

**VOICING THE DEAD: PHOTOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGE IN W.G SEBALD'S *AUSTERLITZ* AND  
*THE EMIGRANTS***

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*By shutting her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human personalities with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me.'*

Marcel Proust, *The Captive; The Fugitive*<sup>1</sup>

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud comments that '[e]ven in the best interpreted dream, there is often a place that must be left in the dark [...] its mycelium.'<sup>2</sup> It is with regards to this 'spot where [the unconscious] reaches down into the unknown' that I will investigate the ways in which W.G Sebald attempts to illuminate this darkness through his use of photography in both *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*.<sup>3</sup> These black and white photographs convey a variety of images that complement the narrative in both texts. It is this integration of photography with language which has been overlooked in much criticism on Sebald. This article will explore the way in which Sebald attempts to convey this silent mycelium and in doing so portray the polyphonic voices of the dead. I

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Proust, 'The Captive (1923); The Fugitive (1925)', in *In Search of Lost Time*, Vol V, trans. By D J Enright (1992), (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (1913)*, ed. and trans. By James Strachey (1955), (U.S.A: Basic Books, 2010), p. 528.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 494.

will examine how Sebald's chosen photographs coalesce with the language employed in the two texts and the relation this has to photographic discourse. This discourse is characterized by what the photograph represents, or what it is showing us that is external to the events of the narrative in both of Sebald's texts. This includes not only the subject of the photograph but the stylistic elements in the photograph, i.e. the angle, the light, colours. The photographs thus operate both autonomously in their own frame of reference, but contrapuntally to the language in the texts.

The starting point for my investigation will be Jacques Austerlitz's description of his breakdown and what this passage tells us about the limits of language in representing trauma. Following this I will then explore the ways in which trauma links to the unconscious mind, drawing on specific moments in Freud's text *Moses and Monotheism*. I will then analyse the 'non-voice' of the unconscious<sup>4</sup> in relation to the dead characters that are portrayed in both of Sebald's texts. Finally I will, contrary to much critical work surrounding Sebald, explore how photography and language synthesise in both *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants* to portray the silent voices of the dead.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Unconscious' in its use here being understood as the recess in human subjectivity that resists easy assimilation into the consciousness and thus resists easy representation in language.

In *Austerlitz*, the eponymous protagonist, suffers a breakdown: '[F]or as soon as I so much picked up my pencil the endless possibilities of language, to which I could once safely abandon myself, became a conglomeration of the most inane phrases.' Jacques conveys how the 'endless possibilities' that language once held for him become meaningless, 'hollow' and thus incommunicable.<sup>5</sup> This passage is particularly poignant when considering the relationship between language and photography throughout the novel, as neither in the past temporality of the breakdown, nor in the present temporality of narration, is Austerlitz able to fully communicate what happened to his mind. Austerlitz describes what happened but can only portray it in terms of loss of language where, '[t]here was/[is] not an expression in the sentence' (p.173). The navel of his breakdown remains elusive, with words such as 'hollow' and 'false' being employed by Austerlitz to describe this process. This choice of wording makes his language empty and thus communicates something that in its very essence defies transference.

Language's inadequacy to communicate trauma is furthered when Austerlitz relates what he underwent during his breakdown:

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<sup>5</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz (2001)*, trans. By Anthea Bell, (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 173. All subsequent reference to this text will be placed after the quotation in parenthesis.

sat for hours, for days on end with my face to the wall, tormenting myself and gradually discovering the horror of finding that even the smallest task or duty, for instance arranging assorted objects in a drawer, can be beyond one's power. (p. 173)

Here, Austerlitz's pain is inscribed onto the physical action of 'arranging assorted objects'. His inability to do so conveys a sense of the weight under which his mind has collapsed, as a seemingly simple task remains 'beyond [his] power.' This failure to finish tasks seeps into the language where verbs are not in past tense. '[D]iscovering', 'finding', and 'arranging' are all present participles that indicate actions which are not yet complete, and as such further reiterates how these actions are out of Austerlitz's reach; they cannot, and never will be, complete. The phrase gradually discovering the horror of finding' is particularly striking, as two present participles follow on in quick succession. This leads to a knock-on-effect whereby both actions remain hanging in the narrative – the 'discovering' and 'finding' remain hidden. The breakdown thus remains beyond articulation in language, its tools proving insufficient for expressing Austerlitz's trauma.

