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"Das metaphysische Unterfutter der Realität": Recent  
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# **“Das metaphysische Unterfutter der Realität”<sup>1</sup>: Recent Publications and Trends in W.G. Sebald Research**

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## **Understanding W.G. Sebald.**

*By Mark R. McCulloh. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.  
xxiv + 193 pages. \$34.95.*

## **W.G. Sebald—A Critical Companion.**

*Edited by J.J. Long and Anne Whitehead. Seattle: University of Washington Press,  
2004. xii + 239 pages. \$60.00.*

## **W.G. Sebald. Mémoire. Transferts. Images / Erinnerung. Übertragungen. Bilder. Recherches germaniques. Hors série no 2.**

*Herausgegeben von Ruth Vogel-Klein. Strasbourg: Université Marc Bloch, 2005.  
224 Seiten. €18,00.*

## **W.G. Sebald. Politische Archäologie und melancholische Bastelei.**

*Herausgegeben von Michael Niehaus und Claudia Öhlschläger. Berlin: Erich  
Schmidt Verlag, 2006. 275 Seiten. €39,80.*

“Vielleicht ist ja alles auch ganz anders  
und nur ich habe es so gesehen und emp-  
funden, was mich dennoch nicht daran  
hindert, dies für die Realität zu halten.”  
Jan Peter Tripp, “Im Schattenreich”<sup>2</sup>

A virtual explosion of secondary literature has followed the death of German author W.G. Sebald in December 2001. In addition to hundreds of articles and numerous chapters in books, ranging in theme from post-unification

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in German authors<sup>3</sup> to cosmopolitanism in “British” authors,<sup>4</sup> a number of monographs have appeared on his works<sup>5</sup> and more are anticipated.<sup>6</sup> Multiple edited volumes<sup>7</sup> and special issues of journals<sup>8</sup> have also been dedicated to Sebald. Several international conferences and symposia around Sebald have taken place, ranging geographically from North Carolina to Sydney.

The four volumes under review—one is a US monograph; one gathers predominantly American and British scholarship; and two are conference proceedings from international conferences in Paris and Munich—attest to the international resonance and reception of Sebald’s works: taken together they represent the current trends and different directions in Sebald scholarship and prove that Sebald’s literary works are far from being exhausted. The themes of nature, travel, exile, and “Heimat,” among others, continue to be fruitful sites of investigation as authors connect them to the overarching questions that define Sebald’s project: history, memory, and representation. Other important recurrent research topics are the text–image relationship; questions of memory and, by extension, trauma through the possible influence of Freud; intertextuality; and the tenuous border between fact and fiction.

All of the books under consideration assert the uniqueness not only of Sebald’s particular prose style but also of the author as a phenomenon of post-war German literature. Though often dealing with Germany’s recent past, the belatedness of his prose works<sup>9</sup> sets them apart from the literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Moreover, the publication of his 1997 Zurich lectures in *Luftkrieg und Literatur*<sup>10</sup> is seen as triggering discussions of German suffering and inciting debates over the role of post-war literature.<sup>11</sup> Ruth Vogel-Klein outlines the reception of Sebald in France as following a pattern similar to the reception of Sebald in the Anglophone world. After the translation of *Die Ausgewanderten* into English (1996) and French (1999), Sebald attained the status of one of the great German writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

J.J. Long and Anne Whitehead’s *Critical Companion* and to a certain extent the Niehaus and Öhlschläger volume are explicitly structured around thematic and aesthetic questions. The special issue of *Recherches germaniques* edited by Ruth Vogel-Klein is not divided in such a way; nevertheless, many of the same themes are implicitly covered by the various contributions. Each of the separate chapters of Mark R. McCulloh’s monograph focuses on one of Sebald’s major prose works; yet again several of the aforementioned themes arise throughout his book. This review proceeds chronologically by year of publication, and this order also coincides with a development marked by these volumes: the approaches move from more introductory to more comprehensive and specialized.

## I

McCulloh's *Understanding W.G. Sebald* limits its focus to the four main prose works of W.G. Sebald, though some attention is also paid to his epic poem *Nach der Natur*<sup>13</sup> and his collection of lectures and essays published as *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. The introduction to the book provides a short biography and outlines Sebald's publication history and literary prizes. Chapter one introduces the major issues in Sebald's works and what McCulloh terms Sebald's "Literary Monism." He dedicates chapter two to *The Emigrants*, chapter three to *The Rings of Saturn*, chapter four to *Vertigo*, chapter five to *Austerlitz*, and chapter six rounds out the volume with McCulloh's conclusions. As part of a series explicitly "intended for the American reader," McCulloh organizes his presentation of Sebald's works according to the order in which the English translations appeared.<sup>14</sup> In addition to a detailed summary of each work, chapters two through five all include a final section that briefly notes the work's reception. McCulloh also includes a separate, easy-to-reference chronology of Sebald's life, publications, and awards, as well as an annotated bibliography. Although quite selective and including primarily American and British publications, the bibliography provides a helpful starting point for both students and scholars: it begins with Sebald's own works (poetry, prose, critical essays, and radio plays), and includes select critical works on Sebald (only eight articles are listed, though a number of others are included in the notes to his chapters), select reviews of Sebald's works (listed separately by work for easy reference), interviews with Sebald, and obituaries.

The first chapter announces to readers of Sebald the various themes, core problems, and key concepts they will encounter throughout Sebald's prose works. McCulloh presents among others: inter- and intratextuality; the Freudian "uncanny," to which he provides a brief background; "realism" in the sense of the relationship between literature and reality;<sup>15</sup> the text-image relationship;<sup>16</sup> the problems in defining Sebald's prose style, that is, limiting it to one generic classification;<sup>17</sup> memory and melancholy;<sup>18</sup> humor and hyperbole; travel; the peculiar sense of time—"the oneness of all things" (21); the prevailing sense of indeterminacy and the role of coincidence; and the tension between thematic uncertainty and Sebald's precise use of language. These aspects are revisited in more detail as they relate to the specific works considered in each chapter.

While divided by work, McCulloh's chapters read well together, as he draws connections across Sebald's œuvre and often moves back to Sebald's literary criticism as well to find possible sources for his literary works. The connections, the many intertextual references, and the contextualization and characterization of Sebald's works drawn from various English and some German reviews, contribute to the book's intended function as an introduction. Theoretical reflection is offered implicitly rather than made explicit by

McCulloh's more general and thematic analyses. Such analyses raise key questions to guide one's reading, and they also provide readers with a gamut of possible directions in which to take their research. Those more familiar with Sebald's works can also gain insights from this book. For instance, McCulloh's comments on the difficulties and discrepancies in translation—not only linguistically from German to English but also visually in terms of the layout and relationship of image and text from one language edition to the other—point to an aspect of Sebald's works yet to be examined systematically. The question of translation is particularly pertinent to the writings of an author such as Sebald who uses language in a highly nuanced and precise way. Moreover, the question of the English translations is of immediate concern, considering the very positive reception of Sebald in the Anglophone world and the continued, if not increasing, interest in Sebald found in English departments and cultural studies programs both in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Even an introduction to Sebald warrants—indeed requires—a certain degree of theoretical and narratological reflection, and here McCulloh's analysis is sometimes lacking. While acknowledging the generic hybridity of Sebald's texts, McCulloh too easily terms them “novels,” which is especially problematic in the case of *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn*. Similarly, the status of the narrator in Sebald's works—the degree of autobiographical overlap in particular—needs a more differentiated examination than statements like: “Indeed, much of the time the first-person narrator seems to be a veiled Sebald. This is a reflection of a certain legerdemain in Sebald's treatment of the nature of identity” (2). Jumping between descriptions of the narrator of *The Emigrants* and references to Sebald can have serious ramifications, especially when McCulloh sweepingly asserts that “[d]espite the many commemorative plaques and the meticulously preserved concentration camp sites such as Bergen-Belsen in Lower Saxony or Dachau near Munich, life goes on very much as if the Third Reich never happened” (1). Sebald indeed plays an important and, some have argued, unique role in postwar German literature. Yet it would be an exaggeration with regard to the diverse discussions of memory and representation of the Holocaust to argue that Sebald was the first to force Germany out of an amnesiac silence. The problematic passage cited from McCulloh above has already evoked a response by Anne Fuchs, who states:

Liest man solche Stimmen, so entsteht unweigerlich der Eindruck, dass es vor Sebald keinerlei ethisch und ästhetisch relevanten Erinnerungsdiskurs gegeben habe. Hier bricht nicht nur die komplexe Geschichte der Protestbewegungen in der Bundesrepublik seit 1968 weg, sondern darüber hinaus werden alle philosophisch und ästhetisch relevanten Ansätze von der Kritischen Theorie bis hin zu den jüngsten Debatten um das kulturelle Gedächtnis vom Tisch gefegt.<sup>19</sup>

The targeted audience for this book, as part of the series “Understanding Modern European and Latin American Literature,” includes not only under-

graduate and graduate students but also nonacademic readers. The goal of the series is for the books to be “compact” and “readable” and make the cultures of Europe and Latin America “more accessible” (James Hardin, “Series Editor’s Preface,” ix). The rather broad and potentially varied intended audience is often reflected in McCulloh’s general analysis that depends explicitly on Sebald’s biography as a major reference point for his particular prose style and characters. At the same time, however, McCulloh highlights intertextuality as a defining aspect of Sebald’s prose, and by placing an emphasis on Sebald’s literary allusions to other authors and texts across European literature and film, he creates an impression of Sebald’s texts as being *romans à clef*. Designating these intertexts “clues to deciphering the code of ‘Sebaldry’” (30) runs the risk of alienating or intimidating the undergraduate or nonacademic reader without the requisite depth and breath of knowledge. This blend, then, of textual analysis based on biography and wide intertextual knowledge, combined with the limited scope of McCulloh’s references (mostly book reviews from newspapers and magazines rather than literary criticism), leaves the volume “neither fish nor fowl.”

While McCulloh does not ignore the German reception of Sebald, it does receive only limited attention, and this in turn clearly restricts the degree of resonance such an introduction to Sebald will have. It might not be fair to reproach the volume for scholarly limitations that are stated so frankly from the start. However, this raises the question of the problematic stance of American German Studies as not looking beyond its borders to a greater international context and community of scholars.

## II

Going beyond the indication of their title, Long and Whitehead’s *Critical Companion* not only provides an introduction and overview to Sebald’s oeuvre and current scholarship; it also draws attention to new aspects and maps out possible areas of future research. The specialized approaches taken by the authors in Long and Whitehead’s pioneering effort are directed at a more advanced audience already familiar with the works of Sebald. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary volume situates Sebald’s works in the European literary tradition and broadens their discussion by engaging with major issues of literary and cultural studies.

Long and Whitehead introduce the *Companion* with an accurate characterization of Sebald’s works, highlighting in particular their “profound ethical and political seriousness,” which, in their view, sets these works apart from other postmodern texts that experiment with genre and blur the borders between fact and fiction (4). Long and Whitehead understand Sebald’s project, as evidenced in his four main prose works, as follows: “to explore man’s historical relationship to his environment, the effects of economic and

political history on nature and on the lives of individuals, and the nature of memory, be it collective, familial or individual.” They continue, “But he is also intensely concerned with questions of representation, with the forms in and through which individual and collective memory, historical knowledge and the cultural heritage can be communicated from one person to another or passed down through the generations” (4). The articles collected in this volume respond directly to these concerns in their thematic and formal analyses of landscape and nature; travel and walking; intertextuality and intermediality; and finally haunting, trauma, and memory in Sebald’s works. The authors structure their *Companion* along these four thematic groupings and begin with an introductory section that treats the “intellectual contexts” of Sebald’s works. While these groupings provide helpful orientation for readers, major concerns cut across the divisions established by the editors, as they themselves readily acknowledge. For example, one could regroup the articles according to more fundamental questions: the relationship of history and literature and the transmission of cultural values (Swales, Duttlinger); the question of representation (Bond, Ward, Riordan, Wilms, Beck); the role of language and the creation of meaning (Klebes, Leone, Zilcosky); and the influence of Freudian/post-Freudian discourse (Ceuppens, Kilbourn, Barzilai). Sebald’s fictional works form the focus of the *Companion*, though select essays also deal with *After Nature* and *On the Natural History of Destruction* as well as Sebald’s scholarly works, *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*, *Unheimliche Heimat*, and *Logis in einem Landhaus*.<sup>20</sup>

The *Companion* broadens current discussions of intertextuality by considering the transmission of cultural values central to Sebald’s works. Martin Swales’s article provides the theoretical and historical contexts pertinent to Sebald in order to elucidate the German tradition in which he is writing; in particular, Swales mentions the influence of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Realism and Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics. Swales further characterizes the German tradition as an “interplay of materiality and mentality,” which he sees as at the heart of Sebald’s work (25):

His writing constantly has a descriptive force to it, a need to acknowledge materiality. Yet that materiality is the precipitate of a specific ‘geistige Lebensform,’ a specific mode of mental and spiritual existence: sometimes in the sense that certain historical, political and social ideologies are recognisably at work in the characters’ lives (hence the entrapment about which Sebald writes so well); but sometimes in the sense of spirituality as a need, a quest for some kind of signification beyond common perception (26).

Swales references the articles that have set the standard for discussions of text–image relations in Sebald’s works,<sup>21</sup> as he connects this idea of an “interplay of materiality and mentality” to the dual role that photographs play in Sebald’s texts: they are at once documentary and evocative.

The connection between landscape and questions of representation grounds the second part of the *Companion*, which contains three articles. Greg Bond shows, through connections to Sir Thomas Browne and Franz Kafka, how Sebald's descriptions of landscapes "invoke not merely alienation or disorientation, but death" (35), and maintains that the fundamental perception and interpretation of "human history and human nature as the history of destruction" is consistent across Sebald's œuvre (39). Simon Ward's article brings out the influence of Walter Benjamin on Sebald, particularly thematized in the motif of ruins in his works. Ward sees ruins as preserving the presence of the past in the present moment, perpetually raising the question of the relationship of progress to ruination (see 68). Colin Riordan reads Sebald's poem *After Nature* in relation to "ecocentrism," which he defines as "a question of value" that implies "a holistic ethos" (46). Such an approach elucidates the thematic and poetic importance of connections and contexts in Sebald's writing, for it is characteristic of his project to bring various fields into dialogue, even disparate ones such as literary discourse and the natural sciences, for example. Riordan argues that nature is a concept mentally and linguistically constructed, i.e. inextricably linked to human culture (see 47). "'Constructed nature' is nature, because it cannot be separated from what human beings do to nature (including representing it)" (48); i.e. Sebald's poem, for Riordan, is not only a poetic presentation or representation of nature but actually constitutive of nature itself.

John Beck's article, "Reading Room: Erosion and Sedimentation in Sebald's Suffolk," introduces the third section of the *Companion*, which is dedicated to themes of travel and walking. Beck characterizes *The Rings of Saturn* as "a book that is sceptical about representational truth-claims, stable viewpoints, and the authority of rational argumentation" (76), and exhorts the reader to view this very book with a similar skepticism. The significance of indeterminacy and "interpretive uncertainty" (77) relate directly to the questionable notion of "the real" or "reality" and, it follows, any representation of this. Beck's view of *The Rings of Saturn*—but this could be extended to Sebald's work in general—as being a "poetics of history" rather than a new theory of history helps in defining the uniqueness of Sebald's project (77). It might be more appropriate to talk of a "poetics of *historiography*," however, for the representation of history is one the major discourses Sebald scrutinizes.

The following contribution in the *Companion* by Massimo Leone provides an interesting contrast to Beck's article. Whereas Beck derived Sebald's critique of order, his challenging of "Enlightenment rationality" (77), and his historical pessimism from the theme of travel, Leone finds a stable center in this theme, reading Sebald's narrators as *flâneurs*. Leone focuses on Sebald's style and semantics to determine how his narrators find or create a system of meaning. In this way, Leone makes a case for why travel (Sebald's "poetics of travel," 90) should be studied through a semiotic lens (91).



