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"New York City in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer"

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of the city in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. It focuses on the dialogue between text and images and how both are used to present the trauma of 9/11 events in terms of the complexity of the formal aspects used to represent the city.

Key words: 9/11, Cityscapes, Jonathan Safran Foer, Intermediality, New York City, Trauma.

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María MORENO CLEMENTE

New York City in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer

O. Introduction

Published in 2005, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a novel by Jonathan Safran Foer, professor of Creative Writing at New York University. Foer was born in 1977 of Jewish parents. His mother was a child of Holocaust survivors and some of his personal life details appear in the novel. His brother is editor of *The New Republic*. He was a pupil of author Joyce Carol Oates while studying at Princeton University, where he received Princeton's Senior Creative Writing Thesis Prize.

The novel tells the story of an imaginative nine-year-old Oskar Schell, who has lost his father in the attacks to the World Trade Centre in 11 September 2001. A non-reliable first person narrator, Oskar tries to come to terms with the memory of his father. The narrative occasionally switches to his grandparents' voices and their personal stories during the years after the Holocaust. Thus, the novel explores three different time periods and interconnected storylines. His grandmother's story comes via letters she writes to Oskar. His grandfather's letters also play a role. They are not addressed to Oskar but to his father, Thomas Schell Jr., and they bring the story back in time to Dresden and post-Holocaust Germany, tracing the family story and their move to New York City. Oskar's grandfather is a victim of the allied bombing of Dresden during World War II, who lost his girlfriend and their unborn child in the attacks and since that day suffers from aphasia. Oskar's paternal grandmother is not only the sister of Thomas Schell's dead girlfriend, but also the wife he leaves behind after she carries his baby, Oskar's father. After their marriage, his grandfather has spent some time in Germany and then returns to the US where he now lives in Oskar's grandmother's extra room, across the street from Oskar and his mother. Initially he is identified as 'the renter'.

The central theme of the text, family relations, connects all the characters through the death of Oskar's father, Thomas Jr. Their traumatic experiences affect the ability of characters to be close to others, and this is the main obstacle for their relationships. Correspondence, especially in the form of letter-writing, has a special place in the book, reinforcing the theme of family relations and communication. The characters' difficulty in articulating oral speech and the limitations of written language are explored and reinforced by the novel's experimental structure and multimodal typefaces. The novel includes photographs of personal objects and ends with a 14 page scrapbook belonging to Oskar and containing photographic records of 9/11.

The presence of New York City is very important in the novel, as Oskar moves through Manhattan in order to solve the mystery of a secret key that he finds in his father's closet and which offers the promise of a connection to his dead father. The key appears inside a vase and in an envelope with the word 'Black' written on the top left corner. Oskar travels all over New York, including the five boroughs, in order to meet every person under this surname. The Sixth Borough episode, to be studied later in this paper, offers several encounters with the eccentric inhabitants of the city, all named Black.

1. Oskar's Quest and The Fall

Although each of the three narrators exemplifies the theme of the journey in a different way, Oskar's quest is the most obvious example. Indeed, the process of becoming an individual 'subject' is achieved by becoming situated in reference to others in the world, framed by individual cognitive experiences, social, economic, political practices, and by the power relations emerging from all of these and structured in spatiotemporal forms by means of

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representations. For this reason, memory is much more than individual recollection exemplified in Henry Bergson's theories of subjective time and in Marcel Proust novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Recollection is, in fact, a pervasive human quality that forms the cultural substrata of a community by transforming the inclination toward oblivion into recorded memory. Memory is, thus, according to Pierre Nora (1993), a space of ghostly fractures, where humans seek, for whatever reason, to bring back the past into the present.

Overall, the novel suggests that physical and emotional journeys are interlinked and that Oskar's quest for his father is a form of growing up were the young Don Quixote learns from the experiences of all the people he meets in his eight months journey searching for the key-lock. Like in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, colours are associated to particular emotions, sometimes merely personal. The word Black plays a significant part in the enigma of the novel. Oskar tries to hold on to his father's memory and searching for the key-lock becomes his "raison d'être."

