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Source: *English Studies in Latin America*, No. 13 (August 2017)

ISSN: 0719-9139

Published by: Facultad de Letras, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

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On Tangle Formations and Fluid Narratives: Scrapbooking and Photography in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

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ABSTRACT

Along the axes of the still-flourishing tendency in industrialized societies to render and mediate experience through image-making practices, and the attraction towards taking photographs of events permeating contemporary narrative, the present study intends to analyze the impact and role of intermedial practices between photographic and verbal language in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer, with a specific emphasis on the protagonist's scrapbook *Stuff That Happened to Me*. Given that Oskar Schell decides to perpetuate what occurs to him primarily through pictures, his diary challenges traditional ways of journaling and storytelling through scrapbooking strategies, thus disrupting the teleological reading of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, while becoming an intertextual resource, a narrative practice and a method of signification.

In order to lay an analysis of the impact of "Stuff that Happened to Me" along the pages *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, selected case-studies are seen through the lens of *Analog Fictions for the Digital Age* by Julia Breitbach and *Writing with Scissors* by Ellen Gruber Harvey, joined to essentials of photographic theory. Ultimately, by posing questions such as: does *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* entail a radical provocation on the relationship between photography and literature, or is it a mere transposition of 18th century scrapbooking practices? Is this novel in its construction just a historical result of the long-known dialogue between word and image, or another symptom of the present information overload? Or is it, surprisingly, a consequence of its contextual circumstances – namely, an age of visual dominance? These inquiries will open the opportunity to briefly address 'the visual turn' in literature and the understanding (or the necessity to understand) new hybrid modes of reading and writing.

KEYWORDS: Scrapbooking, Photography, Intermediality, Narratology

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In the maelstrom of contemporary times, the growing tendency in industrialized societies to render and mediate experience through image-making practices has profoundly impacted the perception of the world and the way we (re)construct it. In this vein, the relentless sophistication of image production in the 21st century has made of the proliferation of pictures not only a characteristic of our age, but also an essential aspect of our *Zeitgeist*. Our current technical sophistication has by far surpassed Heidegger's statement on the value of the image in 1977, where he claimed in *The Age of the World Picture* that, "the fact that the world becomes picture [. . .] is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age" (130). Conversely, and in place of the classic conception of the world as text, images are more prominently chosen to preserve the past, influence the present, and thus linger on Western civilization.

Further, as the idea of the world as a text has become a more distant echo in the landscape of the present, the visual propensity that permeates our milieu has translated into the integration of pictures and other visual devices in contemporary literature. As a result, literature has acquired a more varied spectrum of language choices that reverberate with the notion of the world as a picture, albeit at the expense of eroding and disrupting traditional notions of storytelling, reading and writing. For such reason, the more conspicuous introduction of the visual in 21st century novels demands a revision of structural aspects of narratology that are influenced by the acquisition of pictorial language, unveiling the necessity to close a gap between literary studies and visual culture.

With that aim, the present study intends to analyze the impact and role of the interplay among photographs and verbal language in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer, with a specific emphasis on the protagonist's scrapbook entitled "Stuff That Happened to Me". In his scrapbook, Oskar Schell seeks to give an account of his search in New York for a lock to the key he found in his father's closet, right after the latter died in the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers. Within that context, Oskar Schell decides to perpetuate what occurs to him solely through uncaptioned photographs, which were either taken by himself or downloaded from the Internet. Therefore, his diary represents, on a small scale a progressive transition from the world as text to the world as picture in a digital format, while simultaneously challenging traditional ways of

journaling and storytelling through scrapbooking strategies. Moreover, Oskar's scrapbook "Stuff That Happened to Me" does not merely evoke a transition of the verbal to the visual, since from its hybrid composition new strategies for signification arise that surpass the media involved. These observations make of Oskar Schell's diary an alluring photography-based journal that creates hybrid dynamics of meaning, for it is powerfully loaded with the tantalizing wordlessness of the protagonist's mourning for his father as driving force.