Considering *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, and *The Rings of Saturn*, John Zilcosky explores what he sees as travel writing's master trope—"the fear of getting lost and the desire to find one's way" (102)—and elucidates how Sebald's texts present a reformulation of this trope to accommodate what one could call "the postmodern condition." Due to this reconceptualization, which Zilcosky asserts is decidedly *modernist* and rooted in an idea of modern travel as "primarily uncanny," the figures in Sebald's texts "can never become sufficiently disoriented, can never really lose their way" (103).

Articles by Martin Klebes, Russell J.A. Kilbourn, and Carolin Duttlinger make up the fourth and strongest section of the *Companion*, dedicated to intertextuality and intermediality. Klebes's article brings together several of the themes discussed above, most notably travel and historiography; photography serves to link these two aspects and illustrates the notion of indeterminacy. Not only an authentication of an extratextual reality, photography—as Klebes shows through examples from *Vertigo*—opens up a multiplicity of significations that exist simultaneously and in this way defy any fixed meaning. The intertextual references to Kafka in Sebald's *Vertigo* are frequently cited in current research but nowhere with as much elaboration as Klebes's detailed analysis of the ambiguous and forever drifting figure of the hunter Gracchus from Kafka's eponymous story fragment, making this article indispensable for future examinations of Sebald's use of Kafka in *Vertigo*.

Kilbourn's contribution deals with memory, in particular the various architectural and cinematic metaphors used to represent memory in *Austerlitz*. Kilbourn moves away from Freudian trauma theory by asserting: "That Sebald favours the cinematic and architectural over the doctrinaire psycho-analytical becomes clear in the novel's unflagging interrogation of the mediation of language and text in the construction of collective and individual identity alike" (141). Kilbourn further explores how specific spatial and visual metaphors of memory determine a particular "phenomenology of time" in *Austerlitz* (143).

Carolin Duttlinger's "Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance and the Technical Media in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*" pinpoints a unique duality of Sebald's novels: containing both documentary material and theoretical reflection in the tradition of critical writings on photography, they nevertheless remain works of literature. She focuses on *Austerlitz* and outlines various elements central to this novel: the gaze, darkness, and visual perception, which she ultimately connects to Austerlitz's reflections on memory, identity, architecture, and history. Duttlinger relies on Freud and Benjamin among other theorists of trauma to explicate the notion of a structural similarity between photography and memory (157). Challenging the association of photography with authentication of an extratextual reality (see also Klebes) and the notion of photographs as a visual *aide-mémoire*, Duttlinger suggests that photography should be linked to forgetting (158).

Opening the final section of the *Companion*, dedicated to haunting, trauma, and memory, Wilfried Wilms investigates the Allied bombing of German cities at the end of the Second World War, pointing out a shift in Sebald's position from an article written in 1982<sup>22</sup> and the lectures and essays collected in *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999). Wilms relates the "taboo" of Holocaust representation, with which he prefaces his article, to Sebald's assertions of a willful amnesia on the side of the Germans after the Second World War, a "self-imposed censor of undesirable German memories" (181). Moreover, Wilms underscores Sebald's limited consideration of the political dimensions carried by his argument. The substantial historical account of the politics of representation, exemplified by the control of media in post-war Germany, makes Wilms's article in the *Companion* a very valuable complement to existing Sebald scholarship.

Jan Ceuppens's article, "Seeing Things: Spectres and Angels in W.G. Sebald's Prose Fictions," takes on the task of analyzing various motifs as a way to identify a possible "reconciliatory moment" or a form of transcendence in the model of history presented in Sebald's work. Ceuppens limits his investigation to passages from *The Emigrants* and *Vertigo* and draws connections between these motifs and the notions of the specter, the uncanny, and repetition. He touches on the "infallible memory" of Sebald's figures and narrators in *The Emigrants* when he calls it "one of the many strategies employed by Sebald to indicate that, in spite of their apparent realism, his narratives are fictional, not factual" (191); the same observation could be made of the narration in *Austerlitz*. Ceuppens offers such narratological insights as this via a sweeping tour of Western cultural history, from Hegel to Marx to Derrida and back to Johann Peter Hebel, though the transcendence suggested at the beginning of the article ultimately remains elusive.

Maya Barzilai's "Facing the Past and the Female Spectre in W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*" continues the discussion of the specter raised in Ceuppens's piece, and sets itself apart by providing a gendered reading. In drawing out the role of female figures in Sebald's text as "conduits of male desire and memory" and as a "haunting female spectre," Barzilai is one of the first critics to focus on the question and implications of gender in Sebald's works. However, her article shows why this perspective has perhaps not yet been applied in analyses of his works: Such an approach tends to reify the category of gender, one that Sebald might have consciously avoided in favor of depicting themes of history, exile, suffering, and destruction from the more universal point of view of humankind. Barzilai's analysis is problematic insofar as her Freudian interpretation takes her far away from the text. For Barzilai, the female hallucination in the Max Ferber (Aurach) story of *The Emigrants* represents Germany, the "extraterritorial" land that Ferber left and has since avoided; Barzilai then links Ferber's inability to look at the female figure in his dream to Freud's essay "Medusa's Head," the connection being man's fear of female sexuality.

Before the reader knows it, the Holocaust is feminine and, four pages later, “the history of European Jewry in the twentieth century is marked as feminine in Sebald’s writing” (212). Such conflation is all the more disconcerting when Barzilai turns this around and accuses Sebald himself of creating such connections. She states: “However, in view of the Jewish-Freudian significance of this uncanny imagery, Sebald’s conflation of the emotive reaction toward the history of Jewish persecution with that toward the woman and her body is problematic” (214). This may be the first article that approaches Sebald through the lens of gender; hopefully it will not be the last.

Long and Whitehead give precedence to questions of nature and Freudian and post-Freudian discourse on memory and trauma, and they see Sebald’s work as “steeped in psychoanalytical thought,” asserting that “he consciously integrates Freudian terms into his writing” (8). Long and Whitehead do not focus exclusively on memory, however; they touch on an inherent complexity in Sebald’s writing, which demands a more multifaceted analysis than through the one lens of trauma theory, namely “a complex dialectic between memory and forgetting at play in his writing” (9). Articles like Kilbourn’s, which describes Austerlitz’s “self-imposed amnesia,” or Carolin Duttlinger’s, which connects forgetting more so than remembering to photography, explore this dialectic in further detail. For Sebald, the various ways in which memory functions depend on a unique theory of time that allows for simultaneity of past, present, and future. An examination of memory from this perspective might yield more than through a Freudian analysis. Though Freud proves to be indispensable for several authors in the *Companion*, it is the discussions that both engage with Freud and move beyond him that reveal one of the essential aesthetic principles of Sebald’s prose: the multiplicity of cultural and historical perspectives that defies reduction to one narrow theoretical framework.

### III

The special issue of *Recherches germaniques* under review collects the presentations given at the first international conference on W.G. Sebald to be organized in France, which took place at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in October 2004. The fourteen articles in this bilingual publication range from fifteen to twenty pages, and two of the pieces were originally part of a roundtable discussion on the topic of translation held during the conference. In addition to the conference contributions, Ruth Vogel-Klein, the editor of this volume, also includes an interview she conducted with Sebald’s older sister, Gertrud Th. Aebischer-Sebald, in March 2005. This interview is a wonderful addition to the volume and to Sebald research in general, as it balances out a trend in current research to create a literary persona of “W.G. Sebald.” Aspects of the “Sebald” persona perpetuated in secondary literature are his “self-imposed exile”<sup>23</sup> in England and the problematic relationship to his father.<sup>24</sup>

One example from Aebischer-Sebald's comments that helps to demystify Sebald concerns his nickname "Max." While Sebald indeed referred to himself as Max, this is often incorrectly cited as a shortening of his middle name, "Maximilian." His sister informs us, "Der existiert nicht. Der ist genauso wie seine Literatur! Den Namen hatte er sich erfunden, weil er seine Vornamen nicht mochte" (216). This interview achieves a delicate balance, offering a glimpse into the person of W.G. Sebald without perpetuating a strictly biographical interpretation of his texts.

