THE MYSTICS OF MEMORY: JEWISH MYSTICISM IN W.G SEBALD'S *AUSTERLITZ*

by

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The Mystics of Memory: Jewish Mysticism in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Karen Jacobs

Abstract:

What is memory? Is it a familial inheritance, a file in the archives, an unanswerable question, a ghost of someone, or something, long dead? And, beyond the "what" of memory, there is also the "how*." How* does one gain access to memory? By digging through history books, flipping through family photo albums, daydreaming in solitude, or by listening to the stories of first-hand witnesses? This thesis addresses the above questions in relation to the memorial accounts of the trauma of World War II and the devastation of the Holocaust in W.G. Sebald's novel, *Austerlitz* by making use of the theoretical tools provided by Jewish mysticism—specifically the reparative notion of *tikkun*, the diagrams of the *sefirot*, and the act of creation as part of a dialogue between text and image. Although pairing the *Kabbalah* and a 21st century novel may seem untoward, reading the two together creates a new method for approaching the problem of memory*,* and the memory of trauma specifically. Memory is therefore understood in this thesis as having three key characteristics: it requires movement (in both an imaginative and physical sense), it is an act of creation, and it allows characters to simultaneously be both one and many–an individual and a collective. Turning to theorizations of Jewish mysticism not only contextualizes Sebald's ideas within a much older philosophical heritage, but such a turn also helps to reframe questions of the Holocaust and memory within a distinctly Jewish tradition and thereby exposes a new angle for addressing a series of questions that has saturated scholarship since the end of WWII. Reading Sebald within the context of Jewish mysticism opens up productive avenues for understanding the dialectical exchange between the collective and the

individual in acts of memorial reparation and the ways in which such dialectics rely heavily on

creativity and mobility. Thus, rather than holding the historical and the personal, the public and

the private, the collective and the individual, as oppositional categories, this thesis seeks to

understand the ways in which the text's characters are in constant movement between these

categories whenever they seek to understand a past that has been partially erased by a

monumental loss of human life (and therefore a monumental loss of human memory).

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From March to November of 2017, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City

played host to an unlikely guest. Sara Berman, a Jewish émigré who lived her final years in a

small, Greenwich Village apartment was neither rich, nor famous, nor involved in the art world.

Yet, in spite (and, perhaps in part, because) of these facts, Berman's carefully folded socks,

neatly pressed blouses, and meticulously shined shoes were laid out—first in the tiny street

installation, mmuseumm, and then in the much grander Met—for an exhibition titled "Sara

Berman's Closet." The rhetoric surrounding this display is firmly grounded in concepts of self-

creation. Maira and Alex Kalman (Sara Berman's daughter and grandson, the artists responsible

for bringing the closet to the public), reaffirm this notion in their *New Yorker* video wherein they

claim that Berman "fashioned a sovereign identity through clothing and décor."[1]

Clearly the most obvious source of self-creation involved in this exhibit is Berman

herself. Her decisions—to wear only white, to divorce her husband after over thirty years of

marriage, to live alone, and to carefully place each of her belongings with deliberate intention—

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[1] For the full *New Yorker* video, written and narrated by Maira and Alex Kalman see:
http://video.newyorker.com/watch/sara-berman-s-closet

all manifest in the arrangement of her closet and illuminate the ways in which she was able to manipulate the everyday world of her body and the space in which her body moved. Even so, if we examine the shelves of Berman's closet in the context of the Kalmans' video, it becomes clear that this purported self-creation is layered. In its transformation from daily utility to cultural art object, the closet's life has been extended beyond that of its primary creator. Such an extension has been achieved through a process of familial recreation or, to put it more simply, through the constructive powers of memory. However, the construction of such a memory is only possible through a creative process which involves multiple origins: Berman, her daughter Maira, her grandson Alex, the *New Yorker*'s videographer, the Met's curator. By passing through the hands of each of these individuals, the closet exceeds its former existence as a collection of shelves for Chanel perfume and potato graters and instead becomes a platform for recreating the past. In this sense, the reassembly and public display of the closet means a reassembly of the details of Berman's life—which the *New Yorker* video, by essentially acting as a caption to the visual experience of the closet, fluidly achieves. In the video as well as in the exhibit, Maira and Alex create memory by reviving a seemingly mundane fragment of the life of their deceased mother/grandmother while at the same time directly participating in their own acts of self-creation as they situate themselves within a familial history that extends back to the pogroms of Belarus, a meager existence in Tel Aviv, and a difficult move to the U.S. Assembled years after Berman's death, the display functions as both an artistic and memorial object which allows Maira and Alex to create a space of material memory involving a dialogue between image (the visual display of the closet) and language (the video's story of the woman behind such a display). "Sara Berman's Closet" can therefore be understood as an act of creation just as much as it is an act of memory. Indeed, for this exhibit, the two are inseparable.

By appearing publicly in the aforementioned venues, the creation, or rather *re*creation, of Sara Berman's closet requires movement between the particular and the universal, the individual and the collective. Quite literally, the closet was physically moved from a private to a public space. And, while the closet and the objects were once viewed by a single person with a very intimate and unique relationship to its interior, it can now be viewed by many people who, unable to touch, fold or wear the closet's contents, are only able to experience it in a more general sense. However, the movement of the exhibit is not only physical. The very genre and purpose of the closet changed as soon as it moved from the realm of everyday domesticity to the collective sphere of institutionally sanctioned art. Finally, and in a more abstract, even mystical, sense, Maira Kalman describes the movement which the closet symbolizes as the primary goal of the display, which for her embodies "the unending search from the monumental to the mundane for order, beauty, and meaning."[2]

While working on my own project, the image of "Sara Berman's Closet" and the narrative behind it kept resurfacing as the most poignant and succinct encapsulation of the themes which I have sought to address. By allowing the collective crowds of the Met a doorway into the most individualized spaces—an elderly woman's closet and the life which formed that closet—this real-life Narnia shows the ways in which particular memories find their way into the collective embrace of history through acts of creativity. In another way, it also hints at possibilities of reclaiming a past which has been fragmented by difficulty and violence (such as Belarus's pogroms or Berman's unhappy marriage). This thesis seeks to provide a similar understanding by reaching beyond the constraints of genre and periodization in order to examine

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[2] http://video.newyorker.com/watch/sara-berman-s-closet

the various ways in which movement between the universal and the particular is essential to, as Maira Kalman puts it, "the unending search" of memory.

To address the above concepts, this thesis explores the memorial accounts of the trauma of World War II and the devastation of the Holocaust in W.G. Sebald's novel, *Austerlitz* (2001) through the lens of Kabbalistic concepts of creation and reparation from the *Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Bahir*. Although pairing such seemingly disparate texts—the one a 21st century novel and the others religious and philosophical texts of an unknown date and origin—may strike some as unusual, each address the fluidity of movement between particular and universal identities as well as the notion of layered creation and reparation.

For Sebald, this is addressed through the movements of a protagonist who is in the process of gathering fragments of a past that has been shattered in order to create a new memorial synthesis. Memory is therefore understood in *Austerlitz* as having three key characteristics: it requires mobility, it is an act of creation, and it allows characters to simultaneously be one and many, an individual and a part of a collective. Interestingly, these characterizations of memory overlap with several central theorizations of Jewish mystical thought: the reparative notion of *tikkun*, the diagrams of the *sefirot,* (which allow for an understanding of God as both one and many), the importance of the dialogue between text and image, and the conceptualization of creation as an ongoing process of both creation and destruction. Thus, turning to theorizations of Jewish mysticism contextualizes Sebald's ideas within a much older philosophical heritage and reveals the layered nature of their own creation while also helping to reframe questions of the Holocaust and memory within a distinctly Jewish tradition in a way which creates a new angle of approach to a series of memorial questions that has saturated scholarship since the end of WWII. Although almost no scholarship has addressed

Sebald's potential connection to Jewish mysticism, it is worth noting that Sebald more than likely had a basic knowledge of Jewish mystical thought. Sebald directly discusses the Hassidic notion of the messiah at length in his paper "The Law of Ignominy: Authority, Messianism and Exile in *The Castle."* Even more generally, his interest in and scholarly work on Kafka, whose connection with mystical thought is well established by way of Kafka's correspondence with the Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem makes the connection between Sebald and Jewish mysticism, at the very least, tenable. [3]

Additionally, reading Sebald in the context of Jewish mystical thought opens up productive avenues for understanding the ways in which memory functions as a dialectical exchange between the collective and the individual as well as the ways in which such dialectics rely heavily on creativity and mobility. Rather than holding the historical and the personal, the public and the private, the collective and the individual, as oppositional categories, this thesis, in keeping with key concepts of Jewish mysticism, seeks to understand the ways in which the texts' characters are in constant movement between these categories whenever they seek to understand a past that has been partially erased by a monumental loss of human life (and therefore a monumental loss of human memory).

Towards understanding the memorial movements of *Austerlitz*, I will begin first with a basic overview of the concepts of Jewish mysticism that are most central to this analysis—creation and its reparation (*tikkun)* and the *sefirot*—before engaging in a brief discussion of mobility and space. In addition to these conceptual reviews, I will clarify the terms used to designate various iterations of "the particular" and "the universal." Only once all of these have

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[3] See, for example, Jean Jofen's *The Jewish Mystic in Kafka* and June O. Leav's *The Mystical Life of Franz Kafka: Theosophy, Cabala, and the Modern Spiritual Revival*.

been clearly laid out is it possible to dig into the texts and uncover the traces of mystical movement inherent in their treatment of memory.

CREATIVE MEMORY AND *TIKKUN*

In *On Flirtation,* Adam Phillips addresses the presence of creativity in memory by acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting. In "the gap we call forgetting" he sees a process of creation, a "process of reworking," which produces "phantasmal constructions" (31-2).[4] However, while forgetting opens up a creative mental space in which the individual is not restricted or burdened by the purely factual forms of the past, Phillips notes that creation requires not only space, but material. Memory provides this material. The creative exchange between forgetting and memory can therefore be understood in the following way. Forgetfulness functions as an act of destruction of sorts; it clears out swathes of the crowded mind and opens up a space by which the material of memory can be rearranged or refashioned. Through this process creative memory seeks to find "ways of making the previously unacceptable accessible through rediscription or redepiction" (32). Obviously, this has a strongly psycho-analytic bent and is referring to the repression of individual traumatic memories. Even so, if this interplay of memory and forgetting is examined within the context of a historical trauma, it becomes clear that creative memory is a way to recover memories of trauma which, due to their violent and disturbing nature, were previously deemed "unacceptable" and therefore unreachable.

The notion of creative memory can be taken even further by connecting it to the basic premises of creation and *tikkun* in Jewish mysticism. The concept of *tikkun,* as it will be used

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[4] Phillips, Adam. *On Flirtation.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994.

throughout this thesis, specifically refers to the work of Isaac Luria, a renowned sixteenth-century rabbi and scholar who revised former mystical understandings of creation and whose teachings became the foundation of the Lurianic Kabbalah.[5] In *A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader,* Daniel Horowitz neatly identifies the Lurianic understanding of *tikkun* as actions which address, or rectify, the flawed nature of creation through "'repair' or 'restoration' of these flaws" (225).[6] Lurianic Kabbalah emphasizes *tikkun* not only on a personal, individual level, but on a universal, collective level, through *tikkun olam*, or world-mending. Importantly, in Lurianic thought *tikkun* is intimately tied to the creation of something new out of the shards of the past rather than a return to an original, perfect, state (since such a state never existed). Essentially, *tikkun* aims to deal with the "failure of creation" (Horowitz 225) via acts of *re*creation and is therefore based in destruction and brokenness at the same time that it is based in reparation.[7] These acts of recreation stem from a process of engaging with brokenness through righteous deeds and contemplation. Perhaps Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi—a survivor of Auschwitz and a founder of the Jewish Renewal movement—offers up the most helpful way of conceptualizing this. For him, *tikkun* mimics the process of making a stained glass window from shattered panes of colored glass (Horwitz 226). The window, then, is both a fragmented object of individual pieces attesting to the shattering of windows before it, while at the same time it represents a unified, creative whole that has been formed from the process of destruction.

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[5] Discussions of *tikkun* are not restricted to Lurianic strains of mysticism. However, the Lurianic emphasis on action (and therefore both mental and physical movement) in *tikkun* shares certain similarities with Sebald's emphasis on the human role in remembering.

[6] It is important to understand creation as that which brought about both good *and* evil. Horowitz notes that the origin of the restorative process of *tikkun* is necessarily located in the paradoxical nature of God as "the creator of evil as well as good." (225) This structural paradox is also helpful in understanding the paradox of *Austerlitz* as a source of both remembrance and erasure.

[7] Byron Sherwin perhaps puts this best when he notes that "Lurianic Kabbalah describes destruction, evil and imperfection as necessary aspects of the process of creation. In this view, God cannot create without destroying, not because He is essentially imperfect, but because it is an essential feature of the creative process to include destruction, and because creation, by its very nature, must be imperfect." (63).

Implicit in this cyclical, creative process of creation and destruction is the importance of individual and collective agency. Because *tikkun* "heightens the importance of human actions considerably" (Horowitz 227), each individual is tasked with the responsibility of gathering the lost light of God, while at the same time a larger collective experience of reparation, or *tikkun olam*. Such restoration implies an ability to be simultaneously unified (the stained-glass window) and separate (the broken shards). In *Austerlitz,* a similar movement between the concept of the unifying whole and the isolated fragments, as well as the ability to be both unified and fragmented, is crucial to understanding the way in which memory functions as an almost continuous, and cyclical, act of creation born from pain and destruction. It also sheds light on why, in the face of shattering experiences of trauma, memory becomes a restorative act, a way to mediate between the fragmented remains and a desired unity while also gesturing towards the destruction that lies at the foundation of every memory. If we apply the concept of *tikkun* to memory, we can understand the ways in which every spark of the past that is reclaimed and strung into a constellation of other memories, is also grounded in shattering, or forgetting in a way that is similar to creative memory.

