

INSTITVTVM ROMANVM NORVEGIAE

ACTA
AD ARCHAEOLOGIAM
ET ARTIVM HISTORIAM
PERTINENTIA

VOLVMEN XXVI
(N.S. 12)

Ediderunt

VICTOR PLAHTÉ TSCHUDI

TURID KARLSEN SEIM



SCIENZE E LETTERE
2013

183484071

© SCIENZE E LETTERE *dal 1919*

ISSN 0065-0900

ISBN 978-88-6687-041-8

WITH 230 PAGES AND 56 ILLUSTRATIONS

Published with the support from a grant from

*The Research Council of Norway,
Section for Culture and Society 225372/F10*

Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia is published by the Norwegian Institute in Rome. It presents articles on research in archeology and art history from all periods with a certain concentration on the areas covered by the ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine world.

Communications regarding manuscripts, proofs, orders for off-prints, etc. should be sent to: Istituto di Norvegia, Viale Trenta Aprile 33, I-00153 Roma; e-mail: post@roma.uio.no

Subscriptions may be placed with:

SCIENZE E LETTERE dal 1919 S.r.l.,

Via Piave 7, I-00187 Roma;

e-mail: info@scienzelettere.com; www.scienzelettere.com

*From Site to Sight:
The Transformation of Place in
Art and Literature*

MARI LENDING

Wandering Among Models: Stendhal, Proust, Sebald

Abstract

This paper draws on twofold fictional landscapes; the imaginary landscapes emerging in the writings of Stendhal, Marcel Proust and W. G. Sebald as well as the invented landscapes evoked by the architectural model. Stendhal's extensive travels are reflected in his novels, several memoirs, art criticism and guidebooks. Similarly, the topic of travelling saturates Sebald's fiction and essays; the restless flight and the contemplative promenade in various ways frame his outstanding and existential configurations of architecture. Despite the fact that the protagonist of *A la recherche* is a reluctant and anxious traveler, the longing for experiencing new places are of profound importance in Proust's oeuvre. One after another, the architectural models in Stendhal's *Mémoires d'un touriste* (1838), Proust's *A l'Ombre des jeunes Filles en fleurs* (1918) and Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) destabilize the rapports between descriptions and geographies, fantasies and landscapes. In Stendhal, Proust and Sebald (almost) real places and real models are inscribed in imaginary journeys, presenting landscapes in which we, the readers, can wander among models, guided by the protagonist-narrators. The collection of cork models of Roman monuments Stendhal encounter at Nîmes, the plaster cast of the doorway of the 'Persian' Balbec Church at the Trocadéro Museum in Paris, and the hyper detailed model of the temple of Jerusalem that 'Sebald' comes across walking through East Anglia on foot, in complex ways unfolds the powerful autonomy of the architectural model.

A few years ago a master studio at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design filled up an empty space in the Architecture Museum in Oslo for a week or so. This improvised show between shows was in many ways one of the best looking displays of architecture to date in the new museum. Sverre Fehn's acclaimed glass pavilion in the museum courtyard, inaugurated in 2007, has certainly proved to be an exhibition space posing the same kind of challenges that another famous glass box – Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin – has done for over 50 years. Virtuous as it is the architectural structure tends to fight whatever is placed in the room, calling for all kinds of cumbersome interventions from the covering of the glass walls to control the level of lux to inserting clumsy dividers to hang stuff on. This student show, however, looked just spectacular with conceptual models casually strewn all over the floor. Invested with a minimum of exhibition design, the models were framed only by strips of red tape on the floor, laid out in a grid, marking possible routes among the models. Thus the space was transformed into a strange and lovely landscape, working



Fig. 1 – The balcony in Alvar Aalto's office Tiilimäki 20 in Munkkiniemi outside Helsinki (1955) provided him with a perfect view for inspecting his models from above, as well as overlooking the garden, landscaped as an amphitheater. Photo by Panayotis Tournikiotis.

with and not against the architectural context. This urban topography virtually continued through the grand glass panes and into the surrounding city – designating a landscape in which we could truly wander among models.

Unconsciously perhaps, the show was addressing an important aspect in the historical trajectory of the architectural model: that models recast built environs as miniatures and thereby men as giants, introducing a sense of control or vulnerability in the patron, maker or observer. One need only consider the famous close-up of Le Corbusier's gigantic hand explaining and almost eclipsing the 1925 Plan Voisin of a new, improved Paris. Or the balcony Alvar Aalto installed in his studio outside Helsinki, which he often climbed to attain a panoramic view of his work-in-progress, thereby capturing the aerial God's-eye view permitted by the model (FIG. 1). Or naturally, the effect could be the exact opposite, provoking a kind of vertigo in the visitor who literally tries to step carefully in-between precious and fragile miniature worlds. One example might be the gorgeous Renaissance gardens of Villa d'Este in Tivoli where 4/5 of the Fontana della Rometta collapsed over the cliffs in the late 19th century – a ruined model of ancient Rome visually placed in front of the real Rome – creates an artificial landscape for the contemporary visitor recalling the 19th century event. The

experience of standing by the fountain, imagining Rome at a distance through the deteriorated ruins of a strangely-scaled twofold lost Rome, reminds us that in antiquity, the Latin verb *contemplare* meant to contemplate the city from a distance.¹ This idea can be seen in the placement of Roman villas, which were located so that the *urbs* would still be in sight, as contemporary spectators today can imagine Rome at a distance, spatially, temporally and pictorially through a twofold distance of the ruined model.

Either way, evoking a feeling of control of vulnerability, conflating or inventing the imaginary and the real, models alter our perception of scale, space, site and sights, and of course, history as well. It is rare that we get to see them presented as in the student show in Oslo, displayed as landscapes to ramble in. Such a privilege is generally enjoyed only in dusty archives where models are more or less recklessly stored. As exhibits we often meet them entrapped in the once radical convention established by the Museum of Modern Art's 1932 hyper-historicized *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, placed on pedestals and treated as sculpture, turned into autonomous objects, detached from the surrounding world.

