

THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA THROUGH INTERMEDIALITY IN
SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE, EXTREMELY LOUD & INCREDIBLY CLOSE
AND IN THE SHADOW OF NO TOWERS

Master's Thesis

Literary Studies: English Literature and Culture

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Date: May 30, 2018

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Introduction

Armed conflicts in the past decades have strongly impacted generations of victims on physical and psychological levels. Mass atrocity, often resulting in death of soldiers and civilians alike, damages the lives of those who survive it by carrying psychological trauma beyond the event into their present. Thus, while adjusting to life after a violent event, survivors often suffer from traumatic recall, but have little or no help dealing with it. The atrocities that attend wars produce loss and suffering so overwhelming to the victims and even perpetrators that, instead of attempting to share their experiences with others, many slip into silence and attempt to leave the horrors behind. Others try to share their stories in the form of oral testimonies and written memoirs, a common way for Holocaust survivors, for instance, to frame and process their experiences. These issues are explored in depth in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and in Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers*. Recent research in trauma theory and psychoanalysis suggests that long-term dissociating from traumatic events through silence and repression of trauma can be even more harmful to the victim than his/her attempt to recount, and thus relive, traumatic events (e.g., Caruth 1996; Vickroy 2002). If recounting trauma is therapeutic and necessary for a better understanding of its workings, what literary strategies and narrative techniques do Vonnegut, Foer and Spiegelman use in their works to represent the process of working through individual and collective trauma, and to what extent do they corroborate or depart from trauma theory in their representations?

Depending on the genre, literature traditionally only makes use of the textual medium to narrate a story. However, as trauma theory, and trauma literature, slowly started developing, it began to encompass other disciplines besides literature. Hence, the use of other media in literary texts, specifically the incorporation of visual elements into the textual narrative, became prominent among writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, Art Spiegelman, W. G. Sebald, Joe Sacco or

Jonathan Safran Foer. This merging of different media is known as intermediality, which stresses “the innovative or transgressive potential of artworks that articulate their message in the interstices between two or more media forms” (Jensen 1).

This thesis focuses on three works, fictional and partly autobiographical, that encompass media belonging to the audio, visual and textual domains to represent and articulate the unspeakable nature of trauma by constructing narratives that, in form and content, depart from realism. These fragmented stories are filled with hidden information for the reader to decode and (re)assemble into a whole, allowing him or her, through active reading, to witness the protagonist’s working through of trauma. In my close, comparative analysis of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) and Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), I will look at the ways in which the writers employ various literary techniques (fragmentation, syntax disruption, ellipses, text/image layout, repetitions, symbols, photograph insertion and assimilation, intertexts, framing of panels, and so on) in order to represent the unspeakable and evasive nature of traumatic experiences. Since all three works make use of visual imagery as well as text, I will analyse how the use and interplay of these techniques in the image-text setting of the two novels and Spiegelman’s graphic narrative mimic the workings of trauma and subjectively construct the discursive events that help the reader understand and feel emotionally engaged with the narrator’s story, thus encouraging empathetic reading and contributing to secondary witnessing of the narrator’s trauma on the part of the reader.

The thesis begins with a brief discussion of the key concepts in trauma theory, drawing on works by Cathy Caruth (2006), Laurie Vickroy, Amos Goldberg and Vieda Skultans and briefly looks at the emergence of trauma narratives in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the media used to narrate them. In chapter 2, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* is discussed in relation to trauma theory, focusing on the techniques he uses to represent traumatic events and their

recurrence in the present, as well as on the effects that these techniques produce on the reader. More specifically, recurrent motifs of the narrator's displacement in time and space, the presence of closed spaces, the reappearance of the image of blue feet, as well as the fragmentation of narrative through non-linear positioning of paragraphs and inclusion of two drawings, shifts in tenses and repetition of certain phrases will be closely analysed in connection to some of the key concepts of trauma theory. Following this discussion, I will focus on *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in chapter 3 and Foer's use of photographs, diary entries, letters, voice mail entries and other data along with the prose and faulty grammar to create a fragmented story puzzle that needs to be assembled by the reader in order to understand and bear witness to the narrator's experiences. Finally, chapter 4 takes a closer look at Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, focusing on literary and photographic intertexts, as well as the temporality of trauma, which place the narrator in a liminal space from which to confront and communicate his traumatic experience of the September 11 attacks.

Chapter 1

Trauma theory and trauma narratives: A brief overview

Until 1980, the year in which the American Psychiatric Association introduced the term “posttraumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) as a diagnosis for the psychiatric disorder occurring among returning soldiers, no official diagnosis had been established other than “shellshock” or “traumatic neurosis” (Caruth 158). Trauma has increasingly become the subject of research and psychiatric practice not only among psychologists dealing with victims of physical and sexual abuse, shell-shocked soldiers or survivors of collective violence, but it has also captured the interest of historians and literary scholars. As early as 1940, Sigmund Freud, in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, coined the term “traumatic neurosis” to depict “a condition ... which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life” and which results in the victim’s reliving of the traumatic events through flashbacks, nightmares and compulsive behaviour that is spontaneous, repetitive and unconscious (6-7). He notes that victims of abuse or an accident often experience repeated suffering that occurs spontaneously and that is produced by triggers reminiscent of the violent events (Freud 6). He further deduces that the subject is not aware when the neurosis occurs because he/she is busy not to think of the traumatic event:

The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. ... He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of ... remembering it as something belonging to the past. (Freud 12)

The traumatic event, which is not properly processed and assimilated into memory due to its surprising and overwhelming nature, results in dissociation from and unconscious repression of the experience. At the same time, during flashbacks or nightmares, the patient relives the

traumatic experiences that intrude into the present. Such unprocessed experiences need to be framed and integrated into memory and time structures in order to be articulated. Freud recognised the need to treat patients with traumatic neurosis by triggering the repressed experiences and make them relive them with the goal to make the patient realise that what he is experiencing is not present reality but past experience:

the physician must get him to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. (13)

It is worth noting that the response to traumatic events generally occurs some time after the event, and it is the belated nature of responses to trauma that became one of the main focuses of trauma research after World War II, along with the attempts to find ways to help the victims deal with their past (e.g. Felman & Laub 1992, Caruth 1996, Herman 1997). One of the ways to help the victims deal with their past, Caruth suggests, is by enabling them to distance themselves from the violent events by means of metaphorical and symbolic coding of language, which allows the victims to frame and control the experience (7). In fact, like Freud, Caruth uses literature to describe the nature of traumatic experiences by citing the story of Tancred's killing of his beloved, Clorinda. After the killing, Tancred finds himself in an enchanted forest where he relives the murder by striking a tree, but in his imagination, he opens a wound and hears Clorinda's voice. Seeing the wound and hearing his beloved's voice instead of seeing trees, Tancred re-enacts the murder and fails to realise that this event has happened in the past because it intrudes into his present reality. Caruth maintains that the voice acts as a witness to the act and thus replaces Tancred's witnessing since he is caught in this re-enactment against his will and understanding. The image of the wound simultaneously symbolises an inflicted

injury upon Clorinda's body and an injury inflicted upon Tancred's mind. Psychological trauma is described as

the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (Caruth 4)

Caruth, like Freud, argues that a traumatic event is not assimilated into memory and thus belatedly returns to haunt the victim in nightmares and re-enactments (4). Departing from Freud's example, she focuses on literary texts and trauma theory to explore ways in which trauma speaks using language and through language itself. She also explores the boundary between "knowing and not knowing" that language represents. Furthermore, she asks how a crisis can be recorded and transmitted if it defies assimilation, knowing and representation. As a response, she identifies a fusion between the "unbearable story of death and the unbearable story of life," implying that there is a dialectic not only between life and death but also between the victim and the witness (Caruth 7). She sees the voice from the wound not only as Tancred's relation and reaction to his own traumatic experience, but also "as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth 8). The victim demands to be seen and listened to, demanding witness to her suffering as it is repeated in Tancred's re-enactment of his crime. Consequently, it becomes imperative to share one's traumatic histories through symbolic and metaphorical language to enable understanding and coping. Caruth then proceeds to analyse the ways in which novels, such as Maguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, use language to depict recurring motifs and imagery that hint at the presence of trauma and its intrusion into the narrator's present.

The importance of narrative in attempting to represent the traumatic past is also emphasised by Amos Goldberg, who notes that “meaning always comes afterward, when things have already happened. Only then does it become necessary to organise the events into some meaningful story or structure” (131). Specifically, Goldberg is interested in symbols that acquire meaning over time and how the symbol (signifier) becomes a powerful tool of identification (signified) for people in connection to the Holocaust. He identifies two forms of death that the Jewish community experienced under Nazi rule: the death of the individual by means of the signifier (e. g. the yellow star of David; concentration camp number tattoo) and symbolic death (123). An individual’s death occurs when he/she is robbed of his/her identity by being labelled through symbols that identify the individual as part of a particular group (125). When the symbol becomes the signifier of that group, the individual wearing the symbol begins to identify with what the symbol represents rather than with who he/she is as an individual. For example, Jewish people being forced to wear the yellow badge and having the letter *J* stamped in official documents. The ultimate corporeal form of identification with a symbol is having a number tattooed onto the skin, which aims to erase every trace of individuality and any sense of self (Goldberg 126). Thus, Goldberg argues, Holocaust survivors may identify more with the concept of being a Jew propagated by the Nazis than with themselves as individuals (132).

Goldberg follows Lacan in describing trauma as the subject’s confrontation with “the Real”: the “Real” is a situation that transgresses the symbolic perception of the world and is thus incomprehensible to the subject. Since it evades comprehension, it is not integrated into the subject’s consciousness and memory. Hence, it becomes impossible for the subject to remember or to frame the situation into a meaningful narrative structure to communicate it (133). He notes that the survivors who fail to process trauma and make meaning tend to become silenced: they either avoid talking about their experiences, which often results in incoherent speech, or they experience the total loss of speech. Goldberg calls this experience “the second

death” (134). Consequently, narration, especially through writing, becomes an important tool to work through the traumatic past and reclaim a sense of self, since it allows the writer to look for symbolic signifiers that would depict the traumatic past while acknowledging its inaccessibility:

On the one hand, the world does not completely lose its meaning, and on the other hand, this universe that the writer has been thrown into is not taken for granted as the natural state of being, as if the word of the annihilator that positions the victim as an automaton awaiting death in the camp is the true and last word. This writing preserves the symbolic grid of meaning but also produces the essential gap between the subject and the signifier. In this way, the subject stays in the realm of trauma but avoids succumbing to one of the two forms of death. (Goldberg 136-137)

Hence, writing enables a framing of the self and the traumatic experiences within a narrative that prevents them from relapsing into unconscious re-enactment of the past. Writing allows them to use language and codify their experiences into symbols and images different from, yet echoing, those from their traumatic past, which gives them back their voice, control and identity.

Trauma narratives do not only attest to trauma, but, more importantly, serve to exhibit its workings by mimicking its symptoms through layout, language and narrative structure (Vickroy 3). Laurie Vickroy points out that the writer’s use of specific means of narration allows the reader to witness the character’s struggles to cope with trauma. It also allows the writer to “filter the survivors’ experiences” through narrative and influence the reader’s individual reading experience by comparing his/her personal stories to that of the survivor (Vickroy 5). Non-linear narrative structure, symbolic language, metaphors and repetitions can also imitate the effects of trauma, its spontaneous and haunting return as well as the shock it produces (Vickroy 5). Trauma narratives focus on duration, on temporal and spatial shifts rather

than on the progress of the plot. This effect is achieved through disruption of the chronological order of the events as well as through constant shift between the past and the present timeframes, thus hinting at the intrusion of the past into the present (Vickroy 5). Just as the sudden return and intrusion of the past into the present marks the survivor's lack of agency, so is the narrator paralysed inside the fragmented and repetitive patterns due to his/her lack of control over the narrative at hand (Van der Kolk 446). This results in disorientation and conflict in narrative structure, which mirrors the narrator's loss of control and his/her struggles to regain it and which simultaneously allows him to guide the reader through the narrative and his/her experiences of trauma (Vickroy 3). Trauma narratives articulate the silent, inward struggle with unprocessed events, construct and frame them, give them form and structure and make them available to the reader. They have the potential to engage the reader in witnessing of the other's suffering and struggle to deal with traumatic events. The reader is placed into uncomfortable, alien situations, which urges him/her to reflect upon issues such as collective memory, forgetting and remembering, coping and healing in relation to trauma. This, in turn, solicits empathy and understanding. In popular forms of traumatic testimony, such as memoirs, the protagonists are usually depersonalised individuals who are given a name but who have internalised oppression and victimisation. This usually seeps through the character's narrative and shows how it affects him/her in the present by, for example, depicting abnormal behaviour (Vickroy 4). The characters are often ghost-like and bleak, suggest powerlessness and displacement, and serve as reminders of a dark past (Vickroy 4). The reader is then confronted with the narrator's struggle between remembering and unconsciously repressing the traumatic experiences, which encourages empathy on the part of the reader who compares his/her own struggles with the narrator's. Vickroy notes that personal histories often help reshape the collective perception and memory of violent events (5). Thus, a character's experiences act as testimonies to the horrible past with the aim of preventing future atrocities by making the reader a secondary

witness to the depicted events. Although oral testimonies seem to be more faithful to traumatic experiences due to the capacity of the voice and the body to express emotions and re-enact these experiences more spontaneously in a way that language alone cannot (bodily memory), breaking the silence is essential to allow the victim to work through trauma, and “requires an empathetic listener” (Vickroy 6). Vickroy follows Caruth in maintaining that “trauma narrativists enlist their readers to become witnesses to these kinds of stories through unconventional narrative translations of traumatic experiences and memory that give them a different kind of access to the past than conventional frameworks” (20). Trauma narratives take the reader on a virtual journey through traumatic experiences, allowing him/her to adopt the narrator’s perspective but still be aware that the reader is not the traumatised narrator/ victim. This procedure is known as secondary witnessing (Vickroy 20).

Vickroy identifies some of the tools used by writers to represent the nature of traumatic memories: since these are often static and recurring, testimonies, written and oral, tend to be fragmented, repetitive, non-linear and rather emotionless (30). Writers represent these symptoms of trauma through repetition of words, sentences, symbols and images that represent the physical and emotional stasis and that fragment the narrative. In addition, the presence of multiple narrators sometimes shatters a single perspective, thus further fragmenting and disrupting the linearity. Repetitions and the presence of multiple voices enable the writer to communicate a shattered sense of self and the missed connections between individuals, as well as to exhibit a potential for healing through shared testimonies. The shift between the first-person and third-person narrative, which sometimes occurs within survivors’ testimonies, indicates the narrator’s split sense of self due to prolonged dissociation. It also shows multiple positionings in relation to the past and the present, reflects the conflict between remembering and repression of traumatic events, between silence and voice, between knowing and not knowing (Vickroy 29). The reader absorbs the fragmented narrative through different

perspectives and simultaneously bears witness to individual voices and to the narrator's "splitting" (Vickroy 28). The "splitting" acts as a defence mechanism exhibiting non-assimilation of traumatic experiences into memory structures (Vickroy 28). The reader experiences the narrator's disorientation and confusion and the split between a functioning individual and a victim stuck in the past through fragmented narrative, shifting voices and merging timeframes, which encourages him/her to piece everything together into a coherent narrative.

Moreover, metaphors are often used in trauma narratives to indirectly refer to what one really is trying to say (Vickroy 31). They usually allow the writer/narrator to distance himself from the actual events by codifying them into symbolic language and images, and thus gain control over the narrative. However, in trauma narrative, the use of metaphors often results in "mistaking the object for the signifier" where the metaphor becomes the actual object that is represented and functions as a trigger for traumatic re-enactment (Vickroy 32). Specific visual, sensorial or auditory stimuli experienced in the present (e.g. smoke) can trigger specific traumatic memories by associating the stimuli from the present with those of the past (e.g., smoke from the chimneys in concentration camps) and return the victim to that event. Failing to distinguish between the metaphor and the actual signifier causes obsession with and avoidance of these elements, mirrored by recurrent motifs and images that disrupt the narrative.

Vieda Skultans, who has transcribed and analysed oral testimonies of Latvian survivors of deportation to Siberia, notes that one witness she interviewed tends to switch between the past and present tense when recounting his experiences. She observes that whenever the past tense is used, it signals that past events are processed and incorporated into a timeframe, whereas the use of the present tense indicates a shift into the "witnessing mode" and hints at non-processed events in which the witness remains stuck (187). The shift between the past and

the present tense indicates intrusion and invasion of the present by the past, forcing the victim to re-enact the traumatic experience as if it were experienced for the first time (Skultans 187).

