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Academic Barbarism and the Literature of Concealment: Roberto Bolaño and W. G. Sebald

If there are any writers who describe the experiences of graduate students, adjuncts, early career academics, and soon-to-be-retired academics working on the fringes of the academy as forms of academic barbarism, they are W. G. Sebald and Roberto Bolaño. No author's work has more literary critics than the work of Roberto Bolaño and no writer's protagonists are as caught up in research as those of W. G. Sebald. The researchers and academics of Bolaño's and Sebald's novels display a devotion to the literary search, the archive, and the intertext that often sees them promoting a literature of concealment through a form of academic barbarism that conceals "the book that really matters" ["el libro que realmente importa" (*2666S* 983)]. Their modes of enquiry into their cultural and literary histories focus our attention on their authors' different renderings of the Information Age's institutionalization of the archive as fortress of knowledge or as pastiche of literary formalism and academic hubris. Their protagonists are either left stranded, like Sebald's Austerlitz, in the new Grande Bibliothèque, "Schatzhaus unseres gesamten Schrifterbes" [the treasure-house of our entire literary heritage], feeling like "einen potentiellen Feind" (*A* 404) [a potential enemy (*A1* 398)], or, like Bolaño's academics, they are left in a site of barbarism unaware of how their academic work conceals the literature that really matters—["el libro que realmente importa" (*2666S* 983)], the "magic flower of winter!" (*2666E* 786) ["la flor mágica de invierno!" (*2666S* 983)]. Both writers present scholarship and academic enquiry as a new kind of barbarism, a barbarism that replays Benjamin's multifaceted description of this concept. For Benjamin, barbarism is at

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once integral to every act of transmission while also in its "positive" guise emerging from a "poverty of human experience" (2005, 732) that compels the subject to endlessly "start from scratch" in developing modes of expression dependent on the "laws of their interior" (2005, 733). For such systems it is their "interior, rather than their inwardness" that is privileged and this is what makes them barbaric, a form of barbarism that Sebald and Bolaño suggest flourishes with the archive and the academic industry.

The moral landscapes of Bolaño's and Sebald's novels often return us to scenes of trauma that have their origin in the barbarism of National Socialism. Sebald's novels exhibit a negative teleology where his protagonists struggle to piece together life histories sublimated by the trauma of atrocity while Bolaño's novels are also often haunted by the Holocaust.[1] In *La literatura nazi en América*, for example, Franz Zwickau, one of Bolaño's fictional authors, has the narrative voice wax lyrical about the aesthetic merit of fictional holocaust works such as "Concentration Camp" and "The War Criminals' Son."[2] However, the enquiry into the archive of this era of barbarism spawns artistic and academic modes of semblance and concealment that perpetuate barbarism. This paper therefore examines how these two very different authors present the reader, possibly for the first time, with detailed explorations of the different "ritual *bárbaro*" (*ED* 139) ["barbaric rituals" (*DS* 131)] unique to academic enquiry in the age of the knowledge industry. Their work indirectly passes comment on the present state of the institutionalization of the archive, of cultural memory, and of the knowledge industry and in doing so calls for a bringing together of educational and literary discourses on the state of the archive and the university. These authors examine the effects of this barbarism for a reading industry while also saying something more profound about how the literary work is becoming progressively more occluded by archival systems that Bolaño describes in terms of "ocultamiento" [concealment] and "la apariencia" [semblance].

Both writers' work has been read in various ways in terms of how it negotiates this historic barbarism. Sebald's style has been described as a "melancholic method" (Duttlinger 2009), a negative teleology (Long 2003), an aesthetics of resistance (Oesmann 2014), and as foregrounding the "inadequacy of language" (Dubow 2012) and the impossibility of exemplarity (Bewes 2014). Stewart Martin (2005) and Ignasi Ribó (2009) criticize him for not being political enough

in neglecting post-1945 politics and in engaging in an aesthetic of evasion. However, his unique intertextual representations of the effects of barbarism challenge basic concepts such as exemplarity, communicative reason, and redemptive memory and can be political in their critique of the archive and the knowledge and reading industries. Sebald confronts head-on Benjamin's positive barbarism, a self-serving privileging of the interior of institutional discourse at the expense of "inwardness," which flourishes in the technological age. He reveals how academic enquiry is a perfect breeding ground for such philosophies of the interior, demonstrating how the unique historical "blind spots" intertextual scholarship throws up not only reveal how the archive turns against itself à la Derrida, but how the humanist project can, in dismissing these blind spots, begin to work against its core aims. As Sebald's Austerlitz explains: "unsere besten Plane im Zuge ihrer Verwirklichung sich verkehrten in ihr genaues Gegenteil" (*A* 46) ["just as our best-laid plans […] always turn into the exact opposite when they are put into practice" (*A* 37–8)]. Bolaño's more picaresque, postmodern works can also be read as unveiling the barbarism of such philosophies of the interior through a concentration on the literary quests of researchers and academics. Whereas Bolaño employs notions of concealment and semblance and the figure of the void to represent the deleterious effects of this negative epistemology, Sebald employs a melancholy of resistance through figurations of writing as fissure or chasm, again through the employment of academic protagonists, so as to also elicit how a new kind of academic barbarism has emerged.

Bolaño and Sebald have been compared in terms of their use of the "long dramatic sentence"; however, I want to focus on their shared interest in what I am calling academic barbarism.[3] J. Agustín Pastén B. has described the political motivations of Bolaño in terms of his employment of a kind of "metaliteraria" where he sets in play a "discurso narrativo" [narrative discourse] that oscillates "entre una fuerte valuación de lo literario y una especie de desvalorización de la literatura" (2009, 423) [between a strong valuation of the literary and a kind of devaluing of literature]. This opposition plays itself out most importantly, for Agustín Pastén B., in Bolaño's presentation of the "institucionalización" and the "disolución" of literature. Agustín Pastén B. focuses on how booksellers, editors, and even a publishing "mafia" marshal this institutionalization of literature while also

allowing writers such as Bolaño the opportunity to create "una suerte de democratización textual de la actividad literaria" (429) [a sort of textual democratization of literary activity]. Diego Trelles also notes how Bolaño incorporates the narrative mechanisms of political literature into his fiction in order to engage the reader and to unsettle any possible institutionalization of reading (2005, 143). However, while criticism has been quick to respond to Bolaño's targeting of the institutionalization of literature, little has been made of his presentation of one of the most powerful institutions for mediating literature, namely the university. It is important to note that one of his last collections is entitled *The Unknown University*. This chapter therefore focuses on both writers' presentation of the academic and of academic research.

In making this comparison, it must be noted that Bolaño's notes on what he calls "la literatura de la pesada" (*EP* 28) [a literature of doom (*BP* 25)][4] may suggest that he dislikes the kind of solipsistic, autobiographical narratives Sebald's protagonists are granted. In his "speech" "Derivas de la Pesada" [The Vagaries of the Literature of Doom] from *Entre paréntesis* [*Between Parentheses*] Bolaño argues that such literature is essential, yet "[n]o es mucho para iniciar una escuela" (*EP* 25) ["[h]ardly the basis for a school" (*BP* 21)]. It is a literature that is about "el valor" [bravery] and "la mugre" [squalor] rather than "la inteligencia, mucho menos sobre la moral" (*EP* 23) ["intelligence, let alone morality" (*BP* 19)]; "si sólo existe ella, la literatura se acaba" (*EP* 28) ["if nothing else exists, it's the end of literature" (*BP* 24)].[5] Such writing is also, for Bolaño, marked by "la subjetividad extrema" (*EP* 28) ["extreme subjectivity" (*BP* 24)]. He argues that we live in the age of "la literatura solipsista" (*EP* 28) [solipsistic literature] and "si sólo existieran literatos solipsistas toda la literatura terminaría convirtiéndose en un servicio militar obligatorio del mini-yo en un río de autobiografías, de libros de memorias, de diarios personales, que no tardaría en devenir cloaca" (*EP* 28) ["if all writers were solipsists, literature would turn into the obligatory military service of the mini-me or into a river of autobiographies, memoirs, journals that would soon become a cesspit" (*BP* 24)]. Who cares, he argues, about "las idas y venidas sentimentales de un profesor?" (*EP* 28) ["the sentimental meanderings of a professor?" (*BP* 24)]. However, Sebald's professors and researcher-narrators are caught up in the double bind Bolaño describes. In becoming so immersed in

