

The Edge of Darkness: On W. G. Sebald

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1. You know the picture. A lone figure dressed in a black cloak stands at the edge of an empty shore and looks out onto a dark, windswept sea, which merges imperceptibly with the inky sky. Because his back is turned to us, and because we cannot quite tell if he is wearing a monk's habit or a traveler's cape, the figure remains a cipher to us, a mysterious presence inviting identification. What are his thoughts as he gazes into the infinite, vertiginous theater before him? What has led him to seek out this forsaken spot at the edge of human habitation, with only the natural, cosmic order before him? "Nothing in the world can be as lonely and as unsettling as this place," Heinrich von Kleist wrote in a contemporary review, "the only spark of life in the wide realm of death, the lonely midpoint of a lonely circle."

Although he never mentioned this figure from Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1809–10), W. G. Sebald might well have claimed him as the emblem for his recent prose writings, all of which trace the journey of solitary wanderers who make their way to the very edge of the human world and gaze into the void. "This is the edge of the darkness," a German relative says to the narrator in *The Emigrants* while standing on the New Jersey shore and reflecting on the forty years he has spent in America, far from their native village in Bavaria. "And in truth it seemed as if the mainland were submerged behind us and as if there were nothing above the watery waste but this narrow strip of sand running up to the north and down towards the south." Then, in Sebald's German text, we hear this dislocated German emigrant speak to his German nephew in English: "I often come out here, sagte Onkel Kasimir, it makes me feel that I am a long way away, though I never quite know from where."¹

Until his untimely death in December 2001, W. G. Sebald wrote from a similar position of self-imposed exile and marginality, between languages and national identities. Publishing four books in the span of eleven years, he became an international literary sensation and one of the most unlikely success stories of contemporary German literature. Born in a Bavarian village during the last year

1. W. G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), p. 129. The English version of this passage is on pp. 88–89, *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1996). Hereafter cited in the text.

of the war, Sebald was the child of postwar German silence and shame about the Holocaust. He left for England at the beginning of his career and spent more than three decades as a German professor at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. From this small, remote outpost, he worked as a professor of German literature, writing a number of traditional academic studies and showing a special affinity for Austrian writers like Adalbert Stifter, Franz Kafka, Elias Canetti, and Thomas Bernhard. But then, with an almost imperceptible shift from literary biography into fiction, Sebald began to forge a new idiom of memoir, biography, photomontage, and fictional narration that captivated readers in Europe and, especially, in the United States. The American reception of his last novel, *Austerlitz*, which recounts the efforts of a Czech Jew to recover the fragments of a family history shattered by the Holocaust, ranged from enthusiastic to reverential, with Richard Eder claiming in the *New York Times* that Sebald stands with Primo Levi as “the prime speaker of the Holocaust.”²

How a non-Jewish German, whose father served as an officer in the *Wehrmacht* (armed services), could achieve such critical acclaim is an interesting story that says as much about Sebald’s identification with the victims of German aggression as it does about America’s ongoing fascination with Holocaust memory. In Germany the reception has been decidedly mixed—perhaps for the very same reason he has won such acclaim in the English-speaking world. Although he was awarded several literary prizes in his native country, German readers have shown perplexity, if not resentment, at what has seemed to them Sebald’s stance of moral authority in judging his country’s past from the unique perspective of the Holocaust and its non-German victims. Writing for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (which provided the forum for conservative historians in the so-called *Historikerstreit* [historians’ debate] of the late 1980s), Thomas Steinfeld accused the author of *Austerlitz* of setting himself up as “absolute sovereign in the dark chambers of [German] memory,” as the “Grand Inquisitor” in a world where “all roads lead to Theresienstadt.”³ And in an interview published in Germany in March 2001, *Der Spiegel* magazine raised the question that is particularly unsettling for a broad spectrum of postwar German readers: “Does a German author have the moral right to use real Jewish biographies for his own aesthetic games?”⁴

The problem with this focus, in Germany and America, is that Sebald is not primarily a “Holocaust author.” Most of his books are about existential exile, not mass killing. And their cultural memory emerges from the long *durée* of European history from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the present, not just from the twelve years of the Hitler regime. Sebald’s first literary work, the three-part prose poem *After Nature*, which was first published in Germany in 1988, begins its narrative arc in Christian Europe with the paintings of Matthias Grünewald. His first prose

2. Richard Eder, “Excavating a Life,” *New York Times* Sunday Book Review, October 28, 2001, p. 10.

3. Thomas Steinfeld, “Die Wünschelrute in der Tasche eines Nibelungen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (March 20, 2001), p. 4.

4. “Ich fürchte das Melodramatische,” *Der Spiegel*, March 12, 2001.

collection, *Vertigo*, focuses on Stendhal, Casanova, and Kafka in Italy; only the last chapter brings these topics into oblique proximity with the Nazi past through an account of the narrator's childhood after the war. *The Rings of Saturn* takes us on a "pilgrimage" through the English countryside with only infrequent references to the war; it is more centrally concerned with the modern devastation of the natural habitat. Of the four stories in *The Emigrants*—widely reviewed as a "Holocaust book" about "Jewish" exile—only two concern Jewish victims of Nazi aggression, and one of these (the teacher Paul Bereyter) was "three-quarters Aryan," served in the *Wehrmacht*, and felt himself to be "deeply German." Even Sebald's last novel, *Austerlitz*, spends much of its energy in avoiding direct confrontation with the Holocaust by lingering on collateral instances of human folly and cruelty, such as the austere religiosity of a Welsh preacher or early-modern fortress and prison architecture.

