

THE MULTIDIRECTIONALITY OF MEMORY: NETWORKS OF TRAUMA IN POST-9/11 LITERATURE

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Ever since the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 a conspicuous indecision between a rhetoric of absolute singularity and unprecedented shock on the one side, and an uncanny feeling of familiarity with such spectacles of terror and violence on the other side, has characterised discourses about the events on that day. Leaving aside here the notorious argument that links the alleged déjà-vu effect of the attacks to the imagery of disaster movies, as well as the question of political motivations behind any such discourse, this ambiguity appears to emerge mainly from two dialectically intertwined sources of experience: the purely subjective present and its historical and cultural embedding. Thus, responses have been varying between the individual's shock at the moment of impact —“the unthinkable broke out of a glorious late summer morning, which inexplicably turned into something close to apocalypse” (Borradori 2003: ix)— and the global audience's collective memory, both from factual history and the imaginary realm of science fiction; even the by now established conventions of naming the attacks support such a notion as they allow this rhetorical difference to come into view; consider the familiar reference to the events by the “name-date” (Redfield 2009: 14), 9/11, which points to a note of the incommensurate, of traumatic shock within established discourse, as Jacques Derrida has observed:

For the index pointing toward this date, the bare act, the minimal deictic, the minimalist aim of this dating, also marks something else. Namely, the fact that we

perhaps have no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this “thing” that has just happened, this supposed “event”. (In Borradori 2003: 86)

The likewise much-discussed term ‘Ground Zero’, on the other hand, functions within networks of cultural reference as it carries an undertone of quite another disaster (and one in which, ironically, the US had the role of perpetrator), namely of the site of a nuclear attack. It is interesting to note a subtle ambiguity inherent in this usage; the context of Hiroshima, at the one and same time called up and displaced, can be psychoanalytically interpreted to function as an appropriation that allows us to identify with the innocent victims rather than acknowledge historical guilt (Davis 2006: 6), or, in more general terms, to uncover a likewise generally evaded inseparability of vulnerability and power (Redfield 2009: 24). Underlying the acts of naming the terrorists attacks on September 11th 2001 is therefore a double equivocality; they waver between implications of the un-namable in the name-date 9/11 and an apparently instinctive need for analogy and integration as surfaces in the term ‘Ground Zero’, which, in itself and in relation to the nuclear attacks in World War II in particular, is illuminating as much as it is inhibiting; the historical parallel provides an emblem for enormous suffering and death even while evoking strategies of repression in line with the rhetoric of patriotism.

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This discursive tension finds its parallel in fictional 9/11 literature, where a noticeable tendency towards narrative strategies of cross-referencing can be observed; the intertextual frameworks, multi-perspectivity and complex character constellations which distinguish approaches towards the traumatic mark left by terrorist attacks on that day imply the potential of trauma to function as an intercultural and diachronic link. As other traumata, which have already been integrated into cultural memory, surface once more in the contemporary context, dialogical encounters between experiences of extremity develop and figurative frameworks emerge which allow this new trauma to be approached on a detour, whilst also complementing some specific characteristics of the reception of 9/11. For instance, the characteristic dominance of the visual mode and the compulsive recurrence of certain pictures —most famously the televised images of the planes crashing into the WTC, which came to resemble a mass-mediated traumatic flashback— might marginalise other possible modes of remembering that might have proved more productive in leading towards a meaningful integration into cognitive and affective networks, and thus enable a remembering beyond a fixation to trauma in structures of repetition and return. Narrative fiction, as I will argue, introduces exactly such a complex and alternative approach to the vast array of media imagery, political rhetoric and cultural expression after 9/11, by staging a fruitful, though not necessarily harmonious, encounter with traumata that have already been more deeply integrated into memory and thought.

As the historically singular nature of the attacks on September 11th 2001 is thus implicitly undermined, the quality of the trauma caused by the attacks and their repercussions on both an individual and a national, collective level is set in a different light. That this should be so especially for those directly involved is beyond questioning here, but the striking propensity in 9/11 fictional literature, the space where individual and collective experience most explicitly unite, to conjure up other, older traumata and intertextual references, gives rise to the impression that memorializing 9/11 functions in a more multidirectional way (following Rothberg 2009) than at first glance it appears to do. Literary trauma, rethought in the context of the terrorist attack on the US, emerges not primarily as an un-representable void, but rather in terms of a productive, albeit liminal in-between space of both individual and cultural remembering and aesthetic representation.

