Załącznik

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THEMATIC SECTION: KITSCH IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

ALAN KURDI'S ONLINE RESURRECTIONS – OMRAN DAQNEESH'S ONLINE REANIMATIONS

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By attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive (…). *Photography has something to do with resurrection.*
Roland Barthes (1982: 79-82)

I. THE DEAD BODY AS A REFERENT OF A PHOTOGRAPH

Culture knows three models of perfectly immobile bodies: 1. a sculpture, statue, monument, figure; 2. an image of a body (painted, photographed); 3. a dead body. These models can fuse with one another, an example of which are mediaeval sarcophagi (table tombs) presenting the dead lying on the catafalque[1], as well as photographs showing the corpse. The body,

[1] Nowadays one rather wants to remember the dead as living, and for this purpose gravestones frequently use photographs made while the deceased was still alive. When Roland Barthes (1982: 96) revealed the *punctum* of the photograph of Alexander Gardner *The Portrait of Lewis Payne* (1865), presenting the would-be murderer awaiting execution, he wrote: 'he is going to die'; the common *punctum* of the persons in gravestone photographs is: 'We do not know that we are already dead'; in this way the Barthes-inspired ('each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death'; ibid.: 97) remark by Wojciech Nowicki (2015: 267) that each photograph presenting a person is 'the image of a person dead *in spe*'. The fear related to being photographed (see tales of ethnographers and anthropologists of beliefs that a photograph takes away a part of the soul) was also articulated by Barthes (1982: 14), when he wrote of the 'micro-version of death' as the effect of transformation of the subject into an object by way of the photographer's

touched by the paralysis of death, becomes immobilised again here in the permanence of matter, or in an iconic figuration that is devoid of time.

The corpse is a paradoxical entity – 'a presence that refers to non-presence' (Thomas 1991: 43), the closeness of distance, the embodiment of an irremovable distance that separates those who remain, from the dead. The visual presentation of a corpse is an act of the immortalisation of the dead in their non-existence, yet at the same time it saves the body – in a painting, a figure – from inevitable decay, as it becomes, in a way, preserved, retained with a look not different from the look of a living body, at times even in a position taken by it (some *post mortem* photographs may serve as examples here[2]).

The photograph of a corpse – just like discourse about them – is there to serve the interests of the living. One of the oldest human strategies is to try to preserve the dead in the land of the living, in an image, resemblance, so that the exposition capacity, a property of every social being, is retained. The photograph in this case is a further step in the evolution of representations of the dead, following effigies, masks, casts, sculptures and paintings[3]. As Hans Belting (2011: 130) writes: 'Death, an unbearable

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doings, which he referred to as 'embalming' (so, the photographer does not as much kill me, they disclose and preserve me as a corpse that I shall henceforth be); analogously, he read the feeling of discomfort noted by persons watching photographic representations of themselves: 'what I see is that I have become Total--Image, which is to say, Death in person'.

[2] This practice, characteristic for the Victorian era, is returning again as part of the therapeutic movement ('Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep'), formed in the United States in the year 2005, fusing psychologists, medical doctors and professional photographers, offering the parents who have lost a child (a newborn child, mostly), a photographic session for remembrance, see: www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org [accessed: 14.09.2019].

[3] When photographic cameras became widespread, and bodies of the dead were not yet removed from the sphere of daily existence, there was the custom of taking photographs by mourners with open coffins, in which their close one would lie. A few kinds of these photographs are found in my grandfather's albums. When asked about them, he replied that a common and almost obvious custom was at the time to call a photographer when somebody from the family died. My grandfather himself, who halfway through the 1950s purchased his first

absence, became endurable when an image substituted for the absence, a *symbolic body* replacing a *mortal body* that has dissolved into nothing'.

The second strategy is closely related to the 'iconography of suffering' and presents the body that is dead as a result of the violence it suffered, or a mass of nameless bodies (spaces 'littered with corpses', landscapes where 'corpses fall by the dozen'), or nearly-corpses (scenes of torture and execution) or soon-to-be-corpses (mutilated, disfigured bodies of those still alive, fighting for their lives). The purpose of such representations – or at least, of their creators – is to sensitise to the pain of others and to deter from evil (see:

photographic camera – a Smena – was asked several times to take such photographs at acquaintances. However, he was unable to say, what was the purpose of this (in general, the question as to why one takes photographs, is not easy to answer; this practice-governed obviousness remains partly unanalysed in terms of consciousness). Nowicki (2015: 259) considers photographing oneself by dead relatives to be a secularised counterpart to rituals of preservation or making death casts or masks: 'Most probably, the moment of death – and only this moment – causes notions of memory, contractions of the muscle responsible for storing images (would it be because of the awareness that there will be no more occasions?)'. Barthes (1982: 93) adds a certain significant fact that Nowicki seems to have overlooked: the fragility, the mortality of the photograph itself. 'Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal; this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) Photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of »what has been«, modern society has renounced the Monument'. Earlier on, he writes: 'The only way I can transform the Photograph is into refuse: either the drawer or the wastebasket' (ibid.: 93), which significantly corresponds to the remark by Louis-Vincent Thomas (1991: 101) on the handling of bodies in contemporary society: 'in a culture dominated by economy, where everybody is determined by the measure of their working power, the corpse is, of course, useless, so it is waste – as a car wreck. If hence this system considers death to only be technically mastered, one cannot wonder that practices related to bodies are uncommonly similar to practices related to waste'. Audrey Linkman (2011: 7) perceives this fact quite differently, who, in substantiating the choice of her analyses (photographs showcasing a private loss, not victims of war, cataclysms or violence), writes: 'In these portraits the dead body was neither neglected nor rejected. The physical remains that had once been the living person were still the object of love and care'.

Sontag 2003; Jakubowski 2015; Draguła 2015). Over the course of centuries, the sole bodies that were presented in this way was the (earthly) body of Christ and the bodies of holy martyrs (or perhaps the bodies of enemies, heretics, in triumphant battle scenes[4]). However – as Susan Sontag (2003: 33-35) writes – 'these are destinies beyond deploring or contesting (…). The practice of representing atrocious suffering as something to be deplored, and, if possible, stopped, enters the history of images with a specific subject: the sufferings endured by a civilian population at the hands of a victorious army on the rampage'. Along with Francisco Goya's series *The Disasters of War*, a 'new standard of reactions to suffering' is developed. Or it is rather – a new standard of the *required* reaction, because neither the producer of the image, nor even more so the image itself have the power to determine the use that is to be made of it, and the response (emotional, physiological, ideological) that the recipients will experience (if they experience one at all – indifference is, after all, an undesirable reaction)[5].

[4] Such representations are enjoying a comeback along with the practice of publication of photos of bodies of terrorists – alleged or not – who could be found and killed before they committed (further) crimes. Arjun Appadurai (2006: 107) notes that these representations are characterised by the logic of a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'both state-sponsored violence against terrorists and local violence against ethnic neighbours converge on the display of the captured, wounded, or humiliated body of the enemy as the proof of the very treachery it was designed to destroy. In the repose of death or the immobility of surrender, terrorist bodies become silend memorials to the enemy within, proof of treachery in its very pathetic ordinariness'.

[5] Two more strategies can be named: 3) police or detective work, related to the photographic documentation of crime scenes for the purpose of investigations and collection of proof (the corpse, just like in case of an autopsy, coroner's work or anatomic pathology, gains a certain paradoxical subjectivity in the act of full objectification: it is supposed to 'tell' the story of the last moments of the deceased), and 4) artistic, whereby the corpse becomes an object of aesthetics. The history of artistic photography of bodies of the deceased is presented by Audrey Linkman (2011: 154-186), beginning with photographers who created their series in mortuaries using anonymous 'dead' (Jeffrey Silverthorne, Hans Danusen, Rudolf Schäffer, Andrea Serrano, Joel Peter Witkin), through artists related to US counterculture and the underground bohemians in a time, in which the HIV virus began to 'reap'

In her essay, Sontag traces the history and the intricacies of representations of violence and the discourse surrounding it, beginning with the conviction that 'if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war' (ibid.: 14), through 'pornography of suffering'[6], all the way to the general indifference of all those who day after day, comfortably seated as 'not concerned', consume a solid dose of macabre imagery flowing from newspapers and the television, reacting at most with a fleeting and idle sigh of compassion. Discussions on the legitimacy of representing 'images of the pain of others' emerge from time to time on the occasion of publication of further 'shocking materials', most frequently by tabloids[7], and fizzle out just as quickly. The accusers then speak of violations of ethics standards of plain human decency, the violation of elementary human dignity and of their death, not considering the feelings of those close to the victim, finally – seeking cheap thrills at the expense of human life ('foraging' on somebody's death). Defenders – most commonly representatives of the incriminated press – on the other hand argument

its crop (Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz), all the way to those creators, who used photography to articulate private loss and process the grief (Richard Avedon, Anne Leibovitz, Anne Noble, Briony Campbell, Ishiushi Miyako).