By leaving the language in a state of flux, Sebald links the plot of Austerlitz's narrative, his breakdown, to its literary enactment in the text. The grammatical structures mimic Austerlitz's feeling of being lost in language, as if it were 'an old city full of street and

squares, nooks and crannies' that he cannot 'find his way through' (pp. 174-5). This extract highlights the way in which language reaches a limit in exploring the traumatic events in Austerlitz's life. Shoshana Felman states that '[i]n the testimony, language is in process and in trial'.<sup>6</sup> This acknowledgement of language 'in process' is explicitly replicated by Austerlitz in his use of present participles and thus helps to convey his trauma as something unobtainable. It cannot be captured in a freeze frame, and cannot be ingested by the reader due to its momentum. This pace offers challenges to the reader and as such invites a re-examination of Austerlitz's trauma. Language thus becomes contentious as both character and reader place it on trial, gauging whether it is sufficient in articulating trauma.

The inadequacy of language to capture trauma also appears in another of Sebald's texts, *The Emigrants*. The narrator relays the narrative of Max Ferber during the war years and states that, 'It had been a terribly bad time for him, a time scarcely to be endured, a time he could not bear to say any more about.'<sup>7</sup> This blunt sentence differs greatly to the pages of description in which Austerlitz attempts to convey his breakdown; however both extracts portray the same impenetrable darkness of trauma that language seems

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<sup>6</sup> Shoshana Felman, 'Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. By Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants (1996)*, trans. By Michael Hulse, (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 167.

unable to capture. Ferber's trauma is not explored in any great depth and is overtly portrayed through its unspeakable nature – the reader is aware it is too painful for Ferber to mention.

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud describes trauma as 'those impressions, experienced early and later forgotten, to which we attach such great importance'.<sup>8</sup> He then positions these 'memory-traces' within childhood, explaining that 'traumatic phenomena' is an innate, inaccessible and impenetrable element of the human subject's psyche.<sup>9</sup> Trauma resists representation, much like it does in *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*, but more importantly for Freud it is part of man's pre-history, or 'preconscious'.<sup>10</sup> The trauma experienced by the human subject is 'not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth [... his] *archaic heritage*'.<sup>11</sup> For example, for Freud this traumatic heritage can be seen in man's guilt for murdering the father figure in his essay *Totem and Taboo*, which leads to the 'partial return of the repressed' and Freud's emphasis on the origins of monotheistic religion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism (1964)', in *The Origins of Religion (1985)*, in *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. By & ed. by James Strachey, Vol 13, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 315.

<sup>9</sup> *Moses*, p. 319, p. 343, p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 340.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 343.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 320-327.

Towards the beginning of *Austerlitz*, Jacques describes growing up in Vyrnmy, Wales, and listening to 'Evan the cobbler' who 'told tales of the dead' (p. 74). Evan tells young Austerlitz that these phantoms can be seen and that the living are not as separate from the dead as one might think. He states 'nothing but a piece of silk [...] separates us from the next world' (p.76). If the living world can be equated with the conscious and the 'next world' of the dead equated with the unconscious, we can see that Evan's comments about the dead can be transposed onto the human subject's psyche: the unconscious is that which is dead. This otherness cannot easily be represented and resists full comprehension in a similar way to Freud's traumatic phenomena.

In both *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*, W.G Sebald attempts to voice the silence of the dead using both photography and language. Sebald uses photography not just, as Richard Crownshaw argues, to visualise trauma and hence too the un-representable dead, but also to infuse his language with a photographic discourse that allows the spectres of the dead to haunt the pages of his texts.<sup>13</sup>

In my photographic work I was always especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Crownshaw, 'The Limits of Transference: Theories of Memory and Photography in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Err & Ann Rigney, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 68-83.

exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long. (p.109)

In this extract Austerlitz describes what draws him to photography. This is a poignant departure point in the text, as it is through this chiasmic sentence that the photographic process is explained for the first time in relation to the mind. The 'shadows of reality' that emerge when the photograph is submerged within its developer, bear striking resemblance to Evan's dead who 'blur and flicker slightly at the edges' (p. 74). For Austerlitz 'memories' remain as inaccessible as they did for Freud, and lead to darkness if he tries to bring them to the surface of his mind. This sense of 'slipping away' can be appropriated to the rest of the language in the text, and becomes interesting with regards to the image of the photographic developer.

The photographic developer becomes an important motif throughout the text and permeates the language in a variety of forms. In a scene where Austerlitz describes being in Liverpool Street Station, language and image coalesce to concretise this motif in Sebald's discourse. As Austerlitz watches 'innumerable people [...] disembarking from the trains or boarding them' (p. 179), he describes the layers of 'coke dust and soot, steam, sulphur and diesel oil' (p. 181) which form a 'faint greyness' (p.181) that settles



in the station. In amidst his description is a photograph of a train station shrouded in mist that offers a visual reference of 'faint greyness'. This mist then reappears again, a mere eleven pages later, when Austerlitz describes the memory he has of standing 'in the nave of the wonderful church of Salle in Norfolk' (p. 192). In this scene, a 'white mist' rises from the meadow he is looking at and 'become[s] denser and denser [...] until we [Austerlitz and his love interest Marie de Verneuil] ourselves emerged from it only above the waist' (p. 192).

