The town of Dunwich, once a thriving medieval port on England's Suffolk Coast, has for centuries been crumbling into the sea. All that now remains of the old structures is a small collection of hilltop ruins, flanked by a nineteenth-century church and a handful of newer homes built far from the water's edge. Served by a single pub and a few guesthouses, the local economy has long catered principally to visitors, many of whom are part of a long line of artists and poets who have been drawn here since the Victorian age to contemplate the town's picturesque decay.

I originally learned of Dunwich through W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, a book that cast a strange spell over me when I first read it, eventually compelling me to travel halfway across the world to see its somber sites for myself. In it, the author describes how Dunwich's church towers and graveyards, well shafts and walled fortifications, were all washed away, stone by stone, by the storms and encroaching waters of the North Sea. "All of it has gone under," Sebald wrote, "and is now below the sea, beneath alluvial sand and gravel." The collapse of a community whose endurance must have always seemed certain to its residents, even as its impending disappearance became self-evident, is emblematic of Sebald's obsessions. But Dunwich is distinct from a prototypical ghost town—noteworthy not for the faded allure of its architecture, but for the near total absence of its own ruins. Its former splendor, now entirely intangible, is something to be imagined rather than seen.

In *Pleasure of Ruins*, Rose Macaulay's study of humankind's fixation on the vestiges of our own past, she plainly observes that "the pleasure felt by most of us in good ruins is great." She goes on to quote from Thomas Whately's eighteenth-century study of English gardens, asserting that "no circumstance so forcibly marks the desolation of a spot once inhabited, as the prevalence of nature over it." Since human settlement almost always represents dominion over the environment, there is perhaps some consolation to be had in a place like Dunwich, where nature has won out over humankind's will to subvert it. "If you look out from the cliff-top across the sea towards where the town must once have been," wrote Sebald, "you can sense the immense power of emptiness."

The morning after my arrival in Dunwich, I went for a walk along the cliffs. The sound of the waves that had seemed so distant from my guest room the night before was now crushingly loud, at odds with the tranquil water beyond the swells. This was, perhaps, exactly what I had come for: to stand where Sebald had stood and feel what he might have felt. With the waves roaring against the beach, it became difficult to think straight, as if thoughts themselves were being hollowed out and tossed aside. The sound, pregnant with destructive power and powerful enough to shake the body, was nevertheless the most natural thing in the world.

Leaving the cliffs behind, I walked along the edge of Dunwich Forest until it met the southern end of the Reedland and Dingle marshes, which stretched out toward the slate-colored horizon. Sebald had described these marshlands as a place of "grey water, mudflats, and emptiness," viewing them with the same sense of desolation he perceived all along the coast. But to someone accustomed to the arid vistas of the American Southwest, as I was, the panorama seemed vivid,

filled with movement and life. Continuing across the sedge, I found a small corpse tucked into the wet grass—a red fox sprawled out like a future archaeological specimen, its eyes clenched and its fur still bright under the cloud-covered sun. The animal's flesh had begun to decompose in a few discrete places, with most of its hair still trembling in the cold gusts of wind. I crouched down for a closer look and hovered there for a while, filled with repulsion and awe, almost reaching out, at one point, to touch the remains.

I first began to read Sebald during the years I worked in the deserts of Arizona, as an agent for the US Border Patrol. I was in my early twenties, living alone in a two-bedroom home built for mine workers in the former copper town of Ajo. I read his books one after another in that hot, silent, sparsely furnished house, encountering detailed descriptions of his European wanderings and long digressions into obscure chapters of world history, immersing myself in places and stories that were distant and foreign, yet still somehow familiar. The way Sebald interrogated his surroundings—the reminders of horror he found in abandoned buildings, pieces of detritus, swaths of cleared land—reminded me, perhaps, of the glimmers of violence I encountered day after day in the borderlands. Despite writing from another continent and another decade, Sebald somehow seemed to be speaking about the precise moment I was living in, about the very nature of my own work as an agent of oppression, about the violence being imprinted into me each day as I rose to police the border. More broadly, his work gave language to how violence has been normalized throughout history and written into our landscapes, cities, cultures, and bodies. Sebald's books taught me, in effect, to look for what had been hidden in plain sight all around me.

