

# Thresholds of Remembrance: A study of the Freudian uncanny in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

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## 1. Introduction: Key Aspects of W. G. Sebald's Works

I would like to discuss in this paper some remarkable arts dealing with memory by the German author, W. G. Sebald, with reference to the visual images included in his works. W. G. Sebald is known as one of the most important authors who were engaged with the question of how to describe histories and memories in the post-Holocaust period. His works deal with the problem of how to retrieve memories of survivors who suffer from trauma and memories of the dead. He was born in 1944 in Allgäu, Germany during the War. He can be regarded as one of so-called 1968 generation, or 'Nachgeborene' in German. In the late 1960's, he migrated to England, and settled in 1969 in East Anglia, where he lived until his death in 2001. His major works, sometimes referred to as 'prose fiction', are characterized by his peculiar textual style, that is, by a kind of hybrid blending of novel, essay, memoir, and travel writing. Sebald inserts images such as photographs or reprinted images into these prose works. He wrote four works of prose fiction in all: *Vertigo* (in German, *Schwindel. Gefühle.*) published in 1990, *The Emigrants (Die Ausgewanderten)* published in 1992, *The Rings of Saturn (Die Ringe des Saturn)* published in 1995, and *Austerlitz* published in 2001.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the visual images in his prose fiction is that they have no captions, except very rare and special cases. Therefore, especially in his fiction, no rational or precise correspondence is assured between text and images. Thus, the black and white pictures like old photographs seem sometimes shadowy, as if they contain secrets. He usually uses one image per page, or sometimes a combination of a few images. Occasionally, one finds double-page spreads. In this study, to give you, the reader, an impression of his work, I will show only two pictures of his prose fiction [fig. 1, A63][fig. 2, A207] [1]. There is a visual analogy between the images, even though they are placed so far

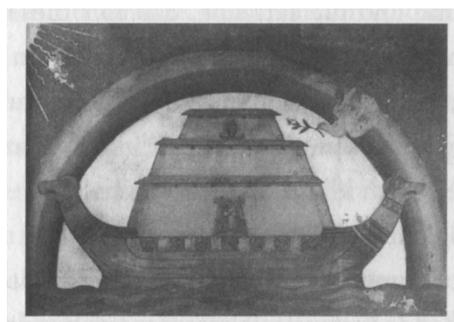


fig. 1

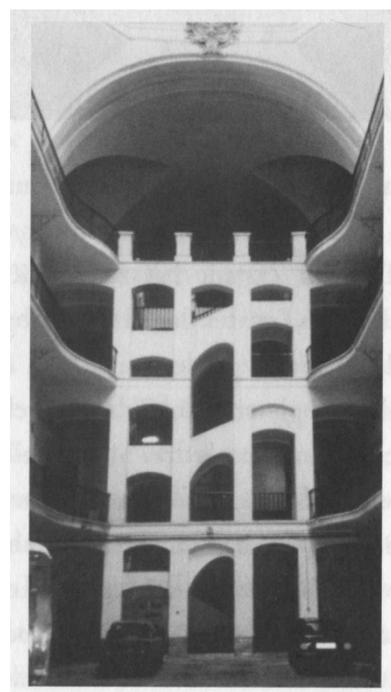


fig. 2

apart from each other in the book and hardly have any relation with each other in the story.

## 2. Thresholds of Remembrance

Now let's move on to Section 2. In this paper, I engage in Sebald's fourth and last work of prose fiction, *Austerlitz*. Here, I want to emphasize two points. First, images of closed doors and windows appear repetitively. Second, they become at the same time a threshold or a passage, through which lost memories return to us.

In *Austerlitz*, the narrator 'I' is a listener and the writer of protagonist Jacques Austerlitz's—the Jewish title-character's—narrative. 'I' runs into Austerlitz at a bar in the old station hotel next to Liverpool Street Station in London after about twenty years since their first encounter at Antwerp Central Station in Belgium. Austerlitz confesses to the narrator his life story. He was sent from Prague to England at the age of four by 'Kindertransport', in English the 'Refugee Children Movement', which occurred shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. At that time, little Austerlitz arrived at Liverpool Street Station. In all his adult life, Austerlitz forgets his mother tongue and loses his childhood memories from his life in Prague. In the early 1990's, some years before he turns sixty, he travels to Prague, following a clue from a dim memory of the long abandoned past. In Prague, he reunites with his old babysitter, Věra, and he learns the truth about his parents and his childhood. He then visits Terezín, where the Theresienstadt concentration camp, also referred to as the Ghetto, was set up and which functioned as a transit point to Auschwitz. His mother Agáta was transported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and from there, she was finally sent to Auschwitz.

Let us examine some of the photographs inserted in *Austerlitz*. These pictures taken in the 1990's, probably by the Author, Sebald himself, show images of Terezín [fig. 3, A269 above] [fig. 4, A271] [fig. 5, A272 above] [fig. 6, A272 below] [fig. 7, A273] [fig. 8, A274] [fig. 9, A275]. Images of closed doors and windows of run-down, ruinous houses appear one after another. The following quote corresponds to these images:

What I found most uncanny of all, however, were gates and doorways of Terezín, all of them, as I thought I sensed, obstructing access to a darkness never yet penetrated, [...]. [2]



größtenteils schon in den sumpfigen Boden des Inundationsgebietes gesunkene Stadt. Jedenfalls ahnte ich,



fig. 3 (above)



fig. 4



entlang aufgereiht waren. Am unheimlichsten aber schienen mir die Türen und Tore von Terezín, die



fig. 5 (above), fig. 6 (below)



fig. 7



fig. 8

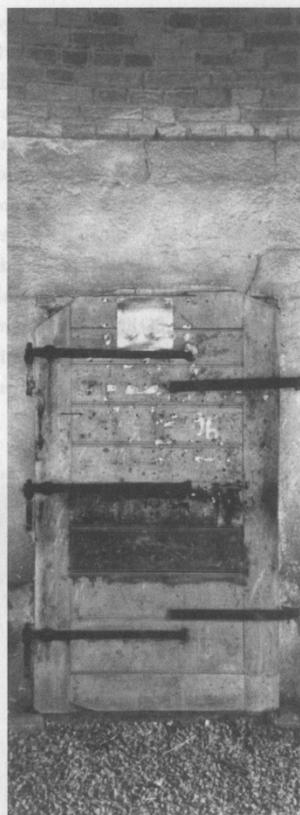


fig. 9



fig. 10

According to Freud, because things hide something behind them, they are uncanny. A series of similar type images, the images of closed doors and windows represent a function of hiding or screening. Directly after this sequence of closed doors and windows, a contrasting type of image is presented, one that provides a strange contrast. That is some photographs of display windows of an antique shop, 'ANTI-KOS BAZAR' in Terezín. Austerlitz tells the narrator 'I' that the inside of the shop was supposed to be deep, where nobody appeared, and a pile of junk was heaped. Through these display windows, we can see only a very small part of the junk [fig. 10, A276–277]. To quote from the text:

And then [inside the display window] there was the stuffed squirrel, already moth-eaten here and there, perched on the stump in a showcase the size of a shoebox, which had its beady buppen ['gläsern' in the German original, which means 'glass'] eye implacably fixed on me, and whose Czech name —veverka— I now recalled like the name of a long-lost friend. [3]

The closeup photographs of these windows distinctly show the optical reflection and transmission of the glass [fig. 11, A278][fig. 12, A280]. Namely, the display windows are optically transmissive and now we can see forgotten things inside. Here is found another function of photographs in Sebald's works. Through an analysis of all these images of doors and windows, I argue that the

schwarze, in den Scheiben sich spiegelnde Astwerk der rings um den Stadtplatz stehenden Linden, hatten für mich eine derartige Anziehungskraft, daß ich mich von ihnen lange nicht losreißen konnte und, die



fig. 11

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

fig. 12

photographs set in *Austerlitz* operate as covering images that prevent us from remembering memories and generating historical insights. But I also argue that they simultaneously function as thresholds or doorways through which something forgotten and repressed returns.

### 3. Imagery and the Return of Things Repressed

In this section, I'd like first to examine a certain group of the images emerging in *Austerlitz* and their visual resemblances. From beyond the display window in Terezín, the glass eyes of the stuffed animal have been fixed on the protagonist. In a traditional analogy to the body, the human eye is compared to the window. The photographs of the antique shop's display windows that appear after the sequence of closed doors and windows have, in a sense, now opened like eyelids, showing us the insides. And now, a set of photographs is inserted at the beginning of *Austerlitz* as a kind of frontispiece to the universe of the story. When we turn over the first page of the book, we notice that the eyes of animals and of humans gaze at us, the readers [fig. 13, A7]. Just like the glass eyes of the stuffed animal in the display window, the images now gaze back at the subject viewing them. To add a little more detail, the first two pictures show the eyes of nocturnal animals in 'Nocturama' of Antwerp Zoo. The person in the last picture is Jewish philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is said to bear a resemblance to the protagonist, Austerlitz. Figure 14 [A15 above] shows the dome of Antwerp Central Station in Antwerp,

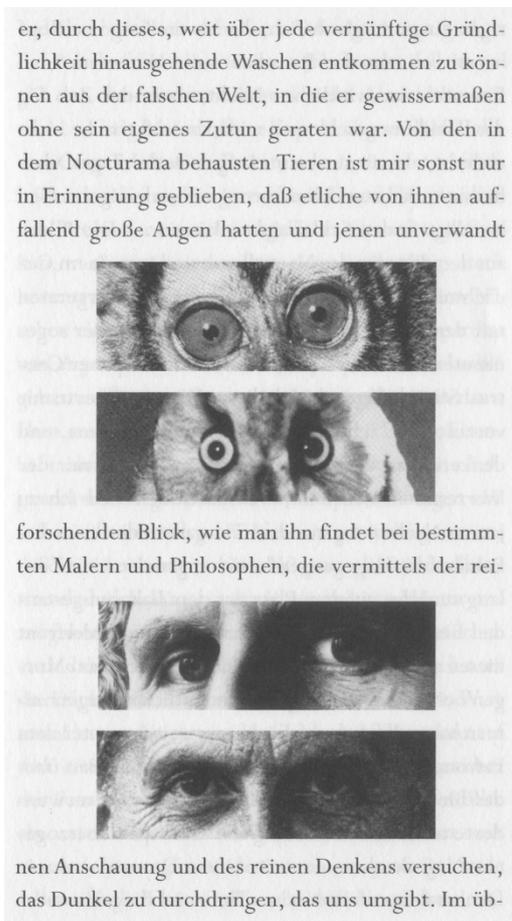
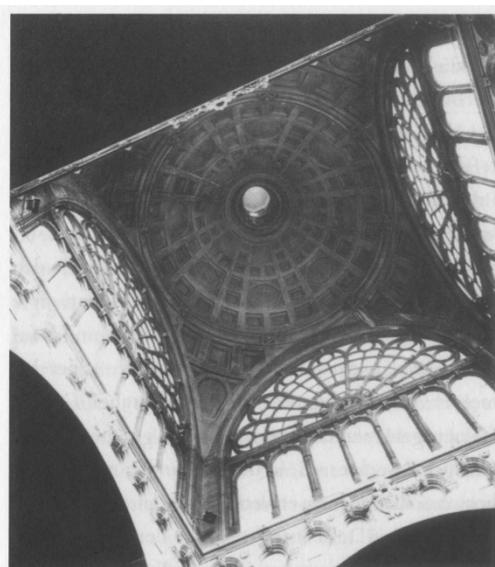


fig. 13



den 5. Februar, als ich längst wieder in tiefstem Schlaf in meinem Züricher Hotelzimmer lag, ist dann in dem Luzerner Bahnhof ein mit großer Geschwindigkeit sich ausbreitendes und den Kuppelbau gänzlich zerstörendes Feuer ausgebrochen. Von den Bildern, die ich am nachfolgenden Tag davon in den Zeitungen und am Fernsehen gesehen habe und die ich während



fig. 14 (above), fig. 15 (below)

nen, daß sich gegen Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts aus den verschiedenen Systemen schließlich das stern-

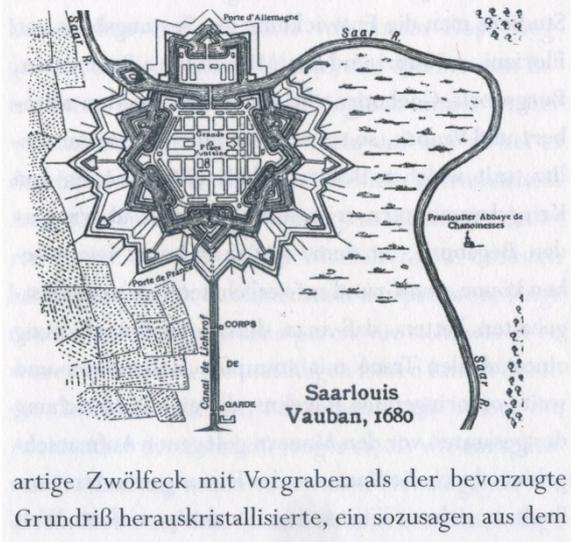


fig. 16

daß ich Austerlitz auf dem ehemaligen Brüsseler Galgenberg wiederum rein zufälligerweise in die Hände gelaufen bin, und zwar auf den Stufen des Justizpalasts, der, wie er mir sogleich sagte, die größte Anhäufung von Steinquadern in ganz Europa darstellte.



