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## Visions of Terror : Reconstructing Literature Through 9/11 Texts

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Visions of Terror: Reconstructing Literature through 9/11 Texts

by

Jennifer Michelle Agens

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

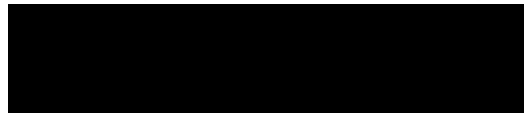
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## Abstract

The shift in communication since the turn of the century necessitates an understanding of visual rhetoric. Critics claim that verbal communication is more effective than using images to communicate ideas. However, visual rhetoricians argue that images appeal to the reader's emotions, thus making an immediate, truthful, and powerful impact. The purpose of my research is to examine the functionality of visual rhetoric and to determine how this field enhances 21st century communication. In consideration of how visual rhetoric has shaped literature since the turn of the century, I have concluded that the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks have made an enormous impact on the writing processes of contemporary writers. Due to the documented visual saturation of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the visual irrevocably influences the ways in which present-day writers compose. I argue that the visual saturation of 9/11 triggers traumatic symptoms in victims who experienced the attacks. Trauma theorists argue that narrative writing is a strong coping mechanism for alleviating symptoms of trauma. However, given the visual saturation of the attacks, prose writing, I argue, is not powerful enough to assuage trauma. The research I have conducted suggests that a multimodal form of writing is necessary in an effort to confront the issues of 9/11 traumas. I have applied theories of visual rhetoric and trauma theory to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, both of which are deemed "trauma narratives." I argue that these texts must combine images and words in order to communicate notions of trauma and national tragedy. The literature under study exemplifies how a multimodal approach to literature is necessary to meet the demands of a visually oriented world of communication.

**VISIONS OF TERROR: RECONSTRUCTING LITERATURE  
THROUGH 9/11 TEXTS**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**For the degree of Master of Arts**

**by**

**JENNIFER MICHELLE AGENS**

**Montclair State University**

**Montclair, NJ**

**May 2014**

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## Chapter 1: Addressing Trauma: The Use of Visual Rhetoric in 9/11 Literature

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Don DeLillo wrote, “The narrative ends in the rubble, and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative” (34). The narrative once understood by Americans— a familiar story of collective strength and prosperity— was, as DeLillo notes, buried underneath the ash and debris at the site of impact. The narrative can be understood as a set of symbols representing a cultural and national identity. After the attacks, the narrative of America had been drastically altered. And, for many, it would be important to reestablish a sense of identity. Thus, the writing of a counter-narrative would be an act of reframing the national symbol. DeLillo claims that the “world narrative” had been taken into the hands of terrorists, and that it is “*our* lives and minds that are occupied now. This catastrophic event changes the way we think and act...Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs, which means we are living in a place of danger and rage” (33). The construction of a narrative gives an authoritative power to the writer. He or she is able to determine what gets written and what gets omitted. The “world narrative” taken into the hands of terrorists implies that America at once lost authoritative power at the time of the attack. The narrative previously constructed by this world power, America, was entirely disrupted, and the familiarity of daily life was made unrecognizable. The new narrative Americans were faced with told a story of an unexpected attack; the story of how the world had been turned upside down. The new narrative, above anything else, began to tell a story about distortion and trauma. Despite the immediate shift in authorship, DeLillo calls upon the victims to regain authoritative power. With the known narrative buried in the rubble, DeLillo beckons for readers to help write a “counter-narrative.” The counter-narrative

would serve as a means to help Americans climb out from under the ashes, confront the new “place of danger and rage,” and to grapple with an unfamiliar and uncomfortable way of thinking. Ultimately, the writing of a new story would allow a disrupted nation to work through an unsettling trauma, and would enable Americans to make sense of the incomprehensible. The counter-narrative would serve as a means for recovery in a time of national struggle. And above all, it would help to reshape the symbol of national and cultural identity.

DeLillo’s essay, “In the Ruins of the Future,” was published in *Harper’s Magazine* in December 2001, only a few short months after the attacks on September 11th. His essay was among the first non-journalistic pieces to emerge in the aftermath of the attacks. Unlike the media coverage which only presented and re-presented facts as they were made available, DeLillo’s piece is thought-provoking and extraordinarily vivid, and it asks readers to consider the state of America before, during, and after the attacks. However, what is most prevalent in the essay is a call to move forward. DeLillo clearly describes the visual scenes of the attacks and the emotions generated throughout the day, but he does not conclude with a somber tone. Instead, through his acknowledgment of the sheer devastation, he asks his readers to move beyond the calamity and distress to make sense of the new world in which they must now live. That is not to say the attacks should be forgotten or repressed, but rather, the only way to go about living, it is suggested, is to acknowledge the terror and make sense of it. For DeLillo, writing about his experiences with the attacks was the first step in moving away from the terror. And the plea for the nation to “write” in response to 9/11, too, is a means toward unifying and healing the wounds felt by the nation. DeLillo’s essay is among the first pieces of writing to address



the issue of recovering from trauma stemming from the attacks. Many other published writers, such as Art Spiegelman, Jonathan Safran Foer, Philip Roth, and Alissa Torres, would follow in suit in the months and years after the attacks.

The call to write a counter-narrative, however, is neither simple nor straightforward. The aftermath of the attacks had left Americans, collectively, in a state of dismay. The terrorist attacks were, undoubtedly, traumatic events. The cataclysm of the attacks, in effect, created not only individual traumas, but also a national, collective trauma. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders defines trauma as:

...an event that involves a “recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone,” noting, however, that the definition and its criteria have various ambiguities and that what constitutes “a recognizable stressor” remains subject to debate....As the subject of study in trauma theory, then, ‘trauma’ refers not so much to the traumatic event as to the traumatic aftermath, the post-traumatic stage. Trauma thus denotes the recurrence or repetition of the stressor event through memory, dreams, narrative and/or various symptoms known under the definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. (qtd. in Visser 271-72)

In the case of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the attacks constitute the traumatic event, and the trauma exists because of the aftermath. Victims suffering from trauma, then, experience symptoms because of a recurrence of the stressor. The attacks themselves did not recur, causing symptoms to emerge, but rather the media coverage, which continuously showed images of the attacks, would be enough to warrant a victim to experience post-traumatic stress disorder. Thus, the act of remembering and recalling

the event is what contributes to destabilization and difficulty with functioning on a day-to-day basis. To further illustrate how debilitating trauma can be, Marc Redfield writes, "Catastrophic experiences outstrip understanding: disrupting the habitual ways we make sense of the world, they feel unreal precisely because they are overwhelming" (68), and Linda S. Kauffman defines the effects of trauma to be "the shattering of psychic identity, the sense of a pervasive threat in everyday life, and a feeling of lack and humiliation" (649). In the aftermath, many Americans felt extraordinarily threatened and unsafe. Many changed their routines in an effort to feel more protected and armed to deal with the possibility of an external threat. Janoff-Bulman and Sheikh write, "We are psychologically unprepared for catastrophic outcomes, and thus it is perhaps not surprising that a phrase echoed time and again by survivors is 'I never thought it could happen to me'" (325). For Americans, the attacks on 9/11 were entirely unexpected, and in the aftermath, the survivors were essentially "thrown into a state of extreme anxiety and disequilibrium" which led to an experience of "existential crisis regarding questions of randomness, meaning, value, and the selective incidence of their misfortune" (Janoff-Bulman and Sheikh 325). Psychologists would suggest that it is critical for survivors dealing with an "existential crisis" to work through the trauma in order to recover and regain a sense of stability and normalcy. This is true, too, for the survivors of the attacks. There was a great need to restore individual and national order after the attacks, but how would a nation be able to stabilize and diminish the trauma?

In order for the nation to overcome the shock and trauma that stemmed from the attacks, individuals would first need to learn to overcome what was lost, what had happened, and ultimately, find a way to sort through the fragments of what remained.

Janoff-Bulman and Sheikh argue:

In the aftermath of traumatic events, survivors struggle to rebuild shattered assumptions and reestablish a sense of safety and security. Survivors of individual trauma engage in cognitive-emotional strategies and behaviors that, overtime, afford a renewed sense of meaning, value, and control in the face of a world that is no longer wholly benevolent and predictable....Similarly, survivors of a national trauma also strive to rebuild a sense of safety and protection in a world that suddenly seems unfamiliar and threatening, a world in which another terrorist attack could happen at any time. (326)

While much of what hinders recuperation is a feeling of unfamiliarity and “shattered assumptions,” it is indeed possible to work through trauma by employing a variety of strategies that ask victims to witness and testify to the traumatic stressor (Kauffman 654). For Americans to return to a state of normalcy, and to pick up to “write” the “counter-narrative,” a confrontation with the trauma would need to occur. A traumatized victim, then, would need to have agency in confronting the stressors that have caused traumatic symptoms. Having agency over the stressors would enable the victim to take control over the experienced symptoms, thus helping to alleviate symptoms of trauma and to subdue vivid and painful remembering of the traumatic event.

The painful remembering of the attacks, I would argue, has much to do with the ways in which the attacks were visually experienced. Americans awoke on that day with a “business-as-usual” attitude, and the “clear Tuesday morning” skies did not send of a signal of impending danger (History.com Staff). However, at 8:46 in the morning, everything changed. The American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of

the World Trade Center. Civilians walking the streets of New York were convinced that it had been a flight error, but then approximately eighteen minutes later, these civilians knew that the city had been under attack. At 9:03, United Airlines Flight 175 flew into the South Tower. In a matter of less than twenty minutes, the city had been redefined (History.com Staff). Emergency response vehicles flooded the streets with sirens blaring. The rumbling of the towers was destabilizing. The cries and screams of victims were deafening. Debris of office paper, ash, and metal turned the blue September sky an eerie shade of gray. While four passenger planes were hijacked and headed to different United States locations, the impact that Flights 11 and 175 had on New York City was the most catastrophic, not only because of the death toll, but also for the immense damage done to the city's infrastructure (History.com Staff). The sights of the city were ghastly, and after the collapse of both towers, the iconic city skyline had been forever changed. It would be the images of crashing planes, falling debris, and a redefined skyline that distorted the vision of many Americans. This new way of seeing would be broadcast repetitively through the media for days and weeks after the attacks, and it would be the repetition of the horrific images and video clips to perpetuate an already provoked trauma.

The wreckage left the American citizens speechless and with a feeling of uncertainty. In his address to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush affirmed, "Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve" ("Text of Bush's Address"). Bush ends his address with a promise of justice. "This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before,

and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world” (“Text of Bush's Address”).

The President's address indeed recognized the emotional and economic devastation that ensued from the terrorist attacks, but his message to Americans was a promise to bring “the evil” to justice. Like DeLillo, President Bush calls for unity of the American people to defend “our world.” Amidst the unsettling feelings America had experienced on 9/11, there was a great sense of urgency to transcend and unite against terrorism. Even though there were still questions to be answered— how could this have happened, and why did this happen? — it was determined that the nation would work toward recovery, but through what means? How would a nation disrupted learn to cope with their fears? How would this nation work through the trauma and regain a feeling of safety and security?

Out of a need to manage the trauma, Americans would go to whatever means possible to return to a semblance of life pre-9/11. The site of the fallen World Trade Center would come to be known as “Ground Zero,” and it was here that survivors would pay tribute to those who perished. Weeks after the attacks, Ground Zero had transformed into a memorial site. Fliers with images of victims were plastered about the city; candles would burn in memory of those lost; flowers and shrines were erected to commemorate. These sites were symbols of love and hope, and for a time, helped survivors alleviate the suffering. However, these memorialized sites were dismantled and relocated, and the removal worsened the suffering of those battling trauma (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 15-18).

For other survivors, visiting a memorial site did not work as a means of recovery. Instead, writing would be a mechanism for coping with trauma. In addition to the

journalism coverage, average civilians took to writing on Internet blogs to share their feelings. The blogs were a means of coping, and writing was used to comfort others, comment on media coverage, express emotion, and interact with other survivors (Bressers and Hume 9-14). Furthermore, published authors took to writing essays, memoirs, narratives, novels, poems, and graphic novels to confront the issues of 9/11. These published pieces of writing not only gave solace to the writers, but the readers were able to understand the attacks from an unmediated point of view. The writing allowed readers to empathize in a way no other medium had allowed (DeRosa 608). The process of writing allows the traumatized to make sense of the unsayable and incomprehensible. In his discussion about the literature published post-9/11, Aaron DeRosa argues that through writing, not only does a history get recorded, but a working-through of trauma may occur (608). Irene Visser also claims that writing, especially in the narrative form, functions as a means for grappling with trauma. It would seem plausible, then, to suggest that writing narratives in the wake of 9/11 would allow a victim agency in dealing with individualized traumas. However, could writing, in the traditional sense of using prose to organize thoughts, be a strong enough vehicle to address trauma evoked by the visual remembering of the terrorist attacks?

