THE USES OF IMAGES: W.G. SEBALD & T.J. CLARK

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Abstract: Scholarship on W.G. Sebald's work, seduced by his brilliant prose, has tended to concentrate on the texts as verbal matters, at the cost, at times at least, of the images. Thus within much of the existing Sebald scholarship the rich and ambiguous relationship between word and image gets short shrift. This chapter interrogates that relationship, approaching Sebald's work, especially *Austerlitz* (2001), as a potentially productive challenge to architectural history. I weave my account through a consideration of *The Sight of Death. An Experiment in Art Writing* (2006) by the renowned art historian, T.J. Clark, which poses a deliberate and self-conscious challenge to certain conventional practices within art history. Thus the chapter examines the use of images – especially images of architecture – in Sebald's work to reflect on what his approach might offer the discipline of art history.

The sophisticated staging of the complex inter-relationship between image and text in the work of W.G. Sebald (1944–2001) is a potentially productive challenge to art history. I weave this reading of Sebald's work, particularly *Austerlitz* (first published in German in 2001), through a consideration of T.J. Clark's *The Sight of Death* with which there are many apparent similarities and resonances.[2] Although it may seem invidious to compare the work of Sebald, who was not an art historian (he referred to his work as 'prose narrative'), with that of a renowned art historian whose work poses a deliberate and self-conscious challenge to certain conventional practices within art history, I argue that it is Sebald who may have most to show us in this regard.

In *The Sight of Death* an eminent art historian adopts – perhaps one should say 'resorts to' – an unusually literary mode of writing, the diary entry, combined with poems, while Sebald's tactic might be characterised as a remarkably historical mode of literary writing. Both Clark and Sebald deploy a multitude of images in their texts: Sebald uses a range of black and white images: plans, paintings, sketches, but mostly black and white photos, which are inserted without captions in his text. Both authors, in their radically differing ways, are writing about the discrepant role of images (photographs, paintings) in both skewering and destabilizing relationships between past and present, about sight, particularly 'the sight of death', about silence and the strange workings of sight and memory. Both authors, again in different ways, confront the problems of the image, of 'seeing' and not seeing and of the queasy relationship between seeing and knowing. Sebald is principally concerned with what we fail to see or mistakenly see, with radical disjuncture between claim and sight, and with the unnerving potential that photographs sometimes possess to release intense connection

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[2] W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2001). Subsequent references are to this edition (abbreviated in the main text as *A)* followed by page numbers. T.J. Clark's *The Sight of Death. An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006) (abbreviated in the main text as *SD*).

between their dead subject and their living viewer; meanwhile Clark aims to make himself and his reader see more – and more of what he himself sees – in specific oil paintings by Nicolas Poussin.

It is not by chance that Clark invokes poetry and Sebald deploys photographs. It is as if both writers found the traditional, conventional modes of their respective practices insufficient to the task they had set themselves. Thus although the differences between Sebald and Clark are many and profound, a juxtaposition of aspects of their work is illuminating. It seems to me that in these two books there is at work an interesting exchange, or intersection, of a sort, between the 'task' of the art historian and that of the literary writer, that is very suggestive. Such slippage across or productive exchange between fields is by no means restricted to these two writers. One could add to their number the names of a host of other, more or less prominent, contemporary writers, who are deploying photographic images, often of architecture, in their work, notably Orhan Pamuk, J.G. Ballard, Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein.[3] Of course, these practices extend beyond contemporary novels and memoirs to the intensified conjunction of text and image in contemporary culture, such as advertising and websites.

Both authors set themselves the problem of *writing after.* For Clark it is that of writing after Marxism; for Sebald that of writing after the Shoah. Both regard themselves as impossibly ensnared. For Sebald the questions revolve around what sort of writing is possible after the Holocaust and in the face of humankind's pitiless extermination of nature, which he has witnessed all around him, and which he regards as indelibly connected to the logic of modernity; for Clark, the most prominent pitfalls are those of the social history of art, of which he once was the most dazzling exponent.[4] Not by chance, then, does Clark invoke poetry and Sebald deploy photographs.

W.G. Sebald's writing shuns the techniques of a realistic novel. Indeed, it can be seen as an attempt to destroy the border between fiction and nonfiction in an attempt to interrogate the problem of how we might 'know' the past. Thus the narrator of *Austerlitz* recounts the efforts of a Czech Jew to recover the fragments of a family history, shattered by the Holocaust. Yet, as Mark Anderson and others have argued, the roads in Sebald's work do not all lead to Theresienstadt, despite the forceful application of that reading of Sebald's work particularly by commentators in the USA and UK.[5] Sebald's concerns are wider – with existential exile, as well as the political refugee, the long history of mass killings in European history, as well as in the twentieth century – and he ranges across European history from the Renaissance and the eighteenth century to the present. The thematization of the Shoah in his work goes hand in hand with a profound concern with the longer history of modernity.[6] As Anderson points out: 'The view of human devastation and darkness is much larger, at once geophysical

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[3] O. Pamuk, *Istanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* (2003) was published in English as *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, trans. by M. Freely (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); J.G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton: an autobiography* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008); I. Sinclair, *London Orbital: A walk around the M25* (London: Granta, 2002); I. Sinclair and R. Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (London: Granta, 1999).

[4] His most significant contribution remains T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), which transformed the face of art history.

[5] Richard Eder in *The New York Times* claimed that Sebald, with Primo Levi, was 'the prime speaker of the Holocaust'. Richard Eder, 'Excavating a Life', *New York Times* Sunday Book Review (October 28, 2001), 10. Quoted by Mark M. Anderson, 'The Edge of Darkness: On W.G. Sebald', *October*, 106 (Fall 2003), 104.

[6] J.J. Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3.

and metaphysical, though their roots lie in a profound meditation on the violence of European modernity'.[7] In short, it is the eerie relationship between presence and being and loss and oblivion that detains him:

> On every new thing there lies already the shadow of annihilation. For the history of every individual, of every social order, indeed of the whole world, does not describe an ever-widening, more and more wonderful arc, but rather follows a course which, once the meridian is reached, leads without fail down into darkness.[8]

T.J. Clark, like Sebald, is concerned with a materialist account of history, but for Clark this is orchestrated around the contemplation of paintings. Clark presents his book, somewhat disingenuously perhaps, as an informal diary account of his engagement with Poussin, more specifically with two paintings by Poussin, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake,* 1648, (National Gallery, London), and *Landscape with a Calm*, 1650–51 (the Getty Center, LA), which Clark encountered hanging together at the Getty Museum while he was on a six-month research stint at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. This was for him a fortuitous opportunity to study the paintings together, away from the jostling dim National Gallery room where *Snake* usually hangs.

While Clark seizes upon the first person voice and the diary form in his quest to achieve intimacy, immediacy, the minimum of mediation, and to authentically convey the contradictory processes of extended looking, Sebald deploys the first person only in gestures of infinite regression. In *Austerlitz*, Sebald's 'place' as author is assumed by a German narrator, whose biographical details closely resemble Sebald's, but whose principal role is to bear witness, to *listen*, rather than to speak. Thus the book is largely made up of avowedly indirect speech, reported in extensive sentences, which range sometimes over pages, and whose protraction itself represents the twists and self-envelopings of time and memory. Yet the narrator holds the narrations together, and is himself woven into them, in an implicit gesture of solidarity and identification that is all the more effective for being unstated. One example must suffice. At the very end of *Austerlitz,* the narrator reads a book by Dan Jacobson, which Austerlitz had given him, which describes the author's search for his grandfather, a search which takes him to Fort IX in Kaunas, Lithuania, where the Wehrmacht command posts were set up in 1941 and where more than 30,000 people were killed over the following three years. 'Transports from the west kept coming to Kaunas until May 1944, when the war had long been lost, as the last messages from those locked in the dungeons of the fortress bear witness', writes Jacobson (*A* 415). One of these messages, 'Max Stern, Paris, 18.5.44', gestures toward W.G. 'Max' Sebald, who was born on that date. Thus Sebald's and the narrator's identities are intertextually affiliated and transnationally ranged, and dispersed, rather than concentrated and seeking convergence as in Clark's work.

Both Sebald and Clark adopt their unconventional modes of writing and representation, because of their awareness of the multiple discrepancies and slippages between images and time. Clark's book recounts the process of standing day after day in front of a painting, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (Fig. 1).

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[7] Anderson, 'The Edge of Darkness', 120.

[8] W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. by Michael Hulse (London: Harvill Press, 1998), first published as *Die Ringe des Saturn: eine englische Wallfahrt* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1995).

Fig. 1: Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with a Man killed by a Snake,* oil on canvas, 118 × 198 cm (National Gallery). Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

Clark observes:

> astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface, what is salient and what incidental alter bewilderingly from day to day, the larger order of the depiction breaks up, recrystallizes, fragments again, persists like an after image. (*SD* 5).

