Graphic and Photographic:

Reading Photographs in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York is said to be "the most photographed disaster in history."[1] In her essay "I Took Pictures" Marianne Hirsch states that "still photography has emerged as the most responsive medium in our attempts to deal with the aftermath of September 11."[2] Today, twelve years after the catastrophe, it is difficult to determine whether the reduction and iconicization of the events that we have come to identify as 9/11 preceded the highly mediated images of television reporting or the other way around. One way or another, the mainstream media's repetitive broadcasts of planes hitting the towers, collapsing skyscrapers and falling bodies reduced the horrific event to a spectacle. The omnipresence of these pictures immediately after the attack defined the disaster and its consequences as an assortment of images. Yet, some images did not stay for long in the public sphere on the account of their disturbing content. In her article "The Fascination of Abomination: The Censored Images of 9/11," Mikita Brottman discusses the disappearance of the recurring images of the falling bodies from the mainstream media shortly after September 2001. Brottman observes that "[a]fter September 12 … there seems to have been a general agreement on the part of the media that the use of any images containing human beings falling from the towers was inappropriate and distasteful. Footage of the falling bodies has not been shown again in the mainstream media but can easily be found online."[3]

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[1] B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11', *The Drama Review,* 47.1 (Spring 2003), pp. 11-48 (p. 12).
[2] M. Hirsch, 'I Took Pictures: September 2001 and Beyond' in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*(Lincoln and London, 2003), pp. 69- 86 (p. 71).
[3] M. Brottman, 'The Fascination of Abomination: The Censored Images of 9/11' in *Film and Television After 9/11* (S Illinois, 2004), pp. 163-177 (p. 172).

This statement has been challenged shortly after by the publication of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (hereafter *Extremely*). In 2005, only a year after Brottman points to the absence of the falling bodies from the mass media and four years after the disastrous events, Foer publishes his 9/11 novel in which he incorporates unusual typography (fig. 1), blank pages (fig. 2) and photographs. Most of the photographs included in Foer's *Extremely* bear no relation to the 9/11 attacks, rather these seem as random illustrations of the novel's storyline (fig. 3). However, the most startling of all these experimental visual elements in Foer's book is the presence of a photo illustration of a falling man reproduced eighteen times in the course of the novel (fig. 4).

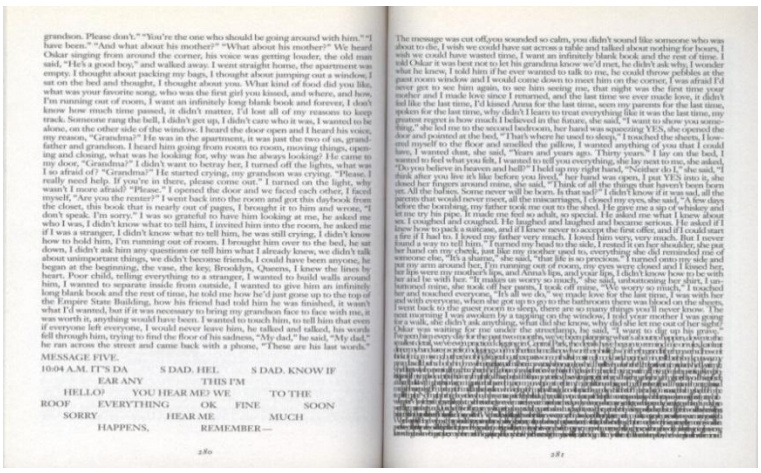


Figure 1. Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Mariner Books, 2005, pp. 280-1.

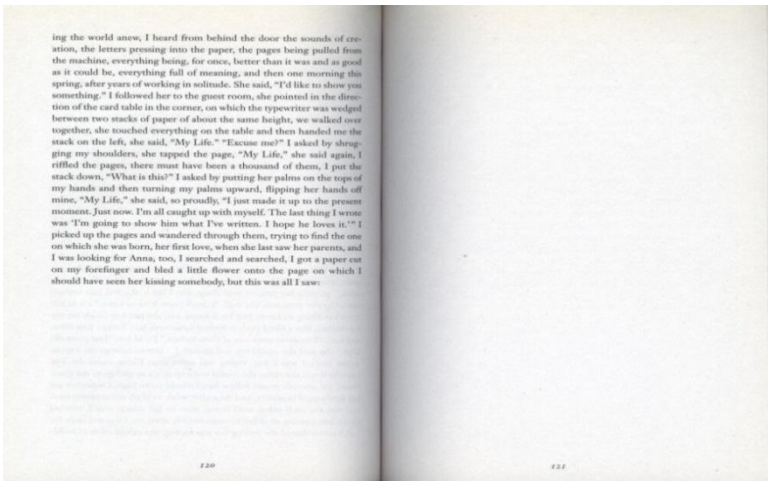
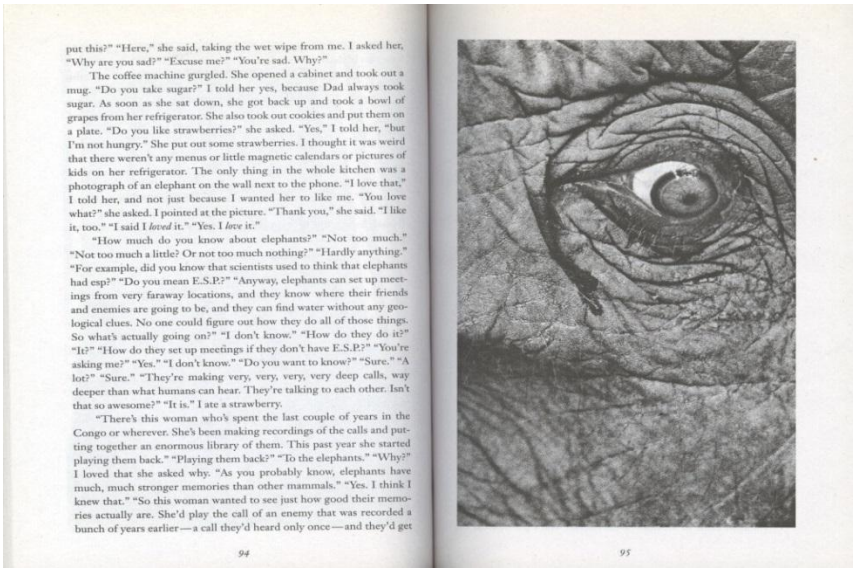