fig. 17

Belgium which was built in the nineteenth century. The concept of this dome comes from the Pantheon in Rome. At the level of the story, the eyes of living things and the dome of the station are independent from one another. Despite this, when we look at the picture of the dome shortly after we gaze at the pictures of the human and animal eyes, the dome does give off the peculiar impression that it is actually gazing back at us. For on the top of the great dome is an oculus open. The word 'oculus' means the round window, and literally, the eye. Through this oculus, the light penetrates into the dome, just as the light streams through the pupil into the cupola of an eye socket. To the image of the dome of Antwerp Central Station is attached, as a kind of footnote, a picture of a fire in Lucerne Station, showing its domed building sending up volumes of smoke [fig. 15, A15 below]. After several pictures, including one of the Vauban Fortress, Saarlouis [fig. 16, A22], and one of the

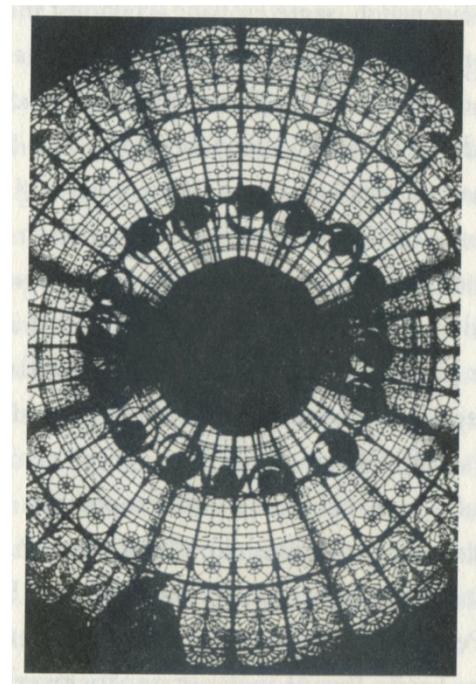
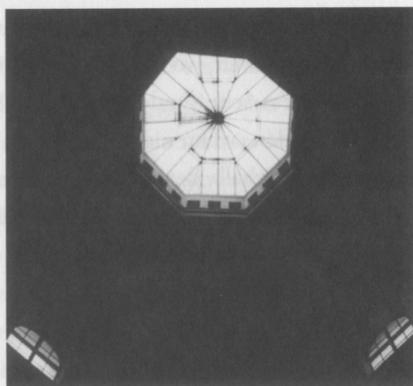


fig. 18

Law Courts of Brussels which also has a massive dome [fig. 17, A42], we now see the high glass dome in the Great Eastern Hotel [fig. 18, A62] next to Liverpool Street Station in London. This is the station where Austerlitz arrived from Prague by 'Kindertransport'. An eyespot of the glass dome looks at the reader, as do the oculus of the dome at Antwerp Central Station or the eyes of the animals at the beginning of the book. Halfway through the story, Austerlitz visits Prague, in

dämmrigen Tonnengewölbe, durch das früher einmal die Kutschen und Kaleschen hineinrollten in den von einer verglasten Kuppel überwölbten, wenigstens



zwanzig mal fünfzig Meter messenden inneren Hof, der auf drei Stockwerken umgeben ist von einer Gale-

fig. 19

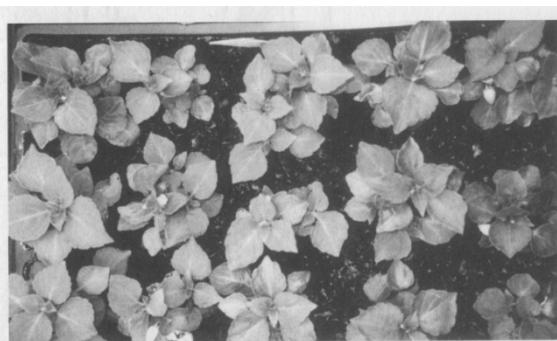
order to find his lost memories and the traces of his family. Figure 19 [A208] shows the glass ceiling of the octagonal cupola of the Central State Archive in Prague, which Austerlitz visits immediately upon arrival at Prague, searching for clues to his past. Here he gets an important piece of information about his mother. Once again, the glazed oculus looks down at the

reader. Figure 20 [A217] shows a mosaic on the floor at the entrance to his old home in Prague. This mosaic has an eyespot like the nocturnal animals we have just seen in the previous pictures. Moreover, this eyespot is surrounded by pointed petals and it bears some structural resemblance to the Vauban's star fort [fig. 16, A22]. Figure 21 [A331] is a picture of the flower bed of a nursery garden in Romford, London, where Austerlitz undergoes therapy after being discharged from a hospital where he receives treatment for physical injuries sustained in an accident caused by posttraumatic stress. The picture shows seedlings with rosette leaves. These leaves look like the rosette mosaic in the previous picture. The image of seedlings gives us a sense of healing, if we read its corresponding section of the text. In the original German text, the equivalent for the word 'seedling' is 'Auge', which primarily means 'eye', and also derivatively, 'oculus'. When we turn over this page, we suddenly come across a double-page spread of the layout of 'Theresienstadt Ghetto', an old star fort with pointed bastions [fig. 22, A332–333]. In shape, it is analogous to the mosaic and the seedlings I have just mentioned. (Here, it should be pointed out that the star-shaped fortification of Saarlouis [fig. 16, A22] is a precursor to or prefiguration of the image of Theresienstadt.) But this figure of a plan of Theresienstadt with eerie black of stains, now covers our entire field of vision. The eye of 'Theresienstadt Ghetto' now opens and gaze back at the reader/spectator. In other words, the rosette leaves, the rosette mosaic and the star-shaped

dem Eingang in die Mauer eingelassene Blechkasten für das Elektrische mit dem Symbol des herabfahrenden Blitzes, die achtblättrige Mosaikblume, tauben-



fig. 20



das vorsichtige Pikieren und Umtopfen der Setzlinge, das Ausbringen der größer gewordenen Pflanzen, die Versorgung der Frühbeete und das Gießen mit der feinen Rosette, das mir von allen Geschäften viel-