In addition, when further observing Oskar's visual journal in relation *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, one can claim that due to the scrapbook's scattered distribution, Oskar's photographic diary blends with the novel as the reading is in flux, bringing new interplays to the narrative surface, creating a dialogue between the storyworld in the scrapbook and that of the novel itself. Consequently, "Stuff That Happened to Me" impacts *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* in two main areas: disrupting the teleological reading of the narrative through the emergence of images, and creating new strategies for signification built on *a priori* / *a posteriori* correlation of images and text. In this regard, one can claim that the aforementioned resources give rise to a two-sided chronicle in Oskar's scrapbook. First, these strategies give a more reliable account of Oskar's quest grounded on photographic resources that taint the narrative with a hue of realism. Secondly, while simultaneously supporting the veracity of Oskar's journey, pictures and text insinuate his subterranean struggle to accept and deal with his father's death. Thus, scrapbooking in "Stuff That Happened to Me" can be considered as an intertextual resource, a narrative practice and a method of signification.

Along this line of analysis and considering *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* at the intersection of photography, narrative and scrapbooking, this study seeks to expand on these preliminary notions using as foundation *Analog Fictions for the Digital Age* by Julia Breitbach and *Writing with Scissors* by Ellen Gruber Harvey. Likewise, this analysis will be divided into three sections: in "Scrapbooking as a Modernist Practice" theoretical and historical background will set the first step towards looking at scrapbooking techniques in "Stuff That Happened to Me", shedding light on strategies of signification with regard to Oskar's diary and its photographs. The

second section, “Tangle Formations: Photography, Narrative and Scrapbooking” will address how Jonathan Safran Foer particularly uses scrapbooking strategies for the sake of meaning-making in regard to the crystallization of memory while hinting at the existence of trauma and struggle in Oskar’s journal. By the same token, this section will additionally map the impact of photography and scrapbooking through the lens of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, thus looking at the disruption of traditional features of narration such as time, linearity and space through the inclusion of photographic images in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

Additionally, after having developed the two previous sections, a third section titled “Photographs as Wild Objects: A Conclusion” will focus on the imperative role of photography in the meaning-making dynamics present in the novel, underlining the conception of photographs as objects for the productivity of literature. This section seeks to emphasize and expand conceptions of the photograph as different to other kinds of interventions and illustrations present in the novel, given the fact that photographs bring specific properties and interplays into the novel that are not inherent to other kinds of images. In this aspect, I will also discuss how *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a “new media” novel which uses old media in order to negotiate narrative strategies and trauma while responding to a visually constituted reality in tune with our *Zeitgeist*. Accordingly, the outcome of this section will allow me to comment on the relationship a visually constituted novel forges and unfolds between visual culture and literature, the relation it bears with “the visual turn” in literature and how it presents new modes of reading and writing, thus encouraging a more thorough analysis of the use of the photograph in literature beyond rigid mimetic and representational discourses, as W.J.T Mitchell most firmly stated.

I. SCRAPBOOKING AS A MODERNIST PRACTICE

In order to get a better grasp of “Stuff That Happened to Me” it is necessary to bear in mind the context and *modus operandi* in which the scrapbook comes into being in the novel. Oskar Schell finds a key in his parents’ bedroom after his father did not survive the collapse of the Twin Towers. Oskar believes the key he found can somehow bring him closer to his dad, so he starts searching information about it online, prior to a plan to explore New York and find the lock. After

his first investigations on the Internet, he finds some pictures, which he prints out and pastes in the scrapbook. These pictures, not taken by Oskar, are still considered as eventful to him, since he pastes them in his scrapbook he describes as “my scrapbook of everything that happened to me” (42), therefore considering these pictures to be part of his life story. In this spirit, and despite Oskar’s authorial role in photographs, “Stuff That Happened to Me” does not diverge from Gruber Harvey’s description of scrapbooks as “visual albums documenting family and personal life – mostly made by women” (18-19). Alongside this definition, Oskar’s scrapbook reflects some characteristics of nineteenth-century scrapbooks, being “personal and emotionally expressive [. . .] carry[ing] information about family relationships” (14-15). This is further illustrated as Oskar confesses: “every time I left our apartment to go searching for the lock, I became a bit lighter, because I was getting closer to dad” (52). This statement further reveals Oskar’s quest as a mean to closeness and connect to his father through registering his search.