the framing of cultural memory through their archival study of the causes and effects of National Socialism, any "extreme subjectivity" they manifest draws the reader-researcher self-reflexively with them into the vertiginous yet profound examination of the "morality" Bolaño finds lacking in his "literature of doom."[6] This process can immerse the reader and critic in Benjamin's notion of "positive barbarism." Bolaño and Sebald, then, share this interest in the "barbaric rituals" and "vertigo" academic enquiry unearths for their scholars of barbarism and National Socialism[7], which ultimately elicits a deep unease about the present state of the institutionalization of the archive. Bolaño's fictional academic critics[8] reap far more destruction for his narrators than those responsble for the brutal murders in Santa Teresa in *2666* while Sebald's[9] research-protagonists are a danger to themselves because of the states of "vertigo" their research produces in them.

To write about the work of Roberto Bolaño and W. G. Sebald is to write about the academic; their work holds a mirror up to the attentions and practices of the academic critic and researcher and, in doing so, can appear to simply guide the literary critic to a form of commentary aligned with what Bolaño's narrators call the "void"; the critic is directed to a style of commentary that has already been derided and evacuated of meaning. Critics have, of course, long been an object of scorn. Rónán McDonald has recently come to the defence of this eroding milieu, arguing that "without critics of authority, the size and variety of contemporary criticism may ultimately serve the cause of cultural banality and uniformity" (McDonald 2007). McDonald argues that the "popular widening of criticism" in the age of the blogosphere and the "academic contraction" of academic criticism due to the heightened specialization of the knowledge industry are symptoms of the same condition, namely that "artistic value" is now simply a question of "personal taste" (McDonald 2009, x). Henry A. Giroux argues that this "neutralization of ethics" is difficult to achieve since "intellectual inquiry and research free from values and norms are impossible to achieve" (Giroux 2011, 27). However, Bolaño and Sebald reveal that this may be to idealize academic endeavour. McDonald's arguments on behalf of the critic also demonstrate how the mid-twentieth-century public intellectuals he lauds, figures such as Leavis and Tynan, are far removed from the new breed of critic that the knowledge industry and the academy as marketplace of ideas

have launched on generations of unsuspecting and impressionable undergraduate readers, the kind of critics Bolaño and Sebald pass comment on.

Bolaño and Sebald respond to the cultural shift brought about by this relatively recent academic institutionalization of criticism in the knowledge industry. Semblance [la apariencia] is a central concept for Bolaño's take on critics and the academy in his novel *2666* and it also a concept that enables us to examine more closely Bolaño's and Sebald's shared concerns about barbarism. Bolaño's fictional writer Hans Reiter, the "real" identity of Reiter's later semblance Benno von Archimboldi, has received the iron cross from his German superiors for his bravery during the Second World War. Reiter realizes how much of life has been a form of semblance as he thinks over the notebooks of Boris Abramovich Ansky, a Polish writer from a Jewish family who has most likely been shot by the Germans at the beginning of the War. Ansky, a fictional author, was a founding member of "Teatro de las Voces Imaginarias" (895) ["the Theater of Imaginary Voices" (716)], who wrote "un ensayo sobre el futuro de la literatura, cuya primera palabra era 'nada'" (896) ["an essay on the future of literature, which began and ended with the word *nothing*" (717)]. Rieter finds the notebooks in Ansky's home in the village of Kostekino on the banks of the Dneiper near the end of the Second World War. In Ansky's notes he also finds the name of the painter he will take as his *nom de plume*, a painter whose technique is "happiness personified" for the young Ansky. Reiter contemplates the notebooks of this undiscovered writer when he is "mal alimentado y por ende débil" (926) ["malnourished and weak" (741)] and recovering from a bullet to the neck; he detects a theme running through Ansky's work:

> La apariencia era una fuerza de ocupación de la realidad, se dijo, incluso de la realidad más extrema y limítrofe. Vivía en las almas de la gente y también en sus gestos, en la voluntad y en el dolor, en la forma en que uno ordena los recuerdos y en la forma en que uno ordena les prioridades. La apariencia proliferaba en los salones de los industriales y en el hampa. Dictaba normas, se revolvía contra sus propias normas (en revueltas que podían ser sangrientas, pero que no por eso dejaban de ser aparentes), dictaba nuevas normas.
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> El nacionalsocialismo era el reino absoluto de la apariencia. (926)

> [Semblance was an occupying force of reality, he said to himself, even the most extreme, borderline reality. It lived in people's souls and their actions, in willpower and in pain, in the way memories and priorities were ordered. Semblance proliferated in the salons of the industrialists and in the underworld. It set the rules, it rebelled against its own rules (in uprisings that could be bloody, but didn't therefore cease to be semblance), it set new rules.
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> National Socialism was the ultimate realm of semblance. (741)]

Both Bolaño's and Sebald's academics delve deep into the origins of the form of semblance National Socialism throws up for cultural memory.[10] Sebald's protagonists often live out lives that appear as little more than semblances of life histories they feel compelled to revisit through excursions into cultural memory. They become like Kafka's man before the law who realizes all too late, after a life spent waiting tentatively before one possible avenue of investigation that he assumed would hold the answer to the law, that there are as many approaches to the law as there are lives lived. The lifelong academic enquiry leaves Sebald's protagonists in *Vertigo* and *Austerlitz* either facing a "void" or cast adrift with "vertigo." Mistaken identity is also a figure for both writers. Sebald's Austerlitz only unravels his historical identity and discovers his lost native tongue towards the end of his research. National Socialism, as the ultimate realm of semblance, is also, in a sense, what grants Bolaño's Reiter his identity as a writer and what, in turn, provides Bolaño's academic sleuths with a reason for being. Reiter discovers the notebooks of Ansky while recuperating with other wounded German soldiers in a small Polish village and he learns that name-changing and the practice of semblance can keep the past hidden as it does for Leo Sammer, a former Volkssturm soldier and commander of sorts, that Reiter meets in a prisoner of war camp after the War. Sammer, or Zeller as he was known in the camp, ran an "organismo era civil, no militar ni de las SS" (940) ["a civil operation, not military or SS" (752)], in which he received "la orden de deshacerse de los judíos griegos" (950) ["the order to dispose of the Greek Jews" (760)] who were formerly employed by him as sweepers and land-clearers. Bolaño's description of the events surrounding the genocide is all the more harrowing as it keeps the details of the murders from us. It concentrates on the strain on the German soldiers who dispatch the bodies to the "hollow" and on

the pressures on Sammer to carry out his orders. This brooding, apophatic silence also acts as a form of prosopopoeia in which, as Paul de Man reminds us, the "dead speak." It "prefigures our own mortality" since "by making the death speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, […] that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (de Man 1979, 928).

