

# The imagistic text in Jonathan Safran Foer: Tracing unconventional texts from Kerouac to the artist's book

David Paton\*

\* David Paton is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Visual Art, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg.

### Abstract

With Jack Kerouac's iconic scroll manuscript of *On the road*<sup>1</sup> exhibited outside of the US for the first time in 2009, attention may once again be brought to bear on the imagistic properties of texts in certain contemporary novels and the influence of artists who work within and around the conventions of the book. By forging an argument for the importance of working outside of the accepted conventions of the novel's structure and form, Kerouac's inventiveness invites us to find other ways in which the novel may be informed by the interpretive acts of artists who use the form of the book in their work. This article explores the relationship between Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005) and structural, linguistic and visual conventions found in selected artists' books.<sup>2</sup> Of particular concern are: the self-reflexive interventions made by the author to draw attention to the novel's meta-narratives; the seemingly random use of imagery as elliptical illuminations; the manipulation of the typographic conventions of the page for imagistic and affective purposes; and, lastly, the use of a flip-book structure at the end of the book, suggesting an alternative conclusion and the reader's collusion in averting history. The novel's unusual structural, linguistic and visual manipulations are analysed through the lens of selected earlier novels which exploited and undermined the literary conventions of their day, as well as selected artists' books in which texts behave as images. In this analysis, the article attempts to show that an awareness of both a history of the breaking of literary conventions, and of certain artists' books and their structures, might help a reader gain greater insight into Foer's narrative by understanding how he enunciates not what a book *is*, but what it *does* and *how* it does it.

### Introduction

In this article I undertake a focused visual reading of Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely loud and incredibly close*, in which I explore some of his departures from what

might be termed 'the conventions of the novel form'. This exploration is supported by an initial examination of selected historical examples of the novel which achieve important departures from the conventions of their day. In these novels, I find physical forms and literary structures which have strong visual associations, connotations or references. My reading of Foer's 'exploded' novel finds parallels with these visual associations (both structural and literary) as well as in the artist's book and texts or publications (including concrete poetry) which had a direct influence on the artist's book before its general acceptance as such in the 1960s. These parallels, I argue, aid in a reading and deconstruction of Foer's work. In doing this I also bring to your attention a book which, at least for me, explodes the conventions of the novel and opens up a space for a richer dialogue between its elements. This is achieved by exploring new spaces which are created when discreet conventions are unhinged; freed up to be read in new ways.

### A visual rethinking of literary conventions

Michel Foucault (1970:9) describes a terrain in which Foer's image/text relationships may jostle in such a manner as to suggest something 'new':

The relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as if they were equivalents.

I argue, however, that it is exactly within the space which is 'deployed by our eyes' that Foer is able to suggest something new: new in terms of the conventions of the contemporary

novel, yet something much older in relation to concrete or visual poetry and the artist's book.

A direction for this article was suggested by the exhibition of Jack Kerouac's scroll manuscript of *On the road*, (1a) for the first time outside of the US, at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, in early 2009. The scroll, which broke with literary, visual and structural<sup>3</sup> conventions of the novel, was typed on a number of reels of 12ft-long paper, taped together to form a 127ft-long continuous typescript scroll<sup>14</sup> (1b) so that Kerouac did not have to stop, fuelled (apparently) only by coffee. The scroll manuscript formed the centerpiece of an

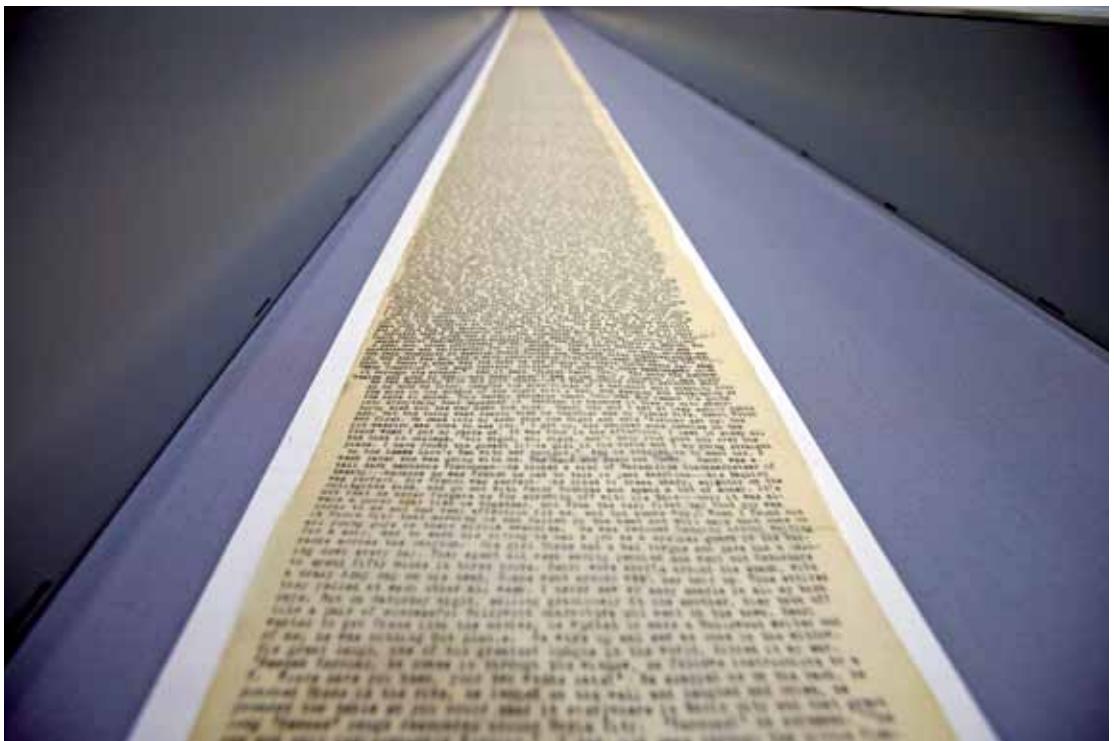


exhibition which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of the book in the United Kingdom (UK).

*The Guardian's* Mark Brown (2008:[sp]) informs us that Kerouac typewrote the scroll in only three weeks, and quotes the exhibition's curator Dick Ellis (2008:[sp]) stating:

This is an iconic manuscript. It is a record of the huge effort Kerouac put into composing it. It was 20 days of typing 6,500 words a day, flat out,<sup>5</sup> in spontaneous composition. He wanted to record things with the most possible accuracy using the spontaneous technique. His typewriter became a compositional instrument ... Kerouac said he wrote fast because the road was fast ... Of course, in the published novel, there are paragraph breaks but in the scroll, there are none. Kerouac did not have the time.

Ellis is not accurate in his reading of 'time' in Kerouac's scroll: Kerouac certainly edited the scroll as he went. Howard Cunnell (2008:1–2) debunks the mythology surrounding both man and scroll, stating that, in a letter of 22 May 1951 to his friend, travelling companion



1a (top) and 1b (bottom) Jack Kerouac, *Continuous typescript scroll of the seminal Beat Generation novel, On the road (1951)*. Photograph: David Sillitoe, 3 December 2008. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2008.

and one of the story's major protagonists, Neil Cassidy (Dean Moriarty in the published version), informing him of the completion of the scroll manuscript which he wrote between 2 and 22 April 1951, Kerouac explained that 'of course since Apr. 22 I've been typing and revising. Thirty days on that.'

But it is the scroll's form and its single paragraph structure which broke both formal presentation and literary stylistic conventions, to which I must turn.

The scroll form of the manuscript is more than a mere pasting of paper to facilitate rapid continuity in narrating a story. If this were so, then many authors would have produced such objects. James Campbell (2001:106) refers to Kerouac's communication with Cassidy of 22 May 1951, in which Kerouac stated that he '[w]ent fast because road is fast' as something more critically spatial. Campbell (2001:106–107) sees the scroll as a 'spatial rendition' of the road as story, a rendition in which the object and form of the scroll facilitated the telling: 'He employed space as a form as well as a subject: spread out along the floor, the single strip of paper rolled on like a road.' This use of the scroll as an appropriate container of the story and as a means of evoking the physical and emotional aspects of a narrative – of and through time – is something taken up by artist bookmakers in search of a content-structure relationship which the codex form seems to limit.<sup>6</sup> Jed Birmingham (2007:[sp]) describes the relationships between object, space and art within the scroll when exhibited:

It is a remarkable object. On one level it stands out in its tangibility, its physicality, its size and expanse, but at the same time it is so fragile, delicate and ephemeral. It threatens to crumble and blow away under your inquiring eyes. As the exhibit makes clear, the scroll as an object immediately brings [sic] to mind the concept of the road, the path, the journey that lies at the heart of *On the Road*. For me, this merging of form and content in the physical object coupled with the physical act of creating it (not just the typing but the act of taping together the paper as well) makes the manuscript a work of art on par with any major work of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The scroll is in some sense ahead of its time, predicting the artists' book, conceptual art and performance art boom of the 1960s and beyond.