Given the extreme and unprecedented mediation of the attacks, Americans were constantly being reminded of how devastating 9/11 was for the nation. For weeks, the media had centralized their coverage on that attacks and the aftermath. The same images of planes crashing, buildings burning and crumbling, and amiss civilians were aired repetitively. The continuous news coverage, both on television and in the newspapers, gave no reprieve for the nation. The constant attention to and the immense visual

saturation of the attacks only perpetuated and worsened the trauma being experienced (Redfield 65-66). The repetitious news coverage, as noted, did nothing in the way of allowing survivors to cope with their feelings of fear and discomfort. The visceral images of the attacks only served as a reminder of the emotions experienced. And through a constant replay on television, a reliving of the attacks occurred for many viewers. Because images, in general, function to first evoke emotion in the viewer, it becomes imperative to then make sense of what has been observed through analytical means. Without analysis, the message of the image is lost (Hill 30-34). The images of 9/11, for many, proved to be *too* vivid to allow for meaning-making. Citizens were already in a state of shock and disbelief. Many could not “believe their eyes,” and learning of the catastrophe left people speechless. Many are reported to have said the attacks seemed “unreal,” and that the images seen seemed as though they were still shots of a movie. The images had a paralyzing effect on many viewers, and because of how “unspeakable” the attacks were, people paused at the sight of those powerful images and were at a true loss for words (Redfield 59). These powerful images of the attacks held the authoritative power and told the nation’s new narrative. For so many Americans, answers to the essential questions of “how” and “why,”— the desire for a reestablishment of the cultural identity— were desperately needed. But if America’s focus was solely on these visceral and emotional images, images that spoke volumes on their own, how would the traumatized ever be able to reconcile the catastrophe?

Given these factors thus far, it can be said that the 9/11 terrorist attacks have caused an absolute disruption to many Americans’ way of life. The attacks were unexpected and catastrophic, and this, for the nation, provoked a series of unanswerable

questions. Coupled with these questions were overwhelming feelings of insecurity and shock. With a disruption to the norm, the nation was faced with a new way of thinking, leading to discomfort and a sense of displacement. The continuous news coverage served as a reminder of the attacks, and with each viewing of an image or video clip was the feeling of experiencing the attacks time and again. The visual saturation of the media made reliving the attacks inescapable. All of these factors contribute to both individual and national trauma. To overcome this sense of overwhelming feeling of distress, Americans would need to, as DeLillo and President Bush respectively assert, unite and find resolve. Psychologists suggest that victims use writing as a strategy for addressing individualized trauma. For individuals struggling with the effects of 9/11, writing has proven itself as a powerful tool for recovery. However, the only means of recovery would be to deal directly with the trauma; to acknowledge the pain and to then make sense of *why* there is pain. Yet, the trauma of 9/11 had been evoked because of what was seen, both through actual experience and visually constructed experience. The intensity of the visual representations of the attacks, however, could prevent an individual from *fully* confronting trauma because the images alone were overwhelmingly powerful and truly captured the horrifying events of that day. Without fully engaging with these images to make sense of them, agency over the traumatic symptoms is difficult to attain. On the contrary, to entirely dismiss these images would be to repress a major component that has attributed to the ongoing trauma. While addressing the trauma through prose-based writing would function as a way to analyze the events of the attacks, it would not allow for a full acknowledgment of the events because much of America's experience of the attacks was through visually mediated documentation. It is then plausible to suggest that



one could make use of the visceral images when writing about 9/11 in an effort to face the entirety of the trauma.

Through a direct response to the haunting images, a victimized individual could confront their traumatic symptoms stemming from visual remembering the attacks. Psychologists who specialize in treatment of trauma suggest writing about the trauma and distress is a strong coping mechanism that will, eventually, help to heal. Writing, then, is a powerful means for battling any level of trauma and stress. However, in the case of 9/11, the trauma experienced is greatly attributed to what was *seen*. For many Americans, the attacks were not something truly physically experienced. Instead, coming to understand what had happened came through second-hand exposure, or through visually mediated representations. It would then be reasonable to argue that no person could think, discuss, or write about the attacks without summoning the vivid images to mind given how widespread these images were during the aftermath.

If writing is a means for recovery, but the dissemination of 9/11 images stands to sustain trauma, I would argue, then, for the use of a multimodal discourse as to fully confront the trauma that still persists. Traumatized Americans may be able to move beyond the visceral reactions if a multimodal discourse were utilized to write about 9/11. As seen in literature that emerged during the aftermath, authors like Art Spiegelman and Alissa Torres have made use of both images and words to not only make sense of what became an historical event in United States, but to also grapple with their own emotions that surfaced as a result of the attacks. Where images describe the visceral emotions associated with the attacks, prose works to elaborate on the reaction to those emotions. In other words, where images fail to produce full meaning, verbal language acts as an aid to

“fill in the gaps.” Similarly, where verbal language is too weak to describe emotions and sensations, images act as a descriptor. When used synchronously, words and images function to tell a detailed and complete narrative. In the case of writing about 9/11, making use of both images and words helps to address the entirety of the catastrophe, and it allows writers to come closer to resolving untreated traumas.

As seen in several examples of 9/11 literature, authors make use of a multimodal writing that employs both images and words in an effort to fully contend with the truths, emotions, and questions associated with the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Most notable, however, are the works of Art Spiegelman and Jonathan Safran Foer. Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* is a graphic novel, a genre that freely lends itself to the symbiotic use of words and images, while Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a prose novel, but is greatly supported by the use of visual aids. Both pieces of literature function to make sense of the terrorist attacks through use of images and words. While both texts approach the attacks from unique positions, each author carefully makes use of images and prose in an attempt to “make sense” of 9/11.

In the analysis to follow, I will demonstrate how the works of Spiegelman and Foer are examples of literature that rely on a multimodal discourse to address the realities, truths, and traumas of 9/11. Through their writing, I will show how a multimodal discourse has been implemented in an effort to confront and distance one’s self from trauma. Both of the aforementioned pieces of literature are examples of how the visual saturation of 9/11 has had an extraordinary impact upon the nation. Furthermore, the literature exemplifies how an acknowledgement of the images that emerged in the aftermath is a critical aspect in fully understanding the attacks.

To support my analysis, I will draw upon the theoretical perspectives from two separate fields of study: visual rhetoric and trauma theory. Both areas of study will inform the ways in which the aforementioned authors use both images and prose to address issues of trauma that exist because of the terrorist attacks. The following scope will help to shape the argument that the use of prose alone is not enough to assuage 9/11 trauma because the images of the attacks greatly contribute to the symptoms of trauma. The images themselves capture the destruction and serve as a reminder of how America's cultural and national identities were disrupted on September 11th. The role, then, of prose is to fill in the gaps of what the images do not effectively convey on their own; prose needs to contextualize and narrate the images. Given that trauma disrupts one's identity, a written narrative coupled with images could be used to combat the trauma. All aspects of 9/11 trauma need to be addressed, and the literature under examination demonstrates a clear need to use both images and prose to reestablish identity.

In the text, *Picturing Texts*, written by Lester Faigley, Diana George, Anna Palchik, Cynthia Selfe, visual rhetoric is explored through an in-depth analysis, and the authors express that arguments can be created through visual texts. Their argument provides readers with an essential toolkit for reading, evaluating, criticizing, analyzing, and composing a myriad of visual texts. They argue that a comprehensive understanding of visual rhetoric is necessary given a proliferation of images and our ability to easily produce and consume images due to advances in technology. Their text also emphasizes the necessity to understand how words and images work together to convey a message to audiences. "We often use words and images in combination to present information that could not be conveyed by either one alone" (7). This notion is especially apparent in the

9/11 literature under discussion. The images seen in the 9/11 literature speak of the devastation, while the prose used enhances the images and reveals a narrative not apparent in the images.

Another major argument made in *Picturing Texts* is the proliferation of image-based reading and writing given the advancements of technology. Faigley, George, Palchik and Selfe argue:

In the era of the Web, we increasingly expect to see words and images together. The Internet has been the star of a new generation of electronic technologies that includes the phenomenal expansion of storage and memory on personal computers and the development of powerful multimedia software. Personal computers, digital cameras, and camcorders have given us the capability of producing texts with images, audio, and video that would have required teams of designers and technicians just a few years ago. As we have more and more need to communicate across geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, the use of images will grow in importance. (8)

As seen with the visual and digital documentation of 9/11, we are becoming more reliant on the visual to help us record and remember important events that exist within our culture. Without the technological advances of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the visual documentation of the terrorist attacks would have been impossible. Due to our access to countless images and hours of video footage, we are able to revisit the events of September 11th and view them as they occurred. The amount of real-time documentation of the attacks likely surmounts any other historically significant event. For historians, this documentation provides insight into the attacks. On the other hand, for the survivors and

witnesses of the attacks, this unprecedented coverage can prolong trauma; the images act as a recurrence of the attacks, and seeing these images can rehash distress. However, if the images are properly assessed and understood, as visual rhetoricians stress the importance of, then the trauma can be partially alleviated.

*Picturing Texts* makes a strong argument for the universality of images. The authors assert that words often bring images or visual associations to mind because images are universal within a culture and more widely understood than prose. Also, at times, concepts can be too complex to explain in just one form or the other. Therefore, a multimodal approach, as seen in 9/11 literature, can be used as a means of expressing universal emotions, vivid imagery, and complex concepts. The authors of *Picturing Texts* note "...although images can show us quickly and often very accurately what something looks like, they cannot tell us what it smells, sounds, or feels like the way words can. Of course, words and images can work together, with words describing details we may not be able to see" (32). This assertion is profoundly apparent in the literature of 9/11, especially in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, when we see Oskar, the protagonist and narrator, struggling with the loss of his father who died in the World Trade Center, rely on images as a source of comfort when words and thoughts evade him.

Faigley, George, Palchik, and Selfe provide in-depth discussions about visual composition, and they supply their readers with strategies for reading images as texts. Their discussion of the use of images to tell stories and personal narratives is particularly useful in analyzing *In the Shadow of No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, where the narrators delve into their inner thoughts in an effort to better understand their place in the tragedy of 9/11. As noted in *Picturing Texts*, "When you analyze a

visual text, you will likely begin with your personal response and then consider the text's immediate and broader contexts" (111). This is especially true in the aforementioned novels. Spiegelman's and Foer's narrators make use of images to explore their trauma and the realities of the attacks, and then make use of prose to explicate the images used. After this is accomplished and the trauma has been addressed, the novels in their entirety address the broader implications of the attacks, moving away from a narrator-centric story to a broader, familiar story with which readers can empathize.

In sum, *Picturing Texts* is useful in understanding how images can be used as a means of communicating ideas in ways that prose cannot achieve on its own. The discussion of form and textual composition is especially useful in understanding why Spiegelman and Foer made particular compositional choices when writing their novels. *Picturing Texts* also presents a theoretical perspective for helping readers to interpret the images used in the 9/11 literature as well as allowing readers to determine how the images are used to address trauma.

The notion that images and words function together to shape meaning is also prevalent in the work of Olson, Finnegan, and Hope. In their discussion about visual rhetoric, they write:

First, unlike some who would wish to separate or isolate word from image, we believe that, in practice and in principle, words and images are oftentimes mixed together in rhetorically interesting ways. To study visual rhetoric, then, means not to study images or artifacts in isolation from larger textual or performative contexts in which an audience might encounter them, but rather in precise relation to those contexts that give them shape and meaning. (2)

Visual rhetoric, by this assertion, is a critical means of understanding how visual and verbal texts function to make meaning in larger contexts. The authors further claim that visual rhetoric “occupies a central place within the interconnected dynamics of civic, cultural, and social discourses” and that it influences “diverse publics” by shaping the “ways we know, think, and behave” (3). The authors are proponents of visual rhetoric and firmly hold to the notion that visual rhetoric influences public knowledge and behavior, ultimately shaping a culture. The visual texts that emerged post-9/11 certainly fit within this framework. If a visual text should be paired with prose and analyzed through the contexts from which they emerged, it is essential, then, that the literature post-9/11 contextualize the images by explicating them with prose to shape them and provide them with cultural significance.

