Tragic Travels and Postmnemonic Alterity in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*: A Peratologic Analysis

Catalina Botez

W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001)[1] explores the tensions between (post)memory and amnesia in the context of exile, travel, and (dis)place(ment) by thematising the dialectics of movement and paralysis with reference to Holocaust trauma and postmemory. In this article, I investigate the eponymous character's uncanny travels from self-oblivion to problematic self-awareness induced by the transcendence of both national and psychological boundaries. To this aim, Stephen Clingman's recent discussion of transnationality, and the 'grammar of identity' as the space of translation between national and cultural borders, serves as a theoretical base.[2]

I also employ the concept of the tragic as *peratology*,[3] which was advanced by Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu in two books, *Tragicul: O fenomenologie a limitei si depasirii* (1975) and *Despre Tragic* (1994).[4] Endemic to the category of the tragic, as contended by Liiceanu, is the notion of the individual's conscious confrontation with limits. I suggest that the concept of the tragic helps define a situation where a child survivor of the

Catalina Botez is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Constance, Germany. Her thesis is titled 'Trauma-Shaped Jewish Identities: A Transnational Perspective.'

[1] All quotations refer to W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. from German by Anthea Bell (London, New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

[2] Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 167-247.

[3] From the Greek *peras* meaning 'limit' or 'border,' *peratology* is 'the study of the limit.' It refers to Gabriel Liiceanu's phenomenological theory on tragedy as a case of the limit; he contends that the tragic character is someone who is trapped within specific limits, unable to transgress the boundaries set by the circumstances of their condition. This argument is presented in *Tragicul: O fenomenologie a limitei si depasirii* (Bucuresti: Univers, 1975) and *Despre Tragic* (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1994).

[4] These books have not yet been translated into English. Their titles would translate as *The Tragic: A Phenomenology of the Limit and its Overcoming*, and *On the Tragic*, respectively (my translation).

Holocaust faces in old age the devastating psychological effects of memory loss. Austerlitz's journey is tragic, I argue, precisely because it involves an impact with certain limits and limitations and, most importantly, a voluntary decision to confront them.

The question that rises is how to reconcile two apparently divergent aspects; on the one hand, the journey as a spatial and psychological (progressive) movement and, on the other hand, the pervasive inner paralysis induced by Austerlitz's trauma. Is it possible to understand such transformative notions as transnationality and transfiction within the restrictive confines of peratologic postmemory?[5] Sebald's narrative response to this quandary is anything but straightforward or one-sided; quite the contrary, it is a complex physical and cultural journey that invites meditation on the role of place and time in identity recovery by projecting an individual crisis against the larger canvas of pan-historic wars and destruction.

Austerlitz is the devastating story of an architectural scholar by the name of Jacques Austerlitz, settled in England, and haunted late in life by the dreadful feeling of ignorance with regard to his past. On overhearing a radio programme that tells the story of a lady relocated from Prague to England via one of the many child transports from German-occupied Europe during WWII, Austerlitz realises that her story is his own (and long suppressed) life story. He therefore decides to embark on a journey to Prague in former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) in order to discover his roots and explore all pathways leading back to his parents. During his European journeys he meets 'the narrator' and passes onto him the task of telling the reader his life story. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes obvious that Jacques Austerlitz is a child survivor of the Holocaust, a Jewish child removed from Prague on a Kindertransport in 1939 in order to survive the Nazis' final solution. Once in Britain, he is placed with a Welsh family who erases all traces of his past, changes his name to Daffyd Elias, and raises him in complete oblivion of his true origins. Throughout his studies and career as an architectural historian, Austerlitz makes conscious efforts to avoid all clues leading to the truth about his identity, but the past returns to haunt him and place him back on the track to 1939, the year when his tragic estrangement began.

Back in Prague after a few decades, Austerlitz sees his childhood nanny Vera again who confirms that his parents are secular Jews who most probably perished in the Holocaust, either in the concentration camp at Terezín[6] (his

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[5] Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity*, pp. 167-204.
[6] Commonly known by its German name Theresienstadt.

mother Agáta) or possibly deported from Paris to an extermination camp (his father). The narrative itself is nothing but the literary expression of travelling memory, a stream of consciousness, which takes the reader around the ruins of post-war Europe, and fuels melancholic meditation on history, postmoemory, loss, and destruction.