Critical references to Kerouac's scroll narrative seem to be littered with spatial, pictorial and visual allusions, to which I later refer, such as *sprawl*, *sketching*, *mosaic*, *horizon*. With an unconventional physical structure facilitating the kind of narrative Kerouac wanted to tell, literary theorist Joshua Kupetz (2008:86) discusses Kerouac's literary style, stating:

Kerouac abandoned the conventional techniques he had used when writing *The Town and the City* so that he might be 'free as Joyce' when composing *On the Road*. ... Ultimately, his concept of form in the scroll manuscript loosely anticipates the tenets of structuralism, the first new theoretical school of the 1960s to decentre New Criticism. Kerouac writes that he was 'not interested in The Novel' and that he wanted to be 'free to wander from the laws of the novel as laid down by [Jane] Austens & [Henry] Fieldings.'

Kupetz (2008:86) states that, for Kerouac, 'the novel is an articulation of recognizable conventions, "laws", that will not help him tell the story that he wants to tell'. A combination of poetic and prosaic elements made his most radical transformations of narrative possible as 'a novel like poetry ... a narrative poem, an epos in mosaic'<sup>7</sup> so as to 'bust out from the European narrative into Mood Chapters of an American poetic "sprawl"' (2008:87).

Cunnell (2008:34) writes how Kerouac described his technique to Allen Ginsberg as 'sketching', which would allow him to change 'the conventional narrative survey ... to the big multi-dimensional conscious and subconscious character invocation' necessary to convey his characters and their stories. Cunnell (2008:25) describes how Kerouac dramatically collapses the distinction between writer and narrated 'I' in a headlong, intimate, discursive and wild manner, with improvised notations including dots and dashes to break sentences so that they 'pile upon themselves like waves'. This 'collapse' flags an important theme for this article: the relationship, or break, between authorial and character voices which, like concrete and visual poetry, expands the narrative into a spatial dimension, atypical of conventional prose. In so consciously disrupting our understanding of what it is that we are reading, writes Cunnell (2008:25), Kerouac claims that *On the road* marks a complete departure from not only his previous work, *The town and the city* (1950), but in fact from

previous American literature. Kupetz (2008:91) elaborates. In that Kerouac's method may be seen as 'contingent' his readers

find themselves ... stranded if they approach his mountain of unbroken text anticipating that it will offer an inherent meaning, if their expectations and interpretative strategies are based upon linearity and predetermined by novelistic convention.

Just as the linearity of Route 6 seduces Kerouac into believing that it represents the wonderful prospect of a direct passage to his destination, but which he soon realises will 'lead him only to death', Kupetz (2008:91) states that the reader must allow the 'sprawling prose' to turn, reverse and set back upon itself in 'a series of deflections' and by accepting 'that the shifting horizon of signification is part of the experience of meaning, the reader can proceed and be "headed there at last"'. Kupetz (2008:91) continues:

As a series of deflections, Kerouac's prose narratives anticipate reader-oriented theories that establish the reader, not the text, as the site of meaning. However, contemporary theory cannot prove that meaning definitely occurs inside the reader, either, so a text's meaning is often considered an effect of the interaction between text and reader. Instead of functioning as works with meanings trapped inside hermetically sealed structures, Kerouac's narratives involve the reader in the process of discovering meaning by encountering unfamiliar structures.

To the American public, the scroll-form was an unfamiliar structure; Kerouac's continuous 'sprawl' was a second unfamiliar structure, while the published version<sup>8</sup> – even as a sanitised, vastly edited, hybrid form of his deflective, sketched, epic poetic prose – was a third form of unfamiliar structure.

Yet for a European audience, such structures are not unfamiliar, and apart from numerous and well-known examples of scrolls in museums, universities and libraries in the UK and Europe, even early forms of the novel undermined conventional narrative structure. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760), one of the first novels in English, interrogated the novel form and in doing so, introduced an element of self-consciousness into both the

narrative as well as the form of the book's conceits and conventions (Drucker 1995:162). In *Tristram Shandy*, the author digresses from the story in order to speak directly to the reader; introduces blank, black and marbled pages as illuminations to, and of, the text; introduces dashes, stars, linear diagrammes and gaps to highlight and extend aspects of the text. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both Guillaume Apollinaire and Stéphane Mallarmé unhinged the semiotic differences between texts and images and ushered in forms of visual and concrete poetry in which these differences began to collapse. Although Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* (1914) proved to be an unrealisable form of what he called 'The Book as a spiritual instrument', what it does achieve, is to 'believe the conventional layout of the book with its "eternally unbearable columns" and manifests a constellation of text' (Drucker 1995:36).<sup>9</sup> For Mallarmé,

a book had the capacity to use its form to 'establish some nameless system of relationships' through which its strength could be realized. This could not happen without attention, a self-conscious act by which the text becomes integral with its placement, movement, symphonic orchestration through the space of the book. (Drucker 1995:36)

Johanna Drucker (1995:233) draws our attention to concrete poetry's difference from the 'random, chaotic, and allover quality to the language and the look of the page' of the early avant-garde experiments of Raoul Hausmann and Tristan Tzara. In contrast, concrete poetry tends to be reductive in a desire to literally concretise meaning and

... embed its verbal complexity in a material, visual form from which it cannot be separated. In this way, Concrete poets take the concept of materiality of language further than earlier experiments, trying to forge inseparable bonds of meaning and presentation through visual form. (Drucker 1995:233)

With concrete poetry as one literary influence, perhaps of equal importance as a foundation for Kerouac are Virginia Woolf's literary developments. In *To the lighthouse* (1927), in which formulae and conventions are denied in order to 'write with an entirely different approach' (Flint 1984:xi), Robert Humphrey (1968:12–13) states that Woolf

wanted to formulate the possibilities and processes of inner realization of truth – a truth she reckoned to be irrepressible; hence only on a level of the mind that is not expressed could she find this process of realization functioning ... she believed the important thing for the artist to express is his private vision of reality, of what life, subjectively, is. She thought that the search for reality is not a matter of dramatic external action ... thus the search ... is a psychic activity. ... And it is, above all, the reason that she chose the stream-of-consciousness medium for her most mature presentation of this theme.

Kate Flint (1984:xi) puts this idea across in succinctly structural terms and quotes from Woolf's journal:

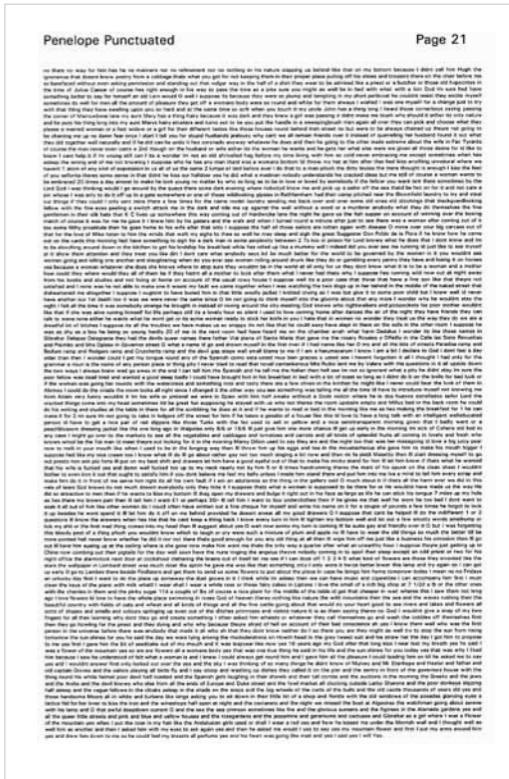
Instead of putting her efforts into organizing a carefully constructed plot, she preferred to manipulate words and sentences, to juxtapose different ways of seeing a scene, in order to show the way in which 'an ordinary mind on an ordinary day' receives, and indeed itself organizes, 'a myriad impressions'.