1. Trauma and the possibility of representation: Multimodal and multidirectional remembering

Ever since trauma theory first reached a peak at the time of the World Wars, theorists from various disciplines have conceived trauma as a crisis of memory and representation; in fact, the move from the individual pathology revolving around a dissociated, uncontrollable and inaccessible memory, onto a more culturally abstract, metaphorical level has in consequence led to a general understanding of trauma as a non-experience beyond direct reference and signification. This conceptual development appears as a common thread that runs through works ranging from Freud's history of Jewish culture as trauma in *Moses and Monotheism*, Walter Benjamin's observation of the demise of communicable experience after World War I in his essay *The Storyteller* and, to name but one prominent voice in the present context, Dori Laub's reflection after 9/11 that a "generalized amorphousness, bewilderment, and most of all, the numbness, seems to me a hallmark of collective massive trauma, a sense of shock so profound that it leads to both cognitive and emotional paralysis" (Laub 2002: 6). This perspective on trauma as a crisis of cultural expression has been given its most influential form in the context of the Third Reich's aftermath when the silenced genocide of the Holocaust penetrated general awareness. Under the auspices of two authors, Theodor W. Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard (whose respective, complex thoughts on the problematic relation between trauma and cultural expression I reduce to the most important common denominators for the context here), the dialectical tension between forgetting and remembering inherent in trauma assumed qualities beyond an individual

pathology of memory; they raised the inaccessibility of memory to an aesthetic and ethical imperative by explicitly radicalizing the psychological traumatic amnesia and implicitly extending the Benjaminian decline of communicable experience. As, in the aporetic thinking of both, the Holocaust can only be adequately remembered through the negativity of an aesthetics of silence, trauma now functions as a conceptual knot between a cultural-historical perspective on the incommensurate, a poetics of absence, and through this, an ethical postulate against forgetting. The aesthetics of trauma postulated here, therefore, centres on the force of a silenced howl in artistic representation, itself both called for by the need to remember and refused by the impossibility of adequate representation—the “unspeakability of history addressed by the unspeakability of art” (Rapaport 2002: 235), which is aesthetically and culturally self-aware. Oscillating between absence and presence, trauma thus acquires the status of a dissociated but insurmountable spectre which gains legitimacy as the non-identical and unsynthesizable within culture.

The most prominent contemporary voice in this tradition, though, is Cathy Caruth. Drawing on both Freudian psychoanalysis and poststructuralist theory, she conceptualises trauma as an inherently “missed experience” (1996: 62), that implodes comprehensibility and manifests itself only belatedly in its haunting, literal returns. Caruth takes trauma as a starting point to re-establish history and experience as phenomena beyond referentiality and comprehension that can only be accessed indirectly by a staging of the traumatic impact in a mainly literary and indirect manner; thus, trauma’s relation to human experience is inverted: it is not that trauma must be integrated, but that experience and knowledge itself must adapt to the indirectness of their emergence that arises from literary readings rather than the empiricism of the natural sciences: “In its active resistance to the platitudes of knowledge, this refusal [of comprehension] opens up the space for a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood” (1995: 155). Thinking about trauma thus, as a negative force that challenges literary representation, is a two-sided coin when considered in the context of post-9/11 literature. The notion that trauma occupies a liminal space of referentiality and signification is, on the one hand, an essential and omnipresent implication underlying relevant trauma literature; nevertheless, the contemporary context necessitates a rethinking of the negative referentiality of trauma and its latent preconditions of stasis and unvarying repetition in favour of a more dynamic model of indirect signification; hence, the denial of aesthetic mediation makes space for a more flexible approach that understands literary trauma as a narrative spiral around the traumatic kernel, and is characterised by the possibility of metaphoric truth claims instead of a referentiality completely unlinked to comprehension and meaning. In terms of the discussion of the aesthetic and

epistemological relations between various traumata which forms the centre of the argument here, there are two aspects worth special consideration; one concerns the temporality of trauma and centres on a more many-sided model of traumatic latency than pure Freudian belatedness, while the second involves an approach to traumatic memory that combines multidirectionality on the cultural-aesthetic level, and a multimodality of memory in the individual's case. The traumatic core, therefore, is neither solely the radical 'beyond' of literary representation in affinity to post-structuralist thinking, nor an affect to be worked on in terms of a positivist process of objectification. Rather, its truth claim in literary representation is of a multidirectional and indirectly metaphorical nature.

When examining closely the impact of traumatic memory on the individual mind, what emerges is a multimodal in-between process constituted by interactions and disruptions between elements of cognition and articulation, the visual, and the corporal. By way of both analogy and interaction, this borderline space of the faculties of the mind ties in with the seesaw of cultural memory as specific traumata evoke different modes of remembering. Indexical reference on a visual and physical plane may account for most indications of 9/11 in post-9/11 literature, whereas the representation of 'older' traumata adds a layer of articulation and communicability (though not necessarily always successful) to the more recent shock. Drawing on Dominick LaCapra's helpful distinction between the "acting out" of trauma, a melancholic state of inescapability and repetition, and its more dynamic and therapeutic "working through" (2001), the interrelation between the multidirectional framework described above and the disruptive, bodily and visual indices, which indicate the more recent trauma, can be described in terms of a narrative approximation, with a latent but pervasive aspect of the 'not quite' to it.

