

HISTORY, NARRATIVE, AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN W. G. SEBALD'S *DIE AUSGEWANDERTEN*

Located at the intersection of biography and autobiography, history and fiction, travel writing and memoir, the narrative works of W. G. Sebald resist traditional genre categories. They partake instead of a generic hybridity dictated by the ambitious scope of Sebald's project, which involves an exploration of man's historical relationship to his environment, the connection between individual, familial, and collective memory, and the means by which such memory is passed on from one generation to the next.

Narratives that seek, like Sebald's, to reconstruct or reevaluate family history and biographical itineraries tend to use photographic images in one of two ways. On the one hand, biographies and autobiographies, especially those of a 'non-literary' nature, frequently include photographic plates that may even occupy a separate quire and whose primary function is documentary. Such photographs assume a 'naive' reader for whom the images refer to a reality that is ontologically prior to the text that frames them. On the other hand, numerous post-war novelists have used family snaps as a starting point for narrative meditations, some prominent German-language examples being Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (1959), Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976), Thomas Bernhard's *Auslöschung* (1986), and Peter Schneider's *Vati* (1987). In all these works, however, photographs are merely described; they are not reproduced within the pages of the text. In the first instance, then, photographs exist as pure evidence, while in the second instance they are paradoxically accessible solely through the interpretations to which they give rise.¹

In contrast to these stable, even reductive, uses of photography, Sebald's literary work, from the 'Elementargedicht' *Nach der Natur* (1988) to *Austerlitz* (2001), is striking in its combination of heterogeneous photographic material and verbal text. Perhaps the most obvious question that comes to mind when reading Sebald's work concerns the authenticity of the photographs. The author himself obliquely touched on this issue when he confessed in a *Guardian* interview that he had always collected 'stray photographs' because 'there's a lot of memory in them'.² These comments implicitly call into question the photographs' documentary status: do the images in Sebald's text really represent what the text tells us they represent, or are they merely 'stray photographs' around which a story has been woven? The nature of the chemical and physical processes involved means that photographs always represent specific realities, but the text that situates the photograph historically and geographically may mislead, undermining the documentary reliability of the photographic image. This device contributes to the ontological hide-and-seek that Sebald plays with his readers, which both invites and thwarts attempts to separate fact from

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¹ Monika Maron's recent *Pawels Briefe* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999) is comparable to Sebald's work in that it incorporates photographic images and uses them to reconstruct family history. A comparison of the two may be instructive, but falls outside the scope of the present article.

² 'Recovered Memories', *Guardian*, 22 September 2001, Review Section, pp. 6–7 (p. 7).

fiction. It may be, however, that such attempts miss the point. The blurring of the distinction between fact and fiction is germane to Sebald's texts, and any attempt to redraw the boundaries that the author systematically effaces may well impoverish rather than enrich our understanding of his work. For this reason, the reading offered in this article brackets the problem of referential authenticity. I explore Sebald's most impressive and coherent work, *Die Ausgewanderten*, in an attempt to relate the formal interaction of narrative and photography to the conceptions of history and memory that are implied by the text. My interest in the photographs lies less in their reference to an external reality than in their role within the textual economy of *Die Ausgewanderten*.

The combination of image and words is a constant in Sebald's work. In the first edition of *Nach der Natur*, the text is preceded and followed by a total of four two-page spreads carrying high-quality reproductions of empty landscapes.³ The dust-jacket blurb implies a mode of reception that reads text and image in conjunction:

Als Entsprechung und Illumination empfehlen sich die Photographien von Thomas Becker, die mit Großbildkamera und nicht zu überbietender Detailschärfe eine Natur zeigt, die den zutiefst melancholischen Gedanken nahelegt, die Welt käme besser aus ohne den Menschen und wäre ganz bei sich nur als eine Welt ohne Sinn.

And yet this caption also raises numerous questions: who is responsible for these words? Precisely how do the photographs 'correspond to' or 'illuminate' the text? What is the status of the 'melancholy' interpretation offered? Do the photographs themselves resist such a univocal ascription of meaning? All these questions ultimately lead to a consideration of the role of language in determining the 'meaning' of photographs. In other words, how is the image related to the text that both frames and is framed by it?

Questions of this kind become all the more urgent in the case of Sebald's prose works: *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990), *Die Ausgewanderten* (1993), *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995), and *Austerlitz* (2001).⁴ In all four, photography no longer forms part of the paratextual apparatus, but is integrated into the fabric of the narrative. Other kinds of image, such as reproductions of paintings, are also included. These, however, are not only themselves *photographic* reproductions, but are fewer in number than photographs in the narrower sense. This is particularly true of *Die Ausgewanderten*, in which the vast majority of the images are of photographic origin. There is a further compelling reason to explore the role of photography in *Die Ausgewanderten*, for acts of taking, viewing, interpreting, and exchanging photographs play a central role within the stories themselves. These acts are in turn intimately linked to questions of memory and narration. This explicit thematization of photography and storytelling not only invites but demands a detailed reading of their interaction.

The role of photographs in Sebald's work has not gone unnoticed by liter-

³ *Nach der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1988). The photographs have unfortunately been omitted from the later paperback edition (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1995).

⁴ *Schwindel. Gefühle* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn, 1990), *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn, 1993), *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn, 1995), and *Austerlitz* (Munich: Hanser, 2001). All references to *Die Ausgewanderten* will henceforth appear parenthetically in the text.

ary critics. Arthur Williams stresses the importance of the visual in *Die Ausgewanderten*, and claims that Sebald contrasts 'painting advantageously with photography'.⁵ While that may hold true as an evaluation of Sebald's aesthetic value-judgements, however, it is not borne out in his textual practice, yet Williams undertakes no detailed analysis of the photographs within the text. Thomas Kastura describes Sebald's narrative mode as 'photographisches Erzählen', and accounts for the relationship between text and image in the following way:

Fest steht, daß die Fotografien, Gemäldereproduktionen, Faksimileabzüge, Landkarten u.v.m. weit mehr als Illustrationen oder 'Dokumente der Beglaubigung' sind, sondern Ausdruck eines erweiterten Textbegriffs: als eigenständige Bildgeschichten, die das Geschriebene nicht nur ergänzen, sondern interpretieren.⁶

This insight, however, is merely tacked on to the end of a wide-ranging discussion whose primary concern is Sebald's pessimistic world-view. The one important point that Kastura does make here is that the relationship between language and image is not a straightforward question of illustration. This is echoed in articles by Eva Juhl and Sigrid Korff, but both authors content themselves with a rather piecemeal analysis of isolated images and ultimately fail to account for the combination of text and image that constitutes a (if not *the*) central feature of Sebald's aesthetics.⁷

A useful way of approaching the relationship between language and photography is via the tripartite semiotic scheme of C. S. Peirce. Peirce understood signification in terms of icon, index, and symbol.⁸ The 'icon' refers by means of physical resemblance or similarity between the sign and what it represents, the 'index' refers by means of contiguity, of cause and effect, like a trace or fingerprint, while the connection between the 'symbol' and its referent is arbitrary. Clearly, photographs can refer to the thing they represent in all these ways.

⁵ 'W. G. Sebald: A Holistic Approach to Texts, Borders and Perspectives', in *German-Language Literature Today: International and Popular?*, ed. by Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, and Julian Preece (Oxford, Bern, and Berlin: Lang, 2000), pp. 99–118 (p. 103).

⁶ 'Geheimnisvolle Fähigkeit zur Transmigration: W. G. Sebalds interkulturelle Wallfahrten in die Leere', *Arcadia*, 31 (1996), 197–216 (p. 216).