However, there are several important characteristics which distinguish creative memory from *tikkun* memory. The first is that, while creative memory seems to imply a singular act, *tikkun* memory carries with it the implication of being a constant process. Memories are built, shattered by forgetfulness, and then rebuilt. Therefore, *tikkun* memory is an act of creative gathering that is never truly complete. Secondly, creative memory seems to signal solely individual memory. *Tikkun* memory, on the other hand, represents a network of recollection through its ability to navigate between particular and universal experiences, places, and identities.

The importance of creativity to *tikkun* memory is a central theme of this paper. But such an argument might be taken to mean that these memories are not reflective of a truly horrific reality. Precisely for this reason, the very practice of creating fiction around the Holocaust is hotly contested. Many find a creative representation of such trauma to be, at its best, unethical and, at its worst, an act of violence against current survivors through its presumption of speaking for them. However, as Herbert Marcuse notes in his discussion of literature in *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, art and creativity neither represent nor imply an essential falsehood, but rather a revolutionary potential. If "the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality" (6), then art, through its object, reveals a hidden reality, a lost memory, and the potential for a revolutionary future. In terms of art which depicts the Holocaust, this potential is the revolutionary act of reversing at least one of the effects of traumatic violence: the destruction of a forgotten past. It fulfills Phillips claim for creative memory by making "the unacceptable accessible" and thus it also fulfills the reparative goal of *tikkun.* This creative recovery and reclamation of memories surrounding the Holocaust can therefore be understood as a revolution which, in many ways echoes Theodor Adorno's hope for education. Perhaps, by recovering memories of trauma through the creative endeavors of not only art, but memory, society can hope to create a world in which the slogan, "never again Auschwitz," is a lived reality.[8]

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[8] Adorno, Theodor. "Education after Auschwitz." *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords.*New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

Jewish mysticism does not only offer up ways of rethinking acts of creation, but it also provides a productive avenue for redefining the categories of the universal and the particular. Ultimately, Kabbalistic thought is able to accomplish this by conceptualizing God and creation as simultaneously singular and multiple; a bewildering quality which is further explored in the examination of the movement that occurs between individual and collective aspects of both. In many ways, memory functions similarly. Michel de Certeau identifies the importance of memory's mobility when he notes that "memory derives its interventionary force from its very capacity to be altered--unmoored, mobile, lacking any fixed position" (86).[9] Thus a creative engagement with memory (that which reforms or alters it) allows memory to intervene, or act between two groups such as individual and collective memories of the past. Memory thus allows us to hold our own unique, individual experiences alongside a multiplicity of collective pasts and to move between these categories through creative acts, such as story-telling.

Yet, the negotiation between the universal and the particular is not a purely imaginative, internal movement but can also manifest in movement through physical space. Mysticism considers the movement between individuality and collectivity as one which occurs on both a spatial and imaginative plane, seeing as such movement occurs within the physical *and* spiritual realms. Memory can be understood in much the same way. Movement, as both a physical reality and an imaginative metaphor, provides an agential and creative method for working through the

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[9] De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984.

past by linking the individual to the collective (and vice versa). Therefore, mobility is central to an imaginative recreation of a past that engages with both global and personal history. But what, exactly, does the term "mobility" mean in the context of this argument?

In his book, *Mobilities,* John Urry identifies mobility as both an imaginative and physical experience in a way that is similar to the previous discussion mystical mobility. On one hand, "particular kinds of movement often feature in the imaginative travel (often through poetry and literature) of migration, exile and displacement" (41). Yet, at the same time mobility can be understood in a more literal, spatial sense wherein "public space becomes mobile and connected, a set of circulating processes that undercuts the spatial divide of the 'public' and the 'private'" (91). Thus, mobility provides a theoretical framework for a discussion of movement which does not separate the imaginative from the spatial and instead looks at the ways the two interact. By combining each of Urry's statements, I propose a notion of mobility that offers opportunities to break down both the spatial and imaginative divides between universal and particular spaces and thus to question the very division between each of these categories.

This breakdown finds a parallel in Jewish mysticism, wherein God is conceptualized as a figure who confounds notions of separate identities and omnipresence. This paradox is best understood by attending to the numerous diagrams of the *sefirot* (beings which represent individual emanations or aspects of God) which occur in a foundational text of Jewish mysticism: the *Sefer Yetzirah,* or Book of Creation.[10] A diagram of the *sefirot* and the paths between them can be seen below. The circles represent the *sefirot,* the ten aspects of God (which, in English can be roughly translated to: crown, wisdom, understanding, love, strength, beauty,

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[10] As is the case with much of the Kabbalah, there are many debates surrounding the date and authorship of the *Sefer Yetzirah*. While some scholars situate the text within a medieval tradition, others insist that the text had been passed-down orally from ancient times.

victory, splendor, foundation, kingship) and the lines between them represent their connections

to one another and to the unifying concept of God as a whole. Note that, on the left page, there

are numerous possibilities for configuring the *sefirot* and for forming connections between them.

Thus, in this diagram, the Jewish God's ability to be both one and many is clearly manifest in

such a way that the viewer is forced to reconsider the notion of what it means to be a collective

versus an individual identity.

Figure 3. Family of diagrams.

Figure 4. The 32 paths as defined by the Ari.
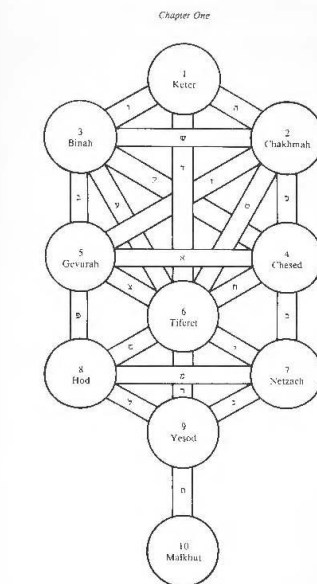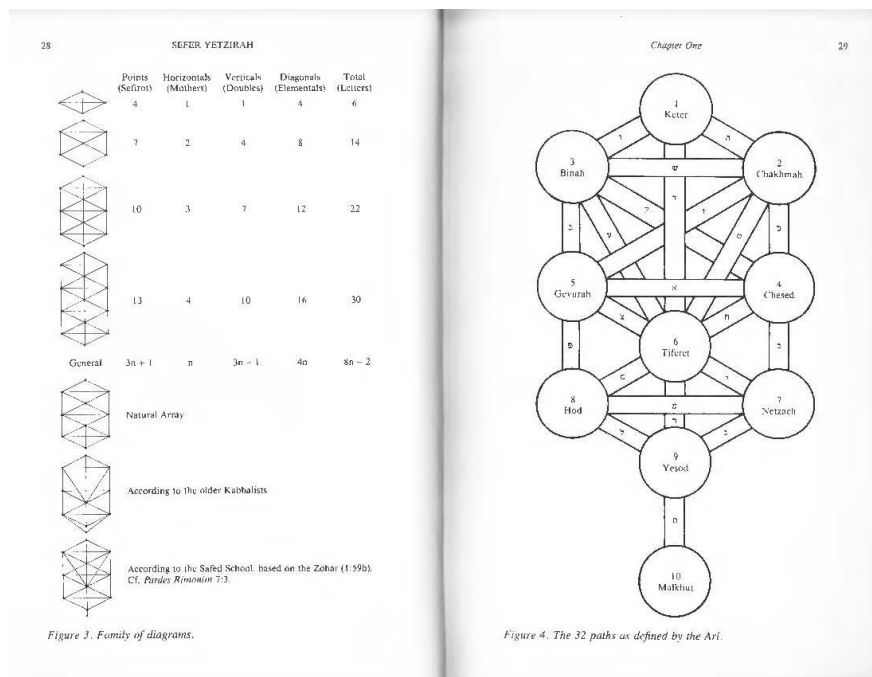
These diagrams represent an imaginative space; however, they are not purely

imaginative. In her thorough analysis on Kabbalistic imagery, Maria Segol notes that these

diagrams embody an existence that both is and is not related to physical space. Segol notes that

"[w]e act in space, in time, and within an order, and Yetsiratic diagrams, because they represent

these, provide an orientation for thought and action"(9). In this sense, the diagrams orient, or

direct, their viewers and, through orienting them, move them through the space of both thought

and action (in fact, Jewish mysticism sees the two categories of thought and action as inseparably

entwined). Thus, the diagrams in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, through their instructive representation of

space create options for mobility which are both imaginative and spatial. By doing so they not only facilitate movement, but also illustrate a way to understand the dialogue between these two types of movement. Obviously, these diagrams illustrate a form of mobility similar to Urry's; they represent both imaginative and spatial movement. In the case of the *sefirot* this movement would occur on an imaginative, non-material plane of existence while at the same time through a distinctly spatial relationship to one another (or, as Segol puts it "within an order").

Another connection to be found between Urry's theories and the *sefirot* diagrams is the above discussion of the "public" and "private" domains and the ways in which mobility blurs the boundaries between these two categories. If the public can be understood as the collective (think of collective experiences of public space) and the private can be understood as the individual (the individual's dominion over their own space), then Urry's mobilities offer a way to understand the simultaneous unity and separation between the individual and the collective. The *sefirot* participate in a similar process. As manifestations of God they can be understood as both a single, unifying presence through their collective identity (together, they make up the whole of god) and ten separate emanations, or aspects of holiness. God is both one and ten, the collective and the separate individual. But mobility factors for the *sefirot* as well, since it is only by traveling between these individual, seemingly separate, aspects of god that humanity is able to develop a concept of God as a whole.

If the paths between the *sefirot* are what provide mobility, then the nature of these paths, which are called *nativ,* may help to ascertain the nature of this notion of mobility. The *Sefir Yetzirah* explains that "A *nativ* on the other hand, is a personal route, a path blazed by the individual for his personal use. It is a hidden path, without markers or signposts, which one must discover on his own, and tread by means of his own devices" (10). Crucially, mobility, in the

case of the *sefirot* and in the case of *Austerlitz*, is an individual endeavor. Thus, not every

individual will engage (or be able to engage) in the same type of mobility. Gender, age,

nationality, experience with trauma and race all determine the ways in which the characters of

Austerlitz are able to participate in movement. In Sebald's text this is blatantly manifest:

Austerlitz is more mobile than Vera, but less mobile than the narrator, for example.[11]

When we move, we move through space and, on account of this, mobility is deeply

connected to concepts of space and place. According to Doreen Massey in "Making

Connections," space is "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity" as well as that

which is "always being made" (231). Thus, if space houses multiplicity while at the same time

being constantly constructed, it is involved in constant movement and imaginative change, each

of which have the ability to be simultaneously one and many in the same way that *sefirot*

diagrams allow. But space is not the same as place, as Tim Cresswell points out in *In Place/Out

of Place.* In some ways, place is clearly beyond the spatial since "What one's place is, is clearly

related to one's relation to others." Therefore, "in this sense 'place' combines the spatial with the

social — it is 'social space'" (3). In light of this assertion, place carries the implication for a

layered meaning to space (that which is both social and material) at the same time that it

provides the potential for mobility between the individual and the collective. Because this form

of mobility is so central to my argument, Cresswell's theorization of place is important because it

recognizes the connective potential inherent in every space as well as the ways in which space is

socially and historically constructed.

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[11] I am indebted to Karen Jacobs for asking the question "are all mobilities created equal?" which prompted my investigation into the nature of the *nativ* and the importance of individual identities to mysticism.

In this thesis, I use a handful of terms to distinguish between two categories which I will broadly identify as the *particular* and the *universal*. The term "particular" refers to that which is highly unique, individual, and seemingly singular—for example: an individual person, a specific event, or isolated image or artwork. The term "universal" refers to the collection of particularities which forms a whole—for example: society, national or global history, public spaces, or a genre. Because I am referring to much of this within the context of theories of creation in mysticism, it may be helpful to imagine, again, the stain glass window which Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi evokes in his discussion of *tikkun.* The particular would be the shards of glass, the individual objects of creation. The universal is the window. Unfortunately, universal and particular are quite broad and I therefore turn to several other terms in specific situations. When discussing experiences of memory, human subjectivity and identity I refer to the individual and the collective. By setting up these categories (the universal and collective versus the particular and the individual) this thesis examines the ways in which the creation of memory, or *tikkun* memory, moves dialectically between the two in such a way that it ultimately erodes the barriers dividing them.

When speaking about memory, we often unknowingly circle one of two drains: history and memory. There are particular, family memories told at the kitchen table, on a family vacation, at the sickbed. Often, they are dismissed as inconsequential—too specialized or unique to have value for society as a whole. Then there are universal memories lectured on in the university classroom, installed in museum galleries, and boxed up in the archives. These are revered as factual, historical, and have great societal value because they encompass large groups of people. Ultimately, it often seems that memory must disappear down one drain, or the other.

Karen Jacobs examines this trend in scholarship throughout her article "Sebald's Apparitional Nabokov" and specifically in her discussion of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire.*[12] Jacobs explains that, according to Nora, memory (which was once lived and collective), has, through subjection to modern history "lost its spontaneous, social, and collective character, and has become above all archival" (150). As a response to this claim, which posits a highly individualized, materially concentrated experience of even the most collective memories, Jacobs asserts that, rather than succumbing to Nora's notion of modern memory, Sebald brings about a "highly permeable and nascently collectivist form of subjectivity" (157) through his relationship to memory. This permeability, the ability to be collective, deeply aligns with this thesis' argument that there is an ability to be both collective and individual, that the very barriers between the two are porous.