Moreover, Oskar’s gesture of selection and appropriation of photographs from the endless material from the Internet is akin to the origins and techniques of scrapbooking. In her historical account on scrapbooking in *Writing with Scissors*, Ellen Gruber Harvey features scrapbooking as a technique that emerged in order to cope with the information overload people felt towards the printed media during the nineteenth century, given that “these readers complained that there was so much to read that they were constantly distracted. [. . .] [They] felt inundated by printed matter, as cheap newspapers proliferated and took on increasing importance” (3). Consequently, scrapbooking was a mechanism that allowed readers to dismiss and select data from an overwhelming source, while providing a portable format that could be either for public access or personal storage. Accordingly, scrapbooking allowed readers to filter and preserve what they felt was worth keeping by selection and transposition onto another surface, with the possibility of either sharing the scrapbook and getting more contributions, or to simply hide it. In this respect, Oskar’s search on the Internet equally presents an overload of available material but in a digital platform, Thus, his strategy of selection and transposition becomes an analogue gesture to the strategies of readers of printed material in the 18th century.

Moreover, and as it is to be further studied in this section, Oskar's search online is deeply driven by his desire to encounter his father again, and therefore borrows material from an open source so to fill the void of the irreversible past. Along these lines, Oskar's approach to scrapbooking more thoroughly tunes in with conceptions from the nineteenth century, since in the past these visual albums were equally seen as the result of a process of selection with a very personal connotation. Each reader applied exclusive, personal, potentially unknown canon for selection in a massive overflow of information available. This criterion could relate to any area of their lives they felt could be completed or mirrored through the preservation of scraps from printed matter.

Thus, Oskar's selection of images online resembles the scrapbooking strategies of the nineteenth century for he copes with an overwhelming amount of available material through selection, transposition, and intimacy of criterion. Additionally, in *Writing with Scissors* intimacy is said to be either of singular or plural character, given that scrapbooks could also have a collective audience and authorship with the purpose of sharing or reinforcing a sentiment in a specific community or to connect desires and longings in a more personal, intimate sphere (Gruber Harvey 14-16). As for Oskar's scrapbook, "Stuff That Happened to Me" stems from a singular intimacy without aiming to interact with a specific community.

Therefore, given the potential unspoken and seemingly alien relation present in scrapbooks for first-time observers, one could attribute such bewilderment to the reason and context in which scrapbooks are born. There is a variety of reasons that give rise to it, for they can have multiple sources and a very restricted target audience, and their place of origin could be in the realm of the past, the present, or even, dreams and other illusory settings. Furthermore, given that scrapbooks can be based on time-oriented material without being attached to any date reference, Ellen Gruber Harvey states that they can create a timeline of their own regardless of their dated or time-based material. In this case, a scrapbook of experiences is based on a curatorial exercise, which would tailor and arrange the selected material to convey a narrative sequence (3-4). This statement proves to be true with Oskar's journal; given that even though the pictures in "Stuff that Happened to Me" were not taken by him, Oskar manages to dislocate and arrange images in a perplexing constellation

that sketches his life across the pages of his scrapbook.

Undoubtedly, then, each scrapbook is unique and provides a glimpse into the life of the maker in fluid perspectives that can certainly shift from one scrapbook to the other. This is better illustrated in *Writing with Scissors*, when the author claims that, “each scrapbook is its world, compelling and impossibly frustrating [. . .]. Each scrapbook seems both opaque and tantalizing on the first reading; magnetic and impossible” (14). As stated, each scrapbook is loaded in symbolism; its existence can only primarily be justified in the filtering of an overwhelming amount of material to the public, for they still preserve another subterranean reason that communicates with a singular, intimate need to preserve, convey, and remember.