It would be more accurate to say that Sebald's fictions present us, in Richard Eder's phrase, with a "Holocaust-in-absence": it is everywhere and nowhere, at once metonymy and allegory of the darkneses in all of modern European history. Yet one of the most unsettling (and least remarked) implications of Sebald's seemingly documentary, autobiographical texts concerns the role of memory itself in preserving the past. "Zerstöret das Letzte / die Erinnerung nicht," reads the vaguely biblical, unattributed, and underpunctuated epigraph to the opening story in *The Emigrants*. The phrase can be translated in several contradictory ways: either as exhortation (Destroy every last thing / [but] not memory), or as a statement of fact formulated as a negative question (Doesn't memory / destroy the last remnants?). Both translations are possible since the verb *zerstöret* (destroy[s]), is both the second-person plural imperative and the third-person singular indicative. Sebald's Italian translator opted for the first version, while the French translation chose the second. Michael Hulse's English edition (carefully vetted by Sebald) also gives this second version, but in a curiously emphatic form: "And the last remnants / memory destroys." But even this latter version is ambiguous. Does memory destroy reality, replacing what actually happened with what we (wish to) remember of it? Or does the memory of reality haunt the living to the point that they destroy themselves? Three of the four main characters in *The Emigrants* are unable to sustain the weight of the past and commit belated suicides. For them, memory does not lead to modernist epiphany of a *temps retrouvé*, in part because these melancholics do everything they can to escape memory. Like the narrator's great-uncle Ambrose Adelwarth, who submits himself to devastating electroshock treatments to "cure" his depression, they long for "an extinction as total and irreversible as possible of [the] capacity to think and remember" (*Emigrants*, p. 114).

2. Though Sebald lived most of his adult life in England, the major ethical dilemma he faced marked the entire generation of German writers and artists born near the end of the war who came of age during the period of student protest and social unrest in the 1960s. How does one signal solidarity with the victims of Nazi genocide without denying one's own German origins, cultural

traditions, and memories? Sebald's personal course was to take up residence outside Germany while continuing to write in German about German history and culture—in effect, following into exile writers like Canetti, Paul Celan, Peter Weiss, or the Austrian (and non-Jewish) poet and novelist Ingeborg Bachmann. To live for thirty years in extraterritorial limbo, far from his native village in Bavaria; to call himself “Max” instead of “Winfried Georg”; to estrange himself from spoken German to the point that he felt incapable of writing realistic dialogue; to slip French and Italian (but not German) phrases into his English conversation; to travel more or less constantly from one European country to the other—these facts betray a deep ambivalence for his provincial German origins.

In his books Sebald's response was to identify with the victims of history—not just of German history, but with all those isolated and idiosyncratic figures who have been broken by some catastrophic historical or personal event and who continue to live in a gray zone between life and death. And yet, Sebald does not hide his German identity behind these figures in a conventional literary relationship between author and protagonist, as if to suggest that he is his (Jewish) subject. Rather, his place is marked by a German narrator whose outward biographical details correspond “pretty much exactly” with his own life (as Sebald remarked in the *Der Spiegel* interview cited above) and whose primary narrative function is to listen and bear witness. All of Sebald's books depend on this unbalanced narrative relationship between a protagonist whose richly documented life makes up the bulk of the story and a laconic, virtually invisible narrator to whom this story is told. Like Thomas Bernhard's “periscopic” prose monologues, his texts depend on reported, secondhand speech; they stage someone else's speech-act.⁵ But unlike Bernhard's claustrophobic encounters in which the characters are more or less condemned to their Austrianness, Sebald's stories involve a subtle interplay of national identities in which no one is truly native. When the protagonist happens to be a Jewish victim of German aggression, the function of this German narrator takes on special poignancy. Offering neither apologies nor expressions of shame, he seems neutral, even impassive. But he listens. At times he goes to great lengths to recover life stories that otherwise would have disappeared in family albums and obscure archives. One senses his solidarity, his interest, his attention—what Walter Benjamin, citing Malebranche, called the “natural prayer of the soul.”

One might also compare Sebald's narrator to Claude Lanzmann's off-camera presence in *Shoah* (1985). For all the differences in personality (Lanzmann the interrogating, sometimes hectoring Frenchman; Sebald the self-effacing German), and the more elusive differences between documentary film and pseudodocumentary fictions, both of their identities shape the stories in a myriad of small but crucial

5. Sebald has written a perceptive essay on Thomas Bernhard, “Die Beschreibung des Unglücks. Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke” (Frankfurt: Fischer, TV, 1994), pp. 103–14; he uses the term “periscopic” to describe Bernhard's characteristic use of quotation within quotation in the *Der Spiegel* interview of March 12, 2001.

ways. In *Shoah* we experience the responses of a German SS officer or a Polish peasant through the eyes of the Jewish filmmaker and interviewer to whom they are speaking. In Sebald's stories the narrator's Germanness—though it is barely noted—similarly establishes the ground for the characters' melancholy tales of exile, dislocation, and homelessness. Unobtrusively, his identity shrunk to a bare minimum, the narrator seems to present these lives without mediation, not as they "really happened," but as they were "really reported" to him, without making them a mere foil for his own story. And yet he is the secret center, the thread that holds these narrations together in an implicit gesture of solidarity and identification that is all the more effective for being unstated.

Here is an example, taken from *The Emigrants*: the first "tale" begins in England with the narrator renting an apartment from an eccentric English doctor named Henry Selwyn. But in the course of their acquaintance, the narrator learns that this "Englishman" was originally a Lithuanian Jew named Hersch Seweryn, who emigrated to England as a young boy. The second tale apparently has nothing to do with the first. It describes the narrator as a young boy in the early 1950s entering in midyear the class of Paul Bereyter; his new teacher: "There I stood, in my dark green pullover with the leaping stag on it, in front of fifty-one fellow pupils, all staring at me with the greatest possible curiosity, and, as if from a great distance, I heard Paul say that I had arrived at precisely the right moment, since he had been telling the story of the stag's leap only the day before" (*Emigrants*, p. 30). It is a simple encounter that conveys the teacher's sensitivity as well as the gratitude of the narrator who, thirty years later, will be troubled by the news of Bereyter's suicide and will set out to learn his history. But there is more: in German the term for stag, *Hirsch*, links Sebald to "Hersch" Seweryn from the preceding story. Hidden but visible, the leaping stag knitted into the boy's sweater works as a literal emblem of identification between the narrator and the text's fictional Jewish characters, Bereyter and Seweryn. But also, implicitly, between Sebald and the actual Jewish victims of German history, not a few of whom bore the name Hirsch.

