'Perdu dans ces filaments': Labyrinths and Intertextuality in Michel Butor and W G Sebald

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Acknowledgements

I first encountered Michel Butor's work in 2005, when I began a part-time French Studies degree course at the University of Sheffield. When I embarked upon reading *L'Emploi du temps* I had no idea that this novel would come to preoccupy me so intensely, and would be the focus not only of my undergraduate dissertation but of a doctoral thesis. At around the same time, I discovered W G Sebald's work, at first unaware of the connection between the two writers. That connection inspired this thesis.

When I began my part-time studies, I had a full-time job and two school-age children. I could not have completed the degree without the steadfast support of my family. As baffled as they were by my desire to take on this challenge, they recognised that this was something I needed to do, and gave me the space and time to do it. They have continued to support and encourage me during my doctoral studies.

I would not have moved on to the PhD without the encouragement of my friend and colleague Dr Amanda Crawley Jackson, who became my supervisor. She, and second supervisor Dr Richard Steadman-Jones, have been unfailing in their support not only through difficult personal challenges but through the pandemic, and have given me inspiration and confidence when I have flagged.

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented me from visiting in person the Deutsches Literaturarchiv at Marbach, where W G Sebald's annotated copy of *L'Emploi du temps,* a vital source for this thesis, is archived. I am therefore very grateful to Dr Julia Maas for arranging for images of the annotations to be provided to me, and to both the DLA and the Wylie Agency for permission to quote and describe those annotations in the thesis.

The publication of a revised version of the English translation of *L'Emploi du temps* (*Passing Time*), long out of print, will, I hope, bring the book back to the attention of non-Francophone readers. I am immensely grateful to Jonny Walsh of Pariah Press for his response to my plea for a new edition, and for giving me the opportunity to co-edit it for publication. If my own writing – here and in my blog – can encourage a new generation of readers, and particularly those who love Sebald, to explore Butor's work, I will be content.

Summary

In this thesis, I propose a fresh reading of a neglected work, Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*, examining why it had such a profound impact upon W G Sebald, how that influence is manifested in Sebald's work, and most importantly, what that shows us about *L'Emploi du temps*, when we re-examine it through that lens. I will show that its reach is much greater than has been acknowledged, both in terms of the range of Sebald's work in which one can hear the echoes of Butor, and the duration of those echoes.

I will show that *L'Emploi du temps* is haunted by Butor's experience of growing up during the Occupation of Paris, and that the fictional city of Bleston, whilst inspired by Manchester, is a mask behind which that Paris hides. This new reading resonates with earlier ways of understanding the work, and will generate in turn further ways of navigating the streets of Bleston. Butor explores themes of memory, trauma and exile, themes that strongly connect his work with that of Sebald. To draw these elements together, I use the motif of the labyrinth, at the heart of *L'Emploi du temps*, and pervasive in Sebald's work. This image from antiquity had renewed significance in the post-war world, where it seemed to speak not only of complexity and confusion, but of disorientation and loss of faith. I have used this motif to structure my thesis, exploring the significance of the labyrinth in depictions of the city, in language and narrative structure, and in the musical architecture of the fugue.

Butor is my starting point, as he was Sebald's, and it is to Butor that I will keep returning, using Sebald's insights to shed new light on *L'Emploi du temps*.

I, Catherine Annabel, confirm that this Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Notes

Extracts from *L'Emploi du temps* are from the 1956 Éditions de Minuit paperback edition. Where I refer to the English translation, *Passing Time*, I use the 2021 Pariah Press edition.

References to works by W G Sebald are to the English translations, unless otherwise stated. Where I quote from German texts, an English translation is provided in the footnotes.

Quotations from and descriptions of Sebald's annotations to his copy of *L'Emploi du temps* are included with the permission of the DLA at Marbach and of the Wylie Agency.

Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

Dedicated to Martyn Annabel (16.11.55-09.10.21), whose unflagging love and support encouraged and strengthened me, and who is so deeply missed

Introduction and Literature Review

In this thesis, I propose a fresh reading of a neglected work, Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*,[1] in light of its influence upon the work of W G Sebald. Whilst this influence has been recognised by Sebald scholars,[2] I will show that its reach is much greater than has been acknowledged, both in terms of the range of Sebald's work in which one can hear the echoes of Butor, and the duration of those echoes, from his early poem, 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical',[3] to his last major work, *Austerlitz*.[4] That early poem suggests to the reader familiar with Butor's novel the themes and preoccupations whose impact upon Sebald, at the very start of his academic and literary career, was to be so strong and lasting. Throughout the thesis, I will weave the works of both authors together, noting not only connections but also contrasts, to draw out those themes and preoccupations. But Butor is my starting point, as he was Sebald's, and it is to Butor that I will keep returning.

Sebald is a writer whose work is inescapably associated with trauma – not his own but that of the millions of victims of the regime under which he was born, and in whose aftermath he grew up. Butor's work does not generally carry those associations, but I will show that *L'Emploi du temps* is a work haunted by the experience of growing up during the Nazi Occupation of Paris,[5] and that, as Butor himself said, his fictional city of Bleston is a mask behind which that capital city hides,[6] even whilst it draws upon his experience of the city of Manchester. Butor did not directly experience the worst horrors of the Occupation, but his adolescence was spent in the atmosphere of fear, of imminent violence, of constant danger, and of the daily knowledge of the trauma of others. Both Butor and Sebald encountered the alienation of a culture of silence, in which that trauma was implicitly denied. Both use the image of the labyrinth as a way of exploring that trauma.

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[1] *L'Emploi du temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1956)

[2] Generally, in relation to Sebald's Manchester works, *After Nature* (trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002)) and *The Emigrants* (trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage Books, 2002)), and the emphasis has been upon the effect of reading Butor on Sebald's state of mind, rather than on the work itself. This is at the heart of the thesis and will be fully explored in the following chapters

[3] In *Across the Land and the Water: Selected Poems, 1964-2001*, trans. Iain Galbraith (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011), pp. 18-22. First published in *Über das Land und das Wasser: Ausgewählte Gedichte 1964-2001*, ed. Sven Meyer (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008)

[4] *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2001); trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002)

[5] André Bourin, 'Instantané: Michel Butor', *Nouvelles littéraires* (17 January 1957), in *Entretiens: Quarante ans de vie littéraire*, ed. Henri Desoubeaux, Vol. I (Nantes: Joseph K, 1999), pp. 28-32 (p. 29)

[6] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor: Essai* (Paris: A G Nizet, 1995), pp. 7-8

The motif of the labyrinth (and the myth of Theseus and the thread of Ariadne) is at the heart of *L'Emploi du temps*, and is pervasive in Sebald's work (see the man-made and naturally occurring labyrinths in *The Rings of Saturn*,[7] and the labyrinthine buildings that preoccupy Austerlitz).[8] Not only do both writers use the image of the labyrinth but both have created labyrinths through their narrative structures and their long, looping sentences. The labyrinth, this image from antiquity, had renewed significance in the post-war world, where it seemed to speak to the generation seeking to make sense not only of complexity and confusion but of disorientation and loss of faith, not only of the challenge of reaching the centre, but of the absence of a centre.[9] I have used this motif to structure my thesis, exploring the significance of the labyrinth in depictions of the city, in language and narrative structure, and in the musical architecture of the fugue. It also reflects the experience of the reader – and that of the researcher, who must risk becoming 'perdu dans ces filaments',[10] ensnared in 'a varied, densely textured web'.[11]

Butor and even his best-known works have been critically neglected in recent decades, whereas Sebald needs no championing. With Sebald's assistance, I will bring to light aspects of *L'Emploi du temps* that have never been fully explored, or that have been overshadowed. Each critic who has written about this novel has proposed a different way of reading it, and I will touch on some of those readings as the thesis progresses. British readers have responded to the book differently than French and other European readers, as its description of an immediately recognisable industrial environment has provided a way in to a challenging narrative. It has inspired other artwork: a novel, a poem, a video installation.[12] But, having spent fifteen years exploring *L'Emploi du temps*, I can say with conviction that no one reading will ever be sufficient to explain its power. As Butor says, 'cette accession de certaines régions à la lumière généralement s'accompagne de l'obscurcissement d'autres jadis éclairées qui deviennent étrangères et muettes jusqu'à ce que, le temps ayant passé, d'autres

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[7] *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage Books, 2002), pp. 38, 171-73

[8] *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 39, 183, 192, 212, 282, 307

[9] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost: The Labyrinthine Nature of Time in Postmodern Fiction', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 12, 3 (September 1996), pp. 297-313 (p. 298); André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', in *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, ed. Pierre Brunel, trans. Wendy Allatson, Judith Hayward and Trista Selous (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 685-719 (p. 719)

[10] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 54

[11] Jo Catling, 'Gratwanderungen bis an den Rand der Natur: W G Sebald's Landscapes of Memory', in *The Anatomist of Melancholy: Essays in Memory of W G Sebald*, ed. Rüdiger Görner (Munich: Iudicium Verlag GmbH, 2003), pp. 19-50 (p. 46)

[12] Richard Wollheim, *A Family Romance* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1969); Allen Fisher, 'Butor. Passing Time Again', in *Gravity* (Cambridge: Salt, 2004), pp. 114-15; Steve Hawley, 'Yarn', <FILMS/VIDEOS | Steve Hawley> [accessed 27 September 2021]

échos viennent les réveiller'.[13] What follows does not and cannot aspire to providing a definitive reading, but is a new reading nonetheless, and one whose echoes will resonate with earlier interpretations, and generate in turn further ways of navigating the streets of Bleston.

Michel Butor: Innovation, Space and Place

Although I will touch only occasionally on Butor's other works, it is relevant first to briefly consider *L'Emploi du temps* in the context of his career and his time. Michel Butor was one of the most prolific and eclectic French writers of the twentieth century. His reputation is based primarily on his four novels, published in the 1950s; after the last of these,[14] his work defied easy classification but he continued to experiment with hybrid forms. Renowned as one of the innovators of his time, he is, nonetheless, not often read or studied.

He is frequently associated with, though never saw himself as fully a part of, the *nouveau roman* group of writers.[15] I mention this association primarily in order to *disassociate* Butor from the *nouveau roman* because, whilst it is inevitably referenced in articles on and retrospectives or obituaries for Butor,[16] it sheds no useful light on the concerns of this thesis. Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet (who published his own 'manifesto' for the *nouveau roman* in 1963)[17] had little in common, as Roland Barthes noted,[18] and there was evidently tension between them, exacerbated by their names being yoked together in this way.[19] But the

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[13] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388

[14] *Degrés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960)

[15] For example, Pierre Deguise, 'Michel Butor et le "nouveau roman"', *French Review*, 35, 2 (1961), pp. 155-62; Ludovic Janvier, *Une Parole exigeante: Le Nouveau roman* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964); Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman: Fiction, Theory, and Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); John Sturrock, *The French New Novel: Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)

[16] For example, René de Ceccaty, 'L'écrivain Michel Butor, figure du Nouveau Roman, est mort', *Le Monde* (24 August 2016), http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2016/08/24/le-romancier-michel-butor-est-mort_4987526_3382.html [accessed 25 August 2021]; Pierre Lepape, 'Michel Butor, figure du nouveau roman, est mort', *Télérama* (24 August 2016), https://www.telerama.fr/livre/michel-butor-figure-du-nouveau-roman-est-mort, 145490.php [accessed 25 August 2021]

[17] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1963)

[18] 'On ne peut donc, semble-t-il, imaginer deux arts plus opposés que ceux de Robbe-Grillet et de Butor. L'un vise à déconditionner le roman de ses réflexes traditionnels, à lui faire exprimer un monde sans qualités; il est l'exercice d'une liberté absolue (étant bien entendu que l'exercice n'est pas forcément une performance; d'où son formalisme déclaré). L'autre, au contraire, est plein à craquer, si l'on peut dire, de positivité: il est comme le versant visible d'une vérité cachée, c'est-à-dire qu'une fois de plus la littérature s'y définit par l'illusion d'être plus qu'elle-même, l'œuvre étant destinée à illustrer un ordre translittéraire'. Roland Barthes, 'Il n'y a pas d'École de Robbe-Grillet', *Argument* (1958), in *Essais critiques* (1964; Paris: Seuil, 1991), <https://www.ae-lib.org.ua/texts/barthes__essais_critiques__fr.htm#24> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[19] Dan Graham, with Michel Butor, *Conversation*, ed. Donatien Grau (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), p. 32. And, as Barthes put it, 'Le moment est sans doute venu où le groupement arbitraire de romanciers comme Butor et Robbe-Grillet – pour ne parler que de ceux qu'on a le plus communément associés – commence à devenir gênant, et pour l'un et pour l'autre. Butor ne fait pas partie de l'École Robbe-Grillet, pour la raison première que cette Ecole n'éxiste pas' ('Il n'y a pas d'École de Robbe-Grillet'). See also John Sturrock, *The French New Novel*, pp. 1-3

nouveau roman was never in reality a group or a movement,[20] rather a loose categorisation (Ludovic Janvier calls it 'un caprice d'édition')[21] that encompassed different generations,[22] as well as very different approaches.

> *Ce désir de nous associer me cause un certain agacement car je suis plus sensible à nos différences qu'à nos ressemblances. Nos livres ont poussé indépendamment les uns des autres, sans échange d'influences.[23]*

What they had in common was a commitment to experimentation which paralleled the equivalent movements in film and music. Butor's work, throughout his career, blurred or erased boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between prose and poetry.

Butor's novels, and some of his subsequent hybrid works, show a preoccupation with space and place, and how to read and write the physical world, particularly the city. His first novel, *Passage de Milan*,[24] was written during the two years he spent at the University of Manchester, where he worked as a *lecteur*. It is rarely read or studied now. Like *L'Emploi du temps* it showed Butor's interest in narrative structures, in this case the architectural structure of a Parisian apartment building in which all of the narrative takes place. *L'Emploi du temps* followed, and was awarded the Prix Fénéon in 1957. Butor's third novel, *La Modification*,[25] is his most widely read work, to this day, and still taught in French schools. Whilst the action of *Passage de Milan* takes place within an apartment block, and that of *L'Emploi du temps* within the bounds of a city, in *La Modification* the location is a train, travelling between Paris and Rome. In *Degrés*, Butor tested the boundaries of the novel still further, but in a departure from the focus on physical space and place, here his protagonist, Pierre Vernier, a teacher in a Paris lycée, attempts to 'record all reality, […] know all that has passed, is passing, and will pass through his pupils' minds'.[26] Butor's career as a novelist ended here, but his literary output did not.

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[20] The list of writers included in this category is somewhat fluid although the four most consistently listed are Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Duras and Butor. It is also worth noting Butor's general disinclination to join movements; in particular, he was left-wing but never joined a party or accepted a specific label (*Curriculum Vitae: Entretiens avec André Clavel* (Paris: Plon, 1996), p. 40)

[21] Ludovic Janvier, *Une Parole exigeante*, p. 12

[22] Odile Quirot, 'Michel Butor: "Nathalie Sarraute aurait pu être ma mère"', *Nouvel observateur* (11 July 2012), <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20120710.OBS6643/michel-butor-nathalie-sarraute-aurait-pu-etre-ma-mere.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[23] Interview with André Bourin, 'Les Enfants du demi-siècle: Michel Butor', *Nouvelles littéraires* (5 December 1957), in *Entretiens*, Vol. I, pp. 37-43 (p. 40)

[24] *Passage de Milan* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1954)

[25] *La Modification* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1957). Notably, this novel is written in the second person (e.g., 'vous avez mis le pied gauche sur la rainure de cuivre', p. 7)

[26] Blurb to English edition: *Degrees*, trans. Richard Howard (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005)

Although the English translation of *Mobile*[27] describes it as 'A Novel', it emphatically is not. It marks Butor's definitive abandonment of the novel, 'pour aller vers la poésie'.[28] Butor himself describes it as *Étude pour une représentation des États-Unis'. Mobile* is 'un collage', 'une maquette de l'espace américain',[29] inspired by the patchwork quilts which he had seen on the east coast. Butor set himself the challenge of 'representing' the US by assembling 'un certain nombre de matériaux, en particulier beaucoup de citations, afin de voir comment les Américains se peignaient eux-mêmes'.[30] This epitomises Butor's vision of 'une œuvre collective',[31] creating polyphony through intertextuality, an approach shared with W G Sebald.

During the 1950s, alongside the novels, Butor was producing essays on literature, both from a theoretical perspective (see in particular 'L'espace du roman', or 'Le roman comme recherche')[32] and as examinations of 'les modernes' (Proust, Mallarmé, Raymond Roussel, Joyce, Pound, Faulkner).[33] He also published the first volume in his sequence on 'le génie du lieu',[34] which drew on his post-war travels (Italy, Turkey, Greece and Egypt). The list of Butor's works after 1960 is lengthy and extraordinarily eclectic, including 'dialogues' with musical compositions,[35] artist books where Butor provided the text to be set on or alongside the artwork,[36] meditations on dreams,[37] an autobiographical 'capriccio'[38] and vast numbers of poems.[39] These works defy easy categorisation, and present considerable challenges to readers. It is therefore perhaps inevitable that despite his own reservations, Butor is still primarily known as a novelist.

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[27] *Mobile: Étude pour une représentation des États-Unis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). See Dan Graham, *Conversation*, p. 41
[28] *Curriculum vitae*, p. 103
[29] Ibid, p. 134
[30] Ibid, p. 133
[31] *L'Arc*, 'Butor', 39 (1969), p. 2
[32] *Essais sur le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960)
[33] *Essais sur les modernes* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960)
[34] *Le Génie du lieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1958)
[35] *Dialogue avec 33 variations de Ludwig van Beethoven sur une valse de Diabelli* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); *Stravinsky au piano* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1995)
[36] See Elinor S Miller, *Prisms and Rainbows: Michel Butor's Collaborations with Jacques Monory, Jiři Kolář and Pierre Alechinsky* (New Jersey; London; Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2003)
[37] *Matières de rêves* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975)
[38] *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe: Capriccio* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967)
[39] For a small sample, see *Anthologie nomade*, ed. Frédéric-Yves Jeannet (Paris: Gallimard, 2004). See also Henri Desoubeaux, *Dictionnaire Butor* which includes Butor's 'Poésie au jour le jour', <site personnel de l'auteur (pagesperso-orange.fr)> [accessed 25 August 2021]

Butor's Labyrinths

This thesis focuses on Butor's second novel, *L'Emploi du temps,* clearly inspired by his time in Manchester (with all the caveats that I will explore in subsequent chapters). It is a diary novel, with the diarist/narrator a young Frenchman, Jacques Revel, who arrives in the northern English city of Bleston for a one-year work placement with a shipping company. The reader who follows Revel as he tries (and often fails) to find his way around Bleston (itself much more than the setting for the narrative, rather, one of the principal characters) soon begins to wonder where exactly they are. Drawn in by a seemingly realistic and wryly humorous description of a foreigner's arrival in a grim northern town, the reader is swiftly wrongfooted by the emotional intensity that is evident from the first pages. Butor built his portrait of Bleston from his personal impressions of the city of Manchester, interwoven with mythological and supernatural elements, stimulated both by the archetypal status of the city, and by the misery of its climate. But the intensity and the passion are not sufficiently explained by this. Where do the fear and hate, the violence and sense of threat, come from? A number of critics have attributed this to the neuroses of the narrator, but I suggest another contribution to the creation of Bleston, that Butor's formative experiences during the Occupation of Paris provide the final element for the alchemical transformation of the city into a monster.

One of the key motifs in Butor's novel is that of the labyrinth, a labyrinth in space and time. Early in my research it became evident to me that the labyrinth was the unifying structure for the thesis. It connects the imagery and themes of the works I am exploring with the form of the text itself, and the experience of the protagonists with that of the reader (and with my own experience as a researcher). Whilst the labyrinth itself dates back to antiquity, its use has changed over the centuries and particularly in the twentieth century has reflected a loss of faith, in God and in humanity. In the aftermath of the Second World War, and of Auschwitz, writers and artists saw the labyrinth as a carceral space, as a space where time works differently, where maps fail, and where trauma may be endlessly repeated, without resolution. All of these aspects of the labyrinth will be explored in the succeeding chapters.

Sebald returns again and again to this image, in a variety of contexts (urban and rural, man-made and naturally occurring). In *L'Emploi du temps*, the labyrinth is both the unnavigable city in which Revel finds himself, and the diary that he writes to attempt to master that city and his own recollections and emotions. Butor and Sebald both describe labyrinths and create

labyrinthine narratives, and both use long sentences that forgo paragraph breaks or standard punctuation, creating challenges for the reader who instinctively tries to hold on to a linear structure and chronology. In addition, both writers create intertextual labyrinths, layers of reference, allusion and quotation, whether to existing or imaginary texts and sources. Whilst these are all features to be found in much post-war literature, Butor insists upon the importance of the labyrinth throughout his text, in which Revel takes on the role of Theseus,[40] and we know from Sebald's annotations to his copy of *L'Emploi du temps* that he was alert to this theme.[41] The labyrinth has been associated not only with the city (see Chapters 3 and 4), but with language and narrative, as I will explore in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition, there is an association with trauma, if we consider the labyrinth as a place of disorientation and deception, and as a carceral space.

Butor's rich and complex novel invites a multiplicity of interpretations, and the reader can follow a number of threads through the labyrinth of the narrative, as the protagonist does through the labyrinth of the city. The writer's experiences and memories reveal through intertextual references (to imaginary texts and works of art, and to mythology and biblical narratives), repeated motifs and key words, a multiplicity of cities – fantastical, mythic, historic and contemporary.

Butor and Sebald

Butor and W G Sebald are not writers who would naturally be considered together, were it not for the fact that Sebald encountered Butor in Manchester, where he read *L'Emploi du temps* and was profoundly influenced by it at the very start of his career. Sebald's work is associated with themes of exile, trauma and memory, and with a labyrinthine intertextuality. I will argue that these elements are found in Butor's work too, and that it is these elements of *L'Emploi du temps* that inspired Sebald. I thus aim to draw attention back to Butor, through the exploration of the links with Sebald. My reading of Sebald is unique in being explicitly from a Butorian perspective – I will illuminate aspects of Sebald's work, but the priority is always to reflect that back to Butor and to *L'Emploi du temps* in particular.

In contrast to Butor's long and prolific writing career, Sebald's œuvre is compressed into a mere decade, abruptly terminated by his death in 2001. His work achieved considerable

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[40] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 88, 133, 204-07

[41] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', in *From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form*, ed. Sabine Wilke (New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 123-42 (pp. 125-26)

success in his lifetime but still more so posthumously. The four major works, like so many of Butor's, are not easy to categorise. There is always a narrator, who both is and is not Sebald, but whose resemblance to the author has led some readers and critics to treat the works as autobiographical (I will explore some of the issues that this creates in a later chapter). Only *Austerlitz*[42] seems to present itself as a novel. *Vertigo*[43] comprises four apparently unconnected pieces, two of which are first-person narratives which may be in some respects autobiographical. *The Rings of Saturn*[44] is an account of the narrator's walking 'pilgrimage' in Suffolk,[45] with digressions to cover the history of the Congo, the trial of Roger Casement, the silk trade[46] and, inevitably, the Holocaust. *The Emigrants*[47] presents the stories of four exiles (not, as so often claimed in blurbs and reviews, all Jewish or all exiles from Nazism), linked by the narrator (although the narrator is not necessarily the same person in each of the stories). Whilst the presence of the Sebaldian narrator has led many readers to assume that the stories to which be bears witness are those of real individuals, we know that Sebald has taken such stories and blended them with elements of fiction. (This practice is most problematic when it comes to *Austerlitz,* as I will discuss in depth in Chapter 6.) Sebald's prose style is frequently described as labyrinthine,[48] and I will explore how he disorientates the reader through his use of non-linear time frames, layers of reported speech and intertextual references, in Chapters 5 and 6. His preoccupation with the motif of the labyrinth is found most strikingly in *The Rings of Saturn*, where he becomes disorientated first in the hedge maze at Somerleyton and subsequently on Dunwich Heath, an experience that finds its way into his dreams,[49] and in *Austerlitz*, where the monumental public buildings, whether Liverpool Street Station or the Palais de Justice in Brussels, which Austerlitz studies as an

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[42] *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2001); *Austerlitz,* trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002)

[43] *Schwindel. Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1990); *Vertigo,* trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage Books, 2002)

[44] *Die Ringe des Saturn. Ein englische Wallfahrt* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1995); *The Rings of Saturn,* trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage Books, 2002)

[45] Note that 'the circular walking tour the narrator claims to make through a sizable chunk of East Anglia never actually took place. Sebald undertook a number of individual walks' (Uwe Schütte, 'Troubling Signs: Sebald, Ambivalence, and the Function of the Critic', *boundary 2*, 47, 3 (August 2020), pp. 21-59 (p. 37))

[46] Shannon Burns, writing about *The Rings of Saturn,* notes 'the thread of silk the narrator follows down the ages, like Theseus retracing his steps out of the labyrinth after confronting the Minotaur' ('*The Rings of Saturn*: A Lasting Chronicle of Mourning', *Sydney Review of Books* (11 December 2015), <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/the-rings-of-saturn-a-lasting-chronicle-of-mourning/> [accessed 25 August 2021])

[47] *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992); *The Emigrants* (2002)

[48] John Beck, 'Reading Room: Erosion and Sedimentation in Sebald's Suffolk', pp. 75-88 (p. 88); Massimo Leone, 'Textual Wanderings: A Vertiginous Reading of W G Sebald', pp. 89-101 (pp. 90, 100); John Zilcosky, 'Sebald's Uncanny Travels: The Impossibility of Getting Lost', pp. 102-20 (p. 116), in *W G Sebald: A Critical Companion*, ed. J J Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004)

[49] *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 38, 171-72

architectural historian, lead us on to the deadly labyrinths of Breendonk, Theresienstadt and Kaunas.[50]

The biographical coincidence of W G Sebald's arrival in Manchester in 1966 as a *Lektor* at the University, fifteen years after Michel Butor came to be a *lecteur* there, has been noted for some time by Sebald scholars. It has been seen as significant largely in relation to Sebald's account of Manchester in *The Emigrants,* which draws upon Butor's descriptions, along with other, earlier portraits of the city as seen by European visitors, and the perceived depressive effect upon Sebald of reading *L'Emploi du temps*. With a detailed knowledge of *L'Emploi du temps*, both specific references and a more general echoing of motifs and themes are apparent. *Saturn's Moons,* the invaluable 2011 'Handbook' on Sebald, confirms that he owned a copy of the French edition, and read it during his time in Manchester,[51] but does not discuss the poem, 'Bleston. A Mancunian Cantical',[52] conclusive evidence of the significance of Butor's work. I will examine the poem in detail in Chapter 1, since it provides the underpinning for this thesis.

Having established the link between the two writers, my aim is, firstly, to explore its significance and reach in terms of Sebald's work, given that the influence of *L'Emploi du temps*, where it is recognised at all, is often assumed to relate only to Sebald's 'Manchester' works. Secondly, and most importantly, I will show how reading Butor through Sebald brings out aspects of the novel that have not been previously recognised, and allows a new and deeper understanding of *L'Emploi du temps* as a narrative haunted by past trauma.[53] By the time that Sebald's work was published, trauma, and the process of dealing with the memory of trauma, was a subject of widespread consideration and study across all of the disciplines, beyond the therapeutic community. Rebecca Clifford's recent study of child survivors of the Holocaust shows very clearly how the understanding of (and willingness to confront) trauma developed since the end of the war,[54] and a reading that would not have been considered at the time that *L'Emploi du temps* was published is now a compelling necessity.

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[50] *Austerlitz*, pp. 24-34, 266-81, 412-15

[51] Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years: W G Sebald's *Lehrjahre* and *Theatralische Sendung* 1963-1975', in *Saturn's Moons: W G Sebald – A Handbook,* ed. Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (Oxford: Legenda, 2011), pp. 64-81 (p. 66); Jo Catling, '*Bibliotheca abscondita*: On W G Sebald's Library', in *Saturn's Moons*, pp. 265-97 (p. 297, n. 85)

[52] *Across the Land and the Water,* pp. 18-22

[53] André Bourin, 'Instantané', p. 29

[54] Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children's Lives after the Holocaust* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2020)

My research began with a first encounter with *L'Emploi du temps*, and with *The Emigrants*, but it was only when 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical' appeared in English translation[55] that the significance of the connection became apparent. I was surprised that there was at that time so little exploration of the poem by Sebald scholars, and only passing references to the fact that Sebald read *L'Emploi du temps* in his first months in Manchester. This situation has barely changed, and this thesis will be the first substantial analysis of how Butor influenced Sebald. I began with the question of what it was in *L'Emploi du temps* that made Sebald work so intensively with the text (in French), during the period when he was attempting to acclimatise to the cultural and climatic shock of Manchester and the need to rapidly improve his English. But this question raised another: how does Sebald's response shed new light on Butor's novel, and suggest new readings of the text, particularly in terms of Sebald's preoccupations with exile and with trauma? My analysis, with Butor as a starting point, identifies links that have not been noted elsewhere, and which only someone very familiar with *L'Emploi du temps* would be likely to see. I draw upon a wide range of work in the fields of literary and cultural studies to support my findings.

Methodology

My approach throughout the thesis is one of close reading of the texts that form the primary corpus. Obviously, the key text here is *L'Emploi du temps*, but my reading of the novel is supported by my knowledge of Butor's œuvre more generally. I draw upon the whole of Sebald's œuvre, whilst focusing upon the four major prose works, and the early poem 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', as I argue that the influence of *L'Emploi du temps* is both more important and more pervasive in Sebald's writing than has been recognised. As a non-German reader, I quote these texts in English translation, other than to draw attention to Sebald's practice in using quotations, both hidden and overt, which I discuss in Chapter 5. I draw too upon the wealth of interviews with and essays by both writers, where these shed light upon their preoccupations and practices. There is at the time of writing no biography for Butor, and Carole Angier's new Sebald biography has only very recently been published.[56] However, Butor's conversations with André Clavel,[57] along with his volume *Improvisations sur Michel Butor*,[58] along with a wide range of interviews, do provide invaluable autobiographical material, in particular providing much insight into Butor's adolescence

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[55] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 18-22
[56] Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence: In Search of W G Sebald* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021)
[57] *Curriculum Vitae*
[58] *Improvisations sur Michel Butor: L'Écriture en transformation* (Paris: La Différence, 1993)

during the Nazi Occupation of Paris. I use this material, along with other first-hand accounts and histories of that period to support my argument that *L'Emploi du temps* is, as an early reviewer said, haunted by the Occupation,[59] and to draw out images and allusions that make this haunting evident. The key biographical material for Sebald relates to his time in Manchester, which proved so influential on his writing: he not only encountered Butor's novel here, but experienced the shock of Manchester as an industrial metropolis and, very importantly, came into contact with Jews and Jewish culture, erased so thoroughly from his homeland.[60] Various interviews, with Sebald himself and with contacts from his time in Manchester, have contributed to my understanding of this period.[61]

In addition to biographical and autobiographical material, I have drawn on historical material relating to Manchester at the time of Butor's arrival in 1951, and Sebald's in 1966. Both writers offer (or seem to offer) some precision and detail in their portrayals of the city, and yet both go beyond what the city was objectively like, to amplify its darkness, gloom and grime and imbue those qualities with a different kind of darkness. In addition to the use of first-hand accounts of the Occupation, referred to above, I have used historical sources to illuminate some of Sebald's more oblique references to the Holocaust.[62]

My research is primarily literary, but the rich intertextuality of the works I have studied has led me into other fields, not only history but, in my final chapter in particular, musical theory and the history of psychoanalysis.

Literature Review

I will review shortly the work specifically on Butor and Sebald that has contributed to my thesis. More broadly, I have explored theories of intertextuality, a vitally important topic in the study of both Butor and Sebald. Julia Kristeva's essay, 'Word, Dialog, and Novel', describes 'a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'[63] and Gerard Genette's *Palimpsestes*[64] defines a number of aspects of this practice, not all of

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[59] André Bourin, 'Instantané', p. 29

[60] Christopher Bigsby, 'In Conversation with W.G. Sebald', in *Writers in Conversation with Christopher Bigsby* Vol. 2 (Norwich: EAS Publishing/Pen & Inc 2001), pp. 139-65 (p. 161)

[61] In particular, Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, ed. Uwe Schütte and Kay Wolfinger, *Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Sebald Gesellschaft*, Vol. I (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2021)

[62] See Anna Hájková's recent work on Theresienstadt, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

[63] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialog, and Novel', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 34-61 (p. 37)

[64] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982)

which are relevant to this study, but which shed light on how Butor and Sebald have absorbed and transformed other texts into and within their own. I have drawn too on the field of 'memory studies', which itself brings together work around collective memory, trauma and post-trauma, postcolonial and Holocaust studies.[65] However, no single theoretical framework has been used. The works on which this thesis focuses are woven from many different literary and cultural threads, and defy attempts to label or to pigeonhole, as do their writers. The labyrinthine intertextuality of their work, and the extraordinary breadth of reading and literary knowledge that this demonstrates, demand both close attention and wide-ranging study.

Butor has received declining critical attention in recent decades. An analysis of the publication dates for journal articles, monographs, and academic studies that include his work shows that the bulk of material was published during the 1970s. Butor's 80th birthday in 2006 prompted celebratory articles in (primarily) the French press but did not lead to any significant increase in critical attention, nor did his death in 2016. To some extent this reflects the degree to which the experimentation of the 1950s has become mainstream, at least in 'literary' fiction. Butor is no more neglected than Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon or Nathalie Sarraute, in terms of readership or critical study, but the association with the *nouveau roman* perhaps does least justice to *L'Emploi du temps*, whose debt is to Proust rather than to Butor's contemporaries;[66] both the title and Revel's purpose in writing the diary echo Proust, as do Butor's long looping sentences. Whilst this work presents challenges to the reader, it is more accessible, and wears its experimentation more lightly, than some contemporary works, and it is surprising that its English translation was for so long out of print, given its obvious

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[65] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Mark Crinson, ed., *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2012); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

[66] 'Apart from Butor's experiment − along the lines of Robbe-Grillet's New Novel − with the detective story genre, a few metatextual devices […] and a staple mythological intertext with the Theseus myth […], this novel presents little by way of the formal design or linguistic experiment of Butor's first book […]. Its most markedly intertextual gesture beckons toward Proust's examination of time and memory.' (David Vichnar, 'The Passing of Michel Butor', *Equus Press* (25 August 2016), <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2016/08/25/the-passing-of-michel-butor-1926-24-aug-2016/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

point of connection with UK readers. The publication of a new edition of that translation,[67] will enable non-francophone readers to discover its riches.

W G Sebald's readership has continued to grow since his death, and his work continues to attract critical attention (the focus of that attention has shifted somewhat, with his final novel, *Austerlitz*, taking over from *The Emigrants* as the most studied text). The primary focus of much of this critical work has been on trauma and memory, particularly in relation to the Holocaust, and these themes run through my thesis, although it must always be acknowledged that these texts are oblique and indirect treatments of trauma, and I will make these distinctions clear in context.

The approach I have taken has required a considerable amount of background reading to inform my exploration of the unifying motif of the labyrinth, and of the three main areas of study: city, text and music. Furthermore, I have engaged extensively with the work of and about writers whose influence upon Butor and Sebald has been significant, most notably Proust and Kafka,[68] and the texts upon which Sebald draws extensively, such as the autobiographical/historical works that underpin the fictional accounts of the Holocaust in *Austerlitz*, explicitly in the cases of Dan Jacobson, Jean Améry and H G Adler,[69] unacknowledged (within the text) in the cases of Susi Bechhöfer and Saul Friedlander.[70] These are key to understanding Sebald's practice with regard to intertextuality, and some of the issues that it raises.

I read widely to explore the origins and cultural significance of the labyrinth, and how a symbol originating in antiquity and appropriated as a metaphor for religious faith has been used in the latter half of the twentieth century (André Peyronie's article in Pierre Brunel's companion to literary myth is an excellent summary).[71] Hendia Baker's paper, drawing on Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language,* has been particularly useful in

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[67] *Passing Time*, trans. Jean Stewart (revised edition; Manchester: Pariah Press, 2021). I was co-editor of this new edition

[68] See also Balzac, Joyce, Gide, Camus and Sartre. I also refer to Edgar Allan Poe and to Baudelaire in Chapter 7 in relation to the concepts of the flâneur and the fugueur. In addition to literary texts, the films of Alain Resnais are important to Sebald's work, particularly in *Austerlitz*

[69] Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom: A Family, a People, a Divided Fate* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1998); Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities,* trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P Rosenfeld (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1980); H G Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-45: The Face of a Coerced Community*, trans. Belinda Cooper, ed. Amy Loewenhaar-Blauweiss (1955; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

[70] Susi Bechhöfer and Jeremy Josephs, *Rosa's Child: The True Story of One Woman's Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past* (London: I B Tauris, 1996); Saul Friedlander, *When Memory Comes* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979)

[71] André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', pp. 685-719

teasing out the way in which the labyrinth has been used in the second half of the twentieth century.[72] In relation to Butor specifically, Pierre Brunel's monograph on *L'Emploi du temps* focuses on 'le texte et le labyrinthe',[73] whilst other studies explore labyrinths in language, the city as labyrinth, and intertextuality as a form of labyrinth.[74] My research draws out particular aspects of the labyrinth – the labyrinth as prison or as trap, and the relationship between the labyrinth and the experience of exile – and I therefore synthesise and go beyond these sources.

I have consulted a number of historic accounts of the city of Manchester, focusing on how it was perceived by visitors from Europe, notably Hippolyte Taine (whose account of a first sight of the city is paraphrased by Sebald in *The Emigrants*)[75] and Alexis de Tocqueville,[76] and on the way in which it was mythologised, a mythology which fed into the perceptions of both Butor and Sebald. The work of Asa Briggs and Tristram Hunt[77] has been useful in this regard. J B Howitt's 1975 paper, and its precursor in his unpublished MA dissertation, provide invaluable detail on Butor's time in Manchester.[78] I have also considered a number of first-hand and later accounts of the Nazi Occupation of Paris, in order to understand what would have been the experience of an adolescent during those years, and how that experience found its way into *L'Emploi du temps*.[79] Here I was looking in particular for the recurring imagery to be found in these accounts, rather than historical detail.

More generally, there are numerous volumes looking at aspects of the city in history, culture and literature. Robert Alter's *Imagined Cities* covers literature from Flaubert to Kafka,

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[72] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost', pp. 297-313; Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1984)

[73] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps*: Le Texte et le labyrinthe* (Paris: PUF, 1995)

[74] Wendy B Faris, *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Marilyn Thomas Faulkenburg, *Church, City, and Labyrinth in Brontë, Dickens, Hardy, and Butor* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Dominique Jullien, 'Intertextuality as Labyrinth: The Presence of Racine in Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*', *Yale French Studies*, 76 (January 1989), pp. 108-24

[75] *The Emigrants*, p. 168

[76] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (Paris: Hachette, 1899) <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k26633f> [accessed 25 August 2021]; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Voyages en Angleterre, Irlande, Suisse et Algérie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958); Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, trans. Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511792700> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[77] Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Phoenix, 2005)

[78] J B Howitt, 'England and the English in the Novels of Michel Butor' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1972); 'Michel Butor and Manchester', *Nottingham French Studies*, 12, 2 (1973), pp. 74-85

[79] Pierre Audiat, *Paris pendant la guerre (juin 1940-août 1944)* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1946); Jean Guéhenno, *Journal des années noires, 1940-1944* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II*, trans. Nathan Bracher (Hanover; London: Brandeis University Press/United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001)

looking at 'experiential realism' in a range of texts whose narratives are structured around the 'moment by moment experience […] of the main character or characters'.[80] Valeria Tinkler-Villani's remit is wider, in terms of chronology and geography, and considers, as the title suggests, 'the basic antithesis or binary opposition informing the topos of the city', liberating dynamism or imprisoning marginality.[81] Whilst neither of these volumes refers to Butor, there is a good deal of general relevance in considering *L'Emploi du temps'* place on the spectrum of writing about the city. Diana Festa-McCormick's volume includes a chapter on Butor ('*Passing Time*: The Equivocal Reality of a City'), as part of her study of 'writers who have seen in cities forces all of their own',[82] and Simon Kemp contributes a study of infernal cities in modern French literature which includes Butor's Bleston, to a volume which focuses on the city as imagined space and a matrix for imagined worlds.[83] Further insights are drawn from Michel de Certeau's chapter on walking in the city, in *L'Invention du quotidien,*[84] whose powerful image of labyrinthine streets seen from a great height helped me to structure my two chapters on the city, around the idea of a view from above and a view from within. Tim Ingold's social anthropological studies of lines and ways of walking also contributed to that dual perspective in relation to the labyrinth,[85] and Tim Edensor's work on industrial ruins was relevant to the post-war experience of cities turned into labyrinths by the destruction of recognisable points of navigation.[86] Walter Benjamin's work was influential upon both Butor and (more explicitly) Sebald, and several of his essays are cited in the thesis, not only his references to the city and memory as labyrinths, but also his work on Baudelaire and the flâneur (in Chapter 7) and on language in Chapter 5.[87]

Given Sebald's preoccupation with the Holocaust, and the case that I make for *L'Emploi du temps* as a novel haunted by the Nazi Occupation of Paris, some reading around the theme of

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[80] Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. x

[81] Valeria Tinkler-Villani, ed., *Babylon or New Jerusalem? Perceptions of the City in Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. ix

[82] Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst: A Study of Ten Novels* (New Jersey; London; Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1979), p. 15

[83] Simon Kemp, 'Urban Hell: Infernal Cities in Modern French Literature', in Christian Emden, Catherine Keen and David R Midgley, eds, *Imagining the City*, *Vol. I: The Art of Urban Living* (Oxford; Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 95-108

[84] Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien, I: Arts de faire* (1980; Paris: Gallimard, 1990)

[85] Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007); Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds, *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

[86] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005)

[87] For example, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' and 'Moscow', in *Reflections: Aphorisms, Essays and Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 2007); 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007)

trauma was required. From Cathy Caruth's key work on trauma, narrative and history I drew upon the chapter on *Hiroshima mon amour* and the literary re-enactment of memory.[88] Anne Whitehead's book on trauma fiction includes a chapter on 'trauma and repetition' in Sebald's work, and discusses the indirect way in which he accesses the Holocaust and its legacy. [89] Roger Luckhurst too considers Sebald (specifically *Austerlitz*) but his view is far more harshly critical (he describes Austerlitz as 'risking traumatophilia').[90] Both proved useful, particularly in considering some of the ethical issues which Sebald's Holocaust writing raises. Rebecca Clifford's recent work on child survivors of the Holocaust[91] provided vital insights into how the understanding of trauma, and the way the body and mind respond to trauma, has developed since the end of the Second World War.

For the final chapter, on the fugue and the fugueur, I studied both the musical and the medical backgrounds. For the former, Paul Griffiths' and Julian Jackson's work on twentieth-century music was vital to enable me to understand the way a baroque musical form was used by the serialists and by post-war composers,[92] whilst for the latter Ian Hacking's analysis of the historical phenomenon of the fugueur or 'mad traveller' is the key source.[93]

As I have previously noted, Butor scholarship was at its strongest in the 1970s and only a few important papers and monographs have appeared since. The key monographs on Butor, grouped chronologically, are those from Jean Roudaut and Léon Roudiez in the 1960s,[94] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Michael Spencer and Dean McWilliams in the 1970s,[95] Mary Lydon in 1980,[96] Mireille Calle-Gruber and Pierre Brunel (both writing about *L'Emploi du temps*) in

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[88] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

[89] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 121

[90] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 111

[91] Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors*

[92] Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: The Avant Garde since 1945* (London; Toronto; Melbourne: J M Dent & Sons, 1981); *Modern Music: A Concise History from Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990); Julian Johnson, *Out of Time: Music and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

[93] Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (London: Free Association, 1998)

[94] Jean Roudaut, *Michel Butor ou le livre futur: Proposition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); Léon S Roudiez, *Michel Butor* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1965)

[95] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor: A Study of his View of the World and a Panorama of his Work, 1954-1974* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1977); Michael Spencer, *Michel Butor* (New York: Twayne, 1974); Dean McWilliams, *The Narratives of Michel Butor: The Writer as Janus* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978)

[96] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile: A Study of the Novels and Aesthetics of Michel Butor* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1980)

1995[97] and Jean Duffy in 2003.[98] The earliest studies, from French scholars, clearly saw Butor primarily as a novelist, and in the context of the *nouveau roman*. In Waelti-Walters, Spencer and McWilliams, who recognise and address the diversity of Butor's work, the emphasis shifts to the mythological and spiritual aspects of Butor's œuvre, taking in, for example, the theme of alchemy and the recurrence of dreams in the novels and other works, and his utopianism about literature and art. Lydon's study of Butor's aesthetics attempts to trace his 'flight path', aiming to bring him recognition amongst anglophone readers.[99] Later writers, faced with the staggering variety and quantity of material, focused on specific aspects: the city (Calle-Gruber), the labyrinth (Brunel) and art and architecture (Duffy). There are Butor editions of literary journals (*World Literature Today* and *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*)[100] in the 1980s, and a collection of short essays on *L'Emploi du temps* which appeared in 1995.[101] I have drawn on all of these studies, for the rich variety of insights and perspectives that they bring to Butor's work, and to the study of *L'Emploi du temps* in particular. All recognise the centrality of time, the importance of Butor's use of mythology in general and of the labyrinth in particular as motif and metaphor. All note too, if only in passing, the importance of Horace Buck, the African exile in whom Revel finds an ally against the hostility of Bleston, albeit with a tendency to treat him as 'exotic', as a 'shaman',[102] or as a 'hapless victim'.[103] I have focused on Buck as the embodiment of exile and alienation, but recognising his reality rather than reducing him to a symbol. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the importance of race in this novel or in Butor's work more generally, but this is something that would benefit from further study from contemporary scholars, in the context of decolonisation, and the reclaiming of black history.

These studies vary, however, in what they see as the essence of *L'Emploi du temps*. For Jennifer Waelti-Walters in her 1977 study, Butor's protagonist Revel is 'grappling with the basic problems posed by modern society',[104] as epitomised by the modern city. J B Howitt's

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[97] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*; Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps

[98] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs: Art and Architecture in the Work of Michel Butor* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003)

[99] Interestingly, by 1980 Lydon sees Butor as an increasingly isolated figure, belonging neither to the avant garde nor to the 'Establishment' (*Perpetuum Mobile*, pp. xv, 235)

[100] *World Literature Today*, 'Passage de Butor: 1981 Puterbaugh Conference', 56, 2 (1982); *Butor Studies*, ed. Germaine Baril (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 32, 1

[101] *Analyses et réflexions sur Butor* − L'Emploi du temps: *La Ville* (Paris: Éditions Ellipses, 1995)

[102] Adèle Bloch, 'Michel Butor and the Myth of Racial Supremacy', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 16, 1 (Spring 1970), pp. 57-65 (pp. 58, 63)

[103] Dean McWilliams, *The Narratives of Michel Butor*, p. 29

[104] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor*, p. 48

paper on Butor and Manchester concludes that the novel expresses what he calls 'the myth of Industrial Man [...], a myth which shows urban man still trapped and repressed by the machinery of a commerce-dominated system which has its roots in the Industrial Revolution of a former age'.[105] Michael Spencer describes the novel as 'a compendium of many themes: an examination of the mobility of the self in time, an analysis of our spiritual bewilderment, and a demonstration of the essential role of literature and myth as a means of overcoming it'.[106] Mary Lydon emphasises Butor's debt to Proust, and the links to Sartre's *La Nausée*, and argues that *L'Emploi du temps* 'represents a further stage [beyond Proust or Sartre] in the autocritique of the genre'.[107] Jean Duffy focuses explicitly on art and architecture in Butor's work, looking at 'high and low culture' in *L'Emploi du temps*, and concludes that the novel is 'a testimony to man's ultimate adaptability, to his capacity to accommodate and assimilate unfamiliar cultures and customs, and to his readiness to fabricate something new from the vestiges of what has been created by previous generations'.[108]

However, there are aspects of Butor's work that have not attracted the attention that they would have done, had these studies been undertaken more recently. All critics (and readers) of *L'Emploi du temps* have grappled with the dissonance between the mundanity of the events described and the heightened language and intense emotion that they inspire. It is perhaps surprising that in this context, Butor's suggestion that 'il est facile de voir à quel point la capitale française se cache sous le masque de Bleston'[109] has not been taken into account by any of his critics, nor have any picked up the comment in an early review that Butor's adolescent experiences during the Nazi Occupation 'ont laissé en lui des impressions dont j'ai retrouvé la hantise dans son roman'.[110] In the light of more recent work on trauma and memory, such as that of Mark Crinson on urban memory[111] and Marianne Hirsch (at an earlier stage in her career a Butor scholar) on post-memory,[112] these aspects of Butor's work can now be more thoroughly explored. Both of these volumes explore Sebald's work explicitly, and indirectly shed light on *L'Emploi du temps*. Crinson's edited volume 'attempts to analyse the characteristic forms, experiences and spaces of modern urban memory through

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[105] J B Howitt, 'Michel Butor and Manchester', p. 84
[106] Michael Spencer, *Michel Butor*, p. 48
[107] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 73
[108] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 101
[109] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*, pp. 7-8
[110] André Bourin, 'Instantané', p. 29
[111] Mark Crinson, ed., *Urban Memory*
[112] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*. It is interesting that Hirsch, despite her work on Butor during the 1970s and 80s, does not note any relevance to her later study of post-memory.

visual art, literature, buildings and events' and he acknowledges Butor's novel in his preface.[113] Hirsch's concept of post-memory is discussed primarily in the context of Sebald's work, but it informs my consideration of the way in which Bleston reflects Butor's (and presumably Revel's) past.

Anyone studying Sebald's work will find the 2011 'Handbook', *Saturn's Moons*,[114] invaluable. It provides biographical background, chronologies and bibliographies, as well as essays, and interviews with Sebald. To complement this, a number of edited volumes are essential sources. Of these several have a broad remit, including papers on the full range of Sebald's work,[115] whilst others are more focused (see Denham and McCulloh's study of history, memory and trauma,[116] and Baxter, Henitiuk and Hutchinson's volume, *A Literature of Restitution*).[117]

Amongst the monographs on Sebald, Uwe Schütte's recent work[118] is particularly revelatory and stimulating, challenging some of the pieties that have crept into writing about Sebald over the years since his death. This is significant with regard to the discussion of Sebald's use of Holocaust survivor accounts in his fiction, which I discuss in Chapter 6. Ernestine Schlant's study of Sebald in the context of West German writing about the Holocaust is essential reading and I quote her definition of 'dense time' at a number of points in the thesis, as it is profoundly relevant to both Sebald and Butor.[119] The chapter on *Austerlitz* in Alfred Thomas's work on Prague is sceptical and insightful,[120] whilst Judith Ryan's chapter on Sebald and French narrative is the most detailed study yet available of Sebald's debt to *L'Emploi du temps*.[121] There is a multitude of journal articles on all aspects of Sebald's work, too numerous and diverse to select any for special mention,[122] but a number of themes recur

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[113] Mark Crinson, ed., *Urban Memory*, pp. xii, xx

[114] Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt, eds, *Saturn's Moons*

[115] Lynne Sharon Schwartz, ed., *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W G Sebald* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010); Rüdiger Görner, ed., *The Anatomist of Melancholy*; J J Long and Anne Whitehead, eds, *W G Sebald: A Critical Companion*

[116] Scott D Denham and Mark McCulloh, eds, *W G Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2006)

[117] Jeannette Baxter, Valerie Henitiuk and Ben Hutchinson, eds, *A Literature of Restitution: Critical Essays on W G Sebald* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

[118] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018)

[119] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 225

[120] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory and the City* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010)

[121] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', pp. 123-42

[122] Described by Sina Rahmani as 'a daunting juggernaut of critical exegesis' ('Words, not Bombs: W G Sebald and the Global Valences of the Critical', *boundary 2*, 47, 3 (August 2020), pp. 1-20 (p. 2))

particularly frequently: trauma, memory, the Holocaust. The *Melilah* special supplement, on traces, memory and the Holocaust in Sebald's writing,[123] is particularly pertinent, even if I take issue with Janet Wolff's treatment of *L'Emploi du temps*, which I explore in more detail in Chapter 2.[124] Most recently, the 2020 *boundary 2* special issue on Sebald has provided some useful and stimulating articles, in particular, Uwe Schütte's contribution. As a former student of Sebald's, Schütte is rigorous in eschewing some of the hagiographical tendencies which have been evident in anglophone studies and unlike many who write about Sebald, can also draw upon Germanic critical work, little of which has been translated into English.[125] Schütte is thus one of the few current writers on Sebald who can bring those worlds together.[126]

There is a dearth of material on the link between Sebald and Butor, and this is the major gap in the scholarship which I will address. Brief reference to Sebald's reading of *L'Emploi du temps* can be found in *Saturn's Moons*[127] and Janet Wolff's article in *Melilah*,[128] but beyond that, there is only Judith Ryan's excellent study of Sebald and French narrative, which looks at his reading not only of Butor but of Proust and Flaubert,[129] and Axel Englund's paper on 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical',[130] which provides the basis for my own analysis of the poem in Chapter 1. Most importantly, the annotations and underlinings in Sebald's copy of *L'Emploi du temps*[131] show a process of reading, as Sebald in the autumn of 1966 reads Butor's fictional diary from the autumn of 1951, as he and Jacques Revel confront the challenges of Manchester/Bleston. These are a vital source to understand the particular aspects of the novel that had such an influence on Sebald, and I bring to the examination of this document the unique perspective of a Butor scholar.

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[123] *Melilah: Traces, Memory and the Holocaust in the Writings of W G Sebald,* ed. Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Janet Wolff, Supplementary Vol. 2 (2012), <http://www.melilahjournal.org/p/2012-supplement-2.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[124] Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-Memory in Mancunian Exile', *Melilah*, pp. 47-56

[125] *boundary 2*, 'W G Sebald and the Global Valences of the Critical', 47, 3 (August 2020), <https://read.dukeupress.edu/boundary-2/issue/47/3> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[126] Only available in the later stages of my research, this volume of interviews, edited by Schütte, has proved invaluable (Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*)

[127] Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt, eds, *Saturn's Moons,* p. 66

[128] Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-memory in Mancunian Exile', pp. 47-56

[129] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative'

[130] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel: Migration, Multilingualism and Intertextuality in W G Sebald's "Mancunian Cantical"', in *Languages of Exile: Migration and Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. Axel Englund and Anders Olsson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 261-80

[131] This is held in the Sebald archives at Marbach and I am grateful to the DLA for providing me with images of the relevant pages during the period when in-person access was impossible due to the pandemic

Structure of the Thesis

The chapter on 'Bleston. A Mancunian Cantical' is my starting point, as the poem is for Sebald's literary œuvre. My analysis demonstrates the links to Butor and draws out the themes and preoccupations to which I will return throughout the thesis. I follow this with a study of the two cities whose presence is most powerfully felt in *L'Emploi du temps*, Manchester and Paris, and the role that they play in the lives and work of both writers, drawing out the themes of exile and trauma. These two chapters underpin what follows, providing detailed analysis of the key evidence for Butor's influence on Sebald, and of the cities that are a vital presence in the texts.

The main body of the thesis comprises five chapters, unified by the theme of the labyrinth. In the first two, linked chapters, I begin by examining the associations between the city and the labyrinth, and how the city as labyrinth becomes a carceral space, a place of danger and deception, and one that defeats mapping and navigation. I then change perspective, from the birds-eye, cartographer's viewpoint to that of the individual within the labyrinth, and their experience of disorientation, exile, alienation and incarceration. The following two chapters examine labyrinths in language and in narrative respectively. I consider language itself as a labyrinth, looking at the texts as multilingual and polyphonic, and exploring further the experience of the exile, 'traduisant, toujours traduisant',[132] as well as the uses of language in the intertextual references (including Sebald's 'citations cryptées').[133] I look too at the Proustian use of long, unbroken passages of text, themselves labyrinthine. I turn then to the labyrinthine narrative, how both writers use specific narrative structures (the detective story, the quest narrative and folk tale or myth), the role of the narrator, the way in which other narratives intervene in the texts, and to what effect. Finally, I look at the musical structures within the novels, particularly the fugue form, and how this relates to the labyrinth, before turning to the phenomenon of the fugueur, the compulsive wanderer. I relate this to Butor's Revel, to Sebald's Austerlitz, and more broadly to the restless figure of the Sebaldian narrator.

All of these ideas, images and themes are found in 'Bleston. A Mancunian Cantical',[134] the starting point for this thesis.

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[132] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 242

[133] Patrick Charbonneau, 'Correspondance(s): Le Traducteur et son auteur', *Europe*, 1009 (2013), pp. 200-18 (p. 208)

[134] 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 18-22

Part I – Sebald and Butor

Chapter 1

Bleston. A Mancunian Cantical

The publication of *Über das Land und das Wasser*, in 2008, which gathers together poems written between 1964 and 2001,[135] brought W G Sebald's early poem, 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical' to the attention of German speaking readers, and was followed in 2011 by an English translation.[136] Until this poem appeared, the only evidence for the significance of Sebald's reading of Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps* was his annotated copy of the novel, only accessible to scholars visiting the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.[137] What these two sources taken together provide is an immediate, contemporary record of Sebald's engagement with the novel. His marginal comments, his underlinings and exclamation marks, made at the time of reading, show very clearly which elements of the novel, which ideas and themes and motifs, struck him most forcefully. The poem stands back more from the novel, replete as it is with references to other texts, but given that it was completed in January 1967, and that Sebald had begun reading in November 1966, very shortly after his arrival in Manchester, it reflects clearly Sebald's initial impressions and reactions. These two sources thus speak directly to the reader of *L'Emploi du temps*, reflecting back the experience of reading the novel, of navigating its labyrinth. The poem is a rich source but, appropriately, not a straightforward one. Sebald responded to Butor's labyrinthine narrative by creating an intertextual labyrinth of his own. He draws upon a wide range of sources, incorporating quotations and references in several different languages, and looking not only back to Butor but forward to his own later work, with passages that appear in slightly different form in *After Nature* and/or *The Emigrants*.[138]

It is perhaps surprising that the connections between Butor's novel and Sebald's work have been so little explored, given that the impact on Sebald of reading *L'Emploi du temps* appears to have been so immediate and intense. The few references that exist mention the novel only as a source of Sebald's malaise in Manchester, with a few exceptions. Axel Englund's article on the Bleston poem is a vital and illuminating source, but does not identify all of the

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[135] *Über das Land und das Wasser*
[136] The English volume, *Across the Land and the Water*, includes all of these poems, and others that had subsequently been discovered in the archives.
[137] < Start - DLA Marbach (dla-marbach.de)> [accessed 15 June 2021]
[138] See *The Emigrants*, pp. 157, 166; *After Nature*, p. 98

references to *L'Emploi du temps,* and does not refer to the annotated copy of the book.[139] Judith Ryan explores Sebald's encounters with French narrative, through his reading of Butor, Flaubert and Proust,[140] but does not refer to the Bleston poem. Her analysis of Sebald's response to *L'Emploi du temps* is detailed and nuanced and she makes considerable use of the annotated copy of *L'Emploi du temps*, showing how Sebald's notes and underlinings highlight the experience of the exile, to the theme of Revel's resistance to the city through writing, motifs of fire and smoke, and the labyrinthine nature of the city.[141] Ryan also suggests that 'the somber, smoky atmosphere of Bleston finds its most striking parallel in *Austerlitz*, where the theme of imprisonment is most extensively treated', and that 'Revel's night-time wanderings in Bleston are a precursor, as it were, of the unnamed narrator's night-time wanderings in *Austerlitz*'.[142] In addition, of course, we have the translator's notes in *Across the Land and the Water*.[143] Iain Galbraith explores the connections between the poem and *L'Emploi du temps*, drawing attention to words and phrases that were in English or in French in the original text, the latter indicating quotations from Butor's novel.

Sebald's poetry has, in general, been seen as 'a weaker prototype of his prose',[144] and accordingly given little sustained critical attention. Sven Meyer's notes in the German edition state that:

> Bleston. A Mancunian Canticle *[sic] ist eine Reaktion auf die Lektüre von Michel Butors* L'Emploi du Temps *(1956, dt.* Der Zeitplan*, 1960), die Sebald zum Anlaß nahm, die eigene, zuweilen unglückliche Situation an der von Butors Erzähler zu spiegeln.*[145]

This emphasises Sebald's identification with the 'unfortunate situation of Butor's narrator',[146] rather than offering any exegesis of the poem. Uwe Schütte's *Figurationen* gives particular significance to Manchester as a city of emigrants, to Sebald's feeling of exile, and his

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[139] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel'

[140] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', pp. 123-42

[141] Ibid, pp. 124-25

[142] Ibid, p. 126. The night time wanderings referred to are surely those of Austerlitz himself, rather than of the narrator.

[143] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 176-80

[144] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 265. Englund redresses the balance somewhat with his articles on some of Sebald's other poems, e.g., 'Readings in the Mist: Two November Poems by W G Sebald', *German Quarterly*, 86, 3 (2013), pp. 275-93; 'British Rail Katabasis: W G Sebald's "Day Return"', *German Life and Letters*, 67, 1 (January 2014), pp. 120-37; 'W G Sebald's Late Lyrics between Words, Images and Languages', *Interlitteraria*, 20, 2 (December 2015), pp. 123-41

[145] *Über das Land und das Wasser*, p. 107. '"Bleston. A Mancunian Canticle" [sic] is a reaction to the reading of Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du Temps* [...] which Sebald took as an opportunity to reflect his own, sometimes unfortunate situation with that of Butor's storyteller'

[146] There is a similar emphasis in Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', p. 66; and in Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-Memory in Mancunian Exile', pp. 48-52

awareness of the incomparability of his own experience with that of those who have been forcibly displaced.[147] He describes the poem as an intertextual dialogue with Butor's novel and other texts, and notes how Sebald's 'multifaceted lyrical reflection' on emigration, exile and alienation foreshadows the concerns of the later prose works.

Taken together, these sources provide a great deal of insight and information. However, this thesis is the first study that brings the poem and the annotations together. It is clear that, as I said in my Introduction, the reason why these connections have not been made, or only partially made, is that Sebald scholars are not familiar with Butor's work, and often not in its original language. I will explore the poem and the wide-ranging references it includes in detail, referring where appropriate to the annotations to *L'Emploi du temps*. This analysis underpins the thesis, as it lays the groundwork for addressing the key research questions: what was it in *L'Emploi du temps* to which Sebald responded so immediately and so powerfully, what light does that shed on Sebald's literary œuvre, and, most importantly, what light does that, in turn, shed on *L'Emploi du temps* itself? I approach these questions from the point of view of a Butor scholar and a Sebald reader, a unique perspective which will put *L'Emploi du temps* in a place of much greater significance in Sebald studies, and will in turn enable readers of Butor to see this work in a different light.

Galbraith warns against an overly detailed exploration of the connections within the poem:

> *The poem presents a labyrinth of allusions, and the reader who attempts to follow them risks becoming 'perdu dans ces filaments' [...] a fate of which the title of the fifth part of the poem appears to warn us.*[148]

Jo Catling echoes this warning in relation to Sebald's work more generally:

> *The echoes and coincidences weave a varied, densely textured web, a kind of labyrinth always ready to ensnare the reader (and perhaps the narrator) in its spellbinding array of images and reflections, resonances and paradoxes, the shimmering interplay of memory, dream and reality encountered in and through the narrator's peregrinations.*[149]

Nevertheless, a full understanding of the importance of *L'Emploi du temps* for Sebald does require entry into the labyrinth.

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[147] Uwe Schütte, *Figurationen: Zum lyrischen Werk von W G Sebald* (Eggingen: Edition Isele, 2013), pp. 25-26
[148] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 177
[149] Jo Catling, 'Gratwanderungen bis an den Rand der Natur', p. 46

Galbraith states that 'Bleston' was completed in January 1967.[150] We cannot be certain when Sebald first encountered Butor's novel, as his fellow *Lektor* Reinbert Tabbert suggests that he was already familiar with it (presumably through the German translation, *Der Zeitplan*)[151] before his arrival in Manchester.[152] However, it is the 1966 French edition that is held in the Sebald archive at the DLA.[153] Sebald writes on the first page, above Revel's first diary entry, 'Sunday night 13th November 66', locating himself in Chorlton/Bleston. (Chorlton is a suburb of Manchester, where Sebald had his second set of lodgings, the first having been intolerable, but it was not until he moved to Didsbury in January 1967 that he found congenial accommodation.)[154] Clearly, he recognised Butor's fictionalised Manchester in his new home. Throughout his copy of the book, he makes notes, underlines or otherwise marks parts of the text which seem particularly important to him, and many of these annotations relate to or shed light on the Bleston poem, as I will show. This gives us a sense of the immediacy of his response, and that he was reading and responding to the novel and writing the poem almost in parallel.

Richard Sheppard speaks of Sebald's low spirits during at least the early part of his Manchester sojourn in similar terms to Meyer:

> *The acute culture shock and sense of isolation that Max suffered during his first term at Manchester could not have been helped by his Baudelairean/Benjaminian flâneries through scenes of slum clearance and urban decay [...] or by his reading of Michel Butor's* L'Emploi du temps.[155]

Whilst it seems self-evident that Sebald's response to Butor's novel was at least initially based on a sense of recognition, on reading the account of a near-contemporary European's encounter with Manchester, I will argue throughout this thesis that its influence was more profound and longer lasting than this, indeed, that we hear some of the strongest echoes of *L'Emploi du temps* in Sebald's last published work, *Austerlitz*.

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[150] *Across the Land and the Water,* p. 177
[151] We should note that the phrase 'der Plan meiner Zeit' (II, l. 12), suggests the German title for *L'Emploi du temps*, *Der Zeitplan* (trans. Helmut Scheffel (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1964).
[152] Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, p. 97. Elsewhere Tabbert records that by mid-October Sebald had discussed with him the coincidence of other novelist *Lektor/lecteurs* (Richard Baumgart and Michel Butor) at the University (Reinbert Tabbert, 'Max in Manchester', *Akzente*, 50, 1 (February 2003), pp. 21-30 (p. 23)).
[153] Jo Catling, '*Bibliotheca abscondita*', p. 297, n. 85
[154] Carole Angier gives a vivid account of these early 'digs' (*Speak, Silence*, p. 230)
[155] Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', p. 66

The Bleston poem is one of the densest in intertextual allusions and citations in this collection.[156] This is a familiar aspect of Sebald's prose writing (the accompanying notes identifying sources for *The Rings of Saturn*, for example, would be almost as long as the book itself).[157] J J Long sees the technique as 'an allusiveness aimed at academics and designed to ensure the work's canonicity' by linking one's own text to the canon 'in a way that could be appreciated only by those professionals in possession of sufficient knowledge to notice the allusions and of the power to grant access to the canon'.[158] Deane Blackler describes it somewhat differently: 'the disobedient reader, prompted by the highly allusive intertextuality produced by the traveller-narrator, is pushed into travels of her own through the cultural archive', following interpretive paths that lie outside the boundaries of the text.[159]

In this context, it is relevant, however, to consider Butor's approach to intertextuality. Butor scholar Jean Duffy relates this to the technique of collage, 'juxtaposition of found materials from a wide variety of sources, and emphasis on the establishment of formal correspondences among those discrete materials'.[160] She argues that a full appreciation of the complexity of Butor's work is dependent on 'our willingness to explore the culture with which he engages and to follow the various interpretative *pistes* that his texts offer us in the form of literary, musical and visual citation'.[161] In Butor's writing, the use of quotations and allusions is a reminder that 'on n'est jamais seul auteur d'un texte',[162] allowing a wide range of voices to be heard: 'La citation est un moyen extraordinairement puissant de réaliser une polyphonie et par conséquent, d'avoir un champ de signification beaucoup plus complexe'.[163] Butor's references in *L'Emploi du temps* are to mythology (Classical and Biblical, specifically the myths of Theseus and the Minotaur, and of Cain and Abel, with references to Orpheus, Oedipus, and to the Book of Daniel) and to imaginary works of art, such as the stained-glass

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[156] 'Clotted […] with references […] Without Galbraith's notes, some of the poems are dense almost to the point of opacity' (Teju Cole, 'Poetry of the Disregarded', in *Known and Strange Things* (London: Faber, 2016), pp. 38-43 (p. 39))

[157] Sam Jordison, 'The Rings of Saturn opens on to a dizzy range of allusions and illusions', *Guardian* (11 June 2019), <The Rings of Saturn opens on to a dizzy range of allusions and illusions | WG Sebald | The Guardian> [accessed 17 August 2021]

[158] J J Long, *W G Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 7

[159] Deane Blackler, *Reading W G Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), p. 94. The question of whether the references are intended to prompt recognition by those who already know the sources, or curiosity and exploration by those who do not, is one which is relevant to Sebald's œuvre more generally, but these motivations are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

[160] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 258

[161] Ibid, p. 259

[162] André Helbo, *Michel Butor: Vers une littérature du signe − précédé d'un dialogue avec Michel Butor* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1975), p. 12

[163] Dana Strand, 'Entretien avec Michel Butor', *Stanford French Review* (Fall 1979), in *Entretiens*, Vol. III, pp. 42-47 (p. 46)

windows in the Old Cathedral, the tapestries depicting the story of Theseus, the detective novel (*Le Meurtre de Bleston*), and the films Revel sees at the cinema (e.g., *A Tour in Crete, Devastating Tamburlaine*). Butor has written about Proust's use of imaginary works of art, specifically the Vinteuil sonata and the Elstir painting, which he sees as 'des modes de sa réflexion créatrice', mirroring as well as meditating upon Proust's own creative endeavour.[164] Sebald too 'orchestrates a multiplicity of voices and text-types in order to produce his own coherent discourse'.[165] His intertextual references are often traceable, even if not explicitly attributed in the text. The quotations from Flaubert in the 'Ambros Adelwarth' section of *The Emigrants,*[166] for example, are identifiable as quotations because they are in French – the implication is that Adelwarth in his journal is knowingly citing Flaubert on Jerusalem.