To further articulate the ways in which visual rhetoric can be used as a means for writing about 9/11, I will turn to *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, edited by Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. Whereas *Picturing Texts* articulates the ways in which different aspects of visual rhetoric function to create a text, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* is a comprehensive collection of essays that discuss the power of visual rhetoric as a field of study as well as a framework for understanding the significance of visual texts within culture. In their introduction, Hill and Helmers write, “Historically, images have played an important role in developing consciousness and the relationship of the self to its surroundings. We learn who we are as private individuals and public citizens by seeing ourselves reflected in images, and we learn who we can become by transporting ourselves into images” (1). The notion that individuals see themselves in images is especially relevant when analyzing the literature of 9/11. Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly*

*Close* relies on images as a way of grappling with the loss of his father. The narrator in *In the Shadow of No Towers* reflects on the image of the “burning towers” and imagines himself situated within a newly fragmented culture. He uses these images to make sense of himself and the new world in which he exists. Helmers and Hill also claim that visual texts that emerge through media are powerful in terms of creating a consciousness and sense of community. They claim that the 9/11 “spectator was able to experience the exceptional power of visual media to create ‘simultaneity,’ a national consciousness of being together as a community” (3-4). While many Americans were nowhere near the sites of impact on 9/11 the media was able to unite the nation by broadcasting images and videos of the attacks. The influence of the media is especially important in discussing how 9/11 created a national trauma. Since the media was visually saturated, it enabled the nation to experience the attacks as though they were present, making the images of the attacks feel disturbingly real. Thus, the necessity for understanding how images function to impact a viewer is critical in a discussion of 9/11, particularly when questioning how the images and “virtual experience” of the attacks have created an extraordinary trauma.

In his essay, Hill discusses how images and verbal rhetoric work separately and symbiotically to construct meaning for a reader. “The Psychology of Rhetorical Images” focuses greatly on the “systematic and heuristic processing” of visual and verbal arguments. He argues that images provide a “seeing is believing attitude” and thus elicit an immediate emotional response from the reader, whereas verbal arguments tend to take a much longer time to process, thus enabling readers to elicit analytical responses. This psychological perspective of visual and analytical rhetoric is useful in analyzing the works of Spiegelman and Foer because it provides insight into the rhetorical decisions



made in the compositional process, and it allows for an understanding of how the texts in their entirety serve to analyze the events of 9/11. The argument in Hill's essay is critical in further discussion of how 9/11 literature confronts and deals with trauma at the individual and national levels.

Similar to Hill's argument, Marguerite Helmers' essay, "Framing the Fine Arts Through Rhetoric," discusses the ways in which individuals respond to images, and articulates this through the notion of "collective memory." She argues that collective memories are decided by a nation and function as a means of determining what is important to remember, save, and commemorate. Collective memory is useful in understanding how the images of 9/11 have contributed to the national remembering of the terrorist attacks. Images, having the ability to permanently capture an event, play a major role in historical and cultural remembering. Given the documentation of the attacks, it is certain that images greatly contribute to the ways in which 9/11 is discussed, remembered, and addressed.

There are countless proponents for visual rhetoric, all arguing that this field of study is vibrant and is it necessary to understand in a 21st century world of communication. J. Anthony Blair argues that most visual arguments contain verbal constructions to help make the message less ambiguous. He, too, argues that visual texts are highly evocative and are a powerful means of appealing to the emotions of a reader. He writes that the "visual has an immediacy, a verisimilitude, and a concreteness that helps influence acceptance," which is not necessarily available through verbal communications (59). Similarly, J. Cherie Strachan and Kathleen E. Kendall argue that visual rhetoric is a powerful means for disseminating information quickly and efficiently.

They argue that texts, such as television broadcasts, allow the reader a much more direct experience than what is provided in verbal texts.

Greg Dickinson and Casey Malone Maugh approach visual rhetoric in a different way, asserting that symbols and visual spaces have a great influence over the ways in which we create identities for ourselves. Dickinson and Maugh discuss the rhetorical environments in which we live, where symbols and other icons help to create identities. They say that those spaces “are not simply or primarily visual, [but are] always material and concrete and they are the sites of our embodied realizations of ourselves” (260). This notion is interesting when considering the visuality of New York City pre- and post-9/11. For so many New Yorkers and visitors to the city, the iconic skyline that featured the Twin Towers was a true symbol of New York; the skyline very much became a part of the city’s identity. When the towers collapsed, many felt that part of the skyline and its symbolism had been destroyed. The notion of identity construction through visually constructed spaces is particularly interesting when analyzing the morale of New Yorkers after the attacks. The altered skyline, I would argue, plays a major role in the perpetuation of trauma where the nation (and city) faced identity crises.

Similar to the argument made by Helmers, Janis L. Edwards argues that iconic images can create a historical memory and such images can frame events, lending meaning to a collective history. She writes:

Since the development of mass media, images disseminated in connection with newsworthy events become attached to the event in the form of cultural remembering. Whether through print or television, some images are routinely re-presented long past the time when they are actually “happening,” creating through

visual equivalence a new experience that calls forth the reminder of the depicted event. Such images are regarded as encapsulating a critical moment in history, the social imaginary of a persona, a critical historical condition, or the social values and effects that attend the moment. Even people who did not witness history engage in a replay of experience through the simulation of iconic photographs and other well-known images. (179)

The images presented by the media at the time of the terrorist attacks do in fact “encapsulate a critical moment in history,” and the authors who utilize these images in the 9/11 literature under discussion are making use of the images not only to grapple with personal trauma, but to comment on how the attacks transformed American history. The literature provides readers with an experience of reliving the events, and it also brings about, as Edwards would agree, an increased sense of identification and empathy. The literature appropriates the images and provides them with a new meaning by contextualizing them in a narrative.

Another critical perspective in understanding how post-9/11 literature makes use of images and words to grapple with trauma is the work published by trauma theorists. While trauma has already been referenced here, I find it is important to further discuss some critical aspects of the theory in order to make connections between trauma and visual rhetoric. Marc Redfield is particularly interested in how 9/11 has created what he calls a “virtual trauma.” He writes:

Trauma involves blockage: an inability to mourn, to move from repetition to working-through. It is certainly plausible that hyperbolic commemorative efforts such as those on display in “9/11 discourse”...are in fact testimonials to blockage;

for that matter it is plausible that a public sphere as saturated by consumerist and military interests as that of the present-day United States has no viable mechanisms for effective public grieving. Yet to say this is also to say that in such a context the very notion of cultural trauma becomes somewhat spectral and uncertain. Wherever one looks in 9/11 discourse, trauma and the warding-off of trauma blur into each other, as the event disappears into its own mediation. All traumatic events arguably do this; but as many have commented, there is something particularly virtual and hyperreal about the central “9/11” event—the World Trade Center catastrophe. (56)

In his in-depth exploration of how victims were traumatized after 9/11, he notes that the media had perpetuated a feeling of disarray because of the continuous footage that was aired. Even though thousands of “traumatized victims” were not present at the sites of attack, they still experienced symptoms of trauma because of the virtual exposure through the media. The images present themselves as true representations of the actual events, so viewing them from afar makes the viewer feel as though they truly experienced the catastrophe, thus leading to a sense of blurred trauma— not being able to distinguish between reality and a representation of the reality. Redfield urges consumers of these images to read them carefully as to engage in a full meaning-making process.

In the same vein, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that the terrorist attacks were the most photographed disaster in history and that it produced a spectacle of instant and incessant photography. She argues that most people understand the attacks not through direct experience, but through the photography of the event. Her article highlights the visual saturation of 9/11 and how Americans have made use of such since

the attacks. She notes that images, sound bites, and videos were primarily used by civilians to mourn, pay respect, remember, and to understand the magnitude of the attacks. In other words, the images mainly serve as a way expressing the emotions felt by Americans in the aftermath of the attacks. This is true, too, of the way the images are used in the works of Spiegelman and Foer. Coupled with narratives, the images in these works of literature attempt to express emotion while working through trauma.

In "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," Irene Visser discusses, at length, the symptoms of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. She discusses the ways in which trauma can debilitate a victim by causing a serious disruption to daily life. Symptoms include depression, flashbacks, depersonalization, and direct changes in spirituality or worldview. For many Americans traumatized by the terrorist attacks, a change in worldview was especially apparent. Drawing upon the work of Freud, Visser discusses hysteria, latency, and repression and how all of these aspects of trauma can affect an individual. Visser notes that trauma is a remembering of a traumatic experience, and trauma can only be realized when the victim presented with stimuli that spark memory of the stressor. In the case of 9/11, the stimuli to spark trauma, I would argue, are the visual representations of the attacks. Furthermore, I argue that in order to work through the trauma an individual would need to address the visual representations and use them as a resource for recovery. Visser argues that narrative is a powerful tool for confronting trauma because memory's agency allows narratives to address the unspeakable (274-75). In a brief discussion of "transmissibility," Visser notes that a trauma narrative influences its reader by reviving their own trauma while allowing them to have an emotional and empathetic response to the text itself. This can lead to a

working-through and alleviation of individualized trauma, not only for the writer but also for the reader.

The theoretical perspectives discussed here provide necessary insights about the current state of 9/11 literature. To reiterate, given the visual saturation of the terrorist attacks, I claim that individuals face trauma because of the unprecedented access to images that capture the attacks in real-time. Repetitive viewing of these images, as trauma theorists claim, can make the trauma recursive and debilitating. Theorists suggest victims can work through the trauma by writing narratives, but again, given the visual saturation, I propose victims make use of the images in their writing by employing principles of visual rhetoric. By addressing the entirety of the traumatic event, recovery is possible. My argument can be applied to two works of literature that make use of visual rhetoric to address trauma caused by 9/11. The literature of Spiegelman and Foer are examples of literature that rely on multimodality to address the realities, truths, and traumas of 9/11. The discussion to follow will explore how both of the aforementioned pieces of literature prove how the visual saturation of 9/11 has had an impact upon the nation. Ultimately, the pieces of literature to be examined will exemplify how writers made use of visual rhetoric to, as DeLillo pleads, write a counter-narrative in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

## Chapter 2: The Graphic Novel Medium and its Role in Addressing 9/11 Trauma

Among the forms of literature that emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the graphic novel genre explores the magnitude of the tragedy in ways that afford writers the opportunity to marry prose and images in an effort to assuage feelings of trauma. Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* uses this multimodal medium to directly confront his traumatic experience of witnessing the north tower collapse. As discussed in the previous chapter, the attacks caused shock and fear in Americans, and as a result, left citizens in a state of disarray. Regardless of how an individual experienced 9/11, the attacks left the whole of the nation traumatized (Redfield 56, Gauthier 369). In the aftermath, it became important and necessary for Americans to rebuild and recover. As previously noted, one of the recommended strategies for confronting trauma is the act of writing (Visser 274). Writing serves as a tool for acknowledging the traumatic event, and it allows the writer the opportunity to cope with their personal traumas caused by said event. Given the role of the media and the visual saturation of news images at the time of the attacks, I assert that the trauma experienced is a visual trauma. Therefore, in order to fully confront the traumatic event and individual symptoms of trauma, one using writing as a coping mechanism might be best served if the writing was accompanied by images. In other words, use of a multimodal rhetoric, like that of the graphic novel, could enable a writer to simultaneously use images and words to grapple with the uncertainties and traumas that exist due to the September 11 terrorist attacks.

*In the Shadow of No Towers* exemplifies how the use of multimodal writing enables Spiegelman to contend with the magnitude and devastation of the attacks. Due to the nature of the graphic novel, a genre that readily lends itself to the interplay of images

and words, the writer is able to approach the visually situated attacks in a way that satisfies the individual's need for closure (Gauthier 271). Furthermore, because Spiegelman employs drawings of the attacks, he is able to distance himself from the widely circulated mediated news images, thus presenting new images from which to view the attacks. Through a new visual vantage point, Spiegelman is able to move away from the media's representation of the attacks in an effort to merge narrative and visual remembering. The convergence of image and narrative provides Spiegelman the necessary leverage to work within and through both individual and national traumas. *In the Shadow of No Towers*, then, may act to encourage readers to reconsider how the events of 9/11 unfolded by offering a new image-based perspective.

Art Spiegelman begins *In the Shadow of No Towers* with a brief narration that reads, "Synopsis: In our last episode, as you might remember, the world ended..." (Spiegelman 1). If a reader were to open to any other comic installment of Spiegelman's graphic narrative, they would see that for Art Spiegelman, the world had, in fact, ended. The world he was familiar with before the attacks had been suddenly altered, forcing him to learn how to exist within a new reality. The gripping drawings in his book would show how the terrorist attacks dismantled his notion of life as a "rooted cosmopolitan." *In the Shadow of No Towers* (herein *No Towers*) clearly illustrates how his eyewitness account of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center instilled fear and trauma in his mind. Watching the burning building, as Spiegelman explains in the introduction to *No Towers*, became an undesirable memory. He says, "The pivotal image from my 9/11 morning-- one that didn't get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids several years later-- was the image of the looming



north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized" (Spiegelman, "The Sky" n. pag.). The image of the "glowing bones" was one that he could not erase from his memory, and for this reason, it would be an image to trigger symptoms of trauma. In an effort to mediate this trauma, Spiegelman turned to writing comics, a medium that combines images and words to convey ideas. Spiegelman would be able use the medium itself as a vehicle for grappling with the trauma caused by what he had seen. Spiegelman's graphic narrative is chaotically organized, which mimics the tendencies of traumatic symptoms, which also occur "chaotically" and at random. It is the structure of comics that allows him to portray the trauma he has experienced because of what he saw on the morning of the terrorist attacks. The graphic narrative to be analyzed herein presents itself as a document that demonstrates how Spiegelman uses images and words to grapple with the image that caused his world to end.