Yet beyond the architectural exhibition, the world of fiction generously provides us with landscapes to ramble in, and sometimes, with landscapes in which we might also wander among models. Such a series of imaginary landscapes emerge in the work of Stendahl, Marcel Proust, and W.B. Sebald, evoked and invented through the architectural model. The profound importance of architecture is common to these three authors, where architectural models, in the guise of literature, destabilize the distinction between description and geography, fantasy and landscape, the real and the imaginary. These models have everything to do with the topos of traveling and the description of landscapes. Marie-Henri-Beyle, or Stendahl as he came to be known, was constantly traveling as part of Napoleon's campaigns and administration, later as a French consul in Italy, and on private sojourns. His extensive European journeys are reflected in his novels, memoirs, art criticism and guidebooks, among them *Promenades dans Rome* (1829), once considered one of the best guidebooks on Rome.² Travel similarly saturates Sebald's fiction and essays. The restless flight, the experience of exile, and the contemplative promenade all frame Sebald's existential configurations of architecture. In Proust, and despite the fact that the protagonist of *A la re-*

1 "The gigantic art of the public space is an art of culture, not an art of nature; its forms and themes are taken from the life of the city that surrounds it. If the unleashed sea is the essential metaphor of the romantic sublime, the orchestrated fountain is the essential metaphor of the art of public space." Stewart 1993, 90. The partly damaged grand miniature of Rome brings into play all kinds of paradoxes concern-

ing scale and size, brilliantly elucidated in Susan Stewart's pioneering study.

2 *Promenade de Rome* is certainly an imaginative *tour de force*, as it was written in Paris, based on Stendhal's cousin's notes from a recent stay in Rome, which Stendhal took over; sampled with extracts from other guide and history books, and sprinkled with his characteristic style.

cherche du Temps perdu is a highly reluctant, troubled and anxious traveler, the longing for new places becomes of paramount importance.

Three scenes from Stendhal's *Mémoires d'un touriste* (1838), Proust's *Within a Budding Grove* (1918), volume 2 of *Remembrance of Things Past* and Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) unfold the powerful autonomy of architectural models in complex ways: the collection of cork models of Roman monuments Stendahl admires in Nîmes; the Romanesque Balbec church juxtaposed with the plaster cast doorway Proust's young Marcel repeatedly visits at the Trocadero Museum in Paris; and the hyper-detailed model of the temple of Jerusalem Sebald's alter ego discovers while hiking through East Anglia. All invite us to explore the gaps between texts and sites, and the transformation and reinvention of place by the relation of models and imaginary journeys.

Stendhal: Scaled realities

Natural and urban landscapes are of profound importance in Stendhal's writings. His fiction and non-fiction bring unforgettable buildings, cities, places, and landscapes into play, capturing a whole universe of geographies and topographies, as well as topologies. While the passage considered in *Memoirs of a Tourist* fills only half a page in a book counting more than a thousand pages, Stendhal's observations on the essential features of the architectural model exemplify the way architecture, environments and landscapes are recurrently approached in this voluminous oeuvre.³ His brief musing on the relation between the scale model, the actual monuments it documents as well as the model as a represented reality within the fictional work encapsulates with emblematic perfection the ways in which we perceive dimension, size and scale, by comparison and perspective. The collection of cork models made by Auguste Pelet, French architect and archaeologist (1785–1865), as reflected on by Stendahl, demonstrates how the miniature helps us to measure and understand real buildings or landscapes more accurately.⁴ Moreover Stendhal's contemplation on Pelet's unique collection of Roman monuments highlights how the comparative effects of models might radically change our perception of what we see and experience, beyond representation.⁵

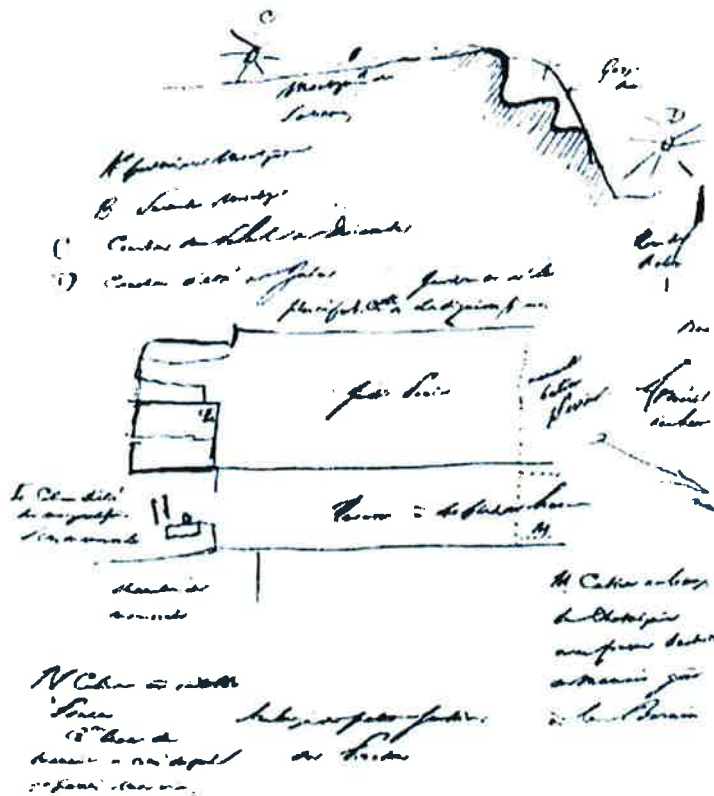
3 This part is omitted in the English translation, *Memoirs of a Tourist*. If not specified differently, the translations are borrowed from Dubbini 2002.

4 Twenty-five of Pelet's cork models were bought by the French state in 1839, and his *Description des monuments grecs et romains exécutés en modèles à l'échelle d'un centimètre par mètre* was published posthumously (Nîmes, 1876). Werner Szambien situates Pelet's collection in the history of architectural collections and comments

on Stendhal's fascination with the cork models in Szambien 1988, 85 and 102.