But there are also, as we will see, quotations from *L'Emploi du temps* within the Bleston poem that have not been recognised as such, either by German or English-speaking readers, since Sebald translated them into German (this practice continues throughout his work, and will be discussed in Chapter 5). We know that Sebald wrote the poem whilst reading (and annotating or underlining) the French text, but his colleague and friend Reinbert Tabbert, has, as we noted earlier, suggested that he was already familiar with the novel through its German edition before coming to Manchester.[167] Since my analysis of the poem had assumed that Sebald's first encounter with Butor was with the French text, it was important to verify whether and to what extent he used the German translation. I have therefore shown below the 'hidden' quotations from Butor, alongside the equivalent passage in *Der Zeitplan*,[168] and in *L'Emploi du temps.*

Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical	Der Zeitplan	L'Emploi du temps
Der Schatten eines Festes Fantom (part III, p. 24)	Der Schatten eines Festes war (p. 180)	L'ombre d'une fête, le fantôme d'une fête morte (p. 237)
Von Zeit zu Zeit dringt / Am mein Ohr des Geschrei / Der Tiere der zoologischen Abteilung (part III, p. 24)	Omitted, for unknown reasons	On entendait de temps en temps les hurlements des animaux dans la section zoologique (p. 250)
Mit dem Blinden Bleston meine Asche / in den Wind deiner Träume (part IV, p. 25)	Der du in deinen Träumen schon meiner Asche verstreutest (p. 231)	Toi [...] qui éparpillais mes cendres au vent dans tes rêves (p. 306)
In dieser Höhle im Inneren einer Höhle (part V, p. 26)	In der riefsten Tiefe dieser Höhle (p. 210)	Dans la cave de cette cave (p. 279)

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[164] 'Les Œuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust', pp. 129-97
[165] Massimo Leone, 'Textual Wanderings', p. 91
[166] *The Emigrants*, pp. 137, 141
[167] Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, p. 97
[168] *Der Zeitplan* (1964)

Clearly Sebald was not primarily using the German text, although it is possible that he referred to it. His copy of *Der Zeitplan* has not been retained in the archive.

To understand Sebald's practice more generally with regard to quotations from other texts, it is useful to consider the brief, unattributed phrases which open each of the four parts of *The Emigrants*. Tracing these has proved quite a challenge, since the sources are relatively obscure, and only one of the 'quotations' is presented exactly as in the source documents.[169] The epigraph for Henry Selwyn's narrative seems to be a loose rendering of words from Hölderlin's Elegy: 'verzehret das Letzte / Selbst die Erinnerung nicht?'[170] becomes 'Zerstöret das Letzte die Erinnerung nicht'[171] (translated into English as 'And the last remnants memory destroys'). For Paul Bereyter, the words 'Manche Nebelflecken löset kein Auge auf', translated as 'There is mist that no eye can dispel',[172] come (without paraphrase) from Jean Paul's 1804 *Vorschule der Ästhetik*,[173] and for Ambros Adelwarth, we have what appears to be a quotation from Chidiock Tichborne's 1586 'Elegy'.[174] But whereas the original poem reads 'My crop of corn is but a field of tares', Sebald gives us 'My field of corn is but a crop of tears'. The epigraph for the Max Ferber/Manchester section is 'Im Abenddämmer kommen sie und suchen nach dem Leben' (They come when night falls to search for life),[175] which seems to be a free adaptation of a German translation from Fernando Pessoa's *Odes of Ricardo Reis*.[176] The consistency with which Sebald transforms other texts, rather than quoting them precisely, suggests that this is an entirely deliberate process. The occasional change in wording could be attributable to a reliance on memory, but in almost every instance some paraphrasing occurs. The quotation from Tichborne noted above does more; it changes the meaning (it is possible that Sebald misheard 'tares' as 'tears' but this can only be speculation). Sebald thus appropriates and transforms other texts, just as he appropriates and transforms other life stories, as we will discuss in Chapter 6.

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[169] Silke Horstkotte, 'Pictorial and Verbal Discourse in W G Sebald's *The Emigrants*', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2, 1 (2002), pp. 33-50 (pp. 38-40)

[170] Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Elegie', *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 Bände, Band 2 (1800-04; Stuttgart: 1953), S. 73-78, <http://www.zeno.org/nid/20005104866> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[171] *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 5; *The Emigrants*, p. 1

[172] *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 39; *The Emigrants*, p. 25

[173] Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (Leipzig: Friedrich Perthes, 1804), Part 1, section 3, para. 14

[174] Chidiock Tichborne, 'Elegy', in *Poems of the Elizabethan Age: An Anthology*, ed. Geoffrey G Hiller (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 111. *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 95; *The Emigrants*, p. 65

[175] *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 215; *The Emigrants*, p. 147

[176] Jo Catling, '*Bibliotheca abscondita*', p. 285

Sebald's response to Butor is to create an intertextual labyrinth of his own. Part IV of the poem[177] is the densest in terms of intertextuality, with references to Kebad Kenya (IV, line 1), a character in Hans Henny Jahnn's 1949 novel *Fluß ohne Ufer,*[178] to a Pythagorean philosopher who experimented in musical theory (IV, lines 6-7),[179] to Virgil's *Eclogue 6*[180] (IV, line 9, quoted here in Latin), another Latin quotation from the German poet Heinrich Meiborn (IV, lines 16-17), which Sebald has inscribed in the front of his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*,[181] and the fairy-tale Rapunzel (IV, line 18).[182] Within this labyrinth, Sebald evokes the labyrinth itself. The French phrase 'fil d'Ariane' (IV, line 14) returns us to *L'Emploi du temps* and Butor's use of the story of Theseus, who found his way through the labyrinth to kill the minotaur with the help of Ariadne's thread. Sebald underlines this passage in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*: 'ce cordon de phrases est un fil d'Ariane parce que je suis dans un labyrinthe, parce que j'écris pour m'y retrouver'.[183] The reference to the wasteland (IV, line 18) is both descriptive of the 'terrains vagues' in Manchester, described both by Butor and Sebald,[184] and also suggestive of T S Eliot's great modernist poem, itself a multilingual, intertextual labyrinth.[185] The title of the final section of the poem, 'Perdu dans ces filaments', refers to Revel's description of himself as a virus, caught in Bleston's threads. He has now acquired a map, and sees himself instead as the scientist examining the cells of the town through a microscope (an illusory confidence, soon to be undermined):

> *Ainsi, moi, virus perdu dans ces filaments, tel un homme de laboratoire,*
> *armé de son microscope, je pouvais examiner cette énorme cellule*
> *cancéreuse dont chaque encre d'imprimerie, […] faisait ressortir un*
> *système d'organes.*[186]

'A World Bibliography of Bibliographies' (V, line 12)[187] suggests 'the vertiginous sense of textual limitlessness'[188] (the poet has been searching 'for years now' (V, line 7)) and the

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[177] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 21

[178] Hans Henny Jahnn, *Fluß ohne Ufer* (Munich; Frankfurt: Willi Weismann, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1949)

[179] Perhaps reminding one of Butor's references to harmonics, e.g., *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 385

[180] Virgil, Eclogue 6, line 84, <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Eclogues_of_Virgil_(1908)/Eclogue_6> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[181] The poem was translated into German by Eduard Mörike, <http://cingolani.com/Moerike_English.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]. See Sebald's essay on Mörike, 'Why I Grieve I do not Know', in *A Place in the Country,* trans. Jo Catling (London: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 67-85

[182] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 178-79

[183] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 247.

[184] *The Emigrants*, pp. 151, 157-58; *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 136-37

[185] Teju Cole remarks on the 'guiding intelligence' of Eliot in the early Sebald poems ('Poetry of the Disregarded', p. 39)

[186] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 54. Sebald marks this passage in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*.

[187] 'A World Bibliography of Bibliographies' [no author given], *Nature,* 144, 69 (1939), <https://www.nature.com/articles/144069a0> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[188] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 276

failure of the Dewey system (V, lines 9-10) is the corollary of the failure of Revel's map of Bleston. It may make us think of Borges's 'Library of Babel', or Alain Resnais' *Toute la mémoire du monde*,[189] which explores the quintessential labyrinth of the library, in which every page of every book potentially leads the reader to other pages of other books. Sebald also refers to the Torah and the Talmud (V, lines 4-5), 'claiming not to be able to choose between an oral source text (the Torah) and its hermeneutic explication (the Talmud)',[190] which Englund interprets as 'another analogization of place and text, the experience of being lost […] transferred into the realm of intertextuality'.[191]

The labyrinth is always a carceral space, and the commentary to *Toute la mémoire du monde* describes the library as a fortress in which each book is a prisoner ('les mots sont emprisonnés') – hence the link to and echoes of Resnais' previous documentary, *Nuit et brouillard*,[192] never referenced directly by Sebald, but powerfully present in his work, particularly in *Austerlitz.* Whilst the imagery of items arriving at the library, never to leave it again, being categorised, stamped and stored, certainly carries uneasy echoes of *Nuit et brouillard*, the library is at the same time a bastion against forgetting, through the archiving of memory, a *lieu de mémoire*, literally and metaphorically, and, as Emma Wilson says in her study of Resnais, it 'preserves and commemorates the very obsessions of Resnais' cinema [and Sebald's writing], his interest in the move between life and death, the material and the immaterial'.[193] There are other suggestions of imprisonment in the poem. The phrase, 'A shuttered world mute' (I, line 2), echoes the repeated motif of the 'grille de fer baissée/fermée' in *L'Emploi du Temps*,[194] and Sebald's line 'In dieser Höhle im Inneren eine Höhle' (V, line 16) is a translation of Butor's 'la cave de cette cave', which refers to the imprisonment in the underworld of Theseus and his companion Pirithous.[195] (Galbraith does

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[189] *Toute la mémoire du monde* (Filmes de la Pléiade, 1957). See Leonida Kovac, 'Sebald's *Toute la mémoire du monde*' (paper given at the 2019 conference of the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, *Memory, Word and Image: W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies*)
[190] It might be relevant to note the way in which the Talmud is structured: 'a column of ancient text is surrounded by commentaries, then by commentaries on the commentaries, in ever-increasing circles, until the central idea has been woven through space and time, into the fabric of communal memory' (Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and how it Changed the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), p. 3)
[191] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 275
[192] *Nuit et brouillard* (Optimum Home Entertainment, 1955); see Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 34. Resnais' work appeared slightly too late to have influenced Butor, who would, however, have been aware of the 'Nacht und Nebel' directive under which the fate of many prisoners arrested for 'offences against the Reich' (including Jean Cayrol, who wrote the commentary for Resnais' film) was deliberately clouded in night and fog (Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, p. 27)
[193] Ibid, p. 35
[194] *L'Emploi du temps*, for example, pp. 11, 104, 112, 241, 281, 327
[195] Ibid, p. 279

not flag this as a quotation, translating it from German into English as 'this cave within a cave'.)[196]

Throughout this thesis we will return to the theme of trauma. We will consider the trauma of exile, the labyrinth as a metaphor for and a description of the experience of trauma and, most particularly, the trauma of the Holocaust; in addition, we will confront the challenge of how to write about trauma, one's own or that of others. Sebald's later preoccupations are foreshadowed in this early work:

> *The astonishment that*
>
> *Sadness exists – one's own*
>
> *Never the other of those who suffer*
>
> *Of those whose right it really is*
>
> *Life is uncomplaining in view of the history*
>
> *Of torture à travers les âges Bleston* (III, lines 2-7)

The German text gives us 'Der Folter à travers les âges', which is clearly a reference to *L'Histoire de la Torture à travers les âges,*[197] the title of a book that Revel sees in a Bleston shop, alongside cookery books, DIY manuals, and green-jacketed Penguin detective novels.[198] Butor here suggests the co-existence of horror with the mundane: he said of the Occupation that it seemed as though nothing was happening, but that the nothing was bloody.[199] In the context of the poem, Sebald is reminding the reader that his experience of exile, however deeply felt, is in a sense trivial – it cannot and must not be compared with the experiences of 'those whose right it really is',[200] and whose 'voices have always already been silenced'.[201] Butor's 'autobiographical' capriccio, *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe,* may have been published too late to be available to Sebald at the time of writing, and we have no evidence that he read it. One would imagine nonetheless that it might have caught his

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[196] Englund links this to Plato's parable of the cave rather than to the Theseus story ('Bleston Babel', p. 276). Clearly one cannot know what was in Sebald's mind, but the fact that this phrase occurs so precisely in Butor's novel suggests that this was the primary source. Sebald also underlines a slightly earlier passage ('tous deux dans l'enfer de cet enfer, dans une caverne à l'intérieur de cette caverne', p. 228)

[197] Englund has identified the probable origin for this title, George Ryley Scott's *The History of Torture throughout the Ages* (London: Torchstream Books, 1940); 'Bleston Babel', p. 270, n. 21

[198] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 131, 362. Sebald underlines the book title in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*.

[199] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 25

[200] Uwe Schütte, *Figurationen*, pp. 25-26

[201] Axel Englund, **'**Bleston Babel', p. 270

attention, as an account of Butor's time in Bavaria, shortly after the war, where he is given access to a vast library of texts including the history of punishments meted out to wrongdoers.[202] Sebald quotes a fragment of Christ's expression of despair and abandonment from the cross ('Eli Eli [lama sabachtani?]', V, line 3)[203] and then turns to Theodor Adorno's 1962 essay, 'Commitment' for a reference to Pascal: 'the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting; Pascal's theological saying, *on ne doit plus dormir* [V, line 13], must be secularized'.[204] Adorno is paraphrasing Pascal, whose words are: 'Jésus sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde: il ne faut pas dormir pendant ce temps-là'.[205] In context, Adorno is re-evaluating his own words about the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz. Here he recognises that 'literature must resist precisely this verdict, that is, be such that it does not surrender to cynicism merely by existing after Auschwitz'. A few years later he expanded upon this, arguing that 'perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems'.[206] The importance of this for Sebald's writing about the Holocaust is inescapable: the suffering and the torture are not his, but he can give expression to those who have been silenced. That he runs the risk in so doing of usurping the stories and appropriating the voices of the sources on which he draws is at the heart of more recent Sebald criticism, and will be explored particularly in Chapter 6.

The labyrinth is temporal as well as spatial, and there are suggestions throughout the poem that time is not working as it should. Bleston is a city where night can seem to last interminably, in the 'snowless, lightless month of December' (I, lines 7-8). Axel Englund notes this temporal confusion, without light or shadow (and thus without the markers of day and night), without snow as the 'meteorological marker of the season',[207] and ultimately expressed in the failure of the starlings to migrate south: 'the starlings have forgotten their old life / No longer flying back to the south / Staying in Bleston all winter' (I, lines 4-6).[208] Sebald re-worked this passage in *The Emigrants*:

[202] *Portrait*, pp. 169-71, 207-13

[203] Matthew 28:46; Mark 15:33

[204] Theodor W Adorno, 'Commitment' (1962), trans. Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review*, 87-88 (September/December 1974), pp. 75-89 (p. 85), cited in *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 180

[205] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670) in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1954), p. 1313

[206] Theodor W Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E B Ashton (1966; London: Continuum, 2004), p. 362

[207] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 267

[208] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 18

> *On those sombre December days when dusk was already falling at three*
> *o'clock, when the starlings, which I had previously imagined to be*
> *migratory songbirds, descended upon the city in dark flocks that must have*
> *numbered hundreds of thousands, and, shrieking incessantly, settled close*
> *together on the ledges and copings of warehouses for the night.[209]*

We are in winter throughout the poem (reflecting the time of writing and, one might conjecture, a more existential chill). In Part II, Bleston is 'A bleak and forsaken place', and 'It is late in our year' (II, lines 8, 17). In 'Perdu dans ces filaments', winter is again snowless ('on snowless fields' (V, line 19)). For Sebald, Bleston *is* winter (or, as Axel Englund puts it, 'an un-winter of sorts',[210] given the absence of snow), lightless, without even the rare illusory days of sun and clear skies that Butor describes. The phrase 'No glance back to the future' (V, line 17) perhaps suggests a reference to the story of Orpheus, one of the mythical narratives threaded through *L'Emploi du temps*, whose 'regard en arrière, la volonté de retrouver *"l'emploi du temps"*'[211] is at the cost of losing his own Ariadne/Eurydice. Englund also suggests a connection with Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, 'its back turned toward the future and its eyes directed into the past'.[212]

The labyrinth as a place of the dead, or the threshold to that place, is a theme to which we will return in subsequent chapters. The boundary between death and life recurs throughout the poem, and through Sebald's work, for example: 'Life was a matter / Of death and cast its shadows / Now that death is all of life' (I, lines 15-17), 'In eternity […], a time / Without beginning or end' (II, lines 1, 12-13), and the Latin quotation from Meiborn, which has been translated as 'How sweet, though lifeless, yet with life to lie, / And without dying, O how sweet to die' (IV, lines 16-17).[213] Axel Englund comments upon the first of these phrases, noting that 'these two categories [death and life] have merged into a nightmarish, undead state. […] death has turned into something undead'.[214] These ideas are echoed in *The Emigrants*: 'And so they are ever returning to us, the dead'.[215] One might suggest a link between Sebald's lines 'I wish to inquire / Into the whereabouts of the dead / Animals none

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[209] *The Emigrants*, p. 157
[210] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p.267
[211] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps*: Le Texte et le labyrinthe*, p. 101
[212] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 276; Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940), in *Illuminations*, pp. 253-64 (pp. 257-58)
[213] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 179
[214] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 267
[215] *The Emigrants*, p. 23; also *Austerlitz*: 'I felt at this time as if the dead were returning from their exile' (p. 188)

of which I have ever seen' (I, lines 18-20), with Revel's musing on what constitutes Bleston's being (a passage which Sebald marks in his copy of the novel):

> *Il peut sembler tout d'abord que tu ne sois formée que de pierres et d'hommes, et que les animaux ne participent point à ta constitution, mais si on prend en considération les enfermés du jardin zoologique dans Plaisance Gardens, les derniers chevaux de trait et les cortèges qui se rendent aux abattoirs dans le onzième, les innombrables chats et la vermine, on est obligé de s'apercevoir qu'ils sont eux aussi hantés dans ton aire, qu'ils sont devenus eux aussi des organes de ta machine, et que, vivants ou morts, viandes ou charognes, spectacles ou parasites, ils incarnent certaines de tes puissances.[216]*

The phrase 'opgekilte schottns' (IV, line 15) is from the Yiddish,[217] and could be translated as 'frozen shadows'. Galbraith suggests that this could be a reference to the story of Theseus who causes the death of his father, a legend that is represented in the tapestries in Bleston's museum, 'a return antithetical to the desired echo'.[218] Part I is entitled 'Fête nocturne'. Galbraith translates this as 'night party' which, given the contexts in which 'fête' appears in both the poem and the novel, might seem to underplay the sinister implications of the phrase. The reference to December suggests that the festival might be Christmas – Revel spends Christmas Eve wandering the city, in the rain, from one church or chapel to another, hearing everywhere 'les mêmes cantiques' and sensing behind the compulsory jollity merely the shadow or ghost of a dead or defunct festival. Christmas Day itself is 'le jour le plus obscur de toute l'année'.[219] However, there is also a reference to All Saints: 'In the sky over All Saints Park' (I, line 10). Throughout *L'Emploi du temps*, the festival of All Saints is a recurring motif, cropping up (as in Sebald)[220] in place names as well as in relation to the date itself:

> *Je venais d'entendre sonner six heures à l'horloge d'All Saints, le temple de tous les saints, de la Toussaint, du premier novembre, de la fête des fantômes [...][221] All Saints Gardens, la rue des sœurs Bailey, All Saints Church [...] All Saints Park, All Saints, le quartier tout entier [...] me rappelaient que le 1ᵉʳ novembre est une fête, la*

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[216] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 387. It is worth noting too that Sebald writes at the foot of the page 'Starlings', connecting the first few lines of the poem and the equivalent passage in *The Emigrants* (p. 157)

[217] Translator's notes in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 178-79; Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', pp. 274-75

[218] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 178-79

[219] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 237. Sebald puts an exclamation mark by the phrase 'cet atroce jour de Noël' (p. 238) in his copy of the novel

[220] *The Emigrants*, p. 157; *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 18

[221] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 75

> *Toussaint, le jour des fantômes.[222] […] j'en étais arrivé à me demander si la Toussaint, le jour des fantômes, avait vraiment été férié.[223]*

Sebald speaks of 'Der Schatten eines Festes Fantom / Eines verstorbenen Festes' ('the mere shadow of a feast-day phantom / Of a defunct feast-day' (III, lines 9-10)). These phrases from *L'Emploi du temps* (underlined in Sebald's copy) are loose translations from Butor's text: 'L'ombre d'une fête, le fantôme d'une fête morte',[224] and evoke two of the most prevalent motifs in *L'Emploi du temps*, shadows and phantoms. Bleston reduces, or tries to reduce, its inhabitants to ghosts, or shades. It is full of shadows, both literal and metaphorical, obscuring both the way ahead and people's motives and intentions.

In Butor's text, Bleston itself addresses Jacques Revel, taunting him with the failure of his resistance (Revel has burned his map of the city in an attempt to revenge himself upon it), and encouraging him to surrender ('dors, ferme donc ces yeux qui te font mal, renonce, dors'):[225]

> *Regarde, Jacques Revel, […] toi qui me hais si fortement, toi qui comptais sur ma décrépitude, qui supputais le temps de ma dégradation, de mon abdication, qui éparpillais mes cendres au vent dans tes rêves [226]*

Sebald translates the latter phrase as 'Bleston meine Asche / In den Wind deiner Träume', which Galbraith in turn translates as 'Bleston my ashes / In the wind of your dreams' (IV, lines 19-20), suggesting that it is Bleston that is being addressed by Revel. Whether this is a deliberate shift, or Sebald's misreading of the French text, is unclear. Ash is a predominant theme in *L'Emploi du temps*, where fires burn on the 'terrains vagues' that ring the city, and break out repeatedly in locations that are central to the narration. These are presumably sites of wartime bombing, places marked not only by fire but by absence (as both *The Emigrants* and *L'Emploi du temps* record).[227] Bleston's air is full of smoke and ash, from these fires and from the industrial pollution of the era. Ash signifies of course not only fire but death and, in the post-Auschwitz world, the industrialisation of death. Fire and ash are recurring themes for Sebald too,[228] in particular the Allied air raids on Nuremberg and other German cities that are referred to in *After Nature* and *The Rings of Saturn*,[229] and are the theme of *On the Natural*

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[222] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 83
[223] Ibid, p. 84
[224] Ibid, p. 237.
[225] Ibid, p. 307
[226] Ibid, p. 306. This phrase is underlined in Sebald's copy.
[227] For example, *The Emigrants*, p. 157
[228] *L'Emploi du temps*, e.g., pp. 262, 272
[229] *After Nature*, p. 84; *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 38-39

History of Destruction.[230] He underlines or otherwise emphasises many references to fire in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*, heading some relevant pages with a capital F.[231]

There are other aspects of the Bleston poem which both reach forward into Sebald's later work, and reflect back to Butor. Firstly, of course, the poem is inspired directly by the experience of arrival in Manchester. Part II deals with the origins of Manchester, and seems to draw very closely upon a 1962 volume which refers both to the source of the name and to the history of its foundation by Agricola (II, lines 4-5).[232] This section of the poem also recalls Butor's passage concerning the origins of Bleston, built on the site of a Roman temple of war, and whose name is likely to derive from 'Belli Civitas'.[233] The last two lines are given in Latin, and can be translated as 'for the spirits of the ancestors I have arranged for the building of this Mamucium' (II, lines 18-19), which may be an actual inscription on a Roman artefact (I have not been able to find a source), or merely a reference to the traditional formulation ('Dis manibus') found on Roman gravestones.[234] This perhaps suggests Manchester itself as 'a giant mausoleum',[235] which finds an echo in *The Emigrants*: 'One might have supposed that the city had long since been deserted, and was left now as a necropolis or mausoleum'.[236] The passage in *The Emigrants* in which Max Ferber and the narrator explore the deserted Ship Canal embankment[237] clearly relates to the final lines of Part III, 'The ships lie offshore / Waiting in the fog' (III, lines 19-20), and fog is of course a constant in Butor's descriptions of Bleston. Sebald's reference to 'Sharon's Full Gospel' (III, lines 17-18)[238] is developed in *After Nature*:

> *[…] And to*
>
> *The Gospel Chapels I went*
>
> *From time to time, witnessing*
>
> *How row after row of the sick,*

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[230] *On the Natural History of Destruction,* trans. Anthea Bell (London: Modern Library, 2004)

[231] For example, *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 262, 272

[232] J A Petch, 'Roman Manchester', in *Manchester and its Region: A Survey Prepared for the Meeting Held in Manchester, August 29 to September 5, 1962*, ed. C F Carter (Manchester: Manchester University Press for the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1962), pp. 109-14 (p. 111)

[233] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 102

[234] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 177

[235] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', p. 269

[236] *The Emigrants*, p. 151

[237] Ibid, p. 166

[238] Sharon Full Gospel Church is on Chorlton Road, Old Trafford, Manchester, not far from Sebald's early lodgings

Amid the congregation's shrieking,

Were healed and even the blind

Had their sight restored.[239]

Secondly, it is important to note the multilingual nature of the poem. Sebald gives to its five sections two titles in French (both drawn from Butor), two in Latin and one in English. Within the body of the poem, we have phrases in all three languages, as well as in Aramaic and Yiddish. This multilinguality continues throughout Sebald's work (see many examples in *Die Ausgewanderten* where fragments of dialogue are given in English, along with brief quotations in French, and in *Austerlitz* where we also find fragments of Dutch, Czech, and a Biblical quotation in Welsh).[240] Englund relates it to Sebald's preoccupation with borders:

> *Language – both as medium and topos – is the site where difference*
> *becomes most crucial and most visible: linguistic borders remain palpable*
> *even in an otherwise borderless world. […] The poem travels across*
> *multiple linguistic territories, its trajectories thus reflecting the migratory*
> *movement that forms its thematic basis.[241]*

Mark Anderson echoes this, writing of Sebald's 'self-imposed exile and marginality, between languages and national identities'.[242] We should also note in this context the significance of 'translation' in *L'Emploi du temps* (emphasising the way in which language isolates the exile) and in Sebald's work more widely. I will explore this in more depth in Chapter 5.

Finally, I would draw attention to the prevalent imagery relating to music and silence. It is worth noting in this context that Sebald's poem is a 'Cantical'. The unusual spelling does not seem to be significant, but the word, in either this or the more common spelling, derives from canto, a song. As an adjective, cantical can refer to a complete succession of periods or of phrases, which echoes Butor, describing how Revel hopes through his journal to create 'toute une série de résonances plus ou moins intenses, séparés par de larges intervalles à peu près muets, comme les harmoniques en quoi se décompose le timbre d'un son'.[243] *L'Emploi du temps* itself is structured on the basis of a canon or fugue: 'Une des structures fondamentales de la polyphonie […] avec des renversements, des miroirs. Des musiciens ont fait des pièces dans lesquelles une seconde voix imite la première, et où parfois une troisième remonte de la

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[239] *After Nature*, p. 98

[240] For example, *Die Ausgewanderten*, pp. 13, 124, 191, 203; *Austerlitz*, pp. 15, 77, 215, 245, 298 (page numbers in *Austerlitz* refer to the English translation). Chapter 5 will explore the motif of Babel in some depth.

[241] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', pp. 164, 166

[242] Mark M Anderson, 'The Edge of Darkness: On W G Sebald', *October*, 106 (2003), pp. 102-21 (p. 102)

[243] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 385

dernière à la première note'.[244] The structure is not only the basis of polyphony but of our perception of time. In this sense *L'Emploi du temps* is a cantical novel.

Part III's title is 'The Sound of Music'. If this is a reference to the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical,[245] it is a dark subversion of that work's tuneful optimism. Indeed, in the first line, the music is an 'unfamiliar lament'. For Butor, Bleston is a place whose musicians have been silenced, in whose fog music cannot find a place. Revel sees in the stained-glass windows of the Old Cathedral the ancestors of industry and music but in contemporary Bleston, 'ville de tisserands et de forgerons', he asks 'qu'as tu fait de tes musiciens?'.[246] Sebald's poem refers to Hipasos [sic][247] of Metapontum, who experimented in musical theory (IV, lines 6-7), and 'claimed the discovery of concords with bronze discs of equal diameter and varying thickness'[248] which perhaps echoes Butor's assertion that Revel's writing – the process, rather than what he has written – is a means of recovering the lost music,[249] achieving 'de nouveaux jours harmoniques'.[250]

Both Butor and Sebald contrast music with silence, and contrast both with the harshness of mechanical sound, or the sounds of birds and animals.[251] Sebald's 'The howls / Of animals in the zoological Department' (III, lines 11-13) is another hidden quotation from *L'Emploi du temps* which both uses the animals to echo Revel's despair, and reinforces the theme of imprisonment ('on entendait de temps en temps les hurlements des animaux dans la section zoologique').[252] This finds an echo much later in Sebald's œuvre, in *Austerlitz*, where the recording from Theresienstadt, slowed down to facilitate Austerlitz's search for an image of his mother, reduces the commentary to a menacing growl,

> *such as I had heard only once before in my life, on an unseasonably hot May Day many years ago in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris when [...] I rested for a while on a park bench beside an aviary not far from the big cats' house, where the lions and tigers, invisible from my vantage point and, as it struck me at the time, said Austerlitz,*

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[244] *Improvisations*, p. 83
[245] Quite probable, given that the film had only recently been released, to great success.
[246] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 94
[247] His name is more usually given as Hippasus
[248] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 178
[249] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 144
[250] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388. See Chapter 7.
[251] See *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 94, 259
[252] Ibid, p. 250. Sebald underlines this passage in his copy of the novel. There is another potential (although less obvious) source as Butor juxtaposes 'le bruit de la hache des demolisseurs' with 'les plaintes des fauves et des oiseaux', during an uncharacteristically sunny and celebratory afternoon at the Plaisance Gardens (p. 150)

> *driven out of their minds in captivity, raised their hollow roars of lament hour after hour without ceasing.*[253]

Elsewhere, we find 'the silence of revelation' (III, line 16), 'Reclining in silence on the river of time' (IV, line 5), 'The valleys of Bleston do not echo [...] Word without answer' (IV, lines 12-14). In *The Emigrants*, Max Ferber speaks of the loss of his mother tongue, German, which he has not spoken since parting from his parents in 1939, 'and which survives in me as no more than an echo, a muted and incomprehensible murmur'.[254] Thus, the ghost who visits him never speaks to him, nor he to her. For Sebald, silence carries a terrible weight of loss, and of complicity. Ernestine Schlant has described West German literature since the war as 'a literature of absence and silence contoured by language'.[255] Mark Anderson has characterised Sebald's fiction specifically as presenting us with a 'Holocaust in absence':

> *the edge of darkness that Sebald's fictions repeatedly bring us up against:*
> *a place and a time in which the ordinary constraints of history give way to*
> *an immense penumbral continuum of human suffering, exile, and 'silent'*
> *catastrophes that take place 'without much ado'.*[256]

The references are often oblique. In *After Nature*, Sebald imagines the clouds into which 'without a word the breath / Of legions of human beings had been absorbed'[257] and in the first of his 'Poemtrees', when he describes how 'the landscape as you pass in a train […] mutely […] watches you vanish',[258] one thinks, inevitably, of the trains that crossed Europe, taking their passengers to annihilation.

This neglected poem therefore marks out what will become Sebald's literary territory, and his literary practice, as he works through his response to the shock that was Manchester, with Butor/Revel as his guide. We have seen how many motifs in the 'Cantical' recur in Sebald's later work – ash and fire, shadows and ghosts, music and silence and, of course, the labyrinth – and we have explored the way in which he uses other texts and other languages, which will be the focus of a later chapter. All of these elements are at the heart of *L'Emploi du temps*. One of the most striking things about that novel, haunted as it is by the darkness of the Occupation, is the constant dissonance between the mundane events and the prosaic precision

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[253] *Austerlitz*, pp. 349-50
[254] *The Emigrants*, p. 182
[255] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 1
[256] Mark M Anderson, 'The Edge of Darkness', p. 121
[257] *After Nature*, p. 96
[258] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 3

of place names and bus numbers, and the sense of foreboding, the weight of darkness that we feel throughout the text. Sebald goes further in taking us at least to the edge of that darkness. Some of that is internal, the existential exile, the sense of placelessness, described in *The Emigrants* through Uncle Kasimir: 'This is the edge of the darkness. […] I often come out here, […] it makes me feel that I am a long way away, though I never quite know from where.'[259] And whilst I resist any simplistic classification of Sebald as a 'Holocaust author', the darkness is also, of course, the horror into which Europe was plunged, which destroyed the families of Max Ferber and Jacques Austerlitz, the anonymous dead who we, in a sense, stumble across whilst walking between Lowestoft and Southwold.[260]

The 'Cantical' is a response to the city of Manchester, and to Butor's transformation of that city into the malign presence that is Bleston. Whilst that response is both immediate and very personal, I have shown how this text links us not only to Sebald's Manchester works, but to his wider œuvre. Throughout Sebald's writing, as Sebald inhabits and explores the labyrinths of the city and of narrative itself, we hear the echoes of *L'Emploi du temps*.

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[259] *The Emigrants*, pp. 88-89
[260] *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 60-61

Chapter 2

Manchester and Paris

> *Ainsi, la succession primaire des jours anciens ne nous est jamais rendue qu'à travers une multitude d'autres changeantes, chaque événement faisant en résonner d'autres antérieurs qui en sont l'origine; explication, ou l'homologue, chaque monument, chaque objet, chaque image nous renvoyant à d'autres périodes qu'il est nécessaire de ranimer pour y retrouver le secret perdu de leur puissance.*[261]

Bleston is more than just the setting for Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*. It is a protagonist, perceived by Jacques Revel as actively working against him, to confound his hopes and plans, using smoke and mirrors to confuse his memories and suppress his will power. It is also, clearly, the city of Manchester, and according to Butor, it is also Paris. Throughout this thesis I will explore the different faces of Bleston, the masks it wears and what lies behind them. Whilst Bleston is Manchester transformed, it is important to recognise that its genesis did indeed lie in Butor's response to Manchester as it was in 1951 when he arrived, only a few years after the end of the war, before the major government initiatives to reduce air pollution, and before the redevelopment of the city. And whilst Butor changed elements of Manchester's geography to suit his narrative purposes, Bleston is, as many readers have found, still recognisable as Manchester. Manchester was, as we have just seen, where Sebald first encountered Butor. This was not a direct encounter, but the place where Sebald read *L'Emploi du temps*, intrigued by the depiction by another young European exile of the city in which he had just arrived, and was immediately inspired to write a long poem about the city, full of references to *L'Emploi du temps,* which was explored in detail in Chapter 1.[262] We do not know if Sebald subsequently read any other work by Butor, nor whether Butor ever read Sebald, and so Manchester's status as the point of connection between the two writers is the only place to begin an exploration of their relationship.

Manchester was the catalyst for the creation of *L'Emploi du temps*, as it was for W G Sebald's literary career. It is important therefore to examine in more depth what it was about the city that had such an impact on both writers. But I will also discuss the ways in which Bleston is not, or not just, Manchester, because 'si on est dans cette ville, on est

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[261] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388
[262] 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', in *Across the Land and the Water,* pp. 18-22

perpétuellement dans un ailleurs',[263] and will explore Paris, the city that lies behind the mask of Bleston. The analogy of the mask is significant here. Butor has never emphasised the relationship of Bleston to Paris; indeed, the statement that 'la capitale française se cache sous le masque de Bleston' is found in his preface to an 'essai' by Mireille Calle-Gruber, published in 1995,[264] and has excited no critical interest, any more than his use of the term 'occultation'[265] in an interview, to describe that relationship. And Bleston, it is clear, is many cities rather than one; there are invocations throughout the text of cities ancient and modern, mythological and real, through the stained-glass windows in the Old Cathedral, and the travelogue films at the Théâtre des Nouvelles. Butor says that Bleston is not 'seule de son espèce', and that 'Manchester ou Leeds, Newcastle ou Sheffield, Liverpool […] ou encore, sans doute, ces villes américaines, Pittsburg ou Detroit, auraient eu sur moi une influence similaire', but concludes that Bleston's sorcery is 'la plus rusée et la plus puissante'.[266] In this sense, Bleston is the archetype, as Manchester was, of the northern industrial city, but we are always aware of those other cities via a cinema screen or an image in a church window, never directly. This leads to a consideration of Sebald's invocation of cities, particularly in *Austerlitz*, and the ways in which London, Paris and Prague reveal their pasts and their ghosts. Of course, one of the major transformations that Butor undertakes is of the city into a labyrinth, and the theme of the labyrinth will be the thread that runs through all of the chapters that follow.

I will look first at the relationship between Manchester and Bleston, and how Butor transformed one into the other. Some aspects of Sebald's response to the city and the novel have already been examined in the context of his 'Bleston' poem, but I will consider that here in more depth, and in relation to other texts. This chapter will address some aspects of the biographies of Butor and Sebald in order to lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion of the labyrinths of city, text and music in their work. I do not argue that Jacques Revel or any of the narrators or protagonists in Sebald's work are self-portraits of their creators. However, Butor gives us reason to connect Revel's experience of and response to the fictionalised version of Manchester to his own background growing up in Occupied Paris, and this connection gives the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps* a depth and intensity which was highly influential upon Sebald.

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[263] Michel Sicard, 'Michel Butor au travail du texte', *Magazine littéraire*, 110 (March 1976), pp. 14-27 (p. 17)
[264] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*, pp. 7-8
[265] Michel Sicard, 'Michel Butor au travail du texte', p. 17
[266] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 47

Even in the earliest accounts, Manchester was mythologised. Disraeli spoke of it as 'as great a human exploit as Athens',[267] Carlyle described it as 'every whit as wonderful, as fearful, as unimaginable, as the oldest Salem or prophetic city',[268] and Léon Faucher spoke of 'the Utopia of Bentham'.[269] However, others emphasised a different aspect of the city. Charles Dickens' Coketown (the setting for *Hard Times*) is widely assumed to be based on Manchester.[270] He uses classical imagery (for example, describing the city as Daedalus' labyrinth), fairy-tale imagery and Biblical references (Coketown is Babylon, the factory chimneys are Towers of Babel).[271] For Hippolyte Taine it was 'la Babel de briques',[272] whilst Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of 'ce labyrinthe infect', and described Manchester's river as 'le Styx de ce nouvel enfer'.[273] Mark Crinson notes how, in the nineteenth century, Manchester was often characterised as 'a vast unknowable chaos', inspiring 'wonder and dread in equal measure'.[274] The description in the *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* of 1858 illustrates this dichotomy:

> *Manchester streets may be irregular, and its trading inscriptions*
> *pretentious, its smoke may be dense and its mud ultra-muddy, but not any*
> *or all of these things can prevent the image of a great city rising before us*
> *as the very symbol of civilisation, foremost in the march of improvement, a*
> *grand incarnation of progress.[275]*

Manchester attracted the metaphor of the labyrinth for two primary reasons. First, its rapid growth during the Industrial Revolution had not been planned. As de Tocqueville put it, 'Everything in the external appearance of the city attests the individual powers of man; nothing the directing power of society. At every turn, human liberty shows its capricious force'.[276] Whilst Paris had grown by adding layer upon layer of suburbs in planned, concentric circles, and in the New World cities had developed on a grid pattern, in

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[267] Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby, or The New Generation* (1844; Stroud: Nonsuch Publishing, 2007). In *After Nature* (p. 95), Sebald 'quotes' Disraeli as referring to Manchester as a celestial Jerusalem, but this would seem to be his paraphrase of this passage.

[268] Disraeli did note that 'sooty Manchester' was built 'upon the infinite abysses', and as Briggs puts it, 'there was wonder […] but there was also alarm' (*Victorian Cities*, p. 93)

[269] Léon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects* (1844; London: Frank Cass, 1969), p. 24

[270] Asa Briggs, however, believes that 'Coketown was really Oldham' (*Victorian Cities*, p. 105)

[271] Gary S Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age: The Half-Known City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 107

[272] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 292

[273] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Voyages en Angleterre, Irlande, Suisse et Algérie*, pp. 80-81

[274] Mark Crinson, 'Towards the Beautiful City', in *Fabrications: New Art and Urban Memory in Manchester*, ed. Natalie Rudd (Manchester: UMiM Publishing, 2002), pp. 18-23 (p. 18)

[275] Quoted in Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 88

[276] Alexis de Tocqueville, cited in Gary S Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, p. 55; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 115

Manchester factories and houses had simply been built wherever they could be fitted in, with the result that the city's streets were narrow and labyrinthine. In addition, the darkness and smoke made navigation perilous. Hippolyte Taine records that 'dans le principal hôtel de la ville, il a fallu tenir le gaz allumé cinq jours durant: à midi on ne voyait pas assez clair pour écrire'.[277] There were two factors here, not only the constant smoke from the chimneys (Manchester became known as 'the chimney of the world')[278] but the moist air from Manchester's natural climate, which meant that acid and other impurities were dissolved in the moisture, and the black parts of the smoke became wet and heavy. This combination created 'the phenomenon of temperature-inversion [which] produced near darkness and zero visibility around the clock for days on end'.[279]

Both Butor and Sebald experienced a sense of shock on arriving in Manchester. Whilst their backgrounds were very different, the circumstances of their arrival were almost identical. Each took up a post as *Lecteur/Lektor* in the French and German departments respectively at Manchester University. Each was assigned by the University initially to miserable lodgings but soon managed to find somewhere that would suit them well for their time in the city. Both seem to have been at least melancholy, if not depressed (Butor was also unwell and had to return to France in 1953 for treatment for an ulcer),[280] and to have spent a lot of time in solitary wanderings. Some of these experiences are reflected in those of Revel and the narrator of the Max Ferber section of *The Emigrants*.

Whilst both had similar responses to the city, their backgrounds determined the nature of the shock. In Butor's case, this was largely attributable to the climate. He had spent the previous year in Egypt, and there was a dramatic contrast between the climate there (he describes himself as 'inondé de soleil' and spoke of 'cet air extraordinairement lumineux')[281] and that of Manchester:

> *J'ai eu un choc climatique [...] Lorsque je me suis trouvé dans cette ville, mon corps s'est demandé comment il se faisait qu'on pouvait vivre dans une ville avec un climat pareil.[282]*
>
> *On était presque toujours dans le brouillard, un smog poisseux, charbonneux, insupportable, qui recouvrait les trottoirs d'une chape*

[277] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 79

[278] Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 21

[279] J B Howitt, 'England and the English in the Novels of Michel Butor', p. 54

[280] J B Howitt, 'Michel Butor and Manchester', p. 77

[281] Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Michel Butor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 96

[282] Ibid, p. 98

> *d'ombre permanente. Certains jours, dans la rue, on ne pouvait pas*
> *distinguer sa propre main.[283]*

There was a cultural shock too, in the contrast with a cosmopolitan, multicultural capital city (as Paris was again by this time), which is reflected in Revel's experience. For Sebald there was the shock simply of being in a major industrial city:

> *I was completely unprepared for it. [...] I certainly had no idea of the*
> *history or the culture of this country [...] Nor had I ever lived in a large*
> *city before. In Germany and Switzerland I had lived in idyllic, beautiful*
> *towns. I had no concept of what an industrial wasteland was because I*
> *hadn't seen that kind of degradation before.[284]*

In addition, Sebald encountered in Manchester for the first time a vibrant and long-established Jewish community.[285]

> *Those who grew up in Germany after 1945 hardly ever encountered a*
> *Jewish person. [...] All that remained [...] were small fragmentary*
> *communities in Frankfurt and Berlin, and it was thus that you could grow*
> *up in Germany and not meet a Jewish person for thirty years. When I got*
> *to Manchester I realized that what I had read in the papers and*
> *Switzerland, in history books and seen in films wasn't about anonymous*
> *victims but that it had concerned real people. [...] The Manchester years*
> *were, for me, a kind of journey of discovery.[286]*

Specifically, Sebald speaks of 'the person who rented me that rather nice room [...] and who fished me out of the depressive melancholic soup into which I had got when I arrived'.[287] He refers to Peter Jordan, the landlord of the lodgings in Didsbury where Sebald moved in January 1967, a child refugee from Munich, and a major source for Sebald's Max Ferber.[288] The connections Sebald made here had profound implications for his writing.

For both Butor and Sebald, the city inspired melancholy and a sense of isolation, but also stirred a sense of haunting, the suggestion of other places and times, of memories and connections. For both, the city was a labyrinth, not only in the challenges it presented to the

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[283] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 63

[284] Christopher Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*, p. 149. Note that Sebald had, however, had the experience of seeing cities reduced to rubble by wartime bombing (*On the Natural History of Destruction,* p. 74; *The Emigrants*, p. 30) and this may well have influenced his view of Manchester

[285] Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740-1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976)

[286] Christopher Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*, p. 161. Carole Angier provides some details of the Jews of the towns and villages where Sebald grew up. There were clearly relatively few to begin with, and none by the time of Sebald's birth (*Speak, Silence*, pp. 4-5)

[287] Christopher Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*, p. 161

[288] Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, pp. 105-14

stranger attempting to navigate its streets, but the threat it seemed to pose, of imprisonment and of the sapping of the will. Butor and Sebald translated their encounters with Manchester's labyrinth into powerful narratives which vividly evoke Manchester itself, whilst reminding one always of *ailleurs*.

Both Butor and Sebald respond to Manchester as archetype but also to specific features of its climate, geography, architecture and history. Both draw upon the fog, darkness and polluted atmosphere – in Butor's novel these elements permeate every page. Crinson, in his work on urban memory, refers to Sebald, who 'found its relation to its past had profound correspondences even with his sense of irrecoverable loss in cities hollowed out by war or genocide', and to Butor, who 'constantly conveys a sense of its archetypal status'.[289]

Sebald's description of Max Ferber's first view of the city seems to explicitly echo Hippolyte Taine's descriptions (an example of Sebald's use of 'citations cryptées'):[290]

> *Nous approchons de Manchester. Dans le ciel cuivré du couchant, un nuage de forme étrange pèse sur la plaine; sous le couvercle immobile, des cheminées hautes comme des obélisques se hérissent par centaines; on distingue un amas énorme et noirâtre, des files indéfinies de bâtisses, et l'on entre dans la Babel de briques.[291]*

> *Over the flatland to the west, a curiously shaped cloud extended to the horizon, and the last rays of sunlight were blazing past its edges [...] Not until this illumination died (said Ferber) did his eye roam, [...] as far as what he took to be the centre of the city, where all seemed one solid mass of utter blackness, bereft of any further distinguishing features. The most impressive thing, of course, said Ferber, were all the chimneys that towered over the plain.[292]*

Butor's descriptions also recall Taine, not only in terms of the climate and pollution: 'L'air et le sol semblent impregnés de brouillard et de suie [...] le brouillard noie, étouffe, engloutit toute la nature visible',[293] but also noting the architecture of Manchester: 'L'ornement est de mauvais goût, chapiteaux, colonnes grecques, balustres, toits gothiques et autres formes empruntées à des siècles ou à des lieux lointains'.[294] One is reminded not only of Butor's comment on the 'ridiculement crénelé'[295] belfry clock on the Town Hall, but also that

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[289] Mark Crinson, ed., *Urban Memory*, p. xx
[290] Patrick Charbonneau, 'Correspondance(s)', p. 208. See Chapter 5
[291] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 292
[292] *The Emigrants*, p.168
[293] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 293
[294] Ibid, p. 295
[295] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 376

Bleston's culture is imported rather than indigenous, providing glimpses of other places and times through the (French) tapestries in the museum, the Gaudi-esque New Cathedral and the short films about ancient and modern cities shown at the Théâtre des Nouvelles.[296]

Butor's descriptions of the river Slee (equivalent to the Irwell, described as early as 1808 as being 'as black as Ink or the Stygian Lake',[297] by Engels as a 'narrow, coal-black stinking river',[298] and by Hugh Miller as 'a flood of liquid manure […] which resembles nothing in nature, except perhaps the stream thrown out in eruption by some mud-volcano')[299] are only marginally less extreme than those of his predecessors: 'une eau épaisse, noire et mousseuse, une sueur de tourbe'.[300] Sebald, writing fifteen years later, when one would expect levels of pollution to have been reduced,[301] still refers to the 'black canal' or 'black water'.[302] Butor echoes the frequently used metaphor of vomiting (found in accounts from Southey, Kay, Faucher[303] and other observers, and which 'added to the impression of the industrial city as an unnatural, grotesque outgrowth')[304] when he describes Bleston as 'cette seiche vomissant son encre sur nous'.[305]

Critics have tended to emphasise either the close relationship of Bleston to Manchester specifically, or its archetypal status as a northern industrial city. Jennifer Waelti-Walters describes it as a 'narrow, gloomy representation of the English industrial city',[306] whilst for Dean McWilliams it is 'the synthesis of the problems of many blighted modern cities'.[307]

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[296] Howitt notes that Butor is less than fair to cultural life in Manchester at the time, although it would undoubtedly have been conservative in comparison with Paris (J B Howitt, 'Michel Butor and Manchester', pp. 82-83)

[297] Richard Holden, a solicitor from Rotherham, who also said that 'the town is abominably filthy, the Steam Engines pestiferous, the Dyehouses noisesome and offensive' (quoted in Gary S. Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, p. 16)

[298] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 49

[299] Hugh Miller, *First Impressions of England and its People* (Edinburgh: William P Nimmo, 1869), p. 62

[300] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 29

[301] Butor himself noted in a 1974 interview that on a recent visit he had found Manchester unrecognisable 'because there was no more smog. Regulations of anti-pollution after years and years had an extraordinary result'. (Kathleen O'Neill, 'On *Passing Time*', *Mosaic*, 8, 1 (Fall 1974), pp. 29-37 (p. 33))

[302] *The Emigrants*, pp. 153, 158, 165. Typically, Sebald focuses on the bleakest aspects, both as a reflection of his state of mind, and as a deliberate invocation of the imagery of Manchester as the ultimate industrial city.

[303] Writing about Manchester, Kay-Shuttleworth described the factories that 'vomit forth dense clouds of smoke' (Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (Bristol: Bristol Selected Pamphlets, 1832), <https://archive.org/details/moralphysicalcon00kaysuoft/page/n0> [accessed 25 August 2021], and Faucher wrote about 'the clouds of smoke vomited forth from the numberless chimneys' (*Manchester in 1844*, p. 16). Robert Southey wrote of Birmingham: 'The tower of some manufactory […] vomiting up flames and smoke' (*Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1808), p. 59

[304] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*, p. 21

[305] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 324

[306] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor*, pp. 143-44

[307] Dean McWilliams, *The Narratives of Michel Butor*, p. 22

Simon Kemp, whilst noting 'its fictional and composite nature', argues that the city is described with a high degree of realism and precision'.[308] On the other hand, Diana Festa-McCormick argues that the fact that Butor spent two years in Manchester and that Manchester might indeed have inspired the book, has little if any bearing upon the reality of Bleston, since 'Bleston only exists within the pages of *Passing Time*, which denies its reality in the very act of giving it shape'.[309] Butor himself described Bleston as a 'transformation' of Manchester.[310] He acknowledges that 'on peut reconnaître un certain nombre de monuments': the most obvious include the Refuge Assurance building (La Vigilance), the river (Slee), the University buildings, the Belle Vue Zoological Gardens (Plaisance Gardens) and Strangeways prison. He refers to Bleston's origin as a Roman temple of war and gives it a fictional Roman name (Bella Civitas) to provide the etymology for 'Bleston'. Sebald's 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical',[311] refers to 'Mamucium', although other sources give the Roman name for Manchester as Mancunium:[312]

> *bitter Bleston*
> *Founded by Gn. Agricola*
> *Between seventy and eighty AD*
> *[...]*
> *Bleston Mamucium Place of*
> *Breast-like hills*
> *[...]*
> *Dis Manibus Mamucium*
> *Hoc faciendum curavi* [313]

Butor's Bleston may share Manchester's Roman history, and is steeped in its status as the ultimate industrial metropolis, but he gives to the two cathedrals a past of bitter division and even violence during the Reformation, which resonates in the hostile and derisive description of the New Cathedral by crime writer George Burton in his pseudonymous detective novel, and the defensive response of Mrs Jenkins (daughter of its architect), rather than drawing on the industrial unrest of its real past. Butor is not primarily concerned with social realism here,

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[308] Simon Kemp, 'Urban Hell', p. 101
[309] Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst,* p. 177
[310] *Improvisations,* p. 81
[311] *Across the Land and the Water,* pp. 18-22
[312] Gary S. Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, p. 6
[313] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 18

despite his vivid depictions of the miseries of the industrial urban environment, but has instead focused on cultural conflict.

Clearly, Butor takes from the real city those elements of its geography and culture that are pertinent to his vision of the city, and changes those which are not. He gives Bleston a network of railway lines which form a somewhat oppressive, noose-like circle around the city centre,[314] denies it Manchester's rich cultural life, and adds a second Cathedral (whilst doubling is a feature throughout the novel (two sisters, two Cathedrals, two copies of the detective novel, etc.), here it serves mainly to create misdirection and confusion). Butor's street names mix the authentically Mancunian (e.g., Chorley) and the generic (e.g., New Bridge, Birch Street) with incongruous and improbable names such as Continents or Geology.[315] F. Whitehead, in an article for the Lancashire Dialect Society, notes the gallicisation of Manchester as it becomes Bleston: for example, the frontispiece map clearly suggests the city's division into 'arrondissements',[316] whilst Manchester was divided into postal areas (even since the establishment of the current postcode system, residents or local newspaper reports tend to refer to those districts by name rather than by number.)

Sebald's Manchester takes fewer significant liberties with the geography of the city. The landmarks to which he refers – the Midland Hotel, Sharon's Full Gospel church, Liston's Music Hall, amongst others – are or were real features of Manchester. There was at the time a real Arosa hotel, although it was located on Wilmslow Road rather than Great Bridgewater Street as described in *The Emigrants*.[317] Sebald himself, unlike his narrator, did not stay there, which may be the reason for his adjustment to the geography in this instance. It allows him to create the fictional landlady, Gracie Irlam, who has a counterpart in Frank Auerbach's paintings, where *EOW on her Blue Eiderdown* becomes in *The Emigrants*, *GI on her Blue Candlewick Cover*.[318] It is also a much more central location, and allows him to look out

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[314] J B Howitt, 'Michel Butor and Manchester', p. 82. 1950s Manchester had five stations: London Road (renamed Piccadilly in 1960), Victoria, Central (later the G-MEX Centre), Oxford Road and Deansgate. They were not linked in a closed circle, however.

[315] In an intriguing passage (omitted in the English edition), street names revert suddenly to French: 'traversant la rue des Veuves, la rue des Evêques, et la rue des Orphelins' (p. 310). Sebald underlines this anomaly

[316] F Whitehead, 'Bleston: or, Manchester Transformed', *Journal of the Lancashire Dialect Society*, 18 (January 1969), pp. 2-4

[317] Sebald uses many real street names, even if some places are relocated. However, he changes Angel Meadows, a notorious nineteenth-century slum and World War II bombsite, into Angel Fields, and thus into 'the Elysian Fields' (*The Emigrants*, p. 157)

[318] Hannah Rothschild, 'Frank Auerbach: An Interview with one of our Greatest Living Painters', *Telegraph* (30 September 2013), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/10336972/Frank-Auerbach-An-interview-with-one-of-our-greatest-living-painters.html> [accessed 25 August 2021], *The Emigrants*, p. 177

towards 'the many-windowed deserted depot of the Great Northern Railway Company'[319] from his room in the hotel. He has Max Ferber find lodgings at 104 (now 154) Palatine Road, 'the selfsame house where Ludwig Wittgenstein [who has a connection also to Austerlitz],[320] then a twenty-year-old engineering student, had lived in 1908'.[321] His description of the Ordsall Slaughter House, 'a Gothic castle in liver-coloured brick' is an example of how a specific Manchester location is used to evoke another geography: in this instance, the building reminds him of the Nuremberg *Lebkuchen*,[322] made by Haeberlein & Metzger. He does not make it explicit whether this connection is because the building resembles an image on the tins used for the Lebkuchen, or because the name 'Metzger' means 'butcher'. In any event, the suggestion has been made, oblique and indirect as is Sebald's practice, with the reference to Nuremberg, and to killing, and thus to the Holocaust.

Sebald also notes many of the landmarks which Butor retains. He refers to the Refuge Assurance Company and to the Grosvenor Picture Palace (the most likely origin of one of the cinemas regularly visited by Revel,[323] and which presumably inspired the name given to Revel's landlady). Butor's Chinese restaurants, another aspect of the city imported from further afield, perhaps have an echo in Sebald's African restaurant, the *Wadi Halfa*.[324] Strangeways prison, described by Butor (and pictured on the frontispiece map) as 'le bâtiment pénitentiaire […] en forme d'étoile à six branches'[325] is described by Sebald both in *The Emigrants* and in *After Nature*,[326] and he too notes the building's star shape.[327] (We will return later to the significance of the prison for both writers.) Both writers refer to the Jewish quarter(s) in the city, Butor (seemingly) in passing, and Sebald more extensively. As we have noted, it was in Manchester that Sebald encountered for the first time a Jewish community, and got to know individual Jews. Revel notes the proximity of 'une petite synagogue, citadelle des juifs pauvres' to the prison, but had forgotten his intention to visit, blaming this

[319] *The Emigrants*, p. 153
[320] *Austerlitz*, pp. 54-56
[321] John Tyrrell, 'Manchester: After Sebald', *Zigzag: Ramblings Ruminations and Reminiscences of a Manchester Blogger* (17 September 2011), <http://john-tyrrell.blogspot.com/2011/09/manchester-after-sebald.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]; David Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein and Sebald: The Place of Home and the Grammar of Memory', in *Language and World, Part 2: Signs, Minds and Actions*, ed. Volker Munz, Klaus Puhl and Joseph Wang (Frankfurt; Paris; Lancaster: Ontos Verlag, 2010)
[322] A type of gingerbread
[323] J B Howitt, 'Michel Butor and Manchester', p. 77
[324] *The Emigrants,* pp. 162-63. It is not known whether this had a real counterpart. It is perhaps unlikely that an African restaurant would have existed in Manchester at a time when Indian and Chinese restaurants were seen as relatively exotic.
[325] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 347
[326] 'An overwhelming / panoptic structure whose walls / are as high as Jericho's' (*After Nature*, p. 98)
[327] *The Emigrants*, p. 157; *After Nature*, p. 98

omission on the 'terrible ville que je haïssais'.[328] Sebald confirms the location of the 'one-time' Jewish quarter, 'around the star-shaped complex of Strangeways prison'.[329] The narrator finds it largely demolished, as the residents have moved into the suburbs, discovering only 'the barely decipherable brass plate of a one-time lawyers' office, bearing names that had a legendary ring to my ear: Glickman, Grunwald and Gottgetreu'.[330] This erasure (however benign) of what had been a Jewish space of course resonates with Sebald's growing preoccupation with the Holocaust.

As we have already seen, Sebald, unlike Butor, was not a child of the city. Indeed, his home was a small town in Southern Bavaria, and he had never encountered a large, industrial metropolis before arriving in Manchester. His first lodgings were, it would seem, rather less hospitable even than the *Arosa*, and as Richard Sheppard notes, his sense of isolation 'could not have been helped by his Baudelairean/Benjaminian flâneries through scenes of slum clearance and urban decay'.[331] Such areas were in fact disappearing, due to the Manchester Development Plan approved in 1961,[332] and the implementation of smokeless zones was making significant improvements in the atmosphere and cleanliness of the city. However, Sebald's 'melancholy at alienation, and exile in a strange land' found its correlative in the 'desolate leftovers of nineteenth century Manchester'.[333] Indeed, whilst the landscapes of inner city slums were themselves labyrinthine spaces, difficult to navigate because streets were narrow, and houses looked identical to one another, as well as often being poorly lit, their demolition too created labyrinths, as we will explore further in Chapter 3, as former landmarks disappeared and former routes became inaccessible.

Sheppard suggests that Sebald's reading of *L'Emploi du temps* may have enhanced his melancholy. Equally, one could say that he was drawn to Butor's novel because it resonated with his own mood and response to Manchester. Janet Wolff challenges the picture painted in 'Max Ferber', noting that Sebald's Manchester 'is a city of ruins, dust, deserted streets, blocked canals, a city in terminal decline', and suggesting that Sebald shows 'a perverse

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[328] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 348. In light of the identification of Bleston with Occupied Paris, it is significant that Bleston seemed (to Revel) to oppose his engagement with Jewish space in the city.
[329] Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry*, p. 298
[330] *The Emigrants,* p. 157
[331] Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', p. 66
[332] Ted Kitchen, 'The Future of Development Plans: Reflections on Manchester's Experiences 1945-1995', *Town Planning Review*, 67, 3 (July 1996), pp. 331-53 (p. 335). This process was incomplete at the time of both Butor's and Sebald's residence and anyone navigating the city was likely to encounter problems with out-of-date maps and areas changed beyond recognition by demolition and redevelopment, creating labyrinths within the labyrinth.
[333] Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', p. 68

determination to distort the reality and insist on ruin and decline where there is none'.[334] However, she subsequently acknowledges that the apparent injustice done to the city may rather suggest that 'none of this is about an actual city'.[335] Interestingly, in the case of Butor she explains this in terms of Revel as unreliable narrator, and further states (wrongly) that 'there are no physical descriptions at all' of Manchester in *L'Emploi du temps*. In the case of Sebald, she argues that 'Manchester itself fades into insignificance in relation to another important geographical, phantasmic and persistent presence, which is Germany'.[336] Perhaps surprisingly, Germany is rarely invoked in Sebald's work, except in the 'Il ritorno in patria' section of *Vertigo*,[337] where he revisits his home village. In a sense, the 'phantasmic presence' is not a country at all, but an overwhelming event, encompassing all of Occupied Europe, an event which for Sebald defines his homeland. Thus the narrator of 'Max Ferber', entering the Midland Hotel, 'suddenly felt as if [he] were in a hotel somewhere in Poland'[338] and subsequently refers to 'polski Manczester', as the closing paragraphs of the book describe photographs from the Litzmannstadt ghetto in Łódź (the Polish industrial centre). I will show that for both writers, however much their narratives draw upon both realistic and mythologised versions of Manchester, 'si on est dans cette ville, on est perpétuellement dans un ailleurs'.[339]

From the first pages of *L'Emploi du temps*, describing the arrival of the diarist, Jacques Revel, at one of Bleston's railway stations, it is clear that Bleston is not just Manchester, nor just an archetype of the Northern industrial city. Whilst many aspects of the account seem realistic, with a grim humour in the reactions of a young European to a city where everything is closed at night, there is also both foreshadowing ('l'eau de mon regard n'était pas encore obscurcie; depuis, chacun des jours y a jeté sa pincée de cendres')[340] and recalled extreme emotion: 'J'ai été soudain pris de peur [...] J'ai été envahi […] de l'absurde envie de reculer, de renoncer, de fuir'[341] and a little later, 'je suis perdu si je reste ici'.[342] Given the layering

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[334] Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-Memory in Mancunian Exile', p. 50

[335] Ibid, p. 50. This is echoed by J M Tyree, who says that the places Sebald describes are an 'internal diagram of European horrors that the writer carried within him wherever he went and found projected on to the map of whichever places he encountered' ('Dunwich Beach, 2019 (Mark Fisher's Agon with W G Sebald', Socrates on the Beach, 2 (2021), <J.M. Tyree — Socrates on the Beach> [accessed 27 September 2021]

[336] Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-Memory in Mancunian Exile', pp. 48-52

[337] *Vertigo*, pp. 171-252

[338] *The Emigrants*, p. 233

[339] Michel Sicard, 'Michel Butor au travail du texte', p. 17

[340] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 10

[341] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 11

[342] Ibid, p. 23

and interweaving of timelines in the novel,[343] it is interesting to note the tense switches just within these few pages. Butor begins by using the imperfect tense (describing a process whereby his vision was at that time clear but subsequently obscured), then the perfect (describing past and completed events or emotional states), and finally the present tense, where Revel is recalling his thoughts at the time, but suggesting that this state of mind has persisted. Revel is writing seven months after his arrival, by which time he feels himself to be at war with the city, a place where fear is a permanent presence and whose smoke and fog are means by which the city oppresses its inhabitants. Thus, Bleston is described frequently in mythological terms – as Circe, as Daedalus' labyrinth, as Babylon or the Tower of Babel, as Hydra.