Now that the most significant aspects of mysticism—the creative process of *tikkun* and its relationship to memory, the *sefirot* diagrams, and the importance of movement between the universal and the particular—have been introduced, I will move into a more focused examination of Sebald's *Austerlitz.* In doing so, my analysis will continue to draw on elements of mysticism while relating them to the memorial processes which Sebald catalogues in his novel. By attending to the text's numerous instances of layered creation, the importance of both language and image, and the recurrence of *tikkun* memory in *Austerlitz*, I hope to reconsider the problems of memory and forgetting through the terms of mysticism.

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[12] Unarguably, my definitions of history and memory do not map onto Nora's. Not only does this thesis use memory to describe both personal and historical experiences of the past, but it posits that history as it has been institutionalized remains a collective endeavor.

Sitting in a shuttered Prague apartment—the only surviving structure of his forgotten childhood—the eponymous character of W.G. Sebald's novel, *Austerlitz,* wonders aloud to his former nanny, Vera, about the Czech word for "squirrel." Vera responds simply that it is "*veverka.*" But, as is so often the case in W.G. Sebald's work, this simple answer refuses to remain so. Austerlitz and Vera's mundane discussion of language and the commonplace squirrel quickly transforms the apartment into a gateway of memory. As she walks an adult Austerlitz down the corridors of his past, back to a time when she was still a young student and he no more than a toddler, Vera recalls the pre-war autumns the two of them spent in Schoborn gardens. She recalls that they would watch squirrels hide their acorns in anticipation of the blanketing white of winter; a scene which caused Austerlitz's childish face to fill with concern at the same time that his mind would fill with the following questions: "How indeed do the squirrels know, what do we know ourselves, how do we remember and what is it we find in the end?" (204). Perhaps, in trying to understand the core of how Sebald's novel, deals with the relationship between memory and forgetting, we need look no further than this scene. The presence of language, the layering of space and, of course, the persistent problem of the past's interaction with the present is framed perfectly here—within an apartment that is also a garden, a man that is also a child, an elderly woman that is also a young student—as a question of memory that is, in fact, a memory itself. Therefore, as we examine *Austerlitz* we must also ask ourselves these questions—questions of acorns, of snow, of translation—in order to understand both the method ("how do we remember?") and the object ("what is it we find in the end?") of memory after World War II.

Rather than address these methods and objects of memory in terms of ability—what or how the characters are *able* to remember—the following analysis aims to conceive of the

memorial acts in *Austerlitz* within the terms of creativity.[13] Here, creativity is not merely a positive presence, but rather one which contains both creation and destruction, presence and absence. As Adam Phillips notes, creative memory functions in such a way that it simultaneously embodies "forms of forgetting" (24) and forms of recollection.[14] Therefore, anyone who engages in creative memory must first have the open space provided by forgetfulness in order to create memory since, if we housed a totalizing and completely accurate memory of the past there would be no room for creation, but only unmoving factuality. Thus, the formation and creation of the past through memory is one which is intimately tied with the destruction, or forgetting, of the same past. In a similar fashion, Jewish mysticism treats creation as an act which is grounded in an experience of shattering, or destruction, that which came before it.

This attempt to create in the face of destruction by connecting to both the personal and the collective makes it possible to read Austerlitz's various pilgrimages of memory as reparative acts, acts which resembles the concept of mending, or *tikkun*. Therefore, this analysis aims to look at mystical thoughts on creation, *sefirot,* and the interplay of text and image in order to draw out the ways in which Sebald attempts to build a world of memory that is creative, reparative, and, because it is never complete, in constant motion. Through the use of the term "creative memory" I am drawing not only on Adam Phillip's notion of memory (as previously cited), but also gesture towards a method of engaging with the past in which the rememberer fills in their own memorial "blanks" with external information (be it the stories of others, historical knowledge, or other sources) in order to imagine what a past that never was. Thus, *tikkun*

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[13] Past scholarship has tended to focus on ability. For example, see Laura García Morenos' claim that the novel illustrates that "a traumatic past has disabled the present" (362) or Stefanie Boese's analysis of *Austerlitz* as a text where "remembering and forgetting the past are equally impossible" (117).
[14] Phillips, Adam. *On Flirtation.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994.

memory embodies the concept of creation as it is used in Kabbalistic thought, an act which is both creation (of a personalized narrative) and destruction (through the disassembling of a memorial whole or the selective erasure of their own memories).

This project of reparative, creative memory is something that Sebald himself directly addressed, as Peter Morgan points out in his article "Your Story is Now My Story." Morgan cites an interview in which "Sebald maintains the dual validity of this work as history and literature, documentation and the imaginative reconstruction of lives in the shadows of Auschwitz" (194). This combination of "documentation" and "imaginative reconstruction" is precisely the *tikkun* memory described above. Because the documentation of any mass act of violence is almost always damaged and incomplete—owing to the fact that death, and therefore erasure, has played a central role in the historical events—creativity must extend the lines which have been erased through the violence of forced forgetfulness. In *Austerlitz,* this creative "filling in" occurs as a response to the dialectic tension between the falsely oppositional forms of memory and forgetting. Such tensions compel Sebald's characters to navigate reservoirs of both collective and personal experiences of history as they create and recreate a past that is, in some ways, unobtainable except by collecting seemingly isolated and separate bits of information and imaginative ordering of such information. Thus, memory in *Austerlitz* becomes a form of creative movement through mental and physical spaces as well as temporalities since Austerlitz must constantly revisit the past through his movements in the present. It is precisely through this exchange—between the vast, often impersonal, archives and the deeply personalized minutiae of the memories of families or individuals—that Sebald attempts to understand the essential problems inherent in the long, grey years of Europe's struggle to engage with memory as a way to grapple with and recover from the traumatizing reverberations of the Holocaust. When

conceptualized in this manner, Sebald's illustrations of memory in many ways overlap with the reparative project central to Jewish mystical thought called *tikkun*. This project, which seeks to redeem the shattered objects of creation through a mobile process of collection and recreation in an attempt to recreate a sense of wholeness, functions in much the same way as Sebald's simultaneous reliance on fragmented documentation and imaginative creation in order to reclaim a more complete sense of the past and present. Precisely because this process of gathering and recreation, in *Austerlitz* as well as in Kabbalistic texts, is never truly finished but rather constantly built and rebuilt, this work of threading the individual into the whole is one which requires constant physical as well as mental motion.

To best explore the theorization of memory as a creative movement which connects the seemingly oppositional worlds of individual and collective pasts, this paper situates Sebald's treatment of the traumatic past alongside theories of postmemory, photography and space/place, couching each of these in the Kabbalistic concepts of creation, the union of image and language, and the mystic practice of *tikkun* (Hebrew for reparation or fixing).[15] Reading *Austerlitz* through the lens of Jewish mystical thought not only illuminates aspects of the exchanges between collective (or unified) and individual (or fragmented) histories by providing a specific understanding of creation and reparation, but also explores the Sebald's connections to bodies of Jewish thought and experience (a connection that scholarship, at its best, has only obliquely addressed and, at worst, left completely unacknowledged).[16]

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[15] During my research, I discovered that, though the connection between Sebald and mysticism has remained generally unexplored, there was one case in which a scholar used the practice of *tikkun* to explicate Sebald's work. Michael Hutchins, in his dissertation, "*Tikkun*: W.G. Sebald"s *Melancholy* Messianism" engagingly explores the notion of *tikkun* as it relates to the concept of the messiah and has done significant work to establish a link between Jewish mysticism and Sebald's writing.

Rather than divide memory into two distinct camps (the historical, or collective, and the personal, or individual), Sebald presents acts of remembrance which frustrate such divisions. For Austerlitz, these acts are neither entirely individual and personal nor entirely monumental and remote, instead they move constantly back and forth in the space between the two categories. As such, memory in the text necessitates a network of connections between individuals' experiences and the massive accumulation of institutional, historical memory. Perhaps more importantly, it allows for movement between such connections. Travelling between the temples of memory—archives, libraries, and museums—and the dwellings of daily life—apartments, hotels, cafes—Austerlitz engages in a process of creative memory that is highly mobile, spatial, and relational. Through his movements, Austerlitz strives to reform/reimagine his childhood despite the obliteration and destruction wrought upon it by blending personal imagination and historical realism— essentially seeking to create an imaginative realm ("what could have been") at the same time he strives to uncover a factual, historical past ("the way it was"). This attempt to create in the face of destruction by connecting to both the personal and the collective makes it possible to read Austerlitz's various pilgrimages of memory as reparative acts, acts which resembles the concept of mending, or *tikkun*.

If *tikkun* is based in a response to the experience of rupture and shattering in Jewish creation, it can be used to understand both the individual characters and the monumental historical realities of World War II in which Sebald's text grounds itself. As a character, Jacques Austerlitz is continually shattered and rebuilt. A middle-aged Jewish man who, at the age of four and a half, was taken from his parents' apartment in Prague, Austerlitz's life begins by shattering the unifying whole of the family (which itself represents the ability to be both a collective unit

and an isolated individual). While the Nazi regime ostensibly claims his parents' lives, Austerlitz is brought up assuming that his mother and father are the catatonically depressed woman and harsh Calvinist preacher who raised him in Wales. His adopted parents withhold any information regarding his Jewish heritage, his parents' lives, or the circumstances which spirited him away from both. In fact, it is not until his teenage years that he discovers the instability of his own past. Even then, Austerlitz is well into middle age when he, plagued by a host of psychosomatic ailments (which the reader assumes stem from an avoidance of the past), begins to pursue his own creation story—his own mythic origin—in earnest. In this project of excavation he attempts to unearth memories of his childhood in Prague and, more disturbingly, the specifics of his parents' disappearance into the crowded transit and labor camps. But there is a cyclical aspect to this project of memorial recovery which, just as in the case of *tikkun*, embodies both creation and destruction. Although Austerlitz sees the reparation of his memories as the antidote to his pain[17] (an antidote which necessitates movement in the form of a visit to Prague), once he engages in the recreation of memory by piecing together a fragmentary past through Vera, photographs of his childhood apartment and a visit to what was likely his mother's last location before being sent to a death camp, Austerlitz is shattered anew. Faced with a history which he himself has painstakingly assembled, he is "overcome by this terrible anxiety in the midst of the simplest actions" in which he "felt like screaming but could not utter a sound." (228-9) and is eventually committed to St. Clement's. Memory, much like creation, has the ability to both create and destroy: the cure, in this instance, is also the disease.

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[17] His journey is directly inspired by the desire to undo "this self-censorship of my mind, the constant suppression of the memories surfacing in me [which] demanded ever greater efforts and finally, and unavoidably, led to the almost total paralysis of my linguistic faculties, the destruction of all my notes and sketches." (140)

Now, while Austerlitz's experiences are shattering as both an individual (a child who is taken away from his family) and as part of a collective (a man removed from the historical implications of own ancestry), the distant past is not the only place he experiences rupture. In the text, the timeline of his narration is shattered as well. Recorded by an anonymous narrator, Austerlitz recants the story of his adulthood and his distress at grappling with a history that both belongs to him and is impossible for him to fully possess. His frequent sojourns into memory make it difficult for a complete picture of Austerltiz's life to form without the ghosts of the past interrupting, abruptly seizing the reader and transporting them to the 18th century, then to London, then a garden in Prague. Here, the narration moves through both time and space so rapidly (and without so much as a quotation mark) that the text simultaneously bleeds into a unifying experience—a global whole—while also rupturing into fragments of historical facts, individual affective experiences, and empty spaces.

But how, exactly, is this fragmented unity, this connection between the personal and the historical, achieved? In part, the answer lies in the central, and yet often invisible, presence of the narrator within the text. Austerltiz's stories, historical asides, and architectural anecdotes are each funneled through the narrator. Regardless of how disparate these threads may seem, they are woven together through the narrator's mediating presence which functions as a way to collect and unify while also preserving the fragmented nature of Austerlitz's experiences. To further muddy the line between the separated individual and the collective whole, it is often difficult to determine the narrative edges which mark the boundaries between the narrator, other characters, and Sebald himself. The difficulty of such an untangling has been widely noted in both reviews[18] and scholarly articles and is perhaps best articulated by quoting again from Peter Morgan's

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[18] For example, by Charles Simic in his review "The Solitary Notetaker" and Susan Sontag in her *Times Literary Supplement* of review of *Vertigo.*

"Your Story is Now My Story," in which Morgan observes that "In *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*
Sebald takes the stories of his subjects and represents them through his own narrative voice,
blurring the boundaries between self and other, past and present, memory and history" (195).
Despite the fact that Morgan sees this blurring as a violation of narrative ethics on Sebald's part,
it nonetheless illustrates the ways in which Sebald's texts explore the nested nature of
storytelling and memory making. Again, the implication here is of an existence which exhibits a
mobile identity, one which oscillates between collectivity and individuality: the ability to be both
a shard of glass and a part of a stained-glass window. While the narrator plays an important role
in the creative interchange between fragmentation and unity, the reader is also intimately
involved in this process. Engagement with the text is an experience of constant shattering and
imaginative recreation wherein the reader must constantly piece together the seemingly disparate
personal and historical content into a narrative whole with each turn of the page.

