

Charles University in Prague
Faculty of Education

Bachelor's Thesis

2013

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Narrative Techniques in Jonathan Safran Foer's
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Bachelor's Thesis

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Prague 2013

I hereby declare that I carried out this bachelor thesis independently, and only with the cited sources and literature.

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Abstract

The objective of the thesis is the analysis of narrative techniques in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The work focuses predominantly on the visual use of graphic representations in the narrative as the means to visualise meaning. It deals with general aspects of visual writing, examines its exploitation in the novel that is distinguished by extensive use of such techniques in particular, and compares the functions these techniques bear within the narrative in relation to the possible interpretations of the text. Theoretical part of the thesis focuses on word-image relation and on the phenomenon of hybrid novel. In the practical part, the analysis of the selected novel is performed.

Key words: hybrid novel, visual narrative techniques, unusual typography, Foer

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat narativní techniky v románu Jonathana Safrana Foera *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). Práce je zaměřena především na vizuální využití grafických prvků jakožto prostředků pro zachycení významu. Zabývá se také obecnými vlastnostmi vizuálního psaní, zkoumá jeho využití v románu, který je výjimečný právě díky rozsáhlosti jejich využití, a porovnává významy, které tyto techniky přinášejí ve spojitosti s možnými interpretacemi textu. Teoretická část práce se zaměřuje na vztah slova a obrazu, jejich společné užití jako uměleckého prostředku v textu a na fenomén zvaný hybridní román. V praktické části je pak proveden rozbor díla.

Klíčová slova: hybridní román, vizuální narativní techniky, nestandardní typografie, Foer

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor PhDr. Petr Chalupský for his time, patience and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the dominant themes and techniques of the narration in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) with an emphasis on visual techniques. It will analyse the methods of their employment and depict their role in the novel. The thesis will also closely examine the language aspect since the language applied by Foer carries specific attributes not often used in traditional fiction.

As for the structure of the thesis, it is divided into three parts. The first part is theoretically oriented. Since the discussed novel carries, as it has been mentioned, many visual-oriented elements, I begin with a chapter focused on word-image relationship. The next chapter is dedicated to the genre, under which the analyzed novel can be classified: hybrid novel. Since hybrid novel is not firmly anchored in the literary criticism I compare various definitions and highlight its specific features. I briefly introduce several significant appearances of such literary phenomenon in the past and I add some examples from the present in order to put the examined Foer's novel into a wider literature context and to show possible influences and inspiration sources. Subsequently, I present the author Jonathan Safran Foer, his work and his background, as this knowledge allows the reader to comprehend deeper the discussed novel and its themes and their direct connection with the author, especially those concerning World War II and the post-war trauma in general. Before I approach the analysis itself, I acquaint the reader with the story of the novel outlining the principal story lines and protagonists in order to make the analysis comprehensible.

The main body is dedicated to practical analysis. I concentrate on interpretations of the themes and narrative techniques. In this part I firstly observe the language of the novel, its alteration and specific features. Thereafter the visual traits are discussed in detail. I put the graphic representations into the context of the novel and analyse their functions in the story as well as their significance for the nature of the narration. I concluded the thesis by a summarization of the facts arising from the analysis.

I. Word and Image, Hybrid Novels

1.1 Word and Image

Parallel use and consequent mutual influence of visual and verbal modes in a literary work has been a subject examined already in the earliest works on literary theory. The question of how the word and the image work as tools of representation dates back to the Ancient Greek. Plato deals with this theme in his *Republic; Book III* (373 b.c.) by distinguishing two separate units, diegesis and mimesis. Diegesis stands for narration and mimesis, on the other hand, offers direct imitation of the reality. Such division continues until 20th century, even though the two elements, occasionally interdigitated, for example in pre-Gutenberg calligraphy, Renaissance “paragone”, in Romantic synthetism. However, the hierarchy of image and word in the world of literature was firmly set and, until recently, the word-image relationship was more or less stable. The images complemented the text, in some ways enlivened and enriched it, but, in general, had no aspiration in developing its content. Thanks to the invention of Gutenberg’s printing press and its expansion, the word became entirely predominant and the picture’s role was left mainly for decorative function (Lester vii).

With the constant progress of culture and society, however, the situation has been gradually changing. The role of the visual message dramatically changed with the development and expansion of visual technology, notably the informative/entertaining one, such as television (in 1950s), personal computer (1970s) or World Wide Web (1990s) (Lester vii), (Challoner). The invention of photographic camera and cinematography also contributed to the transition. Consequently, the fact that society is more and more confronted with images of all kinds must have a direct impact on one of the oldest informational as well as esthetical medium: the book. Moreover, it is not only the impact of quantity of images but also the technology itself which fundamentally influences the present literary works. Katherine Hayles, a literary critic specialized in American electronic literature, points at the process of creation itself:

Almost all printbooks are digital files before they become books; although the print tradition of course influences how these texts are conceived and written, digitality also leaves its mark, notably in the increased visuality of such best-selling novels as Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. (Hayles 99)

It follows from these analyses that the word-image relationship changes radically. Literary critics, philosophers, semioticians and linguists in general¹ are trying to re-determine the image's and the word's attributes and define their new roles and possible interactions. The focus is also aimed on various ways the two elements deliver a message to the reader.

The most significant difference between the image and the word is the straightforwardness of delivering the message. Unlike word, the image is not encoded; it delivers the idea instantly, evoking the emotions within seconds. This feature is probably one of images' most considerable advantages. Since the images are able to communicate across linguistic boundaries, they offer a specific level of unity of the message that is difficult to reach by other devices (Crow 19).

Besides, humans perceive the world through the visual sense since their birth, before any notion of language. The initial contact with reality is thus intermediated through the eye and the words follow in order to interpret or to express complex thoughts and ideas, to develop the beholden image. It follows that the two means of capturing reality are not contrary. The word-image relationship lacks the binary opposition or logical antinomy (McNamara 20). On the contrary, their relationship can be even seen as dialogical (Hillis 95). The image-word co-operation thus logically ends in surpassing their individual boundaries. By applying these two elements simultaneously, each of them becomes more efficient; together they enrich literature with unexpected ways of use, and writers are very well aware of such potentials.

The growing tendency of combining visual devices with text eventually leads to the emergence of the genre of a hybrid novel. The arrival of such phenomenon is logical (due to the sociological conditions) and does not happen only in order to make the book more fancy or unusual but also, and often more importantly, to enrich the narration by dimensions which the verbal devices would not be able to convey just by themselves.

1.2 Hybrid Novel

As a new subgenre, the hybrid novel does not have any officially accepted definition that would adequately express its essence. The reason is multiple. First, despite its continuous expanding, its presence in the literary sphere is still considered peripheral. Moreover, the defining itself causes difficulties since the settled terminology of literary criticism is not equipped enough to handle this phenomenon (Poynor, 21). Semantically, the adjective “hybrid” indicates a connection of two distinct elements producing a new entity. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory* (2005) defines hybrid novel as a combination or subversion of various narrative sub-genres, an employment of “non-literary discourses and text-types” or an introduction of “narrative strategies that strive to imitate the organizing principles of painting, music, and film” (p.227). Another definition was offered by Zoe Sadokierski who describes hybrid novels as “novels in which graphic devices like photographs, drawings and experimental typography are integrated into the written text” (Sadokierski ix). In her analytical work dedicated to hybrid novels, Sadokierski presents the term “multi-modal”, introduced by a semiotician Guther Kress that divides the text into a verbal mode and a visual mode; using both modes at a time then leads to multi-modality. However, Sadokierski does not find the term multi-modal apt since it indicates the two modes (image and word) existing next to each other but not interconnecting mutually. (Sadokierski 3). The term multi-modal is, nevertheless, used for example on the Amazon’s web pages where, under the label “Multimodal (words and images) Novels”, Amazon offers novels which incorporate unusual typeset, photographs and other visual devices - basically novels which Sadokierski prefers to label as hybrid ones.

In general, the crucial principle of such novels dwells in the use of various visual devices not as an addition to the text or as its decoration but as its inseparable part. Such devices become part of the narration, influence its pace and reader's perception of the whole literary work.

This technique is not, however, as new as it might seem to be. Searching back in the literary history many forerunners of the hybrid novel can be found. For instance Laurence Sterne’s highly original work *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760-67) is a typical representative of such genre. Apart from linguistic particularities, frequent digressions are realized by hybrid or multi-modal strategies, such as typographical abnormalities, blank or black pages, illustrations produced by the narrator etc. (fig. 1).

In the 19th century, another precursor can be discovered under the title *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions; With Illustration by the Author, A SQUARE* (1884). This satirical novella written by Edwin Abbott Abbott describes a fantastic two-dimensional world, where women are simple line-segments and men polygons. Through the metaphor of geometric terminology, the author criticises the Victorian rigid society. As the title suggests, the novel is illustrated by the author himself, bringing the hardly imaginable world closer to the reader. The book is full of drawings and layouts, which illustrate two of the novel's fantastic reality (fig. 2).

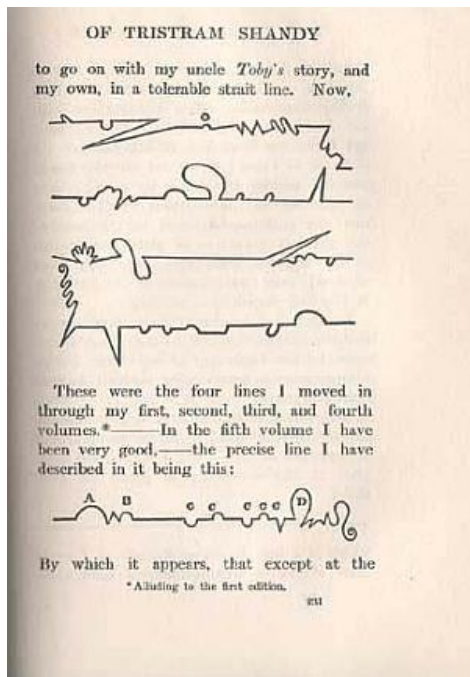


fig. 1

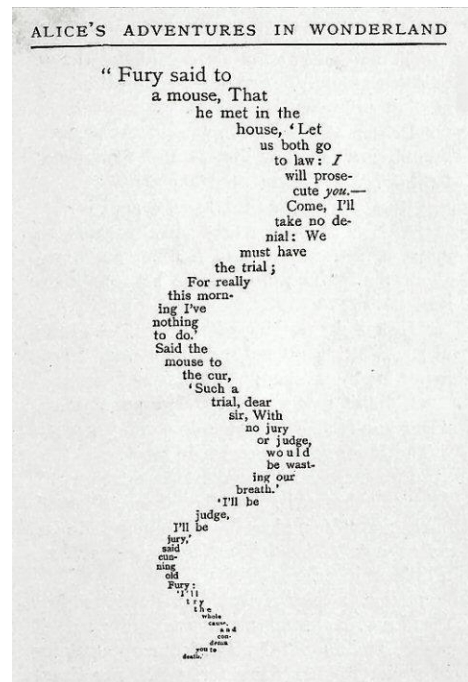


fig.3

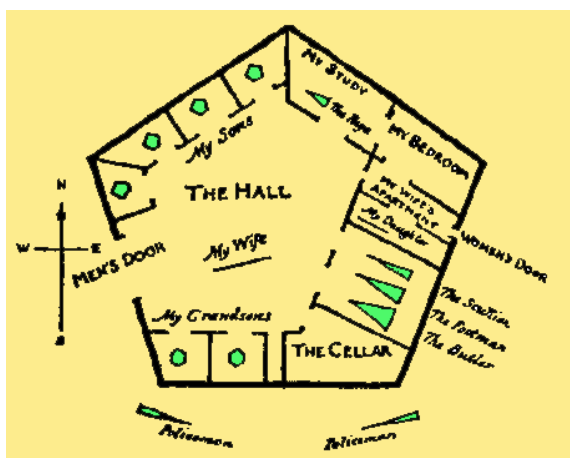
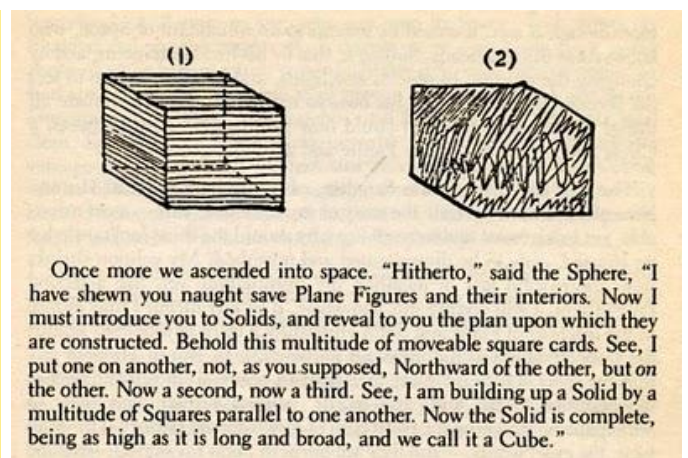


fig.2



Notoriously famous *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson/Lewis Carroll also carries a sign of a typographical rarity. The reader encounters it when a mouse tells Alice her “long and sad tale” (fig. 3). The tale/tail juxtaposition also works out as a pun.

Among the authors of the 20th century, William Faulkner can be mentioned as an example of a certain kind of abnormality as far as the typography is concerned. Faulkner intended to employ ink of various colours in his *Sound and the Fury* (1929) in order to make the complicated text, consisting mainly of stream of consciousnesses, more comprehensible for the reader (Flod). Since the technology was not ready for such ideas, Faulkner had to employ italics instead. More than 80 years later, however, his wish eventually came true when the Folio Society decided to publish his masterpiece in 14 different colours which equal 14 different time lines of the story.¹ (fig. 4)



fig. 4

Another group of precursors, although not in the same genre, can be found in the visually-meaningful poetry, written for example by Guillaume Albert Apollinaire in 1910s (fig 3) who used the typography as a meaningful part of the poems where words complete its sense by their specific organization, or Edward Estlin Cummings in 1920s who used typography in order to influence the pace of reading or to encode its message (fig. 4). In the Czech literature, Václav Havel's collection of poems *Antikódy* (1964) carries the same visual features.

¹ The web page dedicated to the project: <http://www.foliosociety.com/book/SAF/sound-and-the->



fig. 3

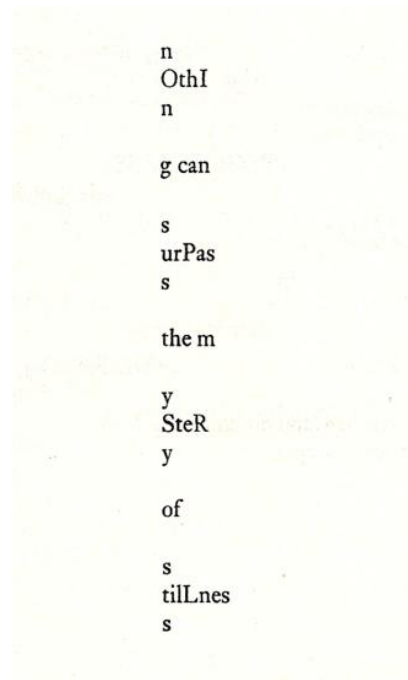


fig. 4

In 1960s and 1970s, Kurt Vonnegut also employed several drawings in his novels, which produced by himself. (fig. 5) They are all fully integral to the text. Professor Peter Reed interprets them as “part of - and draw attention to - the seemingly naive, even adolescent, perspective by which Vonnegut deconstructs and demystifies American culture and society in this novel” (Reed).

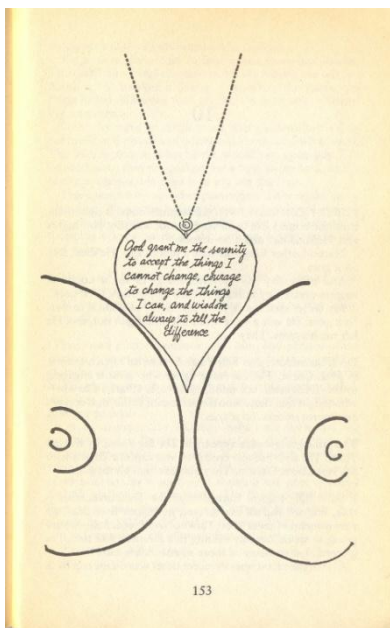
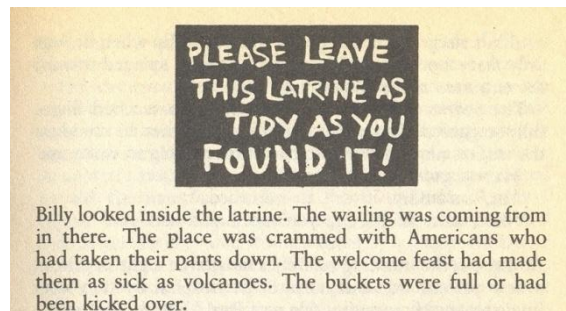
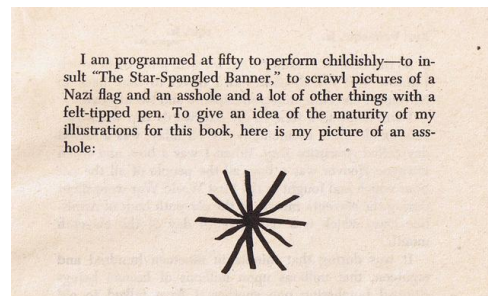


fig. 5



In the 21st century, the number of hybrid novels rapidly rises. From the group of contemporary authors who focused on this genre at least several of them should be pointed out: Mark Danielewski, Steven Hall, Winfried George Sebald, Umberto Eco or Dave Eggers. They all let the visual features enter and influence their narrations in various manners and intensities. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) is specific for the unusual typography, including employing colour words, like Faulkner (fig.6). Hall lets the photographs, ephemeras and illustrative elements dominate his novel *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007). He often creates images by the specific organization of typography (fig.7). George Sebald's novels, on the other hand, concentrate rather on photographs and ephemeras (scrapbook artefacts), reaching thus an impression of maximal authenticity (fig. 8). Umberto Eco's novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2005), for a change, employs pop culture prints, comic strips and other ephemeras from the childhood of the protagonist, who has lost his memory and tries to gain it back by going through these artefacts (fig. 9). Dave Eggers uses predominantly diagrams and simple drawings in his mystery novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) in order to represent autistic mind of his child protagonist (fig. 10).

