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Tourists of the Past: Topographies of Memory in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Ana Menéndez's *Loving Che*, and Teju Cole's *Open City*

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IN W. G. SEBALD'S *AUSTERLITZ*, ANA
MENÉNDEZ'S *LOVING CHÉ*, AND
TEJU COLE'S *OPEN CITY*

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TEJU COLE'S *OPEN CITY*

by

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THESIS

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Chapter 1: Luminous Exposure of the Past in Photography and Silence

Light that makes things seen makes some things invisible. Were it not for darkness, and the shadow of the earth, the noblest part of creation had remained unseen, and the stars in heaven as invisible as on the fourth day, when they were created above the horizon with the sun, and there was not an eye to behold them.

--Sir Thomas Browne¹

Introduction

As a social space, the city contains elements which “*interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another*” (86); therefore, any fabricated or constructed boundaries often prove useless because attempts at walls or enclosures signify an “ambiguous continuity” (Lefebvre 87). In these social spaces, “scale, dimension and rhythm” (Lefebvre 87), like in hydrodynamic systems, are the norm. Consequently, transmitting cultural memories in cities, especially in post-modern ones, proves difficult as they can become a “labile and mobile whole that, in principle, develops endlessly” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 103). As a result of the city’s² paradoxical boundedness and unboundedness, it becomes a space addled with anxiety and uncertainty because pasts replete with violence and trauma are liable to be forgotten, destroyed, or built over. Sometimes, however, traces of memories embedded in socio-cultural spaces inscribe themselves on the body of inhabitants or travelers who move through the city. These inscriptions can be reenacted within mnemonic spaces and thus reduce the opacity of the past. Writers, whose texts engage with vestiges of forgotten times through drift and mobility, route readers into a post-Cartesian mentality and reestablish the materiality of memory. In other words, fissures between space, mind, and body are no longer preserved, but rather they are conflated, and thus the urban space becomes a traversable archive, where walkers engage with

markedly different memory and knowledge systems. These ways of remembering and knowing also confront nationality as a *state* presented uni-dimensionally through the map, and thus, embody routed or itinerant cartographies as a means of dissent.

Examining, comparatively, the exemplary fictional texts of W. G. Sebald, Ana Menéndez, and Teju Cole enriches the study of exilic experience concerning cultural memory as their destabilization, while geographically and ethnically divergent,³ represents the constellations of mobility⁴ and potential for memory. As absences resonate and profoundly disrupt their works, there is a “turn to histories in order to cope with an otherwise uncontainable experience of loss” (Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning* 17). By *turning* to the past, each writer confronts destabilization and uprootedness and, in doing so, plays a game⁵ with History. Readers play too as we search through the fictionalized lacunae to consider the extent to which we are complicit in the histories of violence, separation, and mourning. Throughout Sebald’s, Menéndez’s, and Cole’s respective oeuvres, three works, *Austerlitz*, *Loving Ché*, and *Open City*, trace time, space, mobility, and silence in a parallel fashion as they convey spectral geographies, bemoan the loss of the past, investigate embodied cartographies, and attempt to re-historicize a literary archive. Exploring the tensions between ways of knowing presented in visual, verbal, and tactile spaces of the city as depicted in these prose narratives,⁶ I will argue that the writers construct an alternative epistemology that reclaims subjectivity and problematizes “History” while engaged with a past that radiates in photographs and bodies.

Throughout my study, Sebald’s work functions prototypically because Menéndez’s and Cole’s fictions are haunted by Sebaldian patterns. Menéndez, for example, said she turns to Sebald’s *The Emigrants* repeatedly and finds that when she puts the work down, after multiple readings, she is “haunted, sometimes for years” (Young). In a sense, the historicity of her prose

is permeated by the same metahistorical tropes as Sebald's fictions. Cole, who Kwame Anthony Appiah referred to as "marvelously Sebaldian" (522), also described Sebald as one of his "avowed influences" (Vermeulen 40). Even James Wood, in his review of Cole's *Open City*, remarked that the text "does move in the shadow of W.G. Sebald's work." Not only is Sebald profoundly influential to Cole and Menéndez, but they, like Sebald, have the ability to focus their energies on a heightened and illuminating "sensitivity to the undercurrents of violence" in modern life (Sollors 241). Putting the three in a visual conversation highlights the trajectory of how issues surrounding history, image, and mobility, in textual representation, have evolved.

Tracing the path of their evolution requires exploring the game each writer plays with historiography and history-making as the narrators wander through the space of the city. The narrators in all three texts are prone to bouts of self-imposed exile as they feel almost urged toward movement to understand the archive of the city. Because the post-modern city breaks down distinctions between "dwelling and traveling" (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 111), all three narrators interact with a "*space of flows* rather than a *space of places*" that is "dominated by...nodes of passage" (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 112, 111). In this regard, as literary peregrinators in unstable spaces, their narratives and use of photographs harken back to Walter Benjamin's flâneur in that as they wander through the streets they act as connoisseurs of art, photography, the past, and permanence. In the texts, they walk through a public rather than a private past, and, like the flâneur, the streets conduct them to a vanished time. This action is done throughout the works of Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole, whose narrators "flit through unknown districts—until, utterly exhausted" (Benjamin 417), and eventually, learn the cadence, rhythms, and orientations of the areas they travel. Learning to focus on the construction of space through photography, there is something of the curatorial spirit in each volume as it engages with public,

horrific, and atrocious pasts. As curators, rather than malingering tourists of the past, the writers are involved in acts of witnessing, and therefore attempt to rework, illuminate, or develop a means of helping the reader to recognize an element of the traumatic experience in the histories of mourning they explore. For, when bearing witness, they, as Kelly Oliver contends, work to “ameliorate the trauma particular to othered subjectivity” (7). In particular, Cole and Menéndez “foster attunement to previously unheard suffering” (Craps 37), and through the legitimizing of these experiences, they actively disrupt the process of relegation, oppression, and subordination.

The space each writer wanders, the city, as a construct and lived experience highlights the fraught interrogation of the past in a social space. To understand the anxieties of cultural amnesia possible through structures of the city, Paul Connerton’s and Michele de Certeau’s speculations into the relationship between produced cultural spaces and cultural memory serve as a theoretical framework for understanding it. Because both studies directly engage with the topographies of memory, they allow us to make sense of what happens, culturally, when individuals are forced into or spend a life adrift in a peripatetic state. Namely, Connerton argues that the architecture and structural composition of modern cities establish conditions of forgetting. These conditions are exacerbated for those who travel only transiently through the space of the city. Because the “spatial frameworks of culture” occupy “a pivotal role in the localization of memory” (*How Modernity Forgets* 99), the transmission of memory is contingent on stable spaces and stable enactment within and through the body, but exiles often destabilize space as we see in *Austerlitz*, *Loving Ché*, and *Open City*. While the exiles are self-imposed, several factors contribute to feeling untethered from place in modern societies. The disconnections results from experiences of trauma, genocide, or urbanization so, exiles often work obsessively to recreate memory in response to late capitalism’s culture of obsolescence and obsession with novelty. One way to

resist the tendency toward forgetting is the intentional use of inscription and incorporation of memory within a particular locus; therefore, as Connerton asserts, cities have the potential to perpetuate memory more than other acts of intentional commemoration such as constructing statues, writing memoirs, or compiling photo albums. When cities, places, and locales allow for imitation through the body, memories themselves are more likely to be circulated, preserved, and re-membered. Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole also try to refigure the spaces of memory extant throughout the city in the acts of walking in the streets of divergent cities and thus their prose makes an utterance toward the potential for memory through what de Certeau calls a “pedestrian speech act” (98) — and, as a result, their work is restitutive and redemptive. Uttering “pedestrian speech acts” becomes a “process of appropriation of topographies” as an “acting out of place,” which “implies *relations* among differentiated positions (de Certeau 98). In other words, one can step to the poly-rhythm of the city, where walking, like a speech act, has rhetoric full of intention, purpose, and effect. Being steeped in the city, therefore, allows the narrators in the work of Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole to appropriate and internalize what they traverse as the conceptual becomes actualized reciprocally in place and the body.

Embodying the variegated space of the city in their respective states of unrest contributes to the disruption of the horizon of expectations regarding genre because all three works blur literary and documentary boundaries and engage in a form of historiography.⁷ As prose narratives, they foment protestation, even rebellion, as more than a disruption of literary conventionality because, as Russel Kilbourn said of Sebald’s work, they project a “profound ethical and political seriousness” (251). Sebald desires restitution in response to the erasure following the Holocaust as his narrative begins to, in its multifarious nature, do what cinema once did and carry the “burden of memory” (Kilbourn 256); Menéndez seeks redemption for

memories lost to meretricious advertising⁸ following a period of revolution, and Cole navigates the drive for “diasporic inclusiveness” (Fogang 141) in the face of post-colonial exclusivity and violence. While the generic disruptions promote a slightly different endgame for each text, the pages of each book work to, in their bricolage-like composition, tease out the thread of history and “pull it out...to see” the final tapestry and get a sense of “what the colors of the pattern are” (*The Emergence of Memory* 41). The almost Penelopean⁹ task implied through the image as it depicts simultaneous creation and destruction works not only as a conceit for the act of narrativizing, but the interaction between cities, bodies, and memories.

For Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole, the textual space of the book distorts the distinction between fiction and testimony as they rely on the generic conventions of both historiography and photography to wed the two together. Historians, and by extension writers of fictional testimonials, are “[l]ike the photographer sitting in a darkroom” waiting to witness the “catastrophic image as it emerges from the past into the present and translates invisible remnants into partial visibility” (Hell 371). In other words, historical writing is itself “imagistic” because the “image of the past” or the “*true* picture of the past is the one that is always in a state of passing away” (Cadava 84). The work of yoking together the two media, writing and photography, compound imagistic historicizing done through the words alone. By this convergence of media, they are actively uprooting systematic and empirical knowledge bases through synesthesia; therefore, the books’ spaces continually disrupt readerly expectations setting both the central characters and readers adrift. As though usurping the “good government of the conventional novel form” in the act of protest (Wood 38), the novels unmoor themselves from the weak boundaries between memoir, historiography, cultural critique, and even ethnography. For Sebald and Menéndez, documentary-like¹⁰ characteristics are further

complicated because their published works, for example, act as an assemblage.¹¹ Although there is a dearth of visuals in *Open City*, Cole's text also reads as highly imagistic as the truth of the past slips into the ephemerality of the present and saturates itself within living, breathing, and thinking bodies.