Most arguments against the representability of trauma in literature take the phenomenon of dissociation as their starting point. As the traumatic shock unsettles the victim's mind frame to the point where no experiential memory can be formed, trauma becomes what Cathy Caruth aptly describes as an experience in which forgetting is inherent (1995: 7); it therefore eludes cognitive control and engulfs the traumatised person in an eternal traumatic present to re-live their shock in uncontrollably repetitive nightmares and physical re-enactments. Of particular interest here is not the implosion of conscious remembering as such, but the very complexity of traumatic memory as it alternates between inscriptions in the body, visual manifestations, and verbal symbolization. Departing from Freud, who understood the memory traces of affect and consciousness to be mutually exclusive, these modes of memory appear to form an interactive structure of dynamic

remembering in contemporary trauma literature. The bodily scar, a “wound that cries out” (Caruth 1996: 3) remains pre-linguistic; as it is written on and externalised by the body, trauma insists on the primordial shock at the centre of traumatic experience that, as such, is beyond the reach of words. The body thus functions as a site of index to trauma, an immediate and contiguous reference without communicable meaning attached to it. Traumatic visual images are in a similar way burnt into traumatic memory; Horowitz and others have noted the literality of traumatic images which border on the intensity of immediate perception (Horowitz 1999: 3), making them structurally similar to the bodily wound as un-encoded messages that refer rather than mean and are consequently often accorded the status of a counter- or “phantom memory” (“Phantomerinnerung”, Assmann 2006: 221). Both the body and the visual, by the way, occupy special spaces in memorializing 9/11 and are therefore of specific contextual significance in literature relating to this event; while the visual image, repeated on screens all over the world, seemed to reign in the aftermath of the attacks, the wounded body has been all but excluded from official discourses about the attacks.

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On a third and final note, verbal articulation of traumatic experience constitutes a different mode of remembering, not only because it implies a more detached point of view and therapeutic value, but especially as it introduces trauma into the realm of symbolization and communication. In the multimodal model of traumatic remembering as understood here, though, telling is not the teleological aim of all efforts; the emphasis lies rather on the mutual interactions and influences between the different modes, be they indexical or symbolic, that retain the complexity of trauma as a force that implodes affect and meaning, body and mind.

In the instances of trauma literature discussed here, this multimodality of memory is paralleled on the level of collective memory by a similar in-between state, not concerning individual faculties but historical experiences. Telling 9/11 indirectly through the reception patterns and symbolic frames of traumatic events that actually are in essence disparate, be they the nightmarish experience of bomb raids or the Holocaust, raises questions concerning the nature of collective and historical memory and also calls for further examination of how such an oscillation ties in with the possibility of literary reference to trauma and the various modes of remembering as sketched out above.

In the context of studies on cultural memory, one such focus on the possible interrelations between traumatic experiences has been prepared mainly by Michael Rothberg’s theory of the multidirectionality of collective memory, the preconditions of which prove crucial in our context here as he formulates the way in which memories of different, mainly traumatic events, can function and result in a productive mutual enrichment (Rothberg 2009). This model presupposes

collective memory in terms of a processual “mnemonic labor” (Rothberg 2009: 15) which emerges from negotiations between social groups and their respective memorial focal points in a malleable, media-informed public sphere. Multidirectional memory therefore is not, and emphatically so, a competitive struggle for recognition in which the remembrance of certain historical traumata blocks out others, as has been implied in criticism which sees the strong Holocaust memorial culture in the US as a reason for a relative displacement of the suffering of slaves or Native Americans in official remembrance (Rothberg 2009: 3). Rather, Rothberg explores the dialogical exchanges between memory traditions which take the form of a non-linear remapping of collective memory; just as, for instance, W.E.B. Du Bois’ visit to the Warsaw Ghetto resulted in his concept of a double consciousness in which experiences of other minority groups enter into the African American perspective, such multidirectional processes result in establishing connections between apparently disparate events in history but also, and this is equally important, serve to crystallize their specificities (Rothberg 2009: 111). The detour through collective memory to incorporate traumata in various stages of integration and symbolization constitutes, therefore, not simply a form of displacement, but can provide enriching filters and a cultural analogue to the analyst-patient dialogue in psychoanalysis to help to articulate the apparently incommensurate experience of 9/11.