One of the first people Oskar meets in his detective search for the key's origin is a 48-year-old woman named Abby Black. Oskar and Abby become friends, although she has no information on the key. Oskar continues to search the city, meeting an old man he calls "the renter" a new tenant in Oskar's grandmother's apartment. It turns out to be his grandfather, who finally helps him to dig up his father's empty coffin and fill it up with the unsent letters that he had written to him. Oskar also reconnects with his mother, whom he spent much of the novel resenting. The key turns out to belong to Abby Black's ex-husband. However, Oskar only discovers this at the end of the novel after eight months because Abby had called him directly after his visit, but he had not touched the phone all that time. Oskar's trauma is associated to the phone. When Oskar arrived at his house on 9/11 he heard his father's recorded message and his last words before he died. The situation brings to mind once more the beginning of Paul Auster's short story "City of Glass", included in *The New York Trilogy*. Oskar blames his mother for not having been there. When he discovers the story of the key he feels frustrated: "I didn't know what to say. I found it and now I can stop looking? I found it and it had nothing to do with Dad? I found it and now I'll wear heavy boots for the rest of my life?" (Foer 302) The boy had hoped to find out about his father's last hours and redeem his guilt, but he seems to be denied this fulfilment. The detective quest of Auster's protagonist also parallels Oskar's futile journey through New York City.

As in "City of Glass", major themes in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* include family relations, trauma and mourning family. Trauma is everywhere in this novel. Not just the 09/11 attacks but also the Dresden bombings. The narrative explores the personal trauma that results from these atrocities. Critics have examined the different types of trauma presented in the novel, since it affects not only Oskar but also his family history in post-Holocaust Germany. Oskar's journey through the city and through his grandparents' memories, as captured in their letters, exemplifies the changes his personality suffers in coping with trauma, grief and loss. Oskar suffers from insomnia, panic attacks and depression. He is very cynical for his age, and full of bitterness. The impact of trauma is also reflected in his apathy: "I want to know everything, I told him, but that isn't true anymore either." (Foer 2) He often describes the feeling of depression as wearing heavy boots; Oskar uses the expression at least fifteen times throughout the novel, and an entire chapter is devoted to this metaphor that he uses in situations in which he feels overwhelmed by fear and/or grief: "I desperately wished I had my tambourine with me now, because even after everything I'm still wearing heavy boots, and sometimes it helps to play a good beat" (Foer 2). Unlike Günter Grass' protagonist of *The Tin Drum*, Oskar Mazerath, Oskar Schell's does not use the tambourine to disturb other people but to rhythmically calm himself, just as he feels an constant need to keep his brain occupied," "being with him [his father] made my brain quiet. I didn't have to invent a thing" (Foer 12). He describes various things that give him anxiety:

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Even after a year, I still had an extremely difficult time doing certain things, like taking showers, for some reason, and getting into elevators, obviously. There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I'm not racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places, scaffolding, sewers and subway grates, bags without owners, shoes, people with moustaches, smoke, knots, tall buildings, turbans. (Foer 36)

In the chapter entitled "Heavy Boots," crossed out and replaced with "Heavier Boots" (142), Oskar is performing in his school a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, some twelve weeks after the previous chapter. He is pleased to see audience support at the opening of the school play, but is resents that his grandmother comes to every performance and treats him as a small dependent boy. The chapter is definitely filled with death imagery that correlates with Oskar's current frustrated and depressed mood.

The only thing that makes any sense right then is my smashing JIMMY SNYDER's face. His blood. [...] I keep smashing the skull against his skull, which is also RON's skull (for letting MOM get on with life) and MOM's (for getting on with life) and DAD's skull (for dying) and GRANDMA's skull (for embarrassing me so much) and DR. FEIN's skull (for asking if any good could come out of DAD's death) and the skulls of everyone else I know. [...] It would have been great. (Foer 146-147)