Like Vickroy, Skultans pays special attention to the switch between personal pronouns *I/he/she, we/they* (178). These are used by the interviewed witness to show different positions the speaker takes in relation to his past. When the latter is in command of some of the past events, he tends to use the first-person singular pronoun. In contrast, when the speaker has little or no control over the events that are more painful to recall, he switches to the third-person singular pronoun as means to distance himself from traumatic memories (Skultans, 178). The switch from *I* to *we* suggests a shared collective experience into which the speaker inserts himself and into which he merges other witnesses, making his narrative part of collective history (Skultans, 187). Uldis, the survivor in question, opens his narrative in the first-person plural, hinting at collective experiences that he was part of, and then shifts to the first-person singular to separate his individual experiences from the collective ones. The alternation between *I* and *they* marks a shift in perspective in relation to traumatic events: using alternately the *I* and *they*, Uldis places himself as a witness to other people's experiences and thus separates the collective from the individual experiences. In addition, Skultans observes the survivor's occasional insertion of the pronoun *you* and concludes that it serves as a means not only to distance himself from the painful past, but also to include the listener or an imaginary subject into his narrative, thus providing space for an empathetic secondary witness (Skultans, 186). The listener's inclusion implies that what happened to the victim could also happen to anyone at any time (185).

Another tool to help articulate the traumatic experiences that Skultans identifies in Uldis' narrative is his use of what she terms "literary companions." These are described as "segments of recognizable literary texts [that] are appropriated into the personal narrative" as the story becomes more unsettling (181). Examples include bits from fairy tales and epic poems

that serve as a screen, a literary and cultural metaphor onto which Uldis' traumatising experiences are projected, thus enabling him to incorporate traumatising events into narrative, give them meaning and articulate them. Skultans concludes that most of the recorded testimonies indicate that narrators do not always have adequate narrative elements to structure and frame their past experiences, which is a major reason why they draw on well-known literary texts (187). The greatest fear, she identifies, is the survivors' fear that they won't be fully understood and that their experiences can only be comprehended by someone who was a direct witness (187). It is nevertheless important to share one's stories and the main goal should lie in communicating one's personal trauma on an emotional level to the empathetic listener. What trauma literature, such as Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, aims at is to engage the reader in an empathetic reading of one's struggles with trauma.

Chapter 2

Aliens, Time Travel and Drawings: (Inter)textual and Visual Carriers of Trauma in

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Kurt Vonnegut's World War II novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* is one of the first works that uses the image-text fusion and other non-traditional narrative techniques to communicate trauma and represent its various impacts on a survivor of mass atrocity. Dealing with the bombing of Dresden in 1945, but published during the Vietnam War in 1969, *Slaughterhouse-Five* captured the sense of disillusionment with and opposition towards the U.S military involvement in the Vietnam War shared by the members of the anti-war movement in the United States and across the world. It is best summarised in the following observation: "there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (Vonnegut 19). In an interview about his experiences of World War II, Kurt Vonnegut explains his disillusionment and shock shared by many soldiers sent away to war:

When we went into the war, we felt our Government was a respecter of life, careful about not injuring civilians and that sort of thing. Well, Dresden had no tactical value; it was a city of civilians. Yet the Allies bombed it until it burned and melted. And then they lied about it. All that was startling to us. (Allen 4)

In December 1944, at the age of twenty-two, Vonnegut was captured by the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge and became a prisoner of war. As a prisoner of war, he was sent to Dresden and survived the bombing of the city that took place on February 13, 1945, and which was carried out by British and American forces (Allen 4; Verstraete 49). After the bombing, he was recruited along with other prisoners to dig up and torch dead bodies in piles (Verstraete 51). The Old City was mostly destroyed, and approximately 40,000 people died as a result of the bombings (Verstraete 49). Since the city "was not a major centre of war production," the

bombing came to be seen as “a senseless, gratuitous act of retribution, an enormous-scale massacre that has all the markings of a war crime and indeed a crime against humanity” (Verstraete 50). The event deeply scarred Vonnegut’s life, and writing *Slaughterhouse-Five* became a way for him to deal with his personal war trauma. He even called the compulsion to write about his experience in Dresden a “categorical imperative”: “since it was the largest massacre in the history of Europe and I am a person of European extraction and I, a writer, had been present. I *had* to say something. And it took me a long time and it was painful” (Musil 230). Vonnegut’s difficulty to remember and find the right language and method to share his story is, as has been noted in chapter one, characteristic for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Trauma narratives do not follow traditional patterns in terms of content and form. Many of the twentieth-century trauma texts combine elements of fiction, autobiography and nonfiction, which are replicated and further developed by a number of twenty-first century writers (Gibbs 4). This fusion seems to be crucial to the representation and communication of trauma. The narrator, echoing Vonnegut’s struggle, explains his difficulty to write the novel due to his incapacity to map it out and frame it into a narrative that would do justice to his experiences. He draws it on a wallpaper, noting that “[o]ne end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle” (Vonnegut 5). The vaguely outlined narrative points at the absence of chronology and linearity as well as at the ungraspable aspect of the “middle part” which is the traumatic core of the novel. The characters are represented through coloured lines while the Dresden bombing is literally depicted as “a vertical band of crosshatching” (5). What is striking here is that, although the novel’s outline is not written but drawn as a chaotic fusion of lines, the act itself is verbalised by the narrator. This points towards his first attempts to frame and process the traumatic events, and at the possibility of success in processing trauma. The novel revolves around the years in the narrator’s and his alter ego- Billy Pilgrim’s- life that marked

him the most and builds towards the portrayal of the Dresden bombing, told towards the end of the novel. Depicting the bombing of Dresden and its aftermath at the end of the novel mimics the belated nature of traumatic experiences, their sudden return and their being re-experienced as if they happened for the first time (Allen 9).

The focus of trauma narratives, and that of Vonnegut's novel, is reflected in the narrator's comment as to what readers ought to expect from his narrative:

There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces. One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters. (Vonnegut 164)

However, from the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Billy Pilgrim who, like the narrator, is a survivor of the Dresden fire-bombing and an ex-prisoner of war. The link between the narrator and the fictional character is too obvious to be ignored. The switch from the first-person to the third-person narrative suggests the narrator's attempt to distance himself from traumatic events by switching pronouns and giving himself a name and an identity (Skultans 186). By creating Billy as an alter ego, he is able to assert control over his narrative and safely distance himself from his trauma to narrate his experiences.

Time is another central theme of the novel, especially the perception and loss of time. Billy's story begins when he comes "unstuck in time" and travels between 1955, 1941 and 1963. The three timeframes follow in a non-linear order, which points towards a fractured perception of time and foreshadows the distorted chronology of the novel, a clear marker of trauma. The omniscient narrator reports Billy's time travel episodes in an objective way. The reportage of events echoes the narrator's desire to report on Dresden and the inability to do so, thus linking him to Billy's narrative. He reports that Billy's visits are random, that he never

knows where he will go next and that his “trips aren't necessarily fun” (23). More importantly, the narrator captures the sensation that Billy experiences while unwillingly revisiting his past: “He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next” (23). Billy’s perception of the past and the present is distorted and results in a blur, suggesting that the past often intrudes into the present, bringing back traumatic memories involuntarily. This results in Billy’s unconscious re-enactment of past traumatic experiences which feel as if they were occurring for the first time. Intrusive traumatic memories keep Billy in a constant fear of reliving the traumatic past and make him “unenthusiastic about living” (60). Billy’s loss of a sense of time and space is concretely articulated in chapter 6, but its cause remains untold because it is repressed: “Billy sat up in bed. He had no idea what year it was or what planet he was on. Whatever the planet's name was, it was cold” (136). The lack of control is not only Billy’s weakness, but that of the narrator himself. The latter attempts to relate chronologically Billy’s account of life but fails, which results in fragmented and seemingly unrelated life episodes. The reader’s task is then to reconstruct Billy’s narrative, which coincides with the narrator’s attempt to reconstruct his memory (Wicks 337).

In addition, Billy’s fractured sense of time is mirrored in his time travel episodes and the Tralfamadorians’ time perception, which hints at Billy’s unprocessed trauma. His backward experience of a war film emphasises his distorted perception of time and points towards his inability to find closure:

He came slightly unstuck in time, saw the late movie backwards, then forwards again.

It was a movie about American bombers in the Second World War and the gallant men who flew them. Seen backwards by Billy, the story went like this Billy saw the war movies backwards then forwards—and then it was time to go out into his backyard to

meet the flying saucer. Out he went, his blue and ivory feet crushing the wet salad of the lawn. (74-75)

The rewinding of the film is a literal representation of Billy's trauma: his inability to come to terms with his past as well as the haunting and painful memories that send him back into the past. Just as the film exists on its own, so does Billy's trauma exist outside of temporal, historical or spatial frames. It also allows Billy to undo the past horrors by extrapolating the rewinding process and returning to the beginnings of mankind and so undo death and destruction. This episode anticipates later representations of trauma, such as the reversal of photographs of a falling man in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Gibbs 13). Gibbs notes that "even from the outset, the fantasy of escape is denied" to Billy (13). The reversed view of the movie as an attempt to escape from traumatic events fails, since he first sees it backwards, but then sees it "forwards again" (13). Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, the narrator finally manages to confront and accept death as a natural and inevitable occurrence by speaking it out, thus making it real. Unlike in the rest of the novel, the narrator chooses to focus on life while reading an excerpt from a notebook on the population of Dresden (212). Acceptance of death and focus on life prompts him to go back to his story of travelling back to Dresden with his friend Bernard O'Hare and discuss the trip in detail. It also helps the narrator face and accept the horrible and senseless death of his friend Edgar Derby by finally articulating it through language in the last few pages of the novel. He still uses Billy Pilgrim as a protective shield to access the most painful of traumatic memories, but the narrator deliberately blurs the lines between himself and Billy to show that Billy's experience is his and O'Hare's: "Now Billy and the rest were being marched into the ruins by their guards. I was there. O'Hare was there. We had spent the past two nights in the blind innkeeper's stable" (212).

Simultaneously, the narrator goes back to the beginning of the novel and provides missing information as to his post-war trip as well as to the circumstances of Derby's death.

The novel comes full circle, which points towards the narrator's closure with the past. This coincides with Vonnegut's recognition that writing the novel helped him find a way to verbalise and share his experiences: "It was a therapeutic thing. I'm a different sort of person now. I got rid of a lot of crap" (Todd 32). For the narrator and for Vonnegut, coping and healing are interlinked with literary production, which is why he views his work as therapy (Gulani, *Diagnosing* 181). Susanne Veas-Gulani maintains that

Billy's story allows an indirect and detached exploration of the effects of the Dresden bombing because the character is mostly fictional. The narrator's story parallels Vonnegut's on one level, but on another level, it is an integral part of a work of fiction. Removing himself from the factual to the fictional plane by creating the narrator allows Vonnegut a degree of distance from himself and his experiences. (*Diagnosing* 182)

The writing of the novel, hence, plays a crucial role in coping with loss and coming to terms with the traumatic past that had haunted the writer for decades. The novel and its creation confirm the key trauma concept of going through trauma through narrativization (Herman 181). Vonnegut himself states that, after finishing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he did not have to and did not want to write about Dresden anymore:

It was the end of some sort of career. I don't know why, exactly. I suppose that flowers, when they're through blooming, have some sort of awareness of some purpose having been served. Flowers didn't ask to be flowers and I didn't ask to be me. At the end of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I had a shutting-off feeling that I had done what I was supposed to do and everything was OK. (Allen, *Conversations* 107)

The chaotic nature of trauma in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is represented by a kaleidoscope of genres, fact and fiction. Autobiographical recollections of war, as well as factual entries about crusades and the destruction of Dresden in the eighteenth century quoted from history books, are incorporated into Billy's fictional narrative, while the concepts of time and space are

challenged through the use of science fictional elements. Combining both factual material and fantastic narrative allows Vonnegut to create a safe space in which he, as a writer and narrator, can exist and verbalise his painful past from a distance, without being retraumatised in the process of narration. The mix of fact and fiction, as well as recognition through alienation is also a crucial defining point of the science fiction genre: that of the “exact recreation of the author’s empirical environment” and “the exclusive interest in a strange newness, a *novum*” (Suvin 373). This fusion creates “cognitive estrangement” which acts like a lens through which aspects of the writer’s and the reader’s empirical reality are seen in a new and alienating perspective (Suvin 374). Cognitive estrangement is achieved through an invention or a historical novelty that Darko Suvin terms “the novum” (373). Suvin maintains that cognitive estrangement and the novum found in many science fiction texts allow a discussion of “the political, psychological, anthropological use and effect of sciences, and philosophy of science, and the becoming or failure of new realities as a result of it” (381). In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, cognitive estrangement is constructed through Billy’s mediated testimony of the Dresden bombing and his experience as a prisoner of war in Germany. The novum is produced through the introduction of aliens called Tralfamadorians, flying saucers and time travel elements into the narrative. This fusion produces defamiliarization and allows the reader, and the writer, to remove themselves from their empirical reality through the distance towards the fantastic. As Amanda Wicks notes, the title’s and the book’s use of science fiction elements “speaks to a popular science fiction subject (aliens from another planet) and frames what follows within that genre, while simultaneously calling attention to a specific medical disorder associated with mental breakdowns” (Wicks 334). Thus, distance creates room for criticism of empirical reality. Removal from his empirical reality and the traumatic memories through the use of science fictional elements, allows Vonnegut to create a safe environment and a symbolic realm where he can access and verbalise his trauma.

The book's title emphasises the idea that the novel is not a traditional account of a war experience, but a narrative that aims to convey the experience of confronting death and destruction: "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance With Death by Kurt Vonnegut." Three separate titles are merged into one and hint at Vonnegut's attitude towards war and the function of art. "Slaughterhouse-Five" refers to the pig slaughterhouse in Dresden where Vonnegut was held captive as a prisoner of war. "The Children's Crusade" was "one of the most futile, exploitive, cynical events in all of Western European history ... that never went anywhere and never accomplished anything, except to provide ample prey for all kinds of human vultures to feed upon" (Morse 94). Vonnegut links it to his war experience and ironically hints at the values of glory and heroism traditionally associated with war (Giannone 83). "A Duty Dance with Death" echoes a direct reference in the first chapter to the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline's claim, that art can only be produced when the artist confronts death (Vonnegut 21). Adopting Céline's claim, Vonnegut prepares the reader to experience a work of art that was born from his own suffering and encounter with death. However, since it is connected with the Children's Crusade, the title suggests the absurdity and senselessness of mass destruction.

In addition, the belated response to traumatic events is reflected in Billy's fractured perception of time. For him, it consists of moments that always can be revisited, do not belong into the past or the future and are all part of his present. In chapter 3, for instance, Billy's past intrudes into the present several times within the same paragraph, showing Billy's lack of control or understanding of his traumatic memories:

Billy closed his eyes. When he opened them, he was back in the Second World War again. His head was on the wounded rabbi's shoulder. A German was kicking his feet, telling him to wake up, that it was time to move on. (58)

He closed his eyes, and opened them again. He was still weeping, but he was back in Luxembourg again. He was marching with a lot of other prisoners. It was a winter wind that was bringing tears to his eyes. (63)

The narrator positions both life periods together within the same paragraph, thus linking Billy's present life, supposedly in 1965, and his life during the winter of 1945, pointing at the intrusion of traumatic memories into the present.

Likewise, the novel's structure and composition mirror the narrator's loss of a sense of time and space. It is best explained by the Tralfamadorians, and the narrator's view on literature:

there isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvellous moments seen all at once. (88)

The time unity presented by the narrator has a beginning and an end, but there is no linear progression and the novel does not end with Billy's death as a retired optometrist, thus allowing closure for his narrative. Instead, the novel ends with Billy's view of Dresden reduced to rubble and his observation that spring has arrived. The novel's focus, like that of most of the trauma narratives, lies not in time's progress, but in its duration and stasis (Vickroy 5). The second sentence of the novel's opening page suggests the fragmented and non-linear progression of the novel through the self-conscious claim that the novel is written in a "telegraphic schizophrenic" manner. "Telegraphic" suggests that it is dictated and transmitted from a distance, while being concise, clipped, and elliptical in style, stressing the fact that Vonnegut tells his story retrospectively while still processing his traumatic memories. It also hints at the novel's form and composition: the paragraphs are mostly short and have no linear thematical connection,

carry bits of information and appear almost as short stories thrown together in a non-chronological and non-linear order, which creates a fractured narrative. In addition, different timeframes are used to further disrupt the narrative and raise the question as to who narrates the story. The first chapter deals with the narrator's life in 1964 and 1967 (Vonnegut 1, 11) just as Billy's narrative opens with travelling between 1955, 1941 and 1963 in a non-chronological order (23). The narrator's detachment from the events occurs through his use of a fictional character to tell the narrator's, and Vonnegut's, experience of the bombing. Told in the third-person singular, and framed by the narrator's, and Vonnegut's first-person narrative in the first and last chapters, the novel's switch between points of view hints at the protagonist's distorted perception of the self and suggests a confusing and possibly unreliable account of the events. The term "schizophrenic" is used to depict the novel's structure as well as content, linking it to the effects of schizophrenia. The latter is defined by symptoms such as "delusions, hallucinations, disorganized thinking (speech), grossly disorganized or abnormal motor behaviour (including catatonia), and other negative symptoms," which "have to be present for at least six months" (DSM-5 87). This, in turn, gives the science fictional elements a deeper dimension: instead of being imaginary inventions for the sake of entertainment, the presence of the Tralfamadorians, the flying saucers and the time-travel aspect serve as tools to depict the effects of traumatic events and process them in a more or less safe manner. Moreover, the self-diagnosis of being schizophrenic testifies to Vonnegut's and many other war survivors' need for a concrete, albeit false, diagnosis when there was no official diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder yet. The title thus already introduces not only the thematic core of the novel, but also establishes the new form in which Vonnegut's experiences will be depicted through language, metaphors, repetitions, clipped and seemingly incoherent paragraphs, as well as "literary companions", images and science fiction elements.

