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# Photo/Memory: Recovering Memory and Identity through Photographs in Post-1945 Art and Literature

by  
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## Abstract

The use of the photograph is particularly prevalent among artists of the first post-war generation, born shortly before or after *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour), 1945. These artists become the inheritors of the horrors perpetrated by their parents' generation, and it is through the photograph that they are united in the struggle to comprehend the past. The present paper explores the integration of photographs in both painting and literature as a means of expressing memory and identity in the aftermath of World War II trauma, with regard to works by the writer W. G. Sebald (1944-2001; *Austerlitz*, 2001) and artists Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945; *Heroische Sinnbilder*, 1969) and Hughie O'Donoghue (b. 1953; *Anabasis*, 2003). Their links to the Individual contribute to the collective experience of recollecting the Nazi era.

The extent to which a photograph can be considered evidence of history is examined, with reference to the image's context, its original narrative and the narrative imposed on photographs by these artists. *Anabasis*, *Austerlitz* and *Heroische Sinnbilder* are all presented in book format and contain a similar genre of photograph. By evaluating what constitutes the essence and the atmosphere of a photograph, it is possible to describe the photographs used in all three works as visual metaphors which either facilitate or obstruct the retrieval of memory and the recovery of the past. Individual photographs are discussed in terms of their artistic manipulation within these visual and literary artworks, with a theoretical approach taken to analysing their function as triggers of memory.

## Keywords

photography, memory, identity, post-1945, trauma

## Introduction

The 8th of May 1945, known in German military parlance as *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour), marks German capitulation and the end of the Second World War. The term Zero Hour suggests resetting the clocks after the atrocity of war, and indicates the need for Europeans to assess their relationship with the social, political and cultural damage of Nazism. The present paper explores the integration of photographs in both visual and literary art as a

means of expressing identity and memory in the aftermath of World War II trauma. The use of the photographic medium is examined with regard to the writer W. G. Sebald (1944 Wertach im Allgäu, Germany – 2001), and visual artists Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945 Donaueschingen, Germany) and Hughie O'Donoghue (b. 1953 Manchester, UK), both of whom are primarily painters.

These three artists, all of whom were born shortly before or after 1945, inherited a traumatic past with which they grapple to come to terms through their work. None of these artists are photographers by profession, yet the photograph's embedment into their primary media (painting or literary text) achieves prominence as an expression and manifestation of memory and identity in a European grieving process.

The following works by each artist are analysed:

- *Heroische Sinnbilder* (Heroic Symbols, 1969, Private Collection. Watercolour on paper, graphite, original and magazine photographs, postcards, and linen strips, mounted on cardboard; 65 x 50 x 8.5cm, 46 pages) by Anselm Kiefer.

The artist challenges the very issue of memory and identity by performing the Nazi salute and 'occupying' various locations across Italy, Switzerland and France. He examines inherited German guilt by re-creating Nazi-like scenes.

- *Austerlitz* (2001), a novel by W. G. Sebald.

Jewish émigré Jacques Austerlitz embarks on a journey through Europe to pick up the threads of his ancestry, eventually leading him to Prague. The novel is punctuated by found photographs collected by Sebald and set into a fictional narrative. These images describe the retrieval of Austerlitz's memory as the protagonist uncovers – or recovers – the truth about his identity.

- *Anabasis, a work in twenty four parts* (2003, Irish Museum of Modern Art, oil on prepared books with inkjet on gampi tissue, each part circa 30 x 46 x 6.5cm) by Hughie O'Donoghue.

Each of the twenty four parts consists of a volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, pasted over with photographs taken by the artist's father during his wartime campaigns. Based on classical poems such as the *Anabasis of Xenophon* (*The March Up Country*) and Homer's *Iliad*, O'Donoghue's *Anabasis* describes the integral role remembrance plays in shaping a sense of identity, in both the private and public spheres.

The essential function of the photograph when used by these figures is its ability to *evoke* memory and *invoke* identity. An invocation is a summons or

a call, while an evocation, similar to the Freudian uncanny, is an awakening of something to consciousness, such as a memory. An individual's identity is the totality of their existence, of which 'the remembered' forms a crucial element; therefore, it is impossible to detach memory from identity. The term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, coined in post-war Germany to describe the process of 'coming to terms with the past' also describes the process that Kiefer, Sebald and O'Donoghue go through in dealing with and grieving for their history. The term is questionable, literally implying a 'mastery of the past.' The English translation implies a co-operative acceptance, while the original phrase suggests struggle, victory and conquest. Before either acceptance or conquest can be reached, the process of dealing with history must take place, a working through of ideas, historical facts and emotions. Every individual must come to terms with the past, for the past forms a component of their identity; the most immediate way of working through this is by the examination of photographs.