In this aspect, after highlighting the importance of intimacy in scrapbook-making, the origin of the ungraspable obscurity that scrapbooks carry is related to a unique reason that gives rise to them. For that matter, scrapbooks indeed respond to a covert need of their authors that longs to come afloat, sometimes turning into an act of remediation unveiling the existence of the unspeakable, as for Oskar Schell. This is the heart of the mystery of why scrapbooking feels so visceral and foreign. In this regard, “Stuff That Happened to Me” wholly illustrates the obscurity of reading a scrapbook while providing a hint of Safran Foer’s use of scrapbooking strategies which are next to be analyzed. In this vein, the first fifteen pages of Oskar’s scrapbook shall be added to this study:

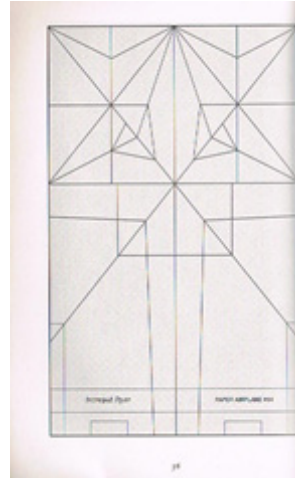




21



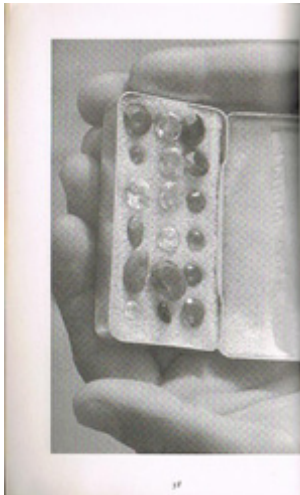
22



23



24



25

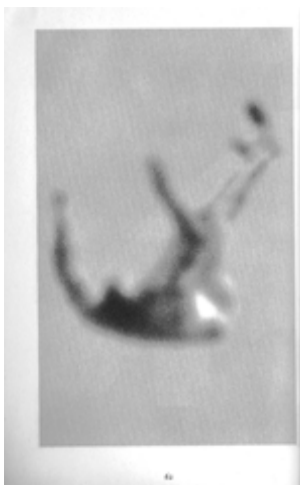


26



27

28



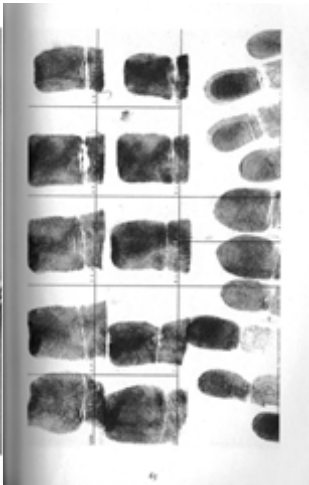
29



30



31



32

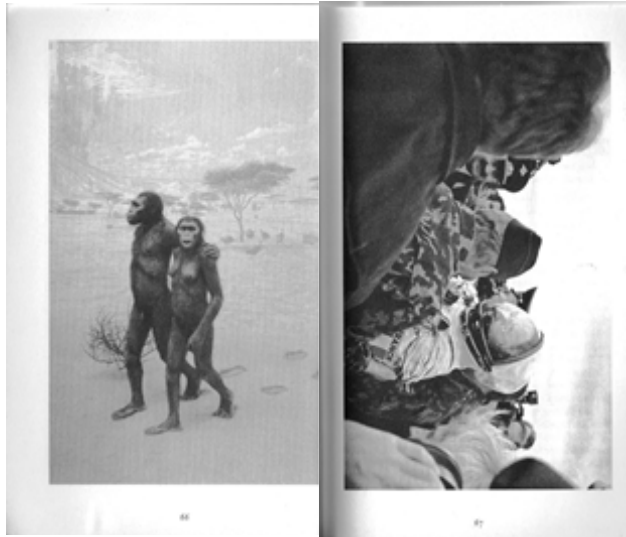


Fig. 1. Scrapbook. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Written by Jonathan Safran Foer. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005) 53-67.