   Because shattering and restoration are processes which feed one another and therefore
fuel acts of creation, the process of recreation is one which is continuously occurring. What was
shattered by WWII (whether it be Austerlitz's childhood, Prague before the second World War,
or the numerous architectural structures, ranging from fortresses to theaters, which interest
Sebald) is reconstructed within the pages of the text through the interplay of language and visual
images, only to be shattered and rebuilt again. One of the moments which most clearly illustrates
this process arises when Austerlitz questions whether a memory of catching a glimpse of blue,
sequined shoes is an authentic recollection of his mother, Agàta, or merely the dream-like
product of his own desire to "conjure up at least some faint recollection of her [his mother's]
appearance" (161). Shortly after Vera confirms the veracity of this image's connection to Agàta,
Austerlitz reports: "I felt as if something were shattering inside my brain" (161). This recreation

or reclamation of an image (or at least a partial image) of his childhood, which had once been

consigned to the dim halls of forgetfulness, becomes both a site of creation and destruction. By

gathering the fragmented memories of his mother and weaving them together in order create a

more complete image of his childhood, Austerlitz experiences another destruction of the whole–

–his mental wholeness (which was, arguably, never whole to begin with).

However, in the wake of such mental shattering, one of the most dynamic and

emotionally charged memories of his past in Prague emerges. As a child, Austerlitz recalls being

"filled by a grief previously unknown to me" while waiting for his mother to come home in order

to be "enveloped by a strange theatrical odor in which dust and drifts of perfume mingled" (162).

But even this memory, which hints at an encompassing unity through its imagery of a child and

mother enveloped in an atmosphere of scent and mutual longing, is also curiously incomplete

and fragmented through its conspicuous emptiness. While Austerlitz remembers the sensation of

waiting (which is, in itself, indicative of an absence) and the smell of his mother, he is unable to

access her full, physical presence. Her image is conspicuously absent from the memory that

gestures towards envelopment and reunion. In fact, Austerlitz cannot remember his mother's face

but only "an iridescent veil of pale, cloudy milkiness" (162). So, while he vividly recalls parts of

the past which indicate a very strong presence and the emotional traces of that presence, his

mother appears in the manner in which a ghost might appear: through a presence that is actually

the exact opposite: a physical absence.

The milky veil of his mother's face evokes a certain ghostliness—almost to the point of

horror—in which it becomes clear that this diffuse recreation of the past both is and isn't a

memory of his mother. She simply refuses to materialize: her physical appearance remains a

mystery, her face is obscured, and her voice is silenced. Thus, Austerlitz's memorial creation is

both unified and fragmented, the site of creation and destruction. Being unable to reform the image or the language of his mother from the shattered past, he is then propelled forward on a mission to gather even more fragments as he searches for her in Terezín, countless archives and museums, and even in a Nazi propaganda film. The cyclical, eternal, nature of this process of creation, destruction, recreation clearly centers on mobility. In the compulsion to collect shards of a shattered past through moments of memorial creation, Austerlitz not only moves through physical space (the museums, the galleries, the city streets) but intellectual space (his rigorous research and engagement with texts and material sources) in order to link the fragmented images of his personal history the expansive and collective narrative of the history of Europe. Yet, each time he creates a memory through these movements which fuse individual memory with the large-scale project of history, he is faced with more absence than presence, more questions than answers. So he continues to move: from Prague's archives to his childhood apartment, from the apartment to Vera, from Vera to Terezín, and so on. Each step simultaneously creates a more complete picture of the past while also destroying it, calling it into question, and shaking Austerlitz's as it destroys any definitive point of origin for his life. He is subsequent shattered in such a way that he is compelled to engage in even more restorative acts of memory (a process which, again, can be understood as analogous to the process of *tikkun*) and therefore, continued movement.

Again, mobility is central to *tikkun* memory's shattering and gathering, its destruction and creation. Only through his travels between the historical and the personal as well as the public and the private—from Prague's archives, to Tereza Ambrosová's office, to the stairwell of his childhood apartment building, to Vera's home— is Austerlitz able to reclaim even fragmented bits of the past. In fact, he does not even have access to any memory of his mother until, when

visiting the Estates Theatre and standing before "the proscenium arch of the stage on which Agáta once sang," an unseen someone walks behind the curtain, sending a "ripple through the heavy folds of fabric" (160). Doreen Massey explains place as "a conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (191), a condition which Austerlitz experiences intimately in the theatre as he imagines his own mother's history.[19] Indeed, through an experience of that public place, which had been visited by thousands throughout the building's life and is layered with histories (including his mother's and her audiences) as well as current movements (that of the person who ripples the curtain), Austerlitz engages with a collective past and present. The accumulation of these layered experiences sparks a memorial discovery: the image of his mother's shoes, the musicians' heads, and the sound of a murmuring audience. However, while this experience of place sparks his memory, it is not until he travels back to Vera, to her apartment that he is able to confirm this memory and, through Vera's retelling of the past, piece together a story which combines Vera's memories with his own. It is precisely this exchange, this mobility between a collective "public" place where thousands gather, such as the theatre, and then traveling to a "private" place, Vera's apartment, that a partial memory is recreated. This movement between public and private repositories of memory is repeated throughout the text and, in many ways, provides the impetus for the continuation of memorial pilgrimages. Austerlitz experiences the exact same pattern of movement when he is finally successful in identifying a photograph of his mother. Only by searching the Prague theatrical archives and then returning to Vera's apartment for confirmation can he confirm that the face which is almost swallowed by a dramatic shadow (253) is his mother. Of course, this reclamation of his mother's visage only leads to more movement. Austerlitz, upon delivering the photograph to the narrator moves on to Paris, "to

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[19] Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts."

search for traces of his father's last movements" (253). Therefore, this *tikkun* memory, this reclamation, is the constant process of mobility: between public and private, other and self, collectivity and individuality.

Austerlitz's ability to engage in almost constant movement is its own source of privilege. We must therefore consider the question of who is able to take part in creative memory and how one's position within the matrix of gender, class, race, sexuality and ability affect access to methods of memory which relate to mobility. While Austerlitz's memorial movement certainly reflects a privileged position within each of these categories, I will focus primarily on reading this in the context of gender and ability. In their introduction to *Gendered Mobilities,* Tanu Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell elaborate on the link between gender and mobility by explaining that "masculinity is coded as mobile and active while femininity is coded as relatively stationary and passive" (3). Of course, this is not to say that women in the 20th century lacked the ability to movement between public and private spaces (although this may certainly have been the case for some), but rather that "[f]eminine mobilities are different from masculine ones. What's more, this difference acts to reaffirm and reproduce the power relations that produced these differences in the first place" (Uteng and Cresswell 3). In taking this into account in the case of Sebald's text, we can begin to understand Austerlitz's pilgrimages into the places of WWII and their pasts as instances which are uniquely afforded to him as a generally able-bodied man with significant financial stability and academic training.

The importance of movement to his practice of *tikkun* memory can be seen by the fact that whenever Austerlitz is unable to walk, take metros, or board planes he also becomes incapable of remembering. These periods of confinement, most often within hospital walls, limit Austerlitz's movement and by doing so, limit his ability to participate in the movement necessary

for him to continue to piece together his past. They act as protective "breaks" from memory and history while also keeping him from moving through trauma in both a literal and mental sense. Arguably, these blank periods are not *caused* by a limitation of movement, but rather are a response to an experience, be it conscious or unconscious, of an accumulation of the overwhelming weight of the past. However, the loss of mobility which accompanies Austerlitz's blank spaces certainly curtails his ability to make pilgrimages into the past which, in turn, keep him from engaging in the reparative act of *tikkun* memory.

During his stay at Salpêtrière, where Austerlitz is institutionalized after a fainting spell, it becomes clear that not only is memory determined by mobility, but mobility is determined by memory. Austerlitz explains that "I could remember nothing about myself, or my own previous history, or anything else whatsoever" (270). This fact, along with his inability to walk, keep him in the "fortress-like hospital" (272). So, while mobility opens up opportunities for the creation of memory, in many ways memory determines one's opportunities for mobility. In order to move through the world, to participate in the present, we must also have access to memory. Without this Austerlitz is not deemed fit to be out amongst society. His mobility is therefore limited and he is confined to the fortress of "for your own good," since being out in the world without a sense of the past would be a dangerous endeavor. Significantly, Austerlitz claims that only once "I regained my lost sense of myself and my memory" is he able to "gradually [master] the crippling physical weakness which had overcome me" (272) and begin to walk again. Here, the reclamation of his memory precipitates his ability for physical movement and his ultimate release from the hospital. In regaining his "lost sense of self," which includes a memory of an incomplete past and the unsolved mystery of the details of his parents' fate, he is propelled forward into the restless motion that constantly drives him. Again, he begins to move between

public spaces of memory, continuing to collect fragments of the past and assembling them in an act of *tikkun* memory. When this relationship between memory and mobility is laid out in the context of Austerlitz's illnesses and recover, it becomes clear that the two are part of a continuous loop. On one hand, Austerlitz's mobility works to reveal the past and recover parts of his fragmented self. But such revelations uncover even more gaps and questions, and thus require even more movement and memorial gathering. This goes on and on until the end of the book, wherein the narrator recollects that Austerlitz is still engaged in motion, though now he is searching for his father. In this way, mobility and memory are each part of a cycle which feeds off of itself.

Additionally, while Austerlitz relies on various female characters, namely Vera but also Maria and the archivist Tereza Ambrosová, he and the narrator, both of whom are men, are the only ones able to share in the full memorial recreation precisely because they are the only ones who adhere to the same code of almost constant movement. Vera in particular does not have the same opportunities for mobility as Austerlitz does and is seen almost entirely in the context of her own apartment (though she does occasionally go on walks with an adult Austerlitz). She has stayed in her apartment since the horror of the war, and the trauma of Agáta's removal, and has thus become trapped in a warehouse of memories. She claims to have "tried to pick up the broken threads" but instead "it was as if all traces were lost in the sand, for at the time […] it often took months to get an answer from abroad" (205). This picking up of threads, this weaving together of multiple lives within a historical context, is unavailable to Vera. Yet it is precisely the project that Austerlitz has engaged himself in through his travels abroad and his ability to seek (or at least attempt to seek) the answers at their sources. Vera herself seems aware of the distinction in mobility between herself and Austerlitz in her comment that "it would have been

different if she could have turned in person to the appropriate authorities but she lacked the opportunity and the means to do so" (205). Obviously, the disproportionate opportunity for mobility is not only due to gender's relationship to movement, but also because of the war's effect on societal systems and the general chaos that ensued from the wide-spread violence and fear and a generational gap. However, there is another sense in which Vera is ambiguously without "opportunity" or "the means" to move in the same way that Austerlitz is able to.

POSTMEMORY AND THE CREATION OF LANGUAGE AND LIGHT

It is difficult, if not impossible, to further discuss creative memory's movement in *Austerlitz* without also discussing postmemory in the context of creation. My framework for discussing postmemory is grounded primarily in the work of Marianne Hirsch. Hirsch, who coined the term, developed a theory that was concerned with the transfer of traumatic memories from survivors to the following generations of children and younger relatives. Accordingly, "postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 106). I aim to augment and complicate this discussion of postmemory by employing Hirsch's theories to examine a trauma to which there were *no* survivors and thereby open up new possibilities for understanding the process of creating a reparative, *tikkun*, memory in the face of a memorial void that is, of course, never truly void. If Austerlitz did not grow up surrounded by "stories, images, and behaviors" which referenced the Holocaust (in fact he avoided them[20]),

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[20] Austerlitz's explanation to the archivist in Prague seems to imply that he is not conscious of the reasons for his previous avoidance of the past. "I began explaining to someone else that because of certain circumstances my origins had been unknown to me, and that for other reasons I had never inquired into them. (147)

then how does reading him within the context of postmemory, complicate our notion of experiences of the past and the movement of memory?

One answer may be that Austerlitz is forced to rely on memorial networks that exists *outside* of family bonds: namely, institutional history, archival collections and the stories of strangers. This seems to align with Emmanuel Alloa's assertion that postmemory "tends to grant memory an inter-individual, social dimension" (2). As such, postmemory becomes a productive method of engaging the creative, social response to missing memory which occurs when both individuals and society at large relate to the past through a network of individual memories which they then assemble into a narrative whole. This relationship of interior dimensions and movement between individuals is, again, reflective of the relationship between the *sefirot* in the Kabbalah. Jewish mystical though posits that by moving along the paths which connect the separate aspects of God to one another, individuals who are able to move through each of the ten *sefirot* can obtain a partial understanding of God as a whole. By gathering up the smallest units of God, the *sefirotic* emanations which may seem disparate or unconnected to one another, believers are encouraged to create their own connections as they forge their own paths towards a more unified understanding of a whole that is both fragmented and unified.

However—as is the case with Austerlitz's memory of his childhood—there is always a part of God which is unobtainable.[21] This inability to completely grasp the whole, to define its every feature, is significant to both mysticism and memory. Here, partial attainability is not a symbol of failure or inability but rather a productive space, a blankness that drives a continual search, a need for creation through the process of travelling between the separate aspects of a

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[21] In the *Sefer Yetzirah* this is called *keter* or the crown *sefirot*. It represents the totality of God, but cannot be understood by creation. Therefore, there is always space between the other nine *sefirot* and the crown which allows for a sense of simultaneous unity and separation.

shattered whole. In other words, it is precisely the process of postmemory which *Austerlitz* best

exemplifies: a creative, reparative act which draws from seemingly disparate sources in order to

create a memorial whole that both is and is not completely whole. Austerlitz's memorial trek

allows for an understanding of the past that is both whole and incomplete since the past that is

being sought is inherently grounded in trauma and, thus, inseparable from elements of loss and

emptiness. Emptiness, in this case, is also part of the past and any attempt to completely fill the

past up, to be able to reclaim it fully, would be to deny its essential nature. Nevertheless, such

empty spaces, unfilled gaps, continue to inspire movement through space—for example

Austerlitz's many wanderings across London, within Prague, and through the Bohemian

countryside—and thought—such as his extensive research, German translations, and archival

visits.