[6] Sontag (2003: 33) herself does not use this term, even though it is ascribed to her; one can derive it, however, from the fragment, where she writes that '[i]t seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked'. Louis-Vincent Thomas (1991: 109) speaks on this occasion about the 'cannibalism of the eye': 'the media are eager to throw the most sensational images of corpses to masses devoid of drama'.

[7] An occasion was provided by the cover of the tabloid „Fakt" of August 20th, 2015, showing a terrified and bloodied ten-year-old girl attacked with an axe at the door to a book store in Kamienna Góra, Poland. The cover caption read: 'The girl is looking on with large, terrified eyes – just moments ago, an insane person attacked her with an axe right in the city centre. The beast calmly stands beside as if nothing had happened. He does not struggle, does not run away. But just now he cracked an innocent child's head with an axe! A few hours later, ten-year-old Kamila died (…). Sleep soundly, angel, only God knows why this happened'. I quote this fragment here solely to showcase the move from venomous protest ('beast', 'cracked an innocent child's head') to idle consolation ('sleep soundly, angel'), which will be of interest to me in the present text.

in favour of the positive effects of such practices, referring to the already mentioned narrations of sensitisation to the suffering of others, and deterrence from evil and violence.

The two strategies presented earlier on – saving the dead *in effigie* and 'the image of the pain of others' – position the corpse in a way, placing it in the private or public sphere, turning it into a person or a symbol and sounding the tone of mourning or guilt. Wojciech Nowicki (2015: 265) seems to refer to this classification, when referring to the photograph of a dead soldier from the time of World War I he writes – with a certain pride – 'I rather look at the body, not at the political causes of death'. These two perspectives may shift between each other back and forth. Case one: three men leading a crowd, each one of them holding the corpse of a child wound in canvas with spots of pale red – as if it were dissolved blood; I read: 'relatives carry the bodies of the victims of Israeli strikes on Beith Gahia (north Gaza strip)'. What the faces of the men is best described by is the Biblical word 'lamentations' (it spans both anger and pain). The dead children (*their* children) are the blow, they are an expression of guilt, the personification of grief and hatred against the aggressor. Case two: three-year-old John F. Kennedy Jr. salutes clumsily in front of his father's coffin being carried in front of a military parade accompanied by the honour guard.

The opponents of publications of images of suffering and violence seem to question the equality of these two perspectives, noting – without a doubt, correctly – that the public aspect is secondary to the private one, that every person represented in them is *primarily* somebody's child or mother, or father, etc., and that it is their next of kin who have the original and inalienable right both to their body, as well as its image, the right to privacy of grief, the right that is violated by political or symbolic exploitation of the image of the dead. What happens, however, if the next of kin themselves join in the spectacle of representations, the hero of which is the corpse of their relative? Is the pornography of the corpse not accompanied at times by the exhibitionism of grief?[8]

[8] Along with the photograph of Alan Kurdi, media started showing photographs of his distraught father with eyes red from crying and lips pursed in a spasm of pain. I am not saying that the grief of Abdullah Kurdi wasn't authentic, only

I do not intend to continue along this line or ascribe to any of the above, slightly dated, rhetorics. Instead, I would like to trace, as a case study, the *fate* of a single photograph and a single frame taken from amateurs footage showing children as victims of the war in Syria and the so-called migrant crisis: Alan Kurdi (in a photograph taken by Nilüfer Demir, a Turkish photojournalist working for the DHA agency, in the beginning of September of 2015 on a Turkish beach in Bodrum) and Omran Daqneesh ('the boy in the ambulance' presented in a short footage showing the consequences of the bombing raids on the Syrian city of Aleppo).

Speaking about 'fate', I am thinking about the quite specific context that was not known to Susan Sontag, and described by the terms convergence culture or participatory culture, meaning – according to the definition by Henry Jenkins (2006: 290) – 'culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content', in which bottom-up and top-down content (related to government, mainstream media, the business world) intertwines, overpowering the hegemonic, centralised transmission model, which became possible ever since the 'people' – formerly, consumers and passive recipients – were given the tools and the infrastructure permitting the genuine involvement in many-to-many communication.

Images showing both boys were indeed not only broadly *shared* – both in traditional media, as well as social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter – but they were also *repeated* in a range of image conversions, remixes, paraphrases or references, becoming 'memory markers', 'image topoi' (as stated by Ewa Domańska [2006]), symbols or visual metonymies of the 'migrant crisis', they became viral, all the way to become memes. To trace all these forms of 'repetitions with differences', by necessity selectively and in an abridged form, will permit a gloss for Sontag, taking into account a change in the cultural paradigm related to the new media model. The basic tools used in the current paper will be a tools of semiotics.

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that in the presence of journalists it must have grown to spectacular (G. Debord) or mythical (R. Barthes) proportions.

II. ALAN KURDI – THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF CONSOLATION, THE UNBEARABLE SOFTNESS OF PROTEST

1. FRAMES AND SIGNS: VISUAL TACTICS

One would need to begin by stating that there are two photographs of the same subject: a boy, later recognised as Alan Kurdi[9], a three-year-old Syrian, ethnically – a Kurd, lying on the beach, just by the shoreline, not far from the Turkish locality of Bodrum. The boy is dressed in a red short-sleeved t-shirt (the t-shirt is rolled up slightly, as a result of which a beige band of his belly can be seen) and navy shorts extending beyond his knees (the colours are darker, because the boy's clothes are wet); on his feet he's wearing black trainers (he might not be wearing any socks). He's lying on his chest, with his head towards the ground, tilted slightly to the left, with his arms lying along his body, palms upwards. The boy's legs are slightly bent at the knees, as a result of which the buttocks are sticking out slightly, pointed to the right. One photograph is oriented vertically, and presents

[9] This individualisation (related to finding many other photographs of Alan, smiling, playing ball, hugging a teddy bear, hugging his brother, who also died in the same circumstances, just like the boys' mother) plays a significant role here: it permits – as stated by the United States artist Nan Goldin, photographing her friends dying of AIDS – 'gave the human face to the statistics (Linkman 2011: 176). Statistics do not give rise to real compassion and do not cause intense opposition (100, 200, 1000 persons – all of this is abstraction that does not differentiate emotions), as opposed to a single person, who one may get to know. This fact was used for instance by Steven Spielberg in *Schindler's List* (1993), singing out from the crowd of victims a girl through her red coat (the entire film, apart of the final shots, is in black and white) and showing her in two scenes: first being caught in the street in the ghetto, then on a carriage removing bodies. A similar effect may be found in the graphics by Robert Tauber Calvo Jimeneza, who pasted the body of Alan Kurdi (small compared to the entire image, placed in a position that is not particularly visible – close to the upper left corner – being the only one in colour) onto a photograph showing beachgoers, who through this had become figures of perfect indifference, see: www.boredpanda.com/mare-nostrum/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].


Fig. 1-2. Alan Kurdi on the beach in Bodrum (photo by Nilüfer Demir /DHA)

the boy from the direction of his feet (fig. 1.), the other is horizontal, and was made from the left side of the boy, about five metres from the body (fig. 2).

The two most significant components of these photographs are the colours of the clothes and the arrangement of the boy's body – it is quite a clumsy position, yet at the same time cute in its clumsiness, akin to the position take by sleeping children. This position is at the same time quite unsettling – an instinct of care would suggest tilting the boy's head more slightly to the left or turning him onto his right side.

Sleep has for a long time been the basic cultural model of what is unthinkable, incomprehensible – of death, just like death is referred to as the 'eternal' sleep. Any attempt to understand death by analogy to dream is based on replacing the unknown with the known, and the unpleasant – with the pleasant. However, sleep – as a component of life – does not cease to be its opposite. A reference to the 'invigorating', regenerative power of sleep suffices. Hence, despite it being disconnected from the capitalist logic of production, it powers its supporting requirement of vitality.

As long as the attempts to understand what death is, which are doomed to fail, attempts at discerning what does it mean / what is it like to 'not live', place sleep as the analogon of death, on the level of representations, it can be its synonym: '(s)he looks as if (s)he were sleeping' – this is the way that bodies lying in coffins are sometimes described, in an act of consolation. In particular, a photograph, which freezes the signs of life present in a sleeping body – the breath, the pulse, changes to the position – may reinforce this feeling of puzzlement, even just be confusing at times ('does the photograph depict a sleeping or a dead person?', 'which of the persons in the photograph

is dead?'[10] – many photographs, in particular old, silent, unsigned and context-free can be asked this in earnest, and, moreover, at times an answer may not be found[11]), yet at times they may console recipients: 'Sleep was simply the sweetener with which it was acceptable to dress and serve the dish that was death' – writes Audrey Linkman (2011: 21-22), adding: 'The death--as-sleep portrait was clearly intended to comfort the bereaved and console the survivors'.