The image that Spiegelman describes in the introduction to *No Towers* permeates every installment in the collection. Not only did this image get "burned onto the inside of [his] eyelids," but it also served as the driving force in his compositional process. He says, "I repeatedly tried to paint this with humiliating results but eventually came close to capturing the vision of disintegration digitally on my computer. I managed to place some sequences of my most vivid memories around that central image but never got to draw others" (Spiegelman, "The Sky" n. pag.). That is to say, the "central image" became the focal point of *No Towers*, so much so that it did not permit him to capture other sights he saw on the day of the attacks. Spiegelman attempts to include other visions from the attacks, as well as his insight and analysis of the attacks in *No Towers*, but as a reader would see, Spiegelman's writing is entirely focused on this single remembered image. In

order for Spiegelman to address other memories of the attacks, he will include the image of the burning towers in a variety of ways throughout *No Towers* to help him grapple with other issues that came out in the aftermath (see fig. 1).

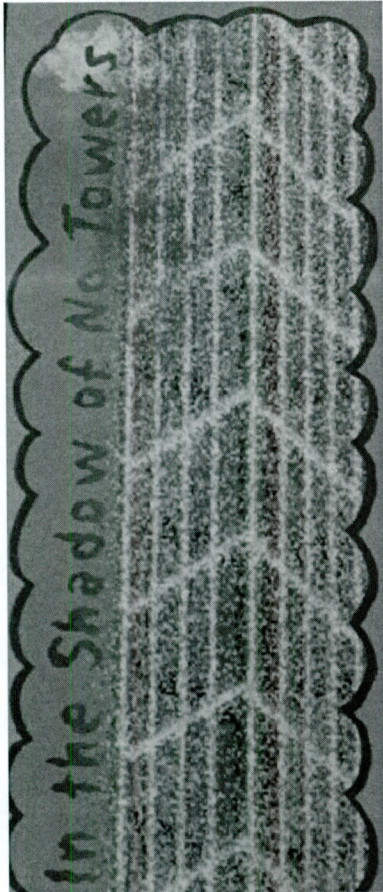


Fig. 1. “North Tower’s Glowing Bones,” *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Art Spiegelman

To help explain why Spiegelman uses this central image throughout *No Towers*, I will turn to Charles A. Hill’s theory of “presence,” as described in “The Psychology of Rhetorical Images.” Hill defines presence as “the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience members” (28). The presence of an object or concept then enters a Field of Consciousness, where the object or concept becomes all

consuming. Spiegelman, the onlooker to the burning tower and its collapse, becomes consumed with this sight because it has entered his Field of Consciousness. When Spiegelman admits to this image of the burning towers as being in the forefront of his mind, it is reminiscent of what Hill describes as presence. This presence of the burning towers is significant when Hill further describes how images rhetorically function. He says, “empirical evidence, as well as everyday experience, suggest that powerful images do not prompt...rational reflection,” but instead “prompt a visceral, emotional response” (30). This would explain why the first few installments of *No Towers* are representative of Spiegelman’s emotions. While he does attempt to confront issues of normalcy and governmental control in the first few installments, Spiegelman’s text is highly emotional and personal. It is not until later in the series when the reader sees Spiegelman has moved away from visceral, emotional responses in an attempt to respond analytically to issues of safety and government control.

Hill describes the difference between “systematic processing” and “heuristic processing” and how these processes help the audience to make sense of texts. Systematic processing is contemplative, analytic, and responsive, whereas heuristic processing is a shortcut used to quickly understand a text. Since images can communicate with “much more force and immediacy than verbal communication allows,” images tend to be read heuristically because they can be evocative and convey a great deal of information in a compact space and time (Blair 53). The first few installments of *No Towers* present themselves as heuristic responses to the attacks. Spiegelman uses the burning tower image to show the reader how the sight he saw infiltrated and consumed his mind, preventing him from systematically processing what he had witnessed. Since this image

of the burning tower entered his Field of Consciousness and prevented him from coping with his trauma, he needed to find a way to use the image as a coping mechanism. In using this image for healing purposes, he would eventually be able to systematically assess the damages caused by the attacks. This is precisely why the comics medium is ideal for Spiegelman's recovery process. He is able to take the visceral image and manipulate it through comics to allow him to grapple with the other "memories" and "sequences" that arose from the attacks.

To further explicate why Spiegelman might have relied on the burning tower image to mediate his trauma, I will once again turn to Hill and his discussion of emotion:

It's relatively easy to understand how some of the more basic emotions (e.g., fear, anger) might be evolutionarily designed to help us deal with sudden potential dangers. Emotions such as these arise quickly and claim all of our attention; it is virtually impossible to ignore them or, in many cases, to even think about other matters until these emotions have been resolved. If the purpose of the emotional response is, as some psychologists believe, to direct our attention to a nearby danger, then it makes sense that we would be programmed to react quickly and decisively, without taking the time to analyze the situation and evaluate all of the information that might be potentially relevant. (34)

Through this explanation, it seems clear as to why the burning tower would reappear in every single one of Spiegelman's comic installments. Since this image "claimed Spiegelman's attention," and evoked an emotional response, it is evident why he felt compelled to render it throughout *No Towers*. This would also explain why the first four installments are personal in nature, exploring the ways in which the attacks became

debilitating to the Spiegelman family. It is not until later in the series when Spiegelman begins to criticize the government that the central burning tower image becomes less prominent. His later criticisms of the government suggest Spiegelman has begun to mediate his own trauma as he moves away from personal reaction to analytical reaction.

I assert that writing comics is especially appropriate in terms of helping Spiegelman transition from heuristic to systematic processing. As Spiegelman claims, it was the image of the burning tower that caused a great deal of his traumatic symptoms. Being that this image is the source of his trauma, coupled, of course, with this first-hand experience in being in lower Manhattan at the time of the attacks, it seems that the comics medium is most appropriate in managing his symptoms of trauma. The medium would allow Spiegelman to make use of the images to show his own visceral response, and then use words to help explore what these images mean. Spiegelman demonstrates how words and images can function symbiotically to express emotions, feelings, ideas, and reactions. He is also able to situate the vivid images from his experience of the attacks inside the confines of the “panel” and explicate these images with words to then fully grapple with the attacks. Situating his visual memories inside of the comic panel allows him the distance he needs to assess the catastrophe. The distancing through the comics medium is what allows him to both systematically process the attacks, and manage his symptoms of trauma.

*No Towers* was published as a compilation of ten oversized newsprint comics, all depicting Spiegelman’s personal traumas that came out of the attacks. Rather than telling one cohesive story, the ten comic installments read more like a diary or journal, allowing the reader access into Spiegelman’s innermost thoughts. The journal-like organization of

*No Towers* allows Spiegelman to address his questions concerning the attacks as they sporadically arise over the course of the two years it took him to compose. The topics Spiegelman addresses in *No Towers* are: readjusting to life post-9/11, which he calls “the New Normal;” how to care for himself and his family; security in America; the role of the United States government in dealing with the attacks; and finally, the issue of identity and what it means to be American. No single installment focuses on just a solitary issue, nor do they reveal the issues in any particular order. Instead, the installments grapple with the aforementioned issues as they occur in his mind, often arising simultaneously. His jagged writing style illustrates how jarring the attacks were. Here, I would argue that because the *content* he writes about is not linear, the comics medium is most appropriate for addressing said content because of how it structurally functions to convey ideas and messages.

The comic strips of *No Towers* clearly illustrate Spiegelman’s tumultuous and fragmented thoughts and feelings post-9/11. The layout of each comic installment strays from the conventional flow of a graphic novel. In the book, *Making Comics*, Scott McCloud refers to “flow” as the way in which a graphic novel is arranged and organized. Flow is the way a writer guides the audience through the work from beginning to end. “Between panels, [the] choice of flow will rely on the unwritten contract between artists and readers which states that panels are read left-to-right first, then up-to-down” (32). According to McCloud, the panels themselves and the content within the panels should be organized in a readable fashion as to clearly and effectively convey information to the reader. In the same vein, the gutter, “the space between the panels,” allows the reader to take “two separate images and [transform] them into a single idea” (McCloud,

*Understanding Comics* 66). McCloud explains the phenomenon of the gutter by use of the term “closure,” which is the mind’s ability to connect fragmented moments to make meaning (McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 62-70). In other words, when reading a series of panels, the reader relies on closure to infer how the artist moved from one image to another. The gutter, the break in between panels, provides the reader with a pause to reflect and infer how ideas connect and build upon one another. As McCloud explains, graphic novelists and comic artists make conscious decisions about how to arrange their stories as to clearly and effectively convey ideas. However, the conventions of flow, the gutter, and closure are challenged in *No Towers*. Within each installment are series of mini comic strips, each one representing an individual idea, arranged in a non-linear fashion. The use of multiple comic strips in a single installment attributes to the journal-like style of writing because Spiegelman only offers a snippet of what he is thinking before he moves on to a new idea in the next strip. Often, these individual strips have nothing to do with one another, making it difficult to determine the central idea of the entire installment. However, what the reader can garner upon reading the entire compilation is that Spiegelman was undoubtedly terrorized by what he had witnessed on the day of the attacks, and by the end of the tenth and final installment, it is clear that Spiegelman has come to terms with his trauma. The reader is charged with the task of determining the flow and order of not only the panels, but also the mini comics themselves. The reader might begin to question not only the order in which to read the panels and mini comics, but also the significance assigned to each mini comic. What does Spiegelman want the reader to focus on and to understand? How does the sequence of reading help to construct meaning? The appearance of each installment is reminiscent of

a collage or scrapbook. Upon first glance, it seems that the comics are arranged haphazardly. However, upon further investigation, it is clear that the arrangement of each mini comic is situated purposefully.

Spiegelman recognizes that *No Towers* is a compilation of non-linear thoughts. He writes, "I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I'd experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw, and the collagelike nature of a newspaper page encouraged my impulse to juxtapose my fragmentary thoughts in different styles" (Spiegelman, "The Sky" n. pag.). The employment of different graphic styles— such as the rendering of the north tower, the appropriation of newspaper comic cartoons, and caricatures of himself— to represent what *he* saw and experienced through a variety of mini comics, and the arrangement of the comics in a non-linear, fragmented manner, plays off of Spiegelman's mental state post-9/11. The unconventional placement of panels gives the reader a sense of how traumatized Spiegelman was, and the total structure of *No Towers* enables the reader to follow the thought process and working-through that occurred for Spiegelman in the near two years it took to complete the project.

To demonstrate how Spiegelman works against the conventions of flow, closure, and the gutter, it is necessary to further examine the layout of the first installment of *No Towers* (see fig. 2). The layout of the first installment is visually complex and jarring, and for this reason, it is not immediately clear as to where the reader should begin reading. Spiegelman makes use of six separate comic strips to convey a variety of issues: "The New Normal," the rendering of the burning towers, the notion of anticipation, and the role of the media during the attacks. However, these issues cannot be read linearly