Creative acts in postmemory and mysticism relate not only to movement between the

individual and the collective, but can also be understood as linguistic and symbolic layering. In

coining the phrase "postmemory," Hirsch elaborates on the meaning of the "post" in this term as

one which "shares the layering of these other 'posts'" of postmodernism, postfeminism,

posthumanism, and post colonialism"(106). Essentially, post means both that which comes

"after" (as is the case in postfeminism) but also the "troubling persistence of" (as is the case in

postcolonialism). This incisive description of the layered meanings of language and knowledge

not only nods towards the process of archaeological history and the accumulation of memory,

but also to the notion that creation is a process that is devoid of a "pure" origin. Acknowledging

the linguistic layers behind any concept, Hirsch makes it clear that the creation of postmemory is

a process of collection—one idea built on top of another in an endless formation without a

discernible singular, point of origin. Creation is, therefore an inherently collective act, always coming from that which came before.

Significantly, Jewish mysticism constructs creation in a similar manner. For instance, in *The Bahir*, an anonymous mystical interpretation of the book of Genesis which is thought to originate in the first century, creation is not born of nothingness. It is not *ex nihilo,* instead implying that the universe's creation is not the first act of creation (nor will it be the last) but one of many. *The Bahir* (also called *The Book of Bright)* explains that, "It is therefore written 'Let there be light, and there was light.' This indicates that it already existed" (10). This passage indicates two points that are crucial for the purposes of rereading Sebald through a mystical lens. The first, as has already been stated, is an understanding of creation as part of a collective process without a discernible origin. The second is that creation is a story of both language (speaking is the first creative act) and light (the first creative product). As a story of creation in its own right, *Austerlitz*, is similarly preoccupied through its very form: a narrative text which weaves together the creative act of language with photography, the recording of light. Thus, Sebald breaks down the process of memorial creation into the two categories that are central to the Jewish creation myth—language and light—and puts them in conversation with one another in order to show the complex way in which both the written word and image interact in the creation story of memory.

LANGUAGES OF THE PAST: CREATION AND NARRATION

The importance of language in the Jewish story of creation cannot be overstated. The *Sefer Yetzirah* explains that "it was through the letters of the Hebrew alphabet that the universe was created." Importantly, "These letters of creation were not only responsible for the inception of the world, but they also constantly sustain it. It is thus written, 'Forever, O God, Your word

stands in the heavens.'" If mysticism brings forth the above idea, that the world is not only built

on language but that it continues to be sustained through its use, a similar reliance on language is

reflected in the narrative structure of *Austerlitz.* Obviously, as a printed text, the world of

Austerlitz's memorial work is quite literally constructed via the building blocks of alphabet.

Again, this reflects the idea that individual aspects—in this case letters, the most singular units of

language — can be strung together to create a collective meaning. Isolated letters combine to

create words, then sentences, then a narrative whole all through their relationship with one

another and their simultaneous separation (they remain separate letters) and unity (they combine

to create a unified meaning).

However, there is a more complex way in which the world, created by the ink of letters

"constantly sustain[s]" itself through language, as the *Sefer Yetzirah* explains. The narrative

structure of the story, in which each narrative holds up the narratives which came before it, is an

extraordinary example of the text's layered structure and interdependence. Since each of these

recollections are substantiated and supported by one another (for example: as a way to account

for the past, Austerlitz often relays the words of others—such as Maria, Vera, Hilary—to the

anonymous narrator who, in turn, relays them to the reader), the layering of individual stories

through language allows the creative whole, the text, to "stand." In "standing" the text not only

relies on a system of support which keeps it from collapsing in on itself (which would certainly

be the case if Austerlitz was able to rely only on his own memory of the past), but becomes, in a

way, three dimensional. This three-dimensionality is largely derived from the fact that the source

of the individual and collective trauma of Europe (the horrific event of Jewish internment and

genocide) is regarded from multiple angles and through various linguistic sources ranging from

the stories of bystanders, like Vera, to historical documents to experiences of architecture in the

present. When dealing with retellings of the aftershocks of the holocaust, Sebald typically indicates this chain of communication through in a few short words, such as, "Perhaps, Vera surmised, said Austerlitz," (205), drawing the reader's attention to the fact that this story is one of concentric circles—Vera's tale within Austerlitz's, Austerlitz's within the narrator's. Yet, he conspicuously avoids quotation marks. This strategy gestures to both the separation of the characters' stories (the narrator attributes each phrase to whichever character relayed it and thus they remain distinct) as well as their unity (without the flags of punctuation it becomes easy to skim over these and just absorb the narrative as a whole). Essentially, each narrative holds up the narratives around it and, through this interdependence, the stories of each individual sustain one another.

This movement between individual stories and a larger narrative structure is not only achieved through communication with the living, but also through a conversation with the dead via the scraps of language they leave behind in printed text. Austerlitz attempts, again and again, to unearth new sparks of memory in his voracious consumption of historical documents; documents that are, often, all that remains of the dead. He is constantly reading, researching, and absorbing a vast historical reality that he then translates into his personal engagement with the world and a transition into motion. While they are, of course, not complete nor fully able to create a memory from the shattered past, the monumental texts of history, the collected documents of the archives, drive Austerlitz into the world of personal experiences. Here, he encounters others, engages with them, and through this dual process, this relationship between institutions and the everyday, he slowly assembles a past which, though painful, is something he can claim.

Ann Pearson, in her defense of Sebald's intertextuality notes that the layers of the characters' stories and historical memory are not the only forms of layering in the text. Beyond Austerlitz's clear-cut engagement with institutions of historical memory as an important element of the creative movement of memory, Sebald employs a much subtler form of discourse with the dead through his numerous uncited references to other literary and theoretical sources. While certainly contentious (some critics cite these instances as examples of plagiarism), this use of intertextuality only further exemplifies language's role in creative memory by drawing attention to the layered construction of creation. As has already been discussed, creativity in postmemory as well as in mysticism is one which is devoid of a singular, pure origin but instead results from accumulation and movement between past concepts and present ones and is thus a collective act. Sebald draws from the larger, institutional sources of history, literature, and theory in order to create memory. Pearson notes that this provides "a fertile engagement with earlier texts that contributes to the historical layering of his narratives." (262) Again, layering functions as a source of fertility by involving seemingly separate narratives (in this case, earlier texts) in the collective movement of *tikkun* memory. Sebald's intertextuality thus seeks to dismantle the notion of a "pure" origin of creation, or a creation out of nothing, and opts instead for a model of creation that draws from that which came before it and therefore, embodies the separate aspects of the past in a creative object (in this case, the thought object of memory) which is simultaneously one and many, and has the ability to move back and forth between the two.

While creation involves the layering of language and narratives, the spirit of imagination is also essential to the concept of *tikkun* memory and postmemory. In her book, *Family Frames,* Hirsch claims that "postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an

imaginative investment and creation" (*Family Frames* 22). Of course, this is not to say that the

pasts which are recreated by postmemory (or *tikkun* memory) are the product of pure imagination

or invention.[22] Rather, Hirsch's statement points out that every form of memory is in some way

"mediated" through imagination—after all, the act of memory essentially aligns with an

imaginative act, or the ability to *make* a mental image of an object or event that is not physically

present—and is therefore a site of creation. As such, postmemory is not merely a collection of

factual objects or historical sources, but also a process of imaginative reordering through an

engagement with narrative. The story-building of postmemory weaves together large-scale,

historical events and the highly personalized memories of individuals in order to create a tapestry

of experience that encompasses both the factual and imaginative.

Janet Jacobs in her book, *The Holocaust Across Generations,* describes this phenomenon

throughout her study of the transference of trauma along generational lines. For Jacobs, a

common way in which such traumatic transference takes place is linguistic inheritance, or

storytelling. She states that "[d]escendants are both the heirs to and recipients of survivor trauma

and co-producers of traumatic memory for the larger society" (135). Because storytelling is an

act which requires significant imaginative investment from both the story-teller (the survivor)

and the audience (the survivor's descendants), we can begin to understand the transference of

Holocaust narratives as an activity which utilizes imaginative investment in order to create a

network. This network links together individuals, such as the survivors and the descendants, to

collective "society at large" through an engagement with language which mediates the distance

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[22] When it comes to survivor's memories and the notion of creativity, I want to avoid straying too far into the realm
of abstraction. Though postmemories of trauma are essentially "imaginative" in the way that *every* memory
(including the memory of institutionalized, "objective" history) is imaginative, I am not implying that survivors'
recollections are forms of exaggeration or falsification. Instead, these memories are grounded in atrocities that are
all-too-real and violences that are indisputable. Creativity and imagination, in this sense, should not bring to mind
images of fanciful day-dreaming or reverie, but rather the creative ingenuity of the medic—one who must recreate
from broken bones, torn flesh, and missing limbs.

between the historical object (the source of trauma, the brutal realities of the Holocaust) and

imaginative investment (recreating that reality to include an emotional reality in the present).

Language, then, is central to the creative process in which traumatic memories are being

recreated. In this sense, the descendants, such as Austerlitz, are involved in a process of creative

and historical meaning making that bridges the gap between the personal and the societal.

Despite the fact that Austerlitz (due to the fact that he has no living family members) is unable to

inherit trauma in the same way that Hirsch's and Jacobs' subjects of postmemory and traumatic

inheritance are, the process of imaginative creation of memory seems to hold true for him as

well. As an individual, Austerlitz seeks to discover his own personalized stories of trauma not by

turning to his survivor ancestors directly, but by exploring a larger collective of historical

narratives. Essentially, he creates a system wherein each individual is nested within a larger,

collective context. Dori Laub identifies such a phenomenon as the testimonial chain, and

explains that, "It is composed of individually framed fragments, each like a still picture

implicated in a border that is closed off from the others. These frames are nevertheless connected

to one another in the very testimonial chain that relates the two separate chronological levels, the

past and the present" (40). So, although these testimonies may come from different sources—

directly from survivors or second hand from written accounts, museums, or archives—language,

as framed by the testimonial chain, is an act of creation and reparation in that it links the

"individually framed fragments" of imaginative images ("a still picture") to a much larger whole.

But the act of sharing narratives through language is not only an expression of mobility between

the individual and the collective, but also represents a mobility in time. Trauma is passed down

decades after the actual event happened and therefor "relates the two separate chronological

levels" by facilitating a movement between past and present. To a certain extent, it reconciles the

two. No longer are the past and the present split by the force of violent trauma but instead, through language, the fragments of both can be gathered up into a linguistic object that is both unified (the chain) and separate (its links- the individual stories).

Like almost everything else in *Austerlitz*, language is not a stable category. Instead, it constantly moves between public and the private spheres of existence, carrying with it highly personalized implications and associations while also acting as a monolithic system for communicating information as a society. For Austerlitz, this movement manifests in his ability to speak several languages, and the fact that he uses each language at very specific times. For example: during his childhood Austerlitz and Vera use French in public and to speak about subjects of collective, societal interest (such as art or literature). Meanwhile, Czech was reserved "for the more domestic and childish matters" (155) in the personalized privacy of Vera's apartment. [23] The movement from one language to another depending on location and subject matter mirrors the movement of the *sefirot*—between individual, isolated emanations and a collective whole.

At the same time, it also illustrates the creative potential of language for *tikkun* memory through the unique way in which different languages trigger memory and specific relationships with a past on both a personal and monumental level. A clear example of such potential can be glimpsed in a scene in which Austerlitz is the recovers his memory of the Czech language.

> In the middle of her account Vera herself, quite involuntarily, had changed
> from one language to the other, and I, who had not for a moment thought
> that Czech could mean anything to me, not at the airport or in the state
> archives, [...]now understood almost everything Vera said, like a deaf man

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[23] Yiddish and Hebrew are conspicuously missing from this text. By way of deferral, Sebald creates a character which is simultaneously Jewish and not, an act which highlights the shattering and recreation of memory. Perhaps, in some sense, there is an inability (or lack of desire) to reclaim this specific aspect of Jewish heritage based on the fact that Austerlitz's parents, as "secular Jews" were more interested in French than Hebrew or Yiddish. Thus, he seeks to reclaim their particular past rather than what might be considered a stereotypically cultural Jewish past.

whose hearing has been miraculously restored, so that all I wanted to do
was close my eyes and listen to her polysyllabic flood of words (155).

The reappearance of Czech, the language of his youth, provides Austerlitz with a rare moment of enjoyment bordering on closed-eyed ecstasy (the experience is so overwhelming that all he wants is to give himself over to the sensory flood of language). But beyond this isolated enjoyment in the moment, the recovery Czech is, for Austerlitz, the recovery of a system of thought, as well as an orientation in space, which opens up a memorial network rather than an individual memory. By recovering Czech, Austerlitz is able to move about Prague differently. He begins to experience it as a former inhabitant rather than a tourist since he is able to speak to its citizens in their national language and he starts to recall the city's spaces (the garden in the back of the apartment, trips to Sofia Island, and the banks of the Vltava (155-8)) with an old familiarity. Perhaps more importantly, the rediscover of Czech allows for the memorial images which were "deeply buried and locked away" to "come luminously back" to his mind (156). In fact, it is only after her recovers the Czech language that he begins to recover the partial memories of his parents.