5 "Like the cork souvenir models of Greek and Roman ruins collected by eighteenth-century travelers, (...) miniatures have meaning beyond immediate replication," Karen Moon rightly states in Moon 2005, 60. Moon however draws attention to miniatures produced by the building's designer, while the scale models of ancient monuments in a different way involves questions of historicity, alteration and loss.

VIE DE HENRY BRULARD



Montagne de Sassenage. — Gorges droites*. — A. Première montagne. — B. Seconde montagne. — C. Coucher du soleil en décembre. — D. Coucher d'été en juin. — Jardin de ville planté par le c[onna]table de Lesdiguières, je crois. — Tour de Rabot. — Jardin Périer. — Nouvelle bâtisse Périer. — Bastille. — S[ain]te-Marie-d'en-Haut. L. Cabinet d'été de mon grand-père. Livres de mon oncle. — Terrasse à quarante pieds de haut. — Nord. — Chambre de mon oncle. — M. Cabinet en losanges de châtaignier avec forme d'architecture de mauvais goût, à la Bernin. — N. Cabinet où s'établit Poncet. — G. Banc de menuisier à côté duquel je passais ma vie. — Auberge et petit jardin de Pironon. — Le pauvre Mantion.

* H. Martineau: ouvertes.

Fig. 2 – While Stendhal insisted that drawings should resemble nature his own sketches are distinctly diagrammatic. Quite spectacularly, this one captures phenomena as diverse as the sun's change in altitude throughout the seasons and books in his uncle's cabinet, as the autobiographer recalls them. From Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, vol. 1; *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 20 (Geneva and Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1986), 249.

These mechanisms of scaling objects and views, shrinking and enlarging, and zooming in and out are all subtle optical and visual techniques employed throughout Stendahl's oeuvre. A closer look at the numerous sketches in his pseudo-autobiographical *Vie de Henry Brulard* (published posthumously in

1890), for example, reveals their strikingly abstracted, diagrammatic qualities. "First and foremost" the autobiographer declares, "a drawing has to resemble nature!"⁶ (FIG. 2). Nonetheless and despite the insistent exclamation mark, while Stendhal's drawings might depict nature, they hardly ever resemble it; they are topological, not topographical or mimetic. Used as mnemotechnical devices in the reconstruction of a life, the Brulard sketches turn out to be diagrams providing dimensions and determining relationships between cities, buildings, interiors, landscapes, piazzas, objects, persons, historical events, natural phenomena, as well as memories.⁷

Seen from the perspective of the tourist, *Brulard* embodies another dimension of scaling. In *Voyage en Italie* Montesquieu noted in the late 1720s: "When I arrive in a city, I climb the highest steeple or tower to have a view of the whole before seeing the individual parts, and when I leave I do the same in order to fix my ideas".⁸ Thus, like Aalto's God-like view from the balcony, a perfect topographical-hermeneutic formula in time and space is captured in the travelling French philosopher's bodily and conceptual movement between the presumed whole and the experienced detail. The Olympic panorama, the unlimited outlook from above proliferated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic culture. This elevated viewpoint is emblematically displayed in the lavish description of Rome in the captivating first scene in the Brulard-book. On an early morning of October 16, 1832, on the steps of San Pietro in Montorio, surrounded by the panoramic beauty of Rome as grasped from the Janiculum Hill, Henry Brulard exclaims, "What a magnificent view!"⁹ His thoughts, however, immediately start to wander, recalling that Raphael's *Transfiguration* was hung in the church behind him and admired for 250 year before being "buried," as he puts it, in the Vatican. Stendhal's evocative rapture of places, times, and events differs from Montesquieu's well-ordered and perfect hermeneutic sequence of ascension and descent. Stendhal identifies details in the whole, zooms in and out, and lets personal memories and historical events conflate. Exposed to a panorama, his gaze turns inward; every outlook results in introspection. Similarly, these inward movements are reversed when the self-investigating subject re-directs his gaze toward the world around him. Consequently, the very site and the fate of Raphael's painting leads him to the melancholic fact that his fiftieth birthday is rapidly approaching, intertwined with a contemplation of the sight, the outlook on the historical and contemporary Rome.

The collection of models appearing in *Mémoires d'un tourist* crystallizes scaling as a method to see things both clearer and in more complex ways. On this occasion the traveling Stendhal (or actually the very Henry Beyle, who signs the

6 Stendhal 2002, 248.

7 For a study of the diagrammatic features of Stendhal's architectural sketches, see Lending

2011.

8 Quoted from Dubbini 2002, 76.

9 Stendhal 2002, 4.

preface) is disguised as Monsieur L., commercial traveler in hardware, crossing France on his way to the colonies. Monsieur L. has left his manuscript describing sites and sights, cities, landscapes and monuments, referred to as *Voyage en France*, in the hands of Beyle, to complete and print.

In Nîmes, Stendhal reports on the roman monuments and lists the most important sights to see while visiting. The amphitheater, the Gate of Augustus, the ancient baths, and the 17th century cathedral are presented according to well-established guidebook conventions, and the descriptions of the monuments are generously sprinkled with the somewhat slightly detached epithet "charmant".¹⁰ Arriving at five o'clock in the morning after having travelled through the night, he immediately hurries to see the *charmant* Maison Carré. Later he sets out to inspect Pont du Gard on his way to Orange. But the experience of seeing the awe-inspiring ancient ruins first hand turns out to be surprisingly dwarfed by the traveler's exposure to the miniatures of the same structures – Pelet's cork models of Roman monuments, one of the finest and still existing collections.¹¹ Stendhal finds the collection mesmerizing: "One could not see a more skillful, or exact imitation. These models, all executed on the same scale, enabled me to have an idea of the comparative size of those monuments for the first time".¹² Exposed to the collection of 1:100 scale models, what Stendhal corroborates is an insight we all might experience when exposed to architecture *in situ* – the feeling of the building getting lost in context, so to speak, of surprise and disappointment in realizing that famous buildings often tend to be much bigger or smaller than expected. Models reveal something about buildings that is unavailable in their physical context or in two-dimensional reproductions. As Renzo Dubbini precisely comments: "In a landscape the human eye can form an environmental image of an object, but from the point of view of the perception of phenomena, the model encouraged theoretical, relational reflection".¹³ Pelet's collection – one of the first of its kind and comprising approximately 40 models thoroughly executed on the same scale – is significant in this perspective.¹⁴ In their abstracted simplicity and removed from the distractions of reality, models provide us with the ability to compare the proportions of monuments, as space *and* scale, as Stendhal testifies to when he observes that the "the Arch of Triumph at Orange, a gigantic work, would easily pass under one of the lower arches of the Pont du Gard."¹⁵ As it turns out, the models do not only resemble