Tactic 1: Reframing

The body of Alan Kurdi in the photograph by Nilüfer Demir could be an ambiguous or even an opposite sign. Its meaning is determined by the context, or more precisely – as we are talking about an image – by its frame. The original frame does not leave any place to doubt that the sign--body of the boy means death – nobody sleeps in *that* position in *that* kind of place; a passing wave washes his face, reaching the level of arms (and the element of water is the enemy of sleep, in this case even – the enemy of life; it is the one, which, caught on the photograph like a murderer who didn't manage to flee the scene of the crime – even if being outside the register of guilt – killed the boy[12]). This indetermination of the meaning

[10] It was again Roland Barthes who articulated this both (epistemological) flaw of a photograph and its (ontological) advantage: the complete triumph of existence at the cost of significance.

[11] 'Such is the Photograph: it cannot *say* what it lets us see' (Barthes 1982: 100). Traces of this confusion can be sought already in the beginnings of the history of photography – I am referring here to the photograph by Hippolyte Bayard from October 18th, 1840. entitled *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*. This photograph shows the author posing as a corpse in protest against the French government's provision of financing for further research to L.J. Daguerre, and omitting Bayard – the inventor of an alternative technology, thanks to whom the photo-sensitive paper showed already the positive of the image.

[12] Audrey Linkman (2011: 24) writes that in many Victorian-era photographs 'disturbing memories of a painful or violent death [are overlaid – P.J.] with a more lasting and consoling image of a soul at rest'. None of the remixes of the photograph of Alan that I know show any references to the pain of drowning, however the streams of water are presented as: caring embraces (www.boredpanda.com/sleep-deep-in-my-shoulders-here-is-your-safe-home/, www.boredpanda.com/

of the body-sign was used by the creators (prosumers) of representations which use the tactic of the reframing. Thanks to this the sign, retaining its identity as the *signifiant*, is shifted to its opposite as the *signifié*. The change of the field of denotation (death is turning into a sleep) also describes a very different level of connotation (unpleasant is now pleasant; painful – cute; unsettling – calm).

The level of the image is dominated by an utopian, counter-real representation ('the way it should be'), whereby its negative reference ('the way it is') hides in the reminiscences ('afterimages') of the original image and is present by way of a network of legible references (fig. 3-4).

Fig. 3. Reframing: illustration by an unknown artist

Fig. 4. Reframing: illustration by Birdan Saha

the-warmest-embrace/ [accessed: 14.09.2019]), bed sheets (www.boredpanda.com/just-sleeping/ [accessed: 14.09.2019]) or a hand holding the boy's body with care (www.boredpanda.com/sleep-my-child/ [accessed: 14.09.2019]).

Tactic 2: Splitting the frame

One of these representations – by Kayled Karajah (fig. 5) – sees the artist including an internal frame, dividing the image into two asymmetric spaces: 'the way it should be' (¾ of the image on the left side) and 'the way it is' (¼ of the image on the right), or 'the way it was' and 'the way it is'. The sign-body of the boy is symmetrically divided by this vertical section, disclosing a dualised meaning (the left side means sleep, the right – death), and at the same time postulative and critical power, permitting the placement of the message on the level of utopia (the way it should be / the way it is) or nostalgia (the way it was / the way it is), whereby the first of these is appreciated positively as the current desired state.

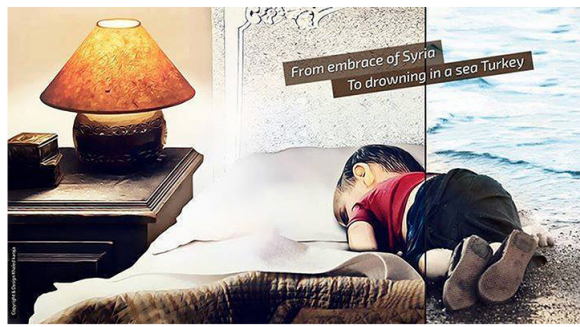

Fig. 5. Illustration by Kayled Karajah

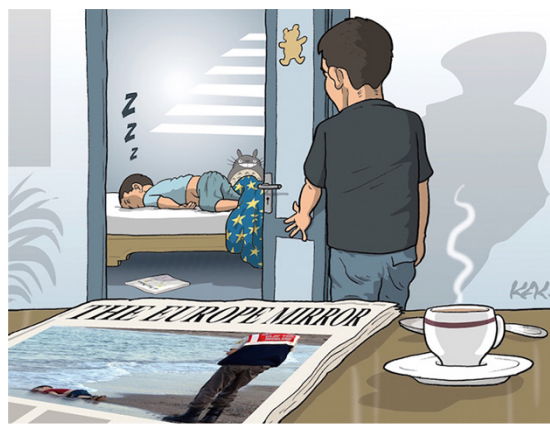

Fig. 6. Doubling the frame: illustration by French illustrator Kak

In a different case (fig. 6), two ambivalent frames (the frame of the bedroom door and the frame of the image on the paper cover) and the corresponding identical signs of opposing meanings were both placed inside a single image.

Tactic 3: Re-signing

A different tactic in turn utilises associations related to the spatial context – indeed, the beach is a place of relaxation, care-freeness and play. Hence, retaining the original frame, the creators transform the sign itself (to discern it from the practice presented earlier, this one might be referred to as 're-signing'), which remains recognisable through its distinctive features (colour of boy's clothing, dark, short hair). The postulative and critical influence is here analogous to reframing: it is the utopian or nostalgic 'way it should be' that fills the level of the image, whereby the painful 'way it is' remains in the afterimage of the original, but not only that – a close analysis of the image by Gunduz Akhayev shows that the thing that the boy is building out of sand on the beach (or the thing that he already built as he is currently focused on finishing the sand building, seeming as if he would like to lift it and carry it away with himself), is a shape of his own body, the position of which is known to us from the photograph by Nilüfer Demir. This death cast (made by the hands of the deceased himself) violates the smooth homogeneity of the representation – immersing itself into it on the aesthetic level, yet radically separating itself from it on the ethical one (fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Re-signing: illustration by Gunduz Aghayev

Turkish artist Ugur Gallen took a different path. In his illustration – which also has a very calm and seaside convention – the sign-body of the boy is unchanged, but its absent reference (utopian or nostalgic) is seen in the form of the shadow cast by the body-sign, but not being its shadow (as it corresponds to it neither physically, nor semantically). We only see a shadow – index of that which is not there, and what was or should be, playing with a bucket; the place of the boy playing on the beach – removed from the representation, just like he was removed from existence – is taken up by the smooth, celadon surface of the empty sea and a slightly cloudy sky (fig. 8).

Fig. 8. The sign and its shadow: illustration by Ugur Gallen

Tactic 4: 'Stones and petrol bombs'

Here, I shall utilise these stereotypical tools, being at the same time weapons, which crowds, people, aim against the soullessness, injustice, violence or blind indifference of rulers, to present the last of the discerned visual tactics of protest. If in most of the images presented beforehand, the mythical (in Roland Barthes' terms) aspect was more or less hidden, it is here that it begins to dominate, and the image takes up its place fully in the register of guilt and public grief. The body-myth is displayed, thrown to the feet of the authorities, aimed against it, as if it were crying: 'Look what you have done!', 'You have blood on your hands!'. Blown out of proportion, it is to be clear proof of guilt serving to dislodge those in power from their indifference and the politics of 'hand-washing'.

Fig. 9. 'Look what you have done' – illustration by anonymous Internet user

In this case, each time we experience the question, whether the message was correctly addressed. Different illustrations point their *J'accuse* in different directions, placing the blame on the UN (and the relations of the West with the Arab world: secret arrangements, weapons for oil deals, hidden circulations of petrodollars, etc.), on the Arab world (with its endless wars)[13], on the EU (with its foreign policy, the work of the Frontex, etc.)[14]. This sheer multitude of potential guilty parties dissolves the voice of reproach and opposition from the powerless and mute body of the boy, entangling it in a network of rhetorical fights which almost exclusively aim at shifting responsibility on to others. From 'a stone and a petrol bomb', the boy's body becomes a 'rotten egg' or 'hot potato' from the children's play, hastily thrown to someone else's hands, which all remain unblemished (fig. 9)[15].