Given the mundane nature of the events described, this heightened and dramatic language has led some critics to see Revel as an unreliable narrator,[344] suffering from some mental illness. W M Frohock, one of the earliest critics of the novel, argues that Revel is 'not completely plausible psychologically', on the basis that however depressing an environment Bleston/Manchester was, he 'should really find his situation less grim on some days than he does on others'.[345] This approach to mental illness is very much of its time, and it presumes, of course, that psychological (or other forms of) realism is Butor's intention. Much more recently, Janet Wolff, as noted above, describes Revel's descriptions of the city as 'the ravings of a neurasthenic, whose debilitated psychological state produces monsters in the environment'.[346] Taking a slightly different tack, Michael Spencer suggests that the attribution of a description of the atmosphere of terror that pervades Bleston to Revel's friend Jenkins could be 'an attempt by Butor to anticipate criticism of Revel's behaviour as pathological'.[347]

I propose[348] that there is another element in the description of Bleston which makes sense of the language of danger, fear, violence and betrayal. Butor's adolescent years were spent in Paris under Nazi occupation and it is possible to read Bleston in this light. I note that neither

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[343] Discussed in Chapter 6 in particular

[344] Whilst that may be an over-simplistic interpretation of the novel, Kathleen O'Neill perceptively notes that 'Revel the reader perceives that Revel, the writer, was not entirely reliable' ('On *Passing Time*', p. 30). It is also true that these interpretations are not mutually exclusive, Revel may be an unreliable narrator because of past traumatic experiences

[345] W M Frohock, 'Introduction to Butor', *Yale French Studies*, 24 (1959), pp. 54-61 (p. 57)

[346] Janet Wolff, 'Max Ferber and the Persistence of Pre-Memory in Mancunian Exile', p. 52

[347] Michael Spencer, *Michel Butor*, p. 51

[348] Catherine Annabel, *'L'Emploi du temps*: Sous le masque de Bleston' (unpublished BA diss., University of Sheffield, 2013)

Butor nor any of his critics have made this interpretation explicit. However, Butor says in his preface to Mireille Calle-Gruber's monograph on *L'Emploi du temps* that 'il est facile de voir à quel point la capitale française se cache sous le masque de Bleston'[349] and, in conversation with Michel Sicard, that the novel is 'un détour par une ville anglaise, car je ne parle pas directement de Paris'. Revel is 'un parisien en exil qui vit dans l'occultation de la ville de Paris'.[350] The language here is interesting. The idea of a detour takes us back to the labyrinth, which constantly takes one further from one's destination in order to reach it. In addition, Butor uses two terms which suggest something hidden, firstly a mask behind which Paris hides, and secondly, 'occultation', which refers to an event that occurs when one object is hidden by another that passes between it and the observer (the context is usually astronomical, but can be used more widely than that, for example to describe a situation where foreground objects obscure distant ones). This suggests that the Paris with which Butor (and Revel, assuming him to be of a similar age) was familiar has been *blocked* from view, with something – not just distance – standing in the way; an apt description of the experience of seeing a familiar place rendered literally foreign: road signs in German, swastika flags on public buildings, German soldiers on the streets, and reminders on every corner that this was no longer your home.[351] André Bourin, interviewing Butor shortly after the publication of *L'Emploi du temps*, noted that Butor's 'vrais débuts dans la vie datent seulement de l'occupation et ces années-là, passés à Paris, ont laissé en lui des impressions dont j'ai retrouvé la hantise dans son roman'.[352] It is 'un livre plein de fantômes'.[353] These hints are sufficiently strong to take the reader back to the novel, and in parallel to Butor's and other evocations of occupied Paris, to look for the traces of that haunting.

If one considers Bleston in relation to the Paris of the early 1950s, it is difficult to see any resemblance. If we instead look at accounts (including Butor's own) of the return to Paris after the *Exode*, the flight of Parisians[354] as French military resistance crumbled, before the German army entered the city on 14 June 1940, the parallels are clear. The characteristics that

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[349] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*, pp. 7-8

[350] Michel Sicard, 'Michel Butor au travail du texte', p. 17

[351] 'Ce grand silence des rues. C'est Thèbes ou Memphis, mais non plus Paris' (Jean Guéhenno, *Journal des années noires*, p. 44)

[352] André Bourin, 'Instantané', pp. 28-32

[353] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', *Otrante*, 7 (Winter 1994), in *Entretiens*, Vol. III, pp. 332-52 (p. 338). Butor said, in a 2011 documentary, that he had been 'profondément marqué' by the war which, to him, was 'toujours proche' (Blandine Armand and Frédéric Ferney, *Michel Butor: L'écrivain migrateur* (Les Bons clients/France Télévision, 2011), http://www.pileface.com/sollers/spip.php?article1754#section1 [accessed 25 August 2021]

[354] Most of these refugees, including Butor's family, returned soon after the Armistice, given the chaos of the exodus, and the need for income and shelter.

are most strongly associated with Paris (light, culture, cosmopolitanism) are marked by their absence under the Occupation. Most first-hand accounts[355] refer to darkness, silence, and empty streets, to the uncanny nature of the transformation of a familiar place, as well as to the atmosphere of threat. Liliane Schroeder describes 'cette ambiance étouffante', the closed shutters and how, at 18.00, 'il n'y eut plus personne […] Paris fut abandonnée, morte'.[356] François Mauriac writes of 'Paris dépossédé de lui-même, désert, noir et comme écartelé'.[357] In Butor's recollection, 'Nous avons découvert une ville totalement vide. Le soir, à cause du couvre-feu, les rues étaient sinistres'.[358] This is echoed in *L'Emploi du temps*, as Revel notes how 'les rares personnes que je croisais semblaient se hâter, comme s'il ne restait plus que quelques instants avant un rigoureux couvre-feu'. Pierre Audiat's account, published in 1946, describes 'un peuple d'aveugles à marcher en tâtonnant […] cette heure du jour qu'on leur avait volée le matin, par l'effet d'on ne sait quelle sorcellerie, ils ne la retrouvaient pas le soir'.[359]

Bleston is clearly, like Occupied Paris, a carceral space. Not only does Revel feel that he cannot leave (he describes the travel posters at the station as 'ironique[s]'[360] and his one attempt to walk away from the city is thwarted)[361] but from the first pages the image of 'des rideaux de fer baissés' repeats, along with other references to barriers and closed doors. [362] The prison is recognisably Strangeways, but with a strong resemblance to La Santé prison in Paris, another 'prison tentaculaire'.[363] It is a powerful and malevolent presence at the heart of the city, with an echo in Revel's hotel, *L'Écrou*. The English translation renders the name as The Anchor, presumably on the basis that 'The Screw' or 'The Prison' would be an improbable name for an English B&B, and thus the implication is lost, apart from the

[355] For example, Berthe Auroy, *Jours de guerre: Ma vie sous l'Occupation* (Montrouge: Bayard Éditions, 2008); Madeleine Blaess, *320 rue St Jacques: The Diary of Madeleine Blaess,* ed. Wendy Michallat (York: White Rose University Press, 2018); Jean Guéhenno, *Journal des années noires*

[356] Liliane Schroeder, *Journal d'Occupation: Paris, 1940-1944: Chronique au jour le jour d'une époque oubliée* (Paris: Guibert, 2000), pp. 54, 118-19

[357] François Mauriac, *Le Cahier noir et autres textes de l'Occupation*, ed. Jean Touzot (1943; Paris: Bartillat, 2016), p. 37

[358] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 24

[359] Pierre Audiat, *Paris pendant la guerre*, p. 89

[360] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 307

[361] Ibid, pp. 40-43

[362] Ibid, p. 11 and frequently thereafter

[363] 'La Santé: Etablissement pénitentiaire – maison d'arrêt', Ministère de la Justice, <http://www.annuaires.justice.gouv.fr/etablissements-penitentiaires-10113/direction-interregionale-de-paris-10121/la-sante-10664.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]. La Santé prison was one of the sites where resistants were imprisoned and executed during the Occupation.

references to the cell-like room looking out on a brick wall, and the receptionist as a wardress.

Another aspect of Manchester which may have triggered Butor's recollections of Paris was the smell of smoke, both from the factory chimneys, and from the seemingly frequent fires in the city. Butor writes that his 'madeleine' was 'l'odeur du charbon' which acted as 'une sorte de sésame, à la fois envoûtant et maléfique car cette odeur est liée à certains incendies auxquels j'ai assisté'.[364] Jean Guéhenno describes how, as the German army approached Paris, 'on a mis le feu aux réservoirs de mazout et d'essence. La fumée noire, en se répandant sur la ville et les jardins a tout empoisonné', [365] the memory of which could well have been triggered by the poisoned atmosphere in Manchester.

If the French capital 'se cache sous le masque de Bleston' most significantly in the form of Occupied Paris, we can then consider how this presence impacts upon narrative and language, and how it may inform a different reading of the text. This makes sense of a number of aspects of the novel, aspects which have been perplexing critics and readers over the years since it was first published. In particular, it casts in a different light the apparent disjunction between the constant references to violence, danger and betrayal and the relatively low-key events described, which has given rise, as noted previously, to the interpretation that Revel is simply an unreliable narrator, whose perceptions are skewed by mental illness, or that Butor's characterisation of Revel is unrealistic. Butor said of the Occupation: 'Je ressentais profondément l'étrangeté de cette guerre d'attente: l'impression que rien ne se passait mais que ce rien, en même temps, était sanglant',[366] echoing Debarati Sanyal's description of Camus' *La Peste*[367] as capturing 'the carceral menace of everyday life in Occupied France'.[368]

We know nothing of Butor's protagonist, Revel, other than that he is French (and according to Butor, 'un parisien en exil qui vit dans l'occultation de la ville de Paris', as mentioned earlier).[369] We can reasonably assume that he is of a similar age to his creator, thus that he experienced the Occupation as an adolescent as Butor did, and it is not then difficult to see traces of that experience in his response to Bleston. Of course, this does not preclude Revel

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[364] *Improvisations*, pp. 33-34
[365] *Journal des années noires,* p. 44
[366] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 25
[367] In which, of course, Occupied Paris is displaced to Oran in Algeria
[368] Debarati Sanyal, 'The French War', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. Marina McKay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 83-97 (p. 90)
[369] Michel Sicard, 'Michel Butor au travail du texte', p. 17

also being an unreliable narrator, as many critics have suggested; rather, it may provide a way of interpreting his apparently histrionic reactions to what would seem to be mainly mundane events. We may doubt his perceptions of those events but that should lead us to look beneath the surface at what might prompt such reactions. I am not suggesting that we read *L'Emploi du temps* as autobiography. Revel's circumstances (translator for a shipping company) are very different to those of Butor, and he does not seem to share Butor's intellectual or cultural interests (he visits the museum and gallery more for the sake of passing time and getting out of the rain rather than out of any overwhelming interest). Butor seems in these respects to distance himself from Revel, but at the same time, he is describing experiences that he did share – the shock of an inhospitable climate and culture, the stress of understanding and making oneself understood in a foreign language, etc. – and has at least given us reason to consider that Revel may have shared some of his past experiences too, and has brought with him to Bleston the trauma of Paris.

The position of Revel in relation to the events and the various interpretations placed upon them is that of someone 'à l'écart'.[370] Again, this could be understood in light of Butor's own status as a passive/vicarious witness to the events of the Occupation. His awareness of the trauma of the years of occupation was indirect or filtered: 'les conversations étaient surveillées. Pendant toute l'occupation allemande je me suis trouvé dans un état étrange dans lequel le savoir était confisqué'.[371] As far as we know, the full horror did not impinge directly upon his family (conservative, Catholic) or his close friends and in the climate of the time, under the blanket of silence imposed by the occupiers and by the Resistance, he was both part of and at one remove from the Occupation. It was, however, a formative time for him, not only because it coincided with the years of his adolescence but because it created a decisive break between the pre-war cultural establishment and that created by Butor and his contemporaries after the Liberation. Post-war, Butor's generation found themselves at odds with their parents who seemed to wish to treat the 'années noires' as a nightmare which, now that the Liberation had awoken them, should be forgotten. As Butor says:

> *A partir du moment où la guerre s'est terminée, ceux qui avaient été*
> *vraiment impliqués, ceux qui avaient été les soldats en 1939-40, surtout*

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[370] It is interesting to note that Butor's latter-day home in Lucinges was called 'À l'écart', <https://www.archipel-butor.fr/larchipel/la-maison-ecrivain-michel-butor/> [accessed 25 August 2021]. At least one of his obituarists saw this as an essentially Butorian characteristic: Jean-Claude Renard, 'Michel Butor, à l'écart, définitivement', *Politis* (25 August 2016), <http://www.politis.fr/articles/2016/08/michel-butor-a-lecart-definitivement-35240/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[371] *Improvisations*, p. 12

> *s'ils ont été prisonniers, déportés, n'ont eu qu'une envie, ç'a été d'oublier*
> *ces années, de faire comme si une horrible parenthèse était enfin fermée.*[372]

Thus the 'atmosphère de mensonges',[373] rather than ending with the Liberation, continued after it. After the brutal but brief *épuration*, many of the most egregious collaborators had their sentences commuted, or were not prosecuted until many years later, if at all.[374] Publishers began to turn away memoirs from surviving deportees (Jews and *résistants*) arguing that there was no longer an appetite for these accounts. There were various reasons for this. Firstly, de Gaulle, through his speeches in the aftermath of the Liberation, established a version of history, 'a mythic vision of France victimized by Nazism yet heroically united in its resistance to the enemy'.[375] Explicitly, he argued that Vichy was not the Republic, which had never ceased to exist but had been embodied in the free French armies and the resistance: 'Vichy fut toujours et demeure nul et non avenu'.[376] Henri Rousso notes how, even whilst memories of the Occupation were still fresh, a version of those events was crystallising into something hard and unchallengeable.[377] This formed a screen behind which were hidden the most troubling images of the period,[378] those least easily reconciled with de Gaulle's vision. It would take decades before the narrative could be radically changed, to recognise the degree of French collaboration in Nazi atrocities, in particular in the deportation of the Jews.[379] In the meantime, both trials of collaborators and survivor accounts were unpleasant reminders of the over-simplification in the official account. And, at an individual level, there was trauma, as well as shame and guilt, to make people choose

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[372] *Improvisations*, p. 13; See also Léon Werth's diary entry from the final battles to liberate Paris, where he says 'Et déjà on sent venir l'oubli' (*Déposition: Journal de guerre 1940-1944* (Paris: Éditions Viviane Hamy, 1992), p. 335)

[373] *Improvisations*, p. 16

[374] For example: Rene Bousquet, not committed for trial until 1989; Paul Touvier, sentenced in 1994; Maurice Papon, sentenced in 1998 (Anthony Beevor and Artemis Cooper, *Paris after the Liberation, 1944-1949* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 385-86)

[375] Debarati Sanyal, 'The French War', p. 92

[376] Charles de Gaulle, cited in Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy: De 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), p. 31.

[377] Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, p. 30.

[378] This reminds one of Freud's use of the term 'screen memory', although the context (widely shared, recent memories with ample available evidence) is different to what Freud describes ('Screen Memories' (1899) in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 3-22

[379] A turning point came on the 53rd anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv round-up, when then President Jacques Chirac asserted that 'la folie criminelle de l'occupant a été secondée par des Français, par l'État français'. 'Allocution de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, prononcée lors des cérémonies commémorant la grande rafle des 16 et 17 juillet 1942', <http://www.jacqueschirac-asso.fr/fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Allocution-Vel-dhiv.pdf> [accessed 2 September 2021]. This is evident on the streets of Paris, where memorial plaques to fallen Resistance fighters clearly date back to shortly after the Liberation, whilst plaques on schools recording the deportation of Jewish pupils have only been mounted in the last twenty-five years.

forgetfulness rather than confrontation with the past. When Butor writes about the sedated sleepwalkers of Bleston, he may be thinking of those who chose 'l'oubli'.

Butor described how 'une sorte de rideau'[380] fell between him and those teachers and would-be mentors who were compromised by this culture of lies and denial, and by the desire for the war years to be forgotten.[381] Conversely, there were thinkers and artists who seemed to offer something more radical:

> *Nous étions des prisonniers, et à travers les grilles de notre geôle, nous apercevions de temps en temps des signaux [...] cet art interdit était un art de lutte qui nous donnait courage.*[382]

Butor does not appear to have taken part directly in any acts of overt Resistance. His father, whilst a right-winger, was fiercely patriotic and 'farouchement anti-allemand',[383] and Butor's teachers and fellow pupils at the Lycée Louis le Grand included both active *résistants* and collaborators. Towards the end of the war, he was drawn into an intellectual group which included Marie-Magdeleine Davy,[384] which met at the Chateau de la Fortrelle. Butor does not mention whether he was aware that this was not just a venue for philosophical discussion free from constraints and surveillance but was used to hide escapees from forced labour, Jews, and British and American aircrew. Davy's apartment on rue Cujas was also a hiding place for *résistants*, using the cover of a Centre de conférences culturelles.[385] Thus, whilst Butor is clearly associated with anti-collaboration elements in Paris, his involvement as far as is known was indirect. We can speculate about how much he knew of the activities of friends such as Davy, or of former pupils at Lycée Louis le Grand such as Thomas Elek[386] or Jacques Lusseyran,[387] and his awareness at the time of the arrest and deportation of Jews.[388] He will certainly have been aware, however indirectly, of Resistance activity more generally, and this would seem to inform Revel's (otherwise somewhat melodramatic) fears that in revealing the

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[380] *Improvisations*, p. 38

[381] Relevant also to Sebald, whose self-exile was at least in part attributed to estrangement from the generation who taught him.

[382] *Improvisations*, p. 29

[383] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 25

[384] *Improvisations*, p. 32

[385] Marc-Alain Descamps, 'La Vie de Marie-Magdeleine Davy', *Présence de Marie-Magdeleine Davy*, <www.europsy.org/pmmdavy/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[386] Elek left school to become a member of the Manouchian group. See Margaret Atack, 'Romans inachevés de l'Histoire et de la mémoire: Les FTP-MOI et l'Affiche Rouge', in *Mémoires occupées: Fictions françaises et seconde guerre mondiale*, ed. Marc Dambré (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2013), pp. 175-182 (pp. 176-77); Alain Blottière, *Le Tombeau de Tommy* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), <www.letombeaudetommy.net> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[387] Jacques Lusseyran, *Et la lumière fut* (1961; Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2005)

[388] Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II*, pp. 260-62, 305-08

true identity of the pseudonymous author of *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, he may be putting his friend's life at risk.[389]

Perhaps this is why Revel is notably passive in many of his interactions with the city. He encounters Bleston through various intermediaries (human and textual) all of which prove to be in various ways inadequate or partial. The possible acts of violence that Revel records are, firstly, an ostensibly fictional narrative (in the detective novel *Le Meurtre de Bleston*) whose *mise en scène* is very specifically described, and whose plot is believed at one point to have a real-life counterpart; and secondly the road accident that injures the novel's author, which at one point is believed to be deliberate. Thus, much weight is placed upon Revel's perceptions, and in neither instance is the truth definitively established. Revel witnesses neither supposed murder nor attempted murder, although he fears that he has himself put the author at risk by revealing his true identity to various other parties. Revel's writing increasingly takes the place of a direct response, and he records occasions where he chooses to continue his efforts to record past events rather than engaging directly with the city and its inhabitants. Is Butor here addressing himself, confronting his choice to write out his own haunting in such an indirect, oblique, coded way? If so, this could be because the events he recalled were too recent and too dangerous to address directly, or because those stories were not his to tell.

Sebald too, for different reasons, finds himself 'à l'écart'. As we will discuss in greater depth in subsequent chapters, he was intensely aware, as he learned about the Holocaust (and particularly as he met Jews who had escaped from Europe as children but whose families had been murdered), of his nationality and of his father's service in the Wehrmacht, whilst having been born in the final stages of the war and thus having no memories of his own. This awareness informs all of his writing about the Holocaust, in which he confronts the full horrors only through the first-hand testimony of others, such as H G Adler or Jean Améry. Paris itself is significant in Sebald's work only in *Austerlitz,* where it is portrayed firstly as a research base for the protagonist, then as the occupied city where his father is believed to have lived before being deported, and thirdly as the place where Austerlitz hopes to find traces of his father's fate. These layers are not hermetically sealed from one another, the past bleeds through into the present. Before we, the narrator or even Austerlitz himself know Austerlitz's story or that of his parents, he tells us that he 'had quite often found himself in the grip of dangerous and entirely incomprehensible currents of emotion in the Parisian

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[389] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 82

railway stations, which, as he said, he regarded as places marked by both blissful happiness and profound misfortune'.[390] Later he associates the station whose name he shares with his father's fate, either rounded up for deportation and taken from the Gare d'Austerlitz to the transit camps,[391] or escaping Paris from that station after the arrival of the Nazis. The new Bibliothèque Nationale is said to be built upon the site of the 'Lager Austerlitz', a Nazi labour camp in which Jewish prisoners sorted, catalogued and packed for transport the properties seized from Jews who had been or were being deported.[392] At the Salpêtrière hospital, where Austerlitz recovers from one of his episodes of mental collapse, he sees a holiday poster showing 'a happy family on a winter holiday in Chamonix', which does not entirely hide 'a yellowed notice issued by the Paris city council in July 1943'.[393]

But for Sebald, Paris is one location in a network of places that embody the recent history of his homeland, none of which, significantly, are in that homeland. There are the fortresses in Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Lithuania[394] that became prisons, torture chambers and sites of mass murder. There are the cities that became prisons (Prague, Paris) and the railway networks that moved people from those and other cities to those and other prisons. These locations have played no part in Sebald's own life, and none is close to his childhood home. Whilst Butor evokes a remembered home that he had seen transformed by occupation and oppression, Sebald evokes many cities, transformed by the same force, but not experienced by him, and whose history he often merely suggests, or simply leaves unspoken. His poems are full of place names, for the most part not well-known and in context seemingly innocuous, but in reality, heavy with that history, for example: Melk (a sub-camp of Mauthausen), Landsberg (a concentration camp), Stettin (a slave labour camp whose workers were subsequently deported to the Lublin Ghetto), Türkenfeld (a sub-camp of Dachau), Wannsee (site of the 1942 conference that determined the fate of the Jews of Europe).[395]

As Butor wrote of the Occupation obliquely, using the mask of Bleston, Sebald makes the Holocaust present in most of his work indirectly, writing as a German, *Nachgeboren* (born

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[390] *Austerlitz,* p. 45
[391] Pithiviers, Beaune la Rolande and Drancy
[392] *Austerlitz,* p. 401; see James L Cowan, 'W G Sebald's *Austerlitz* and the Great Library: History, Fiction, Memory', Part 1, *Monatshefte*, 102, 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 51-81 (pp. 59, 68-72)
[393] *Austerlitz,* p. 377
[394] Breendonk, Theresienstadt and Kaunas
[395] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 26, 57, 79, 135, 148

later),[396] and a non-Jew. In *Austerlitz,* this changes. His protagonist is again a refugee, like Mr Deutsch in *After Nature*, like Max Ferber in *The Emigrants*.[397] Sebald tells us of Mr Deutsch only that he came from Austria in 1938,[398] and we gradually learn of Ferber's own escape, but of his parents only what he was able to discover after the war, that they were deported from Munich to Riga where they were killed. Austerlitz, having been separated not only from his parents but from his name and his past, seeks his own identity through discovering his parents' fate, a journey which takes us into the heart of Europe and of the Holocaust. He recreates his mother's journey from Prague to Theresienstadt, and his father's from Prague to Paris (as well as his own childhood journey across Europe on the Kindertransport) and as Austerlitz is immersed in the history of Theresienstadt, so are we, through the intermediary of H G Adler's history of the ghetto/prison.[399] Even in *Austerlitz*, however, Sebald does not take us to the end of the journey. We do not accompany Agáta into Theresienstadt, and we know only that from there she is 'sent East', a euphemism which by the time of Agáta's deportation no longer hid the truth. The name of the most archetypal of Holocaust sites is never mentioned, only echoed in Austerlitz's own name and in that of the springs near Marienbad (Auschowitz).

Sebald's cities are, like Bleston, fantastical, phantasmagorical places. Whilst for Butor Bleston itself is the mythical monster, the sorcerer, the labyrinth, Sebald's narrator encounters ghosts in each city he visits. He sees the ghost of the poet Dante on the streets of Vienna,[400] and that of King Ludwig II of Bavaria in Venice.[401] In *The Emigrants*, the narrator sees Ambros Adelwarth and his companion Cosmo Solomon in the hotel at Deauville where they had stayed decades earlier.[402] Austerlitz, who has seen his childhood self in the Ladies' Waiting Room at Liverpool Street Station, imagines in Paris that he might suddenly see his father there, as if he 'were still in Paris and just waiting, so to speak, for a good opportunity

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[396] See Bertholt Brecht's 1939 poem, 'An die Nachgeborenen', to those who will come after. *Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht*, ed. and trans. Tom Kuhn and David Constantine (London: W W Norton; New York: Livright Publishing Corporation, 2019), p. 734; Scott Horton, 'Brecht "To Those Who Follow in Our Wake"', *Harper's Magazine* (15 January 2008), <https://harpers.org/blog/2008/01/brecht-to-those-who-follow-in-our-wake/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[397] *After Nature*, p. 99; *The Emigrants*, pp. 149-237

[398] There was a real Jewish landlord of that name, but he in fact came to England in the 1920s (Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', p. 101, n. 67

[399] H G Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-45*. See Chapter 5 for an exploration of this passage in *Austerlitz*, which includes one sentence of more than ten pages

[400] *Vertigo*, p. 35

[401] Ibid, p. 53

[402] *The Emigrants*, pp. 122-23

to reveal himself'.[403] Austerlitz's 'hallucinations' on his nocturnal walks invoke London's past ('a horse-drawn cab in Spitalfields driven by a man in a top hat, a woman wearing the costume of the 1930s'),[404] and he feels 'a cold breath of air on his forehead'[405] that suggests to him the pain and suffering of the inmates of the former Bedlam hospital, on the site of which Liverpool Street Station was being rebuilt. But he also hears people speaking behind his back 'in a foreign tongue, Lithuanian, Hungarian, or something else with a very alien note to it',[406] suggesting that he is experiencing not only echoes of the past of the streets on which he walks, but also of his own past, the trauma as yet unknown (at least consciously) to him of the loss of his parents in another place and at another time, through a language seemingly unknown to him but perhaps the very one that he was shortly to recover on his return to Prague.

Bleston is at the same time Manchester (albeit transformed), and *ailleurs*. Butor brought to its transformation his memories of an adolescence during France's dark years, and of a familiar place rendered hostile and dangerous. The trauma that his protagonist brought with him to Bleston made of that place a monster and an implacable enemy. Sebald thus found in *L'Emploi du temps* not merely the response of a fellow European exile to an uncongenial city, but the presence of layers of past and present, of myth and reality, of different cities from different eras and places, challenging the reader constantly to sift and order in the hope of finding Ariadne's thread to guide them through the labyrinth. What he encountered in Manchester – both the city itself and its Jewish community – brought into sharp focus his attempts to understand and to confront his father's, and his country's, past. 'Past and present intersect, commingle, and overlap'[407] for Butor's Revel, and for Sebald's protagonists.

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[403] *Austerlitz*, pp. 358-59
[404] Ibid, p. 180
[405] Ibid, p. 183
[406] *Austerlitz,* p. 180
[407] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 225

Part II - Labyrinths

Chapter 3

Mapping the City-Labyrinth

> *The city is the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth.*[408]
>
> *Le cordon de phrases qui se love dans cette pile […], ce cordon de phrases est un fil d'Ariane parce que je suis dans un labyrinthe, […] le labyrinthe de mes jours à Bleston, incomparablement plus déroutant que le palais de Crète, puisqu'il s'augmente à mesure que je le parcoure [sic] puisqu'il se déforme à mesure que je l'explore.*[409]

My purpose in this chapter is to show how Butor uses the image of the labyrinth in *L'Emploi du temps* to transform what may initially appear to be an archetypal but mundane northern industrial city into a phantasmagorical place of danger and tension, a place that defeats mapping, and that contains within itself other places and other times. I will examine how Sebald's urban labyrinths echo Bleston, as multi-layered carceral spaces. The map has an apparent clarity which seems to fix in place that which is experienced as constantly changing, [410] and thus in the next chapter, the focus will shift to the contrasting experience of the individual within the labyrinth of the city.

I will first provide some context by examining how cities became associated with the labyrinth, and how this association has changed over the centuries. Our perspective in this chapter will be that of the cartographer, who provides a bird's-eye view of the urban landscape, and I will explore the ways in which that perspective can mislead, and the resulting inadequacy of the map to enable navigation of the labyrinth. I will draw out the particular features of the labyrinth and of the city that make that failure inevitable. We will see how the city is a palimpsest where layers of history,[411] of past habitation, of destruction and renewal can be perceived:

> *La ville moderne […] est mémoire dans la mesure où elle est le spectacle de sa propre temporalité, dans la mesure où elle offre l'évidence d'une manière de collage temporel – des bâtiments de divers moments, qui*

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[408] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (1927-40; Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), pp. 429-30

[409] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 247

[410] ˙La masse gigantesque s'immobilise sous les yeux' (Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien,* p. 139)

[411] For example, in one of the travelogue films he watches, Revel sees 'les ruines d'Athènes dans les parenthèses d'une ville vivante' (*L'Emploi du temps*, p. 318)

The map can only show the city at a moment in time, in which evidence of some of these 'divers moments' will be visible, but others found only as faint traces by the wanderer at pavement level. Not only this, but demolition and destruction will remove landmarks and block access routes and again make the map a lie. The notion of the centre (traditionally the heart of the labyrinth, and the end of the quest) in the twentieth-century city, is significant both literally and metaphorically, and problematic in the endlessly changing city landscape. The city-labyrinth is a network, comprised of transit points and thresholds, places that are in the city but not entirely of it, connections that a map cannot hope to capture. It may appear to have ample entry and exit routes but, in reality, be a closed space, a prison or a trap. The dissonances between the bird's-eye view and that of the wanderer in the labyrinth bring us to the concept of the uncanny which I will touch on at a number of points in this chapter.[413] This will be explored in more depth in Chapter 4, which focuses on the experience of the individual within the city. However, here we will see how the city, through its processes of constant change, by design or destruction, can be profoundly uncanny.

The association of city and labyrinth goes back to antiquity, when labyrinths were frequently given the names of cities (Jerusalem, Nineveh, Jericho, Babylon, Troy)[414] although this was almost certainly an association with the talismanic properties of the labyrinth, providing protection from external threat, rather than descriptive of the city itself.[415] The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria makes the connection between Cain, founder of cities (whose story is one of those woven into the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps*) and the labyrinth: he is multifarious, heterodox and labyrinthine, 'the promulgator […] of a doctrine full of mazes and hard to disentangle'.[416] Philo opposes the Platonic ideal of the *polis* (already in decline at the time he was writing) – the city-state as a structure of government

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[412] Jean Bessière, 'Mémoire et temporalité de la ville, ou le pouvoir du skyline, de T S Eliot à Michel Butor: Notes sur la ville moderniste en littérature', in *La Mémoire des villes*, ed. Yves Clavaron and Bernard Dieterle (St Etienne: Publications de l'Université de St Etienne, 2003), pp. 403-18 (pp. 406-07). Bessière is concerned, as his title suggests, with the city in modernist literature, but his remarks on memory and temporality have wider relevance.

[413] I will refer, of course, to Freud's seminal essay ('The Uncanny' (1919), in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McClintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-62), and to Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1992).

[414] Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 115-16

[415] Marilyn Thomas Faulkenburg, *Church, City and Labyrinth in Brontë, Dickens, Hardy, and Butor*, p. 21

[416] Gerald L Bruns, 'Cain: Or, the Metaphorical Construction of Cities', *Salmagundi*, 74-75 (Spring-Summer 1987), pp. 70-85 (pp. 75)

institutions and well-ordered systems – against the labyrinth as a place of violence, struggle and disruption, a network of heterogeneous relations. It is the latter that Cain inevitably replicates.[417]

But with the advent of the great metropolises of the industrial revolution, the metaphor of the labyrinth became firmly associated with this new urban environment, the unreadable, unnavigable city. The dichotomy between the chaos of nature and the notion of the city as an ordered space was no longer valid: 'la ville devrait être perçue comme perdant de sa familiarité et de son lisibilité'.[418] The labyrinth is both a literal description of the confusion and unreadability of cities (often the product of rapid, unplanned growth, as in Manchester),[419] and a metaphor for the effect that this has upon the wanderer: the disorientation, the failure of maps and guides to provide the assurance they would seem to offer, and the sense of panic that goes with losing one's way.

Manchester and London are archetypes of the city that has experienced rapid and largely unplanned growth, not only outwards, swallowing up the surrounding countryside and absorbing what had been discrete settlements, but within its boundaries, filling every space with scant regard for the living conditions of their inhabitants, let alone for the navigability of their streets. [420] Manchester and London also shared the phenomenon of the heavy smoke-laden air, of fog and smog, that in combination with the sinuous, narrow streets following no pattern that the walker could grasp, made it perilously easy to lose one's way. The paradox is that even the most complex labyrinth will be navigable when viewed from above: 'From the outside, in particular from the privileged position of a bird's-eye view, it divulges its constitution as an intricately ordered pattern'.[421] One might also think of Michel de Certeau's

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[417] Gerald L Bruns, 'Cain', pp. 75, 80

[418] Corinne Fournier Kiss, *La Ville Européenne dans la littérature fantastique du tournant du siècle, 1860-1915* (Lausanne: L'Age de l'homme, 2007), pp. 18-19

[419] Alexis de Tocqueville, cited in Gary S Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, p. 55; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 115

[420] There are, of course, other models of the city in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Eric Hazan describes Paris's expansion in terms of the growth rings on a tree, or the layers of an onion, and the emerging metropolises of the United States were designed as readily legible grids. Adam Thorpe, '*The Invention of Paris* by Eric Hazan and *Parisians* by Graham Robb', *Guardian* (17 April 2010), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/apr/17/paris-history-eric-hazan-review> [accessed 25 August 2021]; Karl Whitney, 'Eric Hazan: Scaling the Walls of Paris', *3:am Magazine* (19 March 2010), <https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/scaling-the-walls-of-paris/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[421] Richard T Gray, 'From Grids to Vanishing Points: W G Sebald's Critique of Visual-Representational Orders in *Die Ringe des Saturn*', *German Studies Review*, 32, 3 (October 2009), pp. 495-526 (p. 496). See Paul Basu's distinction between maze-walker and maze-viewer ('The Labyrinthine Aesthetic in Museum Design', in *Exhibition Experiments*, ed. Sharon MacDonald and Paul Basu (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 47-70 (p. 49))

description of the city viewed from the World Trade Center: 'la masse gigantesque s'immobilise sous les yeux'.[422] However, once within the labyrinth, even when the traveller is armed with a map, the disorienting effect of the twists, turns and returns, the movement away from and then back towards the objective, render that guide inadequate. As Peter Ackroyd says of Venice, it is 'one of the most mapped cities in the world, and yet in a sense it is unmappable. The calli are too labyrinthine, the connections are too circuitous'.[423] Thus, Tim Ingold disputes social anthropologist Alfred Gell's view of the maze as an example of 'the practice of inscribing complex and visually puzzling designs upon surfaces in order to protect […] from attack by evil spirits or demons', on the basis that this assumes a bird's-eye (or in this context a 'demon's-eye') view of the labyrinth. From the point of view of the traveller, 'at the very moment of going underground, of entering the labyrinth, the surface itself disappears from sight. It appears to dissolve. […] Thenceforth […] the ghostly traveller finds himself in a world without any surface at all. Every path is now a thread rather than a trace'.[424]

The panoramic view is what Sebald calls 'the survivor's view', for example, the Waterloo Panorama described in *The Rings of Saturn*. This is a monumental panoramic painting, housed in a rotunda in Belgium, close to the site of the eponymous battle. It is designed to be immersive: 'Le but […] est de confondre les spectateurs qui, éblouis par le tableau qui se déploie tout autour d'eux sur 360° et la lumière qui en émane, ont le sentiment d'être transportés au cœur même de l'action et du lieu représenté'.[425] The panorama is the equivalent of a map, or of the 'official' account of a place or an event: 'This […] is the representation of history. It requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see everything at once, and still we do not know how it was'.[426] It represents the continual effort to comprehend, to grasp and therefore control, even if that proves illusory. The panoramic view 'can promise too much and offer too few distinctions. Narrative and visual panoramas

[422] Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien, I*, p. 139
[423] Peter Ackroyd, *Venice: Pure City* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 423
[424] Tim Ingold, *Lines*, pp. 53-56
[425] 'La Panorama de la Bataille de Waterloo, exemple particulièrement significatif de "Phénomène de Panoramas"', Submission to UNESCO World Heritage Centre by the Division du Patrimoine de la région wallonne de Belgique (8 April 2008), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5364/> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[426] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 125. Sebald's words here perhaps recall *Hiroshima mon amour:* 'He: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing. She: I saw everything. Everything' (*Hiroshima mon amour: text by Marguerite Duras for the film by Alain Resnais*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 15)

may convey the familiarity and omniscience of the realist novel […] rather than the foreignness and uncertainty of the report'.[427]

Revel purchases a plan of Bleston, having found himself lost within moments of arriving in the city, and constantly disoriented thereafter. He briefly entertains the illusion that Bleston is within his mental grasp, when he spreads the map out for the first time:

> *J'ai embrassé d'un seul regard toute l'étendue de la ville. Bien sûr, ce n'était qu'une image très imparfaite [...] pourtant, grâce à elle, grâce à cette image, j'étais mieux renseigné sur la structure de Bleston que n'aurait pu l'être un aviateur la survolant. [...] Ainsi, moi, virus perdu dans ces filaments,[428] tel un homme de laboratoire, armé de son microscope, je pouvais examiner cette énorme cellule cancéreuse.[429]*

This is the bird's-eye view, the view of an aviator flying above the city, or of a scientist with the city under a microscope. The labyrinth confounds the confidence that this viewpoint inspires. Even at the point of purchase, Revel recognises that the map must be supplemented with a bus timetable, which indicates how to get from one point on the map to another, and by a city guide which selects key locations of value or interest to the visitor. Further, it must be augmented by the personal accounts of other inhabitants who know, for example, where to find acceptable food, and which streets to avoid after dark.[430] Revel thus superimposes other imaginary maps over the 'disturbing authority' of the plan.[431] If these varying representations of the city were not enough, the detective novel *Le Meurtre de Bleston* also seems to offer a detailed and realistic account of the city (so much so that Revel takes its narrative as a disguised account of real events), and the background to the stained-glass window in the Old Cathedral, depicting the murder of Abel by his brother, is, it appears, a rendition of Bleston at the era of the windows' construction.

Commentators on *L'Emploi du temps* have surprisingly often seemed to confuse the frontispiece map with a street map of Bleston, or even with the plan purchased by Revel. Frohock commented that he 'should be very much surprised' if Butor had not provided 'an excellent guide to the back as well as the main streets of Manchester'.[432] Others have

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[427] Rebecca L Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (Chichester; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 156
[428] See the title of Part V of 'Bleston' (*Across the Land and the Water*, p. 22)
[429] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 54
[430] Ibid, p. 115
[431] Lorna Martens, 'Empty Center and Open End: The Theme of Language in Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*', *PMLA*, 96, 1 (January 1981), pp. 49-63 (p. 55)
[432] W M Frohock, 'Introduction to Butor', p. 57. One hopes he did not attempt to put this to the test.

interpreted it more subtly. Andrea Goulet notes that 'it looks like a typical map of a typical English town', saying that it 'poses' as an anchor for the reader, but fails to acknowledge just how unreliable an anchor the map would be.[433] Marie-Louise Ryan sees it as 'a gesture of user-friendliness', unusual in the *nouveau roman*.[434] Simon Kemp too comments on the degree of realism in Butor's depiction of Bleston (albeit as a foundation on to which 'the infernal fantasy' can take hold): 'the city is described with a high degree of realism and precision, this latter extending to a street-map on the flyleaf'.[435] Perceptively, Thierry Joliveau acknowledges its 'apparence anodine', that it *seems* like the city plans in tourist guides, that it *seems* to be there to 'préciser les lieux de l'action du livre', but that 'son étrangeté apparait dès qu'on la regarde de plus près'.[436] He notes, for example, how *L'Écrou* (Revel's hotel) is isolated from the rest of the city (the same is true of other key locations where the map gives no indication of how they might be reached, even though they are places to which Revel regularly travelled). He asks, 'Une telle carte sert-t-elle à guider le lecteur ou à le perturber?'.[437] Diana Festa-McCormick notes that

> *The first impression, renewed each time one looks at the map, is that of a maze. As one follows the intricate lines toward the northern top, along the longest and widest street, one gets to the station or, rather, to the stations. There are three of them, [...] forming a ring around Alexandra Place, which is both point of arrival and point of departure. Black lines spread out of it like webs embracing all directions at once; they are the railroads which seem to have no destination other than the city itself. [...] This modern labyrinth [...] holds its own key in the pattern that reveals the way in and out of the maze itself. The labyrinth is thus both the prison and the means to freedom.[438]*

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[433] Andrea Goulet, 'Malet's Maps and Butor's Bleston: City-Space and Formal Play in the *roman policier*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 48, 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 46-59 (p. 52)

[434] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Narrative Cartography: Towards a Visual Narratology', in *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory,* ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin; Boston: de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 333-64 (p. 340)

[435] Simon Kemp, 'Urban Hell', p. 101

[436] T Joliveau, 'Michel Butor, la carte de *L'Emploi du temps*' (29 August 2016), <https://spacefiction.wordpress.com/2016/08/29/michel-butor-la-carte-de-lemploi-du-temps-the-map-of-passing-time > [accessed 25 August 2021]

[437] Ibid

[438] Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst*, p. 182
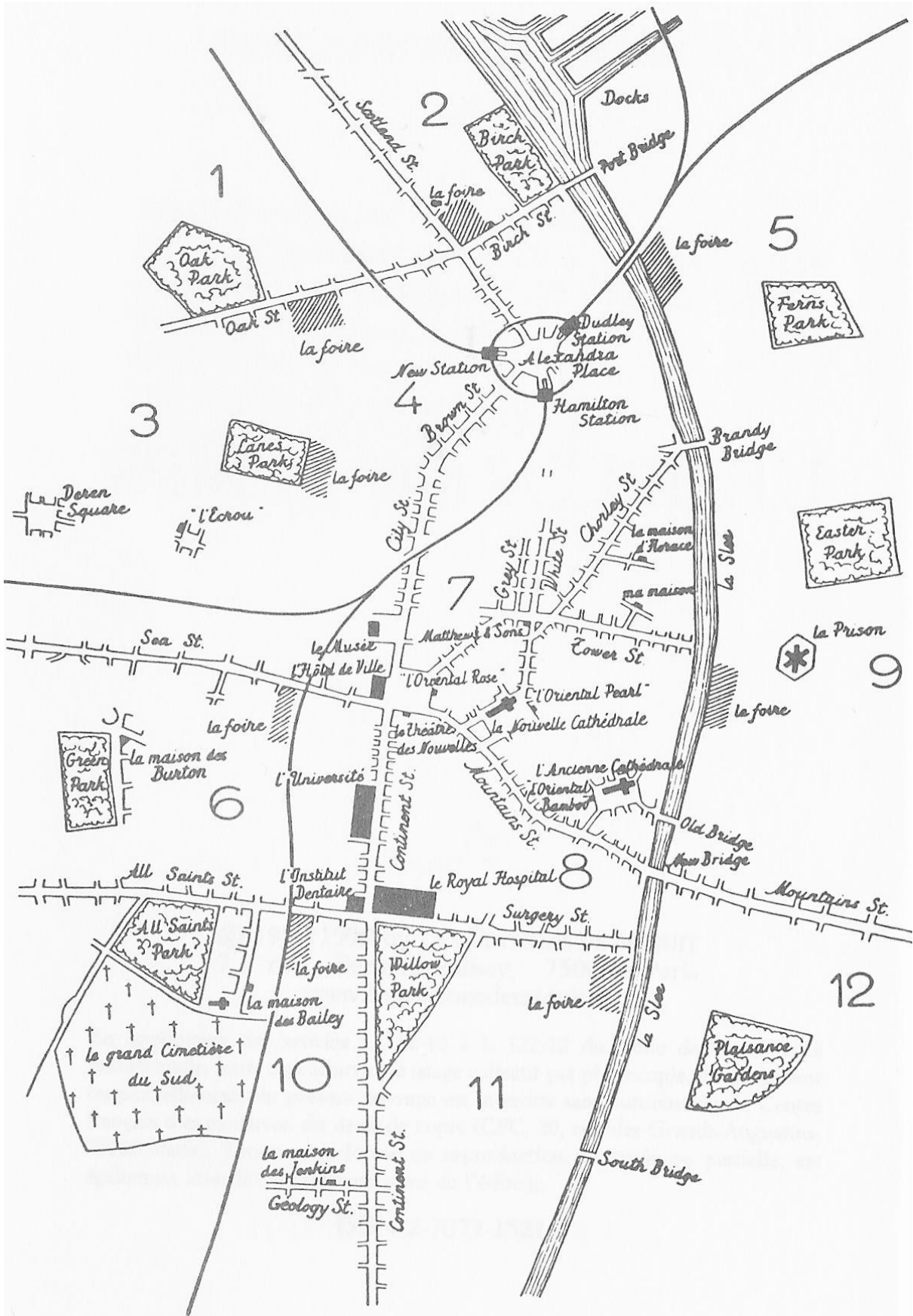
L'Emploi du temps, p. 8

It is also a purely personal map, showing only those locations of significance to Revel, and labelled accordingly, closer in fact to the medieval map as narrative, although even explored territory is not fully depicted, let alone that which remains unexplored. Brian Bartlett Hunt describes it as 'the bilingual and subjective mental map of Revel's Bleston'.[439] Indeed, it is not only Revel's Bleston but Butor's, in that Butor himself would have been lost in Bleston ('sans cela je me serais perdu')[440] had he not attempted to fix the relationships, networks and intersections in his own mind and on the page.

An ironic commentary on the insufficiency of maps is also found in Sebald's *Vertigo*. The narrator finds in Milan a street map whose cover bears the image of a labyrinth, promising to be 'una guida sicura' for the traveller.[441]

Vertigo, p. 107

As Jeannette Baxter comments, 'the reader's gaze is directed by a black arrow that points to the entrance of a multicursal labyrinth. Falling into this black and white spiral of dead ends and broken connections is dizzying and ultimately frustrating, because having traced a path to the centre one realises that the only way out is to retrace one's gaze and return to the initial point of entry: passage in and around the labyrinth is marked by uncanny repetition'.[442]

Thus, the labyrinth defies cartography. 'Navigation in the labyrinth is not a matter of the intellect and calculation but instead it is dependent upon chance and the use of one's

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[439] Brian Bartlett-Hunt, 'Mobile Limits and the Limits of Mobility in French Representations of Urban Space' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015), p. 53
[440] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', p. 337.
[441] *Vertigo*, p. 108
[442] Jeannette Baxter, 'Surrealist Vertigo in *Schwindel. Gefühle*', p. 85

senses',[443] but one's senses may mislead. As Andrew Leak puts it in his study of Georges Perec's 'mapping of loss', there are certain kinds of space that

> *are resistant to* sens *in both senses of that word: direction and meaning. To enter such a space is to be condemned to a desperate wandering, returning always to the same point of departure; or, in terms of the search for meaning, to be adrift in a fruitless divagation that never reaches the* terra firma *of certitude.*[444]

Walter Benjamin's description of Moscow, 'The city is on guard against him, masks itself, flees, intrigues, lures him to wander its circles to the point of exhaustion',[445] could be a summary of the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps*. Mark Crinson describes Bleston as:

> *The city without boundary, a maze traversed by a latter-day Theseus and constantly haunted by the uncanny, in which maps and the plotted nature of detective stories are tantalising but ultimately useless keys to the city's codes. The estrangement of the narrator from the city is itself an epitome of the city's teasing and scattering of memories.*[446]

Cities over time become palimpsests, as demolition and reconstruction, redevelopment and repurposing, overwrite what was there before, creating gaps which speak of absence, and leaving incongruous traces of past presences and events. One thinks of Herman Melville's Redburn, arriving in Liverpool and attempting to find his way with the aid of his father's old guidebook, which proves to be hopelessly out of date. 'This world, my boy, is a moving world',[447] and any attempt to describe the world is also an attempt, doomed from the start, to fix the world into a final form.[448] (The notion of fluidity is linked to the labyrinth: in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Daedalus is inspired in his design for the labyrinth by the 'watery Maeander which deludes the sight, flowing backwards and forwards in its changeable course'.)[449]

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[443] Walter Benjamin, 'One Way Street', cited in Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 25-26

[444] Andrew Leak, 'The Mapping of Loss', in *Georges Perec's Geographies: Material, Performative and Textual Spaces*, ed. Charles Forsdick, Andrew Leak and Richard Phillips (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 17-29 (p. 18)

[445] Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow' (1927), in *Reflections*, pp. 97-30 (p. 99)

[446] Mark Crinson, 'An Introduction', *Urban Memory*, p. xx

[447] Herman Melville, *Redburn* (1849; London: Penguin, 1986), p. 212

[448] Murr, 'Redburn: Henry Melville', *The Lectern* (13 April 2012), <http://thelectern.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/redburn-herman-melville.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[449] Anthony S Kline, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses:* A Complete English Translation and Mythological Index', *The Ovid Collection*, University of Virginia Library, <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph8.htm> [accessed 25 August 2021]. This river gave its name to the decorative border pattern created from one continuous line shaped into a repeated motif, which Karl Kerenyi calls 'the figure of a labyrinth in linear form' (*Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 90)

Erasures are often imperfect, and traces can reappear with time. Sebald's Manchester reveals such traces in the old Jewish quarter ('around the star-shaped complex of Strangeways prison'), where the names on a 'barely decipherable brass plate of a one-time lawyers' office […] had a legendary ring to my ear: Glickman, Grunwald and Gottgetreu'.[450] In *Austerlitz*, Liverpool Street Station (the site of the old Bedlam hospital), before the rebuilding begins in the late 1980s, is portrayed as 'one of the darkest and most sinister places in London, a kind of entrance to the underworld'.[451] The rebuilding work creates labyrinths, an 'ever-changing maze of walls', through which Austerlitz keeps 'almost obsessively trying to imagine […] the location in that huge space of the rooms where the asylum inmates were confined'.[452] Broad Street station is on the site of burial grounds and demolition work there brings up skeletons, the past resurfacing, 'as if the dead were returning from their exile'.[453]

This is an important image for Sebald: 'In fact this ground / Is steeped in history / they find corpses / every time they dig'.[454] This poem ('Calm November Weather') describes the Lustgarten in Berlin, at various times the location for the Berlin City Palace, the Berlin Cathedral, a military parade ground, a park and, immediately after the war, a bomb site. It is thus another place where multiple pasts can make themselves present. It is the German past, specifically, and Sebald invokes similar images in relation to the air war against Germany where he identifies in the silence about this act of war/war crime a 'stream of psychic energy that has not dried up to this day, and which has its source in the well-kept secret of the corpses built into the foundations of our state, a secret that bound all Germans together in the postwar years'.[455] Again, in *The Rings of Saturn*, he cites Joseph Conrad for whom the capital of the Belgian Empire is 'a sepulchral monument erected over a hecatomb of black bodies'.[456] The linking of the dead of Dresden, Hamburg and Berlin with those of the Holocaust and of the atrocities of Belgian colonialism is controversial,[457] and its ethical complexities are beyond the scope of this thesis. It is deeply relevant, however, in terms of what Maxim Silverman calls palimpsestic memory, and Michael Rothberg multidimensional

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[450] *The Emigrants*, p. 157
[451] *Austerlitz*, p. 180
[452] Ibid, p. 183
[453] Ibid, p. 188
[454] 'Calm November Weather', in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 147-48
[455] *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 13
[456] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 122
[457] Brett Ashley Kaplan and Fernando Herrero-Matoses, 'Holocaust Postmemory: W G Sebald and Gerhard Richter', in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Holocaust Literature,* ed. Jenni Adams (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 139-57 (p. 142)

memory, whereby, as Silverman puts it, 'Holocaust literature is always in dialogue with other stories of racialized violence'.[458] It connects also to the theme of the labyrinth, which in many ancient cultures was linked to death and burial, and/or to the spirits of the dead.[459]

Within the labyrinth a precise and confident sense of place and time is challenged. Time does not flow as it does in the outside world. As Crinson says:

> *Urban time is not like a line [...] a continuous sequence of monuments and events. Rather [...] some elements are filtered out, jumped over, left behind or forgotten. Serres[460] uses metaphors like crumpling, folding and liquid turbulence to capture the complex diversity of time.[461]*

The structure of the labyrinth disrupts normal sequence, creating both dense time, 'a time in which past and present intersect, commingle and overlap',[462] and dense space, in which 'the simultaneous traces of many different and non-synchronous periods in the city's history',[463] as well as the sense that all this is changing now, and will go on changing. In this space and time memories and dreams can force themselves to the surface,[464] unexpected connections can be made.

> *A l'image de Bleston se superpose celle des villes de l'antiquité, le monde du rêve fait irruption dans celui de la réalité et lui façonne un visage inédit. La ville de Bleston, jusqu'alors fermée muette, dresse devant Revel son image d'hydre hallucinante et lui adresse un menaçant discours.[465]*

If Bleston/Manchester is for Butor a link to Paris, it links Sebald's Ferber to Jerusalem,[466] and the narrator to Łódź, the Polish industrial centre once known as 'polski Manczester', and the

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[458] Maxim Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 6

[459] Peyronie comments that 'generally speaking, the labyrinth represents the world of evil, and the most developed form of this world was hell' ('The Labyrinth', p. 689), and Petra Eckhard notes that in ancient Egypt the labyrinth was the preferred architectural form used for funerary temples (*Chronotypes of the Uncanny: Time and Space in Postmodern New York Novels* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011), p. 73

[460] Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 58

[461] Mark Crinson and Paul Tyrer, 'Clocking off in Ancoats: Time and Remembrance in the Post-Industrial City', pp. 49-71 (p. 67)

[462] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence,* p. 225

[463] Mark Crinson and Paul Tyrer, 'Clocking off in Ancoats', p. 67

[464] Joseph Mali, 'The Reconciliation of Myth: Benjamin's Homage to Bachofen'*, Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60, 1 (January 1999), pp. 165-87 (p. 179)

[465] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Le Narrateur et son texte dans *L'Emploi du temps* de Michel Butor', *Rocky Mountain Review*, 30, 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 27-40 (p. 33)

[466] See the scale model by 'Frohmann, of Drohobycz' which Ferber sees in a dream (*The Emigrants*, p. 176)

site of the Litzmannstadt ghetto.[467] Butor's mythological/biblical cities are echoed in Sebald's reimagining of Manchester as a post-apocalyptic city, a fire almost suffocated in ash, a necropolis or mausoleum.[468] Thus Revel may be incarcerated in Bleston but he is never solely in Bleston.

> *Chaque monument, chaque objet, chaque image nous renvoyant à d'autres périodes qu'il est nécessaire de ranimer pour y retrouver le secret perdu de leur puissance bonne ou mauvaise [...] Bleston, d'autres périodes et d'autres villes bien au-delà de tes frontières comme celles qui se superposaient dans ma vision samedi, tandis que je regardais les tapisseries du Musée [...] Chaque monument, chaque image nous renvoyant à d'autres périodes et à d'autres villes comme celles qui accompagnent le Vitrail de Caïn [...] Au Théâtre des Nouvelles [...] s'enlaçaient à l'intérieur de ma vision les deux séries de villes et de périodes dont témoignent tes deux grands hiéroglyphes, Bleston, séries de villes et de périodes qui se survivent.[469]*

He finds various windows on to other times and places, through the series of (French) tapestries in the Museum which depict the story of Theseus, the (partial) series of stained-glass windows (also attributed to 'des maîtres' from Revel's homeland) in the Old Cathedral which depict the Biblical narrative of Cain and Abel and a glimpse of an older Bleston, and through the travelogues shown at the cinema exploring historical sites such as Petra, Baalbek, Naxos and Timgad, as well as modern metropolises such as San Francisco and Bombay. For his colleague James, who has never left Bleston, the cinema is 'la seule fenêtre par laquelle il entrevoie, de quels yeux avides, le reste du monde et les autres villes'.[470] Bleston is also associated with Babel, Babylon and Sodom – like Bleston, 'villes maudites'.[471] These spaces – museums and libraries, cinemas and fairgrounds – are where the layers of Bleston can be encountered directly, unobscured, or less obscured, by the city's smoke and mirrors.[472]

Sebald makes the places he describes 'speak of the unspeakable things that happened there'.[473] This does not merely apply to the references to locations linked to the Nazi genocide. Those unspeakable things resonate in Manchester, as they do in the Suffolk

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[467] *The Emigrants*, pp. 235-36

[468] Ibid, pp. 150, 151

[469] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 388-89

[470] Ibid, p. 128

[471] Frédéric Sayer, 'Horreur des villes maudites dans l'œuvre de H P Lovecraft', *Belphegor*, 13, 2 (April 2004) [unpaginated]

[472] Such spaces could be argued to be heterotopic. See Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 22-27; Sudarsan Rangarajan, 'Heterotopias and Collections in Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*', *Symposium*, 57, 1 (2003), pp. 27-48

[473] Eelco Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory*, 45, 1 (February 2006), pp. 1-29 (p. 13)

countryside.[474] The locations become portals or fistulae through which the past seeps through into the present.[475] Of course, Sebald encountered none of the horrors of the Holocaust directly, as one of the *Nachgeborenen* (born later),[476] and nor do his protagonists: both Ferber and Austerlitz escape before the war and only discover much later the fate of their parents who remained, whilst Bereyter loses his fiancée but does not himself face the camps. The experience is therefore mediated through places such as Breendonk and Terezín, and through the testimony of others: the pre-war diary of Ferber's mother, the memories of Austerlitz's former neighbour and nursemaid Věra, and the quotations from and references to Jean Améry, H G Adler and Dan Jacobson.[477]

In the aftermath of the devastation of war, the notion of maps became even more profoundly problematic. National boundaries were being redrawn, vast swathes of the population were displaced and national and political identities were challenged and threatened not only by those factors, but by the trauma of the reckoning. Furthermore, the widespread destruction of urban landscapes across the war zones meant that 'with the demolition of guided pathways and social and physical barriers between spaces, as walls and doors collapse, large ruins evolve into a labyrinthine structure which permits the making of a multitude of paths'.[478] As Anthony Vidler says, noting the loss of territorial security associated with the first world war, 'the site of the uncanny was now no longer confined to the house or the city, but more properly extended to the no-man's land between the trenches, or the fields of ruins left after bombardment'.[479] Such spaces create a sense of unease and estrangement, as well as disorientation.[480]

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[474] See *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 59-62
[475] Eelco Runia, 'Presence', p. 16
[476] See Bertolt Brecht's 1939 poem, 'An die Nachgeborenen', *Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht*, p. 734
[477] Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*; H G Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-45*; Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*. Later chapters will explore what this mediation means, and the challenges it presents.
[478] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, p. 87
[479] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 7
[480] See the work of Ciaran Carson, whose poetry describes the labyrinths created in Belfast during the Troubles: 'A map which shows the bridge that collapsed; the streets that never existed. / Today's plan is already yesterday's – the streets that were there are gone. / And the shape of the jails cannot be shown for security reasons.' (Ciaran Carson, 'Turn Again' in *Belfast Confetti* (Loughcrew: Gallery Press, 1989), p. 11)

Ruins are spatial manifestations of memory, the mind's attempts to reconstruct what was from what remains.[481] But they suggest not only the past, but the possibility of future changes:

> *Ruins do not merely evoke the past. They contain a still and seemingly quiescent present, and they also suggest forebodings, pointing to future erasure and, subsequently, the reproduction of space, thus conveying a sense of the transience of all spaces.*[482]

Sebald recalls that 'few things were so clearly linked in my mind with the word "city" as mounds of rubble, cracked walls, and empty windows through which you saw the empty air'.[483] Butor describes the aftermath of war in terms of familiar landscapes rendered unrecognisable:

> *Les villes entières étaient détruites; c'était le paysage tout entier de la culture ou de la civilisation française qui avait été bouleversé. Il n'y avait plus de bâtiments lézardés sur lesquels donner des coups de pied. Ils étaient déjà tombés en poussière. Que restait-il? [...] Il n'était pas question pour nous de donner de grands coups de pied allègres dans de vieux bâtiments qui tenaient encore un peu debout, puisque rien ne subsistait. Donc tonalité tout autre. [...] Quand on est dans une ville rasée, on se promène au milieu des gravats, et l'on cherche si jamais il y aurait quelque chose à sauver.*[484]

In *The Rings of Saturn* the gardener at Somerleyton describes how he watched squadrons of bombers setting off from nearby airfields, and pictured 'the German cities going up in flames, the firestorms setting the heavens alight, and the survivors rooting about in the ruins'.[485] He recalls the relief map of Germany which he had studied at the time, portrayed as 'a medieval and vastly enigmatic land' of castles and cathedrals, hard to reconcile with the ruined landscape he imagines after the bombing. This map is presumably related to the playing cards recalled by Sebald in his speech 'An Attempt at Restitution':

> *In the Cities Quartet, as I reconstruct it from memory, Germany was still undivided [...] And not only undivided but intact, for the uniformly dark brown pictures of the cities, which gave me at an early age the idea of a*

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481 Barbara A Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2002), p. 16; Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, p. 139
482 Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins,* p. 125
483 *On the Natural History of Destruction,* p. 74; see also an almost identically worded passage in *The Emigrants*, p. 30
484 *Improvisations*, pp. 16-17
485 *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 38

> *dark fatherland, showed the cities of Germany without exception as they had been before the war.*[486]

The game is credited by Sebald with his 'delight in topography', but it also reveals the limitations of topography – Sebald 'could not imagine a journey to [Stuttgart], any more than I could think what the city itself might look like, for whenever I thought of Stuttgart all I could see was the picture of Stuttgart Central Station on one of the cards in the game'.[487] The city remained unknown territory to him post-war, 'remote and with something not quite right about it'.[488]

Bleston is characterised by its 'terrains vagues' which, to the extent that Butor was reflecting Manchester's actual geography, were presumably sites of wartime bombing, cleared of the remains of buildings and now used to house the travelling fair. They are places marked by absence, not only in terms of the memory of the buildings that had been there, their history and habitation, but repeatedly as the fair fills the space and then leaves. This is quite distinct from the other kind of open space the city offers, that of the park, an enclosed and managed substitute for the open countryside which is out of reach for most of its inhabitants. Sebald's Max Ferber too emphasises these spaces, in a passage very reminiscent of Butor's words quoted above:

> *There were whole blocks where the doors and windows were boarded up, and whole districts where everything had been demolished. [...] once the demolition rubble had been removed, all that was left to recall the lives of thousands of people was the grid-like layout of the streets. When night fell upon those vast spaces, which I came to think of as the Elysian Fields, fires would begin to flicker here and there [...] On that bare terrain, which was like a glacis around the heart of the city,[489] it was in fact always and only children that one encountered.[490]*

Clearly these absences in Manchester do not signify the kind of 'nettoyage' that Camus described in *La Chute*,[491] rather, the combination of the legacy of wartime bombing raids and social mobility drawing the middle classes out to the suburbs of the city. But Manchester is never merely Manchester, to either Sebald or Butor, and the empty spaces link to the ruins of

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[486] 'An Attempt at Restitution', *Campo Santo*, ed. Sven Meyer, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 206-15 (pp. 207-09)
[487] 'An Attempt at Restitution', p. 208
[488] Ibid, p. 208
[489] Note that Bleston's 'terrains vagues' similarly encircle the city centre.
[490] *The Emigrants,* pp. 151, 157-58
[491] 'Moi, j'habite le quartier juif, ou ce qui s'appelait ainsi jusqu'au moment où nos frères hitlériens y ont fait de la place. Quel lessivage! Soixante-quinze milles juifs déportés ou assassinés, c'est le nettoyage par le vide' (Albert Camus, *La Chute* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 15)

post-war Europe, just as the Jewish names on derelict buildings carry the suggestion of the deportations that had emptied similar buildings in European cities.

Just as the map cannot show what was there before the bombs fell or before the slums were cleared, it cannot adequately answer the question of what constitutes the 'centre', nor how the city links to and merges with other towns, as part of a vast network. Umberto Eco identifies three types of labyrinth,[492] the third of which is the 'meander'[493] or rhizome, 'a net in which all points are connected to constitute an unlimited, potentially infinite territory without a centre, exit or outside'.[494] The experience of the nineteenth/twentieth-century metropolis is, essentially, that of Eco's third type of labyrinth.[495] The city might not literally be unlimited but it appears so to its inhabitants and is thus a source of insecurity and uncertainty. As the great cities grew and merged with adjacent villages and towns, the sense of where they began and ended became blurred, one city the centre of a wheel that shared spokes with other wheels, and so on across the country.[496] As with Kafka's *The Castle*,[497] the village and town are encapsulated in the description of the castle as 'a series of interconnected buildings', so the quest is a circular one, and offers no escape from the constrictions of modern existence (as Revel realises when he attempts to leave Bleston on foot). The city contained labyrinths, was itself a labyrinth, and was part of a much larger labyrinth. The city-labyrinth could only be experienced in a fragmentary way, therefore, and its whole was impossible to grasp. The city's scope goes beyond its boundaries; it is 'a net in which all points are connected to constitute an unlimited, potentially infinite territory without a centre, exit or outside'.[498]

The question of what lies at the perilous centre of Bleston's labyrinth has been posited, nonetheless.[499] It is, according to Michel Bertrand, 'précisément l'objet de la quête menée par

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[492] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language,* p. 80-84. The other types of labyrinth, which we will touch on occasionally, are the classical (linear, unicursal) labyrinth, and the maze, in which one must make choices, and can therefore make mistakes. In the former, no Ariadne's thread should be needed as there are no choices to be made, in the latter; the thread is essential to avoid endless repetition of the same wrong turnings.

[493] See Anthony S Kline, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'

[494] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost', pp. 298-99

[495] Eco's definition and Baker's further exposition, seem to me to provide a useful description of a particular kind of nineteenth/twentieth-century city, epitomised in this context by Manchester, and to chime with both *L'Emploi du temps* and with Sebald's urban labyrinths. However, I do not intend to give great weight to the 'postmodern' label in relation to either Butor or Sebald.

[496] Wendy B Faris, *Labyrinths of Language*, p. 44

[497] Franz Kafka, *The Castle,* trans. J A Underwood (London: Vintage Books, 2005)

[498] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost', pp. 298-99

[499] It can be argued that the 'centre' is not a place but a date (an elusive one, 29 February, which sits more or less centrally within the narrative), whose events are not recorded but which the narrative suggests may carry some significance (*L'Emploi du temps*, p. 394). See Chapter 6 for more about the significance of 29 February.

Revel tant dans la ville de Bleston qu'au travers de l'écriture de son journal'.[500] The cathedral should be the civic and religious centre of the city, around which the city is organised,[501] but Bleston has two, l'Ancien and le Nouveau, in permanent conflict and competition. Alexandra Place, a circular plaza within the space demarcated by the trinity of stations, is what Revel assumes initially is the centre of the city, but when Revel asks Horace Buck on their first encounter for directions to the centre of Bleston, Buck responds 'Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire par centre?'.[502] Butor himself said that 'nous vivons le crépuscule de la notion du centre. Ce qu'il faut aujourd'hui, ce sont des réseaux, des anneaux, des matrices'.[503] Thus, to seek in the text of *L'Emploi du temps* the centre of the labyrinth will be as futile as Revel's own quest. What we find there instead is the network of relationships and potential relationships created by quotation and intertextual references, the intersections of different traditions, cultures and mythologies, all constantly shifting. In the absence of a centre, all is discourse.[504]

Both Butor and Sebald demonstrate a fascination with railways, the ultimate network, connecting each city with every other. The setting for Butor's *La Modification* is a train journey from Paris to Rome, and *L'Emploi du temps* opens and closes with Revel's arrival and departure at/from one of the three Bleston stations. The railway station is often literally the point of access to the underground, but is also portrayed here as the entrance to the labyrinth of the city, 'with gates closing behind and nowhere to go but forward, into the lurking night and the oppressive squalor of Bleston'.[505] Sebald's Austerlitz had a particular early obsession with 'the idea of a network such as that of the entire railway system'.[506] Railway stations are clearly liminal spaces, thresholds to other cities or countries. They are nodes on a network which connects with other networks, to infinity, and where the traveller may be faced with complex choices about which route to take to reach their destination, weighing a host of variables before reaching a decision. Liminal spaces inevitably come with

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[500] Michel Bertrand, 'Les Structures archaïques, fondatrices du futur dans les premières œuvres de Michel Butor', *Lettres romanes*, 66, 3-4 (July 2012), pp. 451-67 (p. 456)

[501] The medieval city would have developed around the manor/castle and its church.

[502] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 29. Note that in this respect, as in others, Bleston could be said to be 'un miroir de Bouville' (Stephane Gallon, *Michel Butor: L'Emploi du temps dans* L'Emploi du temps (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016), pp. 108-09), Sartre's 1938 fictional version of Le Havre in *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017). Mary Lydon discusses the parallels and differences between the two novels/cities in *Perpetuum Mobile* (pp. 73-80). Georges Raillard also makes an oblique reference to Sartre's novel, placing Revel in 'un univers de la Nausée' (*Butor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 41)

[503] Jean-Marie le Sidaner, *Michel Butor: Voyageur à la roue. Entretien suivi de textes* (Paris: Encre Éditions, 1979), p. 65

[504] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), p. 249

[505] Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst*, p. 183

[506] *Austerlitz*, pp. 44-45

a sense of the uncanny, a threshold between home and *ailleurs*; thus, the railway station appears to be in and of one city but the connections and interactions with the innumerable other cities to which trains are heading and from which trains are arriving mean that it will never entirely belong here. It is both familiar and unknown, both hidden from view and in plain sight.[507] Many railway stations are also, literally, thresholds to an underground world.[508]

In mid twentieth-century Europe, of course, the railway network acquired a darker association,[509] which is explicitly present in *Austerlitz*. Whether Butor witnessed the trains leaving the Gare d'Austerlitz for the camps, or those bringing the deportees home after Liberation, we do not know. He cannot have been unaware, however, that the railway network with which he had been fascinated as a boy, and for which his father worked, had become a means to take many thousands to their deaths, as it was across Occupied Europe.