The mood is heightened in the episode by the contrast thrown up by the previous section's—La parte de los crímenes [The Part about the Crimes]—forensic and graphic detailing of the physical condition of hundreds of women's bodies, the victims of contemporary atrocity in the form of violent murder and rape in the town of Santa Teresa in Mexico. Bolaño dispatches National Socialism's unrepeatable exemplar of institutional barbarism and atrocity to "the hollow" of representation where the descriptions of its events are limited to the psychological pressures they bring to the perpetrators of the crimes—at one point Bolaño has Sammer relate to Reiter: "El trabajo nos había excedido. El hombre, me dije contemplando el horizonte mitad rosa y mitad cloaca desde la ventana de mi oficina, no soporta demasiado tiempo algunos quehaceres" (957) ["The work was too much for us.[11] Man wasn't made to bear some tasks for very long, I said to myself as I contemplated the horizon from my office window, striped in pink and a cloacal murk" (765–6)]. This is likely a statement about the responsibilities of the academic writer who tries to speak for, or bear witness to, contemporary atrocity through the lens of this institutionalized discourse of cultural memory. Despite academic discourse giving us such phrases as "bearing witness," "ethics of analogy," and "ethics of alterity," it is noteworthy that Bolaño consigns this barbaric moment to the "hollow" of representation. Sebald takes a similar course in consigning writing to the figures of chasm and fissure while leaving his narrator at the end of *Vertigo* staring into the ruins of the Breedonk death camp. Even though Bolaño reminds us at one point in the novel that voids can't be filled, he appears to be asking us to re-examine the degree of semblance and concealment that academic language brings to literature that describes atrocity. It either consigns the enquiry into atrocity to the void as does the narrative of Sammer's work or it engages in a somewhat formulaic forensic detailing of the bodies and the scenes of death in approaching an atrocity exhibition of sorts. Reiter—perhaps the embodiment of every *writer*—ultimately prevents a certain

truth from emerging; he confesses to killing Sammer before Sammer is made to confront the camp interrogators. Reiter therefore saves Sammer, a man whom "almost everyone [at the camp] respected" and believed to be "a decent person" (750), from "escarnio público" (959) ["public disgrace"] (767). One of the last things Sammer says to Reiter is "Hacemos cosas, decimos cosas, de las que luego nos arrepentimos con toda el alma" (959) ["We do things, say things, that later we regret with all our souls" (767)] and it is the act of killing Sammer that leads Reiter to a degree of semblance of his own in feeling he has to take on the name Archimboldi.

The question the episode raises is, how is academic enquiry complicit in dispatching atrocities to the "hollow" of representation? But not only this. The episode raises the question of whether the knowledge industry's institutional requirement to churn out reports and papers on such atrocities in which the atrocity itself cannot be represented has pushed academia into a uniquely economic form of the "positive barbarism" Benjamin describes, where a focus on the "interior" of a discourse to the exclusion of "inwardness" through a "poverty of experience" inculcates a mode of collectively administering and dispatching painful cultural blind spots. However, this learned response then leaves the knowledge industry devoted to its sense of interiority, its internal mechanism for dealing with trauma, which recalls the Freudian death drive and its tendency to turn the subject, in this case the humanist project, against itself.

Bolaño's juxtaposition of the brutal murders and rapes in Santa Teresa with the academic search for an elusive writer who has played a part in the concealment of atrocity, raises important ethical questions for the academic critic who approaches such literature. Bolaño relates the resulting acts of "semblance" to the critic's own formal version of "ocultamiento" [concealment] that works to shield readers' hungry eyes from "el libro que realmente importa" (*2666S* 983) ["the book that really matters" (*2666E* 786)]. An old typewriter seller reminds Reiter later in the novel that writing is "ocultamiento" [concealment]. The vast majority of all writing, he argues, apart from masterpieces, merely accepts "los dictados de una obra maestra" (983) ["the dictates of the masterpiece" (786)] because "¡Es necessario que haya muchos libros, muchos pinos encantadores, para que velen de miradas aviesas el libro que realmente importa, la jodida gruta de nuestra desgracia, la flor mágica de invierno!" (983) ["There must be

many books, many lovely pines, to shield from hungry eyes the book that really matters, the wretched cave of our misfortune, the magic flower of winter!" (786)]. However, the important point that Bolaño's typewriter seller raises here is that it is the "writing machine" or industry, spearheaded by the academic and university printers that is responsible for the worst indulgences of this blinding to our misfortune, this blinding to the "book that really matters":

> El juego y la equivocación son la venda y son el impulso de los escritores menores. También: son la promesa de su felicidad futura. Un bosque que crece a una velocidad vertiginosa, un bosque al que nadie le pone freno, ni siquiera las Academias, al contrario, las Academias se encargan de que crezca sin problemas, y los empresarios y las universidades (criaderos de atorrantes), y las oficinas estatales y los mecenas y las asociaciones culturales y las declamadoras de poesía, todos contribuyen a que el bosque crezca y oculte lo que tiene que ocultar, todos contribuyen a que el bosque reproduzca lo que tiene que reproducir, puesto que es inevitable que así lo haga, pero sin revelar nunca qué es aquello que reproduce, aquello que mansamente refleja. (985)
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> [Play and delusion are the blindfold and spur of minor writers. Also: the promise of their future happiness. A forest that grows at a vertiginous rate, a forest no one can fence in, not even the academies, in fact, the academies make sure it flourishes unhindered, as do boosters and universities (breeding grounds for the shameless) and government institutions and cultural associations and declaimers of poetry—all aid the forest to grow and hide what must be hidden, all aid the forest to reproduce what must be reproduced, since the process is inevitable, though no one ever sees what exactly is being reproduced, what is being tamely mirrored back. (787)]

This from a book-lover who gave up writing to rent on typewriters to budding writers, budding writers who will go on to become beacons for academics who do the conference circuit. Writing, "is almost always empty"; writing typically as "novela o poemaria, decentes, decentitos, salen no por un ejercicio de estilo o voluntad, como el pobre desgraciado cree, sino gracias a un ejercicio de *ocultamiento*" (983)

["novel or book of poems, decent, adequate, arises not from an exercise of style or will, as the poor unfortunates believe, but as the result of an exercise of *concealment*" (786)]. And yet are the critics who devote themselves to the work of Archimboldi aware of what this typewriter seller, a man who grants Reiter (Archimboldi) the epiphany that may actually push him into writing, advises? How do they further the work of the universities and academies as "breeding grounds for the shameless" that promote the "play and delusion" of minor writers?

Sebald has also criticized the academic industry, in the shape of the Kafka industry, for "wrestling 'meaning' out of Kafka's 'difficulty'" (in Bewes 2014, 20). However, Sebald has argued that literary description is essential for the evocation of a state of melancholy that resists any institutionalized erasure of history: "Die Beschreibung des Unglücks schließt in sich die Möhglichkeit zu seiner Überwindung ein" [The description of misery involves the possibility of overcoming it]. He continues: "Melancholie, das Überdenken des sich vollziehenden Unglücks, hat aber mit Todessucht nichts gemein. Sie ist eine Form des Widerstands" [Melancholy, the pondering of existing sorrows, has nothing to do with a death wish. It is a form of resistance] (*Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*, 12).[12] Critics have spoken too of the notion of semblance and necessary concealment in Sebald whether it be in terms of a personal history or a Proustian real the "inadequacy of language" keeps at bay. Writing becomes a "fissure" or "confirmation of its failure" (Bewes 2014, 28) and protagonists reveal that personal memory is nothing more than quotation where the past is never appropriated by the present but instead reinvents the present by revealing ever more "lines of continuity that run through history" (Modlinger 2012, 357). This aspect of semblance is particularly striking in the case of Austerlitz who spends most of his life on an academic enquiry into his own past only to realize that "I had never really been alive, or was only now being born, almost on the eve of my death" (*A* 137). Once again, it is the figure of the library and the archive that lies at the heart of these failures. Ann Pearson finds the figure so powerful that she even discerns an "imaginary library of Sebaldian intertextuality" (2008, 277) that like the numerous "real" libraries in *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn* provide "if not the evidence of a culture's failures" then a "sobering contrast between its ideals and the historical reality investigated" by