For Woolf, shifting perspectives, like Kerouac's 'shifting horizons', are not only used as a means of switching between characters, but also to show how the mind can operate on several levels simultaneously: what a character thinks and what a character is doing. A window, presenting a vista (the outside), at one moment for Mrs. Ramsay, becomes a limiting frame (the inside) in a later paragraph. Simultaneity, of 'inner' and 'outer' perception, was typical in Woolf's work from 1920 onward, where she 'was explicitly thinking of a new type of fiction: one based on the author's "own feeling and not on convention"' (Flint 1984:x). So 'character', for Woolf, is not a fixed, static quality and is 'dependent on varied angles of perception' (Flint 1984:xxvi), an idea concomitant with contemporaneous work in the visual arts,<sup>10</sup> what Walton Litz (1961:57) describes as Woolf's 'tendency towards "Imagist" structure'. But what this imagistic and unfixed quality of, and within, characters also achieves is a sense of separation, and thus independence from the author's own voice, expressed as a multivalent set of independent lives, experiences and voices, something akin to what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as *heteroglossia*, a contestation between

voices *within* a language. This contestation is part of a broader *polyglossia* which 'frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myths of language' (Bakhtin in Lye 2008:7). What results, in *To the lighthouse*, is an illusiveness of character, and thus also of the certainty of meaning of any 'thing'.<sup>11</sup> Flint states (1984:xxvi) that 'even a multiplicity of perspectives cannot lead to a final definition and pinning down of Mrs. Ramsay's character', as Lily points out: 'Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman.' Of critical importance to later writers, and particularly to Foer, as I will show, is that this remark 'leads one towards considering that all characters, in and out of fiction, may be similarly elusive ... Woolf does not pretend to know, to give an answer ... she never adopts a fixed, all-knowing ... viewpoint' (Flint 1984:xxvi). Thus the question is asked, if Woolf's presentation tells us more about her characters, since they are shown from both the outside and the inside, than we can ever hope to know about ourselves or others, then any understanding of the communication of others is utterly dependent on '... point of view, and on the shifting perspectives provided by people meeting and interrelating within society' (Flint 1984:xxvii).

Like 'character', Woolf's lighthouse, 'in its many manifestations throughout the novel perpetually reminds us that nothing is "simply one thing", the bearer of one meaning' (Flint 1984:xl). At times (and as we shall later see, in another structure too) its physical properties crumble, reminding us that the individual experience of living is a precarious affair and that English society as a whole is not as apparently safe and secure as it was before the First World War (Flint 1984:xli) – a theme to which I turn later. Woolf's development, along with James Joyce, of writing as a *stream of consciousness*, helped establish this (simultaneity and the fluidity of meaning) as a pre-postmodern form, later to be taken up by, amongst other post-modernists, Jacques Derrida in the parallel narratives of his book *Glas* (1974).<sup>12</sup>

In defending what Carl Solomon, editor at A.A. Wyn publishers, termed 'an incoherent mess', Kerouac wrote that Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) was considered difficult reading and is now hailed as a classic which 'everybody understands' (Kupetz 2008:84). Notwithstanding Kerouac's faith in everybody's



2 Jack Ginsberg, Page 21 of *Penelope punctuated. A project in progress* (1998). Photograph: David Paton, 2009. Reproduced courtesy of Jack Ginsberg.

ability to ‘understand’ *Ulysses*, his earlier stated desire to be ‘free as Joyce’ points towards knowledge of Joyce’s imagistic style in *Ulysses*. It is clear that the critical references to Kerouac’s scroll narrative as spatial, pictorial and visual (*sprawl*, *sketching*, *mosaic*, *horizon*) owe themselves to what Litz (1961:56) terms Joyce’s abandonment of ‘consecutive narration in favour of a “pictorial” or spatial method ... the painter’s sensibility’. Litz (1961:57) continues by describing the entire work of *Ulysses* standing before one as a vast image, in which the reader recreates in his mind an approximation of the total design. ‘The “Imagist” nature of *Ulysses*,’ as Litz (1961:58) calls it, ‘could be deduced from Joyce’s method of composition ... the total design of *Ulysses* was before Joyce during most of his work on the novel, and he could turn to first one, then another part of his “mosaic”, elaborating upon a basic pattern’ and where each word is transformed into a miniature image, a multiple unit capable of sounding a number of themes simultaneously (Litz 1961:59).



3 Jack Ginsberg, Page 41 of *Penelope punctuated. A project in progress* (1998). Photograph: David Paton, 2009. Reproduced courtesy of Jack Ginsberg.

South African artist’s book collector and maker, Jack Ginsberg, has devoted some attention to Joyce’s work.<sup>13</sup> In its most ‘imaginistic’ form, the last chapter of *Ulysses* contains Molly Bloom’s direct interior monologue,<sup>14</sup> often called *Penelope* owing to its parallels with Homer’s *Odyssey*.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons why the work is considered ‘difficult’ is *Penelope*’s notoriety (apart from its explicit eroticism) for having no punctuation as an aspect of the stream of consciousness used to communicate Molly Bloom’s thoughts as she lies in bed daydreaming. Ginsberg (1998:5) considers it ‘Joyce’s great achievement that he managed to convey a plausible version of the workings of a semi- or sub-conscious state of mind’ and that here and with his last work, *Finnegan’s wake* (1939), Ginsberg continues, ‘one might indeed say that the development of the novel ended with Joyce’.<sup>16</sup> In a similar way to Kerouac’s need for the continuous text block of the scroll to visually symbolise the experiences on the ‘fast road’, Joyce’s use of stream of consciousness in *Penelope* allows Molly Bloom’s thoughts to flow in a way

which punctuation would inhibit. Jefferson Hunter (2002:100) describes this: 'She circles widely, moving with complete freedom through space and time' a freedom which here, as in the rest of *Ulysses*, seems to rid the work 'of signs of its author. ... The effect of this great accomplishment is to make the reader feel he is in direct contact with the life represented in the book ... that is to present life as it actually is, without prejudice or direct evaluations'<sup>17</sup> (Humphrey 1968:15). This observation seems to aptly describe Kerouac's aim in the scroll manuscript of *On the road*.

In Ginsberg's artist's book he explores the last part of the monologue, a singular block of unpunctuated text, as a space for typographic play, exploiting the text block's pitch from 1, through 5.5, where the full extract fits onto one page and which, Ginsberg notes (1998:9) is 'a particularly beautiful typographic example owing to its lack of punctuation' (2). Ginsberg's final page, to a pitch size of 262, allows for only the last word: 'yes'. The final full stop is Joyce's! (3). Hereafter Ginsberg punctuates *Penelope* in a humorous attempt to challenge the proof-reader's art; guide a first-time reader and see to what extent such an exercise might make the text more easily comprehensible. Finally, Ginsberg also realises a long-held ambition 'to construct an artist's book, largely typographic in nature, which explores text as image' (1998:3) as much as it might offend the grammar-check functions of Microsoft Word, whose 'prescriptive demands' – from a literary viewpoint, states Ginsberg (1998:3) – seem 'arbitrary – and often just wrong!'.

In summing up this part of the article, I have noted that, in the examples which broke with their literary and novelist conventions, either distinctly spatial and imagistic elements arise, or a need for the simultaneity of the verbal and the visual seems to result. Having established the importance of 'the visual' as an element of these novels, and with the aid of a theoretical underpinning provided by the artist's book in the next part, I undertake a visual analytical reading of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005).