Oskar's mind goes back in time to bring back his meeting with Abe Black, one of the men Oskar meets in his quest. Oskar took a cab to Coney Island and rode a roller-coaster with him despite his fear of heights. He thinks about the other people he has met, like Ada Black, or old Mr. Black, and feels frustrated and disappointed in his quest, reflected in the metaphor of the roller-coaster but also on his fixation on Yorick's skull. Later that night Oskar argues and disagrees with his mother over issues about his father's grave. He expresses a cynical pragmatism and insists that his father's spirit does not live in an empty grave. He accuses her of not being at home when he arrived there on 09/11. Unconsciously he expresses his own grief of hearing the messages and not answering his father's final call. Oskar copes with his trauma by writing in his journal. As he jots down his state of mind, his confusion leads him to correct himself constantly. The crossing out of words is one of the most explicit structural elements of the book. When going to bed that night he downgrades his emotional state and writes

MEDIOCRE
 OPTIMISTIC BUT REALISTIC
 [...] OPTIMISTIC BUT REALISTIC
 EXTREMELY DEPRESSED
 [...] EXTREMELY DEPRESSED
 INCREDIBLY ALONE (Foer 170-171)

Oskar continually misinterprets verbal and non-verbal signs from others. His quest in search of the key-lock is predicated on false assumptions, and he misreads his mother's behavior as negligent, undervaluing the grief that others around him feel. When his mother asks him if he is an optimistic or pessimistic he replies "Nothing is beautiful and true," (Foer 43) His worldview weights upon him like a log, but the expression of his 'heavy boots' exemplify the pessimism and emotional coldness in Oskar's mind: "[...] I got incredibly heavy boots about how relatively insignificant life is." (Foer 86) and further on he complains again about his "heavy, heavy boots" (Foer 159), "so heavy that I was glad there was a column underneath us." (Foer 163) And later on he reflects "I didn't understand why I

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needed help, because it seemed to me that you *should* wear heavy boots when your daddies, and if you *aren't* wearing heavy boots, *then* you need help." (Foer 200)

"Every time I left the apartment to go searching for the lock, I became a little lighter, because I was getting closer to Dad. But I also became a little heavier, because I was getting farther from Mom." (Foer 52) Oskar prioritizes his father's memory over his mother's presence, believing she has abandoned him because she works too much and she has a new "friend" who could substitute his father. Although he does not know how to articulate his feelings, the emphasis on the weight of his 'heavy boots' seems to be an impediment to reach his goal of getting close to his father and finding the key-lock. His grandfather also expresses a similar feeling when he affirms that "sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all of the lives I'm not living." (Foer 113)

The vicious circle of regret and pain is reflected in the metaphor of the weight of intangible things (memories and emotions) affecting in the form of physical objects (the boots or the key): "I didn't know what to say. I found it and now I can stop looking? I found it and it had nothing to do with Dad? I found it and now I'll wear heavy boots for the rest of my life?" (Foer 302) The passage ultimately shows Oskar's fear of remaining restless and caught in a repetitive behaviour for the rest of his life, an immobility metaphorically expressed through the image of his "heavy boots".

2. New York City in the novel: from Utopia to Dystopia

In recent years, a number of studies have offered conceptualizations of the city as a reflection of human acts. Naturally, these studies have included the role of artistic representations that function as interfaces between individual experiences and those of the community, and preserve cultural values, social and individual feelings and experiences. This is so because the city is, among other things, "a state of mind, an order of morality, a pattern of attitudes and ritualized behavior, a network of human connections, and a body of customs and traditions inscribed in certain practices and discourses" (Zhang 1996, 3-4). The relationship between topography and the development communal identity of human groups becomes particularly evident when looking at city life. Edward Relph (1976), for instance, stated that the city is a place where human intention is especially conspicuous, and claimed that cities represent large-scale desires, designs and acts of human coexistence. From the semiotic point of view, streets, squares, arcade sand city buildings are visible signs of social, economic and political processes that can be transported through memory, imagination and cultural representation in different media. Within a historical perspective, the acknowledgment of the significance of national contexts in literary texts, informs Richard Lehan's *The City in Literature* (1998), a comprehensive volume that describes how responses to the modern city varied across time and space, contributing not only to themes and *topoi* but also to the emerge of different literary genres. Lehan argues that the transformations in the structure and function of cities have also influenced the form of the novel, and that diverse narrative methods and generic trends can be related to specific historical stages of urbanization.