Sebald's narrators (277). Pearson argues that Sebald uses "scholarly research" to create a semblance of the trauma (272) that also helps him to turn "away from himself" and possibly from the "inwardness" that Benjamin sets up in opposition to "positive barbarism." Duttlinger argues that Sebald's melancholy of resistance affects even his depiction of beauty, revealing an "inadequacy of language" that once again only leaves him with a form of semblance where objects are only seen through a "melancholy veil" that tranforms them in a "process of mortification" (2009, 335). Sebald also suggests, in beginning Austerlitz's narration to the narrator with a description of a personal crisis where Austerlitz feels that language itself has been "enveloped in impenetrable fog," that once again it is a certain schooling or academic inheritance that is at the root of this breakdown. During his breakdown Austerlitz feels that any sentence that "appears to mean something" ["das ist etwas nur vorgeblich Sinnvolles"] is "in truth a makeshift expedient" ["allenfalls Behelfsmäßiges" (183)] and that "the very thing which may usually convey a sense of purposeful intelligence—the exposition of an idea by means of a certain stylistic facility—now seemed to me nothing but an entirely arbitrary or deluded enterprise" (*A* 175) ["Gerade das, was sonst den Eindruck einer zielgerichten Klugheit erwecken mag, die Hervorbringung einer Idee vermittels einer gewissen stilistischen Fertigkeit, schien mir nun nichts als ein völlig beliebiges oder wahnhaftes Unternehmen" (183–4)]. Austerlitz's thoughts on the archive's part in this "deluded enterprise" reveal, once again, how Benjamin's notion of "positive barbarism" with its focus on the interior of any system or discourse is replayed here by Sebald: "Sitting at my place in the reading room […] I came to the conclusion that in any project we design and develop, the size and degree of complexity of the information and control systems inscribed in it are the crucial factors, so that the all-embracing and absolute perfection of the concept can in practice coincide, indeed ultimately must coincide, with its chronic dysfunction and constitutional instability" (*A* 393) ["Ich habe an meinem Platz in dem Lesesaal […] und bin zu dem Schluß gekommen, daß in jedem von uns entworfenen und entwickelten Projekt die Größendimensionierung und der Grad der Komplexitat der ihm einbeschriebenen Informations- und Steuersysteme die ausschlaggebended Faktoren sind und daß demzufolge die allumfassende, absolute Perfektion des Konzepts in der

Praxis durchaus zusammenfallen kann, ja letztlich zusammenfallen muß mit einer chronischen Dysfunktion und mit konstitutioneller Labilität" (398–9)]. To preface a narration that forms the spine of the novel with such an admission places the whole stylistic enterprise of Sebald's excursion into cultural memory on a fissure, one that is once again traced back to a certain schooling and academic style. Sebald suggests, for Astrid Oesmann, that the best-laid humanist plans can therefore produce the opposite of what is intended. The humanist becomes anti-humanist because of the "scale" of the project he or she pursues. In the case of the architecture of oppression, the researchers appear more content to "represent themselves as superstructures" (457) and these then act as "allegorical forms of cultural and natural history." My argument here is that these allegorical forms can also be extended to the architectonics of an oppressive archive as knowledge industry where the "scale" of the archive or knowledge industry throws up destructive "blind spots." The researchers and protagonists of Sebald's novels have, in a sense, been duped by the acquisition of a certain "stylistic facility" into upholding an expectation that the act of revealing these blind spots will return the narrative to the path of redemption the modernist project sustains.

The irony and pastiche of Bolaño's novels mean his writers have left such consoling myths far behind. In the first section of *2666* entitled "The Part about the Critics" and in other works such as *Estrella distante* [*Distant Star*] and *La literatura nazi en América* [*Nazi Literature in the Americas*] Bolaño develops his pastiche of academic critics. One of his protagonists from *Distant Star*, Bibiano O'Ryan, in commenting on a fellow writer called Di Angeli, remarks: "al menos, decía, *todavía* no se dedica a la *crítica literaria*" (*ES* 68) ["at least he hasn't started writing literary criticism" (59)].[13] In Bolaño's work professors do not live in ivory towers but in "oases or miserably immaculate deserts." He gives critics the opportunity to be less than precious about their profession and to acknowledge how it has dragged them down into "literature's bottomless cesspools." This thematic challenge to the "world of letters" also affects the business and processes of criticism. The relentless satirizing of the critic as anti-hero and of the academic and would-be writer as criminal or Nazi-sympathizer, works against the task of constructing any argument around this satire. The critics, researchers, and writers of Bolaño's and Sebald's novels inhabit such an alienated and murky underworld built on a self-consciously

ambiguous representational terrain that any attempt to describe the complex vertigo from which they suffer is consistently undermined. Modernist characters such as Leopold Bloom and Herzog may be advertising salesmen or newspaper men, but they are rarely academics living off the acquired traits of the academic profession like Di Angeli, Diego Soto, Bibiano O'Ryan, Pelletier, Espinoza, Morini, and Norton from *2666* and Austerlitz, and Sebald's alter egos. Since modernism literary criticism has lived ever more shamelessly off the literary work. Bolaño's work challenges this parasitic arrangement by pushing the objectification the other way. By having his critical anti-heroes attend academic conferences and gain professorships and by relentlessly describing the lives of failed writers in a pseudo-academic writing style he pastiches not only the structures of the academic industry but also its manner of relaying literary ideas to readers. Literary critics and would-be writers who give in to the university profession and to literary criticism drag literature down into "literature's bottomless cesspools" (*DS* 130). They further the concealment that assigns to the life of the writer-as-exile narratives that can only be described in terms of "el triste folklore del exilio" (*ED* 75) ["the melancholy folklore of exile" (66)] that are "en donde más de la mitad de las historias están falseadas o son sólo la sombra de la historia real" (75) ["made up stories that, as often as not, are fabrications or pale copies of what really happened" (66)].

The writers that matter in Bolaño's world belong to the fictional literary movement, the visceral realists. None of the historical literary movements we might recall seem to capture the exploits and ambitions of this now defunct, fictional movement forever elegized in *Los detectives salvajes*.[14] All that we can be certain that the movement scorns is any institutionalization or archiving of itself as a movement. And yet the book does make an attempt at self-archiving; the longest section of *Los detectives salvajes* is devoted to narratives and short biographical sketches for all those writers, editors, filmmakers, publishers, and lovers associated with the movement and the movement's elusive standard-bearers—Arturo Belano (Bolaño's alter ego) and Ulises Lima (an unassuming Latin American parody of the father-figure of all narrative protagonists suffering from wanderlust, Homer's Ulysses, and the alter ego of Bolaño's "best friend" Mario Santiago). However, we discover in the course of the novel that "la famosa antología de Zarco en donde están censados más de quinientos poetas

jóvenes" (*LDS* 509) ["the notorious Zarco anthology that catalogs more than five hundred young poets" (*SD* 480)][15] possibly associated with the movement includes "un número a todas luces excesivo, democrático pero poco realista" (*LDS* 276) ["an excessive number no matter how you looked at it, democratic but hardly realistic" (*SD* 256)]. And this is not the only example of the book's self-parodying as anthology or archive of a movement; the book we are reading that would appear to be Belano's own sketch for "la antología definitiva de la joven poesía latinoamericana" (*LDS* 207) ["the definitive anthology of young Latin American poets" (*SD* 189)], a book he is contracted to write for the publishing house of Lisandro Morales, is ultimately a work that includes none of the works of the movement's authors. The hundreds of writers, editors, critics, and lovers are simply interviewed by the nameless narrator for the interesting asides and anecdotes that, for the most part, describe encounters with Belano or Lima or serve to create an atmosphere of visceral realism.