⁷ See Eva Juhl, 'Die Wahrheit über das Unglück: zu W. G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*', in *Reisen im Diskurs: Modelle literarischer Fremderfahrung von den Pilgerberichten zur Postmoderne*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and Theo Harden (Heidelberg: Narr, 1995), pp. 640–59 (p. 640); and Sigrid Korff, 'Die Treue zum Detail: W. G. Sebalds *Die Ausgewanderten*', in *In der Sprache der Täter: neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Stephan Braese (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), pp. 167–97 (pp. 171–72). Shortly after this article was accepted for publication, Stephanie Harris's essay 'The Return of the Dead: Memory and Photography in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*' appeared in *German Quarterly*, 74 (2001), 379–91. Harris offers a set of reflections on photography in Sebald's text, starting from the premiss that photographs complement the narrative in order to provide a model of cultural memory that recognizes the limitations of both verbal and pictorial representation. In particular, she draws on Barthes's *La Chambre claire* in an examination of the relationship between the generalizing tendency of language and the material specificity of the photograph. Despite containing several illuminating insights, however, her analysis is hampered by a disproportionately large theoretical apparatus and a decidedly narrow understanding of the role of photography in *Die Ausgewanderten*. Harris's article seriously underestimates both the variety and the complexity of text-image relationships in Sebald's text.

⁸ For a useful discussion of Peirce see Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 14–25.

Take, for example, the first photograph in Sebald's text. The image of a tree is iconic because it *looks like* a tree. The image was generated by light hitting the photosensitive plate, so it is also an index, a trace of a reality that is thus deemed to have once existed. The symbolic interpretation of the photographic sign, on the other hand, would draw on cultural conventions and see the graveyard as a symbol of death, but also possibly of peace and rest, with the tree perhaps symbolizing the continuance of life, and so on.

Whether photographs are read primarily for their iconic, indexical, or symbolic significance is ultimately a matter of context. Photographs themselves lack 'intentionality', as Clive Scott puts it in his recent book on photography and language.⁹ In other words, photographs *in themselves* contain no hint about how they are to be read. Language forms part of the textual or institutional framing of the photograph and is thus largely responsible for constructing its meaning. But the transaction between language and photography in *Die Ausgewanderten* is not merely a one-way affair, for photographs are implicated in the process of storytelling. They frequently function as traces of a past that cannot be understood without the supplement of narrative. Scott terms this the 'narrative resources of the photograph', but his discussion is ultimately of limited usefulness because his rhetoric systematically suppresses agency. He claims, for instance, that 'provocative juxtapositions [in phototherapy] project narratives of questions and ambiguities', and that 'photomontage [. . .] attempts to win photography for the projection of possible futures' (pp. 239, 243). Scott is right that photographs can provide a stimulus to narrative, but by locating agency within impersonal phenomena such as 'juxtapositions' and 'photomontage', he ignores the fact that a narrative has to be read into a photograph by an individual subject within a concrete historical and ideological context. We shall see below that issues such as ideology and subjectivity are of central importance for the functioning of photography and narrative in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

A large number of photographs in *Die Ausgewanderten* form part of the various albums handed down to the narrator in the course of his researches. These images have been taken by friends and relatives of the narrator, and can best be read in terms of the narratives to which they give rise. Many other photographs, however, cannot be interpreted in this way. Indeed, the images that are explicitly taken by or implicitly attributable to the narrator *appear* to fulfil a more traditional 'authenticating' role (though we shall have cause to examine this assumption in more detail below). This establishes a different relationship between text and image, and requires a different mode of reading. The argument that follows assumes a two-part typology of photographs: those that are read, interpreted, and narrativized by characters *within* the represented world, and those whose immediate address is to a reader *outside* the text. The interpretative models I put forward are correspondingly different. When discussing family albums and their readers, I employ a primarily psychoanalytic mode of reading in order to link photographs to the process of storytelling. Later, when examining the narrator's photographs, I focus on the reader's role in the process of structuration. These two modes of reading, however, are not incom-

⁹ *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 62.

patible; indeed, it will emerge that they are two related aspects of the same aesthetic strategy, and represent a formal response to the question of history that dominates the thematic level of Sebald's narrative.

Die Ausgewanderten consists, as its subtitle baldly states, of 'four long stories', which reconstruct the biographies of the exiles and émigrés whose names form the stories' titles. 'Dr Henry Selwyn' was a Lithuanian Jew who 'inadvertently' emigrated to England in 1899, his family having boarded a ship on the assumption that it was bound for the United States. Selwyn had had a distinguished academic and medical career and married Hedi, a woman whose inherited wealth had allowed them to live in a grand style in the 1920s and 1930s. The narrator encounters the couple when he rents a flat in Prior's Gate, their capacious Norfolk home. Now retired, Selwyn is estranged from his wife and lives (weather permitting) as 'a kind of ornamental hermit' (p. 11) in the garden. 'Paul Bereyter' was the narrator's much-admired schoolteacher. As a so-called 'Dreiviertelarier', he was initially forced out of his job as a schoolmaster in the 1930s, and spent some time as a private tutor in France before returning to Germany and serving in the Wehrmacht for six years. After the war he took up his former post in 'S.', and never gave up his flat there even when he moved, more or less permanently, to Yverdon. He committed suicide on his final visit to S. in 1984.

'Ambros Adelwarth' tells the story of the narrator's great-uncle, who emigrated to the United States and spent most of his life serving the Solomons, one of New York's wealthiest Jewish banking families. The younger son of the family, Cosmo, was by all accounts a gifted and flamboyant character, and Adelwarth was his companion on numerous trips through Europe and the Middle East. After Cosmo's premature death, Adelwarth resumed his duties as a butler before finally admitting himself to a mental hospital, where he hastened his own death by subjecting himself voluntarily to a lengthy course of electric shock treatment. 'Max Aurach' is the last and longest of the stories. The narrator shares a close friendship with Aurach during his period of study in Manchester in the mid-1960s. As a Jew, Aurach had left Germany to escape persecution in 1939, and settled in England where he established himself as a successful painter. After a gap of almost two decades, the narrator re-establishes contact with Aurach, who gives him his mother's posthumous papers that consist of a description of Jewish middle-class life in the Bad Kissingen region before the Nazi period.

All the stories in *Die Ausgewanderten*, then, deal with experiences of dislocation. This dislocation is not merely geographical; the four main characters live through the traumatic events of cultural displacement, economic migration, political exile, and, ultimately, racial persecution and murder at the hands of the Nazis. Selwyn, Bereyter, Adelwarth, and Aurach are thus representatives of families, and ultimately of entire societies, that have been destroyed or scattered by the political upheavals of the twentieth century. As the text makes clear, these upheavals take place within the context of a wider human history that is characterized by progressive decline, and of a dialectical notion of environmental history in which nature is constantly being destroyed by mankind, but simultaneously attempting to reclaim the products of civilization and turn

them back into the dust from which they originated: witness the buildings that are slowly being reclaimed by sand (pp. 127, 174), or Dr Abramsky's dream of his asylum slowly succumbing to an army of woodworm and collapsing into a pile of dust (pp. 165–66).¹⁰ These visions of entropy provide a literal counterpart to the metaphorical entropy inherent in human relationships and societies. A fitting epigraph for *Die Ausgewanderten* would be Yeats's short but quietly devastating phrase, 'Things fall apart.'¹¹

And yet the exile, loss, and historical pessimism that constitute the thematic core of Sebald's text are counterbalanced by the narrative discourse itself, which involves weaving together the disparate strands of fragmented biographies within the same tale. To this end, the narrator employs complex techniques of narrative embedding that dramatize acts of remembrance and recuperation. The function of the discourse is to integrate two or even three narrative levels: the story of the narrator's investigations frames both the biography of the main protagonist and the life of another character, whose story either mediates that of the central figure (Aunt Fini, Lucy Landau, Dr Abramsky) or is mediated by it (Aurach's mother).