In the following sentence Austerlitz states, 'Memories like this came back to me in the disused Ladies' Waiting-Room of Liverpool Street station,' (p.192), creating a direct parallel between this image and the misty photograph of the train station. He then discloses how he sees these memories 'like the labyrinthine vaults [he] saw in the dusty grey light' (p.192) hanging in the air in the station. By placing these two notions close together, the previously mentioned photographic developer condenses into mist. This mist not only forms the content of Austerlitz's memories, but also triggers a remembrance and brings memories to the surface of his consciousness; it mimics the mechanisms of both the camera and the photograph. The memory is triggered as if looking at a photograph and the image is thus developed or brought to the surface much in the way a camera captures the frame. Later in the text, it even takes the form of a

'cloud of smoke' that brings forth 'images of a faded world' (p.179), bearing an uncanny resemblance to the puff of smoke emitted by Victorian cameras. Here, the photographic process influences the language in *Austerlitz*; it is as if the language is trying to contort and transcend its own media. This is pivotal when considering representations of trauma and language's redundancy in clearly articulating the silent mycelium.

Both *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz* are hybrid texts, wherein language and images influence whereby the language and image both influence and inform one another in an attempt to voice the silence of the dead. James Wood in his introduction to *Austerlitz* comments that 'the text is constantly in communion with the ghosts of the dead' (p. xiii), something which is furthered by the striking photographs of deceased human beings that appear sporadically throughout the text. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* investigates the role of photography and states that 'the person or thing photographed is [...] a kind of little simulacrum [...] the *Spectrum* of the photograph.'<sup>14</sup> In both of my chosen texts, this notion of the 'Spectrum' has its visual representation not only in the numerous photographs of people, but also through the characters of Jacques Austerlitz and Max Ferber.

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<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), trans. By Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 9.

In the fourth and final narrative of *The Emigrants*, the narrator reminisces about the ‘meetings in Trafford Park’ that he and Ferber had.<sup>15</sup> He recounts how when ‘Ferber had been working in charcoal [the] fine powdery dust had given his skin a metallic sheen’.<sup>16</sup> Ferber then tells the narrator about an article he read which observed the changes to a photographer’s skin, ‘whose body had absorbed so much silver in the course of a lengthy professional life that he had become a kind of photographic plate.’<sup>17</sup> Ferber thus becomes associated with the Barthesian Spectrum, as his body’s new sheen develops into a simulacrum of a photograph. Stefanie Harris comments that ‘the *that-has-been* attached to all photographs suggests an implicit trauma because of its irretrievable “past-ness” and the mourning of that loss.’<sup>18</sup> This notion of photography representing the ‘has-been’ – or the dead – is linked to Ferber through Sebald’s use of imagery, and positions Ferber as a spectre in the living world. He begins to develop into this “past-ness” of photography and thus represents a dead man.

A parallel to Ferber’s metallic dust exists in *Austerlitz* though the aunt of the protagonist, Gwendolyn, who applies a ‘powder, fine as dust’ (p. 86) during her illness.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Emigrants*, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 164

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Stefanie Harris, ‘The Return of the Dead: Memory and Photography in W.G.Sebald’s *Die Ausgewanderten*’, in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 4, Sites of Memory (Autumn 2001), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3072632>, [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April], (p. 384).

This dust alludes to other examples of mist that recur throughout the novel, invoking photography within the language. The room Gwendolyn is dying in is one where ‘white powder [has] settled on everything’ and started to resemble ‘ectoplasm’ (p.87). The word ‘ectoplasm’ alludes to ghosts as well as the trace they leave behind, and in this sentence is connected to the white powder that Gwendolyn smothers all over her body. Gwendolyn thus mirrors Ferber as her body and appearance alters to such a degree that she resembles a phantom. Her presence in the narrative thus becomes ghostly, as she not only turns her body white like a phantom, but she is also in the process of dying. This again emphasises how films, in this case the physical film Gwendolyn applies to her skin, develop characters into phantoms present in the living world.