10 Stendhal 1986, 135-150.

11 Part of the Pelet collection was on display at the Musée archéologique de Nîmes for the show *Le Monde Gréco-Romain*, April-December 2010.

12 Translation borrowed from Dubbini 2002, 159.

13 Dubbini 2002, 159.

14 The production of cork models of ancient monuments produced as souvenirs for a marked of Grand Tour travelers, probably dates back

to the 1760s. The work of the Italian cork modellists Giovanni Altieri, Agostino Rosa, and Antonio Chichi from the second part of the 18th century and the five cork models by Altieri bought by the Swedish Gustav III in Naples in 1784 is discussed by Kockel 1992. A common scale did not regulate these picturesque models of ancient ruins.

15 Dubbini 2002, 59.

the real, they also produce it. They allow for glimpses into an architectural reality that we are denied in front of the historical monument.

Proust: The tyranny of the Particular

In Proust, the model in question is a full-scale mock-up executed in plaster, exhibited in what in the novel is referred to as the Trocadéro Museum in Paris (FIG. 3). The replica of the portal of the Romanesque church in Balbec, one of the early and most intense objects of desire introduced in *Remembrance of Things Past*, oscillates between the fictional and the factual. The museum the young Marcel visits is obviously the Musée de sculpture comparée, established by the initiative of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc after the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris. In the post-exposition and now empty Palais Trocadero the French architect finally got an old plan fulfilled – a permanent display of a collection of plaster casts of French medieval and renaissance architecture, many of them structures in which he himself had been involved in the restoration works.¹⁶ Thus the nineteenth-century grand collection of architectural plaster casts designates the museological paradigm in which the young Marcel, within the frame of the novel, wanders among models, longing desperately to experience the original church in the fictive Norman town of Balbec. Imbued with the epithet 'Persian' by Marcel's friend and mentor Charles Swann, the church is situated in an "almost Persian" coastal town, "exquisite, as beautiful as Siena," according to the art collector and connoisseur.¹⁷ The urban landscape of Venetian gothic and the seascape of Normandy are of profound importance in Proust's aesthetics. The impressionism of the fictive painter Elstir, modeled on Turner and Whistler among others, blended sea and land, the maritime and the urban, becoming a fertile repository for Proust's theory on metamorphosis and metaphor. This alluring Normandy landscape is preconfigured by the plaster cast of the Romanesque church doorway in the museum in Paris.

When the day finally arrives for the first trip to Balbec from Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris and the unforgettable, panoramic railroad journey toward the coast, the high-strung, adolescent Marcel is tormented by his departure from home and hysterically full of expectations. The emotion stirred up by the anticipation of experiencing the totality as promised by the plaster fragment in Paris is almost unbearable. Unbalanced, nearly choking from excitement, the young boy must take "a stiff dose of beer or brandy," as prescribed by the family doctor, in order to calm his nerves and attain "a state he called 'euphoria', in which the nervous system is for a time less vulnerable".¹⁸

16 350 pieces from this collection of casts in full scale were reinstalled in the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine at Trocadero for the inauguration in 2008, and can be admired on the

ground floor.

17 Proust 1981, 710.

18 Proust 1981, 700.

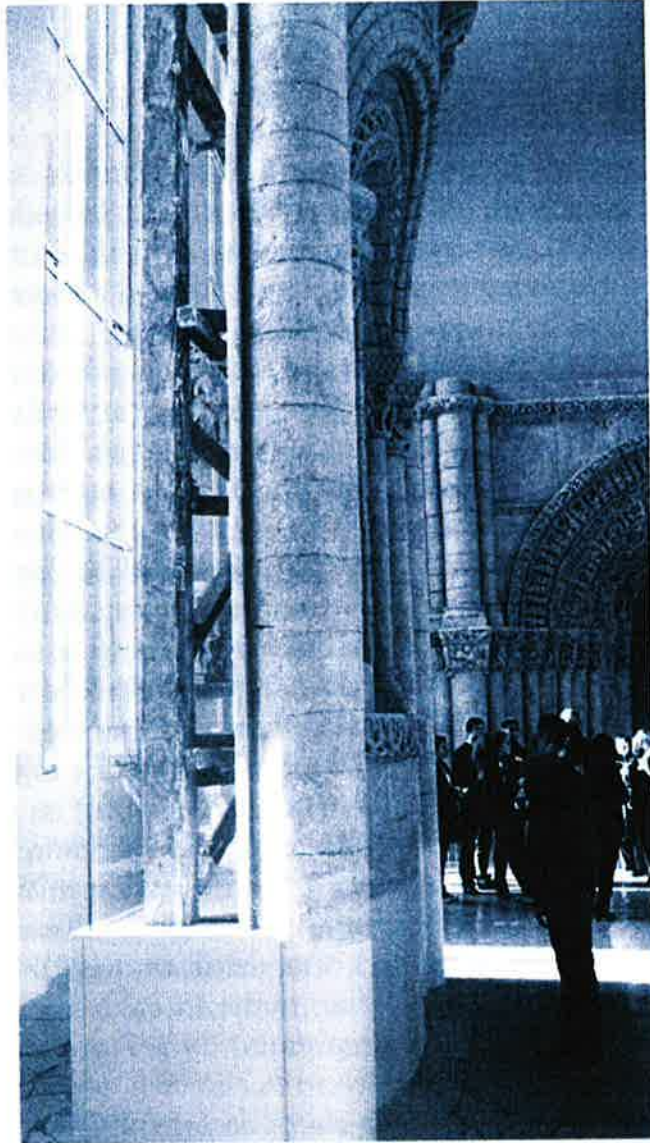


Fig. 3 – Young boy, same age as Marcel, admiring a church doorway at the “Trocadero Museum”. A substantial part of Viollet-le-Ducs’ collection of plaster casts from the Musée de Sculpture Comparée was reinstalled in the Galerie des Moulages, Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine, inaugurated in 2007 at Trocadero. Photo by Mari Lending.