Thus the latent strata of the past that Sebald's narrator seeks to unearth are less his own personal memories than the life stories of third parties. The problem is that these life stories are not available to purely historical or documentary research for two reasons. First, the kind of 'history from below' that Sebald wishes to relate is transmitted primarily by oral means or through documents of an exclusively private nature, such as diaries and notebooks. Secondly, the narrator's relationship with his subjects is characterized by the kind of emotional proximity and overt affective investment that history as a discipline strives to avoid, suppress, or marginalize. The hybridity of the text, then, also manifests itself in the relationship between the narrating subject and the past he represents. The narratives are reducible neither to memory nor to history; they partake of both while being neither.

Marianne Hirsch has termed this phenomenon 'postmemory'. Hirsch makes it clear that the coinage in no way implies that we are now somehow 'beyond' memory. Rather, it characterizes a mode of remembering that traverses generations. For Hirsch, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. She adds that it is a 'powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or its source is mediated not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation.' Postmemory refers to the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, and whose own belated stories are 'evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated'.¹²

That Sebald's books are dominated by precisely this kind of memory emerges

¹⁰ Sebald's negative conception of civilization as one of perpetual destruction has been discussed by Kastura, Williams, and Juhl, and need not be rehearsed here.

¹¹ W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming', in *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 211.

¹² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

in the introduction to his long essay *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, a volume based on a series of lectures delivered in Zürich in 1997:

Im Mai 1944 in einem Dorf in den Allgäuer Alpen geboren, gehörte ich zu denen, die so gut wie unberührt geblieben sind von der damals im deutschen Reich sich vollziehenden Katastrophe. Daß diese Katastrophe dennoch Spuren in meinem Gedächtnis hinterlassen hat, das versuchte ich anhand längerer Passagen aus meinen eigenen literarischen Arbeiten zu zeigen.¹³

These ‘Spuren im Gedächtnis’ correspond to Hirsch’s postmemories: the events in question took place before the author’s birth, and yet cannot be consigned to mere ‘history’ because of the profound affective connection to the recent past that no member of the so-called second generation can escape.¹⁴

The phenomenon of postmemory is repeatedly dramatized in *Die Ausgewanderten*. In all four stories, the author seeks to reconstruct a series of events which took place before his birth but which are accessible through neither purely ‘historical’ research nor personal recollection. Moreover, the four life stories pieced together in the course of Sebald’s text tend progressively to swamp the narrator’s own story. The framing narratives in *Die Ausgewanderten* tell the story of the narrator’s travels and enquiries, and thematize the transmission of knowledge, in various forms, from one person to another. All the stories, however, evince a similar chiasmic structure: in each case the *Rahmenerzählung* becomes increasingly subordinate to the various *Binnenerzählungen*. The resulting inversion of the hierarchy of narrative levels brings with it a shift of textual interest away from the narrator and on to the four biographical subjects of the narration. This can be seen with particular clarity in the last two stories, ‘Ambros Adelwarth’ and ‘Max Aurach’, where the narrating agent withdraws totally and quotes at length from the diaries of Adelwarth (pp. 186–215) or the *Nachlass* of Aurach’s mother, Luisa Lanzberg (pp. 289–327). The narrative techniques of *Die Ausgewanderten*, then, illustrate what Hirsch calls the ‘evacuation’ of the narrator’s story by those of the preceding generation, stories dominated by the traumatic events of geographical and cultural displacement.

However, Hirsch’s claim that postmemory is mediated by ‘imaginative investment and creation’ needs modification (and is indeed modified in her own critical practice), because imagination and creation alone could lead to constructions of pure fantasy possessing no connection to the real. On this reading, postmemory would be no different from Korsakov’s Syndrome, in which, as Aunt Fini explains to the narrator, ‘der Erinnerungsverlust durch phantastische Erfindungen ausgeglichen wird’ (p. 149). For postmemory to function as a useful analytic tool and to carry the ethical burden that Hirsch places upon it, it must be distinguished from unregulated fantasy.¹⁵ The mental constructions

¹³ *Luftkrieg und Literatur: mit einem Essay über Alfred Andersch* (Munich: Hanser, 1999), pp. 5–6.

¹⁴ Eva Juhl expresses puzzlement that Sebald’s ‘ganz persönliche Beteiligung an der kollektiven Verdrängung’ should take place ‘ungeachtet der Gnade der späten Geburt’ (Juhl, p. 643). The notion that the ‘Gnade der späten Geburt’ could somehow render one immune to such repression, however, is based on the faulty assumption that the relationship between the Nazi past and ‘those born later’ ceases to be characterized by any sense of emotional or psychical investment. Sebald himself demonstrates a much more differentiated understanding of this highly problematic aspect of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’.

¹⁵ Hirsch uses, and indeed first developed, the concept of postmemory to account for the ex-

of postmemory must exist in some kind of dialogue with the empirical, must be open to confirmation or contestation by the real. One way in which this can take place is through photography, whose perceived privileged relationship to reality, as icon or index, can check, correct, relativize, but also prompt both primary memory (based on recall) and postmemory (based on retrospective construction).

The complexity of the relationship between memory and the photograph has tended to be underestimated within the critical literature on photography. In her influential book *On Photography*, for example, Susan Sontag's extensive discussions of photography's capacity to function as a substitute for experience culminate in the conclusion that photographs are 'not so much an instrument of memory as an invention of it or a replacement'.¹⁶ Sebald has made similar pronouncements. In an essay on Adalbert Stifter and Peter Handke he writes:

Die entscheidende Differenz zwischen der schriftstellerischen Methode und der ebenso erfahrungsgierigen wie erfahrungsscheuen Technik des Photographierens besteht [. . .] darin, daß das Beschreiben das Eingedenken, das Photographieren jedoch das Vergessen befördert.¹⁷

Both these discussions set up a series of binary oppositions between photography on the one hand, and narrative, experience, and memory on the other, which precludes discussion of the possible dialogue or interaction between them.¹⁸

The writings of Benjamin and Freud suggest some ways in which questions of memory, history, and photography can be related more productively. If, as Benjamin claims, articulating the past historically means 'sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt',¹⁹ it is clear that all of Sebald's stories strive for precisely such an articulation, and at several levels. The subjects of the narratives and the narrator all take possession and control of a hitherto buried memory in the face of a danger that, in this case, is the imminent death of the protagonists and the consequent irrevocable burial of their stories. This process of 'bemächtigen' is not, however, straightforward, for the way in which repressed material surfaces in Sebald's text is frequently linked to a form of memory that is visual rather than narrative. Henry Selwyn tells the narrator: 'Jahrzehntelang seien die Bilder von diesem Auszug aus seinem Gedächtnis verschwunden gewesen, aber in letzter Zeit, sagte er, melden sie sich wieder und kommen zurück' (p. 31). This is followed by several sentences beginning 'Ich sehe [. . .]', as Selwyn recalls with astonishing vividness events that happened over seventy years before. Mme Landau is amazed 'wie

periences of the children of Holocaust survivors. Any attempt to represent and discuss historical trauma is of necessity burdened with a considerable ethical responsibility.

¹⁶ Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 165.

¹⁷ *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks: Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1985), p. 178.