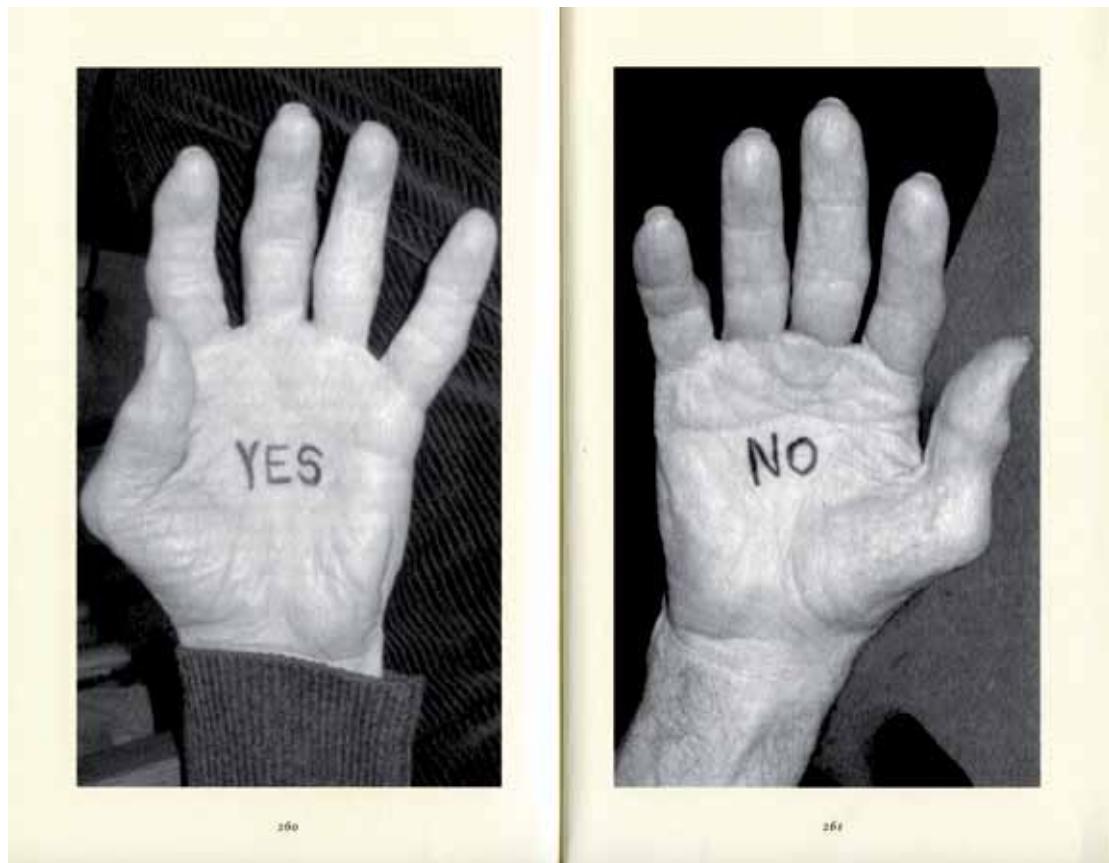
## Visually reading Foer

Foer's second novel is a conceptual and visual tour de force. Briefly stated, it weaves the stories of three related protagonists who have

experienced such traumatic loss that they are barely able to function in conventional society.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, Grandfather, Thomas Schell, who survived the Allied fire-bombings of Dresden in 1945 but lost both Anna, his love, and his unborn child and later loses the son (also a Thomas Schell) in the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, who, it is implied, he had never met. Secondly, his grandson, Oskar Schell, whose beloved father is the one lost in the 9/11 attacks, and thirdly Grandma who experienced and survived both the Dresden bombings and 9/11. Like Woolf, Joyce and Kerouac, Foer weaves a series of non-linear narratives across time and history, constructing a montage of spoken, thought and written communication from, about and to the protagonists and other characters. Just as we have found in *To the lighthouse*, *Ulysses* and *On the road*, these narratives speak of both the externally experienced world of the here-and-now, and of internalised memory and thought. It is beholden upon the reader to understand and separate these texts as well as by which protagonist they are uttered and to whom these thoughts or words are directed. The reader begins to believe that she/he might be privileged to hold a bird's-eye-view of the entire 'mosaic', with the various protagonists and characters understanding, only partially, what the reader knows. But these certainties are removed when characters reveal what they have known and done without the reader's or other protagonists' knowledge.

In this book, the act of writing is self-reflexive and, as such, releases many of its unusual pictorial and visual elements. What is also clear is that, in 2005, Foer presents his work as an object which attempts to undermine the authority of contemporary forms of communication: real-time reportage 'from the field' by CNN, SKY News or Al Jazeera; montages of digital imagery seen in New York's Times Square; media flattened to 'sameness' no matter whether what is shown is commercial desire or spectacles of terror.

For Catherine Morley (2008:310) Foer '... recognises the need to adapt literary realism to describe and present a new world order in which, thanks to the omnipresence of the media, the boundaries between what is real and what is unreal are no longer clear'. Morley (2008:310) continues: '... language seems redundant in the face of terror and the televisual spectacle. Words alone cannot



4 Jonathan Safran Foer, Pages 260–261 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Photographs: Debra Melzer, 2005.  
Reproduced courtesy of Debra Melzer.

unfurl the knot of grief nor can they adequately compete with images of mass destruction.' What is clear, then, is that Foer's protagonists, whether elderly immigrants to America and caught in the events of the past, or a nine-year-old child afraid of 'things' – battle a contemporary media-rich world which cannot provide answers to their experiences of trauma. Foer constructs his protagonist's experiences in quaint, obsessively haptic forms, as: lists; data card indexes; dated envelopes which fill drawers; written letters which fill suitcases; a tattooed 'yes' and 'no' on the palms of the hands,<sup>19</sup> (4) day books (diaries) which fill rooms and whose texts creep out onto the walls when the diaries prove too limited to hold such grief; Oskar's 'Stuff That Happened to Me', his journal which contains Googled material, printed and stuck into it; something he can hold, like a comforter. Tactile and haptic materiality helps the protagonists hold things together: for Oskar it is a mysterious key he has found in his father's closet, the accompanying

lock for which he searches<sup>20</sup> takes him on a journey towards some form of peace. For Foer, it provides an opportunity to expand the novel's conventions through imagery: where pictures become illuminations of Oskar's stream of consciousness or clues in his search or hints as to his state of mind; where objects described in the story take on a resonating iconicity by also being depicted; where texts slip their conventional moorings and, as Foucault describes, pass 'surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks'.

In this way, Foer confronts, what Morley (2008:309) describes as '... the thorny issue of the difficulty and the failure of language and words in the face of the visual, the loss of words in the event of great trauma'.

The book begins with three images: a close-up of a keyhole in an ornamental doorknob (5); birds in flight and an out-of-focus building – we learn later that these are probably photos taken by Oskar and pasted into 'Stuff That Happened

to Me'. But these images are the first three pages we encounter on opening the cover, not the conventional blank and title pages, these only come later. And thus we are forewarned that we are entering something other than the conventional novel: only much later do we understand that the 'something' we are entering might be Oskar's journal or perhaps his memory. The photos' arbitrariness, their specific lack of quality and the fact that they bleed to the page edge hint at their reflexive status as things in and of themselves, self-conscious about being what and where they are.

These are the very qualities Drucker (1995:161–162) draws attention to in describing the artist's book. She states:

The familiarity of the basic conventions of books tend to banalize them: the structures by which books present information, ideas, or diversions, become habitual so that they erase, rather than foreground, their identity. One can ... forget about a book even in the course

