Blurring the Boundaries: History, Memory and Imagination in the Works of W G Sebald

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Walter Benjamin in his essay on Marcel Proust claims that “all great works of literature establish a genre or dissolve one - that they are, in other words, special cases.”¹ When W G Sebald’s fiction was first published many critics found it difficult to define his style or categorise his work, and indeed some claimed he had created a new genre. His work has been variously described as “literary monism,”² a “generic hybridity”³ and “documentary novels”⁴ and Joyce Hackett claims he has “reinvent[ed] the diary as his own genre.”⁵ However, Iris Radisch in Die Zeit refers to Austerlitz as “ein literarischer Bastard”⁶ and suggests that Sebald “ist eigentlich kein Erzähler, sondern ein materialistischer Geschichtsmetaphysiker, ein Virtuose des Zettelkastens, Stimmenimitator, Konversator und Archivar.”⁷ Descriptions of his prose include part documentary, part travelogue, part dream sequence, part history, part memoir, part photo album, and part cultural-historical fantasy.⁸ His narrative style has been said to incorporate reportage, memoir, art criticism, social chroni-
When asked about his style, Sebald’s response was: “I just want to write decent prose.” The indeterminate genre of the narrative is brought about by the way Sebald exploits his sources, which include autobiography, biography, literary texts, historical data, images, and apparent memory. One example of many is in *Die Ringe des Saturn* where the narrative moves from the biography of Joseph Conrad to *Heart of Darkness* and back to the history of the Belgian Congo with nothing to mark the boundary between the three representations of the past and the fictional text that binds it all together.

The many authors Sebald draws from, ranging from Thomas Browne to Grimmelshausen to Borges, also share a fascination with “teils wirklichen, teils imaginären Wesen.” In the introduction to *The Life of Henry Brulard* (Stendhal’s autobiography; one of a number of biographies referred to by Sebald) the reader is warned that “his [Stendhal’s] attitude towards facts and dates was notoriously ‘cavalier’ and that he was more concerned with sincerity than veracity.” One Sebald narrator laments the lack of evidence to document an “unwahrscheinliche Zusammentreffen” while another knows “die unbestreitbaren Vorteile einer fiktiven Vergangenheit.” Sebald himself claims that “facts are troublesome” and that “the idea is to make it seem factual, though some of it may be invented” and that it does not matter if the work is “biographical, autobiographical, [or] topographical.” James Atlas argues that Sebald’s method of writing is to “build up a collage of apparently random details” and “stray bits.” However, there are threads of connection that draw together the past and the present and the incomplete and seemingly unrelated digressions as he and his narrators weave a complicated pattern of coincidences, tiny details and altered perspectives, “Kleinigkeiten, die sich unserer Wahrnehmung entziehen, entscheiden alles!” Sebald’s narrative style exploits and highlights the equivocal nature of history, the inability to define history clearly, or to separate history from fiction. The movement between probable history and possible fiction creates a space where there is no need for certainty of facts wie es eigentlich gewesen as Leopold von Ranke puts it.

While it may not be possible to have a clear division between history and fiction, as Hayden White argues in *Tropics of Discourse*, neither historians nor literary critics are comfortable with the idea of there being little to distinguish between the two. Books that are fictions relating history and biography disturb the accepted idea that history should attempt to remain faithful to the facts, that the author be able to provide documentary proof that an event or action actually occurred; that the document “functions as a
trace left by the past.” Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* sees the resulting “undecidability of the text” between fiction, biography and history in Sebald’s work as problematic and considers it “unacceptable” to leave it to the reader to decide the status of the text. Sebald’s descriptive prose does not function as in a novel where the reader is transported to another time and space that is purely fictional and self-contained, it is rather an altered perspective on what is or has been; “*eine Art Metaphysik der Geschichte gewesen ist, in der das Erinnerte noch einmal lebendig wurde.*” His literary practice is to take what already exists either from history or from literature and view it from “*eine Stück über der Welt imaginierten Punkt.*” Nur so konnte er alles zugleich sehen.” This paper examines the ways that Sebald blurs the boundaries between history and fiction and what this means for the preservation of memories and the representation of the past. All four of Sebald’s fictional works: *Austerlitz, Die Ringe des Saturn, Schwindel. Gefühle*, and *Die Ausgewanderten* are considered.

