a hubris described wryly by Sebald – in order to protect populations from invaders, yet saw their role change to that of places of internment, to concentration camps. This was the case for the fortress of Breendonck, in Flanders,<sup>20</sup> which Austerlitz visits in an attempt to retrace the footsteps of the writer and philosopher Jean Améry. Like Breendonck, the fortress of Terezin also became a concentration camp. However, the transit camp for the Jews of Belgium sent to Auschwitz, through which 25,000 victims passed on their way to their deaths, was not Breendonck, but Malines/Mecheln. Significantly, Jacques Austerlitz goes through the town without stopping at the Dossin barracks, which were turned into a camp and now contain a museum.<sup>21</sup> Terezin, too, was unusual in that it was a ghetto-camp,<sup>22</sup> in which families were not separated, a camp for (temporarily) "privileged" Jews, which served the propaganda objectives of the Reich to fool the free world and the International Red Cross.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Austerlitz, 335.

<sup>17</sup> Austerlitz, 295.

<sup>18</sup> Austerlitz, 296.

<sup>19</sup> The novel starts almost inside this impressive station: Austerlitz, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Austerlitz, 25 and following.

<sup>21</sup> See the website of the Musée de la déportation in Malines-Mecheln: <http://www.kazernedossin.be/en>  
<sup>22</sup> The most thorough work on Terezin remains that of H.G. Adler, which is in fact quoted in Austerlitz, 327–334: H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955); Reprint (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> On the visit of the Red Cross to Terezin, see: C. Lanzmann, *Un vivant qui passe: Auschwitz 1943–Theresienstadt 1944* (Paris: Mille et une nuits/Arte éditions, 1997).

Sebald, then, does not allow himself to go into the Nazi camps or to visit the main sites of destruction, the death pits of Eastern Europe containing the 1.5 million victims of the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing squads; the extermination camps; Birkenau. When pressed on the subject of his taking of such side-roads, and of the impossibility of representing the camps in a work of literary fiction, Sebald was quick to justify his position. This is what he said to Michael Silverblatt, in a highly revealing exchange:

Michael Silverblatt: And that always circling is this silent presence (of the concentration camps) being left out but always gestured toward. Is that correct?

W.G. Sebald: Yes. I mean, your description corresponds very much to my intentions. I've always felt that it was necessary above all to write about the history of persecution, of vilification of minorities, the attempt, well-nigh achieved, to eradicate a whole people. And I was, in pursuing these ideas, at the same time conscious that it's practically impossible to do this; to write about concentration camps in my view is practically impossible (...) So the only way in which one can approach these things, in my view, is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, to my mind, Michael Silverblatt does not phrase the question correctly – and Sebald is in no hurry to put him right. *Austerlitz* speaks about the camps not by avoiding them, but by constantly shifting the subject. It is possible to read *Austerlitz* as a metaphor for the impossible memory of Auschwitz (the book's title, the name of its protagonist, and the final destination of his wanderings, the gare d'Austerlitz in Paris, all begin and end with the same letters and sounds as Auschwitz). One could cite more examples of this, such as when the narrator refers to another Austerlitz, interned in the camp of San Sabba, the infamous Risiera di San Sabba, the Italian camp in which 5000 political opponents and Resistance fighters were tortured and murdered. This camp was also used as a transit camp for Jews deported to Auschwitz. Again, though, (as with Austerlitz's visit to Breendonck) the main Italian transit camp for Jews in their way to Auschwitz was not San Sabba but Bolzano and Fossoli di Carpi.

Paradoxically, the narrative technique chosen by Sebald, that of literary evasion, creates a link to the fictional representations in the literature of the Holocaust from the 1950s and 1960s, a world away from the graphic and supposedly ultra-realistic excesses which have come to the fore in recent years. Jonathan Littell's novel, *The Kindly Ones*,<sup>25</sup> which chronicles the massacres carried out by the mobile killing squads, the Einsatzgruppen, in every conceivable detail, down to every last spurt of blood and shit, perhaps constitutes the *nec plus ultra* of this removal of all presupposed limits placed on representation. Sebald thus places himself within the category of those more sensitive and – let us not be afraid to say it – Jewish authors who have adopted this strategy of avoidance, of circumscription, and have not dared to step inside the camps in their fiction. One famous example of this approach is a novel which met with great public and critical success, *Les bagages de sable* by Anna Langfus, which won the prix Goncourt in 1962.<sup>26</sup> The heroine and narrator is a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, still a young woman, who lives in a tiny attic flat in Paris. During her

<sup>24</sup> M. Silverblatt, "A Poem of an Invisible Subject" (interview) in L. Sharon Schwartz, ed., *The emergence of memory: conversations with W.G. Sebald* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 79–80.