II. TANGLE FORMATIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY, NARRATIVE AND SCRAPBOOKING

After having established the foundations of scrapbooking and having seen the first pages of “Stuff That Happened to Me” and as previously stated in “Scrapbooking as a Modernist Practice”, Oskar’s scrapbook corresponds with the essentials of the nineteenth-century scrapbooking. Moreover, these images turn out to be tantalizing and enigmatic in their first read without background for their understanding, corresponding to the inextricably unique nature of scrapbooking. In this regard, Jonathan Safran Foer preserves the scrapbooking essentials which empower Oskar’s narrative regardless of its digital format, for the outsourcing of images from the Internet is a gesture of selection akin to both framing a photograph or cut-and-paste practices.

In addition, beyond the characteristics scrapbooking brings into Oskar’s diary, the incorporation of photographs also adds multiple characteristics inherent to photography onto the pages of “Stuff that Happened to Me” and the novel. Firstly, we can state that photographs taint the totality of Oskar’s scrapbook with realism. This can be further supported by the reliability attributed to the photograph, since Susan Sontag states, “a photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture” (5). In this context, Oskar Schell’s

visual diary relies on scrapbook qualities in photographic features, which empower the connotation of evidence in the chronicles of Oskar, as a means to validating his experiences and thoughts. Consequently, things happened to Oskar not only because he claims it to be so, but also because there is photographic evidence, which albeit appropriated from the Internet still works in his favor.

Additionally, in “Stuff that Happened to Me” what the scrapbook intends to convey is *not in the image* but beyond its surface, for its photographic appropriation is based on *readymade* material that carries an independent reference, which is disarticulated in order to become a visual embodiment of Oskar’s experiences. This form of overlapping *readymade* images is the raw for Oskar’s own landscape of meaning, which intends to gain validation through the veracity implied in the photograph. Further, since Oskar’s selection of pictures from the Internet is based on an acute feeling arising in the contemplation of images, this statement resonates with Roland Barthes’ *punctum*, for the criterion to select these pictures has much more to do with feeling than mirroring past experience. In this spirit, considering definitions of *punctum* as “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27) relate to Oskar’s experience of seeing:

I did a few other searches, even though I knew they would only hurt me, because I couldn’t help it. I printed out some of the pictures I found—a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, that actress getting a blowjob from her normal boyfriend, a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq, the place on the wall where a famous stolen painting used to hang—and I put them in *Stuff That Happened to Me*, my scrapbook of everything that happened to me. (42)

These images, even though they are not actually shown in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, still speak of Oskar’s scrapbook as an aching “history of seen” which develops through digital media and relates to him through a prosthetic crystallization of his experience. All images *happened* to him in the sense they deeply resonate with his story and therefore become a token of his feelings. Therefore, one can state that Safran Foer makes use of a *punctum*-like relation to images in Oskar’s choice, which allows readers to articulate signification in relation to Oskar’s emotional vulnerability and mourning for his father rather than an illustration of the text. Thus, photographs

mirror, unravel and validate the protagonist’s latent anxieties, for they retrieve the memories, questions and regrets Oskar keeps mostly in relation to his father.

Additionally, having considered the digital source and criteria of selection of images, it is worth adding that their significance in “Stuff that Happened to Me” is not static. The meaning of the photographs in the scrapbook relies on the reading of the novel rather than captions – since for that matter, there are none to be found. Consequently, the meaning of Oskar’s journal is constantly evolving with the reading of the novel. As a result, new references are constantly layering on top of the previously constructed meanings, making the intertextual and scattered condition of the scrapbook minimal in composition yet highly loaded with signification. In order to illustrate the previous statement and to get further insight into Jonathan Safran Foer’s use of scrapbooking, let us consider the following sequence from the scrapbook:



Fig. 2. Scrapbook selection. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Written by Jonathan Safran Foer. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005) 58-63.