Joaquín Font, another member of the visceral realists, has also already informed the narrator and the reader that he has warned Belano and Lima about the obvious perils of publishing good literature, which, we must imagine, includes the lengthy anthology or history of a movement we believe we are reading. Font argues that "una literatura escrita para lectores serenos, resposados, con la mente bien centrada" (*LDS* 202) ["a literature written for cool, serene readers, with their heads set firmly on their shoulders" (*SD* 185)] will always struggle against the "literature of desperation" and the "literature of resentment" that sells so well (185). Bolaño is once again targeting the reading industry and how it has been shaped and transformed by institutionalized descriptions of readership and by the technologization of the archive:

> Primero: se trata de un lector adolescente o de un adulto inmaduro, acobardado, con los nervios a flor de piel. Es el típico pendejo (perdonen la expresión) que se suicidaba después de leer el *Werther*. Segundo: es un lector limitado. ¿Por qué limitado? Elemental, porque no puede leer más que literatura desesperada o para desesperados, tanto monta, monta tanto, un tipo o un engendro incapaz de leerse de un tirón *En busca del tiempo perdido*, [...] Otrosí: los lectores desesperados son como las minas de oro de California. ¡Más temprano que tarde se acaban! ¿Por qué? ¡Resulta evidente!

> No se puede vivir desesperado toda una vida, el cuerpo termina doblegándose, el dolor termina haciéndose insoportable, la lucidez se escapa en grandes chorros fríos. El lector desesperado (más aún el lector de poesía, ése es insoportable, créanme) acaba por desentenderse de los libros, acaba ineluctablemente convirtiéndose en desesperado a secas. (*LDS* 202)
>
> [First: the reader is an adolescent or an immature adult, insecure, all nerves. He's the kind of fucking idiot (pardon my language) who committed suicide after reading *Werther*. Second, he's a limited reader. Why limited? That's easy: because, which amounts to the same thing, the kind of person or freak who's unable to read all the way through *In Search of Lost Time*, for example, […] Furthermore: desperate readers are like the California gold mines. Sooner or later they're exhausted! Why? It's obvious! One can't live one's whole life in desperation. In the end the body rebels, the pain becomes unbearable, lucidity gushes out in great cold spurts. The desperate reader (and especially the desperate poetry reader, who is insufferable, believe me) ends up turning away from books. Inevitably he ends up becoming just plain desperate. (*SD* 185)]

Critics are also parodied throughout *Los detectives salvajes* with the most pointed description of the critic's work coming from "el típico crítico provocador, el crítico kamikaze" (*LDS* 477) ["the typical provocative, kamikaze critic" (*SD* 449)], Inaki Echevarne. Bolaño targets modernist-inspired accounts of criticism through his critic Echevarne:

> Durante un tiempo la Crítica acompaña a la Obra, luego la Crítica se desvanece y son los Lectores quienes la acompañan. El viaje puede ser largo o corto. Luego los Lectores mueren uno por uno y la Obra sigue sola, aunque otra Crítica y otros Lectores poco y la Obra sigue sola, aunque otra Crítica y otros Lectores poco a poco vayan acompasándose a su singladura. Luego la Crítica muere otra vez y los Lectores mueren otra vez y sobore esa huella de huesos sigue la Obra su viaje hacia la soledad. Acercarse a ella, navegar a su estela es señal inequívoca de muerte segura, pero otra Crítica y otros Lectores se le acercan incansables e implacables y el tiempo y la velocidad los devoran. Finalmente la Obra viaja irremediablemente

> sola en la Inmensidad. Y un día la Obre muere, como mueren todas las cosas […]. (484)
>
> [For a while, Criticism travels side by side with the Work, then Criticism vanishes and it's the Readers who keep pace. The journey may be long or short. Then the Readers die one by one and the Work continues on alone, although a new Criticism and new Readers gradually fall into step along its path. Then Criticism dies again and the Readers die again and the Work passes over a trail of bones on its journey toward solitude. To come near the work, to sail in her wake, is a sign of certain death, but new Criticism and new Readers approach relentlessly and are devoured by time and speed. Finally the Work journeys irremediably alone in the Great Vastness. And one day the Work dies, as all things must die […]. (456)]

Bolaño's "made up stories" for the lives of his fictional would-be writers and critics describe numerous barbaric rituals. In *Estrella distante* his writers, as criminals, partake in "ritual *bárbaro*" (*ED* 139) ["barbaric rituals" (131)] where "había que fundirse con las obras maestras" (*ED* 139) ["one had to commune with the master works" (131)] by, among other things, "masturbándose y desparramando el semen sobre las páginas de Gautier o Banville" (139) ["masturbating and spreading one's semen over the pages of Gautier or Banville" (131)] in a process called "humanización" [humanization]. These become symbolic of the more devastating barbarism inflicted by the "real" literary critics of the knowledge industry who perpetuate a parasitic feeding off the truths, disjectia, and marginalia of their hounded "masters." The reader is left wondering whether the only work that does not engage in concealment and semblance is the work written by the unknown author, Archimboldi, the impossibly youthful 80-something who remains concealed from the academics. His non-appearance keeps his German military history and hence his association with barbarism something of a secret and the academics' prognostications only further the play of semblance and concealment in regard to his work.

In *2666* the four main protagonists of the first section—Pelletier, Espinoza, Morini, and Norton—are all early career literary critics. All four of them are Archimboldians, devotees of Benno von Archimboldi, the *nom de plume* for Hans Reiter. When Bolaño describes a comparative literature conference focusing on contemporary German

literature held in Amsterdam in 1995, his description of the adjoining conference rooms devoted to German literature and English literature respectively, once again lampoons the academic conference circuit and its reduction of the book that really matters, the "book of our misfortune," to mere "slogans":

> De más está decir que la mayor parte de los asistentes a tan curiosos diálogos se decantaron por la sala donde se discutía sobre literatura inglesa contemporánea, [...] los aplausos que arrancaba la literatura inglesa se oían en la literatura alemana como si ambas conferencias o diálogos fueran uno solo o como si los ingleses se estuvieran burlando, cuando no boicoteando continuamente a los alemanes, por no decir nada del público, cuya asistencia masiva al diálogo inglés (o angloindio) era notablemente superior al escaso y grave público que acudía al diálogo alemán. Lo que, en el cómputo final, fue altamente provechoso, pues es bien sabido que una charla entre pocos, donde todos se escuchan y reflexionan y nadie grita, suele ser más productiva, y en el peor de los casos más relajada, que un diálogo masivo, que corre el riesgo permanente de convertirse en un mitin o, por la necesaria brevedad de las intervenciones, en una sucesión de consignas tan pronto formuladas como desaparecidas. (32)
>
> [It goes without saying that most of the attendees of these curious discussions gravitated toward the hall where contemporary English literature was being discussed, [...] the applause sparked by English literature could be heard in the German literature room as if the two talks or dialogues were one, or as if the Germans were being mocked, when not drowned out, by the English (or Anglo-Indian) discussion, notably larger than the sparse and earnest audience attending the German discussion. Which in the final analysis was a good thing, because it's common knowledge that a conversation involving only a few people, with everyone listening to everyone else and taking time to think and not shouting, tends to be more productive or at least more relaxed than a mass conversation, which runs the permanent risk of becoming a rally, or, because of the necessary brevity of the speeches, a series of slogans that fade as soon as they're put into words. (17)]

Sometimes Bolaño's critics are "butchers" and their lectures are "massacres" (136) but something happens to them in the "horrible city" of Santa Teresa where they are surrounded by real post-1945 barbarism for the first time. They meet a Chilean lecturer at the university of Santa Teresa named Amalfitano. The "first impression[s]" the French, Spanish, and English professors of German literature have of him reveal[s] how their institutionalized frames of reference conceal and misrepresent his character:

> […] Amalfitano sólo podía ser visto como un náufrago, un tipo descuidadamente vestido, un profesor inexistente de una universidad inexistente, el soldado raso de una batalla perdida de antemano contra la barbarie, o, en términos menos melodramáticos, como lo que finalmente era, un melancólico profesor de filosofía pasturando en su propio campo, el lomo de una bestia caprichosa e infantiloide que se habría tragado de un solo bocado a Heidegger en el supuesto de que Heidegger hubiera tenido la mala pata de nacer en la frontera mexicano-norteamericana. Espinoza y Pelletier vieron en él a un tipo fracasado, fracasado sobre todo porque había vivido y enseñado en Europa, que intentaba protegerse con una capa de dureza, pero cuya delicadeza intrínseca lo delataba en el acto. (152–3)