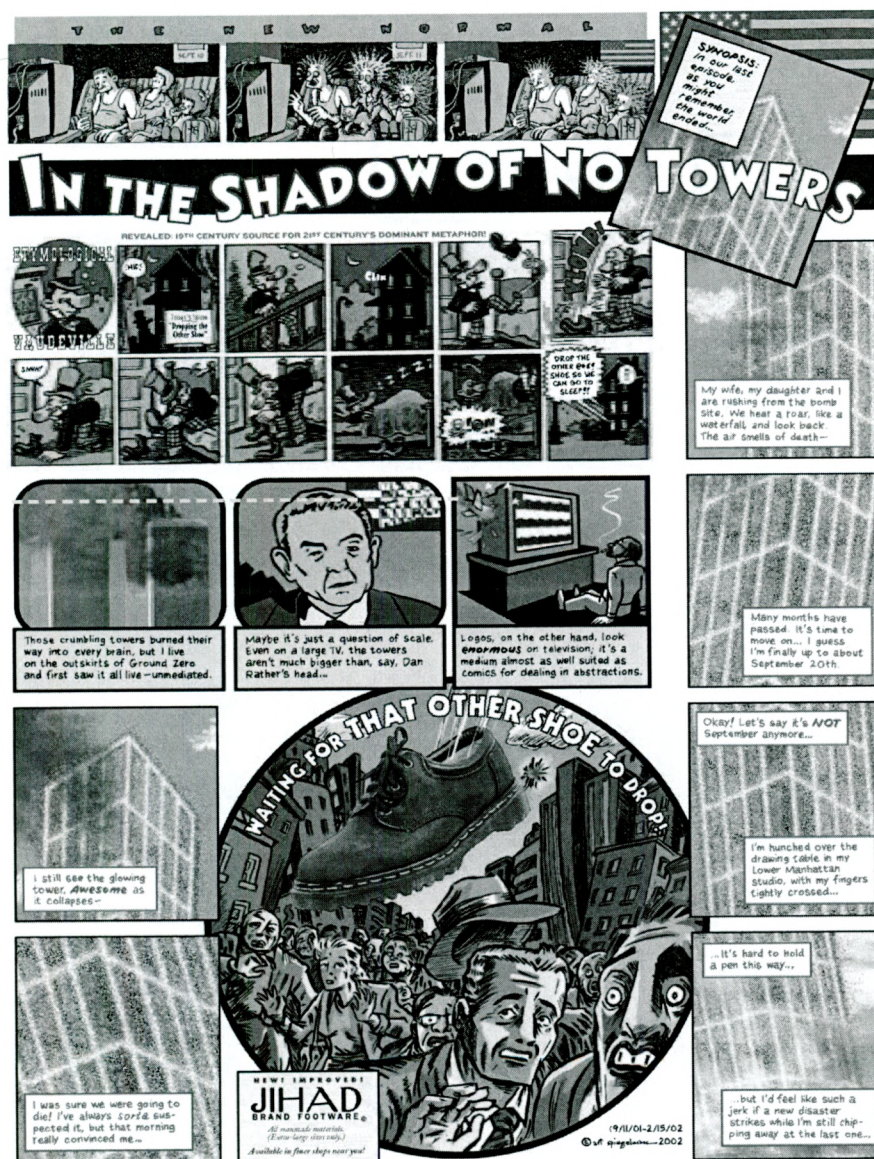


Fig. 2. "First Installment," *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Art Spiegelman

because of how Spiegelman has arranged the comics on the page. On the top of the installment is a horizontal three-panel strip focusing on "The New Normal." This strip clearly illustrates how average Americans were visually traumatized by what they had seen on television during the morning of the attacks. The before, during, and after depictions of the family in the strip help to show how the "normal way of life" had been

drastically altered in the aftermath, causing Americans to display patriotism while still feeling a great sense of shock. Spiegelman is able to use visual details and very few words to show how the attacks created feelings of fear in Americans. Upon concluding this strip, there is a fourth panel depicting the American flag at the end of “The New Normal” that stands on its own. This panel, though, is partially covered by a tilted panel depicting his rendering of the burning tower. Below this, the reader sees four more panels of the tower, this time, arranged vertically, perhaps to mirror the tower’s real-life infrastructure. Once the reader has gotten through this strip, they have reached the end of the page, and must now redirect their attention to the top. The eye, having already read “The New Normal,” is directed to the title of the installment, “In the Shadow of No Towers.” The placement of the title acts as a foreshadowing device. Since the reader reads the title *after* they saw how the tower was on fire, they can assume that the information to follow the placement of the title will be a written response to what exists in the shadow of no towers. The title serves as a verbal cue that the towers have fallen, and that the content Spiegelman includes thereafter is his response to the attacks.

Under the title of the first installment, Spiegelman includes a strip titled “Etymological Vaudeville.” He writes, “Revealed: 19th Century Source for 21st Century’s Dominant Metaphor!” The comic shows an appropriated male comic character entering his home after a late night at the saloon. As the man walks up to his apartment to retire for the evening, he kicks off his left shoe, sending it flying in the air. It abruptly falls to the floor, making a loud “Klomp!” sound. This of course startles the neighbors below him. Instead of kicking off the right shoe, he carefully places it on the floor and then quietly drifts off to sleep. The gutter between this panel and the one to follow

suggests to the reader that some time has passed because the neighbors begin to shout “Drop the other @\*\$! shoe so we can go to sleep!” (Spiegelman 1). The metaphor here— which is carried out in a second strip later in the installment— suggests one of anticipation. As the first panel of the strip indicates, the strip is about “Today’s Idiom: ‘Dropping the Other Shoe’” (1). The reader will only truly understand this “idiom” when they read the stand-alone circular panel at the bottom center of the page. Here, the reader sees frantic urbanites running down a city street, looking up to the sky where a “Jihad Brand Footware” shoe is being dropped on their heads. The panel’s wording reads “Waiting for *That Other Shoe* to Drop!” Though this singular panel and “Etymological Vaudeville” are not situated near one another on the page, the conditions of metaphor help the reader to understand the larger message: Americans at this point in time were anxiously waiting for the next attack. “Often, visual metaphors use a familiar image in an unexpected way as a way of making a point....Metaphors always bring additional associations to the literal meaning” (Faigley et al. 37). Given how unexpected the attacks were the two separate comics here illustrate how many Americans, in their new state of mind, felt anxiety and the looming danger that something else catastrophic might occur at any time. In the case of both of Spiegelman’s illustrations, the metaphor of the falling shoe demonstrates how Americans nervously anticipated something else to fall from the sky.

Spiegelman also makes use of a three panel horizontal strip in the center of the page. This strip comments on the media’s role in relaying information about the attacks. In the first panel, the reader sees an appropriated image from the media: the north tower, billowing with smoke, after being struck. Through the panel is a dotted yellow line

(functioning as a motion line), which directs the reader to the third panel, where an airplane crashes into a television set displaying a larger than life image of the American flag. The narration of the first panel reads “Those crumbling towers burned their way into every brain, but I live on the outskirts of Ground Zero and first saw it all live--unmediated” (Spiegelman 1). The second panel, a depiction of Dan Rather, reads, “Maybe it’s just a question of scale. Even on a large TV, the towers aren’t much bigger than, say, Dan Rather’s head...”. Finally, the third panel where we see Spiegelman watching the television, he writes, “Logos, on the other hand, look *enormous* on television; it’s a medium almost as well suited as comics for dealing with abstractions.” The combination of words and images in this strip suggest that the media coverage in no way could compare to what was actually witnessed. Furthermore, because of his discussion of scale and enormity in the narration, it seems Spiegelman is commenting on the visual saturation and the media’s emphasis on the attacks. Also, the placement of the airplane crashing into the side of the television which aired an image of the American flag, suggests that the media in some way, through its perpetual display of the attacks and of patriotism, became a source of destruction for the viewers. The inclusion of the dotted line also helps provide closure for the reader, guiding their eye through the panels to fully understand the message being conveyed about the media’s role in perpetuating fear in the American people.

The last two panels of this installment show the burning tower rendition in the lower left corner. Here, the purpose of the images is to help articulate Spiegelman’s narration, which states, “I still see the glowing tower, *awesome* as it collapses-- I was sure we were going to die! I’ve always sorta suspected it, but that morning really

convinced me...” (Spiegelman 1). Again, the first installment features two separate strips illustrating the burning towers. The placement of each strip is separated by the larger singular panel of the frantic urbanites running from the Jihad Shoe. The reader might wonder why these graphically similar strips are separated on the page. The layout here, jagged and straying from the conventions of flow, seems to suggest that it was the “Jihad Shoe” that drove the towers apart from one another. The layout of the two separate tower strips and the panel of the Jihad Shoe perform “unity,” or a “grid [providing] a unity to the text by creating an underlying pattern the eye can recognize” (Faigley et al. 46). Unity in this instance helps the reader to make connections between the separate comic strips to garner an understanding of the messages Spiegelman is trying to convey.

The first installment of *No Towers*, through its non-linear layout, disorients the reader and goes against the conventions of flow, closure, and gutter usage. The reader is not able to rely on a straightforward reading pattern to quickly assess the message of the installment. This disjointed layout does not allow the reader to find closure, to borrow McCloud’s term, of ideas. Visually speaking, the panels do not lend to a complete understanding of Spiegelman’s message. What the visual layout does suggest, however, is that the ideas conveyed are representative of Spiegelman’s disconnected thought process in the aftermath of the attacks. Linda S. Kauffman notes that the “effects of trauma” create “the shattering of psychic identity, the sense of a pervasive threat in everyday life, and a feeling of lack and humiliation” (649) and in effect, trauma forces the victim to experience repetition, a forward and backward reliving and recreating of the traumatic event (652). Kauffman claims that working through trauma “involves witnessing, testifying, and translating” the events that led to a victim’s experience with

symptoms of trauma (654). It is evident through the layout of Spiegelman's first installment that he is revisiting the remembered events of the attacks as they occur to him in an attempt to make meaning of out them. Irene Visser's discussion of trauma illustrates that the symptoms of trauma are sudden and can occur at any time (273). The layout of this first installment clearly depicts that Spiegelman's trauma occurred sporadically and in no particular order. The content of this first installment shows how Spiegelman revisits the image of the burning tower that had been burned into his memory. The usage of this image in this installment sets forth his exploration of other issues, such as the anticipation of another catastrophe, or how the media perpetuated images of fear and terror through constant replay. The entire first installment feels cyclical through the reiteration of ideas and fears. It is this cyclical repetition of ideas that mirror the cyclical and randomly occurring symptoms of trauma. To summarize, the layout of this first installment encapsulates the shock and terror that was experienced during the attacks. While the content on its own clearly illustrates this "back and forth dance" with trauma, the layout and lack of conformity to the conventions of flow stand to demonstrate how trauma had an impact on Spiegelman.

Unlike the fragmented layout of the first installment, Spiegelman has arranged his comic strips in the tenth and final installment in the shape of two towers standing side by side (see fig. 3). Within the towers are linear comic strips, which contain more of his story. Of all ten installments, this is the most conventional in terms of layout because Spiegelman has returned to a conventional use of flow where the reader is directed to read left-to-right, top-to-bottom. The linear format suggests that by the end of his writing process, he has worked through his personal trauma to a certain extent. Furthermore, the

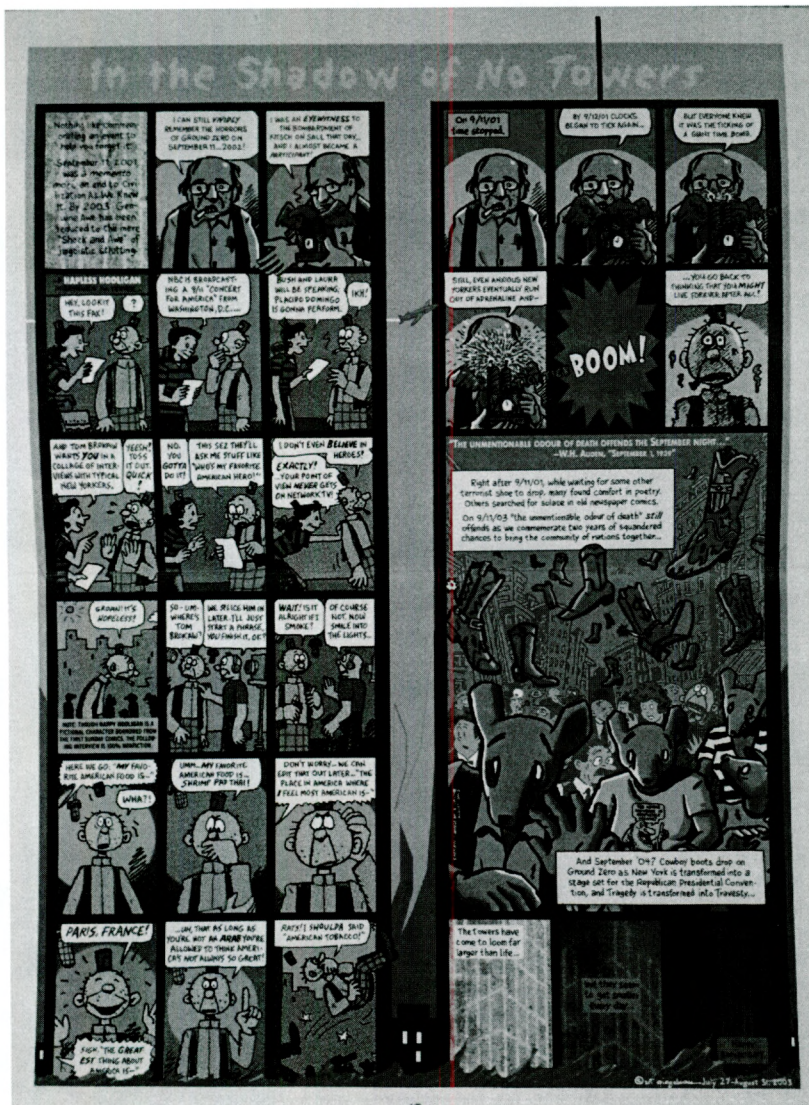


Fig. 3. "Tenth Installment," *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Art Spiegelman

linearity implies that Spiegelman has finally started to assess the attacks through use of systematic processing. The first nine installments of *No Towers* present themselves as symptoms of trauma. The panels themselves are out of sequence, and the content within seems jagged, abrupt, and at times, nonsensical. The physical arrangement of panels and content mirror the real-life trauma that Spiegelman was experiencing. However, the final installment, given its linear structure, shows that through writing in the comics medium,

he has managed his trauma and regained his stability to some degree.

