

Evoking a Memory of the Future in Foer's Everything is Illuminated

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**Doro Wiese,**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Evoking a Memory of the Future in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*" Doro Wiese discusses Jonathan Safran Foer's novel. In the text a photograph plays a decisive role: the image of two young people drives the Jewish American Jonathan to visit the Ukraine. The photograph is presumably of Jonathan's grandfather Safran and a woman named Augustine who saved Safran's life during a nazi raid of his village: the photograph becomes an *ekphrasis*, a description of a visual work of art in another medium which transforms the generic characteristics of written and photographic representations. According to Anselm Haverkamp, photographs are visual citations from history and about history: they show not only people and/or objects at a specific moment in time, but also point towards the irretrievability of that moment. Yet, when photography is transposed into another medium that performs the effects of a confrontation with the given-to-deathness of the people displayed, photography-in-ekphrasis might perform not only mourning over the irretrievability of the life that is lost, but the ethical necessity to resist the devaluation of life in the present.

**Doro WIESE**

### **Evoking a Memory of Future in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated***

Jonathan Safran Foer's 2002 *Everything is Illuminated* is an epistolary novel composed of letters written by two principle narrators and characters: Alex and Jonathan. Both have different geo-political, religious, and historical backgrounds: Jonathan is the Jewish American grandson of a Ukranian survivor of the Shoah and Alex is the secular Ukrainian grandson of a man who betrayed his best friend to the nazis. Both principle characters and narrators have to face the horrors of nazism and their (familial) closeness to it. As such, they must negotiate and construct a complicated legacy with the past despite or because of their ethico-political and historical positioning. They have to ask themselves how they can build a future influenced by their — questionably — responsible choices. If Alex and Jonathan are already opposed in the storyline through their family history, then the narrative form of their exchange of letters drives them even further apart. The style, content, and narrative voice of their letters differ: as a character, Jonathan remains absent from the story he tells. The parts of *Everything is Illuminated* which are ascribed to his narrative voice tell the fantastic and magic realist story of the shtetl Trachimbrod told from an omniscient third-person perspective. Alex, on the other hand, is rendered in multiple but more realistic ways. The storyline of *Everything is Illuminated* consists of his letters to Jonathan which detail daily affairs and personal feelings, reveal confessions, and above all, discuss critical details of a book they are writing together. Since these details coincide with textual parts of *Everything is Illuminated*, it could be concluded that the novel itself, by way of metalepsis, is the fictional outcome of this shared book project.

Yet, while Jonathan and Alex's storylines differ in terms of stylistics, linguistics, and narrative, textual fragments of their stories resurface in the novel repeatedly in different narrative contexts. Written-down resolutions and explanations come up repeatedly, crossing through time and changing contexts sometimes explaining a storyline and sometimes linking characters or sometimes spilling over from one storyline to another. These recorded phrases emphasize the mobility of sense and the enduring characteristic of writing: its ability to enclose and disclose knowledge to readers and characters alike. They thereby establish an understanding of language as something that precedes subjectivity, which is a force that creates meaning rather than expressing it. This force makes the readers responsible for their involvement in the story, because they have to link the different phrases, fragments and hints to each other, and make sense out of the bits and pieces as they rise to the surface, unraveling the narrative strands which have become entangled. The unchanging character of these linguistic bits and pieces qualify them as quotations which remain unchanged despite their changing contexts. They are "blasted" out of the story's continuum only to form constellations with each other thereby commenting on and communicating with their contexts and with each other — once the reader establishes this connection with readerly activity, crossing through time's different layers and series. The fact that narrative fragments can be displaced and become quotations affirms the force of repetition, defined as the repetition of the same in another place and/or time. This repetition points towards a universal condition of each and everyone: one cannot own language because it is expressive beyond oneself, although the person who utters and the conditions under which an utterance is made remain singular and unrepeatable. Thus, even the utterance "I speak" is one that can be taken up by anyone, just as the phrase "this is me" might belong to someone else, so that it is affirmed, once again, that "I" is first and foremost an other who is different from "me."

