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The Symbolic City of Trauma in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

This paper intends to propose an interdisciplinary reading of W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, combining semiotics and psychology to reveal the process of understanding trauma through signs and symbols. By identifying and investigating the architecture and space as signs in London, Prague, and Paris, the three major cities in Sebald's fiction, I wish to reveal the traumatised protagonist's process of healing and search for an identity. I argue that the psychological trauma of dislocation is only understandable through signs not just due to the belated acknowledgement of the absence and inconsistency of personal memory, but also because coming to terms with the traumatic experience is beyond the protagonist's cognitive capacity. Whereas the trauma and its aftermath are demonstrated through the dissociation between the signifier and the signified, the reconnection and reinterpretation of spatial and architectural signs symbolises the psychological recovery. Signification suspends the revelation of meanings, but serves as a protective mechanism that prevents further damage to the traumatised mind and simultaneously imposes historical depths to personal memory. This paper wishes to underscore the prominence of the postmemorial narrative position in representing traumas through the working of signs, which provides a chance to recover from trauma and critique history.