In the town where I grew up, in central Arizona, the border was far from an everyday consideration. Neither, however, was it something entirely abstract, as it is in so much of America. Before my family came to Arizona, we had lived even closer to Mexico, in the wide-open deserts of West Texas, where my mother worked as a ranger in one of the country's least-visited national parks. Like so many who live in the borderlands, we crossed intermittently between two nations and were surrounded by people who moved through them with absolute fluidity, carrying with them a sense of identity and place that was at once bifurcated and whole. But back in the Arizona town that would become our home, more than four hours north of Mexico, the border was understood almost as a non-place: a far-off line that was to be crossed over on the way to the interior, where notions of nationhood and culture were more distinct and recognizable. Undocumented friends knew the border principally as an obstacle that had been overcome, a place with strange cities and vast deserts defined by hostile terrain and hostile enforcers.

The border was also a place that coursed through my own family history. As I grew older, I would begin to sense, like watching thunderheads gather in the distance, that part of myself had been buried there and would one day come for me. I knew, even though I could not begin to

understand what it meant, that my grandfather's family had left all they'd ever known to cross the border during the Mexican Revolution, when he and his siblings were mere children. Eventually they would settle in San Diego, and it was there that they remade their lives as newcomers to America have always done, with ever more tenuous threads connecting them to an old country, an old set of ways.

When my mother was just a toddler, she was severed by divorce from her Mexican father, forever estranging her from the stories and traditions of her Mexican ancestors. Even so, she carried with her a simple reminder of her lineage through her Spanish surname, one that, depending on the circles she ran in, marked her mutedly as "other." Nevertheless, my mother would refuse to change her name through multiple marriages, eventually passing it on to me, her only son, signaling her aspiration that I might someday be able to find something more of myself, and more of the place we had come from, than she had.

While *The Rings of Saturn* is ostensibly centered around a walking tour of the Suffolk Coast, it is immediately distinguishable from a typical travelogue by Sebald's obsessive cataloging of ruins found in even the most pastoral corners of East Anglia. Walking along these same paths, it was hard to distinguish which impressions stemmed from my own reactions to the place and which were rooted in Sebald's melancholy observations.

Making my way down the River Alde, I recognized a pair of decayed mooring posts from one of Sebald's in situ photographs and reached for my phone to attempt to create my own updated image of the scene. Fumbling with the camera app, I accidentally opened an auto-generated slideshow entitled "On This Day" and watched as various images from years past appeared on the screen, including a snapshot taken several years earlier of my friend Christophe, whom I'd gone to see at his home in Cherbourg, Normandy, after he was diagnosed with cancer of the stomach. As the slideshow continued, my body felt as if it were filling with sand. Growing short of breath, I stood stupidly on the trail as I remembered Christophe sprawled out in pain on his parents' couch, describing how he had no choice but to receive care from them as if he were a helpless child, and how, as a result, he had come to hate them altogether and now hoped, quite plainly, to die rather than go on living the prime years of his life in the grip of an incurable sickness. One afternoon during our visit, he mustered enough strength to drive me through the streets of Cherbourg, a hometown he had come to see as utterly devoid of hope. We drove out past the city and along the coast, past the oceanside cliffs and beaches where he would drink with friends as a teenager, dancing around bonfires and blasting punk rock from boom boxes and car stereos. Here on these beaches, he told me, I used to feel that nothing would ever stop me. As the day drew to a close, Christophe took me to a jetty made from black stone and stayed close to shore as I walked its length out into the English Channel, peering into the tide pools at the water's edge and glancing back, every once in a while, at my friend. Less than a year later, after

becoming half-paralyzed and unable to speak, Christophe would die, finally, in a morphine-induced haze.