fig. 21

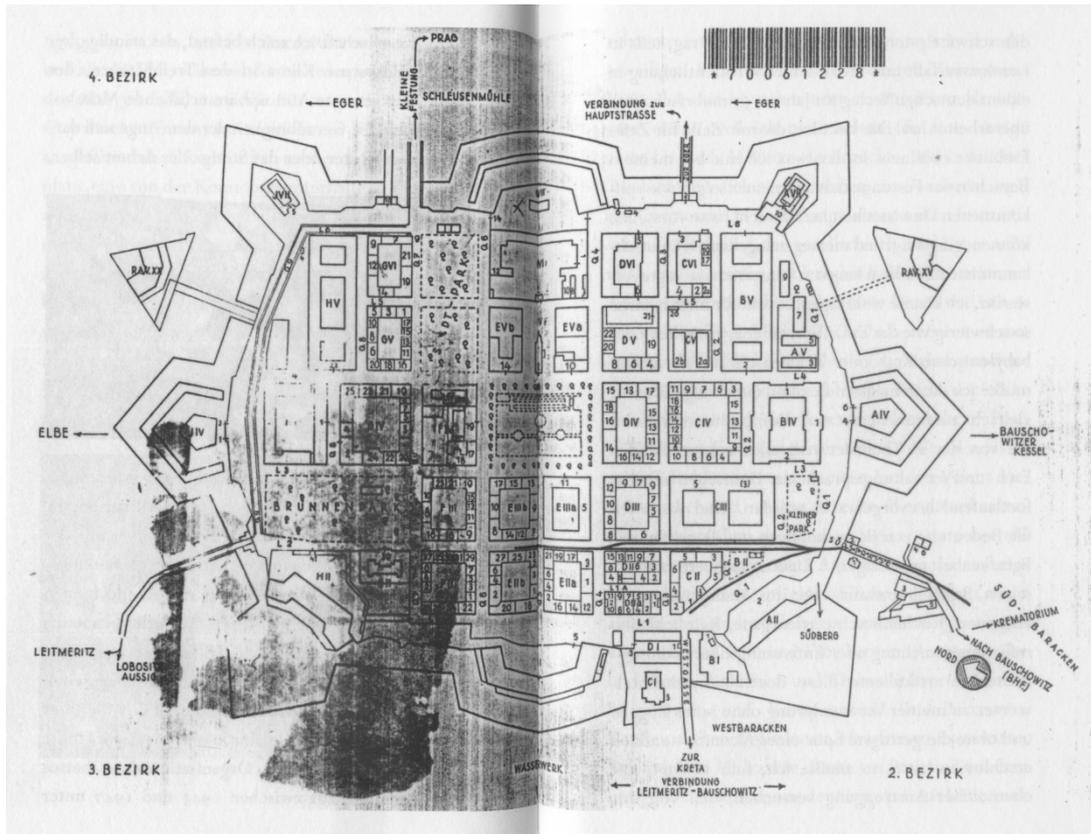


fig. 22

fortification of ‘Theresienstadt Ghetto’ contain a stark visual analogy. Owing to this last image, the other two come to take on opposing senses of healing and violence. The image of the seedling, which assumes a sense of healing, suddenly turns over to an image of the concentration camp. This sudden turn in meaning and moral value instils in the reader/spectator a shock, for such a turn breaks out regardless of semantic contents or certain moral codes. The last image I want to show in this paper is the face of an anonymous actress, believed to be his lost mother, Agáta [fig. 23, A357]. Austerlitz finds this clipping among old documents in an archive in Prague. But even through this female figure he cannot restore his damaged memory of his mother. The shadowy picture gazing at the reader/spectator resonates with the images of eyes of animals and of humans placed at the beginning of the book. This picture taken from a piece of archival material functions as a covering image that intercepts Austerlitz’s remembrance, in the same way as the closed doors and windows I have analysed in the

zweifelsfrei, wie sie sagte, Agáta erkannte, so wie sie damals gewesen war. – Über all dem hatten Auster-



litz und ich den Weg von dem Gräberfeld hinter dem St. Clement’s Spital bis zur Liverpool Street zurückgelegt. Als wir uns vor dem Bahnhof verabschiedeten, überreichte mir Austerlitz in einem Couvert, das er bei sich getragen hatte, die Photographie aus dem Prager Theaterarchiv, zum Andenken, wie er sagte, denn er stehe nun, so sagte er, im Begriff, nach Paris zu gehen, um nach dem Verbleib des Vaters zu forschen und um sich zurückzusetzen in die Zeit, in der er selbst dort gelebt hatte, einesteils befreit von seinem falschen englischen Leben, andererseits

fig. 23

preceding section. But now in her eyes we see feeble spots of light. This picture operates at a psychic level, that is to say, also as a kind of screen onto which something returns from darkness of the history, from oblivion; just as the light penetrate into the domes from the outside through an oculus.

#### 4. *Austerlitz* and Freud's Analysis in "The "Uncanny""

Austerlitz's mother, Agáta was an opera- and operetta singer and played 'Olympia' on her first stage in his hometown, Prague in the autumn of 1938. 'Olympia' is a notorious female automaton who appears in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, an opera by Jacques Offenbach, after whom Jacques Austerlitz is named [4]. The original story of the Act of 'Olympia' is based on 'The Sandman', a famous German novel written by Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann. It is not by accident or fancy that Sebald chose the character of Olympia for Agáta: Austerlitz searches for a woman wearing the costume of Olympia as a sign of his mother—whose face he cannot remember—by scrutinizing a Nazi propaganda film shot in Theresienstadt concentration camp: *Terezin: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area* (1944), directed by Kurt Geron, a German Jewish actor and film director [5], because Austerlitz has read a book in which the author, H. G. Adler, one of the survivors, writes that *The Tales of Hoffmann* was acted out in Theresienstadt as part of a 'beautification campaign' [6]. From this context, one can understand why Agáta must have played the role of Olympia. But I think furthermore that the choice of Olympia for Agáta by Sebald has a immanent necessity for the construction of *Austerlitz*. Originally, Olympia is an automaton in Hoffmann's 'The Sandman'. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) introduces the concept of the 'uncanny' in his essay "The "Uncanny"" (1919), and there the analysis of 'The Sandman' is one of cores. In what follows, I argue that *Austerlitz* fits eerily into the concept of the uncanny by Freud, and then speculate its reason. Now, what is the uncanny? According to Freud, the uncanny is something old and familiar which has been forgotten through the process of repression.