2. OCCUPATION: REPORTER. SPECIALITY: CHILD PHOTOGRAPHY

I have overlooked a very obvious, yet meaningful fact: the photographs of Nilüfer Demir do not only show a corpse, but the corpse of a child. In terms of the issue of the influence of showing violence instigated upon the civilian population on the development of a new standard of reaction to suffering,

[13] www.boredpanda.com/the-leaders-watching/; www.boredpanda.com/arab/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

[14] www.boredpanda.com/stap-looking-away/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

[15] Analogous image: www.boredpanda.com/in-memory-of-Alan-kurdi-by-achraf-baznani/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

as mentioned by Sontag, the figure of the child should be ascribed with a special significance. The child, with its innocence, gentleness, fragility, has the ability to accumulate in itself the entire pointless tragedy of war, as well as the aggravation of the ethical problems related to showing 'images of the pain of others'.

The story about the background of the photograph by Nilüfer Demir fuses in itself components of the Cartier-Bresson's mythology of the 'decisive moment' and the mission of the photojournalist (hindered by humanly, womanly and motherly instincts): 'I almost felt paralyzed when I saw the child's corpse' – says the Turkish reporter – 'At the same time, as a photographer I have a task that does not allow time for second-guessing, for freezing. So, I took the pictures' (quoted after: Küpeli 2015). Asked about her feelings and reflections related to the popularity of the photograph she took, the reporter said: 'On the one hand, I wish I hadn't had to take that picture. I would have much preferred to have taken one of Alan playing on the beach than photographing his corpse. What I saw has left a terrible impression that keeps me awake at night. Then again, I am happy that the word [most probably a typo that should read »world« – P.J.] finally cares and is mourning the dead children. I hope that my picture can contribute to changing the way we look at immigration in Europe, and that no more people have to die on their way out of a war' (ibid.).

As always under such circumstances, voices of opposition and criticism also emerged[16]. I shall quote one of them, by Brendan O'Neill (2015), a columnist for Britain's „The Spectator", as it refers to the new form of idle

[16] The conversions of the photograph by Demir include those that are aimed at the media. In one of these, by Michel Kichka, seven small persons with cameras, photographic cameras and tripods gather around an enormous body of Alan (https://fr.kichka.com/2015/09/03/Alan-kurdi/ [accessed: 21.09.2019]), a different one shows two camera men with lenses aimed at Alan, the top shows the caption 'Jackpot' known from bar games, referring to the maximum possible prize (the signature comes from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*; www.boredpanda.com/society-of-the-spectacle-by-lhomme-jaune/ [accessed: 21.09.2019]). Still a different image shows a photojournalist (male) crouching on a pile of child corpses in a pool of blood (caption: 'Victims of terror'), only to take the shot of one Alan (caption: 'Victim of migration'; www.boredpanda.com/cynizm/ [accessed: 21.09.2019]).

compassion in the recipient, characteristic for the time of Web 2.0, and being an example of so-called slacktivism[17]: 'Isn't this just the saddest photo you've ever seen? And gross too? Quick, share it! Show it to your friends – on Twitter, Facebook – so that they will feel sad and grossed-out too. Gather round, everyone: stare at the dead Syrian child'. The author himself refers to this as a 'moral pornography' and deems it to be a sign of hypocritical narcissism, serving nothing but self-satisfaction and moral catharsis of the recipient: 'I cried, therefore I'm good'.

Just like in case of many 'iconic' photographs, there also emerged the suspicions that the entire scene was staged; these suspicions were even supported by – visual, of course! – proofs (so, where the compassionate and angry recipients tricked?). In line with the presented 'proofs', the body of the boy was moved by a Turkish coast guard from the place, where the sea threw it on the shore, to a more 'scenic' location, and arranged in a position in which it is to be remembered (see: Dearden 2015).

Irrespective of these controversies and speculations, the photograph by Nilüfer Demir will enter the canon of 'images of the pain of others' under the category of 'children', along with equally famous photographs by Nick Ut (1972, Vietnamese girl burnt by napalm – nearly-corpse) or Kevin Carter (1993, Sudanese girl dying of hunger – soon-to-be-corpse). In the culture of convergence, the connection could not go unnoticed and unutilised by creators of on-line 'repetitions with changes'.

In one illustration, a photograph by Ut, processed so that it shows but outlines, is placed, akin to an (anti-)advertising billboard, in the sea, whereby the known silhouette of Alan Kurdi lies on the shore as if he were looking at a photograph (to achieve this effect, it was necessary to twist the body by 90 degrees and align it parallel to the shore line). The Vietnamese girl (Kim Phúc, she is still alive and runs a foundation dealing with aid for child victims of war), taking a step with her right foot – only this part of her body, transgressing the lower edge of the banner frame, is shown in colour – is leaving the image and entering the sea (the creator signified

[17] A term by Malcolm Gladwell, a columnist for the „New Yorker", a neologism fusing the words 'activism' and 'slack', which refers to all forms of easy and – in the end – idle engagement limited to liking, sharing, declaring participation, signing petitions, etc.

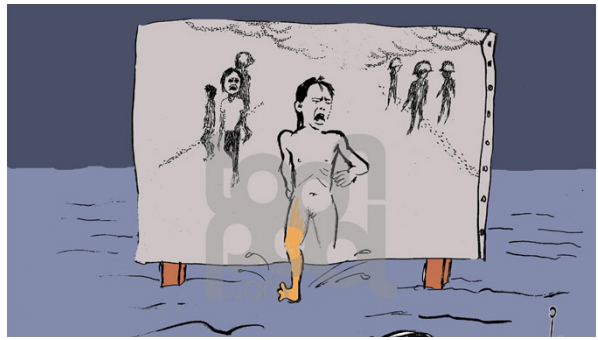

Fig. 10. Image memory: illustration by Joachim Tiedemann

this by a few strokes indicating water splashing), as well as Alan's present. So, the departure from the image is at once a journey in time. Even though the billboard is placed in water, it is somewhat unique (even more so as that it most probably serves to appear as if this symbolic event were true), its hidden resonance unites Kim Phúc and Alan Kurdi in a mythical register – as Child-Victims-of-War (fig. 10). In another image, the multiplied and blurred images of Kim Phúc, holding hands, form a sort of line, within which the body of Alan Kurdi lies (it may be supposed that this is a circle, although much more than the children's circle game it is reminiscent of medieval representations of the *dance macabre*). The multiplied silhouettes look at the viewer intensely, challenging them (breaking the rules of both the line, and the circle, which are oriented towards the inside) (fig. 11).

We do not know, and we will never know, the name of the Sudanese girl, and we can only make suppositions as to her later fate on the basis of improbability of hope; she remains solely as an image, she was solidified in the 'decisive moment', when a vulture landed behind her (critics say that Carter inadvertently immortalised himself in the photograph). I do not know, whether the afterimage of the Pulitzer-awarded photograph on the illustration depicting Alan, and in his background – a vulture with gun heads sticking out as if they were unruly feathers (and a further addressee of guilt indicated on its breast – 'Military industrial complex'), was in this case a purposeful move by the author (fig. 12).

A clearer reference may be found in a different image composed of three parts. In the top part, the author showed illustrations based on the known photographs by Carter and Demir, including the geographic and temporal

Fig. 11. Image memory: illustration by Garry J. Kendellen

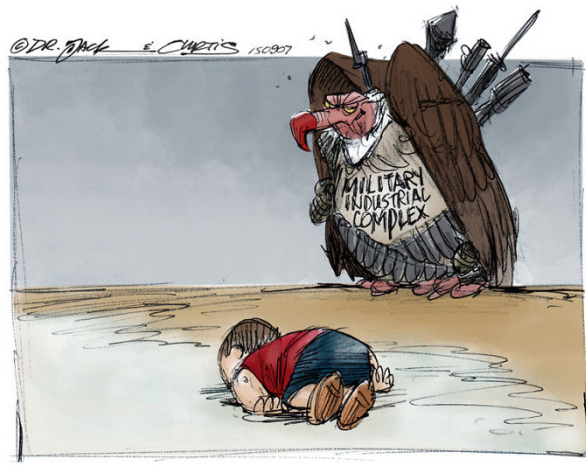

Fig. 12. Image memory: illustration by Dr Jack & Curtis

location, and in the bottom – an imagined meeting between the nameless Sudanese girl (who for this occasion turned into a boy, took off her necklace, but put on underpants that look like a diaper) with Alan Kurdi (whose hair paled). The meeting is taking place somewhere in the clouds, under the watchful eye of the sun: 'Still the same?' – asks the Sudanese boy, 'Still

Fig. 13. Image memory: illustration by Hrishikesh Dev Sarma

the same' – replies Alan. The world is still looking how little children are dying, and lets it happen (fig. 13).