Sebald’s stories are about history, memory, trauma and human experience in times of natural and man-made destruction. The history that is woven throughout the books ranges from the history of the herring to the Taiping Rebellion and demonstrates the interconnected nature of seemingly random events. They are concerned with the problematical representation and re-presentation of the past and the sources from which history is written including the archive and images, and the place of memory and imagination in historiography. The individual participants in history and the debt of memory that is owed to the dead underscores the narrative. They are populated by dead people, set in old buildings, crematoriums and cemeteries, seen through veils of ash, mist and diffused light with repetitions and returns where everything changes but stays essentially the same although strangely distorted, with both “*grauen Feldern*” and “*ungewöhnlicher Deutlichkeit,*” like the photographs that are scattered throughout. The narrators are unnamed but bear a striking resemblance to Sebald himself, often making it difficult for the reader to separate the two. There is a deliberate strategy by Sebald to highlight the artificial nature of point of view. In all the books, but particularly *Austerlitz*, the voice of the narrator and the narrated blend into one. On one occasion a narrator gives his name as Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, an historian and travel writer of the nineteenth century. The protagonists in *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* are modeled on actual people and the narrators meet both real and literary characters. His use of the memories and biographical details of others has led to criticism, including questioning whether he had the “moral right to use real Jewish biographies in his aesthetic games.” Richard Crownshaw,
who has written on post-Holocaust memory and Sebald, is concerned that
Sebald’s adoption of biographies could be considered appropriation, while Georg Klein argues that Sebald is claiming a “false intimacy with the
dead.”

Sebald insists that he tries to avoid “sensationalism and melodrama” in
his work and is “conscious of the danger of usurping others’ existences”
and does not proceed with the use of biographical details of living persons
if the subject is uncomfortable with his doing so. Sebald is conscious of
the responsibility to stay as close as possible to what really happened with
objectivity, arguing in Luftkrieg und Literatur that the only way to deal with
material that is incommensurable with traditional aesthetics is by using the
documentary form, that fiction pales when compared with “authentischen
Fundstücke.” Using destruction and trauma to create an aesthetic effect
not only fails the victims but is also a misrepresentation. However, Sebald’s
stories are about memory and trauma, the real and the imaginary, the dead
and the living and the narrators, perhaps reflecting Sebald’s own dilemma,
find writing to be an arduous task, continuously tormented by scruples.
“Dieser Skrupulantismus bezog sich sowohl auf den Gegenstand meiner
Erzählung, dem ich, wie ich es auch anstellte, nicht gerecht zu werden
glaubte, als auch auf die Fragwürdigkeit der Schriftstellerei überhaupt.”
Sebald and his narrators are torn between the need to write in order to
keep alive the memory of the dead and the possibility of doing harm
through misrepresentation or worse through the use of sentimental and
maudlin prose.