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Casting a side-glance at the foundational texts of trauma theory to explore this culturally informed hypothesis on the individual level as well, it is interesting to note that the notion of trauma as a space of oscillation and in-between-ness can, in its essence, be traced back to observations by Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries. In his writing, Freud crystallizes a question that is crucial when considering diachronic relations and trauma, namely that of traumatic temporality. When compared, the contemporary model of multidirectional memory and Freud’s diagnosis that traumata have the potential to trigger each other into consciousness complement each other on their respective levels of cultural discourse and the individual mind (Freud 1892). If the newer traumatic shock can evoke an older one and in turn add meaning to the recent trauma, then traumatic temporality assumes the quality of what LaPlanche would later term the “seesaw effect” (in Caruth 2002: 102) which in its mutual movement adds to the haunting belatedness and repetitiveness of re-enactments and nightmares from which trauma victims suffer. Trauma, it can thus be said, is an experience essentially constituted by a specific and complex temporality of cross-reference that goes beyond a restricted focus on literal repetition. The back-and-forth movement of traumatic temporality and memory thus encourages a model of trauma aesthetics that builds on a creative dialectic instead of closure by complete and unreflective integration into narrative coherence.

While literary trauma in the context of 9/11 can, within this framework, be described as multimodal and multidirectional, this does not mean a return to an independent network of signifiers. Self-referentiality remains an important implication of this aesthetic of search and processual approximation to the initially dissociated experience, and functions as a metafictional pointer to the difficulty of representing trauma, but there exists also, and crucially so, a strong overtone of cross-generational communicability of trauma. Therefore, trauma is signified in a way that can be described as a functional analogy to Ricoeur's concept of metaphorical truth, as he positions metaphor ultimately within the contained copula of the verb 'to be': "The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like'. If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally 'tensive' sense of the word 'truth'" (Ricoeur 1986: 7). Comparable to this tension between the 'is' and 'is not', the inherent self-awareness of the simultaneous likeness of traumatic experience across time and place and its incompatibility is the key to the authenticity of an indirect signification of trauma. The trauma of Hiroshima, of bomb raids in WWII in 9/11 literature, at the same time is and is not the 9/11 survivor's trauma as it comes close in impact and structure of perception but remains at distance in essence. However, and just as importantly, Ricoeur goes beyond this gap within metaphor by exploiting its epistemological potential as a combination of reference and an innovation in meaning, and it is in just this way that literary trauma steps out of the mere negativity of the void into a status of communicability, not as a positively but as a metaphorically signified, not unproblematic closure or sublimation, but liminal space of dialectic articulation and communication, in an "in-between-voice of un-decidability and the unavailability or radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions" (LaCapra 2001: 20). What surfaces, however, is the latent possibility of comprehension and metaphorical truth. The potential of aesthetic representation is thus recognized, and added to as specifically literary forms of metaphorical referentiality and signification are acknowledged.

To put these arguments in a nutshell, the multidirectionality and multimodality of traumatic narration relate in various ways; they form analogies on the cultural and the individual level in doing justice to trauma as both transhistorical and singular, a pathology of the mind as well as the body and senses; moreover, though, trauma is re-integrated into the realm of referentiality and symbolization within the tentative and experimental space which literature provides, allowing an approach trauma on the detour of indirect reference through collective memory. The various traumatic experiences evoked in 9/11 literature furnish different modes of remembering and thus function as cultural filters and narrative support towards framing the new, as yet uncomprehended trauma of September 11th.

2. Intergenerational and intertextual networks in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In this paper, I focus on Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and on Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, as both exemplify the association of 9/11 in the minds of traumatised Manhattanites with traumata stemming from WWII, but moreover offer perspectives which differ in an interesting way and are in part genre-related. While in Spiegelman's graphic novel, which depicts the author's troubled state of mind after the attacks in his own neighbourhood, the secondary trauma of the Holocaust functions as part of a broader intertextual search for strategies of comprehension, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* an 'intertraumatic' network is established in which differing representational techniques of dealing with specific traumatic events are exemplified from the points of view of the three protagonists. Both Spiegelman's and Foer's works, though, combine the movement between traumata with a narrative tension (a tension between what I will term 'indexical' reference to 9/11) and more coherently phrased accounts of other traumatic events. Trauma in Foer's and Spiegelman's texts therefore emerges as a 2-way circuit: the more performative, often visualised references to 9/11 provide a metacommentary of speechlessness, whereas the integration of other texts and traumata offers a cognitive prosthesis for dealing with 9/11 as well as a narrative one with the survivors' depiction of traumatic events. The authenticity of such trauma narratives, however, arises from exactly this combination, as the actual terror cannot be conveyed in merely documentary reference, but lies in its structure of reception — the implosion of conceptual networks, struggles of representation and the metatextually implied difficulty of dealing with trauma.