3. AH, ALAN! AH, HUMANITY!

The stake in the game, in which many on-line images participate, is faith in humanity. For instance, the YouTube search engine shows ca. 25,000 results for 'losing faith in humanity' and 79,000 for 'restore your faith in humanity' (from which one may infer that it is not that bad – acts of Good outnumber acts of Evil – or just the opposite, that faith in humanity is so weakened that it needs an 'army' of images three times as large). Humanity in itself in the on-line conversions of the photograph by Demir is most frequently present in the form of a hand (or hands), which serve as a *pars pro toto* of a human (whereby these are rather hands of females, mothers, stereotypically indicating sensitivity, gentleness, care, as opposed to male hands that rather speak of robustness, certainty, strength), who, the female

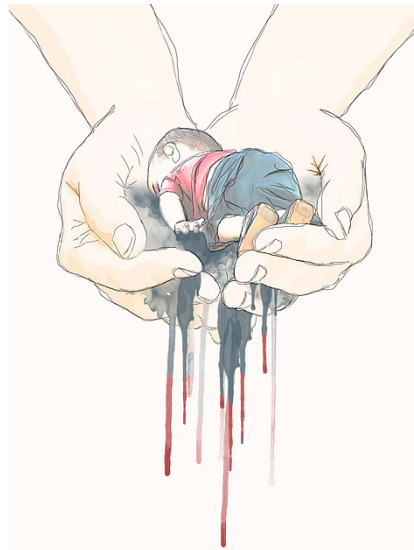

Fig. 14. Synecdoche: drawing by Helen Savvy

human, is in turn a *pars pro toto* of humanity (fig. 14)[18]. However, what do these images express – save for an empty gesture which is at the same time symbolic, utopian and late, lost for ages? I hear from them one word coming: consolation. I ask: for whom?

A much less positive image of humanity can be seen if it is shown metonymically as the World (visually: the globe of the Earth). These representations are clearly accusative, and the World – meaning, all together, hence, nobody in particular – functions as a (further) culprit: 'Thank you World' – says the inscription on the balloon that Alan Kurdi, lying on the beach, is holding in his hand in one image[19] (Banksy-inspired balloons frequently appear in remixes of Demir's photograph).

In two images, Alan is lying on a cloud (is he sleeping?, is he dead? – hard to say) somewhere above the world, which in turn is shown in the shape

[18] 'This is not Anne Geddes' – says the caption for a very similar image (www.boredpanda.com/ceci-nest-pas-anne-geddes/ [accessed: 19.09.2019]), the author of which refers not only to Magritte, but also to the famed photographer of children.

[19] www.boredpanda.com/thank-you-world/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

Fig. 15. Metonymy: illustration by Dinko Art

of a turd ('Leaving a Shitty World' – the caption reads[20]) or enveloped with a fiery halo (the Earth is seemingly on fire) which warms the boy's place of rest somewhat (caption: 'A Better Place') (fig. 15). A further image presents him when he's lying – again: on a cloud[21] – in front of a closed gate resembling the edges of rich mansions or state institutions; an unopened letter is found beside the boy (perhaps an asylum request, and behind the gate is an embassy or an authority for migrant affairs), whereby a man in a blue suit (an official?) is attempting to flee the spot and leave this entire affair behind him – the head of the person is the globe of the Earth, drawn on it as if in a cartoon, the face shows fear and terror (is this what drivers fleeing the scene of an accident look like?), the eyes – acting as if against his will – are turned towards that, from which the man is trying to flee (fig. 16)[22].

[20] www.boredpanda.com/leaving-a-shitty-world/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

[21] Which did not prevent the creator from placing clouds 'in the sky' as well, or at least where they should be, according to the common convention.

[22] There is one more image, in which the boy is placed, uniquely, on a crescent moon. The moon is crying. The caption reads: 'Dirty world'; www.boredpanda.com/dirty-world/ [accessed: 19.09.2019].

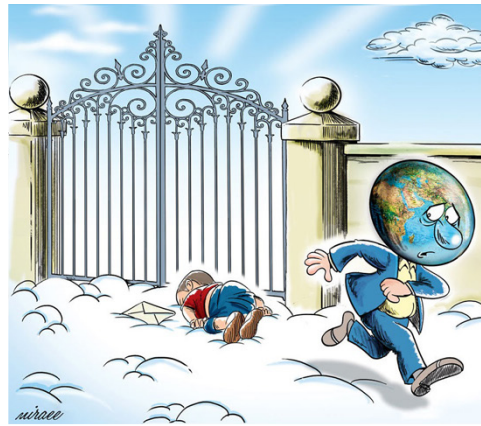

Fig. 16. Metonymy: illustration by Ali Mirae

4. 'HE IS WITH THE ANGELS NOW'

The decisively largest group of representations aligns with something that I would like to describe as a 'rhetoric of consolation'. This rhetoric is present even in critical representations – for instance, at least the last one quoted: why would the creator, having clearly the intention to accuse, not shy away from putting the entire scene on a fairytale cloud?

Many 'images of the pain of others' raise the question about the 'things to come'. This applies clearly to the images of almost-corpses and soon-to-be--corpses. These questions, I believe, are raised not only by 'ordinary human' caring or the simple human desire for a happy end, but the need to recognise, and then adapt one's own reaction to that which was recognised – it could be either grief or relief (this is missing from stories of those who have left home, never to return; stories of mountain explorers, the bodies of whom were never found – the inability to grieve, the inability to accept consolation; an emotional, existential *limbo*).

However, neither the corpse nor their photograph raise questions about the 'things to come', but the thing is that, in response, they have to remain within the fantastic (the imagined) or religious (frequently intertwining). The culture of convergence is not the first to provide these responses with an imaginary body. It is, however, the first, in which this image is such irritatingly naive. We've already seen the little clouds, let us just add that

they are not uniquely safe, as they do not touch upon the potentially irritable tones of religious or cultural differences: the clouds lie above cultural and religious diversities. We also already know Alan playing in the sand, so let's add a few elements – the halo and the wings – to gently suggest that this is not 'our, earthly beach', and we get Alan-the-Angel[23] building sandcastles (fig. 17). And here is laughing, holy Alan[24], who had just completed his first sand building – beside him, quite a jovial man in biblical attire is finishing a creation, placing a white flag at the top (the caption for the image says it is Jesus[25]) (fig. 18). Even an uncomplicated graphical application suffices for Alan to sleep soundly on a flat surface of water among – what else – clouds (whatever they would be doing there) (fig. 19), or simply in the clouds – as an angel or not – beside two sad, hugging bears sitting on the Moon (fig. 20). But, if we already provided Alan with wings and a halo, let's surround him with an additional bright glow, give him a flower in hand and add a pastel celadon background. It's just as easy to conjure up an angel descending from the top of the image (with a quite scary visage at that, but that's not important, right?), extending their merciful hands towards Alan's embattled,

[23] The tactic of styling dead children as angels was already present during the Victorian era, see: Linkman 2011: 27.

[24] The body of Alan was in a sense jointly consecrated, as might be inferred by the reaction to provocations (profanations?) of the artists from „Charlie Hebdo", after which the majority of Internet users stated: *Je ne suis plus Charlie*. As a reminder, the first of the drawings shows Alan lying on the beach, with an advertising banner for McDonald's beside him, with the characteristic silhouette of Ronald the clown and a special offer: 'Two children's sets for the price of one', and the caption reads: 'So close to the target…' The other image, captioned in French: 'Proof that Europe is Christian', we see Jesus walking on water, signed: 'Christians walk on water', and beside a pair of legs pointing upwards in red shorts (the reference is more than clear, especially if one knows the context), caption: 'Muslim children drown'. The third drawing shows Alan from the future and referring to New Year's Eve 2015 incidents from Cologne; caption: 'Who would little Alan have become if he grew up? A butt-groper in Germany'.

[25] I found two drawings in which Alan Kurdi is shown as Jesus: once in the stable (www.boredpanda.com/without-faith-in-humanity/, caption, in Spanish: 'When together with the image of a child my faith in humanity died' [accessed: 21.09.2019]), and once as a pieta (www.boredpanda.com/pieta/ [accessed: 21.09.2019]).