After placing the phone back in my pocket, I set out again on the trail. In the distance the buildings of Southwold grew closer and closer, and soon I was walking among families, joggers, and old couples out for their morning stroll. Writing in the midnineties, Sebald had described "next to no traffic" at the outskirts of Southwold, but the place was now teeming with locals and visitors alike. While times had clearly changed, some things remained the same: Sebald's beloved Sailors' Reading Room, for instance, was still just as he had described it—a quiet and empty space with a profoundly lived-in air. Among its displays were collections of photographs and model ships, paintings of sailors and captains, and a multitude of logbooks and carved figureheads. The room's contemplative air was disturbed only briefly when visitors would enter to browse its curiosities and gab about who must look after these things—forgetting, perhaps, that it was meant to be a place conducive to reading.

Back on the streets of town, at the summit of Gun Hill, cannons still faced the North Sea as they had for centuries. It was easy to imagine, as Sebald did, the flaming ships and billowing smoke of the Battle of Solebay, fought between the Dutch fleet and an alliance of English and French ships in 1672. From his bench on Gun Hill, Sebald considered how, just one year earlier, he had been standing across the water on the Dutch coast, gazing out toward the opposing shore of England, in the direction of the very place where he now sat.

Describing this trip in *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald recalls standing transfixed in The Hague's Mauritshuis museum by Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, one of the artist's early masterpieces depicting a guild of surgeons publicly dissecting the recently executed corpse of a petty thief. As he considers the painting, he remembers a night he spent in the hospital recovering from surgery. "Under the wonderful influence of the painkillers coursing through me," he writes, "I felt, in my iron-framed bed, like a balloonist floating weightless amidst the mountainous clouds towering on every side." Sebald then imagines peering down from his perch in the sky, "down into the depths where I supposed the earth to be, a black and impenetrable maze."

Sebald was born in 1944 in the remote town of Wertach, on the northern outskirts of the Alps, almost exactly one year before Germany's surrender to the Allies. In one interview, he describes his home as "an idyllic place," one untouched by the violence and destruction that had ravaged most of the continent. "At the end of the war," Sebald writes, "I was just one year old, so I can hardly have any impressions of that period of destruction based on personal experience." And yet, he explains, this early proximity to violence had a profound effect on his consciousness: "To this day, when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience cast a shadow over me, and one from which I shall never entirely emerge."

Sebald became fixated, in his life and in his work, with how the bloodshed of World War II—and, in particular, the moral abyss of the Holocaust—could only be understood as part of a long, unbroken arc of human calamity. To write about such things directly, however, seemed practically impossible. "The only way in which one can approach these things," Sebald says in an interview with Michael Silverblatt, "is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation."

Sebald's work accomplishes this through a distinct blend of memoir, travel writing, history, criticism, and biography—allowing him to deviate and diverge, looping through time to build a connective tissue of association and accumulation. While his work is, for marketing purposes, generally regarded as fiction, it nevertheless adheres closely to his own experiences and travels, with narrators that are at best barely veiled versions of himself. *The Rings of Saturn*, more so than any of his other books, concerns a region Sebald perhaps knew more intimately than any other, a place he returned to time and again for recreation and escape. In the book's opening pages, we meet a man in search of solace:

In August 1992, when the dog days were drawing to an end, I set off to walk the county of Suffolk, in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work. And in fact my hope was realized, up to a point; for I have seldom felt so carefree as I did then, walking for hours in the day through the thinly populated countryside, which stretches inland from the coast.

The sense of escape Sebald is seeking, however, eludes him. "I became preoccupied not only with the unaccustomed sense of freedom," he continues, "but also with the paralysing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place." As much as he relied on the Suffolk coast as a place of respite, his understanding of it became too deeply marred by the horrors of history, horrors that would remain embedded in the terrain—to be forgotten or remembered—forever.