¹⁸ In saying this, I am aware that more recent theorists have addressed the question of memory and photography in some detail. See e.g. Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), and Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), I, 691–704 (p. 695).

gegenwärtig die Bilder, die sie von der Trauer um Paul verschüttet geglaubt hatte, in ihr noch seien', and again employs the 'ich sehe [. . .]' formulation in the act of recall (p. 67). Likewise, Bereyter's eye operation and temporary sightlessness result in his acquiring a kind of eidetic memory, and he sees 'Dinge [. . .], von denen er nicht geglaubt hatte, daß sie noch in ihm waren' (p. 76). Uncle Kasimir's emigration to the United States is characterized by a combination of a general forgetfulness and an exceptionally vivid vision of the Lloyd's terminal in Bremerhaven (p. 119). The experience of departure is represented in similar terms by Max Aurach, whose memory of his flight from Germany in May 1939 is likewise purely visual. He cannot remember what his parents said to him, or whether they embraced him or not (p. 279), but he sees 'in schmerzlichster Schärfe vor sich' the scene of his departure, right down to the most ostensibly trivial detail (p. 280).

The significance of these passages becomes apparent when Aurach remarks: 'Die bruchstückhaften Erinnerungsbilder, von denen ich heimgesucht werde, haben den Charakter von Zwangsvorstellungen' (p. 270). This quotation is particularly important, because it explicitly links Aurach's discourse to that of Freud. The notion of 'Zwangsvorstellungen' occurs in many of Freud's writings, and 'heimsuchen' is used, in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, to refer to the involuntary invasion of repressed traumatic memories.²⁰ The role of the visual within the constellation of repression, latency, and return is also addressed repeatedly in Freud's work. Painfully exact, compulsively repeated visual recall that 'possesses' the individual against his or her will is, as Freud noted in chapter 3 of *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, the dominant symptom of traumatic neurosis. Unlike normal dreams, which are always encrypted and are concerned largely with wish-fulfilment, traumatic dreams and visions are defined by an ineluctable literalness that cannot be interpreted in terms of the pleasure principle. The purpose of therapy is to turn these compulsive, 'traumatic' memories into genuinely 'narrative' memories via a process of working through.²¹ In *Die Ausgewanderten*, numerous characters attempt, with the aid of the therapist-narrator, to take possession and control of memories that would otherwise threaten to take possession of them. Visual images, in other words, are integrated within a narrative that allows them to lose some of their compulsive character and take their place as elements of a past that is recognized as past. Both Uncle Kasimir and Max Aurach, for example, are able, through the act of narrating, to situate their vivid visual recollections within a clear temporal framework. This is not to say that the visual is provided with a temporal dimension as such, but that it can be located within a sequence of experiences that precede and follow the visual moment.²²

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, in *Studienausgabe*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), III: *Psychologie des Unbewußten*, pp. 213–72.

²¹ The literature on trauma is vast. The key Freudian texts are *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* and 'Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten', in *Studienausgabe*, XI: *Schriften zur Behandlungstechnik*, pp. 205–15. A useful collection is *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

²² This discrepancy between compulsive recall and narrative memory is hinted at, too, in Fini's descriptions of Adelwarth's storytelling: 'Da selbst die geringfügigsten der von ihm sehr langsam

The link between this kind of compulsive recall and the photograph emerges in Freud's *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, where the metaphor of photography is used to clarify the phenomenon of latency:

[. . .] daß die stärkste zwangsartige Beeinflussung von jenen Eindrücken herrührt, die das Kind zu einer Zeit treffen, da wir seinen psychischen Apparat für noch nicht vollkommen aufnahmefähig halten müssen, [. . .] ist so befremdend, daß wir uns ihr Verständnis durch den Vergleich mit einer photographischen Aufnahme erleichtern dürfen, die nach einem beliebigen Aufschub entwickelt und in ein Bild verwandelt werden mag.²³

Photographic metaphors are also scattered throughout Walter Benjamin's writings on the relationship between experience and knowledge, and are developed most extensively in the posthumously published *Berliner Chronik*:

Jeder kann sich Rechenschaft davon ablegen, daß die Dauer, in der wir Eindrücken ausgesetzt sind, ohne Bedeutung für deren Schicksal in der Erinnerung ist. Nichts, hindert, daß wir Räume, wo wir vierundzwanzig Stunden waren, mehr oder weniger deutlich in Erinnerung halten, und andere, wo wir Monate verbrachten, ganz vergessen. Es ist also durchaus nicht immer Schuld einer allzukurzen Belichtungsdauer, wenn auf der Platte des Erinnerns kein Bild erscheint. Häufiger sind vielleicht die Fälle, wo die Dämmerung der Gewohnheit der Platte jahrelang das nötige Licht versagt, bis dieses aus fremden Quellen wie aus entzündetem Magnesiumpulver aufschießt und nun im Bilde einer Momentaufnahme den Raum auf die Platte bannt.²⁴

The psychic processes by which the past is remembered can thus be seen as somehow duplicating the process of photography, which entails a necessary delay between light hitting the plate and the emergence of the recognizable image. Conversely, the process of photography corresponds to the sudden recall of buried memories after a period of latency. Rather than mimetic immediacy, writes Eduardo Cadava, 'the photographic event reproduces, according to its own faithful and rigorous deathbringing manner, the posthumous character of our lived experience'.²⁵

If we accept this analogy, then photography can be regarded first and foremost not as memory, but as a kind of belated symptom of familial and collective history that needs to be mediated through a process of narration in order to become knowable and communicable. It is in this light that the interaction between narrative and family photography in *Die Ausgewanderten* can best be interpreted. Photographs frequently function as a goad to narration, acting indexically as a metonymic trace of the past that needs to be provided with a temporal context in order to 'make sense'. The importance of narrative can

aus einer offenbar unauslotbaren Tiefe hervorgeholten Reminiszenzen von staunenswerter Genauigkeit waren, gelangte ich beim Zuhören allmählich zu der Überzeugung, daß der Adelwarth-Onkel zwar ein untrügliches Gedächtnis besaß, aber kaum mehr eine mit diesem Gedächtnis ihn verbindende Erinnerungsfähigkeit' (p. 146).

²³ Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, in *Studienausgabe*, ix: *Fragen der Gesellschaft, Ursprünge der Religion*, pp. 455–581 (p. 572).

²⁴ *Berliner Chronik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vi, 465–519 (p. 516). Cf. 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p. 695.

²⁵ Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 8. I am indebted to Cadava's stimulating discussion of photography, memory, and history in Benjamin and Freud.

be witnessed in the completely different types of text provided by the narrator and his aunt Fini when confronted with photographs depicting events that preceded the narrator's birth. The narrator can only attach names to the faces on a photograph depicting a family group:

Ganz links sitzt die Lina neben dem Kasimir. Ganz rechts sitzt die Tante Theres. Die anderen Leute auf dem Kanapee kenne ich nicht, bis auf das kleine Kind mit der Brille. Das ist die Flossie, die nachmals Sekretärin in Tucson/Arizona geworden ist und mit über fünfzig noch das Bauchtanzen gelernt hat. (pp. 103–04)

The captioning here merely specifies the photograph's referents; the minimal 'belly-dancing' narrative is desultory and contributes little to our understanding of the temporal or cultural context of the picture. A commentary offered by Aunt Fini when confronted with a photograph from her pre-emigration days, on the other hand, goes beyond the merely constative, and is much richer in context and narrative purpose. While viewing a snapshot of a school outing, she says:

Ich hatte das Institut in Wettenhausen im Vorjahr schon absolviert gehabt, und vom Herbst 1926 an bin ich Hilfslehrerin ohne Gehalt an der Volksschule in W. gewesen. Das hier ist eine Fotografie aus der damaligen Zeit, wie wir einen Ausflug gemacht haben auf dem Falkenstein. Die Schüler haben alle hinten auf der Ladefläche gestanden, während ich mit dem Lehrer Fuchsluger, der ein Nationalsozialist der ersten Stunde gewesen ist, im Führerhaus gesessen bin neben dem Adlerwirt Benedikt Tannheimer, dem der Wagen gehörte. Das Kind ganz rückwärts mit dem Kreuzchen über dem Kopf ist deine Mutter, die Rosa. Ich erinnere mich, sagte die Tante Fini, wie ich ein paar Monate später, zwei Tage vor meiner Einschiffung ist es gewesen, mit ihr nach Klosterwald gefahren bin und sie dort abgeliefert habe im Internat. Sie hat, glaube ich, damals viel Angst ausstehen müssen durch die so unglücklich mit ihrem Verlassen des Elternhauses zusammentreffende Ausreise ihrer Geschwister nach Übersee, denn auf Weihnachten hat sie uns einen Brief nach New York geschrieben, in dem stand, daß es ihr nicht sehr geheuer sei, wenn sie in der Nacht im Schlafsaal liege. (pp. 109–10)

The difference between the narrator's and Fini's acts of 'captioning' is a question of knowledge and of the ability to understand the photograph as part of a narrative that links the captured moment to those that precede and follow it. The narrator's postmemories, which form much of the text we read, are the result of a complex set of interactions involving photography, memory, and storytelling. Providing the photograph-as-symptom with an adequate narrative context emerges as one of the main tasks of Sebald's text. The question that remains is this: what motivates the *type* of story that gets told in the service of postmemory?

This question can be answered with reference to the kinds of photograph incorporated into Sebald's text and the visual field within which they operate. As we have seen, many of the photographs are taken from family albums, their subjects being either tourist sights depicted on postcards, or the traditional occasions on which family photographs are taken: outings, communal meals and celebrations, studio portraits, the completion of a work contract, school class groups, and prize-giving ceremonies.²⁶

²⁶ See pp. 59, 69, 70, 71, 73, 78, 82, 83, 104, 108, 109, 113, 118, 130, 134, 137, 140, 142, 147, 199, 255, 278, 313, 325, 326.

From early in its development, as Hirsch points out, photography became 'the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation—the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated, by which the family's story would henceforth be told'. Photography 'both chronicles family rituals and constitutes the prime objective of those rituals', and 'perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record reality' (pp. 6–7). The importance of domestic photography in *Die Ausgewanderten* is underlined in 'Max Aurach' by the fact that Luisa Lanzberg's family home has a photographic shrine to absent family members (p. 292) and a satin postcard album that is never moved from its ceremonial place beneath the Sabbath lamp (p. 314). Furthermore, the text mentions numerous family albums that are not only viewed by, but *passed on to*, the narrator in the course of his researches. He first becomes aware of Adelwarth's buried history through the '[mir] in die Hände gefallenes Fotoalbum der Mutter, welches eine Reihe mir gänzlich unbekannter Aufnahmen unserer in der Weimarer Zeit ausgewanderten Verwandten enthielt' (p. 103). In his attempts to reconstruct Adelwarth's life, the narrator visits his Aunt Fini in Lakehurst, where she lives in American exile. She tells the story of her early life while the two of them pore over her photograph album (pp. 108–10), and then she narrates the story of Adelwarth's early career by producing a postcard album that he had himself given to her some years previously (p. 113). In the story about the village schoolteacher, the narrator visits Bereyter's partner Lucy Landau, and she gives him the album that Bereyter had passed on to her (p. 68). In 'Max Aurach' the eponymous character hands the narrator a sheaf of photographs and handwritten notes that his mother had penned between 1939 and 1941, and sent to him in Manchester shortly before her deportation to a concentration camp (p. 288).

Family albums do not merely provide thematic illustrations of the problem of transmission, however; they also impose upon the viewer a particular mode of looking. Hirsch has termed this the 'familial gaze', by which she means the set of visual interrelations that constitute both the subjects and the viewer of the photographs as members of the family group. When Barthes writes, 'Devant l'objectif, je suis à la fois: celui que je me crois, celui que je voudrais qu'on me croie, celui que le photographe me croit, et celui dont il se sert pour exhiber son art',²⁷ he is alluding to the fact that the act of photographing and being photographed involves a multi-layered set of constructions and projections that manifest themselves in, for example, the pose of the photographic subject, and the choice of angle, lighting, focus, and so on, by the photographer. Hirsch's discussion of family photography goes one step further in order to include the force of ideology: family photography is governed by the exchange of looks between the subject and the camera, but these looks are themselves determined by the ideology of the family. Furthermore, the way in which family photographs are usually 'read' reinscribes the familial gaze in the act of reception.

Although the sole story to which this theory can be directly applied is 'Ambros Adelwarth' (the only one of the four emigrants to whom the narrator is related), Hirsch's concept actually turns out to be more elastic than her initial definition

²⁷ *La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993), III, 1105–1200 (p. 1117).

implies. Indeed, she expands the concept of the gaze beyond the narrow confines of kinship ties, using the term 'affiliative gaze' to describe the ways in which other intimate social groups, particularly groups of friends, are constructed in the visual field. Because of the narrator's close acquaintance with and emotional attachment to all four of his biographical subjects, it is this affiliative gaze that dominates his reading of the various family photographs of which he is the recipient. This both conditions and is conditioned by his ability to adopt, as his own postmemories, the memories of the people whose lives he narrates. We have seen that the photographs themselves generate the acts of remembrance and storytelling that then surround them and provide them with a context. The precise nature of these narratives is determined by the way the narrator and his interlocutors view the photographs, which is in turn governed by the familial or affiliative gaze.

This can be seen with particular clarity in the story of Paul Bereyter. In describing Bereyter's album, the narrator writes:

Die ersten Fotografien erzählten von einer glücklichen Kindheit in dem in unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft zur Gärtnerei Lerchenmüller in der Blumenstraße gelegenen Wohnhaus der Bereyters und zeigten Paul mehrfach mit seiner Katze und einem offensichtlich völlig zahmen Gockelhahn. Es folgten die Jahre in einem Landschulheim, kaum minder glücklich als die eben vergangene Kindheit, und daran anschließend der Eintritt in das Lehrerseminar Lauingen, das Paul in der Bildunterschrift als die Lehrerabrichtungsanstalt Lauingen bezeichnete. Mme Landau merkte dazu an, Paul habe sich dieser von den borniertesten Richtlinien und einem krankhaften Katholizismus bestimmten Ausbildung nur deshalb unterzogen, weil er um jeden Preis, auch um den einer solchen Ausbildung, Lehrer werden wollte, und einzig sein absolut bedingungsloser Idealismus habe es ihm erlaubt, die Lauinger Zeit durchzustehen, ohne einen Schaden zu nehmen an seiner Seele. (pp. 69–70)

In this extract, there are three acts of interpretation taking place as three agents add their linguistic supplement to the photographs under discussion. Firstly, the statement that the early photographs 'told of' Paul's happy childhood masks the fact that it is in fact the author who is responsible for the narrative construction placed upon a specific set of images. Secondly, Paul's caption 'Lehrerabrichtungsanstalt Lauingen' conveys his judgement of the institution, and his verdict is finally supported and glossed by Lucy Landau, who offers a psychological explanation for Paul's perseverance in the training institute depicted in the photograph.