> *A quel autre moment de l'histoire les bagnes se sont refermés sur plus d'innocents, à quelle autre époque les enfants furent-ils arrachés à leur mère, entassés dans des wagons à bestiaux tels que je les ai vus par un sombre matin à la gare d'Austerlitz?*[510]

Sebald shows how these transitory places are implicated in the Holocaust. Austerlitz is a child of the Kindertransport, for whom the disused ladies' waiting room at Liverpool Street Station proves the catalyst to remembering his past. In his quest to discover the fate of his mother, Austerlitz visits Terezín, a city which became a ghetto prison, and another temporary stop on the way to Auschwitz. He also believes he has tracked his father to the concentration camp of Gurs in the Pyrenees, and at least hypothetically to the Gare d'Austerlitz from where he imagines he would have left Paris, and from where many thousands of Jews departed for Pithiviers and Beaune la Rolande, and for Auschwitz. Max Ferber describes how 'Waiting at stations, the announcements on the public address, sitting in the train, the country passing by [...], the looks of fellow passengers – all of it is torture to me'.[511] Ferber does not say, but the

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[507] Stephen Keane, 'Imaginary Homelands', p. 84

[508] Tim Ingold, *Lines*, p 53. See the final pages of *Vertigo*, where the narrator pauses at the threshold of an underground station, and, 'although I stood there for a considerable time, on the very brink so to speak, [...] I did not dare to take the final step' (p. 259)

[509] Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009)

[510] François Mauriac, in his clandestine publication, *Le Cahier Noir*, p. 51. This was circulated under the pseudonym Forez, in 1943, through Éditions de Minuit.

[511] *The Emigrants*, p. 169. This passage strikingly resembles Elie Wiesel's words in his autobiography, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), concerning 'those nocturnal trains that crossed the devastated continent': 'Their shadow haunts my writing. They symbolise solitude, distress, and the relentless march of Jewish multitudes towards agony and death. I freeze every time I hear a train whistle' (p. 74)

narrator subsequently discovers, that Ferber's parents 'were taken from Munich to Riga in November 1941, in one of the first deportation trains, and murdered there'.[512]

Paradoxically, whilst the labyrinth as a network is infinite in its connections, both temporally and spatially, it is also, inevitably, a carceral space. It is significant, therefore, that Strangeways Prison in Manchester looms large for both Butor and Sebald.

> *Rencontrant l'un des angles de l'enceinte hexagonale de la Prison, je me suis détourné de mon chemin pour faire le tour de cette région dangereuse, rasant, dans le crépuscule, son haut rempart à la cime hérissée de tessons, le tour de cette région qui est comme un trou, Bleston, à l'intérieur de ton tissu, un trou dans lequel tu rassembles, telle une amibe dans sa vacuole, les corps que tu n'as pas assimilés, ne pouvant pas les rejeter à l'extérieur parce que tes limites sont trop imprécises, cette région en résonance avec ce qui est le plus lointain, et qui apporte sa menace jusqu'en ton cœur, avec le bâtiment pénitentiaire au centre, en forme d'étoile à six branches, à la fois ta condamnation et ta sauvegarde, Bleston, dont la représentation sur ton plan, semblable à un cristal de neige noire, m'était apparue à la fin d'avril, lorsque je te brûlais en effigie, comme une sorte de négative de la marque éblouissante imprimée au front de Caïn.[513]*

The prison as shown on the map of Bleston[514]

The region of the prison is described as 'un trou', which is a slang term for prison (literally meaning a hole or perhaps a void),[515] and the building itself is a six-pointed star. Revel compares its shape on the map also to the mark of Cain. Strangeways is described in Sebald's Manchester texts, *The Emigrants*[516] and *After Nature,* in very similar terms: 'The star-shaped Strangeways / Prison, an overwhelming / panoptic structure whose walls / are as high as

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[512] *The Emigrants*, p. 178
[513] *L'Emploi du temps,* pp. 346-47
[514] Ibid, p. 8
[515] For example, the 1957 novel *Le Trou* (later filmed by Jacques Becker) is set in the La Santé prison (a star-shaped building, like Strangeways)
[516] *The Emigrants*, p. 157

Jericho's'.[517] But its strongest echoes are found in *Austerlitz,* where the protagonist's architectural interests lead him to ponder the prevalence of the hexagonal structure in prison and fortress building, whilst his quest for his mother leads him to the star-shaped ghetto/concentration camp town of Terezín. The narrative is punctuated by these places of incarceration. Austerlitz has a particular interest in what he calls 'our mightiest projects':[518] fortifications, railway architecture, prisons and law courts. We meet the narrator first in the carceral space of Antwerp's Zoo, and after his first conversation with Austerlitz, he is moved to visit Breendonk, one of the fortresses that Austerlitz had mentioned.[519] But it is not the history of how such places were designed, the flawed theories of defence against enemy incursion, that confront him there, but the much more recent past, Breendonk's conversion into a Nazi transit camp for deportation to Auschwitz, and a place of torture. In the final pages, the narrator revisits Breendonk, and reads about Kaunas, the notorious Lithuanian fortress which became a killing site for the Nazis, in the account by Dan Jacobson.[520]

Strangeways is not the only prison which Revel encounters in Bleston. The hotel to which he has been assigned on arrival (where the receptionist is described as 'cette geôlière'), is called *L'Écrou*. Aside from the literal meaning of a nut or a screw, 'l'écrou' is a term for a prison register, and 'la levée d'écrou' refers to release from prison.[521] This is lost in the English translation, where the hotel's name is, in the interests of plausibility, rendered as the more conventional *Anchor*. Jennifer Waelti-Walters proposes that *L'Écrou* here echoes Henry James,[522] which of course may also be a valid (and appropriately sinister) interpretation, but the carceral connotations of the name are echoed not only in descriptions of the place itself but in other references throughout the text and would thus seem to be particularly significant.

Bleston is not, of course, literally a prison. Revel does leave, at the end of his contract, as he could have done at any time during his time in Bleston. Indeed, he acknowledges that after the failure of his attempt to walk out of the city into countryside, he has made no further attempts to escape. Bleston imprisons through the sedating effect of its fumes, just as Gide's labyrinth did.[523] Revel's futile attempts to leave remind one of a trope of supernatural fiction,

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[517] *After Nature*, p. 98
[518] *Austerlitz*, p. 16
[519] Ibid, pp. 24-34
[520] *Austerlitz*, pp. 412-15; Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*
[521] This is presumably linked to the English slang term for a prison officer, a 'screw'.
[522] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor*, p. 45
[523] André Gide, *Thésée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946)

whereby the protagonist is trapped in a town or village, where all apparent routes out simply lead back to the starting point. The phenomenon of urban spread is a fact of modern life, exemplified by Manchester, but as always in *L'Emploi du temps* there is the suggestion of some other force at work (at least in Revel's mind), some Lovecraftian sorcery that prevents escape. The labyrinth deceives, by its nature, but also by design.[524] Whilst the term (labyrinth, or maze) is often used simply to suggest complexity and/or the proliferation of seemingly arbitrary choices, it does also carry suggestions of disguise and trickery. In Bleston, Revel is warned of 'ces rues presque désertes où l'on se perd [...] peut-être avez-vous déjà essayé de vous échapper, mais en ce cas, ce n'est que le commencement, [...] ce n'est pas votre chemin que vous perdez'.[525]

The city is 'incomparablement plus déroutant que le palais de Crète, puisqu'il s'augmente à mesure que je le parcours, puisqu'il se déforme à mesure que je l'explore'.[526] The purpose of the trickery may be to prevent the explorer from reaching the centre (either to protect what is there from the intruder or to protect the intruder from what is there), or to prevent them from escaping. As Jean Baudrillard said of Venice, 'The city is built like a trap, a maze, a labyrinth that inevitably […] brings people back to the same points'.[527] Potentially, once lost, the exit might never be discovered (thus the city becomes a carceral space, even whilst seeming to offer numerous routes of escape). This is another glimpse behind the mask, to Paris under Occupation, where leaving was dangerous, even impossible, for many.

We have considered a number of ways in which the city as portrayed in a map, from a bird's-eye (or panoramic, or 'survivors') view, misleads. It may appear to have many exit points, but be impossible to leave, to not only contain prisons but to be a prison, both open and closed at the same time (a kind of spatial aporia). It may be changed to such an extent, by design or by destruction, that the map is of no help in navigating its streets. It may reveal through its buildings and street names the traces of a past ostensibly long since forgotten. And it may appear discrete and separate but in fact be merged with other towns and settlements, as well as being linked to an almost infinite number of others through the

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[524] The hedge maze at Somerleyton (*The Rings of Saturn*, p. 38) or the original Cretan labyrinth on the one hand, Dunwich Heath (*The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 171-72), the maze of dark, narrow, winding streets in the industrial metropolis on the other (see de Tocqueville's description of Manchester as 'this damp, dark labyrinth' in *Voyages en Angleterre, Irlande, Suisse et Algérie*, p. 105).
[525] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 117
[526] Ibid, p. 247. Sebald marks this passage in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*.
[527] Sophie Calle, 'Please Follow Me', in *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*, ed. Steve Redhead (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 71-82 (p. 78)

transport network. Not only that, but streets which might appear easy to navigate, are disorientating through geography or climate, or through other forces at work there, criminal or military. The labyrinth deceives and imprisons, it disorientates and frustrates. We need to change our focus, to consider how the labyrinth is experienced by the individual within it.

Chapter 4

Lost in the City-Labyrinth

> *Peu à peu, ma malchance m'a paru l'effet d'une volonté mauvaise, toutes*
> *ces propositions des mensonges, et qu'il m'a fallu de plus en plus lutter*
> *contre l'impression que mes démarches étaient condamnées d'avance, que*
> *je tournais autour d'un mur, mystifié par des portes en trompe-l'œil ou des*
> *personnages en trompe-l'œil.[528]*

In the previous chapter we considered the city-labyrinth primarily from a panoramic, bird's-eye, or cartographer's viewpoint. However*, L'Emploi du temps* and Sebald's narratives focus on the experience of the individual *within* the labyrinth, for whom the inadequacy of maps and guides becomes a matter of survival. *L'Emploi du temps* is an account of being lost in a labyrinthine city which confounds its protagonist's attempts to grasp its geography, and of the accommodations which its inhabitants have to make in order to survive within it.

We will explore the perils of the labyrinth city, the ways in which it disorientates and deceives, with smoke and mirrors, creating the need for a map but making that map inevitably a false guide. The experience of getting lost will be considered, in *L'Emploi du temps* where this is Revel's earliest experience of the city, and in Sebald's work, where the narrators of *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn* lose their way, and where Austerlitz embodies the state of lostness as someone detached from his own identity and history.

The notion of the uncanny, mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, is important here as we consider how this is experienced by the wanderer in the city-labyrinth, especially for those who are themselves *unheimlich* through exile. For both Butor and Sebald, whichever city one is in, one is also *ailleurs*. Whether we are in a Manchester haunted by Occupied Paris, or by the Litzmannstadt ghetto[529] there is always another presence, or other presences, whether the past and the ghosts of that place, or the past and the ghosts that Revel, Ferber, Austerlitz and the Sebaldian narrator bring with them. The protagonists in *L'Emploi du temps* and in Sebald's narratives are all separated from *Heimat*, and return is either impossible or compromised – there is no way that they can reach home, and nowhere that they can be at home. The state of lostness is a psychological as well as a physical condition, one which may

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[528] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 62
[529] *The Emigrants*, pp. 235-36

be experienced by those who return home after much time has passed and find it (or themselves) changed, as well as by those attempting to navigate an unfamiliar landscape. What is lost may also be one's own past, and so the struggle to find one's way becomes the struggle to retrieve and confront memories, perhaps of past trauma. We will explore the particular way in which Butor and Sebald explore their own indirect and mediated associations with war, destruction and genocide through the experience of the individual wanderer in the labyrinth of the city. The labyrinth itself may be a site of trauma, but Revel and Austerlitz also experience these spaces as labyrinthine *because of* the trauma they bring with them into the city – there is a two-way relationship. The experience of being lost in the city, as described by Butor and Sebald, is linked to a sense of being trapped, and there is a plethora of carceral imagery in these texts, along with the depictions of a number of literally carceral spaces. Clearly this links back to the origins of the labyrinth, which trapped both the Minotaur and anyone who ventured to enter it, but which is not absolutely closed: it works by repeated deferrals and delays, by temporal as well as spatial disorientation and, too, by deception. But in focusing on the experience of the individual within the labyrinth, we must also note that the individual is not merely passive but resisting, constantly trying to make sense of their environment, to hold on to who they are.

The city's labyrinthine spaces have been construed as 'the source of modern anxiety, from revolution and epidemic to phobia and alienation',[530] and the crowd which is such an essential feature of metropolitan life is itself 'the newest and most impenetrable labyrinth in the maze of the city'.[531] The metaphor also suggests that the metropolis is a place of peril.[532] These qualities make the city-labyrinth the perfect setting for crime and its detection. Eugène Sue's serial novel *Les Mystères de Paris*[533] spawned a genre, 'City mysteries',[534] in which the labyrinth is both setting and narrative structure and the metropolis an environment that generates disorientation and facilitates concealment. Urban detective novels often draw not only on the disorienting 'surface' geography of the metropolis, but on the notion that there is an underworld, literally or metaphorically below that surface, and still more dangerous and

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[530] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. ix

[531] Walter Benjamin, M16.3, *Gessamelte Schriften*, cited in Graham Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis*, pp. 47, 142

[532] There is a vast literature on the perils of urban life, which initially focused upon issues of public health and poverty, but came to encompass the sense of alienation and anomie arising from the size, density and heterogeneity of the city (see Georg Simmel, Louis Wirth, Max Weber, Henri Lefebvre amongst others, whose work has of course been extensively analysed, critiqued, challenged and updated).

[533] Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43; Paris: J J Pauvert, 1963)

[534] Sara James, 'Eugène Sue, G W M Reynolds and the City as "Mystery"', in *Babylon or New Jerusalem?*, pp. 247-59

baffling.[535] In Peter Ackroyd's 'biography' of London, he notes the Victorian invocation of the labyrinth myth in the context of the city, where the Minotaur represented the evils of poverty and prostitution which devoured the young, and the crusaders against these conditions were given the name of Theseus.[536] This is particularly striking in the work of journalist and campaigner W T Stead, whose exposé of the trafficking in child prostitutes was entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', and begins with a re-telling of the Theseus legend, before drawing the parallel with 'the maze of London brotheldom':

> *Within that labyrinth wander, like lost souls, the vast host of London prostitutes [...] Many, no doubt, who venture but a little way within the maze make their escape. But multitudes are swept irresistibly on and on to be destroyed in due season, to give place to others, who also will share their doom. The maw of the London Minotaur is insatiable, and none that go into the secret recesses of his lair return again.[537]*

The more common danger of the urban labyrinth is that of disorientation and losing one's way. Ackroyd cites Thomas de Quincey ('a stranger would soon lose his way in such a maze'), and H G Wells, who goes further in suggesting that without recourse to cabs, 'in a little while the whole population, so vast and incomprehensible is the intricate complexity of this great city, would be hopelessly lost for ever'.[538] For Charles Dickens, one of London's great cartographers, the city is a finite labyrinth: its compelling but oppressive vitality and its threat to the unprotected innocent is offset by the pastoral countryside, where there is, at least for some, the possibility of an exit to a better life. Bleston resembles more closely Engels' description of London as 'a town [...] where a man might wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach'.[539] Thus Revel's attempts to walk out of Bleston into the surrounding countryside that he believes must be there, are inevitably thwarted: the best that Bleston can offer are endless suburbs and the promise of 'de jolis parcs'.[540] The contemporary labyrinth becomes a symbol of human insecurity and efforts to find a centre of meaning. As André Peyronie, in his study of the labyrinth in literature and culture, says:

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[535] The use by both Butor and Sebald of the tropes of detective fiction will be examined in Chapter 6
[536] Peter Ackroyd, *London: A Biography* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), pp. 584-85
[537] W T Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of our Secret Commission', *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 July 1885), <http://www.attackingthedevil.co.uk/pmg/tribute/mt1.php> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[538] Peter Ackroyd, *London*, p. 585
[539] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 23
[540] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 42. Ackroyd quotes Arthur Machen, who describes believing that he has reached the outskirts of the city, only to turn a corner and realise that he was still in the labyrinth (*London*, p. 584)

> *During the nineteenth century the conviction that there was necessarily a path leading to an end died out and, in the space left devoid of its sacred aura, the modern wanderings began [...] the modern seekers of meaning run the constant risk of indifferent and meaningless peregrinations. The collapse of the image of the centre is undoubtedly the reason for the prodigious development of the theme of the labyrinth. With the death of God, the knights left the forest and Man and humanity entered the labyrinth.*[541]

From the very beginning of *L'Emploi du temps*, with Revel's arrival in Bleston, we find an apparently very literal, even mundane, account of getting lost in a strange city. The city immediately challenges his ability to locate himself – 'j'ai commencé par me perdre'.[542] He is disorientated by the 'myriade de petits miroirs'[543] which reflect and multiply the light, and by the city's 'vapeurs brunes' or 'sournoises', literally, smoke and mirrors.[544] The fumes have a dual role. Firstly, there is a narcotic effect, which Revel attributes to Bleston's sorcery: 'la gigantesque sorcellerie insidieuse de Bleston m'a envahi et envoûté, m'a égaré loin de moi-même dans un désert de fumées'.[545] They numb and diminish the sensibilities ('le terrible engourdissement'),[546] rendering the city's inhabitants passive within the labyrinth – it is this sedation that Revel attempts to resist. Butor was certainly familiar with André Gide's work and thus it seems relevant to note the echoes here of his *Thésée*[547] where the physical design of the labyrinth is not its most disorientating feature: Gide's Daedalus augments it with 'des fumées semi-narcotiques' which sap the will, but also stimulate futile activity, a personal *imbroglio*, and create a labyrinth within the individual:

> *Il n'est pas de geôle qui vaille devant un propos de fuite obstiné, pas de barrière ou de fosse que hardiesse et résolution ne franchissent, je pensais que, pour retenir dans le labyrinthe, le mieux était de faire en sorte, non point tant qu'on ne put (tâche de me bien comprendre), mais qu'on n'en voulut pas sortir. [...] Il importait encore et surtout de diminuer jusqu'à l'annihilation leur vouloir.*[548]

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[541] André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', p. 719
[542] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 56-57
[543] Ibid,, p. 9
[544] Ibid, pp. 9, 11
[545] Ibid, p. 37
[546] Ibid, p. 11
[547] André Gide, *Thésée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946). Gide's Minotaur is not monstrous, but beautiful (if stupid), a seductive rather than a terrifying figure. The threat posed is not of being devoured, but of being seduced and sedated, internalising the labyrinth so that escape becomes unimaginable, and hope is lost. (Alexandre Ablamowicz, 'L'Espace de l'homme égaré', in *Espaces romanesques,* ed. Michel Crouzet (Paris: PUF, 1982), pp. 47-57 (p. 56); Laura R Kubinyi, 'Defense of a Dialogue: Michel Butor's *Passing Time*', *boundary 2*, 4, 3 (Spring 1976), pp. 885-904 (p. 887)).
[548] André Gide, *Thésée*, pp. 58-59

More literally, the polluting smoke combines with the natural climate to create thick fog and smog which reduce visibility and make it impossible to see more than a small area of the city at any one time. This also has the effect that the distinction between day and night, and between the seasons of the year, is lost, and thus the literal disorientation is not only spatial but temporal. Butor says that 'dans cette brume [...] on ne sait jamais exactement à quel moment de la journée on se trouve, on est dans une sorte d'errance aussi bien en ce qui concerne le temps qu'en ce qui concerne l'espace'.[549]

Butor's opening sentence, 'Les lueurs se sont multipliées', suggests initially that clarity of vision is possible. However, whilst there is a quantitative increase in light, much of it is reflected and therefore potentially disorienting[550] and it is still 'insuffisante'.[551] The darkness of Bleston is attributable both to the heavy pall of smoke and soot which hangs permanently over the city, and to the fact that Revel has arrived late, and everything is closed. What light there is merely emphasises the fact that 'toutes les fenêtres étaient obscures […] toutes les vitrines étaient fermées'.[552] He also notes that 'les rares personnes que je croisais semblaient se hâter, comme s'il ne restait plus que quelques instants avant un rigoureux couvre-feu', [553] suggesting that this darkness is something imposed rather than an entirely natural occurrence. The 'myriade de petits miroirs'[554] described by Revel on his arrival in Bleston is more than a literal description of the reflections of raindrops on the train windows. The lights of the city are multiplied by these reflections, and this is soon translated into the multiplication of stations, as Revel leaves Bleston Hamilton Station to find a taxi or a hotel, and when he gives up, returns instead to Bleston New Station: 'déjà ce court périple m'avait égaré'.[555] This pattern of duplication will continue throughout the text: there are two Cathedrals, three Chinese restaurants, as well as three stations, creating the literal difficulty of distinguishing between them when asking for or giving directions as well as the suggestion of a hall of mirrors. (There are also two sisters, and Revel's romantic interest is engaged by one, only to

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[549] Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Michel Butor*, p. 98
[550] One might think of the folkloric trope of the marsh light, or will-o'-the-wisp, which leads the unwary traveller away from the safe paths. 'John Brand on Will With A Wisp, 1777', *The Earth's Anomalous Lightforms*, ed. Sean B Palmer, <http://inamidst.com/lights/wisp/brand1777> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[551] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 9
[552] Ibid, p. 12
[553] Ibid, pp. 12-13
[554] Ibid, p. 9
[555] Ibid, p. 13

be transferred to the other – ultimately, he loses both.)[556] Having been misled by the mirroring of the railway stations, Revel is soon misled by the duplication of Cathedrals; he asks for the bus stop near the Cathedral and is directed to get off at the stop near to the New Cathedral, whose existence at that stage is unknown to him. As a result, 'j'étais revenu à mon point de départ'.[557] His response is to be 'furieux comme si j'avais été berné',[558] seemingly by the city itself. Again, he extrapolates from these failures, attributing them to Bleston's hostility.

> *Peu à peu, ma malchance m'a paru l'effet d'une volonté mauvaise, toutes ces propositions des mensonges, et qu'il m'a fallu de plus en plus lutter contre l'impression que mes démarches étaient condamnées d'avance, que je tournais autour d'un mur, mystifié par des portes en trompe-l'œil ou des personnages en trompe-l'œil.[559]*

We are constantly reminded of mirrors[560] and *trompe-l'œil* as 'Revel est pris au piège d'une relation spéculaire ou les rencontres avec les hommes et les lieux lui font présages et miroirs'.[561] It is notable that Revel's 'unmasking' of 'J C Hamilton' occurs under and is reflected by the spherical mirror in the Baileys' lounge, a mirror that has its duplicate in the home of the author, George Burton, in which 'la pièce entière se trouve reproduite concentrée', but in which, on the occasion of Anne's engagement celebrations, Revel finds he cannot see his own reflection – he is lost.[562] In the final stages of his struggles with Bleston, Revel sees the raindrops on his window as 'minuscules miroirs sphériques',[563] echoing both the spherical mirror referred to above, and the 'myriade de petits miroirs' he sees in the train windows on his arrival.[564]

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[556] Note that duplication in Butor's work disrupts comprehension, whereas in Proust it creates depth: 'The two pathways (the Méséglise and the Guermantes ways), the two Vinteuil compositions, the two romantic relationships, these offer by virtue of their depth, the possibility of developing a shape or a sense structure for [Marcel's] life – a means through which noncoincidence might cohere' (Jessica Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought: Art, Literature and Music after Merleau-Ponty* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 27)
[557] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 39
[558] Ibid, p. 39
[559] Ibid, p. 62
[560] Note Richard Macksey's comments on Beckett: 'the labyrinth through which the compulsive voice wanders […] is a maze of mirrors' ('The Artist in the Labyrinth: Design or Dasein', *MLN*, 77, 3 (May 1962), pp. 239-56 (p. 249))
[561] Daniel Bougnoux, 'Approche de quelques lieux butoriens', in *Approches de Michel Butor: Colloques de Cérisy*, ed. Georges Raillard (Paris: Union générale éditions, 1974), pp. 345-67 (p. 351)
[562] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 359-60
[563] Ibid, p. 391
[564] Ibid, p. 9

Despite having lost his way on arrival, Revel initially relies on first impressions and half-understood directions, but rapidly realises that he needs a plan of the city, augmented by a bus timetable, and a guide to the city's 'treasures'. All of these are supplemented by George Burton's detective novel (as well as by the advice of other residents). Of these guides to Bleston, the first (the map) is destroyed (by Revel himself) and then re-purchased, the second (the detective novel) is lent and believed lost, and repurchased. Both the map and the detective novel represent in different ways Bleston's streets and landmarks, but the latter also is believed to disguise real individuals and real events behind the fictitious names of its author and its protagonists. Ultimately Revel concludes that the book itself produces 'une illusion d'optique' and can no longer serve as his guide.[565]

However, when he first acquires the map and spreads it out on his bed, he feels (briefly) confident: 'j'ai embrassé d'un seul regard toute l'étendue de la ville. […] grâce à cette image, j'étais mieux renseigné sur la structure de Bleston que n'aurait pu l'être un aviateur la survolant'.[566] His new perspective is described as that of a scientist, able to study under a microscope the organic entity which is the city.[567] That he uses the image of 'cette énorme cellule cancéreuse'[568] obviously conveys his view of the city as destructive and dangerous, but also suggests the way in which it metastasises, absorbing into itself not only the surrounding countryside and smaller settlements, but the people who inhabit it. This very metaphor is clearly a warning that his confidence may be misplaced. Indeed, it is soon dented; as he sets out, 'plein d'illusions',[569] to find new lodgings, he gets lost almost immediately. He blames the difficulty of estimating distance, the 'sinueuses' streets,[570] the rain and the inadequate light, as well as his own failure to bring the copy of the local paper or even a note of the address he seeks. Later, he ponders the relationship between the map and his, by then much improved, knowledge of the city:

> *Certes, dans cette feuille de papier […] il reste d'immenses lacunes,*
> *d'immenses trous […], où les inscriptions restent lettre morte, où les lignes*
> *ne font apparaître aucune image, où les rues demeurent la notion la plus*
> *vague de 'rues de Bleston', […] et dès que j'examine avec un peu plus*
> *d'attention les parties qui correspondent aux quartiers qui me sont les plus*

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[565] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 157
[566] Ibid, pp. 53-54
[567] Ibid, p. 54
[568] Ibid, p. 54
[569] Ibid, p. 56
[570] Ibid, p. 57

> *familiers, […] je vois un nom qui me surprend, un passage que je n'ai de toute évidence jamais emprunté.*[571]

Despite his study of the map and his extensive wanderings in the city, there are lacunae, 'd'immenses trous', and the city still surprises him, even in those areas with which he should be most familiar. The frontispiece map, of course, incorporates such lacunae, illustrating what Revel describes above, the way in which, whilst parts of the city have acquired some reality for him, others remain effectively empty of memory or connection.[572]

From the moment of his arrival in Bleston, Revel records a more profound sense of being lost.

> *J'ai été soudain pris de peur […], j'ai été envahi, toute une longue seconde, de l'absurde envie de reculer, de renoncer, de fuir; mais un immense fossé me séparait désormais des événements de la matinée et des visages qui m'étaient les plus familiers, un fossé qui s'était démesurément agrandi tandis que je le franchissais, de telle sorte que je n'en percevais plus les profondeurs et que son autre rive, incroyablement lointaine, ne m'apparaissait plus que comme une ligne d'horizon très légèrement découpée sur laquelle il n'était plus possible de discerner aucun détail.*[573]

Later, as he spends his second night in Bleston, now ensconced at the ominously named *L'Écrou*[574] hotel, he says to himself that 'je suis perdu si je reste ici'.[575] As with so much of the narrative, this can be read fairly literally as an emotional response to an inauspicious arrival in an apparently unwelcoming city, and to a hotel room that resembles a prison cell. However, these are early indications that the mundane narrative of lost cigarettes and a missed connection at Euston may not be what it seems. Revel feels not only panic at the idea of remaining here, but that his previous life (whatever and wherever that was) is now so far away that it has become unreal, lost to him, and return is impossible. He has entered the labyrinth and cannot turn back.

The protagonist of *Austerlitz* is lost in the most fundamental sense; he has lost his own past, even his name and that of his parents. However, his wanderings, extensive as they are, follow clear trajectories, even if they are not conscious.[576] Whilst he wanders in the labyrinthine

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[571] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 134

[572] '[The map] is full of blank spaces because it records only the efforts of a single individual to set in order a past that […] involves many other individuals. The maps of these other individuals will supplement his own, or may even contradict it' (John Sturrock, *The French New Novel*, p. 120)

[573] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 11

[574] In Chapter 3 I note that the name means not only nut or screw, but prison register.

[575] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 23

[576] He is, as I will show later, a 'fugueur' (see Chapter 7); Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, pp. 12-13

buildings which obsess him, although he does not know the way, there is no indication of any uncomfortable disorientation. If he is lost, he is not aware of it. Sebald's narrators, on the other hand, frequently lose their way in the more literal sense.[577] In *Vertigo*, on the streets of Vienna, the narrator's compulsive wanderings follow a path that, if inked in,

> *would have seemed as though a man had kept trying out new tracks and connections over and over, only to be thwarted each time by the limitations of his reason, imagination or will-power, and obliged to turn back again.[578]*

Here the narrator is *trying* to lose himself, wandering aimlessly (both purposeless, in terms of a destination, and purposeful, rather like the Baudelairean flâneur). John Zilcosky suggests that he is 'seeking out that proximity to madness that ancient travellers feared – the narrator situates himself within a specifically post-Enlightenment, touristic discourse of lostness'.[579] If this is lostness as a means of self-discovery and/or discovery of somewhere new, it does not work; the narrator is unable to escape the centre of the city. All he discovers is his own limitations, and rather than finding himself somewhere new, he is forever in the familiar and well-defined centre. (This is an inversion of the usual problem of the labyrinth when, seeking the centre, the traveller forever wanders the periphery.)

Whilst Vienna seems to confound the desire to get lost, Venice is known for its capacity to perplex the traveller – an archetypal city-labyrinth.[580] The narrator of *Vertigo* describes the relief of finding himself again at the Grand Canal after wandering in the heart of the city, where:

> *you cannot tell what you will see next or indeed who will see you the very next moment […] If you walk behind someone in a deserted alley-way you have only to quicken your step slightly to instil a little fear into the person you are following. And equally, you can feel like a quarry yourself.[581]*

This suggests not just the general unease of being uncertain which way to go to reach one's destination, but the fear of losing more than that ('ce n'est pas votre chemin que vous perdez', as James Jenkins warns Revel).[582] There is even the suggestion that the distinction

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[577] See *The Emigrants*, pp. 106-07; *Vertigo*, pp. 52-53, 98-101,115; *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 38, 171-73. Note too that Austerlitz is first encountered in the Salle des pas perdus in Antwerp's Central Station (often translated as 'waiting room' and thus one of very many transitory/liminal spaces in both Butor and Sebald's work), a large open space where people wait before going through to a railway platform (*Austerlitz*, pp. 4-8)

[578] *Vertigo*, p. 34

[579] John Zilcosky, 'Sebald's Uncanny Travels', p. 105

[580] Peter Ackroyd, *Venice*, p. 423

[581] *Vertigo*, p. 52. Interestingly, this creates the dual sensation of flight and pursuit which characterises the musical fugue, the focus of Chapter 7.

[582] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 117

between pursuer and quarry is blurred, as if the sense of self is rendered less certain in the labyrinth.

The narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* finds himself repeatedly lost, albeit in rural landscapes rather than urban streets. The hedge maze at Somerleyton is somewhere between the two, a man-made labyrinth in a garden setting. He also encounters a natural labyrinth on the heath at Dunwich, in which he finds himself, 'to my astonishment, not to say horror',[583] having circled around to the point he had left an hour previously.[584] In this environment, simply continuing to go forward (as in a unicursal labyrinth) is impossible and thus 'if one obeyed one's instincts, the path would sooner or later diverge further and further from the goal one was aiming to reach.' He dreams later that he is 'walking the endlessly winding paths again, and again', convinced both that this natural labyrinth is a maze designed specifically for him and that the pattern of the labyrinth, seen from above, 'represented a cross-section of my brain'.[585]

Dunwich Heath is an uncharted space, a naturally occurring labyrinth, in which the wanderer must take their chances and try to overcome the instincts which will lead them astray. Bleston is a man-made labyrinth, yet as unmappable as the Heath. It is a city pervaded by 'une sorte de peur permanente', a place where one senses but cannot see danger, where 'tous les acteurs d'un meurtre y étaient cachés […] mais tout est suspendu'.[586] Even those who know it well find that:

> *Un jour vous déboucherez forcément dans ces rues presque désertes où l'on se perd; peut-être avez-vous déjà goûté à leur amertume, peut-être avez-vous déjà essayé de vous échapper, main en ce cas, ce n'est que le commencement, et [...] ce n'est pas votre chemin que vous perdez.*[587]

James Jenkins does indeed know these streets: 'je m'y dirigerais aveugle et sourd, si je ne me mettais à y déraisonner'.[588] These are streets where violence seems always imminent, and the rare passers-by 'frôlent les murs, et se pressent en fredonnant des chansons, le cou rentré dans les épaules, comme si c'était la nuit noire'.[589] Jenkins' testimony, and that of fellow exile Horace Buck, give individual commentaries on the official versions of the city presented in

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[583] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 171
[584] This is, of course, the experience that Freud describes in his essay 'The Uncanny', p. 144)
[585] *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 171-73
[586] Ibid, pp. 116-17
[587] Ibid, p. 117
[588] Ibid, p. 117
[589] Ibid, p. 117

maps and guides, suggesting how to survive (where to find lodgings, or a decent meal, where it is safe or unsafe to walk at night). Ultimately, however, no guide will be adequate in a city which seems to set out to confound comprehension. As Revel sees it, Bleston

> *se camoufle [...] comme un manteau dont les plis cachent d'autres plis, qui se refuse à l'examen comme si la lumière la brûlait, telle une femme dont on ne pourrait apercevoir le visage qu'en arrachant son voile avec violence.*[590]

The plan is the city's ironic response to Revel's efforts to see it whole, forcing him at each turn to acknowledge the extent of his ignorance.[591] Bleston seems to want Revel made powerless, through blindness, and its smoke and fog, combined with its mud, its ugliness and monotony, come close to achieving that. The city-labyrinth is 'incomparablement plus déroutant que le palais de Crète, puisqu'il s'augmente à mesure que je le parcoure, puisqu'il se déforme à mesure que je l'explore'.[592] Daedalus' labyrinth only appeared subjectively to change shape, but Revel sees Bleston as an active antagonist, undoing his efforts to understand the city by altering its shape.[593]

The unicursal labyrinth takes one further away from the centre before getting closer again, but in the maze one can return, again and again, to a previous point of departure. Revel increasingly feels that he is unable to progress within the city – literally or figuratively – as if he is returning not only to the place but to the time when he began his journey. He feels trapped, fearing that Bleston has already paralysed his will.[594]

> *C'était comme si je n'avançais pas; c'était comme si je n'étais pas arrivé à ce rond-point, comme si je n'avais pas fait demi-tour, comme si je me retrouvais non seulement au même endroit, mais encore au même moment qui allait durer indéfiniment, dont rien n'annonçait l'abolition.*[595]

This repetition, according to Freud,

> *will perhaps be acknowledged by everyone as a source of the sense of the uncanny. According to my own observations it undoubtedly evokes such a feeling under particular conditions, and in combination with particular*

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[590] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 135
[591] Ibid, p. 135
[592] Ibid, p. 247
[593] Of course, one could posit a more literal explanation, given that the smoke and fog are constantly shifting and varying in intensity, thus giving the impression of a changing city
[594] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 43-44
[595] Ibid, p. 42

> *circumstances – a feeling, moreover, that recalls the helplessness we*
> *experience in certain dream-states.*[596]

The term *unheimlich* may defy translation, but the etymology of *Heimlich* suggests two crucial concepts: home and the homely (and therefore familiar), but also something secret and hidden. *Unheimlich* thus suggests at the same time that something is unfamiliar, and that it is in plain sight.[597] As Steve Pile says,

> *Freud sees the shock of the uncanny as being built out of many potential*
> *experiences: the unintended return, a feeling of helplessness, being lost in*
> *such a way that you return to the same place again and again, unintended*
> *repetition that gives the impression of the inevitable or fate, a coincidence*
> *that appears to have greater meaning than mere chance, and the lure of*
> *superstition as if hidden forces were at work.*[598]

A slightly different aspect of the uncanny is defined by Ernst Jentsch (predating Freud by over a decade), who described it in terms of intellectual uncertainty and lack of orientation.[599] If we oppose 'new/foreign/hostile' to 'old/known/familiar', the former inherently could be expected to give rise to uncertainty and disorientation, but the disorientation will be more severe if what seems to be 'old/known/familiar' then betrays expectations. This is of course a sensation familiar from dreams.[600] Ambros Adelwarth's description of being lost in Constantinople indeed reads very much like the account of a dream:

> *Every walk full of surprises and indeed of alarm. The prospects change like*
> *the scenes in a play. One street lined with palatial buildings ends at a*
> *ravine. You go to a theatre and a door in the foyer opens into a copse;*
> *another time, you turn down a gloomy back street that narrows and*
> *narrows till you think you are trapped, whereupon you take one last*
> *desperate turn round a corner and find yourself suddenly gazing from a*
> *vantage point across the vastest of panoramas.*[601]

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[596] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', pp. 143-44. Freud illustrates this with an account of finding himself in the red-light district of an Italian town and, despite turning away immediately, finding that he returns inexorably to the same location.

[597] Stephen Keane, 'Imaginary Homelands : Notes on Heimat and Heimlich', *Angelaki*, 2, 1 (1997), pp. 81-89 (p. 84)

[598] Steve Pile, 'Intensities of Feeling: *Cloverfield*, the Uncanny, and the Always Near Collapse of the City', in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City,* ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 288-303 (p. 297)

[599] Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift*, 8.22 (25 August 1906), pp. 195-98, 8.23 (1 September 1906), pp. 203-05

[600] See Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (London: Faber, 1995) for striking echoes of this.

[601] *The Emigrants*, p. 131

We must also note that these texts are full of ghosts. Revel comes to believe that Bleston seeks to suppress the will of its inhabitants, to reduce them to ghosts, who may appear on the streets as living but who have no autonomy. It is this that he fears, that he might become, or has already become, 'somnambule, fantôme, larve'.[602] In the later pages of the diary, he speaks of 'ma transformation en ce fantôme que je suis devenue',[603] and in one of the last entries, each paragraph begins with 'Fantôme',[604] as he sees himself living out his last few days in Bleston as a ghost on its streets. These ghosts, the sleepwalkers of Bleston or the *revenants* who Sebald's narrators encounter in Venice[605] or in Deauville[606] subvert the everyday, rather than seeming to be the stuff of nightmares. The dead are always close at hand in Sebald's narratives,[607] as ghosts, in dreams or hallucinations – or quite literally in the case of alpine guide Johannes Naegeli, who disappeared in 1914 and reappeared, 'released by the Oberaar glacier', 72 years later.[608] The narrator of *Vertigo* is unable to determine whether he is 'in the land of the living or already in another place',[609] seeming to slip between those two realms, whether literally entering the underground world (as in the final pages as he arrives at Liverpool Street Station) or encountering the past and the dead on the streets of the city. John Wylie draws out the distinction between the spectral and the uncanny in Sebald's work:

> *If the spectral is of the essence of place, insofar as place happens (is* dis-placed*) in haunting, then the uncanny, a compound of strangeness and familiarity, might be conceived as a particular form of displacement from which devolves the figure of the* exile *(doubly spectral: a ghost* out of place*).*[610]

Butor has said that in *L'Emploi du temps*, the motif of the labyrinth serves as 'un thème essentiel qui est celui de l'égarement'.[611] In exploring the interaction of the individual with the city, both Butor and Sebald focus on the city's effect upon someone who is out of place. Writing about Sebald, Gillian Beer says that:

[602] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 140
[603] Ibid, p. 341
[604] Ibid, p. 390-91
[605] *Vertigo*, p. 53
[606] *The Emigrants*, pp. 122-25
[607] Richard Williams, 'Remembering, Forgetting, and the Industrial Gallery Space', in *Urban Memory*, pp. 121-44 (pp. 130-31)
[608] *The Emigrants,* p. 23
[609] *Vertigo,* p. 115
[610] John Wylie, 'The Spectral Geographies of W G Sebald', *Cultural Geographies*, 14, 2 (April 2007), pp. 171-88 (p. 177)
[611] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', p. 335

> *Cities [...] are communicative: present and past coexist in a conversation that composes layers and striations of reference. And the largesse of familiarity means that the whole web of the city is implicit in the local. For the incomer, on the other hand, cities are received as a series of impressions disjunct, with occasional pinpoint places intensely realised, jostling each other in no particular order. Then there is the returning denizen of the city, neither inhabitant nor stranger, who receives the shock of renewal: known places are intensified by unfamiliarity.[612]*

L'Emploi du temps is ostensibly the account of an incomer, encountering a city entirely unfamiliar, in not only geography but also language and its culture. Whilst Butor describes the experience of the stranger in the city as 'l'inverse de mon expérience de Parisien',[613] as I have argued elsewhere, he also draws upon the experience of the 'returning denizen', in particular of those who returned to Paris after the *Exode*,[614] to find the familiar city rendered uncannily unfamiliar. Its geography may have remained the same, although the means of navigating the city had changed in ways both practical and political, but language and culture had undergone profound, seismic shifts.

Revel certainly experiences Bleston as an outsider, as he struggles to find ways of making sense of it:

> *Revel's estrangement, his lack of associations with this city, epitomizes the city's own tearing and scattering of memories. [...] Through his wanderings he discards his first erroneous pictures, and reclaims the lost time of those early confusions.[615]*

As a stranger, Revel constantly feels himself to be excluded, shut out from the city. This is literally the case as he encounters closed doors not only on the night of his arrival but throughout the narrative, in particular, 'les grilles de fer fermées', as repeatedly even places which he has previously entered are found to be barred to him:[616] 'L'exilé est aussi un exclu, un hors-la-loi. Exilé d'un pays, il l'est aussi de lui-même. Il est devenu autre. Il est à la fois possédé et dépossédé'.[617]

Revel's experience is mirrored in heightened form by Horace Buck, the African worker who befriends him and finds him congenial lodgings when his colleagues have been unable to help

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[612] Gillian Beer, 'Sebald in the City', in *After Sebald: Essays and Illuminations,* ed. Jon Cook (Ipswich: Full Circle Editions Ltd), pp. 37-49 (p. 38)

[613] Bernard Valette, 'Entretien avec Michel Butor', in *Analyses et réflexions*, pp. 15-23 (p. 22)

[614] The flight of Parisians as French military resistance crumbled, before the German army entered the city on 14 June 1940. Most returned after the Armistice, given the need for income and shelter.

[615] Mark Crinson, 'Towards the Beautiful City', p. 20

[616] *L'Emploi du temps*, e.g. pp. 11, 61, 69, 104, 112, 147, 239, 241, 257, 311, 314, 315, 327, 328, 355, 376

[617] Colette Prudi, 'De l'Exil à l'écriture', in *Analyses et réflexions,* pp. 44-48 (p. 44)

him do so, but whose estrangement from the city is more permanent and irrevocable (he is 'définitivement exilé').[618] Firstly, he does not know, as Revel does, that his time in Bleston has a fixed end date. Secondly, he cannot be assimilated in the way that Revel or Lucien can, through friendships, romantic attachments and professional roles. For Buck, no matter how long he remains here, or how much his mastery of the language improves, the indigenous inhabitants of Bleston are still likely to react to him with hostility or fear because of his race. Nonetheless, Revel describes Horace as 'l'incarnation de mon propre malheur'.[619] Horace amplifies and embodies Revel's feelings of hostility and alienation: Revel is frequently made uneasy by the intensity of Horace's feelings, and of the anger that is always bubbling up, even in his laughter ('rongé de rage, faisant vibrer les vitres'):[620]

> *C'était comme si j'avais eu peur que sa haine, que sa misère ne fussent contagieuses, et peut-être l'étaient-elles en effet, peut-être étais-je déjà contaminé: mes yeux se sont peu à peu chargés du même nuage que les siens.[621]*

Sebald's protagonists can be both incomers and returners. They are invariably exiles, and if there is a return to their place of origin it is compromised, for Paul Bereyter in *The Emigrants* by his experiences under Nazism, and for Austerlitz by the loss of his parents and the life he would have had in Prague. The narrator too returns 'home' in the final section of *Vertigo*, entitled 'Il ritorno in patria', referring to Homer, and to Monteverdi's opera on the same theme.[622] This is his first return since childhood, but:

> *Many of the localities [...] had continually returned in my dreams and daydreams and had become more real to me than they had been then, yet the village itself, I reflected, as I arrived at that late hour, was more remote from me than any other place I could conceive of.[623]*

He books a room in the Engelwirt Inn, in which his family had lived for a while, and notes the 'structural changes' to the building, whilst identifying the room allocated to him as 'approximately' where the living room had been. He is dispirited by the realisation that the places which had meant so much in memory meant nothing to him now.[624] On his departure he travels through the German countryside 'which has always been alien to me, straightened

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[618] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 138
[619] Ibid, p. 121
[620] Ibid, p. 35
[621] Ibid, p. 37
[622] *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, based on the second half of the *Odyssey*
[623] *Vertigo*, p. 185
[624] Ibid, p. 210

out and tidied up as it is to the last square inch and corner. Everything appeared to be appeased and numbed in some sinister way, and this sense of numbness soon came over me also'.[625]

Austerlitz's return to his childhood home is problematic in a different way. Whilst the protagonist appears entirely persuaded of his identity, this is undercut at various points by the structure of the narrative. Alfred Thomas argues that:

> *The fascination of Prague for Sebald [...] is less its function as a* Heimat *as the way it reflects the postwar German writer's displacement – temporal as well as spatial – from his origins. In this sense the nostalgia for Prague experienced by the protagonist of the novel serves as a poignant metaphor for the German yearning for a pristine place unburdened by guilt and memories of the ruinous World War II.[626]*

Austerlitz's readiness to accept his identity as a Czech Jew and to accept versions of his parents' respective fates which are uncorroborated by other testimony or evidence, complicates the relationship between the exile and the homeland from which he is displaced, 'creating the impression of endless displacement from a unified voice of authentic memory'.[627] This is not a straightforward resolution whereby Austerlitz can integrate his present self with the lost childhood self through his encounter with his Czech home. It is suggested that his discoveries are quasi-miraculous and thus perhaps not to be fully trusted. The way in which the narrative is structured at key points during this process is so complex that it is difficult to be certain who is speaking, Austerlitz or Věra, and this further adds uncertainty to what initially seems to be a narrative of homecoming and reconciliation. This leads Alfred Thomas to assert that 'Austerlitz imagines rather than remembers Prague as the city of his birth'.[628] His arrival there, unlike most other journeys in the novel (and in Sebald's œuvre more generally) is not detailed in terms of route and dates: Austerlitz simply seems to arrive. 'If he belongs anywhere, it is between these places [Czech Republic and France, Austerlitz and Gare d'Austerlitz] rather than in either or both of them.'[629]

Exile is 'fundamentally a discontinuous state of being'.[630] Sebald's essay 'Against the Irreversible',[631] written in memory of Jean Améry, explores how separation from (and the

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[625] *Vertigo*, p. 253
[626] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 155-56
[627] Ibid, p. 159
[628] Ibid, p. 157
[629] Ibid, p. 158
[630] Edward Saïd, *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 177
[631] *On the Natural History of Destruction*, pp. 160-61

destruction of) one's homeland 'is at one with that person's destruction' (as Edward Saïd puts it, the 'unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home').[632] Améry says that 'whoever has lost [the land of their childhood and youth] remains lost himself, even if he has learned not to stumble about in the foreign country as if he were drunk'.[633] It is a quality of homelessness, 'of being elsewhere, être ailleurs', and of increasing tension between 'his native land as it became ever more foreign and the land of his foreign exile as it became ever more familiar'. In this context Améry's suicide is a resolution of the conflict 'between being both at home and in exile'.[634] Whilst Sebald explores directly the nature and origin of his protagonists' homeless state, Butor gives Revel no history, no origins (other than that he is French) and no future location. Thus, we have no sense that he was at home prior to his arrival in Bleston or that he will be once he departs. Horace Buck is given more history than Revel (we know that he originally arrived in Cardiff, then ten years later moved to Bleston, where he has lived for some considerable time)[635] but we are not told where he has come from, and no matter how long he remains he still thinks in terms of a future 'dans un pays tout différent'.[636] Sebald's Max Ferber might have made his permanent home in Manchester but he carries with him the place he left and the place where his parents were killed. Austerlitz returns to his childhood home in Prague but only to set off on the continuation of his quest to discover the fate of his parents, a quest whose outcome the reader does not discover and to which almost certainly there will be no full resolution. And Butor's Revel may be wandering the streets of a disguised Paris, Butor's home, but it is the Paris of the dark years, hostile and dangerous.

As Revel grapples with the chronology of his days in Bleston, and with the geography of its streets, Austerlitz constructs the past that he had lost, its people, places and language. The labyrinth challenges temporal as well as spatial orientation, and the effect on memory may be to bring together events and experiences which were chronologically separated – this is variously described as 'dense time',[637] or as anachronism, which may have a 'powerfully subversive and demystifying' effect.[638] (In Sebald's works, the dead 'are ever returning to us',[639] the ultimate exiles, and inherently anachronistic, displaced both temporally and

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[632] Edward Saïd, *Reflections on Exile,* p. 173
[633] Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, p. 48
[634] *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 161
[635] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 36.
[636] Ibid, p. 36
[637] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 210
[638] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 137
[639] *The Emigrants*, p. 23

spatially.) Walter Benjamin saw both the city and memory as labyrinths 'without beginning or end, in which one may make "endless interpolations" […] Movement in memory is like that in a labyrinth […] The past is not left behind as one moves on, but like spaces in a labyrinth is continually encountered again, returned to, though from different directions'.[640] The way in which memory works is labyrinthine, skirting around traumatic events or returning compulsively to them,[641] subject to distractions and diversions so that one questions how one has arrived at a particular thought or recollection, and deliberately follows a thread to trace a path back to the memory one wishes to recover.

Austerlitz, who has rarely seemed lost in the literal sense, does lose his way on returning to Prague from Terezín.[642]

> *It seemed as if we were descending a kind of ramp into a labyrinth through which we moved very slowly, now this way and now that, until I had lost all sense of direction. When we reached the Prague bus station […] I therefore set out the wrong way through the great throng of people. […] Only later did I see from the map that I had reached the centre not in a more or less straight line, as I thought at first, but by way of a wide detour.*[643]

Instinct has, it seems, taken him unerringly as far as his parents' former home, but now abandons him. What happened after his own departure can only be speculation. Austerlitz's attempts to map his parents' journeys and determine their final destination are frustrated by the absence or ambiguity of the traces they left behind. As he says, 'all traces were lost in the sand',[644] a metaphor that reminds us again of the ephemerality and ambiguity of maps. The transience of lines in the sand recalls the narrator's tactic in the hedge maze at Somerleyton:

> *I became so completely lost that I could not find the way out again until I resorted to drawing a line with the heel of my boot across the white sand of every hedged passage that had proved to be a dead end.*[645]

Somerleyton is a place 'imperceptibly nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion',[646] its aviaries deserted apart from a quail with dementia whose confused wanderings within its cage foreshadow those of the narrator within the maze. Not only are we reminded, with so

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[640] Graham Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis*, p. 5
[641] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, pp. 36-37
[642] I have followed the practice of using the German name, Theresienstadt, when I discuss the ghetto/concentration camp, and the Czech name, Terezín, for the town.
[643] *Austerlitz*, pp. 282-83
[644] Ibid, p. 288.
[645] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 38
[646] Ibid, p. 36

many references to decay and disuse, of the ease with which lines in the sand can be erased but the term 'dead end' has darker echoes in relation to Austerlitz's quest.

Temporal and spatial certainties dissolve in dreams, as they do in the labyrinth, a space where a precise and confident sense of place and time is challenged. The labyrinth in *L'Emploi du temps* originates as a metaphor Revel creates to describe his difficulties with time and space. Revel never reaches the centre of the labyrinth or the 'end of the thread' of text; 'the text-thread itself becomes a labyrinth without a centre to be reached'.[647] Mireille Calle-Gruber, in her study of the city in *L'Emploi du temps*, notes that the *passé simple*, 'le temps des certitudes', is not used in the novel, as Butor prefers to suggest 'un passé qui n'en finit pas de passer, qui ne passe pas', that is still an obstacle in the course of the narrative.[648] Thus he uses the *passé composé*,

> *un passé relatif, et c'est cette loi de la relativité qui fait de la réalité un labyrinthe. [...] Revel est initié au labyrinthe de la temporalité mythique [...] laquelle échappe aux lois du temps réel et, tenant compte du tissage du devenir, est de l'ordre du circuit, du court-circuit, retour, condensation, métamorphose.[649]*

Revel's sense of chronology, to which he is, with increasing desperation, attempting to hold on through the writing of his journal, is more and more disrupted, as he is unable to avoid the linear account of his days in Bleston being layered with foreshadowing of events yet to be recounted, with repetition of events already recounted and with present events and reflections. He is unable therefore to clearly determine cause and effect, or to distinguish between what he felt at the time the event occurred and what he feels now in recounting it. Revel's diary gradually creates layers of time culminating on the final page with 'SEPTEMBRE, mars, septembre, février',[650] and without the page headings the reader would struggle to navigate.[651] In the diary entry for 12 April, written in August, and forming one single sentence, Revel refers to 'events which occurred a week before that date, two months before, one day after, one week after, in the following June, ten days before the time of writing, in the previous October, on 13 April, and on the last Sunday in April […]. The sentence even manages to push one of its tentacles into the future, by its reference to the

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[647] Lorna Martens, 'Empty Center and Open End', p. 55
[648] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*, p. 50. This phrase is very reminiscent of Eric Conan and Henry Rousso's *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).
[649] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps, pp. 50, 73
[650] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 394
[651] One might wonder how German readers fared when confronted by the first edition of *Der Zeitplan* which dispensed both with page headings and with the frontispiece map. Both have been restored in the more recent edition. *Der Zeitplan* (1964); revised edition, ed. Tobias Scheffel (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2009)

projected meal with Ann Bailey'.[652] This suggests a mind in turmoil (Revel has learned at the end of July that he has lost Rose to his compatriot, Lucien), jumping from one past event to another, in a way that prepares us for the prospect that his longed-for meal with Anne will not bring him the clarity he seeks.

The time frames in Sebald's work can be equally complex. *Austerlitz* begins in the late 1960s with the narrator's journey to Belgium and initially follows in (relatively) linear fashion his encounters with Austerlitz himself. As Austerlitz gradually imparts his own story, we move back to his childhood in Wales in the 1940s and follow another relatively linear path through to the early 1960s when he returns from France to work in England. Once his nocturnal wanderings begin, however, we find different time frames seeming to occupy the same space. The child arriving from the Kindertransport seems to be present in the contemporary Liverpool Street Station where a new building is taking shape around the old, which itself is the site of archaeological exploration as the former burial ground for the Bedlam hospital. Austerlitz's 'nocturnal wanderings', a response to his insomnia, draw him irresistibly to the Station, a labyrinthine place where he perceives an accumulation of pain and suffering within its 'ever-changing maze of walls'.[653] It is here that he encounters his own traumatic past, the place and the time when the rupture between his two lives was effected (he acquires at this point new parents, a new name, a new language, and the at least partial and temporary erasure of all childhood memories), and he enters, seemingly by chance, the labyrinth of his own memories:[654]

> *Memories [...] came back to me [...], memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, all interlocking like the labyrinthine vaults I saw in the dusty grey light, and which seemed to go on and on for ever. In fact I felt, said Austerlitz, that the waiting-room where I stood as if dazzled contained all the hours of my past life, all the suppressed and extinguished fears and wishes I had ever entertained [...] I recollected myself as a small child, at the moment when I realized that it must have been to this same waiting-room I had come on my arrival in England over half a century ago.[655]*

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[652] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 303-04. Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 92. Chapters 6 and 7 explore Butor's chronology in more detail.
[653] *Austerlitz*, p. 183
[654] Russell J A Kilbourn, 'Architecture and Cinema: The Representation of Memory in W G Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in *W G Sebald: A Critical Companion*, pp. 140-55 (p. 144)
[655] *Austerlitz*, pp. 191-94

If temporal disorientation is an inevitability in the spatial labyrinth, in the temporal labyrinth time and space are relative: no event has an absolute position in space, and time is a labyrinth of simultaneity; past, present and future are indistinguishably one.[656] For the individual within the temporal labyrinth there can only be confusion – to understand would require one to be outside time.[657] Austerlitz goes on to express his hope that:

> *time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely I shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them, although that, of course, opens up the bleak prospect of ever-lasting misery and never-ending anguish.[658]*

This is echoed by Max Ferber's statement that 'there is neither a past nor a future'. He is part of a seemingly endless process of creating and undoing what he has created, literally erasing with a rag the charcoal marks he has made, so that the end result 'had evolved from a long lineage of grey, ancestral faces, rendered unto ash but still there, as ghostly presences, on the harried paper'.[659]

As Russell Kilbourn notes, there is a 'long-standing association between memory and death', and Sebald's protagonists must journey through the labyrinth/city of the dead, two conflated architectural metaphors for memory.[660] This connection is reinforced by references to a number of other texts, literary and cinematic[661] of which the most significant is Alain Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*.[662] Marienbad is itself a labyrinthine place, and a site of dense time[663] (see also Sebald's poems, 'The Year before Last' and 'Marienbad Elegy').[664] It becomes in *Austerlitz* 'a signifier for an irretrievably idyllic interlude of happiness',[665] the

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[656] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost', pp. 302-06
[657] Ibid, p. 302
[658] *Austerlitz*, pp. 143-44
[659] *The Emigrants*, p. 162. Graeme Gilloch and Jane Kilby, 'Trauma and Memory in the City: From Auster to Austerlitz', in *Urban Memory*, pp. 1-19 (p. 2). See Penelope's attempts to stop time by undoing each night what she has woven during the day (Ruth Franklin, 'Rings of Smoke', in *The Emergence of Memory,* pp. 119-43 (p. 143)), and the Ashbury family in *The Rings of Saturn*, who sew all day and undo their work 'on the same day, the next day or the day after that' (*The Rings of Saturn*, p. 212). The narrator of *The Emigrants* is caught in the same process: set the task of committing Ferber's story to paper, most of what he writes is 'crossed out, discarded or obliterated by additions', his narrative therefore evidencing all of its many versions even in its latest form (*The Emigrants*, p. 230).
[660] Russell J A Kilbourn, 'Architecture and Cinema', p. 141
[661] Including Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* and Fritz Lang's Nibelungen films (Ibid, p. 141)
[662] *Austerlitz*, pp. 289-305
[663] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 225
[664] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 103, 126
[665] Russell J A Kilbourn, 'Architecture and Cinema', p. 148

place where in 1938 Austerlitz stayed with his parents. Austerlitz's second visit in 1972, with Marie de Verneuil, results in an emotional crisis and his separation from her. It is

> *like a trip to a looking-glass underworld in which the Orphic hero loses his beloved to life while he is drawn uncomprehendingly towards death. [...] Marienbad as a physical place is really a metaphorical city of the dead or underworld in temporal terms.[666]*

Austerlitz is drawn to places that are labyrinthine, such as the Palais de Justice in Brussels, with 'corridors and stairways leading nowhere, and doorless rooms and halls where no one would ever set foot'.[667] At Liverpool Street Station, he finds an 'ever-changing maze of walls' and 'labyrinthine vaults'.[668] This labyrinth triggers the memories which lead Austerlitz to Prague, where he finds a 'labyrinth of alleyways, thoroughfares and courtyards' and a 'labyrinthine station'.[669] There are others – the new Bibliothèque National in Paris, for example (prompting a reference to Resnais' film, *Toute la mémoire du monde,* which itself alludes to an earlier work*, Nuit et brouillard*),[670] and the underpasses of the Gare d'Austerlitz. What Austerlitz's labyrinths share is a link to the underworld, the place of the dead, and thus to a lost past. His quest is a perilous one. The liberation of finding who he is, retrieving the personal history that his foster parents took from him, requires him to spend the rest of his life in the world of the dead (the records centre in the rue Geoffroy l'Asnier, the Gare d'Austerlitz, Terezín, Gurs). In taking his leave of the narrator, Austerlitz seems to bequeath him a similar quest, urging him to visit the Ashkenazy cemetery in London.[671]

Butor uses the narrative of Theseus to make the connection between the labyrinth and the realm of the dead. Panel 15 of the Harrey tapestries shows the part of Theseus' story in which he and his companion descend to the underworld to attempt to seduce Persephone. When their intentions are understood, Hades imprisons them in the Underworld, 'dans la cave de

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[666] Russell J A Kilbourn, 'Architecture and Cinema', p. 148
[667] *Austerlitz*, p. 39
[668] Ibid, pp. 59, 183
[669] Ibid, pp. 212, 307
[670] Mattias Frey, 'Theorizing Cinema in Sebald and Sebald with Cinema', in *Searching for Sebald: Photography after W G Sebald*, ed. Lise Patt with Christel Dillbohner (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry/ICI Press, 2007), pp. 228-29. Given the prevalence of 'night and fog' imagery in these texts, one inevitably thinks of Resnais' film although in Butor's case, any conscious or unconscious association would be to the Nazi 'Nacht und Nebel' directive.
[671] Austerlitz also gives the narrator a copy of Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom*, with its descriptions of the sites of mass slaughter at Kaunas, which the narrator reads on a return visit to the fortress at Breendonk (*Austerlitz,* pp. 411, 414-15)

cette cave,[672] immobilisés par des fers'.[673] Revel's various visits to the gallery to view the tapestries, and his gradual understanding of their narrative structure, are part of the process by which he attempts to interpret his own narrative. However, in this as in all of his efforts to regain control, he is thwarted:

> *La tapisserie s'est moquée de lui. Le texte du mythe lui a menti sur celui de sa propre existence. […] Le vainqueur, en définitive, est une fois de plus le labyrinthe, cette 'cave [d'une] cave' infernale qui est à mettre en relation avec le 'caveau' du Minotaure.[674]*

When Austerlitz finds himself in Prague, a place which presumably he last saw as a young child, he finds his way through 'the labyrinth of alleyways, thoroughfares and courtyards' as if he knows it already. Memories are revealing themselves, 'sensory or pre-rational recall that bypass conscious mental efforts at recollection'.[675] They arrive spontaneously, triggered by place, in a clear evocation of Proust. The uneven paving in the Šporkova is one of the triggers,[676] recalling how Proust's narrator stumbles outside the Hotel de Guermantes and thus finds his memories of Venice are rematerialised:

> *La sensation que j'avais ressentie jadis sur deux dalles inégales du baptistère de Saint-Marc m'avait rendue avec toutes les autres sensations jointes ce jour-là à cette sensation-là et qui étaient restées dans l'attente, à leur rang, d'où un brusque hasard les avait impérieusement fait sortir, dans la série des jours oubliés.[677]*

The individual has no conscious control over 'mémoire involontaire' which

> must be surprised or shocked by the uncanny experience, where a minor event appears both strange and deeply familiar. Such an event triggers a forgotten (and thus unconscious) feeling, giving access to a fragment of lost time, which is registered at the level of lived experience.[678]

Austerlitz's quest for the lost time of his past and his parents' fate is beyond the scope of his own memory, *volontaire* or *involontaire*. It is drawn out by digressions, diversions and delays, and indeed it is questionable whether by the end of the novel he has found answers.

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[672] Sebald echoes this phrase in Part V of his 'Cantical': 'In this cave within a cave / No glance back to the future survives' (*Across the Land and the Water*, p. 22), the 'glance back' suggesting Orpheus's failure to rescue Euridice from the underworld.

[673] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 279

[674] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, pp. 100-01

[675] J J Long, *W G Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, p. 157

[676] *Austerlitz*, p. 212

[677] Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 222-23

[678] John Phillips, 'The Future of the Past: Archiving Singapore', in *Urban Memory*, pp. 145-68 (p. 154)

He finds out that his father was interned at Gurs,[679] and in the grip of a conviction that his father left Paris from the Gare d'Austerlitz, he 'wandered around the deserted station half dazed, through the labyrinthine underpasses'.[680] Whilst he believes he has 'found' his mother, in an image from the film made at Theresienstadt, it is significant that this film was itself a duplicitous attempt to persuade the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations that the inhabitants were well-treated.[681] Even if Austerlitz's identification is correct (and Věra's response is to shake her head and put the image aside, which suggests that it is not), he has not in fact established when, where and how she died, knowing only that she was 'sent east' from Theresienstadt.[682] He can only go forward by journeying into the past, attempting to bring those hidden lives and deaths into the light.[683]

Theresienstadt is one of many prisons that feature in these texts, and for both Butor and Sebald, the wanderers in the labyrinth are not only exiles but prisoners. We have earlier observed the recurrence of carceral imagery in relation to the city-labyrinth, both in terms of specific prison structures and of the city itself as it seems to thwart those who attempt to leave it. Factory chimneys are compared to 'les poteaux d'une enceinte',[684] and Butor refers a number of times to the fly 'enfermée dans la bague de [Mme Jenkins]'.[685] Revel describes his hotel room at *L'Écrou* (whose name, as we have noted, evokes the slang term for prison) as a cell and the receptionist as 'cette geôlière'.[686] His one-year work placement in Bleston is portrayed as a prison sentence, something over which he has no control: 'Cet air auquel j'étais désormais condamné pour tout un an'.[687] Whilst Revel's sentence will come to an end, at which point he will have no choice but to leave Bleston, Max Ferber finds that he has no choice but to remain: 'with every year that passes a change of place seems less conceivable.

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[679] Internment/PoW camp in southwestern France, originally set up by the French government at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Under the Vichy regime it became an internment camp for 'foreign' Jews. In August 1942, the Jews in the camp were deported via Drancy, mainly to Auschwitz. Ministère de l'Armée, 'The Gurs Internment Camp', *Chemins de Mémoire* (Paris: Direction des patrimoines, de la mémoire et des archives, undated). <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/gurs-internment-camp> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[680] *Austerlitz*, p. 406

[681] Ibid, pp. 339-42

[682] Ibid, p. 353; Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 162. Note that some commentaries on *Austerlitz* suggest that Theresienstadt was where Agáta was murdered (see Graham Gilloch and Jane Kilby, 'Trauma and Memory in the City', p. 16). However, we are told that she was 'sent east', and we know that Auschwitz was the usual destination of those deported from Theresienstadt (Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, pp. 209, 211).