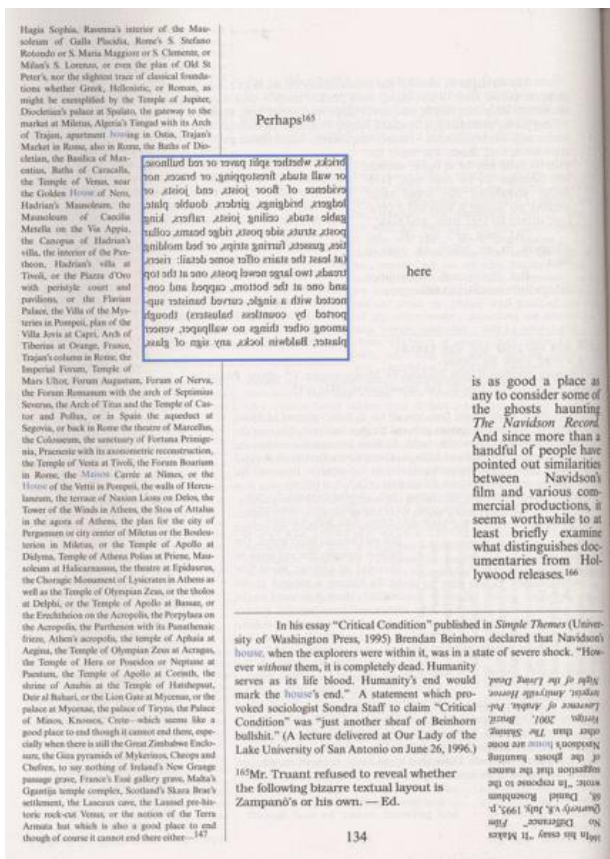


fig. 6



fig. 7 (above), fig. 8



fig. 9

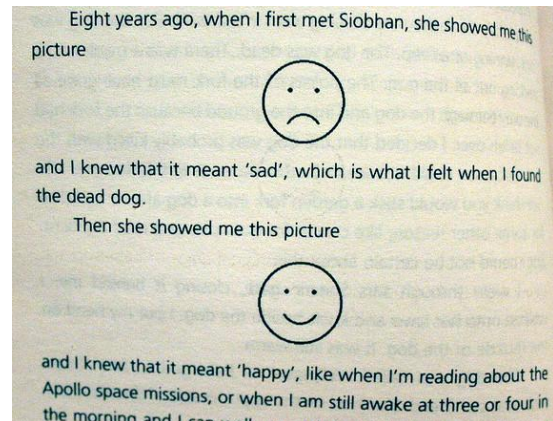
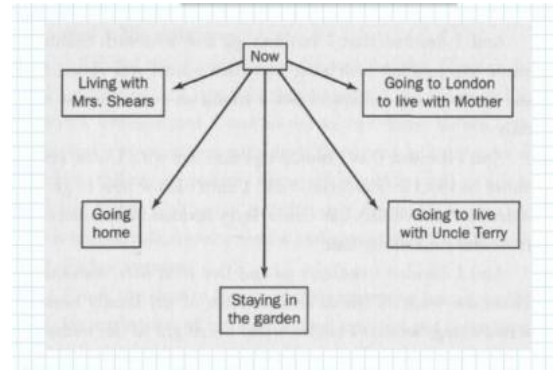


fig.10

It follows from this chapter that the roots of hybrid novel reach all the way to the 18th century and since then the specific genre gradually develops and successfully expands until present days. The means of expression and the employed technologies alter with time but the principle of the exceptionality of hybrid novels stays unchanged since it always dwells in the way it profits from the image-word specific relations and interactions. Due to these unusual interactions, the readers have to approach such literary works with a new way of reading, which is for many of them challenging but promising and eventually highly rewarding. As far as the literary debates are concerned, if the statement “the novel is dead” was true then the rise of the hybrid novel could mean its resurrection.

1.3. Jonathan Safran Foer – *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

1.3.1 Jonathan Safran Foer – biography and work

This chapter focuses on Jonathan Safran Foer's life and work and their close connection. Moreover, by introducing other works of Foer his profound long-term interest in typographic devices is demonstrated. The analysis also shows Foer's continuous search for the relationship between word and image and its possible further elaboration.

Jonathan Safran Foer was born in 1977 in Washington D.C. His father, Albert Foer, decided not to continue in his father's, Jonathan's grandfather's, jewellery business but qualified as a lawyer. Jonathan's mother, Ester Safran Foer, was born in post-war Poland to WWII survivors. Her father, Lewis Safran, fled Ukraine where he lost his first wife and his baby daughter during the Nazi attack of his village. In the camp for displaced persons he met his second wife, a Holocaust survivor. Ester was born and spent part of her childhood in the refugee camp before the whole family immigrated to the United States. Although Jonathan never met his grandfather, his grandmother often narrated him the stories of their family, which deeply influenced him. He decided to go back to Ukraine to track a lady called Augustine who helped his grandfather to escape the attack. Jonathan's journey (realized in 1999) and closer examination of his grandfather's life became the main themes of his final thesis of his studies of philosophy at Princeton. He later developed this thesis into his first novel, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002). His second novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), analysed in the second part of this thesis, bears some features resembling to this first novel. From the formal point of view, in both novels, the reader follows parallel multiple-voice narrations. Unusual typographical devices, like typesetting grids or alternated fonts, are also employed in both cases although they become more significant in his second novel. Moreover, language playfulness plays an important role in the two texts. Both novels draw inspiration from Safran-Foer family, for example the pervasive theme of World War II or the character of Grandfather. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* features other biographical details, like a family-run jewellery shop. Even the traumatized nine-year-old Oskar partly emerges from Foer's childhood experience. At the age of eight he was injured during a chemistry class and could not mentally get over the shock for considerably long time.

In the time between these two novels, Foer also published two short essays in which he focuses on typographic devices. The first essay, "A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease" (2002), treats the punctuation marks for such speech parts that make important elements of conversation but cannot be spotted unless they are witnessed or described in

addition. For instance ■ stands for willed silence marks when silence is an intentional answer. ?? functions as insistent question marks which Foer explains as a “refusal to yield to a willed silence”. ¡ extraunxclamation point are used for whispered phrases or {} should-have brackets are applied for “words that were not spoken but should have been” (Foer). The essay is concluded by a conversation which is composed out of this punctuation only (fig. 11).

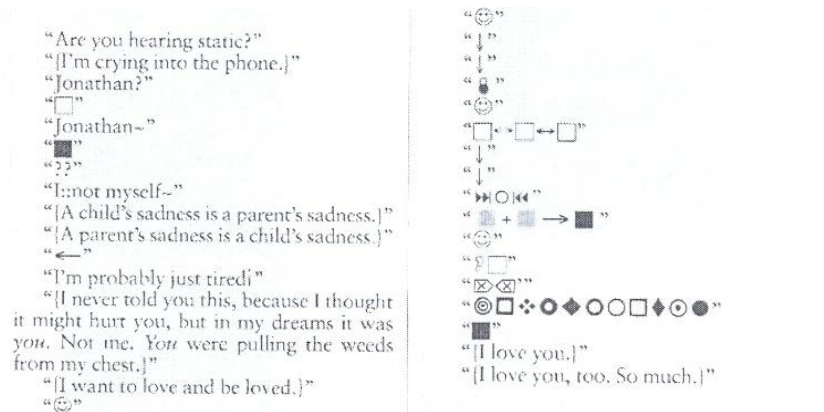


fig.11

At the first sight, it looks like an encoded language but with the explanatory notes it makes to the reader complete sense.

Furthermore, Foer edited an anthology *A Convergence of Birds: Original Fiction and Poetry Inspired by the Work of Joseph Cornell* (2001). On Foer’s incitement, various writers and poets composed a text each inspired by one of Cornell’s assemblages. In this anthology, the images evoke words and let a new text arise. Foer also co-operated on Hiroshi Sugimoto’s large-format book of photographs *Joe* (2003). This time it was Foer himself completing the images with his prose poems. The photographs picture Richard Serra’s sculpture *Joe* installed in the Art building in St Louis. Foer is thus inspired by two types of visual medium in his accompanying text – sculpture and photographs. It is important to stress out the reverse process. In both cases, the image comes first and the writing follows as if completing the role of illustration. Another artistic sphere where Foer blended writing with another art medium is opera. He wrote a libretto for Berlin State Opera called *Seven Attempted Escapes from Silence* (2005). The story of the opera takes place in a prison, where the prisoners lose their ability to speak, which is a rather controversial idea for such verbal genre as opera. In fact, the prisoners do sing but the only words the spectator understands are those from the guards. So, even on this field Foer inclines to break the settled boundaries. One of the seven composers of this opera, Bernhard Lang comments: "So this is opera, but it's not exactly opera. It's an attempt to

escape opera" (Levine). In this work of Foer's, the reader can also find a significant connection with the novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. It is the theme of inability to speak. Foer thus further explores the oxymoronical matter of silent speech.

The latest Foer's published work is called *Tree of Codes* (2010). The word "book" or "novel" is intentionally not employed in this case, since *Tree of Codes* is perceived rather as a concept than as a literary act. It is often described as a sculptural object or as an artwork in the form of a book. Nevertheless, it still remains in the sphere of literature since it comes from a literary work and presents itself as a novel. *Tree of Codes* is created by a technique called die-cutting. Foer took his favourite novel from Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles* (original name *Cinnamon Shops*) (1934), and by cutting out certain words he created a completely new story. This is a truly uncommon way of writing. Foer likens the writing process to sculpting:

Of course one can carve any number of things from a block of marble, but one is still dependent on the marble. And marble is not like granite, which is not like chalk. Has a sculpture taken away from the block of marble? Not really. Has it added? Not really. "Tree of Codes" took "The Street of Crocodiles" as its starting point and made something new. (Foer)

The technique of using other author's work and reorganizing it in order to make a new piece of art is definitely not a new approach. However, leaving the work in its original form and structure and forming a new story from a preserved order is rather innovative. The effect is also highly visual. Due to the die-cutting method, the reader can literally see through the book. (fig.12,13) Foer intended to make a book which would give a tridimensional impression.

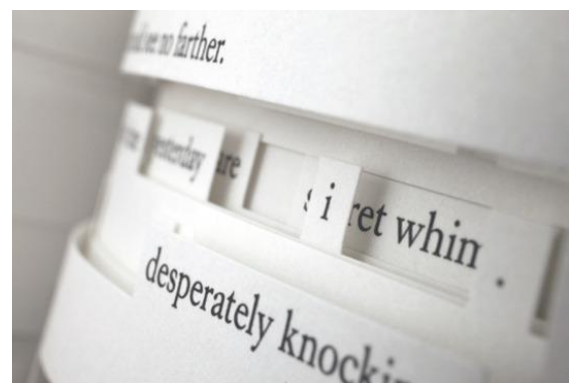


fig. 12, 13

The work was well accepted by the critics as well as by the public. Olafur Eliasson, a respected artist and the author of NYC waterfalls, stated about the book: "Jonathan Safran Foer, deftly deploys sculptural means to craft a truly compelling story. In our world of

screens, he welds narrative, materiality, and our reading experience into a book that remembers that it actually has a body” (Eliasson). Zoe Sadokierski delivers her opinion on Foer’s work in general: “Safran Foer is recognised as an innovative writer with a sophisticated understanding of word-image interplay” (Sadokierski 102).

It follows from this analyses that Jonathan Safran Foer has been interested in connecting the image and the word since his creative carrier commenced. Every fictional work he has produced so far tries to play with the language and the real, material space within which the language dwells. It is noticeable that Foer looks for the direct means of expression of messages which lay hidden under the written or spoken words. He searches for shortcuts to the reader’s deepest emotions and he presumably believes the key is in activating the reader’s visual perception and making it part of the reading.

1.3.2 Outline of the Plot

In the novel, the reader follows three different timelines. One takes place in New York in 2003, the next one is also set in New York City but this time in 1962/63, and the last one takes place in Dresden during the Second World War. The story line from New York City in 2003 is intermediated by Oscar Schell, a nine-year-old boy of an exceptional intelligence and extreme inquisitiveness. He is a peculiar little boy who does not get along with his peers due to his specific way of thinking, oversensitivity and self-consciousness. The exposition of the story starts on the way to the funeral of Oskar’s Father, Thomas Schell, who deceased during the attack on the World Trade Centre, a tragic event known as 9/11. Oskar, who lives with his occupied Mother and over-caring Grandmother, cannot reconcile with the loss. The rising action comes when he accidentally finds an envelope with a key in it in a mysterious vase in his Father’s closet. Oskar believes the key to be a clue to the last “Reconnaissance Expedition” which his Dad used to design for him. These “Reconnaissance Expeditions” were tracking games with complicated, well-hidden clues which helped Oskar to learn to improve his communication skills and to develop his knowledge and exceptional intellect. After the discovery of the key, Oskar decides to solve the riddle and begins to search secretly for the lock. It is Oskar’s way of prolonging his Father’s presence in his life as well as reconciliation with his death. It is also his dealing with sense of guilt, which comes from the day of the 9/11 attack when Oskar was not able to answer his Father’s call after having heard his previous desperate messages. Oskar then in panic let instead the answering machine record his Father’s last message.

In his investigation, Oskar proceeds very systematically. The note “Black” inscribed on the envelope suggests he has to look for somebody of that name. His quest starts when accompanied by his neighbour, an old solitary war veteran, he walks around New York and visits one by one of the 216 addresses of the Black’s families in alphabetical order. At the end of the search Oskar is joined by his long lost Grandfather (also from his Father’s side, Grandma’s husband). Together they find Mr. Black who the key belongs to.

Surprisingly, this is not the climax of the story since the safe opened by the key has got nothing to do with Oskar or with his Father. In fact, it is a key to a safe left by Mr Black’s father to his son in his last will. Mr Black has been looking for it since he sold his father’s estate including the vase. The envelope thus got to the closet only by coincidence and the reader never finds out what the key revealed. Nonetheless, both Oskar and his Grandfather have a strong need for some kind of reconciliation with Oskar’s Father. The climax comes later, when they decide to unearth Father’s empty coffin and fill it with hundreds of Grandfather’s letters which he has been writing to his son all his life but never had the strength to send them.

Some of these letters, as well as Grandma’s letter written to Oskar in present, bring out the second and the third storylines. The reader learns from them about the events taking place in New York 1963 and retrospectively in Dresden 1945. To understand better the chronology and the course of events, the synopsis first treats the period that takes place in Dresden in 1945. A young sculptor Thomas (Oskar’s Grandfather) meets a young girl Anna. They deeply fall in love but their relationship is interrupted by the Dresden firebombing, where pregnant Anna and the whole Grandfather’s family die. Oskar’s Grandfather subsequently immigrates to the United States. Due to the trauma he suffered in Germany, he gradually loses his ability to speak. He thus starts communicating only by writing into his daybook. Later on, in New York, he accidentally comes across Anna’s sister (Oskar’s Grandmother) who also was the only one of her family who survived the firebombing and immigrated. They become closer and decide to get married, presumably because they are both extremely lonely. Besides there is one crucial fact that connects them closely and it is their devoted love to Anna. Nevertheless, their marriage, based only on the common loss and loneliness, cannot fill the emptiness in their traumatized hearts, on the contrary, it makes it even deeper and more grievous. They set up a number of rather absurd rules to make their cohabitation less painful but, paradoxically, this also makes the situation worse. Oskar’s Grandmother therefore decides to change the anxious situation by breaking one of the first rules they agreed on and gets pregnant. This fact is far too unbearable for Grandfather, since it reminds him of his unfulfilled love and the unborn

child and so he becomes determined to leave. When he learns about his fatherhood, he decides to buy a ticket to Dresden which he eventually accomplishes despite Grandmother's attempt to stop him. They are both devastated by this act but he cannot help it. For the rest of his life, until Thomas' death, Grandfather writes letters to his son, in which he tries to explain his deeds and defends them by the story of his life. Nevertheless all the years he posts only empty envelopes.²

Finding out about his son's tragic death is a strong impulse for him to pack his unsent letters and travel from Dresden back to New York where he asks Grandmother to accept him back. She agrees under the condition that he never meets Oskar. So Grandfather hides in the guest room whenever Oskar is around and is presented to him indirectly as a new renter. Never actually meeting him, Oskar considers him to be Grandma's imaginative friend. However, as it has been said, they eventually do meet personally and Oskar relieves to him, as to a stranger, the secret of the Father's last unanswered call and his guilty conscience. Afterwards comes the moment, when they decide to dig up the coffin and fill it with the unsent letters.

Falling action immediately follows when Oskar, after his return from the cemetery, reconciles with his Mother, who has been secretly with him all the time. On the next day after the night ritual Grandfather leaves once again to the airport after saying goodbye to Grandmother. She follows him there just like forty years ago. They eventually talk straightforwardly and agree on living at the airport, a neutral place between New York and Dresden.

² As is shown later in the analysis, just one letter reaches its consignee. This letter is from 1973 and describes the Dresden firebombing in detail.