[...]we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* ['homely'] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*[...]; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. [7]

Freud also says that '[...]we can trace back to infantile psychology the uncanny effect of such similar recurrences' [8]. And he tells:

[...] it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat' proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts —, a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analysis of neurotic patients. All these considerations prepare us for the

discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny. [9]

‘Such similar recurrences’ are caused by the inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ [= repetition compulsion], which is a primitive function of the human mind and which has power over the pleasure principle. Then, would it be possible to believe that the eye images in *Austerlitz* serve as ‘such similar recurrences’, caused by the repetition compulsion? Freud argues in this essay that E. T. A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ is a typical example to explain how the childhood trauma represses a person perpetually, and how something repressed returns to the person as the uncanny. In ‘The “Uncanny”’, Freud finds the theme of eyes and optical wears that appears repetitively in Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’. I give you some examples. First, the eyes of the protagonist, ‘Nathanael’. He is haunted by his traumatic childhood memory, possibly the nightmare in which ‘Coppelius’ violently bent and twisted his limb like a doll’s; Nathanael regards Coppelius as the avatar of the Sandman, an evil character from a nursery rhyme. Since then, Nathanael seems to unconsciously obsess that his eyes might be enucleated by the evil Coppelius/Sandman. Second, the glass eyes of the female automaton ‘Olympia’ in ‘The Sandman’ whom Nathanael falls in love, and whose role Austerlitz’s mother plays in Prague. Third, a telescope, in German ‘Fernglas’, which Nathanael buys from a strange peddler named ‘Coppola’. Fourth, a group or a variation of images of the eye. ‘Coppelius’ and ‘Coppola’ are the names of the characters whom Nathanael fears and identifies as the same person. According to Freud, the name ‘Coppelius’ comes from ‘coppella’ which means the crucible in Italian. And it comes also from ‘coppo’ which means the eye socket in Italian [10]. I add one more variation to these Freud’s indication: ‘Coppa’ means the cup. Coppola sounds somehow like ‘Kuppel’ in German for the dome, and is etymologically related to the word ‘cupola’ (i.e. a dome-shaped structure on the top of a dome or larger roof; dome-shaped organs like the eye socket). From these four points in the Freud’s essay, I would like to examine the photographs of human and animal eyes as well as glass windows contained in *Austerlitz*. It is important, likewise, that the domes and their glasses appear repeatedly. Further, in *Austerlitz*, there are several mentions of optical gear such as eye glasses, a camera or a telescope. It is noteworthy that in the story, the narrator ‘I’ meets Austerlitz by sheer accident, about twenty years after their first meeting, at the bar in the Great Eastern Hotel next to Liverpool Street Station (See Figure 18 [A62], which shows an eyespot on the glass dome of the station), as the narrator, who has suffered from eye trouble, is on his way home after visiting a Czech eye doctor. The structure of *Austerlitz*—built from the levels of the narrator and the protagonist—is similar to that of ‘The Sandman’, which is typical of the frame story genre of the nineteenth century. It is the narrator ‘I’ who arranges Austerlitz’s photographs, edits Austerlitz’s narrative and reconstructs his entire story, as the narrator does in ‘The Sandman’. The narrator ‘I’ discovers or possibly highlights for the reader the recurrence of certain types of images by laying out Austerlitz’s photos while he relates them to episodes and details in Austerlitz’s narrative. It is necessary to clarify, however, that, unlike with ‘The Sandman’, it is not Austerlitz but the narrator ‘I’, who is anxious about the loss of his eyes. If we compare ‘The Sandman’ and *Austerlitz*, it becomes clear that in *Austerlitz*, various images related to the eye emerge one after the other in a similar way that Freud pointed out in ‘The “Uncanny”’. That is,

human and animal eyes are transformed into the oculus of domes such as those in Antwerp Central Station, the station hotel next to Liverpool Street Station and Central State Archive in Prague; into that eyespot of the mosaic; into the rosette leaf seedlings (In the German original text is used the word 'Auge' that means the eye); and finally into the star-shaped Theresienstadt Ghetto. Freud contended that the repetition compulsion in Nathanael's life is exerted by his castration complex, and that images of the eye emerge as the displacement of the male genital organ. If we were to apply Freud's theory literally to the images of the eyes in *Austerlitz*, it could be said that Austerlitz's perpetual anxiety, his behavioural patterns and the recurrence of eye motifs are caused precisely by his castration complex. According to Freud, an eye socket represents castration. For instance, when Austerlitz has a hysterical epilepsy seizure, he is carried to Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris where he temporarily suffers from memory loss. Right before his seizure, he sees an 'Indo-Chinese woman with an alarmingly thin face and eyes sunk deep in their sockets' [11]. Austerlitz's disempowerment which is associated with the hollow eye sockets of the woman can be interpreted as the displacement of castration. In Freud's interpretation of 'The Sandman', he mentions that the castration complex results in a splitting of the 'father imago'. *Austerlitz* also seems to contain such a splitting: the ambivalence of a good father (Austerlitz's real, long-lost father) and an evil symbolic father who rules over and destroys his own family, that is, the Nazi regime. In these regards, Freud's castration complex seems to be an idea with great relevance for the interpretation of *Austerlitz*. However, does such a recurrence of the eye-motif in *Austerlitz* even arise in the very same way as Freud claims in 'The "Uncanny"', namely, only due to a castration complex? Freud says in the 'The "Uncanny"':

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is token of repression. [12]

Freud considers the female genital organs as the object of the Eros. However, the matter is not quite as simple as he suggests. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), Freud proposes his hypothesis of the 'death drive', which became one of major turning points of his theories. 'The "Uncanny"' and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' are intimately linked: In the course of writing 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud began to rewrite the old version of "The "Uncanny"' and completed it. In fact, "The "Uncanny"' was published in the autumn of 1919, before 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. According to Freud, the death drive that causes a repetition compulsion is 'the most universal endeavour of all living substance—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world' [13]. The death drive, owing to a primitive mechanism in the mind, expresses itself as aggressiveness, and if it turns inward on the self, it will manifest as self-destructive impulses. Freud even refers to 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in "The "Uncanny'". Therefore,