(Nine years later, in *Austerlitz*, the same play of proper names continues. While searching for traces of his lost father, Jacques Austerlitz travels to Paris in the 1950s and lets a room from a woman named Amélie "Cerf"—French for stag. Years later he is reminded of her when he comes across the tombstone of Hippolyte Cerf, a Jewish immigrant from Frankfurt "whose original name was probably Hippolyt Hirsch." Not surprisingly, if one knows Sebald's methods of literary encoding, Amélie Cerf resides at "6, avenue Émile-Zola"—the exact address of poet Paul Celan's last apartment, which he rented shortly before committing suicide sometime in late April 1970. Fictional and historical characters intersect in an endless series of seeming coincidences: Hersch leads to Sebald who leads to Cerf and then back to Hirsch; Paul Bereyter leads to Paul Celan, especially because Bereyter's father, Amschel Bereyter, recalls Celan's given name, Antschel; "Max" Sebald himself shares a name with Austerlitz's father, Maximilian . . . and the list goes on in dizzying concatenations.)

From these lines of intertextual and transnational affiliation—Celan would have called them “Meridians”—one can sense the weight of Sebald’s German past. The burden of Nazi crimes irrevocably marks him, and like his generation born near the end of the war he will take on symbolically the guilt that his parents refused to acknowledge. Yet specific references to this past are rare in his writings, and all are covered over with the thin film of semi- or “docu-fictionality.” Consider the last story in *Vertigo*, “Il ritorno in Patria” (a reference to Monteverdi’s opera about the homecoming of Ulysses): it relates the peripatetic return of an unnamed narrator to his native Bavarian village “W” (Sebald was born in Wertach im Allgäu), “where I had not been since my childhood.”⁶ More like K. in Kafka’s *Castle* than Odysseus in Ithaca, he arrives at night after a journey by foot and stands for a long time on a bridge before the town, “looking into the blackness which now enveloped everything” (*Vertigo*, p. 183). The narrator then notices a strip of “waste land” and remembers that a gypsy camp had been there “in the summer months after the war” when he was a small child. When his mother took him to the municipal swimming pool they would pass by their camp and she would pick him up and carry him in her arms. “Across her shoulder I saw the gypsies look up briefly from what they were about, and then lower their eyes again as if in revulsion” (*Vertigo*, p. 183). On the following page we see the snapshot of a smiling gypsy mother and her child that his father took as a *Wehrmacht* soldier and put in an album as a present to his wife for the first “war Christmas.” “[The gypsies] are looking out, smiling, from behind the barbed wire, somewhere in a far corner of

6. W. G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 2000), p. 171. Hereafter cited in the text. Originally published as *Schwindel. Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1990).



From W. G. Sebald, *Schwindel. Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1990).

the Slovakia where my father and his vehicle repairs unit had been stationed for several weeks before the outbreak of war" (*Vertigo*, pp. 184–85). No other commentary is provided, and the text moves seamlessly to another subject. But the reader cannot help asking in the son's place: what was the father's relation to a people destined for extermination by the Nazis? And what is the picture doing, decades after the war, in a book of family memories? With surgical precision Sebald zeroes in on the discrepancy between the glance he received from the gypsies after the war, who lower their eyes "as if in revulsion," and the smiling face of a young mother in his father's photograph before the war. Roland Barthes would have called this the image's "*punctum*": the unwitting smile that bears the signs of her people's persecution and murder, and of her own erasure from history.⁷

3. Images are one of the great strengths—and question marks—in Sebald's writings. Without captions or attributions, they seem to come from nowhere, serving not as the illustration of the text but as its slightly out-of-sync counterpoint, a kind of punctuation that subtly irritates and challenges our notion of what is real, what is fictional. The dialogue between images and text; the alternating rhythm of reading and looking; the fragmentation, splicing, blurring of images; even their occasional insignificance, their scrapbook, antiquarian qualities—all these factors play a role in the very tactile experience of "reading" a Sebald text. But they are no guarantee of truth. For a professor of German literature in the postwar period, images must be suspect for the simple reason that for twelve years Nazi propaganda flooded Germany with doctored images masquerading as historical and "racial" truth. And yet in a country thoroughly decimated by war, where the past was ruthlessly denied, forgotten, or covered over, the surviving remnants of history provide the only possible means of gaining access to this past. Sebald's use of images in his texts seems to follow the contradictory logic of this dual affirmation: every image, every "reality scrap," is precious and must be conserved as a memorial to what has disappeared. It can serve as a corrective to the unreliability of human memory. But also, every image lies, or is capable of lying, and must be subjected to careful scrutiny and interpretation.

One of the paradigmatic examples of the manipulated quality of images comes from the final story of *The Emigrants*. Sebald's narrator there is attempting to track down the history of a Manchester acquaintance, a painter who was sent to England during the war as the child of German Jews. In 1933 the painter's uncle is outraged by a Nazi newspaper clipping of a photograph of the book burning on the main square in Würzburg, which he declares to be a forgery. Since the Nazis couldn't take a picture of the actual nighttime event, he says, they used another picture of the square showing a large crowd and painted in a thick cloud of smoke and a dark night sky. "And just as that document was a fake, so too everything else [about the Nazi regime] had been a fake, from the very start." The painter's family

7. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 150.

is unsure what to make of this claim at the time, but half a century later Sebald's narrator will track down the photo in a Würzburg archive and conclude that "[the uncle's] suspicions were justified" (*Emigrants*, p. 184). Asked about this picture and its relation to his work in an interview with the *New York Times*, Sebald explained:

I had that picture [and] thought very consciously that this is the place to make a declaration. It acts as a paradigm for the whole enterprise. The process of making a photographic image, which purports to be the real thing and isn't anything like, has transformed our self-perception, our perception of each other, our notion of what is beautiful, our notion of what will last and what won't.⁸

The problem with this assertion, for Sebald's critics, is that it can be applied to Nazi propaganda as well as to Sebald's own use of images in his semidocumentary excavation of the past. Or even more pointedly: if all images are potentially doctored, how can one answer the Holocaust deniers who claim that Allied pictures of the concentration camps are a forgery? In Germany, where readers are especially uncomfortable with this issue, Sebald has been charged with contesting the legitimacy of public historiography. His fictions, as Thomas Steinfeld asserted in the previously quoted review of *Austerlitz*, undermine the notion that historical events can be objectively extracted from the distortions of personal memory. There is no easy answer to this question, either in Sebald's books or in the philosophical and historical debates about the reality of the Holocaust and the reliability of historical "evidence." But Sebald made an ethical point of *not* presenting history as a seamless, seemingly objective narrative of "real" events. Much like Lanzmann, who in *Shoah* refused to use documentary footage of the Holocaust and instead relied on interviews with contemporary witnesses who tell their version of history, Sebald situates his texts in the present with a narrator who is listening to or tracking down an always elusive past. Sebald took specific exception to films like Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), whose faux-documentary style—the grainy black-and-white photography, the handheld camera—lures viewers into thinking they are watching the Holocaust unfold before their very eyes. Sebald's much humbler approach presents a scrapbook-like assemblage of images, newspaper clippings, quotations, and personal narrations from which he (and the reader with him) attempts to make sense of the past. "It's one way of making obvious that you don't begin with a white page," he explained. "You do have sources, you do have materials."