> [Amalfitano could only be considered a castaway, a carelessly dressed man, a nonexistent professor at a nonexistent university, the unknown soldier in a doomed battle against barbarism, or less melodramatically, as what he ultimately was, a melancholy literature professor put out to pasture in his own field, on the back of a capricious and childish beast that would have swallowed Heidegger in a single gulp if Heidegger had had the bad luck to be born on the Mexican-U.S. border. Espinoza and Pelletier saw him as a failed man, failed above all because he had lived and taught in Europe, who tried to protect himself with a veneer of toughness but whose innate gentleness gave him away in the act. (114)]

However, it is Amalfitano, like the old typewriter seller, a writer who has turned his back on a certain kind of academic writing deemed acceptable, who is left to explain in the most lyrical and profound way what it is critics and criticism seek to do. In Bolaño

it is never established literary critics and writers from the centres of institutional educational power that are made to ponder the work of criticism or the academy. When Norton, the PhD candidate from England, asks Amalfitano whether "getting by" is the "main concern of all Latin American intellectuals" Amalfitano replies: "some of them are more interested in writing, for example" (120). Amalfitano then describes the work of literary critics in Mexico in terms of actors on a stage who stand before a gaping chasm they cannot see from which emerges the faint echo of all those voices of the great delirium of the literary dead. The section recalls both Kafka's hunger artist and Sebald's narrators who like the audience members in the front seats of Bolaño's imaginary stage are left at the end of their scholarly searches staring into a "chasm" (*A* 414) or a "breathless void" (*V* 262), terrified by the emptiness and sense of displacement their searches have left them with. Sebald's narrator in *Austerlitz* still finds the figure that encapsulates his terror in a book the academic Austerlitz gave to him at their first meeting in Paris. He still needs to conceal his own firsthand emotions behind figures found in old books, gifts from one academic to another. Dan Jacobson's book describing his search for his own grandfather ends in something of a dead end, a dead end Jacobson represents by way of a childhood memory of staring into old, unfenced mines thousands of feet deep near the town of Kimberley in South Africa where his Jewish family had emigrated to. Sebald then redeploys this image for his narrator's and alter ego's own sense of vertigo before the ruins at Breedonk at the end of his intertextual study of the "vanished past of his family" (*A* 415) ["die untergegangene Vorzeit seiner Familie" (420)]. These people "can never be brought up from those depths again" ["von dort drunten nicht mehr heraufholen läßt" (420)] no matter how diligent the research; like Bolaño's stage academics Sebald's narrators' scholarly research only transmits vague echoes of the dead that leave their audiences staring into a bottomless pit. However, the irony is that while Bolaño's academics and Sebald's narrators come to these chasms secondhand through the writings of others or even face away from the chasms or caves, only sensing the scale in the echoes of the dead writers they feed off, it is the audience who see the chasm firsthand for what it is, a vast chasm of emptiness where there was "no transition, only this dividing line, with ordinary life on one side and its unimaginable opposite on the other" (*A* 415) ["sondern nur

diesen Rand, auf der einen Seite das selbstverständliche Leben, auf der anderen sein unausdenkbares Gegenteil" (420)]. Bolaño's image of the stage academic is a powerful image for encapsulating the academic barbarism Sebald's and Bolaño's work resists in its unveiling:

> Y así llegas, sin sombra, a una especie de escenario y te pones a traducir o a reinterpretar o a cantar la realidad. El escenario propiamente dicho es un proscenio y al fondo del proscenio hay un tubo enorme, algo así como una mina o la entrada a una mina de proporciones gigantescas. Digamos que es una caverna. Pero también podemos decir que es una mina. De la boca de la mina salen ruidos ininteligibles. Onomatopeyas, fonemas furibundos o seductores o seductoramente furibundos o bien puede que sólo murmullos y susurros y gemidos. Lo cierto es que nadie ve, lo que se dice ver, la entrada de la mina. Una máquina, un juego de luces y de sombras, una manipulación en el tiempo, hurta el verdadero contorno de la boca a la mirada de los espectadores. En realidad, sólo los espectadores que están más cercanos al proscenio, pegados al foso de la orquesta, pueden ver, […]. Por su parte, los intelectuales sin sombra están siempre *de espaldas* y por lo tanto, a menos que tuvieran ojos en la nuca, les es imposible ver nada. Ellos sólo escuchan los ruidos que salen del fondo de la mina. Y los traducen o reinterpretan o recrean. Su trabajo, cae por su peso decirlo, es pobrísimo. Emplean la retórica allí donde se intuye un huracán, tratan de ser elocuentes allí donde intuyen la furia desatada, procuran ceñirse a la disciplina de la métrica allí donde sólo queda un silencio ensordecedor e inútil. […] Junto a este escenario, por supuesto, hay otros escenarios. Escenarios nuevos que han crecido con el paso del tiempo. […] De la boca de la mina siguen saliendo rugidos y los intelectuales los siguen malinterpretando. En realidad, ellos, que en teoría son los amos del lenguaje, ni siquiera son capaces de enriquecerlo. Sus mejores palabras son palabras prestadas que oyen decir a los espectadores de primera fila. (162–3)

> [And so you arrive on a kind of stage, without your shadow, and you start to translate reality or reinterpret it or sing it. The stage is really a proscenium and upstage there's an enormous tube, something like a mine shaft or the gigantic opening of a mine. Let's call it a cave. But a mine works, too. From the opening of the mine come unintelligible noises. Onomatopoeic noises, syllables

> of rage or of seduction or of seductive rage or maybe just murmurs and whispers and moans. The point is, no one sees, really sees, the mouth of the mine. Stage machinery, the play of light and shadows, a trick of time, hides the real shape of the opening from the gaze of the audience. In fact, only the spectators who are closest to the stage, right up against the orchestra pit, can see the shape, but at any rate it's the shape of something [...] Meanwhile, the shadowless intellectuals are always facing the audience, so unless they have eyes in the backs of their heads, they can't see anything. They only hear the sounds that come from deep in the mine. And they translate or reinterpret or re-create them. Their work, it goes without saying is of a very low standard. They employ rhetoric where they sense a hurricane, they try to be eloquent where they sense fury unleashed, they strive to maintain the discipline of meter where there's only a deafening and hopeless silence. [...] Next to this stage there are others, of course. New stages that have sprung up over time. [...]. The roars keep coming from the opening of the mine and the intellectuals keep misinterpreting them. In fact, they, in theory the masters of language, can't even enrich it themselves. Their best words are borrowings that they hear spoken by the spectators in the front row. (121–2)]

Norton, one of the "shadowless intellectuals," tells Amalfitano that she doesn't understand a word of what he says but the academics' time in Santa Teresa, the homicide capital of Mexico, makes Norton rediscover the importance of what she calls the "practical, real, tangible things" (142). The academics' sense of distaste for Santa Teresa and all it represents is shaken by their experiences there and yet we know they do not have "eyes in the backs of their heads." Espinoza and Pelletier have their own epiphany. They know they will never find what represents all that is best in culture and literature for them, namely Archimboldi, but that he has guided them to Santa Teresa and "this is the closest we'll ever be to him" (159).