Central to the historiographic task then, is how Sebald, Cole, and Menéndez grapple with the “horrible chapter” of personal or national histories, and their integration of visuals allows these artifacts of cultural despair to cross the “threshold of the national consciousness” into personal consciousness (Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* 11). For Sebald and Menéndez, the visuals are actual photographs and other archival documents. For each, the photograph momentarily acts as a “faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality,” but simultaneously it also works as an “interpretation of that reality” (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* 26). Their use and interpretation of this medium helps us to understand and internalize their turn to history and through the photographs, Sebald and Menéndez create a “sort of umbilical cord [to link] the body of the photographed thing to” our “gaze” and thus make the photograph a “carnal medium, a skin [we share] with anyone who has been photographed” (Barthes 81). For Cole, while not explicitly reliant on photography in *Open City*, his prose is highly vivid in its activation of visual and auditory sensualities. Moreover, he is someone who has used photographs in other texts like *Every Day is for the Thief* and, more recently, *Blind Spot*. While Cole's *Open City* represents a blind spot,¹² the embodiment and implied intimacy of visuals functions categorically similar to the other processes of remembering throughout each of the narratives. For example, photographs, ekphrastic techniques, and other meditations on visualization force the reader to pause, and thus foment some potential for sustained memorialization. In contrast to other forms of memorialization, which “conceal the past as much

as they cause us to remember it” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 29). Memorials too, can actually work to combat the “truth” of a given present, and often, the “relationship between memorials and forgetting is reciprocal” and “the threat of forgetting begets memorials and the construction of memorials begets forgetting” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 29).

Contextualized photographs and other visual elements work against this reciprocal drive toward amnesia.

In addition to acts of remembrance, the photographs serve other historiographic purposes throughout the texts. As W.G. Sebald remarked, in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, the integration of visuals can “arrest the passage of time” or, at the very least, halt its flow (*The Emergence of Memory* 41). Standing there observing the literary text as parchment or document drawn from history becomes almost “redemptive” because it takes us out of time, and this, according to Jacques Derrida, is the literary function of testimony itself which “testifies to nothing less than the instant of an interruption of time and history” (73). In a sense, because literary fiction haunts history, the work of Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole is haunted by witness, by testimony, and by the truth. Sebald’s prose, in particular, has been lauded for “[foregrounding] the writing process and the standards by which we judge authenticity, documentary status, historical truth, and even truth in general” (Wolff 264). Because Sebald’s prose serves as a focal point for having inspired and influenced both Menéndez and Cole, all three similarly challenge the “traditional forms of historiography in the interest of finding and representing higher truth” (Wolff 269). The task in each requires an investment of more time walking amongst the dead to construct an alternative archive.

While constructing alternate ways of knowing through engagement with the artifacts of photography and the city, each narrative works to illuminate “repeatedly how rationalist

modernity fails in the face of the chaotic violence of history” (Elias 164). Sebald questions the violence following the Holocaust; Menéndez examines the tumult of revolution, and Cole considers the inevitability of atrocities throughout his oeuvre; and thus, all three writers directly confront the call for the historical sublime. Their engagement conveys that “desire that history, the space of ontological order, exists somewhere, but also the belief that human history will never reach it” (Elias 160). Within all three, there is a longing, rooted in either sexual or intellectual pursuits, that comes to symbolize their respective cultural lacunae. It is as though, with a fated end to a tryst, there is a “lack of faith in, but a continuing desire for ‘historical’ knowledge” (Elias 164), and all three narratives reveal this paradoxical tension. They pine for something to fill the absences, whether personally, culturally, or collectively, and as we see, the desires are left mostly unfulfilled.

“Curious Confusion”:¹³ Painful and Elusive Proximity to the Lacunae of History in

Austerlitz

Austerlitz tells the story of Jacques Austerlitz who, as a child, is put on the *kindertransport* out of Prague during the Nazi occupation. The narrative has a tripartite structure. It moves from reflection on architectural history, through the childhood of Jacques Austerlitz, and finally, to a rediscovery of his absent heritage. At the outset, through a series of chance encounters between the eponymous Austerlitz and the narrator, Austerlitz engages in extended divagations on architectural history during the capitalist era (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 33). The narrator, a pseudo-Sebaldian,¹⁴ grows into an empathetic listener. Austerlitz focuses on the modern era’s tendency toward “monumentalism” along with his academic work where he endlessly searched for a “family likeness between all these buildings” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 33). He was obsessed with a drive toward systems extant in architecture, but as with the meandering cadence of his speech,

the studies develop endlessly, without halt, and devolve into tangential reflection. At this stage in his exile, Austerlitz is unaware of the details surrounding his lost past thus he works at an almost frightening pace to arrive at plausible conclusions about systems as he pines for a network of connection of his own. All throughout this section, it appears that these meditations on architecture and history alone prove fruitless in allowing Austerlitz to construct a fully realized self. Austerlitz, therefore, loses faith in engaging the project of the Enlightenment, which for him is to find purpose, meaning, and even, telos within constructed spaces. As Austerlitz's narrative unfolds, so too does his personal memory "in allegorical form as he explains the cultural and natural history of his physical surroundings" (Oesmann 456). While inhabiting the spatiality of these places, "chronic dysfunction and constitutional instability" (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 281) of state, nations, and even, self comes to the fore. We see this highlighted during many of these first encounters where the unnamed narrator would, for a time think of Austerlitz, then, a moment later, forget him altogether (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 34). Austerlitz represents, then, what it means to be at once "an exile haunted by an unknown history" (Dubow, Steadman-Jones 4-5) who himself haunts history.

Austerlitz's spectral past feels simultaneously present and absent during his subsequent reflections on his childhood. After transitioning from a discussion of intellectual pursuits alone, Austerlitz then divulges his personal history in the second part of the text. Austerlitz, once named Dafydd Elias, rediscovers himself as Jacques Austerlitz. While the name Jacques is recognizable, the name Austerlitz only brings up battles and locales, not a person, and so Austerlitz also becomes indelibly linked to event and place with the newly discovered identity. After Austerlitz learns his actual name, he sets out to determine his lineage. Inquiring, searching, pining for what is blank, absent, and yet, visceral in his life—he sets out to re-member,

reconfigure, and rediscover his family. For a while, throughout the text, there is a deferred epiphany of discovery, but as he is further prompted by space, “Austerlitz suddenly knows who he is and how his previous lack of self-knowledge distorted his entire life” (Schlesinger 57). As his awareness of self develops, the third part of the narrative transitions to his eventual reunion with the past where he learns more about the lives of his biological father and mother.

Throughout his time searching his own past, absence is especially stark in its resonance. For example, within the spaces of the apartment once inhabited by his mother, he finds only a photograph that seems to “resemble the dim memory of [his] mother” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 253). There is no certainty, only traces, fragments, and lingering potential for a full realization of fleeting memories. Throughout all of his reflections, the spaces of the narrative untangle, and during them, photography, visual language, and even syntactical arrangements work to impart the haunting presence of absences as the void left from Enlightenment ideals unwinds and unfurls.

The faint photographs representing dim memories repeatedly work to show coping strategies with loss resulting from the failures of the Enlightenment, and they also establish and simultaneously diminish veracity in Sebald’s augmented text. In an interview with Toby Green, Sebald discusses the nature of photography and their function throughout his prose. Although he made these comments about photographs in 1999, before the publication of *Austerlitz*, he communicates a theory of their purpose in his creative work. He equates the photograph’s function to the documentation of “absence” and expresses that they are “curiously metaphysical (“Three Encounters with Sebald” 390). Sebald finds that they became a part of his process of writing, and they work, characteristically, to show a positionality in his prose. By this notion, he means that they create relativity—moral or otherwise, and, above all, the photographs give

weight to the validity of the prose by granting it a “token of authenticity” (“Three Encounters with Sebald” 390). Sebald’s integration of photographs and even his narrative style have also been discussed through the lens of various sorts of rewriting, tracing, spectrality, and haunting. Interestingly, Sebald’s relationship to these apparitions of the past, at its Benjaminian core, relates to his thorough reading of Susan Sontag’s “Melancholy Objects.”¹⁵ Notably, Sebald’s copy of *On Photography*, for instance, had at least 30 markers, and the most heavily marked was this chapter (“Three Encounters with W.G. Sebald” 380). In this chapter, Sontag connects theories of photography, the photographer, and Benjamin’s flâneur. Photography becomes an “extension of the eye of the middle-class flâneur,” and the photographer at large is an “armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes” (Sontag, *On Photography* 55). Strolling through the streets of the city, or “urban inferno,” allows Austerlitz and the unnamed narrator to see the impacts of loss and sorrow in the face of the widening abyss of absence, whether it is the lack of truth, heritage, or identity.

To account for these illogical elements of absence and presence haunting the spaces of the text, Sebald relies on a strategy adopted from the visual arts, superimposition.¹⁶ This strategy is embodied in the thoughts of the pseudo-Sebaldian narrator, who inhabits a spectral zone, like Austerlitz, throughout the narrative. The narrator’s proximity to pain, which is never distinctly described, appears to arise for similar reasons to those of Austerlitz. In particular, the narrator’s absent and unclear history of mourning prompts him to seek travel, but the motivation for it is “never entirely clear” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 3). When he arrives in Antwerp, Belgium, he finds himself plagued with a horrible sickness. To escape the uneasy feeling, he lingers for a while inside of the Antwerp Nocturama where he finds a raccoon, which “remained lingering in [his]

memory” (*Austerlitz* 4). Within this artificial space, the raccoon washes an apple with a seemingly obsessive quality as it attempts to “escape the unreal world in which it had arrived” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 4). In this scene, there is a “transient simultaneity” of light and dark and thus a sort of “double projection” (Mosbach 392). The ambient character and quality permeate many of the narrator’s thoughts as he waits in Antwerp’s Central Station. For one, he finds that a staff canteen with artifacts of colonial history representative of the African continent strikes him as “another Nocturama” as he feels a “curious confusion” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 6). The two places, the Nocturama and Central Station, are superimposed on one another. The confusion continues. As he is sitting in the station, Sebald’s narrator finds himself in a room with a few travelers who sit silent and motionless as the twilight of the city approaches. Much like the “strikingly large number of dwarf species” in the Nocturama, it is as though he is surrounded by passengers who are “miniaturized” (Sebald *Austerlitz* 6). At this moment, he thinks of them as the “last members of a diminutive race which had perished or had been expelled from its homeland” (Sebald *Austerlitz* 7). Here, the narrator also conflates dimension, size, and time of passengers at the station with captive animals in the Nocturama and thus highlights feelings of enclosure, isolation, and disorientation, which characterize his time in the station and colonial histories of violence altogether.

After this experience, when the narrator meets Austerlitz again, Austerlitz discusses architectural history at length. While speculating on architectural theory, one conceit, further superimposing past and present, relates to the nature of time. Austerlitz finds himself intrigued by the concept of time, and according to him, it was not until the measure of time was unified across the globe that we could “hasten through the gigantic spaces separating us from each other” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 12). In other words, without a concept of time, distant travel from

home could not have been systematized, regulated, and enforced on a worldwide scale. Contradictorily, however, travel, according to Austerlitz, does something to dishevel or disjoint us from time itself. All of his statements become so “perfectly balanced” during his reflections that he begins to develop what seems a sort of “historical metaphysics” (Sebald *Austerlitz* 13). Austerlitz goes on to comment that “marks of pain...trace countless fine lines through history” (Sebald *Austerlitz* 14) as he yokes both time and space together. Regulation of time marks the spaces of history, and these marked spaces show the ubiquity of trauma. Because of the temporalized space history is defined by the possibility for far-reaching, large-scale violence. The two categories, space and time, are continually superimposed in these accounts by Austerlitz. All of these ruminations appear to jar the narrator into a state of anxiety but also prompt him to engage in further sympathetic reflections on the absences probed by Austerlitz, so he goes in search of understanding.