II. Language, Style, Structure - WORD and Image

In this chapter the main focus is aimed at the verbal and structural strategies applied in the analyzed novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Language, style and structure are examined not only in order to comprehend the visual devices employed in the novel but also to demonstrate the fact that the experimental approach is equally applied to graphical devices as well as to the linguistic part.

The novel consists of three narrative voices. The contrast of the three narrative perspectives is accomplished by applying diverse styles, language and speech rhythms. The first narrator is a nine-year-old boy, Oskar, whose voice is predominant in the story. Next to Oskar's narration, the reader follows a storyline intermediated by Oskar's Grandfather. The third storyline is narrated by Oskar's Grandma. Both of these last mentioned narrations carry the form of letters. As for the time of narration, while Oskar relates to the present or recent past both Grandparents focus mostly on the time during WWII and their post-war life in America. Consequently, the narration's time and place shift constantly. Despite these facts, the narration is highly cohesive and eventually meets at one point, unifying the self-reliant details into a harmonic unity. The reader in fact collects ostensibly random shards of a mosaic and puts them one by one together in order to receive the whole picture at the end of the novel. In the following subchapters, each of the narrative voices and their specific features are discussed separately as well as put into a reciprocal context.

2.1 Oskar

2.1.1 Language and style

Oskar's narration covers nine chapters out of seventeen. His chapters are interspersed by chapters written by Grandfather and Grandma, which periodically alternate. The structure is thus highly symmetrical. After every chapter narrated by Oskar comes narration either of Grandma or Grandfather. By this arrangement, Oskar's narration becomes the basis of the novel and the reader therefore creates the closest relationship towards him. Since Oskar is a child narrator, the reader learns immediately that he is not completely trustworthy. His intermediation of the reality is biased due to his age, peculiar character and mental state. This unreliability is increased by numerous indications that Oskar suffers from an ASD syndrome which means he struggles with social interaction and oversensitivity (to sounds,

to light e.g.) which leads to an extreme anxiety. On the other hand, he is abnormally honest, creative and, more importantly, he is endowed with high intelligence. All these factors strongly influence his language and narrative style. Hyperbolic language pervades the whole narration of Oskar in order to illustrate the tense atmosphere (incredibly nervous, extremely subtle, extremely loud, incredibly panicky). This hyperbolic language is justified primarily by his oversensitivity and partly by his age, since hyperboles is a characteristic feature of the child speech. The polarity of his age and intelligence is shown on the specific lexis used in Oskar's narration which consists of a mixture of sophisticated word stock and ideas:

Even though I'm not anymore, I used to be an atheist, which means I didn't believe in things I could not observe. (p. 4)

[...] Stephen Hawking can't use his hands because he has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which I know about, unfortunately. (p. 11)

I am an amateur epidemiologist. (p. 93)

with colloquial teenage slang (cool, crack up, what the?, heavy boots). This combination thus often sounds comically. By virtue of these slang expressions, shorted versions of verbs and fluency of his narration, the reader gains the impression that Oskar tells him his story orally. Unlike Grandma or Grandfather, Oskar's narration is actually aimed at the reader, which is another reason why the reader tends to sympathise with him. At times, the narration even evokes a feeling that the reader is actually present in Oskar's head, witnessing his mental recapitulations, memories and other processes. This feeling is then amplified by the use of visual devices, for instance when the reader actually can see through Oskar's eyes. These devices and their effects are closely discussed in chapter III.

2.1.2 Chronology and Narration

Oskar's main narration concerning the search for the key is retrospective and chronological. Nonetheless, the main plot is frequently interrupted by many digressions. These digressions are dedicated mainly to the memories of his Father and their mutual moments. Other digressions are produced through long passages of stream-of-consciousness when Oskar's imagination invents series of fantastic contrivances and gadgets (pp. 1, 72, 163 etc.). Yet, the major and most extensive digression is in the chapter *The Sixth Borough* (p. 217), which functions in fact as a story within a story. The story of the Sixth Borough is mentioned several times by Oskar in his narration and is eventually presented in a chapter on its own, presented by Oskar word-by-word as it was narrated to him by his Father. Oskar is therefore a narrator and a listener at the same time. Another

distraction from the main story line is realized by Oskar's correspondence with a number of ordinary as well as popular characters. The theme of letters, crucial for the other two storylines, thus penetrates to Oskar's plot, too. The letters, always reacting to Oskar's initial contact, copy the chronology of the main storyline, offer the reader additional information and give him the opportunity to deduce the content of Oskar's side of correspondence. The reader therefore once again takes an active part of the story. The letters also let the reader take a look into the outside world and its reaction towards Oskar. They are diffident, amused, some of them even consider Oskar to be an adult. Although seemingly meaningless, the digressions mentioned above play an important role in comprehending Oskar's background, motives and feelings. They also influence the pace of the story and induce the feeling of authenticity.

2.1.3 Other Narrative Techniques and Intrusions

In addition to these digressions, the narration is enhanced by other types of text such as stage script (pg 145) or transcription of a TV interview (pg 187-189). The former is a rewritten Hamlet scene (including the stage notes), the latter is a transcribed interview with a Hiroshima survivor, describing the moments directly after the attack and an attempt of the victim to save her daughter. In neither of these cases are these insertions purposeless. The numerous references to *Hamlet* complement the omnipresent theme of Father and Son. As for the TV interview, it relates and further illustrates another significant theme of the novel which is trauma of survivors after a catastrophe caused by an international conflict. Here Foer applies another unusual strategy which is a cataphoric explanation of the interview. The reader starts to read a new chapter which begins with the interview without any context and gradually identifies the discussed event but still does not know its purpose. Eventually the reader grasps that he/she was actually watching Oskar's class presentation and follows the situation that ensues the video. These post-explained elements are in fact another novel's typical feature (Grandfather's one-sided answers put into context by Grandmother, pictures of the doorknobs explained in the second half of the book). They confuse the reader, mobilize his attention and then explain its actual meaning.

Another strategy leading to the reader's confusion are Oskar's imaginative reactions. The reader follows Oskar's narration of a situation, which ends by his extreme reaction in which he releases the pent-up anger. The narration then goes back in time and the shocked reader watches Oskar's real reaction realising that the last few lines were happening only in Oskar's head (pp, 145, 203, 254).

“ Do you think *any* good can come from your father’s death?” I kicked over my chair, threw his papers across the floor, and hollered, “No! Of course not, you fucking asshole!” That was what I wanted to do. Instead I just shrugged my shoulders. (pg 203)

This method associates a film cut or a rewind. The same movie rewind concept also springs to the reader’s mind when Oskar describes the event of the 9/11 backwards, going back as far as to the last evening before the tragedy, the evening when his Father was telling him the story about the Sixth Borough (pg. 325). This technique is likewise further supported and developed by the visual devices, closer discussed in chapter III.

Another unexpected manoeuvre appears at the very beginning of the book when the author exposes the actual end of the story. In this case, Oskar only swaps rewinding of time with forwarding. On page 7, he reveals the final action in which the story approaches its climax (pg. 320 – 321).

“I thought about that my second time in a limousine, when the renter and I were on our way to dig up Dad’s empty coffin” (pg. 7)

The reader thus learns the conclusion without even knowing the plot. This fact insinuates that it is not the story itself what is important but other elements hidden in the novel. The reader is thence encouraged to look for them. Moreover, the plotline becomes so complicated and tangled that the reader’s attention is distracted and he can eventually easily forget this information. The author thus surprises the reader twice by one event.

This analysis shows that Oskar’s narration is remarkably varied, not only as far as the language is concerned but also structure-wise. As mentioned, this multifariousness is further developed by the insertion of diverse pictorial and graphical devices. Oskar’s part of the novel gives the impression of a playful but somehow bizarre collage.

2.2 Grandfather, Thomas Sr., Renter

2.2.1 Language and Style

Grandfather’s narration is delivered in letters written in order to explain to his son, Oskar’s Father, the reasons of his departure. The most important factor that influences Grandfather’s style of narration is his trauma from WW II and the subsequent loss of speech. The reader feels the tension coming from his narration due to the narrator’s choleric overwhelming phrasing. Grandfather uses very short sentences but nearly omits full stops, swapping them for commas. The first sentence of his narration covers, for example, fourteen lines (p. 16). From the narration thus emerges an intensely fast pace, eliminating any space for thinking. This feeling is potentiated by the visual form of the text

due to the lack of paragraphs or any other text division. The narration blends into one constant stream-of-consciousness until it is interrupted by a page with a single utterance. This is a moment when the language style penetrates the visual aspect. Not only that the narration is tensed itself but by the look at it the reader experiences the pressure of the narrator or the pressure the narrator undergoes within himself.

Grandfather's urging need to explain his deeds contrasts with his ability of real self-expressing. He seems to be as isolated by his grief and guilt as the utterances levitating in the middle of the blank pages. Moreover, the author illustrates his separation from the world and the misunderstanding by his dadaistic answers to common questions. It is the case when Grandfather runs out of space in his daybook by the end of the day and has to recycle older sentences that suit the best the particular situation.

...if someone asked me, "How are you feeling?" it might be that my best response was to point at "The regular, please," or perhaps, "And I wouldn't say no to something sweet." (p. 28)

Grandfather's disability also leads to a specific kind of dialogues when he writes or points at the sentences and the other person answers the same way. As a result, the reader actually does not read a spoken dialogue but watches two people writing and reading sentences. Here is an example of such conversation including the dadaistic answers.

She took my pen from me and wrote on the next blank page of my daybook, the final one:

Please, marry me. (written on separated page)
(starting a new page) I flipped back and pointed at, "Ha ha ha!" She flipped forward and pointed at, "Please marry me." I flipped back and pointed at, "I'm sorry, this is the smallest I've got." She flipped forward and pointed at, "Please, marry me." I flipped back and pointed at, "I'm not sure, but it's late." (pp. 31 – 33)

This kind of expression consequently reflects in Grandma's narration. Here is an example of similar dialogue from Grandma's point of view, this time this strategy builds up the tension.

I wrote, I am pregnant.
I handed it to him. He read it.
He took the pen and wrote, How could that have happened?
I wrote, I made it happen.
He wrote, But we had a rule.
The next page was a door knob.
I turned the page and wrote, I broke the rule. (pp. 177 - 178)

Moreover, certain parts of Grandfather's narration are even illegible or encoded. For instance when Grandfather telephones Grandma from the airport after his return. Since he cannot speak, he communicates only by pressing the numbers of the keyboard as if he was writing a message on a mobile phone. At this point the verbal narration penetrates again the graphical form of the novel while two and half pages of the narration are covered with numbers mixed with punctuation. Another illegible section of Grandfather's narration is at the very end of his last letter to his son, where he describes his meeting with Oskar. The gaps between the words and phrases get constantly smaller and smaller until they begin to overlap each other and eventually culminate into one black page. Here again the verbal narration transforms into a highly visual form. The letters are present but due to their illegibility they lose their meaning and (metamorphose) take over the role of an image. The narrator continues in his story but the reader cannot follow it anymore, instead he just observes a black page trying to spot words in the jumble of thoughts.

Both of these effects are displayed and more profoundly analyzed in chapter III.

2.2.2 Chronology

Grandfather's narration is divided into four chapters. They all carry the same title, "Why I'm Not Where You Are", and the subtitles indicate the date when the letter was written. The first letter from 5/21/63 (which is the day when Grandfather leaves Grandma) is subdivided into two chapters. The other two chapters represent a letter each, dated 4/12/78 and 9/11/03. Despite the letters being firmly anchored in time by these dates, the time and place of the narration itself switches extensively. Since Grandfather lost his ability to speak, he communicates with the outside world through his daybook, in which he writes short messages, reactions, requests. Moreover, he uses the very same daybook for writing the letters for his Son. Two story lines (Grandfather's real communication with people and his letters to his son) thus penetrate in certain moments of the narration and the reader gains the feeling that he is actually holding the artefact of the daybook in his hands, flicking through its pages. The reader for instant concentrates on an intensively escalating scene in Dresden, where Thomas Sr. and Anna are making love while Anna's Father and his friend discuss the war in the next room. Then there comes a sharp cut in the form of a page with a single sentence: "Do you know what time it is?" On the next page the narrative shifts to Grandfather's conversation with Grandma in America and the following page consists again of one sentence only: "Excuse me, where do you get tickets?". When the reader turns the page again, the narration continues in America, this time shifting the narration to the moment when Grandfather is leaving Grandma (pg. 127-132). The reader

is hence rather disorientated at the beginning and has to collect individual pieces to put them back together in order to see the whole story. These pieces of information are also collected in Grandma's narration, since the two narrations are highly coherent and complement each other in order to eventually create the complex image for the reader.

Grandfather's narration is specific for its urgency. The reader is drawn into the pressure of his traumatized mind by the unusual use of punctuation and text division. The time and place constant shifting mirror the narrator's mind jumping from thought to thought; from reality to memory.

2.3 Grandma

2.3.1 Language, Style and Chronology

Grandma's narration is also written in an epistolary form but this time the reader follows only one letter divided into four chapters. For the distinguishing purposes, Grandma's chapters also carry one repetitive title: My Feelings. In the first chapter the letter is dated 12 September 2003 and the reader learns that it is dedicated to Oskar. It always comes after Grandfather's narration and usually treats the same situations but from other perspective, offering supplement information into the bewildered narration of Grandfather. Nevertheless, Grandma's narration sometimes refers to several similar occasions as to a quite a different story. This fact indicates that none of the narration can actually depict the reality as it happened and points out that none of the narrators of the story is trustworthy.

Grandma's language is, like Grandfather's, predominantly carried out in simple sentences. It reminds the reader that they are both immigrants and English is not their mother tongue. In Grandma's narration however, the sentences occupy much larger space. The abnormally large gaps between sentences can signify a text written on a typewriter or a slow speech of an old and tired person. Very often, there is only one sentence per line. Unlike Grandfather's, this kind of writing offers the reader enough time to reflect on her thoughts. Through this formal layout with the combination of the poetic language by which Grandmother expresses herself, the reader gets the impression of reading a modern poetry. The brief descriptions and dialogues are interwoven by images, thoughts or rhetorical questions.

When I was a girl, my life was music that was always getting louder. Everything moved me. A dog following a stranger. That made me feel so much. A calendar that showed the wrong month. I could have cried over it. I did. Where the

smoke from a chimney ended. How an overturned bottle rested at the edge of a table. (p. 180)

This poetic style captures Grandma's gentle melancholic nature. Moreover, to verbalize intimate feelings or sensitive painful memories is not simple. Poetry, however, permits the narrator to capture such elusive elements. Since Grandma writes about her trauma and other sensitive inner feelings, the poetic language allows her to express them in their full depth. Grandma's narration is mostly free of descriptions or explications. It flows in an associational manner, in some places evoking stream of consciousness, just like in Grandfather's and Oskar's narration, although her pace and pausing make this kind of narration less oppressive.

The dialogues are often bare, with one utterance per line and no further descriptions of tones or other manner of their pronouncing. The utterances are accompanied only by remarks of the protagonists' following actions. This method reminds the reader of a stage script, except for the fact that the utterances are without indications who they belong to. The more important or tense the moment seems to be, the barer the text becomes eliminating even reporting clauses. Her last conversation with Grandfather illustrates well this kind of theatrical writing. In this dialogue Grandfather reveals his meeting with Oskar, their common expedition to the cemetery and his intention to leave again.

He wrote, I was with him last night. That's where I was. I buried the letters.

What letters?

The letters I never sent.

Buried them where?

In the ground. That's where I was. I buried the key too.

What key?

To your apartment.

Our apartment.

He put his hands on the table. (p. 311)

By employing this method of writing, the author invites again the reader to participate and complete the situation with details offering only the frame of the conversation, which is nevertheless intense enough to mediate the charged moment.

This simple way of narration supported by repetitiveness is also used in Grandma's description of the TV news after the attack. Two simple sentences (Planes going into buildings. Bodies falling.) (pg. 230 – 231), which reappear more than twenty times on two pages, embrace the consternation of the situation and its repetitive mediation by the TV. This strategy actually brings the reader closer to the experience and touches him more intensively than an extensive or detailed description would do.

Grandma's narration is, like Grandfather's, very past-oriented. However, although she constantly recapitulates her life in Germany as well as the time of her marriage to Grandfather, the reader feels that she is anchored in the present, notably thanks to her love to Oskar. After all, it is doubtful whether she really intends to give the letter to her Grandson since it incorporates many intimate moments of her life. The recapitulation of her life thus functions rather as a self-therapy and aiming the letter to her beloved Oskar helps her to overcome her traumas and carry on.

III. Visual and Graphic Devices – IMAGE and Word

The novel's exceptionality dwells predominantly in the method and frequency of use of unusual graphic devices. An old Chinese proverb says that one picture is worth a thousand words, which suggests that, like music or fragrance, the image can activate emotional reactions far more straightforwardly than a text. Nevertheless, despite the potential intensity of such instruments, they all eventually reach their limits. However, if an image or other visual devices are thoughtfully combined with verbal devices, these limits can be radically shifted as the images emphasize the text and vice versa. The effect on the reader thus multiplies and he/she undergoes an experience which he/she would not find in a bare text or in an image per se. The discussed novel employs various graphic devices from typographical abnormalities to illustrations and photographs. Some of them raise the reader's curiosity and force them to look for their meaning, other engage the reader in the narration or make him/her feel being present to the narrated situation. The graphical devices also influence the pace of the narration or even modify the difficulty of the reading itself so that the reader undergoes physical experience connected to the story. In any respect, all these devices enrich the writing with a new dimension of the story and intensify the reader's experience enormously.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the visual and graphic devices employed in the discussed novel, set them into the context of the novel and describe their role in the narration along with their influence on the reader. As for the structure of this chapter, it is divided into four subsections, each dedicated to one of the four types of the employed devices, which are the following: specific typographical devices, photographs, scrapbook artefacts and illustrations.