The Leitmotif of J.S. Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the chaotic and experimental quest (for the matching lock to a key found in his late father's closet) that the hyperactive boy Oskar conducts in order to come to terms with the death of his father in the World Trade Centre, underlines the novel's indirect and many-sided approach to writing trauma; its embedding within the interwoven perspectives of his grandparents, haunted by memories of the air raids in World War II, adds a layer of interaction with historical memory to the child's individual level. While the voices of the three protagonists merge together and split apart, the novel moves through the geography of New York, recent history and the characters' imploded memories and shattered lives towards individually characteristic and aesthetically complementary recollections of the initially dissociated traumatic experience. While the novel has been criticised for its detachment from socio-political

circumstances and its melodramatic mode, a narrative strategy undoubtedly present throughout the text and interpreted by Sven Cvek to exemplify a national process of restorative mourning (2011: 65), its embedding in broader discourses lies on a level different from direct political engagement: it works as a prism in which historical experiences and specific representational strategies are made to mutually interact.

Oskar, a representative example of the outsider-as-victim of the highly mediated terrorist attacks, is traumatized when he receives phone messages from his father in the World Trade Centre and is compelled to listen to his increasingly desperate voice without being able to pick up the phone; this indirectness of experience, though, also points to its specific nature as traumatic memory; what haunts Oskar is, after all, not only the phone messages and thus his own, albeit partly displaced, memory, but also his compulsion to picture his father's death and therefore an experience unlinked to himself; he is hit by the impact of 9/11 without actually witnessing it.

The disruptive manner in which references to the destruction of the World Trade Centre emerge throughout the novel emphasises this insistent absence, referred to but elusive, of which the photograph of a man jumping from the skyscraper is the epitomous example both in this novel as in the commemoration of 9/11 as such. This disturbing image evokes Aleida Assmann's commentary on the potential of photography to turn into memory phantoms in a very literal way, as its real-life model was at times dissociated from official discourses and withdrawn from public circulation but has nevertheless retained its disturbing force. Functioning in a paradoxical manner, it suggests the documentary value of the photographic picture which appeals to Oskar in his search for the facts behind his father's death, but, in an ironic twist, turns out to depart from this promise and adopt a referential value that, following Peirce's terminology, can be termed indexical rather than epistemological; the index as a sign, in opposition to an icon or a symbol, is one which "stands for its object by virtue of a real connection with it, or because it forces the mind to attend to that object" (Peirce 1895: 14); it is this relation of contiguity, and the singularity of the referent it is tied to and whose existence it proves, that defines Peircean indexicality and accounts for its productivity here. The photographic image is such a referent and therefore a form of evocation that excludes any denotative ascription of meaning and relies solely on its contiguity to the referent. It provides a direct link to the traumatic experience itself which disrupts narrative coherence and figurative referentialities analogously to the insistence of individual bodily memories of the victim's mental integrity. It is the fact of its occurrence, not the what happened, but the simple confirmation, that something must have happened, which visuality and corporality convey as specific

signifiers as they mark the occurrence of an event and convey its affective content, without stating its nature or context.

The image of the jumping man, therefore, is no source of knowledge and understanding, but a discomfiting proof of a terror that remains outside the child-protagonist's conceptual frame—as Oskar comments, “The closer you look, the less you see” (Foer 2006: 293)—in its mere material contiguity to the event, a Barthesian indexical statement of the “ça, c'est ça, c'est tel” (Barthes 1980: 16) stemming from the photograph's status as imprint of the image itself on paper.

In this context, it is helpful to pause to consider the role of the unmediated visual in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in more general terms. The reproduced photographs and excerpts from diaries by Oskar and his Grandfather which intersperse the text are diverse as to their content—photographs from Oskar's collection, for instance, range from mating turtles to performances of Hamlet, another trauma intertext—and some are mere illustrations of the boy's experiences; what is interesting, though, is that especially those photos which are not taken by Oskar himself, but have been collected or printed out like the image of the jumper, remain largely uncontextualised, frozen moments that exist beyond cognitive reflection or articulation and outline the uncanny within Oskar's rambles. Even though this static character is modified with the introduction of flexibility to the pivotal image of the falling man at the end of the novel, when Oskar reverses the temporal order to make him ‘fall’ upwards into safety instead of to his certain death and thus converts the image into something he may be able to integrate into his worldview, the illusory side to this dreamy end puts a strong question mark behind this attempt to tame this traumatic image.

Stemming from a more personal background, but similar in function, are the corporal scars and bruises Oskar inflicts on himself to exteriorise his inner pain, as well as the structurally more defining phone messages which Oskar continually returns to in his efforts to grasp the traumatic moment on September 11th. Rather than offering direct access to his father's last minutes, his words point to an experience that, in its terror, is indicated but not articulated or communicated, “Smoky. I was hoping you would. Be. Home. I don't know if you've heard about what's happened. But. I. Just wanted you to know that I'm OK. Everything. Is. Fine” (Foer 2006: 69). When alluding to the destruction of the Twin Towers in Foer's novel, a referential relation to what remains an unknowable void is therefore established to overlay symbolic meaning or factual knowledge in Foer's novel. Thus, these references to 9/11 serve to establish an impression of unspeakability as their indexical character highlights their proximity to traumatic flashbacks; throughout the text, they indicate the traumatic core at the centre of the narrative.