Categorised by critic Stephen Clingman as 'transfiction' or a 'migrant form' that shares the characteristics of fiction, journal, catalogue, and research,[7] *Austerlitz* is in his view also a transnational text. The transnational is implied from the very beginning in the description of the central station in Antwerp, Belgium (where Austerlitz meets 'the narrator' for the first time), and which is more than just a crossroads for international travelers. Its history harks back to ancient Roman times and the structural model of the Pantheon. It was built during Belgium's prosperous colonial times and it speaks for the principle of cross-cultural and pan-historic contamination by reiterating a set of architectural patterns borrowed from the Italian Renaissance, Byzantine, and Moorish art. This lavish heterogeneity is intended, however, to pass on a grander socio-political message related to power and hierarchy, sovereignty, and subjection, both in times past and recent history:

> [h]owever laughable in itself, Delacenserie's eclecticism, uniting past and future in the Central Station with its marble stairway in the foyer and the steel and glass roof spanning the platform, was in fact a logical stylistic approach to the new epoch… The movement of all travelers could be surveyed from the central position occupied by the clock… and conversely all travelers had to look up and were obliged to adjust their activities to its demands.[8]

The power relations in imperialist, colonial, or capitalist times never really change; they only get renamed as Sebald suggests. The foreboding connection to the Nazi policies and Austerlitz's now-obscured past lies right there in the subtext; forewarning or presentiment? As Clingman points out, for a person like Austerlitz, "every place is a presentiment, because the presentiment lies

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[7] The term 'transfiction' was coined by Clingman in *The Grammar of Identity*, pp.187-188; it mainly refers to the overlapping of genres in Sebald's *Austerlitz*, to the 'mixed modes' of "image and text, but even within the text the combination of history, memoir, fiction, journal, travelogues, catalogue, research-every available form... It is itself a migrant form... a syntactic form, a metonymic form, a navigational form. No one genre or mode is capable of capturing the truth; together they comprise a journey in modality, as well as content." The original Latin root of the word 'fiction,' namely *fingere*, 'to fashion, mould, imagine, invent,' is now stretched to suggest 'a fashioning, imagining *across*.'

[8] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 12-14.

within him."[9] More precisely, places have a persistent memory for pain, which remains embedded in them and becomes transmissible to someone like Austerlitz, once he is consciously determined to decode their encrypted meaning.

Austerlitz, as it turns out, is very much aware of the regressive nature of the journey forward. He meets his personal appointment with the past after years of conscious, systematic self-censorship of mind, during which time he suspends history through "refined defensive reactions"[10] that create what J. J. Long calls "an internal mnemic void."[11] As Austerlitz confesses, "I knew nothing about the conquest of Europe by the Germans and the slave state they set up, and nothing about the persecution I had escaped… As far as I was concerned the world ended in the nineteenth century."[12] Since these internal self-defensive mechanisms were self-imposed, I suggest that they are parallel in essence but not in intent, with the Nazi attempts to eradicate memory. Austerlitz breaks the pattern, though, when he decides to confront the limits of his memory, and engages in an exploration of his past, although he is not mentally prepared for the blow and magnitude of the entire truth.

But this long-lasting and self-imposed evasion of knowledge is simultaneously, and essentially, also aggression against language, which results in something Gabriele Schwab names "a form of death in life"; "Thus quarantined from the world, he remains immune to traumatic impingements and mnemonic intrusions, a state that ultimately translates into immunity to being."[13] Both Schwab and Sebald indirectly stress the importance of acknowledged memory and language to existence itself. The loss of (spoken and written) words equals self-annihilation and existential malfunction; "this censorship of the mind… led to the almost paralysis of my linguistic faculties, the destruction of all my notes and sketches… up to the point of my nervous breakdown in the summer of 1992."[14] So it is interesting how Sebald's character engages in the destruction of his written work in a symbolic act of purging his ignorant past in order to conceive of, and actively begin his search for, self awareness, which, paradoxically, puts him on the track back to his

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[9] Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity*, p.195.

[10] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 197.

[11] J. J. Long , 'The Archival Subject,' in *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, ed. J. J. Long (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 152.

[12] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 197.

[13] Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 50.

[14] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 198.

origins. Symbolically, the way back to his origins is via same the train tracks that removed him from his past back in 1939.