In a bookstore in the village of Snape, I encountered a small display of "local interest" books laid out on a small wooden table. Propped up alongside nature guides and English classics by Anna Sewell and J. A. Baker were new editions of Sebald's East Anglian opus, marking the first time on my trip I had encountered an outward trace of him. Despite Sebald's growing stature in the decades since his death, I had seen no sites in Suffolk identified for their association with the author—no places named for him, no plaques on the buildings he visited, no signs marking the trails he walked. Unlike Joyce's Dublin or Austen's Chawton and Bath, Sebald's presence along the English coast has yet to be more broadly mythologized. Even so, any number of Sebald aficionados have made their own pilgrimages here to commune with the author. Artists and writers such as Will Self, Tacita Dean, and Teju Cole have each documented their own *Rings*-inspired travels in East Anglia, creating works that may someday help form the foundation of a

cottage industry built upon a mythologized figure and an associated territory—an enduring blending of literature and place.

At the outskirts of Snape I was surprised to find a good number of walkers enjoying the trails. The overcast morning had become a glorious afternoon, thoroughly upending the melancholy I'd assumed was endemic to this place. Trees along the path which had looked so anemic under the cloud cover now seemed positively transformed, budding with spring flowers and buckling my Sebaldian presumptions about the place. Robert Macfarlane, the great chronicler of walking paths and wild lands in the United Kingdom, once thought he might write a book following in Sebald's footsteps until he was similarly confronted with good weather. Arriving in Suffolk, Macfarlane admits, "I really wanted it to be a grey day." Instead, the sun was bright, people bathed in town fountains, the beaches beckoned him to swim and rest beside fields of poppies. "My memory of that walk is one of delight, really, and a refusal of the walk to conform to my idea of what the walk should have been." Our notions of place, Macfarlane suggests, are liable to perpetuate themselves until we are met with the real thing.

Down the trail in the village of Orford, the streets were alive with late-afternoon life. I checked in at the Jolly Sailor Inn and was led to a tiny room above the pub. A crude mural had been painted on the wall next to the fireplace, depicting, with awkward brushstrokes, three ships floating in blue water that was somehow undifferentiated from the blue sky above it. I moved closer and could see web-like cracks crisscrossing the plaster and air pockets bubbling up beneath the thin layers of paint. Suddenly a knock rang throughout the room. Jolted, I opened the door and was informed by the inn clerk that the chef had decided to leave early, and if I wanted dinner I'd best hurry down.

The dining room was nearly empty, with just one old man sitting at the bar and a young family of three preparing to pay their bill with the clerk, who was working as both bartender and server. After ordering my food, I asked the woman if she knew the best way to get to Orford Ness, the nearby peninsula that once housed an atomic-weapons research site whose ruins Sebald likened to "the remains of our own civilization after its extinction." She'd only been there once before, she said, to see one of the outdoor concerts that were put on now and again. It's kind of scary, she confessed—not exactly a nice place to visit. But if I wanted to go, perhaps the harbor master would take me in the morning. He should arrive at nine, she guessed, even as early as eight. A bell dinged in the kitchen and the woman walked away, leaving me to watch in quiet as the old man at the bar finished his beer, and the chef, after throwing down his apron, made his way hurriedly toward the back door.

The next morning, I awoke early and walked down to the docks, taking a seat on an empty bench and gazing out across the water, an act that was becoming more and more customary with each passing day. The horizon was dotted with pagoda-like structures shimmering in the morning light—ruined test labs built to absorb explosions massive enough to detonate an atomic warhead. Soon a trickle of men began to arrive, gathering in a collegial group near the dock. From the

other side of the river, a motor boat pulled up and I hurriedly queued up with the other men to get on, hoping no one would ask my business. It wasn't long before one of them looked at me with a furrowed brow. Are you with…the man trailed off, waiting for me to respond. I'm just a tourist, I said. Hmm, he replied, I'm afraid we're closed. I explained to him that I was hoping to walk around on the peninsula for an hour or so, adding that I had come all the way from America. The man shook his head. Only on Saturdays, I'm afraid. I pleaded with him a bit more, adding that I'd been told the harbor master would surely let me visit. The man politely insisted that there was nothing to be done, until I finally walked away in resignation. Returning to my bench, I sat down and stared out again at the opposing shore, begrudgingly making peace with the fact that, for me, the ruined peninsula would continue to exist only on the page.