“That is what death is like” (Foer 2006: 187) is how a survivor finishes her account of the Hiroshima nuclear attack, which Oskar plays out to his stunned classmates; and that is, all in all, what the contributions by survivors of traumatic events other than 9/11 provide in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. In the novel, the inclusion of the older trauma of Oskar’s grandparents, the firebombing of Dresden in WWII, also represents a turn towards a verbal communication of trauma.

Oskar’s paternal grandparents have both survived the bombing of Dresden and remain deeply traumatized by the experience, trapped in a past whose wounds they externalize in their numbed senses of sight and speech. In a striking paradox, though, the mute grandfather becomes the central figure in the novel to articulate trauma in a verbal way as he manages to put his experiences into written words in a letter to his son: “I saw humans melted into thick pools of liquid [...], I saw bodies crackling like embers, laughing” (Foer 2006: 211). The realistic style of his depiction of the horrific events of that night reverses the indirect references to 9/11 into their opposite, styling it into a contrastive foil that, together with the Hiroshima survivor’s account, exemplifies a marginalised but uncompromising position in trauma aesthetics, namely W.G. Sebald’s ‘documentary realism’. While sharing a strong scepticism towards artistic renderings of trauma with his contemporary Adorno, he arrives at an ideal that is diagonally opposed to the latter’s negativity:

The ideal of truth inherent in its entirely unpretentious objectivity, at least over long passages, proves itself the only legitimate reason for continuing to produce literature in the face of total destruction. Conversely, the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an annihilated world is a process depriving literature of its right to exist. (Sebald 2003: 53)

Mr Schell’s letter, though, simultaneously deconstructs this potentially slightly pornographic approach on a metatextual level as the letter’s reproduction in the novel is strewn with the red markings his son made when reading it, following his habit of correcting mistakes in texts. Whereas Sebald appraises radical realism as the only ethically legitimate stance of narrating the air raids, this reaction suggests helpless incomprehension rather than communication, and sheds doubt on the potential of a documentary depiction of traumatic events alone to convey the complexity and shock of the experience.

Oskar’s grandmother, on the other hand, for most of the novel fails to put her memories into words. It is only after her primary trauma is triggered by the secondary one of 9/11 in which she loses her son, that she communicates her past to her grandson Oskar; in an even more pronounced way than is the case with her husband, her traumata merge into each other in one everlasting traumatic present, “like the space was collapsing onto us” (Foer 2006: 228), in which details from the

night of the bombing supply parallels for what happens in the present. “Rubble” (Foer 2006: 232), for instance, is such an instance of a two-fold reference in that it recalls both the debris of the WTC under which her son is buried and the ruins of her parents’ house in Dresden. Her narrative, generally more associative and emotional in tone than her husband’s, is more accessible and at the same time more complex; instead of offering a crass mirror of near-death and violence, she still displaces experiences which nevertheless must be central to the traumatic impact of her experience, such as her father’s last words. In this way, communicability is achieved around forgetting, while absolute faithfulness induces opaqueness in the reader. Consequently, the grandparents’ letters, taken individually, can be read as failed communications as, in the face of extremity, the potential of language to convey meaning itself is foregrounded and revealed as limited: “Language is strained to the breaking point. Being forced to its expressive extremes of dense volubility, on the one hand, and ominous silence, on the other, it is barely capable of serving its traditional function as a vehicle of communication between the generations” (Versluys 2009: 80).

What emerges thus is a self-reflexive metalevel, which emphasises the collapsing force of trauma on literary representation and language and complements the psychological trauma suffered by the protagonists. The communicatory rupture between the novel’s characters, therefore, is not replayed in exactly the same terms on the compositional level. It is from the perspective of the reader that the fragmenting impact of trauma, psychologically, socially and in terms of its artistic expression, becomes readable as the multiple voices come to interact as complementary parts of a self-reflexive search for representation.

Moreover, and on a slightly different note, the setting of this act of writing trauma in the non-space of an airport adds a more abstract level to ‘Grandma’s’ individual layers of trauma. This is a telling reflection on the articulatory and communicatory potential of the intermediary in trauma literature, just as a metafictional implication about the specificity of literature in broader cultural discourse, the airport as “Not coming or going. Not something or nothing. Not yes or no” (Foer 2006: 312) frames this multilayered representation of trauma with the individual and associative freedom that comes with its ultimate ambivalence.