As mentioned, all three are the first-generation inheritors of the Second World War legacy. Their selected artworks share a close, reciprocal relationship between photograph, paint and text, entering a dialogue with the idea of memory retrieval and national identity as derived from the preceding generation. O'Donoghue, English-born to Irish parents, provides an 'Allied' perspective of his father's frontline experiences as a soldier of the British Army. Though German, Sebald presents the narrative of a displaced Jew in *Austerlitz*, and Kiefer examines what it is to be German after the Third Reich. These diverse origins result in a three-pronged cultural reaction to the War, manifested in the interaction of photography with another medium. Furthermore, the selected works are all presented to the viewer in book form, either handmade (as in *Heroische Sinnbilder*), repurposed from existing books (in *Anabasis*) or published as a literary work (in *Austerlitz*). In each of these the photograph is manipulated by text and/or paint in order to recover memory and express identity.

The approach to this study is historical in perspective, applying a theoretical methodology to analyse the role of the photograph within the three works with reference to theoretical discussions initiated by Viktor Shklovsky, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel. The central strand of my research examines characteristics of these photographs: the book format, the role of the photograph in the wider narrative of the work and the genre of image shared by the artists. For the purposes of this article, I

will focus on the essence and the atmosphere as the two principal elements in the analysis of these photographs.

## The Essence of the Photograph

The Russian Formalist approach to linguistics and literary structure can provide several theoretical perspectives on the photograph's function within the artistically created narrative. Viktor Shklovsky's (1893-1984) definition of a work of art as "works created by special techniques designed to make the works as obviously artistic as possible,"<sup>1</sup> is relevant to Kiefer as he executes his own images, but excludes from its range the photographs used by Sebald and O'Donoghue in their original, unaltered forms. However, it highlights the intervention of the artist as a crucial element in the distinguishing the work as an 'artwork' over any other, non-artistic object. The intervention of the artist in the 'non-artistic' photograph transforms it from an everyday object into a work of art – manipulated either by paint or text, as inferred by Shklovsky's 'special techniques'. A photograph in isolation can evoke personal memories or emotions in the viewer, but the artists have incorporated photographs into a schema designed to provoke very specific ideas of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the process of grief as the progeny of war. By embedding it in a narrative, Sebald, O'Donoghue and Kiefer extract the incidental and commonplace quality from the photograph. This multi-layered design imposed on the photographs turns them into artistic objects.

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) concerns himself with finding the essence of his mother in *Camera Lucida*, which he poignantly summarises in the words "I dream about her, I do not dream *her*."<sup>2</sup> A photograph is always 'about' its subject as it can only ever be a representation of it; it is not the subject itself. The photograph is indexical; its meaning can change depending on its context, whether true to its origins or artistically invented. However, the essence of a photograph is something which is contributed by the viewer herself when prompted by the photograph – essence is in the eye of the beholder. This is in line with Barthes' *punctum*, described thus: "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises

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1 Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977), 61.

2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), 66.

me, is poignant to me).”<sup>3</sup> That the essence of the photograph is found within the viewer rather than in the actual image itself is further supported by Barthes’ observation that the *punctum* emerges when he is not looking at the photograph.<sup>4</sup>

The ability of the photograph to linger and haunt the mind triggers involuntary memories, facilitating the association of the photograph’s essence with an individual’s memory. The experience of an involuntary memory is one which “surfaces unexpectedly and cannot be deliberately sought”<sup>5</sup>, conjuring the past with completeness. Marcel Proust’s ‘madeleine’ episode in *Swann’s Way* (1913), the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-27), is exemplary of this mnemonic type. The power of the madeleine’s taste transports the protagonist to the memory of his childhood, suggesting the capability of inanimate objects to trigger involuntary memories. Proust may emphasise that it is not the visual presence of the madeleine which has this effect because compared to the other senses, sight is the most susceptible to being “buried or overlaid”<sup>6</sup> with multiple meanings. The ‘madeleine’ episode serves to illustrate the significance of the inanimate in the retrieval of memory, an action demonstrated by the photograph’s function as both object and subject in *Anabasis*, *Austerlitz* and *Heroische Sinnbilder*.

The *punctum* is an intangible notion present in the viewer, but Walter Benjamin’s early essay *On Painting, or Sign and Mark* (1913-1919) reveals another theoretical layer of significance to the photograph in the work of Kiefer, Sebald and O’Donoghue. Benjamin makes a distinction between the ‘sign’ and the ‘mark’ asserting that “the sign is imprinted; the mark, by contrast, emerges.”<sup>7</sup> The sign is recognisable, but the mark, like the *punctum*, makes itself known to the viewer. The essence each viewer extracts is individually nuanced. The sign represents its subject, while the mark, like the atom, cannot be broken down into a purer form, or as Benjamin states, “a mark resembles nothing else in its manifestation.”<sup>8</sup>

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3 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

4 *Ibid.*, 53.