Yet a solid dose of brandy is not sufficient to bring a hyper-sensitive mind to rest, and euphoria can not mend the inevitable, pending brutal clash between imagination and reality. The much longed-for moment when Marcel finally stands in front of the architectural oeuvre, *in situ*, he immediately realizes that the original does not measure up to the copy at all. Not only is the church trivialized by the surroundings, by prosaic elements like a café, a bank, a bus station, commercials, streetlights and trams. It is also located in Balbec-en-terre and not, as Marcel had imagined, in Balbec-en-plage “receiving at its base the last dying

foam of the uplifted waves", absorbed in the steep Norman cliffs, from which its stones were once quarried. Yet, most aggravating is to find that the original church, as Proust sensationally puts it, has been "reduced now to its own stone semblance". The church is stripped of the auratic qualities that we normally ascribe to the unique work of art, the original, as compared to the copy. While the model in Paris appeared "endowed with a universal value," immortal, with an intangible beauty, the real building appears as a "little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count." The model is perfect and unalterable, promising the aesthetic and sensual pleasures of the Norman landscape, while the real church is the victim of time and reality, seeming to represent nothing but an oppressive "tyranny of the Particular".¹⁹

This scene was captured by Proust's modernist sensibility at the exact historical moment when the devaluation of the great plaster cast collections in Europe and the US had begun; when museums were in the process of transferring their casts to storage, deeming them worthless junk. Both the Arts and Craft movement's aesthetics of authenticity and the modernist insistence on purity had contributed to this change in taste, for which any copy was a morally and aesthetically flawed – the plaster cast copy with its disembodied materiality even more so. Proust obviously does not share his contemporaries' distaste for the material banality of the plaster cast, and hints at another way of thinking about the convoluted relationship between materiality, context, and significance. The confrontation of the perfect copy and the flawed original testifies to a key matter in the philosophy of the museum to be derived from Proust's grand oeuvre. Framed by what Proust conceived as the neutral nakedness of the museum space, the architectural fragments allowed Marcel to grasp the grandness of the church, undisturbed by the distractions of reality. The model in Paris belongs to a temperate museum landscape of architectural fragments, sheltered from the possible disillusion of a world outside curatorial control. "Proust prefers the decontextualized space of the museum", Didier Maleuvre comments, since it detaches works of art and architecture from their historical origins: "For Proust, the work of art is like a quotation that forgets its source and thereby demonstrates its own origin."²⁰ By promoting and preferring the model, in this case a reproduction of an existing original, Proust audaciously deconstructs any conventional historical or genealogical conception of origins. Inevitably, the version of the work brought first to his attention and rousing his aesthetic pleasure, in this case the model, might take the place conventionally ascribed to the original work of art or architecture.²¹

19 Proust 1981, 710.

20 Maleuvre 1999, 72.

21 Proust's almost perverse tolerance of museums can be explained by him being a *liebhaber*, a *dilettante*, an art consumer, according to Adorno:

"For him works of art are from the outset something more than their specific aesthetic qualities. They are part of the life of the person who observes them; they become an element of his consciousness". Adorno 1997, 181.

Leaving Balbec-en-terre Marcel concludes that he had "broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed."²² This brutal crack in the name and the real site gives the reader a glimpse into the conviction that only the imagination, via a fragment, can make a real or lost totality available, and thereby reveals that the *pars pro toto* provides the plaster cast museum's topological basis. The juxtaposition of the model in the Paris museum and the church in Balbec elevates the delicate constellation of fragment and totality beyond the area of material authenticity. This insight also obviously carries a poetics of significance for the reflection on architecture in Proust's novel: *À la recherche du temps perdu* and the history about Marcel are preferable to life itself: The world of the novel is universal, while life is fraught with particularities in lack of the alluring temptations of abstraction. The model, the detail, and the fragment let us catch sight of perfection and totalities unavailable in reality.

Sebald: Models mediating landscape

Landscapes are central in Sebald's writing, with a most powerful and horrible expression in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, a collection of lectures addressing the trauma of the Allied's carpet-bombing of Germany.²³ So is architecture. The 2001 novel *Austerlitz* is an indisputable climax and a cornucopia for anyone slightly interested in architecture and architectural history. *Austerlitz* encompasses an abandoned, uncompleted history of architecture, it overflows with existing and destroyed buildings, includes an unforgettable Piranesi ekphrasis from Liverpool Street Station in London, theories on monumentality, critical reflections on historicism, allusions to architectural thinkers such as Aby Warburg and Rudolf Wittkower, criticism on contemporary structures (first and foremost of Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1997), an aesthetics of ruins, a philosophy of scale, and more. In sum the late Sebald provided us with a substantial piece of architectural deliberation, disguised as a novel.