Clark's realization was that the diary record was of interest as a 'record of looking taking place and changing through time' (*SD* 5). Thus his book challenges conventional art history's supposed habit of assuming that an artwork remains always the same to the interpreter, to examine instead the ways in which painting, looking, and writing are entwined, and in it he searches to be more responsive – which is also to be more hesitant – to the painting, and to modes of seeing.

What Clark finds increasingly compelling is less the snake and the imposition of a narrative about it than what he calls 'structural and material issues': the size and shape of the picture, the place assigned to animal and human within that shape; the relation of large and small, dark and light, within the pictorial field; and the balance between overall simplification and clarity of structure and materiality in detail. For Clark this amounts to 'a claim for a kind of ethical balance, or ethical composure', which paintings 'through their very wordlessness may strike': 'The pictures' ethical temper is their *atmosphere* most powerfully, and the viewing distance this atmosphere seems to dictate' (*SD* 136). 'There is,' suggests Clark, 'such a thing as an ethics and politics specifically of the image – a set of attitudes to, and demonstrations of, the way giving visual form to experience can (sometimes) edge

understanding away from the confines of the sentence'.[9] For Clark, then, attentive looking at a painting can produce or reveal such an ethics. His book uses images to assist – even perhaps to force – the viewer to participate in such concentrated detailed looking for 'ethical' ends.

Initially, Clark's tone seems designed to encourage us to look more closely and carefully – more hesitantly, perhaps: 'There is a word and a concept hovering here, to do with the point where the mental and manual meet, or the conceptual and material; but for the moment they're escaping me', he writes about *Calm* (*SD* 64). He tries to demonstrate the way in which an earlier engagement with a painting can resurface unpredictably to foreground specific aspects of it later: 'This morning almost the first thing I saw in *Landscape with a Snake* was the pair of tiny figures – are they women or men in togas? – standing at the top of the hill by the farmstead, to the left […] I know I have noticed them before, looking at the picture in London. And now I realise that at least once over the past few days, I half-remembered that there was "something there" – some unfinished business – up on the cliff' (*SD* 44) [Fig. 2]. Clark seeks at once to immerse himself in and explore the yields of repeated acts of looking, partly to test whether 'the work we depend on images to do for us – the work of immobilizing, and therefore making tolerable' is thereby undermined (*SD* 8). More significantly, the repeated returns to *Landscape with a Snake* are a challenge to what he sees as the prevailing practice in art history of 'writing pictures to death' in embedding 'in the *form* of the narrative the (false) suggestion that once upon a time, back there and in the present […] the picture lived everlastingly here and now' (*SD* 8–9).

Elsewhere, however, the apparent hesitancy of Clark's tone yields to something more insistent: 'It is important that we find our way into the picture first (I want to be literal for a moment about our entering the fiction from the nearest point available) on a definite downhill slope' (*SD* 89). Such instructions martial our looking (somewhat as TV cameras direct 'watching' an orchestra play) and combine with the numerous images to produce an insistent and hectoring register. For The *Sight of Death* is lavishly interspersed with illustrations, including many more details of fewer paintings than is usual in art history publications, as well as larger details of smaller areas of the picture surface than is usual (how much detail is too much?). Thus one plate shows at approximately life-size a detail of part of a castle which is no more than one-thirtieth of the whole painting in extent, and several other illustrations show the same castle carefully cropped to highlight its relation to foreground and background. Images are dispersed liberally amongst the text: 'Look at the wrinkles for bricks on the front pillar', Clark enjoins himself and us, 'Go in close again, and the blue, in its very impersonality, is a fragile shifting work of the hand' (*SD* 63). Thus he seeks to draw together text with image. The detail and direction are a form of coercion delivered with the best intentions, of course, since for Clark 'scale and color, and opacity versus transparency, are the forms of an argument in Poussin: they *are* the argument, or what marks this argument off from many others roughly the same, but lacking in precision' (*SD* 49).[10] They are his mode of tracing the way a painting 'directs an inquiry into "what it is saying"' (*SD* 83).

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[9] T.J. Clark, 'Balancing act (letter to the editor)' in *Artforum International* 45:8 (April 2007), 42.

[10] This coerciveness is at odds with Poussin's work, and indeed, it appears to be at variance with Clark's own understanding of it. He observes eagerly with regard to *Landscape with a Calm:* 'this picture's construction is as uncoercive as they come.' Clark, *The Sight of Death*, 90. That is not all that seems to me to be at odds with Poussin. The leisurely, self-indulgent, powerfully Americanized tone and artful manner of writing are at odds with Poussin's rigorous economies.

Detail of *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*,

sion: the branch in question is on another plane altogether, many feet closer to us) is a clump of dark leaves. Behind them is the dark receding corner of the farmstead wall. The red and light blue of what they are wearing are electric: small as they are (a third of an inch in a picture that looks almost 4 feet high) the figures are meant to fixate; and they do, once seen. Even from normal viewing distance, 6 or more feet away, they register. Equally, they can be repressed. I know I have noticed them before, looking at the picture in London. And now I realize that at least once over the past few days I half-remembered that there was "something there" – some unfinished business – up on the cliff. But the half-memory passed and did not lead to me actually looking: it was only today that I saw them, immediately, and then as a consequence saw the slightly larger, darker red and blue walkers down by the lakeside – in the gloom where the swimmers have thrown off their clothes.

Detail of *Landscape with a Calm*.

What are these miniature figures in Poussin about? Why do they come and go in perception? Why, once seen, do they matter so much? Calling the figures tiny is crude. They are smaller or larger within a fairly wide range. The characters hurrying or sauntering on the path by the city wall in *Landscape with a Calm*, for instance – Anne suggested the other day that their being visible only from the waist up may be a way of registering the track they are walking along as worn-down, age-old – are different in kind from the red and blue pair on the cliff, at least if we look at them from a reasonable viewing distance, taking in the picture as a whole. The pair in *Snake* are spots of color, points of light, things that can only be figures even if we cannot exactly make them out – signs of figures, I'd say, if the semiotics were not too cut and dried. The people on the path, by contrast, are just readable as individuals actually doing something, not simply standing for themselves, not upright instances.

FIG. 2: T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death, An Experiment in Art Writing* (Yale University Press: 2006), pp. 44–45, showing the juxtaposition of details of paintings and text.

The imbalance of power in making mute things speak preoccupies both Sebald and Clark, though they respond in very different ways. 'I began writing, and could not stop', Clark claims (*SD* 3). Sebald makes no similar disingenuous disclaimers of responsibility; rather the contrary. From the first, he makes clear both the great *difficulty* and the responsibility of enunciating. His writing demonstrates the extremely problematic relationship between writing and speaking, images and memory, and the obliteration of other stories or other versions of the same story that his words necessarily and inevitably represent, even in their arduous task of searching to remember something and to restore something that has been wilfully obliterated. For Sebald attention to the image does not reveal or produce an ethics. Indeed, his whole work flinches from any ready engagement with that showy and treacherous word. Instead Sebald reveals that his own text is itself quite the reverse: it is complicit and compromised. To do this, rather like Clark, he deploys the image; but for Sebald the relationship between image and text is always troubled. Further, while Clark insists that we look here and see that, Sebald treats the relationship of text and image with far greater wariness. He demonstrates their allure, their tensions and their treachery indirectly, unobtrusively, and non-directively. While Sebald's *Austerlitz*, like Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul*, deploys photographic images, apparently in the manner of more or less conventional illustrations, the volumes always resist, in a range of ways, demeaning the photograph into mere illustration of the text, or vice versa. In this way Sebald's novel disrupts historicist narrative devices in a Benjaminian mode.[11]

A photograph of a cracked display case containing butterflies, for example, is inserted amidst an extended reflection on the beauty of moths and various collected creatures, itself a passage which in its curiously hesitant and divagational tone evokes both the beautiful dead butterfly and its meandering flight (Fig. 3). The photo is forced into the text mid-sentence, such that the whole, text and image taken together, implies that the text itself enters the logic of collecting, figured here as a collection of captured, dead creatures, not readily seen, imprisoned behind cracked glass. Multiple delicate painstaking violences have already taken place and the text is part of them.