To find out more about the absent past, the narrator later finds himself at Breendonk, and several images surround the discussion of this “monolithic, monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 21). The narrator reveals that he is incapable of conceptualizing what the space, as witness, testifies. Photographs and artifacts emphasizing a “bird’s-eye” perspective of what he saw do not fully account for its horror. There are, however, multiple modalities through which the reader can attempt to garner a sense of the trauma, and thus, Breendonk is subjected to a Cartesian gaze. We, as spectators, use rationality and objective reasoning to understand it—as its depiction invites this type of thinking. However, the narrator comments on how this space unfurls, and thus, escapes the symmetry of its blueprint, which Sebald affixes next to a photograph of a calciferous wall of Breendonk with significant damage. After the apparently “rational structure” is depicted, it becomes, to the narrator, an “anatomical

blueprint of some alien and crab-like creature” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 22). Again, his reflections dehumanize the space itself by connecting it to crabs whose exoskeletons and walking along askance or sideways in the ocean further separate it from the human body and simple comprehension. The inhumanity contained in the memories this space conveys are so unfathomable to the narrator, and by extension, the reader—but when the narrator reflects on the mess hall inside of Breendonk, a place he finds “illuminated by a few dim bulbs,” he is capable of imagining a “good son” or “dutiful father” dining there (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 23). There is a willingness to accept the humanity of those who commit heinous and inhumane acts because the “true” history of Breendonk has been for him, along with others in post-war West Germany, startlingly absent. Following the reflection on the photograph and images of Breendonk that inflate our understanding of the dual role played by the visuals and words, it allows us to see a “truth” and transfigures that truth as the narrator finds his memory clouded over. He even determines that much of what he witnesses were, at the moment he witnessed it, “clouding over” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 22). A corridor from Breendonk is depicted during this description and based on its perspective everything is moving toward darkness. He wants us as readers, as denizens of the dark, to remember or see. Doing so, however, results in failure after failure to *turn* toward history and garner greater understanding.

Places like Breendonk, with pronounced violent pasts, prompt investigation by Austerlitz into the history of siegecraft. Austerlitz discusses a “fortified city” illustrating the impacts of peregrination within a pre-modern historical context of the emerging urban space. Bounded spaces, according to Austerlitz, invite invasion and therefore contain shadows of porousness in their own solidity. This idea, where the city with fortified boundaries are functionally attempting to stop an invasion, is absurd and ironic according to Austerlitz because the “largest fortifications

will naturally attract the largest enemy forces” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 16). Austerlitz’s reflection here recalls late modernity’s drive toward the destruction of cities because as the creation of these fortifications not only relies on increasing complexity for their construction and maintenance, but they also anticipate their own destruction. The spaces themselves are also access points to the “traces of pain left in abandoned sites of torture” (McCulloh 114). Austerlitz then reflects on the interconnected nature of all buildings, and constructed spaces for that matter, as ones of torture because they require human labor and death for their creation. While the pain is marked on these spaces, markers of cultural memory, which could allow us to *turn* toward histories of mourning, are not distinct in post-modern spaces because of the drive toward uniformity and speed. What Sebald’s reflection recovers is the diachronic activity of constructing or “building,” which is manifested mnemonically by the “*continuing transitive activity* of construction as the eventual product” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 31). The modern idea of memory as “built” is sterile, whereas Sebald looks to spaces that can be embodied and thus extended into the *longue durée*, whereas a limited, fragmented memory contained in the buildings as “built,” negates the possibility of diachronicity and tends toward forgetting.

In response to post-modern tendencies toward cultural amnesia in architectural spaces, Sebald’s pages are amassed with detailed descriptions, which superimpose structural elements so that the “dissolution of solid demarcations evokes a virtual space in which objects or events formerly separated are brought into contact” (Mosbach 391). For one, the various lenses through which the story is told layer everything. There is a clear absence wherein the “text systematically diffuses” what would be considered clear distinctions between “conflicting narrative perceptions of Austerlitz’s identity” (Mosbach 407). This confusion is created too through the ways the narrative itself appears put together through language that becomes an “assemblage of filiation,

connections, and contiguities, which are sometimes apparent and sometimes hidden” (Dubow and Steadman-Jones 7). Within this overwhelming discursive atmosphere, linguistic spaces perform roles of the exile as Austerlitz’s life is marked by some of the linguistic failures and catastrophes of modernity. As he moves throughout the different spaces, there is an almost immobilization through language. He encounters a type of “aphasia” and, at times, a “desperate babbling” (Dubow and Steadman-Jones 25). His silence might also be the result of damage from the trauma because while he functions individually with a memory and a clear sense of self, he has a limited framework for conceptualizing what happened. The darkness before what he sees now was perhaps too much. Surviving the past, especially ones like his that are fraught with such terror, can require darkness and acts of what Connerton would call *humiliated silences* or Toni Morrison’s disremembering, which can be necessary for the continuation of one’s self or culture. These acts of concealment aid with survival because opacity, superimposition, and blind spots can help individuals endure tragedy. The silences resulting from language’s inefficacy further illustrate how *Austerlitz* grapples with Arendt’s claim that the burden of our time is to understand the realities of genocide’s lingering impact (Arendt vii). Austerlitz relies on a “misleading form of verbose carapace” (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 73). His is an almost effusive paralysis, in which a glittering, endless stream of words is meaningless at the outset. The mechanism is a tool of defense against the presence of absences in his life and the haunting memories for the culture following such unfathomable tragedy.

Reinforcing the failures of language, Austerlitz plays out what it means to grow up and to live with the refusal of personal memory. In other words, he is steeped in a history defined by a “wound” enshrouded in the “ambiance of the unspeakable” (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 73). With the depiction of a rupture, the narrator too tries to locate Austerlitz’s history, and he finds

him in the photographs of Wittgenstein. The two, Wittgenstein and Austerlitz, begin to converge into one. Austerlitz appears to be, to the narrator, a “disconsolate philosopher, a man locked into the glaring clarity of his logical thinking as inextricably as his confused emotions” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 41). Austerlitz is trapped within words, and he is incapable of, as Wittgenstein’s philosophical oeuvre explores, meeting the criterion of *true* communication. It is as though, like his obsessions with architecture, he is limited to the edifice constructed by those who came before him. As the narrative progresses, Austerlitz tries, often unsuccessfully to recall the haunted voids of his past, and he finds himself confronting the “limits of propositionality by supplementing them with visuality” (Straus 44). Words alone, as Wittgenstein expressed in his *Brown Book*, do not consider the machinery of grammar underlying the expression, for when we “communicate a feeling to something” whether or not it reaches the person to whom we hoped to impart the knowledge cannot be known. Austerlitz tries, unsuccessfully, to convey a narrative but he never sees if it was effectively conveyed, just like we “can never know when...the ray of light reaches the mirror” (Wittgenstein, *Major Works* 316). *Austerlitz* then reveals how speech and the space between oneself and others are never limited but only furthered as communication fails to create true empathic listeners.

As a narrative highlighting the feeling of entrapment with epistemologies reliant on empiricism repeatedly questioned, silence plays a prominent role throughout Austerlitz’s attempts to define himself and his past. Silence, for example, is ubiquitous during Austerlitz’s childhood. In the place where his memory of the past has been denied to him—the house of adoptive parents, the Elias’—cold and silence reign (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 46). The motif divulged into before through the entrapment of Austerlitz within the drive for a metanarrative also defines the space of his childhood. Throughout the descriptions of the scene are examples of oppression

and captivity. In a particularly compelling description, the fact that the Eliases never “opened a window” makes him, after seeing a house in passing with the windows open, “feel an extraordinary sense of being carried away out of myself” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 45). The cloistered environment of his youth feels as though it contains him in contrast to the sight of spaces with the incredible sense or potential for liberation. The cold, silence, and sorrow creep into him as his childhood and experiences come to embody the nature of entrapment by historical erasure, and, as Connerton expressed more broadly about silences, they contribute to the limitation of growth and development (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 73). Austerlitz, again, fails to become a fully realized self.

Austerlitz’s discovered identity, which could be liberating, also isolates him as it is delivered to him silently as a fragment of an archive: “Penrith-Smith had written the name [Austerlitz’s name] on a piece of paper” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 67). The rupture of history defines Austerlitz at this moment—as though traced on the single piece of paper, through words, through the articulated silences and voids of the moment, he comes to embody post-memory, the denial of what happened, and what will happen. The name takes on an unrelatable quality, one which fails to make sense, and Austerlitz cannot relate it to something familiar, to something real, and it is all the more disconcerting, jarring, and unnerving because he “could connect no ideas at all with the word *Austerlitz*” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 67). As result, the name Austerlitz takes on the resonance of the *uncanny*. After the time of the word defining his reality, he grows invested in photography and pursuits of the visual. Austerlitz finds joy in how as the photograph develops “out of nothing” comes the “shadows of reality” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 77).

The amnesiac void of experience in Sebald’s post-war West Germany was much of the fodder he used to consider questions of identity and memory. Sebald’s work attempts to explore

the abyss, and he works to broach each opaque refraction of the past to unyoke the gaze from the future and prime his reader to peer backward because he confronts a culture that is at once one of “silence and witness” (McCulloh 12). The sort of “aerial position” that the narrator glances back to the past gives him the guise of an alien through which he can bear witness to the seemingly mundane and illustrate its uncanniness of the scene. At the heart of the prose narrative, and throughout conversations with the unnamed narrator, Austerlitz is obsessed with a dialectical version of history, and he attempts, through architecture and storytelling, to find the architectural supra-theory. The drive toward modern conceptions of systematic ways of knowing and seeing leaves him, eventually, stilted. It is as if he experiences the rupture in history through the incapacity of writing and other codified systems to document fact and establish the truth. The rupture and trauma in cultural memory and history leaves Austerlitz with something akin to a dialogic history. Austerlitz, then, represents the drive to the post-modernity which retains the modern and premodern notion that History is chaotic, but “it loses faith that a supra-historical version of that history, either by God or by man, is possible” (Elias 160). Dialogic history requires listening, remains unresolved and thus, it is akin to the dialogical nature of Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole’s prose. Each requires listening of the reader, but the narrative structure does not always end with historical resolution or healing—as one would hope.