During my early childhood, the outdoor ethos of my mother's job with the Park Service quickly became a framework through which I learned to understand the world. Her duties were not only to help protect and preserve the natural beauty of parklands, but to interpret their stories for visitors by describing the interconnectedness of the flora, the fauna, and the human inhabitants that had mingled there throughout history. These stories weren't just part of her job—my mother told them at home, too, at a time when my four-year-old mind was just beginning to grasp and file away memories. We lived, in those days, far from the distractions of the city and from other children my age, and so I began to form my primary relationships to the natural world that surrounded us—plants and animals, mountains and wind.

The idea of national parks in America has always been rooted in a romanticized desire for solace. In the nineteenth century, Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York's Central Park, and America's most celebrated landscape architect at the time, became one of the foremost advocates for a nationwide system of parks. At the close of the Civil War, as the country emerged from years of unprecedented bloodshed, Olmsted was named among the first overseers of what would later become Yosemite National Park, and began developing the philosophical underpinnings for administrating parks across the country. Setting aside and preserving wild spaces, he thought, could provide an antidote to the profound violence and madness that had come to define the continent, offering a place to calm one's spirit: "We want, especially, the greatest possible contrast with the restraining and confining conditions of the town, those conditions which compel us to walk circumspectly, watchfully, jealously, which compel us to look closely upon others without sympathy." Above all else, Olmsted wrote, "What we want to gain is tranquility and rest to the mind."

Olmsted's thinking about public lands continued to define American discourse and policy on these matters well into the next century. Wallace Stegner, America's "Dean of Western Writers," wrote nearly half a century after the establishment of America's national parks that the country's protected lands had come to form "a geography of hope." Despite the genocide and removal that underlay all federal land ownership, the notion of hope would for generations define the

dominant cultural discourse around the American outdoors. My father, I remember, on a drive through the backcountry, once gestured at the scenery around us and described to me how he understood the mountains the way others understood church—as a place for reflection and clarity, a literal site of worship. For him, they were places that had remained untarnished, providing a space for thought and the muse for creation.

At the age of twenty-three, on my first day of fieldwork as a newly trained Border Patrol agent, I found myself in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument—working, like my mother, on land safeguarded by the National Park Service. Any similarities with the work my mother had done, however, I would soon find to be nonexistent. On a remote dirt road, my colleagues and I were made to pile out of our vehicles to begin tracking a group of marijuana smugglers across a desert glowing pink in the sunset. As we walked for miles following obscure footprints, I began to grasp how differently I was being asked to see my surroundings—not as a storyteller or a steward of the natural world, but as an enforcer charged with learning the lay of the land only insofar as it enabled me to intercept those seeking to cross it. I had become part of an agency whose policies had transformed the desert into a weapon of deterrence, funneling prospective crossers into its most dangerous and remote corners, places of natural beauty that had been successfully reshaped into a deadly terrain.

After walking several miles, we arrived at the base of a rocky chain of mountains and found several bales of marijuana and a pile of backpacks abandoned, most likely, by men who had been coerced into smuggling by the promise of reduced fees for their own passage into America. I rifled through the backpacks with the others and then watched as my coworkers, encouraged by our supervisor, began to gleefully discard the leftover clothing atop trees and cacti, smashing food on rocks and pocketing packets of cigarettes. One agent even pissed on a pile of ransacked belongings, giggling to himself all the while. I knew then—even though we were within the boundaries of a national park, even though policy forbade it—that these possessions had been rendered into trash to be left in the desert, and that no effort would be made to capture the men who had fled or to prevent their becoming lost and disoriented in that vast waterless expanse, a place that was, to most of them, entirely foreign. Nevertheless, I did nothing to stop or speak out against this chain of events, resigned to the fact that most of my new colleagues already looked upon the desert and those seeking to cross it with profound disregard. From that day on, any solace I might have found in the wild expanses of the borderlands became marred by the knowledge that I, too, despite a lifetime of being taught to revere the outdoors, had become complicit in inflicting it with a violence that would never be fully written out of its history.