<sup>25</sup> J. Littell, *The Kindly Ones. A Novel* (New York: Harper, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> A. Langfus, *Les bagages de sable* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). English translation: *The Lost Shore* (London: Collins, 1963).

wanderings, she meets another survivor, both of them recognising each other in the crowd. The catastrophe is only referred to in very allusive terms.

While Sebald's reticence might seem excessive in this age of graphic, cinematic representations of horror, it in fact has a heuristic function. This subject-shifting is not merely evasive: it shows how memory can be thought of as an entity in constant movement, a form of memory which, as in case of the narrator/child-refugee Jacques Austerlitz, threatens with madness anyone who gets too close to it. This mode of functioning through fragments eventually allows the witness, the "Righteous" Véra Rysanova, the neighbour of Austerlitz's parents, the woman who tried to help them and has remained the custodian of their story, to be found.<sup>27</sup> It is her oral narrative which finally allows Jacques Austerlitz to learn his own history, and in the process rediscover his mother tongue. An oral narrative, then, and not the archive, makes this return of memory possible, even if the role of archival documents in *Austerlitz* also needs to be studied. The archive is seen here in terms of individual documents, isolated from each other, saved from the catastrophe, signposts along the route of memory, and not as a series of documents assembled and ready for perusal – and the historian of the Holocaust is suddenly (I speak here from my own experience) made to think about the singular nature of her/his professional practice, which involves poring over vast archives, rummaging through hundreds of boxes in order to build up a more-or-less linear narrative through which to approach the catastrophe. Sebald's approach is more akin to foraging than systematic study, yet as one reads through the book one encounters multiple accumulations of archival material, of old documents which still retain a menacing charge, and cry out to be read.<sup>28</sup> But the archives, the libraries, the museums are all closed, as in (in the book at least) the old Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris: "The old library in the rue Richelieu has been closed, as I saw for myself not long ago, said Austerlitz, the domed hall with its green porcelain lampshades which cast such a soothing, pleasant light is deserted, the books have been taken off the shelves, and the readers, who once sat at the desks numbered with little enamel plates, in close contact with their neighbours and silent harmony with those who had gone before, might have vanished from the face of the earth".<sup>29</sup>

Echoing this mass of books and archival material are vast accumulations of objects, all destined inexorably to disappear, truly an obsession for Sebald. These lifeless objects, seemingly without owners, function as inscriptions of the Holocaust through an interesting representational shift that shows just how sensitive Sebald was to the changes in memorial paradigms that occurred in his time. The most recent of these has been the growing interest in the economic aspects of the persecution and destruction of the Jews of Europe, a process which the Nazis – followed, sometimes rather unthinkingly, by historians – termed "economic aryanisation".<sup>30</sup> This process of mass theft by decree was a gigantic enterprise of looting and

<sup>27</sup> For Véra's narrative, see: *Austerlitz*, 215 and following.

<sup>28</sup> On the role of archives in Sebald's writing, see: P. Artières, "L'archive et les ruines. Pourquoi W.G. Sebald a révolutionné l'écriture de l'histoire?" in J.-M. Dreyfus, E. Loyer, "W.G. Sebald, le souci de l'histoire", *Revue Européenne d'Histoire/European Review of History*, forthcoming July 2012.

<sup>29</sup> *Austerlitz*, 385. In reality, the reading room on the rue de Richelieu is still open for those wishing to consult the collection of medals and prints belonging to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>30</sup> The bibliography on this area of Holocaust studies is now extensive, although this has only recently become the case. For works attempting to give an overview, see in particular: M. Dean, C. Goschler, P. Ther, eds., *Robbery and restitution: the conflict over Jewish property in Europe* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007); M. Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, USHMM, 2008).