Touching Intimate Spaces, Synesthesia, and Laborious Embodiment in *Loving Ché*

Taking issue with Enlightenment and Western rooted epistemologies, and situated, not within Europe, but the hispanophone Caribbean and the United States, Ana Menéndez’s *Loving Ché* similarly depicts another narrative of obsessive longing for personal and collective history. The narrator looks to fill the “blank space where” her “mother should have been” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 4). Like *Austerlitz*, the structure is tripartite and similarly shares the point of view

between two voices, the narrator's and her mother's. It begins with the unnamed narrator's recollections of her childhood, transitions to her mother's love story with Ernesto "Ché" Guevara, and closes with the narrator's attempts to verify, validate, and qualify the statements made in her mother's archive. Teresa de la Landre, a woman who claims to be the narrator's mother, labors, in a gendered act of re-membering, to construct a story of her time with Ché Guevara. In contrast to *Austerlitz*, or even *Open City*, there is even more emphasis on embodiment and embodied knowledge. *Loving Ché* is framed with the story of the unnamed narrator who discovers, after a prolonged search for her heritage and belonging, a collection of letters, fragments, and photographs telling the story of Teresa, who uses sensuality and touch to revive history for herself and her daughter. The anonymous narrator insists on what Elena Machado Sáez called a "totality of knowledge" (221) wherein she privileges artifacts and official documents that she can verify through sight. As the narrator moves through the urban space of Cuba, she becomes a site of what Isabel Alvarez Borland calls "affiliation and rupture" (20). Working as a repository of cultural memory in the space of insularity, she disrupts neat methodological approaches toward constructing knowledge systems. Further, during her time in Cuba, the narrator finds that the city does not invite her scientific and Western epistemology, but instead relies on a different type of memory formation.

Teresa's narrative about her life and love affair with Ché Guevara begins with an Alberto Korda print of Ché and a poem. Ché's Korda print is replicated in a darkened room, and silhouettes of spectators obstruct the reader's view. Each spectator appears fixed on the photograph of Ché, and Ché, in turn, is also transfixed within a solemn monochromatic space of shades of dark gray and black. As readers, we are forced to engage with questions of intimacy that the anonymous narrator made apparent at the outset of the novel and asked to contextualize

the events from the position of, almost voyeuristically, the spectators looking passively at the Korda print. The text *Loving Ché* is a much more intimate encounter for the character within the narrative but also for the reader. There is an attempt at a type of intimacy within Austerlitz, but much of what happens, what is said, and what is felt is mediated through the narrator. While the narrator develops a highly-attuned empathy in *Austerlitz*, it is not nearly as proximal to what happens through the sexually intimate encounters expressed through *Loving Ché*. We, as readers, move between participant and observer as though engaged in an ethnographic study. From this position, we are in an interesting place to consider questions of veracity and the truth-value of the narrative along with the truth-value of fiction altogether (Machado Sáez 133). The framing photo of Ché's around the central narrative also urges us to confront the usurpation of truth through corporate repetition and redundancy. The corporate appropriation decontextualizes the person, Ché, and illuminates how modernity "fragments memory like shards of broken dreams or 'flags in the wind'" ((Ayala-Walsh 189). While at first memory is broken and fragmented, Teresa's narrative that follows defies Ché's co-opting through revitalization.

In response to the corporatizing and politicizing of Ché, acts which erase his humanity, Menéndez's text asks the reader to consider the ethics of remembrance enacted in the site of these photographs. With each image of Ché, we are compelled to consider our relationship to memory and history, and these questions are posed most distinctly when looking at the death photo of Ché (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 126). Perhaps Menéndez's choice of the photograph depicting Ché in death was a matter of finding an image that works to solidify the argument the old man in the shop in Paris says to the narrator: "Death more and more appears to reside most comfortably in the photograph" (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 224). The old man is, of course, drawing on Roland Barthes' argument of the photograph as a memento mori. On Ché's

gruesome yet still appealing physiognomy, there lingers some semblance of comfort for him and the reader in his death. As though traced on his face there is the remembrance of a life lived more completely than any man, or as John Lee Anderson declared, the “most complete human being of our age” (468). In Ché’s countenance are posed questions of future, of past, and the present. From the gaze of his hauntingly open eyes, *we* see a martyr of memory.

His martyrship and role of “Guerrillero Heroico,” however, are played out in a more allusive photograph of Ché Guevara. While Menéndez does not include this image, Teresa’s exclusion of it, given that she would have most likely had access to it, is telling of how *Loving Ché* reenacts and reframes Ché, even in death. The photo captured the day after Ché’s execution, in the Vallegrande hospital, situates Ché amid military personnel and other “official” looking persons. John Berger wrote that this photo became a “political warning”(43) and an “object of demonstration” (46). Ché was splayed out in a way, as Berger describes, akin to Rembrandt’s 1632 *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* and Andrea Mantegna’s 1480 *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*. Even in death, Ché is stripped of history, being used solely as a warning, an “object” of study, or a commodified martyr for his cause. He is subjected to the Cartesian gaze, and we, as spectators, also appear to be complicit in this act of commodification. Menéndez’s subtle inclusion of an alternative death photo, however, gives precedence to his words, and unlike the picture reminiscent of Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson*, it does not, “make an example” (Berger 43) of the dead, rendering Ché manageable, and ultimately, controllable. But acts of obsessive and perverse memorialization emblematic of modernity not only strip Ché of humanity, but they work to erase his past. In an interview with Robert Birnbaum, Menéndez discussed these tendencies toward memorialization and mythologizing as “ultimately destructive”, and throughout the text, there are repeated expressions of this as a particularly “Cuban” trait. The

danger of it arises when something, like a photograph of someone with repeated attributions of heroism and valor, is made “flat, untroubled image of a man” who is not simple but rather “complex” (“Birnbaum v. Ana Menéndez”). Questions embodied in Ché surrounding uniformity and containment are explored throughout the narrative.

Appealing to epistemologies reliant on boundedness and neat, tight, histories of verifiable significance makes it difficult for the narrator to come to terms with what remains of her past. As the narrator attempts to discover her origin after receiving an artifact of her past from her mother, she wanders through Havana trying to verify its veracity and to “prove that her [mother’s] words are true” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 160). As she walks through the city, she scrutinizes it with a Cartesian gaze—as though she contorts the embodied qualities of the city and subjects them to her intentions as does Dr. Tulp or the military personnel in Ché’s death photo Berger described. In Havana, the narrator traces the steps of her mother revealing “how lightly one world rests on the next” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 46), but again the narrator is left feeling a sense of futility because the absence remains, and memories are not fully manifested in her body. During her encounter with the city, after feeling dissatisfied with the archive provided by her mother, the city’s architecture, design, and structure give her an opportunity to re-inscribe her memories and to find what she desperately seeks, a history. The place, as it appears, exudes “florid variations,” but it is also prone to decay and looks as though it has succumbed to some “spectacular disease” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 196). But the narrator is mesmerized by the cityscape as it crumbles. She understands the beauty in the decay and age of the place through which she now ambulates. Caridad, a disabled woman, acts as a spectator similarly to the narrator, looking out over the cityscape from above. For some time, the narrator and Caridad parallel one another, both spatially, in their attempts to separate themselves from the forgetfulness of the city because it is

now stricken with, as Manny, Caridad's son, says, a "collective interest in outrunning the past" (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 198). The desire to outpace the past, however, results in collective fragmentation. As these disjunctions arise, we see that late capitalism has been responsible for stripping Havana of a past, and both the narrator and Caridad recognize this, but it is not until the narrator begins to touch and feel the city that her memories become more distinct and embodied like her mother's. This could be related to what Connerton describes as the emergence of a faster-paced world reliant, or dominated by advertising converging with a "generalized disposition to surplus, an ubiquitous expectation of ornamental visual surfeit" versus a "handmade world, in which all things were made one by one" in "a slow world" (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 34, 30). The narrator, therefore, begins to outrun the present in search of understanding the past's pain, but her quest is addled with despair, longing, and hurt.

These marks of pain and trauma highlighted by the search she undergoes instantiate themselves in the body as a site of melancholic history throughout Menéndez's text. Connerton expressed how affective resonances can awaken through imitation and performance within spaces through what he calls "emphatic projection." In this type of memory formation, the environments match the instantiation of memory that takes place in the bodies of people where the "inanimate topography" is spoken of "as if it were animate" (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 148). The body, therefore, begins to attune or match with the space itself and memory becomes tactile and performative. Throughout the prose narrative, there are multiple instantiations of this type of memory. After returning home following her grandfather's death, for example, the narrator emphasizes the sounds of her former home. The house is "filled with a new silence" that works to "muffle even [her] attempt to mourn" (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 10). The silence itself becomes so unbearable; it makes it so that her mourning is not brought to the surface, but rather

suppressed. Her grief, which she begins to feel in the context of her childhood home, is stifled by silence, but it is the beginning of how the place of her home starts to replicate her emotions. After spending some time feeling her grandfather's presence through a reenactment of the "quiet turning of pages" (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 3), she finds herself in the space of her grandfather's chair, and in a place, that was once "indistinguishable from the other houses" on her street (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 3). After space works to absorb her feelings, it relays them back to her in a way that does not so much mute her feelings but leads her to pursue her origins actively. The street here signifies her pursuit of history. For Connerton, the street represents a *locus* for "place memory," and although he was speaking of the nineteenth-century streets, the "nomadic topography of...the street...clouded the former demarcation which had made it possible to assign experiences to certain insulated categories" (*How Modernity Forgets* 23). Interestingly, when thinking about the nature of being grounded or rooted, the streets, above all other "component element" of the urban environment are "resistant to change" (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, 26). even in a potentially stable space like the street, stability, what the narrator desires, is continually deferred.

The deferral and continued denial of a stable identity relate to the highly visual construction of blank spaces, gaps, and fissures within Menéndez's construction of Teresa de la Landre's narrative, which orchestrates the impulse for cultural fulfillment, yearning, and desire. Menéndez creates absences visually because almost entire pages exhibit a feeling of silence through their blankness. While the framing narrator's pages are more customarily structured, as the space itself is not interspersed with photographs, the absences themselves are implied—not directly displayed. Structurally, the snapshots in Teresa's archive are rife with blank spaces that enact some of the anxieties felt by the narrator. But Teresa's words conflate the ethereal and

tangible complicating the narrator's epistemology. Some of the more significant blankness on the pages appears during the first kiss between Ché and Teresa (91) and other encounters of intimacy when she appears to be breathing him in (97, 99, 150). Each of these moments and spaces is punctuated with verbs illustrative of breathing, air, or ethereal spaces. The intimacy growing between the narrator and Ché creates a silence of anticipation. The anticipation builds up to the moment of them coming together as if their story enacts the desire of the unnamed narrator as akin to an erotic one to trace or fulfill the embodiment of her cultural history. Connerton discusses the plurality of silences in *The Spirit of Mourning*, and he would deem this a sort of conjoining of two types of silence, whose erasure of distinction works to further unhinge the reliance on Western epistemologies. It might be considered both a fore-silence and after-silence: wherein, there is a sort of "anticipatory alertness" (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 54) within Teresa, the narrator, and ultimately, the reader. We yearn, like the narrator, for a sense of fulfillment. The erotic implied here must be eventually fulfilled, but it is not, however, instantiated at this moment. It might also be the depiction of an after-silence because utterances are somewhat terminated, but the utterances do not reach an ultimate finality — rather language shifts.