3.1 Typographic Devices

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the author uses specific typographical devices varying according to the narrative voice. For example while, Grandfather's texts are extremely condensed and give the impression of heaviness and rapidity (fig.14), Grandma's narration appears airy and slow (fig.15).

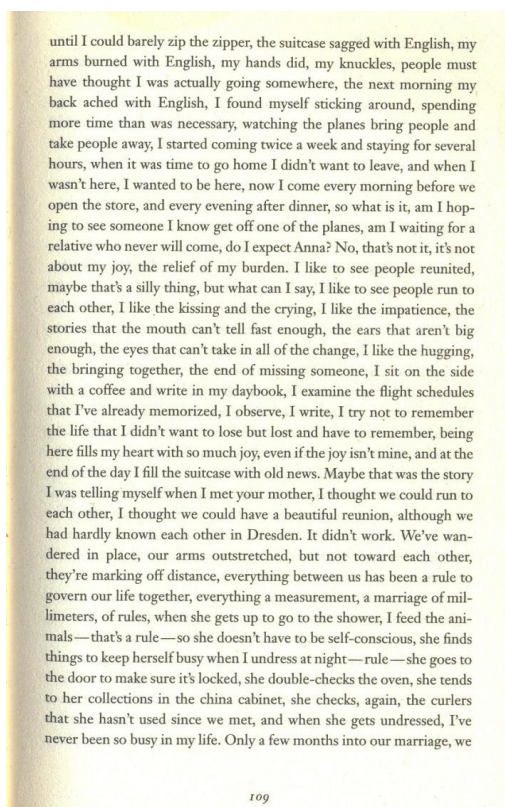


fig.14

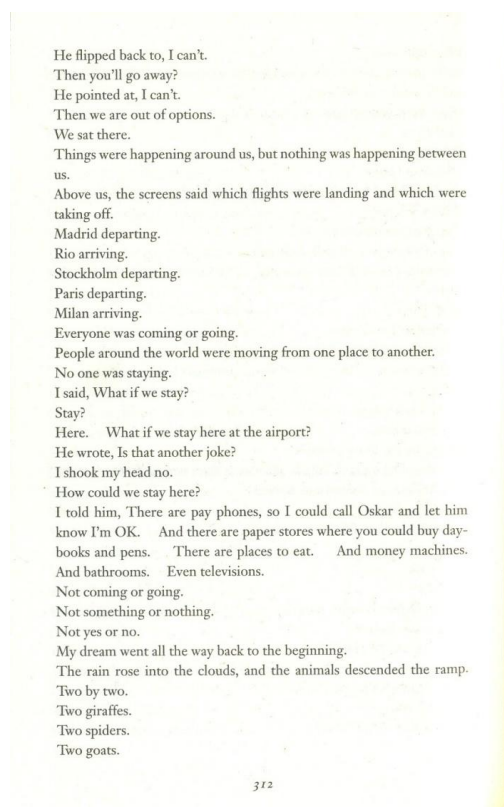


fig. 15

These abnormal features of typeset are even more striking when used simultaneously offering an option of comparison. The typographic aspect thus underlines the enormous contrast of the two narrations. Oskar's narration, on the other hand, does not carry any specific features which would supplement his narrative voice considering the typeset arrangement. His narration is organised classically, including paragraph indentation. However, there are some specific font-features employed in Oskar's narration especially at the moments of disturbances or digressions. This is, for example, the case of the conversation of Oskar's mother with a psychiatrist, which is eavesdropped by Oskar from behind the door and rewritten in fragments. It could be easily retold by Oskar who could intermediate the main point of the conversation and his personal conclusions to the reader. However, the author decides for another technique. The way this fragmental conversation

is transcribed, using enormous gaps where the words are not heard, complements perfectly the impression of being in Oskar's skin (pg. 203-207) (fig. 16).

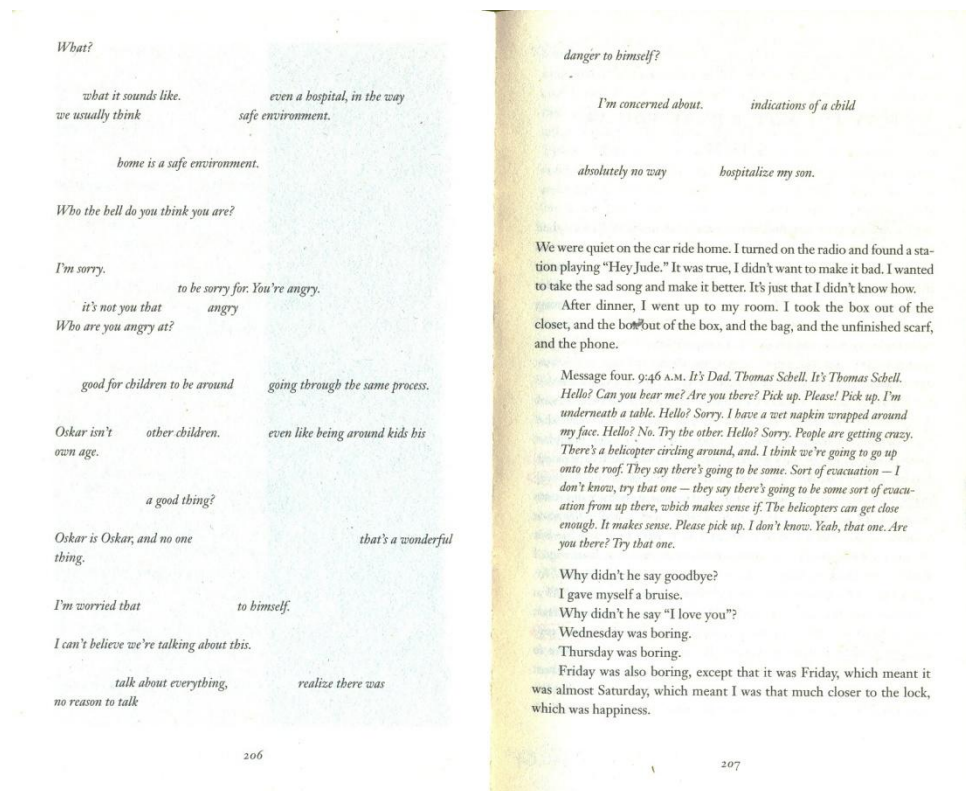


fig. 16

Oskar neither interferes in the conversation nor interprets it. The reader is thus let to listen and figure out the missing words and meaning of the incomplete sentences.

Another example of uncommon typeset is in chapter ~~HEAVY BOOTS~~ HEAVIER BOOTS where the original title Heavy Boots is crossed out and rewritten. As the chapter develops, Oskar changes the title again several times (e.g. ~~OPTIMISTIC, BUT REALISTIC~~ EXTREMELY DEPRESSED / ~~EXTREMELY DEPRESSED~~ INCREDIBLY ALONE) and, at the end of the chapter, the title crystallises into its final version. The fact that the chapter ends with its title is rather uncommon all the more that it is 23 lines long. (fig.17)

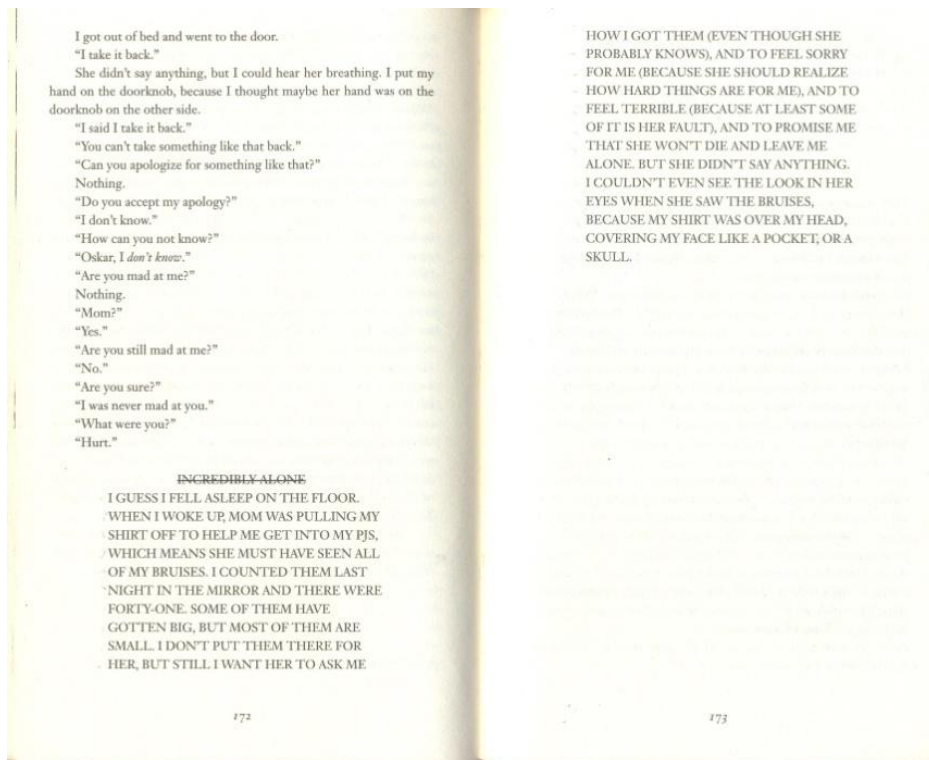


fig. 17

This kind of admitted correction can be found in Grandfather's narration, too. When he comes to America after forty years of absence he is asked for the purpose of his journey to which he answers: "To ~~mourn~~ try to live," (pg. 268). The reader is thus allowed to see the text as if it was really written and corrected in front of their eyes. The feeling of witnessing reality is again enhanced.

As far as the typography is concerned Grandfather's narration is the richest one. As pointed out in the previous chapter, his speech restriction greatly influences his discourse, especially in the typographical sphere. Except for the contrast of the condensed text with the one-sentence pages there are other distinct features such as blank and black pages or two pages filled by numbers.

The blank pages are actually (not)written by Grandma but intermediated by Grandfather. Grandfather encourages Grandma to write the story of her life and after months of listening to Grandma's everyday typewriting she hands him over the typescript of two thousand pages. Grandfather introduces it with the words: "[...] but this was all I saw:" and the reader browses through three empty pages, confused just like Grandfather (pg. 120-123). It provokes many questions about Grandma and the reader has to wait for two chapters for Grandma's explanation. Although Grandfather blames himself for not checking the ink tape and for not noticing Grandma's difficulties with her sight the reader learns, that

Grandma left them blank on purpose in order to symbolize the emptiness of her life. This situation illustrates the mutual misapprehension.

As a contrary to Grandma's blank pages, Grandfather's last chapter finishes with a black page. His narration in this chapter, condensed already by its essence, gradually compresses even more. The gaps between words as well as the space between the lines keep diminishing until the words start overlapping each other. The last three pages thus become illegible. On these three pages the overlapping further escalates until the last page becomes so overloaded with words that there is hardly any white space left. (fig.18)

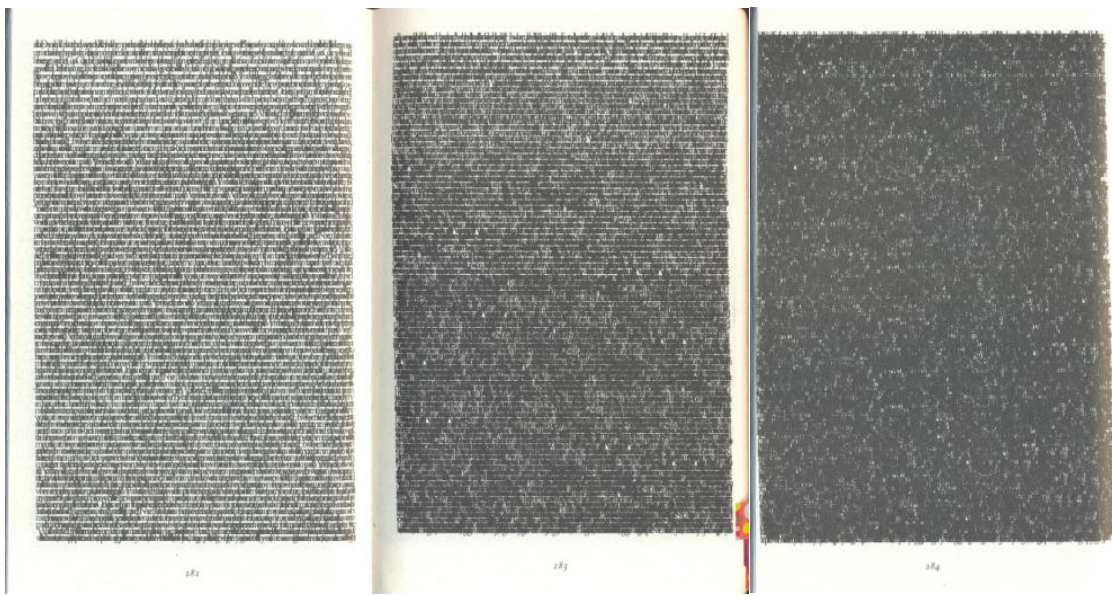
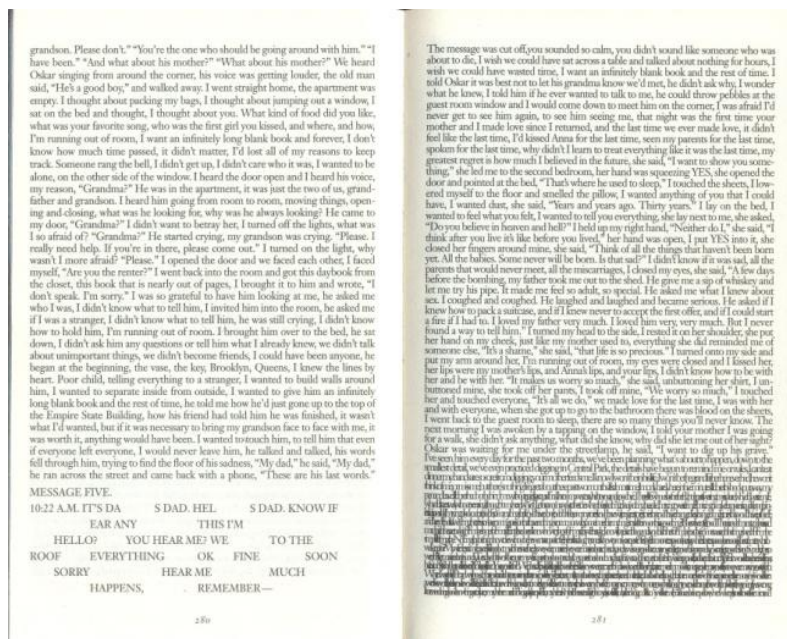


fig. 18

Grandfather claims that he is running out of space in his daybook but still has so much to say to his son that he cannot stop writing. While reading the shrinking text, the reader physically feels the pressure. The activity of reading itself becomes very uncomfortable, to some readers it may even cause vertigo. Paradoxically, despite running out of space, the transcription of Father's last message, played to Grandfather by Oskar, is written in capital letters and occupies a lot of space by levitating fragments of the message. This indicates either that the reader is listening to the message with Grandfather (and this is how he perceives it), or it shows the importance of the message to Grandfather who tries to give his son the space in his world that he deprived him from all his life. The black pages represent the desperate effort of Grandfather to be understood and the fact that the more he tries the more he fails.