[683] Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 178

[684] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 166

[685] Ibid, p. 199

[686] Ibid, p. 143

[687] Ibid, p. 11

Manchester has taken possession of me for good. I cannot leave, I do not want to leave, I must not'.[688] There is another dimension of carcerality, that of internal, psychological imprisonment within a mental labyrinth. If Bleston is not literally a prison (though it contains one), it is effectively so for Revel. This raises the question of whether this is evidence of an unreliable narrator, someone who perceives himself to be trapped whilst nothing in reality prevents him from leaving. Butor himself says that 'l'expérience du personnage, d'un bout à l'autre, est une expérience d'enfermement dans cette ville, qui n'est pas vraiment fermée, mais dont on ne peut pas sortir'.[689] This connects us to Occupied Paris, which was not literally a fortress but which became a prison for many of those living there, and as such a holding camp for those destined for incarceration elsewhere. Philippe Sellier notes the impossibility of leaving Bleston but describes it as 'l'envoûtement de la ville maudite', saying that:

> C'est le règne du huis clos, mais d'un huis clos paradoxal, d'une prison dont les murs reculent à l'infini. Dans L'Emploi du temps rien n'arrive d'extérieur. Tout ce qui arrive, tout ce qui peut arriver est déjà compris dans l'histoire de la ville dans laquelle nous sommes.[690]

Within the labyrinth, there is only the labyrinth.

Judith Ryan argues that Austerlitz 'experiences throughout his life a variant of what Foucault terms the "carceral continuum"'.[691] He is imprisoned psychologically rather than physically in the power structures that are his academic area of study, and his wanderings provoke physical collapse and loss of memory, which lead to his admission to the Salpêtrière Hospital, 'that gigantic complex of buildings where the borders between hospital and penitentiary have always been blurred, and which seems to have grown and spread of its own volition over the centuries until it now forms a universe of its own between the Jardin des Plantes and the Gare d'Austerlitz'.[692] And within this hospital/penitentiary Austerlitz in his semi-conscious state wanders 'a maze of long passages, vaults, galleries and grottoes' which seem to him to be 'a place of exile for those who had fallen on the field of honour, or lost their lives in some other violent way'.[693]

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[688] *The Emigrants*, p. 169
[689] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', p. 342
[690] Philippe Sellier, 'La Ville maudite chez Michel Butor', *Mosaic*, 8, 2 (1975), pp. 115-30 (p. 121)
[691] Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 153
[692] *Austerlitz*, p. 376
[693] Ibid, p. 376

As Butor tells us nothing of Revel's life before Bleston, we do not know whether he too brings past trauma with him into the labyrinth, or indeed whether past trauma is what transforms Bleston into the labyrinth. However, he sees the encroaching narcotic sedation as a threat, not as a relief, something to be resisted through the writing of the journal which marshals his memories of his time in Bleston, bringing those already hazy recollections into focus and thus, perhaps, bringing other darker and more obscure memories into the light.

> *Ainsi, chaque jour, éveillant de nouveaux jours harmoniques, transforme l'apparence du passé, et cette accession de certaines régions à la lumière généralement s'accompagne de l'obscurcissement d'autres jadis éclairées qui deviennent étrangères et muettes jusqu'à ce que, le temps ayant passé, d'autres échos viennent les réveiller.*[694]

For both Butor and Sebald knowledge of the events of the Occupation and the Holocaust risks effacing the reality of those events as experienced by those to whom these traumas properly belong. Cathy Caruth's analysis of *Hiroshima mon amour* may be relevant here. She argues that 'the question of history in this film […] is a matter not only of what we see and know but also of what it is ethical to tell'.[695] The film is set in a rebuilt Hiroshima, in which the French actress's claims to have seen and wept over the fate of Hiroshima are challenged by her Japanese lover.

> *He: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.*
>
> *She: I saw everything. Everything.*[696]

If Manchester in 1952 awoke for Butor memories of the Occupation, through the darkness of the city, the smell of smoke, the sense of the city's hostility and the (literal and metaphorical) barriers which he encountered, he does not tell directly the stories that were evoked for him, perhaps because, essentially, they were not his to tell. He has written only occasionally of his own experiences, most strikingly in his *Improvisations* and in his conversations with André Clavel. The latter gives rare insight into the effects upon Butor of living through the Occupation:

> *Les troupes défilaient dans les rues en chantant et en martelant le sol avec leurs bottes. Au début, quand on les entendait, on les épiait, par curiosité. Puis on s'est vite mis à les haïr. On avait une peur terrible: elle a ensuite redoublé à cause des attentats. […] Je ressentais profondément l'étrangeté*

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[694] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388
[695] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 26
[696] Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour: text by Marguerite Duras*, p. 15

> *de cette guerre d'attente: l'impression que rien ne se passait mais que ce*
> *rien, en même temps, était sanglant.[697]*

Butor elsewhere differentiates the experience of those of his generation who were too young to have fought, resisted or collaborated (and who were not targeted in round-ups and deportations), from those of his parents' generation.[698] For his contemporaries, the post-war world was new and demanded new ways of writing and creating:

> *Pendant toute l'occupation allemande je me suis trouvé dans un état étrange*
> *dans lequel le savoir était confisqué. Le savoir était quelque chose qui avait*
> *existé autrefois et qui existerait peut-être encore un jour, mais pendant ces*
> *années-là c'était la nuit et le mensonge. En 45 il y a eu la Libération, et*
> *toutes sortes de choses sont revenues ou sont venues. Il s'est alors produit*
> *une séparation sournoise et dramatique entre les générations.[699]*

Previous generations, either because of complicity or trauma, may have wished to forget that 'horrible parenthèse',[700] but for those who were awakened by the nightmare into a new consciousness, everything had changed, the catastrophe of war having overturned their understanding of the world and their expectations for their own futures. Their trauma, indirect as it was, is most often explored through the radical reinvention of narrative in literature and film, and through radical departures in visual arts and music, rather than through writing directly and overtly about their own experiences. Lynn Higgins has described this generation[701] in terms of a Janus vision, looking backwards to obsessively explore ideas of memory, but forwards through experimentation and abstraction. These works 'rarely make unambiguous statements or take polemical stands […] but they are always and inevitably "engaged"'.[702] These issues are more complex still for Sebald as a German, born after the war, burdened with his homeland's appalling legacy, and driven to tell those stories, but in a

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[697] *Curriculum Vitae,* pp. 24-25. That final phrase echoes through *L'Emploi du temps*, where constant tension and fear are never translated into actual violence or danger: 'rien ne se passait', as many readers have noted.
[698] This is not, strictly speaking, what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory'. That describes 'the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before' (Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 5). Butor draws on his own memories, and on the experiences of his contemporaries. Sebald, although of the 'generation after' is not shaped by the trauma endured by his parents' generation, but indirectly by the trauma inflicted by that generation. 'Postmemory' is, of course, entirely relevant to Sebald's protagonists Austerlitz and Ferber.
[699] *Improvisations,* p. 12
[700] Ibid, p. 13
[701] Broadly, the *nouveau roman* and the *nouvelle vague* but the same arguments can apply equally to the work of post-war composers such as Pierre Boulez and Butor's long-term collaborator, Henri Pousseur
[702] Lynn A Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 2-3

way that does not claim them as his. Both writers are haunted, and they see the urban landscapes which they traverse through the lens of this haunting.[703]

Austerlitz regards the Parisian railway stations as 'places marked by both blissful happiness and profound misfortune', and later particularly associates the latter with the Gare d'Austerlitz:

> *After that I wandered round the deserted station half dazed, through the labyrinthine underpasses, over foot-bridges, up flights of steps on one side and down on the other. That station, said Austerlitz, has always seemed to me the most mysterious of all the railway terminals of Paris. [...] I was particularly fascinated by the way the Metro trains coming from the Bastille, having crossed the Seine, roll over the iron viaduct into the station's upper storey, quite as if the façade were swallowing them up. And I also remember that I felt an uneasiness induced by the hall behind this façade, filled with a feeble light and almost entirely empty, where on a platform roughly assembled out of beams and boards, there stood a scaffolding reminiscent of a gallows [...] an impression forced itself upon me of being on the scene of some unexpiated crime.[704]*

Liverpool Street station – specifically the disused Ladies' Waiting-Room – is the place where Austerlitz encounters his own past. It is the turning point of the journey which has mapped out his history.[705] Here he is unsure whether he is standing within a ruin or a building under construction; as the new station emerges from the old, a labyrinth in both space and time is created, what appears to be an infinite space, 'labyrinthine vaults […] which seemed to go on and on for ever'.[706] He sees himself, the child from the Kindertransport, and the foster parents who have come to collect him, from half a century previously. This 'mémoire involontaire' can happen because this was not something that Austerlitz experienced 'explicitly and consciously',[707] but an experience that had been buried, or erased, by the life he subsequently led with his foster parents, until that point. Eelco Runia describes what happens in this moment: 'the outward-bound journey of a life without memory […] collapses into a homeward-bound journey of a memory without a life'.[708] From this point, 'Austerlitz sets out on the journey that brings him to the places that have made him into the person he is',[709] a journey which will involve retracing his own steps, and those of each of his parents.

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[703] Note that this does not suggest that these particular urban landscapes are haunted – it is the writers/their protagonists who bring that with them. (John Wylie, 'The Spectral Geographies of W G Sebald', p. 181)
[704] *Austerlitz*, pp. 404-05
[705] Eelco Runia, 'Presence', p. 11
[706] *Austerlitz*, p. 192
[707] Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1939), in *Illuminations*, pp. 155-94 (pp. 160-61)
[708] Eelco Runia, 'Presence', p. 11
[709] Ibid, p. 12

Whilst Revel often presents himself as passive, and dependent upon the intervention of others to survive in Bleston, *L'Emploi du temps* is a narrative of resistance. It recounts his attempts (ineffectual as they appear to be) to resist the stupefying effects of Bleston's atmosphere and to assert his own agency through setting down on paper his account of his time in the city. This is a theme which has been traced through Butor's work more generally:

> *resistance by the conquered through cultural 'contamination' of the conqueror; resistance to academic and critical rigidity and to the compartmentalisation of disciplines and genres; resistance of the natural world to human endeavours to control it physically or through symbolic means; resistance to institutionalised power in its multifarious forms.[710]*

In the context of *L'Emploi du temps* specifically, the recurrence of this motif connects the reader again with the city behind the mask of Bleston, Occupied Paris. I have noted elsewhere how Butor was linked to but not directly engaged with resistance during that period, but an intense awareness of both the necessity and the danger of such engagement must have been hugely influential upon him. As with all aspects of the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps*, multiple interpretations are possible. If we accept that one reading of the novel is its haunting by the city of Butor's adolescence (and if we acknowledge that no writer of Butor's background and generation could use the term 'resistance' without consciously evoking that very recent history), it is also possible to read it more simply as resistance to an oppressive environment, whether that oppression is cultural, atmospheric or climatic. The act of writing is framed both as resistance and as 'une petite vengeance', and intriguingly Sebald annotates these words in his copy of the text, saying 'J'ai commencé à lire pour cette raison'.[711] Judith Ryan observes how Sebald continues for some time to trace this theme through the pages of the novel:

> *It would go too far to suppose that Sebald identifies with Revel's belief that writing can protect him from the hostility of the city, but [...] Other underlinings and marginal lines show that Sebald is reading the book attentively, following the connected motifs of fire and smoke, the theme of irrational action, and the narrator's notion that he can assuage his distress by burning his original copy of the city map and continuing to work laboriously at the text of his diary.[712]*

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[710] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 7
[711] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', p. 124
[712] Ibid, p. 125

Revel's loss of faith in the map leads him to seek another guide, this time the author, J C Hamilton, who has seemingly described Bleston so accurately in his detective novel, *Le Meurtre de Bleston*. Explicitly now he seeks a power to set against that of the city, 'un sorcier […] qui peut me munir de charmes'.[713] The book is a talisman, or a coded text of resistance: it may appear to be just a detective novel but to Revel it is 'un auxiliaire si précieux que je puis presque dire qu'une nouvelle époque s'est ouverte'.[714] The book, however, not only proves an unreliable guide in some respects, as the prejudices of its author become apparent, but comes to seem dangerous. Rather than an entertaining fiction with accurate depictions of various city locations, or even a talisman against the power of the city (note the ambiguity of the title, *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, entirely intended by Butor, although generally lost or weakened in English translation), the book is now a weapon, intended for use against the alleged fratricide but potentially one which could be turned against its author.

Resistance against the city takes the form of fire.[715] Revel feels driven to burn his map of Bleston[716] (an act of rebellion against the city and against the illusion of knowledge which the map had initially given him, if somewhat undercut by his need to buy a replacement almost immediately) and a photograph of his friends George and Harriet Burton, taken at the fair. The fires that break out around the city (which appear to be deliberately set) are viewed as acts of resistance,[717] but at the same time their smoke ('des âcres relents de ses incendies sombre et sournois') adds to the power of Bleston to sedate its inhabitants through 'ses basses fumées insidieuses et endormeuses'.[718] Revel identifies with the fires themselves: 'je sentais la flamme courir, gagner la ville: je la sentais, avec une intense satisfaction vengeresse; je n'ai cessé de la sentir courir, applaudissant à tous les incendies, dans tous les quartiers de la ville'.[719] However, he also feels 'profondément consterné, responsable'[720] as if somehow his

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[713] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 71

[714] Ibid, p. 72

[715] The fire motif can be linked to that of the labyrinth through the opposition in classical narrative between the chaos of passion (fire) and control and containment (the labyrinth, built to house the Minotaur which was a product of unlawful/unnatural passions). Note too that the labyrinth at Knossos was destroyed by fire. As Bleston is characterised by near constant rain and by the black waters of the Slee (and as we have noted elsewhere the labyrinth is associated with water), fire is its opposing element.

[716] Sebald underlines or otherwise emphasises a number of passages relating to the burning of the map (pp. 262-63), along with other references to fire more generally.

[717] 'Il y eut […] une recrudescence d'incendies […] Il s'agissait de personnes […] qui, affolées par le deuil et le malheur, mettaient le feu à leur maison dans l'illusion qu'elles y faisaient mourir la peste' (Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 175)

[718] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 250

[719] Ibid, p. 299. Sebald also underlines this passage in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*.

[720] Ibid, pp. 298-99

own small acts of arson are feeding into Bleston's cycle of self-immolation: 'les mauvaises flammes, ces flammes qui sont parties de mes mains, qui ont couru au travers de la ville'.[721] The fires in Bleston, whether the repeated acts of arson (some of which may be attributable to Horace Buck)[722] or Revel's more purely personal and symbolic acts of destruction, are the result of passionate hatred for the city. Buck's (implied) acts are directed against places where he has encountered prejudice, Revel's against the map as a representation of the city ('un acte désespéré d'anéantir la ville').[723]

What is at the heart of these texts is the experience of exile. The perception of the city as hostile and impenetrable suggests both the practical difficulties of finding one's way (and of being understood, as we will consider in the following chapter) and the experience of being excluded by virtue of one's 'foreignness', whether conveyed by speech or by appearance. Resistance is likely to yield only provisional victory, and that only for some. The perils of the city are most keenly felt by those who do not belong there, who may feel both excluded and imprisoned by it. As noted earlier, the exile both experiences the city as *unheimlich* and is so perceived by its inhabitants. And the displaced person inevitably brings with them the trauma of their separation from home, and encounters within the place of exile those memories and ghosts.

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[721] See *Austerlitz*, pp. 11-12, where the narrator feels irrationally implicated in a fire at Lucerne Station, just as Revel does in the epidemic of arson attacks across Bleston. (*L'Emploi du temps*, p. 298)

[722] Georges Raillard, 'L'Exemple', in *L'Emploi du temps* (Paris: Union générale éditions, 1957), pp. 441-502 (pp. 490-91)

[723] Lucien Giraudo, *L'Emploi du temps: Michel Butor* (Paris: Nathan, 1995), p. 72

Chapter 5

Labyrinths of language

> *If language may be regarded as an old city full of streets and squares, nooks and crannies, with some quarters dating from far back in time while others have been torn down, cleaned up and rebuilt, and with suburbs reaching further and further into the surrounding country, then I was like a man who has been abroad a long time and cannot find his way through this urban sprawl any more, no longer knows what a bus stop is for, or what a backyard is, or a street junction, an avenue or a bridge. The entire structure of language, the syntactical arrangement of parts of speech, punctuation, conjunctions and finally even the nouns denoting ordinary objects were all enveloped in impenetrable fog.*[724]

> *Car je ne savais encore que peu d'anglais, je ne comprenais ce qu'on me disait qu'au travers d'un brouillard, je sentais que chacune des syllabes que je prononçais sonnait faux, mes interlocuteurs avaient à passer sur mes fautes, à démêler mon intention au milieu du chaos de mes erreurs, car j'étais obligé, n'en possédant pas assez, de forcer perpétuellement le sens des mots pour me faire entendre, traduisant, toujours traduisant.*[725]

In the next two chapters, I will consider the texts firstly at the detailed level of words, sentences, language itself, and then, in Chapter 6, at the level of narrative structure (the equivalent, perhaps, of the two perspectives – of the view from within the labyrinth, and the birds-eye or panoramic view – that we have been considering in relation to the city-labyrinth).

We explored earlier how exile and trauma shape the experience of the individual in the labyrinth, and here I will consider the part that language plays in the experience of exile and trauma. Taking as a starting point the myth of the Tower of Babel, I will look at how the 'scattering of languages'[726] relates to the experience of the exile, how the divine punishment made exiles of the inhabitants of Babel, abruptly rendering them foreign to each other, and thus engendering alienation and suspicion. I will consider not only the commonality of that experience amongst the protagonists in both writers' work,[727] but also the complexities of translation, and how that may both take from and add to the source text. I will consider how language fails the exile, the point at which it falls short in the face of trauma, and polyphony

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[724] *Austerlitz*, pp. 174-75

[725] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 242. The last phrase is omitted in the English translation.

[726] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 59

[727] Not only the protagonists but the writers themselves, who both had to wrestle with linguistic alienation (see Dan Graham, *Conversation,* pp. 36-37; Christopher Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust: The Chain of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 33)

as a means of addressing that failure.[728] This includes the uses of language in the intertexts (real and fictional) used by both writers, and the effect of Sebald's 'citations cryptées'.[729] I will also explore how and why both writers use fragments of English in reported speech, and how ambiguity in terms of who is speaking (in relation to Sebald) and who is being addressed (in relation to Butor) creates uncertainty for the reader. I will quote from the German editions of Sebald's texts in a number of instances, in order to illustrate these points.

Another response to trauma, I will suggest, can be seen in the way in which both writers use extremely long sentences, evidence also of the influence of Proust, well established in the case of Butor but rather less so in Sebald's work.[730] I will show that these sentences are themselves labyrinthine, containing within themselves deferrals and dead ends, but also how the texts themselves and the process of their creation are a form of resistance against 'l'oubli'. Revel's diary is an attempt to gain mastery of the labyrinth that is Bleston, and itself becomes labyrinthine: 'in danger of being imprisoned by the universe around him, [he] constructs a labyrinth of words with which he hopes to control the labyrinth of the world'.[731]

Both Butor and Sebald make use of the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babel,[732] which provides an aetiology for the multiplicity of languages, and which has its equivalent in many cultures; George Steiner states that 'no civilisation but has its version of Babel, its mythology of the primal scattering of languages'.[733] This narrative has been explored in the twentieth century by Walter Benjamin[734] amongst others and haunts the work of Kafka[735] and Borges.[736] One might argue that it was the movement of populations on a vast scale and the

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[728] The musical implications of this will be the focus of Chapter 7.

[729] Patrick Charbonneau, 'Correspondance(s)', p. 208

[730] See, however, Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', pp. 131-34, and Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement: The Status of the Text in Sebald and Proust', in *W G Sebald: Schreiben ex patria/Expatriate Writing,* ed. Gerhard Fischer (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 461-74

[731] André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', p. 708. See earlier versions of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Stephen's name is Daedalus (James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer, John J. Slocum, Herbert Cahoon (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1963))

[732] Genesis 11: 1-9

[733] George Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 59

[734] Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as such and on the Language of Man', in *Reflections*, pp. 314-32. See Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel: Language and Exile in W G Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *New German Critique*, 115, 39, 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 3-26 (pp. 10-12)

[735] See, for example, 'The City Coat of Arms', 'The Great Wall of China', in *The Complete Short Stories*, ed. Nahum N Glatzer (London: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 433-34, 235-49 (pp. 238-39)

[736] Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings,* ed. Donald A Yates and James E Irby (London: Penguin, 2000). The new Bibliothèque Nationale described by Austerlitz connects to the Library of Babel: 'Its labyrinthine floors make it an (at least temporary) prison to anybody who tries to find his way around.' (*Austerlitz*, p. 392). Borges' City of the Immortals provides 'prisons for the immortals, towers of Babel, monuments to the hubris and disorder in the mind of man, versions of the House of Asterion [the Minotaur], the labyrinth which is the world' (Ernest H Redekop, 'Labyrinths in Time and Space', *Mosaic*, 13, 3-4 (1980), pp. 95-113 (p. 101))

growth of the major cities, with the consequent experiences of exile and alienation, that gave particular significance in the twentieth century to this confusion of languages. Since the labyrinth became a favoured metaphor for the same writers in the same period, the link between the two is strengthened, despite the very different provenance of the myths. The linguistic confusion which resulted from God's punishment turns language into a labyrinth in which anyone might lose their way or be deceived, intentionally or otherwise, and the labyrinth is a site of disorientation and confusion, and a metaphor for aporia, for difficulty, impasse, doubt and indecision.[737]

Babel is the name used in the Hebrew Bible for the city of Babylon[738] (the Biblical account refers consistently to 'the city and the tower'),[739] but there is also a possible etymology in the Hebrew word *balal*, which means to jumble and confuse.[740] The confusion of languages might mean absolute incomprehension but is as likely to mean the confusion that arises from differences in intonation affecting meaning, from *faux amis*, from difficulties in pronunciation, and from familiar sounding words in an alien context. In a more literal sense, the labyrinth and the tower might appear to be opposite images, given that the labyrinth tends to be a subterranean structure, often an entrance to the kingdom of the dead, whereas the tower of Babel[741] aimed to reach to the heavens. However, we must consider Baudelaire's description of a dream in which he is trapped in a labyrinth-tower, unable to find his way out, whilst the structure crumbles around him,[742] and of course the association between the city and the labyrinth which has been explored in earlier chapters. It is also worth noting other associations with the ancient city of Babylon: it is perhaps the ancient archetype of the great metropolis, as Manchester became during the Industrial Revolution; it was the place of exile for the Jews; and it has long been associated with corruption and excess.[743]

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[737] André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', p. 689

[738] *Babel* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word while *Babylon* comes from the Greek. See Andrew W Dyck, 'Babel or Babylon? A Lexical Grammatical Analysis of Genesis 10:10 and 11:9', *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 45, 4 (2017), pp. 237-42 (p. 241)

[739] Genesis 11: 4-5

[740] 'Its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth' (Genesis 11: 9)

[741] Possibly inspired by the great ziggurat of Babylon, some 70 metres high (P D Smith, *City: A Guidebook for the Urban Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 103)

[742] Charles Baudelaire, 'La Pléiade', cited by André Peyronie, 'The Labyrinth', p. 704; Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 229. See also Judith Ryan's 'The Intertextual Maze: Rilke's "Der Turm" and his Relation to Aestheticism', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 30, 1 (1993), pp. 69-82 (pp. 78-79)

[743] E.g., W T Stead's 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', and Kenneth Anger's 'exposés' of the sordid secrets of 'Hollywood Babylon'

Bleston is implicitly associated with the cursed cities of Biblical myth (Babel, Babylon, Sodom and Rome) as these are all that remain of the sequence of stained-glass windows in the Old Cathedral.[744] For Butor, Babel (as Tower and city) is one of the ancient and mythical cities which is part of the identity of Bleston. Philippe Sellier argues that 'plus que toute autre cité maudite, c'est Babylone qui règne dans *L'Emploi du temps*.'[745] He also notes that Hippolyte Taine describes Manchester in the late nineteenth century as 'la Babel de briques', and 'les magasins de tissus'[746] as 'des monuments babyloniens'.[747] There is an explicit reference in *L'Emploi du temps* to the Biblical narrative, as one of the fragments of stained glass in the Old Cathedral shows part of the inscription written by a mysterious hand upon the wall of Belshazzar's palace and translated by the prophet Daniel: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN', which Daniel renders as 'numbered, numbered, weighed, divided'.[748] Only the last letter remains, a division of division. The destruction of these windows takes place in the period of the Reformation, in a sectarian riot during which the bishop, attempting to calm the mob, is instead struck dumb: 'assuré sans doute qu'il lui suffirait de prononcer quelques mots pour que tout s'apaisât […] il ne parvint pas à ouvrir sa bouche';[749] as the rioters partially destroy the image of the words which had the power to reduce the Babylonian King to terror,[750] the bishop loses the power of speech altogether.

Daniel is a Jew in enforced exile in Babylon, translating (with divine assistance) an unknown language into the language of his captors. The theme of translation is recurrent in both *L'Emploi du temps* and in Sebald's work, and in the latter, the juxtaposition of phrases in different languages. I will explore how both writers use fragments of English, in particular. Firstly, however, I will return to Sebald's 'Bleston Cantical', not only densely intertextual but amongst the most intensely multilingual of Sebald's works.[751] It is notable that Axel Englund's analysis of Sebald's 'Bleston Cantical' is entitled 'Bleston Babel'.[752] Englund sees the poem as 'a set of gloomy variations on language, displacement and death', and compares the novel, in which Revel is constantly preoccupied by his inability to communicate, with the

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[744] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 98-99; Frédéric Sayer, 'Horreur des villes maudites dans l'œuvre de H P Lovecraft'
[745] Philippe Sellier, 'La Ville maudite chez Michel Butor', p. 126
[746] This connects us with the theme of weaving, which will be particularly significant when we consider narrative labyrinths. Manchester, of course, was known as Cottonopolis, and Horace Buck works in one of Bleston's cotton mills (*L'Emploi du temps*, p. 30)
[747] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 292 ; |Sellier, 'La Ville maudite chez Michel Butor', p. 127
[748] Daniel 5: 24-28; *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 246
[749] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 100
[750] Daniel 5: 6, 9
[751] See Chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of the poem and its connections to Butor
[752] Axel Englund, 'Bleston Babel', pp. 261-80

poem in which Sebald 'excels in traversing the borders of language'.[753] Sebald's German is, as Englund puts it, 'intercepted' by English, French, Latin, Yiddish and Aramaic, suggesting that these languages are interrupting, breaking up the monolingual flow of German. Englund argues that this is for Sebald a 'textual representation of a need to distance himself from his native country'.[754] It is a reminder of the linguistic challenges faced by the exile – the reader may share that sensation, confronted with languages they do not recognise or understand.

In Butor's Bleston, of course, there is a dominant linguistic norm. What follows inevitably from the scattering of languages is suspicion and the othering of those who speak a different language. As George Steiner says, 'religious wars and the persecution of supposed heresies arise inevitably from the babel of tongues: men misconstrue and pervert each other's meanings'; thus the multilingual cosmopolitanism epitomised by Austerlitz (and Sebald) became 'a byword for the "degenerate" and Jewish'.[755] The exile is marked out, struggling to make themselves understood and to understand, often confronted with a lack of willingness on the part of their interlocutors to make an equivalent effort.[756] Revel (not, of course, himself a coerced exile) is separated from the majority of Bleston's inhabitants by his difficulties with the language, and also by Bleston's power to, as he sees it, make his words opaque and to generate a fog of misunderstanding.[757] Even after some time,

> *J'avais tant de difficultés encore dans mes entrevues vaines avec des logeuses, ou lorsqu'il me fallait […] demander un nouvel accessoire de toilette; […] chaque fois que M. Blythe émet aimablement à mon intention quelques syllabes pâteuses, je suis obligé de les lui faire répéter, ou mieux, de me les faire traduire.[758]*

His encounter with Horace Buck offers some relief from this. Horace too is separated from those he works with and meets in the city. Even his fellow Africans are from Sierra Leone (we are not told where Buck is from, only where he is not from) and speak a different language, so that, only able to communicate with them in English, he is excluded from their social circles and the solidarity of shared experience. In relation to the wider population of Bleston, Buck is 'définitivement exilé',[759] in a more absolute and profound sense than Revel (who, until he speaks, will be indistinguishable from the native Blestonian), marked out by

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[753] Axel Englund, ''Bleston Babel', in *Languages of Exile*, p. 266
[754] Ibid, p. 279
[755] Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', p. 21
[756] *L'Emploi du temps,* pp. 12, 16, 50, 247
[757] Ibid, p. 115
[758] Ibid, p. 114
[759] Ibid, p. 138

the colour of his skin and treated with suspicion or contempt by most of the English people he encounters. We see, for example, Buck settling his bar tab, saying '"hello, Jack", mais l'autre n'a pas bronché'.[760] On their first meeting it is Buck's pronunciation of English that strikes Revel:

> *Il avait une prononciation pénible, comme dégoûtée [...] tous ses mots étaient un peu déformés, comme assombris, mais il les détachait avec une telle lenteur, de sa voix grave et rouillée, que j'avais le temps de les identifier un par un.[761]*

Buck has been in England for some time[762] and is, almost certainly, from an Anglophone African country, so his difficulty is different to Revel's. Rather than his vocabulary or fluency of speech, it is his pronunciation that emphasises his otherness, and the words that Butor uses ('pénible', 'dégoûtée', 'déformés') suggest Buck's alienation from and hostility towards Bleston, as well as echoing the reaction of Bleston's citizens to him (think of Jenkins' response, 'un insurmontable dégoût').[763]

Revel's colleagues are as opaque to him at the end of his time in Bleston as at the beginning, with the exception of James Jenkins. They respond to the presence of a foreigner amongst them by pretending that he is not a foreigner, making no concessions. They use language to exclude Revel whilst seeming to include him.

> *Jamais ils n'ont cherché à me faire parler, jamais ils n'ont tenté de savoir, dans ce mois d'octobre, si j'avais réussi à accrocher un sens à leurs rares syllabes, dont je sais maintenant qu'elles se réduisent à 'jolie pluie fine, ce matin', 'le vieux Matthews est en colère', 'vous avez l'air très affamé', ou 'l'équipe de Bradford a encore eu le dessus cette année'; et pourtant, comme il était visible que je peinais pour comprendre et me faire comprendre![764]*

The practical necessity of finding lodgings is made substantially more challenging by the need to decipher the mysterious wording of the advertisements, a language all of its own:

> *Il a été long, le déchiffrement des petites annonces de l'*Evening News, *presque chaque mot y étant remplacé par une abréviation que je n'arrivais à traduire correctement qu'après plusieurs tentatives.[765]*

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[760] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 33
[761] Ibid, p. 29
[762] Ibid, p. 36
[763] Ibid, pp. 374-75
[764] Ibid, p. 27
[765] Ibid, p. 56

In a passage that clearly resonated with Sebald, who writes the phrase 'traduisant, toujours traduisant' on the frontispiece of his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*, and underlines it in the text, Revel describes the effect of this linguistic alienation:

> *Car je ne savais encore que peu d'anglais, je ne comprenais ce qu'on me disait qu'au travers d'un brouillard,[766] je sentais que chacune des syllabes que je prononçais sonnait faux, mes interlocuteurs avaient à passer sur mes fautes, à démêler mon intention au milieu du chaos de mes erreurs, car j'étais obligé, n'en possédant pas assez, de forcer perpétuellement le sens des mots pour me faire entendre, traduisant, toujours traduisant.* [767]

He is thus drawn to those few who will make an effort to comprehend him. James Jenkins, whose lack of experience of the world outside Bleston is offset by his connections with the fairground community, is interested rather than merely baffled by Revel (although Horace Buck's otherness is too much for him). Ann Bailey is marked out by her patience as Revel attempts to find the English words he needs:

> *La crainte que j'avais de commettre des fautes ridicules devant elle me rendait encore plus balbutiant. [...] La traduction des mots 'itinéraire', 'trajet', m'échappait. Elle attendait sans se troubler.*[768]

But part of what attracts Revel to Ann's sister Rose, and a source of the ease with which his affections are transferred to her, is that she is studying French and speaks 'si délicieusement français'.[769] Thus he has a reason to speak to her in his own language and to encourage her to reciprocate. She can also empathise with his efforts to speak a foreign language, and with his errors in her own language. He forms an immediate bond with Lucien Blaise, a fellow countryman, although they would appear to have little in common other than nationality. What Buck and Revel share in terms of language is their otherness, the faults in pronunciation which mark them out:

> *Il parlait si lentement que je le comprenais et en même temps si mal qu'en m'adressant à lui, je n'avais plus aucune honte de ma prononciation détestable.*[770]

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[766] An interesting metaphor in light of the prevalence of fog throughout the novel, and echoed by Sebald when describing Austerlitz's loss of language: 'The entire structure of language, the syntactical arrangement of parts of speech, punctuation, conjunctions, and finally even the nouns denoting ordinary objects were all enveloped in impenetrable fog' (*Austerlitz*, p. 175)

[767] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 242. This clearly echoed Butor's own experiences in England (Dan Graham, *Conversation,* pp. 36-37)

[768] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 50

[769] Ibid, p. 195

[770] Ibid, p. 33

Language is thus a source of disorientation; each failure to make oneself understood reinforces the sense of otherness and exclusion, and each misunderstanding leads one further away from conveying or receiving the message. At the most prosaic level, some of Revel's failures in Bleston are attributable either to his inability to communicate, or to his limited understanding, particularly when native speakers make no concessions in terms of speed or colloquialism. Just as the labyrinth tricks one into taking the wrong path, so the unfamiliar language trips up the speaker, giving them the choice of silence or the risk of error. On Revel's arrival, as he tries to order a drink at the station bar, he says that

> *J'aurais voulu dire 'Je vous prie', mettre de l'amabilité dans ma demande, mais j'avais déjà le plus grand mal à retrouver les quelques substantifs indispensables, et je les prononçais de façon si fausse que moi-même je m'en rendais compte et que j'en souffrais.*[771]

A potential means of navigation within the labyrinth is thus fraught with difficulty. Not only is understanding and communicating within the place of exile a constant challenge, but within the labyrinth the traveller is cut off from all that connects them to their previous life, and the exile thus experiences a separation from their own language. 'The thread has been snapped', as Eva Hoffman puts it.[772]

For Sebald's Max Ferber too, there is a separation from his 'mother tongue':

> *German, which I have not once spoken since I parted from my parents at Oberwiesenfeld airport in Munich in 1939, [...] survives in me as no more than an echo, a muted and incomprehensible murmur.*[773]

Ferber's native language has become merely a confused, childhood memory. And if, in *L'Emploi du temps*, linguistic confusion is a feature of experience of the city (mythical and real), in *Austerlitz* it is internalised in Austerlitz himself. As Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones point out, 'the mystery of Austerlitz resides in language',[774] and it is his 'confrontations with English, French, Welsh, Czech and German – their territories and traditions, their exclusivities and entwinements – that map Austerlitz's life in exile'.[775] In rural Wales, the Czech child with a French first name learns by heart from the Welsh Bible 'the chapter about the confounding of languages of the earth'[776] and absorbs the Welsh

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[771] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 16
[772] Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 107-08
[773] *The Emigrants*, p. 182
[774] Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', p. 4
[775] Ibid, p. 25
[776] *Austerlitz*, p. 76

folktales in which, so often, the dead walk amongst the living: 'It is in tales where ghostly processions walk among the dwellings of the living that Austerlitz finds a language that might give expression to his own story – if only he knew what that was'.[777] The narrator notes that Austerlitz's speech in French is far less hesitant than in English, despite his having spent almost all of his life in the UK.[778] Later, Austerlitz has a crisis of language that mirrors the Biblical confounding – he can no longer see the connections between words, the structure of language is lost to him.[779] When he has a second crisis, he finds himself 'babbling in various languages'.[780] In his obsessive nocturnal wanderings he hears 'people behind my back speaking in a foreign tongue, Lithuanian, Hungarian, or something else with a very alien note to it'.[781] And yet, on arrival in Prague, he finds that he effortlessly understands and speaks in the language of his childhood. The loss of language entails the loss of one's own past, and its recovery is framed in terms of a rediscovered language.

As Austerlitz approaches the crisis which will provoke his search for his parents, he finds himself lost in language as if in a city:

> *If language may be regarded as an old city full of streets and squares, nooks and crannies, with some quarters dating from far back in time while others have been torn down, cleaned up and rebuilt, and with suburbs reaching further and further into the surrounding country, then I was like a man who has been abroad a long time and cannot find his way through this urban sprawl any more, no longer knows what a bus stop is for, or what a backyard is, or a street junction, an avenue or a bridge. The entire structure of language, the syntactical arrangement of parts of speech, punctuation, conjunctions and finally even the nouns denoting ordinary objects were all enveloped in impenetrable fog.[782]*

It is notable that this passage draws heavily upon Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*,[783] another example of Sebald's practice of quoting, or rather, paraphrasing, without acknowledgement, and it is thus a covert reference to a figure who appears in both *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*, overtly or again unacknowledged.[784] In this linguistic crisis, Austerlitz, who had been obsessed with networks, is unable to comprehend the connections

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[777] Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', p. 13
[778] *Austerlitz*, p. 42
[779] Ibid, p. 176
[780] Ibid, p. 377
[781] Ibid, p. 180
[782] Ibid, pp. 174-75
[783] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text with an English Translation*, ed. P M S Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G E M Anscombe, P M S Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Malden; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 11-12; for comparison, see the German edition of *Austerlitz*, p. 183
[784] See *Austerlitz,* p. 3 (the third set of eyes belong to Wittgenstein) and pp. 54-56; *The Emigrants,* pp. 166-67, and interviews with Sebald where he compares Paul Bereyter to Wittgenstein (Eleanor Wachtel, 'Ghost Hunter' pp. 37-61 (p. 46); Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', pp. 72-73; in *The Emergence of Memory*)

between words, sentences and ideas in his own writing. After episodes both of aphasia and of disconnected babbling in various languages[785] he finds the thread restored when he is with Věra in Prague:

> *In the middle of her account Věra herself, quite involuntarily, had changed from one language to the other, and I, who had not for a moment thought that Czech could mean anything to me, […] now understood almost everything Věra said, like a deaf man whose hearing had been miraculously restored.*[786]

As Dubow and Steadman-Jones put it, this is 'an extraordinary coup de théâtre'.[787] But it offers less comfort than one might expect (in any writer other than Sebald, perhaps). This recovery of language, rather than settling or territorialising Austerlitz, describes instead his exilic condition. Between him and his childhood lie the monstrous deformations of language of the Nazi era.[788] Věra recounts Agáta's response to a proclamation concerning the disposal of valuables which refers to 'the Jew concerned in the transaction': 'The Jew concerned in the transaction! Agáta had cried, adding: Really, the way these people write! It's enough to make your head swim'.[789] And thence to Theresienstadt and the 'pseudo-technical jargon', the long compound words, created 'to produce an illusion of transparency, a clarity motivated by the need to obscure'.[790] Language put to this purpose becomes a labyrinth, purporting to take one closer to truth, but in fact leading one further from it.

Sebald's use of Adler's text and other sources (acknowledged and unacknowledged) within *Austerlitz* creates a different kind of linguistic labyrinth. Intertextuality in its various forms is inherently labyrinthine, offering 'an infinite number of crossroads'.[791] Each reference or quotation indicates a path which the reader may choose to take, and which may prove to enrich their understanding or merely to distract and divert. Whilst Julia Kristeva argues that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations' and that 'any text is the absorption and transformation of another',[792] it is worth exploring the particular practices of Butor and Sebald in this regard. For both writers, the use of other texts (real or imagined), the

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[785] *Austerlitz*, pp. 175, 377
[786] Ibid, p. 219
[787] Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', p, 19
[788] As George Steiner says, German is 'the language which has most fully embodied and undergone the grammar of the inhuman' (*Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 71)
[789] *Austerlitz*, p. 249
[790] Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', p. 22
[791] Dominique Jullien, 'Intertextuality as Labyrinth', p. 118
[792] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, dialog, and novel', p. 37

introduction of other voices, asserts that the work is not and cannot be complete in itself and thus closed. As Butor said of Proust:

> *C'est cet inachèvement essentiel de l'œuvre-cathédrale qui permet à l'œuvre-robe d'en donner une idée malgré son inachèvement accidentel. Le livre de Proust, tellement fermé à l'origine, tellement un refuge contre le monde, devient en grandissant, et en particulier par l'intermédiaire de ces étapes fondamentales de réflexion que sont les œuvres d'art imaginaires, un livre ouvert dans lequel le monde entier doit pouvoir se voir.*[793]

This essay, 'Les Œuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust' explores the significance of Proust's three fictional artists (the writer Bergotte, the painter Elstir, and the composer Vinteuil)[794] in *À la recherche des temps perdus*. Butor creates two texts, two works (or series of works) of visual art, a number of films, both drama and documentary, and an architectural work within the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps*. In addition, there are multiple references not to specific texts or artefacts but to mythology, Biblical and classical.[795] The writer encountered by Revel is George Burton, who writes detective novels (published in the then familiar green jackets by Penguin) under a variety of pseudonyms. We are given fragments of the text of his *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, the novel that plays such a significant role in Revel's diary entries,[796] and from another (anonymous) text, the guide to Bleston, part of a series called 'Notre Pays et ses Trésors'. All of these texts or artefacts feed into the language of the novel, and are part of Revel's efforts to understand and master both the physical space of Bleston and its effect upon him.

For Butor, intertexuality is a means of creating polyphony. His vision is of a compositional method that weaves together different voices to create 'une œuvre collective'.[797] His work subsequent to *L'Emploi du temps* is more explicitly intertextual and polyphonic, but here he prefigures explorations in his final novel, *Degrés*, in *Mobile* and elsewhere of techniques such as collage and typographical presentation to bring out the different voices, the different lines of the fugue.[798] In a diary novel, where the perspective is exclusively that of the diarist, the *mise en abîme* introduces other perspectives through the texts that Butor creates, so that

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[793] 'Les œuvres d'art imaginaire chez Proust', p. 197

[794] Whilst Vinteuil is arguably the most significant of the fictional creators within Proust's work, he has no equivalent in Bleston, whose musicians have been silenced. But see Chapter 7 which nonetheless argues that *L'Emploi du temps* is a profoundly musical work.

[795] Dominique Jullien argues that there is a debt too to French classical tragedy ('Intertexuality as Labyrinth', pp. 108-24)

[796] Burton also provides Revel with an analysis of how a detective novel works, which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

[797] *L'Arc*, 'Butor', p. 2

[798] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs,* pp. 191-93

Revel can interact with them, assessing their trustworthiness and engaging, in effect, in dialogue with them.

> *Il n'y a pas d'œuvre individuelle. L'œuvre d'un individu est une sorte de nœud qui se produit à l'intérieure d'un tissu culturel au sein duquel l'individu se trouve non pas plongé mais* apparu*. L'individu est, dès l'origine, un moment de ce tissu culturel. Aussi bien une œuvre est-elle* toujours *une œuvre collective.*[799]

Sebald too uses intertexts that he has himself created (at least some of the entries in the purported diaries of Ambros Adelwarth, for example). But his use of intertextuality is distinctively different from Butor's practice in *L'Emploi du temps*. It encompasses not only copious references to real writers, artists, composers and their works but also many quotations or paraphrases, from a wide range of sources. He also, of course, embeds photographs within his texts, not explicitly captioned. Although in some instances the placement in the text does suggest a clear identification (which may prove not to be what it seems), often the onus is on the reader to decode the image. There have been many in-depth studies of Sebald's use of photographs[800] and the way in which they appear to be 'genuine',[801] whilst creating uncertainty through their lack of attribution: 'they make the improbable seem authentic, but at the same time they introduce the possibility of the counterfeit'.[802] I do not intend to focus primarily on that aspect of his intertextuality in this study; rather, I wish to consider his use of quotations, in relation to the theme of translation.

Sebald's works go beyond the majority of texts simply in terms of the profusion of quotations. But it is also notable that whilst some quotations are clearly identified, at least by context, many others are paraphrased, or rendered invisible by translation.[803] In terms of Genette's definitions, Sebald's quotations are very rarely within inverted commas, and thus do not qualify as traditional 'citation', and whilst they are more frequently 'un emprunt non declaré', that is, 'plagiat', they are often not rendered exactly, even where the language of origin is retained; indeed, they may be translated.[804] This practice creates a palimpsest, 'où

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[799] *L'Arc*, 'Butor', p. 2; Anna Otten, 'An Interview with Michel Butor', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 5, 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 92-97 (p. 93), <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-michel-butor-by-anna-otten/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[800] For example, J J Long, *W G Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*; Lise Patt, ed., *Searching for Sebald*, pp. 166-67; Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, pp. 40-52

[801] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', p. 73

[802] Carol Jacobs, *Sebald's Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 166

[803] See Chapter 1, where I explore the intertextual labyrinth of Sebald's Bleston poem.

[804] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 8. 'Quotation may be implicit or explicit; intentional or incidental; marked or unmarked' (Marko Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality,* trans. Timothy Pogačar (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008) p. 43)

l'on voit, sur le même parchemin, un texte se superposer à un autre qu'il ne dissimule pas tout à fait'.[805] Where Sebald has, for example, translated a text from French into German, unless the reader knows the original well, they may not recognise the source. Thus Sebald, by translating, has encrypted it, as Patrick Charbonneau, who has translated a number of Sebald's works into French, puts it: 'La citation cryptée, fidèle ou approximative, textuelle ou détournée, la réminiscence littéraire, en un mot, l'intertextualité'.[806] One of his translators, Michael Hulse, spoke of this process of 're-translating a translation' and of the 'conflation of sources and blurring of distinctions' which created significant challenges for him in working on *The Rings of Saturn* in particular.[807]

To take just one example, appropriately enough from Proust, who used a similar technique when he put into Elstir's mouth quotations from art historian Emile Mâle,[808] in *Austerlitz* we find a passage lifted from the German translation of Proust.[809] I have set out below the original text, from *Le Temps retrouvé*, alongside the German translation read by Sebald, and Sebald's version (in German) in *Austerlitz*, with his changes highlighted:

Comme ces gens atteints au plus haut degré du mal au mer et qui, traversant sur un bateau la mer Caspienne, n'esquissent même une résistance si on leur dit qu'on va les jeter à la mer.[810]	So wie hochgradig seekranke Leute, wenn sie auf einem Dampfer über das Caspische Meer fahren, auch nicht den leisesten Widerstand andeuten, falls man ihnen sagt, man werde sie nunmehr ins Wasser werfen.[811]	So wie hochgradig seekranke Leute, wenn sie etwa auf einem Dampfer über das Kaspische Meer fahren, auch nicht den leisesten Widerstand an den Tag legen, falls man ihnen eröffnet, man werde sie jetzt über Bord werfen.[812]

Whilst there is nothing in Sebald's text to flag this as a quotation, someone familiar with the source might be alerted by the apparently arbitrary reference to seasickness and particularly to the Caspian Sea. Clearly, therefore, this is not 'hidden' in the sense that Sebald is trying to

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[805] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 556
[806] Patrick Charbonneau, 'Correspondance(s)', p. 208.
[807] Michael Hulse, 'Englishing Max', in *Saturn's Moons,* pp. 195-208 (pp. 200, 205)
[808] Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement', p. 465
[809] Ibid, pp. 463-64. Sebald read Proust in 1964-65, before he came to England, in German translation. In the archives at Marbach one can see his markings in the German edition of Proust, mainly in the first two and the final volumes (Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', p. 128)
[810] Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, p. 432
[811] German translation of Proust (Vol. 13, Suhrkamp edition, owned by Sebald); Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', p. 141, n. 49
[812] *Austerlitz*, German edition (p. 182); 'Just as people who suffer from violent seasickness, if they are crossing the Caspian Sea on a steamer, for instance, will not offer the slightest resistance should someone tell them that they are about to be thrown overboard' (*Austerlitz*, p. 174)

claim this text as his own, since it could have easily been disguised had he so chosen. It is not deliberate deception, and yet it may mislead the reader, and it makes of the text a labyrinth. In Sebald's 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical',[813] a number of quotations from *L'Emploi du temps* were similarly translated by Sebald into German and have subsequently been translated into English.[814] There is, again, nothing to mark them as quotations, and unless the reader is very familiar with Butor's text, no reason for anyone to identify their source. Indeed, the translator's extensive footnotes to the poem do not do so. The poem is particularly dense with intertextual references, but the 'citations cryptées'[815] are, according to Richard Bales, 'subterranean manifestations of intertextuality, where the traces are less easily separable from the textual mass, and where, hence, the integration is more complete'.[816] As with other aspects of Sebald's work, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, this integration makes it difficult for the reader to discern what is 'real' and what is fictional, what is Sebald's creation and what he has borrowed.

Just as these 'integrated' quotations become invisible in the English translations of the novels, so do phrases or fragments of dialogue in English.[817] Butor uses these fragments more sparingly than Sebald does. He quotes the children on Guy Fawkes' Night ('penny for the Guy', 'we burn the Guy'),[818] a cultural phenomenon also noted by Sebald.[819] For Butor, the English phrases amidst the French emphasise the strangeness of a tradition that puzzles Revel:

> *J'étais intrigué par tous ces enfants que nous apercevions dans la nuit humide de Deren Street [...] traînant avec des cordes des bouquets de branchages mal liés, James m'a expliqué que nous étions dans la semaine du 'Guy Fawkes Day', et que l'on préparait des bûchers pour ces mannequins [...] que j'avais rencontrés en effet ce matin-là déjà, [...] promenés dans des voitures de poupées [...] qui m'avaient assiégés en me criant : 'A penny for the Guy', des bûchers pour les effigies de ce personnage historique dont il n'aurait su me dire exactement ni l'époque, ni les forfaits.[820]*

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[813] *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 18-22

[814] See Chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of the poem and its references to Butor's work. For a further example, see Sebald's use of Hippolyte Taine's description of his first sight of Manchester in *The Emigrants*, p. 168; Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, p. 292.

[815] Patrick Charbonneau, 'Correspondance(s)', p. 208

[816] Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement', p. 465

[817] It is interesting to note the contrast with Proust's use of English words and phrases, invariably by French characters, where they indicate vulgarity or dishonesty. (Daniel Karlin, *Proust's English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 42-43, 45-46)

[818] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 119-20

[819] Sebald underlines 'A penny for the Guy' in his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*.

[820] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 119

More prosaically, but still emphasising foreignness in this most domestic context, both writers use English to draw attention to the importance of the cup of tea: Mme Grosvenor with 'la "morning cup of tea"',[821] and Gracie Irlam with her Teasmaid, of which she says, 'Very useful, these are […] *an electric miracle'*.[822] Mme Grosvenor and Gracie Irlam both emphasise foreignness in other ways. The former is deeply prejudiced, to the extent that Revel cannot tell her that it was, albeit indirectly, through the agency of the African Horace Buck that he came to take lodgings with her.

> *Elle est venue, brandissant le* Bleston Post, *pour me lire et me commenter, avec des larmes d'indignation dans la voix, le récit d'un meurtre commis par un nègre dans le cinquième*[823] *[…] Elle voue tous ces 'black devils', comme elle dit, en ne choisissant qu'une seule des innombrables dénominations horrifiées qu'elle leur applique en fermant presque les yeux devant la brutalité soudaine de son propre langage, elle voue tous ces démons noirs au même enfer.*[824]

She regards Revel as

> *un être d'une espèce particulière, différent de tous ceux qu'elle a jamais rencontrés, dont il ne faut pas chercher à comprendre les habitudes […] mais en communication effective avec cette région de la réalité, pour elle quasi fabuleuse, le continent.*[825]

Gracie Irlam is more culturally aware, as indicated by her connection to Max Ferber (she is, we assume, the subject of his painting, *GI on her Blue Candlewick Cover*,[826] itself a nod to one of the sources for Ferber, Frank Auerbach, and his painting *EOW on her Blue Eiderdown*).[827] However, on the narrator's arrival at her door, she asks 'And where have you sprung from?' and comments that 'daß es nur ein Ausländer – *an alien* – wie sie sagte – sein könne, der mit solchem Koffer und zu einer solchen Unzeit am heiligen Freitagmorgen vor der Türe stehe'.[828] Her comparative open-mindedness is perhaps indicated elsewhere by her explanation of the activity of some of her other guests:

> *Sometimes, sagte sie, there's a certain commotion. But that need not concern you. It's travelling gentlemen that come and go […] die bunten Damen […]*

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[821] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 348

[822] *Die Ausgewanderten,* pp. 225-26

[823] Note the French use of a numbered arrondissement to locate the event, rather than a named district as one would expect in the UK.

[824] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 139

[825] Ibid, p. 140

[826] *The Emigrants*, p. 177

[827] Hannah Rothschild, 'Frank Auerbach: An Interview with one of our Greatest Living Painters'

[828] *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 222; 'only *an alien* would show up on her doorstep at such an hour on a blessed Friday morning with a case like that' (*The Emigrants*, p. 152)

> *auf die Gracie ausschließlich und ohne das geringste Anzeichen von Ironie*
> *Bezug nahm mit dem offensichlitch von irh selbst geprägten Sammelbegriff*
> *the gentlemen's travelling companions.*[829]

Revel quotes in English the opening paragraph of the detective novel, *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, emphasising that it is the English text with which he is familiar, even if he still translates this instinctively. Butor gives the title consistently in French, probably to emphasise the ambiguity which is lost in translation (*The Bleston Murder* is more obviously about a murder *in* Bleston and does not really suggest a reading where Bleston might be the victim). Revel records the opening words (drawing attention again to the constant necessity of translation):

> *ce début que je connais par cœur maintenant:'The old Cathedral of Bleston is famous*
> *for its big stained glass window, called the Window of the Murderer…', ce début, ou*
> *plutôt la traduction française que je lui superposais automatiquement: 'L'Ancienne*
> *Cathédrale de Bleston est célèbre par son grand vitrail, dit le Vitrail du*
> *Meurtrier…'.*[830]

Elsewhere he quotes George Burton/J C Hamilton's comment on the New Cathedral, including an English phrase, questioning how best to translate this:

> *Ah, J C Hamilton ne ménage pas ses sarcasmes: 'cette misérable farce', 'this*
> *make-believe' (comment traduire? Presque 'cette escroquerie') […] ou 'a*
> *distorted shadow', une ombre déformée, comme dit J C Hamilton.*[831]

This passage is indicative of Revel's growing disillusionment with *Le Meurtre de Bleston* as a reliable guide to the city, a talisman, even, against its sorcery. He has trusted in Burton's assessment of the New Cathedral, only to find it flawed, and in quoting him in English he is putting distance between himself and the text upon which he has relied, now noting the 'étrange aveuglement'[832] of the author. His attempted translation of 'make-believe' is thus relatively pejorative, but perhaps derives from a literal interpretation – to *make* someone else believe, or to deceive them – rather than translating the term as 'fanciful', for example. Burton's hostility towards the New Cathedral and by extension towards its architect, E C Douglas, creates a rift between Revel and James Jenkins (Douglas's grandson) whose source Revel initially fails to understand. Jenkins is a mixture of surprising cosmopolitanism, with his friendship with the fairground family, and less surprising racial prejudice, shown in his

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[829] *Die Ausgewanderten,* p. 226; 'sometimes in the evenings there was (as she put it) a certain commotion. But that need not concern you. It's travelling gentlemen that come and go. […] the garish women […] whom Gracie would refer to, without the slightest hint of irony, with a hold-all phrase she had evidently coined herself, as *the gentlemen's travelling companions*' (*The Emigrants*, p. 155)
[830] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 72
[831] Ibid, p. 157
[832] Ibid, p. 157

reaction to Horace Buck. Jenkins refers to the latter as 'that very brown man',[833] having

glimpsed him from a distance with Revel, and subsequently when introduced to him, cannot

mask his response, 'détournant son visage empreint d'une véritable horreur, comme d'un

insurmontable dégoût'.[834] Again the use of an English phrase indicates alienation, Jenkins'

from Buck and thus from Revel, and Revel's sense of (vicarious) rejection by Jenkins.

If these fragments of English are introduced to emphasise otherness (that of British customs,

or that of the exiled protagonists), it is interesting to note that Sebald gives to Max Ferber,

one of the eponymous 'emigrants', a number of English phrases. One would assume that he

and the narrator would converse in German; however, as noted earlier, Ferber has not spoken

German since he left his parents behind in Munich in 1939,[835] and so this device reminds us

that the two German exiles are communicating in a language to which neither was born. One

of the fragments of English connects us with a recurring figure in *The Emigrants*, the

'butterfly man' who is identified as Vladimir Nabokov.[836] Here, Ferber describes his visit to

Lake Geneva and a moment when he feels a compulsion to jump from the vantage point he

has just reached, but is prevented from doing so by the appearance of the butterfly man:

> *like someone who's popped out of the bloody ground – ein um die sechzig*
> *Jahre alter Mensch mit einem großen Shmetterlingsnetz aus weißer Gaze vor*
> *ihm gestanden und hätte in einem geradeso vornehmen wie letzlich*
> *unidentifizierbaren Englisch gesagt, es sei jetzt an der Zeit, an den Abstieg*
> *zu denken.[837]*

Whilst the butterfly man is reported to have spoken in English, the English phrase is

presumably from Ferber. Most significantly, perhaps, Ferber's statement that 'I am here, as

they used to say, to serve under the chimney'[838] is given in English. This suggests that the

phrase is a saying familiar, if archaic, in that language, although I have yet to find a source

that indicates its origin. Its double meaning, however, is clear: Ferber must 'serve' both the

'physical gloom' of Manchester (the 'chimney of the world'), and the haunting of the past,

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[833] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 373-74

[834] Ibid, pp. 374-75. Lucien too finds the reality of Buck less 'drôle' than Revel's account of him, reacting with
'une espèce de peur instinctive […], de malaise, d'éloignement, de méfiance' (Ibid, p. 283)

[835] *The Emigrants*, p. 182

[836] Adrian Curtin and Maxim D Shrayer, 'Netting the Butterfly Man: The Significance of Vladimir Nabokov in
W G Sebald's *The Emigrants'*, *Religion and the Arts*, 9, 3-4 (2005), pp. 258-83. See *The Emigrants*, pp. 16, 43,
104, 115, 174, 213-14

[837] *Die Ausgewanderten*, p. 256; 'like someone who's popped out of the bloody ground. He was carrying a large
white gauze butterfly net and said, in an English voice that was refined but quite unplaceable, that it was time to
be thinking of going down' (*The Emigrants*, p. 174)

[838] *The Emigrants*, p. 283

symbolised by the crematoria chimneys of the death camps.[839] These fragments of English mislead the reader of the English translation, inevitably, where their function in the original text – to emphasise multilinguality, and the protagonists' constant movement between languages, whether spoken, heard or read – is lost.

Sebald's use of reported speech creates complex layers of speech indicators. Anthea Bell said of the repeated 'said Austerlitz' and its variants that 'it felt both right and satisfyingly rhythmical, like the return of a piece of music now and then to its home key'[840] (the analogy with fugue/counterpoint and polyphony in both Butor and Sebald will be explored further in Chapter 7). The most notable passage is again in *Austerlitz*, as Austerlitz tells the narrator of his return to Prague and his conversation with Věra.[841] Initially, Austerlitz is present in the account less as a narrator than as the subject of Věra's reminiscences, though we should note that all we know of Věra comes from Austerlitz's account. As we find throughout Sebald's work, indirect discourse takes the form of cited speech, 'which never allows us to forget the mediation of the narrator',[842] in this case Austerlitz himself. The speech indicators are mainly 'said Věra', as she recounts Austerlitz's forgotten childhood to him. Gradually this becomes more complex: 'I remember, Věra told me, said Austerlitz'[843] introduces potential confusion as to who it is that is remembering. To the structural confusion is added a layer of uncertainty about Austerlitz's own recollection of these conversations: 'so I think Věra began, said Austerlitz'.[844] As Austerlitz himself fades from the narrative, which focuses on his parents and their experiences under Nazi occupation, the speech indicators consistently give us the dual attribution: 'said Věra, so Austerlitz told me […] said Věra, Austerlitz continued […] so Věra recollected, said Austerlitz […] Věra went on, said Austerlitz'.[845] As Maximilian's voice joins in, Austerlitz recedes further: 'Maximilian had told her, said Věra […] as Maximilian described it to us […] said Věra, Maximilian told us'.[846]

Reading these passages requires a constant process of reorientation within the narrative for the reader. It creates a sense of what Ernestine Schlant calls 'dense time',[847] as the time in

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[839] Lilian R Furst, *Random Destinations: Escaping the Holocaust and Starting Life Anew* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 73
[840] Anthea Bell, 'Translating W G Sebald: With and Without the Author', in *Saturn's Moons*, pp. 209-46 (p. 213)
[841] *Austerlitz*, pp. 216-59
[842] Lilian R Furst, *Random Destinations,* p. 87
[843] *Austerlitz*, p. 226
[844] Ibid, p. 235
[845] Ibid, pp. 236-37
[846] Ibid, pp. 238-39
[847] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 225

which the narrator records his conversation with Austerlitz, the time when the conversation took place, the time when Austerlitz met Věra and the events Věra herself described, are all present and overlapping. This of course returns us to Revel's diary, and the multiple time frames contained within each entry. The chronological complexities of Revel's diary and of Sebald's narratives form labyrinths which disorient the reader, as will be explored further in the next chapter.

We see in these texts the ways in which the attempt to express trauma in words can create labyrinths of language, or can fail altogether. The exceptionally long sentences used by both Butor and Sebald are examples of the former, and reflect too a debt to Proust, who uses long sentences throughout *À la recherche du temps perdu*, frequently eschewing paragraph breaks. This dictates the way in which the work is read: it demands that one give it time, that one allows oneself to be taken along with the flow of the text and not to focus too much on the structure (as rigorous as that is) since – as with a fugue[848] – it becomes impossible both to follow the sense and to interrogate the structure as the sentence continues. Whilst this is a general feature of Proust's style, it is worth noting in what context his longest sentence occurs.[849] In *Sodome et Gomorrhe* the narrator observes from a hidden vantage point the homosexual encounter between M de Charlus and Jupin. This prompts him to consider the nature of sexual 'inversion', and to draw an analogy with the situation of the Jews.

> *Sans honneur que précaire, sans liberté que provisoire jusqu'à la découverte du crime, sans situation qu'instable […] exclus même comme les Juifs autour de Dreyfus, de la sympathie – parfois de la société – de leurs semblables […] comme les Juifs encore […] se fuyant les uns les autres, recherchant ceux qui leur sont les plus opposés […] l'opprobre où ils sont tombés, ayant fini par prendre par une persécution semblable à celle d'Israël, les caractères physiques et moraux d'une race […] comme les Israélites disent de Jésus qu'il était juif, sans songer qu'il n'y avait pas d'anormaux quand l'homosexualité était la norme, pas d'antichrétiens avant le Christ.[850]*

As the ostensible narrator is neither homosexual nor Jewish, and Proust is both, this creates significant ambiguities and conflicts. In all there are fifteen pages of these reflections. As Roger Shattuck puts it in his 'field guide' to *À la recherche du temps perdu*,

> *They contain, like a steep mountain range blocking the way, the longest sentence in Proust's novel – close to two and a half pages. […] It enumerates nine nearly*

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[848] See Chapter 7
[849] Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement', p. 465
[850] Marcel Proust, *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921-22; Paris: Gallimard, 1954), pp. 615-16

> *disabling burdens under which this 'accursed race' must live and compares its predicament to that of the Jews.[851]*

Whether the influence of Proust upon Sebald in terms of style was direct, or mediated via Butor's Proustian novel, is probably impossible to determine, particularly without an analysis of the German translation in which Sebald encountered the work. I would suggest that there are likely to be elements of both. It may also be significant that in this passage Proust explores with passion and intensity the experience of alienation and prejudice which foreshadows Theresienstadt.[852]

The influence of Proust on Butor is very well established, and evident throughout *L'Emploi du temps*. His first draft of the novel was criticised because of the use of long sentences (he cited Proust in his defence but the response was 'mais Proust était Proust')[853] and he thus attempted to write it differently:

> *Je me suis rendu compte que ça ne collait pas: cela me contraignait à multiplier les répétitions, c'était trop filiforme, trop sec. […] Je me suis aperçu que la langue française a l'avantage de posséder un énorme éventail de formes verbales. Cela permet de moduler d'une façon très précise la succession des événements, les uns par rapport aux autres. Si j'avais besoin d'utiliser des structures grammaticales complexes, c'était pour pouvoir attraper certains thèmes à l'aide de grandes boucles, comme avec un lasso, si je puis dire: un équivalent littéraire des spirales que l'on trouve dans l'architecture baroque.[854]*

L'Emploi du temps demanded complexity, baroque loops and spirals that reflected the labyrinth it described. If the novel itself is a labyrinth as well as describing a labyrinth (and this will be explored further in terms of narrative structure), the sentences are microcosms of that labyrinth, duplicating, as Faris put it (referring not only to Butor but to Joyce's *Ulysses* and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe*), 'the form of the labyrinth in the structural design of the text; the placement of words, sentences and ideas, and consequently the reader's progressive perception of them, traces a labyrinthine shape'.[855] Through this 'baroque'[856]

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[851] Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to* In Search of Lost Time (New York; London: W W Norton, 2000), p. 47

[852] See Helen Finch's study of homosexuality in Sebald's work (*Sebald's Bachelors*: *Queer Resistance and the Unconforming Life* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013))

[853] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 76

[854] Ibid, p. 76

[855] Wendy B Faris, *Labyrinths of Language*, p. 9

[856] Note Deleuze's definition of the baroque in terms of 'folds': the fold 'refers to the Multiple, and the latter is only grasped in the shape of a labyrinth' (Jean-Godefroy Bidima, 'Music and the Socio-Historical Real: Rhythm, Series and Critique in Deleuze and O. Revault d'Allonnes', in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) pp. 176-95 (p. 178)).

style, ornamented, crowded and dense, Butor uses structural and grammatical complexity to create disorientation and uncertainty for the reader.[857]

Within *L'Emploi du temps*, the frequency of long, complex sentences increases as the narrative progresses. This reflects the state of mind of the narrator as his hope to seize control of his time in Bleston through the writing of the diary seems increasingly vain and his self-imposed task separates him from his few friends in the city.[858] Mary Lydon suggests that, whilst the influence of Proust is unarguable, there is a shared origin in Henri Bergson, who 'compared life to a single sentence punctuated only by commas':[859]

> *Je crois bien que notre vie intérieure est quelque chose comme une phrase unique entamée dès le premier éveil de la conscience, phrase semée de virgules, mais nulle part coupé par des points.*[860]

Butor saw the long sentences of *L'Emploi du temps* as reflecting 'un des aspects fondamentaux' of the architecture of the labyrinth.[861] The text is 'semée de virgules', including at the ends of paragraphs. In this example, the paragraphs are quite distinct, despite the lack of full stops, beginning with a straightforward account of an outing, then in parentheses (almost a theatrical 'aside') pondering his relationship with Jenkins, and Jenkins' with the sisters, and then a poetic digression as he gazes at Rose:

> *[…] nous fêtions tous la réussite de Rose à ses examens de français, réussite dont aucun de nous n'avait douté, […] tous, c'est-à-dire les sœurs Bailey, Lucien Blaise, moi-même et aussi James Jenkins,*
>
> *(je ne savais pas qu'il s'intéressait tellement à elles; je ne me serais pas douté qu'il participerait à notre petite célébration; c'était la première fois depuis longtemps que je le voyais en dehors des heures de bureau […] depuis ce soir de la fin de mai à la foire dans le deuxième, depuis ce dernier samedi de mai, la veille du jour où j'ai appris aux Bailey le véritable nom de J C Hamilton),*
>
> *où les doigts agiles du soleil, blancs et tenus même ce jour-là, jouaient, comme de minuscules anguilles douces et chaudes, dans les cheveux presque roux de ma Rose, […],*[862]

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[857] Butor uses the musical term 'moduler', which refers to the shift from one tonality to another, with or without a change in key signature, vital to the structuring of the music, without necessarily being evident to the listener.

[858] It also mirrors the musical structure of the novel, modelled on a canon or fugue, in which polyphony and counterpoint create an increasingly complex musical texture. See Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, pp. 93-94, and Chapter 7

[859] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 92

[860] Henri Bergson, 'L'Âme et le corps', *L'Énergie Spirituelle*, cited by Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 93.