The objective and detached tone used to depict Billy's struggles suggests emotional repression, which results in Billy's abnormal physical behaviour. Lorraine B. Cates notes that emotional trauma manifests itself in a somatic form through body language "when painful feelings are unexpressed and undetected" (39). Feelings that are not framed into any form of symbolic articulation, can manifest themselves in different sensations and bodily responses, such as a sense of emptiness or a quickening of the pulse (Cates 39). Thus, the body "provides an *extralinguistic way of knowing*" the presence of trauma in a way that the mind cannot guarantee (Cates 39). Billy's trauma speaks through his body in a recurrent image of feet that are "blue and ivory" (28, 32-33, 53, 65). The image first occurs when Billy finds himself in his cold house while writing a letter in the rumpus room. Later in the same chapter, the reader is taken back to Billy's past, where the image returns, thus providing context and meaning for its reoccurrence: "last came Billy Pilgrim, empty-handed, bleaky, ready for death... he had no helmet, no overcoat, no weapon, and no boots" (32-33). The repetitive appearance of "blue and ivory" feet links Billy's present life to the traumatising episodes from the past, where Billy's feet were covered in rags and where he encountered a teenager who froze to death because he was not wearing boots. The image of blue feet is closely associated with death, something that Billy had seen multiple times during the war and almost experienced himself (53). The image haunts Billy throughout his life, affecting his life in the present and triggering memories of his winter months in the woods of Luxembourg: "Billy got out of bed in the moonlight. He felt spooky and luminous, felt as though he were wrapped in cool fur that was full of static electricity. He looked down at his bare feet. They were ivory and blue" (72). Billy's near-death experience, represented by the synecdoche of frozen feet, is emotionally charged to a point of triggering traumatic memories. Cates notes that people "tend to remember things that arouse emotion, especially strong emotion." Traumatic memory is state-dependent: the more

environmental, contextual similarities there are between past and present, the more likely it is to trigger a memory (Cates 41).

Similarly, bodily memory of the traumatic past comes forth in Billy's reaction to the song he hears at his daughter's wedding:

Unexpectedly, Billy Pilgrim found himself upset by the song and the occasion. Billy had powerful psychosomatic responses to the changing chords. His mouth filled with the taste of lemonade, and his face became grotesque, as though he really were being stretched on the torture engine called the rack.

He looked so peculiar that several people commented on it solicitously when the song was done. They thought he might have been having a heart attack, and Billy seemed to confirm this by going to a chair and sitting down haggardly. (172-173)

Billy's body reacts to a sensory stimulus that triggers repressed traumatic memories inaccessible to the mind. Such an unexpected and powerful response makes Billy realise that it resulted from repressed trauma, which he calls "a great big secret somewhere inside" and which eludes his knowing and understanding (173). Likewise, the wedding tent acts as another trigger for bodily memory: it is orange and black, which is reminiscent of German trains that transported prisoners of war (69, 72). These colours act as visual triggers of Billy's experience as a captive, thus returning him to a disturbing and emotionally charged moment (Wicks 337). Likewise, Billy's reaction to the siren announcing noon clearly indicates that he is stuck in the past and keeps reliving traumatising moments. Associating the siren in the present with the sirens that announced bombing planes during the war makes Billy re-experience the day of the Dresden bombing in the present and clearly point at unprocessed trauma: "A siren went off, scared the hell out of him. He was expecting the Third World War at any time" (57). Cates notes that bodily memory is closely associated with emotions experienced by and through the body, and that some strong emotional experiences can evade linguistic framing and solely reside

in the body (40). She follows Stern in maintaining that bodily memory that is triggered by external stimuli, produces the effect of a “felt past acting in a felt present,” thus fusing two timeframes and leading to re-enactment of the past in the present (Cates 41). Since traumatic events surpass one’s capacity to grasp and process what is happening, they are registered differently than ordinary information. Confrontation with external stimuli reminiscent of past trauma triggers “intrusive symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks and physical or psychological reactions, when confronted with reminders of the traumatization” (Anastasiadis 1).

Vonnegut’s trauma also visually transpires in his biographical note that follows the main title. The paragraph is composed of two long sentences that are cut and arranged in descending order, creating the shape of a missile (Fig. 1). This textual and visual presentation establishes intermediality to not only produce the effect of a falling bomb, but, more importantly, to expose the novel’s primary theme: the traumatic firebombing of Dresden and its haunting aftermath. The simultaneous visualisation and verbalisation of the theme suggests the possibility that the novel serves as a way to process trauma, while also indicating that this process is not yet complete. The general impression of a life in “easy circumstances on Cape Cod” is openly stated, but the following statement “[and smoking too much]” is hidden behind the square brackets and suggests that post-war life is not easy and is in fact full of unpleasant and hidden aspects. Moreover, following Laurie Vickroy’s theory on the use of metaphors discussed in chapter 1, smoking cigarettes not only points at a compulsive re-enactment of trauma, but acts as a metaphor and the repository of traumatic memory for the Dresden bombing. The bracketed assertion precedes the author’s statement of surviving the firebombing of Dresden and thus indirectly refers to it.

Slaughterhouse-Five also uses images to represent the effects of trauma. Athanasios Anastasiadis remarks that photographs, paintings, diaries and archival material usually serve as

tools to “retain memory” for their unmediated, more authentic connection to reality (17). He stresses the interaction between narration, factual and visual material as means to help construct meaning during the reconstruction of the past (Anastasiadis 17). However, visual components capture only a fraction of reality, which, without any context, act as repositories of memory unavailable to the narrator and the reader. There are three visual elements used in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: drawings of a grave (Fig. 2), an inscription (Fig. 3) and a locket between naked breasts (Fig. 4). The use of drawings instead of photographs points towards a mediated, and possibly altered perception of the actual objects. The first drawing occurs in the middle of chapter 5 and it is a grave stone with an inscription “Everything was beautiful, and nothing hurt”. The image follows the dialogue between Billy and Valencia about Billy’s war experience and the death of Edgar Derby, to which Billy responds with “Um” (122). The insertion of the image after Billy’s elusive answer disrupts the dialogue and points towards his silence and repression in connection to his friend’s death. This visual intrusion into the narrated dialogue mimics the unexpected intrusion of the traumatic past into the present, producing a confusing and disorientating effect on the reader, whose focus shifts from the dialogue to a decontextualized image. The reader is forced to make sense of this visual interruption as well as of the harsh contrast that the grave image and its inscription produce, just as Billy is forced to relive the past within his present reality. The dialogue then continues between Valencia and Billy but reads more like an interrogation rather than a conversation. Valencia questions Billy about the circumstances Edgar’s death, but instead of providing context and detail, Billy only answers with “yes” and “no.” The paragraph ends with Billy travelling back to 1944 and his stay in the prison hospital, setting the stage for the next paragraph. This hints at the unspeakable nature of Edgar’s death and shows that Billy has not yet processed this traumatic loss. Billy’s return to the past also brings about the second image, that of a latrine inscription on a signpost. Billy hears prisoners being sick from too much food intake and sees buckets full of excrement

and vomit, as well as dehumanised and suffering people. This has such a harsh effect on Billy that he thinks he is going mad: “‘there they go.’ He meant his brains” (Vonnegut 125). The image visualises Billy’s (re)traumatisation as it is being experienced by him and by the narrator himself, as the pronoun shift indicates: “That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book” (125). The narrator inserts himself into Billy’s narrative, thus framing his own trauma through Billy’s story. Implicitly, the narrator steps outside of Billy’s narrative and acknowledges his traumatic experience, which hints at the beginning process of his trauma.

Moreover, pronoun shift is used on several occasions in the novel, which mimics the victim’s attempt to distance him- or herself from traumatic events. As Vieda Skultans notes in her examination of oral testimonies, traumatised individuals often perform a shift in pronouns to either distance themselves from the painful events or to recount what has been processed and stored inside the memory system (178). The switch between third-person and first-person narrative operates in the same way. It allows the reader to establish the link between the nameless narrator and Billy Pilgrim, which has various effects. Firstly, the shift allows the author to insert himself into Billy’s narration through the “I” of the narrator, thus reminding the reader that the story is not mere fiction (Gibbs 14). Moreover, the pronoun shift demonstrates the difficulty victims of violence have to grasp and articulate elusive traumatic memories. Judith Herman notes that the paradox of “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud” is central to understanding how trauma operates (Herman 1). Thus, positioning themselves outside of the events by using third-person narration allows them to distance themselves from the raw traumatic memories and assume the role of external witness (Skultans 178). The pronoun shift also points towards the narrator’s success at identifying his own trauma. Wicks maintains that “[t]he initial imperative, ‘Listen,’ in the second chapter shapes Billy’s story as Vonnegut’s testimonial; with that command, the reader takes on the imperative role of a witness essential to recovery (334). Hence, the narrator becomes a testifying

victim in need of a witness and, using his narrative, places the reader in the role of a secondary witness.

In addition to images and the narrator's intrusion into Billy's story as means to disrupt and fragment the narrative, Vonnegut uses two repetitions that reoccur throughout the narrator's and Billy's narrative. The phrases "so it goes" and "and so on" usually follow a brief statement of someone's death and are used to mimic the haunting and intrusive aspect of traumatic memories. These two statements represent Billy's emotionally detached reaction to experiencing and witnessing death, but also hint at his incapacity to fully process and accept what he was and is experiencing. Alan Gibbs takes it even further in maintaining that the two phrases act as repository for and shortcuts to traumatic memories: "This repetition frequently combines with a shorthand signification which stands synecdochally for the entire memory, which is usually too terrible to bear" and too incomprehensible to articulate (Gibbs 8). The refrain "so it goes" is borrowed by Billy from the Tralfamadorians, who perceive time as a non-linear entity and for whom death does not represent loss (Gibbs 11). Gibbs emphasises the importance of the borrowed Tralfamadorian chorus noting that it acts as Billy's defence mechanism in order to shield himself from feelings of terror associated with death or injury of others (11). Billy's use of Tralfamadorian phrases and even his adopting their view on life allows him to create a safe environment for formulating, processing and understanding his traumatic experiences without getting too close to them and being retraumatised, a step that is crucial for successful recovery (Herman 125). Gibbs sees the Tralfamadorians as a futile tool for Billy and the narrator to cope with trauma, since it allows them to avoid traumatic memories and deny "one's own agency, a constricted response arising from the fear of traumatic occurrences repeating" (14). At first, this seems like a valid observation, but considering the narrator and Billy as one character, and as an extension of Vonnegut himself, one might argue that the Tralfamadorian fantasy functions as a safe environment created by the patient and

psychiatrist for successful therapy. In this case, Gibbs' observation is unfitting, since both the narrator and Vonnegut manage to confront and acknowledge their traumatic experiences in and through *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Vonnegut also uses literary companions as a proxy to express the unspeakable witnessing of destruction and death. As discussed in chapter one, "literary companions" are described as "segments of recognizable literary texts [that] are appropriated into the personal narrative" as the story becomes more unsettling (Skultans 181). Appropriating popular narratives to depict one's own experiences creates a distance between the survivor and the event (Skultans 181). The first literary companion is an epigraph containing a verse of Martin Luther's Christmas Carol "Away in the Manger", which reappears within Billy's narrative in chapter nine:

The cattle are lowing,

The Baby awakes.

But the little Lord Jesus

No crying He makes. (Before page 1, 197)

The verse announces one of the novel's central themes: "suffering is part of the human but not part of the divine condition and no divine force will intervene in human history to modify much less to stop it" (Morse 91). When the epigraph returns in Billy's narrative, the verse functions as a mirror to Billy's post-traumatic state of being: as an inexperienced and optimistic young man who had been sent to war and survived it, Billy finds himself in an alien world with no direction, values or principles to follow. Traumatized by his war experience, he is emotionally detached from his past and his present, does not enjoy life and is left alone with his painful and haunting memories. Likewise, the narrator's appropriation of fragments taken from limericks

and songs into his own narrative points towards the fragmented sense of self that he, as a victim of traumatic events, experiences in the aftermath of war:

My name is Yon Yonson,

I work in Wisconsin,

I work in a lumbermill there.

The people I meet when I walk down the street,

They say, 'What's your name?

And I say,

'My name is Yon Yonson,

I work in Wisconsin...' (3, my emphasis)

The first three lines reoccur in the narrator's own speech and create a disorienting effect: "And we had babies. And they're all grown up now, and I'm an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls. My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin, I work in a lumbermill there" (7). It could be seen as the narrator's biographical description, but the fact that it first occurs in a song makes the reader wonder why it would be used by the narrator to describe himself. This appropriation underlines the narrator's loss of identity and his need to reclaim agency and control. Repeating those lines throughout the song and Billy's narrative mimics the haunting and intrusive aspect of traumatic memories. Likewise, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah depicted in the Bible is appropriated by the narrator to justify his looking back at his past. He stresses his admiration for Lot's wife and her audacity to look back at the destruction despite God's order not to do so. The narrator's sympathy for the biblical character comes from his own struggle between wanting to forget and the need to remember his traumatic past at the risk of reliving the horrors and being re-traumatized. However, looking into the past is necessary

for him to process his experiences, give them a voice and a temporal setting. Allen notes that Billy Pilgrim's, and by extension Vonnegut's, life is marked by an obsessive return to the past and that they cannot help but look back: "like Lot's wife in the Bible, Vonnegut could not help looking back, despite the danger of being turned metaphorically into a pillar of salt, into an emblem of the death that comes to those who cannot let go of the past" (7).

Vonnegut also uses excerpts from history books as literary companions to narrate the destruction of Dresden and the experience of war. As mentioned above, "The Children's Crusade" is used in the novel's title and refers to a chapter in Charles Mackay's book about historical crusades (15). One passage on the thirteenth-century children's crusade is quoted within the narrator's story and is used as a metaphorical intertext to depict the narrator's own perception of war. The narrator, after meeting up with his friend and the Dresden bombing survivor Bernard O'Hare, seeks help from the latter in remembering their time during the war. Unfortunately, O'Hare, too, suffers from amnesia regarding this period. To fill the memory gap, both look at Mackay's account on historical crusades, one of which the narrator directly quotes. Implicitly, he uses the passage as a screen to project his own war experience without reliving the past and being re-traumatised. The narrator goes even further and uses facts about the destruction of Dresden in 1760 to fill out the gap in his memory regarding the Dresden bombing (17-18). He even includes Goethe's reaction to the devastation of the city to express his own shock and lament. However, the quote is in German, so that the language switch fragments the narrative, prevents understanding and mimics the existing but inaccessible emotional trauma. Here, Vonnegut achieves the literal representation of Caruth's so-called trauma paradox between "knowing and not knowing" (3). While traumatic memories are stored and exist outside of the memory structure, they are out of immediate reach to the victim. Hence, the presence of the text indicates the presence of trauma, but its formulation in a foreign language indicates the incapacity to make sense of the text, and by extension, of traumatic memories.