Another example of such failure is his phone call from the airport which was mentioned in the previous chapter. Since Grandfather cannot speak but needs to communicate with Grandma immediately, he expresses himself by pressing the numbers according to letters as if he was writing a message on a cell phone. (fig.19)

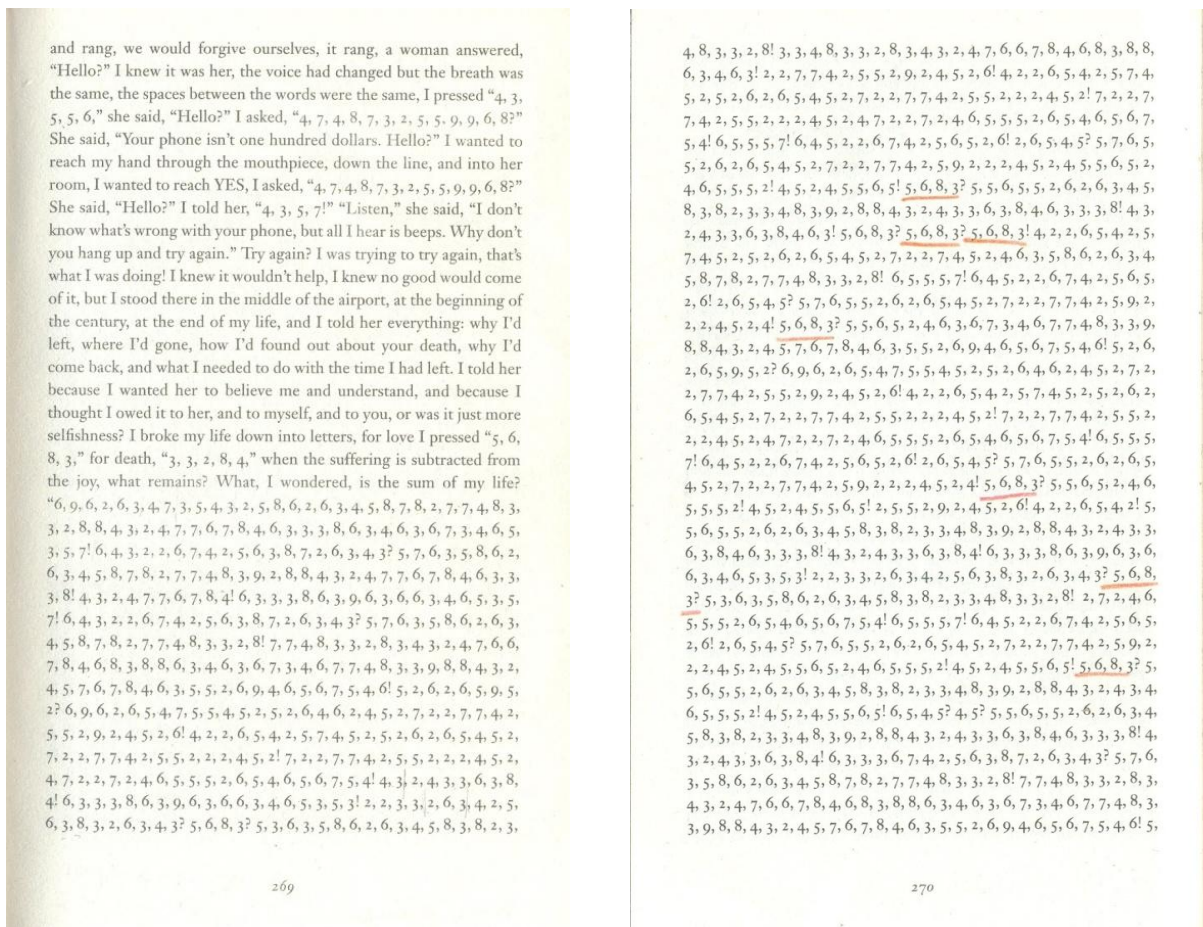


fig.19

This phone call is written down and the reader is offered a clue in order to decrypt the speech. However, if an inquisitive reader really tries to decode the message, he/she is surprised by its meaninglessness. Even if the text is put through a special decoding program, the text does not make sense except for the first few phrases (e.g. 4, 3, 5, 5, 6 = Hello; 4, 7, 4, 8, 7, 3, 2, 5, 9, 9, 6, 8? = Is it really you?) and a repetitive word “love” (5, 6, 8, 3). Nevertheless, if this discovery is paraphrased, a hidden message can be found after all, which indicates that nothing but love makes sense.

These examples show how significant influence specific typographical strategies can have. Not only do they underline the narrative style, influence the pace and draw the reader into the story but also elicit physical reactions, force the reader to put the book away for a moment to be able to continue or make him to reach his/her cell phone in order to decode a hidden message.

3.2 Photographs

The most extensive visual domain of the novel is photographs. They appear throughout the book, some of them even repetitively. They are predominantly incorporated in Oskar’s narration but they also enrich the recounting of Grandfather. On the contrary, the chapters narrated by Grandma are utterly photograph-free, although there are some photographs connected to her storyline.

Preponderance of the photographs is evidently of an unprofessional origin. The reader learns that they are taken either by Oskar or Grandfather, interestingly enough by the very same camera.³ Their quality varies but they are mostly blurry which intensifies their authenticity. Most of the photographs do not indicate any artistic intention which implies that they are taken in order to capture important moments or objects for purely personal purposes and not in a quest for aesthetic. In addition to the amateur photos some professional photographs also appear in the novel. In most cases their origin is not specified but the reader can conclude that they were either downloaded from the internet or cut out of magazines or newspapers. For the thesis’ purposes such images are further classified as scrapbook artefacts and they are analysed in a separate subchapter (2.3).

The importance of photographs as a visual device is indicated from the very beginning of the book as it is the first encounter of the reader with the story. The book is commenced

³ Grandfather leaves the camera behind when he flees to Germany. Thirty five years later Grandma offers the camera to Oskar for his birthday in order to distract him from his father’s death.

with series of photographs before the title page actually appears, so-called frontispieces⁴. (fig.20 a,b,c)



fig. 20a

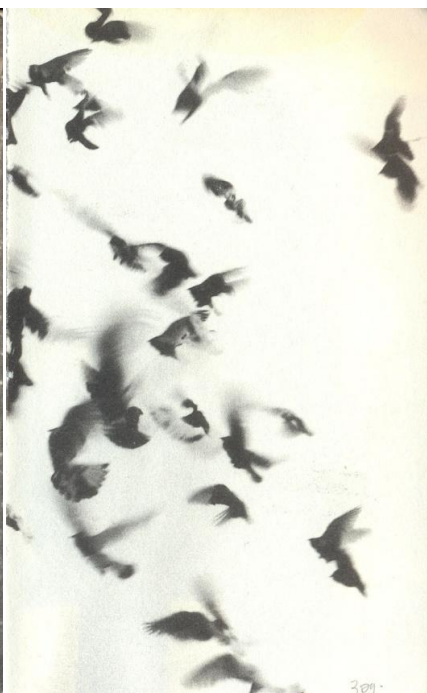


fig. 20b



fig. 20c

All three frontispieces are closely attached to the story, two of them actually reappear later in the book (fig.4b, 4c), or, more precisely, their enlarged details. However, seeing it for the first time surely causes some puzzlement. The first chapter which follows these initial photographs is aptly called WHAT THE?, which probably reflects the reader's first impression that re-emerges several times as the book proceeds. It can be concluded that the introduction basically foreshadows the principle of the whole novel: extraordinary senseless elements which eventually unveil their meaning. So even in this case, after getting to know the book a bit closer, the reader understands that each photograph represents one protagonist (Grandfather, Oskar and Grandma) and implies some of the major themes of the novel, from the concrete ones (such as the quest for the lock) to abstract ones (isolation, escape, or closeness/distance issue). Moreover, the frontispieces not only mirror the main narrative voices and the major themes but also introduce the organization of the narrative voices in the novel, which has been described in chapter I. So parallelly to the succession of the initial photographs (1st doorknob = Grandfather, 2nd flock of birds = Oskar, 3rd windows of apartments = Grandma), each of Oskar's chapters (except for the introductory one) is preceded by the narration of Grandfather and followed by

⁴ Frontispiece was popular especially in the 18th century; illustrations from the books or portraits of the authors were their common themes. In present days the book usually starts directly with the title page and frontispiece occurrence became quite rare. Triple frontispiece is also very uncommon.

Grandma's. The frontispieces along with other amateur photographs that appear in the novel are put into context and further analyzed in the following subchapters, each dedicated to the concerned protagonist, Grandfather (2.2.1) and Oskar (2.2.2).

3.2.1 Grandfather

The first frontispiece shows a photograph of a keyhole, a symbol connected with Grandfather's storyline. This link becomes evident in the 2nd chapter, where Grandfather's narration presents a doorknob, the only theme of his photographs, for the first time. They reappear in every one of his four letters (fig. 21 - 25). Nevertheless, unlike frontispieces connected to Oskar and Grandma (which reappear in the text as their enlarged detail), Grandfather's frontispiece cannot be found in the text. Moreover, the frontispiece looks like a blow-up already. So there arises a double contrast with the unity of Oskar's and Grandma's pattern which already somehow separates Grandfather from these two protagonists. *it is supported* Moreover, the detail of the keyhole later reminds the reader of Grandfather's physical separation when he is condemned to watch Oskar visiting his Grandma only through a keyhole. It is also a metaphor of his life, which he cannot enjoy entirely and which he watches passing by only through the keyhole of his trauma.

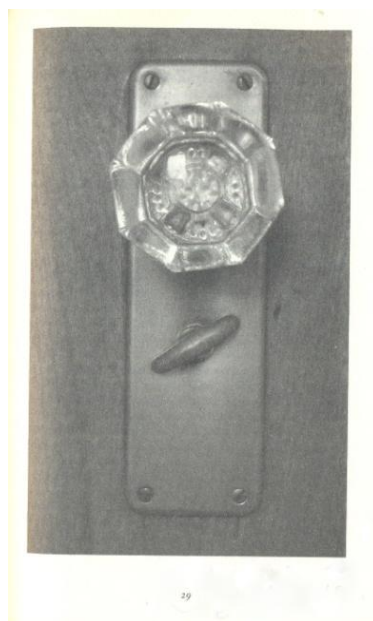


fig.21

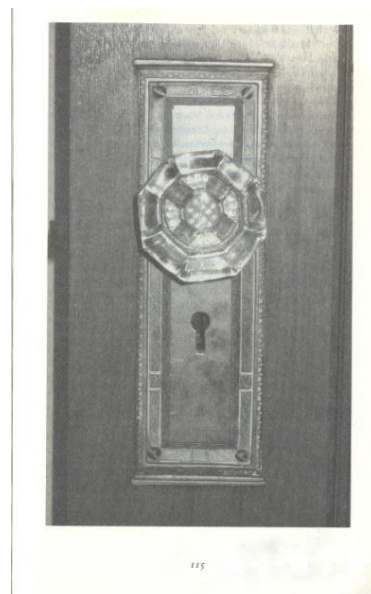


fig. 22

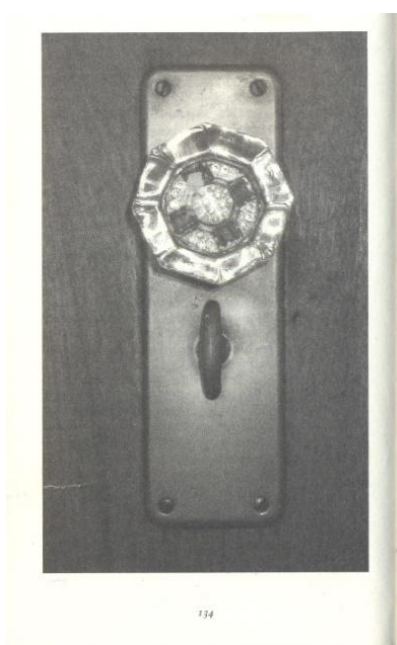


fig. 23

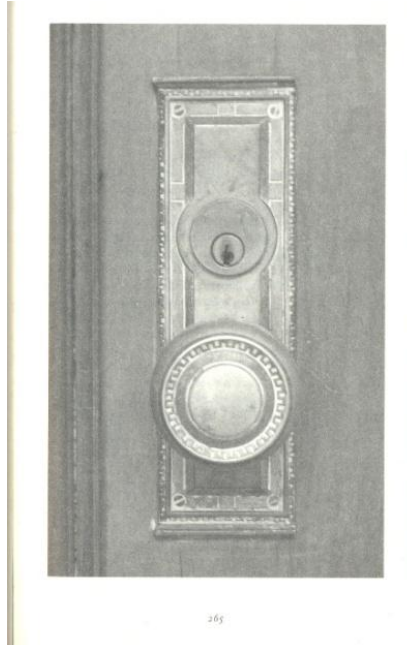


fig.24

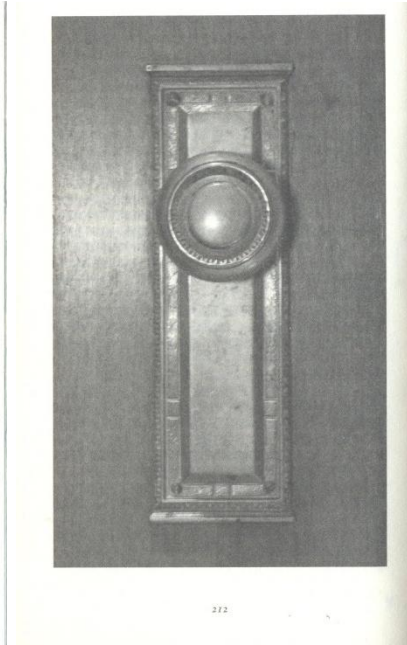


fig. 25

As far as the comprehensibility of the photographs is concerned, the strategy of postponed explanation is applied again. In the first half of the book their appearance is not justified, neither is there at least an allusion to such artefacts in Grandfather's texts. The only connection with the story is that it reminds the reader of Oskar's quest for the keyhole. The clarification does not come sooner than in the 8th chapter where the reader learns from Grandma's narration that Grandfather took picture of everything in their apartment when they first moved in for the insurance purposes and stuck the photos into his daybooks so he could carry the pictures everywhere with him (pg. 175). The reader suddenly realizes that when he/she is reading the letters, he/she is actually really holding the daybook and comes across a picture of a door knob since it is its inseparable authentic part. Furthermore, just like the reader is disturbed by the photographs when reading, Oskar undergoes the same experience during his first encounter with Grandfather when Grandfather writes his answers to one of his notebooks.

“Who are you?” He went to the next page and wrote, “My name is Thomas.” “That was my dad's name. It's pretty common. He died.” On the next page he wrote, “I'm sorry. “ I told him, “You didn't kill my dad.” On the next page there was a picture of a doorknob, for some reason, so he went to the page after that and wrote, “I'm still sorry.” I told him, “Thanks.” (pg. 237)

Since this meeting happens in the 13th chapter so after Grandma's elucidation, the reader already understands the presence of the doorknobs and, at the same time, sympathizes with

Oskar having been in the same situation only few chapters ago. It is peculiar though that Grandfather himself does not comment on the presence of the doorknobs in his narration. The only reference can be found in his description of the raid in Dresden where his trauma roots.

[...] all that remained of our house was a patch of the facade that stubbornly held up the front door, a horse on fire galloped past [...], I told my parents I had to find Anna [...], my father begged me to stay, I grabbed the doorknob and it took the skin of my hand, I saw the muscles of my palm, red and pulsing, why did I grab it with my other hand?[...] (p.211)

The doorknobs thus become a metaphor of Grandfather's isolation and trauma which locked him away from the outside world for the rest of his life.

As it has been mentioned, the doorknobs also function as a parallel to Oskar's search for the lock belonging to the mysterious key. While Oskar looks for the right keyhole, Grandfather came back to America with desperate need of a metaphorical key which would help him escape from his permanent inner solitude. This deduction insinuates that these two protagonists belong to each other, and once they meet the door opens and the conflict can be resolved. The first meeting of Oskar with his Grandfather *personifies* the metaphorical theme.

[...] I could hear breathing, but I knew it wasn't Grandma's, because it was heavier and slower. Something touched the door. A hand? Two hands?

"Hello?"

The doorknob turned.

"If you're a burglar, please don't murder me."

The door opened.

A man stood there without saying anything, and it was obvious he wasn't a burglar.

(pg.237)

Thus, along with the real door the symbolic door of Grandfather long-time solitude also opens. The author let the actual plot, the visual device and the symbolic layer all interdigitate in one moment.

3.2.2 Oskar

Unlike Grandfather's, photographs presented in Oskar's narration are not unified in theme, quality or origin. They are an amalgam of what Oskar sees and captures by his camera, inherited from his Grandfather. However, the reader actually does not get to see Oskar's photographs until the fifth chapter of the novel. In the third chapter, Oskar lets the reader look into his scrapbook called "Stuff that happened to me", which is, as one would expect,

ment to be a kind of album of his photographs, it is, however, full of cuttings and borrowed photographs. The real “Staff” in fact starts happening to him once he sets out in order to search for the keyhole. Oskar takes the first photograph on his first expedition at the moment of crossing the Brooklyn Bridge while trying find the invisible border line between the familiar Manhattan and the unknown Queens (pg 89), (fig. 26). The photograph symbolizes the brave step of an anxious boy whose motivation is stronger than his inner fears. The detail of the Brooklyn Bridge *personifies* this motivation in the noticeable letter F (as Father), which is formed by the construction of the bridge. If the reader inspects the geometry of the construction even longer he/she can eventually find every letter of the word “Father” hidden in it.

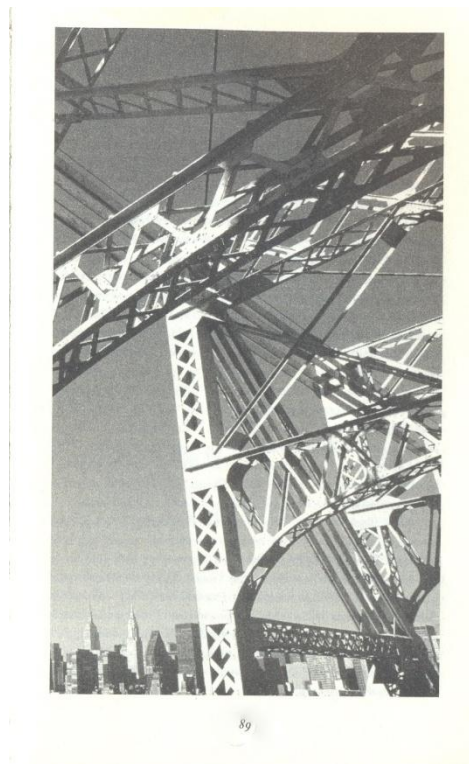


fig. 26

Oskar captures two more significant photos during his visit of the Black family number one: an entrance door to an apartment and Mrs Black, which is a portrait taken from behind (fig. 27).

Oskar searches the keyhole all over New York only to find out that the aim was all the time in this very first house. The photo of the entrance thus repeats again in the 15th chapter

when Oskar comes back in order to finally solve the riddle⁵. The theme of the odd portrait then also recurs, this time Oskar photographs a nape of her husband, a person who the key belongs to (fig.28).