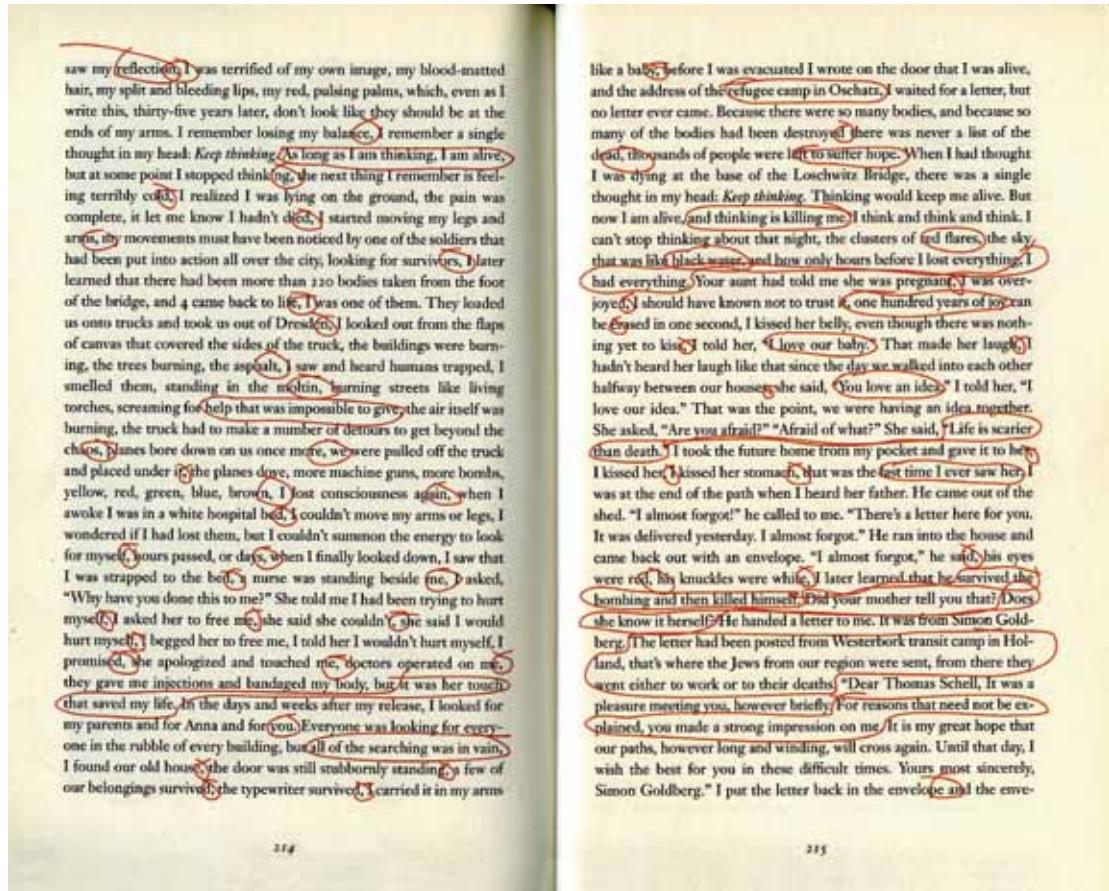


5 Jonathan Safran Foer, Page i of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Photograph: Debra Melzer, 2005. Reproduced courtesy of Debra Melzer.

of reading it. ... But when a book calls attention to the conceits and conventions by which it normally effaces its identity, then it performs a theoretical operation ... calls attention to its own processes of enunciation. ... Self-conscious attention to the means of enunciation often lay bare the devices of literary or visual strategies of illusionism.

Drucker (2003:[sp]) describes artists' books as "phenomenal" books, which mark the shift from books as artefacts, documents, vehicles for delivery of content, and instead demonstrate the living, dynamic nature of work as produced by interpretive acts' and reminds us that the idea of an artist's or 'phenomenal' book should be grounded in replacing the identity of what a book *is* with what it *does* and *how* it does it. Drucker understands the artist's book as something which interrogates the very conventions of bookness, exploiting tropes of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity in terms of the structural, literary, literal, narrative and material conventions of the page and book format. In these terms, book artists exploit technical and graphic conceits in order to call attention to the conventions by which, through constant exposure, a book normally neutralises or effaces its identity.

With this in mind, Drucker (1995:10) is able to help us 'read' Foer's opening pages as they extend the parameters of what a book *does* as a verbal field in a manner which also extends the possibilities of the way in which a book can function as a text. Thus all images (whether clearly or seemingly vaguely linked) become illuminations and extensions of the text: I pursue the first image, the doorknob – through whose keyhole we are able to conceptually peer into the novel/journal/mind, and towards the desperate search Oskar undertakes, over a period of eight months, to find the one lock, of 162 million possible locks in New York, Oskar calculates (p. 41), which fits the key. The doorknob/key image appears again in various forms, yet only on p. 303 do we first glimpse the key to which Oskar is attempting to find the lock and which clearly fits none of the locks thus far shown and which ultimately leads to a dead end. By not looking for the lock anymore, Oskar is prevented from staying close to his father for a little longer. Other forms of self-reflexive and self-conscious image structures include business cards which, later, become the object through which Oskar finds his identity and selfhood (p. 286);<sup>21</sup> X-out



6 Jonathan Safran Foer, Pages 214–215 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

(p. 75) and struck-through texts (pp. 171 and 178) – strongly reminiscent of Kerouac's scroll edits: indexes of states and changes of mind for both Grandfather and Oskar; red pen notations (pp. 10, 208–216) (6) of spelling, grammar and factual or perceived errors which index the act of correcting and which provide a graphic link between Oskar's father, who marked errors in the New York Times in this fashion: and which suggest that he must indeed have had some contact with his father (Oskar's grandfather) as one of the 'unsent' letters is marked in this manner. It seems that Oskar has this letter in his journal, presumably taken when Grandfather finally places a score of unsent letters in his son's grave as an act of redemption. These red 'clues' hint not only at relationships which Foer keeps from the reader, but mark an act of hunting which the various protagonists undertake in an attempt to quell the grief in their respective losses.

The reader, in the absence of a logical straight-line narrative, must hunt, like Oskar

and Kerouac, 'to turn, reverse and set back in a series of deflections and accept that the shifting horizon of signification is part of the experience of meaning', so as to be 'headed there at last'. For Foer, the process of writing is a self-reflexive act in the exploration of meaning. Thus, a relationship between reader and writer develops through the novel. But as we have found in *To the lighthouse* and *Ulysses*, here, the writer is not necessarily Foer but a collection of authors and authored fragments which the reader must deconstruct and reconstitute as 'the narrative'; something akin to the referencing and appropriation of the imagery of others by many postmodern visual artists. All Foer's protagonists write to some other protagonist or character, and in Oskar's act of collecting, we are able to glimpse Foer's underlying message: writing as an attempt at healing. Oskar, we note, begins writing letters only after his father's death.

But if this is what Drucker's 'phenomenal book' might hint at, Foer is not done. When

Grandma types her 'My Life' of many hundreds of pages and asks Grandfather to read them, blank pages are all he sees (pp. 121–123) (7). The typewriter was one of the few possessions he has managed to save from the destruction of Dresden – the means of preserving his memories – but from which he has pulled the ribbon as 'an act of revenge against the typewriter and myself'. He states, 'unwinding the negative it held – the future homes I had created for Anna, the letters I wrote without response – as if they would protect me from my actual life' (p. 124). Grandma, who always described her eyesight as 'crummy' (p. 124), is seemingly exposed as 'blind' – not only physically, but also emotionally. This exposure occurs at the very moment we realise that Grandfather had left her and their unborn child (Oskar's father Thomas) in New York and returned to Dresden, unable to speak<sup>22</sup> and unable to confront his loss. It is from Dresden where he writes to his son for 40 years but is unable to send the letters.

Like Woolf's lighthouse, Foer's image of writing, in its many manifestations, also perpetually reminds us that nothing is 'simply one thing, the bearer of one meaning'. Writing, too, reminds us that the individual experience of living is a precarious affair and that society as a whole is still not as safe and secure as it thought it was before the so-called War on Terror.

If Grandma's 'My Life' was reduced to 'two thousand white pages' (p. 124), at least in her husband's eyes (as what are we to make of the letters Oscar has seemingly received from her and which he seemingly keeps in 'Stuff That Happened to Me', Grandma had simply been hitting the space bar in place of typing the story of her life) Foer produces a masterstroke in rendering Grandfather's obsessive writings as a counterpoint to Grandma's blank pages. As he has been unable to speak for more than the 40 years between leaving and returning to New York, Thomas has written everything down: simple questions to strangers, rendered by Foer as a single line on the page (8) as an index of Thomas's daily form of communication; the mountain of letters written and never sent to and finally buried in the grave of his son; and the final letter he writes to his son on the rapidly diminishing pages of his daybook.