Images detonate and throw the reader off kilter; text disorients the reading of the image. Sometimes this is orchestrated graphically, as for example, in *Schwindel. Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1990) (Fig. 4). Here, as Mark Anderson has shown, the top of the painting of the Battle of Marengo showing only pale sky, is located at the bottom of the left-hand page, introduced by the centred three-word line 'mit sich allein' ('alone with himself').[12] The bottom of the painting, representing the actual battle, is at the top of the facing page, and is followed by a second triad of words, 'wie ein Untergehender' ('like one meeting his doom'). The image, like a baroque *trompe l'oeil*, is cropped to resemble a memorial column, complete with verse-like epitaph. The belated experience of the materiality of death leads to the dizzying cut: the spliced painting trips the reader up and induces a textual vertigo akin to the 'vertiginous sense of confusion' in the text experienced by Henri Beyle related to his renunciation of a military career, and his decision to become Stendhal.[13]

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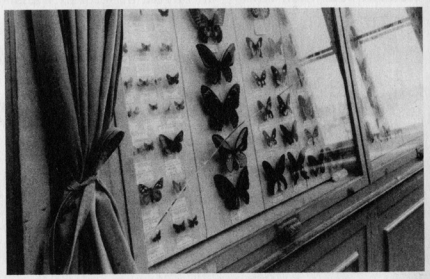
[11] In Pamuk's case this device enables him to explore Islamic unease with figurative visual representation.

[12] The passage is brilliantly analysed in Anderson, 'Edge of Darkness'. The editions in English translation fail to reproduce such subtleties in the relationship between text and image, thereby considerably blunting the work of the novel. Anderson, 'Edge of Darkness', 102–121, esp. 118–119.

[13] Marie-Henri Beyle (1783–1842) adopted the pen name of Stendhal (among others).

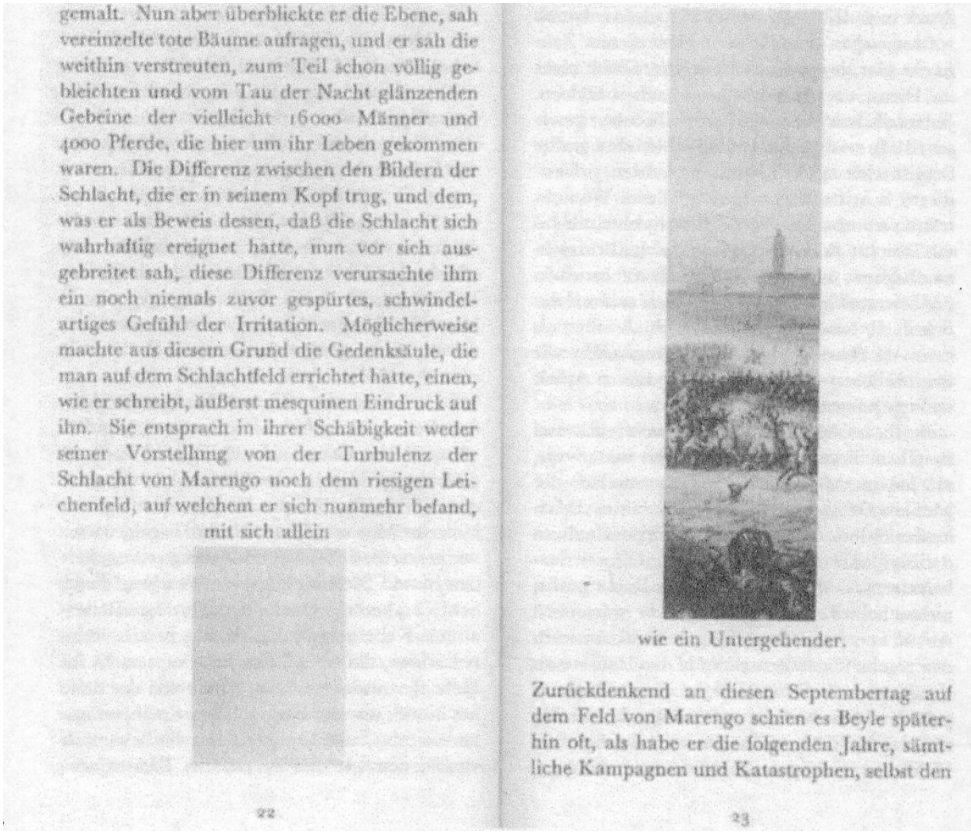
ein aschgraues Gefieder, außerdem einen karminroten Schwanz, einen schwarzen Schnabel und ein weißliches, wie man denken konnte, von tiefer Trauer gezeichnetes Gesicht. Im übrigen, fuhr Austerlitz fort, fand sich fast in jedem der Räume von Andromeda Lodge irgendein Naturalienkabinett, Kästen mit zahlreichen, zum Teil verglasten Schubladen, in denen die ziemlich kugeligen Eier der Papageien zu Hunderten aufrangiert waren, Muschel-, Mineralien-, Käfer- und Schmetterlingssammlungen, in Formaldehyd



eingelegte Blindschleichen, Nattern und Echsen, Schneckenhäuser und Seesterne, Krebse und Krabben und große Herbarien mit Baumblättern, Blüten und Gräsern. Adela habe ihm einmal erzählt, sagte

Austerlitz, daß die Verwandlung von Andromeda Lodge in eine Art Naturhistorisches Museum ihren Anfang genommen habe mit der Bekanntschaft, die der Papageienvorfahre Geralds im Jahr 1869 mit Charles Darwin gemacht hatte, als dieser in einem von ihm unweit von Dolgellau gemieteten Haus arbeitete an seiner Studie über die Abstammung des Menschen. Darwin sei damals oft bei den Fitzpatricks in Andromeda Lodge zu Gast gewesen und habe, der Familienüberlieferung zufolge, immer wieder die paradiesische Aussicht gerühmt, die man von hier oben genoß. Aus jener Zeit datiere auch, so, sagte Austerlitz, habe ihm Adela gesagt, das bis auf den heutigen Tag sich fortsetzende Schisma in dem Clan der Fitzpatricks, nach dem in jeder Generation einer der jeweils zwei Söhne dem Katholizismus abtrünnig und Naturforscher geworden sei. So war Aldous, der Vater Geralds, Botaniker gewesen, während sein um mehr als zwanzig Jahre älterer Bruder Evelyn festgehalten hatte an dem überkommenen Glaubensbekenntnis des in Wales als die schlimmste aller Perversionen geltenden Papismus. Tatsächlich war auch die katholische Linie in der Familie immer die der Exzentriker und Verrückten gewesen, wie man deutlich am Fall des Onkels Evelyn noch sehen konnte. Er ist zu der Zeit, während ich als Gast Geralds alljährlich viele Wochen hindurch bei den Fitzpatricks war, sagte

FIG. 3: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 126–127, showing Sebald's characteristic use of grainy images set into text without caption.


gemalt. Nun aber überblickte er die Ebene, sah vereinzelte tote Bäume aufragen, und er sah die weithin verstreuten, zum Teil schon völlig gebleichten und vom Tau der Nacht glänzenden Gebeine der vielleicht 16000 Männer und 4000 Pferde, die hier um ihr Leben gekommen waren. Die Differenz zwischen den Bildern der Schlacht, die er in seinem Kopf trug, und dem, was er als Beweis dessen, daß die Schlacht sich wahrhaftig ereignet hatte, nun vor sich ausgebreitet sah, diese Differenz verursachte ihm ein noch niemals zuvor gespürtes, schwindelartiges Gefühl der Irritation. Möglicherweise machte aus diesem Grund die Gedenksäule, die man auf dem Schlachtfeld errichtet hatte, einen, wie er schreibt, äußerst mesquinen Eindruck auf ihn. Sie entsprach in ihrer Schäbigkeit weder seiner Vorstellung von der Turbulenz der Schlacht von Marengo noch dem riesigen Leichenfeld, auf welchem er sich nunmehr befand, mit sich allein

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wie ein Untergehender.

Zurückdenkend an diesen Septembertag auf dem Feld von Marengo schien es Beyle späterhin oft, als habe er die folgenden Jahre, sämtliche Kampagnen und Katastrophen, selbst den

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Fig. 4: W.G. Sebald, Schwindel. Gefühle (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1990), pp.22–23, showing Sebald's manipulation of image and text relationship.

Sebald deploys photographs like guns. They disrupt and knock off course. Even as they suggest authentification and truth, they undermine that assumption. But the knock-out shots they deliver are unrelated to force. The photographic medium does not impose a sense of mediation. There is, rather, an invitation to meditate.[14] Consider the first spread of images from *Austerlitz* (Fig. 5). Closely cropped ogling eyes of defamiliarised animals, supposedly from the Antwerp Nocturama, and of the painter Jan Peter Tripp and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein are the first images to appear in *Austerlitz*. Insistently but quietly they suggest questions about the relationships between animal and human, between text and image, and between looking and interpreting; and about the connections between all three. Moreover, as the narrator claims that the eyes of the nocturnal animals resemble those of 'certain painters and philosophers', the photographs occupy a position of disturbance in relation to the text, since the animals' eyes, contrary to those claims, do not actually closely resemble those of either the painter or the philosopher. Thus the question of the difference

[14] P. Muldoon, *Plan B* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2009), 7.

er, durch dieses, weit über jede vernünftige Gründlichkeit hinausgehende Waschen entkommen zu können aus der falschen Welt, in die er gewissermaßen ohne sein eigenes Zutun geraten war. Von den in dem Nocturama behausten Tieren ist mir sonst nur in Erinnerung geblieben, daß etliche von ihnen auffallend große Augen hatten und jenen unverwandt

forschenden Blick, wie man ihn findet bei bestimmten Malern und Philosophen, die vermittels der rei-

nen Anschauung und des reinen Denkens versuchen, das Dunkel zu durchdringen, das uns umgibt. Im üb-

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Fig. 5: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), p. 11.

between seeing and knowing, sight and seeing, and between claim and evidence is implied. While the nocturnal animals can see in the dark, humans cannot; instead humans have a remarkable capacity to see what they are told is there. Thus paradoxically, through the sight of the organs of sight the problem of 'the darkness that surrounds us' (*A* 3) is subtly set in motion.