Sebald’s narrators pursue the past and its representation in all its
forms: biography, history, museums, architecture, photographs, paintings
and documents, and most importantly, memory. Despite the difficulties
associated with using memory as an historical source, and its entanglement
with imagination, as Jacques LeGoff in History and Memory argues, it is the
“raw material of history” and “the living source from which historians
draw.” However, Jean-Luc Nancy in Finite History argues that once
memory has been taken up by the historian it is no longer memory but has
become history, which he considers to be quite separate. Sebald’s narrators
make no distinction between memory and history, questioning whether
there is or can be any clear distinction between the two. They challenge
historians and history by creating a sense of connectedness between the
past and the present as it is represented in both fiction and history, display-
ing the way memory works and its importance to history and memory, as
well as to those who remember. Edward Casey in his book Remembering
describes memory as having three broad categories: reminding, reminisc-
ing and recognising. Reminding is the recalling of the past into the present,
through an association with things. Sebald uses photographs as reminders of past events; however, they also remind the reader that narratives may “conceal or distort the truth” as Mark McCulloh suggests. Throughout Sebald’s books there are photographs and reproductions of paintings and documents; none of these picture are captioned and there is a disturbing tension between text and picture. Many of the pictures are authentic in that they are of the place, building or person named in the text; however, the “authenticity” of many of the photographs of people as they relate to the text is questionable. The second category, reminiscing, is reliving the past for no other reason than to re-enter the past; to reminisce is to make the past live again. The experience of reminiscing does not necessarily require strict adherence either to the consistency of time and space or to the totality of the event remembered. Those who reminisce freely move around within a memory as elements are recalled and rather than being strictly a narrative are more like Claude Levi-Strauss’ bricolage. Casey describes reminiscing as “an essentially privileged and especially powerful way, of getting back inside our own past more intimately, of reliving it from within” (italics in original). Paul Ricoeur considers diaries and autobiographies to be forms of reminiscing where the act of writing provides the traces of the past. Memories are turned into writing in order to preserve them but they retain their reminiscing quality. Sebald’s work, with its digressions and coincidences, and reproduction of biographies and diaries has a strong sense of reminiscing. While reminding relies on signs and reminiscing on words, recognising, the third category, is “linked to the past only through its shadow in the present.” However, to recognise something from the past it must have been experienced or at least to have been encountered before in some way. In Luftkrieg und Literatur Sebald writes:


This same sense of being in the shadow of something that was not experienced is felt by Sebald’s narrators. Recognising as memory is located in the present and as such is, argues Casey, “a borderline phenomenon – as located somewhere between [italics in original] memory and perception, past and present, myself and another” and is the space where Sebald locates his stories. Reminiscing brings the past wholly into the present as a self-contained event, whereas recognising retains some of its past nature - it remains linked to the past. This means that in reminiscing there is a discontinuity between the present version of an event and the original version
– there is no engagement with the past. Recognising on the other hand, brings the past event into the present and brings with it past emotions that combine with the present. Ricoeur considers “recognition to be the small miracle of memory.”  

Subconsciously Austerlitz was, for most of his life, careful to avoid the possibility of recognising anything from his past, “Ich las keine Zeitungen [und] drehte das Radio nur zu bestimmten Stunden an.”  

It was by chance that he heard and recognised his past through the voice of another. For Austerlitz this recognition enabled him to combine what he now recognized as his past with his present identity. For the narrators this recognition of the past creates a sense of confusion rather than clarity.

The many ways that memory engages with the past blurs the distinction between history and fiction but this distinction is further complicated by the way that memory merges with hallucination, dream and imagination and its role in testimony, and the difficulty of knowing where memory ends and imagination begins. Sebald’s narrators and characters struggle to know the difference between the memory of an event and the memory of a dream or something that has been read, heard or seen.

Austerlitz’s experiences in the Liverpool Street Station oscillate between memory and hallucination as he hears voices and sees faces and “Bilder aus einer verblichenen Welt”; he is tormented by hallucinations and “wiederholt träumte.” Hallucinations, dreams and memory have become indistinguishable. Paul Ricoeur in Memory, History, Forgetting, claims that the “problem posed by the entanglement of memory and imagination is as old as Western philosophy,” but that it is possible to know the difference as memory can be recognised as something that we know has happened “which [has] implicated us as agents, as patients, as witnesses” whereas something imagined need have no connection with reality. The problem all the narrators grapple with is that all versions of the past “keinen wahren Eindruck davon zu vermitteln” and it is not always possible to recognize from ones memories those things that really happened and those things that were or are imagined. Past events are not accurately stored in memory waiting to be recalled; as Benjamin argues in Excavation and Memory: memory is “not the instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium.” There are many versions and perspectives of the past but the potential for the biggest discrepancy is between those who were victims and
those who are survivors.

Das also, denkt man, indem man langsam im Kreis geht, ist die Kunst der Repräsentation der Geschichte. Sie beruht auf einer Fälschung der Perspektive. Wir, die Überlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter, sehen alles zugleich und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war.  