5 Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 104.

6 Whitehead, *Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 109.

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 222.

8 Judith Butler, “Beyond Seduction and Morality: Benjamin’s Early Aesthetics”, in *The Life and Death of Images*, Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon, eds. (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 64.

O'Donoghue's mark-making on *Anabasis* is the only work of the three in which both paint and photograph physically mix and overlap. Benjamin's mark and Barthes' *punctum* seem to be inextricably linked in the viewer, reaching and stirring the deep, dark ground of the mind. The mark is the indivisible component of the painting, reduced to its most essential form, while the *punctum* is the response the photograph awakens in the viewer. Both 'emerge' after contemplation. In combination, these two ideas point toward the essence of the photograph, both as an aesthetic object and a functional tool. If the psyche is 'pricked' by the *punctum* upon seeing a photograph, it triggers traumas and pleasures of the past, and thereby provides the conscious mind an access point into memory.

As members of the first post-war generation, O'Donoghue, Kiefer and Sebald all seek to recover an inherited past. In the case of Kiefer and Sebald, this has particular significance for the shaping of German national identity after *Stunde Null*. Barzilai describes the photographs placed within the narrative of *Austerlitz* as "conduits that prompt the retrieval of memory or verify certain recollections".<sup>9</sup> They are triggers of long-buried and repressed memories which still exist within him. Photographs are articulate non-linear shards of captured time, in the same way as the memories themselves are highly detailed yet isolated fragmentations. Photographs in the text vary in size, frequency and subject matter, but throughout serve as motifs of memory, as in *Anabasis*. However, the photographs of *Austerlitz* never shed as much light on the situation as the protagonist seeks.

Photographs can conceal as well as expose, and thus the dark swathes in them represent the 'hidden', while the paler areas are the 'revealed'. Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) notion of *lethe* and *aletheia* is at the very core of this process.<sup>10</sup> *Aletheia* is translated from Greek as 'unconcealment', while *lethe*, or 'concealment', is the oblivion which shrouds the truth.<sup>11</sup> The black and white photographic medium provides an ideal outlet for expression of the concealed and the unconcealed by assigning traditional colour associations to them, i.e. black is associated with darkness, the

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9 Maya Barzilai, "On Exposure: Photography and Uncanny Memory in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*", in *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 206.

10 Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, translated by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press) 1992.

11 *Ibid.*

unknown, and therefore the feared (*lethe*), while white denotes purity, the divine and transparency (*aletheia*). This representation occurs not just on a symbolic level - the black and white areas visually infer what is being uncovered, re-discovered or perhaps obscured from the protagonist's view. Sebald employs photography not to document Austerlitz's past but to illustrate his returning memories, even if they only reveal the so-called '*Schatten der Wirklichkeit*' or 'shadows of reality'.<sup>12</sup> His photographs appear as fragments of thoughts and experiences, always leaving doubt over the credibility of the memories and cannot be considered a reliable representation of reality for Austerlitz. O'Donoghue, conversely, presents photographs within a particular historical context. They depict a precisely focused time frame and subject matter, and therefore are read more literally than those which illustrate *Austerlitz*.

## The Atmosphere of Memory

The atmosphere of a photograph is shaped in part by its aesthetics, but 'atmosphere' and 'essence' exist in close proximity to one another. Atmosphere is primarily the emotional reaction to the photograph, while the essence encompasses the meaning and implications of the photograph's subject matter. However, they overlap in Barthes' *punctum*, for the reaction that 'pricks' and affects him long after viewing the image means that something of the photograph's atmosphere has remained with him. It can be likewise said that *lethe* and *aletheia* contribute aesthetically to the atmosphere or 'feeling' of a photograph.

The factors which determine the atmosphere of a photograph lie in the scene or object being photographed and in the technical processes of taking, developing and displaying the photograph, as controlled by the photographer (O'Donoghue and Sebald's decision to include certain photographs falls into this latter category as they themselves did not take the photographs in their works). Light, place, colour and subject matter can be placed in the first category - these elements are derived from the reality of the photograph's subject, at the moment of its capture. In the second category consists of exposure time, resulting in a light or dark tone, black and white or colour film, the photographer's angle, skill and artistic vision, and the environment in which the photograph is displayed.

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<sup>12</sup> W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), 117.



These aspects impact the atmospheric potential of the photograph and influence the interpretation of individual viewers. No single atmosphere in a photograph can be labelled as 'definitive'.

