

## CHAPTER ONE:

[straight from the board:]

the barely & almost imperceptible  
vapor....clouds...vapor trail (the soul)  
burning bodies (smoke) urns

### DEATH

metamorphosis/life after death  
caterpillars, moths (silkworms?)  
the dissection of Aris Kindt  
“traces of destruction”  
freedom & paralysis -- other paradoxes  
(lots of burning people)  
what escapes annihilation  
the purple silk in the urn of patroclus?  
(...silk worms)

[Sebald's mediation in this first chapter seems focussed on death, though many ideas could stand as the central one (decay, destruction, etc.). I think it is wise to use the last sentence of the chapter as our hinch-pin: the purple silk.... what does it mean? A reference to Browne's work... pursuing some answer to the question: what escapes annihilation? If all things fall apart, die, decay, what is ever left? If entropy destroys everything, perhaps entropy itself, the traces it leaves, is the sole survivor, the order of orders. It puts me in mind of Italo Calvino's Invisible cities (I'll bring it in) in which Kublai Khan and Marco Polo exchange talk about the empire, Polo describing fanciful city after city... Kublai knows his empire is crumbling, knows it has expanded too far out for him to understand it, rule it, know it... and he hopes something will survive its collapse, that there is some thread through it all that extends back into the depths of time and forward to the next world. And of course, Borges, with Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius, described in detail in chapter 3. Strangely, Borges ends this story (see the end of ch 3) with reference to Browne's Urn Burial. What is the connection that Sebald is making? Notice how Sebald's own way of making meaning through history, literature, and memory is weaving the finest, frailest of fabrics... something so delicate it might survive a disaster (paradoxes always).

Anyhow, we can imagine that the rest of the book is Sebald's exploration of this question drawn from Browne.

We also have some of Sebald's motifs noted: vapor/smoke (anything somewhat ethereal), birds/beasts (animals real and mystical), the country vs the city, the interior of the body (the mind) and the physical body (the urn and its contents?), silk - worms and creatures that destroy themselves, history itself -- how stories are told, discovered, kept and lost, illness, and, of course, burning people (oh how flammable we are!).]

## CHAPTER TWO:

note the thoughts on the Allied bombing of Germany, Sebald's concern with a kind of collective memory loss or suppression. “the image of a phoenix: everything changes but nothing is lost” [matter cannot be created or destroyed?]  
Somerleyton Palace (the hopes and dreams, ideals of the modern age [remember this when you hear mention of Kublai Khan and other rulers who have tried to manifest a golden age, also the golden age that is built on the “mountain of death,”

# RINGS of SATURN

seminar notes: 11-12-02

slaves in the Congo, amazon, etc]

in connection with Somerleyton, which is now only gardens, there is the record of Hazel, the gardener, who is the last one alive, it seems, to tell the stories... but alas, he burned himself up, too.

the tale of the city of Lowestoft reinforces the same theme, the sense that people have forgotten the ideal (for better or worse?) on which their surroundings have been constructed...

## CHAPTER THREE:

modern times clashing with old ways...

fishing (herring) : killing the sea

work and values [note sure I've got that note right]

story/history creates a new reality

the birds and the lovers when Sebald is at the cliff's edge?

Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius: the advantages of a fictitious past  
Herring as a light source, the investigation of herring and whether they survive at all out of water (desperate curiosity about death, in the course of which people are unspeakably cruel and murderous)

Swine (the parable of transferring the bad spirits into the herd of swine and running them into the sea, thus swine are unclean...)

Sebald questions recorded truths, at least wonders which kind of truth such stories are trying to convey....

## CHAPTER FOUR:

the sickness of humanity... battles, lives lost, unrecorded... how paintings of battles, histories of battles, can't convey what it is like to be IN battle.

battles had spectators

human cruelty: talk of the concentration camps

switching to night.../death

“dreams are indistinct”

city as an enclosure, lifeless?

boredom in the airport (flight to Norwich) with disembodies  
angelic voices

## CHAPTER FIVE:

“off solid ground” -- water, flight, freedom, mountain of death

Conrad & Casement

Conrad's family exiled to barren lands/ canard sails - freedom  
Casement, to the congo, amazon, seeing crimes against humanity... then turning to the “Irish Problem.”

he is eventually sentenced to death to a large extent because of his homosexuality (which had been a secret).

Sebald surmises that his homosexuality contributed to his empathy for or ability to perceive the plight of the oppressed, marginalized, enslaved...

reading interwoven stories....