Sebald’s inclusion of biography and what appear to be the memories of others allows him to draw on Marianne Hirsch idea of “post-memory” to tell stories about times and events which he did not witness and of which he has no personal memory; to bridge the gap between those who experienced “history” and those who are onlookers in an effort to view the past from another’s perspective. Sebald’s narrators tell the stories of those who are victims of history and while they are themselves neither victims nor perpetrators the aftermath of the events has not left them untouched.

Those memories that are associated with trauma are part of a complex set of “Erinnerungen, hinter denen und in denen sich viel weiter noch zurückreichende Dinge verbargen, immer das eine im andern verschachtelt, gerade so wie die labyrinthischen Gewölbe, die ich in dem staubgrauen Licht zu erkennen glaubte, sich fortsetzten in unendlicher Folge.” Lawrence Langer in Holocaust Testimonies defines testimonies as “human documents rather than merely historical ones” and a “form of remembering” that recalls “a personal history vexed by traumas that thwart smooth-flowing chronicles.” Sebald’s texts include stories of exiles, those with damaged lives and survivors of either natural or man-made destruction. The stories of these characters are told through a narrator, and often the narrator is relating the story told to him by someone other than the victim, for example, Paul Bereyter’s story is told to the narrator by Mrs Landau. Many of the stories are personal accounts of the way that past trauma impacts on the victim for their entire life and there is the retelling of traumatic periods of history but those narrating the stories were not present at the traumatic event. However, although the narrator of testimony was actually present at the event as witness, at the time of narrating he or she is now a “third-person observer.”

Freud describes trauma as resulting from “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield … [and is] bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale … and set in motion every possible defensive measure.” These defensive measures result in trauma standing outside of memory. To recall the event into memory requires a reconstruction of the event that will inevitably involve imagination.
Just as physical "memory" in the form of buildings and archaeology is transformed over time into something new, such as the Liverpool Street Station in Austerlitz, so too are memories transformed over time. They contain traces of the past, but are filtered through subsequent experience and time. Austerlitz needed to reconstruct his memories after he had "forgotten" both his trip on the Kindertransport and his first language. A series of events triggered the memory and set in motion his search for his past. When he does remember he realizes "wie wenig Übung ich in der Erinnerung hatte, und wie sehr ich, im Gegenteil, immer bemüht gewesen sein mußte, mich an möglichst gar nichts zu erinnern und allem aus dem Weg zu gehen."\(^55\)

This lack of practice in using memory and the desire to recollect as little as possible are as corrosive to memory as altered perspectives and the mixing together of fact and fiction. Even more corrosive is the desire to forget. History needs memories to avoid the risk of forgetting "crimes that must not be forgotten, victims whose suffering cries less for vengeance than for narration."\(^56\) The protagonists of the four stories in Die Ausgewanderten are tormented by their desire to forget and the inability to do so but the trail of natural and manmade destruction and the dead continue to impact on the present: "So also kehren sie wieder, die Toten."\(^57\) LaCapra sees the "undecidability of the text" as a negative aspect of Sebald's stories but Ricoeur sees it as "up to the recipients of the historical text to determine, for themselves and on the plane of public discussion, the balance between history and memory."\(^58\) But "memory and the passing on of the objective information it retains must be delegated to those who are ready to live with the risk of remembering,"\(^59\) the past is full of "Schmerzensspuren, in unzähligen feinen Linien durch die Geschichte ziehen."\(^60\) But it is memory that allows us to mourn the dead; Mr Squirrel, despite his "Trauermanie," nevertheless had no memory therefore could not possibly "der Toten gedenke."\(^61\) It is these problems that Sebald's narrators and characters struggle to come to terms with. The outcome of so much confusion between what is real and what is imaginary, which perspective to take and the understanding that what we can know in the present is nothing more than a shadow of the past leaves all of Sebald's narrators confused, sick and melancholy.