Figure 2. Foer, *Extremely*, p. 121.



put this?" "Here," she said, taking the wet wipe from me. I asked her, "Why are you sad?" "Excuse me?" "You're sad. Why?"

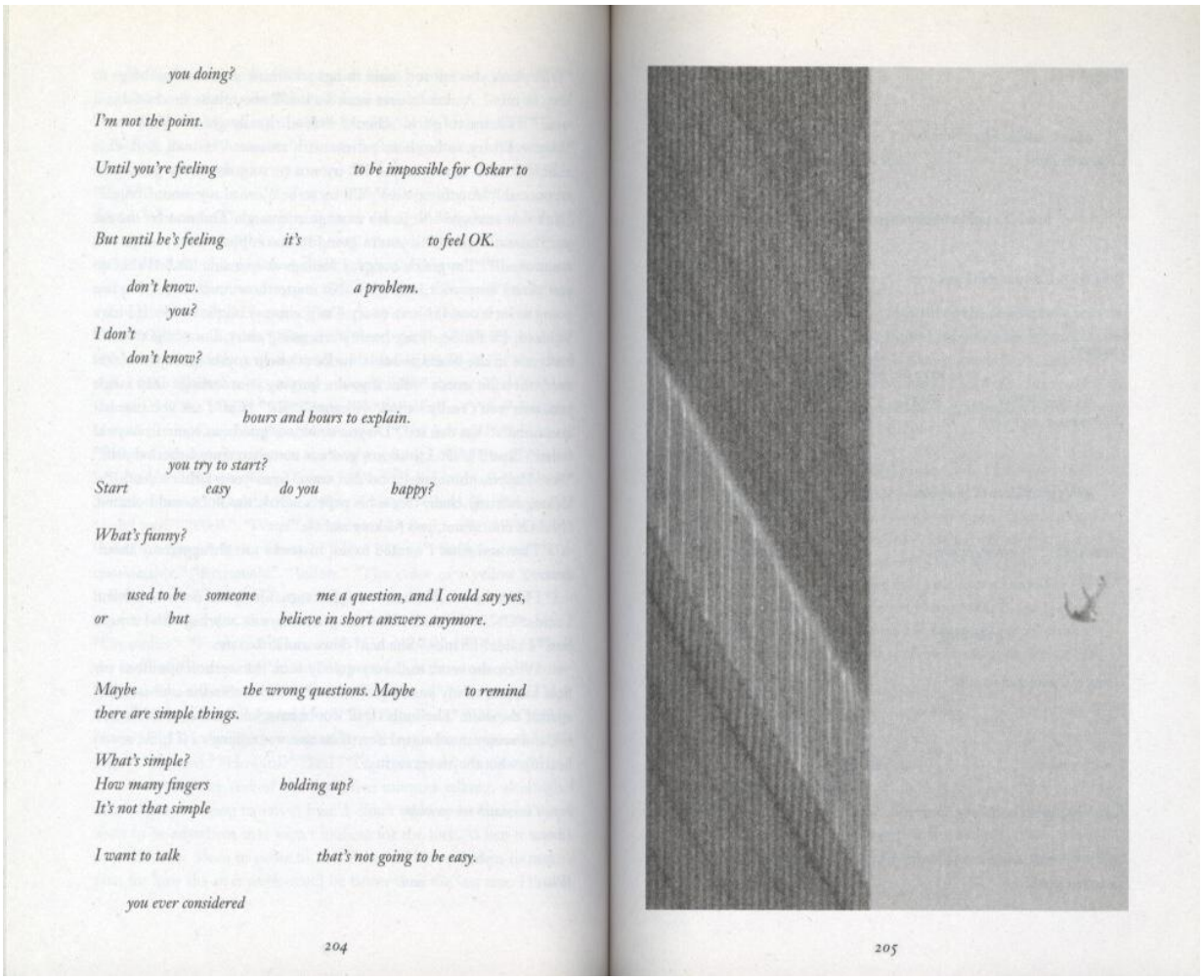
The coffee machine gurgled. She opened a cabinet and took out a mug. "Do you take sugar?" I told her yes, because Dad always took sugar. As soon as she sat down, she got back up and took a bowl of grapes from her refrigerator. She also took out cookies and put them on a plate. "Do you like strawberries?" she asked. "Yes," I told her, "but I'm not hungry." She put out some strawberries. I thought it was weird that there weren't any menus or little magnetic calendars or pictures of kids on her refrigerator. The only thing in the whole kitchen was a photograph of an elephant on the wall next to the phone. "I love that," I told her, and not just because I wanted her to like me. "You love what?" she asked. I pointed at the picture. "Thank you," she said. "I like it, too." "I said I *loved* it." "Yes. I *love* it."