Interestingly, in Sebald's work, the recurring trope of the intricate network of railway tracks operates in similar ways to the syntax of memory. As Clingman suggests, "the very modes of origin, connection, and transit that link Europe are Austerlitz's grammar of loss."[15] The railway imagery yields, however, an ambivalent message: on the one hand, it facilitates the transgression of borders, ensures the transfer to seemingly safe destinations, and hypostatises mobility, freedom, and escape; on the other hand, it appears tragically linked to captivity, entrapment, and inertia. The tracks are, therefore, mere trajectories between tragic landmarks, while Jacque's journeys are both promises of escape and, sadly and eventually, dead ends of hope.

Gabriel Liiceanu's theory of the tragic as border-related, or *peratologic*, crisis helps understand the dialectics of freedom and entrapment in this transfictional narrative, and the dilemma of traumatic dislocation and translocation. According to Liiceanu, the tragic is an operational concept rooted in the Greek notion of *peras*, meaning 'border' or 'limit.' "The discerning aspect related to the tragic, Liiceanu avers, is that it *always* occurs at the border."[16] This liminal clash is a necessary aspect of the tragic confrontation because it signals a conscious withdrawal from *Geborgenheit* (security or sheltered-ness), meaning the particular sense of security and safety that a sheltered, albeit finite, existence provides.

So how and to what extent does the concept of the tragic apply to Sebald's narrative and what role does travel play in this tragic scenario? How does Austerlitz fit into this philosophical description of 'the tragic patient' (Liiceanu) and what constitutes the limit or so-called 'tragic agent' (Liiceanu)? I suggest that, in Sebald's plot, the 'tragic agent' is anything related to Austerlitz's past, his Jewish origins, the circumstances of his parents' death, and the absent memory of his early years in Prague. As Austerlitz confesses to his unnamed friend and narrator:

> [s]ince my childhood and youth… I have never known who I really was… It has also become clear to me of late why an agency greater than or superior to my own capacity for thought… has always preserved me from my own secret.[17]

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[15] Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity*, p. 197.

[16] 'Ceea ce distinge tragicul este faptul ca el se desfasoara *întotdeauna* la hotar.' See Liiceanu, *Tragicul*, p. 48. Author's in-text translation.

[17] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 60-61.

The limit, as it turns out, is internal and connected to the innermost mechanisms of the human psyche; i.e. a dysfunctional traumatised memory. Prolonged repression and postponement have hampered memory retrieval throughout the years, a fact which renders the *tragic* task of recovering that past even more difficult to initiate.[18]

The delay in launching the self-search is paradoxical, since numerous, uncanny remnants of the past lie waiting to be uncovered all across Europe, Sebald implies. For instance, the new Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and its archives document the official past, while the former Galéries d'Austerlitz used to store the goods stolen from the deported Jews in its basement. History and counter-history, like life and death, coexist. They are superimposed; that is to say the aforementioned cultural institutions beyond their role as preservers of cultural memory, also stand as testimony to oppression, pain, and genocide. The ironic coexistence of both realities within the structure of today's architectural spaces of national significance is nothing short of uncanny.

If the uncanny is omnipresent, then its limits extend beyond the national and, consequently, involve the transnational. "As Freud suggests, the national is the boundary that holds off the unconscious of its own reality. Therefore, the search must intrinsically become transnational."[19] In which case, the tragic agent itself must look into the transnational. That is to say, the architectural history of places and buildings, i.e., their complex layering, simultaneously covers and reveals a network of pan-historic truth that expands beyond the national and has to be regarded transnationally. This thought informs Austerlitz's travels and the narrator's interpretation of these travels as

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[18] Jacques's conscious suppression of memory, i.e., deliberate avoidance of the limit, prevents him from being involved in *the tragic* at this stage; however, this attitude does not lead to his *cancellation of the tragic*, because Austerlitz believes neither in a transcendent heaven nor in heaven on earth. *The cancellation of the tragic* can only be achieved in these two ways, according to Liiceanu's phenomenological theory: a) on the one hand, one can relativise the limit, and thereby cancel it, by postulating the existence of a transcendent heaven; b) on the other hand, one can absolutise the limit by freezing history and postulating a terrestrial heaven. 'Exista doua modalitati majore de *anulare a tragicului* descris în limitele peratologiei: a) relativizarea limitei absolute, care trimite la anularea tragicului existential prin postularea unui paradis extramundan; b) absolutizarea limitei relative, care trimite la anularea tragicului istoriei prin "înghetarea" istoriei si postularea unui paradis terestru.' See Liiceanu, *Tragicul*, p. 53. Neither of these two cases applies to Austerlitz, although, through trauma, he does feel that the temporal boundaries between past and present are dissolved and that the dead coexist with the living. Yet, I argue, his surrealism is pathological, not metaphysical.