Clark insists that looking takes time and effort. We look from different views and at different moments. His book confounds the lure of visibility that it appears to offer the reader. '*Landscape with a Snake* seems to me wonderful', writes Clark, 'because it puts that fiction of visibility to the test' (*SD* 9). Despite his tiresome defensiveness, his clever and arch contrivance, despite so much being wise after the event—and all in the name of its obverse – Clark, too, is searching for an ethical way to do (art) history, and it is that search that produces the unconventional form of his book. The marks of Poussin's praxis come to stand for an ethics and a politics that Clark can state 'only by means of tracing the slipperiness of the materiality of Poussin's paint'.[15] Through that exploration, Clark traces an ethics in Poussin: 'for a painter like Poussin the stakes were higher than truth to materials. What he was after was a freedom – freedom and accuracy – a way of reopening the world to imaginative scrutiny'.[16]

The numerous and detailed reproductions of Poussin's paintings in Clark's book (on which Yale University Press has lavished huge resources) seem to represent an effort both to replicate seeing the paintings themselves and to match as closely as possible what T.J. Clark's text tells us that he saw and directs us to see also. Thus the dream here is of identicality: seeing the same and the same seeing. For Sebald that is precisely the nightmare and the fear. Instead Sebald selects images that are often hard to decipher, murky and grainy, images which self-evidently lack authority, and which fail to support textual claims – even directly undermining textual authority. Sebald's scrupulous avoidance of the subjection of image to text or text to image is most apparent in his fastidious avoidance of captions, but it extends to including images that have no direct consonance with the text whatsoever. Thus his images serve to further fragment truth, rather than to guarantee it, for instance by playing on apparent consonances which are simultaneously exposed to be either wittily unreliable or to have no literal correspondence at all. A description of a medieval castle is illustrated with a photo of a castle amid a rocky landscape, which, on closer inspection, turns out to be a close-up of a planter in the form of a castle sprouting cacti.

What at first sight appears to be a prosaic photograph of two billiard balls (Fig. 6) is inserted into an account about Iver Grove, a 'building now everywhere falling into decay' (*A* 147), which Austerlitz and his history teacher happen to visit: 'it seemed to us as if silent horror had seized upon the house at the prospect of its imminent and shameful end' (*A* 147). The owner of Iver Grove tells them that his ancestor, who built it, suffered from insomnia and withdrew into the observatory 'to devote himself to various astronomical studies, particularly selenography or the delineation of the moon' (*A* 148). After his death, no-one had ever played in the billiard room again:

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[15] P. Plock, 'Social Paint', unpublished paper delivered to the annual conference of Association of Art Historians (2009). See Clark, *Sight of Death*, 43.

[16] Clark, *Sight of Death*, 127.

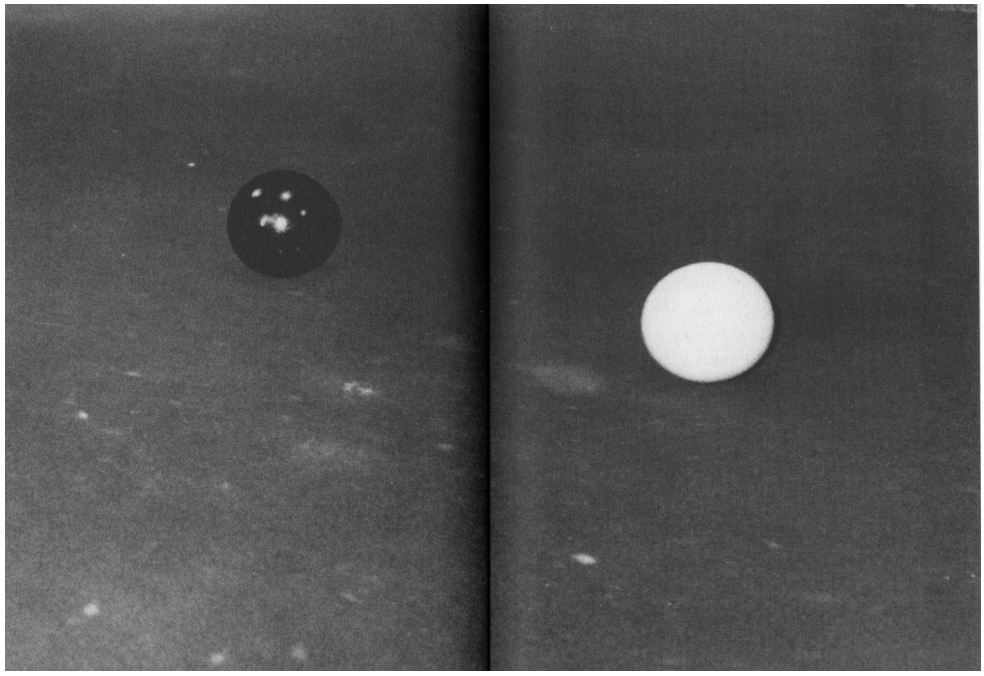

FIG. 6: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, pp.158–9.

> Evidently, said Austerlitz, this place had always remained so secluded from the rest of the house that for a century and a half scarcely so much as a gossamer-thin layer of dust had been able to settle on […] the green baize cloth stretched over the table, which seemed like a self-contained universe. (*A* 152).

The photograph, therefore, depicts at once planet and satellite, billiard table and balls, and a dust-covered 'self-contained universe' that is a neglected memorial to the ancestor.

Just as *Austerlitz* shuns the techniques of a realistic novel, its images shun the status of illustration. Sebald demonstrates a lively awareness of the problems of the photograph. Jacques Austerlitz is himself an architectural historian, and interested in photography:

> From the outset my main concern was with the shape and the self-contained nature of discrete things, the curve of banisters on a staircase, the moulding of a stone arch over a gateway [...] it never seemed to me right to turn [...] my camera on people. (*A* 108).

I am not, of course, claiming that W.G. Sebald *was* an architectural historian or that his books are in any straightforward way architectural history. But I would like to raise the question here of whether they may not also be an important *form* of architectural history – and therefore present a challenge to certain conventionally established and unexamined practices within architectural history.

The issue posed by Sebald, which is also found in much contemporary cultural production, is the way in which images juxtaposed with texts produce an inter-play between them (the

interstices or the intertextuality) to indicate the constructed nature of the text itself. Sebald's work appears to participate in the 'pictorial turn' (or, as it is sometimes called, the 'iconic' or 'visual' turn) in contemporary culture, that is, in the widely shared notion that visual images have replaced words as the dominant mode of expression in our time. This idea is elaborated and resisted most notably by W.J.T. Mitchell.[17] Rather than adopting a simplistic notion that 'images are replacing words', or relying on a pre-existing theory or method, Mitchell suggest we let pictures 'speak for themselves'.[18] Starting from 'metapictures' or pictures that reflect on the process of pictorial representation itself, he sought to study pictures themselves as forms of theorizing. He aims to 'picture theory, not to import a theory of pictures from somewhere else'.[19] Sebald's use of images is less didactic, and is above all concerned with photographs. Unlike many writers who use photographs to interrogate memory (such as Pamuk, who writes about Istanbul by drawing heavily on his own experiences), Sebald deploys his writing and photographs in order to 'give myself an idea of that which I myself never lived and which no-one spoke to me about'.[20] Thus his is a conjuring of absences, without a wish to produce solid presences. This method draws on the mysterious power in photographs of what Barthes calls 'concomitance', or 'co-presence', whereby photographs can sometimes strangely convey to a viewer a sense of her own earlier and thitherto forgotten presence in the scene.[21]

These very practices, which are at work in the text-image relations and constitute their density, pose a direct challenge to conventional architectural history, both in its rather naïvely 'flat' use of photographs as 'illustration', and in its equally naïve historicist appropriation of memory and time.

A single spread (Fig. 7) from Deborah Howard's *Architectural History of Venice* (in many ways, an exemplary piece of architectural history), demonstrates two ways in which architectural history habitually seeks to annihilate the specifics of the moment in its use of photographs. The right-hand photograph in Figure 7 is characteristic of architectural history's habit of selecting photographs devoid of people, and in which all signs of the specificity of the moment are effaced. Such photographic illustrations appear to indicate that the moment privileged for analysis is contemporaneous neither with the building's execution nor with the architecture's interpretation, so much as *outside* of history itself.