The dialectical exchange between the seemingly oppositional spaces of the institution (the archives, the airport) and the domestic (Vera's apartment, during dinner) can be seen in this recovery as well. While the archives and airport were instrumental in creating the impetus of movement and Austerlitz's ability to find the personal traces of his past (and therefore Vera) it is only in a domestic space that this resurfacing happens. Though Sebald seems to put a certain primacy on the domestic space[24] through his emphasis on the importance of Vera's apartment in

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[24] It's possible to conceive of the domestic space as its own source of privilege since much of the trauma of the Holocaust centered specifically on the destruction of personal, domestic spaces. One does wonder, then, what would become of Austerlitz's memories if there was no remaining domestic space attached to his childhood. What would become of him if Vera had been interned alongside Agàta.

the initial recovery of Austerlitz's memory of his early childhood, both the institutional and the domestic, the collective and the personal, are vital for the development of that memory into a larger, historical conscious. Such consciousness allows Austerlitz to locate himself within the tragedy of the Holocaust and thereby open up more creative potential for *tikkun* memory as he is able to return to reservoirs of institutional memories (such as the archives or historical texts) and explore connections that had been previously unknown to him. Again, both personal and historical methods are important for this specific memorial project of *tikkun* memory. They exist in a dialogue with one another and, for Austerlitz, cannot be separated

THE DIALOGUE OF LANGUAGE AND LIGHT

If creation is truly a story of language and light, then the photographs in *Austerlitz* are the light. Not only do they literally capture and record light—the very definition of a photograph—but they illuminate spaces in a way that is distinct from Sebald's written descriptions and dialogues. While the images in the text are part of Austerlitz's story, they function differently than language. Importantly, they are not subordinated by the text's narrative or merely used to illustrate what the narrative has already explored (an arrangement which would, in fact, assert the primacy of written language over the importance of the image by defining the image solely through the presence of language). Indeed, the text's images are never accompanied by traditional captions or anything that definitively fixes the role of the image within the story. In turn, there often remains a level of ambiguity regarding the image. While the reader is mostly able to guess at the place the photograph plays in Austerlitz's tale, she is denied complete certainty and although there are often hints in the narrative which partially explain the photographs' connection to the story, some—like the ambiguous spheres, one black, one white, which sprawl over pages 106-7 of the text—appear without introduction. Thus, the images and

written language in *Austerlitz* are of equal importance since text and image define each other reciprocally. Neither form dominates the other, and each provides a certain opportunity for interpretive movement thanks to the ambiguity created by the exchange between the two. As such, Sebald's integration of photography and language is in many ways an answer to what Walter Benjamin, in "Small History of Photography," identifies as an essential problem of photography: namely the ability for the viewer to make associations. Benjamin states:

> Cameras are getting smaller and smaller, and ever more ready to fix fleeting and surreptitious images, whose shocks bring the viewer's association mechanism to a standstill. In its place the caption needs to install itself, which implicates photo-graphy in the litarization of all the conditions of life and without which all photo-graphic construction is stalled in vagueness (93)

While Sebald avoids the traditional caption, which despite Benjamin's demand for it, would continue to stall "the viewer's association mechanism " by definitively fixing the photograph to a specific time and place, he goes even further in weaving the photographic image into the fabric of literature. The entire text becomes the caption and the viewer is rescued from being "stalled in vagueness" as the potential for the interpretive movement remains open. This openness sets the stage for the possibility of an exchange between the universal and particular as Sebald provides a universal context for the image while at the same time leaves this context open enough for Austerlitz, as well as the readers, to create their own particular associations. The captioning of images of *Austerlitz* with the narrative therefore participates in the "litarization" of life by allowing particular involvement (the individual viewer is able to make their own memorial associations within a text that collects memories). Sebald therefore creates a work which involves an exchange between word and image that resists a totalizing effect on either side.[25]

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[25] In her article "Sebald's Apparitional Nabokov," Karen Jacobs identifies a similar tendency of Sebald's in to "unceremoniously shatters a series of totalities in turn" (140).

Because *Austerlitz* resists a totalizing narrative through the relationship between image and the written word, Sebald invites creative participation as the reader is left to puzzle over the images in order to connect them to Austerlitz's particular history as well as to the universal historical events which occurred in the places they frequently depict. Such participation further establishes the need for the connection and interaction between the collective and individual experiences of memory through the transference of postmemory; though, in this case, the transference is not between characters, but to the reader. Sebald solicits the reader's participation in the act of postmemory through the inclusion of images of the haunted, empty, and disorienting spaces of Europe not only in the wake of the Holocaust but before and during WWII as well. With the photos that are placed alongside Austerlitz's story, the reader is also forced to participate in a chain of memory that reaches back to the rise of Nazism (for example, in the still of the propaganda video of Theresienstadt) and well before the war (many of the photos of architecture are of structures built in the 18th and 19th centuries). By refusing to limit the text to the 20th century and opting instead to explore a wide swath of European history, Sebald seems to signal for the need to create a memory of the past that is, again, devoid of a singular origin but acknowledges the inherited nature of history and memory. Instead, the text seeks to contextualize what might be considered the singular event of the Holocaust (in that it falls under a single name) in larger scale of collective history just as it seeks to contextualize the individual (Austerlitz) in the larger scale of history.

When thinking about the presence of photography in Sebald's text, it is again helpful to turn to mysticism's treatment of imagery and the written word. In many ways, photographs play a crucial role in *Austerlitz* in the same way that the diagrams play a crucial role in Kabbalistic texts and, although these forms of language and light function in different manners, they cannot

be separated from one another. Maria Segol notes that the separation of text from image is an oversight that plagues early translations of the Kabbalah (which are often published without the original illustrations) and the analysis of such translations. For her, divorcing the image from the text and the text from the image, "effectively separates mystical thought from material culture" (3) and blatantly ignores one of mysticism's most central concerns: the porous relationship between the material and spiritual world. Therefore, any method of analysis which cleaves the world into the artificially separate spheres of materiality and thought ignores the ways in which the two categories influence one another. Sebald can be understood as involved in a similar project. Rather than quarantine Austerlitz's theoretical musings from the physical world, Sebald demands that the world of thought and the world of materiality meet. And where is this meeting place? As is the case with the Kabbalah, it is in the space between language (or thought) and materiality (or image) and the creative, interpretive movement which occurs by way of their connection.

Reading language and image as part of a dialectic, and therefore in constant conversation with one another, not only establishes an understanding of the world of memory as both material and abstract, but helps to reveal the constructed, layered nature of history and memory. Segol elaborates on this through her discussion of the necessarily interwoven nature of the written word and the image in Kabbalah, noting that: "In the dialogue between text and diagram it is possible to observe the manipulation of an older tradition by a new one, and vice versa" (8). Here, Segol is referring to the fact that the texts which accompany many of the diagrams of the *sefirot* in Jewish mysticism were likely written well after the diagrams themselves were produced.[26] Yet, if we read Sebald in the way that Segol would have us read mystical texts—as an engaged dialogue

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[26] Since mystical teaching were notoriously secretive and passed down in an exclusively oral manner until the medieval period, it is believed that the diagrams stem from an "older tradition" than the text itself. (**cite**)

between the image and the text—it is possible to further reveal the manipulations involved in memory and the ways in which these manipulations seek to reclaim a past of violent erasure through acts of creation.

Each image was, by necessity, created before Sebald's completion of the text and before the consumption of the text by a reader. Essentially, this means that the photographs and the blueprints stem from an "older" historical tradition which predates the text's creation. In the creation of Austerlitz's story, Sebald inserts these photographs, these links to a very real past, and uses the more recent tradition of Austerlitz's journey to manipulate them, forming them into a story. Often, the manipulation of images forces the world of thought, or Austerlitz's narration, into direct contact with the material world through the physical representations of the places and objects he discusses. As a moment of reconciliation, between the recently created life of Austerlitz and the photographs and images which have existed long before he was formed on the page, Sebald draws attention to the notion that even though Austerlitz's story is fictional, it does not proceed from a single point of origin, but instead from multiple sources that have a very material basis in the physical world.[27] This serves to situate the text within a larger historical context even as it is itself a 21st century source. The photographs signal to a layered history, a creation with no singular origin, and therefore bring up associations of a vast past that would be impossible to access solely through written language. The synthesis we get from reading the text and the image together is the synthesis of a form of memory that is both individual and collective, that allows a singular reader to participate, at least partially, in an accumulation of collective trauma.

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[27] The relationship between factuality and fiction in *Austerlitz* is not an easy one to define, and will be discussed at greater length later in this paper.

But this manipulation, of the older traditions by the new, is not uni-directional. As Segol

states, this manipulation also functions in "vice versa." The photographs also manipulate the text.

Specifically, the photographs of architecture (be it the metro stations, the ruined forts, the current

state of Terezín) manipulate the text in that they force a text that is immensely concerned with

the past into the "present." Obviously, as was pointed out above, the photographs represent a

time that is no longer. Yet, by preserving that time in the eternal state in which it was just

happening, the moment in which the photograph was taken, photography opens up a feeling of

eternal now-ness, a way to examine the past through, quite literally, the lens of the present.

Photography thus bends time in such a way that the reader is able to experience a past time as if

it were occurring in the current moment. This experience seems to echo Walter Benjamin's

concept of now-time, in which the past is "blasted out of the continuum of history" (395) by

considering historical places or events through the context of current ones.[28] Thus, the

photographs manipulate a text that takes place entirely in the language of the past tense and use

an experience of the present in order to read the past. This engagement with now-time is, similar

to *tikkun,* focused on redemption and aims to, according to Benjamin, "awaken the dead, and

make whole what has been smashed" (392). However, just as with *tikkun,* the gathering of "what

has been smashed" is never complete. Because the post-Holocaust "now" is in many ways

desolate, so too is the past (hence all the photos of empty spaces). The dead may be awakened,

but they are awakened as ghosts. The *tikkun* memory which is experienced through the now-time

of Sebald's photos is not a return to an original state, a rewinding to perfection, but rather a new

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[28] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History." To draw out this comparison, Benjamin uses the moment of the French Revolution's relationship to the history of Rome as an example of now-time. Because Robespierre understood the revolution as "Rome incarnate," he was able to view the past (Rome) through the lens of the present moment (the French Revolution).

form of creation. Thus, while the past is able to be redeemed, in some ways gathered and remade, it is never able to be fully reclaimed.

There is yet another productive connection to be made between Kabbalistic diagrams and Sebald's photography. This is the connection and the dialogue between the image and the text and what this dialogue says about factuality and fiction. Segol explains that in the Kabbalah "the meaning of both texts and diagrams comes from their relationship, and separating them deprives us of a chance to consider it" (3). In the same way that the diagrams of the Kabbalah do not reflect an actual physical space (but instead, according to Segol, create a mental map of sorts) Sebald's photographs, while they absolutely reflect space, do not represent the factual reality which they claim to represent. As James Woods' introduction to the novel notes that although Sebald's use of "photographs relies on, and plays off of, the tradition and verity of reportage," the photographs themselves are, in fact, fictional within the context of the story (xiii). Despite this, these photographs are not purely fictional. Many of them are represent historical structures and characters and are therefore simultaneously both fictional and factual, real and unreal. They do not represent the reality they claim (in fact, this would be impossible as Austerlitz is a created character), but they do represent some physical reality in the world, some actual existence, even if the origin behind such an existence is obscured. Thus the photographs represent a duality: they are based in fact, but not the facts Sebald claims for them.[29]

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[29] In an interview Sebald clarifies that "the majority of the photographs do come from the albums that certainly middle-class people kept in the thirties and forties." (41). So, while their use in the story is fictional (Sebald is not trying to recreate the lives of those who owned the photo albums in exactitude), their sources are the same historical time as the narrative. (Schwartz, Lynn Sharon. *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald.* New York, Seven Stories Press, 2007)

Perhaps the most obvious objection to reading the images of *Austerlitz* alongside Jewish mysticism is the question of iconoclasm. If Jewish mysticism can be categorized as iconoclastic, then how is it possible to use it to decipher Sebald's inclusion of imagery? The rebuttal lies in seemingly contradictory terms of iconoclasm in Jewish mysticism. On one hand, the *Sefir Yetzirah* claims that "the *Sefirot* are inexpressible by their very nature" (26). But on the other hand, they are nonetheless diagrammed in a way that physically represents them. This is explained by the fact that these representations are not replications of human or animal bodies, and are therefore not "creation" in the strictest sense. Nonetheless, they do have an undeniably visual component. A similar trend occurs in *Austerlitz.* Though the novel clearly replicates images of creation, it shies away from *clear or exact* representation, and very rarely makes use of human images. Of the sixty-five black and white photographs in the text, only thirteen contain a human form. Of these thirteen, only seven portray a complete, recognizable human face. Why is this? Perhaps there is a dark analogy to be made, again, between mysticism and memory: If we cannot capture the glory of God, is it possible that, in a perverse reflection of this theory, that we cannot truly capture the horror of the holocaust through imagery alone? Is there a way which, as Segol stated above, the exchange between the text and the image is necessary for such a project?

Andrea Liss, in her introduction to *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography & the Holocaust* notes that through encounters with the "debilitating photographic images of victims seen in the most mute and degrading states of pathos" viewers are "stunned by the photographs' blinding violence." (xi) The ironic ability of a photograph to blind clearly forges a connection between photography, especially that of a graphic nature, and light, which also has the conflicting ability to both illuminate and blind. At the same time, this statement

suggests that the direct, shocking, and "factual" depictions of horrific violence might create a barrier between viewers in the present and the bodies or spaces of the past which would keep them from actually engaging with it. Sebald skirts this pitfall, which risks inuring the public to the past, by only including photographs which allude to loss, often through the emptiness of the frame, and absolutely none which gesture towards the mutilated, skeletal bodies so commonly associated with the loss of Jewish life during WWII. Memory is therefore achieved through a negative, rather than a positive representation of violence. The reader must fill in the blanks by drawing from the resources of the text's personal narratives and historical facts. Instead he accesses these memories of loss indirectly, by locating them in a broader historical context composed largely of architecture, landscape, and objects. There is one exception to Sebald's visual muteness on direct experiences of death: a photograph of several skulls in the mud, a halo of rainwater around the central cranium. Yet, even this reference is indirect in a way. Understandably, it is hard to not imagine a connection to the concentration camps when the page is turned and one is confronted with an image that is impossible to dissociate from death, but, the text references not the victims of Nazi persecution, but the bodies of patients from an asylum which now rests beneath Liverpool station. Even in this moment of direct imager, the language of the text geographically defers such associations, transporting the bodies to England, rather than Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Ukraine. The genius of this is that it allows an understanding of reality without equating it to a factual obsession with reality. Rather it creates a feeling of empathy, confusion, displacement that allows for an emotional transference of the Holocaust without the voyeurism that is so often involved. In the same way that Sebald refuses to use direct, totalizing language to describe the holocaust, but rather skirts around the corners of such monumental tragedies, so he treats his photographs. Both mediums avoid direct representation

and, in doing so, leave a respectful distance for the dead while also attempting to form a

collective memory that is able to address both the horror of the holocaust and the essential loss,

or emptiness.