[19] Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity*, pp. 178-179.

transnational meditations on the interconnectedness of the personal with the collective, as well as on the panhistoric consequences of tyranny, violence, and usurpation of truth.

The 'tragic patient,' on the other hand, is described by Liiceanu as the being who suffers the effects of their own limit-challenging actions. He can only be regarded as tragic if he endures the effects of the self-initiated clash with the limit.[20] Thus, Austerlitz becomes a tragic character only when he consciously engages in tackling his limit by attempting to retrieve his past. Following an overheard radio conversation on wartime child transports, which confirms some of his own presentiments, he travels to Prague, Terezín, Marienbad, and Paris, visits the archives there and the Ghetto Museum in Terezín, and also revisits the Marienbad spa.[21] All these locations, so intimately linked to the history of the Holocaust, bear remnants of Austerlitz's individual past, and bring about a partial, incomplete memory retrieval.

The motif of the archive, which often carries equivocal (and counter-historical) functions throughout Sebald's work, is usually regarded as memory aid or even as memory replacement tool, a prosthesis for lost or merely recoverable collective memory. But some critics caution us against that interpretation and warn us against its traps, which Sebald hints at in *Austerlitz*. Featured as prosthetic[22] memory and infinite regression, the archive, in J. J. Long's view, "becomes a self-generating, self-referential system that entails a perpetual deferral of the moment of completion," which is precisely the effect of Sebald's narrative.[23] The narrative texture of *Austerlitz*, just like the rich

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[20] In original: 'Factorul care suporta efectele actiunii pe care a declansat-o ca forma de tentare a limitei poate fi numit *pacient tragic.* El nu este pacient decît în masura în care *suportă efectele propriei sale acţiuni.* Pacientul tragic este elementul principal al scenariului tragic (eroul), pentru ca este initiatorul coliziunii cu limita.' See Liiceanu, *Tragicul*, pp. 49-50.

[21] This was his last holiday destination with his parents.

[22] Postmemory is essentially a form of intergenerational prosthetic subjectivity: "Prosthetic memories thus become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses…these memories are not 'natural' or 'authentic' and yet they organize and energize the bodies and subjectivities that take them on." Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 26. In Austerlitz's case, however, this substitute memory has not got exclusively beneficent effects. See also Celia Lury, 'Identity and Prosthetic Culture,' in *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-7.

[23] Long, 'The Archival Subject,' p. 154.

labyrinthine content of the archives, postpones arrival to a clear and definite destination. They make use of postponement techniques that defeat the initially stated purpose (to elucidate and help preserve historic truth), and therefore perpetuate a contradiction that undermines the meaning of their own existence.

The controversial (and perilous) nature of the archive also transpires in its contribution to the long-term deletion of human memory, which is precisely what lies in the subtext of Sebald's meditation on archival memory. Pondering on the margins of Derrida's thoughts on *le mal d'archive* (the archive fever), Richard Crownshaw contends that the archive is built on yet another contradiction; it amasses information while at the same time consuming and therefore destroying memory.[24] Similarly, German scholar Aleida Assmann argues that "memory, including cultural memory [by which she refers directly to the archive], is always permeated and shot through with forgetting… The function of the archive, the reference memory of a society… creates a meta-memory, a second-order memory that preserves what has been forgotten."[25] It is precisely by holding on to it, however, that the archive makes human memory idle or over-reliant on stored information which, by being stored, offers the false comfort of also being remembered or at hand, and not necessary to be brought to the surface. Therefore, in time, stored and institutionalised information becomes forgotten.

Another problem with the archive is that "embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural/archival memory"[26] are incomplete.[27] As

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[24] Richard Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering Post-Memory: Photography, The Archive, and Post-Holocaust Memory in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*,' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Ideas*, vol. 37 (2004), pp. 219-220.

[25] Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive,' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds Astrid Erll and Angskar Nünning (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 105-106.