The difficulty of classifying Sebald's work within literary genres has extended to whether or not they can be considered Holocaust literature. He rarely makes any direct reference to either the Nazis or the Holocaust. Instead he deals with the crimes and excesses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from imperialism to the Second World War and all its atrocities, and the degradation of the environment by mankind and nature. His stories cover the "broader catastrophe" of modern history as well as the Spuren der Zerstörung\(^62\) that are the consequences of that history, and as
such it is possible that his stories cannot avoid being in the shadow of the Holocaust. Some critics have claimed that the stories have a preoccupation with the Holocaust, while others have been critical of his treatment of the Holocaust as just a moment in history or as natural history. Scott Denham reads his work as “a Holocaust literature of a special sort,” that he is “thoughtful and eloquent” in his approach to the subject. 63 Sebald did not consider his work to be “Holocaust literature,” disliking the term. 64 James Wood in his essay “W G Sebald’s Uncertainty” claims that Sebald’s books are “not really about the Holocaust” and “certainly not about Nazism,” but rather they are “menaced by 20th century history.” 65 However, as critics and Sebald himself have noted, it may be impossible for him to avoid the shadow of the Holocaust. Born in 1944, he escaped any direct consequences of the war but believes he grew up in its shadow and as a German he believed it was a subject he could not ignore; his history and identity are bound up with the events and the aftermath of the Second World War. Sebald faced the ethical dilemma of his generation of how to sympathise with the victims of the Nazis while at the same time retaining one’s own Germaness.

Peter Weiss writes in his Notizbücher, quoted by Sebald: “writing is an attempt to preserve our equilibrium among the living with all our dead within us, as we lament the dead and with our own death before our eyes, in order to set memory to work, since it alone justifies survival in the shadow of a mountain of guilt.” 66 Sebald’s narrators are the inheritors of history, collecting the memories of others and often they seem not to know what to do with the information they have gathered. Peter Morgan describes Sebald’s texts as reflecting his “cultural pessimism” and “melancholy disappointment.” He argues that the process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung 67 is still under way for those of Sebald’s generation and that he has not been able to resolve the history that he has inherited. 68 The effort to understand or to see anything clearly seems to result in nothing, there is no resolution; the narrator of Austerlitz returns to the place where he started, haunted by the dead. Are we able to really know the past or can we only know what remains of the past in the form left to us by previous writers? “Wir alle, auch diejenigen, die meinen, selbst auf das Geringfügigste geachtet zu haben, behelfen uns nur mit Versatzstücken, die von anderen schon oft genug auf der Bühne herumgeschoben worden sind.”69 There is a sense of going over what has already been said before, as though those tiny details, like the individuals who disappear when a scene is viewed from a great distance, still impact on the present. Another perspective on Sebald’s work is that it is about how those of us who have inherited the consequences of past deeds can approach the past in an attempt to live with it rather than
deal with it. Sebald claimed in his speech at the opening of the Stuttgart Literaturhaus in 2001: “Es gibt viele Formen des Schreibens; einzig aber in der literarischen gibt es, über die Registrierung der Tatsachen und über die Wissenschaft hinaus, um einen Versuch der Restitution.”

Rather than writing in the shadow of the war or the Holocaust Sebald’s work could be viewed as being in the shadow of Vergangenheitsbewältigung.

Sebald’s narrators remember, recollect, recall, recognise, reminisce, imagine, hallucinate and dream as they attempt to preserve and explore the past rather than make sense of it. The weight of history that Sebald’s narrators carry with them is bound up with the fictional literature of the past, photographs and the physical remains of the past. The uncertainty of where imagination takes over from history in Sebald’s prose reminds the reader that all narrative, history and fiction, is told through the voice of a narrator posing as autobiographer, biographer, historian or literary author and that all “surviving remnants of history” are valuable even those that only resemble reality. Sebald’s narrators are unreliable historians but for Sebald history is an unreliable process. He was critical of those narrators who have a “reassuring quality” and instead wanted his narrators to sound uncertain so that the reader would share with the narrator, and the author, a sense of “irritation” at the lack of certainty.

The stories are a perspective on history and biographies through Nacherzählung, a re-telling of stories and events. Sebald’s prose is a type of witnessing that is not testimony. How to present history is a difficult and vexing task and, as Mark Anderson wrote, in a country such as Germany “where the past was ruthlessly denied, forgotten, or covered over, the surviving remnants of history provide the only possible means of gaining access to the past.”