Perhaps the best way of understanding the function of images in Sebald's texts is in terms of the subject's will to capture the past in a fixed, unambiguous way—and of the fallibility of this desire. In his search to recover some trace of his mother, of whom he has only the most distant memory, Jacques Austerlitz tracks down a film of a concert at Theresienstadt where she was imprisoned before being murdered. The film shows a young woman in the audience who seems to correspond

8. "W. G. Sebald Combines Memoir, Novel and Essay and Adds Photos," interview with Arthur Lubow, *New York Times*, December 11, 2001.

to Austerlitz's "faint memories" and the "few other clues to her appearance" he has gathered in his research. "I gaze and gaze again at that face, which seems to me both strange and familiar, said Austerlitz, I run the tape back repeatedly, looking at the time indicator in the top left-hand corner of the screen, where the figures covering part of her forehead show the minutes and seconds, from 10:53 to 10:57, while the hundredths of a second flash by so fast that you cannot read and capture them."⁹ This is in a sense the dilemma posed by all the "documents" in Sebald's texts, which point not so much to the reality of their representations as to the limitations of the human subjects looking at them across an unbridgeable temporal divide. Even when Austerlitz comes across a photograph of an actress that the mother's aged housekeeper identifies "without a shadow of doubt" as resembling Austerlitz's mother "as she had then been," the image itself shows a face emerging from a great darkness, her forehead and eyes masked in shadows (*Austerlitz*, p. 253). Austerlitz presumably gains some consolation from this image, but the search for his parents does not stop here, and the text proceeds without epiphany or reconciliation. For the photograph is, to quote Barthes again, always "*le constat d'une mort*," a kind of death warrant stipulating what has died and cannot be recovered: "*This will be and this has been . . . every photograph is this catastrophe.*"

4. One of the reasons that Germans have not quite known how to respond to Sebald's work is that it quietly defies a number of the taboos that have governed his generation's "left-liberal consensus" about the Nazi past. One of these taboos concerns the demarcation between victim and perpetrator, which should be kept as clear as possible. But in *The Emigrants*, for instance, Paul Bereyter is one-quarter Jewish and three-quarters Aryan. He is denied the right to teach German school-children by the Nazis, yet he also serves in the *Wehrmacht*, part of the time in Poland, and thus is quite possibly a spectator to or even participant in the killing that claimed millions of lives, including his Jewish fiancée and her mother. With typically English understatement Sebald mentions this point in passing: "He was in Poland, Belgium, France, the Balkans, Russia and the Mediterranean, and doubtless saw more than any heart or eye can bear" (*Emigrants*, pp. 55–56)—but the notion of visual and emotional overload is a key trope for Bereyter's story and sets up the quite crucial point that this Jewish soldier for Hitler "lost more and more of one's qualities, became less comprehensible to oneself, increasingly abstract." Echoing the punch line of a Jewish joke, Bereyter noted under a war photograph of himself that he was always "about 2,000 km away, but from where?"¹⁰ Years later he is literally riven by his

9. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 251–52. Hereafter cited in the text. Originally published as *Austerlitz* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2001).

10. Sebald would certainly have known this joke, as it furnishes the title to *Lontano da dove*, a well-known study of Josef Roth by Italian Germanist Claudio Magris. Two Jews meet after their shtetl has been razed to the ground. One says: "I've had it. I'm moving to Australia." The other: "That's a long way away." The first: "A long way from where?" Bereyter uses the line unwittingly; its citational, interpolated quality is suggested by the fact that it recurs more or less verbatim in the third story when Sebald's Uncle Kasimir describes his sense of placelessness on the dark beach in New Jersey.

competing identities. Drawn back after the war to his provincial origins in the town of S. by a Germanness he felt “to the marrow,” he gradually becomes obsessed with the writings of exiles and suicides, often of Jewish origin, reading late into the night as his eyesight diminishes (*Emigrants*, p. 57). The spiritual illumination of belonging “to the exiles and not to the people of S” coincides with the onset of a physical blindness that touches its apogee in the act of suicide: Bereyter’s blindness fixed, as it were, in the story’s opening image of the railroad tracks on which he laid himself in front of an oncoming train; the hard steel of the rails in the photo’s lower edge dissolves into a bright blur (*Emigrants*, p. 59).

Few postwar German writers have created such tactful identification with their Jewish protagonists, and for Sebald the fact that he lived for almost forty years in England with German-Jewish exile colleagues like Michael Hamburger, H. G. Adler, and Canetti undoubtedly assisted this delicate balancing act. Unusually, Sebald’s sympathy with the victims of German aggression does not rule out a fascination with and even pride in his German origins that is normally the province of political conservatives and nostalgics. But for Sebald these personal elements are deeply intertwined in his country’s own Jewish past. In the “Ambrose Adelwarth” chapter of *The Emigrants* he engages in a kind of familial genealogy that is filled with German-Jewish connections. His Uncle Kasimir first found work as a tinsmith when he helped put a new copper roof on the synagogue in Augsburg in 1928. Later emigrating to Manhattan, he rents a room from a “Mrs.