Georg Simmel (1858-1918) defines atmosphere in landscape as suffusing "all details in it without its being possible to ascribe greater importance to one than the other."<sup>13</sup> It is this indivisible notion that prompts the photograph's power to invoke identity and evoke memory in the viewer. Furthermore, if a photograph acts as a memory prompt, then the atmosphere of the resulting memory will be infused with both the emotion of the time in which it occurred and the emotion experienced while recollecting it. The essence, as an indispensable quality of the photograph, implies permanence of meaning – once Barthes found his mother's essence in the Winter Garden Photograph, he sought to hold onto it – while atmosphere of a photograph, much like air, is imbued with the capacity to change according to conditions. These conditions depend on the context into which the photograph is placed, but it has also much to do with the reception it receives from the viewer who engages with it. The mood of the viewer, their sensitivity to the subject, the memory and experiences they bring to viewing a photograph all influence its atmosphere because it is a subjective quality – the essence, as the intrinsic characteristic of the photograph, should remain constant. Atmosphere connects the viewer and the artwork, and can be described as "the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived",<sup>14</sup> so that the atmosphere which surrounds the object influences the mood of the viewer.<sup>15</sup> In terms of employing photographs as the 'recollectors' of memory and identity, each act of retrieval relies on the already existing (conscious or unconscious) memories of the individual.

### Kiefer's *Gehen auf Wasser* (Versuch in der Badewanne)

An atmosphere can also be staged to provoke certain feelings in the viewer – in an artwork, atmosphere does not come about coincidentally but it is orchestrated by the artist. Kiefer's double photographs entitled *Gehen auf Wasser* (*Versuch in der Badewanne*), or *Walking on Water* (*Attempt*

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<sup>13</sup> Georg Simmel, *La tragedie de la culture et autres essais*, Petites Biblioteque Rivages, 239. Translated in Guénola Stork, "P. S. Krøyer's Light as the Poetics of Memory" in *Harmony in Blue*, ed. Annette Johansen and Mette Bøgh Jensen, (Skagens Museum, 2001) 98.

<sup>14</sup> Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics", *Thesis Eleven* no. 36, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993) 122.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

in the *Bathwater*) demonstrate how the atmosphere of the image is linked to the retrieval of identity. Kiefer casts himself as an actor in *Heroische Sinnbilder*, taking on the role of a Nazi. He seeks to conceptualise the requirements needed 'to be a Nazi', and the persona he adopts in his productions oscillates from sinister to amateurish. By projecting the actual characteristics of 'being a Nazi' in a satirized setting, Kiefer subverts the culture of fascism.<sup>16</sup> Saltzman likens the pathetic nature of his persona's performance to a child dressing up,<sup>17</sup> suggesting his persona is innocent and oblivious to the implications of carrying out Nazi salutes and actions. The titles of the photographs, as well as the copy book-like cover are written in a simple, childlike hand, disconcertingly juxtaposed with the ominous *Gehen auf Wasser* images.

The two photographs of roughly the same size and rectangular shape are centrally placed, side by side, on pages four and five. The subject matter is identical in both photographs - the artist stands on what might be a stool or small table in a full bathtub of water – but by including two versions of the same subject, one from a distance, the other, zoomed in, as though the viewer has taken a step closer, Kiefer heightens the sense of expectation. The narrative sequence moves from left to right, with the first image taken in another room, framing Kiefer and the bathtub with the black surrounds of the doorway. Like stills from moving film, the second photograph zooms in on Kiefer from the edge of the bath upwards. The first image shows how this 'walking on water' illusion is created – Kiefer constructs the scene with a bath, jarringly displaced from a bathroom in an open room, the floor strewn with paper. There is a chair, a billowing curtain, and the table to the artist's right is chaotic and cluttered. The disorder of the room is counteracted by the eerie stillness of the bathwater and Kiefer's statuesque pose. His black, spectral, almost faceless silhouette dominates the scene. He towers above the disorder in the room, the blinding white light emanates from the window, rendering his figure Christ-like. A messianic counterpart in the portrayal of Hitler is found in the *Es Lebe Deutschland* (Long Live Germany) poster from c. 1936, which substitutes a dove as the descending Holy Spirit for the symbolic German eagle (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> Walking on water is a

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16 Matthew Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

17 Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56.

18 David F. Crew, *Hitler and the Nazis - A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

hypothetical miracle, but in *Gehen auf Wasser* Kiefer enters a dialogue with fascist propaganda, revealing the tricks of his 'miracle' to the audience. The chiaroscuro effects of the black and white image are evident, and tonally they provide the composition with structure and visual impact.