These pages, consecutively shown in “Stuff That Happened to Me” carry a concatenated, collective meaning, referring to the question of the fate of Oskar’s father. This can be better explained in a more detailed account of the references embodied in these images as follows: (1) Gems - linked to Oskar’s father’s jewelry business; (2) man falling from the World Trade Center - Oskar wondering if this could be his father; (3) picture of the sixth borough (the bedtime story Oskar’s father used to tell him) - arguably relating to Oskar’s inability to fall asleep; (4) zoomed, blurry version of the same man falling - Oskar, asking himself whether this person is actually his dad; and (5) word “purple” written in green - addressing Oskar’s father’s supposed visit to the art supply store, which intrigues Oskar. As explained in detail, all these pictures boil down to the

subject of the death of Oskar's father, and his attempt to make sense of the last traces of his dad. Therefore, in this aspect, the meaning of the sequence is related to the accumulation of the reading more than a chronicle of Oskar's life – which indeed occurs yet seems to be secondary against the main purpose of “Stuff That Happened to Me”.

By the same token, given that Safran Foer makes of the images' meaning a fluid constitution when extra information is added from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, these previous images are open to multi-faceted interpretations. This is the case of the first picture, where the stones or gems in a box firstly relate to Oskar's father and grandfather, since both were owners of the jewelry family business. The following picture where the word “purple” is written in green carries two possible meanings in the novel. First, this picture alludes to Oskar's belief that it is his father's writing at the art supply store, however, as the reading of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* progresses, we learn that it was actually Oskar's grandfather who visited the shop. This revelation adds more than one interpretation to the pictures of the scrapbook, making it impossible to determine whether the box with the gems belongs to Oskar's grandfather, or his father. Consequently, when bearing in mind the overlapping meanings in pictures, it is possible to state that Safran Foer uses pictures that are multi-layered surfaces, which speak of Oskar's experience of seeing in relation to a subterranean *punctum* that stems from the loss of his father. Conversely, depending on the stage of the reading of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, these pictures permeate, overlap and accumulate more than one meaning, however, all of them still point back to Oskar's restless search for the last traces of his dad.

Additionally, within a deeper understanding of the disruption of the teleological reading of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and its sequences of linearity, one can state that Safran Foer foreshadows, highlights and brings back events in Oskar's life through the images present in the scrapbook. In this respect, then, images in “Stuff That Happened to Me” emphasize in a latent predicate of the future or a flashback from the past. So is the case in the first four images of the scrapbook:



Fig. 3. Scrapbook selection. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Written by Jonathan Safran Foer. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005) 53-56.

The first image shown belongs to the keys that Oskar sees in the Frazer and Sons locksmith's store. This image is the first one conspicuously shown as part of the scrapbook on page 53. However, Oskar tells us about his visit to the locksmith's store before on page 39 after his dad's funeral. Therefore, Safran Foer places this picture first in the scrapbook to highlight through the teleological and visual correlation what is central to Oskar, connecting the narrative with Oskar's first attempt to know about the key, and depicting the latency of the subject after his visit to the store on the written text. Further, the next picture in the scrapbook is a picture of Stephen Hawking on page 54. Oskar writes him several letters which appear regularly throughout the pages of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. For that matter, the first letter Oskar writes is on page 11:

The first letter I wrote was to Stephen Hawking. I used a stamp of Alexander Graham Bell.

Dear Stephen Hawking,

Can I please be your protégé?

Thanks,

Oskar Schell

I thought he wasn't going to respond, because he was such an amazing person and I was so normal (11).