In January 1984, the news reached me from S that on the evening of the 30th of December, a week after his seventy-fourth birthday, Paul Bereyter, who had been my teacher at primary school, had put an end to his life. A short distance from S, where the railway track curves out of a willow copse into the open fields, he had lain himself down in front of a train. The obituary in the local paper was headed “Grief at the Loss of a Popular Teacher” and there was no mention of the fact that Paul Bereyter had died of his own free will, or through a self-destructive compulsion. It spoke merely of the dead man’s services to education, his dedicated care for his pupils, far beyond the call of duty, his great love of music, his astonishing inventiveness, and of much else in the same vein. Almost by way of an aside, the obituary added, with no further explanation, that during the Third Reich Paul Bereyter had been prevented from practising his chosen profession. It was this curiously unconnected, inconsequential statement, as much as the violent manner of his death, which

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Risa Litwak” on the Lower East Side and works for a Jewish employer, originally from Brünn, who one day, “a few weeks after Passover,” gives him a job roofing a new Yeshiva in Washington Heights. His great-uncle Ambrose Adelwarth works for a wealthy Jewish family from Long Island; accompanies the son Cosmo, as a valet, to Europe and the Middle East; and finishes out his life in a sanatorium in Ithaca, New York, where he is subjected to brutal electroshock treatment in the 1950s. His doctors are also displaced German-speaking Europeans, at least one of them of Jewish origin: one named Fahnstock who trained in Lemberg and moved west after the breakup of the Hapsburg Empire; the other, Dr. Abramsky, with a similar background. In one of the most haunting passages of the book, Abramsky relates to the Sebaldian narrator the “therapeutic” treatments administered to his great-uncle in the early 1950s: “I see him lying before me, said Dr. Abramsky, the electrodes on his temples, the

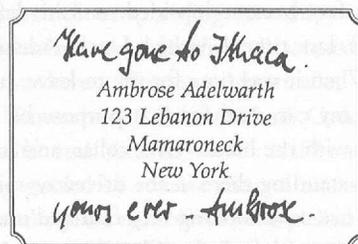
rubber bit between his teeth, buckled into the canvas wraps that were riveted to the treatment table like a man shrouded for burial at sea. . . . Fahnstock's prognosis was distinctly optimistic. But I could see from Ambrose's face that he was now destroyed, all but a vestige of him" (*Emigrants*, pp. 115–16).

Though the roots of Ambrose's depression remain elusive, it seems to stem from unfulfilled or closeted love. (Sex is virtually unimaginable in Sebald's realm of chronic depressives, though the trip to Europe and the Middle East that Cosmo and Ambrose take suggests physical intimacy.) During World War I the visionary Cosmo is plagued by horrific images of mass death, and in the 1920s he suffers a nervous breakdown from which he never recovers, dying in a private sanatorium in Ithaca. Decades later, after sinking deeper and deeper into melancholy, Ambrose decides to finish his last years in the same sanatorium. "Have gone to Ithaca," he writes simply on his visiting card to a relative. This willing obliteration of self at the site of his lost friend—far removed from any ideological positioning of Jewish victims and German perpetrators—is only one example among many why *The Emigrants* cannot be read simply as a "Holocaust book."

Sebald's polemical essay on the Allied air war poses similar problems of classification, though not for the reason of German revanchism that many reviewers feared.¹¹ Until recently the topic of German civilian casualties had been proscribed by left-wing German intellectuals, who saw it as an attempt to relativize or deny German guilt for the Holocaust. But Sebald's chief argument about the

11. W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 12. Hereafter cited in the text as *Natural History*. Originally published as *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1999).

a doctor, too. One morning when I went out to Mamaroneck, Uncle Adelwarth was gone. In the mirror of the hall stand he had stuck a visiting card with a message for me, and I have carried it with me ever since. Have gone to Ithaca. Yours



ever – Ambrose. It was a while before I understood what he meant by Ithaca. Needless to say, I drove over to Ithaca as often as I could in the weeks and months that followed. Ithaca is in a beautiful part of the country. All around there are forests and gorges through which the water rushes down

From Sebald, *The Emigrants*.

Germans' failure to come to terms with their own experience of suffering and violence is the continuation, not the reverse, of the 1968 student protests. Far from being an *Aufrechnung* of German versus Jewish suffering, Sebald's essay extends the charge of the Germans' psychological and moral illiteracy about Jews to their own suffering and victimhood. "The almost entire absence of profound disturbance to the inner life of the nation suggests that the new Federal German society relegated the experiences of its own prehistory to the back of its mind and developed an almost perfectly functioning mechanism of repression, one which allowed it to recognize the fact of its own rise from total degradation while disengaging entirely from its stock of emotions" (*Natural History*, p. 12). Parts of Sebald's political critique read almost like crude political tracts, articulating the Marxist charge that postwar capitalist Germany was simply fascism disguised. "The prerequisites of the German economic miracle," he writes, came not just from the Marshall Plan, but also from a work ethic hardened by totalitarianism, an industrial and commercial adaptability learned from wartime production modes, experience in the use of "foreign labor forces," etc. (*Natural History*, p. 12). The stream of "psychic energy" in Germany that has not dried up to this day, he remarks acerbically, has its source in the "well-kept secret of the corpses built into the foundations of our state, a secret that bound all Germans together in the postwar years, and indeed still binds them, more closely than any positive goal such as the realization of democracy ever could" (*Natural History*, p. 13).

These are bitter, unforgiving sentences aimed directly at the generation of Sebald's parents, perpetrators of a vast conspiracy of silence "in every household" (as he once remarked) about the Nazi period. But political polemic is not the real point of these essays. Nor, despite their academic origins and stated intention, do they serve as a convincing account of the strange lacunae in postwar German literature about the bombings. Rather, *On the Natural History of Destruction* is the imaginative attempt to reexperience and understand the material conditions of catastrophe and violence that conditioned his own infancy at the end of the war, far from the bombings, and yet, Sebald seemed convinced, connected to them. "I spent my childhood and youth on the northern outskirts of the Alps, in a region that was largely spared the immediate effects of the so-called hostilities," and thus he can "hardly have any impressions of that period of destruction based on personal experience" (*Natural History*, pp. 70–71). And yet he knows that in his first year of life, "when I was lying in my bassinet on the balcony of the Seefeld house and looking up at the pale blue sky," there was a "pall of smoke" over all of Europe, "over the ruins of the German cities" as well as "the camps where untold numbers of people were burnt." This is Benjamin's angel of history, who does not tally up Jewish victims on one side and Germans on the other, but sees "one single catastrophe" as the storm called Progress blows him into the future:

[The angel's] face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to

stay, awaken the dead, make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise . . . (Benjamin as quoted by Sebald, *Natural History*, pp. 67–68)