Now that the dialogue between text and image has been explored, a closer examination of

the specifics of photography's unique role in *tikkun* memory may begin. As has already been

addressed, images in both the Kabbalah and in *Austerlitz* express a material presence. But what,

precisely, is the nature of this materiality? One answer to this question is intimately tied up with

notions of emptiness and, by extension, space. Sebald's photographs offer up a method of

addressing the problem of forgetting through the materialization and spatialization of emptiness.

By displaying the abandoned objects of Terezín (196-7) and the flat surfaces of the empty halls

of Breendonk which once teemed with prisoners (23), Sebald uses photography to express the

material of the forgotten in a way which is inherently unavailable to language except through the

use of a blank page. This material presence is essential to discussions of the Holocaust, or any

traumatic event that exits both with and without survivors and therefore relies on a system that

includes both memory and forgetting. Such representation of emptiness or loss relate back to the

way in which mystical diagrams seek to portray the inherent ineffability of God. Despite the fact

that complete understanding of God is impossible, there is nevertheless a bewildering attempt to

illustrate that which is unreachable and unfathomable in the divine through the image of *keter,*

the crown *sefirot* at the very top of the *sefirotic* diagrams. Essentially, the images of *Austerlitz*

represent a similar endeavor: to materially address that which is no longer through a certain

blankness in the present moment. In order to do so the photographs must somehow take on the

paradoxical task of representing a past that, due to violence of WWII, has been rendered unreachable and unfathomable.

Austerlitz expresses a fascination with photography's unique ability to convey blankness. Responding to the question of why photographs appeal to him, he explains that, "Pictures which in their very emptiness, as I realized only later, reflected my orphaned frame of mind" (265). In this statement, he identifies photography as a medium which is particularly adept at mirroring the blankness of forgetfulness and erasure which he has experienced so extensively throughout his life. To a certain extent, photography is able to touch on his orphaned past (and present) in a way that language, through its positive presence, is unable to. Now, while the emptiness of Austerlitz's photos is analogous to the seemingly empty space of his past, such an emptiness (the emptiness of historical and individual forgetting) is not void. Just as Austerlitz's past is not void, but is instead full of something beyond the direct language of his family, so too are the text's photographs full of something which is beyond language. As such, Sebald presents his readers with images, often of empty or abandoned spaces—such as the empty hallways of Breendonk (pictured below), the uninhabited fields of Prague's Seminar Garden, or the abandoned *Antikos Bazar* of Terezín (23, 162, 194-5)—in order to access this pregnant emptiness. Although these empty photographic spaces are, by definition, devoid of sound or written language they are a unique and paradoxical representation of a silence that speaks.

In *The Differend,* Jean-Francoise Lyotard addresses this exact subject, saying, "the silence imposed on knowledge does not impose the silence of forgetting, it imposes a feeling" (56*)*. So, while there is undoubtable a silence surrounding Austerlitz's knowledge of the past due to the fact that both his biological and adoptive parents have died, he is not doomed to forgetting. Rather, he is confined to feeling. When faced with an accumulation of a past that resists traditional methods of knowing (for example, through family history), Austerlitz is often gripped with a ghostly perception. In describing his childhood, he realizes that he "never shook of the feeling that something very obvious, very manifest in itself was hidden from me" (54). This feeling—of absence, of missing—manifests in a nearly palpable way as Austerlitz comes to feel "as if an invisible twin brother were walking beside me, the reverse of a shadow." (55) Here, absence, or blankness, creates its own object, the twin, that, through his invisibility, both is and is not present. Undeniably, this twin's symbolism is quite rich and multivalent, but one way of understanding this invisible presence is to conceptualize the twin as the light (the opposite of shadow) of the restless feeling that "something very obvious" is being missed. Alongside the shadowy Austerlitz, the two can be understood as a metaphorical photograph, light and shadow, that which is invisible and that which is not. As a way of knowledge this feeling, this twin, lies outside the realm of the collective facts of history or the accumulated lore of family stories. Instead, it lives in the body, the life of the personal and the present. Certainly it is difficult to think of anything more individual, more personalized than this embodied feeling. However, and it is precisely this feeling, this search-light twin, that urges Austerlitz on in his search for what has been hidden from him: his memory. In this way, Austerlitz's feelings, which are deeply individual and personal, compel him to collect both language (oral stories and written accounts) and images (photographs and blueprints) as he participates in the gathering process of *tikkun*

memory. Through this, he begins to connect reservoirs of institutionalized memory of history to his personal past, thereby creating a sense of the past that is full of both the presence and absence of memory.

Andrea Liss confirms the important role that feeling plays when facing forgotten and unreachable elements of the past. "If history renders facts, then the spaces between what cannot be documented or what has been obliterated render feelings for what cannot be recalled as facts" (9).[30] The photographs in Sebald's text seem to represent these very spaces of loss and feeling and, at some points, may even act as a materialization of the memories which belong to those who did not survive the violence of the Holocaust. Indeed, Vera describes her experience with certain photographs as if she were describing a personal interaction with a memorial past: "[it was] as if the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us had played in our former lives" (182-3). The photos, in this case, are similar to Austerlitz's twin in that they signal to a memory of a hidden past. They are both there, and not there. They symbolize both the ultimate presence, and the ultimate loss, of the lives claimed in the devastation of WWII.

In an interview, Sebald explained that "photographs are for me, as it were, one of the emanations of the dead, especially these older photographs of people no longer with us" (41). So photographs, just like the *sefirot* are "emanations" and certain parallels can be drawn between the two. In one instance, Sebald's use of empty photographs forms the notion of a past that is both present and absent which is similar to the ineffability of God that is nonetheless portrayed by the diagrams of mysticism. Each emanation of God, each *sefirot,* represents God at the same

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[30] Liss, Andrea. *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, & the Holocaust.* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. 1998.

time that it materializes the very essence of God which is unrepresentable. Only by viewing each of the *sefirot* within relation to one another, that is viewing them as a collective whole, can the evasive magnitude of divinity begin to be grasped. Sebalds's photographic collection is similar. They must be seen in relation to one another, and therefore become spaces of connection, between images but also between the living and the dead, the past and the present. Through this layered connection the photographs, similar to the *sefirot* help to form a network of identities.

In addition to creating a network which encompasses both survivors and the deceased, memory and forgetting, blankness also allows for an imaginative projection of feeling. Often when the text presents an image of emptiness, Austerlitz attempts to forge an emotional connection to the past by imaginatively engaging with how others were feeling. Thus, the blank and the empty, provide a canvas on which Austerlitz attempts to trace a connection between himself, a memorial individual, and a collective past of pain and suffering. As examples, the tunnel of Breendonk (pictured above) as well as the image of the blank wall and the dead moth (below) are both followed immediately by Austerlitz's desire to understand the feelings of others. While in Breendonk he struggles to picture the labor and pain of those who were interned there and when he regards the dead moth he asks, "I wonder what kind of fear and pain they feel while they are lost." (94)

Blankness and emptiness, therefore, provide (in a similar way that forgetting might provide) an opening for creation through an imaginative connection. Such a connection occurs between the

individual of the present moment (such as Austerlitz) and the collective identities of the past (such as the prisoners of Breendonk or the moths on the wall). As yet another aspect of *tikkun* memory, this projection onto blankness, this imaginative space of the past, allows for a reclamation of memory that does not cover up the fact that the past, and especially the past of trauma, is often blank or unknowable. Yet, in Austerlitz's engagement with blankness, Sebald seems to indicate that, despite the fact that such a past does not offer up pure facts and clear lines, engaging with it in order to create a new form of memory, a memory of feelings, in the face of such blankness is nonetheless possible.

BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE: SPACES OF CONNECTION

But blank and empty spaces are not the only spaces which foster the connection between individuals and collectives. In fact, they are certainly the more abstract of Sebald's examples of spaces of connection and transition which clearly hold a particular fascination for Sebald. Not only does the story center around the mobility provided by transportation, but a significant portion of the photographs are of spaces of the literal "in-between": doorways, metro stations, stairwells, and hallways. These spaces, similar to the *nativ* paths connecting the *sefirot,* represent the paradoxical ability to be both one, an individual, and many, a collective. One of the ways in which Sebald explores this connective potential is through his engagement with doors.

While discussing doors in *The Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard notes that "the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of a daydream that accumulates desires and temptations" (237). Sebald seems to hold a similar notion of the importance of door in that they often represent an entrance to the past that can be both terrifying and utopian, representing both destructive and constructive desires. On one hand Austerlitz fears "the doors behind which our childhood terrors lurk" (25), while on the other

hand, he admits to dreaming that "one of those locked doors opens up and I step through it, to a friendlier, more familiar world" (44). In either sense the doors represent the two sides of any escape into a past: the terror of discovering a past of pain and the imaginative hope of discovering what once was. Therefore, this primal half-openness signals the potential for connection to the past and the creation of memory.
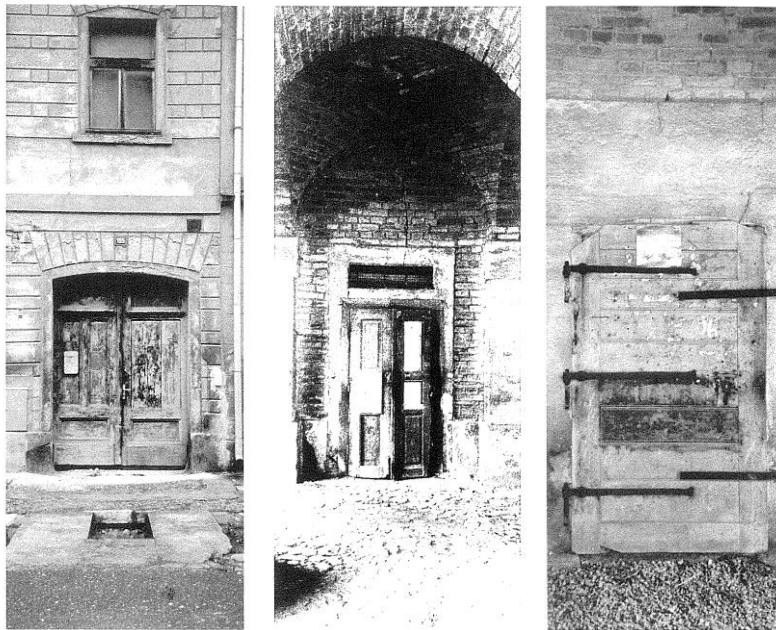
Doors do not appear solely in the text's language, but they also feature prominently in the photographs, as the above images indicate. Generally, Sebald disperses his photos throughout the text. However, there is one exception to this practice which occurs when Austerlitz finally visits Terezín—the final location of his mother before her death. In a series of four pages, the reader is greeted with monumental door after monumental door. In some ways, it gives one the sense of walking through each of them, only to encounter another door. The object, the image of the mother, is constantly deferred and, as such, movement through door after door of the past, is constant. The doors emphasize both the presence and absence of memory, the potential of discovery as well as the ultimate loss of certainty. While they are physical present, they do not offer up what lies behind them. Instead, they emphasize spaces of connection, of movement,

rather than a space of arrival. This connection is not only between the individual and the

collective (Austerlitz and his family) but between the past and the present and the constant

movement, the unending opening of doors, that goes into the creation of memorial connection.

MEMORY AND BECOMING SPACE

Michel de Certeau elaborates on the relationship between memory and space as an

essentially transformative one. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* he claims that "Memory

mediates spatial transformations [...] Its foreignness makes possible a transgression of the law of

the place" (85). Photographs, as Roland Barthes points out in *Camera Lucida,* captures space and

invite engagement. They must be "habitable, not visitable. This longing to inhabit [...] is

fantasmic, deriving from a kind of second sight" (40). They represent a space and, importantly,

an ability, or desire, to live in, and transform, that space. Perhaps on account of this relationship,

the ability to remember, as well as the potential to forget, constantly evoke spatial metaphors in

Austerlitz. Obviously Sebald's preoccupation with architecture and his persistent reminders of

the layering effect with which history blankets space (for example, Liverpool station, which was

at one point a convent, at another an asylum, before transforming itself into its current identity as

a transport hub) play with notions of the relationship between time and space and their effect on

memory. However, there is also a sense in which individuals, through memory, *become* the

spaces they inhabit, essentially transforming both the space and themselves. The experience of

this internalization of space affects Austerlitz at crucial points throughout the text, almost always

when he is moving—either on the subway or walking. This metaphoric opening signals a

creative potential, or the ability to exist between an individual and collective identity which is

afforded only by movement through space.

In this, manner Austerlitz navigates space in a way which also allows him to navigate the particularities of a past which are both deeply personal and broadly applicable. Sebald suggests that this process is both incredibly creative, and incredibly painful, similar to the process of *tikkun*. In order to fully understand this, we will first examine an instance in which Austerlitz encounters others merging with the spaces that contain them and then an instance where he himself becomes spatialized.