Before and after the blank spaces are also significant thematic discussions in the narrative that engages with some of the central questions concerning memory and history. Calixto on revolution directly conjoins the partition of space created between mother and child after the narrator's birth (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 153). Calixto's examination of revolution as a "semantic fortress" suggests that actions similar to revolution or reminiscence are forever doomed to "retrace steps for eternity" (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 152), implying futility in the almost Sisyphean task. Again, there is a reference to the mother who works to follow the steps of her

daughter on the cobblestone streets, and the narrator who attempts to retrace the steps of Teresa. This multiplicity and enactment of recurrence imply futility felt in the blank spaces because there is no escaping the overwhelming whiteness of the page. The absence or blank spaces then becomes symbolic of the journey the narrator is now set on and precedes her anxieties surrounding belonging and origin enacted on and through her body. It is as though the narrator grappled with only the wound of the past, but not the memory, so she re-members one of her own, and thus, the absence is felt in the body and performed in the relationship with Ché.

Elements other than sound also blur to match the epistemic void the narrator feels. In one instance, Teresa starts to “breathe the moist soft of [Ché’s] beard” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 99). Conflating two distinct elements, air and the solid of his beard—Teresa works to confuse the two binary distinctions between the narrator’s demarcated and classified epistemologies. Reviving Ché’s memory through her breath becomes a trope throughout the text as though each character, including the narrator, resuscitates him and is resuscitated by him. During the intimate encounters following her time with Ché, there is often discussion of how the breathing in the interaction will lead to boundaries erasing or blurring borders making them “without end or design” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 97). Memory and its condition here become more fluid rather than stable and telluric as divisions are erased and sensory experiences are conflated into a form of synesthesia.

In response to feelings of confusion and uncertainty, the architecture and the topographies of the city are illustrative of her capacity to remember and her ability to take disconsolate and untethered moments of her life and “labor” to give memories of origin to her daughter. Teresa’s narrative works to recapture the “roundness” and “totality” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 65) of not only Ché but history itself. *Loving Ché* asserts the evocative power of Ché

through a framed image on its cover. In his eyes is a lingering sadness, dark despair, and the haunting of absence, one felt most viscerally by the narrator, but Menéndez recasts the image throughout the text revising not only Ché's life but giving new affect to his countenance. With these revisions and, as we tour the past with Teresa and the narrator, the text oxidizes the drop of blood circulating throughout the space of Cuba, thus revitalizing its national imagination. While Menéndez's treatment focuses on nation-building, Teju Cole emphasizes the absences felt in the city, not as a highly inflected and revolutionary national space, but within the potentially cosmopolitan migratory pathways of the city.

Melodic Spaces, Flighty Memories, and Faulty Empathy in *Open City*

With an emphasis on the mental, physical, and cultural wounds enacted through loss, absence, and deferment, Teju Cole's *Open City* follows the story of Julius, a Nigerian with an African father and German mother, who, after a seemingly difficult breakup, travels to Brussels in search of his past—embodied in his oma, his maternal grandmother. As he does so, he continues to exhibit a desire to understand what happens and unfolds around him. Following long stints of work during his psychiatry residency in New York, Julius finds himself drawn again and again to the acts of walking as he is taken over by an urge to engage in “aimless wandering” (Cole, *Open City* 3). The text is paradoxically discursive yet focused, which matches his illogical sense of drift. While Julius' words unwind and weave through the city, he too becomes a body like the unnamed narrators of *Austerlitz* and *Loving Ché* in search of the past. The past, within *Open City*, is often interred amongst the banal spaces that bear witness to, if examined closely, the histories of atrocities and horrors that make the quotidian perverse. Julius, and those with whom he converses, encounter forms of “insidious trauma” from, not only a *singular* “incident alone” but rather an accumulation of “micro-aggressions...which

together...create an intense traumatic impact” (Craps 26). Like the characters of Sebald and Menéndez’ prose, Julius is also extracting history as a solitary and scholarly ambulator who is trying to discover and re-member the pains and ruptures of the past and thus, his narrative blurs the boundaries of time. At first, he seeks systematic ways of knowing, but as filiations, haunting absences, and uncertainty grow, his memory and body, become a palimpsest on which fragmentation, history, and trauma are written, erased, traced, and rewritten.

The process opens through Julius’ acute awareness of the processes of urbanization, commodification, and his attempt to “read” the space of New York City. Julius, within his flights of memory¹⁷ and thought, transitions from a description of the visceral neighborhoods of New York to attempts at categorizing what he sees according to substrate, substance, and materiality. He finds that each area seems to “have a different air pressure, a different psychic weight” and Julius begins the long process of trying to “sort” each of them, but they are eventually muted, stopped, and endlessly morphing into one another as they “assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city” (Cole *Open City* 7). Julius’ attempt leaves him sleeping dreamlessly, but it is this failed epistemic practice of categorizing that forms the need to walk throughout his story. To walk in the city, for Julius, becomes a sort of utterance in the same way that speaking is illustrative in the language system. Julius cannot completely solidify the structures he sees, and his body cannot imitate the resonant memories without this form of direct engagement. As an African migrant, his walking throughout Brussels and New York city serves another purpose; Julius begins to “posture as a cosmopolitan flâneur” as a way to expose the “limitations of literary cosmopolitanism” (Vermeulen 42). Similar to the flâneur, Julius “thrives on intercultural curiosity,” (Vermeulen 42), but the more nefarious, depressing, “fugure,” which may not only apply to Cole’s *Open City*, but the work of Menéndez and Sebald too, comes to potentially

define some of Julius' posturing and inability to be at rest. The fugitive is in the condition of "restless mobility...a parody of mass tourism... moreover, even as a pathological flip-side of the *flâneur*" (Vermeulen 42). The text, therefore, illustrates through Julius' restlessness, the ways exile become, as Julia Kristeva explains, a "cosmopolitanism of excoriation" (qtd. in Burgin 284). Accordingly, the only way to fit into the world culture, for exiles like Julius, is to lose a sense of embodied practices and selves. The continued and malingering presence of loss surrounds the inaccessibility of heritage and haunts language in Cole's texts. In midst of such isolating trauma, Julius works to find his own identity, but he realizes the inefficacy of this cosmopolitanism, and he is feeling the sense that "something more troubling was at work" (Cole 259) in the city.

Julius is, therefore, in a disturbed state and to counter the feeling of loss, much of *Open City* centers on the inversion of sensuous expectation. For example, in contrast to the blending of different sensory apparatuses with *Loving Ché* and *Austerlitz*, the silences of Cole's *Open City* are unexpectedly musical in their construction. The silences stem from an unacknowledged and continuous trauma, lingering from the experiences of colonial violence and racialized subjugation. Cole takes issue with visuals and thus does not rely on them as Sebald or Menéndez who blend them with other sensory apparatuses like touch and sound. In contrast to the condition of blankness and absence splayed out visually, in Cole's work, there is an unexpected engagement with silence in musical and conversational forms. According to Connerton, within music, there is a form of notation "superior to spoken language at encoding small silences" (*Spirit of Mourning* 54). Therefore, silence itself becomes the "essence of rhythm" (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 66). Threaded throughout Julius' divagations are interspersed notes of silence and noise that begin to express the musicality of his prose and illuminate the "continuity of all

places, by the singing line that connects them” (*Blind Spot* 325, 324). Julius begins his meditations with a discussion of classical music, and he speaks of the interruption of Western consumer culture in this sacred musical space, especially American stations which were interspersed with too many commercials. The serenity and reflection offered by listening to and hearing the silence was interrupted. Julius questions: How can one truly invest oneself in the music when it is, as Julius states, “Beethoven followed by ski jackets” or “Wagner after artisanal cheese” (Cole, *Open City* 4)? As a result, he finds himself in a “sonic fugue” (Cole, *Open City* 5) during this time.

Without the capacity to engage fully with the silence, Julius is, in a sense, ready to flee, incapable of grounding himself within the culture at large. He feels this way after briefly alluding to several of the volumes he has found himself meandering through, which include *Camera Lucida* and *Telegrams of the Soul*. The constant vacillation between these two and the ambulatory cadence surrounding his engagement with them speaks volumes to the nature of interrupted silence’s unnerving potential. As a further indication of his desire for silence, he reflects on St. Augustine who was singularly impressed by St. Ambrose’s ability to “read without sounding out the words,” and Julius, taken aback by the notion that “we can comprehend words without voicing them” (Cole, *Open City* 5) reveals a central concern. The musicality of this silence then corresponds with a reflection on the conversational nature of the book, and conversation, much like music, relies on the silences of the contrapuntal—a condition Edward Said used when reflecting on the state of exile itself. During this sonic fugue, Julius goes out to walk the city of New York, and when he does, it is at first unsettling as though “someone had shattered the calm of a silent private chapel with the blare of a TV set” (Cole, *Open City* 6), but he finds refuge in the space of walking, even for all of its punctuations of loudness within the

silence of regimented life as it, like jazz and other musical ventures, allowed for improvisation (Cole, *Open City* 7). Awareness of these silences then lets Cole learn, as Susan Sontag expressed, that “words come to weigh more” (qtd in Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 69). In a way, what the silences of the narrative preceding Julius’ engagement with the loudness of the streets allowed for him to momentarily feel was a balance, a cadence and step that served as a “ballast” to “stop in its tracks the spurious speed of speech as it runs along on automatic pilot into the inauthentic” (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 69). He is resilient to the spirit associated with the panacea of modernity and seeks freedom from the penitentiary of his deafening silence as a wanderer in the city.

Cole’s reflections on silence help us see its centrality to narratives articulating loss during a state of exile. While all three narratives employ silence in markedly different ways, their ultimate goal is similar. They seek to impart knowledge through different spaces of the narrative. *Open City*, in particular, displays potential for a blurring of those neat, methodological boundaries, as it is driven away from a simple return to silence or sound through his investment in the contrapuntal musical form. In his narrative, there are almost two musical lines played at the same time, and they appear to jumble fact, fiction, reality, authenticity, and deception. While each writer relies on some iteration of the trope of silence, whether through its visual, aural, or oral impartation—the investment in silence serves to translate the differences between intentional and imposed silences, which as Connerton suggests can be understood through the distinction between the noun, silence, and the active verb, silencing (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 79). As all three exiles, Teresa de la Landre, Austerlitz, and Julius, drift from the space of their homeland, moving without being hinged to a particular way of seeing the world, they react to the loss. While all three are to some extent experiencing the process of silencing,

they use silence as a way to respond to undermine the epistemologies defining a Western ways of knowing as they either invert or yoke together the sensualities of seeing, hearing, looking, and listening.