Despite these gestures toward a materialist theory of history, Sebald's text on the Allied air war may finally be less about history writ large than his own existential and aesthetic origins. As we can see from his first literary publication, *After Nature* (1988), recently translated into English, Sebald's fascination with the catastrophes and cosmic conditions attending his birth runs deep, and creates a not-so-hidden stream underlying all his literary texts as well as his essays. The last section of this long narrative poem speaks of a photograph of his mother "in an open / coat, with a lightness of being / she later lost. Father also / a bit to the side, hands in his pockets / seems carefree."¹² The mother has gone to Bamberg, apparently to meet her husband who was on furlough from military duty. The date is August 26, 1943. Two days later, on the night of the 28th, 582 Allied bombers attack Nuremberg. The mother can travel by train only as far as Furth, where she watches the city go up in flames. "Today however she can't remember / what the burning city looked like / and what sort of emotion she felt / at the sight." Then we learn that the mother has just become pregnant, presumably with the poet/narrator Sebald himself, who was born on May 18, 1944, "the day of Christ's ascension" (*After Nature*, p. 76).

With almost mystical conviction, Sebald thus situates his own conception and prenatal "impressions" with these cataclysmic military events. But this is not really the origin of his own intuition into what he calls a "silent catastrophe" that takes place "without much ado before the viewer" (*After Nature*, p. 77). This comes from his repeated experience of falling down as a child and then sitting with bandaged hands at the window, looking at a hedge of fuchsias for hours on end and waiting for the pain to subside. This quiet, solitary incident provides an almost Lord Chandos-like epiphany to the young Sebald, which he attempts to capture with a striking amalgamation of human and natural figures: "I still cannot truly fathom what I thought to myself in those times / as I looked down at the herb garden / in which the cloistered nuns with their starched cap / moved through the furrows so slowly, / as if only a moment before / they had still been caterpillars" (*After Nature*, p. 77). The reference to the slow, patient work of caterpillars is highly symbolic and is often associated in Sebald with silk production as an emblem of his own literary "weaving." Just what this near mystical vision entails is never made clear, though the poem makes various forays into folklore, magic, European painting, anthropology, and natural history in a series of narrative loops. Like his essay on the "natural" history of destruction, however,

12. W. G. Sebald, *Nach der Natur. Ein Elementargedicht*, photographs by Thomas Becker (Nördlingen, Germany: Franz Greno, 1988), p. 73. Hereafter cited in the text as *After Nature*. English edition, *After Nature*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Random House: New York, 2002). This and all subsequent translations are my own.

the poem uses this notion of catastrophe to take a cosmic turn that is at once materialist and metaphysical: “I could sense the trembling / of the antennas on the roofs / of the houses as a crackling / in my brain, could hear, / far outside, the Gaussian rustling of the elements, a single / noise spread over the entire acoustic spectrum / from the earth up to / the heavens where the stars / are swimming in the ether” (*After Nature*, pp. 88–89).

Here we can understand how the air war, with its view of massive destruction from a great height above the earth, functions within the metaphorical economy of Sebald’s own metaphysically, mystically, and geophysically inclined vision of a world “after nature.” Again and again the poem seeks out this aerial or global perspective, above the normal confines of space and time. The extended ekphrastic excursus into three Renaissance paintings in *After Nature*—Aldorfer’s grandiose portrait of Lot and his daughters watching the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; Brueghel’s picture of Icarus falling into the ocean after flying too close to the sun; and Aldorfer’s Battle of Alexander—all take up this “modern” aerial perspective. The latter in particular teaches him, not the lesson of Western supremacy, slaughter of infidels, and Christian salvation he learned in school, but rather—“slowly, through the tininess / of the figures and the unfathomable / beauty of nature”—how to see that “other” unimagined side of life. Beyond the “battle” or “massacre” (*Schlacht*) we see a camp of white Persian tents in the evening sun, a city lying along the coast, boats with full sails and then, the poet/painter’s gaze lifting ever higher and further, the Nile Delta, the Sinai peninsula, the Red Sea, and finally the snow- and ice-covered mountains “of the foreign, unexplored and / African continent” (*After Nature*, p. 99).

So ends Sebald’s first literary publication, encapsulating in these few lines the underlying metaphorical principles and philosophical ideas that recur throughout *Vertigo*, *The Rings of Saturn*, and *The Emigrants*. In all these works, so apparently embedded in the material details of individual lives, one senses that time and place are arbitrary distinctions, that there is no contingency or accident, that one life merges with another as the living merge with the dead. Even airplanes, he notes, are “the gray brothers of prehistoric times . . . lifting themselves from the lagoons and swamps” (*After Nature*, p. 85). One can, of course, criticize the shift from the historical and political to the natural and metaphysical, especially in an ostensibly historical text like *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Some commentators have even suggested that this tendency brings Sebald’s work into proximity with “a traditional metaphysics of nature.”¹³ But Sebald’s “geometaphysical” gaze is consistently tempered by his sense for the telling detail, the mysteries of the small and apparently inconsequential. In many ways his mysticism resembles Stifter’s praise of small things in the preface to *Colored Stones*, or Hofmannsthal’s

13. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 150. Huyssen seems uncomfortable with the notion of a “natural history of destruction,” criticizing the lack of a “messianic dimension” in Sebald that counterbalances the pessimism of Benjamin’s angel (p. 155).

evocation of a mystical, inexpressible plenitude in the fictional letter of Lord Chandos, or Freud and Kafka's superb sense of the uncanny and mysterious in everyday life—a distinctly Austrian tradition that is quite different from the relentlessly pessimistic, eschatological vision some have attributed to him.

5. Sebald's cosmopolitanism is a crucial, though less frequently noted, strand in his writing that works both with and against his native traditions. To be a "good European" is of course the political strategy that many Germans have followed as a means of combating the nationalist follies of the Nazi period. But for Sebald, who studied in French-speaking Switzerland, the openness toward French culture of the Enlightenment and early nineteenth century has special significance. Like the Frankfurt School philosophers, he sees a close relation between bourgeois rationality and violence, whether this takes place in the Belgian colonial oppression of the Congo, the capitalist exploitation of the Amazon rain forest, or the massacres brought about by Napoleon's military campaigns in the name of Reason and the French state. Hence his fascination with French writers like Stendhal and Balzac, who came of age on the heels of Revolution, revolutionary terror, and the Napoleonic Wars, just as he came of age after the Holocaust.