Likewise, Vonnegut uses science fiction as a literary companion to help him cope with his traumatic past. Amanda Wicks observes that science fiction's estranging nature and the use of bizarre, alienating elements "take on properties associated with trauma" (331). Alien kidnappings and time travel are used as a way to safely access traumatic memories and to make sense of them while adjusting to life. This is also reflected in Billy's fascination with Kilgore Trout's science fiction novels and his appropriation of different aspects found in Trout's novels. These provide not only the explanation to Billy's psychological state, but also a "language and structure to discuss the temporal breakdown and confusing interjections continually posed by traumatic memory" (Wicks 335). Thus, science fiction to Billy, and Vonnegut, becomes "a lens through which to relive, understand and articulate the war trauma in general, and their Dresden experience in particular" (Shields 162). Some of Billy's Talfamadore episodes coincide with plots from Trout's book, making the reader wonder whether or not Billy has false memories:

He got a few paragraphs into it, and then he realized that he had read it before— years ago, in the veterans' hospital. It was about an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon 212. (201)

The kidnapping of a man and a woman by aliens from Zircon strongly mirrors Billy's fantasy of being kidnapped by Talfamadorians and kept in a zoo with Montana Wildhack (Allen 12). Billy appropriates the fantastic story to frame and articulate his experience of war from a distance to avoid re-enacting them and getting re-traumatized by them. Moreover, since Billy's time perception is distorted to the point of not distinguishing between the past, present and future, Trout's adopted science fictional characters manage to make him see time as lying outside of linear structure and "give him insights into what was really going on" (Vonnegut 30). This provides Billy and the narrator with answers to the never-ending "why?" and brings them both closer to grasping and framing his war trauma (Wicks 336). It also helps them to accept

their suffering as part of natural order of things and not as divine providence summarised in Tralfamadorian response: “There is no why” (77). Trout’s plot from *The Big Board* is appropriated and transformed by Billy into the Tralfamadorian experience and points to Vonnegut’s “attempt to deal with the problem of mortality through writing fiction” (Allen 12).

Recounting trauma allows to reconstruct, process and integrate painful and shattering experiences into a coherent whole and assign a place to it in the past. Herman emphasises the importance of articulating trauma and its integration within memory structures, noting that the “trauma story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real” (Herman 181). Traumatic memories are not changed or forgotten, but are framed, verbalised and shared through language. More than that, *Slaughterhouse-Five* acts as a testimony to war horrors and all the individuals that have ever been in any way victims of mass atrocity (Herman 181). It also contributes to collective memory and shapes collective perspectives not only in connection to Dresden, but any war, past or ongoing (Herman 181).

Chapter 3

“Googolplex”: Communicating the Unspeakable Through Text and Image in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

Like Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* combines the visual with the textual to communicate the unspeakable and elusive nature of trauma, as well as to represent ways in which it impacts the traumatised individuals in the aftermath of trauma. Foer’s novel received mixed reviews upon its publication, with some applauding Foer’s ability to represent trauma by fusing both the visual and the textual while others criticize his use of photographs as unauthentic, arguing that, in Harry Siegel’s words, they “serve no purpose but to remind us that this is an important book” (Siegel 2005). Siegel also notes that Foer’s techniques to illustrate trauma strongly echo W. G. Sebald’s and Paul Auster’s methods, but that they serve no function: “he pillages other authors’ techniques, stripping them of their context and using them merely for show” (Siegel 2005). Foer indeed seems to borrow from different authors. However, he does so because he acknowledges these techniques as being more fitting to depict trauma in contrast to only using language, and he develops them in his novel to serve specific purposes. Meta-textual elements, especially photographs embedded into the textual narrative, are crucial for the reader’s understanding of the plot, the characters and their going through trauma. Indeed, the merger of photographs “with different visual or verbal media [allows] to produce unique narrative combinations that entice readers to develop a new literacy” (Pedri 2).

This chapter closely examines Foer’s use of text and images, focusing on the layout of the text, syntax, word choices and repetitions, and their function in the novel, as well as the effects they produce. It also discusses the function of the included photographs, how they fit the narrative as a whole, and how they help communicate personal feelings of survivor’s guilt and the loss of self when language fails to articulate them. The chapter looks at Foer’s mix of

text and images as a technique proper to comics. It maintains that the novel, like comics, can be seen as a “hybrid [of] two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual,” where the factual, historical dimension and collective memory meets the fictional, personal and individual counter-narrative (Chute 452).

Foer uses multiple voices in the novel to depict individual accounts of personal trauma. Unlike in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the multiple voices do not act as the main protagonist’s alter egos, but belong to three different narrators belonging to the same family: Oskar Schell, Thomas Schell Sr. and his wife, referred to as Grandma. However, the use of multiple perspectives produces a similar effect as in Vonnegut’s novel. The three characters alternately narrate their stories throughout the chapters; for example, the first chapter opens with Oskar’s belated account of the 9/11 attacks, followed by Grandpa’s letter to his unborn son disclosed in chapter two, and Grandma’s recollections of her life in Dresden in chapter three. As a result, their accounts of life constantly interrupt each other and disrupt the linearity of the narrative as a whole. This technique aims to mirror the distorted perception of time that traumatised individuals often experience. It also allows Foer to explore each of the three characters’ personal struggles to communicate and represent traumatic experiences using written narrative and photography. Todd Atchison stresses the importance of such personal accounts of trauma, which he calls “counter-narratives,”¹ in collecting the “elements of post-traumatic survival without universalizing the event” (Atchison 360). Throughout the novel, these personal life stories offer a constant flow of traumatic discourse, since they portray the characters’ lives post-9/11 alongside past traumas, such as the Dresden bombing in 1945 (Atchison 360). Using multiple perspectives, Foer manages to communicate the effect of chaos and disorientation

¹ The attacks of September 11th became a globally televised event, so that it mainly came to be associated with the media footage of planes flying into buildings, the collapsing towers and people falling out of the windows. “Counter-narratives” here refer to the witnesses’ personal accounts of the attacks, as opposed to the collective, mediated memory: “These counter-narratives create life stories reinforcing diverse perspectives/voices from the chaos of unique experiences” (Atchison 360).

when attempting to make sense of the traumatic events (Atchison 360). The constant disruption of the three narratives invites the reader to actively participate in the process of connecting the dots to make sense of the novel and experience the complexity and incommunicability of trauma through reading (Geertsma 101).

The novel's introduction of the characters is unconventional and disruptive, and points towards the unusual composition of the novel. The cover of the book is a collage of an image of a boy and scattered birds, followed by the title in a red and large font (Fig. 1). However, the cover already contains elements that will reoccur throughout the novel, such as the words "extremely" and "incredibly" and the image of the scattered birds. The first three pages preceding the title page contain three seemingly random images: that of a doorknob and a key hole, scattered birds, echoing the cover image, and a picture of windows illuminated from the inside (Fig. 2, 3, 4). At first, this selection seems to be unrelated to the novel, and the pictures seem to serve only as illustrations. However, as the reading progresses, the reader comes across them once again and attempts to piece textual information and the visual meta-texts together to make meaning (Atchison 361). The three narrators, Oskar, Grandfather Schell and Grandma implicitly provide contextual information for these photographs through verbal, textual and meta-textual mediums. Thus, the first three images preceding the actual story may be associated with the three narrators: the doorknob with the key hole represents Grandfather's narrative, the birds are associated with Oskar and the apartment windows stand for Grandmother's narrative. The visual introduction to the story through photographs invites the reader to connect the images with the textual information provided by each of the three narrators to gain insight into personal experiences of dealing with trauma. Atchison maintains that "once Foer's narrators yield their personal histories through representation (verbal, written, and visual) then readers may fill in these meta-textual lacunas in an attempt to bridge the gap between sign and signifier" (361). The photographs act as visual signs that, as the reading progresses, become symbolic

representations of the three narrators. They also predict the structure of the novel: just as the three images associated with a different narrator follow each other, so do the chapters in the book. The novel opens with Oskar's narrative a year after the 9/11 attacks. He is a nine-year-old whose father perished in the attacks and who struggles with traumatic loss by setting out to find the matching lock to a key found in his father's tuxedo. Oskar hopes that this will help him understand his father's death. In the process, he archives information about the objects he collects, the people he meets, his thoughts and experiences using text and photography. The "Stuff That Happened to Me" scrapbook conflates the visual with the written while he explores the five boroughs of New York City. Parallel to Oskar's trauma, the opening chapter introduces his grandparents as the traumatized survivors of the Dresden bombings, whose traumatic loss of their beloved ones is re-enacted by their son's death in the 9/11 attacks. Both attempt to communicate their feelings and record their memories in letter form, but these letters are never sent to their respective addressees.

The grandparents' letters are connected through their past experiences in Dresden, especially through their traumatic loss. The grandparents met during WWII and lived in Dresden. Grandpa was in love with Grandma's sister Anna, who got pregnant with his child. Both of their families perished in the bombings of Dresden. After the tragedy, Grandma moved to America where some years later she met Grandfather Schell. United in their love for Grandma's sister Anna, who died in the bombings, they moved in together. After a few months, Grandpa moved back to Dresden, leaving Grandma pregnant with his son Thomas Schell. Some decades later, Grandma is re-traumatized by the loss of her son, who perished in the 9/11 attacks, which is when Grandpa returns to New York. In order to cope with her loss and readjust to life, she writes letters to Oskar that she never sends, and attempts to tell her life story by typing it out on an old typewriter. However, her life story is fittingly represented through empty pages included in the novel (Foer 121, 123). Despite her knowledge of English and German, she is

unable to articulate her trauma, which results in her hitting the space bar instead of letters. The blank pages visually represent Caruth's paradox of *knowing* and *not knowing* in connection to traumatic memory: the absence of text shows the presence and inaccessibility of trauma, as well as the failure of language to mediate, frame and communicate the traumatic loss (Atchison 364). Despite Grandma's mastery of English and German, she is unable to break the silence that censors her whole story from her living family, and by implication, from the reader. Censorship through imposed silence also visually opens Grandma's first chapter and resonates through her writing. In her letter to Oskar, she includes another letter that she received from a Turkish labour camp in 1921. Visually, the sentences are disrupted through the censor's heavy use of X, so that Grandma, and the reader, are left with just a few disconnected words. Just like Grandmother's blank spaces between the sentences and the blank pages of her life story, the letter provides no information or context and denotes "an absence through the presence of silenced language" (Atchison 364). Like the distorted and decontextualized letter, Grandma's subsequent narrative illustrates the victim's need and the failure to be heard. The prisoner's and Grandmother's letters are one-sided and unanswered, just like the messages Oskar's father left on his answering machine on the day of the 9/11 attacks (Atchison 364). Sien Uytterschout observes that "her adoption of a foreign language and consequent abandonment of her native language indicate a certain loss of control *over* herself" ("Incomprehensibility" 67). The loss of self and the loss of agency are further underlined by the absence of Grandma's name throughout the novel.

Similarly, grandfather Schell's struggle to communicate with the outside world in general, and to articulate his traumatic experiences in particular, are illustrated in his writing and his behaviour. In his first letter "Why I'm Not Writing Where You Are" (16-33), addressed to his unborn child who perished in the Dresden bombings, the reader learns that grandfather Shell suffers from aphasia, which occurred sometime after he survived the Dresden bombings in 1945. As discussed in chapter one, loss of speech was a common phenomenon among

Holocaust survivors, some of whom slipped into total silence as a result of their avoidance and inability to frame and to articulate their traumatic experiences (Goldberg 134). Amos Goldberg sees aphasia as the “symbolic death” of an individual, a loss of self that is clearly articulated in Grandpa’s first letter: “and then I lost 'I' and my silence was complete” (17). Unable to communicate orally, he resorts to writing, filling pages of blank journals with phrases he uses in everyday life. He also uses journals to articulate his feelings, thoughts and experiences, so that his writing style is characterised through long sentences separated more by commas than by full stops. Foer uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to create a destabilising and unmediated patchwork of themes and images to represent the struggle between the need to communicate the traumatic past and the inability to access and formulate it into a coherent whole. This might be seen as therapeutic, since Grandpa finds his voice and the lost words in writing and uses them to grasp and symbolically frame his traumatic past. Writing also allows Grandpa to regain a certain sense of agency and control, and by extension, a sense of self by asserting himself as the writer of his own narrative.

However, as the novel progresses and his writing moves towards the present and increases in volume, Grandpa runs out of paper to write on and has to compress his writing. The sentences become layered on top of each other until it becomes undecipherable blackness and, instead of informing the reader, it occults the narrative and meaning (Fig. 5). Through writing, Grandpa attempts to testify to and confront his traumatic past, but never manages to fully convey it, so that failure of language and lack of paper “physically manifest themselves in pages with the lines merging until the text is beyond the point of recognition” (Uytterschout 66-67). Miscommunication due to traumatisation is further illustrated through Grandpa’s encoded phone message. In his last letter, Grandpa talks about how he called Grandma after returning to Dresden and how his loss of speech prompted him to type his message on the phone, which takes up two pages in the novel (269-271) (Fig. 6). Encoding the message in

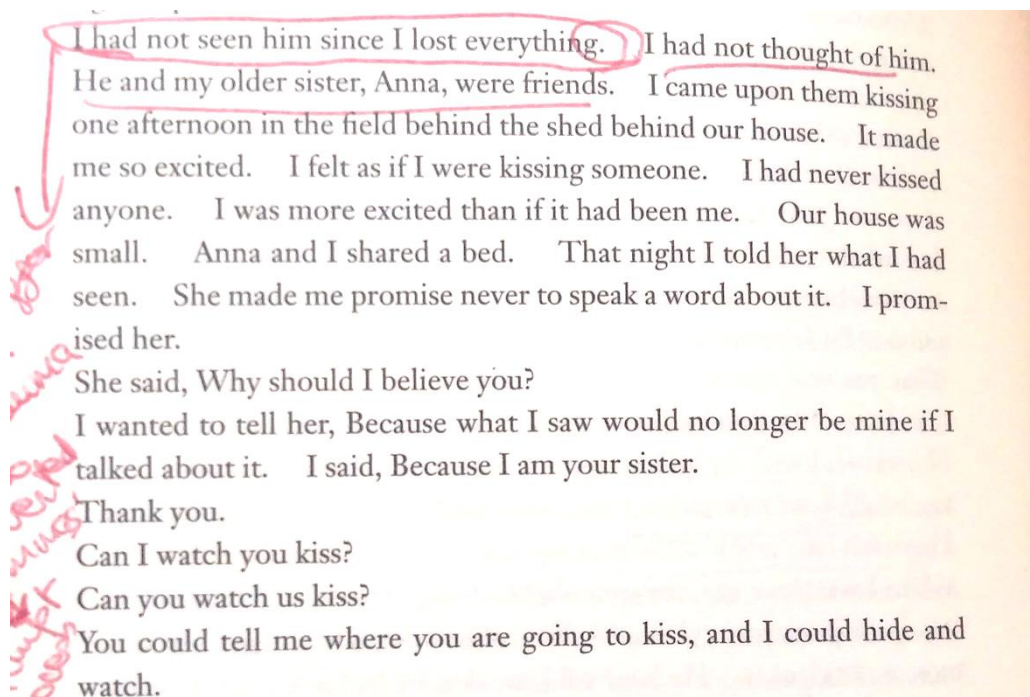
numbers, Grandpa creates a cypher that is not understood by his interlocutor and, by extension, remains a mystery to the reader. Symbolically, the code “point[s] toward the immense weight of the incomprehensibility of his trauma” (Uytterschout 70). Like Grandma’s blank pages and vast spaces between sentences, Grandpa’s black pages and the cypher constitute a visual representation of self-censorship and silence, testifying to the failure of language to grasp and communicate his traumatic experiences (Atchison 365-66). The empty and the cyphered pages can be seen as Foer’s attempt to involve the reader into the active process of uncovering the grandparents’ trauma (Uytterschout 71). The blackness also can be seen as a visualisation of grandfather Schell’s “psychological suffering as a trauma victim” (Uytterschout 71).

Oskar’s need and inability to communicate is reflected in his behaviour. The fragmented rendition of the eavesdropped conversation between his psychiatrist and his mother, and the insertion of the photograph of the falling figure illustrate how traumatic memory intrudes into the present (203-207) (Fig. 7). The reader assumes that Oskar only overhears fragments of their discussion, but it is more likely that he omits the fragments that could be potential triggers. Oskar’s mother and the psychiatrist discuss Oskar’s progress in therapy and seem to slide into a discussion about Oskar’s father’s death. This is when the photograph of the falling man appears on the opposite page, further disrupting the conversation and acting as a traumatic recall. Articulated visually instead of verbally, the picture illustrates the presence of trauma and Oskar’s attempt to grasp and communicate it (Uytterschout 70). As a result, the remaining words on the page do not form coherent sentences, so that, like Oskar, the reader is asked to fill in the gaps. Likewise, Oskar uses Morse code to communicate his feelings of guilt and his secrets to his mother while making her jewellery:

I made her other Morse code jewellery with Dad’s messages – a necklace, an anklet, some dangly earrings, a tiara – but the bracelet was definitely the most beautiful, probably because it was the last, which made it the most precious. (35-6) (19)

Like Grandpa Schell's cyphered message to Grandma, Oskar's jewellery represents both the need and the failed attempt to communicate. Without his mother knowing the code, Oskar's message goes unread, his voice remains silenced and the jewellery becomes an artefact carrying his feelings of guilt.