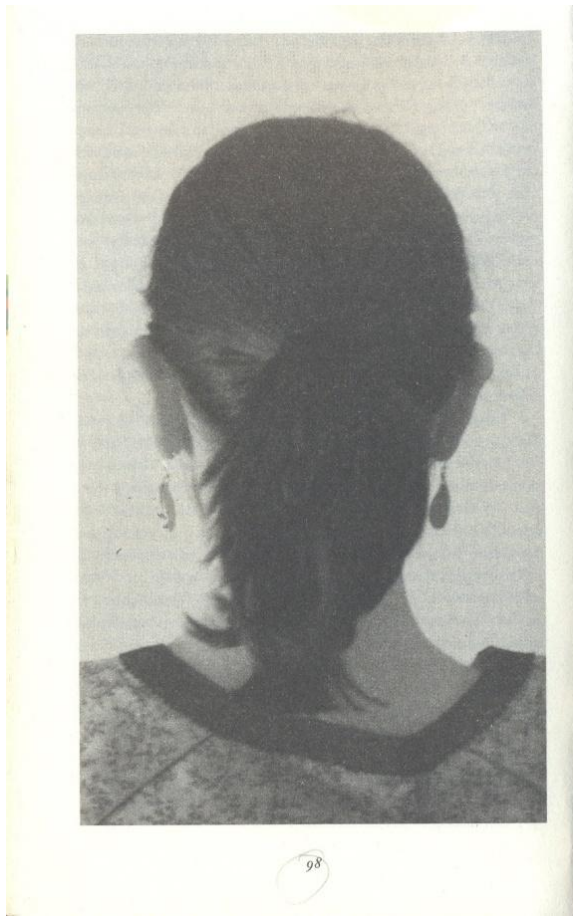


fig. 27

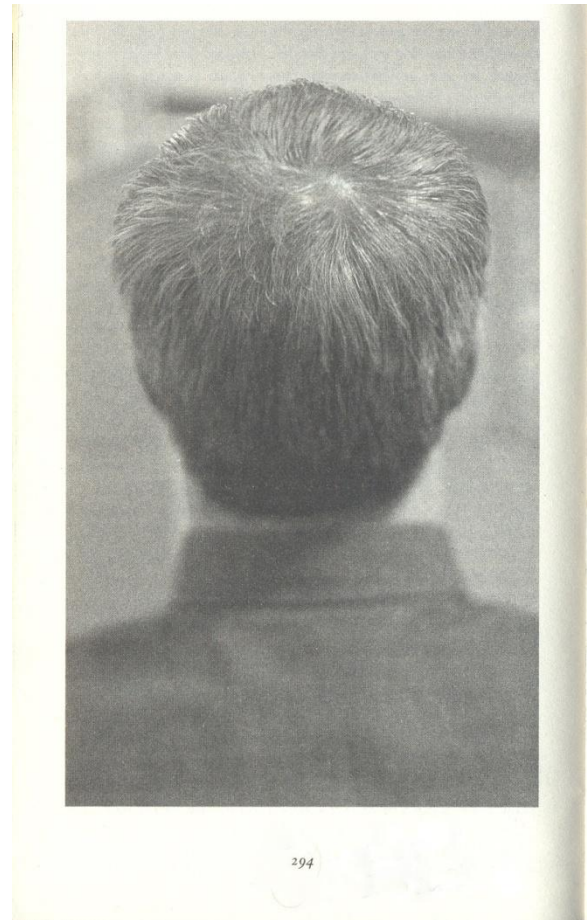


fig. 28

These peculiar photographs could symbolize the fact that Oskar reached his aim yet left the secret uncovered which is something that the reader did not expect. From more metaphorical perspectives, the picture of the nape taken from close-up could mirror the fact that even though people get very close to each other they actually never succeed in knowing each other properly. Fact, which the reader already learns from the relationship of Grandma and Grandfather or Oskar and his Mother or Oskar and his Grandma. A few pages later, after Oskar's return from his first expedition he contemplates the very same theme, analyzing his relationship with Grandma.

We spent so much time together. I don't think there's anyone that I spent more time with [...] but there were a lot of people that I knew better. For example, I didn't know anything about what it was like when she was a

⁵ The picture of the entrance also resonates with the theme of Oskar's key as well as with Grandfather's series of photographs of doorknobs.

kid [...]. So here's my question: What were we spending so much time doing if not getting to know each other? (pg. 105)

my comment

The last picture of this chapter is taken at night and it captures Grandma's apartment. (fig. 29)

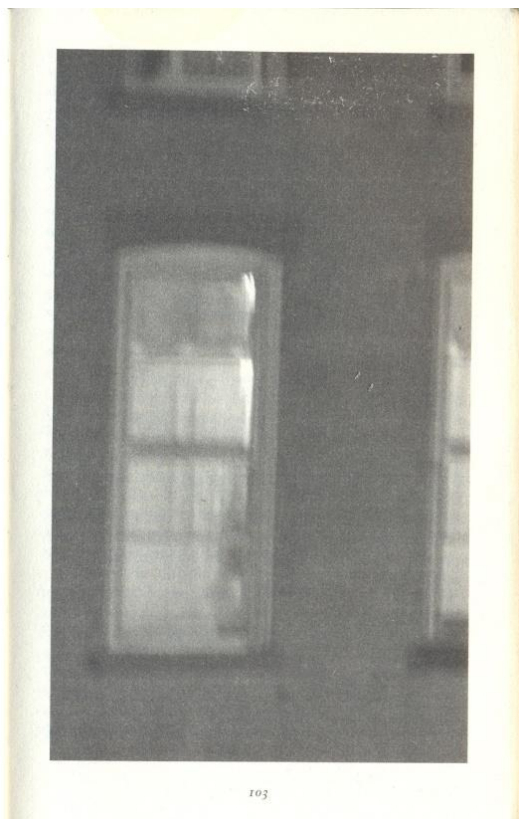


fig. 29

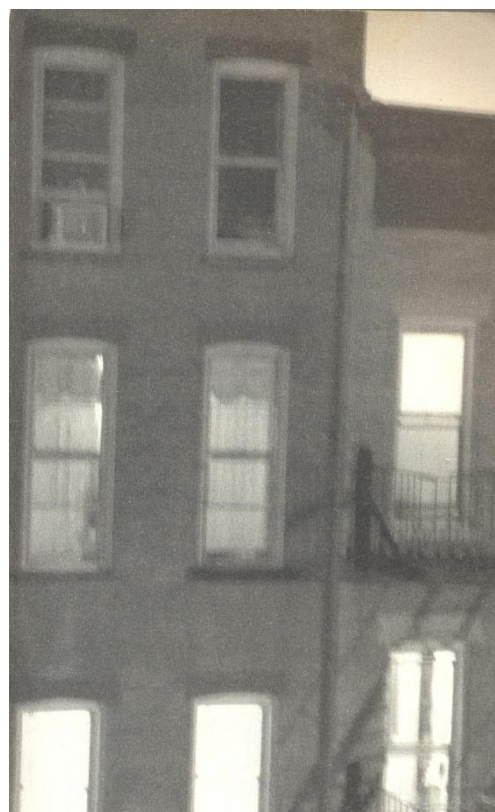


fig. 30

It is an allusion to the third photograph presented at the beginning of the novel (fig. 30). This time it is a detail of the frontispiece dedicated to Grandma. It is in fact the only photograph in the novel (out of 57) connected directly to her. Grandma's apartment is opposite to Oskar's and they often talk during the night through an old two-way radio. Oskar also watches her window with his binoculars just to make sure she is there. Not only is the reader presented with the real time and real place moment, the lit up window in the darkness also symbolizes Grandma's role in Oskar's life, which is probably reciprocal. The glowing window may also parallel Grandma's own life – despite the miserable moments of her destiny, she never stopped believing in life, she never stopped trying. The quality of the photograph is very poor and the reader can hardly recognize a silhouette behind the window but, after reading Oskar's narration, he/she knows that she is there, which is another moment, when the text and the image co-operate closely, enriching each other and letting the reader look into the intimacy of the protagonists.

As the book proceeds, the reader starts realizing that there are some common denominators which link some of his photographs. One of these common themes is a *flight/free fall*. The reader can find it for instance already in the frontispiece and its enlarged version of the flying birds (fig. 33), in the photograph of the free fall of a roller coaster (fig. 31), or of the falling cat (fig. 32).

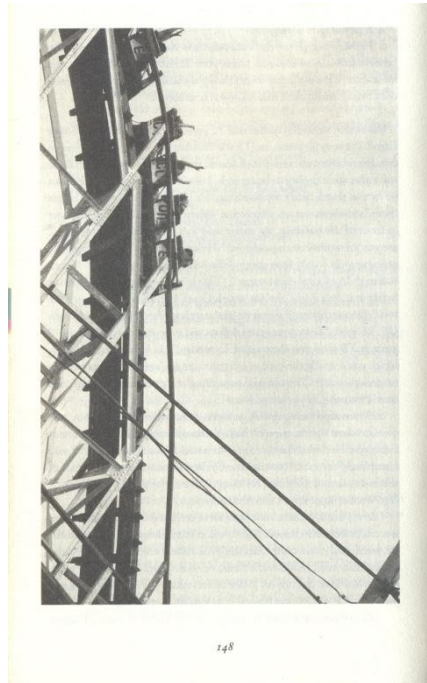


fig. 31

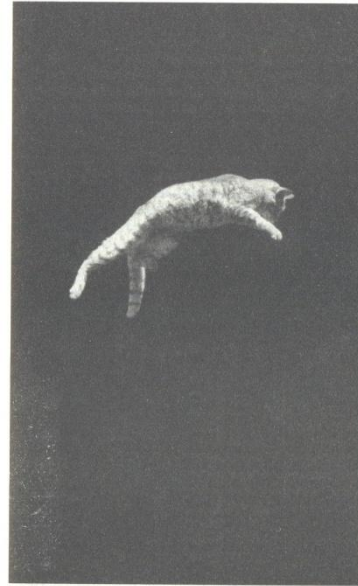


fig. 32



fig. 33

This motif is closely connected with Oskar's obsession with the photograph of the falling man which Oskar finds during his search on the internet and which reappears in the novel several times⁶ (fig. 34).

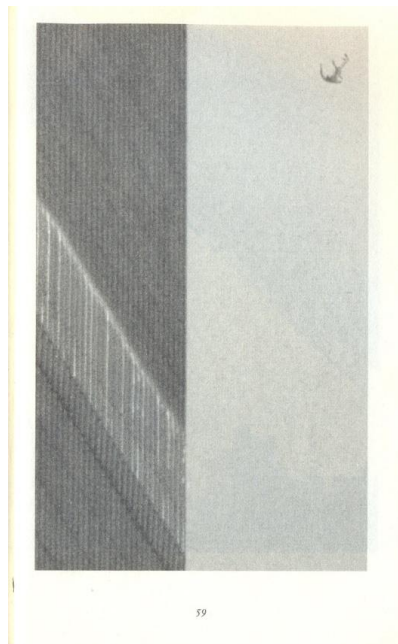


fig. 34

Oskar is desperate to find out the way his father died. He enlarges the found photo in order to see whether it is or is not him. The theme of flying or falling objects thus reflects this thorny necessity to know and to protect himself and other people from such kind of death. The double page of the flock of birds functions as an allusion of such a solution since Oskar invents a “birdseed t-shirt” which would save the falling people. The photograph of the flock of birds is placed literally in the middle of the book and covers two pages. Besides, it is the only photograph that is not paged. Within the story it is placed at the moment when Oskar encounters his one-hundred-year-old neighbour who suffers from hearing difficulty. On Oskar's request he puts back on his hearing aid after many years of deaf isolation and as he turns it on:

[...] out of nowhere, a flock of birds flew by the window, extremely fast and incredibly close. Maybe twenty of them. Maybe more. But they also seemed like just one birds, because somehow they all knew (the reader turns the page to find the double page with the photograph of the birds and the text continues on the following page) exactly what to do. Mr. Black grabbed at his ears and made a bunch of weird sounds. He started crying [...] (pg. 165-168)

⁶ The photo of the falling man plays a very important role in the novel. Its significance along with the reaction of the public to the employment of such sensitive material are further discussed in the following chapter 2.3 Scrapbook artefacts.

Thanks to the picture the reader is once again nearly physically present to the situation. At that moment the flying birds also symbolize the liberation of Mr. Black from his solitude. Mr. Black starts accompanying Oskar on his investigative errands, giving him support and protection, deputizing for the missing Grandfather. He stops once he realizes that there is a real Grandfather who has been following them but who Oskar does not know about. The reader can find a visual connection between these two characters in the novel, both intermediated by Oskar. When Oskar meets Mr. Black his hands remind him of “[...] the hands of the skeleton in the Rainier Scientific catalogue [...] except they had skin, blotchy skin [...]” (pg. 154). On the opposite page the reader sees an illustration of Oskar’s association (fig. 35), cut out probably from a catalogue. Similarly, Oskar illustrates his first meeting with Grandfather, this time by taking photos of his tattooed hands. (fig. 36)



fig. 35

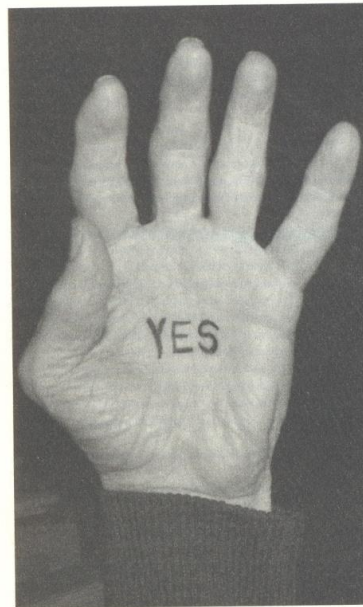
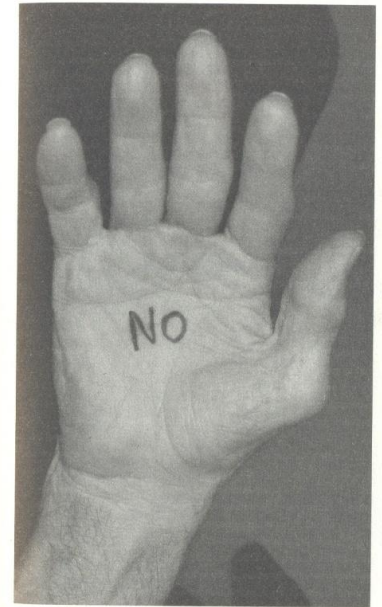


fig. 36



Oskar encounters two old men and is somehow fascinated by them. The connection of the photos as well as the obvious contrast is symbolic. While the photograph illustrating Mr. Black is borrowed from an unknown source, the photographs of Grandfather’s hands are taken by Oskar himself. This implies that although Mr. Black is significant and close to Oskar, the real Grandfather can never be substituted. In fact, he carries the information in his hands which could help Oskar cope with his trauma. Again metaphorically as well as literally. Metaphorically since it is proved that people understand themselves better when they know the family story and when they can talk to their next of kin, recognizing

themselves in their character. The “literal” moment comes at the end of Oskar’s chapter ALIVE AND ALONE, in which Oskar, after being left by Mr. Black, encounters his Grandfather and reveals his story to him. At night when Oskar is vainly trying to fall asleep, his mind refusing to cease inventing, he suddenly comes upon the solution.

And then a thought came into my brain that wasn’t like the other thoughts. It was closer to me, and louder. I didn’t know where it came from, or what it meant, or if I loved it or hated it. It opened up like a fist, or a flower.

What about digging up Dad’s empty coffin? (p. 259)

These are the last words on the page. When the reader turns to the next page he/she sees the double page with photographs of Grandfather’s hands with the YES/NO tattoo on them (fig. 21). Oskar knows that he cannot realize his plan by himself and the only adult who could help him is his Grandfather. Oskar’s question is thus aimed directly at him and *it(what?)* will depend on which hand Grandfather chooses for his answer. As the reader learns in the following chapter, Grandfather agrees and digging up the empty coffin becomes an act of conciliation with the trauma for both.

The connection between Grandfather and Oskar is amplified by another photograph which Oskar takes at night on his way to the graveyard. He captures with his Grandfather’s camera the night starlit sky (fig. 37).

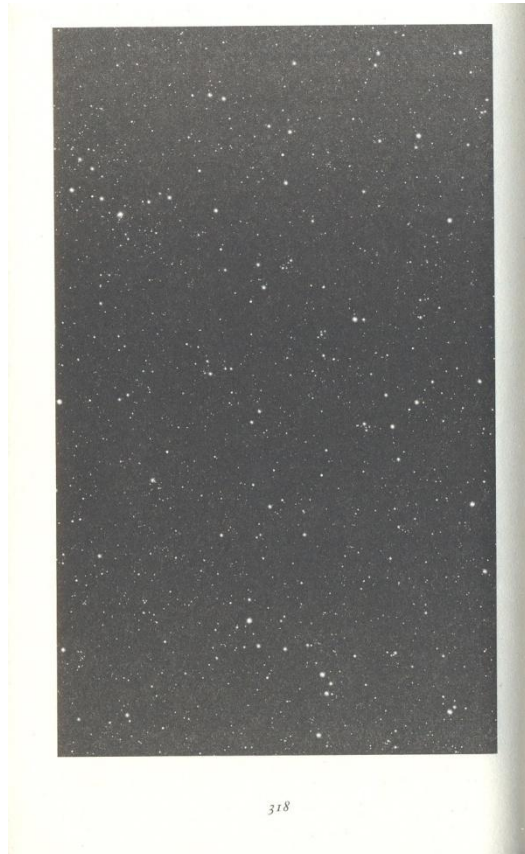


fig.37



fig. 38

There is a visible link between Oskar’s last photograph and Grandfather’s last page of his letter (fig. 38). As it was discussed in the previous chapter, 2.1, the black page is a result of accumulated words which, within three pages, gradually overtake the whole page. If the reader goes back to the page with the last just about visible words, he/she realizes that the text becomes illegible when Oskar tells Grandfather about his plan to dig up the grave and Grandfather begins to describe their preparation for the daring deed (fig. 39).