"How much do you know about elephants?" "Not too much." "Not too much a little? Or not too much nothing?" "Hardly anything." "For example, did you know that scientists used to think that elephants had esp?" "Do you mean E.S.P.?" "Anyway, elephants can set up meetings from very faraway locations, and they know where their friends and enemies are going to be, and they can find water without any geological clues. No one could figure out how they do all of those things. So what's actually going on?" "I don't know." "How do they do it?" "It?" "How do they set up meetings if they don't have E.S.P.?" "You're asking me?" "Yes." "I don't know." "Do you want to know?" "Sure." "A lot?" "Sure." "They're making very, very, very, very deep calls, way deeper than what humans can hear. They're talking to each other. Isn't that so awesome?" "It is." I ate a strawberry.

"There's this woman who's spent the last couple of years in the Congo or wherever. She's been making recordings of the calls and putting together an enormous library of them. This past year she started playing them back." "Playing them back?" "To the elephants." "Why?" I loved that she asked why. "As you probably know, elephants have much, much stronger memories than other mammals." "Yes. I think I knew that." "So this woman wanted to see just how good their memories actually are. She'd play the call of an enemy that was recorded a bunch of years earlier—a call they'd heard only once—and they'd get

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Figure 3. Foer, *Extremely,* p. 95. An image of a photograph of an elephant's eye described in the novel.



you doing?

I'm not the point.

Until you're feeling to be impossible for Oskar to

But until he's feeling it's to feel OK.

don't know. a problem.
you?
I don't
don't know?

hours and hours to explain.

you try to start?
Start easy do you happy?

What's funny?

used to be someone me a question, and I could say yes,
or but believe in short answers anymore.

Maybe the wrong questions. Maybe to remind
there are simple things.

What's simple?
How many fingers holding up?
It's not that simple

I want to talk that's not going to be easy.

you ever considered

204 205

Figure 4. Foer, *Extremely*, p. 205. The image is reproduced on pages 59, 62, 205, 327-355 (right hand pages), photo illustration based on a photograph by Lyle Owerko © 2001.

Although *Extremely* graphically represents the image of a falling body, it reproduces none of the canonical images mentioned above—images that unlike the falling man photo illustration have evidently been available in the mainstream media. The inclusion of the excluded image in Foer's novel in general and the fifteen final pages of the novel that consist of a series of pictures of a figure falling from the towers, rearranged so that as one flips the pages, the figure ascends instead of falling have been regarded by some reviewers as a disrespectful attempt at representing the unrepresentable and as a crude endeavour to undermine the agreed consensus. Lawrence Goodman of *JBOOKS.COM* criticizes Foer's integration of the video images' in reverse order as seen in the flipbook in the end of the novel. For Goodman, Foer's usage of the image of the falling man is a cynical exploitation that "take[s] the ineffable horror of that day and [makes] it tangible in a way that violates the event's sanctity."[4] Foer's experimental style have enraged Harry Siegel of the *New York Press* so much that in his review, entitled "Extremely Cloying & Incredibly False," Siegel calls Foer a "bad" and "vile" author and refers to *Extremely* as "cut-and-paste assemblage of words, pictures, blank pages and pages where the text runs together and becomes illegible."[5] Finally, some critics including Goodman and Siegel accused Foer's incorporation of photographs as a mere copying of W. G. Sebald.

While some critics attack the novel and its experimental employment of visual imagery, others see Foer's incorporation of the graphic apparatus as an attempt to "stretch the novel's limits" and encourage the reader-viewer's "active engagement in the reading

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[4] L. Goodman, 'W.G. Sebald Meets Captain Underpants', *JBOOKS.COM*, accessed 20 March 2013.< http://www.jbooks.com/fiction/index/FI_Goodman_Foer.htm>.
[5] H. Siegel, 'Extremely Cloying & Incredibly False', *NYPress*, accessed 20 March, 2013. < http://nypress.com/extremely-cloying-incredibly-false/>.

process."[6] For Romi Mikulinsky the integration of the images of the falling body in the textual framework of the novel is constructive rather than violent and offensive. Mikulinsky "find[s] that these images' inclusion in the novel (as opposed to their presence on the internet) redeems them from their repressed status and their internet connotations of snuff."[7] Moreover, she notes: "[b]y focusing on one man rather than on the collective tragedy" the novel works "against 9/11's representation as a spectacle." [8]

Both those who praise and those who condemn Foer's *Extremely* build their commentary around the photographs that are present in the novel's framework, I however, am interested in paying special attention to photographs and images that are verbally described in the course of the novel but are visually absent from the pages of Foer's text. In this essay I focus specifically on the absence of photographs that came to shape our perception of 9/11 and argue that the lack of these photographs is accentuated by the verbal descriptions of these images and by the presence of other photographs that one does not expect to find in a graphic novel that narrates the events of 9/11(fig. 5). I further argue that while the novel's incorporation of certain images that are directly related to the events of September 2001 overtly upholds the status of 9/11 as a spectacle, covertly the visual blurriness of the falling man photo illustration and the absence of other images—such as planes crushing into WTC and the collapsing towers —resist the status of 9/11 as a spectacle. I ground my argument and my discussion of the spectacle in Guy Debord's claim that the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, rather it is that which "by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever representation takes on the independent existence,

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[6] R. Mikulinsky, 'Photography and Trauma in Photo-fiction: Literary Montage in the Writings of Jonathan Safran Foer, Aleksandar Hemon and WG Sebald' (University of Toronto, DPhil thesis, 2009), pp. 150, 144.
[7] Mikulinsky, 'Photography', p. 167.
[8] ibid.

the spectacle re-establishes its rule." [9] In other words, a spectacle encourages its viewers' passivity. In my reading, *Extremely* aims to uproot this very passivity that is instigated by the paralyzing images.