The intrusion of the past into the present is mimicked through the fusion of direct and indirect speech due to the absence of quotation marks, and the blank spaces in the text. In Grandma's first letter, for instance, the intrusive past makes its appearance during her recollection of a dialogue with Anna. The spacing between sentences is unusually large and interrupts the reading flow (80) (Fig 8).



(Fig. 8)

The blank spaces between the sentences occur in all of Grandma's letters that deal with her past, which points at the painful struggle she must endure in order to tell her past. The large blank spaces also suggest that elements too traumatic and painful to process are missing from the written account of her life story, thus pointing towards her incapacity to confront and

communicate the traumatic experiences. The dialogue is not distinguished through quotations marks from the rest of Grandma's narrative, pointing towards the fusion of the past and the present. The dialogue with Anna is fused with Grandma's present narrative, which visually represents the intrusion of the past into the present and Grandma's re-living of the past as if it were happening in the present. In addition, she avoids direct reference to the Dresden bombings by referring to them as the day when she "lost everything" (80). Grandma is unable to specifically refer to the event and avoids it through elusive and vague language, which hints at unprocessed traumatic memory. The inability to translate the shattering experience of the Dresden bombings that she and Grandpa had experienced is belatedly noted by Grandma herself: "We had everything to say to each other, but no ways to say it" (81). This self-conscious statement shows not only the failure of language to articulate the unspeakable, but also that their past is still too painful to confront, which results in repression and silence: "we never talked about the past" (83).

Textual layout, repeated sentences and disrupted syntax further mimic the effects of trauma. Oskar Schell's process of mourning and the impact caused by the traumatic loss of his father is illustrated through repetitions and vague language. The words "extremely" and "incredibly" that dominate the book's cover are often repeated in Oskar's narrative, especially when he indirectly refers to the events of September 11. The bit of the title, "extremely loud," is mostly repeated when Oskar talks to Mr. Black across rooms (93, 152, 153), and "incredibly close" appears in connection to the closeness of Grandma's and Abby Black's face (70, 97). However, in one particular instance, Oskar uses both "extremely loud" and "incredibly close" when talking about preventing accidents that indirectly refer to his father's death: "I invented a device that would detect when a bird is **incredibly close** to a building, and that would trigger an **extremely loud** birdcall from another skyscraper, and they'd be drawn to that" (250, my boldface). Oskar codifies the traumatic events of September 11 into symbolic language, which

allows him to distance himself from them. Avoidance is a crucial marker of traumatic grief and post-traumatic stress disorder, since it allows the victim to “excessively stay away from people, places, or activities that remind the subject of the deceased” (Jacobs 192). It is not, however, the solution to coming to terms with trauma, and a confrontation with traumatic memory is inevitable: “I need to know how he died ... so I can stop inventing how he died. I’m always inventing” (256).

Likewise, Oskar’s intimate knowledge of destruction and death at the beginning of the novel is formulated through symbolic language, which hints at the presence of trauma. He links people’s beating hearts to the sound of war and explosions. This points towards his traumatic experience of the 9/11 attacks, which he avoids addressing directly. The reader is asked to deduce from the context of the book that Oskar is familiar with explosions through mediated footage of the attacks. He refers to September 11 as “the worst day,” which also reoccurs throughout Oskar’s narrative, especially when he is talking about his father (11, 12, 68, 104, 235). Although he clearly states that his father has died (3), he avoids talking about the circumstances because he seems to not know the details of his father’s death. Oskar possibly uses this as an excuse for not talking about death, for it is still too painful for him. The self-imposed silence produces an obsession of looking for clues that would help him understand and accept his father’s death (6). The search for understanding and closure is translated into Oskar’s quest for the lock. His questioning of people and his listening to the messages on the answering machine points towards traumatic grief (Jacobs 186). Selby Jacobs defines the term “traumatic grief” as a merger of symptoms that belong to grieving and separation distress. Grief is characterised by “a form of attachment behaviour that occurs in the circumstances of a death [and] includes the emotional, cognitive, and somatic aspects of a person’s response to a death. *Separation distress* refers to pangs of yearning, preoccupations, loneliness, crying, a perceptual set including visual, tactile, and auditory illusions, and searching for the deceased significant

other” (Jacobs 186). Thus, looking for the lock symbolically points towards Oskar’s need to get close to his father and unlock the meaning of his death. Pictures of doors and keys occur several times in the novel, emphasising their symbolic meaning (first page after the cover, 29, 53, 92, 115, 134, 198, 212, 265, 303). Two pictures of keys are especially significant in Oskar’s narrative (53,303) since they, as in the case of Grandpa Schell, visualise the presence of trauma that has to be confronted and accepted, a process underlying Oskar’s search for the lock (Uytterschout 69). The image of uncut keys reflects Oskar’s incomprehensibility of trauma, since they symbolise “the myriad of thoughts going through the boy’s head when trying to find an answer to what happened to his father and why” (Uytterschout 69).

Grandma’s use of language in her letter to Oskar, when depicting her witnessing of the attacks on the World Trade Center on television, signals trauma and acts as a trigger for traumatic memory (224-233). Watching a man on television talk to a reporter about his missing daughter and his hope of finding her, projects Grandma into her traumatic past. She fixates on the father because of her own failure to find her sister after the Dresden bombings. When she sees “Black smoke” on television, it triggers a flashback of her home in Dresden being destroyed by bombs (225). Interestingly, the phrase is placed between two paragraphs that refer to different timelines, so that the black smoke rising from the towers simultaneously acts as black smoke that destroyed her home in Dresden:

I didn't feel anything when they showed the burning building. I wasn't even surprised. I kept knitting for you, and I kept thinking about the father of the missing girl. He kept believing. Smoke kept pouring from a hole in the building.

Black smoke.

I remember the worst storm of my childhood. From my window I saw the books pulled from my father's shelves. They flew. (225)

Grandmother's re-traumatisation through media footage is even more salient in her belated reaction to the attacks. The phrases "Bodies falling. Planes going into buildings", "Buildings falling" and "People waving shirts out of high windows" are repeated throughout the letter (230, 231, 232), which suggests that the visual trigger brings about the unconscious re-enactment of those images. Moreover, the sentences are clipped and follow one another downwards, which mirrors the act of falling. The syntax is faulty, for only participles are used in relation to the subject. The lack of an active verb prevents the reader from placing these sentences into any grammatical tense, rendering the action of falling static and never-ending. Their repetition on subsequent pages points towards circularity, imitating the effect of the recurring traumatic flashbacks, as well as mirroring the overwhelming exposure to the media footage of the attacks that people were subjected to.

The failure of language to represent the unspeakable is expressed through the insertion and reoccurrence of certain images. Indeed, in Grandpa's written narrative, the image of a door handle reappears in the middle of the text and catches the reader off guard, disrupting the narrative's flow, so that one must interrupt the reading and make sense of the decontextualized photograph by connecting it to the information provided by the novel. Mitchum Huehls suggests that the doorknob photographs seem to lack a symbolic dimension, being only "the thing they represent" (*Timely Traumas* 51). However, one could argue that for the reader, their lack of symbolism becomes symbolic of trauma in itself. In fact, the doorknobs appear in specific places within Grandpa's narrative and hence provide some context. In the first letter to his unborn child, grandfather Schell talks about being at the Central Park Zoo with a friend and how he fed the animals burgers. Connecting this piece of information and the door knob image suggests that this episode has more meaning for the narrator, but that this meaning is hidden, inaccessible. The intrusion of a closed door visually suggests the presence of traumatic memory that remains ungraspable and unknown to the narrator and to the reader (Foer 29). Later in the

novel, the reader connects the Central Park Zoo episode and the door knob image with a traumatic episode from the past told in Grandpa's third letter. In this letter, he depicts his experience of the bombing and how, while searching for a refuge, he passed a zoo with open cages and animals that were trying to escape. He recalls the zookeeper's order to find the carnivores and "shoot everything" (213). Interestingly, the photograph of the door knob is also present in this chapter and disrupts Grandpa's account of the bombing just as it threatens to become too graphic. The intrusion of the image signals to the reader that s/he, as an implied empathetic listener, has to bear witness to the Grandpa's account of the traumatic event. Since the door does not have a lock, the door cannot be opened (212). The picture's symbolic meaning in connection to the narrative that frames it could hint at Grandpa's confrontation with his horrific past without any possibility to escape it through an open door. This suggests that Grandpa's may be beginning to process trauma.

Beside writing, Grandpa also uses other means to communicate his traumatic past. As noted above, he uses photographs of door knobs that he includes into his letters. He also communicates his traumatic loss through his sculptures. This suggests that, while writing seems to be the most effective way to tell his story, he does not achieve any understanding or closure in connection to his traumatic past. His failure to access and articulate it probably also lies in the fact that, while he attempts to produce a written testimony of his past, he lacks an empathetic listener who would bear witness to his testimony and help him reconstruct his trauma as an experience of the past. Sculpture, like photographs, however, follows the premise "show, don't tell," so that even though Grandpa and Grandma avoid talking about Anna, the sculptures that Grandpa makes, speak about her and their inability to accept her death. Grandma notes that "[a]fter only a few sessions it became clear that he was sculpting Anna. He was trying to remake the girl he knew seven years before. He looked at me as he sculpted, but he saw her" (83). Anna's impersonation in the sculpture of Grandma becomes a palpable ghost from the past that

haunts both grandparents, but Grandpa in particular, since her loss is closely linked to his survivor's guilt of leaving Anna and being responsible for her death: "I'm sorry for everything. For having said goodbye to Anna when maybe I could have saved her and our idea, or at least died with them" (132).

Both Grandma and grandfather Schell's backward experience of their present reality points towards their inability to deal with their traumatic past and find closure. Like Billy's backward experience of a war film in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Grandma's dreams are also characterized by regression: "In my dream, all of the collapsed ceilings re-formed above us. The fire went back into the bombs, which rose up and into the bellies of planes whose propellers turned backward, like the second hands of the clocks across Dresden, only faster" (306-07). Similarly, when moving back in with Grandpa, she is obsessed with one question: "Why does anyone ever make love?" (84, 85, 177, 181). The two possible answers to this question, pleasure and procreation, seem to be a taboo topic for Grandma because of the traumatic loss of her pregnant sister. More importantly, this question implies a reversal of events back to the beginning of humanity, which is echoed in the end of Grandma's dream: "At the end of my dream, Eve put the apple back on the branch. The tree went back into the ground. It became a sapling, which became a seed" (313). The absence of love-making and the return to the beginning of all existence show that Grandma is incapable of dealing with the loss of her sister and of her son, implying that "if there is no sex, there is no procreation, therefore no birth, and therefore no death" (Gibbs 31). Grandfather imagines similar reversals: "I imagined dozens of homes, some were magical (a clock tower with a stopped clock in a city where time stood still [...])" (208-09). Like Billy Pilgrim, the grandparents attempt to undo their own past traumas, their losses of loved ones and death in general by extrapolating the rewinding process up to the original sin and God's creation of the universe. In her last letter to Oskar, Grandma acknowledges the inevitability of death and suffering in connection to life: "When I looked at

you, my life made sense. Even the bad things made sense. They were necessary to make you possible. My parents' lives made sense. My grandparents'. Even Anna's life" (232). Grandpa, however, is unable to come to terms with the death of his son, especially since he never knew him, and becomes traumatised at the end of his last letter. The re-traumatisation is visualised through the closing pages of his last letter, where sentences overlap and form an indecipherable blackness that testifies to the urge to communicate and the urge to remain silent.

Likewise, in Oskar's narrative, the photograph of a figure frozen in the fall reoccurs three times (59, 62, 205) and closes the novel as a flipbook, mimicking the presence of unprocessed trauma. The image of the falling figure is a heavily mediated version of Lyle Owerko's "World Trade Center Jumper" photograph, which hints at Oskar's appropriation of and a deeper, emotional connection to it (Frost 192). In the novel, it is in black and white, cropped and, at times, enlarged to the point of becoming abstract and unrecognisable, whereas the original is in colour and the falling figure is smaller (Mauro 596). Foer's modification of the picture and its inclusion into Oskar's narrative hints at the latter's deep personal connection towards the photograph. Since Oskar does not know exactly how his father died, either by suffocating, jumping out of the window or being trapped under rubble, he imagines the falling figure to be his father so that he can stop imagining ways of him dying and find closure. One might see the image of the falling man as Oskar's "literary companion" to help him explain his father's death without directly referring to it (see Skultans 181). Marianne Hirsch maintains that photographs can serve as a "contemporary form of witnessing or even mourning" (*I Took Pictures* 71). Photographs can "communicate an emotional or bodily experience to us by evoking our own emotional and bodily memories" (Hirsch, *Marked* 82). This explains why Oskar also includes photographs that, for the reader, are seemingly irrelevant to the plot: a man holding a skull, an outline of a paper airplane, mating turtles, fingerprints and so on. While these pictures are not explained and bear no direct connection to the plot, Oskar's narrative

provides enough contextual information to connect them to the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath (Frost 186). For instance, the photograph of a man holding a skull refers to *Hamlet* and functions as a symbol for death and haunting memories. Oskar appropriates and re-interprets the picture in connection to his traumatic loss. Thus, the meaning of the photograph “lies not in the original event but in its subsequent reception and perpetual reinterpretation” (Lieberman 89). As Oskar attempts to comprehend his father’s death, he observes “if everyone wanted to play *Hamlet* at once, they couldn’t, because there aren’t enough skulls!” (3). This echoes Oskar’s involvement into a school production of *Hamlet*, where he acts as Yorick, the skull. The skull as an image and reoccurring theme symbolises not only Oskar’s inability to comprehend death, but also hints at him being haunted by the memories of his father. The intertextual link also suggests that Oskar identifies not only with Hamlet, since both are haunted by traumatic loss, but also with Yorick, the symbol of death. His costume requires Oskar to wear a constructed skull over his head, so that, metaphorically and through artistic transformation, he becomes death (66). This metaphor is especially striking when, at the end of the novel, the reader learns that Oskar witnessed his father’s last minutes of life on the phone without being able to pick up the receiver when his father was pleading to communicate. Oskar’s transformation into Yorick communicates his loss of self, or, as Goldberg calls it, “death of the individual by means of the signifier” due to over-identification with the symbol and what it represents (123). His transformation into Yorick also points towards Oskar’s conviction that he is responsible for his father’s death. Through photographs and his narrative, Oskar manages to communicate his feelings of fear, survivor’s guilt and his being haunted by his father. The photographs, then, register “the impact of the event for [Oskar] and allude[] to details behind [them] that the novel does not admit” (Frost 186).

The constant reappearance of the image of the falling figure also reflects the extent to which the event had been mediated and how it was perceived by most Americans and the

whole world (Frost 185). The attack's mediatisation through news footage on television, in newspapers and later in magazines, has created a visual traumatic event. Anne E. Kaplan notes that "this unique visuality of 9/11 mirrors the way in which trauma – primarily a psychic disorder– often externalises itself by leaving imprints of an otherwise physically untraceable disorder on the victim's body" (*Trauma Culture* 13). Foer himself stresses the impact that the visual footage has on the witnesses of September 11th:

Can anyone even think about it without seeing the planes going into the buildings or the body falling? I read somewhere that it was the most visually documented event in human history; nothing's ever been seen by more people than what happened that day. In that sense, I think it was the first truly global event. (Dave, *Unlocking*)

The 9/11 attacks became a globally witnessed event because of the constant repetitions of the visual footage. This implies that the footage that circulated during and after the attacks became central to people's remembering of this event (Simon 359). Simon notes that "the visual replay of the attacks and subsequent human and physical devastation enacts a reproduction of the awe, fear, and fascination that feeds a practical consciousness of dread" rather than helps to distance and process the event (359). Thus, the reoccurrence of the photograph of the falling man mimics the media brainwash people were subjected to during and after the attacks. Grandma is one example of an individual traumatised by the 9/11 footage. Oskar is forbidden to watch it, but eventually finds a way to see the footage of people jumping from the windows (256). As a result, Oskar consciously avoids high buildings, elevators and subways, which points towards his fear, shared by most of the victims and enhanced through recurrent media footage of the attacks, that the event could happen again. Repetitions also work to ensure that the event never ceases to happen, reflecting the workings of traumatic memory (Simon 359).