In the following, I pay close attention to a specific quotation that plays a decisive role in *Everything is Illuminated*, namely a photograph (on Foer's work, see, e.g., Brillenburg Wurth <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss3/14>>). Anselm Haverkamp understands photographs to be visual citations from and about history: they not only show people and/or objects at a certain moment in time, but also indicate the irretrievability of that moment, the being given-to-death of the person and/or object in the photograph. Yet, when photography is staged in another medium, in this case a novel, it can be transformed from quotation into what I call "a memory of the future." Transposed into another medium, it can perform the effects of a confrontation with the depicted person's being given-to-death. This is exactly what happens in *Everything is Illuminated*, where a photograph plays a decisive role: the image of two young people, a man and a woman, standing

beside each other, has compelled the Jewish American Jonathan to visit the Ukraine. The photograph presumably depicts Jonathan's grandfather Safran and a woman named Augustine who saved Safran's life during a Nazi raid of his village. Staged in a work of literary fiction, this photograph becomes an ekphrasis — that is, a description of a visual work of art, whether real or imaginary, in another medium. This means that we have to consider the interplay of two media: photography and literature. On the one hand, readers know how they would perceive a photograph on the condition that they were able to enter into the narrative world. On the other hand, the photograph can only be experienced through the literary text in which it is represented.

To understand the specific use of the photograph in *Everything is Illuminated*, we must first consider what the generic qualities of photography are. Here, I rely on Roland Barthes's investigation into the photographic medium. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes defines the specific quality of photographs — their *noeme* — as their ability to show immediately and doubtlessly the former reality of a past object: "in Photography, I can never deny that *the thing has been there* ... there is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (76-77; emphasis in the original). Further, Barthes insists that photographs cannot be separated from the referent itself, which means that it is impossible to talk about photography in general. The essence of photography exists only in the absolute, particular, sovereign and contingent photograph itself: "this photograph, not Photography" (4). However, another notion that Barthes clings to persistently is more important for the current context: it is a certain attention of the observer, called for by a *punctum*, the Latin word for wound or puncture, which emanates from the photograph and triggers its effect. Only then, he maintains, can he explore photography "not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think" (21). Thus, any writing about photography has to restrict itself to a specific object, which has both a "mode" and a "tense" while Barthes prefers to access its reality by experiencing and giving a singular and personal voice to the effects it produces. Yet the precondition of these experiences is first and foremost the "wound": that which can be explored when a photograph is taken in through the sensory and the thinking apparatus.

At first sight, the "wound" relates to a semiotic experience Barthes used to express: "the *punctum*," a "sting, speck, cut, little hole" that might prick, bruise or have a poignant effect" (26-27) and this can only be established through interaction with the observer. Rightly or not, we could claim that Barthes's wound is caused by the activity of the *punctum*, since to prick or to bruise might lead to a wound. Yet in another way, the *punctum*, or to use its more familiar Greek translation, the trauma, might also be seen as the starting-point for the interest, the *intersum* of a singular observer — its invisible source. For it is one specific photograph that rouses Barthes from the indifference caused by the "daily flood of photographs" (77). This photograph is of his mother as a child, one he stumbles upon shortly after her death when he begins to "consult" images of her, looking in vain for a souvenir through which he could be able to "recall her features (summon them up as a totality)" (63). The situation in which Barthes is roused from a lack of interest is thus evoked by his realization of the impossibility of ever having such a vivid image of someone's corporeality that her or his death would seem to be cancelled out: the impossibility of total recall. In this situation that might call for despair, since it shows the irrevocability of death and the irretrievability of the dead person, no matter how much one might have loved them, Barthes finds a photograph that consoles him because it is a photograph that has captured not his mother's identity, but her essence. But this essence is not constituted in the visible, while it is recognized through the visible. This recognition seems to be necessarily performed through another medium, namely writing, since the photograph of his mother as a child is the only one that Barthes has not included in *Camera Lucida*. We might already conclude here that the trauma of a photograph, its *punctum*, cannot be captured at its origin, but needs to be transformed into a written form and repeated in another guise.