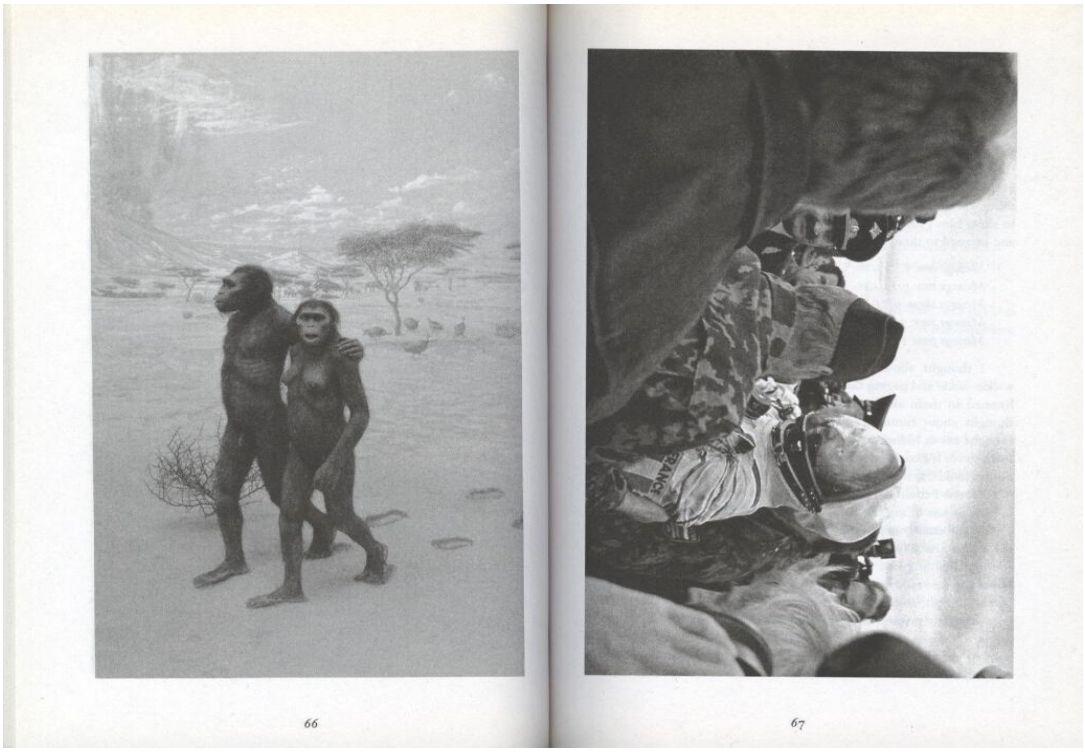


Figure 5. Foer, *Extremely*, pp. 66-7.

Before I discuss the significance of the absent photographs to our engagement with Foer's *Extremely* I delineate a brief synopsis of the novel. The novel presents three simultaneous and interrelated narratives all of which engage with the consequences of 9/11. The main plot is narrated by the 9-year-old Oskar Schell who lost his father in the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. Oskar wishes "to stop inventing" how his father lost his life in the terrorist attack, to do so he sets on a journey the point of which is to find out the 'truth' about his father's last moments.[10] The two other plots are told by Oskar's grandparents. Each of these secondary storylines provides an individual account

[9] G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York, 1994), p. 17.
[10] J. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Boston and New York, 2005), p. 257.

and narrates the life stories of Oskar's grandmother and grandfather both of whom survived the Dresden bombings. In these accounts we are exposed to the ways in which the older generation deals with the losses that their catastrophic reality entails.

All three accounts are interspersed with graphic reproductions of images, however, not all the photographs that are discussed in the course of the novel are reproduced for us, the readers, to see. Although conventionally we do not expect to see photographs in a novel, the presence of the various graphic elements throughout *Extremely* echoes Susan Sontag's valuable advice: in her *Regarding the Pain of Others* Sontag recommends that we should always ask ourselves "what pictures … are not being shown" and why.[11] Following Sontag's suggestion I am interested in unravelling the logic that stands behind Foer's omission of certain images from the visual landscape of his 9/11 novel. To do so I focus on two pivotal passages; both provide an account of how the characters learn about the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

First, I turn to Oskar's grandmother's account of the hours that follow the terrorist attack—when the images of the falling bodies have not yet been excluded from the American press. She describes the images she sees on the television screen, however, no visual reproduction follows these words:

> The same pictures over and over.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> People waving shirts out of high windows.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> People covered in gray dust.
> Bodies falling.
> Buildings falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Buildings falling.
> People waving shirts out of high windows.

[11] S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London, 2003), p. 12.

Bodies falling.
Planes going into buildings.[12]

In a way, the words' graphic arrangement on the white page becomes the visual rendition of the images described as the short sentences that fail to fill the whole line look somewhat like a collapsing structure. The unconventional form of these lines and the lack of adjectives in the grandmother's description can be read as the collapse of language in the face of disaster. The grandmother, who has just discovered about her only son's death, cannot find a way to describe her grief. Instead, she condenses the horrific images into minimalistic signs—words—that on the surface seem to strip the events from their meaning. However, the words she uses capture the events that were broadcast in the mass media during and immediately after the events. Unlike the descriptive language that consists of adjectives, the grandmother uses no adjectives in her report. The absence of adjectives reduces the events to sheer facts that can be read as resisting imagination that is "[t]he power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses."[13] Perhaps this resistance to imagine is a request to stop visualizing.