these two essays can be considered as counterparts. In ‘The “Uncanny”’, Freud seems to think that this ‘homing’ desire to return to the mother’s womb results from the Eros. Namely, the mother is the object of the Eros in the context of the castration complex. Freud’s discourse in ‘The “Uncanny”’ focuses primarily on the castration complex that arises in the Oedipal period. However, when put into the context of the repetition compulsion in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, the ‘homing’ desire to return to the mother’s womb can also be considered as an instinct-excitation towards death, viewed from the perspective of the death drive. Therefore, the ‘mother’ can be interpreted not only as object of the Eros from the Oedipus complex but also as object of death drive, namely, as symbol of the death. Otto Rank (1884–1939), one of Freud’s outstanding pupils, focused on the early mother-infant relationship in the pre-Oedipal period; he argued that childhood anxieties and neuroses stem from the traumas of the mother-infant separation at birth. Freud firmly opposed Rank’s theory, which was published as *The Trauma of Birth* (1924) [14], because he was afraid that his own theory of the Oedipal complex was, in a sense, castrated by Rank’s theory. The book drove a wedge between master and pupil. The last excerpt from ‘The “Uncanny”’ written about the uncanniness of female genital organs can be seen as a presage that his theory of the Oedipal castration complex suffocates and overpowers Rank’s pre-Oedipal mother-infant relationship theory. Therefore, we cannot naively link the images of the eyes, the stars, and the domes in *Austerlitz* solely to the castration complex; instead, we also need to analyse these images from the perspective of the death drive towards the maternal body. In this case, the interior spaces of the domed buildings in *Austerlitz* can be interpreted as womb-like areas in which the Eros and the death drive are in conflict, and where the former functions under the rule of the latter. (For descriptions of domed buildings in *Austerlitz* that have a womb-like character, please refer to my other paper [15].) Even though he has long forgotten this, four-year-old Austerlitz was held in his mother’s arms under the dome of Prague Main railway station right before he left for London; he was separated from her and from the domed station—in a sense, delivered. Therefore, each domed railway station in the metropolises of Antwerp, London, Prague and a circus near Austerlitz Station in Paris are associated with imageries of the hollow eye socket and the womb, and they might well be called ‘uncanny homes’ (‘unheimliche Heimat’ [16]), forgotten through the process of repression.

## 5. Intrinsic Characteristics of Visual Images in *Austerlitz*

In the previous sections, we considered the recurrence of specific types of images in *Austerlitz* and drew a comparison with Freud’s theories. But we cannot overlook one important aspect: Freud constructs a textual analysis of ‘The Sandman’, while we intensively analyse the visual images used in *Austerlitz*. The visual image has a unique power in that sheer visual analogies among images have the power to cancel out even semantic contents or moral codes which each image carries, as shown through the sets of photographs, for example, the seedlings and the plan of the Ghetto in Section 3. The Rhyme has a similar characteristic, creating a sequence of acoustic analogy, overpowering word meanings and violating the flow of textual meaning. Similarly, the pictures in *Austerlitz* rhyme visually, linking with each other through their analogies. This raises the following question: how do such visual images function *per se*

and affect the reader/spectator?

At the onset, I detail some of the characteristics of pictures used in *Austerlitz*. First, These pictures, as well as those used in Sebald's other prose fiction, are broadly classified into two major groups: one is composed of photographs from printed matter: newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, post cards, ephemera etc.; the other is composed of private photographs, for instance, from albums or Sebald (or someone he knows) has shot. Sebald uses the printed material more than the private. Second, before *Austerlitz* was sent for printing, most of the picture materials were shot in black and white. Through my recent investigation, I have learned also that many of the images I have taken up in Section 3 were originally used in printed matter. Here are sources and bibliographic data for these. The first two pictures (of the eyes of nocturnal animals, in Figure 13 [A7]) come from a booklet published by the Antwerp Zoo that Sebald possessed, *Nocturama* [17]. The figure of a lemur is found on page 17 and the owl on page 12 in this booklet. The face of a man [fig. 13] above Ludwig Wittgenstein's face was cut from a printed image of a lithographic self-portrait, *Ich, im August* (1977) by Jan Peter Tripp (1945–), a German artist who has collaborated with Sebald, and his countryman. The face of Wittgenstein is Figure 449 on page 317 in a German book whose bibliographic data I have not yet identified. Sebald uses a copy of this Figure 449 for the printing. This photograph is a very famous one which Wittgenstein's friend Ben Richards shot on September 1947 in Swansea and which one sees often in books or on the Internet. Figure 14 [A15 above], the picture of the dome of Antwerp Central Station, comes from a publication composed of a large-sized 17 colour photographs [18]. Figure 15 [A15 below], the photograph of a fire in Lucerne Station is a reproduction of a figure on page 25 of an exhibition catalogue, *Het Centraal Station van Antwerpen, een levend monument* [19]. These two publications were also in Sebald's possession. Figure 16 [A22], the picture of Vauban Fortress, Saarlouis, is a reproduction of a figure on page 690 of an article on 'Fortification and Siegecraft' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* [20]. Figure 17 [A42], the domed building of the Law courts of Brussels, is a reproduction of a press photograph in the article: 'Viele Treppen führen ins Nichts: Brüssels Justizpalast als Rhetorik der Macht' in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [21]. Figure 18 [A62], the image of the glass dome of the Great Eastern Hotel next to Liverpool Street Station, as well as Figure 1 [A63], a decorative image of Noah's ark in the same hotel, were taken from a book *Broadgate and Liverpool Street Station* [22]. They are on pages 62 and 63 of this book respectively. Figure 22 [A332–333], a plan of Theresienstadt Ghetto comes from a copy from the front endpapers of the book by H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*. In contrast, Figure 21 [A331], the picture of seedlings, is from a normal colour photograph Sebald possessed (the photographer and the date are unidentified). I could not find sources for Figure 19 [A208], the picture of the glass ceiling of the octagonal cupola of the State Central Archive in Prague; Figure 20 [A217], the picture of the mosaic; and Figure 23 [A357], the picture of the woman. However, I suspect that Figure 23 originates in printed matter, because it is rough textured. It has become clear from the above that the sharpness or the resolution of his images never matters for Sebald, and that he presents equally and indiscriminately old and new pictures, and originals and reproductions from printed matter. This approach makes the pictures in his work seem somehow old, of a historical provenance.

It is a key fact that many of the pictures in Sebald's prose fiction works come from

newspapers, magazines, books, and photographic postcards etc. which constitute part of the public sphere in the media culture. In what follows, I take up a discussion by a German art historian, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh about initial panels of Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*. Then I compare the visual images in *Austerlitz* with those in *Mnemosyne Atlas* by Aby Warburg. Finally, I highlight characteristics of the visual images in *Austerlitz*, with reference to the concept of the 'flatbed picture plane' put forth by an art historian and art critic Leo Steinberg.