In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the compositional heteroglossia can thus be said to provide the basis of a shared ethics of vulnerability, as Ilka Saal suggests (2011: 464); however, this is not to be understood in terms of a complete equality of experience and its literary representation, as witnesses from World War II supply what remains outside the field of vision of the external witness of 9/11, and to a certain extent a taboo in official commemoration of the attacks: the actual individual suffering and inhuman grotesqueness of violence at that scale. While the

three witnessing voices of Oskar and his grandparents, and their respective modes of remembering, are too far apart to smooth trauma as depicted here into a homogenous, globalized state of mind, the interweaving perspectives nevertheless underline the interactive potential between ways of dealing with traumatic memories and contrastive narrative strategies, even though the events behind them may be largely incomparable —the individual's suffering remains the common fact. While the communication between the protagonists themselves remains largely obstructed, their complexity both in point of view and individual setup as well as narrative technique provides the reader with a multilayered network of traumatic experience that, latently and self-reflexively, makes trauma readable. Not forcing into coherence but multimodal remembering, not singularity and closure but an allowance for voices from different historical backgrounds, not pure negativism but narrative approximation, the kind of trauma narrative as seen in Foer's novel suggests a conformity to the *Zeitgeist* and socially responsible obligation to tell and attribute meaning to the events of 9/11.

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Reflections on the multidirectional potential of traumatic memory, though, lead to different conclusions when considering Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which aligns efforts to grasp his own traumatized state of mind with an experimental search for means to represent the condition of society after the attacks. In his introduction, Spiegelman very distinctly makes his transgenerational inheritance of a sensitiveness towards traumatic events the framework of this hybrid cartoon, handed down to him from his parents whose sufferings in the Holocaust he made the topic of his *Maus*-cartoons, as well as his ambiguous feelings towards his own initial impression of the absolute singularity of the attacks on September 11th and their ensuing, politically initiated closure. Leaving the political undertones and the intriguing relationship between satire and trauma aside for present purposes, this oscillation between primary and secondary trauma is, of course, of major interest and is supplemented by a different kind of seesawing; Spiegelman constructs an intertextual, genre-centred framework of cartoons as a specific form of cultural expression, deeply ingrained in everyday culture and concerns, which form a productively contrasting background for the insistently recurrent images of the glowing towers of the World Trade Centre.

The one leitmotif that relentlessly permeates Spiegelman's tumultuously collage-like, outsized panels is a digitalised reproduction of the North Tower at the moment before collapse. A "vision of disintegration [...] burned onto the inside of my eyelids" (Spiegelman 2004: introductory panel), this skeletal rendering of an architectural structure void of human life assumes the character of an indelible mark of trauma on the mind and body of the author-protagonist. It is also, and essentially, an outsider's observation and therefore more directly symbolizes the

traumatic implosion of the familiar architectural and socio-cultural environment than the impact of the attacks on the individual within. The human suffering that underlies the traumatic impact of this distinctly abstract vision is thus placed in the emptiness within, a visualised traumatic gap of what cannot be witnessed from the outside and what exceeds straightforward integration and artistic representation. There is, all in all, a general impression in Spiegelman's cartoon panels that the attacks as such are discursively close to the unspeakable. When, for instance, "Awesome" (Spiegelman 2004: panel 2) is the term he comes up with to describe the moment when he heard the Tower falling, this resembles more an ironic comment on the lack of adequate linguistic referents than an actual description and complements the visual indication of an epistemological divide. Around this central image, though, instances of other traumata as well as cartoon microcosms are drawn up to fulfil a twofold function; they help chart the impact of 9/11 on cultural identity and structures of meaning on the one hand, and allow the void indicated in the image of the glowing tower to be approached on the other hand.

First and foremost, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is visually integrated into collective national memory, as it is set between two reproductions of a newspaper title featuring another September in US history, namely exactly a century before in 1901, when President McKinley was assassinated. While the first newspaper page preceding the actual comix appears as a comparatively authentic reproduction, it is covered in a layer of headlines referring to the post-9/11 world at the end. The headline "President's wound reopened. Slight change for worse" (Spiegelman 2004) sets the slightly fatalistic tone for the graphic novel but simultaneously embeds 9/11 within a framework of historical national shock; the terrorist attacks, such is the suggestion, are not something that is absolutely unforeseen, but rather a vulnerability triggered freshly into consciousness on a collective level; the individual and collective experience emerge as parallels here, as the individual son of Holocaust survivors also experiences his indirect, transferred trauma surfacing with the shock of the new one. While this diachronic alternation is a typical instance of the intergenerational transmission of trauma (see, for example, Kühner 2007: 68) as well as a basic implication of Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory, the Holocaust in *In the Shadow of No Towers* also assumes a more productive function in providing an existent symbolic system for representing trauma. The highly iconic *Maus* imagery he developed in his Holocaust cartoons thus allows Spiegelman the means with which to express the feeling of helpless vulnerability that is new to him as an individual. Due to the abstractness of the imagery, the implication is not so much an equation of Holocaust suffering and 9/11 (which, if the case, would indeed have been questionable), but rather a movement away from this tradition of Jewish suffering to a repetition with a difference; the *Maus* imagery is re-valued in the contemporary context to suggest trauma as independent