Yet, the interest that is evoked in the observer might allow her or him to bridge the gap between past and present. As Haverkamp points out, what is performed in Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is therefore not a return of the dead — a haunting — but "a return of the living to the dead" (267). This return induces as its invisible point — its *punctum* — feelings for the dead. This point will remain invisible until it is transferred into language (275). It is this necessary transference which causes Haverkamp to insist that photography neither mimics nor replaces the work of memory, but works as a quotation: "cited from the text of history and quoting the texture of history" (275), a texture we can only

"develop" if we "insist" on repeating the original image as a quotation. This repetition necessarily will not only take place in another context (since a quotation is by definition a transfer of an original piece of text). It will also transform object, subject and the interaction between them because it takes place in the entirely different medium of writing. What Barthes finds when seeking to uncover the nature of the photograph is not solely the essence of an object, but the transference that this essence needs to be voiced. Photography is like a verb that conjugates its observer to a past point in time, yet this transfer is solely made possible through the transference of an observer who contributes her or his feelings to get close to — to embrace — the object displayed. Nevertheless, this closeness is only a felt one, since a photograph can only be seen by those excluded from the image; what one sees is always a person or an object that was "real" in the past, and was able to inscribe its light onto a silver plate at an irretrievable moment in time. In photography, the texture of history is therefore always shaped by a loss, by an irrecoverability of a past moment in the life of a "real" person or object, while its effect is necessarily transposed into another medium that performs, with all its might, the mourning of the irrecoverability of the life that has been lost, caused by the trauma that death and its realization evokes.

In order to transfer these insights to a reading of Augustine's figuration in *Everything is Illuminated*, we could first of all note that she — a nameless woman — or her photograph is enveloped in a literary articulation in our readerly encounter. As such, her "reality" is distinct and hidden from view, while it is transferred through the medium of writing. But, based on my reading of Barthes's self-exposure to photography, this form of writing is able to "repeat" the experience of a photograph's *punctum*. Intradiegetically, however, the photograph signifies first and foremost a certain relation to her reality and to time. That is to say that Augustine has been real, and this is the quintessential expression of photography. As such, the photograph of Augustine is indeed a quotation "cited from the text of history and quoting the texture of history" (Haverkamp 275) from a given moment in time. History mediated in photography is something that is always already past — however close we might feel to the objects and people exposed in it; their "real bodies" cannot be brought back to life, but are irretrievably lost in time. Therefore, only their "text" can be quoted, while the "texture" from which they have been taken is irrecoverable, so dense and past as to never be restored. Yet, contrary to Barthes' presumption that a photograph always expresses the death-in-the-future of the object of photography, the characters in *Everything is Illuminated* see it as proof that Augustine is possibly "the only one still alive" (59) — even if this hope does not spring from the photograph itself, but from inscription on its flipside: "This is me with Augustine, February 21, 1943" (60). This indicates that Augustine has at least certainly survived a certain moment in time in which, intradiegetically — but also historically — the inhabitants of the Jewish shtetl Trachimbrod were murdered one by one by the nazis. The ekphrastic staging of Augustine's photograph in *Everything is Illuminated* thereby changes the text of history and the texture of history, since she is able to transmit a notion of hope and survival in the face of past deaths. Contrary to the general characteristics of photography, this photograph is proof of survival in the face of death — proof of her being "given-to-life" and her "giving-of-life" — and we should not forget that she is the one who saved Jonathan's grandfather from certain death at the hands of the nazis. Through ekphrasis, the photograph therefore acquires a new generic meaning in the novel, and this meaning distinguishes it from other photographs.

However, this is by far not the only result of the ekphrasis of Augustine's photograph in the novel, since her transposition into written language transforms her into a figuration that is by definition susceptible to telepoiesis — a process described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a "cutting and pasting" (43) through which we project imaginings to a space far away and into a future perfect. In other words, the staging of Augustine's photograph allows an affect to infect our notion of time. Yet, this "cutting and pasting" is not appropriation, since there is no position that allows for personal possession. Instead, if we accept my concept of the literary machine, the addressee of literature is not us, but a "we" in search for an "us," who is asking us to become an "us" who are able to witness and work through the story caught in the twists and turns of its language and figuration. And we, affected by its very form and force might answer this call without fulfilling it, and as such, we might become social and responsive agents to this call. Mediating other times, peoples and worlds, reading is precisely one of those practices that allow us to be othered and to be haunted by difference in and for itself. It calls forth different times, peoples, and worlds so that these "others" can haunt our present,