[861] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', p. 339

[862] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 151

These sentences turn back upon themselves or arrive at a point, a junction, where they abandon one time-frame for another. As the sentences become longer, Butor uses repetition 'pour obtenir une structure avec des boucles',[863] often underlining the repeated phrases by the use of paragraph divisions. To quote Bergson once again, 'Mon état d'âme, en avançant sur la route du temps, s'enfle continuellement de la durée qu'il ramasse; il fait pour ainsi dire, boule de neige avec lui-même'.[864] The words or phrases accumulate weight with each repetition, as a snowball gathers snow. As Deleuze says, repetitions 'do not add a second and third time to the first, but carry the first time to the "nth" power'.[865]

We will see this process of 'snowballing', in Revel's diary entry for Friday 8 August, a moment of crisis for him following the announcement of Rose's engagement to Lucien, and one of Butor's longest sentences. It takes up over four pages, broken into paragraphs, each of which begins with the name 'Rose', which is also the final word of the final paragraph. Marian Grant notes that whilst Rose's name is, on each occurrence, followed by a relative clause, there are no main verbs. As she puts it, 'the whole of this entry is thus transformed into a single impassioned evocation'.[866] In his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*, Sebald underlines each repetition of Rose's name, and writes at the top of the page 'une fuge [sic]' and 'point d'orgue'.[867]

The repetition at the beginning of each paragraph goes further:

> *Rose que j'ai retrouvée […] Rose qui restait […] Rose qui m'a regardé […] Rose avec qui j'ai déjeuné […] Rose qui restait […] Rose que j'ai dû ramener chez elle […] Rose qui compte tant sur moi […] Rose qui a tellement changé […] Rose dont le corps s'est assuré […] Rose qui aurait dû mieux me deviner […] Rose à qui je dois renoncer […][868]*

until the final paragraph, which separates the 'qui' with the invocation of the mythical names he has attributed to her:

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[863] Denis Mellier, 'Boucles, trajets, repliements', p. 340

[864] Henri Bergson, 'De l'évolution de la vie', *L'Evolution Créatrice*, cited by Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 93. It is interesting to note Butor's comment on Bergson: 'N'est-il pas singulier que les métaphores employées par Bergson pour nous rendre sensibles à certains aspects "continus" de notre expérience du temps soient justement à son insu des métaphores éminemment spatiales?' ('Recherches sur la technique du roman', in *Essais sur le roman*, p. 119)

[865] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (1968; London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 2

[866] Marian A Grant, *Michel Butor − L'Emploi du temps* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 43

[867] <https://www.lexico.com/definition/point_d'orgue> [accessed 25 August 2021]. Chapter 7 focuses on the musical structures and techniques used by both Butor and Sebald, and in particular, the fugue.

[868] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 270-74. Note that the verb forms become more complex as this passage progresses.

> *Rose, ma Perséphone, ma Phèdre, ma Rose qui s'est ouverte dans ce marais de paralysie et de gaz lourds, depuis le temps des grands brouillards, hélas non point ma Rose, mais seulement Rose, l'interdite Rose, la dérobée, la réservée, la vive, la simple, la tendre, la cruelle Rose.[869]*

Within the diary entry, Revel attempts two detours from his obsession with Rose, whom he knows he has lost (without ever having declared his attachment). The first recounts his futile pursuit of Richard Tenn (whom he suspects of responsibility for what he believes to be an attempt to kill George Burton), reminiscent of early sections of the diary with its repetition of bus numbers and street names. He then turns his thoughts to Rose's sister Ann, to whom he had been attracted before meeting Rose, before returning to Rose again. Here Revel's inability to bring his thoughts to a conclusion, to structure them coherently, reflect his emotional distress and his obsession. The entry for 29 July, itself one long sentence, breaks off abruptly, as Revel is interrupted by the couple's arrival:

> *[…] quand je suis arrivé à l'hôpital, j'ai trouvé dans la chambre des gens que je ne connaissais pas, ce qui a rendu la conversation assez difficile […] de telle sorte que je me suis retiré après quelques…[870]*

In the following day's entry, as he recounts the nature of the interruption, he torments himself with the repetition of phrases such as 'tous les deux' ('Ils avaient l'air tellement heureux tous les deux'),[871] and subsequently 'à quoi bon' ('À quoi bon maintenant continuer […] à quoi bon retrouver […] à quoi bon aviver'). [872]

Another example of how Butor suggests the disordered state of Revel's thoughts can be found in the entry for 19 August. Here, he refers back to the events of 12 April, in one sentence which encompasses 'events which occurred a week before that date, two months before, one day after, one week after, in the following June, ten days before the time of writing, in the previous October, on 13 April, and on the last Sunday in April'.[873] The changes of direction in this long paragraph alert us to the jumps in time:

> *ce deuxième samedi d'avril […] à peu près deux mois plus tôt […] le lendemain […] le dimanche 13 avril […] le samedi suivant, le 19 avril […] un soir de juin […] il y a*

[869] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 274
[870] Ibid, p. 248
[871] Ibid, pp. 248-49
[872] Ibid, pp. 249-50
[873] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile,* p. 92

> *dix jours [...] il y a très longtemps, en octobre [...] un dimanche du mois d'avril, le deuxième dimanche d'avril, le 13 avril [...] le samedi 12, la veille*[874]

In another example, part of the entry for 8 September, the jumps are not only in time but in location:

> *Chez Matthews and Sons [...] Théâtre des Nouvelles [...] l'Oriental Rose [...] Bombay, dans City Street [...] au-delà de la place du Musée*[875]

and then away from Bleston altogether to the cities seen on screen at the Théâtre des Nouvelles: 'Athènes [...] la Rome des empereurs [...] Petra, Baalbeck et Timgad [...] la Crète'.[876] The reference to Crete returns him to thoughts of Ann/Ariane and to his 'lamentable échec auprès d'elle'.[877] He refers back to his earlier attempts to persuade himself that all is not lost:

> *C'est un simple échec temporaire, Ann, un retard bien malencontreux, mais c'est seulement un retard [...] C'est un simple échec temporaire, et je crois que j'arriverai à vous expliquer lui aussi; c'est un simple retard sans importance [...] un simple retard qui me trouble certes [...] C'est un simple retard sans importance, Ann [...] C'est un simple retard auquel je n'ai que trop tendance à attacher de l'importance*[878]

Whilst a Sebaldian ambiguity about who is speaking is outside of the scope of a diary novel, there is increasing room for ambiguity about who is being addressed, as Revel's narrative develops. He despairs of his attempts to communicate with Ann; he refers to 'cette vaine lettre suppliante' which he began on 25 August,[879] whilst elsewhere he suggests that the diary itself is intended for her eyes (and indeed there are sections, as in the quotation above, amongst others, where she is directly addressed: 'si je ne vous ai pas, pour ainsi dire, adressé une seule parole [...] Aussi vous comprendrez, Ann, pourquoi [...] je ne réussirais pas à vous déclarer ma misère').[880] However, buried within the first paragraph of the 8 September entry is a direct address to the city: 'dans ton port au nord-ouest, Bleston',[881] and subsequently

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[874] *L'Emploi du temps,* pp. 303-04. See Butor's comments on 'discontinuité temporelle' in the novel: 'de temps en temps le récit procèdera par flux, mais entre ces îlots de flux, nous ferons presque sans nous en douter d'énorme sauts' ('Recherches sur la technique du roman', in *Essais sur le roman*, p. 116)

[875] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 353

[876] Ibid, p. 353

[877] Ibid, p. 353

[878] Ibid, pp. 315-18

[879] Ibid, p. 353

[880] Ibid, pp. 326-28

[881] Ibid, p. 352

'dans ton sous-sol, Bleston'.[882] And from halfway through the penultimate paragraph, it is clear that Bleston is the 'tu' to whom Revel is writing:

> *pour que, par ces deux sœurs, Bleston, tu commences à déchiffrer ce déchiffrement de toi-même [...] tes yeux pleins de poussière et de patience [...] tu poursuives ta propre lecture, étaies ta lente guérison, affermisses les plus sûrs de tes rêves, rassembles ton peuple d'étincelles, pour que mes propres paroles silencieuses se mettent à résonner dans toutes tes poutres, pour que tes propres paroles silencieuses atteignent enfin au chant brûlant, Bleston qui au fond de toi-même désires ta mort autant que moi.[883]*

These abrupt shifts disrupt the reader's comprehension of the text, given that we have been led to think that within the fictive context the writing of the diary is to benefit Revel himself. Given that the notion of addressing the city is clearly fantastical, these passages strengthen the reader's sense of the distance between the events Revel describes and his interpretation of them. The use of the subjunctive form within this passage ('poursuives', 'affermisses', 'rassembles'), indicates aim and intention, but also suggests doubt and uncertainty. We may also briefly consider that Revel is writing in order to explain himself to Ann, but this is not the intention with which he initially embarked upon the diary. Whilst Revel says that he intends his letter to let Ann know 'comme je l'ai vraiment aimée malgré tout' he realises that it will tell her more than this: 'pour qu'elle me sache lâche, calculateur, aveugle et haineux',[884] and he recognises the futility of this exercise once Ann is engaged to James. We may thus conclude that the address to Ann is as rhetorical as that to Bleston, but the switches between the two undermine our confidence in Revel's perceptions. J Hillis Miller has analysed how Proust uses Albertine's 'brusques sauts de syntaxe ressemblant un peu à ce que les grammairiens appellent anacoluthe'[885] (an unexpected discontinuity in the expression of ideas within a sentence, leading to a form of words in which there is logical incoherence of thought), to indicate that she is lying about her relationships with other women (she corrects 'je' to 'elle' to change her own role from active to passive).[886] Revel is not actively attempting to deceive (other than himself) but the reader is wrong-footed, nonetheless. Richard Bales has argued that whilst the frequent association of anacoluthon is with a lie it is also an inevitable feature of the Proustian sentence, the sentence from which there is no escape: 'The sentence meanders, digresses and parenthesises to such an extent that any

[882] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 353
[883] Ibid, pp. 354-55
[884] Ibid, p. 354
[885] Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière* (1923: Paris: Flammarion, 1984), p. 249
[886] J Hillis Miller, *Reading Narrative* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 150-51

meaningful direction it initially possessed is lost sight of: it just goes on endlessly […]
Semantic content dictates syntactic form.'[887]

Whilst Butor's most convoluted sentences reflect the disordered and obsessive state of mind
of his narrator in response to the shock of loss, Sebald's longest sentence is a response to the
trauma of the Holocaust, mediated through the assumed experience of Austerlitz's mother,
and through quotations from and references to H G Adler's work on life at Theresienstadt.[888]
This goes on for nine pages,[889] and the structure of a sentence of this length is inherently very
difficult to grasp. There are interjections to remind the reader who is narrating ('said
Austerlitz', 'Austerlitz continued'),[890] although these are abandoned for two full pages, and to
refer back to Adler ('as Adler's reconstruction shows', 'which Adler tells us, said Austerlitz',
'again according to Adler').[891] In addition, there are lengthy lists: of the professions and
national origins of those imprisoned at Theresienstadt,[892] of the 'primitive factories' and the
'operations serving the ghetto's internal economy',[893] and of the 'improvements and
embellishments'[894] undertaken to present the ghetto to a Red Cross Commission. Sebald's
translator, Anthea Bell, said of her work on this passage:

> *In my very first draft I put a full stop about two pages into this passage, and then
> immediately took it out again;[895] I knew without being told that it must remain one
> long, continuous sentence in English, to convey the mindless, busy haste of the regime
> in the camp.[896]*

The sentence gathers weight as it continues (the snowballing effect again), it creates tension
and anxiety in the reader who will crave a resolution that cannot be offered. It is inexorable
and relentless, like the 'terrible, pointless, bureaucratic industry of the Nazis'.[897]

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[887] Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement', p. 470

[888] H G Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-45*

[889] *Austerlitz*, pp. 331-42

[890] Ibid, pp. 334-35

[891] Ibid, pp. 337, 342

[892] Ibid, pp. 331-32

[893] Ibid, p. 333

[894] Ibid, p. 340

[895] This returns us to Bergson:'nulle part coupé par des points' ('L'Âme et le corps', *L'Énergie Spirituelle*, cited
by Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 93)

[896] Anthea Bell, 'Translating W G Sebald: With and Without the Author', p. 213

[897] Anthea Bell, 'On Translating W G Sebald', in *The Anatomist of Melancholy*, pp. 11-18 (p. 13). Ali Smith
described 'the horrific connectivity […] the doggedness of its refutal of all literary naiveties of connectivity: it
leaves a phrase like Forster's 'only connect' hanging ragged, or, rather, cancels the phrase's naivety and rewrites
its urgency in the new light, the new dark, of the end of the twentieth century ' ('Loosed in Translation', in *After
Sebald,* pp. 71-83 (p. 80))

The text is not only shaped by the trauma, but is an act of resistance against it. H G Adler's account of Theresienstadt is a damning, exhaustive testimony on behalf of those who could no longer be heard, and Sebald's own writing (often controversially) is 'contre l'oubli'. But more generally, as A S Byatt put it, 'he appears to be holding himself together with his writing'.[898] Revel certainly sees the writing of his diary as a means of survival and of resistance against the power of Bleston. He describes 'le cordon de phrases' as 'un fil d'Ariane', 'toutes ces lignes étant les marques dont je jalonne les trajets déjà reconnus',[899] and his writing table is 'mon rempart contre Bleston'.[900] However, just as Austerlitz finds that language fails him at the critical moments of his life, Revel loses faith in words, as Bleston seems to have defeated him:

> *Il ne me reste plus dans cet effondrement que ce dérisoire amoncellement de phrases vaines, semblable aux ruines d'un édifice inachevé, en partie cause de ma perte, incapable de me servir de refuge contre la torrentielle pluie sulfureuse, contre l'inondation de ces eaux bitumeuses au clapotement vrombissant, contre le perpétuel assaut de ce ricanement grondant qui se propage de maison en maison jusqu'aux papiers peints de ma chambre.[901]*

It is notable that Revel compares his work to the ruins of an unfinished building (this reminds us of the incomplete New Cathedral, and of the buildings that inspired it, Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and Gaudi's Sagrada Familia, both unfinished at the time Butor was writing).[902] He contemplates burning the pages he has so assiduously filled with words, but does not do so, instead writing on a blank page words that come not from him but from Bleston, 'nous sommes quittes'.[903] Nonetheless, he believes that 'mon écriture te brûle, puisqu'il est clair que je n'ai échappé que de justesse à la destruction de ces pages grâce auxquelles tout cela est enfin clair, gardé contre ton grand travail d'oubli'.[904] The sentences that Revel has painfully crafted, maintaining his discipline even in the face of personal crisis, and continuing to write on the eve of his departure and even as he waits for his train to leave, are both a way of navigating through the labyrinth[905] and a pointless accumulation of words. He sees them as having saved him, but also as 'en partie cause de ma perte'. In the last month

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[898] A S Byatt, quoted in Stephen Moss, 'Falling for *Vertigo* by W G Sebald', *Guardian* (20 January 2000), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/20/wgsebald> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[899] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 247

[900] Ibid, p. 236

[901] Ibid, p. 333

[902] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 85

[903] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 340

[904] Ibid, p. 345-46

[905] Ibid, p. 247

he refers constantly to his failure, to the inadequacy of this great project, to the gaps that remain despite his constant re-reading and re-writing: 'je m'étonnais de son insuffisance',[906] 'cet ensemble de pages qui sera inévitablement insuffisant, inévitablement lacunaire'.[907] But he also asserts its potency. In a passage that reminds one strikingly of Max Ferber's artistic practice,[908] he describes

> *cette épaisse couche de peinture que ma plume gratte, telle une pointe de couteau, que ma plume fait s'écailler, telle une flamme de chalumeau, pour me révéler peu à peu, au travers de toutes ces craquelures que sont mes phrases.[909]*

And whilst Revel is haunted by his failure, he also recognises that 'toutes ces phrases et ces pages'[910] are 'at once the record and the cause of his survival'.[911] But it seems to be the physical reality of the number of pages, the weight of the pile of pages and the hours they represent: 'c'est ce nombre, ce temps, ce poids' that has helped him to resist the insidious voice of Bleston.[912] He has created a labyrinth of words to oppose the labyrinth of the city, but it is the act, the process of writing, rather than the completion or perfection of the work that has saved him, just as it had trapped him. Ferber is similarly caught up in the process of creation, saying that the encrustation of paint and the layers of dust on the floor are 'the true product of his continuing endeavours and the most palpable proof of his failure'.[913] The impetus for artistic endeavour is to counter oblivion, whether through Ferber's painting, Luisa Lanzburg's journal, Revel's diary or Austerlitz's attempts to reconstruct his own and his parents' story (mirrored in the works he references, from Jean Améry, Dan Jacobson and H G Adler). This work is at the same time vital and carries with it its own failure; it will always be insufficient, always incomplete.

I have explored the way in which language may become a labyrinth, as it does for the protagonists of both Butor and Sebald's works, through sentence structure, intertextual allusions and quotations, and how that relates to the multilingual experience of the exile. Just as we saw in the previous chapter how the exile's disorientation and sense of otherness make

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[906] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 382
[907] Ibid, p. 384
[908] Which in turn is based upon Frank Auerbach, who 'layers, scrapes, molds and reworks paintings over long periods of time', 'Works by Frank Auerbach at Sotheby's', <https://www.sothebys.com/en/artists/frank-auerbach> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[909] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 365
[910] Ibid, p. 342
[911] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile,* p. 79
[912] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 342
[913] *The Emigrants*, p. 161

the city streets unnavigable, so here they make everyday interactions and connections fraught with tension. Translation is a constant process, and in translation there is always loss of nuance, loss of ambiguity, as well as the possibility of the accretion of other, unintended meanings. The ways in which both writers express these tensions – through long, looping sentences, through the repetition of phrases and words, adding weight each time they recur (like Bergson's *boule de neige*),[914] through the ambiguities of speaker and of addressee – recreates the tensions in the reader, who must attempt to hold on to structure and meaning even as both are obscured. The reader thus enters into the experience of the exile, disoriented and alienated, lost in the labyrinths of language.

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[914] Henri Bergson, 'De l'évolution de la vie', *L'Évolution Créatrice*, cited by Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 93

Chapter 6

Labyrinthine Narrative

> *Ariadne's thread is the line of continuity, real or imagined, that directs our attention to the experiencing, reading or interpretation of all manner of complex, intricate, potentially confounding spatial or temporal phenomena.*[915]

In this chapter I will explore the idea of the thread in the context of narrative, and consider how both Sebald and Butor create narrative labyrinths, which present the reader with diversions, delays, lacunae, reversals and repetitions, creating ambiguity and uncertainty, and which never arrive at a centre, with or without a Minotaur. I will look at how both writers achieve this effect, at the use of specific narrative forms (the detective story, the quest narrative and the folk tale or myth); and at how (and why) the non-linear narrative form deliberately makes temporal and spatial progression problematic. We will see how in both *L'Emploi du temps* and in Sebald's texts, as Roger Shattuck puts it, 'the very act of narration interferes [with the action] and calls attention to itself',[916] and gives the reader not the sequence in which events take place (although this can be reconstructed), but the sequence in which they are recounted.[917] We will note how both Revel and the Sebaldian narrator(s) describe the process and practice of writing, and draw attention to the inadequacies of their account, in what it omits and through the constant re-evaluation of events and perceptions.[918] We are constantly reminded of the limited perspective of the narrator, who one might expect to provide the guiding *fil d'Ariane* through the text and thus upon whom we as readers are dependent for our navigation of the labyrinth.[919]

The focus in this chapter will be on how both writers incorporate other narratives as part of their structure and how these narratives (whether created by the author himself or existing independently) direct or misdirect, enlighten or disorient the reader. There are books within

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[915] Thomas Grey, '... wie ein rother Faden: On the Origins of "Leitmotif" as Critical Construct and Musical Practice', in *Music Theory in the Age of Romanticism*, ed. Ian Bent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 187-210 (p. 197). Chapter 7 will focus on musical labyrinths, in particular the structure of the fugue.
[916] Roger Shattuck, 'The Doubting of Fiction', *Yale French Studies*, 6 (1950), pp. 101-08 (p. 102)
[917] They are in this sense *récits*, which give the sequence in which events are related, as distinct from *histoires* which provide the sequence in which events took place. Other examples are Albert Camus, *La Chute* (1956) ; Maurice Blanchot, *L'Arrêt de mort* (1948), André Gide, *L'Immoraliste* (1902)
[918] *L'Emploi du temps*. p. 370. As Butor says of Blanchot, he 's'efforce toujours de revenir sur ce qu'il vient de dire pour essayer de l'atténuer' ('Révolution dans le roman? Cinq écrivains aux prises', ed. Roger Priouret, *Le Figaro Littéraire* (29 March 1958), in *Entretiens*, Vol. I, pp. 66-79 (p. 70))
[919] Daniel Just, 'The Politics of the Novel and Maurice Blanchot's Theory of the Récit', *French Forum*, 33, 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2000), pp. 121-39 (p. 121)

each book, stories within each story. We will explore how these *mises en abîme* not only complicate or disrupt chronology, but create uncertainty about the reliability of the various narrators. The connection between narrative, labyrinth and trauma will also be relevant here, not only in terms of how the telling of stories relates to the processing of past trauma, but in terms of how past trauma disrupts and complicates those stories. This will also require some consideration of Sebald's approach to writing about Holocaust trauma, especially in relation to his blurring of fact and fiction, in this context one of the more controversial aspects of his writing.[920] More has probably been written about this aspect of Sebald's work than about any other,[921] and it is not my intention to add significantly to that, but to suggest how this relates to the theme of the labyrinth, and how it links the works and the writers under consideration. Whilst both Sebald and Butor require their protagonists to navigate labyrinths of traumatic memory, they differ considerably in how they suggest the nature of that trauma, from the oblique and opaque presentation of Revel's mental state in *L'Emploi du temps*, to the explicit and historically specific presentation of Austerlitz's personal history through intertextual references that themselves create a labyrinth.

We will begin with the notion of Ariadne's thread, itself a thread running through the previous chapters, which is especially pertinent when we consider narrative. Particularly in the complex and non-linear post-war narratives that we are discussing, a guiding thread is vital to the reader if they are to navigate the text. But the authors do not wish to make this easy – the reader must do the work of finding and then holding on to the thread. The chronology of events (the *histoire*) will, as we noted above, need to be reconstructed by the reader from the *récit*. This is exemplified by Revel's diary, in which the dates that anchor the reader in the text are not the dates on which events happened, but the dates on which Revel wrote about them. Carlo Ginzburg defines the thread as 'the thread of narration, which helps us to orient ourselves within the labyrinth of reality', and the trace (or tracks or trails) as the evidence left behind by others, which the historian must follow.[922] Within the labyrinth, or within a labyrinthine text, a map will mislead, traces (tracks or trails) will not be visible. Looking at the work 'from above', from the survivors' view, as Sebald put it,[923] all may seem to be clear, but within the labyrinth we have only the thread, and all we know of the thread is

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[920] Roger Luckhurst, in *The Trauma Question*, describes *Austerlitz* as 'a tortured investigation of trauma subjectivity', and argues that it 'risks traumatophilia' (p. 111)

[921] It is one of the main preoccupations in Carole Angier's new biography of Sebald (*Speak, Silence*, pp. viii-x)

[922] Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2012), p. 1

[923] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 125

what we are holding on to at that moment. In general, a satisfying or interesting narrative will withhold the overview from the reader, and allow them to gradually accumulate an understanding of the patterns as they read. In these texts, however, we are constantly forced to abandon the patterns we thought we had perceived, to question the reliability of our Ariadne. One recurring pattern in Sebald's writing is that of the gradual, fragmentary emergence of a life story, over time and through recurrent encounters with the narrator(s). It is only after the narrator has moved out of lodgings owned by Henry Selwyn that he discovers how his family had left Lithuania in 1899,[924] which suggests that the past has resurfaced and which presages Selwyn's suicide. Similarly, the narrator[925] at first receives only an 'extremely cursory'[926] version of Ferber's life from Ferber himself, discovering his flight from Germany and the murder of his parents from a magazine article. This reflects the process by which Sebald learned of the experiences of his Manchester landlord, Peter Jordan, returning after some years to interview him in detail and to request his aunt's diary (which became Ferber's mother's diary in *The Emigrants*)[927] and other documents, to supplement the fragments that he had discovered during their earlier conversations.[928]

If we are thinking about thread(s), we also need to consider spinning and weaving as a metaphor for narration, 'essential to the survival both of stories and of the art of their telling'.[929] Throughout both *L'Emploi du temps* and Sebald's work more generally we find references to threads and the way they are woven together, literally or metaphorically, to create patterns, or the way in which they can create a web or a net in which one may become caught.[930] One of the narratives which Butor weaves through *L'Emploi du temps* is itself literally woven, the Harrey tapestries which tell the story of Theseus in a sequence of panels.[931] Sebald in particular is preoccupied with spinning and weaving: in *The Rings of*

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[924] *The Emigrants*, pp. 18-19

[925] We cannot assume that the unnamed narrator in each of the four sections of *The Emigrants* is the same person (nor can we necessarily identify him with the narrators of Sebald's other works). Whilst the respective timelines do not absolutely preclude this, it seems improbable, and there is no cross-referencing between the narratives, apart from the repeated motifs of Lake Geneva/Nabokov

[926] *The Emigrants*, p. 166

[927] Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, p. 284

[928] Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, p. 106

[929] David Darby, 'Landscape and Memory: Sebald's Redemption of History', in *W G Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, pp. 265-78 (p. 273)

[930] This is particularly apt, given Manchester's historical links with cotton and weaving of fabrics

[931] Butor describes each panel of the tapestry in detail (*L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 204-07), a reminder of the use of ekphrasis in classical literature (for example the descriptions of the shield of Achilles (*The Iliad*, Book 18, lines 478-608), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0134%3Abook%3D18 [accessed 25 August 2021] or that of Aeneus (*The Aeneid*, Book 8, lines 429-719) http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0054%3Abook%3D8%3Acard%3D424 [accessed 25 August 2021)

Saturn this is a symbol of the entire text, 'an intricate model of getting lost which, nonetheless, has a tendency to circle back to its own familiar centre',[932] and he places at the end of *The Emigrants* the description of a photograph of three young women in the Łódź ghetto behind a loom – 'the daughters of night, with spindle, scissors and thread'.[933] These young women, whose real names are unknown and whose fate we can only assume, are identified by Sebald with Nona, Decuma[934] and Morta: the Roman Parcae (the Greek equivalent is the Moirai) or the Fates. Nona (or Clotho) spins the thread of life, Decuma/Decima (or Lachesis) measures it, and Morta (Atropos) finally severs it. Their appearance here suggests that they are creating the very coincidences of the narrative.[935]

In Tim Ingold's social anthropological exploration of lines, threads and paths, he identifies the labyrinth as 'perhaps the most archetypal use of the thread to be found not only in the history of Western civilisation but throughout the world'.[936] It is:

> *a powerful image of movement and wayfaring in a world of the dead that is believed to lie beneath the surface of the world of quotidian experience. [...] At the very moment of going underground, of entering the labyrinth, the surface itself disappears from sight.[937]*

Within the labyrinth, 'every step forward is a step into the unknown. One cannot follow the trace of other "wayfarers", and there are no maps. The path may turn out to be deceptive, to come to a dead end, or to lead one astray'.[938] Thus the threads which purport to lead us through the narratives – chronology, place, a narrator's voice – are often poor guides. The threads may be layered into a pattern that cannot be seen during the process of reading but only from a different vantage point (see Revel's misinterpretation of the Theseus tapestries, for example),[939] or may connect us to so many others that we move further from the plot we were attempting to follow, just as we seemed to be getting closer to its heart.

It is often said that *L'Emploi du temps* is a labyrinthine text, but we need to unpack what this means. Butor describes how, as its sentences accumulate on sheet after sheet of paper, the

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[932] John Zilcosky, 'Sebald's Uncanny Travels', p. 111
[933] *The Emigrants*, p. 237
[934] This name is more usually rendered as Decima, which makes a more obvious connection to her role in allotting or measuring time.
[935] Leland de la Durantaye, 'The Facts of Fiction, or the Figure of Vladimir Nabokov in W G Sebald', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45, 4 (2008), pp. 425-45 (pp. 442-43)
[936] Tim Ingold, *Lines*, p. 54
[937] Ibid, p. 55-58
[938] Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, *Ways of Walking*, pp. 15, 18
[939] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 88

sentences become longer and longer, and the time-frame more and more complex, as it reflects back on itself, *en abîme*. This illustrates Revel's frame of mind, as he loses his grip upon his own memories and upon his understanding of events and people. It creates the same experience in the reader (and, as Butor explained in his *Improvisations*, in the author as he rewrote it).[940] The first phrase in the novel is the first brick in the defences[941] which Revel builds to protect himself against the urban labyrinth. At the same time, it is the beginning of the rope of sentences which he has begun to weave, the *fil d'Ariane* which he needs to find his way,[942] when the map of Bleston and the other guides have shown themselves to be inadequate or unhelpful. But, as Brunel asks, what if this Ariadne's thread is itself the labyrinth and Jacques Revel is the captive of and threatened by the labyrinth that he has created?[943] Like Daedalus, he has become lost in his own creation and in turn the reader too finds they are adrift and disoriented.

American literary scholar J. Hillis Miller describes a similar process as he attempts a study of narrative theory:

> *Each chapter, I thought, would be shorter than the one before, as though the line being traced out were circling closer and closer to the center of a labyrinth. The penultimate chapter on the straight-line labyrinth in Borges's 'la muerte y la brujula', would, I imagined, be only a few lines long [...] But each chapter, as I tried to write it, got longer and longer, until the project began to appear virtually interminable.[944]*

The clue to the labyrinth turns out to be the labyrinth. Butor, like Joyce and Robbe-Grillet, 'duplicate[s] the form of the labyrinth in the structural design of [the] prose so that [...] besides the labyrinths *in* the texts we experience the labyrinths *of* the texts'[945] with all of their error and backtracking, dead ends and repetitions.

Whilst *L'Emploi du temps* may be the most explicitly labyrinthine of Butor's works, Claude Marie Senninger describes the experience of reading Butor's first novel, *Passage de Milan*, as 'not understanding, forgetting from one chapter to the next, even from one page to the next, starting again, pushing myself, becoming annoyed, so much so that I was totally

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[940] *Improvisations*, pp. 85, 86-88
[941] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 236
[942] Ibid, p. 247
[943] Pierre Brunel, *Butor*: L'Emploi du temps, pp. 18-19
[944] J Hillis Miller, *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. x
[945] Wendy B Faris, 'The Labyrinth as Sign', in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1991), pp. 33-41 (p. 35)

entrapped by the game'.[946] Senninger created diagrams to enable him to map the movements of the characters, both spatially and temporally, in order to escape this confusion, just as Butor himself created grids, maps and diagrams whilst writing his novels to avoid becoming lost in his own creations.[947] As Marc-André Wiesmann puts it in his study of Montaigne's intertextual labyrinths,

> *For the reader struggling within [the labyrinthine text] everything is chaos and 'error'. There are no criteria by which one can decide upon the validity of directional decisions. However, for the reader standing on a slightly elevated vantage point outside of the building and able to behold its center, the interior confusion evaporates.[948]*

Much has been written about the narrative structure of *L'Emploi du temps*. Elsewhere I explore the relationship between this structure and the musical form of the fugue,[949] but in this chapter it is the way in which Butor combines labyrinthine narrative complexity with highly specific and precise detail which concerns me. The novel has a five-part structure, with each section being roughly equal in length and each relating to one month's writing of the diary. Each section is formed from five sub-sections, usually comprising entries written between Monday and Friday, with some exceptions, which Revel notes as unusual departures from habit. The dates and days of the week correspond precisely to the calendar for 1951-52,[950] and thus to the first year of Butor's residence in the UK. This precision marks a clear distinction between this labyrinthine narrative and, for example, Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe*, where within the first paragraph alone time is shown to be entirely fluid: 'Outside it is raining […] outside it is cold […] Outside the sun is shining […] Outside it is snowing. Outside it has snowed, it was snowing, outside it is snowing'.[951] In *L'Emploi du temps* winter follows autumn and is followed by spring and summer, we mark All Saints' Day, Guy

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[946] Claude Marie Senninger, '*Passage de Milan* or the Butorian Way of Unveiling Character', *World Literature Today*, 56, 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 269-73 (p. 269)

[947] This reminds us of Ingold's remark that, 'at the moment of going underground, of entering the labyrinth, the surface itself disappears from sight'. The diagram is the view from above, which both reader and author will lose when immersed in the narrative (*Lines*, p. 55-58)

[948] Marc-André Wiesmann, 'Intertextual Labyrinths: Ariadne's Lament in Montaigne's "Sur des vers de Virgile"', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53, 3 (Autumn 2000), pp. 792-820 (p. 810). This takes us back not only to Ingold's analysis, but to de Certeau's description of how the 'masse gigantesque' is immobilised, the fluid becomes fixed, when viewed from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien,* p. 139) and to the limitations and distortions of that viewpoint, discussed in Chapter 3

[949] See Chapter 7

[950] It is interesting to note how painstakingly Sebald 'faked' Ambros Adelwarth's diary entries in *The Emigrants* to ensure that the dates and days of the week matched for the year 1913, before photographing them for inclusion in the text (Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, p. 85)

[951] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *In the Labyrinth*, trans. Christine Brooke-Rose (1968; Richmond: Oneworld Classics Ltd, 2008), pp. 9, 11

Fawkes Day,[952] Christmas Day and New Year. The reader may be reassured by this, and certainly the early sections of *L'Emploi du temps* do not suggest that the narrative will be particularly problematic or complex.

Revel begins writing his diary in May, and this first section is straightforward: from Thursday 1 May to Thursday 30 May, he writes about the events of October, beginning with the moment of his arrival in Bleston. The events of May are not explicitly described – Revel is at this point applying himself to his self-imposed task of recording what happened in chronological order, albeit with extensive foreshadowing:

> *Cette année dont plus de la moitié s'est écoulée […] si j'avais su […][953] je revois tout cela très clairement […] mon imperméable alors couleur de sable […] l'eau de mon regard n'était pas encore obscurcie[954][…] cet air auquel j'étais désormais condamné […] le terrible engourdissement dont je viens de me réveiller […] je m'en souviens, j'ai été soudain pris de peur[955]*

On first reading, one might not be fully conscious of the portents in these early pages, but they prepare the ground, hinting at an unexplained unease. The second part, 'Les Presages' (the title itself echoes those early forewarnings), begins by writing in June about June, and thereafter the page headings switch between three modes: writing in June about June (A), writing in June about June and November (B) and writing in June about November (C). Clearly, Revel is already struggling to progress his project. To cover all twelve months of his residence in Bleston during five months of writing he would need to catch up with himself, by 'a constant reduction of the initial gap'.[956] Writing at this initial pace he would only reach February by the point of his departure. Rather than addressing this problem in a systematic way, he complicates things further; as Butor scholar Mary Lydon says, 'the journal […] remains incomplete, the increasingly pressing need to record current events preventing him from ever fully catching up on the backlog from October to May'.[957] Revel's difficulties

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[952] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 119. Butor refers to 'la semaine du "Guy Fawkes Day"' but suggests that 6 November is the key date ('j'ai donné irrémédiablement une fausse date au Guy Fawkes day' (*Curriculum Vitae*, p. 75)). Jean Stewart, the translator, adds a gloss in the text that 'in Bleston they celebrate the festival of Guy Fawkes for a week' (*Passing Time*, p. 95)
[953] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 9
[954] Ibid, p. 10
[955] Ibid, p. 11
[956] Michael Spencer, *Michel Butor*, p. 47. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan reminds us that Tristram Shandy, after a year of writing, realised he had covered only the first day of his life (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 90)
[957] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 69

create increasing difficulties for the reader attempting to hold on to a sense of the sequence of events.

Having begun to write about 'the importunate present'[958] alongside the attempt to recapture chronologically the months after his arrival in Bleston, Revel finds that what is happening currently recalls specific earlier events, or requires him to refer back to them in order to explain what is happening now (his encounter with George Burton, for example). The reader is thus at the mercy of Revel's preoccupations as he becomes more distressed by current events and more preoccupied by past ones. Thus 'L'Accident' has five modes: writing in July about May, about May and July, about July and December, about December. 'Les Deux soeurs' has seven modes, writing in August about combinations of August, June, April, and January. 'L'Adieu' increases this to ten, writing in September about August, July, March, and February, in various permutations. Whilst most months' events are recorded chronologically, there is an increasing tendency to refer back to particular dates. 31 May-1 June, 23 August and 14 September are all revisited multiple times. Events in March, April and May are recorded in reverse chronological order. This serves further to disorient the reader.

Whilst we know the day and date for much of what happened in October, November and December, and again in the period from the point when the writing of the diary commenced, references to January-April are much vaguer. Some are very fleeting, and one might not notice the lacunae without having a clear overview to work with. One might also conclude that little of note happened in January or February in particular. However, we are told that in fact something did happen in February, on 29 February specifically, that had significance[959] but that Revel did not have time to record. The only references to February occur in the final section, written immediately before his departure, in September.[960] This is consistent with the straightforward alignment of the five sections to the five months of writing, but by the time Revel reaches that point in the chronology he is also attempting before he leaves to capture a backlog of recollections from March, July and August, as well as reflections from the time of writing.

We are thus clearly not going to get what the first section appears to promise, *histoire*, a chronological account of Revel's time in Bleston. In fact, it becomes more and more difficult

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[958] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 96
[959] Butor says that 'quelque chose de très important s'est passé ce jour-là, et qui serait sans doute la clef de tout' but that 'nous ne saurions jamais' what took place (*Curriculum Vitae*, p. 84)
[960] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 379-81, 392

to discern the sequence of events. The only clear sequence is that of the diary entries, which are given the day and date on which they were written, but within each entry reference is made to events which may or may not be dated. Each page is headed with the month of writing (in capitals), and the month(s) referred to on that page. If Part 1 is the model (month of writing, month written about, in chronological sequence), this gets more remote as we continue. In Part 2, June/November crops up on five of the fourteen page headings. In Part 3, July/December appears four out of seventeen times. Part 4 gives us August/January only twice in 25 permutations, and Part 5 offers September/February twice in 30. Thus, the number of different permutations increases in each section of the novel, and the ostensible goal of recording what happened in sequence becomes lost in the increasingly complex web of references. The difference between this entanglement and the confusion created by Robbe-Grillet, for example, in *In the Labyrinth*, cited earlier,[961] is that we have in front of us a text that gives us sequential dates (the dates when diary entries were written) and so we continue to believe that a linear progression must be possible and to struggle with the text to arrive at that.[962]

February in particular remains opaque: 'Le début de février dont je ne me souviens que fort mal, ce moment le plus froid de l'année'.[963] In February he has met Rose Bailey, but not yet Lucien Blaise, who will relieve him of her. He meets George Burton without at this point being aware that he is the author of *Le Meurtre de Bleston*. He buys a second copy of *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, having lent the first to Rose's older sister, Ann. He dines with the Bailey family for the first time (whilst noting that he is spending less time with Ann, as his affections begin to drift towards Rose). These are pivotal events, sowing the seeds of the estrangement between himself and Ann, himself and James, and ultimately himself and Rose. February is the coldest point of the year, 'au cœur de l'hiver'.[964]

> *Cette sinistre région de février à laquelle je voudrais ne plus penser, mais*
> *qu'il me faudrait au contraire saisir au milieu des broussailles de mes*
> *souvenirs de l'hiver, avec de solides et souples tenailles de langage, qu'il me*

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[961] Robbe-Grillet's protagonist 'does not seem to construct the future or the meaning of the narrative environment but rather describes it as best he can, in order to understand, if possible, his own place', a kind of 'surrender to the labyrinth'(Stephen C Bold, 'Labyrinths of Invention from the New Novel to OuLiPo', *Neophilologus*, 82, 4 (1998), pp. 543-57 (p. 548)

[962] The volume *Analyses et réflexions* provides two different ways of reconstructing the chronology, or the histoire, firstly according to the dates on which things happened (Nathalie Griton-Rotterdam, 'L'Introuvable agenda de Jacques Revel', pp. 24-30), and then by setting the diary entry dates against the events described in those entries (Marie-Noëlle Wicker, 'Le Découpage temporel', pp. 31-34)

[963] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 350

[964] Ibid, p. 379

> *faudrait garder devant les yeux [...] cette sinistre région de février, que je ne pouvais m'empêcher de rôder de plus en plus souvent du côté d'Alexandra Place, d'être de plus en plus souvent dans Hamilton Station pour regarder les trains partir.[965]*

> *Et je n'ai même plus le temps de noter ce qui s'était passé le soir du 29 février, et qui va s'effacer de plus en plus de ma mémoire, [...] ce qui me paraissait si important à propos du 29 février.[966]*

That the narrative ends with a reference to the mystery of 29 February perhaps suggests that this date was the centre of the labyrinth as it is almost (one month short of) the halfway point of Revel's stay in Bleston. Of course, February 29 is always going to seem significant, by virtue of its rarity. It exists only once every four years (it occurred in 1952, during Butor's first year in Manchester), and thus can be, in effect, hidden for three out of four years. In addition, it is an administrative creation, designed to synchronise the calendar year with the astronomical or seasonal year. (One could say that it is a 'jour fantôme'.)[967] Revel's failure to record what happened on 29 February is indicative of the failure of his enterprise overall. The time of writing and the time written about will never be reconciled and this gap is the evidence of that disjunction. It is a blank space, an empty centre, an enigma.[968] The final diary entry is a record of other failures. He notes that 'je n'ai même pas pu aller regarder enfin la vieille église Saint-Jude, de l'autre côté de la Slee'[969] (St Jude being the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes). St Jude's is close to a small synagogue, which Revel has also failed to visit (having forgotten that he had wanted to do so).[970] He describes 'cette sinistre région de février' (note the striking spatialisation of time implicit in this phrase) when his longing to leave the city is at its most intense, but which he would prefer not to think about, 'mais qu'il me faudrait au contraire saisir au milieu des broussailles de mes souvenirs de l'hiver, avec de solides et souples tenailles de langage, qu'il me faudrait garder devant les yeux'.[971] So, rather than being unable to recall what happened on 29 February, perhaps Revel chooses not to. It is a deliberate blank, which draws our attention to a significant absence, like the blank space on the back of the detective novel, where the author's photograph should

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[965] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 392
[966] Ibid, p. 394
[967] Ibid, p. 84
[968] 'It is a hole in the story, so that the book is at the same time closed and open' (Michel Butor, in Kathleen O'Neill, 'On *Passing Time*', p. 36)
[969] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 393
[970] Ibid, p. 348
[971] Ibid, p. 392

sit,[972] like the missing pieces in the sequence of stained-glass windows,[973] the blank spaces on the frontispiece map, the 'terrain vague' on the outskirts of the town, the incomplete New Cathedral building:

> *D'alphabet dont je sais qu'il est incomplet, qu'il lui manque au moins une lettre, de clavier dont je sais qu'il lui manque au moins une touche, de tarot dont je sais qu'il lui manque au moins un arcane.* [974]

As readers we have been deliberately misdirected by that opening section. Just as Revel imagines he can recreate a coherent sequence of events,[975] we assume that this is what we will be reading. However, as Lydon puts it, the reader 'has been had. He has been induced to live Jacques Revel's experience with him, to lend him his own *durée*, to endure passing time in the fullest sense of the word'.[976] The labyrinth is designed to misdirect and to disorient, to suggest that one is getting closer to some resolution (whether the centre, or the exit) but then to take one further away from that. Revel in February, in the heart or the middle of the winter and at the central, pivotal point of the narrative, is obsessively thinking about his final exit from the labyrinth, as he watches the trains leave Hamilton Station. He fails to comprehend what is happening at that time or its significance and by the time he comes to record those events the fog has engulfed them.

Butor's readers will share Revel's sense of disorientation, and of having been misdirected. Revel attributes this to the labyrinth that is Bleston, but we are also led to first trust and then doubt sources of guidance that he encounters. Horace Buck provides invaluable help to Revel in finding him lodgings, but it is suggested that he has taken the loathing of the city which he shares with Revel to another level and may be partly or wholly implicated in some of the acts of arson which take place with such frequency in Bleston. George Burton, as discussed earlier, cannot be treated as a reliable guide to the city, given his visceral hostility to its New Cathedral, a judgement which Revel comes to question, and which has been instrumental in creating a rift between him and his close colleague James. Similarly, the maps and guides which Revel accumulates prove to offer only partial and sometimes unhelpful information (see Chapter 3). As readers, we quickly lose track of the chronology, once the linear structure

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[972] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 71
[973] Ibid, pp. 96-97
[974] Ibid, p. 364. One thinks here of Perec, of the blank map of the ocean in *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), of the missing letter 'e' in *La Disparition* (Paris: Denoël, 1969) and of the disappearance of Perec's mother in *W ou la souvenir d'enfance* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), like Sebald's Agáta, vanished with no trace, even of a grave (Andrew Leak, 'The Mapping of Loss', p. 21)
[975] See Revel's own description of his writing practice, *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 370
[976] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 70

that applies in Part I has been abandoned, and we can find no reassurance in the specificity of bus numbers and street names, given that Revel and thus the reader continues to get lost. And the overlapping time frames mean that we are led to doubt Burton even before we have read the account of Revel's first encounter with him.

This experience of reading *L'Emploi du temps* is, I would be confident, widely shared. Those who are familiar with less linear approaches to narrative may not be easily deterred, but will still struggle to find their way as the time frames proliferate and Revel's confusion deepens. Sebald's narratives confuse in different ways. Whereas in *The Emigrants* we have four discrete narratives, albeit each with complex chronologies and more than one narrative voice, in *The Rings of Saturn* each of the very specific landmarks of the Suffolk coast that the narrator encounters prompts multiple excursions into other times and other places, with other narrators (real, fictional or a blend of the two).[977] *The Rings of Saturn* is distinctly labyrinthine in structure – to read it is to repeatedly question where one is, despite the anchor of place names. It uses a circular narrative model, 'a string of narratives within narratives, Russian doll-like, operating with an opening out then a closing rhythm'.[978] This provides the narrative equivalent of the author's wanderings. Each place visited prompts the narrative to spool out like concentric circles across a relationship of time and space. (For example, his visit to Southwold prompts references to the battle with the Dutch fleet in 1672, Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus,* the icefields of the Caucasus, the Vallula Massif in Austria, a visit to The Hague and the Mauritshuis, the story of St Sebolt, Lévi-Strauss's description of a street in Sao Paulo, and the South African diamond mines.)[979] Syntax and structure are designed to forestall closure.

But it is perhaps in *Austerlitz* that one finds the most striking parallels with Butor's unreliable narrative, and I will therefore take this text as the basis for my exploration of Sebald's narrative labyrinths. *Austerlitz* is of particular interest given its Proustian references (albeit unacknowledged in the text), the notion of the quest[980] which links to Revel and to his mythic counterparts, and the way in which the narrative arrives back at the same location as it began. It also fits the definition of a novel more closely than Sebald's earlier work, and is thus more directly comparable to *L'Emploi du temps*. Whilst the characters of Revel and Austerlitz resemble one another neither in personality nor in background and circumstances,

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[977] Carol Angier, *Speak Silence*, p. 408
[978] Richard Bales, 'Homeland and Displacement', p. 467
[979] *The Rings of Saturn*, pp. 75-92
[980] Note that in German, *The Rings of Saturn* is subtitled 'Eine englische wallfahrt'.

Austerlitz's attempts to make sense of his past, and the questions that these attempts raise for the reader, are reminiscent of Revel's battle for mastery of the city.

If Butor achieves high levels of temporal complexity whilst covering a period of only twelve months, it is unsurprising that Sebald's narrative becomes even more disorientating, given that it is covering sixty years of Austerlitz's life, with excursions back as far as the seventeenth century. (These may not confuse the primary chronology, but they do interrupt and thus disrupt it.) Both writers create diversions into other narratives (*Le Meurtre de Bleston*, the Harrey tapestries, the Cain windows – all fictional – for Butor; *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Heshel's Kingdom*, H G Adler's *Theresienstadt* – all real texts – for Sebald),[981] as well as diversions in time. It is more difficult again, however, to hold on to the chronological threads, given Sebald's approach to reported speech, discussed in the preceding chapter, which creates ambiguity as to whose voice we are hearing and thus where it sits in the overall sequence of events. Sebald also gives the reader none of the navigational aids that Butor offers – there are no chapter breaks, no paragraph breaks, and no page headings. All that disrupts the flow of the text is the photographs, which as always with Sebald are uncaptioned and thus not directly useful in locating us temporally or spatially within the narrative.[982] The conventions of photographs placed within a body of text encourage us to assume an illustrative purpose, that we are seeing something that is referred to in the text and, moreover, that the illustration adds something to the text. But with no captions to confirm the origins of the images, we cannot be certain what it is we are seeing. The placing of the photographs invites us to read significance into them, and perhaps to assume a degree of specificity and a veracity which does not withstand close examination.[983] As such they may simply add another kind of disorientation to what the reader is already experiencing. We are reminded of the distinction between the diagrammatic, mathematical construction of narrative time (the panoptic view), and the experience of the reader, the latter being, as Arnold Weinstein puts it (writing about *L'Emploi du temps*), 'overwhelmingly chaotic',[984] requiring a continual and challenging process of reorientation.

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[981] Honoré de Balzac, *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832; Paris: Livre de Poche, 2014); Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*; H G Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-45*. There are other intertextual diversions too, acknowledged as in the cases of Jean Améry and Claude Simon, or unacknowledged in the cases of Proust and Kafka

[982] See Carol Jacobs, *Sebald's Vision,* pp. 166-67; Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, pp. 40-52; Silke Horstkotte, 'Pictorial and Verbal Discourse in W G Sebald's *The Emigrants*', pp. 33-50

[983] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 131

[984] Arnold Weinstein, *Vision and Response in Modern Fiction* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 106

Nonetheless, for Uwe Schütte in his recent monograph on Sebald, *Austerlitz* 'veered dangerously close to the conventions of the novel, a form of writing he repeatedly disavowed in interviews',[985] and despite Sebald's classification of it as 'a prose book of an undetermined kind',[986] or 'a long prose elegy',[987] it was generally perceived as such by critics and readers. *Austerlitz* is not written in the form of a diary, but there is a chronological thread taking one from the narrator's first encounter with Austerlitz in 1967, through a period of thirty years until their (final?) meeting in 1997, in the same place (Antwerp). There are lengthy gaps when the two do not meet, and each subsequent meeting thus prompts Austerlitz to recount his activities during that hiatus period, which in turn take him back to his own and Europe's past. The narrative may not be linear, but is focused on the eponymous protagonist, rather than being comprised of 'separate yet interrelated individual stories'.[988] The thread of Austerlitz's reported narration gives us another (mainly) chronological sequence, and it is this that provides the arc for the novel. When the narrator and Austerlitz meet in 1996, Austerlitz begins to recount his own history, from his childhood and school days in Wales and beyond. This sequence takes us from 1938-39 through to 1954, then back to 1947, and on to 1956. From the point at which Austerlitz stumbles upon the key to his past (over-hearing a radio programme about the Kindertransport), a dual chronology (with diversions) is set up, one following Austerlitz's journey to Prague and then to Paris, the other following his attempted reconstruction of his parents' story. He deliberately retraces his own childhood journey on the Kindertransport and attempts to retrace the steps of his mother (from Prague to Theresienstadt, though no further – all we know is that she was 'sent east') and his father (from Prague to Paris and, it is suggested, from Paris to Gurs).

Time becomes denser in certain places. Věra recounts a 'wonderful, almost blissful' childhood visit to Marienbad (in 1938, a date which is weighted with the imminence of separation),[989] which triggers memories of Austerlitz's visit with Marie de Verneuil in 1972, and leads to an understanding of why that latter visit had been so traumatic. The name Marienbad links us to Alain Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, which inspired one of Sebald's poems ('The Year Before Last')[990] and to Goethe, whose 'Marienbad Elegy'

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[985] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018) p. 88
[986] Quoted in Ruth Franklin, 'Rings of Smoke', p. 123
[987] Joseph Cuomo, 'A Conversation with W G Sebald', in *The Emergence of Memory*, pp. 93-118 (p. 103)
[988] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 88
[989] *Austerlitz*, p. 289
[990] 'The Year Before Last', in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 103-07

inspired another.[991] We can add to these layers the passing reference to the Auschowitz Springs[992] and the fact that Marienbad connects Austerlitz not only with his parents but with Marie de Verneuil (whose name is a reference to Balzac)[993] and thus with Paris. Austerlitz lived in Paris in the late 1950s, before visiting in 1997 to seek traces of his father's life there. The latter quest prompts reflections upon the Occupation and its traces in the contemporary city, with references to earlier periods and figures in Parisian history (associated often with particular buildings such as the Salpêtrière (see Chapter 7 for the significance of this institution in relation to the fugueur), the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Bibliothèque Nationale). These layers are created by intertextual references, by associations of ideas, links within this narrative as well as to other historical narratives.

The interrelationship between temporality and spatiality is key here. As noted, the narrator's temporal journey – the narrative of his encounters with Austerlitz – completes a circle, starting and concluding in Antwerp (just as Revel's narrative begins and ends in a train carriage in Bleston's Hamilton Station). However, whilst Austerlitz's journey initially appears to trace a circle, from Prague to Prague, the various revisitings and returns create widening spirals, taking in Liverpool Street Station in 1938 and 1992, Marienbad in 1938 and 1972, Paris in the 1950s and 1997, and Antwerp in 1967 and 1997 and so on. In addition, the history of each city and its buildings adds additional loops to the pattern, for example, the history of Breendonk fortress, from 1859 to 1940 and to 1996-97; Bedlam hospital in the seventeenth century to the building of Broad Street Station in 1865 to demolition work in the 1980s, revealing the skeletons of past inmates; the fortress town of Terezín in 1866, in 1942-45 and in 1997. The layers of the past can be made visible in the very literal sense (the Bedlam excavations), through personal memory or through other narratives. Thus Jean Améry's testimony awakens the past horrors of Breendonk (also prompted by Claude Simon's *Le Jardin des plantes*),[994] Breendonk proves to be an architectural link to Terezín, in relation to which H G Adler's personal and historical account is present throughout Austerlitz's visit to the site,[995] and to Kaunas in Lithuania, as described in Jacobson's

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[991] 'Marienbad Elegy', in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 126-31
[992] *Austerlitz*, p. 295
[993] Marie de Verneuil is the heroine of Balzac's 1829 novel of the post-Revolutionary uprising in Brittany, *Les Chouans* (Paris: Garnier, 1957)
[994] *Austerlitz*, pp. 33-34; Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, pp. 21-22, 32-33; Claude Simon, *Le Jardin des plantes* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1997), p. 253
[995] *Austerlitz*, pp. 266-81

Heshel's Kingdom.[996] And, of course, Austerlitz glimpses his own past and memories which had been buried for decades in Liverpool Street Station.[997]

It is undoubtedly significant that one of the places where the narrator and Austerlitz meet is the Greenwich Observatory, in the octagonal observation room where Austerlitz 'embarked on a disquisition of some length on time'.[998]

> *I have always resisted the power of time [...] keeping myself apart from so-called current events in the hope, as I now think, said Austerlitz, that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely I shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously.*[999]

Austerlitz challenges Newton's metaphor of time as a river, but himself likens it to 'an unquantifiable dimension which disregards linear regularity, does not progress constantly forward but moves in eddies, is marked by episodes of congestion and irruption, recurs in ever-changing form, and evolves in no one knows what direction'.[1000] (We have already noted the link between the notion of fluidity and the labyrinth).[1001] This section also recalls Hendia Baker's analysis of labyrinthine time in postmodern fiction:

> *In fictional texts which deal with or are structured as temporal labyrinths, time is no longer linear and characters move around in time. [...] a labyrinth of simultaneity or the ever-present [...] past, present and future are indistinguishably one.*[1002]

This is not to say that in *Austerlitz* we abandon the notion of chronological time – it is possible to reconstruct the narrative as a chronological sequence of events, as we are given at least an indication of dates and locations of those events, just as it is for *L'Emploi du temps*. Austerlitz moves backwards and forwards in time as he assembles the components of his own story, drawing on historical research, on recovered memory and on the accounts of others. However, Austerlitz's soliloquy should alert us to the improbability that the narrative will reach a neat conclusion.[1003] Whilst we might have imagined at various points that we are

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[996] *Austerlitz*, pp. 414-15; Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*, pp. 159-62
[997] *Austerlitz*, pp. 192-94
[998] Ibid. p. 141
[999] Ibid, pp. 143-44
[1000] Ibid, p. 143; See also, for a contrasting image, a striking passage in Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom* where he likens time both to a fluid through which we swim and to granite that petrifies behind us (p. 233).
[1001] Anthony S Kline, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'
[1002] Hendia Baker, 'Minotaur Lost', pp. 301-03. These texts we are considering here do not allow for 'time travel' but create the sense of simultaneity of past, present and future through the way the narrative folds different time periods together.
[1003] One is reminded of Kafka's 'The Burrow', in which the protagonist seeks security within his labyrinth against threats which may or may not be real. The story is unfinished but there is nothing to suggest that an

getting closer to the centre of the labyrinth, which we would assume to be the answer to Austerlitz's questions about his parents, in fact we end as the quest continues: 'I don't know, said Austerlitz, what all this means, and so I am going to continue looking for my father, and for Marie de Verneuil as well'.[1004]

Rather than any resolution of Austerlitz's narrative, we are referred to another, to Dan Jacobson's own quest for his family history,[1005] starting in Lithuania, moving to South Africa, and then returning to Lithuania to find the traces. This too remains unfinished (for the narrator), as he starts to read the book (a gift from Austerlitz) whilst revisiting Breendonk, and reads 'to the end of the fifteenth chapter'.[1006] The narrator gives no significance to the point at which he finished reading; the suggestion is that he simply ran out of time, wishing to return to Mechelen before dark. However, we may note that he abandons Jacobson's narrative at the point of his visit to Kaunas, the last of the trilogy of fortresses (with Breendonk and Terezín), and the discovery of the names of French Jewish prisoners scratched into the walls (including the name of one Max Stern, dated 18 May 1944),[1007] but before he finds the sites of the mass killings in Lithuania and the direct connections with Jacobson's own family and their fate.

We last encounter Sebald's narrator as he is about to leave the city where we first met him, just as Butor ends his narrative with Revel again in a train compartment but this time awaiting the train's departure from Bleston. Both have left tasks unfinished, gaps which now cannot be filled – and meanwhile Austerlitz's own quest goes on, with no probable end. However, as noted elsewhere, Revel's story appears to begin with his arrival in Bleston and end with his departure. He tells us nothing about his life before that arrival or about where the train about to leave Bleston will take him. What is more, we have learned to question his perceptions of people, events and his own part in events, as the narrative progresses. Judith Ryan, in her study of Sebald's encounters with French literature, argues that the open ending suggests that Sebald 'still subscribes to a belief in the power of narrative to bring hidden things to light, while at the same time putting this very capacity seriously into question'.[1008]

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ending would be achievable – the struggle will continue as long as life does (*The Complete Short Stories*, pp. 325-59). Pierre Boulez discusses this story in in relation to 'the labyrinth notion in a work of art' in his article 'Sonate, que me veux tu', trans. David Noakes and Paul Jacobs, *Perspectives of New Music*, 1, 2 (Spring 1963), pp. 32-44 (p. 35)

[1004] *Austerlitz*, p. 408
[1005] Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*
[1006] *Austerlitz*, p. 415
[1007] Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*, p. 161. 18 May 1944 is 'Max' Sebald's birth date
[1008] Judith Ryan, *The Novel after Theory*, p. 153

She notes the similarly contradictory approach illustrated by Jacques Revel, who 'alternates between belief in the power of narrative to uncover the truth and despair at the complications that it introduces: writing as a way to salvation comes to appear highly questionable'.[1009] It is worth noting, however, that Butor himself took a somewhat utopian view of the power of art, and of writing in particular: 'on écrit pour changer son existence. Et on ne peut changer son existence qu'en essayant de changer celle des autres'.[1010] And, whilst Revel is haunted by his failure, he also recognises that 'toutes ces phrases et ces pages, ce qui les a sauvées, m'a sauvé':[1011] they are 'at once the record and the cause of his survival'.[1012]

The account of his own past which Austerlitz constructs could be described in the same way. However, whilst we are not overtly encouraged to question his account of events, we are led to wonder whether his interpretation of them is sustainable. (Like Revel, he would appear to be a somewhat unreliable narrator.)[1013] This is particularly the case following his recovery of the memory of his arrival at Liverpool Street Station. Through chance he hears a radio programme about the Kindertransport and the mere mention of the ferry *Prague* not only unlocks further memories but seems to confirm to him that he must go to that city.[1014] His leap of intuition is borne out when he arrives there, and without difficulty or delay finds the address that he requires, moreover finds that his former neighbour and nursemaid still lives there (Judith Ryan refers to Věra as 'the woman that he believes is his former nanny'),[1015] and that the language he had not spoken since he was a young child comes back to him: to quote Uwe Schütte, 'Yet another chance encounter', 'yet another set of rather unlikely events', 'this highly unlikely scenario'.[1016] Alfred Thomas, in his study of writing and memory in relation to Prague, confirms that these coincidences and leaps of faith render Austerlitz's connection to the city 'problematic' (for one thing, he would not have heard the name of the city in its English form when he was a child). Whilst arrivals and departures are usually, in Sebald's work, given some precision (in terms of time and place, if not intent),

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[1009] Judith Ryan, 'Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative', p. 126

[1010] Cited in Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 13

[1011] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 342

[1012] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 79

[1013] James Wood reports Sebald as saying that 'any form of authorial writing where the narrator sets himself up as stagehand and director and judge and executor in a text, I find somehow unacceptable. […] These certainties [about the world and how it works] have been taken from us by the course of history, and […] we do have to […] try and write accordingly' (*How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 6)

[1014] This is reminiscent of the fugueur, Albert Dadas, who on overhearing a place name was compelled to go there, on arrival having no clear idea of how he had done so (Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 21). See Chapter 7 for an exploration of the fugueur in history and literature

[1015] Judith Ryan, *The Novel after Theory*, pp. 203-04

[1016] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 99

Austerlitz's journey to Prague seems almost 'as if he were transported there by magic rather than reality'.[1017] Thomas also points out how much of Austerlitz's recovered family history is drawn (without acknowledgement) from Kafka's biography and his fiction, for example in the description of the messengers who arrive to advise Agáta that she will be deported:

> *These messengers, as Věra described them to me, said Austerlitz, who were strikingly alike and had faces that seemed somehow indistinct, with flickering outlines, wore jackets furnished with assorted pleats, pockets, button facings and a belt, garments which looked especially versatile although it was not clear what purpose they served.[1018]*

> *He [...] was wearing a fitted black jacket, which, like a traveller's outfit, was provided with a variety of pleats, pockets, buckles, buttons and a belt, and thus appeared eminently practical, although its purpose remained obscure.[1019]*

To a reader familiar with the Kafka text, this will suggest strongly that the story, as relayed by Věra from memories dating back half a century, has at least acquired some literary resonances in the re-telling. We are also distanced from the account by the Sebaldian form 'as Věra described them to me, said Austerlitz', discussed in the previous chapter. Further, the faces of the messengers are 'indistinct, with flickering outlines'. This recalls Austerlitz' account of Evan the cobbler's tales of ghosts: 'At first glance they seemed to be normal people, but when you looked more closely their faces would blur or flicker slightly at the edges'.[1020] Austerlitz himself says that 'As far back as I can remember [...] I have always felt as if I had no place in reality, as if I were not there at all'.[1021] His experiences in Prague have many dream-like features. On his journey to Terezín, he stands in a trance on the railway platform, he 'perceive[s] everything indistinctly',[1022] and the town itself, which had been 'for many years now [...] an ordinary town',[1023] nonetheless appears to be populated only by ghosts, who had 'never been taken away after all, but were still living crammed into these buildings'.[1024] On leaving Terezín (on a bus which appears as if from nowhere), he finds himself on entering the suburbs of Prague, 'descending a kind of ramp into a labyrinth through which we moved very slowly, now this way and now that, until I had lost all sense of

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[1017] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 156-57

[1018] *Austerlitz*, p. 250

[1019] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Breon Mitchell (1925; New York: Schocken Books, 1998), pp. 3-4

[1020] *Austerlitz*, p. 75. This passage occurs in identical form in his essay 'Campo Santo', *Campo Santo*, p. 31. See also the 'phantom traces', trails of light apparently left behind by moths in flight, but which do not really exist (p. 131).

[1021] *Austerlitz*, p. 261

[1022] Ibid, p. 262

[1023] Ibid, p. 266

[1024] Ibid, p. 281

direction'. Thus, he loses his way for the first time in Prague, reaching his hotel in the city centre via a wide detour.[1025] The reader risks the same fate, having noted (consciously or unconsciously) these suggestions of doubt about the narrative.

How are we to interpret this 'fusion of fact and fiction, memory and invention'?[1026] That Austerlitz believes that he has established his own lost identity, his childhood home and a link to his parents is not in question. But is the reader being misled and if so, to what purpose? The ambiguity is not resolved, and cannot be. Austerlitz's narrative is constructed from aspects of several other lives. Sebald himself claimed a link to a retired architectural historian of Czech origin, 'a London colleague of mine, who[m] I have known for many years and who over the years has released, as it were, bit by bit, the tale of his life'.[1027] Carole Angier suggests that this is Stefan Muthesius, who is indeed a retired architectural historian, but is not from London, not Czech and, more significantly, not Jewish (he had an uncle who had been a Nazi party official).[1028] Sebald has melded a non-Jewish and a Jewish life story before (the 'Henry Selwyn' from whom he rented a flat was not Jewish, but did end his life in the way Sebald describes) but in this instance it seems more likely that Muthesius was the model specifically for Austerlitz's architectural interests, and indeed, this is what Muthesius himself believes.[1029] Schütte suggests that Sebald mentioned the 'retired architectural historian' to distract attention from his actual major source.[1030] This is Susi Bechhöfer,[1031] who came from Munich with her sister on the Kindertransport and was fostered in the home of a Welsh preacher, discovering her identity only when informed of it by a school teacher. Here the similarities are far too strong and too detailed to be insignificant.[1032] Kindertransport memoirs tend to follow a similar pattern: early childhood memories before the Nazi persecution began, the departure from home, travel across Europe, the warmth of welcome in the Netherlands, ferry to Harwich or Southampton and then assignment to foster parents,

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[1025] *Austerlitz*, p. 282-83
[1026] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 157
[1027] Steve Wasserman, 'Three Conversations with W G Sebald: (3)', in *Saturn's Moons*, pp. 364-75 (p. 372)
[1028] Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, pp. 420-21
[1029] Ibid, pp. 420-21
[1030] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 89
[1031] Terry Pitts, 'Susi and Jacques', *Vertigo* (28 June 2010), <https://sebald.wordpress.com/category/susi-bechhofer/> [accessed 25 August 2021]; John Rossall, 'The Gift of Grace: 40 Minutes, BBC2', *AJR Information* (Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain), XLVI, 2 (February 1991)
[1032] Oddly, in an interview, Sebald makes some aspects of Bechhöfer's story fit his fictional narrative, claiming that 'both foster parents ended tragically […], the father in a lunatic asylum, the mother through an early death' (Joseph Cuomo, 'A Conversation with W G Sebald', p. 111). That is Austerlitz's story, not Bechhöfer's; her foster parents were still living when her story emerged in the 1990s. One can only speculate on whether this was genuine confusion on Sebald's part, or deliberate obfuscation.

difficulties of assimilation, discovery of the fate of parents after the war.[1033] Sebald could thus have easily constructed a narrative which was not directly appropriated from – and recognisable as – one individual's account, and yet he used this particular story, whose publisher's blurb makes clear the extent of the debt:

> *Liverpool Street Station, London, May 1939: A 3-year-old Jewish child and her twin sister, just arrived in the Kindertransport evacuating Jewish children from Germany, await the start of a new life. Adopted by a childless Welsh Baptist minister and his wife, Susi Bechhöfer and her sister Lotte are given a new identity. In an attempt to erase all traces of their previous existence, Susi is renamed Grace and Lotte becomes Eunice. Only fifty years later does Grace Stocken, a Christian, and former nursing sister living in Rugby, discover the terrible truth about her background: she is the daughter of Rosa Bechhöfer, a young Jewish woman who perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The discovery of her real identity propels Grace – now once again calling herself Susi, the name given by Rosa – on a painful and courageous quest in search of her past and for the surviving members of her natural family.[1034]*

Compare the blurb to the English edition of *Austerlitz*:

> *In 1939, five-year-old Jacques Austerlitz is sent to England on a Kindertransport and placed with foster parents. This childless couple promptly erase from the boy all knowledge of his identity and he grows up ignorant of his past. Later in life, […] Austerlitz – having avoided all clues that might point to his origin – finds the past returning to haunt him and he is forced to explore what happened to him fifty years before…*

Whilst the blurbs focus on the confrontation in middle age with the suppressed past, both Bechhöfer and Austerlitz discover their real names much earlier, at the point of taking a school examination when advised that this is what they need to use on the examination paper. 'Well, that's your real name', says Bechhöfer's teacher, whilst Austerlitz's headmaster says that 'It appears […] that this is your real name'.[1035]

Bechhöfer was not asked for permission to use her story,[1036] and challenged Sebald about it. He said that his aim had been to construct 'something like an exemplary case, at the remove of documented reality',[1037] but his death in 2001 precluded formal acknowledgement in

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[1033] Caroline Sharples, 'Reconstructing the Past: Refugee Writings on the Kindertransport', *Holocaust Studies*, 12, 3 (2006), pp. 40-62 (p. 45)
[1034] Susi Bechhöfer and Jeremy Josephs, *Rosa's Child*
[1035] Ibid, p. 40; *Austerlitz*, p. 93
[1036] A 2017 interview describes Sebald's use of her story as a 'painful assault on her identity' (Jenni Frazer, 'Susi Bechhöfer: Finding her own History', *Jewish Chronicle* (21 August 2017), https://www.thejc.com/susi-bechhofer-1.443118 [accessed 25 August 2021]).
[1037] Private letter from Sebald to Bechhöfer, dated 2 July 2001, cited by Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 89

future editions.[1038] Bechhöfer's story was the basis of a BBC TV documentary broadcast in 1991. Austerlitz's epiphany is dated to spring 1993, but it is reasonable to suppose that it was this programme (or some other contemporary coverage) that inspired his account of a radio broadcast featuring 'two women talking to each other about the summer of 1939, when they were children and had been sent to England on a special transport'.[1039] If Sebald had wished to obscure his use of Bechhöfer's account, this could have been done easily, by changing certain details (relocating the foster home, changing the circumstances in which the true identity is revealed, for example). One must assume therefore that he was happy for the connection to be made, and thus that he did not see it as exploitative, although many critics remain uneasy about this aspect of Sebald's work. Sebald has pointed readers to another, less often noted source, in Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander's autobiography, which recounts the author's return to Prague, which he had left with his parents after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, and his reunion with his former nanny.[1040] However, neither the circumstances of the return (Friedlander was contacted by the nanny, Vlasta, after one of his books was reviewed in the Czech press) nor any of its details seem to chime with the account in *Austerlitz*. Whilst Austerlitz finds that 'everything was just as it had been almost sixty years ago'[1041] when he enters Věra's apartment (perhaps another indication of unreality, given the time that had passed, and the ravages of war), Friedlander finds both that everything in his former home appears tiny to him, and that his uncle's apartment had been divided up 'so nothing of its former layout was left'.[1042] This is closer to the narrator's experience in *Vertigo* than to that of Austerlitz and one must wonder again whether this is deliberate misdirection.[1043] Certainly these narratives, drawing on multiple first person accounts, and weaving them together in the text, create a labyrinth which readers and critics have struggled to navigate.