When events and people do intrude, architectural history fastidiously ignores them. Thus in the left hand photo in Figure 7 the mysterious gentleman taking his coffee, who appears to be purposefully framed by the open door and who would not be out of place in a book by Sebald, is at once shown and effaced. The text is forbidden from mentioning such people. A particularly eloquent example is a beautiful photograph of Palazzo Bonagia in Palermo in Anthony Blunt's *Sicilian Baroque* (1968), taken, as the caption points out, before the aerial bombardment of 1943 (Fig. 8).

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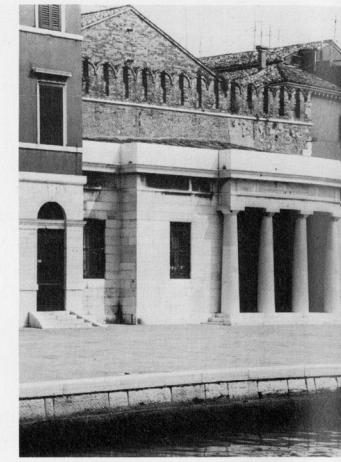
[17] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: essays on verbal and visual representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

[18] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 6.

[19] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 6.

[20] Quoted in R. Kahn, 'La photographie dans *Les Anneaux de Saturne* de W.G. Sebald', in R. Kahn, ed., *À travers les modes* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Université de Rouen, 2004), 25–34, 26.

[21] Scrutinizing Lartigue's 1931 beach image, Barthes wondered whether 'maybe [as a younger man] I was there'. Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), 84.



ABOVE, LEFT
121 Caffè Florian, Piazza San Marco, décor by Ludovico Cadorin, 1858 *(Sarah Quill)*

ABOVE, RIGHT
122 Corpo di Guardia, Arsenal, by Giovanni Casoni, designed 1829 *(Sarah Quill)*

Although Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy was short-lived, it established certain attitudes towards the architectural heritage of the city which were to survive through much of the nineteenth century. The most significant of these were a continuing readiness to demolish historic buildings and a bold policy of modernization. The Neoclassical movement, which had formulated an idiom so well-suited to Napoleonic ideals, had provided the style adopted by the Establishment. As the chief propagator of Neoclassicism, the Venetian Accademia di Belle Arti was given full recognition, and in 1807 Giannantonio Selva was given the task of converting the former Scuola and monastery of the Carità into their new premises. Meanwhile, a new organizational framework for local government in the city was founded to replace the Republic's numerous magistracies. Thus the Kingdom of Italy not only bequeathed its policies, but also the administrative machinery with which to implement them.

The second and third periods of Austrian rule (1814–48 and 1849–66)

With the return of the Austrians a period of recession and economic hardship set in. A trade blockade in 1813–14 had only aggravated the already precarious financial situation. The cumbersome bureaucracy established during the Napoleonic period proved incapable of tackling the huge social problems caused by the economic decline – poverty, infant mortality and unemployment. The changing social conditions in the city are reflected in the fact that the number of people in domestic service fell by as much as 90% in the early nineteenth century. Heavy taxation penalized property owners so severely that many palaces and houses were demolished, simply because their

FIG. 7: Deborah Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice* (London: Batsford, 1989), p. 218. Photograph © Sarah Quill.

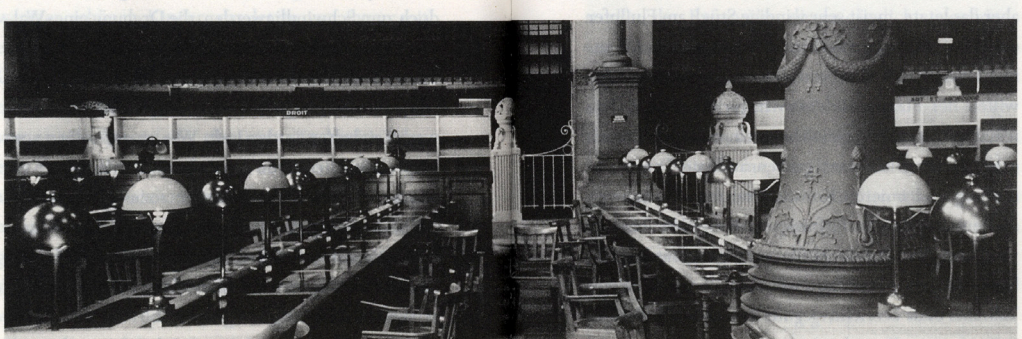
115 *(top left)* Trapani Staircase of the Santuario dell'Annunziata, now the Museo Pepoli, begun in 1639 with decoration added in the 18th century.
116 *(top right)* Palermo Court of the Palazzo Cattolica. Probably built about 1720 by Giacomo Amato.
117 *(below)* Palermo Staircase of the Palazzo Castel di Mirto, now Bonagia (photographed before the bombing of 1943), said to have been built by Andrea Giganti in the 1750s. Based on Neapolitan models.

Fig. 8: Anthony Blunt. *Sicilian Baroque* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968): fig. 117, showing the use of an old photograph in architectural history illustration: in this case a photograph that predates the bombing of 1943.

Two boys stand at the foot of the staircase facing each other. One is dressed in pale linens and wears a boater; the other is rougher, darker and in a cloth cap. They stand semi-adversarially, together a metaphor for the question of who will occupy this aristocratic splendour in future – after the allied attack which half destroyed the palace not long after this photo was taken. They at once stage the architecture of the staircase, and are themselves staged. Yet they are scrupulously and utterly ignored in the text. Thus although people are sometimes visible in its photos, the task of architectural history is to make them invisible. In short, architectural history's image practice is markedly squeamish about incident, event, and life. It is as if architectural history fears those inhabitants and the disturbing concomitance of photographs, as if its task were the exorcism of the ghosts of architecture's own inhabitants.

Let us turn to two examples of Sebald's approach to architecture. Emblematic of his thinking of the losses incurred in the course of modernity is the contrast Sebald draws between

zum erstenmal in meinem Leben ausweitete vor Glück. Weshalb gewisse Klangfarben, Verschattungen in der Tonart und Synkopen einen dermaßen ergreifen, das wird ein von Grund auf unmusikalischer Mensch, wie ich es bin, sagte Austerlitz, niemals verstehen, aber heute, in der Rückschau, kommt mir vor, als sei das Geheimnis, von dem ich damals angerührt wurde, aufgehoben gewesen in dem Bild der schneeweißen Gans, die reglos und unverwandt, solange sie spielten, zwischen den musizierenden Schaustellern stand. Mit etwas vorgerecktem Hals und gesenkten Lidern horchte sie in den von dem gemalten Himmelszelt überspannten Raum hinein, bis die letzten Töne verschwebt waren, als kennte sie ihr eigenes



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Los und auch das derjenigen, in deren Gesellschaft sie sich befand. – Wie mir vielleicht bekannt sei, so nahm Austerlitz bei unserer nächsten Begegnung in der Brasserie Le Havane seine Geschichte wieder auf, ist in der über die Jahre immer mehr heruntergekommenen Zone am linken Seineufer, wo er seinerzeit mit Marie de Verneuil in dieser ihm unvergeßlich gebliebenen Zirkusvorstellung gewesen sei, inzwischen die den Namen des französischen Präsidenten tragende neue Nationalbibliothek errichtet worden. Die alte Bibliothek in der rue Richelieu hat man bereits zugesperrt, wie ich mich unlängst selbst überzeugte, sagte Austerlitz; der Kuppelsaal mit den grünen Porzellanlampenschirmen, die ein so gutes, beruhigen-

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FIG. 9: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 390–391.

the old Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the new one bearing the name of the French president, just along the Quai from the Gare d'Austerlitz. It is worth quoting his reflections on these buildings at length, to demonstrate their comic, cutting qualities, and the relationship between text and image in the astute reading of architecture, archive, reading, and memory. The scene is set by Austerlitz's description of an unforgettable circus performance in 'the increasingly dilapidated area' that later became the site of the new library:

> nor could I have said at the time whether my heart was contracting in pain or expanding with happiness for the first time of my life […] , said Austerlitz, but today, looking back, it seems to me as if the mystery which touched me at the time was summed up in the image of the snow-white goose standing motionless and steadfast among the musicians as long as they played. (*A* 383–4).

There is, of course, no photograph to record this epiphanic goose; instead, below there is a photograph of the old library in the rue Richelieu, since closed (Fig. 9):

> 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 them, might have vanished from the face of the earth. (*A* 385–6).