Fig. 17. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by Edgar Humberto Alvarez

Fig. 18. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by Asprino Leonardo

Fig. 19. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by Sara VJ

Fig. 20. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by Mariyana Koleva

Fig. 21. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by Dijwar Ibrahim

Fig. 22. Rhetoric of consolation: illustration by the artist using the pseudonym/nickname SuperSmurgger

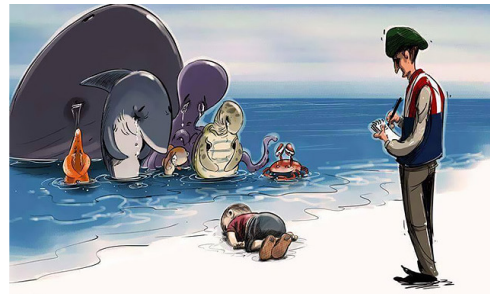

Fig. 23. Cartoon grief: illustration by Azzam Daaboul

innocent soul (fig. 21). Finally, in order for the whip discord to hit human indifference where it hurts most, we make Alan look at his own loneliness, a child's body lying on the shore, but let the onlooking Alan be smiling, may he be – this is getting boring, so I'll stop now, even though I could still go on – sitting on a cloud, may he have wings, and may there be an inscription in the clouds, in semi-transparent Arial: 'How many more shall be wasted in the name of indifference?' (let's add a tiny provocation: the 'No littering' sign) (fig 22).

And now for the most intense representation of fairytale and cartoon grief: a boy in a red t-shirt is lying on the beach again, beside him, a Turkish policeman is writing his report flatly, and a selection of marine animals are seen coming from the sea – a crab, a turtle, an octopus, a dolphin, a starfish, a whale and some smaller fish – they put their fins, legs or whatever they have, in a sign of prayer, crying profusely (fig. 23). In other images, teddy bears join them in tears, the Moon joins in, an unsettlingly weird fairy cries, the entire world cries.

I get the unsettling notion that these representations fall (together with the model of expected reception that they include) under Kundera's criterion of kitsch, meaning, the 'second tear' – the tear that is cried by a person that is moved by their own emotion. Is, however, communication based on visual cues and compressed content aiming at the evocation of emotional resonance, able to express protest, without at the same time moving towards kitsch? Even if some examples indicate that it is, of course, possible, should we automatically discredit those who are unable to achieve this? They remain clearly rare examples of empathy and calling for responsibility

in a world – virtual or not – that would rather keep migrants in ghettos, separate oneself from them with thick walls, or even do away with them…

5. ALAN'S LEGACY

On September 7th 2015, five days after Alan's death, Palestinian artist Osama Esbaitah made on the beach in Puri, in India, a five-metre-long sand sculpture representing the position and the clothes of the boy (the clothes and the hair were coloured)[26]. Two days later, thirty Moroccans, dressed in red t-shirts and jeans trousers, lay for several minutes completely still on a beach in Rabat in an act of protest and solidarity (Stanton 2016). In January of 2016, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, who frequently engages in issue on refugees (the same who a month later will gather fourteen thousand orange lifejackets and tie them around the columns of Berlin's Schauspielhaus), publishes in „India Today" a photograph taken on a Greek beach on the island of Lesbos, not far from Bodrum. The image by the Indian photographer Rohit Chawli presents the artist in the 'Alan-like' position (Tan 2016). The beach is rocky, not sandy, the photograph is black and white, the person is not a boy, but a middle-aged man of clearly Asian descent, dressed in full trousers and a dark sweatshirt, however, the reference – thanks to afterimages of the original photograph – remains clear (fig. 24).

The intentions of persons protesting/paying tribute, and of the artists, are quite clear: they seek to support, or perhaps increase, the 'firepower' of the original photograph through the authority and power of the Crowds or the authority and power of Art, and at the same time to 'extend' it in these 'repetitions with differences', to prevent it from being lost in archives, overflowing with further media-distributed images, to continue to move and cause discord.

In March of 2016 Justus Becker (nickname COR) and Oğuz Şen (nickname Bobby Borderline) created on a wall at the river Main in Frankfurt a 120 square metre mural depicting Alan. Through this intervention in the urban iconosphere, the artists sought to move the beneficiaries of the welfare state passing by from the position of those who are not concerned, to remind them that the reverse of their success and luck is the suffering and the death

[26] http://m.chinadaily.com.cn/en/2015-09/08/content_21817372.htm [accessed: 10.11.2019].

Fig. 24. Ai Weiwei on the Lesbos beach (photo by R. Chawla)

Fig. 25. The destroyed mural of Alan Kurdi, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (photo by AFP)

of others (let us add that the mural was put opposite the seat of the European Central Bank). 'We hope to have people emotionally rethink their selfish fears of refugees coming to Germany' – said Becker. 'It is a memorial piece representing all children who died fleeing from war to Europe' (quoted after: McGee 2016) – added the artist, thus legitimating the status of the (image of) Alan as a symbolic representation of the child victims of the so-called migrant crisis, an iconic 'marker of remembrance'. Three months later, unknown perpetrators (most probably of far-right roots) painted over a part of the mural, writing 'Grenzen retten Leben!' ('Borders save lives!'), and with smaller caption: 'Fuck antifa' (fig. 25) (BBC News 2016).

Also in March of 2016, the Icelandic branch of UNICEF organised an event entailing bringing four hundred toys – each was to symbolise one child that drowned since Alan's death during escape attempts from Syria by sea – to be distributed along the island's rocky shore (Benjamin 2016).

In September of 2018, US hip-hop artist Lupe Fiasco recorded the song *Alan forever* (included on the album *Drogas wave*), which can be regarded as a literary counterpart of the above-mentioned tactic of reframing: 'The waves can be your cover / The beach can be your pillow / My heart can be your house / My eyes can be your windows' – sings the chorus. The second verse in turn represents the potential further fate of Alan, in which the element of water is strongly accented. The utopian vision sees a reversal of the relations of power – it is Alan who this time conquers it, and then ties his life to it: he wins medals in swimming at the Olympic Games (representing Canada – the destination country of Kurdi's family flight), he breaks world records, to become a beach guard, saving another little boy from drowning[27].

In February of 2019, a German rescue ship operating in the Mediterranean was renamed to 'Alan Kurdi'. The rechristening ceremony was attended by the father and aunt of the boy (Agence France-Press 2019).

5. HEAR MY CRY

'In *protest* there is the word *testis*, witness: you pro-test before you can at-test' – said Paul Ricoeur (2016). The problem of attesting in the name of those unable to do it was also taken on by Giorgio Agamben (1999), who claimed that if the witnesses' testimonies are based on the inability to speak of those who had been deprived of this right, then the genuineness of those testimonies cannot be negated. Bearing witness, they speak 'on the authority' of the one who, dying, fell silent and cannot express their inability to speak or the cause of this. However inadequate this may sound, the contemporary prosumers, facing the photograph by Nilüfer Demir, responding to it, become such a *testis*, and their *testimonium*, expressed by the image, gains the weight of protest-witness of the time of Web 2.0: 'The only thing I could do was to make his [Alan's – P.J.] outcry heard' – said the Turkish photojournalist. Internet users, as we saw, are more than eager to aid her in this and bear the burden of giving testimony of the short life and the premature, tragic death of the Syrian boy.

[27] The tune is available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GIHl3-BzQ [accessed: 12.09.2019].

I believe in the nobility of intentions of the creators of the discussed images just as I believe in the statements by Nilüfer Demir. Is, however, Alan's cry of protest heard? I seriously doubt this. Even though one may suggest a certain influence in the area of tougher measures against smuggles or – a world-wide first – the reaction of the Canadian society (the Kurdi family chose Canada as the target of their migration), which led to the simplification of migration and asylum procedures (see: Newton 2015), but referring to the Polish context, it is difficult to point to any changes, the source of which may be the three-year-old boy's photograph.

Two months before Alan's death, the contemporary prime minister of Poland, Ewa Kopacz, made a subdivision of migrants based on the religious criterion (welcomed Christian versus not-wanted Muslims), pointing those who may seek shelter in Poland and those who may not (Alan would be among the latter; let us add that the boy died two days after Angela Merkel pronounced her famous 'Willkommen!'). Between March and October of 2015 (Alan, I remind, died in September) the share of adult Poles who responded 'no' to the question: 'Should, in your view, Poland accept refugees from war-stricken countries?', rose twofold – from 21% to 43%, to half a year later cross the threshold of 60% (CBOS 2018). On October 12th 2015, a month after Alan's death, Warsaw saw a nationalist demonstration under the watchword of 'Poles against migrants', during which banners were shown with the slogans 'Poland for Poles' or 'Muslim migrants are Europe's Trojan horse'. In January of 2016, during a similar event, a crowd of over a thousand gathered in the Castle Square in Warsaw to sin univocally – following the melody of a famous Polish song *Karuzela* (*The merry-go-round*) by Maria Koterbska – 'All of Poland sings along with us, fuck off migrants', waving white-and-red flags. In the meantime, the parliamentary elections were won by a party clearly against the acceptance of migrants, and this attitude (called by some commentators as 'the governance by fear') was regularly used during the campaign to gather political advocaci (see: Sowa 2017; Żyła 2018)[28]. On April 1st 2016., the new parliament passed the resolution, according to which 'it expresses decisive opposition against any attempts to put in place fixed EU

[28] Alternative forces, in turn, in privileged and influential fields of the media and politics did not oppose the words of competitors with a clear 'yes' on the migrant issue, instead being rather murky, distanced and moderate, see: Gdula 2018.

mechanisms of allocation of refugees or migrants'[29]. After many reductions of the proposed EU quotas, Poland finally refused to accept 400 (in words: four hundred) persons fleeing areas of war and famine. To this day (fall of 2019) Poland, beside Hungary and Austria, is Europe's sole country not to relocate any persons of those who made it to Europe.