In his essay 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive', Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (1941–), a German contemporary of Sebald, analyses a number of the initial panels of *Atlas* (1962–), which were assembled in the 1960s by a German artist, Gerhard Richter (1932–) [23]. Richter's *Atlas* begins with amateur photographs of his own and someone else's family and of holiday travels; then, Richter introduces a broad variety of clippings from West German illustrated journals in the post-war period. There emerge on the panels a flood of media images, for example, images on fashion, travel, pornography and advertising [24]. Buchloh contends that those genres of mass media image, such as the ones mentioned above, operate independently while simultaneously intersecting; this constitutes 'that complex field of disavowals and displacements, field of repression and cover images within which memory is constituted in the register of the photographic order' [25]. This complex field conceals 'the trauma from which compulsion to repress had originated'. Buchloh argues that the pictures of victims in concentration camps that suddenly appeared in panels of *Atlas* rupture this field, because they reveal the links between referents (victims of the Holocaust) and their images. Buchloh concludes, therefore, that Richter's *Atlas* functions as an 'image reservoir' with a 'perpetual pendulum' of 'the dialectics of amnesia and memory' [26]. Through an analysis of the images and their layout in the panels in *Atlas*, Buchloh aims to capture these dialectics of collective repression and emergence of memories of the Nazi era. Similar to those in *Atlas*, the photographs in *Austerlitz* function not only as covering images but also serve as a threshold of remembrance and exposure of the trauma, as discussed in Section 2. In short, the function of images in *Austerlitz* and *Atlas* are similar: to create a dialectics of amnesia and memory. However, Buchloh's argument is not very convincing in the following respects. Why was it only the photos of the concentration camp victims that could rupture as a kind of 'punctum' the field of 'repression and cover images', even though they were taken from the mass media in the same manner as the photos from other genres in *Atlas*? Why could they exclusively represent and reveal the links between the referents, 'the true mnemonic objects', and the images? Let us now think about the characteristics of the visual images in *Austerlitz*. What if there is no true mnemonic image behind the covering images? Then, behind the closed doors and windows in Theresienstadt as represented in *Austerlitz* will be found the hidden absence of the true mnemonic images. In other words, Austerlitz's childhood trauma (on the level of the fiction) and the impossibility of reaching one's destroyed memories of the Holocaust (on the collective memory level) are concealed behind them. In *Austerlitz*, the traumatic or unconscious manifests itself prominently in the recurrence and the network of visual images, formed by their resistance against the flow of the narrative. Conversely, if one examines the recurrence of visual images and the network of their resemblances, one can trace a rhetorical movement which originates from the textual unconscious.

Richter makes us more conscious of the repressive power of covering images by separating

them from their original contexts and arranging them on panels. Sebald does the same. In addition, Sebald's pictures are shot again in black and white before they are printed in the book. This process petrifies the pictures, devitalizing their repressive power. Moreover, they become homogenized; they are now pictures that can stand alone, becoming somewhat like a card. Each combination of these image cards functions like a set of tarot cards, that is, a constellation by which to approach history's underlying unconsciousness. With regard to the historical origins for the use of dialectics of images, we must look to *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1926–1929) by Aby Warburg (1866–1929), the originator of 'iconology' [27]. Warburg assembled by himself more than sixty panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas*. The panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas* contain various images from the fields of art history and the humanities, secular manuscripts, as well as clippings of press photographs and postage stamps of his time. Warburg and his team shot those materials. After that, Warburg set each photograph on the panels in his own unique way, akin to some photomontage works of the 1920s. It is not difficult to find that Sebald and Warburg have something in common, regarding the process of shooting. One of major themes in *Mnemosyne Atlas* is 'pathosformel'. Pathosformel means the representation of certain types of gestures and bodily expressions derived from ancient times, expressing the most vehement human emotions. The semantic connotations of those gestures and bodily expressions often change drastically depending on the period in which they appear. By juxtaposing and grouping those black and white photographs on the panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Warburg attempts to read latent interconnections of those images and the historical contexts behind them. With one glance at the panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas*, spectators can perceive how a pathosformel emerges on picture surfaces, beyond time and space. Furthermore, Warburg assumes that the image is a vehicle for the unconsciousness of each period and society. In this respect, Warburg's theory resonates clearly with Freud, his contemporary. Warburg constructs *Mnemosyne Atlas* in order to show that collective social memories and traumas are transmitted historically. Therefore Warburg's methods on *Mnemosyne Atlas*, i.e. to duplicate printed matter; to arrange those duplicated images according to visual resemblances among them; to read images as symptom originated from unconscious structure of times and societies, might well provide telling clues to understanding visual images in *Austerlitz*.

Next, I deal with the concept of the 'flatbed picture plane', put forth by Leo Steinberg (1920–2011), an art critic and art historian [28]. Steinberg compared a certain new type of 1960s painting with the flatbed (here specifically the flatbed press) in view of its horizontality. This trend in art is exemplified in the works of Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), who uses junk and/or opaque layers of common silkscreen. Steinberg terms such picture planes 'receptor surfaces'. According to him, the receptor surface receives a large amount of fragmentary information from the urban landscape; he particularly mentions several of Rauschenberg's silkscreen works from the early 1960s. Now, let us view the concept of 'receptor surface' in the context of Sebald's works. The pages of his books can be considered to be a kind of receptor surface, on which piles of images drift, which have drifted from one time to another and from one page to another. It should be noted here that the first, limited editions of *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn* were stereotyped. In other words, the images and letters in these limited editions were literally placed on real flatbeds.

## 6. Conclusion

In the last moments before young Austerlitz departed from Prague Main railway station, he was held in his mother's arms under the dome of the station and gazed at its ceiling. In this light, it is not difficult to understand why Austerlitz fixates on the domes and their interior spaces: Images associated with the eye (and the star shape as a variation thereof) and the dome expose the intensity of his trauma. For Freud as a psychoanalyst, the repetition compulsion is an evil force that needs to be subdued. In 'The Sandman', the repetition compulsion is felt as an uncanny effect that runs through the entire text. Sebald differs from Freud in that he takes advantage of the recurrence of visual images as a dialectical dynamic driving in his work, namely, the dialectics between the repression and emergence of memories.

With regard to pictures in his works, Sebald utilizes a tension between two levels in the photographs; one perceives both levels simultaneously in an automatic manner. At the fictive level, Austerlitz gives his collection of pictures to the narrator, 'I'. As I argue in Section 4, the repetition compulsion, from which Austerlitz cannot escape, is then fictively and visually re-enacted through the narrator's arrangement of images. The second level is that of the power of reference to reality; this level is inherent in the photographs themselves. In addition, many of the figures I took up in Section 3, associated with the eye, the star and the dome, derive from printed matter such as newspapers, magazines, books etc. But Sebald makes it difficult for readers to distinguish at a glance between these images and the private photographs. In other words, Sebald deconstructs the representation- and distribution system for visual images. This point is crucial to understand the use of these visual images in *Austerlitz*. The pages of *Austerlitz*, as well as Sebald's other prose fiction works, serve as a kind of plane upon which images drift, wandering around beyond time and space, just like the junk that lay in a heap in the antique shop 'ANTI-KOS BAZAR' in Terezín. The deterioration of these images through their repeated transmission also folds together their contexts at each moment or era, leaving them charged in a multi-layered way with collective memories and trauma. Sebald embeds these images in the narrative of a fictional character. In sum, by tracing Austerlitz's story and viewing such images repeatedly, readers are led into innumerable unconscious and anonymous memories of the world across the layers of time.