In a chapter without paragraph breaks, and in one block of text – with the spirits of Joyce, Woolf and Kerouac seemingly looking over his shoulder – Foer produces perhaps the most visually, emotionally charged piece of human communication in contemporary fiction. Thomas Schell's stream of consciousness pulls together the book's themes, characters and their impossible hopes. He begins: 'To my child' and describes the reason for returning, the purpose of his visit, by writing to the man



7 (left) Jonathan Safran Foer, Pages 122–123 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

8 (right) Jonathan Safran Foer, Page 21 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

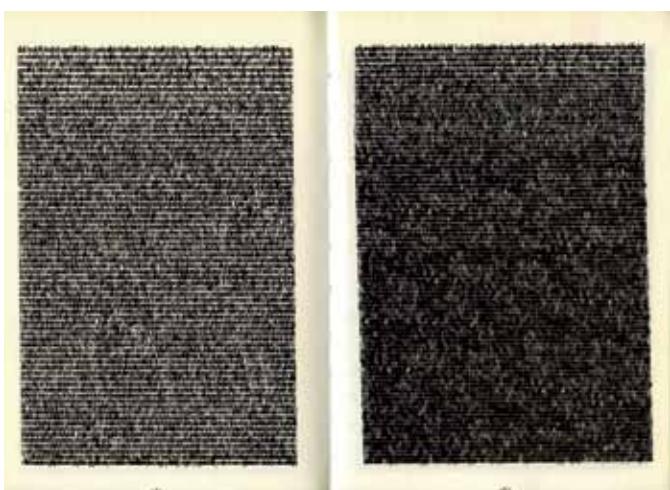




<sup>9</sup> (left) Jonathan Safran Foer, Pages 270–271 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

10 (right) Jonathan Safran Foer, Page 281 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

to tell, explain and write everything  
**(2).**



11 (left) Jonathan Safran Foer, Pages 282–283 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK.

12 (right) Jonathan Safran Foer, Page 284 of *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005). Hamish Hamilton. Reproduced courtesy of Penguin Group UK



While I suspect that Joyce, Woolf and Kerouac might smile in Foer's direction and that even Drucker might accept that this unhinging of semiotic difference between image and text may approach and acknowledge the field of the 'phenomenal' or artist's book, Foer's structural, linguistic and visual disruptions of the conventions of the novel have proven controversial for contemporary literary review and criticism, with some denouncing him as faddish.<sup>24</sup> In order to argue for this not being the case, there are other elements to which I turn in order to forge a deeper relationship between Foer's novel and the space already created by Kerouac's 'transgressive journey' in search of elusive authenticity (Mouratides 2008:80). Both a thematic and stylistic comparison deserves our attention. Penny Vlagopoulos' (2008:53) description of *On the road* as arising from the particular conditions of the era in which it was written as a '... kind of blueprint for translating the upheavals and aftershocks of its historical moment into vital, perennial concerns', parallels Foer. In her reading of Kerouac's themes, Vlagopoulos describes a literary and cultural space with which Foer seems to readily engage. When Kerouac writes (in the scroll manuscript) that if men 'stop the machine and come home – and get on their knees – and ask for forgiveness – and the women bless them – peace will suddenly descend on the earth with a great silence like the inherent silence of the Apocalypse', he

anchors the relationship between America and the rest of the world on a collective redressing of wrongs, represented ... through a critique of gender roles. He suggests that borders, both within and between nations, have the potential to erode if we begin to untangle our human histories of oppression, negligence, and shame through a prism of love and empathy. (Vlagopoulos 2008:62)

Foer, I argue, takes up this theme in Thomas's desperate imagistic attempt to find belated forgiveness and in which Kerouac's 'silent Apocalypse' has multiple connotations: Thomas's Aphasia; 9/11 as an apocalyptic event; the stunned silence of its aftermath; the double spread (pp. 282–283) of overtyped text blocks as symbolic, disintegrating buildings. But for Foer, Kerouac's hope is inverted through the de-anchored relationship between Thomas and the rest of his family as an image of, and metaphor for, the de-anchored

'relationship between America and the rest of the world'. Vlagopoulos (2008:54, 63) in drawing our attention to the post-World War II period in which Kerouac was writing (as one in which artists and intellectuals were required to prove their loyalty to the US, by renouncing Communism and 'deviance' so as to defend their way of life) seems to prefigure a similar period for Foer, one in which the theme of writing – as an attempt at healing – might begin to answer Kerouac's question of 'why do men go on living'. Vlagopoulos (2008:63), quoting Ann Douglas, forges the possibility of an even more direct relationship between the authors when she reminds us that

[in] the age that invented the idea of classified information, Kerouac's effort was to declassify the secrets of the human body and soul. Kerouac was always interested in honesty, especially to himself, at whatever cost, and often this meant offering a picture of possibility rather than providing a direct guide.

For Foer, Thomas and Grandma's imagined stories can only be 'pictures of possibility' in the 'declassification of the secrets of the human body and soul' and it might thus seem more than serendipitous that in both *On the road* and *Extremely loud*, the major protagonists, Neal Cassidy and Thomas Schell, both lose their ability to speak. Kerouac himself sought the figure of Cassidy as a surrogate who might facilitate his

search to reconnect with those he had lost – brother, father, wife, household – a way of staving off the ephemerality that brought about this sense of abandonment and ultimate elusiveness, and a way of transcending the guilt and burden of existing in their wake. (Vlagopoulos 2008:71)

Kerouac could be describing Oscar or Thomas or Grandma or a number of other characters Foer invokes. Yet alongside these thematic links which, I suggest, are germane in placing Vlagopoulos's reading of Kerouac in relation to Foer, is another crucial parallel – one of literary form as a visual phenomenon.

Vlagopoulos (2008:64–65) states that, for Kerouac, the processes of reading and writing emerge as crucial artistic practices in which he 'seemed to approach words from outside of their expected meanings, as if they were found objects to be appropriated and made new'. She (2008:66) continues:

Following a dash from one point to the next without stopping to construct an architecture of expected logic in a sentence more closely mimes the feeling of actually being on the road ... as does sideslipping through descriptions without clear subordinate clauses ... Kerouac seemed to be grasping to know America in a way that would encode a hidden editing process, a way that would recuperate the losses and failures inherent in the very structures of our language.

'A weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world' goaded Kerouac to recuperate these losses and failures by abandoning paragraph breaks, colons, semicolons and commas for dashes, ellipses and run-on sentences: as he wrote in his journal, 'it's not the words that count, but the rush of what is said'. This 'rush' is given affective and visual status by Foer in his use of overtyped and blank pages, as well as other texts-as-images which locate meaning not in the prose, not in the 'very structures of our language', but in grasping and recuperation as a 'picture of possibility'. What Foer seems to be achieving here is an extreme example of what Bakhtin terms 'monologic' language, and in which the centripetal forces of the system of language and the individual who speaks it are so pushed to a central point that they collapse the very leading and kerning which maintain the integrity of the text block and thus, by implication, the system and the individual. Here, I argue, centripetal forces provoke a powerful visual index of monologic language in which a particular voice is seemingly the only one to be heard or heeded at a particular moment. Within the book's broader polyglossia in which the complexity and multiplicity of voices, 'languages' and narrators are given scope, these visual manifestations of monologic, centripetal structure explore the limits of the conventions of novelistic language when accepted as dialogical and heteroglossic.

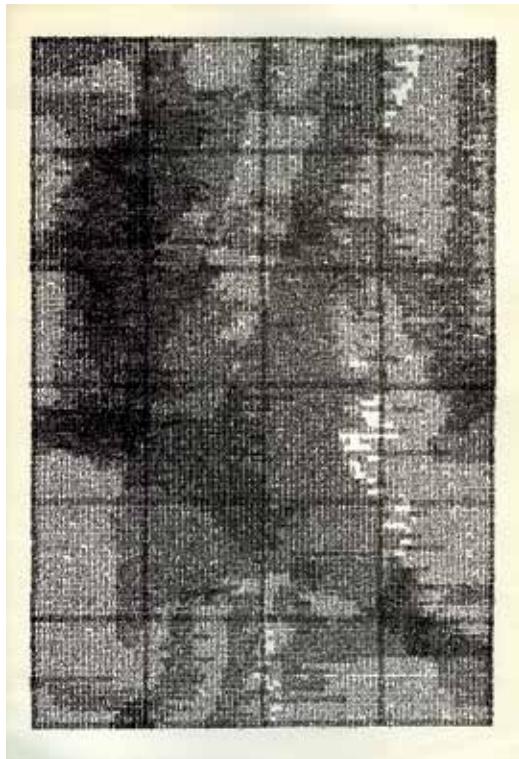
The prose artist, says Bakhtin (in Klages 2001:8–9) 'elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogized overtones [and because] discourse lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context' – between the languages of the speaker/writer and the languages of the listener/reader – 'the fiction writer is always directing his/her writing towards the possible

responses of readers, and is always finding more things to say, more ways to say it, so that readers can understand the message(s)'. Foer's overprinted, single sentence and blank pages, as extreme examples of centripetal, monologic language, perform a role as indexes of futile labour and the futility of his protagonists' desperate attempts to communicate. This is something which a reader can begin to understand in visual terms. Foer seems to indicate that the single story, the singular, authoritative voice (monologic language) cannot succeed in narrating meaning. Instead, Bakhtin's notion of the *parodic* – the deliberate displacement and subversion of the ideological constraints of the system of language – gives scope to Foer's heteroglossia as a contestation between voices within a language of attempted communication.