The title of this volume, *Mémoire. Transferts. Images / Erinnerungen. Übertragungen. Bilder.*, indicates the focus of this conference on three of the main strands in Sebald's writing, two of which—the discourse on memory and the text–image relationship—dominate much current research on Sebald. The discussion of transfer draws well-deserved attention to a rich aspect of Sebald's work and sets forth a new direction for future research. Ultimately it is the "synergy" of these three topics that constitutes one of the specificities of Sebald's œuvre (1).

Among the four contributions that deal with memory, Stéphane Pesnel's article traces the literary affinities between Sebald and Joseph Roth, and focuses in particular on questions of exile and memory, since these are the two thematic poles around which Sebald's essay on Joseph Roth revolves.<sup>25</sup> The point of convergence between Roth and Sebald, as outlined by Pesnel, is the dignity of the writer's *métier*, which lies in its "devoir de mémoire" and its action of archiving a lost world. "Heimat" as a literary construct serves as a point of connection for the artist in exile to his memories of this lost world. Pesnel cites Roth from the preface to his *Radetzkymarsch*,

Die Völker vergehn, die Reiche verwehn. (Aus den vergehenden besteht die Geschichte.) Aus dem Vergehenden, dem Verwehenden das Merkwürdige und zugleich das Menschlich-Bezeichnende festzuhalten ist die Pflicht des Schriftstellers. Er hat die erhabene und bescheidene Aufgabe, die privaten Schicksale aufzuklauben, welche die Geschichte fallen läßt, blind und leichtfertig, wie es scheint (75).

Roth's assertion that the task of the writer be the preservation of the private stories that history leaves out reads almost as a formulation of the driving force behind Sebald's œuvre.

Vogel-Klein explores Sebald's constructions of time and space through a concept that she terms "Gegen-zeitigkeit," a place/space where the dead/the past is able to reenter, albeit through anachronism. She defines this "Gegen-zeitigkeit" as "einen Widerstand gegen die Auslöschung der Erinnerung, wie er in Sebalds Werk in der Umkehrung der linearen Chronologie und der Wiederkehr der Toten zu Tage tritt" (100). Through correspondences, the dead become connected within intertextual relationships and are thus preserved (*verewigt*). Vogel-Klein further highlights the connection between time and

place in Sebald's work—which can be connected to the verbal–visual discourse discussions as well: “Diese zeitliche Um-Ordnung wird hier verräumlicht, wodurch die Sebaldsche ‘Gegen-zeitigkeit’ visuell veranschaulicht scheint” (100). Vogel-Klein emphasizes how Sebald's engaged memory is a form of resistance against forgetting (99), and how literature offers not only a space for mourning forgotten lives but also a possibility of restitution.<sup>26</sup>

Marcel Atze examines the role of H.G. Adler's book on Theresienstadt<sup>27</sup> in the reconstruction of memory in *Austerlitz*. Atze shows how Austerlitz surprisingly finds an access to the memory of his mother not in his actual visit to Terezín but rather in Adler's documentary tome *Theresienstadt*. Atze sees the “Mischform aus Paraphrase und Zitat” (92) from Adler's text in *Austerlitz* as characteristic for Sebald's particular form of documentary fiction. Atze concludes with conjectures of further connections between *Austerlitz* and Adler's prose piece *Eine Reise*.

Irene Heidelberger-Leonard reads Sebald's *Austerlitz* as it is informed by his essayistic discussion of Jean Améry, and she outlines a connection between the authors in that they both reflect on the difference between the observer of events and the individual who experiences them. Heidelberger-Leonard situates Sebald among the *Nachgeborenen*, the generation born after the Second World War, and in this position “die geschärften Sinne von Sehen, Hören und Riechen” serve him as a medium with which to reconstruct memory. Heidelberger-Leonard sees Améry's works as *Urtexte* rather than as *Prä-Texte* to Sebald's works, insofar as the extratextual individual of Sebald himself (not just his fictional figure Austerlitz) is personally affected and confronted with the history of the Holocaust through these works. While Atze's and Heidelberger-Leonard's presentations were given during the part of the conference focusing on memory, their contributions also deal significantly with ideas of transfer, namely, the transfer from “reality” to text and intertextual transfer. The insights of these investigations exemplify the “synergy” Vogel-Klein alludes to in her introduction.

Transfer, as defined by the conference participants in the next six contributions, ranges from specific questions of linguistic and cultural translation as well as issues of facticity to fictionality (transfer from “reality” to literature) and intertextuality (transfer between texts). While secondary literature has characterized Sebald as soft-spoken, even stylized him as *schüchtern*, his literary works unequivocally reveal he was an author dedicated to linguistic precision and deeply concerned with the tone and tenor of his texts. With this in mind, it is both enlightening and pleasurable to read the comments of Sebald's translators on their experiences of working in intimate and intricate detail with him. Patrick Charbonneau's comments on his French translations of Sebald's works highlight fundamental questions of the translator's art and craft, such as the translation of syntax, tone (*la sonorité*, to which Sebald was particularly attentive, 210), and rhythm of a text, as well as questions and concerns unique to Sebald's works, such as their specific tone *de ‘mélancolie’* (208)

and the translation of regionalisms, dialects, and rare words.<sup>28</sup> Charbonneau's essay also reveals a significant element of Sebald's poetics, that of suspension, which has been defined by Amir Eshel as "a poetics that suspends notions of chronology, succession, comprehension, and closure—a poetics that rather than depicting and commenting on the historical event in time, constitutes an event, becomes the writing of a different, a literary time."<sup>29</sup> Charbonneau describes in concrete terms the effect this prolongation of meaning has on readers. Sebald's hypotactic structure, comprised of relative and subordinate clauses and participial constructions, brings about a hastened reading and with it the necessity to return and reread passages.<sup>30</sup> Charbonneau's gentle criticism concerning Sebald's French provides a counterbalance to Anthea Bell's admiring assessment of Sebald's English.<sup>31</sup>

In their article, "Traducteur—Bricoleur. W.G. Sebald à Strasbourg: la question de la traduction," Irène Kuhn and Sibylle Muller cite Sebald's now famous assessment of his mode of working as a system of *bricolage*, in the sense of Claude Lévi-Strauss's definition of the term (see Covindassamy below), and they liken the activity of the translator to this method. Kuhn and Muller began organizing translation workshops in 1996; in 2000, both Sebald and the French author Robert Bober participated (in addition to docents and students from universities in Strasbourg, Heidelberg, and Düsseldorf). Kuhn and Muller recount how Sebald did not give the participants an explicit theory of translation during this workshop, "mais bien une attitude par rapport à celle-ci: travail de précision, respectueux, approche de la littérature exigeante et libre" (191). During the workshop, Sebald read an excerpt from *Austerlitz*, which he was working on at the time. Kuhn and Muller comment, "En prêtant au discours écrit une voix, c'est-à-dire un timbre, une diction, un rythme, on perçoit que le mot et la phrase ne sont que des unités minimales du texte, et que c'est aussi sur cela qu'il faudra travailler dans la traduction" (191).

Sven Meyer elucidates the coherence in Sebald's work that is achieved through the correspondences between his works as a "Wissenschaftler" and as an "Essayist." Meyer reveals Sebald's avoidance of the concept of "novel" and the related implications of this genre to be embedded in his poetics. According to Meyer, this turning away from traditional forms of storytelling, from the "Romanhafte," which can be attributed to Sebald's "Horror vor allen billigen Formen der Fiktionalisierung" (184), is an unbroken continuity in his writing. Meyer reconstructs Sebald's poetics through a detailed examination of his scholarly works, including Sebald's master's thesis on Carl Sternheim<sup>32</sup> and his dissertation on Alfred Döblin.<sup>33</sup> In particular Meyer draws attention to two processes in Sebald's literary praxis: 1) his rejection of the artistic reproduction/representation of pain, "'bildnerische[ ] Nachschöpfung' und 'künstlerische[ ] Reproduktion des Schmerzes'" (178–79); and 2) his bringing together of factual and fictional elements as well as a reverting to the forms of reports and documents, the use of images as (pseudo-)documents.