Beginning halfway in 2015, migrants became the 'folk devil' (Pasamonik 2017) of far-right and nationalist media and politicians. The Polish Internet saw the pinnacle, invigorated by the so-called migrant crisis, of hate speech, reaching the limits of 'persecutory imagination' (René Girard). Reports of further victims taken by the Mediterranean or by Balkan winters saw notorious comments suggesting bluntly that the migrant crisis should be solved by mass executions, the start-up of gas chambers and the reinstatement of crematory furnaces. The Polish public discourse was dominated by the representation of the migrating crowds as a threat on many levels: the economic, cultural, civilisational, health care, and in terms of a source of specific threats to the lives of the citizens (rapes, violence, terrorist attacks). The issue of migrants – as Zygmunt Bauman (2016) stated – was 'adiaphorized', meaning, excluded from the area of ethical responsibility and moved to the area of public safety (Foucault's biopolitics). Reactions to the photograph presenting the body of Alan Kurdi turned out to be, I believe, a clear example of what the Polish sociologist referred to as 'moral carnivals' – 'short-lived carnivalesque explosions of solidarity and care that are triggered by media images of successive spectacular tragedies in the migrants' unending saga" (ibid.: 90).

III. OMRAN DAQNEESH – THE ETHICS OF REMIX

In this case, it is not a photograph, but a still frame extracted from short footage by Mahmoud Raslan, who documented the effects of the bombings of Aleppo, conducted on August 17th 2016, most probably by the forces of the Russian Federation in concert with the Bashar-Al-Assad regime during the Syrian civil war. The footage shows a boy covered almost entirely with dust, who was found in rubble, as he sits inside an ambulance. The greyness of the body and

[29] Resolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland of April 1st, 2016, on the migrant policy of Poland, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/18_u/$file/18_u.pdf [accessed: 10.09.2019].

Fig. 26. Omran Daqneesh wounded during the bombing of Aleppo

clothes, broken by the spot of clotted blood covering the left side of the boy's face, contrasts the various shades of orange dominant in the ambulance.

The still is most strongly dominated by the boy's gaze: disoriented, absent, uncertain, terrified, full of fear; as if it were aimed within, not without, still transfixed on the experienced trauma and not entirely aware of the fact that the greatest danger is most probably over, that he was *saved*. The effect is the stronger that all of this – or perhaps even more – is found in solely one eye, the right one; the left is half-closed due to the swelling, almost invisible under the darker spot of blood there. The boy, it seems, is sitting calmly, passively, fully subordinated to what was to happen; his hair tousled, his lips pursed, his hands in his lap, with bruised legs sticking out of his shorts and bare feet overhanging the seat of an oversized, 'adult' seat.

Setting aside as much as possible the ethical plane of the image – the unavoidable fact that we are yet again 'regarding the pain of others' – this image most certainly has its aesthetic values (see: Zarychta 2016), both in terms of composition (the almost ideal proportions between the central point and the background) as well as colours (the contrast between greys and oranges, the red blood spot on the face fitting the olive-burgundy image on the shirt – perhaps a dragon, which in this context looks unsettlingly similar to bowels). Furthermore, we are seeing a perfect lack of any ethnically discerning factors (in the context of contemporary Islamophobia [Bobako 2017]: stigmas) – one could say that the boy would be white, were he only not grey (fig. 26).

However, we recognise the topoi: 'The practice of representing atrocious suffering as something to be deplored, and, if possible, stopped, enters the history of images with a specific subject: the sufferings endured by a civilian population at the hands of a victorious army on the rampage' (Sontag 2003: 35). Of course, the 'civilian population' has a particular place for women, children and the elderly, whose position additionally emphasizes the innocence and randomness stemming from 'being civilian', reinforcing thus the discord, compassion or the indignation concerning the violence they experience and the pointlessness of war. In case of the Near East conflict raging from the beginnings of the second decade of the 21st century[30], and the consequential so-called migrant crisis, the photographs have 'the deeper bite (…), provide[s] a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it' (ibid.: 20), present two boys: three-year-old Alan Kurdi, of which I spoke in the earlier part of this text, and five-year-old Omran Daqneesh – the 'boy in the ambulance', 'the boy from Aleppo'.

1. BROTHERS IN SUFFERING

Let me start off by two general remarks. First of all, googling brought about a much lower number of prosumer's references than in case of the photograph of Alan Kurdi. Second of all, among those that I was able to find, much more were as 'clear' reproductions of the image of Omran Daqneesh as possible, subordinated to the rules of a different visual medium (graphics, including computer graphics, murals but also… children's dolls [fig. 27]).

Even though the image itself, it seems, could quite easily be reframed, e.g. by transferring the boy into the safe space of a house or playground[31],

[30] Even though its specific sources should rather be sought in the US military intervention in Afghanistan as part of the war on terror announced by the George W. Bush administration. See the uniquely thorough journalistic analysis found in the Pulitzer prize-distinguished book of Joby Warrick (2015).

[31] An example of such reframing was noting the visual similarities between Omran Daqneesh and six-year-old Alex (see: Express Web Desk 2016), who wrote the famous 'moving' letter to Barack Obama with the following content: 'Dear President Obama, Remember the boy who was picked up by the ambulance in Syria? Can you please go get him and bring him to our home? Park in the driveway or on the street and we will be waiting for you guys with flags, flowers, and balloons? We

Fig. 27. Doll representing Omran Daqneesh by Romanian artist Dan Cretu, called the 'Sufference Doll'

artists frequently decided to recreate the original shot – and thus, to multiply its frames – forgoing clear interventions such as adding different visual components or verbal commentary[32] (as if they were true to the rule that the image should 'speak for itself').

Among the images I have found, a few presented both boys – Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh. Already placing them in a joint frame may be considered a critical gesture indicating on the one hand the permanence of suffering, the end, it seems, cannot be expected soon (these depictions seem by default to open up space for a further victim), yet on the other hand – the permanence of indifference to this suffering.

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will give him a family and he will be our brother. Catherine, my little sister, will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him. In my school, I have a friend from Syria, Omar, and I will introduce him [Omran – P. J.] to Omar. We can all play together. We can invite him to birthday parties and he will teach us another language. Since he won't bring toys and doesn't have toys Catherine will share her big blue stripy white bunny. And I will share my bike and I will teach him how to ride it. I will teach him additions and subtractions in math. (…) Thank you very much! I can't wait for you to come'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6r1kbQH8hI [accessed: 24.09.2019].

[32] Perhaps with a terse yet very clear comment, e. g. the mural showing Omran on building blocks that make up the words 'End war'; https://www.trendhunter.com/trends/antiwar [accessed: 23.09.2019].

Fig. 28. Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi – illustration by Ruben L. Oppenheimer

However, do these representations not supply arguments that could be used against themselves, when (on the side) they also reveal the *permanent inefficiency of production and reproduction* of 'images of the pain of others'? Such suppositions strongly come to mind with respect to the image by Ruben L. Oppenheimer (fig. 28), the image by whom seems to rail against the idleness of slacktivism[33], as it was chosen to be published on… Twitter, hence, willingly or not, he generated what he turned against (retweets, likes, shares, approving comments, etc.)[34]. Khalid Albaih, in turn, a Romanian--born Sudanese illustrator, referring to himself as a 'virtual revolutionist'[35], showed the figures of Omran and Alan to depict two possible scenarios of a tragic alternative, to which Syrian children were left: what you will experience if you stay (Omran Daqneesh), and if you leave (Alan Kurdi) (fig. 29). More critical, in the area of heartbreaking, is the image showing

[33] An expression of which is the placement of a comic book-style caption with the thoughts of Omran Daqneesh including the word 'blah' repeated among Facebook and Twitter logos against the backdrop of the body of Alan Kurdi.