Morley (2008:309) seems to conclude this idea when she states that '[t]his combination of the visual with the written, for Foer, is a deliberate and positive method of articulating grief and trauma ... [b]y combining the visual and the written, Foer succeeds in offering an altered form of realism for the post-9/11 cultural landscape.'



13 Willem Boshoff, *Verskanste Openbaring* (detail) from *Kykafrikaans* (1980). Uitgewery Panavis. Photograph: David Paton, 2007. Reproduced courtesy of Willem Boshoff.



14 Willem Boshoff, *Verdwaalkaart* from *Kykafrikaans* (1980). Uitgewery Panevis. Photograph: David Paton, 2007. Reproduced courtesy of Willem Boshoff.

I have seen nothing like this in the contemporary novel, but it is 'incredibly close' to those other icons to the futility of human communication: Willem Boshoff's *Verskanste Openbaring* (Entrenched Revelation) (13) and *Verdwaalkaart* (A Map to Get Lost By) (14) typed some 30 years ago as part of *Kykafrikaans* (1976–1980) – published as an artist's book in 1980 – and now in *The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry*, Miami, Florida.<sup>25</sup> Of these works, Boshoff (in Siebrits 2007:40) states:

Simplistically one could say that in *Kykafrikaans* the typewriter is posited as an instrument for processing text, in much the same manner as a brush or pencil functions in painting or drawing. ... However, on closer inspection these eccentric poems are at odds with writing and interpretation. At times they take issue with literary prejudices such as the conventional requirements of coherence and economy of writing. They frequently subvert orthodoxy and instead venerate

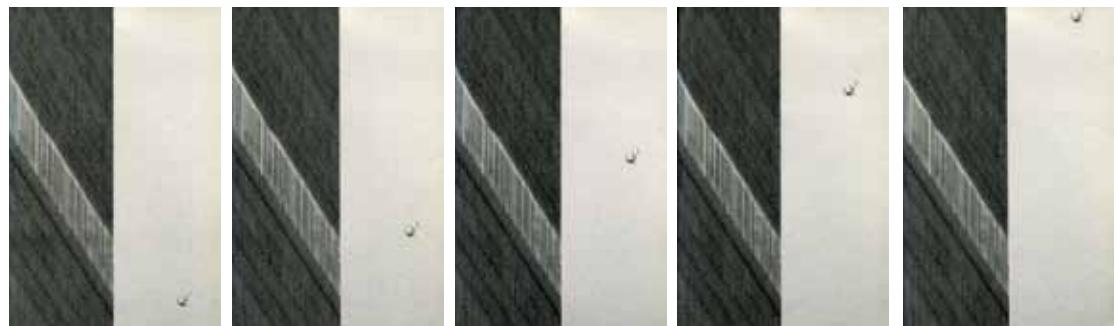
triviality or ambiguity in the guise of being meticulously and assiduously composed.

What messages we are to understand in Boshoff's visually centripetal and monologic poems are not those of futile labour, but rather an acknowledgement of a ploy, on Boshoff's part, to subvert and thus prevent communication and meaning from reaching his reader intact. In Boshoff's terms, obfuscation of the text is not an index of an obsessive yet failed attempt on the part of another's voice to communicate 'the secrets of their body and soul'. In describing how *Verskanste Openbaring* operates, Ivan Vadislavić (2005:26), states that '[t]he reader trying to retrieve meaning from its layered chaos is compelled to relive the moment of its disappearance' and continues by engaging directly with this duality between authorial voice and the voice of 'another':

In his commentaries, Boshoff makes much of the idea of 'disqualifying the text'. Who is in a position to *disqualify* a text? An authority, one could even say a higher authority. This would be simple enough to imagine if the authority in question were dealing with someone else's text, but Boshoff is talking about texts he himself has created, has authorized. In other words, he means to authorize the text and then disqualify it. We can see this double process (exemplified in *Verskanste Openbaring*) at work especially in those poems that most closely resemble images, where the final effect is visual rather than verbal. (Vadislavić 2005:26)

Vadislavić's (2005:26) summing up of Boshoff's ploy of disqualification seems aptly applicable to Foer's facilitation of Thomas's and Grandma's textual self-disqualification when he states: '[T]he more word approximates image, the more the text becomes texture. This "disqualification" is thus part of a general lobbying on behalf of the image in the face of the word.'

Yet for all Foer's typographic and structural manipulations, he is still not finished with his reader. Just as the book opens with illuminating imagery even before the title page is given its due, the final pages forge another relationship with the artist's book. In an attempt to control or at least delay both historical fact and the seeming omnipotence of the deluge of information and imagery in a post-postmodern world, something which this book seems so



15a-e (left to right) Jonathan Safran Foer, Selected end pages from *Extremely loud and incredibly close* (2005).  
Photograph: Lyle Owerko, 2001. Reproduced courtesy of Lyle Owerko.

dedicated to achieve, Foer acknowledges that the quaintness of turning a paper page, instead of downloading or uploading its digital equivalent has, in fact, become critical. One of the conventions of the artist's book is to interrogate the act of reading and page turning through the structure known as the 'flip book'.<sup>26</sup> Foer describes Oskar tearing out from his journal and rearranging the Googled images of the World Trade Centre's unidentified 'falling man' (pp. 325–326). In an act of artist's bookmanship and haptic reassertion of control over the ready-availability, ubiquity and glut of decontextualised digital imagery, and in which the reader is so intimately and physically implicated, Oskar flips the falling man (could this be his father?) back, toward his son, toward *his* father and to safety (15 a-e).

## Conclusion

In rephrasing Kupetz's (2008:91) argument, that instead of functioning as works with meanings trapped inside hermetically sealed structures, Foer's narratives, too, involve the reader in a process of discovering meaning by encountering unfamiliar structures. It has not been my aim to show Foer's direct literary influences or that he might have been aware of specific artists' books and their structures. Rather, I have attempted to show that an awareness of both a history of the breaking of literary conventions, and of artists' books and their structures, might help a reader gain greater insight into Foer's content. In order to contextualise Foer I have argued that, in Kerouac's iconic scroll manuscript, *On the road*, a relationship between the contemporary novel and the influence of artists who work within and around the conventions of the book might

be fruitful. By working outside of the accepted conventions of the novel's structure and form, Kerouac invites his reader to find ways in which the novel may be informed by imagistic, visual and spatial concerns.

I have traced what I consider to be imagistic, visual and spatial qualities in the work of Sterne, Woolf and Joyce, so that a visual reading of Safran Foer's novel *Extremely loud and incredibly close* might be considered from within historical precedent which, itself, may inform and be informed by structural, linguistic and visual conventions found in selected artists' books. I have also applied Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia to Foer's image/text relations in order to argue for an imagistic way in which Foer might convey his message. Of particular focus in this section of the article are: Foer's self-reflexive interventions which draw attention to the novel's meta-narratives; the seemingly random use of imagery as elliptical illuminations; the manipulation of the typographic conventions of the page for imagistic and affective purposes; and lastly, the use of a flip-book structure at the end of the book, suggesting an alternative conclusion and the reader's collusion in averting history. In this analysis, I have attempted to show that an awareness of both a history of the breaking of literary conventions, and of artists' books and their structures, might help a reader gain greater insight into Foer's narrative by understanding how he enunciates not what a book *is*, but what it *does* and *how* it does it.