Aside from silence, *Open City* foregrounds superimposition as an inversion of spatial orientation to explore questions of empathy's potential as similarly depicted in the dangerous distances of *Austerlitz* and the messy intimacies of *Loving Ché*. When Julius arrives in Brussels, he visualizes encounters of people in various psychological states, from intense jubilee to melancholy. Brussels has multiple resonances as a space of the potential for preservation in the face of efforts at eradication, as it is the "open city" referred to in the title. During a war, an "open city" is a place that has abandoned defensive efforts and allows the enemy forces to take over the space. However, what is being preserved, for someone like Julius, as an African, there are also resonances of the continuation of Belgian history and the lasting impact of colonialism and exploitation of the Congo that allowed for Brussels to become an economic stronghold. In a starkly visual representation of what is preserved in this open city, Julius "rove[s] into the landscape" (Cole, *Open City* 96) and sees Dr. Maillotte, a person he recently met, Junichiro Saito, a former professor of English, and his maternal and paternal grandparents. All of them exist on the same plane, at the same time. Maillotte celebrates the end of the war in 1944 when the Germans finally left Belgium, and she described it as the "happiest day of [her] life" (Cole, *Open City* 90). He sees Saito, "in an arid room in a fenced in a compound in Idaho, far away from his books" (Cole, *Open City* 96). The series of prepositional phrases here create an incredible sense of unhappiness, isolation, and enclosure as Saito, a Japanese-American professor, feels excluded from knowledge. Positioning these two stories in counterpoint to each other, but now

superimposed on one another in the same landscape shows the conflation of memories, and how Julius' perspective is not a homogenized, flat, linear, or neat depiction of history.

Julius recognizes the existence, through awareness of the polyphonic voices, and the dialogic form of history unfolding before him. Picturing his grandparents, “[o]ut there on that day” (Cole, *Open City* 96), he also brings in his lineage, heritage, and positionality to the examination of historical moments. There is a certain amount of blindness to his heritage. The scene is superimposed, conflated, and therefore leads to “systematic dissolution of spatial [and temporal] distinctions” (Mosbach 392). Ultimately, causality is questionable here, but as all three of Julius' ancestors look upon the world, their eyes appear “open as if shut” (Cole, *Open City* 96). His grandparents represent the blindness of the contemporary moment because they stand there “mercifully seeing nothing of the brutal half-century ahead,” and even more, they are so unfamiliar with the “unspeakable worldwide disorder of that very moment” (Cole, *Open City* 96). Cole's narrator comes to rely on a different type of knowledge than the generation who came before him. Even though their eyes are open, they cannot see. It requires recognition of the multiple voices, identities, and issues extant throughout the world, to know, to see, to recognize, and thus to be ethically sound in the face of the world's violence. His exploration is of the natural history of violence, a Sebaldian concern, played out in Brussels, a city with a history of colonial violence itself. Julius here can, through a spatial conflation of memory, not recall an exact or markedly true history, but he can “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 255). Julius grasps onto the memory, and within it, he includes other spatially distinct markers to try to articulate a way of knowing that runs counter to the dangers of historical violence wherein even the dead are at risk of further eradication. Although the moment he chooses does not move past temporal boundaries, this experience, for

Julius, is the beginning of an engagement with a different kind of memory that is not personal but something else entirely.

After the shift in memory construction, walking, for Julius, changes during his time in Brussels. Now, feeling almost entirely alone and isolated, he walks, and the aimless quality of his gait is interrupted by the streets which have now become “sodden, liquid underfoot” (Cole, *Open City* 108). Because Julius cannot find sure footing, he momentarily loses a sense of himself and looks for some direction. During a visit to a café, he sees a middle-aged tourist “scrutinizing a map” (Cole, *Open City* 108). They have some conversation, and then the afternoon begins to take on the “character of a dream” (Cole, *Open City* 109). There is an intimacy of touch in their encounter and the haptic moment bears ambiguity, even ambivalence at first until they are able to shed inhibition in the nameless tourist’s hotel bedroom. Because he cannot remember her name, he gives her a false name, which almost feels, to Julius, “seedy” (Cole, *Open City* 110). After the encounter, however, his walking changes altogether and he begins to what appears to be a sense of joy as everything is “wreathed in smiles” (110). The encounter with intimacy helps him achieve a sense of surety in where he stands and where he travels.

There are other moments of intense uncertainty, however, where the weight of his unsure footing drives him to terror. In one instance, Julius wakes up in the middle of the night after dreaming of running through Lagos with his sister. When he is awakened in the total darkness of the night, he is “gripped” by a “deeper terror” than temporal dislocation as he finds himself wondering where he is, whether is he alone or with a partner, and feels like he is “float[ing] in the dark, anonymous to [himself]” (Cole, *Open City* 130). The disorientation as the dream world, where he, as an only child, runs a marathon with a sister he does not have, conflates the realities of the spectral worlds and his own. The space he awakens in fails to satisfy his desire for

stability, and he insists on an aerial image of himself floating throughout the space of the world. Eventually, when he begins to recall the familiarity of the space, including the soft rumble of the garbage trucks, he finds a “trivial-seeming ballast” for his identity (Cole, *Open City* 131). The ballast serves as a counterpoint to his dislocation, travel, and isolation. After this intense feeling of loss and doubt, he recalls an episode from his childhood. It centers on ruminations about Coca Cola, for its colonial and consumerist resonance along with its real power, which lay in its forbidden nature. The flood of memories corresponding with the weather outside prompts in him a morose sentiment, and when the rain continues, it appears to make “life a muddy mess” (Cole, *Open City* 136). Overcome with the intensity of the rain, he reflects on the mixing of sensory experience upon entering a restaurant, an absurdly and stiflingly quiet space where the “furtive notes that shot through the musical texture, like shafts of light refracted through stained glass” (Cole, *Open City* 138). Julius is so disoriented with loss and unclear identity mixes sight and sound, rather than emphasizing sensory inversion as he had done near the opening of the narrative. Upon returning to New York, he further shifts to reflections on the visual. Julius goes to see an exhibit of Martin Munkácsi’s photography. During his attendance at the event, he remarks on how photography is an “uncanny art like no other” because it takes “[o]ne moment, in all of history” and makes all time before and after it disappear “into the onrush...” and “only that selected moment itself was privileged, saved, for no other reason than its having been picked out by the camera’s eye” (Cole, *Open City* 152). Time and history collapse into these comments made by Julius. Sight and sound are incapable of creating the clear, systematic knowledge systems he yearns to have in his possession. With the failing of this process, he continues his search.

Part of this ambling quest comes to the fore through embodied experiences. In the text, there are repeated encounters between the body of Julius, mutilated bodies, and the topographical features of the city as an “amplification of the body’s experiences” (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 148). These experiences become a point of reference, a mnemonic feature wherein there is an “embodiment, an incarnation, of an entire system of social organization” (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 132). Near the close of *Open City*, Julius describes a story about Nietzsche, who so determined to reveal the truth of Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, that he imitates an act of self-immolation. Attempting to prove the truth of Scaevola’s act, Nietzsche stuck his right hand in a fire to “show his fearlessness” (Cole, *Open City* 246). Julius mistakenly says that Nietzsche held on to a lump of coal but finds out that it was “several lit matchsticks that he had placed in the center of his palm” (Cole, *Open City* 246). Nietzsche’s and Scaevola’s respective scarifications articulate, boldness through the skin. Both are willing, in the face of doubt, to mark their bodies as reminders of “truth.” The stories emphasize the repeated gestures and references illustrative of scarring throughout the narrative, but Julius’ are not externally mnemonic, at least not through the body itself, but rather the traces of the city externalize inner feeling of despair and anguish.

Julius’ emphasis here on an embodied knowledge weighs heavily on the interpretation of the interred bodies throughout the city of New York. According to Cole, histories, especially those marked by intense violence, are buried underneath the “endless hum of quotidian commerce and government” (Cole, *Open City* 220). Lingered throughout the city, as Julius remarks, are histories of implacable violence that continue to scar the lives of people of color throughout the city. The history of exploitation and oppression leads to the manifestations of signs and signifiers of the crime throughout the city referring to acts of contemporary violence,

which reads, as Julius remarks parenthetically about what would happen following the report of his own attack, “as so often before, in all the previous instances when [he] wasn’t the victim,” that the attackers were “male, black, and young, of average height and weight” (Cole, *Open City* 214). The pain, as his body is pummeled, is sharp and distinct and throughout the rest of the narrative culminates in his left hand. As though in anticipation of the Nietzsche and Scaevola anecdote near the close, he inverts their mnemonic markings of boldness and power, to speak to memory’s inverted and sinister side. The internal experiences he undergoes are interrogated throughout the text, but his pain becomes remarkably fresh after standing near a burial ground of “fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves” where the “land had been built over, and the people of the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground” (Cole, *Open City* 220). He mourns the past, and as he lifts a stone from the grass, a pain shoots through his left hand. The connection between the suffering across generations is awakened internally by the traces of his own suffering. Julius’ body amplifies trauma through entanglement within the palimpsest of the city. He understands, localizes, and embodies the fabric of pain he undergoes. Bodies are buried, so too is his pain, but the traces are felt again and again throughout the narrative.

The internalized grief finds an outlet within a temporal shift in *Open City*. Immediately following his time at the African Burial Ground, Julius relates the story of his father’s burial. He reflects that the “memory of the day wasn’t secure, because it was a public event and was as such taken over by other people’s concerns” (Cole, *Open City* 227). His inability to recollect, accurately and securely, is predicated on the indistinguishable personal and collective. There is mounting tension between these two ways of reference. Reading these counterpoints between the personal and the collective using music theory, Vermeulen argues that there is a “maddening indistinguishability” between whether they are a just “felicitous montage” or “inconsequentially

contiguous bits” (47, 48). Putting the death and burial of his father in conversation with thousands of buried bodies of enslaved and oppressed blacks results in an inability to interpret whether the events he describes from his life are in “fugal harmony” or just “mere noise” (Vermeulen 48). In essence, the body as depicted here cannot be easily separated from the historically and collectively rooted knowledge. Within these events is a sort of vitriolic contempt for pain illustrated by the mention of Nietzsche and Scaevola, but it also speaks to some of the more sinister elements of the narrative too. As Connerton distinguishes between the marks on the body as illustrative of honor or shame, we see Julius embodying the juxtaposition between the two. This distinction between specific embodied mnemonics is starkly unfolded in the narrative of Julius, and he transfigures this binary distinction. He eradicates the clear distinctions between a mark of honor and shame, and thus works to effectively tease out and question tenets central to Western epistemology. He inverts the way that the memory codes the body through internalized scarification and reveals that the “loci memoria,” in which places recall events for the onlooker or participant, are part of the mutilated bodies of those who cope with insidious traumas.