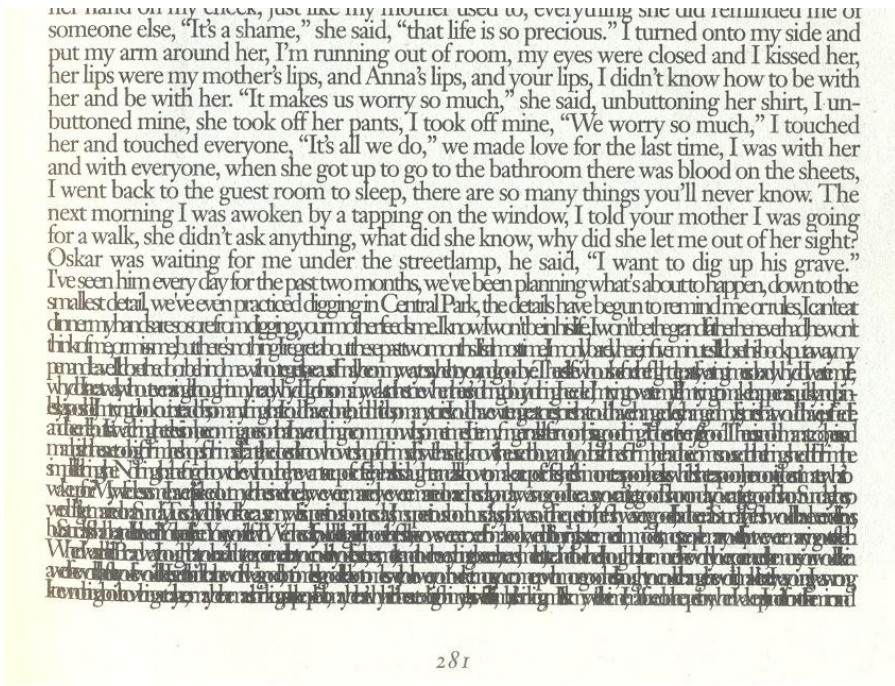


fig. 39

Thanks to this strategy the two storylines meet and penetrate each other not only in the verbal narration but also through the visual devices.

It follows that the photographs used in the novel pervade several layers of the narration. By their concrete connection to the plot they function as illustrations which bring the reader closer to the story and offer him/her a direct view of the reality which the protagonist experience. At the same time, however, the photographs add a new level to the narration, which exceeds to a more symbolic sphere. The photographs thus do not only fulfil an aesthetical role but they primarily function as a key to the linkages and interpretations which are hidden from the first sight, or would not be recognizable in a bare text.

3.3 Scrapbook artefacts

There are several types of scrapbook artefacts included in the novel. In addition to photographs collected from various media, the reader comes across personal cards (fig. 40, fig. 41) or cards from Mr. Black's file cabinet where he keeps a record of every significant person, each of them characterized by one single word (fig. 42).

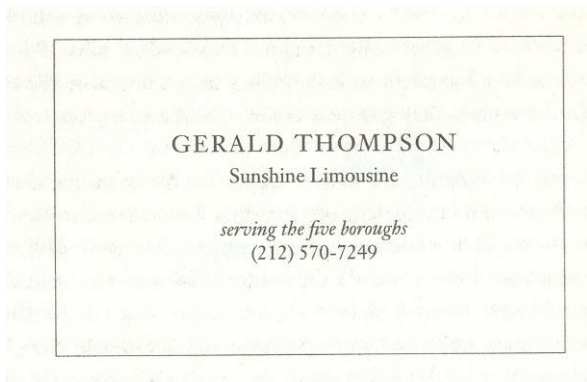


fig. 40

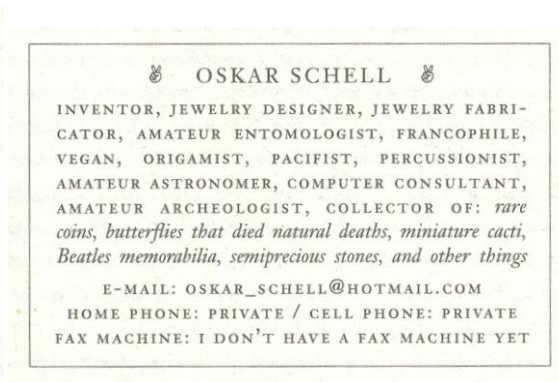


fig. 41

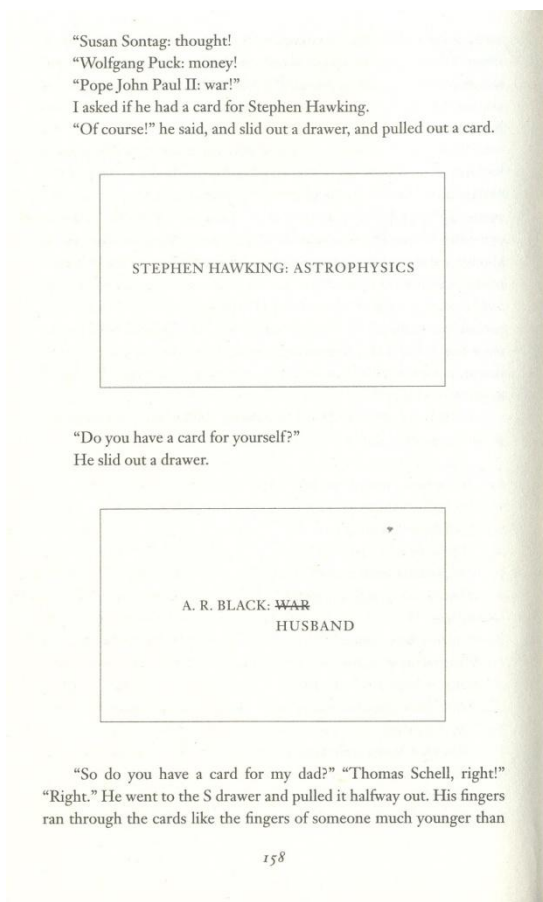
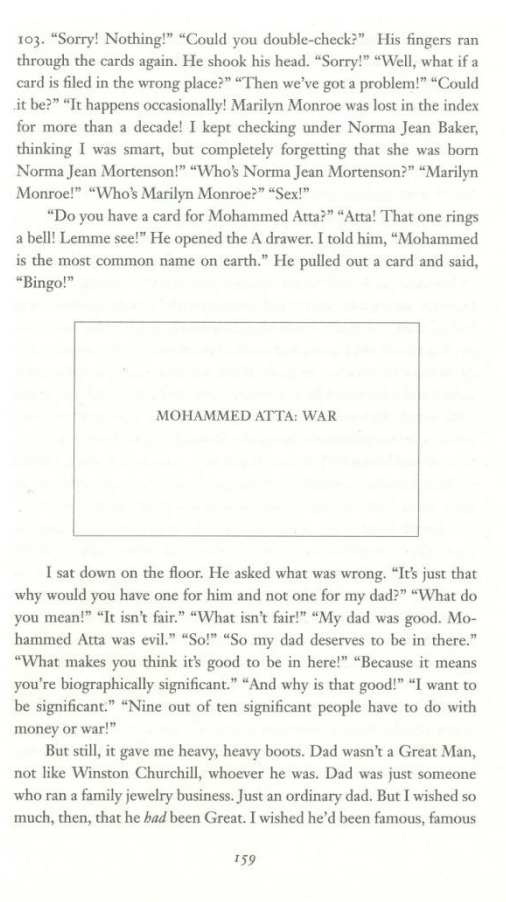


fig.42



They are always introduced to the reader when handled by the protagonists.

There is also one newspaper cutting but since its significance is based on a circle made by a red pen marker, it is discussed in chapter 2.4 which analyzes illustrations.

Nevertheless, the most plentiful scrapbook artefacts are pictures and photographs which were neither taken by Oskar, nor by his Grandfather. These photographs are incorporated solely to chapters narrated by Oskar, who collects and archives them in his scrapbook called “Stuff That Happened to Me”. This scrapbook becomes part of the book and, at certain point; the reader can browse through it, understanding more or less individual photographs and cuttings (p. 52-67). Unlike the real photographs taken by Oskar, which are oriented to the outside world, the scrapbook artefacts rather reflect the inner world of Oskar. They illustrate his memories, fears, traumas as well as things and people he loves or esteems. This is why the reader encounters them predominantly in the first half of the book where Oskar is self-oriented, locked up in his thoughts, before he actually starts taking action and sets out in order to find the key. In the second half of the novel the scrapbook pictures become much rarer only to triumphantly conclude the story.

“Stuff That Happened to Me” is introduced to the reader when Oskar goes to bed and browses through it when trying to fall asleep. At that moment, the reader enters Oskar’s mind for a while and flicks through the scrapbook together with him wondering what thought, idea or memory each photograph signifies. (fig. 43-46 = first four pages of the scrapbook)

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. I pulled *Stuff That Happened to Me* from the space between the bed and the wall, and I flipped through it for a while, wishing I would finally fall asleep. (p.52) (The rest of the page is blank and on the opposite page the eight-page-long presentation starts.)

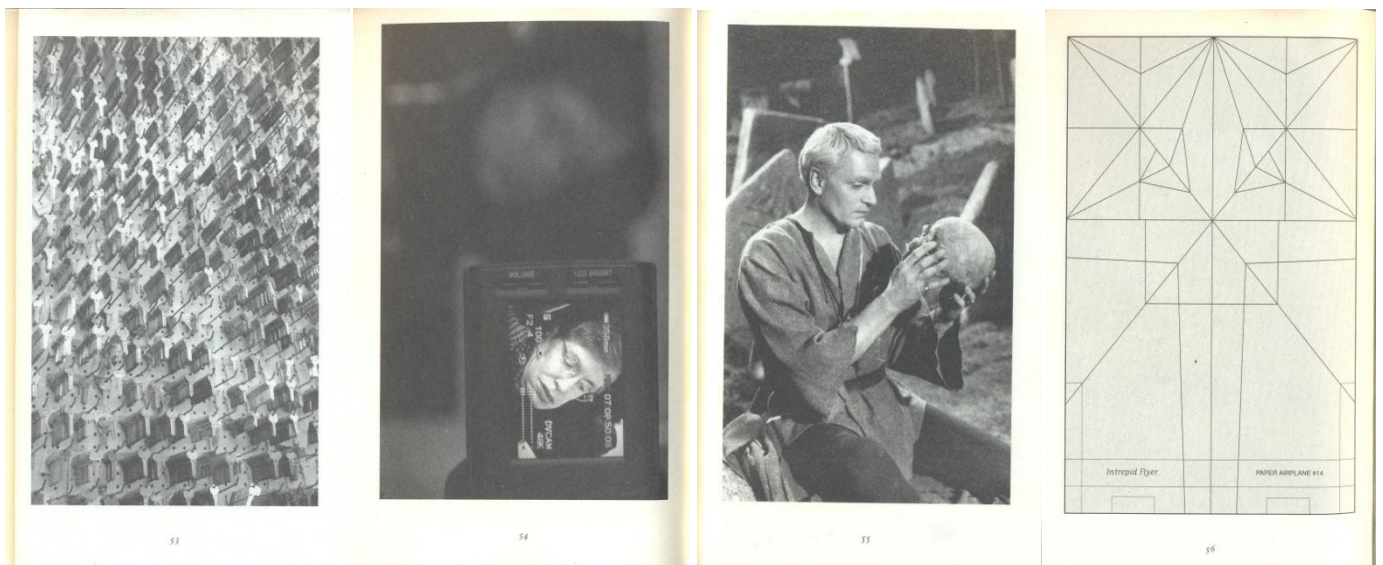


fig. 43

fig. 44

fig. 45

fig. 46

As it comes out of the text, the scrapbook is well hidden; it is introduced to the reader by Oskar as if he was unveiling his secrets, letting him look into his inner world.

This is another case when the author lets the reader physically enter to the story, moreover, he leaves it up to him/her to find the connections with the narration from the previous pages. However, since Oskar retells the story retrospectively and “Staff That Happened to Me” is placed at the beginning of the book, Oskar’s second chapter, the reader has not been acquainted with certain parts of the story yet and some of the scrapbook images become confusing. Nevertheless, the linkages are eventually clarified and when the reader comes back to this visual part he/she enjoys the sudden comprehension. This strategy livens up the reading and encourages the reader to take active part in completing the story and to rethink and recapitulate it constantly. So for example among the obvious-ones is the photograph of the keys which reflects the trickiness of Oskar’s task. Portrait of Stephen Hawking reminds the reader of Oskar’s favourite book *A Brief History of Time* as well as of his correspondence with the famous physicist. The photograph of two mating turtles (fig. 47) wittily complements the theory of “Turtles all the way down”⁷ taken out of the Hawking’s book and cited by Oskar in the first chapter (p. 11).

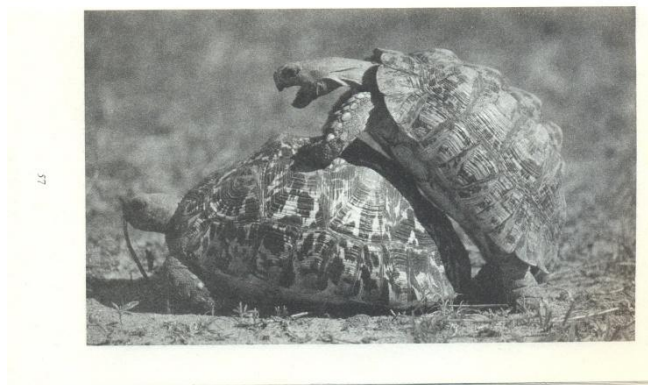


fig. 47

On the other hand, when the reader comes across double-paged photograph of New York with the Central park cut out of it (fig. 48), the only thing he/she can connect it with is only the Reconnaissance Expedition which Oskar’s Father organized for him. The reader can deduce that the cut-out central park symbolizes the empty space that Oskar feels after his Father’s death. However, later on in the book, when his Oskar, after several postponements, eventually gets to his Father’s narration of the story THE SIXTH BOROUGH,

⁷ A well-known scientist (some say it was [Bertrand Russell](#)) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise." The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the tortoise standing on?" "You're very clever, young man, very clever," said the old lady. "But it's turtles all the way down!" (Hawking)

the reader learns that this image is also Oskar's illustration of this story, since its punchline dwells in the fact that the Central park was actually cut out of the sixth neighbour once this borough started floating away and put where it is now.

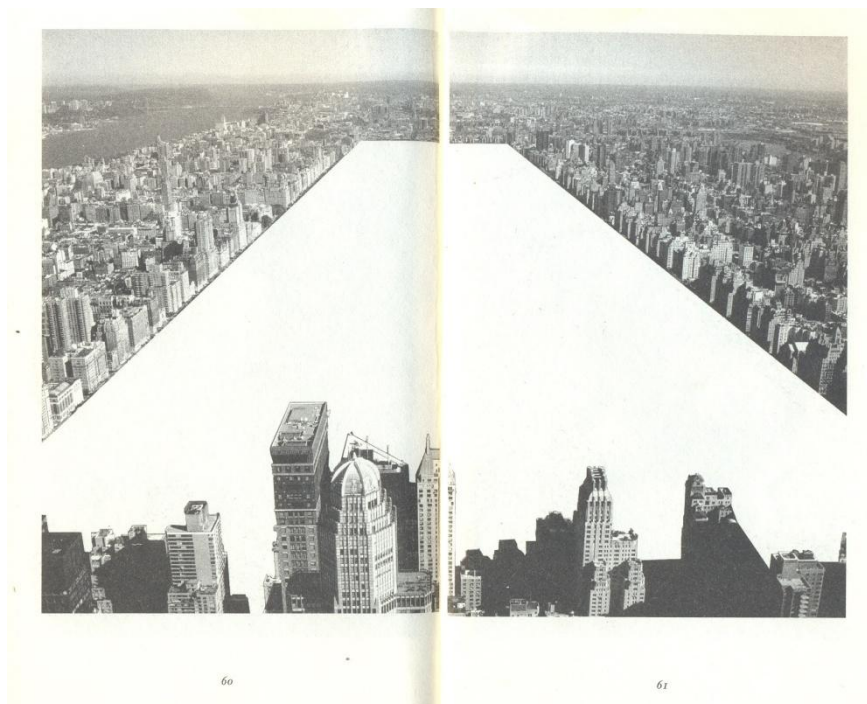


fig. 48

The reader gradually learns that most of the photographs are connected with several parts of the book and furthermore some of them contribute to the symbolic level of the story.

The picture of Hamlet holding the skull of Yorik is another good example (fig. 45). It refers to preceding as well as oncoming situations and underlines other crucial themes of the novel which are death and a father-and-son relationship. Oskar also mentions Hamlet on his way first way to cemetery, quoting a did-you-know fact that: “[...] there are more people alive now than have died in all of human history. In other words, if everyone wanted to play Hamlet at once, they couldn't, because there aren't enough skulls!” (pg.3). The theme of Hamlet then penetrates the whole story while Oskar rehearses the performance at school. As mentioned in chapter 1.2.3, the novel even includes the stage script with the depicted scene of Hamlet on the graveyard, in which Oskar performs Yorik's skull. Furthermore, the climax in which Oskar and Thomas Senior dig out the coffin allude to the very same graveyard scene. (*oskar stojí na shakespeareovi, když najde klíč, play withing the play – letter in a letter*)

What is more, in Oskar's scrapbook, the photograph of the falling man appears and not only once. Two pages after the first appearance, there is enclosed its enlarged detail (fig 49, 50). This brings the reader “extremely close” to the tragedy.