The old library bears an imprint of a former way of life now lost. The new library, by contrast, deforms social life and seeks to exclude the reader, the one who wishes to remember, as a potential enemy. The dissolution of the capacity to remember, in line with the inexorable spread of processed data, and the architectural effoudrement of the Bibliothèque Nationale are inextricably intertwined:

> In order to reach the Grande Bibliothèque you have to travel through a desolate no-man's land in one of those robot-driven Métro trains steered by a ghostly voice. (*A* 386).

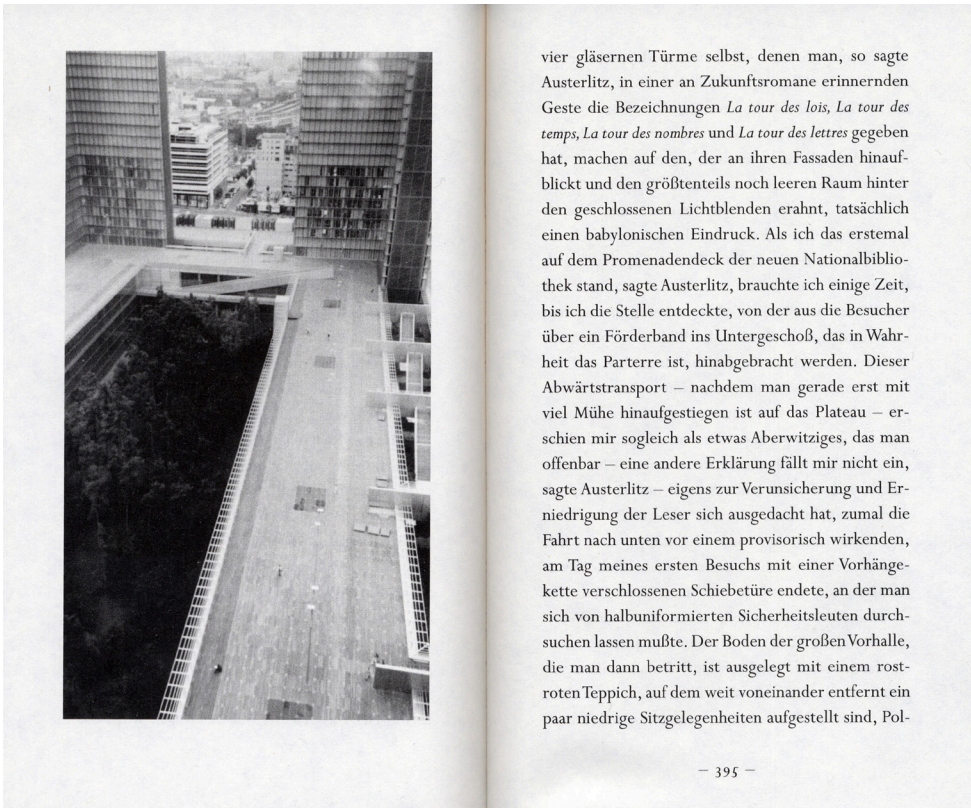
Sebald's reference to the new library as a 'hideous, *outsize building*' (my italics) returns the reader to a discussion earlier in the text of the Palace of Justice in Brussels: 'for somehow, we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them' (*A* 24). The library, we are presented with is, then, already partially ruinous, ruined and ruining (Fig. 10). As in Kafka's Castle, access, knowledge, and hierarchy are architecturally ranged.

> You might think, especially on days when the wind drives rain over this totally exposed platform, as it quite often does, said Austerlitz, that by some mistake you had found your way to the deck of the *Berengaria*. (*A* 387).

Cataclysm is at hand: Theresienstadt's inhabitants were arrayed 'almost as if they were passengers enjoying an evening stroll on the deck of an ocean-going steamer' (*A* 341). Sebald depicts a close relationship between bourgeois rationality and violence, wherever it may unfold, including the architecture and processes of the library:

> This downwards journey, when you have just laboriously ascended to the plateau, struck me as an utter absurdity, something that must have been devised – I can think of no other explanation, said Austerlitz – on purpose to instil a sense of insecurity and humiliation in the poor readers. (*A* 389).

The new library treats the work of history and of the intellectual as suspect: uniformed officials question new readers in cubicles, 'as if you were on business of an extremely dubious



vier gläsernen Türme selbst, denen man, so sagte Austerlitz, in einer an Zukunftsromane erinnernden Geste die Bezeichnungen *La tour des lois, La tour des temps, La tour des nombres* und *La tour des lettres* gegeben hat, machen auf den, der an ihren Fassaden hinaufblickt und den größtenteils noch leeren Raum hinter den geschlossenen Lichtblenden erahnt, tatsächlich einen babylonischen Eindruck. Als ich das erstemal auf dem Promenadendeck der neuen Nationalbibliothek stand, sagte Austerlitz, brauchte ich einige Zeit, bis ich die Stelle entdeckte, von der aus die Besucher über ein Förderband ins Untergeschoß, das in Wahrheit das Parterre ist, hinabgebracht werden. Dieser Abwärtstransport – nachdem man gerade erst mit viel Mühe hinaufgestiegen ist auf das Plateau – erschien mir sogleich als etwas Aberwitziges, das man offenbar – eine andere Erklärung fällt mir nicht ein, sagte Austerlitz – eigens zur Verunsicherung und Erniedrigung der Leser sich ausgedacht hat, zumal die Fahrt nach unten vor einem provisorisch wirkenden, am Tag meines ersten Besuchs mit einer Vorhängekette verschlossenen Schiebetüre endete, an der man sich von halbuniformierten Sicherheitsleuten durchsuchen lassen mußte. Der Boden der großen Vorhalle, die man dann betritt, ist ausgelegt mit einem rostroten Teppich, auf dem weit voneinander entfernt ein paar niedrige Sitzgelegenheiten aufgestellt sind, Pol-

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Fig. 10: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 394–5.

nature, or at least had to be dealt with away from the public gaze'. And, despite its size, it proves useless in Austerlitz's search for traces of his father, who had disappeared from Paris fifty years before. Indeed, the library is referred to as a 'place of banishment' (*A* 391). Even its 'curious nature reserve' is a place of trickery and death: 'birds which had lost their way in the library forest flew into the mirror images of the trees in the reading-room windows, struck the glass with a dull thud, and fell lifeless to the ground' (*A* 392). The library is presented as a manifestation of the increasingly importunate urge to break with everything that bears living connection to the past.

The next photograph in the book follows a few pages after the account of the library (Fig. 11). This is a double-page photo of the room of files on prisoners in the little fortress of Terezín, from where Austerlitz's parents went to their death. This photo, in turn, evokes one earlier in the book, of another computerless windowless office filled with papers, that is, Austerlitz's own (Fig. 12). That room, humanized by its very disorder, both works to underline the ruthless ordering in the files on prisoners and aligns the latter with the inhumanity of the order at the new Bibliothèque Nationale.

The humiliating new library remembers and is related to what it has obscured, the subterranean world of cities, the lost colombaria, repeatedly referred to through the text:

> Thus, on the waste land [...] 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 of Paris [...], 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. (*A* 403).

There then follows a description of the retreat of light from the city seen from above, in which scale and proximity are dizzyingly confounded and nature becomes destruction such that tree-tops of the pine-grove that earlier had resembled 'moss-covered ground', end as a 'regular black rectangle' (*A* 403). Like the coincidences Sebald speaks of, his style recovers, devours, and displaces the past. Remarking elsewhere on the literary style of Sir Thomas Browne, Sebald argues that he manages to 'levitate' the reader's perspective: 'The greater the distance, the clearer the view: one sees the tiniest details with the utmost clarity. It is as if one were looking through a reversed opera glass and through a microscope at the same time'.[22] In this *selbstvergessenes Schauen*, a phrase Sebald uses in *Unheimliche Heimat*, his study of