[26] See Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive,' pp. 97-107; and Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory,' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds Astrid Erll and Angskar Nünning (Berlin, New York: Water de Gruyter), pp. 109-118.

[27] Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory,' *Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2008), p. 110; this refers back to Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (1997), in which he discriminates between the 'communicative,' biographical or factual memory, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional or archival memory, on the other. Hirsch also reminds us that nine years later in 2006, Aleida Assmann elaborates on this twofold distinction by distinguishing four memory compartments: on the one hand, individual and family/group memory correspond to Jan Assmann's 'communicative'

M. Hirsch also stresses, family/group memories were dissolved into chaotic emotions, and the erasure of records perpetrated by the Nazis upset the archival memory.[28] Thus, memory, be it individual or collective, is also essentially flawed and therefore unreliable, which is precisely what W. G. Sebald seems to suggest via his character Austerlitz; no matter how long he searches through the European archives, the knowledge he gains about his long lost parents is minimal and inconclusive. And rather than shedding some light on their destinies and current whereabouts, the archives only deepen his anxieties, feed his uncertainties, and hint at his worst fears of having lost his parents for ever. The archives, therefore, become yet another limit in Austerlitz's path towards clarity and inner peace.

Perhaps the most touching confrontation with the limit is Austerlitz's attempt to recall the circumstances surrounding a photograph of himself dressed as a page for a masked ball at the age of four. Taken in February 1939, just six months before the final separation from his mother Agáta,[29] this photograph stirs no single trace of remembrance in him:

> [A]ll memory was extinguished in me… I have studied the photograph many times since… I examined every detail under the magnifying glass without once finding the slightest clue…I was not… moved or distressed… only speechless and uncomprehending, incapable of any lucid thought. Even later nothing but blind panic filled me when I thought of the five-year-old page.[30]

This moment of on-looking is tragic in that it typifies not only the implacability of the *limes* or border of memory, but also the defeat of the traumatised mind, unable to recall personal experience; in Freud's words, this is a case of failed *Durcharbeiten* or unsuccessful working through of trauma. The difficulty in coping with absent memory rises also from the fact that the picture becomes a palpable proof of the painful and irreversible split between the five year-old Jacquot in the chevalier costume and the now old Jacques Austerlitz returned to Prague in search of his roots, who are and yet are not the same person any

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memory; on the other hand, national/political memory and cultural/archival memory are classified under J. Assmann's second category of 'cultural' memory.

[28] "Under the Nazis, cultural archives were destroyed, records burned, possessions lost, histories suppressed and eradicated." Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory,' p. 111.

[29] He receives this information from his former nanny Vera.

[30] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 259-260.

more. The photograph functions here as postmnemonic tool,[31] but is, as Duttlinger avers, "fragmentary, decontextualised and opaque."[32]

Thus, like individual and archival memory, photographs themselves also prove to be fragile, precarious media of memory. According to the same Duttlinger,

> [P]hotography is thus figured as a model not for the permanence of memory but for the phenomenon of forgetting. Interestingly, all three processes – photography, recollection and forgetting – take place in the dark…and therefore in the liminal sphere between dreaming and waking, consciousness and the unconscious.[33]

This idea sparks a striking resemblance to well-known Freudian concepts regarding the similarity between photographic development and the mechanism of memory and trauma, particularly with regard to disturbing childhood events that block out memories due to insufficient receptivity of the psychic apparatus. According to S. Pane, however, Austerlitz's purpose, when faced with the four-year old pageboy in the photograph is 'Barthian'; i.e. to ratify the past, not restore it. Once unable to ratify that past, Jacques experiences what Barthes calls *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*, i.e., the wounding or piercing effect of a certain detail in a photo, translated as the inability to

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[31] Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term, explains that "postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection." Although Austerlitz is a child survivor and not second-generation, the photograph is for him a post-mnemonic object because of the distance imposed by the lost memory. Hirsch also clarifies that "photographs in their enduring 'ombilical' connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory, and postmemory. They are the left-overs, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through the holes of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance." Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 22-23. On Sebald's use of photography as a means to pin down history, that is, "to rescue something out of the stream of history that keeps running past," see Sebald's interview in Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (eds), *W.G. Sebald*: *History, Memory, Trauma* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 21-33.

[32] Carolin Duttlinger, 'Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance and the Technical Media in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*,' in *W.G Sebald: A Critical Companion*, eds J. J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 157.