This is far from the only instance of Sebald creating composite characters. None of the protagonists in *The Emigrants* is, as many readers have assumed, a straightforward account of a real person. At the very least, names have been changed, and some details of the life rearranged. In the first German edition, Max Ferber was called Aurach, drawing attention to

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[1038] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 89
[1039] *Austerlitz*, p. 200
[1040] Steve Wasserman, 'Three Conversations with W G Sebald: (3)', p. 372; Saul Friedlander, *When Memory Comes*, pp. 32-33. Friedlander did not leave on the Kindertransport but escaped to France with his parents, who were subsequently deported. He survived the Occupation in hiding in a Catholic boarding school.
[1041] *Austerlitz*, p. 216
[1042] Saul Friedlander, *When Memory Comes*, p. 33
[1043] *Vertigo*, pp. 192-93

the link to Frank Auerbach, and Sebald changed the name following Auerbach's objection to the use of one of his paintings and to the too obvious identification with his own life story.[1044] *Austerlitz* may seem in some respects to more closely resemble a novel than do Sebald's earlier texts, and so we might be expected to accept that this life is a fiction. And yet the collage of identities and sources is unsettling, once one learns how closely Austerlitz's story draws upon those other real lives. As Angier puts it, 'It's the combining of the two stories that's the problem. I can just see people recognising the story of the artist and then believing that this is his life story for ever after'.[1045] It is worth noting that this practice may also serve to cast doubt on the reality of figures such as Dan Jacobson and H G Adler, on whose work Sebald draws extensively, but who may not be widely known, and on whom he provides little background.[1046] This is particularly interesting in the case of Jacobson, who is described as a colleague of Austerlitz's[1047] and who indeed did hold an academic post at the University of London from 1979 to 1994.

Sebald's approach to the blurring of fact with fiction in itself creates a labyrinth for the reader. Doubt is a feature of the labyrinth, where each path might take one closer to the centre, or back to one's starting point, or indeed might be a dead end, and if one begins to explore these questions about Sebald's sources one can very quickly become 'perdu dans ces filaments'.[1048] Carole Angier's interview with him in 1996, focusing on *The Emigrants*, illustrates the effect this can have, if one begins to question.

> *So the schoolteacher in the second story [...] and all the others, too, were* ***real*** *people? And these are their* ***real*** *stories? [...] Was Ambros Adelwarth [...]* ***really*** *your great-uncle? [...] Did your great-uncle* ***really*** *keep a diary? [...] Did you actually find that in the diary? [...] And Ferber?[1049]*

[1044] Maya Jaggi, 'Recovered Memories', *Guardian* (22 September 2001), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/sep/22/artsandhumanities.highereducation> [accessed 25 August 2021]; Terry Pitts, 'Missing Pictures 2: The Emigrants', *Vertigo* (30 July 2007), <https://sebald.wordpress.com/2007/07/30/missing-pictures-2-the-emigrants/> [accessed 25 August 2021]. The other primary source for Max Ferber is Sebald's Manchester landlord, Peter Jordan, who did consent to Sebald's use of his story, and of family memoirs (Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, pp. 106, 112; Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, pp. 286-87). However, Angier notes that Jordan was uneasy about the extent to which his aunt Thea's memoir (not his mother's, as in *The Emigrants)* was used, without being credited. She also notes that Auerbach remained angry about what he regarded as an intrusion (*Speak, Silence*, pp. 288-89)

[1045] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', p. 75

[1046] Peter Filkins, 'Twisted Threads: The Entwined Narratives of W G Sebald and H G Adler', in *A Literature of Restitution*, pp. 149-65 (p. 151)

[1047] *Austerlitz*, p. 412-13

[1048] 'Bleston', part V, in *Across the Land and the Water,* p. 22

[1049] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', pp. 70-73. See Angier's repetition of the word 'real' – my emphasis).

Sebald's replies do not provide the kind of clarity that Angier seeks.

> *Essentially, yes, with some small changes […] It just needed a tiny little rapprochement to make it fit […] That wasn't his name, of course […] That […] is falsification. I wrote it. What matters is all true. […] What you need is just a tiny little shift to make it match up […] Ninety per cent of the photographs are genuine.*[1050]

We must question here how Sebald defines 'what matters', and what he means by 'true', 'real', or 'genuine'. This is a particularly puzzling issue in relation to the photographs: as they carry no captions, one could argue that Sebald is making no claims about what they represent, merely leaving the reader to make assumptions based upon their position in the text.[1051] Angier describes her response, as Sebald unpacks the origins of Max Ferber: 'I suddenly feel slightly dizzy'.[1052] Angier ultimately seems to accept Sebald's justification of what he at one moment acknowledges is 'falsification' (referring to Adelwarth's diary) but at others describes as 'some small changes', 'a tiny little shift'. He does not (in her terms) 'fudge' the way in which factual and personal detail is used, and acknowledges the potential issues:

> *This whole business of usurping someone else's life bothers me. […] But – unless they're dead – I ask them. I show them what I've written before I publish it; and if anyone objects, I don't do it.*[1053]

The truthfulness of this, however, must be questioned given, firstly, the close identification of Ferber/Aurach with Frank Auerbach, which was, as noted above, only corrected after publication, and, secondly, the fact that Sebald did not ask Susi Bechhöfer before he 'usurped' her life in *Austerlitz*.[1054] We should also note that in her recent biography of Sebald, Angier is much less sanguine about this practice, and says that when she interviewed Sebald, she 'believed every word. But doing the research for the book, I saw that I'd been

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[1050] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?'*,* pp. 70-74. Sebald extrapolates on this in interview with Christopher Bigsby, saying that 'a very small proportion of the pictures are retouched. I change things in them, brush things in or cut things out or make them more gloomy or lighter, depending on what I need to do' (Christopher Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*, pp. 154-55)

[1051] This is complicated still further when Sebald uses a photograph 'of the book burning on the Residenzplatz in Wurzburg', which Ferber's Uncle Leo claims is a fake (*The Emigrants*, pp. 183-84). See James Wood, 'An Interview with W G Sebald', *Brick,* 57 (Spring 1998), <https://brickmag.com/an-interview-with-w-g-sebald/> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[1052] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', p. 73. Angier may be consciously or sub-consciously referencing *Vertigo* here. The same effect – a symptom of labyrinthitis! – is described by Lisa Cohen, reviewing *The Emigrants* for *The Boston Review* (March 1997): 'one experiences the registers of fact and fiction, dream and reality, in turn and at once, to dizzying effect'

[1053] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', p. 73

[1054] Interestingly, Bechhöfer herself uses the term 'usurp' ('I felt that my identity had been usurped, to some extent' (Thomas Honickel, *Curriculum Vitae: Die W G Sebald-Interviews*, p. 268)

wrong. [...] he had spun me a tale'.[1055] She refers in particular to Sebald's account of the origin of Henry Selwyn, where he acknowledges 'some small changes', but in fact makes the profoundly significant change that the man on whom Selwyn was clearly based was not originally from Lithuania, and not Jewish.[1056]

Whether this blurring of the lines between fiction and biography is partially responsible for the repeated misrepresentations in blurbs and reviews[1057] of the subjects of *The Emigrants*, one cannot say. They are regularly referred to as being four Jewish exiles or emigrés,[1058] although only two would strictly be defined as Jewish, one as one-quarter Jewish (Paul Bereyter), and one not Jewish although he spent much of his life associated with a Jewish family. Again, the association of Sebald with the Holocaust has led some to assume that all four were victims of Nazism,[1059] whereas two had left Europe long before Hitler came to power, or at least to overstate the presence of the Holocaust in these narratives (see Carol Bere's assertion that in all four cases its residual impact 'has determined or shaped the way in which their lives have been lived').[1060] Sebald himself repudiated the label of 'Holocaust writer'[1061] (and would surely have been dismayed by the review in the *New York Times* which stated that he 'stands with Primo Levi as the prime speaker of the Holocaust'),[1062] but given that *Austerlitz*, in which the Holocaust is indeed a central event, was published so close to his death, he could not challenge the way in which that book was interpreted, or the tendency to interpret his earlier work in a similar way.

Sebald created a labyrinth of intertextual references, of acknowledged and unacknowledged sources, and we cannot, with or without his guidance, definitively disentangle the threads that he has woven together. This is one of the distinguishing features of his œuvre. The attempts of readers and critics to track down the life stories that he has appropriated, the sources for photographs and other images, the origins of quotations, lead frequently to dead ends.[1063] Thus, the experience of the reader mirrors that of Sebald's protagonists and of his narrator(s).

[1055] Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, p. x
[1056] Ibid, p. 25
[1057] For example, 'Fiction Book Review: *The Emigrants*', *Publishers Weekly* (10 February 1996), <https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-8112-1338-7> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1058] See the blurb to the 2011 reprint of the 2002 paperback edition
[1059] Carol Jacobs, *Sebald's Vision*, pp. 21-22
[1060] Carol Bere, 'The Book of Memory: W G Sebald's *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*', *Literary Review*, 46, 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 184-92 (p. 186)
[1061] Uwe Schütte, *W G Sebald* (2018), p. 58
[1062] Richard Eder, 'Austerlitz: Excavating a Life', *New York Times Review of Books* (28 October 2001), <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/28/books/excavating-a-life.html> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1063] Thus Sebald's work has an extra labyrinthine dimension, because it constantly and explicitly connects with the world outside his text, but in a way that creates difficulties of interpretation.

Austerlitz's story is a labyrinth with false leads and dead ends, and which never reaches (never will reach) the centre (the answers to his questions) or the exit (a resolution to the traumas which have haunted him).

Whatever conclusions one may reach about Austerlitz's account, it is certainly purposeful, whereas the narrator acknowledges that his own reasons for travelling to and from Belgium were 'partly for study reasons, partly for other reasons which were never entirely clear to me'.[1064] The narrator of 'Max Ferber' is similarly vague – he decided 'for various reasons' to move to England, and his decision to leave Manchester for Switzerland and then to return again is again 'for various reasons'. Whilst we begin this section with the narrator's arrival in Manchester and leave him in Manchester, however, his engagement with Luisa Lanzberg's memoirs has taken him in the interim to Kissingen and Steinach, where Ferber's mother had grown up, and these experiences suggest to him that he is 'in a hotel somewhere in Poland', and bring to mind photographs of the ghetto at Łódź and the young women weavers who he associates with the three Fates, or the three 'daughters of night'.[1065]

The Sebaldian narrator cannot be assumed to be Sebald, or to be the same person in each of Sebald's narratives. In each case, his story is only lightly sketched in to provide some brief context for his travels, and in a number of cases, the narrative concludes not with a resolution of his story but with part of another.[1066] It is not, primarily, his own story that he is there to narrate, even in *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn*. The narrator of *Vertigo*, after an opening chapter dealing with Henri Beyle (Stendhal), travels 'from England where I had then been living for nearly twenty-five years […] to Vienna, hoping that a change of place would help me get over a particularly difficult period in my life'.[1067] We accompany him (with various diversions) on his 'ritorno in patria'[1068] (itself drawing upon Sebald's own early life) but his return to England is concluded with a dream (one of many that feature in the narrative) triggered by Pepys' account of the Great Fire of London.[1069] What the 'difficult period' had entailed, whether anything had been resolved, or what his plans were on returning to England we are not told. The narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* sets off to 'walk the county of Suffolk, in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long

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[1064] *Austerlitz*, p. 1
[1065] *The Emigrants*, pp. 233-35
[1066] Arguably this positioning of the narrator relates to Sebald's own identity as 'nachgeborenen' and thus telling not his own story but those of others, in relation to which he is an onlooker rather than participant.
[1067] *Vertigo*, p. 33
[1068] The title of this section refers to Monteverdi's opera, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*
[1069] *Vertigo*, pp. 261-63

stint of work'. Instead, it results in a hospital admission, in a 'state of almost total immobility'.[1070] There is considerably more to suggest that the narrator here is Sebald himself, in references to the deaths of two of his UEA colleagues,[1071] and to his visit to Michael Hamburger, his translator for *After Nature* and *Unrecounted*. He tells us more of them than he does of himself, however. There is one reference to a partner, Clara, who appears also in the Henry Selwyn section of *The Emigrants*.[1072] However, elsewhere the narrator's travels seem unencumbered by family, and there is no indication that it is to family that he will return. Whilst Maya Jaggi asserts that 'in all his fiction, Sebald's narrator is one W G Sebald, who lives in Norfolk, comes from the German village of "W", and has a companion, "Clara"',[1073] she is collating details from a number of works. We cannot even be certain that the narrator in each of the four sections of *The Emigrants* is the same person. Richard Sheppard provides a chronology[1074] which maps the events of Sebald's life and includes references to events experienced by his narrator(s), and whilst there are certainly instances where Sebald seems to be taking events directly from his own life[1075] we cannot rashly conclude that there is a consistent correlation. Jaggi herself quotes a friend of Sebald who argues that the narrator is 'a distinct persona' (or possibly a number of distinct personae): 'He has obvious affinities with Max, but it's playing on our naivety, because the reader is always tempted to identify the narrator with the writer. He's taunting us'.[1076] Again, the reader is misdirected, towards paths that almost certainly lead nowhere, or to no real illumination.

Sebald's use of narrative framing relates to the notion of story-telling as a means of dealing with the loss of homeland or even to ward off death (successfully or otherwise). The narrator (whoever he may be) is our first storyteller, but his account frames those of others (in *The Emigrants* this may be the titular emigrant himself or someone from that person's past – Max Ferber's mother, Luisa Lanzberg, or Paul Bereyter's friend, Lucy Landau – and in each case there is also a documentary source, a manuscript or a photograph album, which is shared with the narrator). Jillian DeMair argues that this framing serves to 'convey uncertainty as to the

[1070] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 3
[1071] Janine Dakyns and Michael Parkinson (see <obituaries | French Studies | Oxford Academic (oup.com)> [accessed 17 August 2021])
[1072] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 295; *The Emigrants*, p. 3
[1073] Maya Jaggi, 'Recovered Memories', *Guardian* (22 September 2001)
[1074] Richard Sheppard, 'Chronology', in *Saturn's Moons*, pp. 618-54
[1075] For example, in October 1970 the Sebalds rented a flat at Vicar Street, Wymondham, whilst in the Henry Selwyn episode of *The Emigrants* the narrator and Clara rent a flat at Prior's Gate, Hingham (Richard Sheppard, 'Chronology', p. 625)
[1076] Maya Jaggi, 'Recovered Memories', *Guardian* (22 September 2001)

sequence of events' and keeps the reliability of each narrator unclear,[1077] but at the same time, it strengthens the impression that we are reading about 'real' people and events, and thus the effect may be to misdirect and disorient the reader, to provide apparent *fils d'Ariane* which will fail to guide us through the labyrinth.

If we cannot read *L'Emploi du temps* as a realistic account of one year in a northern city, and we cannot take *Austerlitz* at face value as an account of one man's quest to find his identity, how are we to find our way through the labyrinth of these narratives? It may be useful to explore two other genres on which both Butor and Sebald draw. The narrative structure of both *L'Emploi du temps* and much of Sebald's work has features in common with two genres in particular. Firstly, both writers use elements of myth and fairy-tale, overtly or implicitly. Secondly, again overtly or implicitly, the tropes of detective fiction are used and subverted. The two genres have in common the search for truth or wisdom, and both may be labyrinthine in structure.[1078] They may seem antithetical: the detective depends on logic and evidence to trace the path back from the crime to the perpetrator and writers place great emphasis on credibility (researching railway timetables and the like to ensure that what they say happened could indeed have happened), whereas the fairy-tale can subvert, suspend or ignore logic and the laws that govern reality. However, there are fundamental elements in common, as we might see from the obviously connected French terms, *enquête* (enquiry or investigation) and *quête* (quest). The detective is frequently a lone figure, driven by the compulsion to find the guilty party, assailed by personal doubt and by the scepticism or hostility of others, as well as by deliberate attempts to mislead or deter. The quest is for the truth, in the case of the detective novel, for wisdom or inner truth in the fairy tale or myth. In both, the hero encounters setbacks and dead ends, such that progress towards their goal can be cancelled out at any time. In the labyrinth, we may feel that we are getting closer to the centre and to the revelation that it holds, only to realise that we have moved further away from it, and are revisiting the point of our departure. Usually, the reader knows as much as but no more than the detective, and thus, until the mystery is solved, we share with the detective the frustration and bafflement of promising leads that peter out. However, in the quest narrative, the quest itself rather than its completion may be the source of wisdom,[1079]

[1077] Jillian DeMair, 'Inherited Traditions of Narrative Framing in W G Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten'*, *Orbis Litterarum*, 73, 1 (February 2018), pp. 29-51 (pp. 30-31)

[1078] Peter Biella discusses the relevance of labyrinths and mazes for the literary genre of detective fiction in 'Coherent Labyrinths', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 27, 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 1-20 (pp. 2-11)

[1079] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor,* p. 117

whilst the classic detective novel would be deeply unsatisfying if the truth was not discovered.[1080]

Butor introduces a detective novel (set in Bleston) and its pseudonymous author into the narrative of *L'Emploi du temps*. The author, George Burton (aka J C Hamilton), explains his theories concerning the genre:

> *Tout roman policier est bâti sur deux meurtres [...] dont le premier, commis par l'assassin, n'est que l'occasion du second dans lequel il est la victime du meurtrier pur et impunissable, du détective qui le met à mort, non par un de ces moyens vils que lui-même était réduit à employer [...] mais par l'explosion de la vérité.[...] Toute sa vie est tendue vers ce prodigieux moment où l'efficacité de ses explications, de sa révélation, de ces mots par lesquels il dévoile et démasque, prononcés le plus souvent sur un ton solennellement triste comme pour en atténuer le terrible éclat, la lumière dont ils sont chargés, si douce pour ceux qu'elle délivre, mais si cruelle, si consternante, si aveuglante aussi, ou l'efficacité de sa parole va jusqu'à l'anéantissement du coupable, jusqu'à cette mort dont il a besoin, seul événement suffisamment définitif pour pouvoir lui servir de preuve définitive, où il transforme la réalité, la purifie par la seule puissance de sa vision perçante et juste.[1081]*

The detective here is less the brilliant analyst of evidence and interrogator of witnesses, more Theseus battling the Minotaur.

Butor was an aficionado of the detective novel in its classic form, in which the narrative 'se ferme d'une façon simple. On a proposé un certain nombre de solutions différentes à l'énigme […] à la fin, on est sûr qu'on le sait, que le coupable est découvert. […] on a besoin à la fin de savoir pour que le livre se ferme'.[1082] He acknowledges that there are writers who subvert the format to some extent, leaving the reader undecided between two or more possible resolutions to the mystery, but to leave completely open the question of whether the crime took place at all, let alone who perpetrated it, would be to depart entirely from the genre.

[1080] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile,* pp. 69-70. See also Butor's comments on the genre in an interview with Jean Gilberte ('Entretien avec Michel Butor: La Mithridatisation par le roman policier', *Tangence*, 38 (1992), in *Entretiens*, Vol. III, pp. 298-306)

[1081] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 191-92. Tzvetan Todorov describes this as 'the best general characterisation I know' of the rules of classic detective fiction ('The Typology of Detective Fiction', in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2008), pp. 225-32 (p. 227)

[1082] Jean Gilberte, 'Entretien avec Michel Butor', p. 300

> *Le roman policier est fait pour que nous le lisions en une soirée. Et une fois que nous l'avons lu, les choses se referment. Il y a cet aspect final qui explique tout. Le coupable est puni. Nous pouvons dormir tranquilles.*[1083]

This appetite for narratives in which criminals are unmasked and appropriately punished is not hard to understand, even (or perhaps particularly) in the post-war world in which those responsible for collaboration with crimes against humanity in many cases escaped arrest entirely, and in others did not face justice until they were old men.[1084] As Butor says, at least with fiction, one can sleep peacefully at night, knowing that justice has been done. Post-war writers have certainly subverted the genre in many ways, as Butor does in *L'Emploi du temps*. Most do not leave the reader still entirely perplexed.[1085] But much fiction that deals with crime draws upon the genre without obeying its 'rules', and *L'Emploi du temps* plays with the form, acknowledges its tropes, but leaves us uncertain whether any crime has been committed.

In terms of narrative structure, the detective story is interesting in that it begins with, if not the final event, at least a penultimate event, the crime itself, and the detective must retrace the murderer's and the victim's steps to that point ('à contre-courant'),[1086] until the perpetrator is uncovered, in effect working backwards in order to construct a linear narrative that shows how, why and by whom the crime was committed. This narrative will not be revealed in chronological order, but as fragments which must be pieced together to arrive at the truth. Meanwhile the detective's narrative will proceed, for the most part, in a chronological sequence following the discovery of the crime, through the investigation, to the conclusion.[1087] Along the way, many apparently useful paths will turn out to be dead ends, or to lead back to where the quest began. The use of 'red herrings', a staple of crime fiction, suggests the convention that the suspect who seems the most perfect, and the most obviously

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[1083] Laura Rice-Sayre, 'Le Roman policier et le nouveau roman: Entretien avec Michel Butor', *French-American Review*, 1 (1977), in *Entretiens*, Vol. II, pp. 220-32

[1084] See Didier Daeninckx' *Meurtres pour memoire* (1983; Paris: Belin Gallimard, 2008) for a crime novel that deals very directly with this: the first crime is triggered by an investigation of a murder committed during the massacre of Algerian demonstrators in 1961, which in turn draws into the light the hidden crimes of the Occupation, fictionalising the case of Maurice Papon (Richard Golsan, *The Papon Affair: Memory and Justice on Trial* (London: Routledge, 2000)). See also Margaret Atack, 'Representing the Occupation in the Novel of the 1950s: *Ne jugez pas*', *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 29 (Fall 2010), pp. 76-88 (p. 79)

[1085] Todorov says that 'the reader habitually considers novels [that dispense with the conventions of the classic detective novel] as marginal to the genre, an intermediary form between detective fiction and the novel itself'' ('The Typology of Detective Fiction', p. 232)

[1086] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 224-25; 'ce qui peut déconcerter certains' (p. 225)

[1087] See Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 'the whodunit goes backwards as it goes forwards, or more precisely […] it reconstructs the time line of the crime in the time line of the investigation' (p. 87)

guilty, cannot ultimately be shown to be the culprit.[1088] Thus, Horace Buck as the most obvious suspect for the acts of arson in the city, and James and Richard Tenn as suspects for the attempt on Burton's life, are unlikely to prove to be the guilty parties (although the genre can, of course, engage in double bluffs, and in this case, we are still uncertain at the end of the book). There will be deception – by the perpetrator to evade exposure, by witnesses who have something to hide, by the detective to trick witnesses or the perpetrator into revealing more than they intend. So, whilst the conventional detective novel will mislead and conceal information, no matter how many red herrings are introduced, we expect the real culprit to be revealed at the end, and we expect that the process by which the detective has arrived at that revelation will be, at least by the final pages, transparent. The centre of the labyrinth is the discovery of the murderer, and the second (judicial) murder of which Burton speaks.

L'Emploi du temps features not only Burton's theories on the genre in which he works, but Revel's attempts to use the Bleston policier as a *roman-clef* to solve a murder, and then to solve the apparent attempted murder of Burton himself. In neither case does he uncover the truth, and indeed it is strongly suggested that in neither case was any real murder carried out or intended. If he had established the truth, then the narrative would 'disparaître en fumée, dans l'apothéose de l'explication', as Jean Pouillon puts it.[1089] For Lydon, 'the detective story intrigue in *L'Emploi du temps* serves the same purpose in exploring its structure as does *Le Meurtre de Bleston* in Jacques Revel's exploration of that city. It provides a means of access.[1090]

George Burton reveals himself to be the exponent of a particular narrative tradition, specifically that of the classic detective novel, which (as he explains) must follow certain rules, but implicitly through his scathing commentary on the New Cathedral's art and architecture which contrasts with the way he refers to the Old Cathedral. The detective story, and the sequence of stained-glass windows in the Old Cathedral (which feature prominently in *Le Meurtre de Bleston*), 'use their art to tell a story and to reveal a truth'.[1091] But whilst the stained-glass windows may once have presented a coherent, linear account of the biblical narratives (with, along the way, a history of Bleston), they now give only fragments, and what has survived gives a prominence to Cain the murderer which would not have been

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[1088] Stéphane Gallon, *Michel Butor: L'Emploi du temps dans* L'Emploi du temps, p. 31
[1089] Jean Pouillon, 'Les Règles du "je"', *Temps modernes*, 134 (April 1957), pp. 1591-98 (p. 1594), cited by Mary Lydon in *Perpetuum Mobile,* p. 71
[1090] Ibid, pp. 69-70
[1091] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 63

countenanced by their creator or by the church, and which distorts the meaning and message of the story. Further, the window representing the Last Judgement was never completed.[1092] This supposed exemplar of the linear narrative is not what it seems. The New Cathedral (inspired at least in part by Gaudi's Sagrada Familia, which Butor visited whilst working on this novel),[1093] is 'characterised by lavish ornamentation based on and testifying to the profusion and variety of forms in the natural world',[1094] and Revel's descriptions of it stress both the astonishing originality and the way in which the elements of the structure are linked: 'ces arcs épais, […] ces ponts bordés de fines balustrades qui relient deux à deux les colonnes de la nef, avec ces plate-formes circulaires […] ces balcons'.[1095] Revel begins to see it as an organic, living structure, which makes its way into a terrifying dream in which the New Cathedral swallows up the buildings which surround it. Burton's authority as a guide to Bleston is undermined: he sees the New Cathedral as 'une imitation vide d'un modèle incompris',[1096] whereas for Revel it is 'a rich and bold construction, the greatness of which lies in its subversive variations on traditional motifs and in its forewarning of new beginnings.'[1097] The Gaudi building which inspired it is also, of course, unfinished. The 'Nouvelle Cathédrale' thus suggests the *nouveau roman* or the *nouvelle vague*, post-war upheavals in artistic practice which (building, of course, on pre-war innovators such as Joyce) challenged the linearity of narrative and the view of the artwork as a completed artefact.

Sebald introduces elements of the *roman noir* (crime narrative without detective) in *Vertigo*, in which the narrator believes himself to be being followed by two young men who crop up repeatedly while he is in Venice and then reappear in Verona. There is the hint that they may be linked to the (real) Organizzazione Ludwig, responsible for a number of unsolved murders in various Italian cities. Another two men (the same?) assault him years later in Milan, and he finds out about the arrest and trial of the perpetrators of the Ludwig murders. But the context of these references is one in which the narrator also claims to recognise in contemporary Venice King Ludwig II of Bavaria and has recurring visions from Kafka's story of the Hunter Gracchus.[1098] In *The Emigrants*, the narrator uses first- and second-hand accounts to reconstruct aspects of the lives of the four exiles, sifting evidence such as Adelwarth's diary

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[1092] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 65
[1093] Ibid, pp. 74-87
[1094] See also Jennifer Waelti-Walter on Butor's descriptions of Weissenstein Castle (*Michel Butor*, p. 71)
[1095] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 146
[1096] Ibid, p. 157
[1097] Jean Duffy, *Signs and Designs*, p. 82
[1098] Franz Kafka, 'The Hunter Gracchus', in *The Complete Short Stories,* pp. 226-31

(we note that the narrator describes struggling to decipher Adelwarth's handwriting but in fact Sebald himself created the diary pages whose photograph appears in the text, thus Sebald is creating a clue for the narrator to decode).[1099] *Austerlitz* also contains elements of the detective story. Through a combination of chance encounters and archival research Austerlitz attempts to uncover his parents' story, from the point at which his father left them for France, and the point at which he left his mother to take the Kindertransport to Britain. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we are given many reasons to question both what he believes he has found out, and what he may be able to find out.

Both the linearity and the logic of these narratives are undermined by the unreliability of narrators and by the constant slippage into dream or hallucination. Thus, the stories we are told are often linked or compared to myths or fairy tales. Max Ferber describes the experience of re-reading his mother's memoirs as 'like one of those evil German fairy tales in which, once you are under the spell, you have to carry on to the finish, till your heart breaks, with whatever work you've begun – in this case, the remembering, writing and reading'.[1100] Adelwarth tells stories as a compulsion, 'as much a torment to him as an attempt at self-liberation. He was at once saving himself, in some way, and mercilessly destroying himself'.[1101] The process of telling the story makes it both more and less real. Luisa Lanzberg remarks that

> *If I think back nowadays to our childhood in Steinach […], it often seems as if it had*
> *been open-ended in time, in every direction – indeed, as if it were still going on, right*
> *into these lines I am now writing. But in reality, as I know only too well, childhood*
> *ended in January 1905.*[1102]

 She contrasts known 'reality' with her attempts to capture her own story on paper. Austerlitz relates how the Ashkenazi cemetery behind his London house (something which he only discovers just before leaving London for the last time, despite living there for many years, and despite his interest in such places) seems to him as if he had 'entered a fairy tale which, like life itself, had grown older with the passing of time'.[1103] The narrator too experiences the enchantment of this place through Austerlitz's account, but it sends him not directly to

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[1099] Carole Angier, 'Who is W G Sebald?', p. 72
[1100] *The Emigrants*, p. 193
[1101] Ibid, p. 100
[1102] Ibid, p. 207
[1103] *Austerlitz*, p. 409

London, but back to Antwerp, to the Nocturama and to Breendonk, where his first encounters with Austerlitz took place.[1104]

Butor uses *The Thousand and One Nights* as a recurring motif throughout his *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*,[1105] a narrative which combines autobiography with fantasy/dream (the two are distinguished by the alternation of sections, and by the use of roman or italic type;[1106] we do not slip unnoticed from one to another as we do in Sebald). In contrast to his use of Biblical and classical myths in *L'Emploi du temps*, here Butor draws upon folk tales from various cultures: we encounter a vampire, an imprisoned princess and her would-be rescuer, a prince transformed into a monkey. The text is saturated with references to alchemical texts and to notions of initiation. Whilst these are explicit in *Portrait*, it has been argued that *L'Emploi du temps* contains a hidden narrative, one of 'sacrificial ritual that juxtaposes destruction and writing and suggests a possible interrelation between the two'.[1107] Seda Chavdarian, whose work on Butor draws out the mythological riches in his œuvre, and in particular his use of Egyptian mythology (he proposes, for example, that Horace Buck is a reference to Horus, Egyptian symbol of death), focuses on the prevalence of fire and water in the novel, as means of destruction, purging, cleansing, and thus renewal. Whether or not one accepts the specific reading he offers, Chavdarian is not alone in emphasising these aspects of Butor's writing. David Baguley has also explored this aspect of *L'Emploi du temps*, whilst Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Eilene Hoft-March and Thomas O'Donnell have focused on *Portrait*.[1108]

Alchemy encompasses the idea that 'every book is a hermetic one', but the literature of Grail quests and alchemic experiments also suggests that 'the quest is in many ways more important than its result, for from it wisdom is gained'.[1109] Certainly Revel seeks signs and portents, talismans and guides as he seeks knowledge to gain mastery over the city. He sees his colleague James as 'un livre-fée dont une nouvelle page ne s'ouvre qui si beaucoup de

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[1104] *Austerlitz*, p. 410

[1105] It would be fascinating to know whether Sebald read this work, which is set in Germany close to where he grew up, immediately after the war.

[1106] Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* uses the same typographical distinction between the equivalent two strands of his narrative

[1107] Seda Chavdarian, '*L'Emploi du temps*: A Distorted Shadow', *Romance Notes*, 27, 3 (Spring 1987), pp. 205-11 (p. 205)

[1108] David Baguley, 'The Reign of Chronos: (More) on Alchemy in Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 16, 3 (July 1980), pp. 281-92; Jennifer Waelti-Walters, 'Michel Butor and *The Thousand and One Nights*', *Neophilologus*, 59, 2 (1975), pp. 213-22; Eilene Hoft-March, 'Truth or Literary Consequences: Butor's Confessions of a Portraitist', *Neophilologus*, 78, 3 (July 1994), pp. 361-70; Thomas O'Donnell, 'Polemic', *Diacritics*, 2, 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 52-56

[1109] Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Michel Butor*, p. 117

conditions sont rassemblées'[1110] – the mysteries and contradictions of James' character require an 'open sesame' to be unlocked. The progression from not knowing to knowing is present perhaps in every narrative but for Revel and for Austerlitz the knowing is and will remain imperfect and incomplete. Alchemy is 'une recherche, une enquête et une quête, recherché de quelque chose de perdu dont l'intelligibilité est dans le passé'.[1111] Stephane Gallon describes *L'Emploi du temps* as 'une œuvre en quête du monde',[1112] which invites us to interpret Revel's quest in wider, more universal terms than we have done here. Revel's narrative describes the task of putting together the fragments of his life in Bleston, decoding the meaning of events and symbols, pushing back against the power that he ascribes to the city. He himself uses the word 'recherche' to describe the process.[1113] The text both describes the passage through the labyrinth in search of the elusive centre, the sanctuary of knowledge, and is itself that quest. As Alain Robbe-Grillet argued:

> *chaque romancier, chaque roman, doit inventer sa propre forme. […] Le livre crée pour lui seul ses propres règles. Encore le mouvement de l'écriture doit-il souvent conduire à les mettre en péril, en échec peut-être, et à les faire éclater.*[1114]

This process is then experienced by the reader, who navigates the labyrinthine structure of the text, and experiences vicariously the journey of both writer and protagonist. The protagonists' journeys are both physical/external and interior. Revel's compulsive wanderings through the streets of Bleston are an attempt at mastery of the city but also at mastery of his own memories and perceptions. Austerlitz seeks not only information about his parents' fate but an understanding of who he is, of the identity which was taken from him by his foster parents. The twentieth-century quest hero, alienated and dislocated, set adrift without compass and soundings, seeks his way through the labyrinth to some sort of recomposition of self, to the 'lost paradise of the hero's own affective origins'.[1115]

We have noted earlier the way in which narrator and protagonists in these works use texts, and indeed use the process of narration, to respond to trauma. This raises not only questions about what can be known, and what can be spoken, but about how not to betray the past, of what it is right to tell and who has the right to tell. These questions have been raised in

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[1110] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 175
[1111] Alain Montandon, '*L'Emploi du temps* comme roman alchimique', in *Analyses et réflexions*, pp. 81-85 (p. 81)
[1112] Stéphane Gallon, *L'Emploi du temps dans* L'Emploi du temps, p. 268
[1113] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 45
[1114] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman*, p. 12-13
[1115] Richard Macksey, 'The Artist in the Labyrinth', pp. 243-45

relation to Sebald's work, particularly given his appropriation of individual stories (Frank Auerbach, Susi Bechhöfer, amongst others) and of other writers' words (Proust, Butor, Kafka, and many others). This is particularly acute because Sebald was German, and chose to tell the stories of victims of the Holocaust. He clearly had no memories of trauma of his own on which to draw, only his gradual realisation of the trauma of others. Martin Swales, who has written extensively on Goethe and Mann, as well as on more recent German literature, describes Sebald's relationship to the Holocaust as post-memory:[1116]

> *His narrativity is grounded in the condition of being-at-one-remove. What he tried to do is to speak tangentially, metonymically, rather than directly. We do not get close to Austerlitz, or to the narrator. Nor do they get close to each other. The narrator listens and bears witness. Austerlitz talks and bears witness. Witness to the sayable things that are at the circumference of the suffering centre [...] rather than the suffering itself.[1117]*

However, this is challenged by Peter Morgan, writing on the ethics of narration in Grass and Sebald:

> *Post-memory was coined to identify the middle realm between history and memory for the children of survivors whose childhood memories are so powerfully formed by the experiences of their parents; the term was not designed to enable the telling of Jewish stories by Germans such as Sebald. 'Post-memory' for Sebald would surely involve the coming to terms with the experiences, overheard stories, silences and confusions from his German childhood and home environment.[1118]*

Sebald's use of the experiences of Jewish survivors would seem at odds with his stated conviction that 'any form of usurpation of Jewish history and suffering by non-Jewish writers is problematic and potentially morally questionable'.[1119] This is a significant question, which cannot be adequately addressed within the remit of this thesis, but which it is appropriate to mention here, in the context of the therapeutic process of writing about traumatic memory,[1120] a catharsis which Susi Bechhöfer exercised in writing the personal narrative that Sebald

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[1116] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*. Hirsch was addressing the situation of the 'second generation', the 'hinge generation', to whom the knowledge of the Holocaust had been transferred.

[1117] Martin Swales, 'Intertextuality, Authenticity, Metonymy? On Reading W G Sebald', in *The Anatomist of Melancholy*, pp. 81-87 (p. 87)

[1118] Peter Morgan, '"Your Story is now My Story": The Ethics of Narration in Grass and Sebald', *Monatshefte*, 101, 2 (Summer 2009), pp. 186-206 (p. 195)

[1119] Martin Modlinger, '"You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same": The Kindertransport Experience of Susi Bechhöfer in W G Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in *The Kindertransport to Britain, 1938/9: New Perspectives*, ed. Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 219-32 (p. 229); see also Sebald's essay on Alfred Andersch, in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, pp. 105-42

[1120] Caroline Sharples, 'Reconstructing the Past', pp. 40-62 (p. 43). Carole Angier considers this question in depth in her new Sebald biography (*Speak, Silence*)

appropriates for his fictional creation. Martin Modlinger argues that 'if Austerlitz, as Sebald would have it, becomes a person in his own right, then Susi Bechhöfer loses the exclusive right to her own history (and it is only really a right if it is exclusive)'.[1121]

Anne Whitehead, in her study of trauma fiction suggests that trauma is 'resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities'.[1122] As Bessel van der Kolk says, it 'is not stored as a narrative with an orderly beginning, middle and end'.[1123] Rather, it acts as 'a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition'.[1124] Austerlitz blocks out his fragmentary and decontextualized memories until they 'insistently and intrusively' return with his experience at Liverpool Street Station. He suffers a number of crises which can be attributed to that intrusion. His past, and that of his parents, emerges in fragments, mediated by Věra, who not only tells him about events that he experienced but did not understand, or simply did not recall because their significance was not clear to him at such a young age, but also tells him much that he never knew, about what happened after he had taken the Kindertransport to safety. He is therefore dealing not only with the realisation of his own direct trauma of separation from his parents and the loss of his identity, but his first indirect encounter with the trauma suffered by his parents. Just as he pieces together the fragments of his past, he passes them on to the narrator over a number of years. The narrator in turn passes them on to the reader, in the non-chronological form in which he receives them, and with the lacunae unfilled. At such a distance (we are now at five removes from Agáta's experience – Agáta, Věra, Austerlitz, the narrator, the reader), the reader will struggle to resolve inconsistencies and sift established fact from untrustworthy recollection.

We may not know what past trauma Revel brings with him to Bleston, but I would suggest that the experiences of occupied Paris, of what was witnessed there, however indirectly, are what lead him to see Bleston in the heightened and fearful way he does. Butor, in this work in particular, is haunted by that period, but he tells the story in such an oblique way, far more so than Sebald, because he can only authentically speak of what *he* saw and heard, and thus cannot come close to representing what was happening to others. Revel narrates Butor's own haunting, without naming its source. He feels that he is confronting again the fear, the

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[1121] Martin Modlinger, '"You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same"', p. 228
[1122] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 5
[1123] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 162
[1124] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 5

constant sense of imminent violence, the darkness, the suspicion of those years, and he seeks to use his own text to protect himself against the city,[1125] accumulating page after page to add to his defences, having found other narratives wanting. He does not succeed – at best the result is a draw – and it seems to be essentially the immutability of his departure from Bleston that ends the process (although one might remark on the fact that we do not witness the train leaving the station, any more than we witnessed its arrival). As each day, 'éveillant de nouveaux jours harmoniques, transforme l'apparence du passé', some parts of the past are brought into the light, but this is always accompanied by 'l'obscurcissement d'autres jadis éclairées'.[1126] The process goes on and will, we assume, go on, whatever Revel's next destination.

Whilst Sebald's readers will certainly be aware of the historical traumas to which he refers, readers of *L'Emploi du temps* are unlikely to identify the source of Revel's haunting. Critics have often assumed that Revel is demonstrating some mental instability, and that his seemingly melodramatic interpretations of what appear to be relatively mundane events are symptoms of that illness. This may be a valid reading, but it does not itself rule out the hypothesis that his illness is the result of trauma, and that the trauma relates to the experience of the Occupation. Without any overt references within the text (we are not told Revel's age, or where he lived before coming to Bleston) there is no reason for the reader to come to this conclusion. Clearly if Butor had wished to make the identification of Bleston with Paris more explicit within the novel (rather than merely making a passing reference in the preface to a critical study),[1127] to provide a clear route through the labyrinth, he could easily have done so. He chose to make Revel a man apparently without a past or a context, but haunted, nonetheless, such that he is assailed by dread, by the sense of menace. Thus, we can interpret his experiences as universal. It is probable that when the novel was first published, only twelve years after the Liberation, readers (particularly French readers) might more readily have made a connection with France's recent dark past. However, I have found only one contemporary review that does so.[1128] Bleston provides an effective disguise – and it is clear both that Butor *chose* to write about an English industrial city, and that his depiction of Bleston lends itself to many interpretations.

[1125] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 77
[1126] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388
[1127] Mireille Calle-Gruber, *La Ville dans* L'Emploi du temps *de Michel Butor*, pp. 7-8
[1128] André Bourin, 'Instantané', p. 29

These texts do not offer the protagonist or the reader any resolution. As Anne Whitehead says (of Sebald):

> *like the mazes in which his protagonists are trapped, [the text] offers the reader no escape from the repeated acting out of trauma. The novels respond to trauma by evoking its disorientation and its symptomatic dimensions at a stylistic level, but they do not offer any way of coming to terms with the traumatic experiences which they represent.*[1129]

Roger Luckhurst in his monograph on cultural memory and trauma studies, indeed suggests that in *Austerlitz* Sebald takes 'a kind of perverse delight in the repetition of abject assumption of a collapsed trauma subjectivity' and 'seems interested only in the psychology of mental entrapment'[1130] rather than in a more complex exploration of the negotiation of trauma. The relationship between labyrinth and trauma, in relation to memory particularly, is explored by Jeremy Woodcock, a therapist working with survivors of war and political oppression. He uses 'labyrinth' repeatedly as a metaphor for the experience of trauma, and sees the therapeutic process as a means of mapping that labyrinth, and creating the threads that will allow the patient to emerge from it.[1131] This echoes Jung's use of the labyrinth metaphor, describing the 'right way to wholeness' as a path whose labyrinthine twists and turns bring their own terrors, a 'longissima via, not straight but snake-like',[1132] with many fateful detours and wrong turnings. However, the optimistic view that the patient will emerge from the labyrinth whole, or closer to wholeness, perhaps draws more on the Christian use of the myth rather than what Umberto Eco calls the maze, in which 'one might spend one's life in turning around by repeating the same moves'.[1133] Repetition may not have a therapeutic value, and may merely represent the frustration and panic of being trapped. Indeed, Freud sees repetition as a compulsion resulting from repression of traumatic memories, for which the treatment is 'to force into memory as much as possible and to leave as little as possible to repetition'.[1134]

The narrative labyrinth presents challenges to the reader as soon as *histoire* becomes *récit*. But with these narratives the presence of doubt is pervasive: we quickly learn to doubt our

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[1129] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 138
[1130] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 111
[1131] Jeremy Woodcock, 'Threads from the Labyrinth: Therapy with Survivors of War and Political Oppression', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 23, 2 (2001), pp. 136-54 (pp. 151-52)
[1132] Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Collected Works of C G Jung, Vol. 12 (1944; London: Routledge & Kegal Paul, 1969), p. 6
[1133] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 81
[1134] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922; Miami: HardPress, 2017), pp. 17-18

narrators (they remind us frequently that their recollection of events is fragmented or muddled), and are given clues that we should not uncritically accept anything we are told, by anyone. We are offered a range of narratives within the narrative, but Revel finds no authoritative guide to Bleston, all are proved to be partial (in both senses), and with Sebald as soon as one realises that nothing (the photographs, the diary entries, the quotations) can be taken at face value, we experience vertigo, and doubt prevails. But all of our narrators are nonetheless seeking certainty, seeking memories to which they can hold fast, seeking the thread to their own story, the resolution to the *enquête* or to the *quête*. For Revel and for Austerlitz, the labyrinth proves ultimately unmappable, the centre ever elusive. This is the text as labyrinth without Minotaur. The limits of the published text, contained within covers, and the chronology of the narrative (however non-linear), still allow for infinite variation and continuation, because there are gaps which not only are not filled within the narrative but which cannot be filled, and because the threads that we follow through these texts link us to other narratives, other texts as well as to other times and places.

Chapter 7

Musical Labyrinths: Fugue and Fugueur

> *Une des structures fondamentales de la polyphonie [...] avec des renversements, des miroirs. Des musiciens ont fait des pièces dans lesquelles une seconde voix imite la première et où parfois, une troisième voix remonte de la dernière à la première note. Ce sont des structures fondamentales de notre perception du temps et de l'Histoire. Ainsi la musique peut nous donner des modèles narratifs.[1135]*

The preceding chapters have explored how Butor and Sebald have written about finding and losing one's way in the labyrinth of the city, and how their language and narrative structures have created and described labyrinths. In this chapter, I will apply some of the same approaches to a study of the musicality of Butor and Sebald's writing. *L'Emploi du temps* has been described as a 'roman musical',[1136] and Butor has stated explicitly that its structure is based on that of a canon, or fugue.[1137] To present a simple definition of this complex musical form is challenging, and we will return to many aspects of the fugue in the course of this chapter, but at base, it is a piece of music built upon a theme which is introduced at the beginning and then returns in different 'voices', repeated with variations until it finally returns to the original subject in the original key. There are technical complexities to the study of the fugue that are beyond the scope of this thesis, which nonetheless will address the importance of music as structure, as subject, and as recurring theme, in the work of both Butor and Sebald, and explore how music relates to the overarching motif of the labyrinth, and how we can read the work of both writers as musical.

There are specific features of the musical fugue which are relevant here. Firstly, there is a long-standing association of fugue with labyrinth (see the 'Harmonic Labyrinths' of Bach and his contemporaries).[1138] This is more than a mere acknowledgement of the complexity of the fugue form, but reflects the difficulties that it presents for the listener, who will struggle to follow a path through the piece as it adds and interweaves new voices and variations. We can

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[1135] *Improvisations,* p. 83
[1136] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 17
[1137] *Improvisations*, p. 83
[1138] Lewis Rowell, *Thinking about Music: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music* (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1983), p. 238

speak of the listener 'losing their way' in a fugue, a metaphor which connects this experience to that of the urban traveller.[1139] The fugue is a polyphonic form, and both Butor and Sebald aspire to polyphonic effect through the way in which they structure their texts (we will explore some specific examples of this in relation to *L'Emploi du temps* and *The Emigrants*). It is also notable that the fugue, even in its baroque form, is a means of creating a piece of music whose duration could be almost infinite, if all possible variations on the initial subject were to be developed. I will consider these technical aspects of fugue, as well as something of its history and in particular its development in the twentieth century, in more detail in this chapter. I will then turn to an exploration of the fascination that this form has held for writers, particularly in the twentieth century, and the possibilities (and limitations) of the fugue in literary form.

I will in the second part of this chapter consider a very different kind of fugue – the 'fugue state', or dissociative fugue,[1140] a condition which involves selective memory loss, and in some instances, the compulsion to travel. I will show how Butor's Revel and Sebald's Austerlitz are both, in this sense, 'fugueurs', the name given in the late nineteenth century to those who, often in response to trauma, engage in these compulsive wanderings.

The background of the two writers in terms of musicality is very different. Sebald describes his early attempts to learn to play an instrument, inspired by his teacher 'Bereyter',[1141] thwarted by the fact that the only instrument available was the zither, which was a torment to him:

> *A kind of rack on which you twisted and turned in vain and which left your fingers crooked, even leaving aside the ridiculous nature of the little pieces written for the instrument.[1142]*

There have been no significant studies of Sebald's relationship to music but there are many references to musical performances and composers in his work, and the way in which he writes about music suggests a deep knowledge both of the classical repertoire and of musical theory. Some of these references do suggest a certain ambivalence, however. He responds to

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[1139] See Chapters 3 and 4
[1140] Manisha Jha and Vibha Sharma, 'Dissociative Fugue Disorder: Identification and Psychological Intervention', *Psychological Studies*, 60, 1 (March 2015), pp. 17-23 (p. 17); Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, pp. 12-13
[1141] The name Sebald gives him in *The Emigrants.* See Carole Angier, *Speak, Silence*, p. 159
[1142] 'Moments musicaux', *Campo Santo*, pp. 191-93

the traditional music of Bavaria with something approaching horror: it has for him 'taken on in retrospect the character of something terrible which I know will pursue me to my grave'.[1143] This is echoed in *Austerlitz* when the slowing down of the recording from Terezín results in a 'transformation of sounds', whereby a 'merry polka' becomes a funeral march and other pieces too move 'in a kind of subterranean world, through the most nightmarish depths'.[1144] Austerlitz himself claims to have been 'left almost untouched by any kind of music all my life', but finds himself affected deeply by a performance near the Gare d'Austerlitz by a group of travelling musicians, whose melodies suggested to him 'a long-forgotten Welsh hymn', but also a waltz, a Ländler theme[1145] or a funeral march. He is unsure whether his response is pain or happiness.[1146]

> *Why certain tonal colours, subtleties of key and syncopations can take such a hold on the mind is something that an entirely unmusical person like myself can never understand.[1147]*

Sebald could not be less like his protagonist in this regard. Aside from the copious musical references within his œuvre,[1148] we should note his perceptive annotation of his copy of *L'Emploi du temps*. Sebald highlights a section of the text[1149] and writes at the top of the page 'une fuge [sic]' and 'point d'orgue'. The latter (in English usually called a fermata), is a musical symbol indicating that a note should be prolonged beyond the normal duration its note value would indicate (at the discretion of the musician or conductor). Sebald is observing here how the sentences begin with the invocation of 'Rose' and loop around to return to her name, with fugue-like repetitions and variations, but also how the repetition of the name echoes through the entire piece as if it is a single note around which the rest of the piece is structured.

[1143] 'Moments musicaux', *Campo Santo*, p. 190

[1144] *Austerlitz*, pp. 348-49

[1145] A folk dance from Sebald's home region which, we have already noted, fills him with horror

[1146] 'Neither an affirmation nor a negation, music here is that strange condition in which Austerlitz endures, caught in the past-present-state of waiting without term, an incessant return, like a vigil or the state of survivorship' (Jessica Dubow and Richard Steadman-Jones, 'Mapping Babel', pp. 23-24)

[1147] *Austerlitz*, pp. 382-83. See the very similar account of Lithuanian buskers, who remind Sebald of Jewish village musicians, in 'To the Brothel by Way of Switzerland: On Kafka's Travel Diaries', *Campo Santo*, p. 143.

[1148] For example, his discussion of Schubert's last piano sonata in 'Why I Grieve I do not Know: A Memoir of Mörike' (*A Place in the Country*, pp. 79-82), his reference to Adorno (here referred to as Wiesengrund) on Mahler in 'To the Brothel by Way of Switzerland: On Kafka's Travel Diaries', *Campo Santo*, p. 143; the description of Paul Bereyter's musicianship in *The Emigrants* (p. 41), echoed in 'Moments musicaux', *Campo Santo* (p. 191). There are musical references too in many of the poems in *Across the Land and the Water*, for example, 'Mölkerbastei' (Beethoven), p. 71, 'Poetry for an Album' (Schumann), pp. 81-82, 'In the Summer of 1836' (Chopin), pp. 153-54

[1149] *L'Emploi du temps*, pp. 270-74. This passage, Butor's longest sentence, is discussed in detail in Chapter 5

However, Sebald's essay 'Moments musicaux' is often as much about the absence of music as it is about music itself. He says that 'immediately after the war there was almost no music at all in the village of W', and one of his most potent musical memories 'is, as it happens, a silent scene' in which Sebald watches a musical performance without being able to hear it.[1150] He endorses a view that he attributes to Freud, that 'the deepest secret of music is that it is a gesture warding off paranoia, and we make music to defend ourselves against being overwhelmed by the terrors of reality'.[1151] I have been unable to verify the attribution to Freud of this quotation,[1152] which in fact is strongly reminiscent of the famous passage from Deleuze and Guattari:

> *A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos.[1153]*

Alan Lockwood's Sebald obituary celebrates his 'extraordinary musicality', describing how '"Il ritorno in patria" resounds in Sebald's minor keys, a non-choral "Ode to Joy"' and defining musicality as 'the delicate, insistent, intuitive relation of parts, a genre bursting quality that remains the ultimate human form'.[1154] I will examine the musicality of *The Emigrants* later in this chapter.

Michel Butor's interest in and passion for music stems from his childhood.[1155] He studied violin, and evidently gained a significant knowledge of the classical repertoire (alongside his explorations of the jazz clubs of Paris).[1156] However, his mother's deafness not only created discomfort as he recognised her distress at what she could not share, but also led him to consider more deeply what music meant: 'on peut percevoir la musique autrement que par les

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[1150] 'Moments musicaux', *Campo Santo*, pp. 189, 194
[1151] Freud described himself as 'ganz unmusikalisch' and appears to have experienced anxiety, rather like Austerlitz, about the way in which one can be emotionally moved by something without knowing what is having that effect, or why. Sigmund Freud (1936), letter to M. Bonaparte, cited in Asja Nina Kovacev, 'Return to the Origins: Wagner, Jung and Symbolic Forms', *Musicological Annual*, 45, 1 (May 2009), pp. 89-115 (p. 89)
[1152] Sebald does qualify this with 'unless I am much mistaken' ('Moments musicaux', *Campo Santo*, p. 193)
[1153] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (1980; London: Continuum: 2004), pp. 343-44. The refrain, or 'ritournelle' refers to 'any kind of rhythmic pattern that stakes out a territory, but Deleuze and Guattari relate this particular form of the refrain to classical music specifically (Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 17, 38)
[1154] Alan Lockwood, 'With Us, Without Us: In Memoriam W G Sebald', *Brooklyn Rail* (1 March 2002), <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2002/03/books/with-us-without-us-in-memoriam-wg-sebald> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1155] *Curriculum Vitae*, pp. 13, 21-23
[1156] Ibid, p. 42; Dan Graham, *Conversation*, p. 28

oreilles'.[1157] Many of Butor's essays and interviews demonstrate his knowledge of music:

> *Ce que je connais le mieux, c'est la musique depuis Monteverdi, à Beethoven, ou à Schubert. Et après ça, [...] à la musique française: Fauré, Debussy, Ravel [...] et puis la musique viennoise: Schoenberg et les autres [...], la musique sérielle, par Boulez et les autres.[1158]*

He recognised the difficulty that many listeners found in appreciating the composers of the post-war period, which parallel the challenges that the *nouveau roman* posed for readers. The reassurance of traditional structures, of knowing that the work (musical, literary or cinematic) will end with a resolution, with a return home, are absent, reflecting the post-war labyrinth of displacement and the challenging of certainties. Nonetheless, these difficulties must be faced, if one is to achieve any enlightenment:

> *Si on cherche vraiment à dire quelque chose on va rencontrer des difficultés qui ne sont pas des difficultés de virtuosité mais de conception, de sensibilité, et au point de vue technique, ça peut être très simple, mais ce sera très difficile de jouer ça convenablement, c'est-à-dire de comprendre de quoi il s'agit.*[1159]

For Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, who edited an anthology of Butor's poetry,

> *tout n'est pour Michel Butor que poème, prolongement d'un même poème: la rotation et la musique des sphères rejoignent l'immensité du présent et du quotidien à fouiller. Telle est l'utopie harmonique à laquelle travaille inlassablement [...] l'œuvre poétique de Michel Butor et donc son œuvre entière.[1160]*

For Butor, the role of the arts is to change the world, no less: 'le livre est […] un moyen de connaître le monde et d'agir sur lui. Dès lors, un travail en commun sur les structures du réel est possible.'[1161] Music, for Butor, can be the *fil d'Ariane* through the labyrinth that is life in the world. In this 'travail en commun', then, music has an essential part to play:

> *Elle nous enseigne, même dans ses formes les plus hautaines, les plus détachées apparemment de tout, quelque chose sur le monde, que la grammaire musicale est une grammaire du réel, que les chants transforment la vie. [...] La musique n'est pas un divertissement d'oisifs,*

[1157] *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 22

[1158] Annick Desbizet and Thierry Belleguic, 'Michel Butor: Musique et littérature', *Frontenac Review*, 8 (1991), in *Entretiens*, Vol. III, pp. 269-81 (p. 270)

[1159] Ibid, pp. 274-75

[1160] Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, 'L'Harmonie des états', in *Anthologie Nomade*, p. 18

[1161] Henri Ronse, 'Le Livre futur: Entretien avec Michel Butor', *Synthèses* (January 1967), in *Entretiens,* Vol. I, pp. 292-98 (p. 297). This was a response to a question about Butor's collaborations with musicians, painters and photographers, hence 'un travail en commun'

> *d'amateurs, ôtez-vous cela de l'esprit. La musique est indispensable à*
> *notre vie, à la vie de tous, et jamais nous n'en avons eu autant besoin.*[1162]

Butor's engagement with music through his own work took several forms. He wrote about music directly in 'dialogues' with works by Beethoven and Stravinsky,[1163] and he collaborated with a number of composers, most notably Henri Pousseur, with whom he wrote the opera *Votre Faust*,[1164] and provided libretti for other works. Further, a number of his works suggest an affinity with a musical form. His autobiographical *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*[1165] is subtitled 'Capriccio', which suggests the fanciful, fantastical themes of the work as well as the fact that it does not fall into a conventional genre category. *Mobile* has been described as a 'sorte de symphonie spatiale discontinue',[1166] and is subtitled 'Étude', suggesting a technical exercise. In particular, in 6 *810 000 Litres*[1167] which Michael Spencer describes as his fugue:

> *The subject [...] and countersubject [...] are stated. In the development,*
> *subject and countersubject are connected by episodes or 'divertissements'*
> *(the various parentheses) in which the latter is complicated by the addition*
> *of voices; later on, the themes overlap still further (principle of stretti)*
> *until, in the last section, entitled 'Coda', a dominant theme is restated [...]*
> *with the main countersubject as the theme of change.*[1168]

Butor drew an analogy between the novel and musical composition:

> *Le musicien projette sa composition dans l'espace de son papier réglé,*
> *l'horizontale devenant le cours du temps, la verticale la détermination des*
> *différents instrumentistes; de même le romancier peut disposer différentes*
> *histoires individuelles dans un solide divisé en étages, [...] les relations*
> *verticales entre les différents objets ou évènements pouvant être aussi*
> *expressive que celles entre la flute et le violon*[1169]

As Spencer's analysis suggests, the fugue has a relatively strict structure. In its simplest form, that of the canon, or round, it might seem impossible to lose one's way. However, the more voices that join in, the harder it is for the individual to hold tight to their place even in a

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[1162] 'La Musique, art réaliste: Les Paroles et la musique', *Esprit*, 280, 1 (January 1960), pp. 138-56 (pp. 139, 156)

[1163] *Dialogue avec 33 variations de Ludwig van Beethoven sur une valse de Diabelli*; *Stravinsky au piano*

[1164] Henri Pousseur and Michel Butor, *Votre Faust*, 1960-68, <https://www.discogs.com/Butor-Pousseur-Votre-Faust/release/1683014> [accessed 25 August 2021]. This is a highly intertextual work, of which Pousseur said that he was trying to achieve 'a system sufficiently general that quotations find their places, as in crosswords, as in a chessboard of possibilities' (cited in Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: The Avant Garde since 1945*, p. 258)

[1165] *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*

[1166] Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, 'L'Harmonie des états', in *Anthologie Nomade*, p. 7

[1167] *6 810 000 litres d'eau par seconde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966)

[1168] Michael Spencer, *Michel Butor*, p. 129

[1169] 'L'espace du roman', in *Essais sur le roman*, p. 56

relatively straightforward pattern. In the fugue, the first voice introduces the main theme (subject), a second enters, taking and modifying the subject, starting on a different note. This is the 'answer' to the subject. If there are more than two voices, at least two melodic lines will be in imitation at any time, with any remaining voices providing harmony and free counterpoint. These voices interweave, in a conversation in which a topic can 'fly' from one voice to another, in which they can interrupt or harmonise, a combination of differentiation and synthesis.[1170] The fugue adds layer upon layer, modulating the intensity of the composition. Any attempt by the listener to follow one distinct path through the piece will not succeed. As Edward Saïd says, in one of his explorations of the notion of counterpoint:

> *A fugue can contain two, three, four or five voices: they're all part of the same composition, but they're each distinct. They operate together, and it's a question of how you conceive of the togetherness: if you think that it's got to be this or that, then you're paralysed.[1171]*

Ilya Bernstein says that 'the listener […] may be aware of the degree of intricacy that its structure has attained at any given moment but the time-scale in terms of which he perceives the music is constant throughout: his listening experience is shaped by the variable complexity of material within the same temporal frame.'[1172] Kate Merrell Wells, in a sceptical account of the fugue, describes it as a device to produce tension: at the moment of hearing we are 'tantalizingly unable (and yet almost able!) to untangle the bewildering assortment of scraps and snatches, half understood relationships and unresolved conflicts' (an apt description of Sebald's texts, in particular).[1173] Thus, if there are more than three voices, the function of the additional voices is 'contributory enrichment'. The fugue is a labyrinth in musical form, creating a disorientation that can paralyse with indecision.

The fugue as an essentially polyphonic form thus reminds us of the suspicion with which the introduction of polyphony in sacred music in the twelfth century (most notably by the Notre Dame School, with composers such as Léonin and Pérotin) was greeted by some in the

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[1170] Leonid Perlovsky, 'Musical Emotions: Functions, Origins, Evolution', *Physics of Life Review*, 7, 1 (2010), pp. 2-27 (pp. 20-21)

[1171] Edward Saïd, in *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W Saïd,* ed. Gauri Viswanathan (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), p. 91. Saïd, best known as a scholar of colonialism, was also a Julliard trained pianist who drew on his musical knowledge throughout his writing. He used the idea of counterpoint to talk about the experience of exile, whereby the recollections of what has been left behind play against current experience (see Colin Symes, 'The Paradox of the Canon: Edward W Saïd and Musical Transgression', *Discourse*, 27, 3 (2006), pp. 309-24)

[1172] Ilya Bernstein, 'Temporal Registers in the Realist Novel', *Philosophy and Literature*, 32, 1 (April 2008), pp. 173-82 (p. 179)

[1173] Kate Merrell Wells, 'The Fugue as an Expressive Vehicle', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 6, 4 (June 1948), pp. 339-40 (p. 339). The fugue is, in her view, an inherently ingrown, self-preoccupied form

Church who feared that the complexity and interweaving of vocal lines would make it impossible for worshippers to hear clearly the liturgy for which the music was a vehicle. Nonetheless, by the thirteenth century composers were exploring the possibilities of polyphony both within the context of the church and beyond it, interweaving secular tunes or even lyrics with the sacred texts. The fugue is perhaps most strongly associated with Bach and the baroque – he and his contemporaries constructed harmonic labyrinths, 'primarily demonstration pieces that modulate systematically through the gamut of keys and return to the starting point'.[1174] There are, however, many later fugues: Julian Johnson gives examples from the work of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Mahler and Shostakovich.[1175]

Most importantly, in relation to discussions of Butor's work, the form was revived in the twentieth century by composers of the so-called Second Viennese School, or the serialist movement, most strongly associated with Schoenberg. Paul Griffiths argues that serialism was Schoenberg's response to the prevalence of atonality in his own work and that of his contemporaries, which seemed to arise 'largely intuitively', and to suspend 'most of the fundamental principles of the tradition'. Schoenberg 'had been troubled by the lack of system, the absence of harmonic bearings on which large forms might be directed'.[1176] The twelve notes of the chromatic scale were 'arranged in a fixed order, the series, which can be used to create melodies and harmonies, and which remains binding for a whole work'.[1177] Pierre Brunel analyses Butor's use of a fugue structure for *L'Emploi du temps* in terms of serialism: 'Cette pratique du mouvement rétrograde est caractéristique, au XXème siècle, de la musique sérielle, dont Butor est proche. C'est "l'exposition d'une mélodie (ou d'une série) en ordre inverse"'.[1178] If the series is the order of succession of the twelve notes of the scale without any repetition of a given note, its recurrence, in retrograde order:

> sera la 'lecture de droite à gauche de la série originale'.[1179] Il pourra y
> avoir tout aussi bien exposition rétrograde du renversement de la série, ce
> renversement correspondant lui-même au changement de sens, ascendant
> ou descendant, des intervalles de la série originale.[1180]

[1174] Lewis Rowell, *Thinking about Music*, p. 238
[1175] Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, pp. 54-55, 111
[1176] Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History from Debussy to Boulez*, p. 86
[1177] Ibid, p. 87
[1178] Denis Arnold, *Université d'Oxford: Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la musique*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1988), p. 571
[1179] Dominique and Jean-Yves Bosseur, *Révolutions musicales: La musique contemporaine depuis 1945* (Paris: Minerve, 1993), p. 11
[1180] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 153

The series was thus a hidden theme, a source of ideas and a point of reference.[1181] It could be manipulated, its register changed, transposed entirely, inverted or reversed, just like the ways in which the first voice/theme of the fugue can be manipulated. There were unlimited possibilities, but the guarantee of a degree of harmonic coherence.[1182]

The labyrinth has been used as a metaphor for counterpoint, from Bach to Steve Reich's 'New York Counterpoint', whose first movement 'is devoted to elaborate, interlocking canons which, once assembled, form a complex contrapuntal labyrinth'.[1183] Harrison Birtwistle likens his own music to labyrinthine journeys which progress, in that one is always steadily moving through the piece, but also incorporate the possibility of retracing and return, with exact repetition or a variety of altered perspectives. 'As a metaphor for musical experience, the labyrinth reminds us of the possibility of an experience of change that is underpinned by no larger certainty as to form or shape - that makes no recourse to the assurance of an underlying "time".'[1184] As the 'narrative' turns back on itself, with disorienting effect for the reader, and the protagonist loses his way, or finds he has unintentionally returned to his starting point in the labyrinthine city, so the listener can feel lost in the increasing complexity of the fugue. As Merrell Wells has said, the fugue is a device to produce tension, which tantalises with the possibility of grasping the whole, but effectively making that impossible as the echoes and repetitions suggest connections without clarifying them, and conflicts without resolving them.[1185] Thus, the labyrinth, in its classical form, suggests a simple, unicursal route but subverts that by looping away from the centre, then back towards it. Even in its more complex multicursal forms, it may appear to be comprehensible when seen from above, but from within, the traveller – or the listener – struggles to hold on to those certainties.