In a conversation with Christian Scholz, Sebald comments on his use of photography: ‘I believe that the black-and-white photograph, or rather the gray zones in the black-and-white, stand for [the] territory that is located between death and life.’<sup>19</sup> This ‘gray zone’ is transposed onto Max Ferber, Aunt Gwendolyn, and Jacques Austerlitz in Sebald’s texts; the difference being in Austerlitz’s case that his appearance does not allude to a photograph - he is by profession a photographer. His world is one where ‘[a]ll forms and

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<sup>19</sup> Christian Scholz, ‘But the Written Word is not a True Document’: A Conversation with W.G. Sebald on Literature and Photography’, in *Searching for Sebald: Photography after W.G. Sebald*, trans. By Markus Zisselsberger, ed. by Lise Patt with Christel Dillbohner, (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007), p. 108.

colours were dissolved in a pear-gray haze' with 'no contrasts' (p.135) and throughout the text there is a significant lack of vibrant colour. The city is 'grey or plaster coloured' (pp. 145-6) as, like his Uncle Alphonso, Austerlitz sees 'the landscape [...] through a fine veil that muted its colours' (p.124): the veil separating the dead from the living.

This veil and Austerlitz's parochial existence position him in the liminal<sup>20</sup> state between life and death – in the place of the phantom. Even in the narrative itself, Austerlitz dissolves away in scenes and uncannily floats from page to page. In one particular meeting between the narrator and Austerlitz, the narrator comments that he 'saw Austerlitz coming towards [him] on the promenade at Zeebrugge when evening was falling and there was not another living soul in sight' (p. 42). The specific reference to not 'another living soul' further reinforces Austerlitz's spectral existence. It imbues this meeting with an eerie undertone, as both the narrator and Austerlitz meet at night-time with not another human being in sight. Additionally, at a later point in the novel, the narrator meets Austerlitz coincidentally after years of hearing nothing from him and even comments that during the years they did not speak: 'I did not often think of Austerlitz in all those years, and when the thought of him did cross my mind I always forgot him again next moment' (p.46).

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<sup>20</sup> Liminal in this instance is referring to the limbo state that Austerlitz is in. He is both living and dead and as such occupies a position on both sides of the life/death boundary

Austerlitz remains an elusive character and Wood highlights in his introduction to the text that '[h]e remains as unknowable at the end as he was at the beginning' (p. xi). Austerlitz is said to 'reappear' (p. 36) in and out of scenes and this ghostly allusion to becoming visible imbues him with an eerie, un-dead characteristic. When Austerlitz does return to the narrative, he picks up his story with the narrator as if there has been no break in-between: 'he took up the conversation that evening [...] where it had last been broken off' (p. 56). The lack of greetings when the two characters meet is furthered by the narrator's admission that he doesn't know much about Austerlitz's beginnings, as Austerlitz does not divulge 'very much about his origins and his own life' (p.7) at their first meeting. This sentence becomes hauntingly true for the reader, who always remains at a distance from Austerlitz. We learn about his traumatic past but through various narrators such as Vela and Alphonso, and a vast number of the memories we are given concentrate on other characters in his life. The stories from his childhood illustrate this, focusing more on Gwendolyn and Dafydd's decline, rather than his own narrative. This distances the reader from Austerlitz, as his thoughts and feelings are not disclosed.

In his short essay *Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology*, Nicholas Abraham states that 'the phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious – for good reason', paralleling Proust's notes upon the alien within human subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> The second clause to his statement positions the phantom as something foreboding and dangerous, and furthers his subsequent point that the phantom 'point[s] to a gap, that is, to the unspeakable'.<sup>22</sup> This unspeakable gap mirrors Austerlitz's incommunicable trauma and further underpins him as the phantom of Sebald's text. Through the use of black-and-white imagery and metaphors that allude to photography, Austerlitz becomes anachronistic – he is positioned outside of the time of the novel; he becomes the physical manifestation of Barthes' Spectrum.

The phantom character of Austerlitz should be pivotal when considering how Sebald tries to convey the voices of the dead in his work. Throughout the entirety of *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*, Sebald's narrator documents the lives of his characters without speech marks. Their narratives are related with only occasional reference to who is speaking, such as 'said Austerlitz' or 'said Ferber'. Critic David Kaufmann notes

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology', in *Critical Inquiry*, trans. By Nicholas Rand, Vol. 13, No. 2, *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis* (Winter, 1987), (U.S.A: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 287-292, p. 289. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable.1341493> > [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2013]

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 290.