This speculation could clarify the absence of the images of the collapsing towers and the crashing planes, but this could not elucidate why of all the images described in this section the only image that Foer's novel graphically reproduces is an image of a falling body, one of many images that were categorically removed from mainstream media. Possibly Foer's resistance to provide the visual representation of the minimalistic description Oskar's grandmother frantically repeats serves the purpose of prompting the reader of the novel into action thus resisting the stasis Debord affiliates with the concept of the spectacle. Mikulinsky rightly observes that Foer's integration of graphic elements in

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[12] Foer, *Extremely,* p. 230.
[13] "imagination, n.". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press, accessed 15 April 2013. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91643?redirectedFrom=imagination >.

the novel's framework "requires from readers an active engagement in the reading process. Readers have to disentangle the photos' significance, to figure out on their own what was the original context of each image and to reveal (and create, or sometimes, guess) the networks of meaning in which the image participates in the book." [14] I however, would like to push Mikulinsky's argument further and propose that it is not merely the presence of images that invites the readers' engagement with the text but also the absence of certain images that are present only linguistically as seen in the passages I bring forward in this essay.

I suggest that the grandmother's 'screen of words' signals movement in a more immediate way than do photographs. While photographs arrest our gaze, the unusual presentation of the words in the contexts of the novel forces the readers' eyes to move rapidly from one line to the other and make a visible progress in the reading of the book. Thus, the grandmother's verbal depiction forces us to physically move as it requires to turn pages in a rapid way and to move our eyes as we read the portrayed scene. Contrary to words, photographs entail stasis both because of their quality of freezing a moment in mid-air and because they shock us since we have to stop in order to try and understand the relationship between the photograph and the novel's text.

Moreover, the text hints that even when the images are absent they stay in the viewer's memory. Later, when the grandmother strolls down the street, her thoughts are intermingled with and interrupted by the images she saw earlier that day:

> I went back across the street.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> Planes going into buildings.

[14] Mikulinsky, 'Photography', p. 144.

> Planes going into buildings.
> Planes going into buildings.[15]

The verbal representation allows us to remember the images, to dig in our collective memories and find out that the memory still exists as it has ceaselessly appeared in mass media. The scene concludes with the grandmother's recollection:

> The television was the only light.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Planes going into buildings.[16]

The light from the television then is not merely a physical illumination of the room but it is also the only source that provided New Yorkers and the rest of the world with the events' coverage and promised to make sense out of non-sense by repeating the images time after time. Nevertheless, this light did not illumine but rather obscured the reality of the event since the repetitive images transformed the public into passive observers that remember the event as a spectacle.

Another example where Foer describes the popular images with no graphic reproduction of these pictures can be seen in Oskar's grandfather's description as he relates how he learns about the terrorist attack while in Dresden, Germany. This scene illustrates, to put it in Nancy K. Miller's words, how "knowledge of the event arrived through the highly mediated narratives of television reporting."[17]

> the second plane hit … I looked up, there were hundreds of people around the televisions now … I stood up and looked, I didn't understand what I was seeing on the screen, was it a commercial, a new movie? … I stood there, a person in the crowd, was I watching the images, or was something more complicated happening?[18]

The images that 'glue' the crowd to the TV screens without any explanation of what it is that one is being shown is repeated to such an extent that it penetrates the public sphere

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[15] Foer, *Extremely*, p. 231.
[16] Foer, *Extremely,* p. 232.
[17] N. K. Miller, 'Reporting the Disaster', in *Trauma at Home*, pp. 39-47 (p. 39).
[18] Foer, *Extremely*, p. 272.

with such a force that no one can possibly escape it. Later, on his way home, The grandfather stops "in front of an electronics store, the front window was a grid of televisions … showing the buildings, the same images over and over, as if the world itself were repeating, a crowd had gathered on the sidewalk."[19] This repetition, the grid of the television screens is never represented visually but it does trigger the readers' memory and asks to recollect our experience of witnessing the events of 9/11 from far and near and acknowledge that due to the mediation of the disastrous images "the world is so big and small."[20]

The television grid calls to mind "Death in America" images of Andy Warhol from the early 1960s, images that display a catastrophe compulsively repeated in a form of grid (fig. 6, 7).

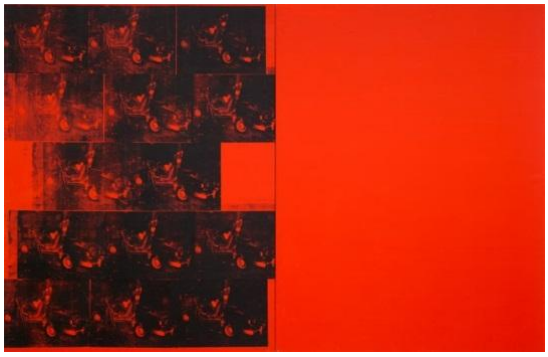


Figure 6. Andy Warhol, *Orange Car Crash [5 Deaths 11 Times in Orange]*, 1963.

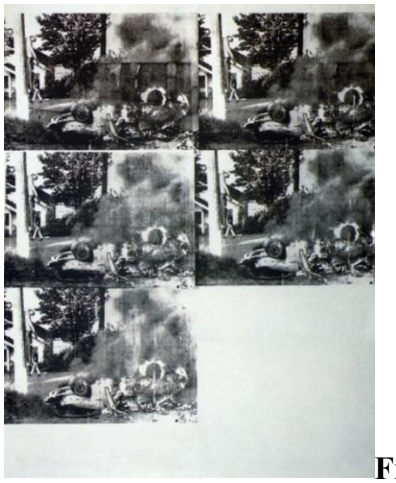


Figure 7. Andy Warhol, *White Burning Car III*, 1963.

[19] Foer, *Extremely*, p. 272.
[20] ibid.