Considering that Oskar only started writing letters after “the worst day” – namely, the day of his father’s death, the correlation of images in the scrapbook corresponds with the events that happened after 9/11 to him. Therefore, it is possible to observe that Safran Foer uses Oskar’s scrapbook as a narrative practice with a chronology of its own that responds to the events of the narrative, while simultaneously hinting at the intimacy and most poignant aspects of Oskar’s private life.

As seen, these images arguably correspond with the order of the narration, given that Oskar mentions he started writing letters after the death of his father. However, in a more meticulous revision, it is possible to notice that he started writing *before* he goes to the locksmith’s store; thus suggesting the order of the images in the scrapbook is to be inverted. Therefore, bearing in mind this break between images and narration, it is possible to claim that “Stuff That Happened to Me” was created after finding the key, and that Oskar, from that moment, decides to look back and report the experiences that after “the worst day” are crucial to him through photographs he finds online. This account of the past through photographs corresponds to the essential crystallization of memory through scrapbooking, and justifies Oskar’s lack of photographs taken by him. Consequently, Oskar longs to grasp the vanishing past in images that would relate to his story, perpetuating by proxy what happened to him.

Given what I have stated above, it is possible to claim that the scrapbook develops an independent narrative practice based on photographs; it tells the “unspeakable” for Oskar, it highlights a line of thought under the textual narrative, and also works as a revision of events that puts into hierarchical order what is more relevant for Oskar in the first place. Briefly, then, in relation to scrapbooking as a narrative practice, the order of these pictures previously shown from the scrapbook correlates to a general timeline of events after the death of Oskar’s father, yet they are in an inverted order in the scrapbook, showing that the key is more important to Oskar than the letters he writes.

This previous statement is in accordance with the third picture in terms of importance, which shows Laurence Olivier interpreting Hamlet, in the well-known movie adaptation from 1948.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, it is stated that Oskar plays Yorick's skull in this play at school, and he first mentions Hamlet on page 3, before mentioning and showing the letter he sent to Stephen Hawking, and before discovering the key. This sequence, then, is also taking a backward direction, revealing that Oskar is looking back at what happened after "the worst day" once again, but at the same time, this backwards sequence is organized by relevance. In addition, when it comes to revising the relation between the third picture and the narrative, we get to know that Oskar plays Yorick at school before the display of "Stuff That Happened to Me", while the picture of the scene of *Hamlet* corresponds to page 55. In addition, Oskar later mentions that the different Blacks he visits will go to see him perform, thus additionally signaling an event that is later to be explained as well.

Further, the next image in Oskar's journal is a diagram of a paper airplane; Oskar describes on page 70 that he used to make paper planes with his dad in order to make them fly from their apartment to Oskar's grandmother, whereas the image of the paper airplane in the scrapbook comes prior to the narration. In this case, the image of the paper plane in the scrapbook corresponds to a certain latency in remembering, considering that Oskar refers to the episode of the airplanes later in the text, but it is nevertheless present before in the scrapbook. This last example breaks the pattern of the backwards accounting of events, proving that "Stuff that Happened to Me" responds to a more intrinsic characteristic of scrapbooking, where the teleological order is constantly disrupted.

The anachronic qualities of Oskar's scrapbook also enhance the aspects of scrapbooking as a "place for oneself" (Gruber Harvey 4) which attempts to fulfill Oskar's need for comfort in the midst of his mourning. This is further represented in the moment he decides to take a look at his scrapbook: "In bed that night, I couldn't stop thinking about the key, and how every 2,777 seconds another lock was born in New York. I pulled *Stuff That Happened to Me* [. . .] wishing that I would finally fall asleep" (52). Considering that Oskar starts scrapbooking after finding the key, photographs in the scrapbook speak further of Safran Foer's use of this specific kind of images as evidence, for Oskar includes them as key in his investigation and its chronicle. This vision of photography is in accordance with Susan Sontag's conception of the photographic image, for she

claims that photographs mean “putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and therefore, like power” (4) which explains further Oskar’s use of photographs against the restlessness that prevents him from sleeping, when the possibilities of finding the lock are so little. Therefore, one can conclude that photographs, aside from being dislocated material for signification, add veracity and imply knowledge (or the longing for knowledge) when it comes to their role in “Stuff that Happened to Me”. All in all, this small review on the order of the images in Oskar’s scrapbook in comparison to its narrative lines proves that Safran Foer does not use pictures in illustrative terms but rather, as an independent narrative exercise and visual memoir within the scrapbook entity.