that Sebald's syntax allows unprecedented fluidity in his text, which 'can be heard in his uncanny ventriloquism and his paraphrases' of his characters' narrative.<sup>23</sup> In doing this, the narrator blurs the boundary between himself and the characters he is attempting to reconstruct, interpolating himself into Austerlitz and Ferber's ghostly persona. Kaufman explains that this is the 'narrator's capacity to take on liminal identities and identifications.'<sup>24</sup> Abraham comments that '[t]he phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other'.<sup>25</sup> Abraham's dead thus becomes Proust's 'alien' and as such belongs to the human subject as much as it belongs to the Other.<sup>26</sup> By aligning himself with the characters of both Austerlitz and Ferber, Sebald's narrator positions himself in the liminal state between self and other. He is thus able to represent this buried dead as he is situated on the boundary between the living and ghostly characters of the texts. The result is that Sebald's narrator becomes not just a ventriloquist, but also a clairvoyant for the phantoms Jacques Austerlitz and Max Ferber.

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<sup>23</sup> David Kaufmann, 'Angels Visit the Scene of Disgrace: Melancholy and Trauma from Sebald to Benjamin and Back', in *Cultural Critique* 70.1 (2008): 94-119. *Project MUSE* <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May] (p. 104).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Abraham, p. 291.

<sup>26</sup> Proust, p. 72.



By aligning language that is imbued with various references to photography with the ghostly ventriloquised narratives of both Austerlitz and Ferber, Sebald allows their deadened, phantom 'selves' to be re-animated: he allows the silence of the dead to talk. Ulrich Baer in his investigation, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, notes that 'trauma blocks routine processes from converting an experience into memory or forgetting [and thus] parallels the defining structure of photography, which also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory'.<sup>27</sup> In his work Sebald uses photography not only to demonstrate what Baer theorises, but also to influence and coerce his narrative to portray the voices of the dead. It is this voice that hides within the traumatic narratives of both Ferber and Austerlitz, and which Sebald reveals through a style of language that makes constant reference to the medium of photography.

Lisa Diedrich comments on Sebald and the ghosts that haunt his pages stating:

'[g]hosts become material to be investigated and traced. His evidence (both pictorial and narrative) is ghostly, and his methodology attempts to materialize such ghostly evidence, at least fleeting, by collecting and scavenging, by combining and juxtaposing historical events, words and images'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, (U.S.A: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Lisa Diedrich, 'Gathering Evidence of Ghosts: W.G. Sebald's Practises of Witnessing', in *Searching for Sebald: Photography after W.G. Sebald's Practises of Witnessing*, ed. By Lise Patt & Christel Dillbohner, (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007), p. 257.

Whilst it is evident that the combination of print and photograph, or as Diedrich describes it 'pictorial and narrative/words and images', does indeed further the exploration of ghostly traces in Sebald's work, she fails to notice that the photographs actually impact upon Sebald's language and style. The word and image are not simply juxtaposed, as Diedrich suggests, but are in fact intertwined. For example, on page seventy-one of *The Emigrants* we are directed by the narrator to view 'the photograph that follows' the narrative. Underneath the image, the photograph is then described to us bit by bit, 'Lina is sitting on the far left'.<sup>29</sup> Later on in the text, in Max Ferber's narrative, amongst these black and white images, the narrator mentions a tragedy that 'later shot up again [and] kept me so much in the shade and dark in recent years.'<sup>30</sup> Here the use of the word shot, shade and dark imbue this narrative with allusions to the photographic images that reappear throughout the text. In Sebald's texts language comes as close as it can to linguistically representing the photographic medium, and thus as close as it can to unveil the material ghosts that haunt his texts.

In both *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants* Sebald integrates language into a photographic discourse and as such attempts to represent the voices of the dead. By analysing Freud's notions of archaic, innate trauma we are able to use his analysis of the unconscious to

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<sup>29</sup> *Emigrants*, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 191.

expand even the cobbler's comments about the dead in *Austerlitz*. Examining this alongside the motif of the photographic developer that permeates both texts, we are able to see exactly how Sebald attempts to re-animate the dead through language. This photographic developer reappears in the form of dust that covers both Max Ferber and Aunt Gwendolyn, until they become the dead 'museum object' that Barthes describes as hiding in every photograph.<sup>31</sup> In doing this, Sebald takes the medium of photography very literally; photography enacts itself through Sebald's language in the text: it develops his characters into phantoms. Language thus becomes insufficient to the task of re-animation, unless it is substituted by photography. This culminates with the character Austerlitz who by profession is a photographer. Throughout the text, he does not develop in the same way as Ferber and Gwendolyn; however his gaze is anachronistic and parochial, positioning him on the boundary between life and death. He becomes the phantom of the text, voiced through Sebald's narrator who acts as a clairvoyant, thus allowing the dead to speak.

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<sup>31</sup> Barthes, p. 13.

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