As semiotic structures, cityscapes are configurations of signs related to human conceptualizations of spatiotemporal allocations where the city can be conceptualized as a composite of representational human acts. Some scholars, like Andreas Huyssen have analyzed public memory in relation to cities such as Berlin—the fall of the Berlin Wall—, and New York —issues concerning the attack on the World Trade Center— showing how historical trauma has a unique power to generate works of art. Thus, wording the city includes representations that identify, organize, and remember places according to their spatiality, for instance, recreating paths. The temporal aspects of city representations involve particular historical periods. In this way, to think of the realms of memory, to borrow Pierre Nora's title, as well as the realms of the city, involves hybrid semiotic processes that include aspects of reality and of imagination.

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The story of New York City has frequently been told from the point of view of economic and political practices since the city became the engine of the US economic growth in middle of the 19th-century. The first native New Yorkers were the Lenape, an Algonquin tribe that resided in the region until the arrival of the Europeans at the beginning of the 16th century. The Italian Navigant Giovanni da Verrazzano, the Dutch West India Company that settled on "Nutten Island" (today's Governors Island) later called New Amsterdam, its transformation in the 1664 into New York City after being seized by the British, the population growth that extended the city's five boroughs in the 1760s, and its significant role in the cotton economy and textile industry, its participation in the Revolutionary War and in the War of Independence, becoming in the 1800s one of the most important port and trading capital of the new nation. As the city grew, an orderly grid of streets and avenues was established for parts of Manhattan. In 1837, construction began on the Croton Aqueduct which provided clean water for the city's growing population. The New York City Police Department was created in 1890. Growing immigration settled in distinct ethnic neighborhoods, joined trade unions and political organizations and built churches and social clubs. In 1895, residents of Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island and Brooklyn –all independent cities at that time– voted to "consolidate" with Manhattan to form a five-borough "Greater New York." Immigration laws in the 1965s revitalized some of these boroughs with the arrival of immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Several passages in the novel show New York City as a capitalized place, highly urbanized, with a lot of people, cars, and many signs of capitalization like banks. The stressed lifestyle causes the alienation of people, who do not know each other, even within the family circle. Oskar feels lost in the non-sleeping city: "In bed that night, I couldn't stop thinking about the key, and how every 2.777 seconds another lock was born in New York" (Foer 52).

When Oskar does not understand something or he wants some information about whatever he always uses "google", it becomes a very important tool in his detective's game "Then I did some research in internet" (40) "I googled around and found" (41) The Internet is a fundamental element.

Then I did some research on the Internet about the locks of New York, and I found out a lot of useful information. For example, there are 319 post offices and 207,352 post office boxes. Each box has a lock, obviously. I also found out that there are about 70,571 hotel rooms, and most rooms have a main lock, a bathroom lock, a closet lock, and a lock to the mini-bar. [...] There are more than 300,000 cars in New York, which doesn't even count the 12,187 cabs and 4,425 buses. Also, I remembered from when I used to take the subway that the conductors used keys to open and close the doors, so there were those, too. More than 9 million people live in New York (a baby is born in New York every 50 seconds), and everyone has to live somewhere, and most apartments have two locks on the front, and to at least some of the bathrooms, and maybe to some other rooms and obviously to dressers and jewelry boxes. Also there are offices, and art studios, and storage facilities, and banks with safe-deposit boxes, and gates to yards, and parking lots. I figured that if you included everything—from bicycle locks to roof latches to places for cufflinks—there are probably about 18 locks for every person in New York City, which would mean about 162 million locks, which is a *crevasse*-load of locks." (40-41)

Most importantly, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* presents the city of New York as a site of trauma after the 9/11 events. The city is one of the protagonists of the novel and contributes to give identity to the human groups living in it. This is particularly evident in the chapter entitled "The Sixth Borough" and "My Feelings". In this chapter, Oskar remembers how the night before 09/11 his father told him a story about how "New York City [once] had a sixth borough" (Foer 217). In the novel, Oskar has mentioned the story previously, particularly in the first chapter of the novel. This suggests its importance and the impact that

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it has in the novel, in ways that Oskar initially is not quite capable of articulating. As the anniversary of 09/11 approaches, Oskar slows down his quest (the pace of the novel slows in this section) to simply recollect on that evening.