However, the atmosphere of the photograph is derived from the figure of Kiefer, who appears immaterial in these photographs. Not only does he seek to perform an illusion, but he himself is illusory. His form is grey, as though light is passing through him. Like a resurfacing memory, the viewer is unsure of certain details, including his holographic body and faintly demarcated facial features. Though Kiefer attempts to expose the 'miracles' of the Nazi propaganda campaign as nothing more than mere illusions or tricks of light, the artist's lone messianic figure becomes the essence of memory – that which was once concealed but is now resurrected from the mind. As though coming to water's surface for air, these photographs question the credibility of memory and the integrity of German national identity in the wake of Nazi indoctrination.

Kiefer creates an unsettling atmosphere – he is an apparition, reflected by the bathwater. Water symbolises purity, but like the lake water on pages 8-9 of *Heroische Sinnbilder*, it is still and stagnant. Kiefer portrays his persona as the 'truth', illuminating the room with an aura of white hazy light, yet his form is practically indecipherable and opaque, as impenetrable as *lethe*. The austerity of his pose is juxtaposed with the absurdity of his action and its obvious pretence – standing on a bath, jarringly displaced from its conventional setting. Kiefer's orchestration of these photographs results in a perverse atmosphere – the lighting effects declares his figure prophet-like, but his strange and calm performance in the midst of a disorderly room is deeply disquieting. These elements combine to form an otherworldly atmosphere, a term which can describe the Nazi regime, for Nazi doctrine castigated and punished the perceived 'other' in society who failed to conform to Aryan ideals. By duplicating his subject matter, and through the repetition of motifs such as the *Sieg Heil* throughout *Heroische Sinnbilder*, Kiefer seeks to recreate the atmosphere of Nazism. Through repetition an action becomes second nature, a process underlying Nazi indoctrination.

## The Pageboy to Die Rosenkönigen

Sebald selects this image to portray Austerlitz as a boy, dressed as an

attendant of *die Rosenkönigin*. Finding the photograph from his childhood in Prague begins a process of memory retrieval for Austerlitz. The depiction of *lethe* and *aletheia* is especially strong and intensified by its black and white quality and composition. The position of the young Austerlitz, in an elaborate white costume, is such that his head is about level with the horizon line. The dark grassy background does little to create a sense of perspective, resulting in his apparent submergence, as though drowning. The fact that the boy, who symbolically is the white of *aletheia*, the truth, is seemingly submerged in the oblivion of *lethe* means that only he holds the answers his adult self craves to remember. He looks out at the reader defiantly, as though he guards precious information, and instils in Austerlitz “...*einem überwältigenden Gefühl der Vergangenheit.*”<sup>19</sup>

The photographs in *Austerlitz* and *Anabasis* have the “mysterious quality peculiar to such photographs when they surface from oblivion”.<sup>20</sup> Austerlitz describes his attempts to retrieve the memory as “blind panic”.<sup>21</sup> ‘Blind panic’ and ‘blind spots’ are visually related to the blinding white light of the text’s photographs, and the pristine costume of the page boy is an inversion of a drop of black ink in water. The blinding light is also found in Kiefer’s *Gehen auf Wasser* – the black and white medium will inevitably produce this effect, but in the context of mnemonic recovery, the implications of the medium are intensified. Paint takes the place of the ‘blinding’ in O’Donoghue’s work – the artist selectively blocks sections and elements from view.

The text conveys Austerlitz’s desperation to remember how he was in the photograph. While this photograph does not trigger the retrieval of any hidden memory in Austerlitz, after hours of examination it does prompt a dream of his parents, as they were then, and though he is present in their apartment, they do not see him. According to Barthes, photographs are ‘violent’ because they force themselves into the sight, so that what they depict can never be denied or doubted.<sup>22</sup> Their irreversibility and irrevocability in the eyes of the viewer can have a negative effect where the recovery of memory is concerned, as the photograph “actually blocks

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19 Author’s translation: “an overwhelming sense of the past.” W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), 267.

20 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 258.

21 *Ibid.* P. 260.

22 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.

memory, [and] quickly becomes a counter-memory."<sup>23</sup> It is this precise panic which fills Austerlitz when he sees the photograph, which he is certain depicts him as a child - the child's defiant gaze seems to recognise Austerlitz, almost tauntingly as his adult self struggles to recall.

This block or blind spot is manifested in the black smudge above his head. It also produces a simultaneously involuntary and counter-memory: Austerlitz's dream of his parents. The narrator also highlights the "... blurred, dark area above the horizon..."<sup>24</sup> that hovers spectrally around the boy's head, demarking his own memory block - it is a shadow of *lethe* which veils this very memory. This blur is symbolic of Sebald's complementary cooperation between the prose and photograph. Through this smudge of memory above the boy's head, Sebald engages the reader on subtle, but also more immediate and illustrative level. The boy Austerlitz appears to be marked in a similar sense to Benjamin's 'mark' in a painting, expressing the essence of the painting, but also reminiscent of marks of guilt which do not resemble anything but will "stamp or brand a person in their individuality"<sup>25</sup>, such as stigmata. The mark above the child's head describes the most basic expression of demarcation - the photograph seems to predestine Austerlitz's forgetfulness of his past, the blur appearing near the child's head alluding to his memory lapse.