In a celebrated interview of 1963 Warhol claimed that "[w]hen you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect."[21] According to Warhol repetition desensitizes the viewers to the visual data. However, going back to Foer's 9/11 novel, the grandfather's description of the crowd as a passive body that is paralyzed to the television screens undermines Warhol's premise and suggests that repetition amplifies the effect rather than the other way around. It is well worth noting that the grandfather goes on to say that "[t]he cafes were full that afternoon, people were laughing , there were lines in front of the movie theatre, *they were going to see comedies*" [my emphasis].[22] This addition might be read as supportive of Warhol's claim that we become indifferent to images that repeat themselves too often. Still, I maintain that the mentioning of movies as a form of entertaining, more than anything else, points at the public's desire to replace the disturbing images they consumed in the mainstream media with lightheaded visual imagery. The need to replace the images stresses the strong impact the images of 9/11 bear upon the viewers. If this is the case, how should we read the absence of these paralyzing images from Foer's novel? Does the verbal representation spare us the horror that has been paralyzing us for twelve years now?

In this context I would like to briefly allude to the screen adaptation of Foer's *Extremely* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2011). I propose that the film version of *Extremely* can be seen as a mirror image of the passage where Oskar's grandfather learns about the horrors of 9/11. The passivity of the crowd that gathers around the grid of the television sets in the grandfather's narrative recalls the paralysis one feels when witnessing a mediated disaster and is emphasized through the screen adaptation of *Extremely* that draws the viewers back into the position of the passive observers that are left with no choice but to repeatedly

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[21] G. Swenson, 'What is Pop Art?', p. 60 qtd. in H. Foster, 'The Return of the Real', in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 127-168 (p.131).
[22] Foer, *Extremely,* p. 272.

witness the catastrophe. In that sense, the film functions as the recreation of the events, a repetition of "the same images over and over" while the novel insists on blocking the images with a screen of words.[23]

However, as I mentioned earlier, not all images are excluded from the novel's framework, therefore one might argue that my observation stands at odds with the graphic reproduction of the photo-illustration of the falling man since the multiple images of the falling body seem to imitate the repetitive pictures of the crushing planes and the collapsing towers. Yet, I maintain that the reproduction of the falling body within the context of *Extremely* differs from the use American mainstream media made of the circulated images. In order to show how Foer's usage of 9/11 imagery departs from the images that came to stand as the authoritative representation of September 2001 I compare the photo-illustration reproduced in the novel and the famous photograph of the falling man that came to shape the 9/11 tragedy in the public's mind. "The Falling Man" photograph taken by Richard Drew, *Associate Press* photographer, depicts a man falling from the North tower of the World Trade Centre during the September 11 attacks in New York City (fig. 8).



Figure 8. Richard Drew, *The Falling Man*, September 11, 2001.

[23] Foer, *Extremely,* p. 272.

Instead of reproducing the photograph that "burned itself into the consciousness of anybody who has looked at it" the novel incorporates a blurry photo illustration the presence of which stresses the absence of the most "memorable" photograph and accentuates the fact that the presence of the image in the novel is mediated through multiple layers.[24] Not only this is an illustration *based on* a photograph—namely a copy of the original spectacle that was reproduced a countless number of times—but it is also always already a copy of a photograph. This calls for Sontag's discussion of the photographic medium as an apparatus of knowledge: in her widely read collection of essays *On Photography* Sontag notes that "[w]hat most people know of the famous photographs – in books, newspapers, magazines, and so forth – are photographs of photographs."[25] This observation anticipates the way the image of the falling body is incorporated in Foer's *Extremely.* On the copyright page, Foer explicitly states that the image is a reproduction—"a photo illustration based on a photograph by Lyle Owerko © 2001." Although this mediation distances the reader-viewer from the horrific events of 9/11 and from their original representation, we should bear in mind that "[e]very picture of the devastation, however grainy or imperfect," makes "visible" the horrific events that we desire to erase from our collective history.[26] Therefore, the reproduced image, however mediated, makes the invisible graphically explicit—a gesture that can explain the anger of critics like Goodman and Siegel discussed earlier in this essay.

Moreover, the repetition of the image in the end of the novel in a flipbook form that reverses temporal and spatial sequence so that the turning of the pages allows us to see "a

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[24]A. Harrison Levi, 'The Falling Man: An Interview with Henry Singer', *Observatory,* accessed 20 March 2013. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/the-falling-man-an-interview-with-henry-singer/30048/>.
[25] S. Sontag, *On Pgotography* (London, 1979), p. 140.
[26] Hirsch, 'I Took Pictures', p. 72.

scene from 9/11 unfold backwards" might seem to articulate the message Goodman sees appropriate in the case of *Extremely* (fig. 9, 10).[27]