called for by the close attention paid to language and the surrender to it that might be triggered through reading. Nevertheless, the "cutting and pasting" that reading implies –the transference it allows– is a process that is generalizable per se, and for this reason, the figuration of Augustine is also susceptible to it and again forms an antithesis to photography's *noeme* of absolute singularity as described by Barthes. This process of generalization is precisely that which is staged in *Everything is Illuminated*, since a general teleopoiesis takes grip of the "me" that has been Jonathan's grandfather, so that it acquires different layers in time, while others are taken to be, mistakenly or justifiably, Augustine's older self. As such, the photograph of Jonathan's grandfather and Augustine is put to multiple uses, a multiplication in time and place that already shows itself in its (photographic) reproduction, quite literally so. But that is not all, over time the image also acquires a meaning beyond its purely referential value. Alex, for example, mentions in one of the first letters he sends to Jonathan that "I have thought without end of what you said about falling in love with her. I never fathomed it when you uttered it in Ukraine. But I am certain that I fathom it now. I examine her once when it is morning, and once before I manufacture Z's, and on every instance I see something new, some manner in which her hair produces shadows, or her lips summarize angles" (24).

Alex not only has a quite idolatrous relation to the image of Augustine, he also imagines falling in love with her, a position that is in no way unique, since in his account, both he and Jonathan have "fathomed" this feeling. At other times, the image soothes him, so that he is not in his "normal solitude" (53). The photograph's capacity to soothe far exceeds that of "normal" images, and in this way it acquires mythical qualities. But this is in no way the only possible use and effect of the photograph, since Alex's grandfather, who drove Jonathan and Alex around during their search for Augustine, is, as viewer of the picture, also exchanging the figuration in the image itself:

As for Grandfather, he is always becoming worse. ... I have witnessed him crying three times this week, each very tardy at night when I was returning from roosting at the beach. ... The first night I witnessed him crying he was investigating an aged leather bag, brimmed with many photographs and pieces of paper, like one of Augustine's boxes. ... The second night he was crying he had the photograph of Augustine in his hand. The weather program was on, but it was so late that they only presented a map of the planet Earth, without any weather on it. "Augustine," I could hear him say. "Augustine." The third night he was crying he had a photograph of you in his hands. It is only possible that secured it from my desk where I keep all of the photographs that you posted me. Again he was saying "Augustine," although I do not understand why. (102)

In the above quoted passage, Augustine transforms from a person with boxes of photos into a photograph and a generalizable name, one which might be used to refer to others, regardless of their gender, nationality, religion or age. Augustine thus becomes the most generalizable name imaginable, while on the other hand, it is the specific feeling that she triggers which makes her so exceptional: people love her, feel soothed, or cry when they look at her. And while this quality might already make her – or rather her photograph – quite exceptional, it stands in stark contrast to the experiences of love described by the main characters who have only been close to love: "Really close, like almost there ... But never, I don't think" (110). As such, Augustine's image has the ability to call up an unthought-of feeling that remains inexhaustibly "new" and "beautiful," since Alex always discovers a different aspect of her "producing" and "summarizing" corporeality – a beauty that in this way is able to create and to encapsulate differences in and for themselves. In short, Augustine is not only singled out through a feeling of love, she also makes others experience a loving feeling for other people, whereby she becomes the singular cause for a generalizable "love," and the general effect of a singular "love." In this way, Augustine is a "concrete image" that exceeds its status of representation through its ability to affect with a feeling that goes well beyond her. What is staged in *Everything is Illuminated* by giving a photograph a written-down "worlding" is thus the event by which a structure of address between perceiver and perceived is exceeded. This event is already double in itself, since it is simultaneously belated and becoming. Being written, it is a belated event, since writing always comes after the experience or perception it records. However, being writing, its ability to affect might entice the readers to become, to dive into the folds and place themselves at the limit where it is an other that enunciates "them."

*Everything is Illuminated* doubles these forces of belatedness and becoming more than once, creating in this way an ever-shifting field of forces, as if cutting through an ocean. Thus, not only the persons that might or might not have fallen in love with Augustine proliferate, but the act of possibly

falling in love is also recounted at various times, therefore making the act itself susceptible to the "cutting and pasting" of anyone who dares to do so, thereby crossing through time and space. Not only might Jonathan's grandfather have fallen in love with Augustine and given this possibility away by writing, belatedly, her name and a general pronoun on the back of a photograph, but Jonathan and Alex's falling for her is also recounted in retrospect, through comments in an exchange of letters, in which the reader participates. In other words, it seems as if Augustine's photograph is captured by a pure power of time that exceeds any subjective notion of it, since her image is generally, for all time, accessible to new interpretations, while she, simultaneously, eternally returns as an image that has lost its context and becomes a quotation for which a new context needs to be developed.