Iris Denneler's contribution furthers the discussions of intertextual aspects of Sebald's work. Denneler, like Vogel-Klein, points to the connection between Balzac's *Le colonel Chabert* and Sebald's *Austerlitz* but takes the connection one step further or rather "back," by pointing out that the additional intertexts of Claude Simon's *Le Jardin des Plantes* and *Le Vent* are already citations of the Balzac story. Denneler's examination of the intertextualities at work in *Austerlitz* elucidates literature's function as a response not only to lived experiences but to other literary works; she mentions Oscar Wilde's famous dictum that life imitates art rather than the other way around (147, note 41). Denneler discusses these intertextualities on the level of fiction (*fiktionsintern*, to use Andrea Tischel's useful distinction from the Niehaus and Öhlschläger volume) but then moves her focus to a fully developed description of the similarities and differences between Sebald and Simon's poetics, their aesthetic ideals and principles. Denneler's deceptively "simple" title, "Am Anfang A," brings to light the complex process that occurs in reading Sebald's work: one may begin with the most basic element of language, a phoneme for example, but very quickly one is led to the most fundamental epistemological question: "[W]as können wir wissen, was dürfen wir dem Erzähler glauben, was konstituiert 'Wirklichkeit', wie und durch was gelangen wir zum Sehen, und bedeutet dieses Sehen auch wirklich Erkennen?" (154).

Mandana Covindassamy's contribution on *Die Ringe des Saturn* continues the discussion of intertextualities found in Sebald's works. Covindassamy understands at face value the definition of the rings of Saturn, which Sebald takes from the *Brockhaus Encyclopedia*, as made up of pieces of debris that have organized themselves. Covindassamy considers the organization of "textual debris" introduced by Sebald in a recurrent manner in *Die Ringe des Saturn* and how such citations or *Bruchstücke* from other texts can build new structures that lend new forms of meaning to the work at hand. She examines three examples from *Die Ringe des Saturn*: Chateaubriand (the connection between writing and death found in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*), Jorge Luis Borges (geographic materiality and the materiality of the text), and Sir Thomas Browne (the "structure spéculaire"). Covindassamy outlines and explores in detail Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, to which Sebald himself referred when characterizing his method of writing as a form of "wildem Arbeiten, von vorrationalem Denken."<sup>34</sup>

Richard Bales traces in careful detail the intertextual connections between Sebald and Proust in their thematic and conceptual underpinnings, mainly memory—both cultural and individual—and writing. This intertextual examination goes beyond a thematic comparison of the two authors, as Bales not only investigates Proust's influence on Sebald but elaborates on what he sees as the regions of "l'imaginaire humain" inhabited by both Proust and Sebald (130). This idea of "region," a specific localization in space of both authors and of figures in their works is central to both writers. Bales focuses

on three types of buildings, in particular: train stations, dwellings/residences (*demeures*), and sacred spaces (such as churches or cemeteries), and by highlighting the affinities between places/spaces and time/memory Bales reveals the text—"L'édifice immense du souvenir"<sup>35</sup>—as the most important construction common to both authors.

Jan Peter Tripp's essay "Im Schattenreich" opens the discussion of the third and final focus of this volume: images. Rather than concerning himself with specific visual images from Sebald's texts, Tripp illuminates the correspondences between their artistic endeavors and their personal friendship. Tripp likens Sebald's process of writing to that of the *Manière noire*, a particular technique of copperplate engraving that uses vast shades of gray, "eine stufenlose und unerschöpfliche Skala von Grauwerten" (7) to create subtle, detailed forms. Tripp's metaphorical description of Sebald's writing as being taken from a palette of grays, steel blue, and earth tones, where "[d]er Verzicht auf reine Farbe schärft die Sinne" (8), reveals the mode of perception inherent in his writing. Additionally, Tripp's "portrait"—both this article and his painting that is reproduced in the text (*L'œil oder die weisse Zeit*, 2003)—of Sebald can be seen as a response to and interpretation of Sebald's writing.

Claudia Öhlschläger continues the idea of *Grauzonen* in Sebald's works and draws specifically from Sebald's use of black-and-white photographs. *Unschärfe* and *Schwindel* are the two categories she explores to examine how Sebald's poetic work on the reconstruction of individual and collective catastrophes connects to fundamental reflections on the practices of memory (11). She characterizes the tension between facticity and fictionality as being part of an unrelenting play of authentication and deception; yet Sebald's project remains one of historiography, "ein Stück Geschichtsschreibung mit poetischen Mitteln" (11). Öhlschläger connects the disjuncture between experience and memory to the idea of *Schwindel* in its broad and shifting semantic field (18–19). Drawing further from Sebald's own essay on Tripp,<sup>36</sup> Öhlschläger identifies how Sebald's writing pursues an aesthetic transformation of reality through an imaginative and imaginary overlapping of representation (*des Dargestellten*) (23), a principle which can be seen in Tripp's watercolor painting *Ein leiser Sprung*.

Markus R. Weber's article shows how the images in Sebald's texts not only engage the reader but are integral in developing the different roles the narrators have. The stark contrast between the literariness of the textual descriptions and the photographs, which themselves are often blurred or of poor quality, incites the reader to call into question the authority of the narrator.<sup>37</sup> The tension between text and images in both Sebald's poetry and prose works extends the meaning of the text: be it through the narrator's disappearance (which can be seen, according to Weber, as a development across Sebald's œuvre); the narrator's "durchschaubare Fiktion" in *Austerlitz* (42); the dissociated narrator in *Schwindel. Gefühle*; the narrator as "arranger" of image material (34); or the perception techniques of the narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (38).



Silke Horstkotte examines literature and photography as means of mediating transgenerational space and memory. Horstkotte outlines how the transgenerational character is made literary and fictional through the intermedial arrangement of verbal text and photography. She shows the *Erzählkontinuum* (64) in Sebald's texts to be dialogic or circular rather than linear, which enables the characters to engage with past events and experiences in a dialogic process of memory.

The detailed and sophisticated analyses in this volume reveal the cultural multiplicity inherent in Sebald's works, setting a high standard for future scholarship. Moreover, this franco-allemand exchange (one that this reviewer had the pleasure to attend *in situ*), with its contributions from scholars working in France and Germany as well as Belgium and Ireland, also represents a truly productive cultural exchange in the field of literary studies, providing a model for further international collaborations.

#### IV

*W.G. Sebald. Politische Archäologie und melancholische Bastelei* presents the proceedings of an international conference on Sebald's œuvre held in March 2004 at the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung in Munich. The number (sixteen) and length (fifteen to twenty pages) of contributions is similar to the proceedings of the Paris conference, and some of the contributors are the same as well.<sup>38</sup> As the title indicates, this conference defined its approach to Sebald by considering his works from two different points of view, which the editors view as complementary: 1) the archaeological way of dealing with historical knowledge that determines Sebald's *Gedächtniskunst* ("art of memory") and 2) the narrative and medial processes that give Sebald's poetics their particular character.

Niehaus and Öhlschläger specify the metaphoric concept of "political archaeology" as involving a reconstruction of both collective history and individual life stories. The status of the "fictional" is a necessary component in this archaeological reconstruction. Political, national, collective, and individual catastrophes are considered. (Niehaus and Öhlschläger, with reference to the work of Judith Butler, argue that this process of consideration is in itself inherently political.) Forgotten traces are sought after, recovered, and reconstructed; among others the experience of exile and homelessness as well as national socialist and colonial pasts. The political dimension of Sebald's work lies in the fact that "history" for Sebald is necessarily a history of humanity.

The second category, "melancholische Bastelei," depends on Lévi-Strauss's aforementioned process of *bricolage*. Niehaus and Öhlschläger state that this idea of *bricolage* (for which *Bastelei*, with its negative connotations, is a rather problematic translation) characterizes the artificial dimension within Sebald's texts and that it marks the problem of fictionality so central

to Sebald's œuvre. The volume strives to examine the poetological dimension of melancholy rather than understanding it only as a psychic condition. In this way, the contributions here move away from an approach to Sebald's works based on the category of trauma, a move which proves to be one of the volume's strengths.