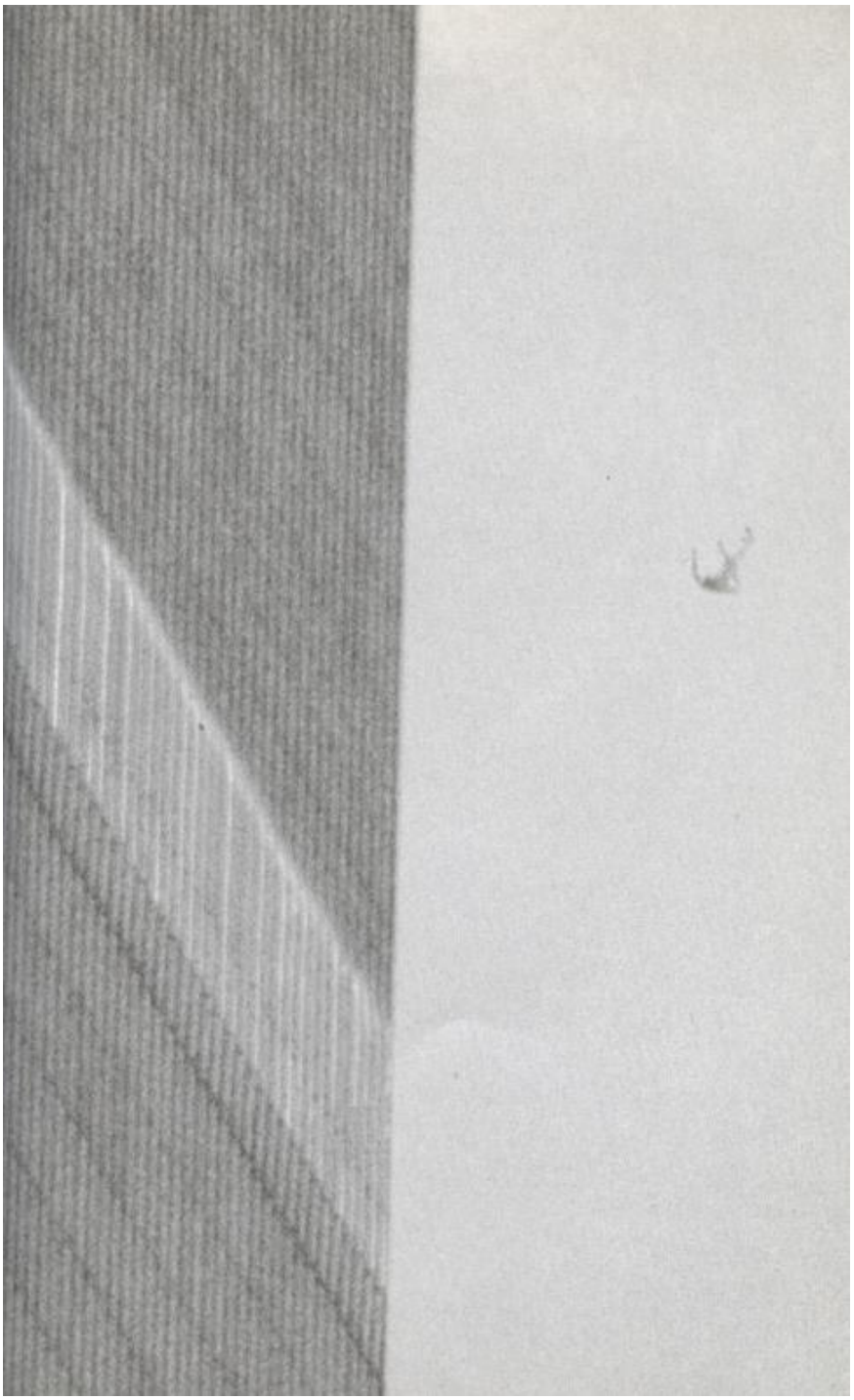


Figure 9. Foer, *Extremely*, p. 345. One of the images extracted from the flipbook on pages 327-355.

[27] Goodman. < http://www.jbooks.com/fiction/index/FI_Goodman_Foer.htm>.



Figure 10. Foer, *Extremely*, pp. 327-355. I extracted several images from the flipbook and arranged them side by side to illustrate the flipbook effect. This image should be viewed in a landscape format, from left to right so that the left-most frame is the first page in the flipbook and the right-most frame is the last page of the flipbook and of the novel.

For Goodman, Foer's novel "is imbued with a quintessentially American faith that imagination and the powers of language can heal all manner of grief."[28] To me the replicated images in the flipbook construct do not function as a naïve way of dealing with loss; rather the presence of the photo illustration and its flipbook representation comments on the way 9/11 has been represented in American mass media: as a spectacle that resists language and relies on voyeurism to sustain its status as such.

Moreover, reading images in a textual framework goes hand in hand with reading language and therefore it seems to me that by crediting the end of *Extremely* with naïve hope Goodman overlooks the "what-if mode" that characterizes the final pages of the novel.[29] At the end of the novel Oskar imagines how things might have been different if only he could have reversed the progress of time thus saving his father's life and his own sense of security. The controversial flipbook follows immediately after this passage. Since the passage is narrated in the third conditional implying that the narrated events cannot ever take place outside of language, the presence of the flipbook contradicts rather than illustrates, as Goodman would have it, the words uttered before it—words that tell us about the impossibility of reversal of time and the finality of death. The presence of the flipbook extracts the words from the linguistic domain and substitutes them with graphic illustration, an action that is always already undermined through the usage of third conditional as a means to express the desire to reverse the progress of time. This easily overlooked incongruity between the passage and the photo-illustrated flipbook has a twofold implication: on the one hand it underlines our desire to trust photographic images as reliable sources of information, while on the other it stresses the incompatibility between narrated events and their visual representation, be it in a novel or in a live reportage. The final passage of the book underscores the impossibility of reversal,

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[28] Goodman. < http://www.jbooks.com/fiction/index/FI_Goodman_Foer.htm>.
[29] Mikulinsky, 'Photography', p. 178

therefore Oskar and others are doomed to live with the grim consequences that cannot be undone neither through language nor through visual means. We end up reading and hearing silence (in the form of images) instead of speech, implicating that however close these images might be they will never be loud enough to comfort us. Thus, the novel ends on a realistic note as Oskar's search forces him to acknowledge that there is no making sense out of 9/11 and as such he continues to mourn his father's death.

I further propose that the multiple reproductions of the falling body image stands in sharp contrast with the graphic omission of the other, more acceptable images of 9/11, and can be seen as Foer's response to the "graphic footage of human death" that was "so conspicuously absent" from the mainstream reports of the disaster.[30] By reproducing the falling body and excluding the other images that came to represent the events of that day Foer renders the popular images that made 9/11 into a spectacle "conspicuously absent," thus yet again, subverting the spectacle status of September 11.

Much like the characters in Foer's *Extremely* who learn about the events of 9/11 from the images displayed again and again on the television screens we too witnessed the events through the strikingly repetitive footage of the same very few images, used over and over again iconically and emblematically to signal this disaster. Foer's reproduction of the falling body image recalls our engagement with visual data in the immediate aftermath of the event.