But the efforts of Sebald’s characters and narrators, real and imaginary and the long list of those from whom he borrows, are all sickened in some way by their efforts to remember. The narrator of Max Aurach’s story “spürte ich doch in zunehmendem Maß, daß die rings mich umgebende Geistesverarmung und Erinnerunglosigkeit der Deutschen, das Geschick, mit dem man alles bereinigt hatte, mir Kopf und Nerven anzugreifen begann.”

The link between past, present and future in Sebald’s books is not through either landscape or buildings, fictions, history or images, all of these are shown to be transient, but through the physical presence of the body; the narrator of All’estero asks “was als eine undeutliche Sehnsucht über unsere Körper sich fortspant, um sie zu bevölkern, die staubigen Landstriche und die überschwemmten Felder der Zukunft.”

The past and its dead are a cross between the silk thread that is light, beautiful and natural, running through all of his stories and the backpack that is carried by Sebald and his characters as they travel through time and space in search of something they never seem to find, discover
details they had previously overlooked and see things from new and altered perspectives. The result of Sebald’s narratives is to put into doubt the need for a clear distinction between history and fiction, and memory and imagination.

NOTES


4 McCulloh, Understanding Sebald, p. xx.

5 Joyce Hackett, quoted in McCulloh, Understanding W G Sebald, p. xx.


7 Radisch, “is in fact not a storyteller, but a materialistic historical metaphysicist, a virtuoso of the card index, impersonator, conservator and archivist” (my translation).

8 McCulloh, Understanding Sebald, p. xix.

9 Hackett, quoted in McCulloh, Understanding Sebald, p. xx.


18 White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 122.
20 Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 34.
22 Sebald, Die Ringe des Saturn, p. 103, “an imaginary position some distance above the earth. Only in this way could he see it all together,” The Rings of Saturn, p. 83.
33 McCulloh, Understanding Sebald, p. 126.
37 Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, p. 77-8, “when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience had cast a shadow over me, and one from which I shall never entirely emerge,” *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 71.
38 Casey, *Remembering*, p. 129.
40 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 205, “I did not read the newspapers … [and] turned on the radio only at certain hours of the day,” *Austerlitz*, p. 197.
41 Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, p. 98-9, “I suppose it is submerged memories that give to dreams their curious air of hyper-reality. But perhaps there is something else as well, something nebulous, gauze-like, through which everything one sees in a dream seems, paradoxically, much clearer,” *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 79-80.
46 Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, p. 95, “fail to convey any true impression of how it must have been,” *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 77.
48 Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, p. 151-2, “This then, I thought, as I looked round about me, is the representation of history. It requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see everything from above, see everything at once, and still we do not know how it was,” *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 125.
50 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 200, “memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, all interlocking like the labyrinthine vaults I saw in the dusty grey light, and which seemed to go on and on forever,” *Austerlitz*, p. 192.
55 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 205, “how little practice I had in using my memory, and conversely how hard I must always have tried to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related in any way to my unknown past,” *Austerlitz*, p. 197.
57 Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 36, “And so they are ever returning to us, the dead,” *The Emigrants*, p. 23.


60 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 24, “the marks of pain which … trace countless fine lines through history,” *Austerlitz*, p.16.


67 “Process of coming to terms with the past,” Collins German English Dictionary.


69 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 109; “All of us, even when we think we have noted every tiny detail, resort to set pieces which have already been staged often enough by others,” *Austerlitz*, p. 101.

70 W G Sebald, speech printed in *Stuttgart Zeitung Online*, 18 November 2001, access date 14 March 2007; “There are many forms of writing; only in literature, however, can there be an attempt at restitution over and above the mere recital of facts and over and above scholarship,” *Campo Santo*, p. 215.


73 Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 338, “felt increasingly that the mental impoverishment and lack of memory that marked the Germans, and the efficiency with which they had cleaned everything up, were beginning to affect my head and my nerves,” *The Emigrants*, p. 225.

74 Sebald, *Schwindel Gefühle*, p. 121, “what relation was there between the so-called monuments of the past and the vague longing, propagated through our bodies, to people the dust-blown expanses and tidal plains of the future,” *Vertigo*, p. 106.