Articles by Helmut Lethen, Alexandra Tischel, and Claudia Albes make up the first section of the volume, focusing on the text–image relationship. Similar to J.J. Long's previous work,<sup>39</sup> Lethen's article reiterates the ontological unrest that photographs evoke due to their uncertain status between trace and construction, between a location within and outside of the text. Lethen's emphasis on the process of perception, the essential separation and tension between a viewer's perception and the "real world," broadens the current text–image discussions of Sebald's works. Lethen also highlights a critically important thematic and poetic tension in Sebald's works: "Die Grammatik seiner allseits beobachteten altmeisterlichen Prosa cartesianisiert die Wahrnehmung, relativiert den 'Dunst,' den er thematisch feiert" (21).

Focusing on the relationship between photography and memory, Tischel provides a solid introduction to the theoretical considerations necessary to any text–image analysis of Sebald's works. The distinction between internal and external levels of the text, specifically manifested in the photograph, is fundamental to understanding Sebald's project. Tischel shows the inherent contradiction in photographs as an "emanation of the 'real,'" which in turn hides the memory of this "real." While problematizing the status of the "real" in relation to the text, Tischel does not question the status of truth; rather a single *Wahrheit* seems to exist for her regardless of one's position inside or outside of the text.

Albes's contribution complements Tischel's by connecting the text–image discussion to the question of autobiography and by problematizing the concept of "truth." Albes discusses images, photographs, and paintings that are not inserted in Sebald's texts, and in particular she examines the conspicuous lack of visual material in Sebald's *Nach der Natur*.<sup>40</sup> Albes reiterates the necessity of knowing these images visually, beyond their verbal/ekphrastic representation found within Sebald's texts, for any comprehensive analysis of the text–image connection.

Only two articles make up the section of the volume dealing with "Heimat," however Niehaus and Öhlschläger see it as "ein unhintergehbare—als gleichsam naturgegeben gesetzter—Referenzpunkt" (10) for Sebald's works, referring in particular to his collection of essays *Unheimliche Heimat*. Anne Fuchs shows how such a concept demands an allegorizing of history (as "Naturgeschichte"). She juxtaposes the idea of "Heimat" as an "unmodische Thematik" with Sebald's formal innovations, in particular the intertextuality and intermediality of his texts, (89), arguing that Sebald radicalizes the concept of "Heimat" through its "Entterritorialisierung" (97). She states,

Sebalds Werk charakterisiert sich damit aber durch eine unlösbare Spannung zwischen dem Verständnis von Geschichte als einem spezifisch menschlichem [sic] Zerstörungswerk, das im Holocaust seinen Höhepunkt findet, und andererseits der metaphysischen Sicht auf die Geschichte als Teil der Naturgeschichte, die sich die eiteln Menschenwerke wieder einverleibt. Geschichte kippt bei Sebald immer wieder um in die Metaphysik der Naturgeschichte (98).<sup>41</sup>

In this article, Fuchs exemplifies her point, drawing heavily from Benjamin's conceptualization of history and loss, with reference to allegorical passages in *Die Ringe des Saturn*.

Gabriele Ecker's article problematizes the notion of "Heimat" and probes the limits of Sebald's method of writing as *bricolage*. For Ecker, Sebald's concept of "Heimat" is always closely tied to the concept of "Exil" (here in quotes, because her discussion of exile remains predominantly metaphoric). She exemplifies her argument by focusing on three structural aspects: the pain experienced in "Entfernung," the idea of origin or the place of one's childhood, and a constant movement in traveling that reveals "Heimat" as a "konkrete Topographie" but also a "phantasmatisches Moment eines begehrten ambivalenzfreien Zustands" (77).

The largest part of the volume, comprised of seven articles, is dedicated to poetological considerations. In her article, "'Der panische Halsknick.' Organisches und Anorganisches in W.G. Sebalds Prosa," Anja K. Maier, like Lethen, looks at perception itself, in particular how the disturbance of the senses directs our attention to the process of perceiving while also raising questions of how one can express the world in a textual form. While Maier finds it exaggerated to make a direct analogy between physical pain and the effort of writing literature, she nevertheless identifies a certain tendency to "Romantisierung des Leidens durch die konstruierte Nähe von Schmerz und Schrift" (117) in Sebald's writing.

Doren Wohlleben's article reveals the structural role of *Schwindel* and *Unschärfe* in Sebald's narrative process. She traces their effect on both the levels of *histoire* and *discours*. Moreover, she supports her analysis with examples of how *Schwindel* and *Unschärfe* function not only textually but visually as well. Rather than discrediting these two narrative and visual strategies, Wohlleben elevates especially the status of *Unschärfe* by asserting it as a "Medium der Bewahrheitung [. . .], als literarischer Authentifizierungsmechanismus" (132).

Niehaus's examination of the first-person narrator in Sebald's texts, couched in a detailed discussion of Schiller's concept of "sentimentalische Dichtung," is a much-needed, indeed indispensable, contribution to current research on Sebald. Niehaus's discussion of the first-person narrator—which is so central to understanding Sebald's œuvre but all too often collapsed with the author Sebald without much theoretical reflection—is differentiated both narratologically and ontologically (Niehaus considers both the "Stellung des

‘Ich’” and the ‘ich’ itself, 177). Käte Hamburger’s distinction between the “prosaische Erzähler” and the “erzählende Dichter (*Die Logik der Dichtung*)” also informs Niehaus’s investigation. Ultimately Niehaus locates the narrator, as well as many of the characters across Sebald’s works, in a place of “Absonderung,” which he terms the “melancholic position” (181). The trajectory of Sebald’s literary development, as Niehaus traces it in his conclusion, leads from “sentimentalische Dichtung” to fiction (187).

Öhlschläger’s article focuses on Sebald’s poetic critique of civilization in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, tracing a line back to the dialectic of progress and destruction taken from Benjamin’s *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Considering the various topoi of melancholy found in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Öhlschläger argues that melancholia is a requirement for describing the history of civilization as a history of decline (192). Benjamin’s reading of modernity as a history of “Trümmer” is essential to her interpretation of this text’s melancholic concept of history (203). Öhlschläger also refers back to the passages in *Luftkrieg und Literatur* where Sebald considers the different ways of representing destruction. In contrast to what Todd Samuel Presner has written on the “synoptic” view of history suggested by Sebald in *Luftkrieg und Literatur*,<sup>42</sup> Öhlschläger points to a different mode of representation implicitly suggested in this text. She writes of Sebald, “Ganz offensichtlich schlägt er vor, sich historischen Ereignissen nicht auf dem Weg einer auf Vollständigkeit bedachten, positivistischen Rekonstruktion zu nähern, sondern über Verfahren der Evidenzerzeugung, die nicht nur eine sinnliche, sondern eine intellektuelle Dimension besitzen” (197–98). What Öhlschläger draws out as the most important aspect of Sebald’s poetic presentation of history that makes traces of a collective past visible is an *Entzifferungsimpuls* (198), a call to interpret and engage with this past.

Both Holger Steinmann and Jan-Henrik Witthaus also focus on *Die Ringe des Saturn* in their articles. Witthaus considers Sebald’s model of memory as formed through an intertextual process. Full of citations and enriched with fiction (171), it often makes orientation impossible. Witthaus’s primary reference is to Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges, and the question of *Gedächtnisordnungen* also directs his investigation. Steinmann, similar to Öhlschläger, takes up the idea of human history as a history of decadence and deterioration of memory (154). Extending the discussion of Benjamin, he connects Sebald thematically and intertextually to baroque poet Sir Thomas Browne. Steinmann shows that Sebald arrived at a form of orientation between empiricism and doubt. Harkening back to Duttlinger’s work in Long and Whitehead’s *Companion*, Steinmann also reveals forgetting to be a necessary condition of remembering rather than its polar opposite.

Situated after this large section on Sebald’s poetics is Atze’s article “‘... und wer spricht über Dresden?’ Der Luftkrieg als öffentliches und literarisches Thema in der Zeit des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses 1963–1965.”