Moreover, meta-texts such as Thomas Schell's messages left on an answering machine function as repositories of personal memory. Communicating through the phone during the last

moments of his life, Thomas Schell leaves a trace of himself. The tapes also provide a rare insight as to what happened inside the building, to which Oskar unwillingly became a witness since he could not make himself pick up the phone. The messages thus bear a strong emotional connection to Oskar. The last message, in particular, triggers feelings of guilt associated with the traumatic event, which points towards unprocessed loss. From the first chapter, Oskar makes the reader believe that his father left six messages on the answering machine “on the worst day,” but he avoids revealing the content of these messages, uncovering them one by one as his narrative progresses. Gibbs notes that Oskar repeatedly describes the messages within his narrative but divulges some of them selectively throughout the chapters, avoiding the last message until the end of the novel (*Collective Trauma* 25). His avoidance points towards repression, which is further underlined in his inconsistent reproduction of these messages. Oskar claims that his father left six messages and times them:

Message one: 8:52 A.M.

Message two: 9:12 A.M.

Message three: 9:31 A.M.

Message four: 9:46 A.M.

Message five: 10:04 A.M. (15)

However, he only reproduces five messages and, according to Oskar’s account later in the novel, the fifth message was recorded not at 10:04 but at 10:22:27, which coincides with the time of the sixth message being recorded:

MESSAGE FIVE.

10:22 A.M. IT'S DA S DAD. HEL SDAD. KNOW IF

EAR ANY THIS I'M
 HELLO? YOU HEAR ME? WE TO THE
 ROOF EVERYTHING OK FINE SOON
 SORRY HEAR ME MUCH
 HAPPENS, REMEMBER –

(Foer 280)

The inconsistency in the timeline suggests more than just a mistake on Oskar's part and points towards his avoidance of the last message. He withholds his father's last words from himself and from the reader until the very end of the novel, thus implicitly avoiding his father's death. Frost maintains that the four-minute difference between the father's last message and the collapse of the North Tower is crucial since "they mark the difference between a building that is standing and a building that collapses. A living father and a dead one" (196). In the last chapter, when he meets William Black, Oskar finally confesses to him, and implicitly to the reader, that there is a sixth message recorded due to his inability make himself answer the phone during his father's last call. The final message thus becomes an artefact for his father's memory and the conflicting emotions associated with his death (Atchison 361). When Oskar discloses the truth to William Black, he recalls the message exactly as it was recorded. The visual representation of the message through repetition suggests that the message is the trigger for Oskar's traumatic memory, which intrudes into the present and results in a compulsive re-enactment of the episode:

There are fifteen seconds between the third and the fourth, which is the longest space. You can hear people in the background screaming and crying. And you can hear glass breaking, which is part of what makes me wonder if people were jumping.

experiences” (Atchison 362). They also help illustrate the chaotic, disruptive and incomprehensible nature of traumatic memories that haunt a traumatised individual in a more immediate, unmediated way without recurring to language. Indeed, together with the grandparents’ unconventional epistolary account of their past, the three characters “construct meta-narratives that work independently through their fragmented pasts and move toward distorted convergence” (Atchison 362).

Moreover, Oskar’s use of photography may serve as therapeutic tool to process trauma. Laura Frost argues that Foer’s use of photography, especially in the final pages of the book, points toward a static fixation on the past (196). Alan Gibbs supports this claim noting that Oscar’s imagined reversal of the falling figure, and by extension, of his father’s death, is just an “escapist fantasy” (Gibbs, 31). However, Oskar’s repudiation only lasts until he is ready to face the truth, which happens during his meeting with William Black. Talking to Mr. Black, Oskar admits that he “couldn’t pick up the phone” when his father called (301). As a witness to Oskar’s testimony of his traumatic loss, Mr. Black helps Oskar move “beyond the uncertainty and fear of this new world toward a sense of unconditional trust for his neighbours” (Mauro 603-604). The flipbook at the end of the novel does not represent the real world, but Oscar’s attempts to find closure in an imagined moment of safety. Laura Frost, however, notes that the flip book at the end of the novel consists of the same photograph which has been altered and repeated fifteen times (194). Thus, ending the novel with the same reoccurring photograph mimics the haunting and static presence of trauma and “repetition compulsion” rather than a narrative development and communication (Frost 194). She notes that the flipbook “reinstates the trauma at the novel’s conclusion” rather than suggesting Oskar’s recovery. However, the flipbook and the falling man’s reverse flight can only function if the reader continues to flip the pages forward, thus relying on the progress of time: it is only through “time’s forward movement that the images can be reversed” (Geertsma 102). The use of the conditional tense

underlines the possibility of processing trauma, since it allows Oscar to distinguish between what is and what is not. Using “we would have been safe” instead of “we are safe” suggests that in Oskar’s present reality, unlike in his fantasised alternative world, the attacks happened, and people died, which leads him towards acceptance of his traumatic loss and of death as inevitable. The use of the pronoun “we” further stresses Oskar’s beginning recovery: Oskar is not only referring to his family but also to those who perished or lost someone in the attacks (Smith 158). Thus, the three narratives, and the novel as a whole, constitute a cultural entity that is grounded in space and time, and which gives a voice to the victims ignored in the globally televised footage.

Like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* uses decontextualized images within the characters’ narratives to suggest the presence of trauma and its elusiveness. The disruption of the text through faulty punctuation, repetitions, textual layout and the inclusion of photographs in the middle of Oskar’s and Grandpa’s narratives successfully mimic the chaos and incomprehensibility of traumatic events in the wake of their aftermath. In connection to the text, photographs act as a repository of personal memories due to the characters’, especially Oskar’s, strong emotional connection to what they represent. Images also allow to communicate the characters’ personal struggles that cannot be translated into words, such as the loss of identity, feelings of guilt and the need to confront personal trauma. The novel thus acts as a collection of individual testimonies to the collective trauma of September 11, giving voice to individual experiences of the event. It also contributes to collective memory of the event and shapes the collective perspective in connection to mass atrocity, past or ongoing.

Chapter 4

Personal Trauma: Reframing the events of September 11 in Art in Spiegelman's *In The Shadow Of No Towers*

Art Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers* is a testimony to the personal experience of the event, as well as to the belated personal struggle to grasp what he saw and what it meant. During the days that followed the attack, Spiegelman suggests, chaos and displacement provided a loophole for the government officials to channel the population's emotions and frame September 11 as a vicious and undeserved attack on the American way of life, which called for immediate retaliation.² Spiegelman's graphic narrative offers an alternative, more personal and a less clear view and understanding of the events. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the attacks of 9/11 were a highly visual event, globally watched through mediated and repetitive footage of the plane flying into the buildings, buildings collapsing and people falling out of the towers, the latter footage being almost immediately withdrawn from circulation in newspapers, journals and televised news coverage. Being reduced to mere fragmented images of explosions and collapse, the complexity and totality of the event could not fully be captured through camera lenses. As tends to be the case with photography in general, the media representation of the 9/11 attacks focused on these decontextualized details, not on the event as a whole or the victims and their feelings. These photographs simply "did not, and could not, tell the whole story" (Gauthier 370).

Susan Sontag maintains that "photographic exploration and duplication of the world fragments continuities and feeds the pieces to an interminable dossier thereby providing

² "Spiegelman's 9/11 book focuses on the hegemonic role of the media in the process through which individual traumatic experience is translated into communal vicarious trauma, a state of the nation which, Spiegelman argues, functioned as the affective basis for repressive domestic and aggressive foreign policies that instrumentalized human loss for the material interests of American power-elites" (Cvek 85).

possibilities of control” (156). However, in the case of 9/11, control of the event is lost because the existing images represent only a small part of what happened, thus failing to provide understanding of what has been witnessed. Out of context, distorted through camera lenses, unrecognisable and depersonalised, they are only a visual snapshot of what happened. Hence, Spiegelman’s, and other artists’, urge to provide a contextual frame to these images and to the event as a whole can be understood as a need to reconstruct and understand 9/11 as a personal event. Spiegelman’s comix³ form seems to be the most convenient medium to convey personal and cultural trauma, since “trauma that may be unspeakable...may be communicated viscerally and emotionally through the alternative cognitive structures of the visual” (Hirsch, “Collateral Damage” 1211). Spiegelman himself notes the need to distinguish between his own experience of the attack and that produced by the media:

I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I’d experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw. The pivotal image from my 9/11 morning – one that didn’t get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids several years later – was the image of the looming north tower’s glowing bones just before it vaporized.
(Spiegelman, *No Towers*, Foreword)

Reconstructing and thus articulating the 9/11 attacks in the merged form of images and text allows Spiegelman to “expand our visual recollection, seek to wrest control away from the dominant ideologies, and insert degrees of nuance not found in the images broadcast” (Gauthier 371). Spiegelman’s frames are packed with complex visuals and intertexts, which are layered on top of each other and arranged in a non-linear way, leaving the reader in a liminal space,

³ “Comix” refer to Spiegelman’s designation of non-fictional graphic narrative that originated during the underground comics movement in the late 1960s. Its spelling marks the graphic narrative’s difference from mainstream comics in the sense that the former embodies “a seriousness of purpose that goes against the essential lightness of the cartoon mode” (Orvell 111, 122-123).

confused and lost as to where to start reading. This chapter examines the temporality of Spiegelman's trauma and ways in which his text-images reflect it in form and layout of the panels. It also looks at the intertexts used in the comix and their relevance to Spiegelman's trauma narrative. The chapter posits that *In The Shadow of No Towers* reframes the events of September 11 into a personal experience and explores the belated response to them from a liminal space, constructed through temporality and intertextuality.

Associated with theology and anthropology, liminal spaces depict the transitioning stage between two rites. This term can also be applied to trauma victims, who find themselves in a "time between the 'what was' and the 'next'...[in] a place of transition, waiting, and not knowing" (Phillips). As a transition period between the haunting and the coming to terms with trauma, liminal spaces reflect Caruth's (1996) paradox of "knowing" and "not knowing," or as Mitchum Huehls describes it, the paradox between "waiting and the obsessive fixation on the event" (53). Huehls' formulation hints at a fractured sense of time that trauma victims experience after a traumatic event. Spiegelman's opening to *No Towers* introduces the disruption of temporality, setting it as a major theme in the opening panel sequence titled "The New Normal" (1) (Fig. 1). In all three frames time is tracked by a calendar caption: the first reads "10th September", the second, "11th September", but in the third frame, the calendar has been replaced with an American flag. The omission of the calendar in the third frame suggests that time not only has stopped, but that it has disappeared altogether. The image of the family in front of the TV and their transformation from bored to shocked watchers in the second and the third frame emphasizes the idea of the loss of time. The first panel depicts them as sitting comfortably and apathetically in front of a television, while the second panel shows them strongly reacting to the events on television. All characters sit upright, hovering over the couch with eyes almost falling out of their sockets, with open mouths and their hair standing up. The third panel mixes the elements from the first and second panel: the family is back on the couch

in the same positions as in the first panel and everything seems to be back to normal, but the standing hair that also appears in the second panel, points at the prevailing shock caused by the televised footage of the 9/11 attacks (1). The effect of disrupted temporality is mimicked by the reader's non-linear reading of the panels. In fact, the third panel makes the reader to linger on the third frame and on the sequence as a whole to try to make sense of the differences encountered in each frame. Similarly, the reader is at a loss as to what to read next, since two narrative threads are positioned against each other in descending order. The panel sequence on the right side of the page depicts the glowing tower skeleton and contains Spiegelman's synopsis and a comment on the 9/11 attacks, while the panels opposite the glowing tower sequence capture a personal and immediate response to the event (Fig. 1). Spiegelman places his panels in a way that allows them to be read from left to right or from up to down or both, which confuses the reader by constantly interrupting his/her reading, asking to fill in the gaps between the "gutters" (spaces between the panels) and to re-evaluate the information provided by the text and panels to make meaning (Chute 452). This disrupts the narrative's linearity and chronology and communicates the feelings of displacement and loss on a visual, thematic and meta-textual levels. Thus, through the confusing placement of the panels, Spiegelman aims to "achieve not so much the illusion of motion, but rather the illusion of a coherent, continuous, dynamic movement of action across time" (Pedri 4). The illusion of linearity, progress and a coherent time frame creates a liminal space for the writer/narrator to personally confront his trauma in an attempt to understand and articulate it. Thus, trauma is depicted as "something that resides in the temporality of the witness and more exactly in time's standing still" (Glejzer 99).

When trauma occurs "time cannot be made to tell a [...] story, cannot be restored to narrative coherence, because violence shatters time" (Gilmore 93). Spiegelman stresses the disruption and stillness of time that the 9/11 attacks have produced on several occasions. In a panel sequence depicting him carrying an albatross around his neck (2) (Fig 2), Spiegelman

complains about his compulsion and his frustration to testify to his experience of the attacks while the rest of the world has moved on. In the third frame, Spiegelman makes a self-conscious remark about trauma and temporality, which is carried on to the fourth frame and transforms into a re-enactment of his witnessing of the glowing tower: “That’s when time stands still at the moment of trauma...which strikes me as a totally reasonable response to the current events!...I see that awesome tower glowing as it collapses!...” (2). The intrusion of the traumatic event into the present points at liminality and is underlined in the fourth panel by the red spirals that replace the narrator’s eyes, pointing towards the circular, static and hypnotizing nature of traumatic recall. The layout of the individual frames in the sequence further visualises the liminal space in which the narrator is trapped by depicting the frames as three-dimensional boxes resembling dominoes on the verge of collapsing, just as the narrator’s relapse into the traumatic memory of September 11 takes place. The last two frames are turned in such a way that no drawing inside the panels is visible. Instead, the last two frames end up resembling the Twin Towers, thus visualising the intrusive traumatic event that the narrator involuntarily sees and re-experiences.

Furthermore, the image of the burning tower reoccurs on every page emphasising the haunting presence of trauma within the present. The glowing skeleton reappears on every page, usually as a disruptive flashback framed and placed in the background (1,2) or hallucinations signalled by red spirals (2, top of the plate; 7, top of the plate; 8). The intrusion of the tower image into the narrator’s narrative, and by extension, into his present, creates a liminal space for the latter to belatedly react and comment on the witnessed events in order to make meaning: “In our last episode, as you might remember, Time stood still (And maybe it’s just as well: last week the artist began describing his September 11th morning and only got up to 9:15...Considering that it takes him at least a month to complete each page, he should’ve started this ‘weekly’ series in September 1999 to get it all told by Judgement Day” (2). The text is laid

out in a block on top of the burning tower image, with cropped sentences appearing underneath each other, so that reading and looking progress downwards. The layout of the text mirrors the falling motion, symbolically marking the fall of the towers and the narrator's relapse into his traumatic experience. The attacks, visualised through the recurring image of the skeleton of the burning tower, represent "the very moment of seeing that Spiegelman can't move beyond...the point of witness upon which an understanding of 9/11 continually stumbles" (Glejzer 104). Traumatic recollection is visualised through the shadow of the twin towers falling diagonally across the page and converging with some frames depicting the media footage as well as the narrator's personal witnessing of the burning towers (2). This fusion illustrates the haunting and circular nature of traumatic recollection which becomes the narrator's present reality and is not experienced as a memory belonging to the past. The panel sequence at the bottom of the page depicts the falling of the tower as witnessed by the narrator and, in their form, the frames resemble the towers that slowly collapse. In fact, the last pair of frames resembling the towers is disrupted as one of the frames is turned into an exclamation mark containing an image of a brain. Visually and symbolically, the sequence follows the narrator's collapsed understanding of the events, as well as the urge and the inability to communicate his experience. His mind is stuck in the event, just as the event is stuck in his mind, and he is unable to focus on anything else, thus remaining in the liminal space of the present-past and between suppressing and remembering (Leys 2). Encouraging the reader to "read back and forth between images and words, comics reveal the visuality and thus the materiality of words and the discursivity and narrativity of images" (Hirsch 1213).

Liminality is also constructed through intertexts that Spiegelman incorporates into his narrative as "literary companions" to help him process trauma. He includes B-movies, old comic strips, references to his first graphic narrative *Maus*, the controversial photographs by Lyle Owerko and Richard Drew showing people falling out of the tower, and the albatross from

Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." These intertexts act as a distancing lens, which allows Spiegelman to reconstruct and process his experience of the attacks without being re-traumatised. The intertexts also engage the reader into reading across references, combining Spiegelman's account of the 9/11 attacks and narratives from a different time that lie outside of his experience. Just like the switch between first-person and third-person narrative, these intertexts function as "a distancing device", which adds "an extra layer of interpretation between the events and the response" (Versluys 64-65). When the narrator hears about the attack on the Pentagon on the radio, his reaction is hidden by a Mars Attacks card, while the caption below reads: "It was hard for puny human brains to assimilate genuinely new information...and it remains just as hard now, these many months later..." (3). As in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the narrator uses science fiction elements to process what he has just witnessed. The Mars Attacks card substitutes the narrator's reality, creating the effect of the hyperreal. Since he cannot explain the witnessed loss and destruction in his present reality, the B-movie reference fills in the gap between what the narrator saw and what it actually meant to make meaning in the face of the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event.