The installment as a whole demonstrates a shift from experiencing trauma to an acceptance of life post-9/11. Whereas the earlier installments illustrate chaos, the final installment illustrates deliberate remembering. At the end of the installment, he uses the phrase "Happy Anniversary," which suggests Spiegelman has moved away from traumatic experiences. However, what is more striking in terms of deliberate remembering is the total layout of the installment. As previously noted, the installment is organized in the shape of the twin towers. The choice to arrange his mini comics within the confines of the two towers shows that Spiegelman is deliberately remembering the infrastructure before the attacks. The gutter in between the two towers is a visual cue to help the reader realize this is an act of remembering. In the gutter, the reader sees an airplane approaching the north tower. However, the plane is frozen in the gutter, and has not yet made impact with the building. For a brief moment while Spiegelman has suspended the plane's movement, he is able to offer his final thoughts of the attacks. In reading the comic strips contained within Spiegelman's north tower, the reader sees Spiegelman grappling with the notion of time stopping abruptly on 9/11. In the very next panel, time starts again (on September 12th), and it is here that the reader sees time acting as an explosive device. By the fifth panel, the plane in the gutter has been set back in motion as the reader sees time explode. This sequence of time elapse suggests that time, no matter how much one wishes it would remain still, will continue to "tick." Spiegelman illustrates that time is fluid, but more importantly, that time is able to heal. He illustrates that through the movement of time, he was able to effectively confront his trauma and commemorate the events. As we see in the fading of the towers in the last three panels,



time has been used to heal and to put the haunting images to rest. While the image does not entirely fade in these final panels, and the layout of the installment acts to commemorate through two larger-than-life towers, Spiegelman suggests that even though he will never forget what he experienced on that day, he is no longer being haunted by the effects of trauma.

Through the use of the comics medium, Spiegelman is able to effectively appropriate the image from his own mind and use them to make sense of what he witnessed on September 11, 2001. Spiegelman uses the images from his mind throughout *No Towers* in an effort to work through the emotions he felt and the images he had seen, and he uses words in a variety of ways to understand, analyze, and criticize said experiences. The conventions of flow, closure, the gutter and presence allow Spiegelman to convey his fragmentary thoughts, and through temporality, he is effectively able to better organize the disjointed thoughts to make amends with his trauma. The attacks on 9/11 were undoubtedly a visual event, and to disregard this when analyzing the event would be to greatly ignore how the attacks would be remembered and dealt with. Spiegelman masterfully acknowledges the attacks as a visual event by compartmentalizing his experience through images. By explicitly incorporating images into his writing, he is able to use writing as a tool for managing stress and trauma. It is evident that through the use of multimodal writing, Spiegelman is effectively able to grapple with the trauma and furthermore, the multimodality of his text offers a new, unmediated perspective of the attacks. The complete *No Towers* show how the graphic novel is an effective genre for coping with a visual event. His conclusion illustrates that by careful acknowledgment of visceral images and systematic verbal processing, that

what is truly left in the shadow of no towers is not the existence of trauma, but rather the ability to properly memorialize and commemorate what has been lost.

### Chapter 3: The Multimodal Novel as a Tool to Work Through 9/11 Trauma

Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, is a key example of how an author can make use of both prose and visual representations as a means for assuaging trauma evoked by visually mediated images from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Unlike *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which addresses the attacks as a trauma-evoking event from Spiegelman's own point of view, Foer's novel grapples with issues of trauma and loss through the perspectives of fictional characters. Through these characters, Foer is able to convey the damaging effects of the terrorist attacks, namely the disruption to daily life and the struggle to cope with death. The characters in Foer's novel may serve as representations for how post-9/11 trauma played a role in American lives, particularly in New Yorkers who were closest to the World Trade Center attacks. It is through the narratives of Oskar Schell, a nine-year-old boy whose father died on the morning of the attacks, and Oskar's paternal grandparents, that Foer is able to construct a narrative that illustrates the effects of the attacks. Though *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is predominantly written in prose, Foer relies on a variety of visual constructions to further explicate the traumas experienced by each of the characters. Yet while the prose in the novel is extraordinarily vivid in describing the trauma and suffering of each character, the prose alone does not adequately reveal the ways in which the characters deal with their traumatic symptoms. The visual constructions, I would argue, assist the traditional prose in revealing the ways in which each character grapples with the loss of a loved one while learning to live in a post-9/11 world. In other words, Foer's prose outlines how the characters were traumatized, and the use of visual constructions illustrate the coping mechanisms used by the characters to work through their trauma. In

the analysis to follow, I will demonstrate how Foer uses visual constructions to show specifically how Oskar attempts to negotiate the trauma evoked by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

To begin, in order to clearly explore the ways in which Foer allows Oskar to grapple with his trauma, it is critical to examine what leads Oskar to experience symptoms of trauma. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, set in post-9/11 New York City, intertwines three separate narratives, each of which directly confronts issues relating to the death of Thomas Schell Jr., who died during the attacks on the World Trade Center. The focal point of the novel, however, revolves around the son of Thomas Schell Jr., Oskar, who is plagued by his father's death. The text reveals that though Oskar is a curious nine-year-old boy who seeks to understand everything, he is unable to clearly understand how and why his father died. Foer uses prose to carefully characterize Oskar, making it clear that Oskar struggles to live in a world post-9/11. Oskar becomes confrontational with his mother, often blaming her for his father's death (Foer 170); he is also afraid of heights, infrastructure, and public transportation, which Foer reveals through Oskar's need to "invent things" to keep him and others safe (12). Oskar meets with a therapist to help him cope with his father's death, but Oskar only becomes frustrated with his doctor (203). Oskar is entirely consumed by the terrorist attacks and how they have caused a great disruption to his life, leading him to feel unsafe and depressed. Oskar is desperate to understand how his father died, and it seems that if Oskar could understand this, he would be able to reconcile his father's death, giving him a "proper burial." For this reason, it becomes evident that the core of Oskar's trauma is the fact that he cannot adequately cope with the death of his father. Through use of prose,

Foer is able to reveal a great deal about Oskar's personality, how he became traumatized, and how it negatively affects his life.

While Foer clearly establishes the core of Oskar's traumas through prose, he does not solely rely on prose to illustrate the ways in which Oskar attempts to subdue his traumas. Instead, Foer uses a variety of visual constructions to show how Oskar alleviates the symptoms he experiences. Furthermore, the visual constructions included throughout Oskar's narrative help him to better understand the cause of his father's death, which is what disrupts his ability to function on a day-to-day basis. Irene Visser argues that trauma can be defined as "the painful remembering of an experience" and that it is this act of remembering that causes traumatic symptoms to occur (273). It is clear that Oskar endures traumatic symptoms on a daily basis, given the amount of time he devotes to thinking about the possible ways his father died on September 11th. Visser goes on to argue that narrative writing can serve as a powerful tool for confronting traumatic symptoms. When writing the victim is forced to remember the stressor event, giving the victim agency over the event. Memory, then, serves to enable the victim to directly confront the stressor event, giving her the necessary power to better understand the ways in which she was affected by the event, allowing her the leverage to begin "repairing" her shattered assumptions of the world (274-75). The notion that memory provides agency is problematic for Oskar because he does not have full access to his own trauma. That is to say, since he is unaware of how his father died, he is unable to fully use memory as an agent in helping him recover. In order, then, to gain agency, Oskar must figure out how his father died. If he were able to learn of the cause of death, Oskar would then be able to start using his acts of remembering as a means for recovery. Visser suggests narrative

writing as a possible tool for working through the act of remembering. Rather than using narrative writing, Foer enables Oskar to exercise his memory through photographs. The photographs are a part of Oskar's photo scrapbook, and it is through this deliberate compilation of images that Oskar is able to use memory as an agent for working through his trauma.

The scrapbook in Oskar's narrative functions as an agent of memory in two ways: it helps him to remember all of the important moments in his life; and looking at photographs helps him to assuage his feelings of sadness. Using an old family camera, Oskar captures important moments in his life and includes the photographs in a scrapbook, which he calls "Stuff That Happened To Me" (Foer 52). For Oskar, these photographs reveal "truths," which are important in helping him learn how his father died (99). It is interesting that Oskar collects images for a scrapbook, which is a type of autobiographical text, functioning as a pictorial and verbal journal representing "lives and the colliding bits of personal experience that help [formulate identities]....As collections of material artifacts, scrapbooks demonstrate a kind of respect for small things, ephemeral items that together convey personal meaning" (Faigley et al. 158-59). Foer's inclusion of the scrapbook serves as a way for Oskar to reflect and remember particular moments that have, in some capacity, had a lasting effect on him.

It is significant that Oskar maintains a photo scrapbook because he uses this as a vehicle for obtaining the "truth," especially when it comes to knowing the truth about how his father died (Foer 52). However, the images Oskar includes are not always accurate depictions of "things that happened to him," because in fact, most of the images did not "happen" to him. Rather, most of the images in the scrapbook are reflections of

his emotions and thoughts, particularly those that tangentially relate to the terrorist attacks. For example, Oskar includes an image of the descent of a roller coaster (Foer 148). This image is one that does reflect an experience Oskar had, but what is more striking is that the image illustrates the act of falling, which is significant because Oskar often questions if his father died by falling out of a World Trade Center window. This image is also paired with text on the previous page, where Oskar says, "I'm incredibly panicky about roller coasters." Despite this, he "sat in the front car," and he "kept wondering if what [he] was feeling was at all like falling" (147). The text paired with the image shows how Foer uses visuals to help Oskar think about the possible reasons for his father's death. In postulating a cause of death, Oskar is able to think through his trauma. However, this thinking through does not adequately function to help him resolve his trauma because the images in the scrapbook, as noted before, are not actual representations of the attacks, which Oskar needs in order to understand how his father died. Instead, the images seem to function merely as a way to cope with his father's death, especially since Oskar reflects on the images at times when he feels especially saddened by his father's absence (Foer 52). In other words, the images Foer uses in Oskar's scrapbook operate as a coping mechanism that brings Oskar comfort. Due to the lack of accurate 9/11 representations, the images by no means can fully help Oskar to understand how his father died, which would help to remedy the trauma.

Though Oskar's scrapbook includes images that are reminiscent of the attacks, they are not actual news photographs because his mother did not allow Oskar to watch television; he was unable to bear witness to the attacks through the media (Foer 4). The censorship of media images prevents Oskar from truly understanding the magnitude of

the attacks and what his father had experienced on that day. Foer never directly reveals why Oskar is not permitted to watch the news coverage, but one may surmise that Oskar's mother felt the images might have been too graphic and emotionally damaging. Marc Redfield argues that the mediation of the 9/11 attacks was highly repetitive and it was this that makes the attacks so difficult to forget, even if one wished to block the attacks from their memory (61-62). He argues that the mediation of the attacks was inescapable, causing a "virtual and hyperreal" cultural trauma (56). He says that the mediation of the attacks produced a "representational power." The images produced by the media made the attacks a "spectacle," and the representational power of the media images had the ability to make one feel as though they experienced the attacks first hand (68-69). To summarize, even if someone had not experienced 9/11 as a witness, but had seen mediated footage, the representational power of the images could present itself as feeling "eerily" like the "real thing," and as a result, could lead to experiencing symptoms of trauma. If the media coverage, then, had the power to make images seem realistic enough to make one feel as though they had experienced the attacks first-hand, this may explain why Oskar was forbidden to watch the news. Furthermore, given the cyclical nature of the media coverage, where viewers perpetually consumed the visual images of the attacks, Oskar's mother may have been shielding Oskar from bearing witness as a way to eliminate feelings of despair.

However, censoring the visual media coverage may, in turn, have been more damaging to Oskar, who sincerely needed to understand how his father died in an effort to reduce the trauma he experienced. In other words, the censorship has prevented Oskar from knowing all of the possible ways his father may have died. The media's visual



documentation provided access to a variety of images, showing the ways in which Americans perished in the attacks. The victims of the attacks may have died by impact of the planes crashing into the buildings; by toxic smoke inhalation; by entrapment; death by jumping from the burning towers; or even by perishing during the collapse of the infrastructure. Foer uses prose to show how Oskar considers the possibilities of death, but because Oskar was not allowed to see or even learn about these causes of death, he did not have full access to understanding how his father may have died. By not having all of the possibilities available to him, Oskar is unable to fully contend with his trauma.

Since he was not allowed to see footage of the attacks through his own eyes, he constructed images of what he thought the attacks may have looked like in an attempt to move closer to the “truth” about the way in which his father died. Without access to television news, Oskar often turns to the Internet as a means for finding visual clues about his father’s death (Foer 41). “I printed out some of the pictures I found-- a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers...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” (42). The images of shark attacks, tightrope walkers, and soldiers clearly do not capture the truths of how people perished on 9/11. However, the images represent *ideas* that can be closely associated with the 9/11 events: vicious attacks, suspension in air between the towers, and war. The aforementioned images illustrate how even though repeated footage of the attacks may have perpetuated fear and terror, the censorship forces Oskar to create his own images, which in and of itself could be ineffective in giving him agency over his own trauma. Since Foer affords Oskar the opportunity to grapple with trauma through composing a

visual scrapbook, Oskar would then need access to images that truly represented the possible ways in which his father died. Capturing the truth through photography was important to Oskar, but because he was not allowed to watch the media coverage, his photographic realities were compromised. Without any access to the actual news images, Oskar is left to collect images that hardly represent the realities of the attacks, thus leaving Oskar to continue speculating about the cause of his father's death.