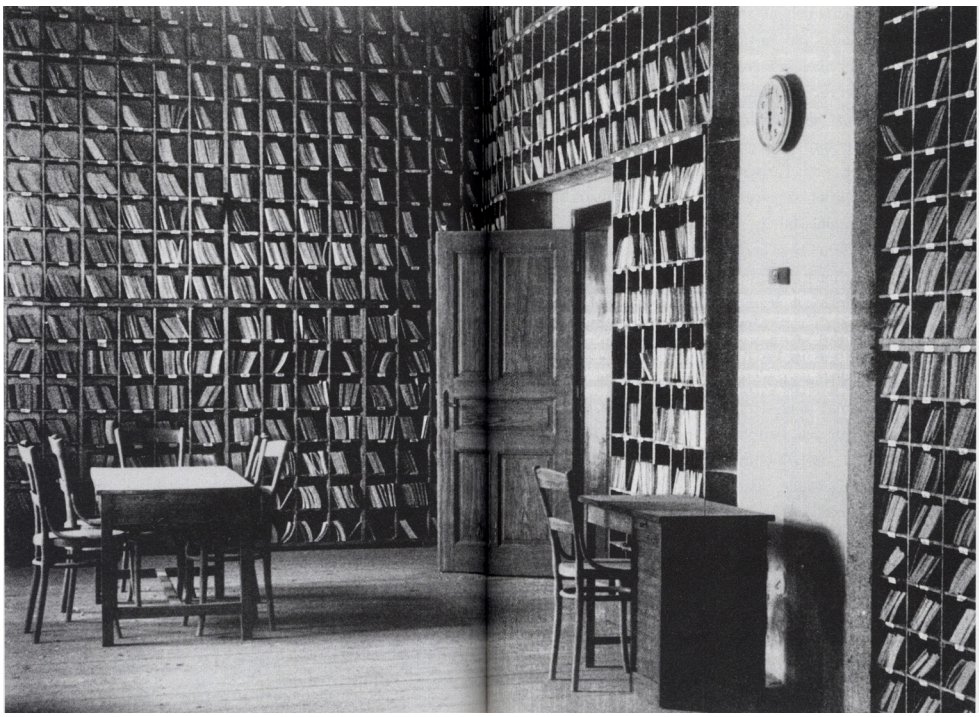
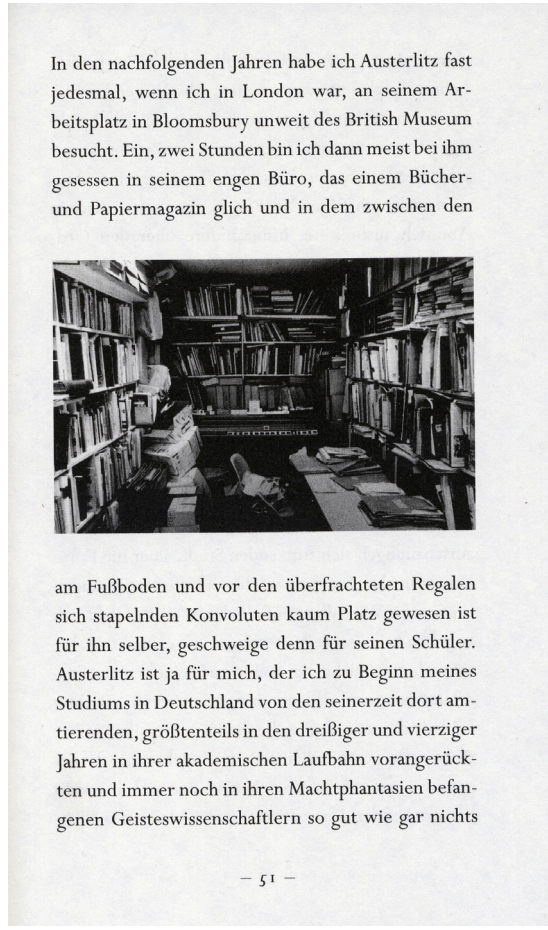


Fig. 11: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 402–3.

[22] Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*, 19.



In den nachfolgenden Jahren habe ich Austerlitz fast jedesmal, wenn ich in London war, an seinem Arbeitsplatz in Bloomsbury unweit des British Museum besucht. Ein, zwei Stunden bin ich dann meist bei ihm gesessen in seinem engen Büro, das einem Bücher- und Papiermagazin glich und in dem zwischen den

am Fußboden und vor den überfrachteten Regalen sich stapelnden Konvoluten kaum Platz gewesen ist für ihn selber, geschweige denn für seinen Schüler. Austerlitz ist ja für mich, der ich zu Beginn meines Studiums in Deutschland von den seinerzeit dort amtierenden, größtenteils in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren in ihrer akademischen Laufbahn vorangerückten und immer noch in ihren Machtphantasien befangenen Geisteswissenschaftlern so gut wie gar nichts

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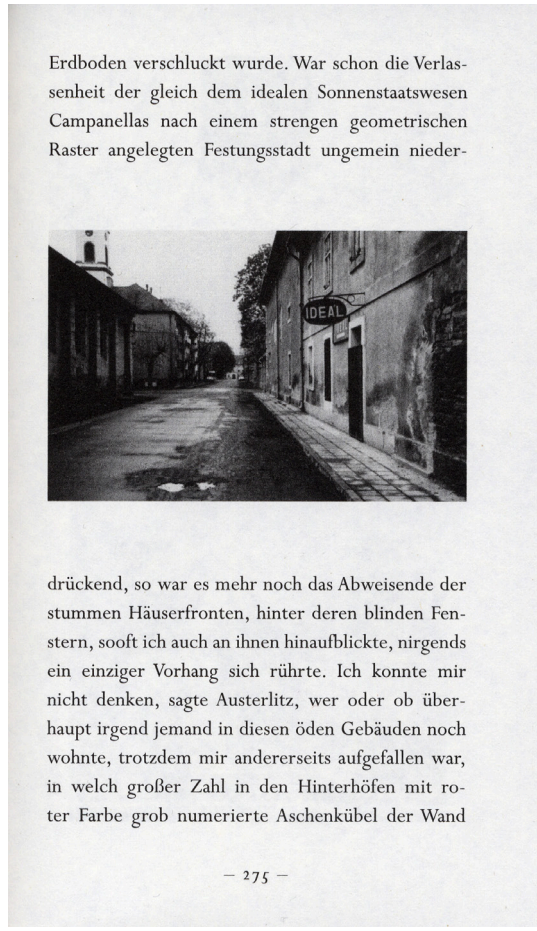
FIG. 12: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), p. 51.

Austrian literature, transcendence becomes possible: 'The metaphysical moment and its surveying perspective have their origins in a profound fascination in which our relation to the world is for a time reversed. In the process of looking, we sense that things are looking at us, and we begin to comprehend that we are not here to look piercingly at the universe, but rather to be looked as piercingly by it'.[23]

By contrast when Austerlitz gets to Theresienstadt, with an intensifying feverishness over several pages text is replaced by images, and the reader is hurled against closed and urban emptiness, barred windows and broken doors.

[23] W.G. Sebald, 'Jenseits der Grenze. Peter Handkes Erzählung Die Wiederholung' in *Unheimliche Heimat: Essays zur Österreichischen Literatur,* (Frankfurt: Frankfurt Fischer, 1984), 158.


Erdboden verschluckt wurde. War schon die Verlassenheit der gleich dem idealen Sonnenstaatswesen Campanellas nach einem strengen geometrischen Raster angelegten Festungsstadt ungemein nieder-

drückend, so war es mehr noch das Abweisende der stummen Häuserfronten, hinter deren blinden Fenstern, sooft ich auch an ihnen hinaufblickte, nirgends ein einziger Vorhang sich rührte. Ich konnte mir nicht denken, sagte Austerlitz, wer oder ob überhaupt irgend jemand in diesen öden Gebäuden noch wohnte, trotzdem mir andererseits aufgefallen war, in welch großer Zahl in den Hinterhöfen mit roter Farbe grob numerierte Aschenkübel der Wand

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FIG. 13: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), p. 275.

The photo that introduces us to Theresienstadt boasts a sign trumpeting 'IDEAL', that distances and makes ironic what it seems to lay before us (Fig. 13), Theresienstadt, the city that Hitler gave the Jews, the 'ideal' city that was anything but. Next is a double spread of three photos of closed windows, doorways and rubbish bins, threaded with fragmented text (Fig. 14).

> most uncanny of all, were the gates and doorways (Tören and Tore) of Terezín, all of them, as I thought I sensed obstructing access to a darkness never yet penetrated [...] in which there was no more movement at all. (*A* 267–268).