"Once upon a time, New York City had a sixth borough." "What's a borough?" "That's what I call an interruption." "I know, but the story won't make any sense to me if I don't know what a borough is" "It is like a neighborhood. Or a collection of neighborhoods." "So if there was once a sixth borough, then what are the five boroughs?" "Manhattan, obviously, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx" (Foer 13)

In the story, the Sixth Borough was an island separated from Manhattan by the thinnest of water ways. Every year, at a huge ceremony, an athlete jumped between the two islands as New Yorkers cheered. His leap was always flawless until one year, his toe skimmed the water. At that point, the New Yorkers realized that the Sixth Borough was floating away. The island continued to separate each year until the jumper could not reach it at all. Over time, the bridges connecting the island collapsed, boat circulation stopped, and the people of the Sixth Borough could not communicate with main Manhattan any more. The people in the Sixth Borough refused to leave, "so they floated away one millimeter at a time" (Foer 221). New York authorities tried to stop the drift by using chains hooked to cement blocks, huge magnets and other artefacts, but nothing seemed to work. Oskar's father explained that Central Park was part of that Sixth Borough, a section that Manhattan managed to keep in place, and that evidence for this remains in Central Park's strange fossil record, its pH levels, and the mysterious names carved into its trees. The rest of the Sixth Borough was, according to Oskar's father, in Antarctica.

When Oskar expressed his doubt about the story, his father asked whether he was a pessimist or an optimist. Oskar decided on the latter, and his father noted that a pessimist could never be convinced, while "there is an abundance of clues that would give the wanting believer something to hold to" (Foer 221).

The fantastic tale of the Sixth Borough employs imagery that resonates within the larger storyline. As Oskar searches through all five boroughs and remembers his final Reconnaissance Expedition in Central Park, he is implicitly treating the city as a wonderland full of mysteries to be uncovered. Besides, one of the anecdotes that Oskar's father mentioned in relation to the story of the Sixth Borough is that its inhabitants threw paper airplanes in order to communicate with the people in central Manhattan. Immediately, this association, however loose, brings to the reader's mind a visual echo of the horrible images of the planes striking the Twin Towers. Oskar holds on to the memory of his father's story in an attempt to hold on to him.

The metaphor of the island slowly drifting away evokes the loss of memory connections. It also brings forth the topic of fiction versus reality, present in the novel in various ways. The floating island is a clear reference to Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*. Oskar's father depicts the city as a fantastical place. This resembles Oskar's quest where he finds tiny items in the park in his encounters with the Black people he meets. He struggles to make sense out of these casual clues in the imaginary story he is building in his mind as a way to escape the reality of his anguish and guilt. More's Utopia is also composed of several borough (or rather cities), 54 in total. They're all the same and they're between 24 miles and 1 day foot away from each other. All its inhabitants share the same knowledge and values and this has created a perfect state within the idyllic island.

The largest borough in Utopia, Amaurot, is protected by thick walls with towers and bastions and a deep moat which is part of the river, much like New York City. Amaurot has wide streets for better traffic and for wind protection. There is a double door protection in every building, made of extraordinary durable materials, whose doors are kept always open but under surveillance. They pretend to have no social classes, and treat everyone as an

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equal, but their hypocritical behavior is shown in their distribution of ranks of power in their society. Although Utopians are supposed to be against violence they still make use of their army in order to defend themselves from invaders. Being an island, isolated and protected from the rest of the world, it is easier to keep things going on the way you want, because there is no exterior influence possible.

The fantastical elements of the tale of the Sixth Borough provide some indication of the education Thomas Jr. wanted to give his son. Oskar, a self-professed realist before his father's death, had no belief in supernatural explanations. And yet his father forces such a story on him, demanding the boy choose whether he is an optimist or a pessimist and causing him to question his scientific understanding of the world. He wants to show Oskar the thin line that separates fact from fiction, reality and fantasy, dystopia and utopia.