Chapter 2: The City as Palimpsest¹⁸

At the foreground of each narrative are encounters and experiences with one distinct place, the spaces of the city. These topographies allow the walker, the flâneur, or the wanderer as someone who has to traverse the city, to feel a certain resonant absence in what is left behind. In this process, one can begin to understand the marks of erasure while simultaneously punctuating the city with an invisible and absent trail—tracing the past, present, and future endlessly. At a time when information is at a surfeit, navigating through the plenum has proved difficult in its incitement of peregrination, wandering, and the like. Each writer shows a reinvestment of themselves, while walking, in the “devices of Daedalus” (de Certeau 92) as they no longer fly above, arrogantly garnering only a bird’s eye and flattened perspective. Rather, they immerse themselves within the city, embracing blindness, doubt, and uncertainty. No longer are they at a distance but rather proximal to the rhythms and palpitations of the cityscape as the beat of their steps meets the syncopated tune of the city itself. It contributes to relativity within the constructs of knowledge, and even though there is a certain amount of blindness it forces aversion to a “totalizing eye” (de Certeau 92) and thus satisfies the drive for a multitudinous and dialogic narrative. Walkers are responsible for simultaneously traversing and constructing a map. The city becomes inscribed on the body as the body inscribes the city. The narrators are limited, however, by their intimacy with the city. A cartographer may have a bird's-eye view of the scene, but in this case, Sebald’s, Cole’s, and Menéndez’s respective narrators are so invested within the cartographic intimacies of the space, that they find themselves as “blind as that of lovers in each other's arms” (de Certeau 93). The intimacy and blindness are enacted, almost literally, in the relationship between de la Landre and Ché, in the meandering conversations in *Austerlitz*, and the intricate isolating traversal of the city—wherein knowledge, known grossly and hauntingly to

another, is denied to Julius. Each exacts an embodied memory throughout the city as they create maps of the mind, spirit, and body.

The actions of the narrators who walk the city, matches, metaphorically, how each of them is grappling with the sense of exile that leaves them simultaneously encountering an “immanent sense of fragmentation and obliteration” (Wylie 178). To provide testimony at the same time they are bearing witness to the city’s nodes of passage, each character reacts differently. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* opens with a narrator who is so perplexed and un-stationary, he finds himself traveling as does Austerlitz. Julius, of *Open City*, works actively as a peregrinator, already feeling a sense of unease in New York as it “works itself into [his] life at a walking pace” (Cole, *Open City* 3). Moreover, the unnamed narrator of *Loving Ché* finds herself ill at ease when she travels, and because of this wellspring of emotion, feels compelled to “linger” about the “dusty shelves” of “junk stores” to “soothe her fears on the eve of departure” by “excavating into other people’s memories” (*Loving Ché* 1). Throughout these attempts to hinge oneself to a sense of belonging, maintain a sense of identity, and create a connection; each work illustrates a side of the feelings of exile whether highly visual, musical, or tactile. All three works show different aspects of the, what Said called, “insurmountable sadness of exile” (*Reflections on Exile* 173). For of all them, however, there is a trace of the contrapuntal, in the way the activities of the narrator are inhabiting two worlds simultaneously. The lives of the past are seemingly superimposed over contemporary moments.

Part of those feelings of twoness are the result of the exilic experience. Each writer, in those experiences, characterizes this feeling of exile as inhabiting a mind of winter, wherein all seasons but winter are “unobtainable” (Said, *Reflections of Exile* 186). Spring, summer, and fall are hauntingly absent. For the narrator of *Loving Ché* exile, and its associated feelings of pining

for what is gone is connected to a loss of mobility—almost conveying winter molecularly. This yearning, to her, represents an immobilizing “madness” with “everyone living in an asylum” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 2). For *Austerlitz*’s narrator, it is the dead who live and move and exhibit more freedom than the living. They are the ones taking up space and sprawling out, endlessly as Austerlitz reflects on how the dead and living interact. The living are “unreal” in the eyes of the dead and only “in certain lights and atmospheric conditions, do we appear in their field of vision” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 185). Throughout Cole’s *Open City*, as Julius enters the park in New York, he is immediately reminded of a natural phenomenon that is responsible for blurring his sight—a storm. The “intensity of the rain” blurred his sight. It is this recollection that begins his thinking on the way winter storms, especially blizzards, are in the habit of giving the setting one inhabits a “primeval feeling” and making it difficult to “guess which century it was” (Cole, *Open City* 36). Exile disrupts the senses, and so each narrative disrupts the capacity for knowledge.

The question becomes whether they have ever moved past opaque histories into a more transparent past. In Teju Cole’s *Blind Spot* one photograph titled “Rome,” exhibits this condition. In *Blind Spot*, Cole draws upon myths, Biblical stories, montage of memories, and haunting histories in the “memoir meets museum catalog” and “engagingly meandering, genre-bending collection” (Kirkus Reviews). In the pairing of text with Rome, there is a colorful horse on a carousel behind a veneer of plastic sheeting. The horse, as he neighs, appears to be silenced. Cole, here, perfectly captures the conflation of sound and visual in the space of a text. He pairs it with an etymology of the word, “obscure,” which, according to Cole, comes from French and Latin roots. Contained in this image is the cosmopolitan dilemma of being set adrift, highlighting the linguistic, visual, and silence of the body within the carnivalesque space of performance. The

carousel, a contrivance, illustrative of mechanical history, works to unpack the nefarious progress of history in modernity. Perhaps the carousel captures the acceleration of history connecting the circularity and the return of the past. It also becomes illustrative of the historical project of postmodernity in the layered texts of Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole. For histories to be maintained, the construction of imagined communities relies on the construction of a body of signifiers that suggest unification—the map. Cartography comes to represent the geographical desire to create expansive, encompassing projects, but Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole disrupt the notions of static, singular origins of self, state, and memory.

Embodied Cartographies and Itineraries of Inner¹⁹ and Outer Exile

“You don’t consider yourself a good walker, but you have circumnavigated the globe on foot four times over” (Cole, *Blind Spot* 188)



[Figure 1: Zürich, 2014 Teju Cole's *Blind Spot* pp. 188-89]

The cartographies of modernity layer meaning throughout each of the texts in ways that contribute to the emergence of an amnesiac void. The notion of map-making, both as an activity

and ideology, layers the content of the diasporic experience—especially within the Caribbean, Jewish, and African context of each piece—as haunted by routes or *itineraries*. With the emergence of Western or modern scientific practices and principles about map-making, the mobilities and modalities of traversal were erased or muddled, and there was no longer a conception of the “map...representing *route* to be traversed but a *state* of geographic knowledge” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 51). The routed nature of states and cities comes to the fore in Teju Cole’s *Blind Spot* especially in the ways it disrupts contentions surrounding single origins. In an image taken from a liquor store, with bottles, cans, and boxes behind a grate, there is a compounding of frames. As one zooms in and in, there is the repeated suggestion of a city within a city, depending on how one frames the image itself. The image suggests the scaffolding of a large superstructure, and as Cole notes the city is a “druggy rush of the machine: rectilinear, vertical, tantalizing, and masked” (Cole, *Blind Spot* 32). Mobility in the space of the city, and thus the maintenance of cultural memories, proves difficult. Cole speaks of the “continuous city” as though it is imparted in DNA, and thus is replicable with, of course, some type of mutation or repeated pattern as a “fractal city” (Cole, *Blind Spot* 32). Maps, as constructions of the modality of the city, the state, and the nation, have historical resonance in the move toward forgetting and the erasure of collective memories. The investment in the fractality of the city reverts the space to one of constant change, itineracy, and mobility: there, too, is a paradox in the reality of the city. It is a space of endless repetition of construction and destruction, composure and erasure. Connerton’s reflection on the birth of modern societies about the map as a “*state* of geographical knowledge” (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 51) shows that the previous conception of the map as an itinerary is now effaced. Where once existed on the map, traversal, destination, expedition, now, these “*signs of memory* became effaced” as

the map “eliminated the pictorial figures which represented the laborious practices necessary to produce it,” and now, in the “new cartographic space that was abstract, homogenous and universal” there was, again, a tendency toward loss and forgetting (Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 51). The turn toward sensuality in each of the texts is developed through the engagement, whether directly or indirectly, with maps.

The different sensory apparatuses, both visual and tactile, are engaged through the cartographic resonances throughout the narratives. The map itself becomes almost multi-sensory as the “paper maps” involve the “work of a *hand that touches to see* and a body that acts within a multisensory environment” (Rossetto 87). Maps, as a multi-modal route, are intended to evoke the conflation of the two senses because much of the work done by Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole is to trace the spectral geographies in spaces, hearts, and communities afflicted by trauma, so the absence that cannot be seen, while sometimes combatted with photographs, takes on the added element through the metaphoric insistence on map-making, wherein senses of touch and sight are blurred together. All three texts reveal, too, the corporeality of the maps. The insistence on touch illuminates the “transitory, short-lived and ungraspable nature of mapping itself” (Rossetto 99). In the age of migration, movement, and diaspora, the map untangles as a contested and contestable space. States no longer have a static status.

Austerlitz comes to articulate the striving to return to a cartographic space opposed to the spectral topographies. As he wanders throughout the space of his personal memory, he looks for a commonality, as he contains in his mind, the different temporalities and topographies of the past. As he still has not learned of his true name, his mind “thus created a kind of ideal landscape in which the Arabian desert, the realm of the Aztecs, the continent of Antarctica, the snow-covered Alps, the North-West passage, the river Congo, and the Crimean peninsula formed a

single panorama, populated by all the figures proper to those places” (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 61).

What Austerlitz creates is a synchronic version of space. This tool works, for Austerlitz, to stave off depression, which others at the school he attends were subject to, and he is able to historicize and situate a version of himself within an atemporal space. In *Loving Ché*, after Teresa discusses her affair with Ché, she goes on to discuss her lack of faith in the unidimensional conception of “truth,” and she finds, through her creative work, much like Austerlitz’s mental mapping, a way to disrupt the “flat plane” of history (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 141). She maps the body of Ché when she learns that she can manipulate the “plane” or singular dimension of him (141). She talks about how she used to believe in a type of truth that had no weight or dimension, but she configures of what might be considered truth in her mapping of Ché through artistry.

Menéndez’s construction of this within the narrative reveals how the creative-functioning of the artist re-enacts the artist’s scape. The map of her body, Ché’s body, and an ancient one become figured in her art. Reacting to the homogeneity of modern-mapping, this action reveals a tacit knowledge through haptics. Her skin, body, and map all come together.

Conflating different sensualities counters how the space of the West often pins down subjects and defines based on origin. The positionality of body thus asks us to move into a space that allows for fluidity, in essence as Fongang argues, a “space of existence” that allows for the “shifting site of transition and movement, which allows [us] to be fluid subjects and never pinned down by prescribed hegemonic ideologies” (Fongang 140). Cole describes his unwillingness to be nested or embedded in a single ideological standpoint as having “lumpy sympathies” (Hoddapp 247). He sees being lumped in, as a novelist, thinker, and photographer with a specific group as dousing the “possibility of identity” (Hoddapp 247). Restrictions to singular ways of being, thinking, or acting within creative work is stultifying for him. Within the constructs of

map-making, Cole places his emphasis on movement, traversal, between borderlands—straddling, undermining, and plunging into extant philosophies within each space. His discussion allows us to see, engage with, and unpack the problematic of origin and locality, which is akin to what Afropolitan Taiye Selaisi expressed by saying, “don’t ask me where I’m from, ask me where I’m local” (qtd in Hoddapp 247). He does not have a space of belonging and constantly exists outside on the fringes of the cosmopolitan community. When he walks through the city, he thinks of the alleyways as indicative of the “heart.” One might normally associate the heart of the city with other, more populous spaces, but to him, the heart, enclosed, isolated and made up of “brick walls and shut-up doors,” where the shadows “feel as crisply as engravings” (Cole, *Open City* 52). The place he prefers to navigate is what he refers to as “no one’s preferred route to any destination” (52). Although Cole does not explicitly make the connection here with Odysseus through employing a capital “No One” as the name, Nemo, it appears as though since this is the “heart” of the city to him, he prefers it.