As I made my way from Orford to Rendlesham Forest, the sound of gunshots rang out in the distance. Signs of human inhabitance had become scarce, and even though the map on my phone showed I was approaching a nearby ferry crossing, the emptiness of the countryside was increasingly unnerving. In the distance, I noticed a strange willowy creature bounding toward me

in a panic along a narrow strip of riverbank that ran between a wire fence and the water's edge. As it approached, its deer-like eyes flashed with terror and its nostrils flared with heaving breath. Another traveler soon approached from the opposite direction, and I stopped him to ask if he knew what the animal was. It might be a muntjac, he said. Someone must have locked it behind the fence—it's been running along since way up there. He gestured far up the river and then shrugged, continuing down the path. I stood for a moment by the fence line, wondering if there was something I should do to help the creature, unsure if the menace in the air was something inherent to the place or sought out by a mind attuned to violence.

Up the trail at the tiny Butley Ferry, I found little more than a sign outlining the history of the river crossing, which had been in operation since at least the sixteenth century but was now staffed only during summer months. Left with no other choice, I walked to a nearby dirt road and hitched a ride from an oyster delivery truck. The driver's accent was barely comprehensible, but I was able to understand just enough to learn that he had been born in Lowestoft and had been driving delivery trucks across Suffolk for more than thirty years. When I mentioned that I had walked from Dunwich, the man laughed and told me he had been there earlier this morning to deliver fish to the town pub. Well, I said, I ate fish and chips there two nights ago. You probably delivered it. Aye, he said, I probably did.

The driver dropped me at the edge of Rendlesham Forest and before driving off mentioned that the wood used to build Nelson's armada had been felled there. The roadside trailhead led deep into the forest, eventually opening up into a large clearing of downed trees. At the center of the open area there was a vast complex of fenced-in buildings—warehouses, towers, domes, barracks, and a long tarmac—all part of a nameless instillation guarded on all sides by razor wire strung from concrete posts. I touched the metal and recalled, briefly, the voice of a woman who stood across from me on the other side of the border wall more than a decade ago, her hands pressed and shaking against the metal, explaining how her son had crossed there days before—or maybe it had been a week—asking me if there was any way I could help her figure out whether he had been caught or if he was lost somewhere in the desert or if he was even still alive.

Half a mile up the path, still following the perimeter of the militarized compound, I came upon a pile of collapsed pillars and concrete detritus from past iterations of the boundary line, now brightly overgrown with grass and flowers, and, like the ruins of Dunwich, slowly being returned to the earth.

When I was a child living with my mother in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, in West Texas, we did most of our shopping and errands more than an hour and a half away in El Paso. On our weekly runs to the city, the highway across the desert plains was so empty that we often saw more jackrabbits than passing cars. On these long drives, I would beg my mother to tell me stories to pass the time, one after another. It wasn't long before she implemented a new rule,

refusing to tell me a new story until I told her one in return. I would insist that I didn't know any stories, but my mother would point toward the horizon, asking me to describe what I saw. I quickly learned to name the passing features: I see peaks and clouds, I told her. Rocks and sand. Birds and rabbits. Well, my mother would say, make a story about them.

Soon, storytelling became an easy exchange, one I came to understand as rooted in place. This is also how, ever since I can remember, I was made to look to the landscape for inspiration. In those early days, I could perceive no shadows darkening the ground as we drove toward the border, and I was unable to imagine, even for a moment, that such a place might ever be made to hold anything other than beauty.

