Dissociated Senses & Mediated Communication in

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close
Outline

I. Theoretical Preamble
   – Q & A
   – Sociology Beyond Societies

II. Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close
   – General Intro
   – Discussion

III. Housekeeping
Q & A: Any introductory books on the studies of (urban) space in film or lit?

- See **Geocriticism** for a list of classics. (Lefebvre, etc. → Soja)
  


  --Another example of the “location-specific” nature of interdisciplinary studies of cities and cinema:

  Mennel, Barbara. *Cities and Cinema* (FJU)
The Spatial Turn & Trauma—according to Westphal

— “Like Adorno, Westphal identifies the epistemological rupture of the contemporary period with the historical rupture of World War II and the emblem of its dehumanizing brutality, *Auschwitz. World War II*, Westphal reminds us, destroyed the Enlightenment metanarrative of progress (conceived as a linear process) and led immediately to the fracturing of the myth of history as a single unified narrative. For Westphal, ‘time had been deprived of its structuring metaphor’ (24) “ (Tally 19)
Geocriticism

“As a way to demarcate geocriticism from other modes of spatially oriented literary criticism, the advantages of this approach are clear: the specificity of geocriticism is to be a truly geocentric or geocentered mode of analysis, focused on understanding a given place (through the problematics of representation) rather than studying a given set of representations (through the thematics of place). The traditional tools of literary criticism and interpretation have a role to play in such an investigation (they help to reveal the complex relations between the mode of representation and the object of representation), but the ultimate objective is spatial.” (Tally 21)
Geocriticism (2)

– “Joyce’s Dublin” ...a kind of metacritical endeavor, one that extends literary studies into the domain of the geographical referent in a way that transcends literature’s aesthetic function and seeks to show how it can actually participate in and inflect the history of the places in question. (Tally 22)
Geocriticism (3)

Extensions of Westphal’s Geocriticism:
1) To “non-geographic places” (such as domestic spaces)
2) To a type of places (such as squatter town)
3) To modes of spatial practice

Henri Lefebvre: 1) production of space
2) space of representation, representation of space, spatial practice in dialectical relation with one another
space of representation
- e.g. Literature, film, bulletin boards, Picture book, etc.

Representation of space
- e.g. Zoning, park, construction, apartment house

Spatial practice
- e.g. Protesting, flash chorus, walking in the city
Relevance to our texts …

– **The Five Senses**: breaking the boundaries between the public and the private/domestic spaces; also isolation of the senses

– **Extremely Loud**: resorting the spatial practice and spatial/fragmentary narrative when the core of the event cannot be articulated
“Senses” & Risk

– **Premise**: objects (machines, objects and technologies) as “actants” in a network of humans and objects (78) → *hybrids* (e.g. map-maker, photographer, landscape-viewer, car driver, TV viewer)

– **Focus**: how various senses operate in mobile ‘open societies; e.g. disempowerment of senses in global risk societies (p. 79)
1) Associated with reasoning and thinking 
2) Reciprocal, Detached, and Possessive 
3) Open us to mediatization and surveillance 

1) Playing key roles in construction of class relations 
2) Intimacy between the “subject” and the “object” 
3) Diverse smellsapes associated with a certain place 
4) Modernity: “neutralize” smells (99), the ‘stench of Auschwitz’ 

1) We cannot avoid being at the center of the acoustic sense 
2) A historical shift from oral/acoustic culture to visual culture 
3) Recent “reinvigorated oral culture” (100) 
4) Soundscape as distraction or pollution—each with a different one
“Times”

– Clock time (homogeneous, empty time) vs. Lived Time (visible, inscribed within space)
– OR one’s being disembedded from lived environment e.g. time table at a train station or airport
Different Kinds of Time

- Time as **arrow of time**: a sequence of past-present-future
- Time as **clock-time** (homogeneous, empty time)
- Duree vs. temp (Bergson) and
- **qualitative and heterogeneous space**, which influences our sense of time and makes memory possible (Bachelard) (p. 117)
B-series: the Aristotelian sense of time as ‘before and after’

• Time separate, each seen as “before” or “after” the other

A-series: time indicated by the relationships of ‘past-to-present-to-future’.

• The past is always reconstructed in the present (115)
Instantaneous times in Information Society

– Short-term and fragmented time
– collage effect & tragic sense
– 3-min culture and multimedia skills
– extended present & unreliable future
– the time–space paths of individuals often desynchronised. (No longer family viewing)
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

General Intro
Outline

– The author and 911
– Discussion Questions
– Disembeddedness of People and Signs
– The Grandparents’ Traumas & Communication
– Oskar’s Traumas & Communication
Jonathan Safran Foer (1977~ )

– Published two novels (*Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*) and a nonfiction (*Eating Animals*)
– Grandson of a Nazi survivor
  – **A Speech** at Kingswood Oxford School about books, his books and what happened around the creation of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} novel (3:00)
  – **About Oskar**
  – **Response to the film** (like hearing my voice on an answering machine)
Multimodality in his work

– 1) “most honest way to express what it was like, or what it feels like.” (qtd in Gibbons 129)
– 2) a response to the changing cultural environment of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.
– 3) an attempt to bring up the strongest response in readers (Gibbons 129)
– → Co-witnessing
Discussion Questions

The novel is about the disruption of communication among people, esp. family members and fathers and sons, due to wars and accidents.