Highly autobiographical, the rich, melancholic and associative *The Rings of Saturn* is a record about a man easily confused with W.G. Sebald. After a major breakdown, physically and mentally, the narrator sets out on an odyssey on foot, in time as well as in space, accompanied by ghosts of many sorts – historical persons, texts, and histories. If *Austerlitz* is Sebald's book on architecture, *The Rings of Saturn* is his book on museums and collections – or more precisely, a discourse drawing on the logics, epistemologies and attributes of the cabinet of curiosities. Fragmented textually as well as narratively, archaeological in scope and furnished with ruins and deserted places, *The Rings of Saturn* is loaded with vitrines, taxonomies, rare objects, idiosyncratic or enigmatic ordering of knowledge, and natural and historical artifacts. It also offers a wild palimpsest of

22 Proust 1981, 710.

23 *Luftkrieg und Literature* (1999) was expanded

with several essays when translated into English in 2003.

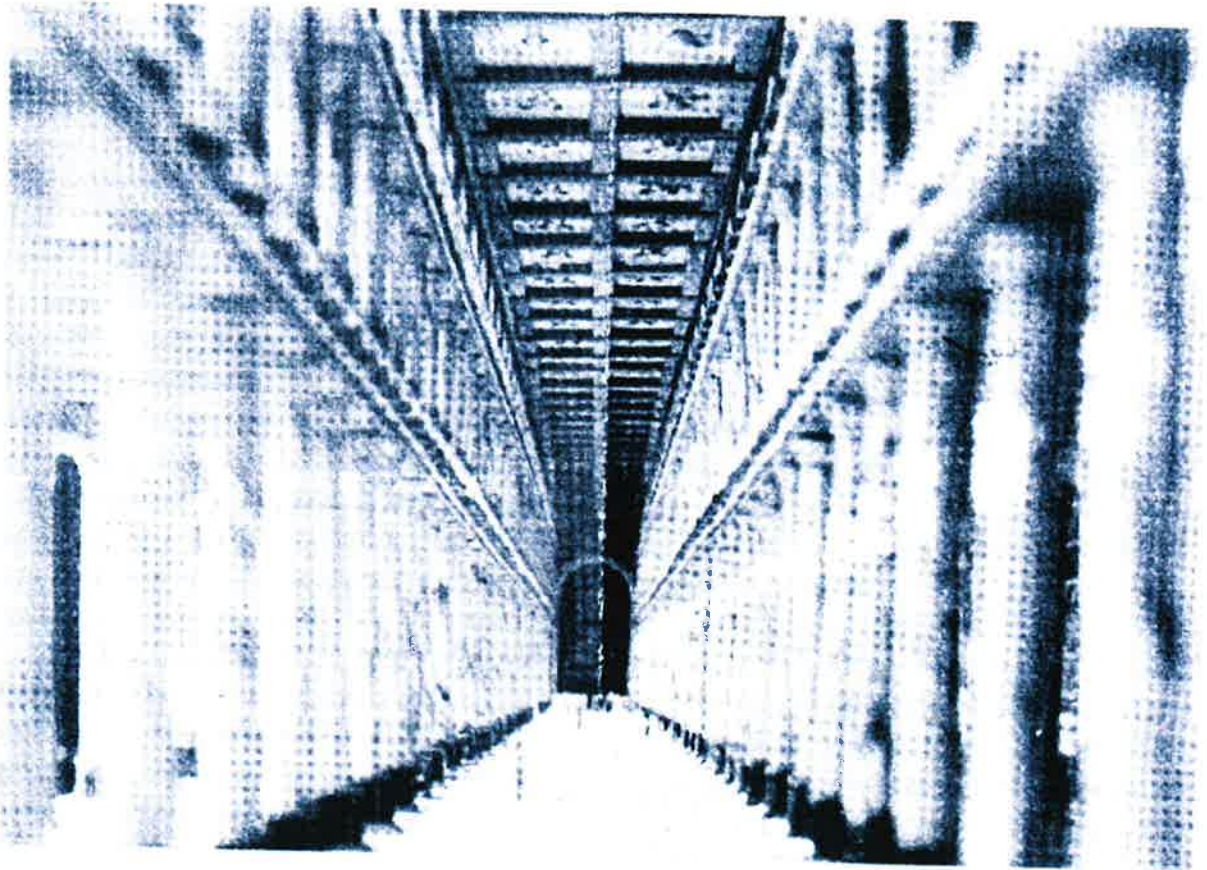


Fig. 4 – The model of the temple in Jerusalem as presented in W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*, attributed to the fictional character Thomas Abrams, farmer-turned-model maker at a farm in East Anglia. W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, (London: Vintage 2002), 246-47.

landscapes, spanning from the virtual paper landscape of lecture notes, letters, documents and books occupying the office of a Flaubert scholar – a veritable topography of deserts, mountains, valleys, and glaciers – to the natural beauty of the east coast of England.

Towards the end of the journey the protagonist follows an old Roman road for hours, crosses a meadow and arrives at the Chestnut Tree Farm, inhabited by Thomas Abrams, farmer turned into passionate model builder. Consequently and surprisingly, wandering through the landscape while casually reporting on the terrain and the skies, 'Sebald' encounters a painstaking reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem, the one destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD (FIG. 4). We learn that Abrams has been working on this scale model since the late 1960s, striving to recreate "the Temple of Jerusalem exactly as it was at the beginning of our time".²⁴ The archaeologically accurate and carefully researched model

²⁴ Sebald 2002, 242.

covers nearly ten square yards and includes hundreds of columns, thousands of stone blocks, and more than 2000 human figures, each less than one-quarter of an inch high.²⁵