[33] Carolin Duttlinger, 'Traumatic Photographs,' p.158.

name the source of grief.[34] This goes to prove, in Austerlitz's case, that sometimes inability to remember traumatic details hurts more than the very memory of those same events.

I propose, however, an understanding of this failure of identification by using the term "heteropathic recollection" that Marianne Hirsch employs.[35] Heteropathic recollection applies when talking about contemporary second-generation survivors glimpsing at photos of child victims of the Holocaust and experiencing identification with them through the so-called "triangular visual encounter": "The adult…encounters the child (the other child and his/her own child self) both as a child, through identification, and from the protective vantage point of the adult-looking subject."[36] Hirsch goes on to explain that "in the particular case of postmemory and 'heteropathic recollection' where the subject is not split just between past and present, adult and child, but also between self and other, the layers of recollection and the subjective topography are even more complicated" because "the adult subject of postmemory encounters the image of the child victim *as* child witness, and thus the split subjectivity characterizing the structure of memory is triangulated."[37] This triangle, I argue, is also inherent in postmnemonic alterity and it is defined as both cultural and intergenerational. The fact that the adult Austerlitz does not recognise himself in the photo of the page boy can also be interpreted, I suggest, as a case of 'heteropathic recollection' because identification between Austerlitz's own child self and the child in the photo does not occur at any stage.

Moreover, I concur with critic Russell J.A. Kilbourn's view, who compares Jacques' uncanny journey of self-discovery to an intentionally ironic and recontextualised modern Odyssey, an underworld excursion: "The self's recuperation of lost memory-content allegorises his re-emergence into the land of the living, the state of 'un-remembering' or mnemonic divestment is shown to be emblematic of the self's sojourn though a living death." So much so that,

[34] As discussed in Samuel Pane, '*Trauma Obscura*: Photographic Media in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*,' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Ideas*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2005), pp. 47-48.
[35] Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy,' in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).
[36] Hirsch, 'Projected Memory,' p. 15.
[37] Hirsch, 'Projected Memory,' p. 15.

"in the end, *Austerlitz* presents not the *production* of an individual subjective interiority but its ironic deconstitution."[38]

As I have shown, Jacques's is a case of travelling trauma with implications both personal and pan-historic.[39] His confrontation with the tragic limit, although involving some degree of mobility, is only a transitional stage from the trauma of not knowing at all, on the one hand, to not knowing enough, on the other. Either way, it involves a form of traumatic stasis; both before and after his self-searching journey, a shattering sense of emotional and intellectual paralysis coerces Austerlitz into calling his very own existence into question. He remains, therefore, a tragically liminal figure of postmnemonic alterity.

In this paper, I have taken stock of the possibilities and forms of travel in W. G. Sebald's narrative, which range from the structural composition and mixture of genres that trans-fiction implies, to an exploration of the connection between trauma and travel at the personal and collective, as well as transcultural and pan-historic levels. Thus, all the travel modes deployed in Sebald's text express a concern with the memory and pain embedded in places, with stories that run counter to official history, and equally with the investigation of palimpsest-like, (dis-)located layers of truth. Various aspects of travel are conveyed through stories of forced migration, post-traumatic anguish, research-aimed travel, and self-restorative/therapeutic journeys. Last but not least, travel takes the form of a critical historiography, i.e., an exploration of the recurrent ideological follies of the past, be they colonial, imperialist, totalitarian, and capitalist, and the way they subsist in and condition the present. Sebald's insightful efforts ultimately reveal the tragic condition of Holocaust survivorship and the exile's fragility when confronted with his own limits, the perils of suppression as well as the depths of memory and identity loss.

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[38] R. J. Kilbourn, 'Architecture and Cinema: The Representation of Memory in W.G. Sebald's Austerlitz,' in *W.G Sebald: A Critical Companion*, eds J. J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 152.

[39] His name *Austerlitz* is embedded in and dissipated throughout the history of the European continent. It bears echoes of the Napoleonic wars and imperialism through its allusion to the famous battle in Moravia, but also to Kafka and his life (he was circumcised by a person by that name); Gare d'Austerlitz and Les Galeries d'Austerlitz bear witness to the counter-histories of racism and Nazi crimes: these places preserve the memory of pain in similar ways to Jacques' own retention of traumatic experience. Also, the homonymic echoes of Auschwitz in the name Austerlitz are unmistakable.