A year after my tour of Suffolk, I returned to East Anglia to attend the opening of an exhibition featuring unseen work by Sebald. In addition to a multitude of photographs, the curators had gathered much of the actual ephemera around which he constructed *The Rings of Saturn*, including television newscasts he watched from his hotel rooms, paintings at the center of his long tangential musings, and other related curiosities such as a cast of Sir Thomas Browne's skull and the pattern books of Norwich silk weavers.

The exhibition's opening ceremony took place inside the atrium of the 950-year-old Norwich Castle, with a hundred or more people in attendance. Several prominent members of the local community gave welcome speeches from a staircase, but were interrupted when a woman fainted, casting a strange and lingering hush over the proceedings. After the reception, the crowd moved into the gallery, where Sebald's baritone filled the room, playing from a television interview being shown on loop. Hung all along the walls was a multitude of photos from the author's archives, color prints that were organized according to place, acting as uncanny extensions of the world he created in *The Rings of Saturn*, revealing a more human, less canonized side to his wanderings. Deeper in the gallery, visitors became increasingly quiet and drawn in by the ephemera. Lifted as they were from the page, the materials worked to piece together a mind and its singular way of thinking, giving rise to brief, almost tangible impressions of inhabiting Sebald's own thoughts.

The next day, the exhibition's curator invited me to his office, which had been inherited from Sebald's university colleague and printmaker, Michael Brandon-Jones, and where he had assembled a temporary collection of items on loan from the author's estate and the university archives. Among the materials were posters of Robert Walser, Walter Benjamin, and Thomas Bernhard—images that once decorated the walls of Sebald's office like bedroom posters of a teen's favorite rock bands. The curator showed me several of Sebald's old books and pointed out the author's habit of highlighting text with markers that matched the color of the book's cover—revealing his exceedingly German sense for organizational aesthetics.

We eventually made our way into a darkroom—the same place where Brandon-Jones made the prints for nearly all the images included in Sebald's books. In the room were dozens of filing boxes filled with photo sleeves and pictures. Gazing at the snapshots, I was struck by their casual familiarity. There were pictures of street dogs and horses, awkward candids of people dancing at pubs and sleeping in airports, images of museum exhibitions and cities seen from airplane windows, and endless photos of old doors and windowpanes, hiking trails and highways, distant clouds and mountainsides. There were also images meant to serve as reminders, as a form of note-taking: pictures of newspaper headlines and book pages, signs and placards, license plates and company names. The collection seemed, above all else, like an exceedingly ordinary one, made by an ordinary traveler on ordinary journeys across Europe.

The curator, having spent countless hours looking through Sebald's uncatalogued photographs, shared with me his observation that Sebald almost never appeared in any of his own photos, and neither did he ever seem to be accompanied in his travels by companions or loved ones aside from his dog, Maurice. In one sleeve of photos taken shortly before the publication of *Austerlitz* and not long before Sebald's death, the curator showed me a series of images from a lush, overgrown graveyard. The pictures, he'd concluded, were part of an unfinished project Sebald had been working on about World War I. Scrawled on the side of the photo boxes were difficult-to-discern labels with abbreviations like "H'WLERKOPF," "O'BURG," or "F'HOF." Mercifully, some locations were spelled out quite clearly, like "PICARDIE" and "ST. PIERRE." As we rifled through images taken in the north of France, the curator asked me if I had ever visited the region. I shook my head no before realizing my mistake. Actually, I told him, yes—I've been to Normandy. To Cherbourg.

It occurred to me then, as I stood among the wide-open filing boxes and storage envelopes stuffed with photographs, that buried somewhere deep within my own uncatalogued archive was a snapshot of Christophe taken not in France, but during the semester we first met studying abroad in Mexico, when we would spend long nights laughing and spilling our beer as we danced to reggaetón and rock en español, eating street tacos in the early morning hours as the sweat dried from our bodies, long before his insides would be overrun with sickness, before he would be filled with resentment for his own mother and father, for the very people and places that shaped him. I chose in that moment to remember my friend as he existed in that one image: sitting quietly on a desert hillside bathed in the warm light of the sunset, smiling as he looked out upon a perfect landscape.