Throughout the novel, the reader realizes that Oskar's grief is partly due to the fact that he can only think of his father in unemotional material terms, as a dead body with no spirit or memory, and therefore as an empty coffin in the argument with his mother in the 'heavy boots' chapter. At the end of the conversation with his father Oskar had wanted to say something emotional, but did not. Now his unspoken words haunt him. He was never able to tell his father that he loved him because he felt that expressing his love was a way to show his weaknesses. The story shows that unspoken emotions can weigh as much as scientific fact.

Maurice Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist who died of dysentery at Buchenwald in 1945 after being detained by the Gestapo when protesting the arrest of his Jewish father-in-law, is well known for developing the concept of 'collective memory' (1992). For Halbwachs, memory is not just about lived time; it is also about socially lived space, and about its collective representation, the reconstruction of loss and presence through intersubjective dialogue and negotiation. Memories function as mediators between individual and collective experiences, real and imaginary between past, present and future. The memories that his grandmother shares with him help Oskar to come to terms with his own grief and feelings. She tells him that she saw the horrific images of 9/11 while she was knitting him a scarf. She then called Oskar's mother to inquiry about his father. (Foer 226) When she came to the house Oskar was hiding under the bed and she comforted him until his mother came home. Oskar remembers that his mother returned from work and made posters with his father's picture on them, in case he would be found. Oskar's grandmother spent the day wishing she could have died in the North Tower instead of her son. On the day of the funeral, she watched as her son's empty coffin was lowered into the ground. Later that day, she received a letter from her husband, Thomas Sr., who had returned to New York. The letter simply read, "I'm sorry" (Foer 233)

Like Oskar, his grandmother lives mostly in her own mind, but in this section Foer succeeds in personalizing the tragedy of 9/11 and the pain experienced by all the family members. Her narrating style is exhausting, very detailed, but redundant information in a sort of dreamy tone that reflects her inner emptiness. It is through her husband's letters, for he remains always silent, that the reader discovers their past story. The process of mourning frequently ties memories to specific locations. The physical trace, the tomb, family grave, burial ground or memorial monument becomes almost mandatory in order to store past memories in a place and then convert them into an exportable body of mytho-poetic representations (Mignolo 1989, 51-96). The maps of memories are particularly conspicuous in cities, where the cult for the dead can be observed in their construction plans, mapped around religious monuments and other memorial cartographies (i.e. arcs of triumph). For Pierre Nora, the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (memory places) refers to inscriptions that can take the form of written texts, visual images and monuments.

Although memories are established by means of external landmarks, the vestiges of remembrance, like those of history, can be manipulated (not only mentally but also institutionally) following particular interests. One could speak of mytho-poetic 'imagined memories', just like Benedict Anderson (1983) spoke of "imagined communities". These

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interpretations of the past may take on special values at moments of personal and collective crisis, when the need for mapping stability is particularly strong. Locating memories allows the re-integration of lost events, assuring the continuity of life experiences.

Through Thomas' letters the reader learns about the couple's life after he came back to New York City. David Wyatt (2009) refers to the couple's marriage as "a marriage of millimetres" (143). Thomas and his wife have created "Nothing Spaces" (Foer 108; 120) which provides them with the distance they needed to co-exist but not 'live' together. The couple does not even look at each other while having sex.

Only a few months into our marriage, we started marking off areas in the apartment as "Nothing Places," in which one could be assured of complete privacy, we agreed that we never would look at the marked-off zones, that they would be nonexistent in the apartment in which one could temporarily cease to exist, the first was in the bedroom, by the foot of the bed, we marked it off with red tape on the carpet, and it was just large enough to stand in, it was a good place to disappear, we knew it was there but we never looked at it, worked so well that we decided to create a Nothing Place in the living room, it seemed necessary, because there are times when one needs to disappear while in the living room. (Foer 109-110)

Like Marc Augè's 'non-places', places of transience that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". Examples of a non-place would be a motorway, a hotel room, an airport or a supermarket, the 'Nothing spaces' in Foer's novel are places where no common memories exist. Where the shadow of trauma is so large that it is almost impossible to represent the experience and share it, whether in oral or written communication, and often in other forms of art representation. The search for a form is therefore peremptory, as the traumatic memories fill their lives like some kind of floating element that is simultaneously very heavy (the image of the 'heavy boots'): "One million pieces of paper filled the sky. They stayed there, like a ring around the building. Like the rings of Saturn. The rings of coffee staining my father's desk." (Foer 225)

At the end of the novel, the entire city of New York seems to become a 'non-place'. The story not only emphasizes the lack of communication between family members and among the rest of eccentric citizens that Oskar meets in his quest. It also attempts to capture the ungraspable in its intermedial representational forms, both textual and iconic.