Butor's contemporary Pierre Boulez[1186] saw the twelve-tone techniques of Schoenberg and

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[1181] Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History from Debussy to Boulez*, pp. 87-88
[1182] Ibid, p.88
[1183] Brian Wise, 'Steve Reich: *New York Counterpoint*, for clarinet, bass clarinet and tape', *AllMusic,* <http://www.allmusic.com/composition/new-york-counterpoint-for-clarinet-bass-clarinet-tape-mc0002414095> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1184] Robert Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 116. Birtwistle was a student at the Manchester College of Music at the same time that Butor was working at the University. There is no record of any direct link, or that Birtwistle was aware of Butor's 'Manchester novel' but, as Johnson says (*Out of Time,* p. 135), it is a neat historical coincidence
[1185] Kate Merrell Wells, 'The Fugue as an Expressive Vehicle', p. 339
[1186] One year older than Butor, Boulez experienced the years of the Occupation first in Lyon, a centre of the Resistance, and then in Paris

his colleagues as a way to 'disrupt music's inclination to settle into familiar patterns'.[1187] For him and others of his generation this was a form of resistance,[1188] a way of ensuring that in the chaotic aftermath of the Second World War there was a challenge to the yearning for reassurance and stability, but without a return to the 'total harmonic freedom, unpredictable rhythm, no themes, each piece creating its own form'[1189] which had characterised Schoenberg and Webern's earlier, more purely atonal works. This was a direct artistic response to the post-Auschwitz world. Just as so many of the cities of Europe had become unfamiliar and unnavigable labyrinths as a result of the conflict, and so many of its population were displaced and disoriented, music too became disorienting and challenging to navigate. As Paul Griffiths points out, the notion of music 'progressing' in anything resembling a linear fashion was no longer valid. Within the labyrinth, as its path twists and turns back upon itself all sorts of juxtapositions and connections become possible.[1190] At the same time, the structures were rigorous and scrupulously planned:[1191] even where aleatory elements were used (as by Boulez, Cage, and Butor's collaborator Pousseur).[1192] These labyrinths are designed, the chaos is in the perceptions of the listener or reader, not in the mind of their creator.

Boulez said that 'the most important recent notion […] is that of the labyrinth, which has been introduced into creation. […] the modern notion of the labyrinth in works of art is certainly one of the most important leaps accomplished by Western thought – one from which there is no return'.[1193] But the connection can be traced back many centuries. The labyrinth was in earlier times used as a metaphor for faith; one true path leading to salvation, but requiring the traveller to resolutely suppress their own sensations of disorientation in order to avoid false turnings and dead ends.[1194] The musical labyrinths of the Baroque era provided the challenge of complex structure, with the introduction of different voices, reversals and repetitions, such that even the most experienced musician will find it easy to lose their way,

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[1187] Paul Griffiths, 'Music in the Modern-Postmodern Labyrinth', *New England Review*, 27, 2 (January 2006), pp. 96-113 (p. 96)
[1188] Boulez was one of the instigators of protests in 1945 against Stravinsky's abandonment of his own earlier radicalism in favour of a neo-classical style (Ibid, p. 96)
[1189] Ibid, p. 96
[1190] Ibid, p. 112
[1191] As are Butor's texts, as we have previously noted
[1192] Both the opera, *Votre Faust*, and its 'satellite' work, *Miroir de Votre Faust*, included elements where audience or performers had to make choices, or where the next section to be played was determined by chance
[1193] Pierre Boulez, 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?', p. 35
[1194] See Chapter 3

but always with the assurance that there would be resolution, just as, in the work of later symphonic composers, we can be confident that all the threads will ultimately be gathered together, in a firm and decisive final chord. As Julian Johnson points out, the sixteenth-century fugue, which originated this complex form, also offered 'implicitly, an image of the divine ordering of the temporal universe', and 'an aesthetic image of its harmonious reconciliation'.[1195] The listener is required, not to attempt to grasp the divine order, but to put their faith in its Creator and lose themselves in its harmonies. The late nineteenth- and twentieth-century fugues offer no such comforts. The strict structure is used instead to create doubt, dissonance and disorientation, without resolution.

In such music, as in the literature and films which have also challenged those conventions, we struggle to find the thread, to hold on to it, to follow it, and we feel unsettled when we end up not back at home but somewhere else entirely. In the post-war world, the notion of going home became both more poignantly desirable and more problematic, with up to 20 million people in Europe displaced. Many never found their way home; others did, but found that home, and they, had changed beyond recognition or recovery. Even those who were not literally displaced by war, Butor and Sebald amongst them, had to question notions of home. Butor's childhood home became a place of darkness, suspicion, fear and danger, and his subsequent restless travels suggest that had a long-term effect. Sebald's growing understanding of the Nazi era forced him to see his childhood home as a place of darkness and he found it impossible to settle in Germany; he said that his 'ideal station would be [...] a hotel in Switzerland',[1196] just as Butor chose to live near the French/Swiss border. To venture from home, like Butor and Sebald, like Revel and Ferber, is to accept risk, but to set off new harmonics, to find in a city of emigrants the thread that connects with the unrecoverable home: 'The valleys of Bleston do not echo / And with them is no more returning'.[1197]

Julian Johnson says that the task of musical modernity was always 'to find a dwelling place in music, to create a home within its space'. It plays out in tonal forms (as opera does dramatically) 'a drama of leaving home, of spatial derangement and complexity, and the

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[1195] Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, p. 54
[1196] Maya Jaggi, 'Recovered Memories', *Guardian* (22 September 2001)
[1197] 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', in *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 21

search for return'.[1198] But it does not necessarily provide that reassuring homecoming[1199] and thus creates the possibility of openness, of creating a work that (as Deleuze and Guattari said of Messiaen), puts 'in continuous variation all components' and forms a rhizome instead of a tree.[1200] As in a raga, the music could in theory go on forever, and so we hear it as part of something bigger, not complete in itself.[1201] Like the novels under scrutiny here, the fugue is an open form, whose ending is arbitrary, always leaving part of the story untold and questions unanswered.[1202] Butor's long-term musical collaborator Henri Pousseur shared his vision of polyphony and openness, saying that 'composition will not always be the production of closed and finished objects which one can buy and sell. [...] We will have to think increasingly in a collective way',[1203] and in his work expanded serialist techniques to integrate past musics, seeking 'the integration of all styles from the past in a coming-to-terms which can be the only route to a future utopia, social and aesthetic'.[1204] Butor preferred to speak of art as transformation rather than creation, because the artist starts not with a blank slate, at the beginning of the process, but with all that there is already in the world, all of the words, the notes, the colours. The threads are there to be woven together, to be followed wherever they lead. In Jean-Godefroy Bidima's study of music in the work of Deleuze, he describes music as a dynamic, complex conversation; it is 'the domain of possibilities, or potentialities […] a fold, a flow, a source of possibility, and in consequence, a labyrinth'.[1205]

If Boulez in his compositions was emulating the literary innovations of Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce and Kafka[1206] (and Butor too – he compares part of his Third Piano Sonata to 'the map

[1198] Julian Johnson, *Out of Time,* p.186

[1199] Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* (1911) contrasted 'the easy charm of the familiar' with 'the hard truth of the new', the yearning for comfort with 'the thinker, who keeps on searching […] shows that there are problems and that they are unsolved' (Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), p. 64)

[1200] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, p. 24

[1201] Sometimes an unresolved ending is very clearly an ending, nonetheless, as for example in Kurtág's 'In Memoriam Aczél György' which cuts off abruptly in mid phrase, as did the life that it commemorates (György Kurtág, *Signs, Games and Messages for Viola*: *No. 14, In memoriam Aczél György* (1991))

[1202] As Sharon Spencer describes it, in leaving unanswered questions, the author has prevented the reader from leaving the narrative 'with the sense of fulfilment common to readers of traditional fiction, the serenity of knowing just how everything was disposed of once and for all'. (Sharon Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 63)

[1203] John Whiting, 'Henri Pousseur: Avant-garde Composer Seeking a Synthesis of Sound and Image', *Guardian* (11 June 2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jun/11/obituary-henri-pousseur> [accessed 25 August 2021]

[1204] Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History from Debussy to Boulez*, p. 200

[1205] Jean-Godefroy Bidima, 'Music and the Socio-Historical Real', p. 179

[1206] Pierre Boulez, 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?'; Claude Samuel, *Éclats/Boulez* (Paris: Édition du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986); Peter F Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. viii

of an unknown city (which plays so large a role in *L'Emploi du temps*)'),[1207] so in turn writers have emulated the qualities of music. In particular many have been drawn to the form of the fugue, with its polyphony and counterpoint, interweaving voices and narrative threads. However, this confronts one fundamental problem. Text cannot provide the literal simultaneity of music; the listener can accommodate and comprehend that in one moment of music one is hearing multiple instruments playing different notes, but the reader cannot literally read several lines of text or even several words at the same time (and comprehend them).[1208] Despite this, writers (particularly in the twentieth century) have explored the possibilities of the fugue, attracted in particular by its polyphonic, rhizomic, infinitely variable nature.[1209] There are numerous texts which have been argued to bear some relation to fugue (one of the best known is the 'Sirens' episode in Joyce's *Ulysses*, which has been described as his 'experiment in prose polyphony',[1210] as 'a fugue with all musical notations',[1211] and as a *fuga per canonem*, a fifteenth/sixteenth century precursor of the fugue as perfected by Bach in the eighteenth century).[1212] We read these texts, as we would listen to a fugue, with a double awareness, a 'subtle schizophrenia', 'resolving every sequential or "melodic" development back into the stasis of its "harmonic" situation, the totality of its associative chains, the web of its intermittent paradigms'.[1213] I would argue that this is an entirely appropriate way in which to read both Butor and Sebald.

[1207] Pierre Boulez, 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?', p. 41; Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, p. 135

[1208] Eric Prieto, *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2002), pp. 17, 62

[1209] Calvin S Brown, in *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1948), finds an early example of the fugue in literature in Thomas de Quincey's essay 'The English Mail-Coach' (*The English Mail Coach* and *Joan of Arc*, ed. Milton Haight Turk (Boston: Ginn, 1905), pp. 53-63), whose final section, 'Dream-Fugue', recounts a series of visions, all derived from a specific incident. The fugue provides a strict logic and resulting inevitability which serves de Quincey's narrative purpose. He uses a group of ideas, which remain constant, 'while the varying setting and details perform the function of the shifting contrapuntal accompaniment', the dream setting allowing the repetition of the same general subject with different accompaniment.

[1210] Lawrence Levin, 'The Sirens Episode as Music: Joyce's Experiment in Prose Polyphony', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 3, 1 (Fall 1965), pp. 12-24. Joyce's text was set to music in 1958-59 by Luciano Berio, in a composition for voice and tape, based on Cathy Berberian's interpretative reading of 'Sirens'. Luciano Berio, 'Author's Note', *Thema: Omaggio a Joyce*, Centro Studi Luciano Berio, <http://www.lucianoberio.org/node/1503?948448529=1> [accessed 25 August 2021]. Note also Berio's later work, *Laborintus II* (1965).

[1211] Lawrence Levin, 'The Sirens Episode as Music', p. 12

[1212] Ibid, p. 12

[1213] David Herman, '"Sirens" after Schönberg', p. 481; Theodor W Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G Mitchell and Wesley V Blomster (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 484

According to Butor:

> *lorsque nous écoutons de la musique, les temps que nous écoutons ne se déroulent pas tout à fait d'une façon linéaire, parce que à l'intérieur de la musique ce qui est absolument essentiel, c'est la façon dont les choses se répètent ou ne se répètent pas [...] Dans* L'Emploi du temps *le temps musical vient au secours du temps vécu et se met à réorganiser le temps du calendrier.*[1214]

The musical analogy, according to Butor, helps us to reconcile time as it is lived with the time of the calendar, just as, when we listen to music, our experience of the music (particularly when the music is complex) does not follow the linear structure of the score, but is triggered by repetitions to recall earlier passages. Butor further explains this in the context of the fugue:

> *C'est particulièrement clair dans certains aspects de la musique classique: ce qu'on appelle 'la fugue', notamment. Ce mot 'fugue', qui indique la fuite, la fuite du temps justement, la fugue est un moyen de courir après le temps lui-même, de maîtriser cette fuite du temps. Dans un tel morceau de musique, nous reconnaissons au bout de quelques instants qu'un thème est repris, qu'il peut se renverser, varier de toutes sortes de façons*[1215]

On the page, as the layers of time are added, the reader experiences them one by one, but memory allows the other layers to echo in the mind. Ernestine Schlant describes this as '"dense time", a time in which past and present intersect, commingle, and overlap. This commingling destroys sequence and evokes the sense of a labyrinth with no exit'.[1216] Schlant was speaking specifically of Sebald's writing, but it would equally be a powerful description of *L'Emploi du temps*.[1217] One could say also that 'dense time' is what happens in the fugue, as its 'multiple tracks become a rich polyphonic simultaneity [...] of being in several points of time simultaneously'.[1218]

Butor's musical credentials have been established already. However, on the face of it, *L'Emploi du temps* is not the most musical of his works. As Brunel says, 'riche en références à l'art du vitrail, de la tapisserie, et même du cinéma, le texte [...] est indigent en références

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[1214] Carlo Ossola, *Michel Butor/Carlos Ossola: Conversation sur le temps* (Brussels: Éditions de la Différence, 2012), pp. 20-21

[1215] Ibid, p. 21

[1216] Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 225

[1217] See my analysis of Butor's narrative layering in Chapter 6. One example amongst many: p. 386, where, writing on 23 September, Revel revisits 'ce fragment de decembre', 'la zone d'ombre séparant ceux de janvier et de novembre', then referring to April, June, next Tuesday, 'ce fragment de mai', 19 July and 10 August.

[1218] Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, p. 54

musicales'.[1219] Despite this, Brunel also calls this a 'roman musical',[1220] It is in the absence of music that one can read the malaise of Bleston, a place whose musicians have been silenced, in whose fog music cannot find a place. Revel sees in the stained-glass windows of the Old Cathedral the ancestors of industry and music but in contemporary Bleston, 'ville de tisserands et de forgerons', he asks 'qu'as-tu fait de tes musiciens?'[1221] Later, he describes how in these same windows, 'tout s'accomplissait en silence […] les métiers tissaient en silence, les marteaux forgeaient en silence, les musiciens mimaient le bruit dans le silence'.[1222] The silence is broken, as is his earlier reverie, by mechanical noise, the screech and then the siren of a police car.[1223] Music in Bleston is stifled, lost in the labyrinth-city which makes Revel mute, and the woman he loves deaf to him, and the only real music Revel hears in the city is Horace Buck's harmonica, plaintively recalling long-ago voyages in distant lands, music which unequivocally does not belong there.[1224]

Butor states explicitly that *L'Emploi du temps* uses the structure of a canon,

> *avec des renversements, des miroirs. Des musiciens ont fait des pièces dans lesquelles une seconde voix imite la première et ou parfois, une troisième voix remonte de la dernière à la première note. Ce sont des structures fondamentales de notre perception du temps et de l'Histoire. Ainsi la musique peut nous donner des modèles narratifs.[1225]*

This structure enabled him to create dense time, as the protagonist writes his diary, initially writing in May about October (though with foreshadowing of later events), but increasingly writing directly about the moment of writing, and looking back to earlier events outside the linear sequence.[1226] As the temporal structure becomes more complex, so too do the sentences, with increasing repetition of phrases as well as of motifs. These sentences mirror, by their frequency as well as by their complex internal structure, the movement of the novel as a whole.[1227] They also create a polyphonic effect. However, the writer faces the challenge referred to above, of replicating in text the apparently impossible simultaneity of music. The superposition of voices is arguably 'by a sort of osmosis, in the mind of the reader, who, as

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[1219] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 143
[1220] Ibid, p. 17
[1221] *L'Emploi du temps,* p. 94
[1222] Ibid, p. 259
[1223] Ibid, pp. 94, 259
[1224] Ibid, p. 127
[1225] *Improvisations,* p. 83. See the earlier reference to the fugue in relation to the pursuit or the mastery of time.
[1226] This has been explored earlier in the thesis, particularly in Chapter 6.
[1227] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 93

he follows Revel's frequently tortuous chain of associations, is forced to remember the incidents to which they refer. In this way, a kind of contrapuntal structure is elaborated'.[1228] One could use the analogy of harmonics (a metaphor which we have already encountered in Butor's work), whereby as one string sounds, another, related note, may be heard. In a literary text, one phrase, or even a name, will recall another such that we read the one imbued with our memory of the other. The extensive use of repetition with variations, in *L'Emploi du temps,* is one of the ways in which Butor achieves this effect.[1229] The repetition of key elements in each of the voices guarantees a degree of harmonic coherence. There are numerous motifs, words and phrases which recur, with variations, and there are numerous series, which indicate key themes and ideas. In particular, we find two narrative series: the stained-glass windows, whose narrative is fragmented and appears to be wrongly ordered because of missing elements; and the tapestries, which tell the story of Theseus, but which Revel initially sees not as a linear sequence but as isolated images. This reflects the way in which the diary, whilst appearing to promise a linear narrative, in fact presents us with events in an increasingly complex order and leaves considerable uncertainty about the precise sequence in which they occurred, as well as lacunae which are never resolved.

In Chapter 6 we explored the structure of *L'Emploi du temps* in terms of narrativity. Here, we will take the same material and consider it in terms of musical structures and techniques. In *L'Emploi du temps* there are five parts, or voices. The twelve months of Revel's stay in Bleston[1230] form our overall scale, and each of the five sections (each of which is also subdivided into five), move up and down part of this scale. It is worth looking at it explicitly in terms of a twelve-tone scale.[1231] If we assign a number to each month according to the sequence in which the months appear, it becomes evident that this is far from random. Parts 1 and 2 give us the sequence 1-2-3-4 (May-October-June-November). In Part 3, the month of writing is 5 (July), but the other months written about follow the sequence 1-6-1-6-1-6-1 (May-December). Part 4 introduces month 7 (August), and the sequence 3-8-9 (June-April-January, repeated four times). Part 5 introduces month 10 (September), and the sequence 7-5-11-12 (August-July-March-February, repeated four times). In each instance, the month of writing weaves in and out of the sequence.

[1228] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 94
[1229] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 2
[1230] Similarly, the twelve districts of the city are all explored, or at least visited
[1231] This is not to suggest that Butor is conforming to strict serialist technique here, merely that he may be deliberately playing on the idea of using the twelve months of the year as a means of structuring his text

Another way of analysing the structure takes account of the fugue as polyphony. We note that in part 1 Revel starts writing in May to describe the events of October. In part 2, he is writing in June, weaving together memories of November with events in June, so this is already a canon or a fugue in two voices. In the third part, a third voice appears, along with July and December, reverting to the events of May. A fourth voice intervenes as Revel re-reads his previous entries, and the fifth voice again is re-reading but this time in reverse or retrograde order, going back to the beginning. In each part a new voice joins in, until in the final part, we have his contemporary account interwoven with memories of five other months. As Mary Lydon suggests, the novel illustrates Bergson's 'melodic concept of duration': 'the indivisible and indestructible continuity of a melody where the past comes into the present and forms with it a whole undivided and even indivisible, despite what is added to it at each instant, or rather, thanks to what is added to it'.[1232] The complexity of the structure suggests fugue rather than the simpler canon. Brunel argues that:

> *le parcours de la fugue est moins uniforme, moins raide, que celui du canon, avec des possibilités de divertissement libre, d'épisodes en quelque sorte […] Cela correspond bien au déroulement plutôt foisonnant de* L'Emploi du temps *et n'empêche pas que le stretto, suite serrée de reprises du sujet, amène dans 'L'Adieu' [the final section of the novel] un relatif apaisement.*[1233]

These musical structures are potentially infinite and so the endings are in a sense arbitrary, as in the novel. As Wilfred Mellers has said of Messiaen's harmonically centred, static technique, which 'evades the concept of beginning, middle and end', 'there is no reason why [these pieces] – any more than a Gothic motet or the improvisation of an Indian vina player – should ever stop'.[1234] This was another source of its appeal for Butor, who sought ways to make his work open-ended. The beginning and end of the novel are arbitrary and abrupt – Revel arrives in Bleston, and he leaves it. We know nothing of what his life might have been before his arrival, or what it will be after he leaves. Thus, we have the sense that we are seeing only a fragment of a whole, an episode in a larger story. When Revel leaves Bleston, he leaves us with the lacunae in his story unfilled, the mysteries unresolved; the book ends just before the train pulls out of the station, just as it began on the train's arrival. If Revel's

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[1232] Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile*, p. 94
[1233] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 151
[1234] Wilfred Mellers, *Caliban Reborn: Renewal in Twentieth-Century Music (*London: Gollancz, 1968)

writing has saved him, therefore, it is the act, the process, rather than what he has written. 'Écrire dans le labyrinthe reste […] la seule vraie tentative pour retrouver une musique perdue',[1235] to achieve 'de nouveaux jours harmoniques'.[1236]

Sebald does not present any of his works explicitly as mirroring a musical form. Nonetheless, I will show that he too uses structural techniques from fugue to map out his narrative labyrinths. To explore the use of fugue structure in Sebald's work, I will examine *The Emigrants*, which comprises four sections, each on a theme of exile, linked by the narrator's presence, but also by narrative devices, recurring motifs, themes and phrases. Each begins with the name of the subject (Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, Ambros Adelwarth, Max Ferber), an epigraph, and a locating statement (time, place and context) from the narrator. The narrator's voice is then joined by others. In only the first section (Henry Selwyn) is this second voice that of the subject of the piece and in only Selwyn and Ferber's narratives do we ever hear at first hand from the subject (in the latter case, we hear from the narrator's landlady, Gracie Irlam, before we hear from Max Ferber himself). In 'Ambros Adelwarth' we hear initially from Aunt Fini and other family members before Adelwarth, whose voice comes to us indirectly, through his diary. Our introduction to Paul Bereyter is first via a newspaper article and subsequently mediated via the narrator and Bereyter's friend Lucy.

Whilst each narrative provides a chronology of the subject's life, this is not presented in a linear fashion. For example, we can reconstruct the sequence of events in the life of Henry Selwyn. Born in Lithuania in 1892, his family emigrate to the UK (having intended to go to the USA) in 1899. In 1908-09 he changes his name from Hersch Seweryn and begins medical studies at Cambridge, which he completes in 1913, and travels to Switzerland, where he meets Johannes Naegeli. In 1914, Naegeli disappears, and Selwyn undertakes military service in India. There is then a gap in our knowledge, but we resume the chronology in 1960, when Selwyn gives up his medical practice and travels with Edwin Elliott (we learn of his travels through the photographs and slides that the narrator is later shown). In 1970 the narrator meets Selwyn, and in 1971, Selwyn commits suicide. These events, however, are presented to us in the following sequence: 1970, 1913, 1914, 1960, 1899, 1908-09, 1914, 1960, and 1971. The importance of Johannes Naegeli is signalled by the fact that Selwyn's encounter with

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[1235] Pierre Brunel, *Butor:* L'Emploi du temps, p. 144
[1236] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 388

him is the first significant episode in his life that we learn about,[1237] and that Naegeli 'returns' at the end of the section, literally in that his body is discovered, 72 years after his disappearance.[1238] Naegeli and Edwin Elliott, the travelling companion who takes up a central place in the narrative, seem to hold key roles, more so than Selwyn's wife Elli, who is almost conflated with the similarly named servant, Elaine – we do not hear an account of either Selwyn's meeting with Elli, or his separation from her. Thus, the sequence of events as revealed to us communicates the significance of key events and people. This is reinforced by the placing of key repeated motifs (which link to the other narratives in *The Emigrants*). Lake Geneva features in all four accounts,[1239] and here is referred to in relation to the discovery of Naegeli's body, with a brief reference during the slide show given by Edwin Elliott. The figure of Vladimir Nabokov, another recurring presence in all of the narratives, here appears in the context of the 1960 travels. As well as echoes created by repeated motifs, there are echoes within the 'Henry Selwyn' section in some of the names used: Elli/Elaine/Elliott/Selwyn; Herschel/Hersch; Naegeli/Feigelis. Similarly, in 'Max Ferber' we find copious use of alliteration: Lazarus, Lob, Leo, Lily and Luisa Lanzberg, Lionel Lynch Lewis, the Lions, Liebmans, Liebermanns and Lindwurms.

As mentioned above, there are two particular motifs which occur in each of the four stories. Lake Geneva, as well as its appearance at key moments in Henry Selwyn's story, is visited by Paul Bereyter with Lucy Landau (a name which itself echoes Luisa Lanzberg) soon after they meet, by Cosmo Solomon and Ambros Adelwarth in 1911 as they play the casinos of Europe, and by Max Ferber first with his father in 1936 and then, on one of his rare departures from Manchester, in 1964. With regard to Vladimir Nabokov, his appearance in Henry Selwyn's story is indirect – one of the photographs of Selwyn shown to the narrator reminds him of a photograph of Nabokov (both are holding butterfly nets),[1240] and in 'Paul Bereyter' he is the unconscious means of bringing Paul and Lucy Landau together as Paul sees her reading Nabokov's autobiography.[1241] In 'Ambros Adelwarth' and 'Max Ferber' Nabokov makes personal appearances as the butterfly man, seen by Ambros and by Ferber's parents (at different times).[1242]

[1237] *The Emigrants*, pp. 13-15
[1238] Ibid, p. 23
[1239] Ibid, Selwyn: pp 13, 23; Bereyter: pp. 45, 51; Adelwarth: p. 91; Ferber: pp. 169, 172
[1240] Ibid, p. 16
[1241] Ibid, p. 43; Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (1951; 1967; London: Penguin, 2000)
[1242] *The Emigrant*s, Adelwarth: pp. 104, 115; Ferber: pp. 174, 213-14

Throughout each narrative, other locations are invoked, through the accounts of the subjects or through photograph albums, diaries etc. Many of these places are mentioned without explicit reference to their place in Holocaust history, but as so often in Sebald, the names echo with that history. Ambros Adelwarth's travels take him to Riga (where Max Ferber's parents later died), Augsburg (location of a sub-camp of Dachau), Brno (from which Jews were transported to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz), Lemberg (location of the Lwów ghetto), Kolomea and Drohobycz from whose ghettos Jews were transported to Belżec. It is notable that the one account whose subject is not Jewish includes the greatest number of such echoes, and also establishes many other links such as the Yeshiva in New York, and the Jewish quarter in Constantinople.

This is by no means an exhaustive account of the echoes and repetitions within each narrative, and between the four narratives. It illustrates, however, the use of one of the key elements of fugue. Through these echoes and repetitions, a polyphonic effect is created, whereby the voices of the narrator and the subject are joined by many others, named and unnamed. We can see therefore that the text has features in common with fugue. Does it – as a whole or in each of its four sections – replicate the fugue structure as we see it in, for example, *L'Emploi du temps*?

Returning to the first narrative, 'Henry Selwyn', one could describe it in fugue terms as follows. The first voice is that of the narrator, introducing the subject, which is nominally Henry Selwyn, but it could also perhaps be death, as we begin in a graveyard. The second voice is Selwyn, who himself takes up the narrative. The third voice is that of Selwyn's friend, Edwin Elliott, who introduces an account of the travels which mark a mid-point in the chronology. This 'voice' is essentially the slide show, which has to speak for itself as neither Elliott nor Selwyn provide commentary. The fourth voice introduces Johannes Naegeli and Nabokov, taking us back to 1914, interwoven with Selwyn and Elliott's voices. The fifth and arguably further voices take us back still further, to Selwyn's early life, which we then see in chronological order, before moving forward to 1971 and his death. From here we move forward again to 1986 and the narrator's travels to Lake Geneva and back to 1914 with Naegeli's reappearance and the phrase 'And so they are ever returning to us, the dead',[1243]

[1243] *The Emigrants,* p. 23

which returns us to the beginning, both by completing Selwyn's story and by returning to the graveyard or burial place.

Bereyter's story similarly begins and ends with death. Bereyter's suicide, unlike Selwyn's, is revealed at the start of the narrative, which then (as usual in a non-linear manner) reveals what led to it. The voices are those of the narrator and of Lucy Landau, a friend of Bereyter, with Bereyter himself (unlike the other three subjects) encountered solely through the narrator, Landau and the photograph album which Bereyter gave her. The first voice has more to say before being joined by the others, since, like Max Ferber, there are substantial personal recollections to draw upon (Selwyn was known to the narrator for only two years, and he had met Adelwarth only once). The time frame jumps from the newspaper account in 1984 of Bereyter's suicide back to the narrator's own recollections of him from 1952, and then moves forward and backwards through the chronology of his life, particularly the period 1934-39, which is recounted almost sequentially, but with interventions from Lucy. It is the photograph album which prompts Lucy's words: 'it truly seemed to me, and still does, as if the dead were coming back, or as if we were on the point of joining them'[1244] which echo phrases at the end of 'Henry Selwyn' and in each of the other narratives: 'They were silent, as the dead usually are when they appear in our dreams'[1245] and 'They come when night falls to search for life', the epigraph to Max Ferber's narrative.[1246]

Similarly, Ferber's narrative is in three voices, the narrator, Ferber himself, and his mother, Luisa Lanzberg, whose diary recounts her life before the war, so shedding no direct light upon Ferber's life but portraying a lost past. When we first meet Ferber's parents, it is without the suggestion of their ultimate fate, as Ferber's initial reminiscences (from 1936) make no reference to this. When we return to that narrative, and to that year, it is to learn that Ferber's grandmother took her own life, his Uncle Leo is 'compulsorily retired' and plans to emigrate, and following this, we learn of his father's imprisonment in Dachau and the decision to send Max to England. Thus the re-reading of that earlier description, itself offset by Ferber's recollection of revisiting the site of his trip to Lake Geneva with his father, is now laden with dread, and our understanding of Ferber's emotions is more profound: these

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[1244] *The Emigrants*, p. 46
[1245] Ibid, p. 122
[1246] Ibid, p. 147. These 'revenants' perhaps have a musical equivalent in the way that the initial theme or voice in a fugue returns, but changed, with modulations and reversals.

are memories 'that had long been buried and which I had never dared disturb', and the revisited landscapes are 'strangely threatening', inducing his severe anxiety and frailty, and an episode of dissociative fugue.[1247]

Through this layering of voices, times and places, Sebald creates a textual counterpoint, which builds not a chronological, linear narrative of individual lives but a polyphony in which the voices of the dead join with those of the living. Within the narratives, the intermingling of these voices makes it difficult to clearly distinguish each one. This challenge to the reader is most acute, however, in *Austerlitz*, because of the labyrinthine structure of the novel, combined with the narrative technique whereby the narrator recounts Austerlitz's words (interspersed with 'said Austerlitz'), which may themselves be reporting someone else's words. Alfred Thomas notes this passage in particular: 'When the weather was bad, said Věra, we often visited my aunt Otýlie in the glove shop on the Šeríková'.[1248] It would initially seem clear that it is Věra who is speaking, but Otýlie is not her aunt but Austerlitz's. Thomas notes 'the sense of ontological instability which results from this lack of an authentic, unified voice' which he argues suggests that we should not take at face value Austerlitz's convictions about his past, as the novel 'exposes the secondary, citational function of these memories'.[1249] Whether or not one accepts this interpretation, the use of fugue structures and polyphonic layering work against any interpretation of the narrative as a quest fulfilled: 'only traces of the past – and of the self – can be recovered'.[1250]

The relevance of fugue to memory and to trauma connects us to the idea of the 'fugue state' and the 'mad traveller', or fugueur. The etymology of the term fugue is not clear cut. Julian Johnson says that 'we are told' that it derives from both *fugere* (to flee) and *fugare* (to chase), and adds, 'This is instructive, regardless of whether it is linguistically true. One might conceive of a fugue as a form in which a first voice flees while a second gives chase'.[1251] The fugue could also be said to be simultaneously in pursuit of and in flight from the subject or the compositional unity of the form. Schoenberg added another layer of complexity when he argued that fugues which do not conform to the theory of contrapuntal combination may

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[1247] *The Emigrants,* p. 172-73. Ferber has revisited a site that connects him to the past, and this provokes suicidal ideation (he is prevented from acting on these impulses by the arrival of the 'butterfly man'). He then experiences 'a lagoon of oblivion' relating to his descent from the mountain and his journey home (p. 174)
[1248] *Austerlitz*, p. 225
[1249] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 159, 156
[1250] Ibid, p. 159
[1251] Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, pp. 53-54

derive from *fugere*, but those that do, derive from the German *fügen* – to bind together or to structure, thus, 'Fuge = composition'.[1252] This derivation could be argued to have relevance to the intertextuality of both Sebald and Butor, binding together elements from other writers and artists to create their own work.

But it is *fugere* that gives rise to the medical meaning of the term fugue which is interesting in the context of both Butor and Sebald's work. A fugue state is defined as involving selective memory loss, the inability to recall specific, perhaps traumatic, events.[1253] This may be accompanied by wandering and travelling, half intentional and half irresistible, in an attempt to recover memory/identity, or perhaps in a flight from it: the etymological paradox of flight/pursuit.

> *If you walk behind someone in a deserted alley-way, you have only to quicken your step slightly to instil a little fear into the person you are following. And equally, you can feel like a quarry yourself. Confusion and ice-cold terror alternate'.[1254]*

This perhaps recalls Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'The Man of the Crowd',[1255] in which, as Butor said, the two individuals are identical: the second places his steps in the footprints of the first, who is unaware of him, but is unknowingly the initiator, the guide, and therefore in control.[1256] One could also say that the state of 'bewildered wandering'[1257] is akin to the experience of the traveller within the labyrinth, or even, metaphorically, to the listener to a piece of music or the reader of a text with multiple threads and voices to follow.

The fugueur is quite distinct from that more familiar literary wanderer, the flâneur, whose journeying is deliberately aimless and random, an end in itself. It is worth clarifying this distinction. The classic description of the flâneur is by Baudelaire, who describes him as 'observateur, flâneur, philosophe, appelez-le comme vous voudrez'.[1258] This is someone who

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[1252] Severine Neff, 'Schoenberg as Theorist: Three Forms of Presentation', in *Schoenberg and his World*, ed. Walter Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 55-84 (p. 79)
[1253] Manisha Jha and Vibha Sharma, 'Dissociative Fugue Disorder', p. 17
[1254] *Vertigo*, p. 52
[1255] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), in *Selected Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
[1256] *Histoire extraordinaire: Essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 33
[1257] V A Arlington, 'Dissociative Disorders', *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013, fifth edition), <https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/doi/book/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1258] Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1864; Paris: Éditions Mille et une nuits, 2010), p. 14

is 'hors de chez soi, […] pourtant [se sent] partout chez soi',[1259] which makes him the opposite of the exiled protagonists of Butor and Sebald's work, never feeling that they are 'chez soi'. In Walter Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire[1260] the tone has changed. We start to see flânerie as a dream state, and the view of the city from the flâneur's perspective as a phantasmagoria. Benjamin described a 'shock-induced anaesthesia, created by the overwhelming sensory bombardment of the city'.[1261] Thus, the wanderer appears to be rather less in control of his activity and his perceptions than has been previously suggested. However, in other respects, Benjamin reiterates the Baudelairean concept, and draws attention to the notion of the flâneur as an unwilling detective, his apparent indolence masking intense watchfulness as he follows a trail.[1262] This reminds us again of 'The Man of the Crowd',[1263] in which there are two wanderers, the narrator who (despite Baudelaire's reading) is the flâneur,[1264] who can and does choose to abandon his pursuit and resume his life, and his quarry, who resembles the fugueur, a lesser known (and shorter-lived) phenomenon which emerged not long after that of the flâneur, and whose behaviour was seen as a clinical manifestation of trauma.

The fugueur came to attention of the medical fraternity through the work of Bordeaux medical student Philippe Tissié, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his student Henri Meige at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, at the end of the nineteenth century. They documented a number of cases of men undertaking strange and unexpected trips, often in states of obscured consciousness. This phenomenon was also known as 'automatisme ambulatoire', and its sufferers as 'les aliénés voyageurs'.[1265] They were subject to hallucinations, and often dominated by ideas of persecution. Their conduct during the episode appeared normal, but they were unconscious of what they were doing, and had no memory of it afterwards. What triggered these wanderings was not clearly established. It has been argued that these men were 'enacting escape from symbolically controlled space in general and the social norms

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[1259] Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, p. 22

[1260] Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire,* ed. Michael W Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland and others (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006)

[1261] Bobby Seal, 'Baudelaire, Benjamin and the Birth of the Flâneur', *Psychogeographic Review* (14 November 2013), <http://psychogeographicreview.com/baudelaire-benjamin-and-the-birth-of-the-flâneur/> [accessed 25 August 2021]. This does remind one of Revel's response to Bleston.

[1262] Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, p. 72

[1263] Edgar Allan Poe, 'L'Homme des foules', in *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*, trans. Charles Baudelaire (1857; Paris: Garnier, 1961)

[1264] Walter Benjamin, 'The Flâneur', in *The Writer of Modern Life*, p. 89

[1265] Ian Hacking, 'Les Aliénés Voyageurs: How Fugue became a Medical Entity', *History of Psychiatry*, 7 (September 1996), pp. 425-49

and identities imposed on them in particular',[1266] and Ian Hacking calls it 'the bodily expression of male powerlessness'.[1267] The phenomenon of dissociative fugue more generally is linked to trauma, a crisis of memory or identity[1268] and one can interpret this particular manifestation either as a quest, albeit with an unknown goal, or as the more literal meaning of the word suggests, as a flight from something.[1269]

Whilst the flâneur walked the streets as if he owned them because, wealthy and well-educated, he could, for the fugueur, in his state of obscured consciousness, the outcomes were very different. He was likely to be mistaken for a vagrant (Albert Dadas, 'patient zero' in the mini-epidemic of 'mad travelling', was repeatedly arrested for vagabondage). The fugueurs were generally of more modest means than the flâneurs and their travels took them far afield. If someone spoke of a city or a country, Albert was seized by the need to go there, and he did so, often then finding himself in difficulties due to lack of funds.[1270] One of Charcot's patients, a young Hungarian Jew named Klein, was 'constantly driven by an irresistible need to change his surroundings, to travel, without being able to settle down anywhere'.[1271] This particular patient prompted a link with the then prevailing view that Jews were more prone than other races to various forms of neurasthenia and that this particular manifestation was 'in the character of their race'.[1272] Thus the mythological figure of the Wandering Jew was, according to Henri Meige's thesis, 'only a sort of prototype of neurotic Israelites journeying throughout the world'.[1273] Steven Fink has argued persuasively that Poe's 'man of the crowd' is the Wandering Jew, condemned to wander endlessly, guilty of some unspeakable

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[1266] Barbara Straumann, *Figurations of Exile in Hitchcock and Nabokov* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 174

[1267] Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 49

[1268] Manisha Jha and Vibha Sharma, 'Dissociative Fugue Disorder', p. 17

[1269] Charcot's diagnosis and the term 'hystero-epilepsy' in particular, fell out of favour, largely due to the failure to identify a common cause that would account for a collection of rather disparate individual cases. Yet this is the diagnosis received by Austerlitz after one of his breakdowns, which leads to him being admitted to Charcot's hospital, the Salpêtrière (*Austerlitz*, p. 374)

[1270] Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 21. As mentioned elsewhere, this is echoed in Austerlitz's sudden compulsion to go to Prague (*Austerlitz*, p. 202)

[1271] Jan Goldstein, 'The Wandering Jew and the Problem of Psychiatric Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle France', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 4 (October 1985), pp. 521-52 (p. 537); Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 114-15

[1272] Jan Goldstein, 'The Wandering Jew', p. 541

[1273] This was forcefully challenged in the *Archives Israélites*, where it was argued that if the Jews had a tendency to move from place to place, this was likely to be driven by 'the terrible persecutions that our co-religionists suffer' rather than neurasthenia, (Ibid, p. 545). It is worth noting that the 'golden age', as Hacking puts it, for the fugueur diagnosis was also the time of the Dreyfus case (Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 115)

crime'.[1274] Certainly, the description of the Wandering Jew by Siegfried Kracauer is remarkably close to Poe's description of the old man:

> *I imagine [his face] to be many faces, each reflecting one of the periods which he traversed and all of them combining into ever new patterns as he restlessly and vainly tries on his wanderings to reconstruct out of the times that shaped him the one time he is doomed to incarnate.*[1275]

Whilst the attribution of compulsive wandering to Jewish neurasthenia ignores the most powerful impetus for the movement of Jews across borders and continents, it does link the notion of the fugueur to the various legends in which an individual (Cain, the captain of the Flying Dutchman, the Ancient Mariner, the Wandering Jew)[1276] is cursed to wander the earth until some expiation or redemption is achieved. Cain is a significant figure in *L'Emploi du temps*,[1277] in which his roles, illustrated in the stained-glass windows, as the founder of the first city (seemingly at odds with his status as an eternal wanderer), and as the murderer of his brother, are foregrounded. George Shulman argues that Cain wanders between worlds, a marginal figure whose rootlessness enables him to become 'the first political philosopher, artist and cosmopolitan'. The city is thus associated with movement, with transience and with exile.[1278]

In the post-war world in particular, trauma and exile create a more melancholy and more driven wanderer, in a world where boundaries were being redrawn, and where vast swathes of the population were in transit.[1279] Butor's fugueur, Jacques Revel, walks the streets to find lodgings, a meal, somewhere to get out of the rain, but aside from the practical purpose, he is compelled by restless discontent and anxiety. He begins by getting lost in the city of Bleston and continues to struggle to grasp its geography. He cannot find his way out of the city, and often finds himself returning unwittingly to the point of his departure:

[1274] Steven Fink, 'Who is Poe's "Man of the Crowd"?', *Poe Studies*, 44 (2011), pp. 17-38

[1275] Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 157

[1276] The name of the Wandering Jew is, according to tradition, Ahasuerus. Might one, possibly, hear a link to Austerlitz/Auschowitz/Auschwitz?

[1277] Sebald marks his copy of *L'Emploi du temps* at several points where Cain is referenced (pp. 89, 95, 153)

[1278] George M Shulman, 'The Myth of Cain: Fratricide, City Building, and Politics', *Political Theory,* 14, 2 (May 1986), pp. 215-38 (p. 226)

[1279] Contemporary psychogeographers draw upon both traditions, as does Iain Sinclair, who characterises his *London Orbital* as a fugue (*London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Penguin, 2003); Ina Habermann, 'Running Rings round London: Psychogeography in Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital*', in *English Topographies in Literature and Culture: Space, Place and Identity*, ed. Ina Habermann and Daniela Keller (Leiden; Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016), pp. 61-73 (p. 63))

> *C'était comme si je n'avançais pas; c'était comme si je n'étais pas arrivé à ce rond-point, comme si je n'avais pas fait demi-tour, comme si je me retrouvais non seulement au même endroit, mais encore au même moment qui allait durer indéfiniment, dont rien n'annonçait l'abolition; et la fatigue, le sentiment de la solitude, tels de longs serpents de vase froide, s'enroulaient autour de ma poitrine.[1280]*

His wanderings continue throughout his time in Bleston, increasingly becoming an attempt to master the city by reconciling its physical reality with the maps and guide books he has purchased, just as he tries to master his experience and memory of the city by writing his diary. He notes the street names, landmarks and bus numbers which should fix the geography of the city, but somehow fail to do so, such that it appears to be changing shape in order to elude and confuse him.

> *Je pensais être tout près de l'Ancienne Cathédrale, le terminus de cette ligne, et je la croyais devant moi, cachée par quelque haute maison, alors qu'elle était à ma droite. Les rues, les places que j'avais traversées, les bâtiments que j'avais vus et même ceux dont je ne connaissais que l'existence, s'étaient déjà organisés dans mon esprit, s'agglomérant en une vague représentation générale très fausse de la ville par laquelle je m'orientais sans en prendre clairement conscience.[1281]*

Often the nature of his quest demonstrates the limitations of the maps and guides on which he depends. In his restless wanderings through the streets, he seems to be searching, mostly fruitlessly: for the African worker who he met but whose name he was never told, for 'the countryside', which he attempts to reach by simply walking away from the city centre, or for a congenial lodging. The map provides a panoptic view, compartmentalising the city, and making it readable. But the wanderer has to interact with the labyrinth, and instinct becomes a guide when the map fails. As discussed in previous chapters, we know nothing of Jacques Revel's life before his arrival in Bleston, or of what he will do after he leaves. He speaks of his year there as a prison sentence – he is unable to leave the city during that period, and compelled to leave it on a specific date. He is certainly not at home in Bleston, but he seems entirely rootless, without any connection elsewhere. Ultimately his quest is to master the city by walking its streets, grasping the reality which seems to be changing around him as he walks; it is a phantasmagorical city, whose heavily polluted atmosphere creates a narcotic, dream-like state, distorting his perceptions and leaving him disorientated.

[1280] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 42
[1281] Ibid, p. 28

Sebald's narrators and protagonists are also constantly on the move. *Austerlitz* begins: 'In the second half of the 1960s I travelled repeatedly from England to Belgium partly for study reasons, partly for other reasons which were never entirely clear to me'.[1282] *Vertigo*'s first section begins with Napoleon and his army's crossing of the Great St Bernard Pass,[1283] the second with 'In October 1980 I travelled from England […] to Vienna',[1284] the third with Dr K's journey to Vienna,[1285] and the final part with the narrator's decision to return to England via W, his childhood home ('Il ritorno in patria').[1286] *The Rings of Saturn* starts with the narrator setting off to walk the county of Suffolk, 'in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work'.[1287] The first and the last of the four *Emigrants* narratives follow the same pattern: 'At the end of September 1970 […] I drove out to Hingham',[1288] and 'in the autumn of 1966 […] I decided, for various reasons, to move to England'.[1289] Where reasons are given for the journey, they are often ill-defined ('for various reasons', 'reasons which were never entirely clear to me'), or addressing a sense of malaise. These travels seem to be a form of fugue, in the sense of an instinctive flight.

The narrator of *Vertigo* walks to fill his time, 'without aim or purpose', yet realises when he maps his wanderings that he has remained within a 'precisely defined sickle- or crescent-shaped area'. Had his routes been recorded, 'it would have seemed as though a man had kept trying out new tracks and connections over and over, only to be thwarted each time by the limitations of his reason, imagination or will-power'.[1290] An alternative interpretation would be that offered in Sebald's conversation with Joseph Cuomo, where he describes the process of 'unsystematic searching': 'One can find something only in that way, i.e., in the same way in which, say, a dog runs through a field. If you look at a dog following the advice of his nose, he traverses a patch of land in a completely unplottable manner. And he invariably finds what he is looking for'.[1291] Thus, what appears to be random and purposeless in fact reveals an unconscious aim, a quest. But the wanderings that were intended to be beneficial

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[1282] *Austerlitz*, p. 1
[1283] *Vertigo*, p. 3
[1284] Ibid, p. 33
[1285] Ibid, p. 141
[1286] Ibid, p. 171
[1287] *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 3
[1288] *The Emigrants*, p. 3
[1289] Ibid, p. 149
[1290] *Vertigo*, p. 34
[1291] Joseph Cuomo, 'A Conversation with W G Sebald', p. 94

and healing induce hallucinatory experiences, vertigo and mental paralysis.[1292] As John Zilcosky says of Sebald's narrator(s), 'random wandering, the narrator hopes, will allow for a salutary Romantic self-reinvention, instead it leads to unwanted repetitions and finally, to a near total mental and physical 'immobility'.[1293] Sebald's wanderers may not embark on their travels in a fugue state but the wanderings induce such a state:

> *all of a sudden [I] no longer had any knowledge of where I was. Despite a great effort to account for the last few days and how I had come to be in this place, I was unable even to determine whether I was in the land of the living or already in another place.[1294]*

As we have noted, whilst the travels described in Sebald's narratives are generally precise about when, and where (although the layering of timeframes and locations means that we can lose these certainties as the narrative progresses), frequently the 'why' is obscure, not just to the reader but to the narrator himself. Like Revel, the narrator and the various protagonists are rarely, if ever, 'at home'. They are often in transit or in provisional, interim spaces such as waiting rooms, railway stations, and transport cafes.[1295] Their journeys often induce episodes of near paralysis, physical or mental, and they end inconclusively, often with a sense that the quest will continue after the final page.

But if the Sebaldian narrator is a contemporary example of the melancholy flâneur, Jacques Austerlitz connects us directly with the fugueur, and with wandering as a response to trauma and loss. With his life 'clouded by unrelieved despair',[1296] he wanders to escape insomnia[1297] after a period in which he loses faith in his writing and research, and finds himself in the grip of panic, using the analogy of 'a man who has been abroad a long time and cannot find his way through this urban sprawl any more',[1298] to describe his sudden disorientation amidst the structure of language. Most significantly, what is lost is the connection between words,[1299] denying him the means to comprehend, or navigate, what he reads. His night-time journeys have a dream-like quality, he meets only 'nocturnal spectres' or faces from his past, and has sensations that 'the noises of the city were dying down around me and the traffic was flowing

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[1292] *Vertigo*, p. 36

[1293] John Zilcosky, 'Sebald's Uncanny Travels', p. 109

[1294] *Vertigo*, p. 115

[1295] Or, as Marc Augé would have it, non-places (*Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (1992; London; New York: Verso, 1995))

[1296] *Austerlitz,* p. 178

[1297] Ibid, p. 178

[1298] Ibid, p. 174-75

[1299] Ibid, p. 177

silently down the street, or as if someone had plucked me by the sleeve. And I would hear people behind my back speaking in a foreign tongue'.[1300] He walks through London, alone, outwards into the suburbs, and then back at dawn with the commuters into the city. He is irresistibly drawn to Liverpool Street Station, a place full of ghosts, built as it is on the remains of Bedlam hospital, and, in the disused Ladies' Waiting Room, encounters the ghosts of his foster parents and the small boy he once was. Thus, he begins the systematic search for his own memories.[1301] He is drawn here by 'a series of coincidences', which are 'slight inner adjustments of which we are barely conscious'.[1302] His pursuit of memory is dramatic. Overhearing a radio documentary about the Kindertransport, and the reference to a ship named *The Prague*, like Albert Dadas, the original fugueur:[1303] 'the mere mention of the city's name in the present context was enough to convince me that I would have to go there'.[1304] It could be argued that his earlier peregrinations were part of 'the resistance [he] had put up for so many years against the emergence of memory',[1305] which he elsewhere describes as 'a constant process of obliteration, a turning away from myself and the world'.[1306]

Thus, his obsessive wanderings appear (in retrospect) to have had a sub-conscious purpose, taking him back to the point of rupture between one life and another, in order that he could encounter his own past. His quest, and his confrontation with the losses that defined his life, leads to 'several fainting fits […] temporary but complete loss of memory, a condition described in psychiatric textbooks […] as hysterical epilepsy'.[1307] He is taken, significantly, to the Salpêtrière, where Charcot had established this diagnosis almost a century earlier. This diagnosis would, by the time of Austerlitz's admission, be included in psychiatric textbooks only as a historical footnote, so this is perhaps an example of Sebald's dense or layered time: we know precisely where we are, but now the 'when' is not so straightforward. Austerlitz's

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[1300] *Austerlitz,* p. 180
[1301] There are striking resemblances to Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, in which Perec speaks of 'cette absence d'histoire', and asserts that 'Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance'. The book is Perec's attempt 'd'affronter cet anéantissement du passé et d'en tirer un sens, à partir de sa mémoire et des faibles traces qui en subsistent […] par l'écriture, Perec tente de renouer les fils rompus de l'enfance avec sa vie d'adulte; c'est-à-dire, en réalité, de réinventer sa propre histoire et de se l'approprier' (Laurent Olivier, 'L'Impossible archéologie de la mémoire: à propos de *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* de Georges Perec', *European Journal of Archaeology*, 3, 3 (2000), pp. 387-406 (p. 389))
[1302] *Austerlitz*, pp. 195, 189
[1303] Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, p. 21
[1304] *Austerlitz*, p. 202
[1305] Ibid, p. 300-01
[1306] Ibid, p. 174
[1307] Ibid, p. 374

wanderings in Prague result in memories revealing themselves to him 'not by means of any mental effort but through [his] senses, so long numbed and now coming back to life'. His earlier travels seem to be purposeful (for example, 'looking for a labyrinth used in the initiation ceremonies of the freemasons'),[1308] at least in terms of the particular obsessions which consume him, even if they are sometimes impulsive.[1309] His encounters with the narrator, however, appear to depend to a significant extent upon chance ('our paths kept crossing, in a way that I still find hard to understand, on all my Belgian excursions of that time, none of them planned in advance')[1310] but which Austerlitz attributes to 'an astonishing, positively imperative internal logic'.[1311]

These peregrinations, in both Sebald and Butor, may be purposeful but result in disorientation, they may appear aimless but in fact trace a particular, significant trajectory. In either case there is a dissonance between the protagonist's perception and the reality of their journey. Within the labyrinth the path cannot be comprehended fully, only when viewed from above, with the vantage point of a map, can the errors and confusions be resolved. As in the musical fugue, the interweaving voices can be traced on a score where the pattern will be evident, but the listener will have to abandon themselves to the experience, allowing the echoes to resonate, without being able at any point to clearly identify where they are. We are thus reminded of the discussion in earlier chapters of the city-labyrinth, of the inadequacy of maps and the experience of disorientation on its streets, as well as of the labyrinths in language and narrative created by Sebald and Butor and by their protagonists.

The analogy of music links these ideas; music plays out in time and memory, and in space too. Pierre Boulez compared his 3rd Piano Sonata, which explored aleatoric composition, to the plan of a city, where 'one does not change its design, one perceives exactly what it is, and that there are different ways to go through it'.[1312] Butor's account of a walk through a small Dutch town well known for its bells is worth noting here:

> *Leurs rapports d'intensité se transformant, et s'inversant, selon le point où
> l'on était, de telle sorte qu'une promenade dans les rues suscitait
> inventions mélodiques et variations que la ville entière se transformait en*

[1308] *Austerlitz*, p. 39
[1309] Ibid, p. 57
[1310] Ibid, p. 36
[1311] Ibid, p. 60
[1312] Cited in Allen B Ruch, *The Modern Word : James Joyce* <Joyce - Music: Pierre Boulez's "Third Piano Sonata" (archive.org)> [accessed 26 August 2021]

> *un prodigieux instrument de musique, dont on jouait, sur lequel on improvisait, la parcourant.*[1313]

We have in the course of this thesis considered the labyrinths of the city, labyrinths in text and in language, so it is appropriate, dealing as we are with a labyrinthine novel structured as a fugue, that, having begun with a Cantical, we conclude with a labyrinth in music, and that, having begun with Revel wandering the streets of Bleston, we conclude with the compulsive wanderings of the fugueur, and the labyrinths that those wanderings mark out.

The labyrinth, as we have encountered it in previous chapters, is deceptive, a carceral place, a trap, but Butor suggests that music may be a way to defeat it. Deleuze spoke of 'the sonority in Ariadne's thread' as an ordering principle, that holds chaos at bay and enables one to 'join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune'.[1314] In the labyrinth of Bleston, Revel asks, 'ville de tisserands et de forgerons, qu'as tu fait de tes musiciens?',[1315] but hopes, through his journal, to create 'toute une série de résonances plus ou moins intenses, séparés par de larges intervalles à peu près muettes, comme les harmoniques en quoi se décompose le timbre d'un son'.[1316]

[1313] 'La Musique, art réaliste', p. 145
[1314] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 344
[1315] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 94
[1316] Ibid, p. 385. 'Bands' of memory are here compared to light refracted through a prism, a metaphor which links to Proust and to the Vinteuil Sonata ('Les Œuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust', p. 6) and to a harmonic series (Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile,* p. 86). A harmonic series is the sequence of frequencies, musical tones, or pure tones created when a resonator (e.g. a string) in a pitched musical instrument oscillates at numerous modes simultaneously

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have set out a fresh reading of Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*, considering this neglected work through the lens of W G Sebald, on whose œuvre it had a significant influence. I have shown that this influence is both greater and longer lasting than has been recognised, drawing not only on his 'Manchester' texts, but also on his last published work, *Austerlitz*. In particular, I have analysed the early Sebald poem, 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', which was a direct and immediate response to reading Butor's novel, shortly after his arrival in Manchester. I have explored Butor's Manchester, and how it overlaps with Sebald's but also shown how for both writers when they are in one city they are nonetheless always *ailleurs*. In particular, I have shown how Paris – specifically Paris under Nazi occupation – does, as Butor indicated, lie behind the mask of Bleston, and that this prefigures the way in which Sebald describes not only Manchester but other cities, such that they are not only that place and time but others, the places that haunt him, as Paris haunted Butor.

I have traced throughout the thesis the themes, motifs and preoccupations which the two writers share, using the motif of the labyrinth to structure my work. I have explored city-labyrinths, textual labyrinths, and the musical labyrinth that is the fugue, and throughout these explorations I have shown how the themes of memory, trauma and exile connect with the idea of the labyrinth, that disorientating, deceptive, carceral space. This motif, and the myths that underlie it, are central to *L'Emploi du temps* and recur in all of Sebald's work. But as I have shown, it is not just that Butor and Sebald invoke this image, but that their works are themselves labyrinthine, in terms of structure and in the way in which both writers misdirect and disorientate the reader, through complex timelines, long, looping sentences, narratives and narrators on whom we cannot rely. They are also both densely intertextual (albeit in different ways), and these references and allusions too create labyrinths.

Through this process I have drawn out aspects of Butor's work which are not generally studied, in particular his response to the post-war silence on the traumatic experiences of the Occupation, through the portrayal of the dark and carceral city of Bleston. This is at the heart of most writing on Sebald, but uncharted territory with regard to Butor, and I have shown its importance in understanding *L'Emploi du temps*.

The origins of this thesis go back to 2011, and the publication of W G Sebald's 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical'[1317] in English for the first time. I had already noted the coincidence of Sebald having come to Manchester in similar circumstances to Michel Butor fifteen years previously,[1318] but until I saw the reference to 'Bleston' in a review of the Sebald poems, I did not know that he had read *L'Emploi du temps*. When I read the poem, and the translator's notes, I realised immediately that there were references to Butor's novel that had not been identified as such, and having compared those passages to the English translation and to the French original, concluded from internal evidence that Sebald was using the latter. I subsequently found confirmation of this in Catling and Hibbitt's Sebald handbook, which referred to the 'heavily annotated' copy held by the DLA at Marbach.[1319]

I realised from these very preliminary researches that exploring not only the poem but Sebald's later work armed with a detailed knowledge of *L'Emploi du temps* was likely to yield significant insights into the work of both writers, and this thesis, through forensically close reading of the texts, achieves that. Towards the end of my research, I obtained access to the annotations to Sebald's copy of Butor's novel, which were profoundly revealing. It was a powerful experience, to see the immediacy and the very personal nature of his response to the novel on the page, in the form of vigorous underlinings, exclamation marks, and scribbled marginal notes.

The poem which was my starting point, and the annotations which I knew of at the outset but saw only in the final stages of my research, illuminate one another. The latter necessitated many amendments to what I had written earlier, from entirely new additions to changes in emphasis or interpretation. The obvious importance of the poem, from the very earliest stage of Sebald's literary output, perhaps led me to assume that the echoes of *L'Emploi du temps* would be heard most clearly in the work that related specifically to Manchester (*After Nature*, and *The Emigrants*). Whilst there was certainly a great deal of relevance here, it became apparent that it was in *Austerlitz*, Sebald's last published work, that those echoes would be strongest. This draws out the overall conclusion of my study, that whilst Sebald's response to *L'Emploi du temps* was clearly and closely linked to his response to Manchester, he had

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[1317] 'Bleston: A Mancunian Cantical', in *Across the Land and the Water*, pp. 18-22
[1318] Terry Pitts, 'Literary Cities: Manchester', *Vertigo* (10 August 2007),
<http://sebald.wordpress.com/2007/08/10/literary-cities-Manchester/> [accessed 25 August 2021]
[1319] Jo Catling, '*Bibliotheca abscondita*', p. 297, n. 85.

discerned other threads in the novel, ideas and themes of much wider relevance and which chimed with his wider preoccupations and concerns.

The above might suggest that the primary focus of this thesis is W G Sebald. However, my aim has been to use Sebald to illuminate Butor, and thus Butor is always my starting point (as he was Sebald's), and the point to which I return, even as I weave the work of both authors together in my analysis of the texts. Thus, the roots of this thesis lie further back, with my discovery of Butor's work, and of *L'Emploi du temps* in particular. The novel's initial appeal was that it offered a young European's response to the archetypal English industrial city, not long after the war. But as I began to study the text in more depth (my part-time French degree allowed a lot of flexibility in terms of essay topics, and I was able to orient a number of projects towards Butor's work) I became intrigued, as have so many readers and critics, by the dissonance between the mundane events described and the intensity of the language used to describe them. My undergraduate thesis[1320] wrestled with this, and provided a new reading of the text which made a compelling case, developed further in this thesis, that Bleston is a depiction not only of Manchester but of the occupied Paris of Butor's adolescence.

This brings these two very different writers together on a second plane. Not only did they share the experience of Manchester, but they both encountered in the streets of that city other places and times, and saw reflected memory, trauma and exile. These are not the aspects of Butor's work upon which previous generations of critics have focused (though they are very much the preoccupations of most Sebald scholars), but they are themes to which contemporary readers and critics would be more attuned. It is interesting to note how little any writers on Butor say about his adolescence. This is partly due to the piecemeal nature of autobiographical or biographical information on Butor,[1321] but perhaps more to the culture of silence that prevailed in France,[1322] as in other parts of Occupied Europe (and obviously in Germany itself) about those years. I have noted previously that by the time Butor was writing, the appetite of publishers (and presumably readers) for memoirs of resistance or deportation had waned, and that did not change for a long period. From a contemporary perspective, it seems obvious that, in however oblique and indirect a form, those experiences must be present in the writing and artistic output of those who lived through the war.

[1320] Catherine Annabel, *'L'Emploi du temps*: Sous le masque de Bleston'
[1321] The primary sources are *Curriculum Vitae, Improvisations* and J B Howitt's work on Butor's Manchester years ('England and the English in the Novels of Michel Butor'; 'Michel Butor and Manchester')
[1322] Explored in Henry Rousso's *Le Syndrome de Vichy,* 'Le deuil inachevé (1944-1954)', pp. 29-76

Certainly, I looked for the evidence of that presence in *L'Emploi du temps*, and throughout the thesis I have shown where and in what form I found it.

The labyrinth in these works is both subject matter and form, but it is also the experience of the reader, and of the researcher. The translator of the 'Bleston Cantical' warns of the perils of the reader becoming 'perdu dans ces filaments'[1323] if they attempt to follow all of the allusions in the text. The researcher has no choice but to take that risk if they are to present a rigorous and scholarly account of these labyrinthine works. The structure of this thesis presented many challenges because of the sheer volume of relevant material, and it was only when it became apparent that the labyrinth was not simply one aspect but the unifying theme of the thesis that these problems became soluble. Even so, many pathways were explored and then abandoned, and many others are referred to only in passing, reluctantly postponed to other projects or yielded to other scholars. In particular, I have acknowledged that whilst I have in this thesis contributed to Sebald scholarship I am not a Sebald scholar, as I cannot read his work in the language in which it was written. This is something that I regret, but which could not realistically be addressed during my doctoral studies, particularly given Sebald's idiosyncratically archaic German style. It is for those who can claim to be Sebald scholars to explore further the aspects of Sebald's work that I have raised here,[1324] although it would be an interesting area for a collaboration between a Butor specialist and a Sebald scholar, which could bring to light aspects of Sebald's reading of Butor that have not as yet been revealed. Another productive area of collaboration could, perhaps, address the importance of Alain Resnais' films to Sebald, something that I have briefly touched upon but which has great potential for further research.

There are, of course, aspects of *L'Emploi du temps*, outside the scope of this thesis, that deserve more attention than they have so far been given, in particular the character of Horace Buck, 'définitivement exilé'.[1325] The minimal back story that Butor gives him (still more than is given to Revel) is tantalising and his role in the narrative clearly of profound importance to Butor, who went on to explore aspects of racial politics in the US in *Mobile*,[1326] and in his

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[1323] *Across the Land and the Water*, p. 177
[1324] I will shortly, however, have chapters in two edited volumes, one exploring Sebald's debt to post-war French literature and film, the other Sebald's Manchester years ('In the Labyrinth: W G Sebald's (Postwar) French Connections', in *Memory, Word and Image: W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies*, ed. Ilse van Rijn et al. (not yet published); 'Manchester', in *W G Sebald in Context*, ed. Uwe Schütte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, not yet published)
[1325] *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 138
[1326] Throughout the text, Butor refers to the genocide of the Native American population and to the segregation and discrimination against Black Americans (see *Mobile*, pp. 27-29, for example)

collaborations with Henri Pousseur, such as *Couleurs Croisées*.[1327] A study of Buck, in the wider context of Butor's work, could open up new decolonial/postcolonial readings.

It has been a long while since any significant new work on this novel or on Butor's work more widely has appeared.[1328] In this thesis I have not only demonstrated the significant influence of Butor on Sebald, but opened up new perspectives on both writers. I hope that the Sebald connection, and the availability of the English translation of *L'Emploi du temps* at an accessible price for the first time in many years, in a revised edition of which I was a co-editor,[1329] will lead to change. And, of course, whilst *L'Emploi du temps* is overdue for re-evaluation and re-reading, Butor's wider œuvre, post-novel, is far less known, less read and less studied. It is vast and eclectic, and its accessibility is variable,[1330] but there are riches there to be discovered, if a newer generation of readers are willing to follow Butor into the labyrinth of his work.

[1327] A 1967 piece incorporating recordings of a black Baptist preacher, a calendar of American racial history, and a libretto drawing on a speech by Native American chief Seattle (Henri Pousseur, sleeve notes to *Musique Mixte, 1966:1970* (Sub Rosa, 2005))

[1328] Specifically, since Jean Duffy's *Signs and Designs* (2003)

[1329] *Passing Time* (2021). I worked closely with the publisher on this edition to ensure that our revisions remained faithful to Butor's text, in terms of wording, tone and typographical layout.

[1330] A new English translation of some of Butor's essays is due out in 2022 (*Selected Essays*, trans. Mathilde Merouani, ed. Richard Skinner (London: Vanguard Éditions, 2022)).

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