Interestingly, the childhood photographs are absent. Just as Roland Barthes withholds the photograph of his mother that forms the starting point for many of his speculations in *La Chambre claire*, the narrator suppresses the photographs of the young Bereyter in a way that allows him to foreground his own fantasy narrative of Paul's childhood without fear that other interpreters, who are not caught up in the viewing relations of the affiliative gaze, may produce different symbolic readings of the photographs. Hirsch argues that the referentiality of a photograph persists even if it is only described and not reproduced (p. 202). Description itself is always also interpretation, of course, but because the described photograph is absent, the interpretation cannot be contested. As readers, we are robbed of any criteria that would allow us to

contradict the Edenic reading of Paul's childhood put forward by the narrator.

The negative affect dominating the representation of the 'Lehrerseminar', on the other hand, is lent authority by the fact that Paul's own caption is reproduced along with a photograph that depicts a set of stiffly posed, formally clad and becaped seminarists standing on the front steps of an imposing public building, with a row of four masters seated on chairs in front of them. Indeed, the typographical layout of the text means that the word 'Lehrerabrichtungsanstalt' actually *contains* the image to which it refers (p. 69). Lucy Landau's comments, based on genuine recollection of her conversations with Paul, further strengthen the condemnation of the 'Lehrerseminar' and constitute Paul as the quietly rebellious outsider figure that Sebald's narrative reveals him to have been.²⁸ The narrator's 'postmemory' is thus a hybrid construction consisting of and mediated through the narratives of others, the narratives implied by the continuity and captioning of the family album, and the fantasy interpretations that the author places upon photographic images.

The role of language in determining photographic meaning is here particularly evident. The photograph of the 'Lehrerseminar' is in fact open to a quite different reading. Firstly, and most strikingly, hardly any of the seminarists are actually looking at the camera, even though all their masters are. This represents a moment of subversion, as the boys refuse to return the gaze of the camera and thereby resist the ideological conformity that the school wished to inculcate in them. The exception is the 'Musterknabe' on the far right, who distinguishes himself by his exaggeratedly upright posture and the physical gap between himself and the other boys, and this figure throws the distraction of the other seminarists into greater relief. At the same time, the teacher on the far left is distinguished from his colleagues by means of his beard, the pale colour of his jacket, and his slouching posture. His upper body and right foot are tilted towards the edge of the left-hand frame of the photograph, implying a desire to dissociate himself from the other three teachers or even to flee the photographic gaze altogether. And yet the captions provided seek to anchor and limit the meanings that can be ascribed to this particular image.

A similar process may be witnessed in 'Ambros Adelwarth'. The 12-year-old dervish discovered by Ambros and Cosmo, for example, is presented in the text as a tourist sight, and the photograph of him as a souvenir (pp. 199–200). And yet the implied homosexuality of Adelwarth and Cosmo invites a different reading, namely one that stresses the desire for sexual possession of the 'außerordentlich schöne[r] Knabe' (p. 200), a desire for which photographic possession represents a surrogate.²⁹ Approaching this photograph and the por-

²⁸ Sebald's narrative of Paul Bereyter's life casts him as a nonconformist in perpetual, silent conflict with authority, however it should manifest itself. The first thing he does on his arrival at the village school is to scrape off the whitewash with which the previous teacher had painted the classroom windows (p. 51), he detests the representatives of Catholicism (pp. 53–55), and he devotes hardly any time to the prescribed school curriculum (p. 56). During the early Nazi period, he is the victim of Nazi persecution because of his status as a 'Dreiviertelarier', and is never truly at home in post-war Germany.

²⁹ Cf. Sebald's own remark that the eye is the original 'Organ der Besitzergreifung und Einverleibung', *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*, p. 26.

trait of Adelwarth in Arab costume (p. 137) with a postcolonial gaze would lead to yet other readings stressing the Western tendency to represent the East as a site of the exotic. Acts of posing and photographing here become acts of appropriation.³⁰ But because 'Ambros Adelwarth' is a story concerned with reconstructing the life of the narrator's great-uncle (as we learn in the first sentence of the text), the gaze that determines his reading of the photographs concerned is the familial gaze. The images themselves are understood in terms of their function within the economy of the family album, which marginalizes their erotic or political import and constitutes the images as evidence of a familiar ritual: tourism.

The way in which the text attempts to limit the meaning of these images throws yet more light on the processes of postmemory. The main contention of Hirsch's *Family Frames* is that reading family photography can be a subversive act, a means of resisting the 'familial gaze'. This can serve two functions: it can allow tensions, rifts, and rivalries to emerge from the surface of images whose function is to perpetuate the myth of the cohesive nuclear unit, thereby contributing to a form of *Ideologiekritik* that takes the family as its object. It can also enable the individual subject to emancipate him- or herself from the narrow behavioural norms dictated by the ideology of kinship ties and social roles (chapters 2, 4, and 6). It may, however, be pragmatically important *not* to read photographs in this way, but to interpret them as a sign or proof of unity and continuity. This is particularly the case when traumatic experiences of loss and exile have severed family ties through geographical distance or violent death. In this connection, Susan Sontag's comment that family photography is a symbolic surrogate for or memorial of the geographically dispersed, extended family that effectively exists only within the leaves of the album becomes apt in a way that Sontag herself had not intended (pp. 8–9). For Sontag, this phenomenon was just one more symptom of a modernity towards which she seems highly ambivalent. For Bereyter, Landau, Fini, and the narrator, on the other hand, the affiliative gaze facilitates the construction and transmission of a set of coherent, consistent life stories. It also allows the narrator-viewer to understand his own experience of exile in terms of the narratives of others, and to assert the bonds of kinship and friendship whose durability goes some way towards compensating for the rupture, displacement, and bereavement inflicted on the individual by the vicissitudes of political history.

The relationship between family photography and narrative in *Die Ausgewanderten* is one of interdependence: photographs function as the impulse that generates the narrative, and are simultaneously enveloped and 'fixed' in their meaning by the narratives to which they give rise. My alternative reading of Bereyter's 'Lehrerseminar' photograph shows that this fixity is potentially fragile, and that the interpretations placed upon photographs can always be contested. But such resistant readings can be undertaken only by severing the photograph from its context. Within the narrative economy of Sebald's text, photographs acquire their meaning through acts of captioning and commentary

³⁰ On photography, tourism, and colonialism see Anandi Ramamurthy, 'Constructions of Illusion: Photography and Commodity Culture', in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn, ed. by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 165–216, especially pp. 188–202.

that are circumscribed by the familial and affiliative gaze. Reading the family album emerges as one way in which something permanent can be salvaged from the passing of time and the ravages of history.

The discussion so far has concentrated on photographs that are passed down to the narrator in the course of his investigations. These are not the only images for which a reading of *Die Ausgewanderten* has to account, for the text also contains photographs whose primary address is to the reader rather than to characters within the represented world. Here, relations between word and image take two forms. Some of the images are clearly referential, and illustrate the verbal text. Certain other images, however, exist in a radically indeterminate relationship to the words that surround them.

At the pole of maximum referentiality are those photographs that are attributable to the narrator himself and that document both his past life and his investigations into the lives of others: the empty gardens in 'Henry Selwyn' (pp. 12, 13, 19), the drawings of the classroom in S. and of the railway sidings that the narrator had prepared during childhood lessons with Paul Bereyter (pp. 50, 91), the snapshots of buildings in Deauville (pp. 173, 174, 175), or the numerous images, in 'Max Aurach', of Manchester (pp. 232, 235, 247, 346, 347, 348, 353) and Bad Kissingen (pp. 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 339, 341, 343). The referents are clear, and the photographs invite a primarily indexical reading: they appear to serve an authenticating function, providing irrefutable evidence for the narrator's claims to have seen and done certain things, and anchoring the autobiographical tendency of the discourse.³¹ Such a reading would view the photographs as more or less unmediated fragments of the real, whose role is merely to document contingency.