The mark in the photograph functions in the same way as the Star of David armband, differentiating the Jewish 'other' from society. This mark also suggests interference of some sort with the photograph, whether by the photographer during development, or later by another party. In this way, the impact of the photograph was manipulated and altered after its capture - whether or not accidental, the effect in the narrative of Austerlitz is one which disconcerts the reader. The nature of the photograph is still and lifeless. Therefore it is impossible to say whether this mark is emerging from the pale sky like Austerlitz's re-emerging memory, or whether it is a stubborn oblivion, hanging like a mist which will not lift over his past. This photograph is placed under suspicion both visually through the mark, and in the text itself through Austerlitz's failure to recall the memory.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.

24 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 259.

25 Butler, "Beyond Seduction and Morality: Benjamin's Early Aesthetics", 72.

26 Christoph Eggers, *Das Dunkel durchdringen, das uns umgibt: Die Fotografie im Werk von W. G. Sebald*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 68.

The reproduction of the photograph is too small in both editions to properly examine the details, the features of Austerlitz, reflecting the dichotomy of a physical proximity (to the photograph, i.e., the past) but psychological distance (the concealment of the memory) in the protagonist. Its use as the cover image in each case underlies its significance, but in doing so, ascribes greater value to this photograph's function over others in the narrative.

## Daniel O'Donoghue at Baia, Naples

The representation of O'Donoghue's father as the Everyman in *Anabasis* provides a personal channel for the artist to comprehend life as a soldier during the Second World War. By memorialising his father's experiences in *Anabasis*, the personal dimension is multiplied to represent the collective experience of soldiers at war. In this way, *Anabasis*, which at first appears to be deeply personal to the O'Donoghue family, becomes relevant to society as a whole in the recollection of wartime fighting. Book VI. *Baia* of *Anabasis* (Fig. 3) can be ascribed the same function of memory retrieval as the Pageboy to *die Rosenkönigen* and *Gehen auf Wasser* images.

O'Donoghue, in an interview with Michael Peppiatt, speaks of the "physicality of the painting",<sup>27</sup> the layering and density of paint. The physicality of Book VI. *Baia* is not concealed or disguised; O'Donoghue allows the viewer to understand both the content and structure of his work. The text of the Encyclopaedia Britannica casts shadows behind the veil of gampi tissue – the reproduced photograph is on the left page, with the title scrawled by hand on the right in a loose, scrapbook style. O'Donoghue's father is submerged to his chest in the sea; the strand and cliffs of Baia are visible in the distance, and he is facing the photographer with his back to the shore. In the sequencing of images in *Anabasis*, it is bound by Book V. *Outside the El Alamein Club* and Book VII. *Invasions of Ancient Italy* as a moment's respite between bustling Egyptian traders and soldiers marching towards Rome.

Unlike the stillness of many other photographs included in *Anabasis* (and particularly in the desolate, empty images in *Austerlitz*), this photograph's atmosphere lies in the perceived movement of the water. The water motif already seen in *Gehen auf Wasser* and *die Rosenkönigen* photograph is repeated here, but to radically different effect. Kiefer portrays the water

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Peppiatt, *Interview with Artists 1966-2012* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 103.

on which he ‘miraculously’ walks as frozen and motionless, complying with his attempts at Nazism, while Austerlitz’s pageboy metaphorically sinks in the landscape of his own history – in both photographs, water is portrayed as a sinister entity. By contrast, Daniel O’Donoghue appears contentedly immersed in the soft swells of the sea.

The photographer’s position is always imposed on the viewer, and here, the photographer, who is a fellow soldier,<sup>28</sup> is placed directly in the sea. Daniel is engulfed by a black shadow which seems to connect him to the surface of the sea. The entire foreground is united by the shadows of the swells and Daniel’s body, creating a separate plane to the paler foreground. The composition of the photograph resembles *die Rosenkönigen* in many ways. The protagonists of the artworks, Daniel O’Donoghue, and Austerlitz, are both centrally positioned and appear to drown against a background – Austerlitz below the high horizon line of the field, and Daniel is embedded in a ‘wall’ of water. Even the layering of book, text, tissue, paint and photograph in *Anabasis* gives the illusion of viewing it through a pale blue, watery membrane, which the artist chose as a reference to the Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup>