*Everything is Illuminated* allows for a third option in-between a passed-on history and a fading life story. The suitability of Augustine's photograph to be cut and pasted into the lives of "others" allows for her to be doubled in another time and in an other's time. While her image is in this way continually repeated as "the same," it is also permanently transferred into a "new" context, open to unforeseeable interpretations and appropriations. Its repetition is shown to have singular effects, whereby the differences in space and time are stressed in which she finds herself repeated. Augustine's photograph, generally reproducible and therefore repeatable, also indicates, when transposed into writing, the advent of her coming as the other in "me," of the eternal other hidden in the generality of a pronoun. This event can be witnessed directly while reading, when her representation is present to an other who engages telepoietically with her figuration. Although her photographic representation is severed from any secure knowledge about her past, her displacement in a work of fiction highlights the difference between her present articulation and what we do not know about her past, thereby stressing "the ascent of the course of time in writing the event" (Muresan 152). It is this ascending time that secures a difference in kind between original event, photographic display, verbal articulation and act of reading, since what is repeated is irretrievable, lost to time, while our wish to repeat remains possible, articulating itself as "the real movement for the other, from the other, by the other" (Muresan 161). As such, reading witnesses to the advent of the other as other, to what cannot be accommodated in our grid-works of knowledge and reflection: "it is not an image that can be kept in memory as recollection, but rather the movement of pure memory itself that brings to the fore something forgotten; it is a stroke that founds memory as it brings to light the recessive part of things, confronted with what eludes in them any archive" (Muresan 161).

Through our readerly encounter with a figuration suitable to cutting and pasting, combined with the possibility that we, the readers, could become agents of this act of transposition, the original constellation of the fading image and well-recorded history is exceeded by the notion that it could have been "me" in the image or behind the camera, it could have been me who wrote in the margins of a photograph, me who was overwhelmed by a loving feeling and who wanted to freeze a moment for an eternity to come, while she, Augustine, was wearing short sleeves and had bare legs when she was taken by surprise, smiling into the camera. But is this the only story possible to tell about "me" and "Augustine?" Here, I would like to unfold another fold hidden in *Everything is Illuminated* where instead of multiplying "Augustine" in time and place the "true" referent of the picture is sought after, thereby narrowing the interpretative possibilities down to a singular point. For the characters find, after a long day of driving around and of moving in circles, with little hope left that their search will be successful, a woman who, peculiarly enough, has never witnessed anyone in the picture of "Augustine and me," but has instead been witnessed by "them":

"Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?"

"No." She was humming again, with more volume.

"Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?"

"No," she said. "No." I saw a tear descend to her white dress. It too would dry and leave a mark.

"Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?" I inquired, and I felt cruel, like an awful person, but I was certain that I was performing the right thing.

"No," she said, "I have not. They all look like strangers."

I periled everything.

"Has anyone in this photograph ever witnessed you?"

Another tear descended.

"I have been waiting for you for so long." (118)

How are we to understand this configuration of witnessing? And who is this woman, sitting on the doorstep of a small house, surrounded by laundry drying on the grass, and peeling corn? She is the one who "knows" about Trachimbrod, in fact, as the only survivor of the shtetl whose inhabitants have all been killed in cold blood, shot one by one, made to spit on the Torah, made to watch their relatives die, who commenced acts of bravery and acts of cowardice in the face of death, as if this would or could matter in the face of certain death, Augustine "is" Trachimbrod. She says she is not Augustine, and only her strange walk links her to one of the stories of Trachimbrod, in which a woman is shot through her vagina and survives because she is heavily pregnant. This story might be hers, but she does not recognize as hers. She claims it is a story of someone close to her, her sister. But then, if the story is not hers, how can she do what she does? Namely, collect the remains of the village: the watches, hair-pins, diaries and the dust? She considers herself to be among "the not-lucky ones" in surviving, because "you should never have to be the one remaining" (153). There is only one scene that explain her actions; she is there "in case," just like the ring of Rivka is there "in case." Rivka hid her ring although she knew she was going to be killed, just "in case someone came searching one day" (192), someone who existed "in case of the ring" (192): "In case" something can be passed on, anything at all. But is this woman only a function, is she the one who sees to it that the stories are told? Is she there "in case" someone finds her and asks her about the remains? Here, we have to take the name of the chapter in which this occurs into account as well as how we are entitled to read it: "What we saw when we saw Trachimbrod, or Falling in Love" (181). How are we to understand this? We might link it to the kiss Alex's grandfather gives her at the end, showing his affection for her. On a more abstract level, we might link "the falling in love" to the figure of her in the story, because the way through which she unfolds as a character might make us "love" her for what she is and not what she does. This reading might help us to understand her last utterance as well: "I am" she says, and although she will again chain herself to the past, to the possibly dead baby who is missing despite of her return to the dead, the rendering of the story will ensure that she is more than one particular account in one story (193). She is, to borrow a phrase by Wayne Booth, "The company we keep": a character who accompanies us through the story, who bears the story for us, making sure that we can grasp it like Rivka's ring and making sure that we get the story without ever having to experience it personally. Precisely because literature is not reality and precisely because it is fictional, it allows us to get in touch with the unbearable, while the characters can add love, care, humor and friendship to the story, while they guide — or non-guide — us through the events.