I would like to conclude my discussion by a brief consideration of the frame that is used as a backdrop of each and every image in *Extremely* except for the images that constitute the flipbook (fig. 11, 12). In this context I draw on Hirsch's discussion of framing. Hirsch asserts that the reduction of the horrific day to an image—an object—cannot possibly contain the reality of 9/11: "We contain and circumscribe the enormity of

[30] Brottman, 'Fascination of Abomination', p. 165.

the event, but even as we stare at the small square print, we know that it is only a fragment, and that, in itself, brings us back to all that cannot be contained by the frame."[31] For Hirsch, the framing "of photographs give a sense of the fragmentariness of our knowledge, the inability we feel to take in the magnitude of the event and the losses it engendered."[32] Hirsch's reflection emphasizes photograpy's fragmantizing quality that blocks our access to the 'whole picture' and effectively restricts our knowledge of the event to what we see in a photograph or a set of photographs that are linked to one another through a narrative.

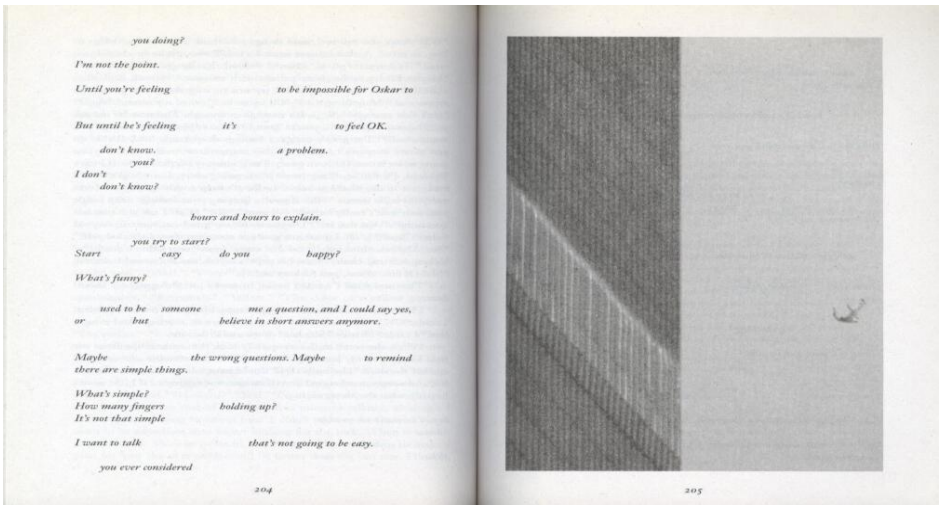


Figure 11. Foer, *Extremely*, p. 205. Framed image of a falling body.

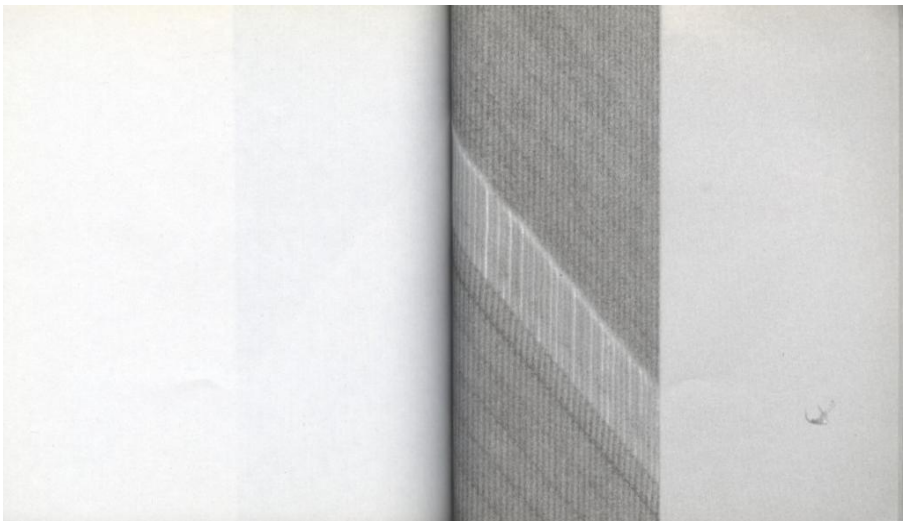


Figure 12. Foer. *Extremely,* p. 333. Unframed image of a falling body.

[31] Hirsch 'I Took Pictures', p. 77.
[32] ibid.

The frame in Foer's novel (fig. 11) and the lack of it at the end of the novel (fig. 12) emphasize the fragmentary quality of photography. The removal of the frame in the final pages of the book symbolically grants us the access to the images that have been excluded from the mainstream media in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The lack of the frame and the absence of a page number can be read as the removal of the images from its immediate context—Foer's novel—and their misplacement into the readers-viewers' hands. This gesture, on the one hand presents us with access to the barred images but on the other, this symbolical access signals at our inability to gain knowledge based on photographs for it reminds us that, whether framed or unframed, a photograph is a fragment of a complex and at times, unrepresentable reality.

In conclusion, in this essay I departed from those who read Foer's incorporation of images in his 2005 novel. Instead, I focused on the images that are absent from the visual landscape of *Extremely.* I showed that Foer's exclusion of iconic images of the terrorist attacks on September 2001 from his 2005 novel, their replacement with verbal descriptions as well as the substitution of the well-known photograph of the falling man with a photo illustration that is merely based on a photograph can all be read as Foer's resistance to reduce the disaster to "an image—the spectacle, the word, above all the *number as enigmatic name:* 9/11."[33]

[33] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago, 2011), p. 51.

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