redistribution. The resulting piles of objects, sorted into categories, have come to signify the destruction of their owners.<sup>31</sup> These aryianisation operations are described by Véra to Jacques Austerlitz: “I think it was in the late autumn of 1941, said Véra, that Agata had to take her wireless, her gramophone and the records she loved so much, her binoculars and opera glasses, musical instruments, jewellery, furs and the clothes Maximilian had left behind to the so-called Compulsory Collection Centre”.<sup>32</sup> We see these stolen items reflected in the windows of the Bazar Antikos in the town of Terezin during Jacques Austerlitz’s visit, mysterious objects from which it is difficult to avert one’s gaze, “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”.<sup>33</sup> This accumulation of objects on a vast scale was almost certainly what caught Sebald’s attention when he read an article in the German magazine *Die Zeit*, entitled “The Towers of Silence”.<sup>34</sup> This heavily illustrated article described the existence of an internment and forced labour camp for Jews in the heart of Paris, not far from the gare d’Austerlitz. Officially called the “Dienststelle Westen” (“Western Service”) by the German authorities, for its inmates and survivors it was simply “Austerlitz”. According to the journalist, it had been located on the same site as the newly-opened Bibliothèque Nationale de France, later rechristened the Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand, although in fact Austerlitz camp was situated some way further down the Seine, on the quai Panhard-et-Levassor, towards the Paris ring-road. For the journalist, however, the close proximity of high culture to destruction, of the nation’s greatest repository of learning to one of the branches of the Nazi concentration-camp system, could not fail to provoke a reaction on the part of the reader.

One could carry out a systematic comparison of the *Die Zeit* article with Sebald’s text. A large number of points taken from the article by the author have subsequently been proved false by historians. For instance, we now know that the camp guards were not “Indochinese” but in fact Central Asian troop from the Vlassov Army.<sup>35</sup> Sebald also contrasts the old library on the rue de Richelieu with its new incarnation, echoing the heated debates that accompanied its opening in France.<sup>36</sup> After all, was the “Babylonian” architecture of the *Très Grande Bibliothèque* not designed “on purpose to instil a sense of insecurity and humiliation in the poor readers...”?<sup>37</sup> In the library, Jacques Austerlitz, who is approaching the end of his travels, meets a conservator by the name of Henri Lemoine, who leads him up to the top of one of the library’s four towers. It is here that he has the vision – like Moses seeing the Promised Land which he is forbidden from entering – of what happened in the camp at Austerlitz:

an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris... In the years from 1942 onwards everything our civilization has produced, whether for embellishment of life or merely for everyday use, from Louis XVI

<sup>31</sup> Another literary expression of this trope is found in D. Keene, *The Rain* (1998). See: <http://australianplays.org/script/ASC-1226/extract>

<sup>32</sup> *Austerlitz*, 249–250. Some photos taken in Prague’s Collection Centre do exist, but Sebald did not use them in his book.

<sup>33</sup> *Austerlitz*, 274–275.

<sup>34</sup> A. Smolczyk, “Die Turmen des Schweigens”, *Die Zeit*, 23 January 1997.

<sup>35</sup> The division commanded by General Vlassov, a captured Soviet general, was constituted by the Wehrmacht out of Soviet POWs from the Baltic republics and central Asia.

<sup>36</sup> See for example two special issues of the magazine *Le Débat* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999–2000), Nr 105 (May–August 1999); Nr 109 (March–April 2000).

<sup>37</sup> *Austerlitz*, 389.

chest of drawers, Meissen porcelain, Persian rugs and whole libraries, down to the last salt-cellar and peppermill, was stacked there in the Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot.<sup>38</sup>

The description continues for two whole pages yet contains some curious inaccuracies. I was myself researching the history of this unknown camp in Paris in 2001, at the time that Sebald's book was published in French by the publishing house Actes Sud. The sociologist Sarah Gensburger and I were jointly assembling documents on the history of Drancy's three satellite camps, where Jews with "privileged" status (in most cases through intermarriage) were forced to sort, clean, pack and remove all traces of ownership from the objects and furniture looted from 38,000 apartments in Paris and its suburbs.<sup>39</sup> In the end, the furniture is no longer there, the objects have all vanished, along with their owners, whose ancestors are to be found in the Jewish section of Montparnasse cemetery, visited a few pages earlier by Jacques Austerlitz.<sup>40</sup> The last station on the line for Jacques Austerlitz, a child of the Kindertransport saved from the catastrophe, the gare d'Austerlitz in Paris echoes Liverpool Street Station, where he arrived as a child and where he heard the first voices he can remember. The only possible narrative of the catastrophe is one of a ceaseless wandering that allows his family's history to be pieced together from fragments using a powerful combination of emotions and invocations, in the spiritualist sense of the term. For sometimes the dead return, in the form of physical remains, or images that have survived. Sebald thus provides us not so much with a meditation on historical writing as an ethics of the representation of horror, an ethics which, I would argue, historians would do well to consider more closely.

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<sup>38</sup> Austerlitz, 401–402.

<sup>39</sup> Our book was eventually published at the end of 2003: J.M. Dreyfus, S. Gensburger, *Des camps dans Paris. Austerlitz, Léviton, Bassano, juin 1943–août 1944* (Paris: Fayard, 2003); English translation: *Nazi Labour Camps in Paris* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Austerlitz, 360–363.