## Notes

- 1 Between 2 and 22 April 1951, Jack Kerouac wrote a full-length novel on a long strip of paper, constructed from taped-together sheets, without

- paragraph breaks and which, when rolled out, resembles a road. This was the original scroll manuscript of *On the road*. From 22 April, another 30 days were spent on editing the manuscript.
- 2 Although describing and discussing the diverse nature of *artists' books* as a field is outside the scope of this article, here, I contextualise an artist's book as a book whose formal, structural and aesthetic conceits have been interrogated and manipulated by the artists in order to draw attention to the object's bookness; how it operates and how it communicates its content rather than functioning as 'a vehicle for reproduction' (Drucker 1995:9). Of particular focus in this article is the exploitation of texts and typographic conventions for their visual and imagistic qualities.
  - 3 The conventional manuscript structure, which can be bound into a convenient codex form, is replaced with the scroll structure in the original work.
  - 4 In *This is the Beat Generation* (2001:134–135), James Campbell enumerates the contradictory sources of information regarding both the scroll's length and particularly the material upon which it was typed. 120ft seems to be the consensus, but Allen Ginsberg stated it was 'many hundreds of feet' and Beat historian Steven Watson estimated it at 120 yards. The material ranged from 'teletype roll' (Ann Charters and Allen Ginsberg); Japanese drawing paper (Gerald Nicosia); oilskin art paper (Tom Clark); shelf-paper (John Celelon Homes); tracing paper (Kerouac) and 'a block-long piece of drawing paper' (Kerouac).
  - 5 In relation to the number of words the scroll contains, Campbell continues: 'According to Watson, the scroll contained 186,000 words. Nicosia knocked a digit off of that, and called it 86,000 words, whereas Kerouac himself, obsessive when it came to computing his output, reckoned 125,000 words, an average of 6,000 per day and 15,000 on the final day.'
  - 6 It is important to note that, despite a long history of scrolls and scroll-forms from Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and which are of cultural and religious importance, the focus on the scroll form in this article is limited to Kerouac's association of the act of continuous typing with the experience of the road as his subject: a conflation of act and idea, facilitated by the form of the scroll.
  - 7 Walton Litz (1961:58) refers to James Joyce's design of *Ulysses* as a 'mosaic'.
  - 8 Kerouac had to wait six years, until 5 September 1957, for final publication.
  - 9 A 'constellation' which would help to liberate typography in the bookwork of, amongst many other early modernists, Ilia Zdanovich (Iliazd),

Vladimir Mayakovsky and Filippo Marinetti, as well as some Dada and Surrealist publications, and might, indeed, foreshadow Kerouac. Concrete poetry differs from other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century experiments with the visual appearance of language in both its form and aesthetic principles. The Futurists and Dada artists exploited a variety of typefaces and formats in an attempt to liberate poetic language from the constraints of literary convention such as linearity and the even grey-toned page, while the concrete poets sought a unity between visual and verbal aspects of a work (Drucker 1995:233).

- 10 Cézanne's work, for example *Table, Napkin, And Fruit (Un Coin De Table)* of 1895–1900 and later, in examples of Picasso's 'Analytical Cubism' such as *Portrait Of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* of 1910, an exploration of simultaneity of viewpoint, was considered a particularly 'truthful' mode of representation. Duchamp, the Dadaists and Synthetic Cubists exploited collage and multiplicity. These visual developments were to mature in the Surrealists' diverse modes of perception, including a visual exploitation of literary forms advocated by, amongst others, André Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. Such forms included stream of consciousness, so-called 'automatic writing' and 'exquisite corps' poetry. A fine example of the visual manifestation of literary and diverse sources is Max Ernst's book *Une semaine de bonté* (A week of kindness) which was published in 1934.
- 11 It may be argued that this occurs in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) too. Sue Vice, citing Makiko Minow-Pinkney (in Vice 1997:95) states: 'The text presents itself as a homogeneous unity in the conventional narrative guise of third-person past tense, but is in fact radically heterogeneous. Subjects of sentences are continually shifting. ... Whenever we try to pinpoint the locus of the subject, we get lost in a discursive mist.'
- 12 In *Glas* (1974), Derrida follows a parallel structure, suggested by Jean Genet, in which the text is written in two sometimes intermingling columns: the left column is about Hegel while the right column is about Genet.
- 13 Ginsberg's *Penelope punctuated: A project in progress* (1998) is an artist's book in which typographic and literary aims are explored. Ginsberg divides the book into four parts: the first is a contextualisation of his project, taking Joyce's last 'chapter' of *Ulysses*, an unpunctuated single paragraph often called *Penelope* as his subject; the second provides the text of Joyce's *Penelope* to read; the third part explores the unpunctuated *Penelope* as a field of typographic play in which the increasing pitch size of *Univers* text is in inverse relation to

- the number of words which can be fitted onto a single page (p. 21 contains the full text of *Penelope* in 5.5 pitch, while the last page, p. 41 contains one word at a pitch of 262). The fourth part offers a humorous and speculative attempt at punctuating *Penelope*.
- 14 Ginsberg terms *Penelope* a 'soliloquy'. I will use Humphrey's (1968:27) term 'direct interior monologue'.
  - 15 Penelope was the wife of Odysseus (Ulysses) who waited 20 years for her husband's return from the Trojan War.
  - 16 Cordell Yee (1997:19) quotes Colin MacCabe's assertion that 'Joyce's texts grant primacy to the material of language over the fugitive meanings attached to it' and that '*Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are concerned not with representing experience through language but with experiencing language through the destruction of representation'.
  - 17 Humphrey (1968:27) terms 'the last forty-five pages of James Joyce's *Ulysses*' (he does not call it *Penelope*) an example of 'direct interior monologue' by asking: 'What role does the author play in the passage? As it is represented, he plays none. The author has disappeared entirely: it is in the first person; the tense is willy-nilly, past, imperfect, present, or conditional as Molly's mind dictates; and there are no commentaries, no stage directions from the author.'
  - 18 See Uytterschout and Versluys (2008) *Melancholy and mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's 'Extremely loud and incredibly close'* in which the three protagonists' behaviours and coping strategies are analysed in terms of LaCapara's theories of 'acting out' (melancholia) and 'working through' (mourning).
  - 19 Morley (2008:309) draws further attention to the haptic nature of the form, by reminding one that it is only through the visual and tactile art of sculpture that Thomas can express his loss and desire and that the 'YES' and 'NO' come into direct contact with the clay in the forming of an image of his lost lover.
  - 20 Oskar's father often provided him with clues for 'reconnaissance expeditions', games in which Thomas would send his son out on 'quests' or treasure hunts. Oskar believes that the key might be such a clue from his father, but is really only an attempt to keep his father's memory alive.
  - 21 Oskar's business card (p. 99) lists him as: inventor, jewelry designer, jewelry fabricator, amateur entomologist, Francophile, vegan, origamist, pacifist, percussionist, amateur astronomer, computer consultant, amateur archeologist and collector. On p. 286, however, he (and we) discovers a card with the simple entry 'Oskar Schell: Son'.
  - 22 Uytterschout and Versluys (2008:222) state that '[i]n a very literal sense, Thomas Schell is unable to share his traumatic experiences with others because he suffers from aphasia – the loss of speech. It is not unreasonable to assume that he has unconsciously inflicted this condition on himself. His inability or refusal to speak testifies to an unwillingness to cope with his traumatic past.'
  - 23 An echo of Kerouac's 'adolescent question, *Why do men go on living?*'
  - 24 W.R. Greer states: 'Jonathan Safran Foer's novel is not a perfect one. In addition to the oddities in Oskar's grandfather's chapters, the book is full of photos and drawings, all things that Oskar collected in his attempt to understand his world. Among these is a photo of a body falling from one of the towers, one which Oskar enlarges to see if maybe it was his dad. While these are all supposed to be reflective of Oskar's mind, they don't really add anything to the novel.'
  - 25 Foer's exploding of the typographic, literary and visual conventions of the contemporary novel may, however, prove helpful in positioning and coping with more demanding examples of visual and typographic complexity found in novels such as Mark Danielewski's *House of leaves* (Anchor, 2000). In formal terms, the only South African book which, as a totality, approaches the textual and visual complexity of Foer's work, and of which I am aware, is Andre Brink's *Orgie* (Malherbe, 1965). In this work, Brink exploits and undermines various typographical and literary conventions such as, like Stern, the use of blank and black pages. *Orgie*, of which Boshoff was aware, predates Boshoff's manipulations in *Kyafrikaans*, and was a catalyst for the early forms of the artist's book in South Africa. (See my 2000:32–56.)
  - 26 Of interest is a recent projection, in June 2009, of William Kentridge's latest flip book into the public domain from the window of the Goodman Gallery, overlooking Jan Smuts Avenue, Johannesburg. The conventionally private activity of book reading was turned into a public performance through a looped animation of flipping pages.

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