Sebald's protagonists and narrators are very often researchers or academics who have internalized genealogical, historical, and cultural forms of archival enquiry to the extent that they no longer seem able to differentiate between life and research, which is, of course, already understood to be a false dichotomy.[16] Sebald is indirectly pointing to another kind of semblance or concealment that

academic enquiry privileges and that his protagonists discover again through their meticulous study of events surrounding the atrocities of National Socialism. His researcher-protagonists can only come to terms with painful memories by navigating a labyrinthine, heavily annotated research path into various cultural memories. The personal voice appears for the first time in *Schwindel. Gefühle* [*Vertigo*] on the first page of the second section—ALL'ESTERO—after a lengthy first section on the notes of a Marie Henri Beyle, one of the soldiers in Napoleon's legendary transalpine march through the Great St Bernard Pass in May of 1800. It begins: "Ich war damals, im Oktober 1980 ist es gewesen, von England aus, wo ich nun seit nahezu fünfundzwanzig Jahren in einer meist grau überwölkten Grafschaft lebe, nach Wien gefahren in der Hoffnung, durch eine Ortsveränderung über eine besonders ungute Zeit hinwegzukommen" (39) ["In October 1980 I travelled from England, where I had then been living for nearly twenty-five years in a country which was almost always under grey skies, to Vienna, hoping that a change of place would help me get over a particularly difficult period in my life" (33)].[17] The academic reader may become conscious of the parallels between Sebald's life and that of the narrator of *Vertigo*, leading him or her to reflect on his or her own internalized academic discourses for self-understanding.

In the final section of *Vertigo*, a section entitled *Il ritorno in patria*, the protagonist decides to go back to W., before returning to England, where he had spent his childhood. However, this will be no ordinary homecoming. As Bolaño reminds us, "[p]ara el escritor de verdad su única patria es su biblioteca" (*EP* 43) ["books are the only homeland of the true writer" (*BP* 42)]. Sebald will demonstrate how the contemporary writer as exile has a whole new bulwark of academic discourses on diaspora identity, post-exilic trauma, and auto-ethnography with which to save himself from himself. The narrator tells us that as a researcher, he has been "working on my various tasks" in the summer in Verona. He gets shown into his room in the Engelwirt Inn, a room that "was approximately where our living room had once been, the room was furnished with all the pieces my parents had bought in 1936" (193) ["befand sich das mir angewiesene Zimmer an derselben Stelle, an der unser Wohnzimmer gewesen war mit der Einrichtung, die die Eltern angeschafft hatten" (210)]. He spends hours looking over the Engelwirt's

landlady's "collection of postcards she kept in three large folio volumes" (196) ["und habe stundenlang die in drei großen Folianten untergebrachte Ansichtskartensammlung angeschaut" (213)]. This leads the protagonist and Sebald's alter ego to vertiginous asides about the Far East, Vesuvius, and about the life of Rosina Zobel's (the landlady) husband, old Engelwirt. All the time we know the research is necessary for the composed revelation the researcher-protagonist knows he has hit upon in relation to this return to the *Unheimlich Heimat*. In other words, the composed and studious manner of the work of scholarly research is being assigned to a somewhat traumatic and alienating retelling of an imagined return to a homeland. The protagonist recounts how he spends his day: "Den Nachmittag über bin ich, mit meinen Aufzeichnungen und dem damit verbundenen Nachsinnen beschäftigt" (223) ["I spent the afternoons sitting [...], turning over my recollections and writing up my notes" (204)]. Through the research he revisits the scenes of his youth: "Immerhin ht es mich durch das Gehen von Bild zu Bild weitergezogen, und ich bin hinaus auf die Felder und hinauf auf die auf den Anhöhen ringsum liegenden Weiler" (228) ["At all events I found that as I went from one of his works to another I was drawn onward, and I walked through the fields and towards the outlying hamlets on the surrounding mountainsides and hills"] (208–9). Sebald's narrator is Proust's Combray narrator in the age of mass education and the knowledge industry where memory itself has been colonized by invasive instititutional discourses of cultural memory. But even the composed and studied manner of the protagonist's return to the scene of his childhood does not prevent him from discovering a deep sense of loss as he walks the hills and fields of his youth:

> [...] alles Wege, die ich in der Kindheit neben dem Groβvater her gemacht hatte und die mir in der Erinnerung so viel, in Wirklichkeit aber, wie ich jetzt feststellen muβte, so gut wie gar nichts mehr bedeuten. Niedergeschlagen kehrte ich jedesmal von diesen Exkursionen in den Engelwirt zurück und zu den disparaten Notizen, an denen ich in letter Zeit doch einen gewissen Halt gefunden hatte, selbst wenn mir dabei das Beispiel des Kunstmalers Hengge und die Fragwürdigkeit der Kunstmalerei überhaupt immer warnend vor Augen standen. (229)

> [[…] paths that I had walked in my childhood at my grandfather's side and which had meant so much to me in my memory, but, as I came to realise, meant nothing to me now. From every one of these excursions I returned dispirited to the Engelwirt and to the writing of my notes, which had afforded me a degree of comfort of late [notes are a constant support for his narrators when they discover, as the narrator of Austerlitz does, that events have "dulled my sense of other people's existence" (46)], even as the example of Hengge the artist, and the questionable nature of painting as an enterprise in general, remained before me as a warning 210)]

The reader recalls that the writer is an aging academic, an academic who may well be playing with the Proustian motif of memory as a device that his alter ego has interiorized. The reader becomes aware that the worldview adopted is grounded on an outmoded and esoteric academic speculation that further alienates the subject when interiorized as a mode of self-knowing. The note-taking and the research into a life that is traced back as one's own, can only offer a modicum of relief. Even at moments of profound despair alienation remains because the protagonist-researcher is incapable of divorcing personal reflection from the modes and cues of cultural reflection. Sebald's researcher still stands centre-stage like Bolaño's, a "shadowless intellectual" who has given his own shadow up to the play of the archive and cultural memory.

The reminiscences take on a darker hue and the alter ego recounts family illnesses and passings. The reader is also burdened by the fact that this German childhood of the 1920s is moving ever closer to the context of the emergence of National Socialism in government in the 1930s. He speaks of the "years of continuous disappointment and perenially revived hope" (216) and he describes how the chance archives found in an attic become physically marked in the mind of the researcher by the content they conjure and record: "Zeichen einer langsamen Auflösung in die auf dem Dachboden herrschende völlige Stille" (244) ["tokens of the slow disintegration of all material forms in the complete silence of this attic" (223–4)]. They then become a metaphor for all archives that drive enquiry and are thus complicit in a process of concealment: the archival objects defy the gaze of the researcher: "Man konnte sich leicht einbilden, daβ diese gesamte Versammlung der verschiedensten Dinge bis zu dem Augenblick,

da wir eingetreten waren, sich in Bewelgung, in einer Art Evolution befunded hatte und jetzt nur aufgrund unserer Anwesenheit lautlos verharrte, als sei nichts gewesen" (244) ["It was easy to imagine that this entire assemblage of the most diverse objects had been moving, in some sort of secret evolution, until the moment we entered, and that it was only because of our presence that these things now held their breath as if nothing had happened" (224)]. The narrator then recalls a litany of catastrophes to have hit the town of W. that become subsumed by the memories of complete terror before "old Kopf" the barber whom he recalls "setting about shaving the fuzz from my neck with that freshly stropped knife" (243) ["als wenn der Köpf, bei dem ich mir, […] mir mit diesem an dem Lederriemen frisch abgezogenen Messer den Nacken ausrasierte" (266)]. The memories of trauma at W. are then sublimated into a selective Adlerian life-history that looks for evidence in childhood of a life always proleptically turning towards research and academic enquiry. The narrator has been academically diligent in his appreciation of how memories must be selectively stored in order to recreate the personal life-story that is deemed most appropriate: "I would sit with my teacher on the bench by the stove and on sunny days outside in the revolving summer-house under the trees, completely devoted to the tasks I was set, filling my exercise books with a web of lines and numbers in which I hoped to entangle Fraulein Rauch for ever" (252) ["und saß bei schlechtem Wetter neben der sanftmütigen Lehramtskandidatin auf der Ofenbank, bei schönem Wetter draußen in dem drehbaren Gartenhaus inmitten des Arboretums und füllte mit Hingabe meine Schulhefte mit einem Netzwerk von Zeilen und Zahlen, in welches ich das Fräulein Rauch auf immer einzuspinnen und zu verstricken hoffte" (275)]. Of course, the irony is that it is the protagonist-researcher who has become entangled to a much greater extent in the lines and numbers of scholarly amanuensis and in personal memory as cultural memory. Where can the personal now be found? It is on this note that he becomes dispirited about his exploits into researching himself, finding as we all will, if we research ourselves as Proust did, that it only leads to the discovery that "my writing had reached the point at which I either had to continue for ever or break off" (252–3) ["meinen Aufzeichnungen an den Punkt gekommen war, wo ich entweder immerfort weitermachen oder aber abbrechen mußte" (276)]. He refers to his own profession, one in