When visiting the Térezin ghetto, the last known locale of his mother Agàta, Austerlitz is assaulted by a thought which illuminates the dynamic relationship between humans and the spaces they occupy. Walking through the fortress turned ghetto, he describes how, "it suddenly seemed to me, with the greatest clarity, that they [the Czech Jews] had never been taken away after all, but were still living crammed into those buildings and basements and attics, as if they were incessantly going up and down the stairs, looking out of windows, moving in vast numbers throughout the streets and alleys" (200) This hallucinatory image indicate the importance of motion to memories of trauma, the significance of space, and the necessity of negotiating the distance between monumental and individual memories in several levels. First, it makes memory physically palpable. In this sense it overlays the past with the present through a manipulation of space. Thus it combines an abstract engagement with the past with the lived, physical reality of the present. It also, significantly, implies motion, using the present participle (going, looking, moving) to describe a past that which is decidedly immobile—the dead. In this sense, Sebald signals to the possibility of the impossible motion of the dead through memory and movement through space. Here, movement is, however, not one of complete freedom, but is, rather, restricted in a sense. It is an inability to be still while also being confined by boundaries (be they of space or of time). Again, such an image illustrates the idea of a unified whole (the community

incarcerated in the fortress) which contains fractured multitudes (individuals which jostle against one another). This paradoxical display of motion is an expression of both hope (perhaps his mother, perhaps all those killed in the Holocaust are not really dead) and terror (the claustrophobia of being forever contained in a space of torture). Perhaps more importantly it allows Austerlitz, an isolated individual, to connect with a monumental past, a collective being which he was denied by the deliberate erasure of his past and identity by the parents who raised him in Wales.

As was previously mentioned, Austerlitz's experience of spatial memory is not limited to his projection of others, the family and culture he has been irreparably alienated from, but applies to himself as well. In an inversion of sorts, Austerlitz, suffering from one of his bouts of catatonic amnesia, experiences an opening of mental space (rather than a merging with material space). Austerlitz experiences this mental internalization in a way that is significantly changed from a well-known memory technique of the memory palace which entails a mental construction of space. Seth Long explains in his article "Excavating the Memory Palace," that a memory palace, at its most functional, is based on the "familiar place of sorts" (generally a domestic space) and filled with emotionally evocative objects (125). On the other hand, when Austerlitz experiences an internalization of space is, the reader is exposed a space which, though familiar in the sense that it takes the form of a labyrinth of métro stations, is expansive and conspicuously devoid of objects. Austerlitz elaborates:

> I lay there in my semi-conscious condition for several days and in that
> state I saw myself wandering around a maze of long passages, vaults,
> galleries, and grottoes where the names of various Métro stations—
> Campo Formio, Crimeé, Elysée, Ilena, Invalides, Oberkampf, Simplon,
> Solferno, Stalingrad— and certain discolorations and shadings in the air
> seemed to indicate that this was a place of exile for those who had fallen
> on the field of honor, or lost their lives in some other violent way (269).

Again, memory is an experience of perpetual motion, a journey between the collective and the individual. Importantly, in this moment Austerlitz does not mention the station with which he shares a name. This opens up the possibility of understanding Austerlitz as a station and therefore, as a symbol of transition, connection and mobility. Similar to the doors discussed above, metros are spaces which facilitate both connection between individuals and collectives and movement. It seems fitting, then, that Austerlitz, a man who is constantly engaging in *tikkun* memory and therefore tracing the paths between the universal and the particular, can be hazily identified with the metro station. To further the overlap between Austerlitz the man and Austerlitz the station, the above quote also attends to "a place of exile." The constant motion in Austerlitz's life, his lack of a home, his removal from his family, and his Jewish heritage all indicate that exile, and the movement which is a necessary function of exile. By understanding Austerlitz as one might understand a metro station, as a transitional space of mobility and potential, Sebald deepens a characterization of Austerlitz as a character who is both individual and collective. In addition to this, he also becomes the sight of potential synthesis as memories (both his own and the memories of others) move through and are united within him.

Finally, while the readers never see a picture of Austerlitz, the person, Sebald allows (almost iconoclastically) a second-hand portrait of Austerlitz, the station (which is seen below). Interestingly the photo spans both pages and includes both text an image. It is possible to understand this as an ultimate representation of the network of *tikkun* Sebald is attempting to create: one which includes both language and image, individual and collective identities, and the layered nature of history. Again, this connects the individual identity to a massive network, a network of transportation and layered space.
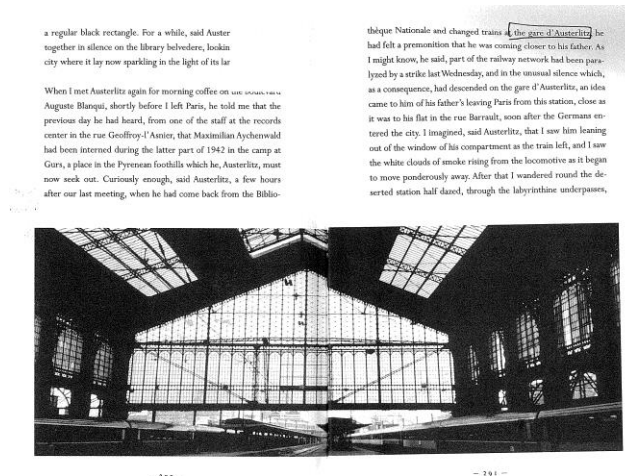
Now that a selection of *Austerlitz'*s photos have been examined as particular images in isolation. After all, it would be antithetical to this very project's emphasis on the relational network that exists between the universal and the particular to leave these images in their particular state without acknowledging the universal figure which they create. Instead, we, as viewers can move between their individual identity and the collective unit they offer. In looking back over these photographs: the stairs outside Vera's apartment, the blank wall, the hallway of Breendonk, the doors of Terezín, the glass ceilings of gare d'Austerlitz, we can begin to see a phantasmic house. Throughout the entire novel Sebald provides pieces of buildings (including, even, the floor). Thus, on a macro level, the use of photographs can be understood as both particular, isolated fragments, at the same time that they offer the very potential of *tikkun.* By gathering each of these up, we can create a whole that is simultaneously one and many, that facilitates movement within its walls.

AN ETERNAL RING: MAPPING THE KABBALAH ONTO *AUSTERLITZ*

Suitably, this thesis will conclude by examining the structure of *Austerlitz's* ending. The novel ends, not with Austerlitz, but with his absence as the narrator arrives to town after a day at Breendonk "as evening began to fall." (297) The text's geographic symmetry paired with the

imagery of a darkening world creates an atmosphere of somber beauty— a soft tragedy full of

implications that are difficult to ignore. The narrator has ended up in the same location in which

the book began, creating a circle into which darkness descends. In this cycle of creation and

destruction, clarity, resolutions, or complete reclamation of the past have not been granted.

Austerlitz continues to search for his father, still knows very little about his mother, and is left to

imagine the lives he might have lived had his family remained together. In many ways, Sebald

seems to suggest that, rather than absolute certainty or complete memorial creation, this partial

movement, between what we know, or remember, and what we do not, or forget, is important in

and of itself. If memory is indeed part of a creative network, then it must, inherently be imperfect

and incomplete, not a question of ability/inability, but neither and both. The circular nature of the

novel affirms this by returning to the beginning and confirming the endless nature of memorial

movement. However, it is now the narrator, rather than Austerlitz, on this memorial journey and

change which signals the connection of memory and its transference from Austerlitz to the

narrator. By ending in darkness, Sebald gestures towards memory's foundation in destruction

and shattering even as creative movement, such as the narrator's involvement in aspects of

Austerlitz's past, continues on.

The circular, chiastic structure of *Austerlitz* is not unique to contemporary novels, but

also plays a significant role in the structure of Jewish mystical texts. Segol discusses the cyclical

formation of many Jewish mystical texts, called the "ring structure," and their diagrams by

explaining that "the second half of the story echoes the first, as if the writer is walking backward

through the plot. The ending is a return to the beginning" (43). Not only does this draw attention

to the continuous memorial movement of the text by implying that the narrative will begin again

from a beginning which is also the end, but it also forces the reader to orient the text spatially.

Segol explains that, within this structure, "in order to make meaning of the text, the reader must visualize its elements in spatial relationship to one another" (44). Thus, the ring structure of *Austerlitz* further emphasizes a network of relationships that is both about visualizing a spatial relationship between textual events (the way one might visualize a trip once it has been taken), as well as the relationships which the parts play within the whole. In doing so, the structure emphasizes both the notion of constant motion and the importance of acknowledging the separation of the parts and the unity of the whole simultaneously.

The symmetry of the novel is not only a symmetry of place (Breendonk) and language, but also one of imagery. The novel opens with an image of Austerlitz's office, which is pictured below on the left (32) and ends with "the room filled with open shelves up to the ceiling where the files on the prisoners in the little fortress of Terezín" (284).
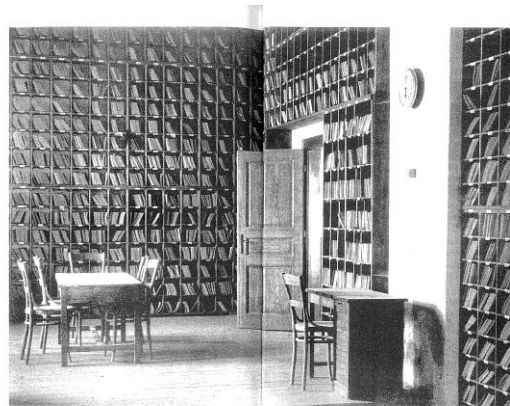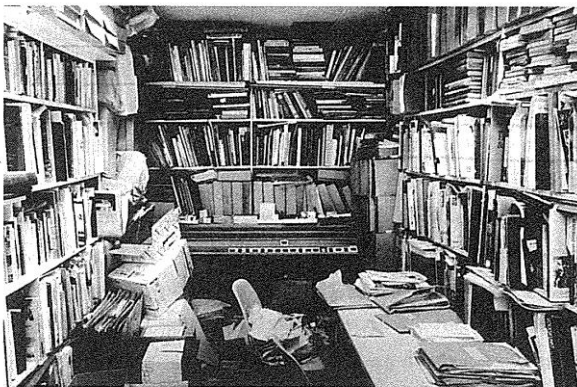
There are certainly similarities between the two, and thus a circle is invoked. However, it is necessary to emphasize that this return, this circle, of the text is not a perfect return to the past. A cyclical structure is not to imply that nothing has changed and, just like the practice of *tikkun*, this creative return is rather a refashioning or recreation of a past hat has been shattered. In examining these pictures, a change *is* evident. The records and shelves pictured at the end of the book are, neat, orderly and, while they host the horrific details of the suffering of those interned

at Terezín, they also hold a record of Austerlitz's specific past: the record of his mother. While

his office before assumedly contained vast stores of collective knowledge (architectural history,

books of theory, etc), the room in which the book ends contains deeply individual and personal

knowledge (the knowledge of specific and particular lives). Importantly, by ensuring that both

the language and the images within the text are part of the same symbolic cycle, Sebald

continues to assert the importance of viewing the two together.

CONCLUSION

> Facts are important not as data with fixed meanings, but as connective pathways
> that can continue to surprise us. Facts should inspire imagination rather than tying
> it down. The less they are subsumed under the fiction of secure knowledge,
> marshaled as proof of a predetermined and authoritative thesis, the more truth
> they are capable of revealing.
> — Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (14)

Although the above quote by Buck-Morss specifically addresses neither memory nor

Sebald, I am hard pressed to find an excerpt that more aptly lays out the significance of the

connection between, and the coexistence of, fact and imagination in relation to the past. If we

read Buck-Morss within the context of *Austerlitz,* her ideas, while inspirational, reflect

imagination's darker, more tragic side. Here, the "truth" reached is the truth of trauma and

irreversible loss and the imagination inspired by facts is the imagining of—on a universal level—

a past genocide and—on a particular level—an imagined family life that was never allowed to

flourish. When applying Buck-Morss' ideas to the concept of memory the argument of this thesis

manifest clearly. Memories, and especially memories that have to deal with trauma, are more

"capable of revealing" truth when the "connective pathways" of history are not treated as secure,

unarguable knowledge. This focus on the creative movement which allows for unique and

surprising connections through the connective pathways of history, emphasizes the importance of action and agency in any form of meaning making—including both memory and forgetfulness.

Buck-Morss' notion conflicts with how memory and forgetting are often understood: as passive events and "secure knowledge." We refer to memory as something that happens to us, often in the same terms used to talk about the weather or natural events. Forgetting is discussed as if it were a snowstorm—something that suddenly hides everything from view. Meanwhile, memory is a wave—an event that suddenly washes over us, carrying us away with the force of the past. Now, although the involuntary aspects of memory have been well established (we need only to think of Proust's madeleine), there are undoubtedly ways in which a configuration suggesting that memory is wholly unintentional or that the most powerful memories are involuntary, overlooks the ways in which memory is an act both of agency and creativity. In an effort to critique this understanding, this thesis has explored Kabbalistic notions of creation, *tikkun*, the movement of the *sefirot* and the importance of the image as each relate to memories of trauma in Sebald's novel. By reading these texts in tandem, we can begin to see the ways in which memory is a continuous, cyclical, act of creation that embodies both loss and creativity, forgetting and memory. In light of this, *Austerlitz* proposes a model of memory that is reliant on mobility, and particularly the ability to move between universal and particular pasts and places. Through this memorial movement, Sebald creates a form of memory that is deeply involved in the eternal process of *tikkun,* an act of creation that allows one to hold on to memories of life before loss, without erasing the fact that loss certainly took place, that there is no going back. In light of this seemingly impossible paradox, Jewish mysticism offers that the creation of memory, if it can be anything, is a synthesis of the new, a never-complete whole that is part of an eternal process of collection, unification, and destruction.

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