From a detached portrayal of a deserted-looking farm with a motionless centuries-old chestnut tree and quietly paddling ducks in the pond, we find the wanderer in the model builder's barn, admiring the scale model of the temple nearing completion. In unexpected ways the replica of the ancient structure tends to blend into the East Anglia landscape as the local evening light streams into the barn, making the model come alive: "the temple with its antechambers and the living quarters of the priesthood, the Roman garrison, the bath-houses, the market stalls, the sacrificial altars, covered walkways and staircases, the forecourts and outer provinces" as well as, and even more significant, "the mountains in the background, as if everything were already completed and as if I was gazing into eternity".²⁶ The model not only evokes but also reinvents the mountains surrounding Jerusalem in East Anglia. Furthermore, as Abrams presents his guest with a aerial view of the present-day temple precinct ("white stones, dark cypresses, and in the centre; gleaming, the golden Dome of the Rock"), the photography of the site on which the model's lost signifié were once placed, invokes by association, another X-Large structure, this time a local one: "the dome of the Sizewell reactor, which can be seen on moonlit nights shining like a shrine far across the land and the sea."²⁷ In effect, and mediated by the model of the destroyed temple, the two domes – the dome of the Sizewell B pressurized water reactor power station and the golden Dome of the Rock – tend to blur Jerusalem and Suffolk in an unforeseen imaginary landscape. This association based on formal similarities in monumental architectural structures, anticipates the way Wittgenstein's concept of *Familienähnlichkeiten* is combined with a 19th century scientific historicism almost into absurdity in the unconcluded architectural history by the fictional architectural historian Austerlitz published a few years later.²⁸ The imagined amalgamation of the two monuments, made possible only by the presence of the scale model, recalls the way in *Austerlitz* Sebald theorized the sublime horror and potential destruction of monumental landmarks through a discourse on power, scale and size.

In *The Rings of Saturn*, however, architecture as model and the specific model of the temple of Jerusalem pertain to a softer and more melancholic dimension, rather than a discourse on power and suppression. The model expands on the

25 The model for the character Thomas Abrams was Alec Garrard, author of *The Splendor of the Temple* (2000). Garrard used his 1:100 scale masterpiece to describe the history, architecture, and functions of the real Temple – from which the model photo in *The Rings of Saturn* is reproduced. Kafatou 1998.

26 Sebald 2002, 248.

27 Sebald 2002, 248.

28 With scale, size, order and similarity as parameters Austerlitz' oeuvre disperses "into endless preliminary sketches for a study, based on his own views, of the family likeness between all these buildings". Sebald 2001, 33.

given. "After all, if the Temple is to create the impression of being true to life, I have to make every one of the tiny coffers on the ceilings, and every single one of the many thousand of diminutive stone blocks by hand, and paint them as well," the model builder explains his guest.²⁹ The scrupulous detailing of a lost structure translates into a vivid illusion, transcending time and space. Returning to his expedition through decaying coastal towns and deserted farmlands, 'Sebald', later the same day, hitchhiking with the model builder to the nearest town, wishes "that the short drive through the country would never come to an end, that we could go on and on, all the way to Jerusalem."³⁰

Abrams is reconstructing a replica of a structure destroyed almost two millennia earlier within a fragmented novel'esque travel book pondering ruins and decay. Sebald, the wanderer, contemplates that while the temple endured for less than a hundred years, the model will probably last longer. Thus, the model represents a kind of permanence in a highly historicized landscape gravitating toward loss.

Modeling the Real

Architectural models are often perceived as secondary to the architectural structures they present or represent, more often than not, constructed at less than full-scale. Used as a working tool for architects they carry two temporalities – pre-dating or following the built structure. Used to project or anticipate future buildings models clarify and develop ideas of space, context, materiality, structure and form; present potential concepts to clients and for competitions. In short they are tools for visualizing, correcting, controlling and manipulating on a small (though sometimes full-) scale what might be accomplished as built elsewhere. The Roman historian Suetonius recounts Julius Caesar's ordering of the complete demolition of a brand new, luxurious villa at his estate on Lake Nemi. According to the Renaissance architect Alberti, the emperor's disappointment could only be explained by his architect not using a model, which to a much larger degree than drawings and sketches can highlight every relationship of consequence for a successful structure, from interiors to landscaping, from construction and materials to cost estimates. Alberti warned passionately, however, against the use of highly decorated, painted, embellished models which are employed by architects to persuade the client, "striving to attract and seduce the eye of the beholder, and to divert his attention from a proper examination of the parts to be considered toward admiration of himself."³¹

As documents, executed after the building, models serve many purposes. They might record, present, highlight, or research various aspects of an existing, destroyed, altered or never-built structure. August Pelet's cork models of Roman

29 Sebald 2002, 255.

30 Sebald 2002, 249.

31 Alberti 1996, 34.

monuments belong to this category. From the late 18th century on, cork models of ancient monuments were produced as souvenirs for a new tourist industry. The flexibility and porosity of cork made it an ideal material in which to capture the monument's quality as a picturesque ruin. As cork is light, these miniatures were easy for the Grand Tour travelers to bring home. The full-scale replicas of French architectural sculpture, conceived as plaster casts and exhibited in Musée de sculpture compare at Trocadéro, documented fragments of structures under restoration and alteration, as well as monuments threatened by deterioration or demolition. The English model of the Temple of Jerusalem, produced by Thomas Abrams/Alec Garrard is not only meticulously researched but itself a research tool, attempting to determine what the vanished temple might have looked like.

Models are also a laboratory of architectural investigation, a mode of experimentation for construction, materials, form and space, considered beyond or outside or in addition to the realm of the primary structure. Some have been referred to as buildings "trapped forever in their diminutive existence," with reference to canonical, utopian projects such as Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1919) or Mies van der Rohe's skyscraper projects for Berlin from the early 1920s.³² "The question whether a building can assume a place of authority in the world of architecture without actually being built is a curious one. But the answer is not in doubt," Sir John Summerson notes: "Bramante's design for St. Peter's dome and Wren's great model for St. Paul still put their weight in the history books and a whole treatise could be written on the influence of Bernini's rejected design for the Louvre."³³ Thus, from a historiographical perspective, the canonical power as well as the autonomy of the model is indisputable. Yet, the architectural model as it appears in fiction adds a twist to this autonomy, for the model-as-literature as we have seen, belongs to a twofold imaginary landscape.