which he "was forever bent over my papers" ["ich andauernd über meine Papiere gebeugt war" (275–6)] so that any ordinary salesman would regard him, upon having taken one "look at my outward appearance," as "perhaps [in a] more dubious profession" ["zweifelhafteres Metier schlossen" (276)] than theirs (*V* 252). He eventually falls to more direct notes about the countryside of his homeland, saying it "has always been alien to me, straightened out and tidied up as it is to the last square inch and corner" (253). We then get apocalyptic descriptions of the landscape of Germany for this academic exile as well as the description of his personal blackout that leaves him regarding his academic learning that has granted him "a certain stylistic facility" as a "deluded enterprise": "zu der Überzeugung kam, daβ so etwas wie die Zersetzung meiner Schädelnerven nunmehr endgültig eingesetzt habe" (278) ["I came to the conclusion that something like an eclipse of my mental faculties was about to occur" (254)] and "Der Zwang, unter dem ich mich befand, legte sich erst, als der Zug in den Heidelberger Bahnhof hineinrollte, wo derart zahlreich die Menschen auf den Bahnsteigen standen, daβ ich sogleich annahm, sie seien auf der Flucht aus der untergehenden oder bereits untergegangenen Stadt" (278) ["the compulsive fixation did not wear off until the train pulled into Heidelberg station, where there were so many people crowding the platforms that I feared they were fleeing from a city doomed or already laid waste" (254)].

The protagonist then has a momentary epiphany before a woman in front of him who recites some lines of poetry after reading a book entitled *The Seas of Bohemia*, a book he can later never find on any bookshelf or catalogue. Once again, all this academic's revelations come to him secondhand through the intertext. But the sense of levity this momentary encounter with another nameless and almost visionary fellow commuter allows him is almost immediately dispelled after his long walk from the National Gallery to Liverpool Street Station by him once again succumbing to the reverie of researcher's notes. He falls into a dream on the way home inspired by him idly turning, as most academics of course now never do, the pages of an "India paper edition of Samuel Pepys's diary, Everyman's Library, 1913" ["der Dünndruckausgabe—Everyman's Library 1913—des Tagebuchs von samuel Pepys" (285)] and the dream becomes not all his own, not a key to the sense of fatigue and horror and vertigo he experiences in returning twice to different homes, but something

that rushes to fill the "breathless void" created by these sensations. The silence is now absolute but his dream becomes an echo of the "fragments from the account of the Great Fire of London as recorded by Samuel Pepys" (262) ["Fragmente aus dem Bericht über das große Feuer von London" (287)]. The notes of the Great Fire become a terrifiying metaphor for the fury of research itself that leaves him feeling one with the terrified Londoners "flee[ing] onto the water. The glare around us everywhere, and yonder, before the darkened skies, in one great arc the jagged wall of fire. And, the day after, a silent rain of ashes, westward as far as Windsor Park" (263) ["Wir fliehen auf das Wasser. Um uns der Widerschein, und vor dem tiefen Himmelsdunkel in einem Bogen hügelan die ausgezackte Feuerwand bald eine Meile breit. Und andern Tags ein stiller Aschenregen—westwärts, bis über Windsor Park hinaus" (287)]. The researcher, it would seem, must only dream, not in technicolor, but in aquatint and yellowed paperback. However, the fact that this yellowed recording of the Great Fire by one of the English canon's greatest annotators must then become a metaphor for the roots of the personal trauma he cannot confront is revealing of the destructive power of the modes of academic enquiry he has internalized.

The recasting of how research can become a tool to sustain oneself while also saving oneself from oneself is repeated in *Austerlitz*. At the end of the book Sebald has the narrator report how Austerlitz, the lecturer in art history, describes the archive itself as becoming the greatest obstacle to the work it drives. For Austerlitz, the newly constructed Grande Bibliothèque becomes a vast metaphor for the institutions and practices of learning that himself and the narrator have grounded their self-enquiries on; it is now an institution that bars them from entry at every point and treats them as one would an "enemy." Sebald's description of Breedonk as a "penal colony" comes to mind. Martin Modlinger and Richard Crownshaw have described Sebald's comparison of the archive and the "deathcamp" at Theresienstadt in terms of the archive that is "working against itself […] towards the eradication of memory" (Modlinger 2012, 352). Like Kafka's protagonists Sebald's scholars and researchers confront the archive knowing they must climb all the right stairs, descend all the right passageways, pass all the security checks, respond to all the interrogations in small cubicles, and wait at all the right doors before the book they require is recovered for them. Once in possession of

the book these academics are so wearied by the quest their academic pursuits have launched them on, a ship they can now never disembark from, that they simply sit and peer out the glass windows at the cityscapes where the life flowing beneath is, for Austerlitz's fellow reader Lemoine, nothing but the "body of the city" ["daß Körper der Stadt" (405)] that has "been infected by an obscure disease spreading underground" (399) ["befallen sei von einer obskuren, unterirdisch fortwuchernden Krankheit" (405)]; life beyond the archive often appears dead to these researchers. But even these images of decay send these weary academics into labyrinthine reveries that grant them further justifications for seeing the physical bulk of this High Church of academic enquiry, this Grande Bibliothèque, as yet another metaphor for the obstacles that the research industry now embodies for the researcher intent on locating the "book that really matters," Bolaño's "flower of winter." However, the irony is, as Bolaño's stage academics remind us, that they are all the time turned away from confronting the real chasm of emptiness that the literature of suffering records. Austerlitz laments how any research into the nature of the "loot […] taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris" (401) from 1942 by the "Germans" is now impossible since the Grande Bibliothèque has been built on the site of the complex on the wasteland between the marshalling yard of the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Pont Tolbiac. In the end these researchers are left researching dead ends; Austerlitz takes his leave from the narrator discussing an Ashkenazi cemetery in London and the narrator ends his narrative sitting before the remains of the German deathcamp at Breedonk and staring into its dark chasms once again through the pages of a book he reads about another fruitless search for a Jewish grandfather. As we have seen, Jacobson's mines that describe the experience staring at Breedonk's architecture of oppression are offered up as a final terrifying metaphor for the researcher's inability to distinguish personal memory from cultural memory: "Wahrhaft schreckenerregend sei es gewesen, schreibt Jacobson, einen Schritt von dem festen Erdboden eine solche Leere sich auftun zu sehen, zu begreifen, daβ es da keinen Übergang gab, sondern nur diesen Rand, auf der einen Seite das selbstverständliche Leben, auf der anderen sein unausdenkbares Gegenteil" (420) ["it was truly terrifying to see such emptiness open up a foot away from firm ground, to realize that there was no transition, only this dividing line, with ordinary life on one side and its unimaginable opposite on the other side" (414)].

Sebald and Bolaño present us with different aspects of the "barbaric rituals" of academic enquiry that flourish in the age of the archive and knowledge industry. Their work returns us to Benjamin's notion of positive barbarism in describing a new kind of academic barbarism. They describe how a reading industry moulded by the knowledge industry creates discourses of concealment and semblance that detract from the "book that really matters." However, in passionately evoking the visceral search for this "book" and in meticulously recreating the sense of wonder still found before the riches of an archive stolidly repelling the reader, their work also offers stubborn, heroic readers glimpses of the evasive vertigo and playful wanderlust writing must still hope to elicit.