Niehaus und Öhlschläger characterize Atze's piece as a "Seitenstück" to the complex of "Heimat;" however, the article holds a central place in the volume for the broader political implications it draws. Atze critically examines the discursive standpoint which Sebald takes in relation to coping with the difficulties of a destroyed "Heimat" through literature. Atze recounts how the trial documentation found in various newspapers, relating the events of the first days of the trial, discussed not only Auschwitz but also the attacks on Hamburg and Dresden by British and American forces (205). The "Überlagerung der Diskurse Holocaust und Luftkrieg" throughout the Auschwitz trial is central to Atze's argument that there was significant publicity of the Allied bombing during the trial, even that this trial played an essential role in making the "nur scheinbar 'unausgesprochene Kollektivbefindlichkeit' der Deutschen als Opfervolk" a seriously considered topic of discussion (208). Such historical documentation and analysis enable more complex discussions of this controversial past, rather than perpetuating the idea that a conspiracy of silence reigned over Germany.

The discursive location of Sebald's texts forms the focus of the fourth and final section of the volume. J.J. Long uses Foucault's ideas on discipline and disciplinarity as a way of reading not only Sebald's characters and narrators but also his implied readers. The first part of his article extensively outlines these Foucauldian notions, which proves helpful for the rest of his detailed textual analysis. Long sees a compatibility between the pedagogical instances and institutions narrated by Sebald and those described by Foucault, but he also makes clear the differences between the two, and in this difference elucidates Sebald's idea of modernity.

Ceuppens's contribution, "Realia. Konstellationen bei Benjamin, Barthes, Lacan—und Sebald," considers the many forms of listing (*Aufzählung*) in Sebald's texts, his joy in and obsession with detail, and how, rather than producing an *effet de réel*, this variety of detail augments the aspect of "fictionality" in his texts. Both Long's and Ceuppens's articles locate Sebald in relation to important 20<sup>th</sup>-century theorists (primarily Foucault and Lacan, respectively). Almost as a side effect such analyses serve to highlight for the reader the uniqueness of Sebald's texts, including the fact that comparisons and constellation-drawing only go so far in elucidating his texts—which is not to say that only a strictly *werkimmanent* reading of Sebald can be meaningful.

As a sort of bookend to Niehaus and Öhlschläger's introduction, which summarizes the current status of Sebald research,<sup>43</sup> the final contribution by Scott Denham is a report on the state of Sebald reception in the United States. Denham's analysis relies heavily on what can be found in the internet (i.e. through a Google search). While this form of (re)search does make it faster and easier to find out what professors are requiring their students to read, such information might not be the best measure of Sebald's "popularity," nor does it reveal how exactly he is being received.<sup>44</sup> A point of further differentiation

with regard to reception that should be considered in the future is the reception of Sebald in departments of German versus departments of English, be they in Germany, the US, or the UK.

## V

McCulloh's close reading of and commentary on differences between the English and German editions of Sebald's works—and specific problems of their translation—continually reminds readers of the linguistic, literary, and cultural context of Sebald's writing. McCulloh's introduction serves as a good guide for new readers of Sebald in an academic setting, and it also has the potential to encourage these readers to further explore Sebald as well as other influential authors of German-language literature. Long and Whitehead's *Companion* is a logical next resource and should be on the reading list of those dealing with Sebald who are looking for theoretically-informed investigations. The same is true for the Vogel-Klein volume, which remains accessible even in theoretical sophistication. Differing from the broader scope of the previous works, however, the articles gathered in the Niehaus and Öhlschläger volume are highly specialized and could prove daunting even to experienced Sebald researchers.

One of the defining aspects of Sebald's prose is the relationship between history—be it individual or collective, personal or institutionalized—and historiography (the various ways these histories can be written). Sebald's unique presentation of the past and the simultaneous reflection on the representation of history demand a differentiated understanding of history on the part of the scholar. Atze's work in both the Vogel-Klein and Niehaus and Öhlschläger volumes and Wilms's contribution to the *Companion* provide good models for future analyses based in more historical documentation and contexts. In addition to this historical (contextual) approach, there is ongoing potential for poetological and narratological examinations (in the vein of the enlightening analyses provided by Meyer, Niehaus, and Denneker) due to the complex interpretive possibilities of Sebald's texts. Duttlinger and Öhlschläger both emphasized Sebald's writing as literature, even if it is historiographic in nature; this tension as well as others among the various discourses from which Sebald draws is an area for continued scholarly reflection. The frequent references and connections made to his literary criticism and essays indicate possible directions in which future research can be taken. A balance must be struck between tracing and interpreting intertextual references, lest one focus too narrowly on identifying the myriad literary quotations or applying a binary identification system to Sebald's works (such as the categories of fact or fiction).

While many scholars have indicated the importance of the role indeterminacy and coincidence play in Sebald's works, there is still room to elaborate on the relationship of these two themes to those of reason and rationality



(perhaps beyond the link to Benjamin or the association with a critique of so-called “Enlightenment rationality”). McCulloh hinted at an “internal logic” in Sebald’s works and one could conjecture the implications of this form of logic by sketching out a network of associations to perception and the constitution of time and space, not only on a thematic level but also in a more fundamental, epistemological sense. Further endeavors to contextualize Sebald’s literary achievements within broader categories of Western European, or even “World” literature, will continue to define the specificity of his *œuvre* and perhaps raise new questions for literary and cultural studies in general.

<sup>1</sup>W.G. Sebald, “Wie Tag und Nacht—Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps.” *Logis in einem Landhaus. Über Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser und andere*. W.G. Sebald. (München: Hanser, 1998): 169–188, here 181.

<sup>2</sup>Jan Peter Tripp, “Im Schattenreich,” *W.G. Sebald. Mémoire. Transferts. Images / Erinnerung. Übertragungen. Bilder*. Ed. Ruth Vogel-Klein *Recherches germaniques. Hors Série 2* (2005) 3–10, here 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ernestine Schlant, “Post-Unification: Bernhard Schlink, Peter Schneider, W.G. Sebald,” *The Language of Silence* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999) 209–234; Helmut Schmitz, “. . . only signs everywhere of the annihilation.” W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*,” *On Their Own Terms. The Legacy of National Socialism in Post-1990 German Fiction* (Birmingham, U.K.: U of Birmingham P, 2004) 291–321.

<sup>4</sup>Rebecca Walkowitz, “Sebald’s Vertigo,” *Cosmopolitan Style. Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia U P, 2006) 153–170.

<sup>5</sup>Mark R. McCulloh, *Understanding W.G. Sebald* (Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2003); Anne Fuchs, ‘Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte.’ *Zur Poetik der Erinnerung in W.G. Sebalds Prosa* (Köln: Böhlau, 2004); Susanne Schedel, ‘Wer weiss, wie es vor Zeiten wirklich gewesen ist?’ *Textbeziehungen als Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung bei W.G. Sebald* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>Recent dissertations include Antje Tennstedt, *Annäherung an die Vergangenheit bei Claude Simon und W.G. Sebald am Beispiel von Le Jardin des Plantes (1997), Die Ausgewanderten (1992) und Austerlitz (2001)*, Freiburg: Phil. Diss. 2005.

<sup>7</sup>Franz Loquai, ed., *Far From Home. W.G. Sebald* (Bamberg: Otto-Friedrich Universität, 1995) and *W.G. Sebald* (Eggingen: Ed. Isele, 1997); Marcel Atze and Franz Loquai, eds., *Sebald. Lektüren* (Eggingen: Ed. Isele, 2005); Gerhard Köpf, ed., *Mitteilungen über Max. Marginalien zu W.G. Sebald* (Oberhausen: K.M. Laufen, 1998); Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed., *W.G. Sebald. Serie Text + Kritik* 158 (2003); Rüdiger Görner, ed., *The Anatomist of Melancholy. Essays in Memory of W.G. Sebald* (München: Iudicium, 2003); Lise Patt, ed., *Searching for Sebald. Photography After W.G. Sebald* (Forthcoming from the Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Los Angeles, California, 2007); Christian Schulte and Winfried Siebers, eds., *Figuren der Erinnerung – Studien zum Werk W.G. Sebalds* (Forthcoming, 2006); Gerhard Fischer, ed., *W.G. Sebald and Expatriate Writing* (Forthcoming with Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>Michael Krüger, ed., *W.G. Sebald zum Gedächtnis. Akzente*. 50.1 (2003) 1–96; Mark M. Anderson, ed., *W.G. Sebald. Germanic Review* 79.3 (2004) 155–223.