One of the most intriguing images Foer includes in Oskar's scrapbook is a photograph of the "Tribute in Light" memorial (Foer 253). The Tribute in Light memorial is a "work of art" that is presented yearly by The Municipal Art Society of New York. The Tribute of Light is said to be

...one of the most powerful and healing works of public art ever produced. The majestic blue twin [light] beams are presented annually by MAS, shining from dusk on September 11, through dawn the next day. Visible within a sixty-mile radius on a clear night, Tribute has become a world-renowned icon of remembrance, honoring those who were lost, as well as those who worked so hard to get [New York City] through that terrible trial. (The Municipal Art Society of New York)

The lights of this memorial serve as a "healing work of public art," which in turn has become an "icon of remembrance" honoring those who perished and those who assisted in recovery efforts. Foer's inclusion of the Tribute in Lights photograph is highly significant for two reasons. The first is that it serves as a memorial for Oskar's father. Having this image in his scrapbook allows Oskar to pay tribute to his father, one of the people for whom this memorial is designed. In looking at and reflecting upon this image,

Oskar is able to use the agency of his memory to remember his father. The second reason that this image is so significant is that it is representational of true “news images.” Of all of the images to surface in the aftermath of the attacks, this image is one that Oskar has complete access to. The image does not reflect horrific scenes of death, but rather it acts to commemorate and to “heal.” However, the image in the novel only serves to remind Oskar that his father has died, and does not help him to understand *how* he died.

Following this image, Oskar says, “I miss my dad more now that when I started, even though the whole point was to stop missing him” (255). Here, Oskar is referring to his journey to figure out how his father died. He claims that he wants to stop missing him, but as the image from the scrapbook would indicate, Oskar is unable to stop missing him because he has yet to discover how his father died. The image of the Tribute in Light acts to reconstruct the World Trade Center towers and through commemoration, serves to avoid remembering how people died, and rather invites viewers to remember the lives of the people for whom the memorial was designed. In sum, because this photograph functions to commemorate, it forces Oskar to remember and to “miss his father,” as opposed to looking at images that serve as clues to understanding how his father may have died in the attacks. Foer’s use of this image seems to suggest that ceasing to “miss” someone is not possible given the nation’s need to commemorate and to remember the lives lost in the attacks. Despite Oskar’s desire to terminate his trauma and to “stop missing” his father, this photograph suggests that expunging his trauma altogether will not be possible, but rather through commemoration, one can remember as a means of subduing trauma.

Of all the images included in Oscar's scrapbook, only one is an image captured from the day of the attacks. The image is of a man falling from the windows of the World Trade Center. Oskar obtained this image not from watching television, but from secretly "Googling" images of the attacks on foreign websites. Oskar feels a peculiar bond with this image of the falling man, given how many times it recurs in his scrapbook (Foer 59, 62, 205). He says in regard to the image's original posting on a foreign website, "It makes me incredibly angry that people all over the world can know things that I can't, because it happened *here*, and happened to *me*, so shouldn't it be *mine*?" (256). Here, Oskar is pleading for ownership over the attacks because he believes the attacks directly affected him. Given how traumatized Oskar is over his father's death, he desperately wants agency over the image of the falling man that which he had been shielded from. Once Oskar is able to obtain this graphic image, he uses it repetitively throughout the scrapbook. The recurring image is reminiscent to several aspects of trauma, the first being that trauma occurs spontaneously and repetitively (Caruth 181). This might explain, then, why Foer inserts the image of the falling man at seemingly random moments throughout the span of Oskar's narrative. By placing the image near the beginning, middle, and end of Oskar's story, Foer is playing off of Oskar's spontaneous and repetitive bouts of traumatic symptoms. Another aspect of trauma to which this image relates is repression, where the painful experiences "[remain] in the unconscious to resurface in the form of disturbing symptoms" (Visser 273). This news image, the only to appear in Oskar's scrapbook, captures a very graphic form of death on 9/11. Though Oskar does not immediately claim his father died by falling, the repetition of the image suggests that Oskar may have thought this to be the cause of death.

The final aspect of trauma of which this image relates is latency and belatedness, where “the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it” (qtd. in Visser 273-74). The repetitious use of the image of the falling man suggests that Foer used this image as a way of expressing latency and belatedness in Oskar’s understanding of his father’s death. The image itself is a clear depiction of the effects of the attacks; this, then, is the “most direct seeing of a violent event.” As previously discussed, Redfield suggests that the mediated 9/11 images have a representational power that makes the images seem as though they “are the real thing.” The image has a certain verisimilitude about it, which may be, in part, why Oskar does not immediately recognize the image as one to illustrate the way in which his father perished. Furthermore, given its repeated use in Oskar’s narrative, I would argue that Foer is suggesting that even though Oskar refers to this image time and time again, the overwhelming shock factor of the image does not allow him to know that the image may contain the truth about his father’s death. The repetition of the image, then, suggests that the image of the falling man is a part of Oskar’s latent understanding or suspicion about the sincere possibility that his father died by jumping from the World Trade Center.

The significance of Foer’s use of the image of the falling man is evident at the conclusion of the novel when Oskar grows weary of trying to figure out the cause of his father’s death. Throughout the novel, Oskar sets out on an expedition to see if perfect strangers have any information about his father’s death. The reason he goes on this journey is because he found an unmarked key in his father’s closet. Oskar believed that if he could find the owner of the key, he would move closer to understanding how his father died. However, at the novel’s end, Foer reveals that the owner of the key had had no

relationship with or knowledge of Oskar's father. Defeated, Oskar gives up on his search. In his discussion with the owner of the key, Oskar reveals that on the morning of the attacks, his father had called their home five times, and that on the messages his father left, Oskar heard "people in the background screaming and crying. And you can hear glass breaking, which is part of what makes me wonder if people were jumping" (Foer 301). At this confession, it becomes evident that the images Foer includes are very much a part of Oskar's latent understanding about the possibility that his father died by jumping. After Oskar confesses this, he seems to feel a great sense of relief. He hands the key over to its rightful owner, and he goes home.

Though Oskar never truly overcomes his trauma, because he still is not entirely certain if his father died by jumping or by the building's collapse (Foer 302), he begins to return to a normal state of living. Oskar says,

I felt in the space between the bed and the wall, and found *Stuff That Happened To Me*. It was completely full. I was going to have to start a new volume soon. I read that it was the paper that kept the towers burning....Maybe if we lived in a paperless society... Dad would still be alive. Maybe I shouldn't start a new volume. I grabbed the flashlight from my backpack and aimed it at the book.... The whole world was in there. Finally, I found the pictures of the falling body.... Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody. I ripped the pages out of the book. I reversed the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky. And if I'd had more pictures, he would've flown through a window, back

into the building, and the smoke would've poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of. (325)

Foer includes these images in the last fourteen pages of the novel. When the reader flips through it quickly, as though it were a flip-book, it shows the falling man falling up back into the building instead of falling down to a certain death. The reverse sequencing of this news image suggests that Oskar has come to terms with two things: that his father is deceased, and that it is highly possible that his father died by jumping from the building. Foer allows Oskar to use this flip-book as a coping mechanism. As Oskar slowly flips through the fourteen still shots, he is able to "undo" the terrorist attacks. In this undoing, Oskar is greatly subduing his traumatic symptoms. After Oskar visualizes the man re-enter the building, he begins to imagine his dad, at home, tucking Oskar safely into bed. In the act of reversal, Oskar takes solace in remembering life pre-9/11. At this point, Oskar finally has agency over remembering the attacks, and he is able to shift his remembering from tragedy to something more comforting, like having his father safe at home. After Oskar flips through his rearranged images, he is able to conclude by saying, "We would have been safe" (326). While it seems Oskar is still struggling with the fact that his father is deceased, the power of using images to replay the attacks gives Oskar an authorial power that he desperately needed to confront his trauma. Foer affords Oskar the opportunity to use the scrapbook and the flip-book of images as a powerful means of coping with death and trauma.

The use of images in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is necessary in showing how the power of images can be used to confront issues of trauma inflicted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Foer illustrates through his characters, specifically Oskar, how

the attacks became a visual spectacle, causing immense symptoms of trauma. Through incorporating a variety of images in the form of a scrapbook, Foer is able to demonstrate how influential images were in the wake of the attacks. Whether these influential images were representational of the attacks themselves, or were merely representational of the idea of the attacks (namely falling and height), Foer demonstrates that confronting said images can be a strong vehicle for mediating trauma. Whereas Visser and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argue that writing narratives can function to alleviate trauma, I argue that using images and visual composition can serve to be just as effective in grappling with and subduing trauma. It is evident through Foer's novel that using images in composition can serve as a coping mechanism. In the case of Oskar Schell, images were a necessity in helping him to understand the terrorist attacks, ultimately serving to help him end speculating about his father's death. Foer's incorporation of images not only serves to aid the prose of his novel, but also function on their own as a tool for negotiating trauma.



#### **Chapter 4: Conclusions on the Role of Multimodal Constructions in Literature**

Both *In the Shadows of No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are examples of post-9/11 literature that aim to address the ways in which the terrorist attacks affected and disrupted the lives of American citizens. While both Art Spiegelman and Jonathan Safran Foer clearly articulate the damaging effects that the attacks had on the nation, their novels also serve as vehicles that grapple with and negotiate symptoms of trauma. Both pieces of literature are able to effectively work through 9/11-evoked traumas because the authors make use of visual elements, giving their narrators the agency necessary to confront the stressors that have in turn made the events and aftermath incomprehensible for those who bore witness to the attacks.

My assertion that visual rhetoric is critical for understanding the functionality of trauma narratives rests on the value of this scholarship for understanding symbiotic use of words and images and the preponderance of the images themselves. Faigley, George, Palchik and Selfe argue that we have a greater ability to produce and consume images because of advances in technology, (4), and indeed, professional and amateur photographers captured the events of 9/11 on an unprecedented scale. This visual documentation rapidly disseminated to the public through a variety of media outlets. Due to advancements in technology and the ways in which the public consumes and produces information, the public has “become accustomed...to seeing words and images together everywhere” and thus “expect to see words and images [used] together” (Faigley et al. 6-8). This expectancy encourages the public to “use words and images in combination to present information that could not be conveyed by either one alone” (Faigley et al. 7). *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *In the Shadow of No Towers* make use of

image-word combination as a way to explain what was experienced and witnessed during and after 9/11. Both authors rely on images to show the events of the attacks, and use words to explicate the emotions felt in response to what was visually witnessed. Faigley et al. argue “although images can show us quickly and often very accurately what something looks like, they cannot tell us what it smells, sounds, or feels like the way words can. Of course, words and images can work together, with words describing details we may not be able to see” (32). Though Spiegelman’s and Foer’s images show the magnitude of the attacks, the images alone do not articulate how these images emotionally and psychologically affected Spiegelman and Oskar, and subsequently how the visual witnessing caused trauma. Therefore, in order for Spiegelman and Foer to use their texts as vehicles for coping with 9/11 traumas, they combine images and words to explicate how the “visual event” affected the normalcies of life.

The images to emerge in the aftermath of 9/11 speak to the argument made by J. Anthony Blair. He argues “the visual has an immediacy, a verisimilitude, and a concreteness...that are not available to the verbal” (59). Both Spiegelman’s and Foer’s texts use the visual functions to show what words cannot adequately describe. For instance, Spiegelman incorporates his depiction of the north tower’s glowing bones throughout his graphic novel because this image was at the core of his trauma. He needed to work with images to show his audience precisely how the images of what he saw during the attacks had affected him. Foer, on the other hand, uses images to show how Oskar is plagued by the notion of “falling” and how the image of the falling man represents the possible way in which his father died during the attacks. Furthermore, Blair also argues that images are evocative and have the power to convey information

quickly and in a compact space and time, whereas verbal constructions do not always have these evocative properties. However, images lack a “dialectical form,” therefore a combination of both the visual and verbal can help to convey a greater depth of meaning all at once (49-53). Both *No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* make use of evocative images, again, to show the magnitude of the attacks, but the prose in each novel functions to explicate ideas and emotions that the images do not readily convey. Through Blair’s argument, it is evident that Spiegelman and Foer must rely on both images and words to adequately write a trauma narrative that confronts the mediated images while using writing as a coping mechanism.