In order to slip through the 'dream-censor', latent 'dream-thoughts' must be distorted through condensation and displacement of the 'dream-work'. The universe of Austerlitz is filled with signs of something that returns repeatedly. The images in *Austerlitz* connect through displacement and condensation, transforming in shape. In other words, such images can be interpreted as symptoms of Austerlitz's trauma and of social collective trauma which, as a whole, remains unknown. In short, Sebald attempts to approach the trauma of the Holocaust through this dream-work-like operation. The images in his works function as thresholds which, when crossed repeatedly, reveal submerged traumas buried deep in the unconscious mind.

## Notes

- [1] W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, Hanser, 2001 (German original). Henceforth cited in the text as 'A',

followed by the page references. Figures from *Austerlitz* are cited also as ‘A’, followed by the page reference.

- [2] The citation is from the English version *Austerlitz* translated by Anthea Bell, Penguin Books, 2002 [first published by Hamish Hamilton in 2001], pp.267f. See also the German original, A272–276. In the revised Japanese version, translated by Hitoko Suzuki, Hakusuisya, 2012, see p.182.
- [3] *Austerlitz*, Penguin Books, 2002, pp.275f. See also the German original, A279f. In Hakusuisya (Japanese version), p.188.
- [4] Actually, Sebald made an inquiry with Jitka Ludvová, an expert in Czech theatre studies, in 1999 regarding which pieces were staged at ‘Estates Theatre’ (where, in the story, Agáta played Olympia in the autumn of 1938) and ‘New German Theatre’ in Prague in the winter of 1937/38. Receiving a report from Ludvová, Sebald checked the information that Offenbach’s opéra bouffe, *Parisian life*, was staged on 25 September 1937 at New German Theatre. Ref. Brief from Dr. Jitka Ludvová, Divadelní Ústav (Theater Institute) to W. G. Sebald, written in Prague on 26 March 1999; presently in the possession of the German Literature Archive.
- [5] The film is also known as *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*. After shooting the film, Geron and almost all the cast members were transported to Auschwitz and killed by gas. The film was destroyed in 1945, and today, it survives only in fragmentary form. Regarding the film production, see H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft; Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* [*Theresienstadt 1941–1945: The Face of an Enforced Community; History, Sociology, Psychology*], J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1955, S.179–181.
- [6] A346; see also Penguin Books (English version), p.343. In Hakusuisya (Japanese version), p.234. Regarding the performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann* in Theresienstadt Ghetto, see Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, S.584. In this part of the book, however, Adler does not say clearly that *The Tales of Hoffmann* was performed in the period of Beautification Campaign.
- [7] Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr., ed., rev. James Strachey, 1955, vol.17, p.241. The second brackets in SE. Henceforth cited as ‘The “Uncanny”’, SE, vol.17, followed by the page references. See also Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, *Studienausgabe*, Bd.4, S.Fischer Verlag, 1970, S.264. Henceforth cited as ‘Das Unheimliche’, SA, Bd.4, followed by the page references. Sebald possessed this SA version. In his copy he wrote marginal notes and underlined and marked many places.
- [8] Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, SE, vol.17, p.238. See also Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, SA, Bd.4, S.261.
- [9] *ibid.* p.238. See also Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, SA, Bd.4, S.261.
- [10] Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, SE, vol.17, fn.1, p.230. See also Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, SA, Anm.1, S.254.
- [11] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, Penguin Books, p.375. See also A377f. In the Japanese version, p.256.
- [12] Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, SE, vol.17, p.245. The first and last brackets in SE. See also Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, SA, Bd.4, S.267.
- [13] Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, SE, vol.18, p.62. See also Freud, ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’, SA, vol.3, S.270. *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd.13, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips, Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse, Das Ich und das Es*, hg. von Anna Freud, E. Bibring, W. Hoffer, E. Kris, O. Isakower, Imago Publishing Co., 1940, Zehnte Auflage, S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, S.68.
- [14] Otto Rank, *Das Trauma der Geburt: Und Seine Bedeutung für die Psychoanalyse* [*The Trauma of Birth*], first published by Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924.
- [15] Yoshiko Suzuki, ‘Spaces of Remembrance in W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. Architectures and the Art of Memory’, *Saitama University Review (Faculty of Liberal Arts)*, vol.48 (no.2), 2012, pp.123–147.
- [16] It is also clear that Sebald has Freud’s ‘The “Uncanny”’ in mind, because Sebald published a book with the words ‘Unheimliche Heimat’ (uncanny home) in the title: *Unheimliche Heimat. Essays zur österreichischen Literatur*, Residenz, 1991.
- [17] W. Van den Bergh, S. E. Van Praag, A. Gijzen, J. Tiskens, R. Van Bockstaele, A. P. Van den Sande, *Nocturama*, De National Zoo van Antwerpen, 1974, 68P.

- [18] Text: Herman Welter, photo: Marc Steculorum, photogravure: Photogravure De Schutter, *Antwerpen-Centraal: Een verhaal van tijd und ruimte*, Brussels: Willy Van Gestel, 1993.
- [19] Patricia De Somer, Gaston De Smet, *Het Centraal Station van Antwerpen, een levend monument*, Antwerp, 1986, 64P. [Accompanied an exhibiton in Jordaenshuis, 4–26 October 1986.]
- [20] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 10, 1910–1911, p. 690.
- [21] ‘Viele Treppen führen ins Nichts: Brüssels Justizpalast als Rhetorik der Macht’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26. 06. 1996, S. 0N6 / Seitenüberschrift: Geisteswissenschaften.
- [22] *Broadgate and Liverpool Street Station*, Rosenhaugh Stanhope Developments PLC, 1991, 112P.
- [23] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ‘Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*. The Anomic Archive’, *October*, 1999, vol.88, pp.117–145.
- [24] Buchloh, ‘Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*’ p.139.
- [25] *ibid*, p.140.
- [26] *ibid*, pp.143f.
- [27] Aby Moritz Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, hrsg. von Martin Warnke, unter Mitarbeit von Claudia Brink, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2. Abt. Bd.2, 1, Akademie Verlag, 2003 [4., gegenüber der 3. unveränderte Aufl., 2012].
- [28] Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Oxford University Press, 1972, especially, pp.82–91.

The Section 1 – 4 of this paper is based on the presentation in the 19th International Congress of Aesthetics (Cracow, 2013). The Japanese version in: *Kallista*, no.20, 2013, pp.79–118. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research) (C), Grant Number 24520104.

\* I wish to thank the German Literature Archive for the help for my research.

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