Spiegelman also uses characters from older comics as literary companions to create a liminal space, which would allow him to distance himself from and to understand his trauma. This substitution also points towards the dissociation and loss of identity that trauma victims experience. In the sequence titled "Weapons of Mass Displacement," for instance, Spiegelman aligns the loss of identity with displacement, and visualises it by having his head shift and being replaced by a lamp, a cat, a hand holding a cigarette, a shoe, and finally, a mouse mask, familiar to the reader from his 1980 graphic narrative *Maus* (9) (Fig.3). As a result, the reader lingers on these symbolic representations of the self and halts the reading, which ruptures the linearity and chronology of the narrative and mimics the fragmenting and repetitive nature of traumatic recall. The comic strips fulfil the same function. Mitchum Huehls maintains that "coming out

of the past, the historical characters provide the experiential temporality,” or, I would argue, the liminal space, needed to process the event sequences (Huehls 57). For example, Spiegelman uses Rudolph Dirk’s Katzenjammer Kids to represent the towers and his reaction to the September 11 attacks, which allows him to approach the event from a safe distance. This approach to traumatic memories echoes Vonnegut’s technique in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to distance the narrator from his Dresden trauma by creating the alter-ego of Billy Pilgrim and using a science fictional plot. In a panel that illustrates Spiegelman and his wife’s reaction to the news of the attack, both are substituted by the Katzenjammer Kids wearing the twin towers on their heads, faces frozen in horror, calling for their daughter (2) (Fig. 4). This image appears two times on the same page, as do the characters in the subsequent plates (4, 5), offering a liminal space for the narrator to process what he witnessed and attempt to historicize it (Espiritu 181).

Likewise, Spiegelman casts himself into the role of the Ancient Mariner who carries an albatross around his neck (2). The intertext refers to Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” in which the mariner compulsively tells his life story. He tells a wedding guest how he shot an albatross and had to wear it around his neck as a reminder of the big crime he committed, of suffering and of his own mortality. The albatross around the neck acts as a metaphor to illustrate the weight of Spiegelman’s trauma that he carries alone like a burden and his attempt to lift it off by communicating it, while the reader is projected into the role of the wedding guest, a reluctant witness to his testimony. The albatross also acts as a political symbol through its resemblance with the bald eagle and his wearing a Stars and Stripes hat, an emblem for the US government. In the top panel sequence (2), the albatross/eagle comments on Spiegelman’s reactions to 9/11, insisting that “everything’s changed!” and urging him to “go out and shop!” and to “be afraid!” (2). Through this polysemic character, the narrator creates a liminal space in which he is able to articulate his feelings of loss, displacement and haunting

that belatedly return as a response to his trauma. Simultaneously, he depicts the government's controlling and manipulative appropriation of the event in an attempt to dictate people's reaction in order to push its "war on terrorism" agenda. Through shopping, Gauthier maintains, "we would re-energize the wounded economy, but we would also be demonstrating that we had put the event behind us. By being afraid, we would naturally relinquish some of our freedoms so that the government could better protect us" (377).

In addition, Spiegelman makes a cross-reference to his graphic narrative *Maus* by having the protagonist's face transform into the head of a mouse (2, 3, 9). In a strip depicting Spiegelman's change of appearance and his loss of identity, he notes that after September 11 he let his beard grow out, but that people, and possibly the narrator himself, found it inappropriate, since the beard became a signifier for a terrorist. Consequently, he shaves the beard off, which, in Foer's novel, echoes Oskar Schell's phobia of bearded men and Arabs as a response to the attacks. After shaving off the beard, the narrator becomes Artie wearing a mouse mask, noting that "issues of self-representation have left [him] slack-jawed!" (2) (Fig. 5). Adopting the identity of Artie, the recorder of and a secondary witness to his father's testimony in *Maus*, Spiegelman once more tries to distance himself from his direct witnessing of the attacks and to historicise the witnessing of the event (Glejzer 100). The intertextual link to *Maus* is made directly by Spiegelman when describing the overall atmosphere on the day of the attacks. He recalls his father's description of the smell of smoke in Auschwitz and compares it to the smell of the air in Manhattan: after the towers collapsed, "the closest he got was telling me it was... 'indescribable.' That's what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11!" (2). The vagueness of the depiction suggests not so much the awful nature of the smell, but rather what it symbolises: the sudden destruction and death with which Spiegelman was confronted, which are still too fresh and too painful for him to process. As a symbol used both in *Maus* and Spiegelman's testimony of 9/11, the smoke simultaneously acts as a metaphor for

the cremated bodies in Auschwitz and for those who died in the burning towers on September 11. Visually, the smoke slowly disperses across the panels and disturbs the narrator, while obscuring the text and making it hard to read. The polysemy of smoke is further underlined through the opposing images of the burning tower and the burning cigarette on both edges of the page, which suggests that cigarettes and smoke both act as triggers for Spiegelman's transgenerational trauma, connecting Vladek's experiences during World War II with his own experience of 9/11.

Another literary companion used to reframe the events of September 11 is the mediated use of the photograph of the falling man (6) (Fig. 6). Spiegelman fuses his own vision of the burning tower with the iconic photographs of people falling from the windows shot by Richard Drew and Lyle Owerko. Just as Oskar crops and assimilates the image to articulate his feelings in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Spiegelman inserts himself as a falling person into the drawn copy of the photograph, with his comment running from the top to the bottom of the frame/tower, mimicking the fall. A similar image appears on the cover of the book, with black, reflecting towers and the shadows of falling cartoon characters laid out against a black background. Spiegelman inserts himself into his reworking of the pictures by portraying himself in colour on the back cover page (Fig. 7). He is frozen in his fall, which, like a photographic snapshot, captures only a moment of Spiegelman's experience of the attacks. Yet, the drawing, as well as the reworking of the photograph as a whole, points at Spiegelman's traumatised state through the witnessing and the video footage of the attacks, which are not incorporated into time frames or memory structures and thus return throughout the comix like a compulsive re-enactment of the events. Thus, the reworking of Owerko's and Drew's photographs serves to metaphorically illustrate the narrator's constant fall back into his traumatic experience and to help him to re-imagine himself, possibly as a victim, in connection to the event. This, again, points to Spiegelman's loss of identity, or as Amos Goldberg terms it, the "death of the

individual,” emphasised by his landing at the bottom of the tower as the Hapless Hooligan (Goldberg 123). The assimilation of the photograph into his narrative also illustrates traumatisation through indirect witnessing, which results in false memories caused by the constant media coverage of the attacks that now haunts him (6). As a result of direct and indirect witnessing, Spiegelman is wounded as a viewer of the media coverage and identifies too strongly with the victims (Hirsch 1213). The image of the burning tower recurs on almost every page, mostly in the background or on the edges of a page, symbolising the looming presence of trauma. Sometimes the tower is directly incorporated into Spiegelman’s narrative and appears in a frame, chaotically dispersed on the page (4). Just like Oskar’s repeated inclusion of the picture of the falling figure into his scrapbook, the constant reappearance of the burning tower points towards the intrusion of the traumatic memory into the narrator’s present. It also visualises Spiegelman’s fixation on what he personally saw and his struggle to process and verbalise it.

The use of the text-image medium allows Spiegelman not only to fuse the visual and textual narratives into a whole, but to create two narrative tracks, each communicating different aspects of his trauma. The disruptive layout of panels throughout the pages, as well as the different intertexts included in Spiegelman’s narrative, fragment the narrative in a way that places the reader into a liminal, metatextual space to make him/her linger longer on the panels. The reading is interrupted by the reader, thus allowing him/her to make meaning and re-evaluate the narrative as a whole, as well as the reader’s own experience (and possible trauma) of 9/11, mimicking the liminal space in which the traumatised narrator finds himself. *In the Shadow of No Towers* reframes the mediated September 11 attacks by looking at them through a personal and creative lens. The graphic narrative internalises “the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures,” thus refusing to establish a specific narrative and provide a fixed meaning (Vickroy 3).

Conclusion

According to trauma theory, traumatic events exist outside of time structures because they are not directly assimilated into memory and hence evade understanding and framing as experiences that are located in the past. As a result, trauma belatedly returns in the form of flashbacks, nightmares and traumatic re-enactment to be re-experienced in the present. The process of working through trauma by confronting and articulating it through symbolic language is arduous and protracted, since trauma often permanently disrupts the victim's sense of self. Literature is a medium by which both personal and collective trauma can be processed. The three novels analysed in this thesis, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*, explore the historical traumas of the bombing of Dresden by allied forces in 1945 and the terrorist attacks of 2001 both in content and form. This thesis has demonstrated how these three works constantly address the elusive and unspeakable nature of trauma through literary and stylistic devices, such as recurrent metaphors, disrupted syntax, faulty grammar, as well as through the inclusion of mediated, reworked images and their interplay with the text. Intermediality plays a crucial role in the three works, since it manages to communicate the nature of trauma through the visual, textual and, in some instances, auditive elements, but also presents an intertextual dimension. The fractured sense of self is reflected in the pronoun switches within the protagonist's narrative, and the characters' alternating narratives produce multiple voices and perspectives from which to depict and view traumatic experiences. The multiplicity of voices also acts as a defence mechanism to distance oneself, albeit not always successfully, from traumatic memories to articulate them. This is well illustrated in Vonnegut's novel, and Spiegelman takes the fractured sense of self even further by not only switching pronouns, but by depicting himself as old cartoon characters and at time adopting the mouse mask, echoing his self-portrait as a secondary witness to the trauma of the Holocaust in *Maus*.

The fragmentary and disruptive nature of trauma is also conveyed by the use of intertexts that act as what Vieda Skultans has called “literary companions” to the traumatised characters. These intertexts ask the reader to step outside of the narrative at hand and read across the text in order to make meaning. Vonnegut uses entries from history books, bits of songs and snippets of prayers. Foer and Spiegelman take it further by using not only literary intertexts, but also including photographs as literary companions to depict the unspeakable. Reworkings of Drew’s and Owerko’s photographs of the people falling from the towers allows the narrators to illustrate *visually* how traumatic events impact them, thus conveying the disruptive and “unspeakable” nature of trauma, and giving the images a personal and emotional dimension.

The intermediality of text and image in the three works disrupts the linearity and chronology of the narratives due to the insertion of decontextualized images, which asks the reader to place them into the context provided by the text. The sudden appearance of images within the textual narrative mimics the intrusive nature of traumatic memory that reoccurs in the form of flashbacks and strong bodily reactions, as *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *In the Shadow of No Towers* illustrate. It also imitates the fractured sense of time that trauma victims experience after witnessing a traumatic event.

Designed to destabilise the reader and engage him/her into an active (re)construction of the events and the narrative as a whole, both novels and the graphic narrative depart from conventional storytelling, thus constantly pointing at the struggle to fully grasp and to communicate trauma through language. The three works corroborate the key theoretical concepts in relation verbalising trauma through written narratives, but they also take these concepts a step further by adding the visual elements as conveyors of trauma. The assimilated images act as lenses through which the complexity of trauma can be seen and understood in ways that language alone cannot convey. Through their framing, layout and charged content, the images invite the reader to look closely and interpret them first as standing on their own,

and then re-evaluate them by placing them in dialogue with the textual narrative to see what the image alone and in connection to the text tries to communicate. Through reading, the reader becomes aware of the artistic endeavour and the subjective view adopted by and through the narrator in representing trauma: the process of narrativizing trauma is long, demanding and at times almost impossible. The ambiguous endings of the three literary works leave the question of whether or not the narrators are able to come to terms with their traumas unresolved. Just as, according to trauma theory, processing trauma may never be fully completed, the three works refrain from providing a fixed narrative and an ultimate meaning, thus reinforcing the idea of trauma as a shattering and incomprehensible experience. The reader is invited to assume the role of an empathetic secondary witness through active (re)construction of the narrative. Artistic works such as these carry the potential to raise awareness of and engage the readers with trauma through the narratives' non-conventional form, structure and use of different media. The use of these different narrative techniques and their interplay with the visual elements thus does not act as non-functional gimmickry, as was sometimes suggested by reviewers, but effectively bears witness to the experience of personal and collective trauma.

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Appendix:

Slaughterhouse-Five

Fig. 1

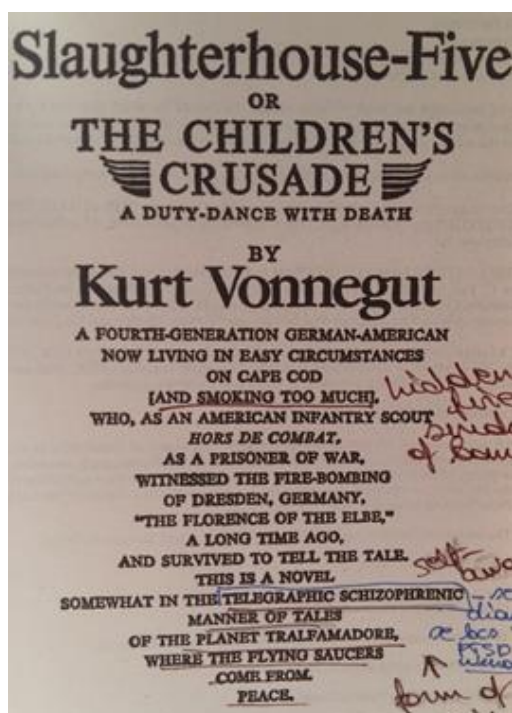


Fig. 2

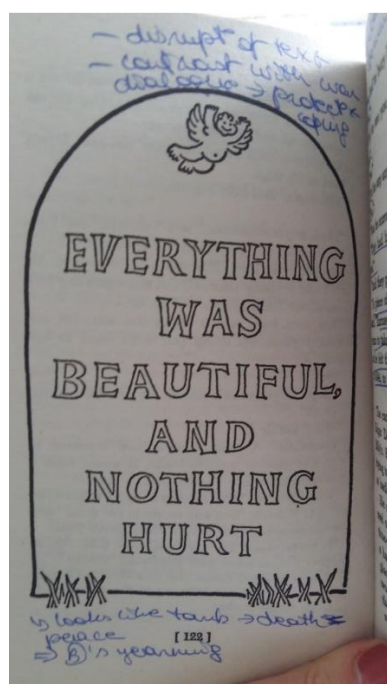
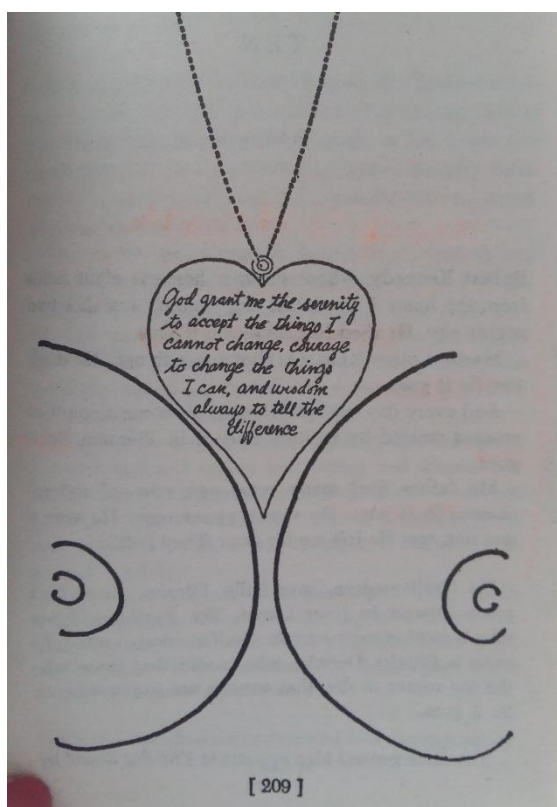