The photograph, due to its portrait layout, is placed over the left page of the open encyclopaedia. The encyclopaedia’s chapter title, ‘Lymphatic System’, is visible across the top of the page, along with the accompanying text and diagrams. There is a subtle dialogue between O’Donoghue’s photograph and the pages he selects to ‘freeze’ open from the encyclopaedia. The etymology of ‘lymph’ is derived from 16<sup>th</sup> century French *lymphe*, and though it refers to a colourless fluid in the bloodstream, it can also mean ‘pure water’.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the diagram of the dissected torso mirrors the pose of the bathing Daniel on the opposite page. The alignment of the ‘dead’ dissected body with that of the living soldier is a foreboding sight. A scientific diagram is didactic, but when juxtaposed with the bare chest of the soldier, it suggests the human destruction of war. While Daniel O’Donoghue was not killed during his service, the potential for atrocity, as alluded to by the dissected diagram, is made all the more poignant by his carefree demeanour. The reality of the artist’s father is overtaken by the

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28 James Hamilton, *Hughie O’Donoghue, Painting, Memory, Myth* (London: Merrell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 19.

29 Kerstina Mortensen, Email Interview with Hughie O’Donoghue, 12 August 2014.

30 Oxford English Dictionaries, “Lymph” accessed 10 August 2014 <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/lymph>.

*atmosphere* of his father in his memory.

The 'embeddedness' of Daniel is a parallel to the physical 'embeddedness' of the photograph in the encyclopaedia using paint, tissue and text. Daniel's integration in the scene describes the fact that in this photograph, his presence is rooted and permanent in the past. This fixedness has an alienating quality to O'Donoghue, as the photographs, which are highly personal to his father, do not relate to him. They illustrate the life Daniel O'Donoghue led independent from his family. Barthes describes the necessity of this distancing effect when considering the past:

Thus the life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses in its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.<sup>31</sup>

Yvonne Scott describes the "discipline of history [as] engaged in piecing together and filling in the gaps"<sup>32</sup> left in the records of history. Following this thought, it can be claimed that while using photographs to 'fill in' the parts of his father's life unknown to him, O'Donoghue contributes to the larger, collective archive of war memories.

## Conclusion

To understand why the photograph is used in these artworks when the painting and writing are the artists' primary media is to recognise the power of the photograph's essence. It has an existence independent to that of the artist's hand. This separateness is partly due to the photograph's realism, true or untrue. A photograph is immediately accessible as an audience will recognise the inherent 'documentary' quality of the photographic genre, irrespective of whether the image has been altered, adjusted or abstracted – even if the subject cannot be distinguished, one searches to find it in the composition, in a way that does not occur with painting, reiterating Barthes' dictum that "painting can feign reality without having seen it."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is perceived that something real in this world must have passed before the lens of the camera which has then been captured,

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31 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 65.

32 Yvonne Scott, "Reconstructing the Raft, Semiotics and Memory in the Art of the Shipwreck and the Raft", in *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 166.

33 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.



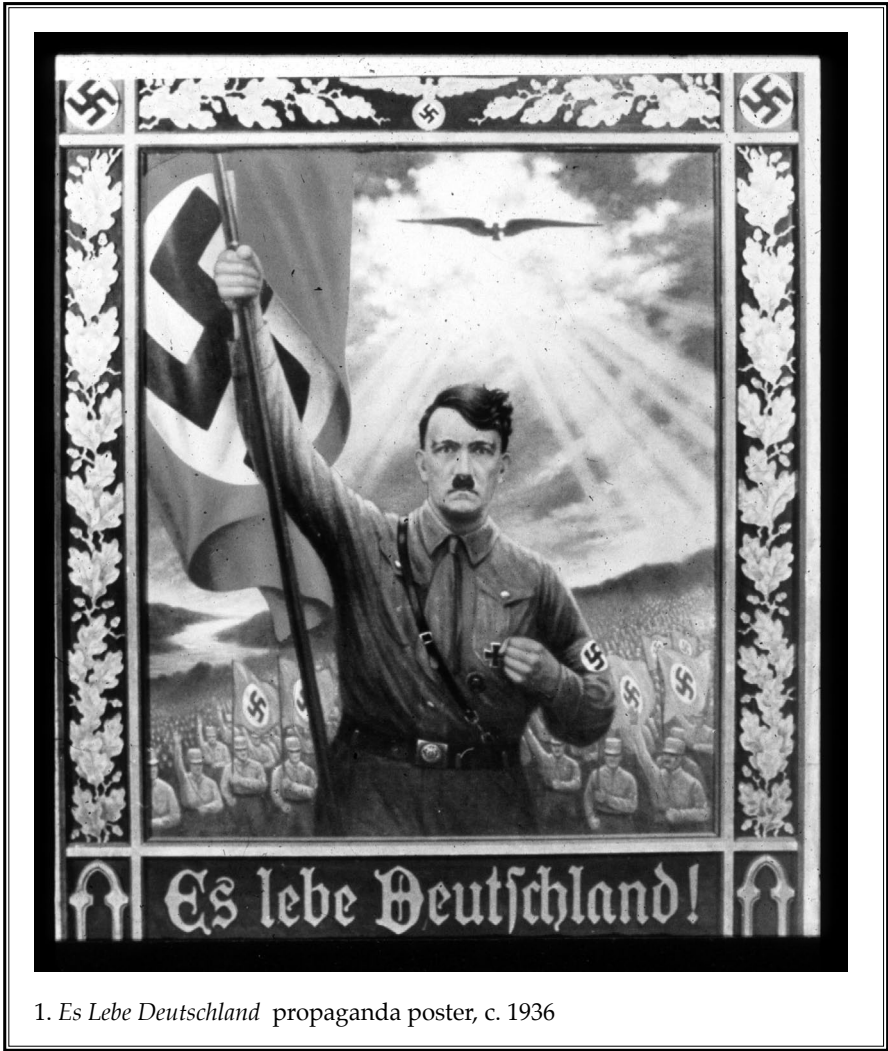
wholly or partially, in the photograph. It is this quality which makes the photograph an appealing medium in the context of historically-rooted artworks of this study.