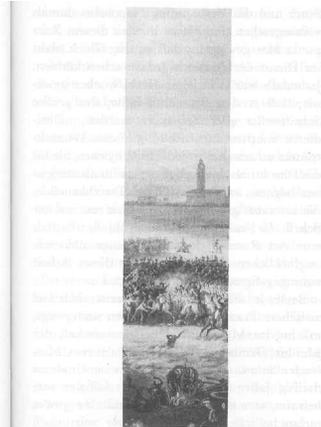
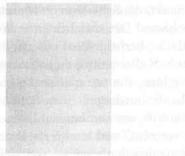
Sebald's first literary prose text, *Vertigo*, begins with the story of the young Stendhal in Italy during the Napoleon's campaign. On the surface, the text seems to be a somewhat haphazard account of Stendhal's love affairs in Italy, not his military experiences. But in fact it sets out to examine "the various difficulties entailed in the act of recollection," and specifically the role of war trauma in obliterating the historical past (*Vertigo*, p. 5). In his semiautobiographical *Vie de Henry Brulard*, the fifty-three-year-old Beyle (as Sebald teasingly refers to him) complains that memories of events from his youth have been covered over by later memories and reconstructions or, in some cases, obliterated by the violence of their initial impression: "[Beyle] writes that he was so affected by the large number of dead horses lying by the wayside, and the other detritus of war the army left in its wake as it moved in a long, drawn-out file up the mountains, that he now has no clear idea whatsoever of the things he found so horrifying then. It seemed to him that his impressions had been erased by the very violence of their impact" (*Vertigo*, pp. 5–6). To parry this loss, and to avoid what he dismissively calls "novelizing" (*faire du roman*), Beyle makes a sketch of a battle in which he took part, carefully marking the positions of the cannons, the village, the precipice into which countless horses plunged "in a frenzy of fear," and finally his own position as observer. "Yet, of course," remarks Sebald, "when Beyle was in actual fact standing at that spot, he will not have been viewing the scene in this precise way, for in reality, as we know, everything is always quite different" (*Vertigo*, pp. 6–7).

These reflections on the negative role of images in "fixing" the truth of the past culminate in the description of Beyle's panic while viewing, fifteen months after the actual bloodshed, the vast and silent terrain of one of Napoleon's early victories, the Battle of Marengo. Before visiting the site, Beyle

knew of the battle through many verbal accounts as well as his own repeated visualizations of the military maneuvers. But when he actually found himself on the site and contemplated “the bones of perhaps sixteen thousand men and four thousand horses that had lost their lives there, already bleached and shining with dew,” Beyle was overwhelmed by a “vertiginous sense of confusion such as he had never previously experienced” (*Vertigo*, p. 17). This moment of “vertigo” (*Schwindel*, the same word that appears in the book’s title) arises from the gulf between aesthetic representations and the subjective, individual intuition of death. But it is also the “swindle” (another meaning of *Schwindel*) perpetrated by official memorial culture: “In its shabbiness, [the memorial column honoring the dead] fitted neither with his conception of the turbulence of the Battle of Marengo nor with the vast field of the dead on which he was now standing, alone with himself, like one meeting his doom” (*Vertigo*, p. 18). Later, in a premonition of “all the campaigns and disasters” that Napoleon would bring about, Beyle realizes that he will not find his fortune by serving in the army; and shortly thereafter he resolves to become “the greatest writer of all time” (*Vertigo*, p. 18).

Sebald underscores this key moment of vertigo and writerly ambition with a rather elaborate play between text and image that ends just following the sentence quoted above with “like one meeting his doom.” Strangely, this game has been eliminated from the English layout and from subsequent German paperback editions. But in the original German text an image of the contemporary painting representing this battle has been cropped to include only a narrow vertical panel, which itself has been spliced into two parts and put on separate pages.

gemalt. Nun aber überblickte er die Ebene, sah vereinzelt 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 Gedensäule, die man auf dem Schlachtfeld errichtet hatte, einen, wie er schreibt, äußerst mesquinen Eindruck auf ihn. Sie entsprach in ihrer Schabigheit weder seiner Vorstellung von der Turbulenz der Schlacht von Marengo noch dem riesigen Leichenfeld, auf welchem er sich nunmehr befand, mit sich allein



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

The top of the painting, which shows only a pale sky and is thus virtually empty, is located at the bottom of the left-hand page and is introduced by the three-word centered line “*mit sich allein*” (alone with himself). The bottom of the painting representing a portion of 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 itself thus works as a kind of baroque trompe-l’oeil, cropped vertically to make it resemble the memorial column, complete with a verse-like epigraph. But the belated experience of the materiality of death undercuts the integrity of this representation, which leads to the dizzying cut that Sebald makes in the painting that puts the sky at the bottom of one page and the field of battle high on the facing page. Much like the oddly placed period in the title of his book, *Schwindel. Gefühle*, the spliced painting is meant to trip up the reader and induce a textual vertigo akin to Beyle’s own “vertiginous sense of confusion” and his decision to renounce a military career and become “Stendhal.”¹⁴

Fabrice del Dongo’s inability to make sense of the Battle of Waterloo in the opening chapters of *The Charterhouse of Parma* still stands as one of the defining moments of European fiction: the admission, within realism itself, of a vertiginous chasm between individual perception and collective historical memory. Sebald eschews such grandiosity, but his modest story is not less radical than Stendhal’s novel from an epistemological viewpoint: “For in reality, as we know, everything is always quite different.” His image-strewn fictions do not preserve the past, they hold it suspended between being and nonbeing, reality fragments that must always be interpreted, interrogated, reread. One is reminded of Kafka’s wish to be able to write stories that would be as “solid as a table” and, at the same time, as insubstantial and elusive as dreams. His stories are “only pictures,” he is said to have confided to his friend Gustav Janouch in a remark that applies equally to Sebald’s work. “[They] are a way of closing my eyes.”¹⁵

Let us return to the painting of Caspar David Friedrich, which grew out of the patriotic German response to Napoleon’s invading troops. Who knows if the monk at the edge of the sea was not meditating on the same violence that so preoccupied Stendhal? Sebald was certainly thinking about it. “Napoleon and everything connected with him appears in almost all my books,” he declared to *Der Spiegel* in the interview quoted above. “[He appears] as a historical

14. Turned upside down, emptied of its memorial function, the slice of painted sky evokes the “confusion” of another German author’s realist protagonist, Büchner’s Lenz, who “at times grew irritated at not being able to walk on his head.” Paul Celan’s gloss on this well-known passage in his “Meridian” acceptance speech for the Büchner Prize of 1960 is known to every Germanist and would not have escaped Sebald’s attention: “A man who walks on his head, ladies and gentlemen, a man who walks on his head sees the sky below, as an abyss” (*Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop [Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986], p. 46). Celan’s gloss depends on the strange coincidence of dates that Büchner’s Lenz walks through the mountains on the twentieth of January, the same date on which the Nazis met in Wannsee more than a century later to organize the “Final Solution.”