Many of the photographs, however, possess no such stable referentiality. Take, for example, the first photograph of the text. *Pace* Sigrid Korff (p. 172), it is an overstatement to claim that this photograph has no link to the subsequent text. It is just that the link is indeterminate. The image depicts what is probably a yew tree standing in a graveyard, but whether it is the 'Rasenfriedhof mit schottischen Pinien und Eiben' (p. 8) near the narrator's home cannot be deduced with any certainty, because the photograph does not contain enough information: the Scots pines and the church described in the text are absent from the photograph. The picture of a mountain landscape (p. 25) exists in a similarly ambiguous relationship to the text. The subsequent pages describe a slide-show given by Henry Selwyn to a small dinner party consisting of the narrator, his partner Clara, and another guest named Edward Ellis. The passage contains the following description:

Auf dem letzten der Bilder breitete sich vor uns die von einer nördlichen Paßhöhe herab aufgenommene Hochebene von Lasithi aus. Die Aufnahme mußte um die Mittagszeit gemacht worden sein, denn die Strahlen der Sonne kamen dem Beschauer entgegen.

³¹ There are many correspondences between the narrator of *Die Ausgewanderten* and the real W. G. Sebald, including their birthdays, the villages in which they grew up, and the outlines of their biography. There is also a photograph of Sebald (p. 130). (Photographs of Sebald are also reproduced in *Schwindel. Gefühle*, p. 135, and *Die Ringe des Saturn*, p. 313.) Nevertheless, there are not sufficient grounds for a naive one-to-one equation of the narrator and Sebald, which is why I prefer the neutral term 'narrator' when referring to the voice responsible for telling the stories.

Der im Süden die Ebene überragende, über zweitausend Meter hohe Berg Spathi wirkte wie eine Luftspiegelung hinter der Flut des Lichts. (p. 28)

Up to this point, the passage could well be a caption corresponding to the previous photograph, but as the description continues, this assumption becomes increasingly untenable: 'Auf dem weiten Talboden waren die Kartoffel- und Gemüsiefelder, die Obsthaine, die anderen kleinen Baumgruppen und das unbestellte Land ein einziges Grün in Grün, das durchsetzt war von den Aberhundertten weißen Segeln der Windpumpen' (p. 28). None of these things can be distinguished on the photograph.

The connection between the image of railway lines that precedes 'Paul Bereyter' (p. 41) and the caption that follows soon afterwards is analogous in its effects. The narrator attempts to imagine Bereyter's last moments as he lies on the track awaiting the train that is to kill him: 'Die glänzenden Stahlbänder, die Querbalken der Schwellen, das Fichtenwäldchen an der Altstädter Stiege und der ihm so vertraute Gebirgsbogen waren vor seinen kurzsichtigen Augen verschwommen und ausgelöscht in der Dämmerung' (p. 44). The first part of this quotation could refer to the photograph, but the focus of the image is the very inverse of the effects of myopia: the foreground is blurred, while objects in the middle and far distance are in sharp focus. Furthermore, the three mountains Trettach, Kratzer, and Himmelschrofen are not visible at all. Even more disorientating for the reader are some of the photographs in 'Max Aurach'. A description of a train journey from Norwich to Manchester is accompanied by an image of an utterly flat landscape on which no detail can be made out at all (p. 266). After narrating his trip to the salina at Bad Kissingen, the narrator incorporates a photograph of a twig into his text which might have been broken off one of the huge stacks of twigs in the salt-works, but which cannot be seen to illustrate the text in any specifiable way (p. 344). In both these examples, the referents of the photographs remain unclear, and their purpose within the narrative can only be a matter of speculation and conjecture.

On the one hand, then, *Die Ausgewanderten* contains images which appear to do nothing but reproduce the real, in all its meaninglessness. On the other hand, there is a set of photographs whose reference to the real cannot be specified with any certainty, and whose relationship to the text is so vague as to open up the potential for a totally unregulated and arbitrary symbolic reading. In both cases, but for opposite reasons, the images ostensibly elude the grasp of the interpreter.

This conclusion, however, holds only if we assume that the photographs in question have to be read in terms of their reference to a reality that is prior and external to the text. Kastura's claim that Sebald's use of photography is the 'Ausdruck eines erweiterten Textbegriffs' suggests that the photographs can be read in another way, namely as images that refer to other images within the same text. So, for example, the cemetery with the yew tree can be linked in terms of subject to the three photographs that the narrator takes in the Jewish Cemetery in Bad Kissingen (pp. 333–35), and mirrors compositionally the reproduction of Courbet's *Die Eiche des Vercingetorix* (p. 268). The extracts from Paul Bereyter's notebooks (pp. 86–87) anticipate the later pictures

of Adelwarth's diaries (pp. 194–95, 200–1), and the narrator's drawing of the classroom in S. (p. 50) corresponds to the photograph of the same classroom twenty pages later (p. 70). The postcard of the Hotel Eden in Montreux (p. 113) mirrors compositionally the photograph of the Banff Springs Hotel (p. 142), both of which have mountains looming behind them. In addition, these images are linked to other pictures of hotels in Deauville (pp. 174–75) and Manchester (p. 348). There are also numerous photographs of houses and dwellings: Selwyn's hermitage (p. 19), the pagoda-like mansion of the Japanese ambassador for whom Adelwarth worked (p. 116), the Solomons' Long Island property (p. 128), the terrace in Manchester's Palatine Road that was once inhabited by Wittgenstein and later by Max Aurach (p. 247), and the Lanzbergs' magnificent Bad Kissingen villa (p. 313).

As well as being traces of an external reality, then, the photographs in *Die Ausgewanderten* are related to other photographs both within and across the four stories. This complex set of pictorial interrelations means that the relationship between the images and the text goes beyond that of photograph and caption. Taken in their entirety, the photographs can be seen as addressing the overall thematic issues that permeate the verbal narrative. The possibility of reading the photographs symbolically results not only from the relationship between photography and language, but from the cross-referencing of photographs to each other. Cemeteries, for example, are an obvious symbol of both death and memorial, and we have seen that the text explores the means by which the stories of the dead may be recuperated and memorialized. Indeed, the text itself fulfils, on one level, a memorial function. The drawings and notebooks reproduced thematize the problems of writing and representation, and our inability to fix a multifaceted reality on paper. These problems are addressed extensively in 'Max Aurach'. The painter's strange, palimpsestic technique is a response to the ultimate unrepresentability of three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional canvas, and his aesthetic success consists precisely in the fact that all his attempts end in failure (pp. 239–40; cf. p. 260). The narrator's writing enterprise is characterized by the same scrupulous attitude and techniques of erasure:

Hunderte von Seiten hatte ich bedeckt mit meinem Bleistifts- und Kugelschreibergekritzel. Weitaus das meiste davon war durchgestrichen, verworfen oder bis zur Unleserlichkeit mit Zusätzen überschmiert. Selbst das, was ich schließlich für die 'endgültige Fassung' retten konnte, erschien mir als ein mißratenes Stückwerk. (p. 345)

The hotels and houses, on the other hand, offer powerful visual images of *Heimat* and the loss thereof. In particular, temporary dwellings, most of them devoid of visible inhabitants, are repeatedly depicted in a way that foregrounds the deracination and fundamental homelessness experienced by Sebald's emigrants.³²

The technique of mobilizing motifs that refer not only to external reality but to other motifs within the text has been termed by Joseph Frank 'the principle of reflexive reference'. The concept of 'reflexive reference' occurs in Frank's

³² For a reading that emphasizes transcendental homelessness in relation to Judaism and the loss of an idealized Jerusalem, see Korff, throughout.

well-known essay 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature',³³ where he analyses novels by Flaubert, Joyce, and Djuna Barnes in order to demonstrate that these authors intended their texts to be apprehended 'spatially, in a moment in time' (p. 9). Spatial form is a highly problematic notion, partly because the word 'spatial' conflates textual form and the phenomenology of perception. In addition, narrative is ineluctably temporal, both in its subject matter and in its reading, and so to talk of spatial form entails a wilful refusal to examine the distribution of individual motifs along the narrative syntagma. Nevertheless, the meaning of narratives is not purely dependent on linearity. Indeed, extensive motivic repetitions often exceed the capacity of linear narrative organization to account for them, and they therefore have to be subjected to another mode of reading. It is in this case that the concept of reflexive reference is useful. Those photographs that cannot be fully understood as illustrating the linear unfolding of events can be recuperated as images that refer to other images within the text in order to construct a pictorial metaphor for the thematics of the verbal narrative.