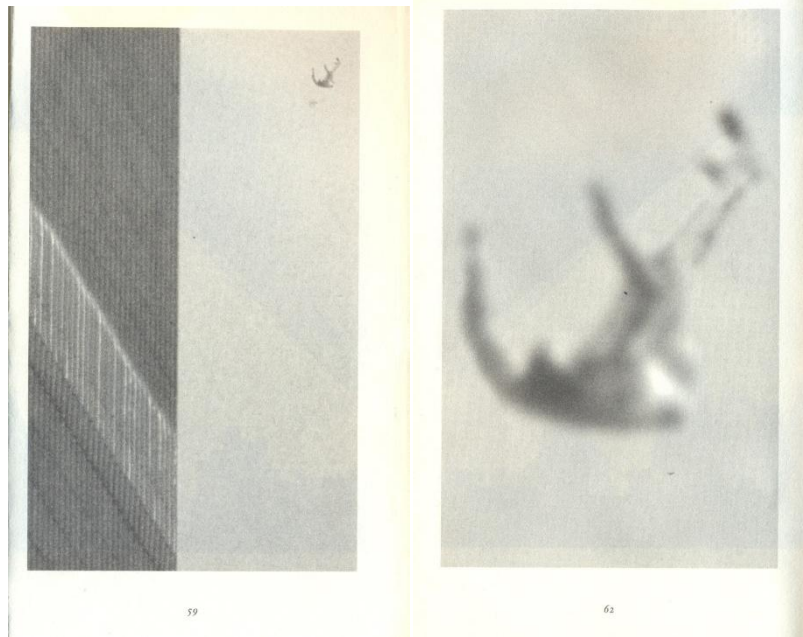


fig. 49

fig. 50

Oskar is agonized by the lack of information about the way his Father died. On that account he enlarges pictures of people jumping from the Twin Towers during the attack in case one of them is his Father. This is in fact the most controversial part of the book, since the photographs are authentic and capture a video of a real person jumping in desperation out of the attacked building. They reappear several times in the novel and, what is more, conclude it as a flipbook where the photographs become animated. (fig. 51 – first 5 out of 15 photographs)

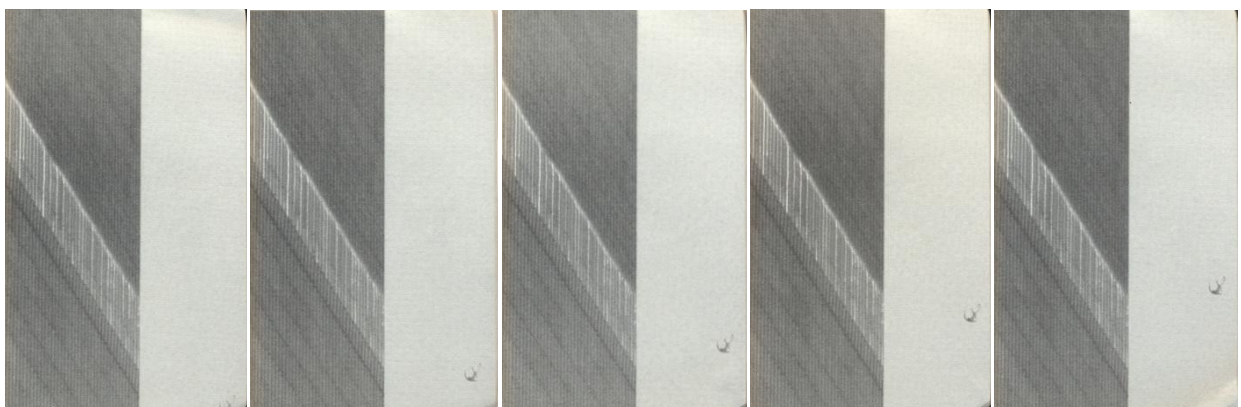


fig. 51

By the reversed arrangement of the fall, the flipbook makes an illusion of o men flying up towards the sky. Realization that there is a real life only seconds from its end on the

examined picture provokes emotions and disapproving reactions. The use of the authentic photography is certainly a disputable act since it depicts a real tragedy of a real person. Nevertheless, the aim of the author may be to demonstrate, that the life stories as well as trauma and pain within his novel, although fictional, are real and probably truly happened to someone. These, to somebody shocking photographs, alert the reader and bring him somehow closer to otherwise impersonal tragedy, making him/her experience its heaviness. The legitimacy of combination of flipbook form with such a tragedy is yet rather questionable. The genre of flipbook is usually connected with funny, amusing topics dedicated notably to children. Choosing such device for a reversed depiction of a suicide naturally provokes rejecting reactions. The author, however, indicates this way that it is possible to work with the trauma. He suggests that it should not become an untouchable taboo. The flipbook is the means through which Oskar, a nine-year-old child, comes to terms with his wish to rewind the time, to save his Father and other impacted people. Howsoever impossible the wish is he does his best to make it happen, which finally helps to comfort his disturbed soul.

Another part of the scrapbook is made by photographs which are mentioned in the text but are not included in the collection presented to the reader. While browsing the internet, Oskar comes across violent, pornographic or peculiar photographs; material which people cannot help themselves not to look at when found. It is the same case with Oskar.

I Googled around and found out that Black wasn't the name of a company that made lockboxes. [...] I did a few other researches, even though I knew they would only hurt me, because I couldn't help it. I printed out some of the pictures I found – a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, that actress getting a blowjob from her normal boyfriend, a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq [...] – and I put them in *Stuff That Happened to Me*, my scrapbook of everything that happened to me. (p.42)

None of these pictures mentioned by Oskar are however included in the *Stuff That Happened to Me* presented to the reader even though Oskar explicitly says that he put them there. So either Oskar stops browsing his scrapbook at some point and consequently so does the reader or the author decided to avoid their physical appearance but considered important mentioning that Oskar encountered such images and, what is more, archived them. Another peculiar fact raising from the cited extract is that, unlike the presented photographs (fig. 27-34), none of these verbally mentioned pictures have a direct connection with Oskar's memories or experiences. They emerge from the random browsing yet Oskar includes them into scrapbook dedicated to things he experienced. In

some way he did experience them only by looking at them and being moved by them, however considering them as his own is irrelevant. This implies how influential internet can be, especially on children. Oskar is not allowed to watch TV for obvious reasons but is free to browse through such sensitive material. This might alert “the parent reader” and make him re-thing how much control he/she has got on their child’s internet exploration. Here the narration passes *again* a message standing above the story itself.

To conclude, the scrapbook artefacts enrich the story by enhancing the atmosphere of the authenticity. In addition, they also supplement the plot by not only its illustrative nature but also by being a riddle, involving the reader in finding its solution. Moreover, like the real photographs analysed in chapter 2.3, these scrapbook images bring a message exceeding the original story.

3.4 Illustrations

Although illustrations are used much less frequently than other visual devices, their role is just as significant. It is actually an illustration that introduces a new voice in the novel, the one belonging to Oskar’s Father. Through an illustration, the reader meets this character for the first time only briefly in the first chapter, where the Father circles a message for Oskar in the newspaper. (fig. 52)

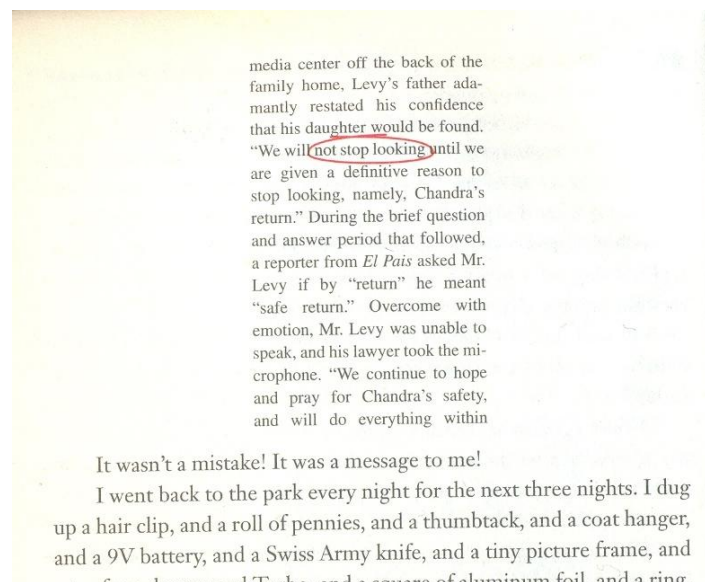


fig. 52

The reader learns that Oskar’s Father likes to correct mistakes in the *New York Times* with his red marker, although this time his correction is in fact a hidden message for Oskar’s

Sunday Reconnaissance Expedition. The second time Oskar's Father enters the story is through one of the Grandfather's letters. (fig. 53)

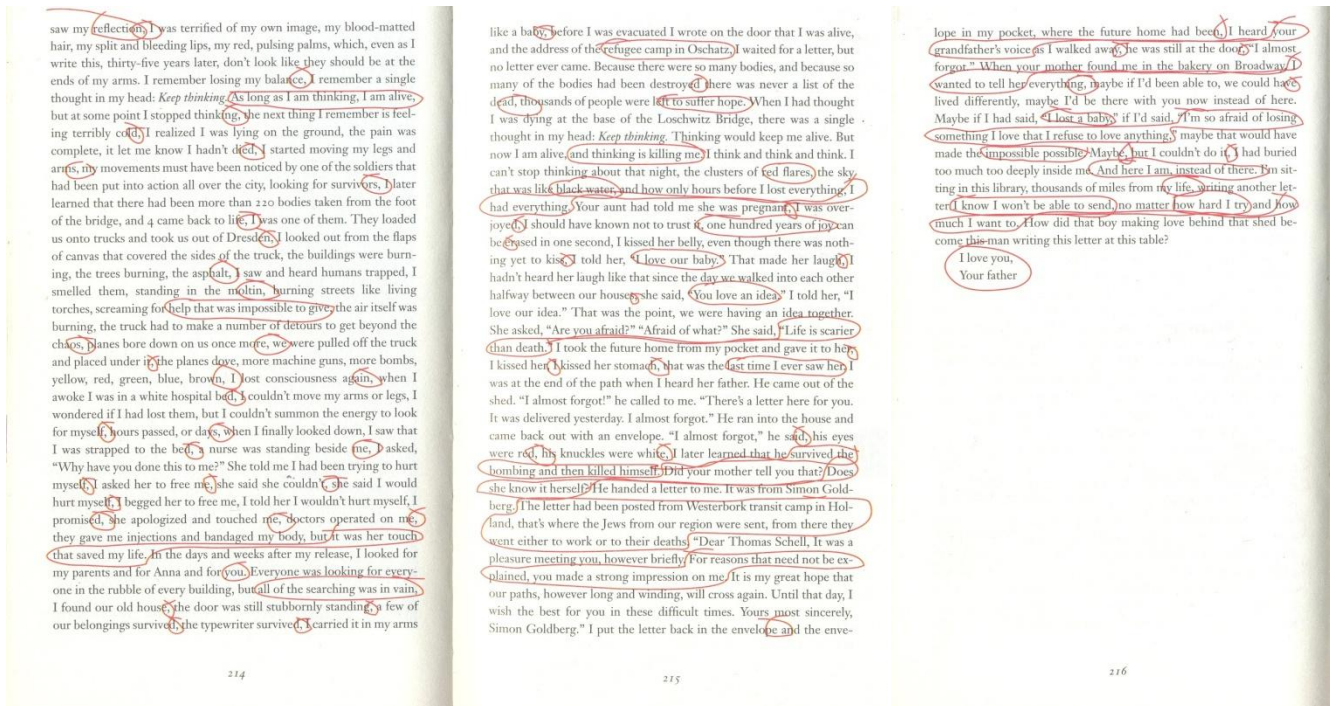


fig. 53

The reader already possesses the clue to understand such intervention, knowing that Oskar's Father, while reading, circles every mistake he can find (grammatical, lexical, or even those concerning veracity). The reader thus realizes that this is probably the only letter that Grandfather sent to his son and that his son received it and read it. By the circled parts of the letter, the reader obliquely deduces Father's reactions and possible attitudes. Besides correcting wrong use of punctuation, typical for Grandfather's style, or misspelling (e.g. the alps, your mothers house, Metamorphosis, over joyed), Oskar's Father also circles statements which he disagrees with (e.g. Life is scarier than death, a letter I know I won't be able to send, you can't love anything more than something you miss, I love you, Your Father) (p. 208-216) (fig. 53). This original method thus offers the reader an opportunity to witness a specific dialogue and to assume the posture and personality of the absent character through a text which was not produced directly by him or about him.

Another example of the use of illustrations can be found in the second chapter, at the very beginning of Oskar's search for the lock. In order to understand the inscription on the envelope with the key (Black) he goes to the art supply store and asks for closer information about the black colour. The shop assistant, however, claims, that the word Black probably does not stand for a colour, since it is written by a red pen and people

rarely write a different name of colour than the one they are writing with, and that the word would more likely stand for a name Black. As a proof, she offers Oskar to have a look at the pad of paper that is next to the display of pens. (fig. 54)



fig.54

This is another situation when the reader is invited to examine visual elements together with Oskar. Moreover, in the jumble of writings, a perceptive reader finds Thomas Schell's name. Oskar also spots it and becomes overexcited since he thinks the name stands for his Father. It just does not make much sense to him and neither it does to the reader. Oskar examines the store only to find out that Thomas Schell was trying out different art tools and that it must have happened less than a year ago which contradicts with the fact that his Father died earlier than that. Even the reader is confused until he/she grasps later that it was Oskar's Grandfather (a sculptor) who was shopping there. This is yet another moment where the reader has to deduce himself/herself the real essence of the situation and put another piece into the complex mosaic image. The pages from the stationary pad thus make the narration more vivid and entertaining and offer another riddle to solve. The last illustration used in the book appears in Oskar's scrapbook *Stuff that Happened to Me*. (fig. 55)

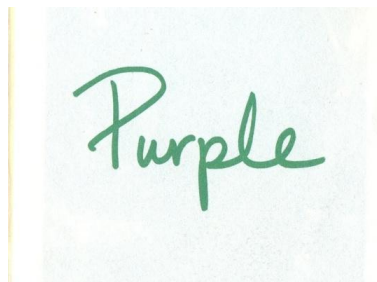


fig.55

After closer examination the reader finds out that this time it is not a detail taken out of the four sheets from the stationary. It is probably Oskar's experiment on how difficult it is to write a name of a specific colour with a pen of a different colour. Moreover, according to colour symbolism purple used to be the colour of mourning. It is also considered as an unlucky colour and symbolizes magic and mystery. Green, on the contrary, is associated with newness, life force and good luck. Oskar fuses these two opposites into one unit just like they intersect during his journey. All these hidden meanings fit perfectly into the puzzle of Oskar's story.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the narrative techniques in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. This literary work is specific primarily due to the use of unusual typographic and visual devices. Such narrative strategies, together with the specific use of language are highly frequent throughout the book and they strongly influence the pace of the story as well as the core of the novel itself. The theoretical part of the thesis was dedicated to the realm of the word and image interplay and its possible employment in literature. With the relation to the analyzed novel, the phenomenon of a hybrid novel was introduced, described and put into a wider literary context. Subsequently, the practical part of this thesis was dealing with the particular use of various narrative techniques, focusing on individual device and their mutual interactions. To be able to comprehend this specific interaction, the language of each protagonist was analyzed in detail as well as the pace and the chronology of their narrations. In the next section of the practical part, the analyses of the visual devices followed, profiting from the facts arising from the study of language. Since the novel uses various visual techniques, they were divided into individual subchapters. This division helped the reader to orient himself/herself better in the amount of diverse visual elements.

As it follows from the analyses, the two contrary elements, a word and an image, cooperate closely in the novel, often overlapping each other. By this interdigitation, they create together some kind of a third space, a "hybrid meaning" which is difficult to capture by terminology. This finding explains the difficulties that the present literary criticism has to face when trying to evaluate any kind of hybrid novel. The image and the word come so close that sometimes they even metamorphose into each other, for example when words overlap so closely that they become an image (a black page reminding of the night sky) in

Grandfather's last letter, or Oskar's photograph of Brooklyn Bridge reminding of the letter F or of the word "Father" itself. Moreover, by a thoughtful combination of these two elements, an image (notably photographs) and a word, the author achieves the effect of authenticity and evokes the impression of a real story in the reader. The presence of photographs evokes a feeling that the reader holds a proof of the events he follows in the narration. This is also a strategy how to bring the reader closer to the story. Identifying with a "real story" is definitely easier and more powerful reading experience.

From a more general point of view, by ingeniously incorporating the disturbing or supplementing typography, photographs and other artefacts, Foer provokes the reader to search for their meaning and to find a justification for their presence within the text, which connects the reader directly with the novel. Consequently, the reader can be likened to Oskar, playing himself/herself the Reconnaissance Expedition in the book by looking for clues and hidden messages left by the author. Nevertheless, just like in Oskar's case, such a quest sometimes does not lead anywhere, as for example in the scene where the reader tries to decode Grandfather's numeric message only to find out that most of it does not make sense. The reader, however, realizes that despite the fact that Oskar's search for the lock did not result in a great success, it was the search itself that was crucial, purifying and enriching for the little boy. The same proverbial motto, "It is not the destination that matters but the journey," applies also to the reader's quest since the search for the meaning of photographs, illustrations or scrapbook artefacts leads to more general and unexpected philosophical contemplations.

It follows from the analyses that despite some negative reviews that consider Foer's narrative strategy autotelic⁸, the multilayered well-founded core of the novel cannot be denied since it indisputably offers the above mentioned "third space", the "hybrid meaning", which is extremely difficult to determine, sometimes challenging to understand but unequivocally enriching for the world of novel.

⁸ e.g, review by W.R. Gree: „Disaster Recovery“
http://www.reviewsofbooks.com/extremely_loud_and_incredibly_close/review/
review by B.R. Meyers,: „A bag of tired tricks“
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/05/a-bag-of-tired-tricks/303913/>

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