As Julius descends to New York on a plane, he is enthralled by how the scale map of the city built for the 1964 World’s Fair almost show “with impressive detail, with almost a million tiny building and bridges, parks, rivers, and architectural landmarks, the true form of the city” (Cole, *Open City* 150). The city bearing the marks of a “true form” is a puzzling contention for someone who appears so reticent to submit to these forms of knowledge. Appiah remarks on how this moment put Julius in the “mind, naturally, of Borges’s cartographers” (522). While this encounter with the city leaves him with a state of certainty, he captures an embodied truth of what is contained in the cartographers or the map-makers enterprise of representing actual places. As Appiah further suggests, while Julius might appear to be informed by the homogeneity of the place, as he walks and engages with the city more tactilely, he can see a

“hundred other cities furled within it” (522). The city, ideology, and memories cannot be easily mapped, so Sebald, Menendez, and Cole show us different routes toward establishing representation across diasporic experiences.

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt, when discussing Walter Benjamin, paints a picture of him as a collector. Nothing was, according to Arendt, “more characteristic of him in the thirties than the little notes with black covers which he always carried with him and in which he tirelessly entered in the form of quotations what daily living and reading netted him the way of ‘pearls’ and ‘corals’” (qtd. in Benjamin 42). These acts of collection, with their ease in allowing the collector to display himself as an expert, a moralist, and a scientist, who collates, and processes the boundless information unfolding before us, is not dissimilar to Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole. Their narratives, with the confrontation with the surfeit of information, deliver to us, the reader, a sort of little pearl or coral in a boundless sea of pointless or impossible abstractions and unending details. At times, the texts themselves appear unpackaged, free-formed and without structure or precision, but they offer a little account of knowledge. Not too dissimilar are they in their act of curation, as they choose, sift, and ensure that the documents, photographs, and prose, their presentation, and positionality, all work to convey the central thread of each narrative. As Sontag remarked, the task of the photographer, “is unsystematic, indeed anti-systematic” and the photograph is engaged in it not for “content or value, that which makes the subject classifiable” but rather it is engaged in a reflection on the subject’s “thereness; its rightness...its quiddity—whatever qualities make it unique” (Sontag, *On Photography* 77). The interesting thing is, as they are engaged in a more curatorial mode, they are collectors of already collected things—their engagement is a twofold one.

For Sebald, much of his creative labor surrounding the bricolage character of photographs, which he would find, collected image and constructed a narrative around it. Through this act, as Scholz contended, he is able to “rescue[s] it [the photography] from its nomadic existence (qtd in Long 47). As he resuscitates and fictionalizes memory through photography, so too does the unnamed narrator in *Loving Ché*. When given the box with “papers and photographs that spilled out smell[ing] of dark drawers and dusty rooms” (Menéndez, *Loving Ché* 12), she also places the photographs in a narrative context. Whether Teresa de la Landre or the narrator authored the letters surrounding the photographs is unclear, but in positioning them in relation to each other and creating a seemingly neat and bounded narrative arch that culminates in both a photograph of her as a child and a demure Ernesto peeking playfully around a corner. Her investment is in a form of resuscitation, but it requires her to discover the “singing line” (Cole, *Blind Spot* 324) that connects all these visual spaces. For Cole, he does not piece together the narrative of *Open City* with reliance on images, but it is his collection, *Blind Spot* that sheds light on the urge to collect, even in the face of the fact that only a fraction is possibly knowable in reference to connections. Moving toward connection amongst the photographs he captures, curates, and positions in conversation works like symphonic development of Sebald’s and Menéndez’s prose narratives.

The prose narratives unmoor and problematize History and coalesce around a constellation of histories. Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole, in Connerton’s conception, reveal topographies of remembering and forgetting. Their discussion of space and their spatialization of memory work to illustrate some of the confrontations between experiences of modernity from differences between exile and inhabitant. A rupture between place and origin is personified in the nameless character, who in her nomadism, is continuously separated from a sense of belonging.

For Sebald, Menéndez, and Cole the architecture and the topographies are illustrative of each respective narrator's capacity to remember and ability to take disconsolate and untethered moments of life and breathe history and "truth" within. With these revisions and, as we tour the past with two unnamed narrators, Austerlitz, Teresa de la Landre, and Julius, the narratives allow us to see the serious implications of the game of history. Within the context of a culture invested in not a history of legitimation, anticipation, desire-fulfillment, but rather a spatial reality wherein the individual and the culture are invested in the untangling of traumatic episodes in a historical past—silence does come to the fore. Within Western spaces, however, with the emergence of rhetoric as a critical component of public life and public spaces, silences were devalued as the "acoustic ecology of the last two centuries has contributed more than anything to the disappearance of silence" (Connerton, *Spirit of Mourning* 52). Responding to this eradication of silence, and in an attempt still to fulfill the amnesiac void left through the resonance of diaspora and trauma, Menéndez, Sebald, and Cole construct narratives responding to silence, almost paradoxically. The spatial relationships amongst the characters' sense of regard for the city, and within the constructs of the novel's limitations, are exhibited through *Loving Ché*, *Austerlitz*, and *Open City* as an affront to purely systematic and binary epistemologies.

¹ *Pseudodoxia Epidemica: Or Enquiries Into Very Many Received Tenets and Commonly Presumed* p. 240

² Patrick Geddes' term the "conurbation" might be appropriate to considering the formless, boundless, and growing metropolises of modernity and post-modernity. Frank Lloyd Wright presciently remarked in 1932 that the "future city will be everywhere and nowhere, and it will be a city so greatly different from the ancient city or any city of today that we will probably fail to recognize its coming as the city at all" (qtd in Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 108).

³ To distinguish between the ultimate goals of the current project, in addition to some of the subsequent findings, a brief discussion of methodology is necessary. For one, when looking at the divergent narratives, with a history as multifarious as the sources themselves, the current study does not attempt to categorize and define, and as a result, demarcate, but rather it offers a way of viewing the spatial orientations, structures, and spaces of the text in the light of different memory theorists and the lingering anxiety with the notion of constructing a linear, and therefore, clear history. Several traces of the argument owe their inception to the theories of Paul Connerton, Michel de Certeau, Hayden White, Lynn Wolff, Tim Cresswell and especially Jacques Derrida's meditations on history, fiction, and testimony.

⁴ The term is used with the valence of Tim Cresswell's constellations of mobility in which six elements, motive, force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction, play a central role.

⁵ The narrator of Ana Menéndez's *Loving Ché* uses the term "game" to describe her nostalgia-filled activities while perusing found photographs. This connects to Sontag, who claims that the the photograph is an artifact in that it is almost like a found object or an "unpremeditated slice of the world" (Sontag, *On Photography* 69).

⁶ Rather than relying on the topically inappropriate title of "novel," I will use the more generically disruptive, "prose narratives," which was Sebald's preferred term. The different structure of each text with the shards of personal, private, and public thrust into the singular and varied space of the book itself. The pages relay "facts," engage in reflection, mute, mutate, transform, and transfix time and history so the contemporary distinguishing title, novel, is not enough to resonate clearly the structure of each text.

⁷ See Gregory Hemlick for the Cuban post-exile novel as illustrative of Menendez's work and Lynn Wolff for her discussion of H.G. Adler and W.G. Sebald. The more appropriate term for discussing the texts could be either metafictional historiography and metahistorical romance as per the works of Linda Hutcheon and Amy Elias respectively.

⁸ Le Goff's *History and Memory* discusses the public's fear over losing memory, heritage, or identity as a driving force in the valorization of memory and thus making it an object of intrigue or "best-seller in a consumer society" (162). The market aesthetic driving diasporic fictions here is commented on by Elena Machado Sáez in her *Market Aesthetics*.

⁹ I am thinking here of the wife of Odysseus who, in her fidelity, weaves, and then, unweaves a burial shroud for Laertes each night saying she will only choose a suitor after she has finished with the task. The intentionality of the act of destruction makes vivid Connerton's claim that materials such as cloth, carry "no such of illusions of enduring witness" (*Spirit of Mourning* 15).

¹⁰ In *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Sebald contends that a "plausible literary approach," especially in a time defined by ruin and tragedy, is both "concrete and documentary" (58). This insistence motivates his ethical situatedness of constructing literature that aestheticizes moments of catastrophe or despair, and it gives a seriousness to his prose and literary goals. The pleasures of these aesthetics, Julia Hell finds, are kept "at bay" in the work of Sebald, but ironically, he ends up, through his conceptualization of an Orphic "angel of history" aestheticizing the dead, the mutilated, and the ruinous cities of the past.

¹¹ I use the term here with reference to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but I am also thinking of Jane Bennet's more recent work in *Vibrant Matter* because the texts themselves move beyond the simple materiality of the book itself as "throbbing confederation" that "is able to function despite the presence of energies that confound them from within" (Bennet 23-4).

¹² Teju Cole is particularly invested in blind spots. An essay in *Granta Magazine*, which discusses his failing vision, and a collection of photography both have the title. This obsession works its way in *Open City*, where Julius, discusses the limitations of knowledge in the practices of psychiatry, which he likens to a "blind spot so broad that it had taken over most of the eye" (Cole, *Open City* 239).

¹³ W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* p. 6

¹⁴ Mark Anderson used this term during the CUNY Center for the Humanities conference titled "Art, Fiction, and History: The Work of W.G. Sebald" to describe the markedly similar character of Sebald, as the writer, and his connected narrators in *The Emigrants*, *Vertigo*, and *The Rings of Saturn*.

¹⁵ Melancholy connects to Connerton's histories of mourning associated with the Freudian loss of one's love object, places, or ideal, and this concept also relates to the bemoaning, and nostalgia, for the loss of one's heritage through dislocation and diaspora specially with David Eng and Shinee Han's work on "racial melancholia" in his 2019 *Racial Melancholia, Racial Disassociation*.

¹⁶ Bettina Mosbach's work in *Searching for Sebald: Photography After Sebald* looks at this phenomenon in his use of photography and narrative structure.

¹⁷ Pieter Vermeulen, for example, titles his investigation of *Open City* "Flights of Memory" because of the various auspices, resonances, and engagements with flight in the form of loss, estrangement, and especially, cosmopolitanism.

¹⁸ This title is taken from Teju Cole's reading and talk delivered to the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 2012.

¹⁹ In Paul Illie's introduction to *Literature and Inner Exile*, he suggests that exile is someone who "does not partake in the prevailing values" and "perceives this moral difference and responds to it emotionally" (2). The response throughout all three texts is within the desire to construct the contours of memory on the body that allow for the inner and outer aspects of exile to be voiced through a divergent form of cartography.

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Vita

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