The traumatized: Oskar, Grandpa (Thomas Sr.) and Grandma

– What are their traumatic responses?
– How do they try to communicate? What sense(s) do they focus on?
– The other characters? (The mother and the Blacks?)
– Media of communication: letters, the clues
– Rules of communication? Effects?
| 1 | What the –Oskar writing a year after the tragedy (pp. 3-4) Oskar’s obsession and invention → one of the messages |
| 2 | Why I'm Not Where You Are: 5/21/63 | Letter from Oskar's grandfather to his father About how he loses spoken language → meeting his wife |
| 3 | Googolplex – the beginning of his quest | Communication with broken signs: letters → meeting Thomas |
| | -- communication: a mysterious key in a blue vase | The mother’s role? 50, 51 |
| | -- disconnection, broken signs: Lies 38 | |
| | -- communication: 472 people in the New York phone book with the surname Black 51 | |
| | -- disconnection, broken signs: images 56-67 | |
| | -- disconnection, broken signs: messages 68 | |
| | -- communication: renter; talking to grandma 69 | |
| 4 | My Feelings | |
| | -- a letter that Grandma wrote on September 12, 2003 to Oskar | |
| | Communication with broken signs: letters → meeting Thomas | |
Modernity: Disembeddedness of Time and Space

– removal of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space
– Time and space virtualized

– **Causes:**
  – telecommunication system + capitalist system of globalization
  – Global flows
  – traumatic incidents

– **Consequences:** loss of fixed context, self-reflexivity or hybridity, mediation in communication + separation of the senses
Disembodiedness in 911

– Although 9/11 is not caused by the disembembedding mechanisms defined by Giddens, as a quintessential example of risk, it involves skillful appropriation and deflection of the expert system of air transportation. In effect, it leads to disembodiedness in extreme forms: extracting thousands of city dwellers from their living social network and, literally, stopping the usage of zip code 10048 until probably the opening of 1WTC in summer, 2014.
Disembeddedness: a whole zip code area // the 6th borough
911 – its Floating Images: The Falling Man

Mad Men’s March 2012 cover

Richard Drew
Traumas: Examples of Disembodiedness in the novel (1)

Grandparents’

– The war:
  – Anna’s father kills himself after the war (trapped in the ceiling);
  – Goldberg’s disappearance
  – Anna’s death
  – Thomas’s experience of Dresden bombing
  – The two experienced displacement
(1) Grandfather’s Responses

– Thomas Sr. unable to speak
– repeated use of the same book, the same words (yes, no)
– Images of “non-place” airport, train station
– Setting non-place (Nothing place) at home
– Fragments of the past → Disorientation in the present: Excuse me do you know what time it is.
– Does he, then, fail to communicate?
Grandmother’s responses

- Receiving letters without seeming to respond to them
- Writing letters without, apparently, having them read
- Typing her book without a ribbon on (To Oskar: “You are the only one I trust” 84)
Grandfather’s and Grandmother’s letters compared

- When did s/he propose? (pp. 32-33; 82-83)
- He stops her from committing suicide
- Two kinds of language:
  - grandfather: repetitive, but his “Yes/No” and words “intertext”/interact with objects (17, 28)
  - grandmother: manipulative or soliciting life stories (78-79)
Examples of Disembeddedness in the novel (2) Oskar’s Responses

- Repression: not talking about his missing the father’s phone calls
- Self-inflicted pain: Gives himself bruises
- Alienated from his mother, blaming her for befriending Ron.
- More later ...
Traumas: Examples of Disembeddedness in the novel (2)

Oskar’s Responses

1) Writing letters
2) Inventing things
3) Working on his picture book
4) searching for the lock for the father’s key—looking for the Blacks (“So if Mom asked me, "Where are you going and when will you be back?" I would tell her, "Out, later." But if one of the Blacks wanted to know something, I would tell everything. ”)

Acting out (Repetition Compulsion) or working through his trauma? Communication?
Oskar’s use of communication tools and his interpretation of signs

– The beads: encoding his father's last telephone message.

– Walkie-Talkie
Graphics and Photos

– Oskar’s

*Stuff That Happened to Me*

*(14 pages)*
Time Reversals
Oskar’s fears and Violence

– Fears 36

– (p. 2; 5) stories of attack:
  – self-defense with jujitsu to “how a jujitsu student becomes a jujitsu master.”
  – kicked a French chicken in the stomach twice
  – (Oskar as Yorick, imagining himself attacking Jimmy Snyder)
Oskar’s secret & sadness

- The phone messages pp. 68 -
- Invented a special drain 38
- “sad” about everything p. 42

2) Also trying to construct/imagine the collectivity of New York
3) Perceptive & trying to understand
Communication:
Oskar’s “raison d’être”: firm basis of his self-reconstruction

– raison d’être
  – Entomology (a sophisticated child quick in learning things) p. 1
  – Making her (mother) happy p. 7; p. 68
  – the lock ultimate raison d’être 69
  – Not hurting her (grandma) 100
Oskar’s inventions

☐- space and time: limousine(5) →
distract

☐(pp1; 3) “what about”
   A teakettle, microphones, birdseed shirt, skyscraper for the dead people (up and down)?
☐ -- portable pocket (71) → Ambulance 72

→ Decompensation for
1) Not speaking/listening;
2) His father’s not escaping from the building
The Characters’ Communication

– **Grandmother**: inspired by a letter filled with gaps to ask others to write her letters without explaining **why** (no key),
– **Oskar** (key without a lock) – leaving his sleeping bag
– **Thomas Sr**: a day book – breaking out of the “marble-self”