In that spirit, Safran Foer articulates Oskar’s “Stuff That Happened to Me” through scrapbooking and photography principles, making of Oskar’s journal an obscure narrative artefact, whose origin and meaning cannot be properly fixed for it moves forward and backwards with the reading. Therefore, scrapbooking is an intertextual practice within *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, creating hybrid strategies of meaning-making that erode classical notions of linearity, time, and space in narration.

III. PHOTOGRAPHS AS WILD OBJECTS: A CONCLUSION

Provided that photographs in “Stuff that Happened to Me” function as an intertextual resource, a narrative practice and as a method of signification, one can attribute these specific roles only to photographs and not to other kinds of images, agreeing on the premise that photographs possess the quality of also being objects. This difference, in relation to other kinds of images essentially boils down to the fact that “photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire” (Sontag 4). For this reason, the strong object-like connotation that photographs carry makes Oskar’s scrapbook look as if it were composed by pieces of the world that tell his own story while resembling old scrapbooks. Further, as photographs in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* act as objects carry multi-faceted discourse, they chime in with *Analog Fictions for the Digital Age*, wherein Julia Breitenbach quotes John Tagg claiming that “photography [...] is not a “unified medium” but

exists in and through various practices and discourses, as “photographies” (12-15). These two characteristics embodied in photographs defy the notion of stasis and rigidity innate in objects, thus allowing me to present photographs neither as merely images nor objects, but as wild objects that resist classification in any the two aforementioned categories, proving to be more fruitful in their integration in 21st century literature.

By the same token, photographs partially reject the sole category of objects not only due to their multiplicity of discourses as seen in “Stuff That Happened to Me”, but also because photographs keep this multiplicity in discourse across different devices, platforms, and screens. This is a fundamental quality that allows Oskar to scrapbook through the use of the Internet, perpetuating old strategies of scrapbooking in a digitally-dominated era. Likewise, due the malleable nature present in photographs as objects, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* reaches a heavily loaded narrative fluid in meaning by means of the dynamic materiality of the photograph, which invites the observer to interpret and interact with its surface to the point of appropriation.

Therefore, considering my notion of the photograph as a “wild object” I believe it is important to disagree with W.J.T. Mitchell since it can prove to be further productive within the realm of literature, given that he claims that “the photo-as-object acts as a stable signifier [. . .] guaranteeing reference and anchoring meaning within a fixed framework of preconceptions and expectations” (qtd. in Breitenbach 65). On the other hand, to consider the photo-as-object without having a stable signifier justifies the tendency to create constellations of photographs that permeate each other and challenge their traditional, surface-bound signification. Additionally, the *modus operandi* of the photo-as-object can be further illustrated in other activities akin to collage and other crafts, wherein the very trimming and selection mutilates and resurrects the photograph in a new semantic order, as Oskar Schell does in “Stuff that Happened to Me”.

Notwithstanding, considering the photograph as a wild object also helps us to elucidate that *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a consequence of a long-known relationship between image and text which finds its essence in the *objectiveness* of the photograph, which today entitles technology to propagate its reach and importance to the point of constituting representations of the

world and our *Zeitgeist*, thus permeating at large the cultural production of our era. Undoubtedly, then, one of the ways through which literature joins the visual turn in our times is through the use of photographs as wild objects, making of the interplay of signification an interdisciplinary field constantly fueled by new possibilities of the creation of new narrative artefacts, where the visual and the verbal will continue to mingle, irrevocably preserving the value of the book in a society where the digital seems to impose ephemerality and trigger nostalgia for the materiality of the past.

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