What we see in Trachimbrod is thus a character who recurrently emphasizes her being present, while situating herself in a chain of witnessing in which she does not take an active part. Are we then to conclude that she then must necessarily be a "passive witness," someone "made witness" by the circumstances, by the wishes and will of her dead predecessors? I would like to suggest here, again, that we pay attention to the way she is staged in the novel, since this reflects her specific condition of being. If we take into account that literature allows us to become "like a third person of the infinitive, a fourth person singular" (Deleuze and Parnet 48), this nameless woman might be a prefiguration of a version of ourselves, one which awaits and precedes us: a prefiguration which we might step into through reading. Such stepping in allows us to be haunted by different layers of time and different people(s), since she, our third person of the infinitive, narrates the past in our readerly present, while speaking to "us," the readers to come. One cannot fail to note the messianic structure of this staging, because arguably, we will never become "us," the past will never become present, while the third person of the infinitive necessarily needs to await the conjugations we subject it to. Nonetheless, this aporia is possible, and allows us to get a glimpse of what might become of us if we fall in love. And we have been close. Claiming this structure for a feminist collective to come, I see something rising on the horizon of our knowledge. I hope it will be her, standing in, as a woman, to signify our impossible chances. I maintain that she would come "if we worked for her" (Woolf 633) and it is to this end that we should stretch ourselves to become Augustine, or "August, perhaps. Or just Alex, if that is satisfactory to you" (180).

In conclusion, I suggest that *Everything is Illuminated* positions readers in such a way that they can assume an ethical position towards the Shoah, which I consider as urgently needed for a post-Auschwitz generation. In my reading of *Everything is Illuminated* I link Barthes's arguments about the generic qualities of photography with Haverkamp's extrapolation of a specific view on history that



ekphrasis allows to emerge. This enables me to show how the photograph described in Foer's novel changes its generic meaning. In Haverkamp's view, photographs are visual citations from and about history. This is the case because photography — as explained by Barthes — indicates a certain relation that objects or persons shown in photographs have with temporality: they are quintessentially captured at a moment that is always already past, so that any knowledge about their limited temporality, their given-to-deathness, is transferred through the medium itself. I show that in Foer's novel the photograph of Augustine supersedes this quintessential pastness by expressing her survival in the face of an almost certain death at the hands of Nazi murderers who invade the shtetl of Trachimbrod. Staged through ekphrasis in a literary work, the photograph of Augustine becomes proof of her being given-to-life (her survival) and her giving-of-life (by saving the life of Jonathan's grandfather Safran). In this way, she transfers the hope for survival (of the Nazi raid) and resistance (by grandfather Safran's life) against the devaluations of life that are epitomized in the mass murder of a people in Auschwitz. As I show, readers are drawn into the construction of a complicated legacy with an unfathomable past for which they nevertheless provide the grounds in the form of a teleopoiesis by cutting and pasting through time and space. Thus I suggest that *Everything is Illuminated* develops a postmemorial ethics precisely by asking what kind of relationship one might develop to the legacy of the past and by displaying impossible hopes for the future. *Everything is Illuminated* ends with a promise: "And I will" (276) are the last words spoken in the book, words which establish a bond with a future that is indeed illuminated by "everything that occurred" (6). Alex and Jonathan represent the third generation after the Shoah. Differently to their grandfathers, they hopefully have better, still possible choices.

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