The photographs in these works are united by a sense of re-surfacing, return and revelation after a period of absence. It is the atmosphere of photographs found in *Anabasis*, *Austerlitz* and *Heroische Sinnbilder* that triggers involuntary memories in the viewer. Memory and identity are expressed in the three works through the atmosphere of the photograph, through the excavation of the past, and through the personal dimension which provides these artists with a direct link to the events and trauma pre-1945. Not only do the photographs act as prompts in the recovery of memory and identity for the artists, but the aesthetics of these images also describe the act of memory retrieval. It may be appropriate to close with a quote by Barthes which centralises the arguments of this article, in which he states that "...photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance."<sup>34</sup>

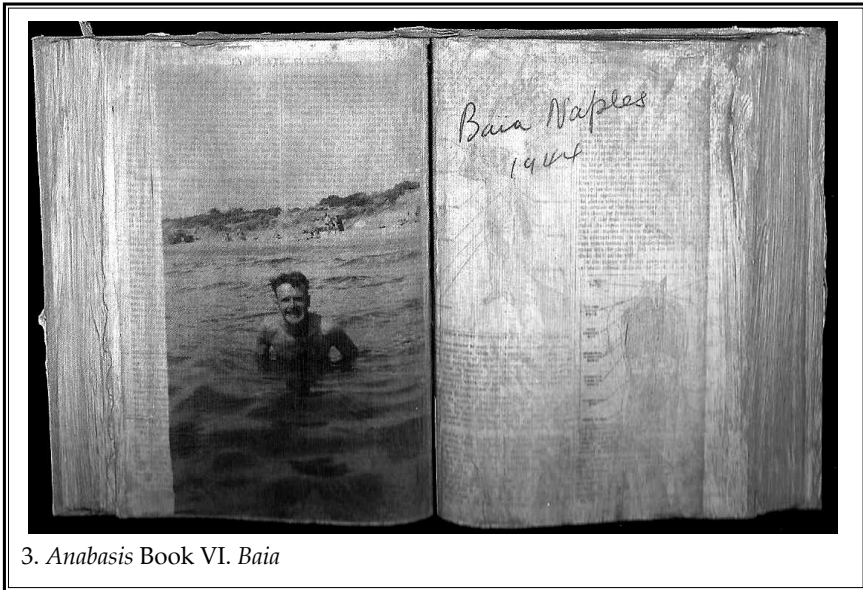
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<sup>34</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70.

Figures



Page 83 image omitted from digital version due to copyright;  
image available in printed version of the journal.



3. *Anabasis* Book VI. *Baia*

## Legend to Figures

1. *Es Lebe Deutschland* propaganda poster, c. 1936

Image from David F. Crew, *Hitler and the Nazis – A History in Documents*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

2. Image omitted from digital version due to copyright

3. Hughie O'Donoghue, *Anabasis* (2003) Book VI. *Baia*, 2003, Irish Museum of Modern Art, oil on prepared books with inkjet on gampi tissue, twenty-four parts, each part circa 30 x 46 x 6.5cm.

Image from James Hamilton, *Hughie O'Donoghue, Painting, Memory, Myth* (London: Merrell Publishers Ltd 2003), 126.

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