15. *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 31.

paradigm connected with the idea of Europe, which, for the first time, was brutally put into practice.” If it’s true, as Jorge Luis Borges suggested, that every author “creates” his or her own literary predecessors, one can say that Sebald invented the author of *La Vie de Henry Brulard* and *La Chartreuse de Parme* for his own purposes. A great European cosmopolitan who scattered English and Italian throughout his French; a writer who took a German pseudonym in order to escape the hated paternal name of Beyle; an “eternal traveler” hastening from one country to another all his life; and especially a melancholic who sought refuge in a form of writing halfway between autobiography and fiction—Stendhal was also the writer who laid bare the vertiginous discrepancy between reality and representation that, 150 years later, would become Sebald’s project in dealing with the legacy of Germany’s Nazi past and his detested familial and provincial origins. “Je ne sens pas du tout le charme de ma patrie,” Stendhal wrote at the end of his autobiography in a passage that Sebald might well have called his own. “J’ai pour le lieu où je suis né une répugnance qui va jusqu’au dégoût physique.”¹⁶

No, the roads in Sebald’s work do not all lead to Theresienstadt. The vision of human devastation and darkness is much larger, at once geophysical and metaphysical, though their roots lie in a profound meditation on the violence of European modernity. His is a religious sensibility in a disenchanted, physically devastated universe “after nature.” As in Dante’s *Commedia*, the lost souls

16. Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, ed. Béatrice Didier (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 431.



From Sebald,
The Emigrants.

in his books wander like ghosts in a vast transhistorical terrain of suffering and death. When Jacques Austerlitz arrives in Paris in the 1980s he is seeking information about his Jewish father's passage there forty years earlier. He walks the streets, plunges into his family's past, relives the traumatic events of the 1930s and 1940s. But in his wanderings, he notices the Parisian subway stations recalling famous Napoleonic battles: Iéna, Solferino, and of course "his" Austerlitz, the train station where, perhaps, his father boarded a train to the south to escape the German army, but also the site of the French army's victory more than a hundred years earlier. After suffering a nervous breakdown, he hallucinates that he is wandering through a maze of Metro passageways filled with fallen soldiers, exiles, and the persecuted: "I saw armies of these unredeemed souls thronging over bridges to the opposite bank, or coming towards me down the tunnels, their eyes fixed, cold, and dead."¹⁷

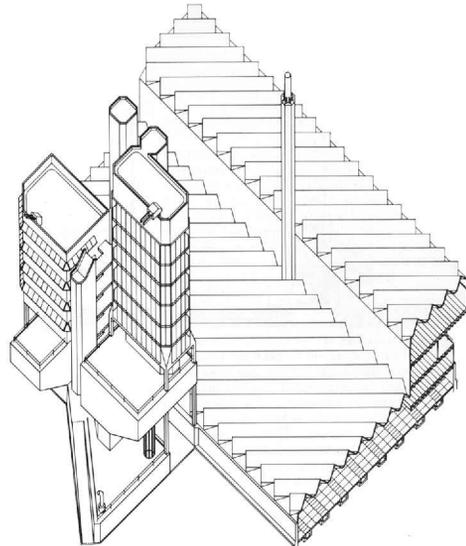
This is the edge of darkness that Sebald's fictions repeatedly bring us up against: a place and a time in which the ordinary constraints of history give way to an immense penumbral continuum of human suffering, exile, and "silent" catastrophes that take place "without much ado." "It makes me feel that I am a long way away," says Sebald's fictional uncle in *The Emigrants*. But from where?

17. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 260–70. In his essay on the Austrian philosopher Jean Améry, included in the English edition of *Natural History*, Sebald quotes the corresponding passage from Dante, linking it significantly to Primo Levi's and Améry's description of Auschwitz as a "city" and "Babylonian conglomeration" (pp. 165–66).

Frampton: No, it wasn't. But something else was. In England I was influenced by Anthony Hill, who is exactly my age. He is a British Constructionist—as opposed to Constructivist—artist who contributed to this Anglo-Dutch magazine *Structure* edited by Joost Bajlieu. Other members of this circle were Stephen Gilbert, an English Neo-Constructivist sculptor living in Paris; John Ernest, an American émigré in London; and Kenneth and Mary Martin. Along with Victor Pasmore they were all inspired by Charles Biederman's *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* (1948), which is an all-but-mythic book, astonishing in its way, but somehow virtually lost. These people made me aware of Russian formalism and Theo van Doesburg's *Art Concret* at about the same time that the Gray book appeared.

Foster: Artists, then, more than architects: they are one source of your fascination with the tectonic—not only in Russian Constructivism, but also through Anglo-Dutch Constructionism . . .

Allen: I wanted to ask about the example of Stirling. His engineering building at Leicester University is designed in 1959, and some of its elements have been compared to Konstantin Melnikov's Rusakov Workers' Club in Moscow (1927–28)—the form of its cantilevered auditorium in particular. If you think about Stirling's trajectory—from, say, his flats for Ham Common (1955–58), which is a weighty, brick architecture, wedded to the earth and influenced by Le Corbusier's *Maisons Jaoul*, to the Leicester building, which is by contrast a lightweight, predominantly glass-and-steel architecture, an assembly of almost found pieces, very dynamically composed—it is almost a demonstration case of the positive influence of the Constructivist example. I don't know how conscious it was on his part.



*James Stirling and James Gowan.
Engineering facility, Leicester
University, England (axonometric).
1959–63.*