In Stendhal, Proust and Sebald (almost) real places and real models are inscribed in imaginary journeys, presenting landscapes in which we, the readers, can wander among models, guided by the protagonist-narrators. The historical collection of cork models of Roman monuments in Southern France; the museum habitat of the plaster cast of the Balbec church doorway as a fictitious addition to the actual Paris collection curated by Viollet-le-Duc; and the scale model of the temple in Jerusalem in East Anglia (an accurate translation from the real model constructed by W.G. Sebald's friend Alec Garrard) are parts of landscapes to ramble in, similar to the conceptual student models at the show at the Oslo architecture museum. Presented as literature the models emerge as optical-aesthetical instruments: They allow us to grasp aspects of what they represent in

32 These were "controversial competition winners (and indeed, celebrated losers)", according to Porter and Neale 2000, 18.

33 John Summerson quoted from Porter and Neal 2000, 16.

ways that are otherwise unavailable. They radically amplify the perception of the landscapes in which they are invented and presented, and in some ways they also produce the landscape. "What is the virtue of reduction either in scale or in the number of qualities," Claude Lévi-Strauss asks rhetorically, and immediately points to the fact that when we try to understand "a real object in its totality" we tend to work by its parts.³⁴ The power and intrinsic value of the reduced model is explained by the way it compensates for a lack of sensual dimensions by an increase of intellectual dimensions: "And even if this is an illusion, the point of the procedure is to create or sustain the illusion, which gratifies the intelligence and gives rise to a sense of pleasure which can already be called aesthetic on these grounds alone."³⁵

This model aesthetics allows the literary personas of Stendhal, Proust and Sebald to imagine lost totalities exposed to the miniature or the fragment. In different ways the models of the Roman monuments, the doorway of the Romanesque church and the temple appear more real than the real, or in some ways produce the real, seen both from the inside and the outside of the fictional worlds they belong to. In Stendhal, the scale models of the monuments elucidate matters of dimensions and relations inaccessible for the tourist, the historian, or for the reader. Performed on the same scale the miniature monuments invite us to compare; abstracted, simplified and indifferent to what Proust called the *tyranny of the Particular*. In Proust, the mock-up in Paris anticipates the aura of the Norman landscape in a way the original is incapable of. The model questions the idea of the original and at the same time stands out as a new original. The model, *off situ*, is universal, perfect and immortal, while the real church in its total environment is subjected to historical change and contaminated with the banalities of everyday life. Contrary to the built structure, lost or existing, the model holds permanence. In Sebald, the model of the temple not only presents to us a building we for obvious reasons will never get to experience; it also conflates two fundamental different landscapes in time and space. The model mediates an imaginary Jerusalem in the East Anglia landscape, as a kind of ultimate decontextualization. All the models are inventive and productive; they create, transform, or enchant the surroundings, and provide a more complex understanding than the buildings themselves could offer, whether intact or as ruins.

In *Vertigo* (1990) Sebald paraphrases Stendhal, almost ad verbatim: "Beyle's advice is not to purchase engravings of fine views and prospects seen on one's travels, since before very long they will displace our memories completely, indeed one might say they destroy them."³⁶ In *The Life of Henry Brulard*, Stendhal warned against collecting engravings from journeys: "Soon the engraving constitutes the whole memory." Images threaten to eclipse the remembrance of both

34 Lévi-Strauss 1966, 23.

35 Lévi-Strauss 1966, 24.

36 Sebald 2000, 8.

sites and sight, as he realizes that his collection of engravings "*has taken the place of reality.*"³⁷ Engravings and models are among architecture's many representational mass media. However, Stendhal suggests something quite fascinating: While the engraving, a two-dimensional medium, colonializes the experience of the real, the three-dimensional model creates and interprets rather than represents. Hence the model becomes dynamic and productive rather than passive and documentary.

The architectural model oscillates between the abstract and the concrete. It covers a spectrum spanning from prophesy to documentation, and is able to invoke the possible, the unachievable, the typical, the utopian, the rejected, the permanent, the past. Stendhal speaks for both Proust and Sebald when he insists that the model gives us exclusive access to otherwise inaccessible dimensions of the real. As such, the way architectural models mediate imaginary landscapes in Stendhal, Proust and Sebald, it obviously carries a poetics: The models become emblematic for literature's capacity of unfolding the imaginary as real, that is: changing our perception of history, architecture, and landscapes.

Mari Lending
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design
Mari.Lending@aho.no

37 Stendhal 2002, 468.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adorno, T. W. 1997: "Valéry Proust Museum" (1955), in *Prisms*, Cambridge, Mass.
- Alberti 1996: *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavenor, Cambridge, Mass.
- Dubbini, R. 2002: *Geography of the Gaze. Urban and Rural Vision in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Chicago.
- Kafatou, S. 1998: "An Interview with W.G. Sebald", *Harvard Review* 15, Fall 1998.
- Kockel V. in *Tempel i kork*, exhibition catalogue, Stockholm: Medelhavsmuseet 1992
- Lending, M. 2011: "Writing a Life from the Inside of a Drawing: Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard*", *Chora 6. Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, Montreal.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966: *The Savage Mind* (1962), trans. George Weidenfeld, Hertfordshire.
- Maleuvre, D. 1999: *Museum Memories. History, Technology, Art*, Stanford, California.
- Moon, K. 2005: *Modeling Messages: The Architect and the Model*, New York.
- Pelet, A. 1876: *Description des monuments grecs et romains exécutés en modèles à l'échelle d'un centimètre par mètre*, Nîmes.
- Porter, T and John Neale 2000: *Architectural Supermodels*, Oxford.
- Proust, M. 1981: *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 1, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, New York.
- Sebald, W. G. 2002: *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), trans. Michael Hulse, London.
- Sebald, W. G. 2001: *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell, New York.
- Sebald, W. G. 2000: *Vertigo*, trans. Michael Hulse, London.
- Szambien, W. 1988: *Le musée d'architecture*, Paris.
- Stendhal 1962: *Memoirs of a Tourist*, trans. Allan Seager, Northwestern University Press.
- Stendhal 1986: *Mémoires d'un tourist*, Oeuvres complètes, vol. 16, Geneva and Paris.
- Stendhal 2002: *Life of Henry Brulard*, trans. John Sturrock, New York.
- Susan Stewart 1993: *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London.