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Fig. 1

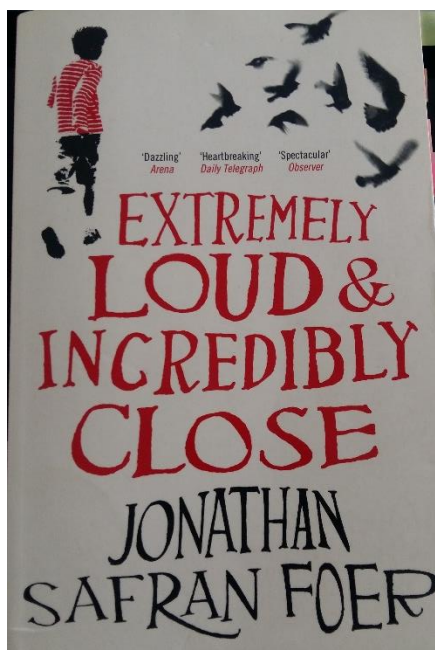


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

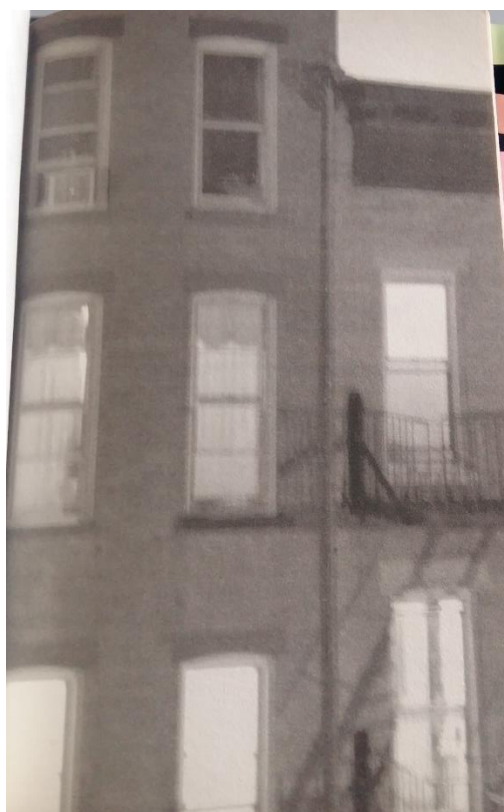


Fig. 5

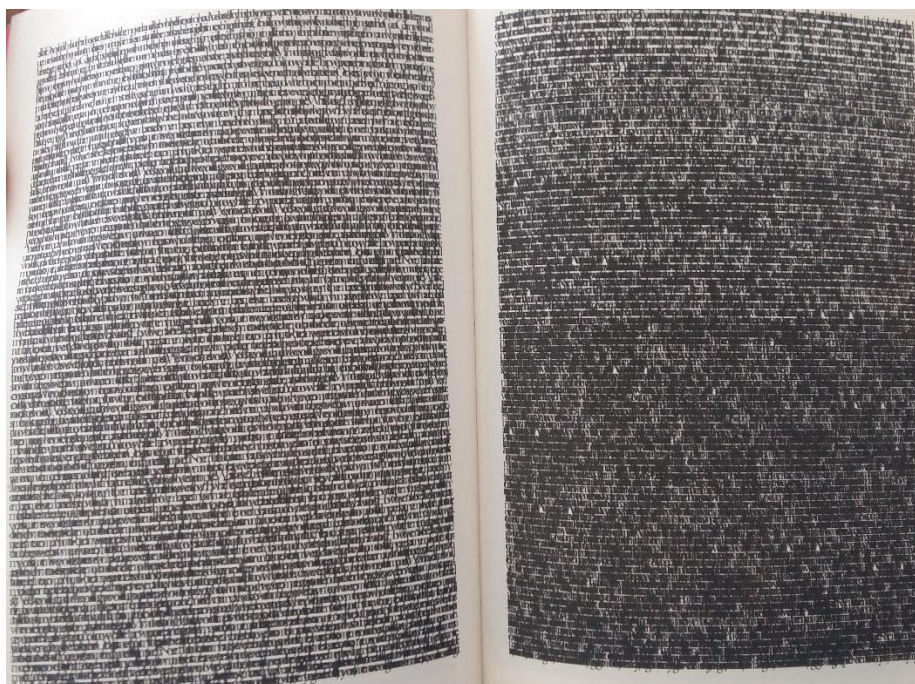
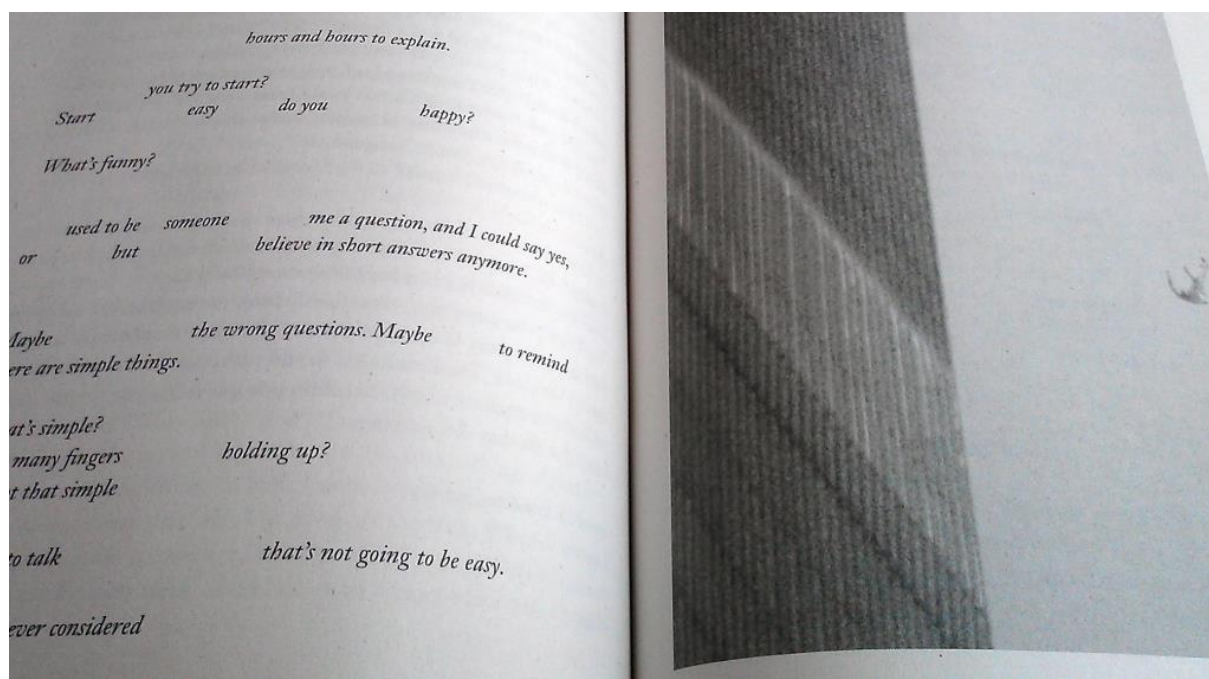


Fig. 6

She said, "Hello?" I told her, "4, 3, 5, 7!" "Listen," she said, "I don't know what's wrong with your phone, but all I hear is beeps. Why don't you hang up and try again." Try again? I was trying to try again, that's what I was doing! I knew it wouldn't help, I knew no good would come of it, but I stood there in the middle of the airport, at the beginning of the century, at the end of my life, and I told her everything: why I'd left, where I'd gone, how I'd found out about your death, why I'd come back, and what I needed to do with the time I had left. I told her because I wanted her to believe me and understand, and because I thought I owed it to her, and to myself, and to you, or was it just more selfishness? I broke my life down into letters, for love I pressed "5, 6, 8, 3," for death, "3, 3, 2, 8, 4," when the suffering is subtracted from the joy, what remains? What, I wondered, is the sum of my life?

"6, 9, 6, 2, 6, 3, 4, 7, 3, 5, 4, 3, 2, 5, 8, 6, 2, 6, 3, 4, 5, 8, 7, 8, 2, 7, 7, 4, 8, 3, 3, 2, 8, 8, 4, 3, 2, 4, 7, 6, 7, 8, 4, 6, 3, 3, 3, 8, 6, 3, 4, 6, 3, 6, 7, 3, 4, 6, 5, 3, 5, 7! 6, 4, 3, 2, 2, 6, 7, 4, 2, 5, 6, 3, 8, 7, 2, 6, 3, 4, 3? 5, 7, 6, 3, 5, 8, 6, 2, 6, 3, 4, 5, 8, 7, 8, 2, 7, 7, 4, 8, 3, 9, 2, 8, 8, 4, 3, 2, 4, 7, 7, 6, 7, 8, 4, 6, 3, 3, 3, 8! 4, 3, 2, 4, 7, 6, 7, 8, 4! 6, 3, 3, 3, 8, 6, 3, 9, 6, 3, 6, 3, 4, 6, 5, 3, 5, 7! 6, 4, 3, 2, 2, 6, 7, 4, 2, 5, 6, 3, 8, 7, 2, 6, 3, 4, 3? 5, 7, 6, 3, 5, 8, 6, 2, 6, 3, 4, 5, 8, 7, 8, 2, 7, 7, 4, 8, 3, 3, 2, 8! 7, 7, 4, 8, 3, 3, 2, 8, 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 7, 6, 6, 7, 8, 4, 6, 8, 3, 8, 8, 6, 3, 4, 6, 3, 6, 7, 3, 4, 6, 7, 7, 4, 8, 3, 3, 9, 8, 8, 4, 3, 2, 4, 5, 7, 6, 7, 8, 4, 6, 3, 5, 5, 2, 6, 9, 4, 6, 5, 6, 7, 5, 4, 6! 5, 2, 6, 2, 6, 5, 9, 5, 2? 6, 9, 6, 2, 6, 5, 4, 7, 5, 5, 4, 5, 2, 5, 2, 6, 4, 6, 2, 4, 5, 2, 7, 2, 2, 7, 4, 2, 5, 5, 2, 9, 2, 4, 5, 2, 6! 4, 2, 2, 6, 5, 4, 2, 5, 7, 4, 5, 2, 5, 2, 6, 2, 6, 5, 4, 5, 2, 7, 2, 2, 7, 7, 4, 2, 5, 5, 2, 2, 4, 5, 2! 7, 2, 2, 7, 7, 4, 2, 5, 5, 2, 2, 4, 5, 2, 4, 7, 2, 2, 7, 2, 4, 6, 5, 5, 5, 2, 6, 5, 4, 6, 5, 6, 7, 5, 4! 4, 3, 2, 4, 3, 6, 3, 8, 4! 6, 3, 3, 3, 8, 6, 3, 9, 6, 3, 6, 3, 4, 6, 5, 3, 5, 3! 2, 2, 3, 3, 2, 6, 3, 4, 2, 5, 6, 3, 8, 3, 2, 6, 3, 4, 3? 5, 6, 8, 3? 5, 3, 6, 3, 5, 8, 6, 2, 6, 3, 4, 5, 8, 3, 8, 2, 3,

Fig. 7



In The Shadow of No Towers

Fig. 1

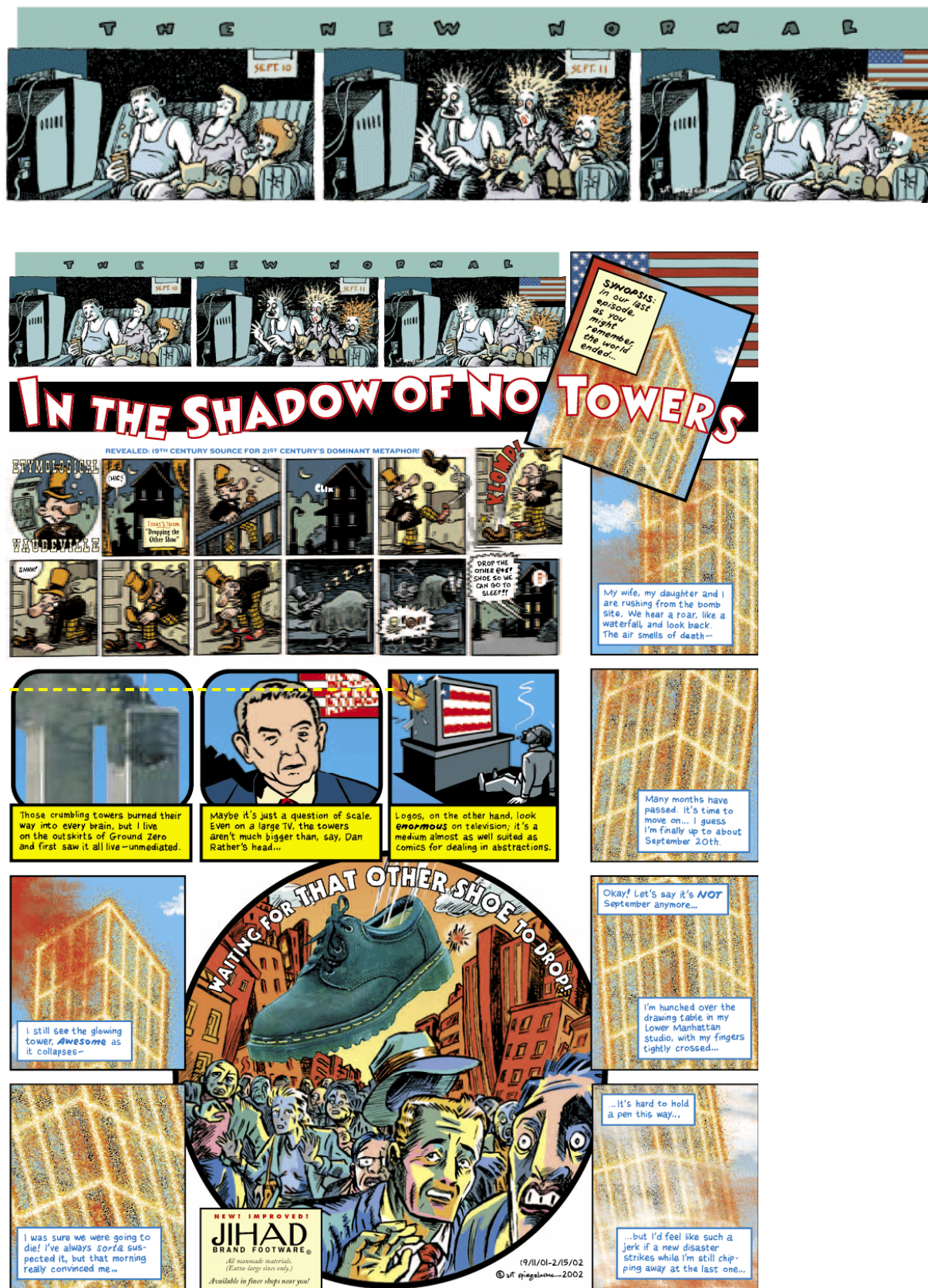


Fig. 2

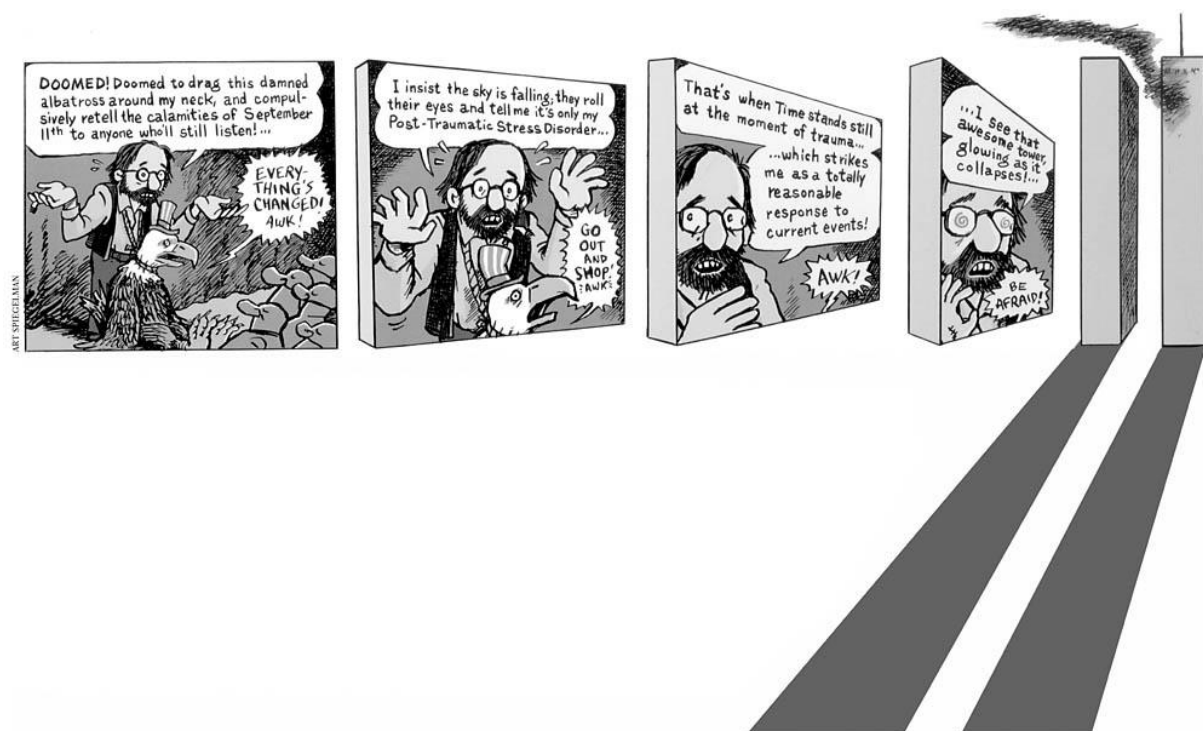


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