Such an interpretative strategy has important consequences for our understanding of the relationship between photography and history in *Die Ausgewanderten*. As we have seen, photographs characterized by referential indeterminacy on the one hand and representation of contingent and random reality on the other can initially appear to be arbitrary either in the sense that they merely 'authenticate' the verbal narrative, or in the sense that they are unmotivated by the text that surrounds them. On this reading, their effect would be to underpin the sense of dispersion that characterizes the conception of history, environmental change, and family life in *Die Ausgewanderten*. Reading the photographs in terms of reflexive reference, on the other hand, allows them to emerge as part of a network of images that actually fulfil the opposite function: they create patterns of constancy that are repeated within and between the lives of the individual emigrants, including that of the narrator himself.³⁴

It is at this point that we can turn once again to the relationship between the photographs and the verbal narrative. One of the features of Sebald's text to which numerous critics have drawn attention is the dense tissue of motivic repetitions. Arthur Williams isolates the numerous descriptions of trees and mountains, the references to Vladimir Nabokov, the recurrence of the date of Sebald's birthday, the prominence of mirrors, and other motifs.³⁵ Sigrid Korff's argument (pp. 173–85) that the Holocaust is omnipresent in *Die Ausgewanderten* relies on identifying a complex of motifs that links railways, chimneys, the Łódź ghetto, Manchester, and Jerusalem. Eva Juhl (pp. 642–43) points out the persistent sense of haunting that recurs with leitmotivic frequency in the

³³ In *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3–62 (p. 14).

³⁴ For a reading of W. G. Sebald as the fifth emigrant see Susanne Finke, 'W. G. Sebald—der fünfte Ausgewanderte', in *Far From Home: W. G. Sebald*, ed. by Franz Loquai (Bamberg: Fußnoten zur Literatur, 1995), pp. 22–34.

³⁵ See Arthur Williams, 'Elusive First-Person Plural. Real Absences in Reiner Kunze, Bernd-Dieter Hüge and W. G. Sebald', in *Whose Story? Continuities in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, ed. by Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, and Julian Preece (Bern: Lang, 1998), pp. 85–113 (pp. 98–110).

first three stories, and draws attention to the two pairs of doubles in the text: the catechist Meier and the beneficiate Maier, and the shop assistants Müller Heinrich and Müller Hermann.

More important than these motifs, however, are the myriad events whose configurations are repeated across time in the lives of diverse characters. As the narrator drives away from the home of Aunt Fini, her waving figure becomes the double of Adelwarth at the scene of his final parting from Fini herself (p. 152). There are numerous other episodes that follow the same pattern. Theres's departure for the United States after her last visit to Germany in 'Ambros Adelwarth' (pp. 100–01) mirrors Max Aurach's flight from the same Munich airport (pp. 279–80) and the narrator's night flight to Manchester with which 'Max Aurach' begins (pp. 219–21). The caravan of camels painted on the wall of the Wadi Halfa, the café frequented by Aurach and the narrator in Manchester (p. 243), echoes, right down to the angle from which the fresco is painted, the description of the film that led to Cosmo Solomon's eventual mental breakdown (p. 141). The narrator's return to Aurach's studio repeats his first visit with genuinely uncanny exactitude (pp. 268–69); the destruction of Jerusalem as described in Adelwarth's diaries (pp. 203–04) prefigures the destruction of Manchester, the so-called 'Industriejerusalem' (pp. 232–33); Gracie Irlam, the narrator's landlady in Manchester, crops up later in a painting by Aurach of the said Gracie on her candlewick bedspread (pp. 224–25, 264); and Gracie Irlam's bookkeeping ritual (pp. 229–30) is repeated in that of Luisa Lanzberg's father (p. 298). This list could be extended. The point to note is that reflexive reference operates not only within the photographic discourse, but between motifs and episodes of the verbal narrative as well.

In an essay on Robert Walser, Sebald notes the similarities between the life of Walser and the life of his own grandfather. His initial response is to speculate on the nature of such similarities:

Was bedeuten solche Ähnlichkeiten, Überschneidungen und Korrespondenzen? Handelt es sich nur um Vexierbilder der Erinnerung, um Selbst- oder Sinnestäuschungen oder die in das Chaos der menschlichen Beziehungen einprogrammierten, über Lebendige und Tote gleichermaßen sich erstreckenden Schemata einer uns unbegreiflichen Ordnung?

In a later passage in the same text, he comes down firmly on the side of the latter explanation:

Langsam habe ich seither begreifen gelernt, wie über den Raum und die Zeiten hinweg alles miteinander verbunden ist, [. . .] die Geburtsdaten mit denen des Todes, das Glück mit dem Unglück, die Geschichte der Natur mit der unserer Industrie, die der Heimat mit der des Exils.³⁶

Reflexive reference, operative within both the photographic and the narrative discourses of *Die Ausgewanderten*, represents a formal analogue of these reflections on correspondence that allow similarity to be perceived across spatial and temporal distance.

In the course of this discussion, I have put forward two basic interpretative

³⁶ *Logis in einem Landhaus: Über Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser und andere* (Munich: Hanser, 1998), pp. 137–38, 162–63.

models that can be used to account for the relationship between narrative and photography in Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*. The first is that of the historical symptom that becomes a 'postmemory' via a process of narrativization which is determined by the affiliative gaze. The second is that of reflexive reference, according to which photographs can be seen to refer to each other, constituting a nexus of interrelations that mirrors metaphorically the overall thematics of the verbal narrative. Both these techniques need, finally, to be read in the light of Sebald's conception of history. His view of historical process, as we have seen, is characterized by a negative teleology in which entropy, both literal and metaphorical, results in the decline of cultures, the diasporic scattering of peoples, environmental destruction, and the inexorable decay of matter.

Both the affiliative gaze and the technique of reflexive reference are motivated by the desire to find something stable and constant in the face of such historical pessimism. A metaphor that is often used in contemporary criticism is that of 'suturing', the attempt to create some form of durable bond in the face of a perceived historical or post-traumatic fragmentation. The metaphor of suturing allows us to understand the narrator's use of both the affiliative gaze and reflexive reference. His reading of family albums allows him to suture himself into the stories of others and construct a sense of narrative and biographical continuity as a compensation for exile and loss. Reflexive reference, on the other hand, allows patterns of repetition to emerge that go beyond mere coincidence and hint at a hidden, almost magical order behind the ostensible chaos of history and entropy of matter. The combination of narrative and photography in *Die Ausgewanderten* can thus be seen as an attempt, at the level of form, to counteract the dispersal, dissipation, and rupture inherent in the historical process. For Sebald (as for Nabokov, whose often nameless form haunts the narrative with his butterfly net) it is only through such aesthetic strategies that history can possibly be redeemed.