Images and text (the regimented numbered rubbish bins, the illegible graffiti) block understanding and deny access (Fig. 14). The very next pages bear no words at all; two

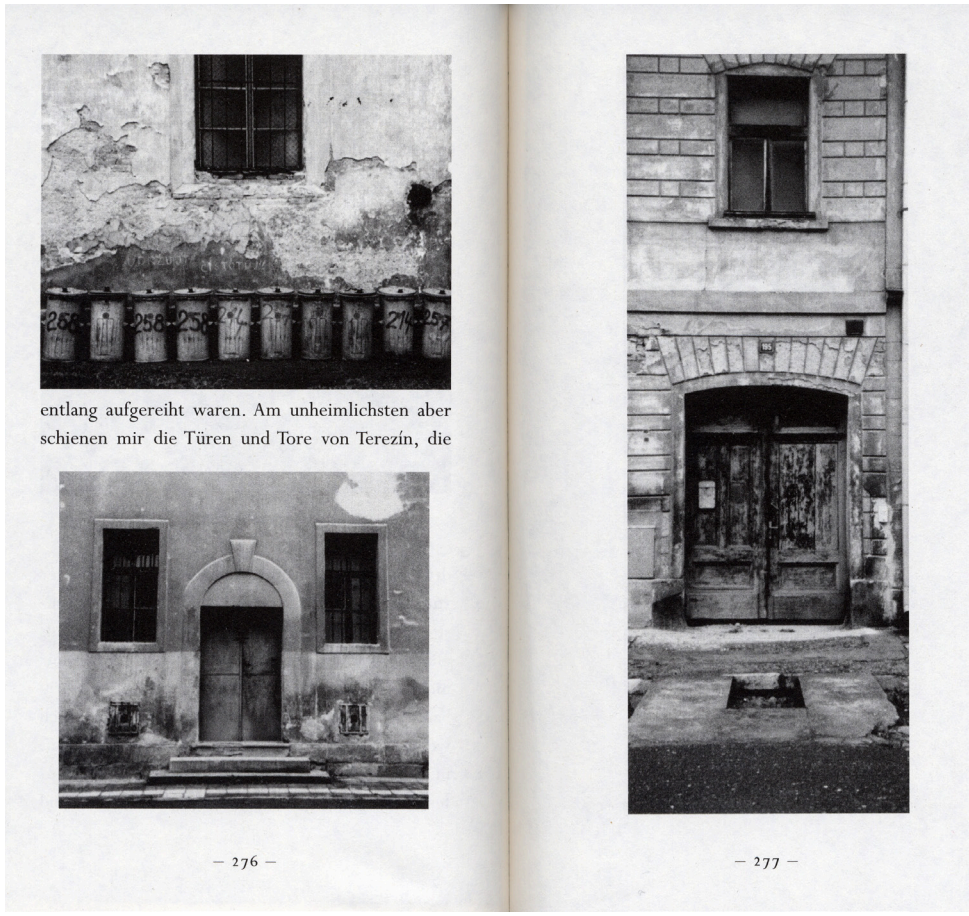


Fig. 14: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 276–277.

photographs of ruinous doors, closed and ominously battered, claustrophobic, confrontational, and silent (Fig. 15).

At midday Austerlitz reaches the dead-end of the Antikos Bazaar, which occupies one of the largest buildings in Terezín. It is imaged three times, as if drawing closer to the subject, but although we are told that its vaults 'reach back a long way as well' (*A* 273), the photographs increasingly emphasize not depth but surface. First a long low photograph stretching across a double spread, with text above, of the shop front and its windows, each increasingly dark, dejected and empty; followed by two smaller photos of the junkshop windows, as if drawing closer to the subject. In the junkshop windows lie jumbled stranded objects 'that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction' (*A* 277).

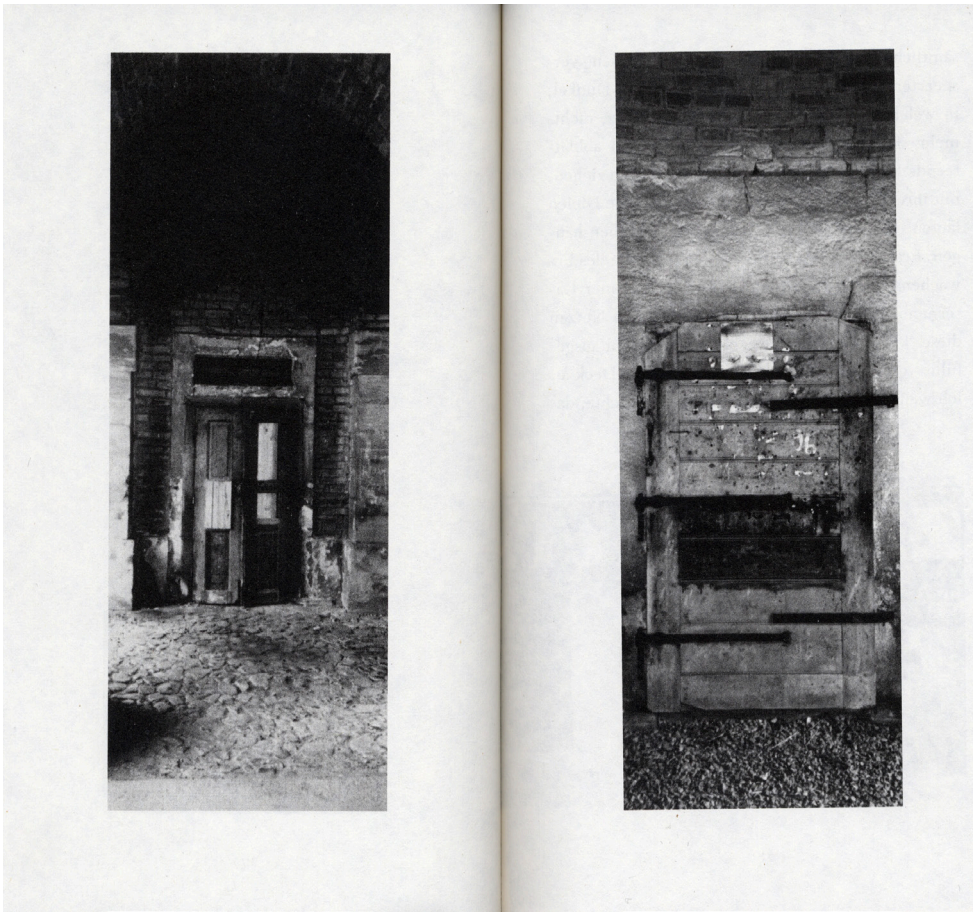
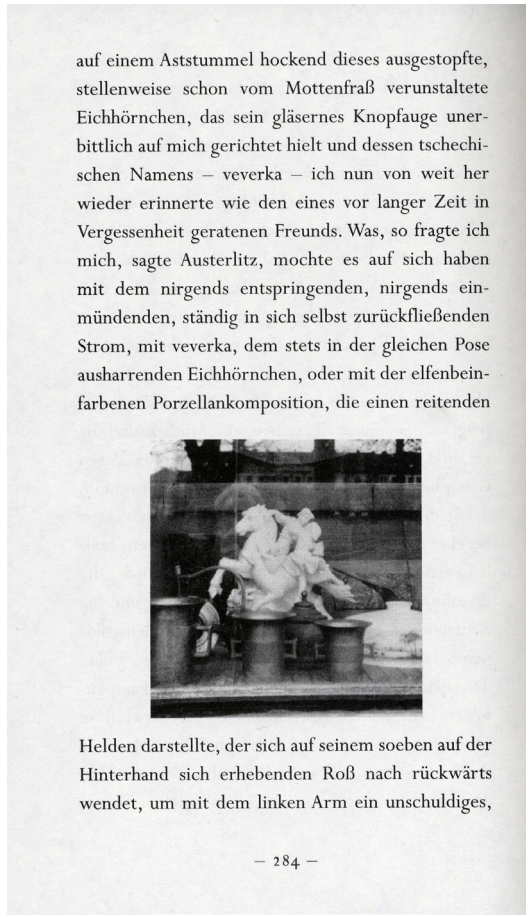


Fig. 15: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), pp. 278–9.

In the last of these photos a porcelain horseman rescues a girl, 'in a moment, perpetuated but for ever just occurring' (*A* 277) (Fig. 16). Superimposed on it and barely perceptible, the reflection of the narrator-photographer himself forms another survival from a destroyed past, for which his narrative is both search and record of loss, in a moment that occupies an entirely unfixable relation to time.

In contrast to Clark's emphatically directed looking and his insistence on the ethics of a certain sort of looking, and in even greater contrast to the frozen engagement of much architectural history, Sebald's encounters are open and fluid. Movement and transience run through the work, echoed by an apparent openness in the narrative that follows distractions or coincidences, and that traverse, ignore, or transgress boundaries, in order to 'walk after' ('nachgehen') the stories that cross his path, following the vanishing traces of people, objects,

ideas and memories, in order to save them from oblivion. In this task he is inspired, assisted, and thwarted by photos and other images which he allows to have more memory and more future than the beings who contemplate them.



auf einem Aststummel hockend dieses ausgestopfte, stellenweise schon vom Mottenfraß verunstaltete Eichhörnchen, das sein gläsernes Knopfauge unerbittlich auf mich gerichtet hielt und dessen tschechischen Namens – veverka – ich nun von weit her wieder erinnerte wie den eines vor langer Zeit in Vergessenheit geratenen Freunds. Was, so fragte ich mich, sagte Austerlitz, mochte es auf sich haben mit dem nirgends entspringenden, nirgends einmündenden, ständig in sich selbst zurückfließenden Strom, mit veverka, dem stets in der gleichen Pose ausharrenden Eichhörnchen, oder mit der elfenbeinfarbenen Porzellankomposition, die einen reitenden

Helden darstellte, der sich auf seinem soeben auf der Hinterhand sich erhebenden Roß nach rückwärts wendet, um mit dem linken Arm ein unschuldiges,

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Fig. 16: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003), p. 284.