The last pages of the novel represent Oskar's wish to get back his father alive; he remembers every step of his father's day and imagines that the falling man from the picture is his father. The order of the facts and also the order of the pages as if he could save the falling man's life, his father,

When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky. And if I'd had more pictures, he would've flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would've poured into a hole that the plane was about to come out of. Dad would've left his message backward, until the machine was empty, and the plane would've flown backward away from him, all the way to Boston . . . We would have been safe. (Foer 326)

A culture like the United States prides itself on triumphant success, on the stories of the heroes, the fire-fighters. It is a culture modeled on the myth of the "City upon the Hill." Jonathan Safran Foer's novel seems to question Redemption. It seems to focus on a sort of reality of the ephemeral; on the falling men and women. It seems impossible to frame this reality as triumphant; almost impossible to frame as real. It seems to be an event that never acquires the status of fact.

Moreno Clemente, María. "New York City in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer" *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 2.1 (2014): 83-93
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Some authors like Andreas Huyssen explain the social alarm that the 9/11 caused and how with the population coped with trauma as time passed: "No ruins allowed in the American imagination" (Huyssen 158)

3. The Function of Images and Intermedial References

Trauma is present in Foer's narrative and also in the images he uses. The largest image appears in pages 60-61. It represents New York City, with a huge gap in the centre of the image. This could be interpreted as the feeling of something missing at the heart of the city, and also as an empty space that it is difficult to fill, and where Oskar feels alone, looking for something in the streets, something that it just is not there. Buildings are huge structures, non-identifiable and not alive with people. The emptiness of Oskar's heart is represented in the void at the centre of the image. Page 89 also presents a lifeless metallic structure, some kind of massive building that points to Oskar's fears and trauma.

One of the most emblematic images appears in page 92, a house with trees, inhabited by Abby Black, perhaps a real person. Before Abby, this house at Bedfore street had been home to the poet Edna Saint Vincent Millay, Pulitzer Prize-winner and one of the most successful and respected poets in America, popular for her riveting readings and performances, her progressive political stances, her frank portrayal of both hetero and homosexuality. Above all, Edna Saint Vincent Millay is the embodiment and representation of new kinds of female experience and expression: "There was a little sign above the door that said the poet Edna Saint Vincent Millay once lived in the house and that it was the narrowest house in New York" (90)

However, the most striking image is the one Richard Drew took fifteen seconds past 9:41 am, on September 11, 2001; the falling of a man from one of the Twin Towers. The photograph began to circulate in the media and social networks. The following day the photograph appeared on page seven of *The New York Times* and in hundreds of other newspapers around the world. Due to the ensuing public outrage directed toward editors for what was deemed an obscene representation of a man's death, many newspapers were forced to issue apologies and refrain from publishing this image and others like it. While in Abby Black's home, Oskar is thinking about the image of the falling man, establishing a relation with his father's death. At the same time, Abby is looking at the key (Foer 59; 97). Suddenly, the episode is somehow fixed in the mind of the reader, almost as if suspended in time, the image of the eternal fall and the quest of the key to unnamed enigma.

4. Conclusion

The image of the falling man has remain a taboo within mainstream media in the United States, as it continues to evoke questions regarding the limits between history, memory and representation. Can the cult for the dead be represented in art? How can historical representations of death become aesthetic objects? The image, placed at the end of the novel, is crucial to Foer's novel, since his narrative is precisely a textual representation of the 9/11 events and the memories imprinted upon people. His characters, fictional or not, carry the weight of the emotional trauma. It is only in telling that the enigma opens up; it is only in finding a sympathetic listener, or a visual witness that can share the traumatic events that the unbearable becomes lighter.

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