Furthermore, visual rhetoricians such as Hobbs, Hill, Helmers, and Edwards assert that images bear historical and societal significance. However, it is left to the viewer to supply dialogue and sequential action to an image in order for it to convey meaning (Helmers 68). Spiegelman and Foer have utilized 9/11 images, which bear historical, cultural, and societal significance, by appropriating them in their own narratives, presenting the images with new meanings. Through situating the 9/11 news images in their writing, Spiegelman and Foer have been able to present their readers with a new perspective, while simultaneously using the images to confront matters of trauma.

The concern of constructing a 9/11 trauma narrative that adequately functions to deal with the trauma evoked by visual witnessing can be addressed by multimodal composition. It is evident through Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* that a multimodal approach can be used effectively in confronting and working through trauma evoked by the visual witnessing of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Spiegelman uses the graphic novel format to

organize his thoughts, visions, and traumas. The layout of the graphic novel medium allows Spiegelman to incorporate images while using a variety of wording techniques to help him explain how the images have had an impact on him. Throughout *No Towers*, Spiegelman grapples with his trauma while considering his safety in a disrupted society and his government's role in addressing the attacks. Spiegelman relies on a variety of techniques unique to the comics genre to help him address the aforementioned issues. He uses the layout of panels, at first, to convey how the attacks disrupted his normal routine and subsequently caused him to experience trauma. As the installments proceed, he uses the panels in a much more linear fashion as to suggest he is coming to terms with how the attacks have affected him. Spiegelman also uses appropriated news images and newspaper comics characters to help him convey his perspective of the attacks. Spiegelman makes use of visual details such as color selection to suggest that as time moves forward he is able to come to terms with his trauma. The most notable example of color usage is in the tenth installment where the image of the north tower's glowing bones fades from a vibrant, burning orange to a faded gray. The color fade works to suggest the image that haunted Spiegelman's mind for nearly two years has become subdued and no longer exists in the forefront of his mind. The graphic novel format allows Spiegelman to incorporate images to represent what he witnessed during the attacks, words to explain how these images affected him, and finally, the layout allows him to visually convey the ways in which he experienced trauma. The multimodal composition allows Spiegelman to use images and prose in a narrative as an agent to control his memory of the attacks, thus giving him the ability to work through trauma.

Foer's novel, while predominantly written in prose, makes use of images to show how Oskar negotiated his trauma which was inflicted by his father's untimely death. The images Foer includes are a part of Oskar's photographic scrapbook, which brings Oskar comfort when his traumatic symptoms affect him most. Given his infatuation with images because of their ability to convey the truth, Oskar uses images as a means for finding out the truth behind his father's death. Foer's use of images throughout the novel helps Oskar confront his trauma. The most notable image Foer incorporates is the image of the falling man. This image recurs throughout the novel, suggesting that Oskar believes his father died by falling. The images, then, serve to help Oskar find the "truth" and help him to cope throughout his quest to learn about his father's death. While the images suggest Oskar is engaged in a healing process, Foer uses prose to explicate the ways in which Oskar experiences pains of loss. The multimodal approach in Foer's novel helps Oskar come to terms with a new reality, and the novel as a whole presents readers with a new way of interpreting the terrorist attacks.

The necessity to make use of images, when confronting and writing about 9/11 arises out of the visual media saturation of the attacks. In her discussion regarding the ways in which the media played a role in understanding the attacks, Sonia Baelo-Allué writes,

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States can be considered a cultural trauma and an intermedial phenomenon. The attack has become one of the most represented disasters in history since it produced an unprecedented visual impact on those around the world who watched the second plane crash into the South Tower live on television. That 9/11 was a media event is inextricably linked to the

way we remember the attacks and the way we coped with them when they took place. (184)

Baelo-Allué claims that the visual saturation greatly affected the ways in which Americans would remember and cope with the events that unfolded on 9/11. She also argues that visual remembering would hold a significant role in the literature that would emerge in the aftermath of the attacks. “Even though in the aftermath of 9/11 fiction was rejected as a suitable means for understanding the traumatic events, some authors rose to the challenge by drawing from other media and even using taboo images that had been hidden from the public” (191). She then argues that literature “has the capacity to make us face the unspeakable, to act out cultural traumas to work through them” (191-92). Both Spiegelman and Foer demonstrate how multimodal literature (literature that makes use of prose and visual constructs to convey a message) has the ability to confront the “unspeakable.” Their novels support Baelo-Allué’s claim that 9/11 was a “media event,” and that its “visual impact” is in fact linked to the ways in which we remember, discuss, and write about the attacks in an effort to make sense of them. In the introduction to *No Towers*, Spiegelman reveals that he felt compelled to use the “pivotal image from [his] 9/11 morning” in his writing. He says through writing, he would be able to “sort out the fragments of what [he had] experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what [he] actually saw” (Spiegelman, “The Sky” n. pag.). It is clear that for Spiegelman, it was necessary to draw upon the visual as a means for making sense of the “fragments” of his experience. Both Spiegelman and Foer incorporate mediated images throughout their writing as a way to cope with the aftermath of the attacks. *No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* strongly support Baelo-Allué’s assertion that it is impossible

to separate 9/11 images from the 9/11 prose literature because of how the images function in the act of remembering the attacks.

Similarly, Tim Gauthier argues “one of the most widespread [traumas endured on 9/11] was our silent, helpless witnessing of the televised events” (369). He argues that the “distanced perspective” of watching the attacks unfold on television “made comprehension nearly impossible,” thus making it “almost impossible to extricate our experience from what we witnessed on the screen, and, similarly, from the narratives reiterated during those endless hours of compulsive television viewing” (369-70).

Gauthier suggests that the images that emerged in the aftermath of the attacks do not adequately lend to the meaning-making process on their own, and therefore, it is critical to “re-translate” the images. He proposes “since the initial narratives were largely conveyed through images, it stands to reason that a medium that incorporates both text and image...might have more success with the ‘translation’” of understanding the mediated news images (370). *No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are two pieces of literature that show a “re-translation” of mediated news images.

Spiegelman and Foer have taken images depicting the attacks and have used them in new ways. Spiegelman used both images from the attacks and from his memory as a way to make sense of what he witnessed. Foer uses the image of the falling man to allow Oskar a means for grappling with his father’s death. Though both pieces of literature use images in vastly different ways, it still remains that the multimodal approaches aided the authors in making arguments about the ways in which the visual witnessing of the attacks had a traumatizing effect on individuals and the nation as a whole.

Both Baelo-Allué and Gauthier advocate for the use of multimodal composition as a means for addressing the trauma evoked by witnessing the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The claim that multimodal composition can serve to make meaning of the attacks can be supported by the arguments made by trauma theorists. Irene Visser, Amos Goldberg, and Gabriele Schwab assert that writing narratives is one powerful means for confronting and grappling with trauma. Visser most notably articulates the ways in which narrative functions to give agency to the writer. Through writing, the victim engages in acts of remembering, which allows the victim to fully confront the traumatic stressors (Visser 274). Memory, then, gives the victim agency, allowing control over the stressors that have caused the victim to experience traumatic symptoms. With the ability to control the stressors, the victim can then use writing as a means for reconstructing the traumatic events in an effort to understand how and why they have experienced traumatic symptoms. The reconstruction through written prose narrative, as Visser suggests, can aid in subduing or reconciling trauma.

Similarly, Goldberg asserts a “life story is the first essential step toward recovery, or at least toward working through trauma” (122). He then goes on to argue that a “narrative depicts the writer’s life but also in the more literal sense that it actually enables life” (137). This assertion implies that writing narrative in response to trauma can in fact serve to alleviate symptoms, thus functioning as a useful coping mechanism that “enables” the victimized to experience “life.” While Goldberg and Visser firmly believe that narrative writing can be used as a vehicle for managing symptoms of trauma, Schwab asserts that narrative writing needs to be approached in a different manner in an effort to fully contend with how damaging the effects of trauma can be. She says, “Life



writings often emerge from a traumatic core, occupying a space between two parallel universes: daily life and trauma. In real life, it is dangerous for these universes to touch. In writing, they must converge” (95). Without a convergence of life and trauma, Schwab argues “stories remain cut off, their words stranded in the silence they try to cover” (95). Schwab later acknowledges that trauma theory is often criticized because traumatic symptoms are difficult to represent and diagnose, given that each individual experiences trauma in different ways. She claims that there are great paradoxes in trauma studies, and poses the question, “how then do we write what resists representation?” (102). She says, “We know that traumatic amnesia can generate other prohibitions on thought and emotion that are fundamentally opposed to narrative and storytelling. And yet we also know that telling and witnessing are necessary for healing trauma” (102). Given the paradox between representation and storytelling, Schwab asserts, “We need, then, a theory of traumatic narrative that deals with the paradox of telling what cannot be told and/or has been silenced” (102).

Schwab’s assertion holds true in consideration of how the American public would cope with the traumatic symptoms experienced as a result of witnessing the 9/11 attacks. The notion that 9/11 was an “unimaginable” event, one that would leave witnesses with feelings of uncertainty, resonates with Schwab’s call for a new form of trauma narrative. In the case of the 9/11 trauma narrative, Baelo-Allué and Gauthier might suggest it is necessary to include news images that represent the attacks as a means for accurately conveying all aspects of the trauma. In other words, Baelo-Allué and Gauthier maintain that the visual saturation during and after 9/11 has become an inescapable component in remembering the attacks, and as Gauthier claims, idle viewing of these images has done

nothing but perpetuate trauma. Schwab's call for a new trauma narrative--one that functions to fully address all aspects of how traumatic symptoms occur within a widespread and varied population--might be best addressed by Baelo-Allué's and Gauthier's claims that images could serve to work through trauma.

As I have previously demonstrated through analysis of *In the Shadow of No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, authors Art Spiegelman and Jonathan Safran Foer are two writers who have made use of images in writing trauma narratives. The combination of Schwab's, Baelo-Allué's and Gauthier's arguments is implicated in both *No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Spiegelman and Foer have adopted multimodal composition strategies to establish traumatic symptoms evoked by witnessing and surviving the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, multimodal composition has acted as an agent, giving the authors and their characters some control over the traumatic stressors, giving them the ability to confront symptoms of trauma experienced in the wake of the attacks. *No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* support trauma theorists' claims that narratives do serve to confront and work through trauma. The texts also clearly demonstrate how it is difficult to remember the attacks without making reference to the images that emerged in the aftermath. Whereas trauma theorists argue narrative writing is a strategy that can be used to negotiate trauma, and literary scholars studying the effects of 9/11 suggest that images need to be utilized in the 9/11 literature, there has been scarce discussion on the ways in which multimodal narratives can specifically serve to alleviate trauma. As I have suggested elsewhere in my argument, it is critical to assess the ways in which visual rhetoric and visual composition can serve to work through traumatic symptoms. Through use of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of*

*No Towers* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, I have shown how authors have been successful in using a multimodal approach in writing trauma narratives.

In both works of literature, images serve to negotiate the traumas experienced, and words are used to help explicate what the images do not convey on their own. Both Spiegelman and Foer exemplify how an author can use multimodal composition as a means for addressing traumas evoked by the visual media of 9/11. Both suggest that the visual saturation of the terrorist attacks is inescapable in terms of dealing with trauma. Foer and Spiegelman effectively appropriate the media images in their narratives, using them to convey how the visual witnessing of the attacks perpetuated symptoms of trauma. The multimodal approach in each novel allows the writers agency, giving them control over the images that evoked terror. Through taking control over the images that terrorized the nation, Spiegelman and Foer were able to construct texts that offered a new perspective of the attacks, while simultaneously working to subdue feelings of trauma experienced by the narrators. The success in approaching a complex and catastrophic event through multimodal means suggests that this form of traumatic narrative writing may be useful in writing through trauma in the future. Given the ways in which technology is changing society's role in consuming and producing images, it is likely that future catastrophic events will be rich in visual documentation, just as in the case of 9/11. As photographic documentation continues to develop in our culture, our awareness of visual rhetoric will need to expand. Having an understanding of how to read, analyze, and interpret images will help shape the ways in which we use images to communicate. In the case of 9/11, images demanded our attention, thus making us dependent upon the images

as a means for grappling with and understanding the attacks. The literature to emerge in the aftermath clearly illustrates how images were necessary in writing about the attacks. It is arguable that 9/11 set a precedent for image consumption and production, especially in the way of writing about catastrophe, terror, and trauma. Trauma theorists may extend this research to consider the ways in which visual rhetoric and multimodal composition may serve as another means for working through trauma. Further consideration of multimodal composition may become critical in the field of trauma studies, given the proliferation of image production and consumption, as well as the immediacy of accessing information in the 21st century. Art Spiegelman and Jonathan Safran Foer have undoubtedly set out to write in response to 9/11, and their works are, in their own right, a new category of trauma narrative. Through their careful symbiotic use of images and words, Spiegelman and Foer have responded to Don DeLillo's call to write America's counter-narrative. *In the Shadow of No Towers* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* emerged in a time of displacement and uncertainty in America, but they have risen to occasion to write a counter-narrative, one that would present a new perspective in an effort help to alleviate the traumas experienced by a shattered nation.

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