<sup>9</sup>*Schwindel. Gefühle* was initially published in 1990; *Die Ausgewanderten. Vier lange Erzählungen* followed in 1992; *Die Ringe des Saturn. Eine englische Wallfahrt* first appeared in 1995; and *Austerlitz* was published posthumously in 2001.

<sup>10</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur. Mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch* (München, Wien: Hanser, 1999); *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003).

<sup>11</sup>See for example Graham Jackman, “Introduction,” *German Life and Letters* 57.4 (2004) 343–353; and Wilfried Wilms, “Taboo and Repression in W.G. Sebald’s *On the Natural History of Destruction*,” in the Long and Whitehead *Companion* reviewed here.

<sup>12</sup>Susan Sontag's review of *The Emigrants* is also often cited as decisive for establishing Sebald's international renown. Cf. Susan Sontag, "A Mind in Mourning," *Times Literary Supplement* (February 25, 2000) 3–4.

<sup>13</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Nach der Natur. Ein Elementargedicht*. Photographien von Thomas Becker (Nördlingen: Greno, 1988); *After Nature*. Trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002).

<sup>14</sup>W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*. Trans. Michael Hulse (London: Harvill, 1996); *The Rings of Saturn*. Trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1998); *Vertigo*. Trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 2000); *Austerlitz*. Trans. Anthea Bell (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Sebald's fiction, according to McCulloh, creates a "heightened or intensified reality," (7) and offers the "possibility of dual or multiple realities" (116).

<sup>16</sup>Roland Barthes's *La chambre claire* provides the basis for McCulloh's assertion of the photograph's referential status, which in turn might also inspire a narrative.

<sup>17</sup>McCulloh mentions Peter Craven's use of the term "faction." Cf. Peter Craven, "W.G. Sebald: Anatomy of Faction," *HEAT* 13 (1999) 212–24.

<sup>18</sup>To elucidate this connection between memory and mourning, McCulloh identifies Sebald's article on Günter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer as a response to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's work. Cf. W.G. Sebald, "Konstruktion der Trauer. Zu Günter Grass *Tagebuch einer Schnecke* und Wolfgang Hildesheimer *Tynset*," *Der Deutschunterricht* 35.5 (1983) 32–47.

<sup>19</sup>Fuchs, *Schmerzesspuren der Geschichte* 12.

<sup>20</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks. Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke* (Salzburg u.a.: Residenz-Verlag, 1985); *Unheimliche Heimat. Essays zur österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg u.a.: Residenz-Verlag, 1991); *Logis in einem Landhaus. Über Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser und andere* (München, Wien: Hanser, 1998).

<sup>21</sup>Stefanie Harris, "The Return of the Dead: Memory and Photography in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*," *German Quarterly* 74.4 (2001) 379–91; Heiner Boehncke, "Clair obscur: W.G. Sebalds Bilder," *W.G. Sebald. Text + Kritik* (2003) 43–62; J.J. Long, "History, Narrative, and Photography in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*," *Modern Language Review* 98.1 (2003) 117–37.

<sup>22</sup>W.G. Sebald, "Zwischen Geschichte und Naturgeschichte: Versuch über die literarische Beschreibung totaler Zerstörung mit Anmerkungen zu Kasack, Nossack und Kluge," *Orbis Litterarum* 37 (1982) 345–366.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. James Atlas, "W.G. Sebald. A Profile," *The Paris Review* 41.151 (1999) 278–298; Arthur Williams, "W.G. Sebald: A Holistic Approach to Borders, Texts and Perspectives," *German-Language Literature Today: International and Popular?* Eds. Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, and Julian Preece. (Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 99–118; Ronald H. McKinney, "W.G. Sebald and 'the Questionable Business' of Post-Holocaust Writing," *Philosophy Today* 49.2 (2005) 115–126; et al.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Mark M. Anderson, "Wo die Schrecken der Kindheit verborgen sind. W.G. Sebalds Dilemma der zwei Väter. Biographische Skizze zu einem Portrait des Dichters als junger Mann," *Literaturen* 7/8 (2006) 32–39.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. W.G. Sebald, "Ein Kaddisch für Österreich—Über Joseph Roth," *Unheimliche Heimat* 104–117, 187–188.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. W.G. Sebald, "Ein Versuch der Restitution," *Campo Santo*. Ed. Sven Meyer (München, Wien: Hanser, 2003) 240–248.

<sup>27</sup>H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955).

<sup>28</sup>One example of a "not rare" in *Die Ausgewanderten* is actually a word of Sebald's invention. Charbonneau cites Sebald's comments on his translation from their correspondence, "'lauriers lusitaniens: das müsste eigentlich gehen. Lusitanischer Lorbeer war meine Erfindung. Es gibt den Baum in Deutschland nicht. In England ist er sehr häufig und heißt: portugese [sic] laurel. Botanischer Name: Prunus Lusitanica.'" Further evidence of Sebald's attention to detail is the fact that he included a leaf of this tree in his letter to Charbonneau, who writes "Était jointe



à la lettre une feuille de l'arbre en question, qui ressemble d'ailleurs, en un peu plus allongé, à une feuille de laurine" (202).

<sup>29</sup> Amir Eshel, "Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," *New German Critique* 88 (2003) 71–96, here 74.

<sup>30</sup> Charbonneau offers the example of an inadvertently omitted clause from his translation of *Schwindel.Gefühle*, attributing this to the affect of Sebald's constructions on his own reading.

<sup>31</sup> See Anthea Bell, "On Translating W.G. Sebald," *The Anatomist of Melancholy. Essays in Memory of W.G. Sebald*. Ed. Rüdiger Görner (München: Iudicium, 2003) 11–18.

<sup>32</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Carl Sternheim. Kritiker und Opfer der Wilhelminischen Ära* (Stuttgart u.a.: Kohlhammer, 1969).

<sup>33</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1980; Literaturwissenschaft—Gesellschaftswissenschaft 45).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. "'Wildes Denken.' Gespräch mit W.G. Sebald," *W.G. Sebald*. Ed. Franz Loquai (Eggingen: Ed. Isele, 1997) 135–137, here 136.

<sup>35</sup> Taken from Proust, this formulation also serves as the title of Bales's article.

<sup>36</sup> W.G. Sebald, "Wie Tag und Nacht—Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps," *Logis in einem Landhaus* 169–188.

<sup>37</sup> A similar argument is made by Silke Horstkotte, "Fantastic Gaps: Photography Inserted into Narrative in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," *Science, Technology and German Cultural Imagination*. (*Cultural History and Literary Imagination* 3.) Eds. Christian Emden and David Midgley (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005) 269–286.

<sup>38</sup> Looking across recent publications and conference participation (North Carolina, Paris, Munich, and Sydney), one finds a core group of active Sebald scholars.

<sup>39</sup> Long, "History, Narrative, and Photography."

<sup>40</sup> The first edition of *Nach der Natur* appeared with photographs by Thomas Becker placed at the front and back of the book, rather than inserted into the body of the text as is common in Sebald's prose works.

<sup>41</sup> This argument is central to Fuchs's book, where practically the same formulation of history can be found: "Geschichte bei Sebald droht immer wieder in die Metaphysik des Unglücks umzukippen" and "Geschichte kippt bei Sebald immer wieder um in die Metaphysik der Naturgeschichte." Cf. Fuchs, *Schmerzesspuren der Geschichte* 19 and 167.

<sup>42</sup> Todd Samuel Presner, "'What a Synoptic and Artificial View Reveals': Extreme History and the Modernism of W.G. Sebald's Realism," *Criticism* 46.3 (2004) 341–360.

<sup>43</sup> In particular they name the first large conference on Sebald (held at Davidson College in North Carolina in 2003), the proceedings of which are to be published as *W. G. Sebald. History—Memory—Trauma*. Eds. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> One picky detail that points to the potential hazard of misinformation culled from the internet: Lutz Koepnick does not teach at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, but at Washington University in St. Louis.