of place and time, a state of mind unlinked to specific events. Historical trauma here, therefore, does not fill the void of 9/11 with concise images of suffering; rather, an implication of speechlessness is preserved. Just as no apt words are found for the collapse of the World Trade Centre, “indescribable” (Spiegelman 2004: panel 3) is the term transferred from Spiegelman’s father’s memories about the smoke in Auschwitz to the toxic stench on Ground Zero. Consequently, the value of historical references lies in the existence of a symbolic system in order to represent and communicate trauma as a mental state, even while and because the sense of a non-articulated shock impact that wavers beneath this transfer is preserved. History in *In the Shadow of No Towers* therefore emerges, on an individual as well as cultural level, as a history of trauma in which the artistic representations of disparate events inform each other. In a productive association between traumatic belatedness and materialistic historiography, Sven Cvek describes this dynamic in Benjaminian terms, as a pattern of cyclic repetition structured by the intrusions of latent historical events into the present. This model of history in its most basic assumptions, even though the revolutionary, illuminative potential of the moment in which the time spheres implode, seems a rather individualistically utopian view in the face of Spiegelman’s engagement in the negotiation of meaning in the contemporary media-saturated reality. It is nevertheless an interesting precursor of multidirectional models of collective remembering. Through the intergenerational trauma of the author-protagonist, the Holocaust and 9/11 therefore enter into a “generative dialogue” (Cvek 2011: 95) in which both emerge as much through their analogies as their discrepancies.

The *Maus* references, however, are not the only and not even the most conspicuous instance of a multidirectional trauma representation here. *In the Shadow of No Towers* owes its hybridity to a large extent to an intertext of historical cartoons. Departing from their characteristically closed symbolic microcosms and neat and linear structure, these implode into each other and suffuse the graphic novel’s context in a search for adequate expression as the specific cultural memory of newspaper cartoons is activated on a disordered surface. In a transformatory pastiche, the innocent anarchism of these cartoon heroes turns into 21st-century terror and violence, as the 19th century ‘Katzenjammer Kids’ run in fear with the burning towers on their heads, or their ‘Uncle Screwloose’ emerges as a vengeful caricature of US militarism fighting the ‘Iraknid’ bug (Spiegelman 2004: panel 5). The world after 9/11, which the author-protagonist remains at odds with throughout the cartoon, is thus made available by contrast; the reader can nostalgically peruse the included comics supplement to witness the endearingly rebellious original figures contained in their boxes and microcosms, whilst their breaking loose and collapse into the contemporary narrative manifests a cultural-aesthetic traumatic disintegration of distinctive borderlines and categories of

understanding. Still, and crucially, these cartoons also supply iconic frameworks to work with and to communicate to a wider public. While the glowing tower remains comparatively static, it is the detour through the flexible cartoons that allows the portrayal of a traumatic implosion and the process of working through which finally results, again, in their and the traumatic glowing tower's containment within the panel-filling towers on the last page. The author-protagonist and his family remain vulnerably depicted as *Maus* characters, but with the orderly structuring of the cartoon boxes the shock impact mirrored by the historical cartoons, chaotically jumbled up before, seems to have been detained. Intertextuality in this trauma narrative is therefore not limited to the suggestion of inescapability, which Ann Whitehead emphasises (2004: 90), but provides a symbolic framework with which to access 9/11.

The inclusion of older traumata in narrative discourses on September 11th, paradoxical at first glance, thus emerges as a complex attribute of fictional literature in that it sheds new light on traumatic signification as an indirect but dynamic process, allows the exploration of the interrelations between the multimodal nature of individual memory, the multidirectionality of collective remembering and their respective narrative potentials, and, lastly, carries implications for literature as a factor of flexibilisation in broader cultural discourse.

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A form of witnessing that emanates from a border space between distinct historical traumata rather than the contemporary context alone, this oscillation acknowledges the dilemma of representing the elusive shock of traumatic experience while, simultaneously, allowing the possibility of communication to arise and move beyond conveying a purely negative void. The contemporary trauma narratives after 9/11, therefore, depart from the trauma aesthetic indebted to Adorno or Lyotard in their emphasis on the productive potential of diachronic detours through historical traumata and intertextual experiment with representational possibilities. Because witnesses and iconic systems from disparate experiences enter into a mutual interaction and complementation, the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 enter into a framework that encourages telling and makes accessible what was initially experienced as incommensurate.

Returning to the broader context of post-9/11 discourses, the instances of literature discussed here open up the rhetoric of singularity that was pervasive especially in the immediate aftermath of the attacks in a way that strongly differs from simple displacement, undifferentiated comparison or a certain competitiveness between the commemoration of different collective traumata, be it WWII or 9/11. Their multidirectionality and multimodality counter tendencies of oversimplification and closure whilst providing a historically and aesthetically dynamic possibility of remembering.

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