[34] An example of a direct attack on the media participation in the emergence of global 'indifference' is in turn the image by Saada Hajo showing Omran reading a paper with numerous graphics of… himself. The boy looks with sorrow from behind the paper (and from the paper) onto the onlookers, see: https://mjcob.com/hajo-saadomran-reads-about-omran [accessed: 20.09.2019].

[35] https://www.cartoonmovement.com/p/3310 [accessed: 18.09.2019].

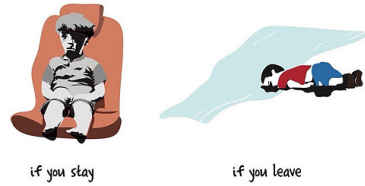

Fig. 29. Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi – illustration by Khalid Albaih

Fig. 30. Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi – illustration by an anonymous artist

Alan lying (sleeping?) in Omran's lap, who additionally covers 'his little brother' with his left hand (fig. 30). This representation is surely far away from the 'rhetoric of consolation' that I criticised – there are no clouds, angels or cute pastels here, but an atmosphere of sadness, resignation, reconciliation with the violence of the world and a desperate attempt to get for oneself even a bit of warmth, of a gentle touch, in these desperate times (as a sidenote, I notice that in the two last quoted examples both boys are perfectly 'white', which surely is in place to simplify empathic instincts of Western audiences).

2. BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS

Among images that present Omran alone, one can find such that reproduce the strategy of direct protest and accusation (accusation both of indifference or permission as well as – indirect – perpetration), described by me – as a reference to the punk protest song by Polish band Cool Kids of Death and stereotypical tools of opposition of the 'people' against 'power' – as 'stones and petrol bombs'. Just like in the case of Alan Kurdi, the image of Omran

Fig. 31. Omran Daqneesh and 'leaders of the world' – illustration by artist under the nickname Gungor

Fig. 32. Omran Daqneesh and 'leaders of the world' – illustration by artist under the nickname Sherif Arafa

is put up for show, presented to 'the wealthy of the world'. And so, the image by the Turkish artist working under the nickname Gundur shows a boy in a stereotypical attire of a schoolboy during a presentation to representatives of 'worldly authorities' – lay as well as religious[36] – of a chest or laptop, onto which the author quite clumsily pasted a fragment of Omran's image from

[36] The majority of the *dramatis personae* is easy to identify, I only do not know whether the man beside Pope Francis (who beside everything is the source of perhaps the most clear and unequivocal pro-migrant message on the global political stage) is certainly Bashar al-Assad, and it is difficult for me to discern who is the man beside Putin in the 'Uncle Sam' costume – perhaps a 'variable designator' for the 'president of the United States' (Barack Obama included).

Fig. 33. Omran Daqneesh and 'leaders of the world' – photomontage by an unknown author

the ambulance (fig. 31). However, who among the eight is responsible for what happened? And could among these be perhaps found those who do not deserve to be placed in this context?

A similar tone is struck by the image of Egyptian cartoonist Sherif Arafa published in the paper „Al-Ittihad". In this case, however, Omran is the subject of collective derision by representatives of many forces – frequently opposing each other, to note. Beside president Bashar al-Assad (the only one 'in person'), the image shows symbolic representations: of Russia (bear in an *ushanka*), the United States, the Arab world (in two versions: one rather 'Saudi', the other rather 'Maghreb'), the Jewish world, the UN, the EU, the Catholic church (if the second person from the left is a nun), and… a terrorist in a suicide vest, taking a group selfie with a pink smartphone (behind them, in the background, there is a crowd of men in good moods – probably meant to represent the 'world'). The humiliated Omran turns his gaze away, looking at his own bloodied hand (fig. 32).

Thus, guilty are all those, so nobody in particular, hence: others, perhaps the 'world'[37], maybe 'the West'[38], but not only, for sure (I saw three images with Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama beside Omran (fig. 33); deconstructed

[37] Just as in case of remixes of the photograph of Alan – shown metaphorically as the Globe of the Earth (resp. the figure with the globe instead of the head). See e.g. https://politicalcartoons.com/?s=omran [accessed: 23.09.2019].

[38] In an image by John Cole, a pair of young people staring at their phones (their clothes say 'The West') pass by Omran; the woman asks: 'Hey, any Pokemon around here?'; https://image.cagle.com/183718/1155/183718.png [accessed: 21.09.2019].

Cold War rhetoric retains its framework of the presence of two 'powers' here, however, they are not against each other – they collaborate, with others, like Omran, but also Alan, being the victims[39]).

3. SAINT OMRAN

The majority of the 'on-line resurrections' of Alan Kurdi analysed by me was subordinated to what I described as the 'rhetoric of consolation'. In case of manipulations of the image of Omran Daqneesh, I found one[40] – but

[39] The image by Brazilian cartoonist Vini Oliveira shows Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama, both smiling and glad, playing chess. The chessboard is the Syrian territory, and the pawns – Alan Kurdi (held by the head by the president of Russia) and Omran Daqneesh (which the former president of the United States is playing with); https://mjcob.com/vini-oliveira-omran-daqneesh-and-Alan-kurdi-pieces-of-board-of-a-dirty/ [accessed: 23.09.2019].

[40] The meagre presence of the mentioned rhetoric may be substantiated by the fact that Omran's story has a happy ending – so, it does not need to be added by images of the boy's joy on the other side – the five-year-old survived, and a year later the media and the Internet saw photographs and films showing Omran 'alive and well' home with his father and siblings (at that time the information emerged that during bombings, his ten-year-old brother Ali also died; see: Sanchez 2017). On this occasion, numerous controversies arose. It came to light that Omran's father declared loyalty to the regime of president Bashar al-Assad, accusing the media of 'Trading in his [Omran's – P.J.] blood' (a film showing a rescue mission was published on the website of the Aleppo Media Center, a group of opposition activists fighting Assad's policies), whereby Omran himself was supposed to deny that he was injured in course of attacks of the government forces of Syria (the participation of Russians in the bombings of rebel districts remains alleged). Western commentators noted that the man might have been forced to make that statement – after all, the family remains in Syria, and the interview was provided to the government-backed Syrian and Lebanese television channels (including the journalist Kinana Allouche from Al-Sama TV, who once gained fame when she posed, all smiles, for a selfie against the backdrop of dead fighters; see: The New Arab 2016). These are not the only controversies showing Omran. After the government of Syria denied all liability for victims of bombings, putting the blame on the rebels, Chinese public television CCTV published viral material from an ambulance suggesting it was staged (I remind that analogous suspicions, together with proof of being staged, emerged on the occasion of the photograph of Alan Kurdi), and

Fig. 34. Judith Mehr, Omran, Angels Are Here *(2016), oil on canvas*

spectacular – depiction of this rhetoric, and it was fused with a veritable canonisation of the boy – not an on-line remix, but an oil painting by US painter Judith Mehr entitled *Omran, Angels Are Here*, visually referring to the *Trinity* icon (ca. 1410-1427) by Andrei Rublev. Three angels surround the sitting boy, with an inscription in their halos: 'joy – peace – hope' respectively in Arabic, English and Latin; the entirety is framed with an 'Arab-looking' ornament, and the top of the image bears the inscription 'peace be with you' (in Arabic), the bottom – the title of the painting (in English) (fig. 34).

The artist herself spoke in this way of her inspirations and intentions: 'I saw that photo of the little boy in the ambulance seat who had just been pulled out of the rubble of a bombed building in Aleppo, Syria. I really wanted to comfort [*sic*! – P.J.] that boy so I thought of angels coming to attend to him' (quoted after: Neeley, Webber 2016). So, this painting is a visualisation of the empathic instinct of the authoress, however, problematic is its limited creative self-awareness. Mehr – certainly 'in earnest', and not following

that it is part of a Western 'propaganda war' which is supposed to substantiate the necessity of a 'humanitarian' military intervention aimed at ending the civil war in Syria (the EU and the USA were frequently criticised for their passivity with respect to the conflict and hidden support for al-Assad's policies); see: Dearden 2016.

Fig. 35. Sanatan Dinda, body painting with Omran Daqneesh

a post-modern game – fused into one whole three radically different traditions of relations between the image and the *sacrum*: non-representing (Muslim), figurative (Western, Catholic) and making-present (Eastern, Orthodox). Moreover, the icon, which not only contains a uniquely sublime symbolic stratum based on deep theological knowledge, but the process of creation (writing) itself being almost like prayer, is summarised by the author to just be the surface, striving solely to achieve a visual similarity.

A different example of quite a unique alteration of the shot with Omran Daqneesh is the work by Indian painter Sanatan Dinda, who chose to paint the boy on a… model's naked body (fig. 35). The story of the birth of the idea for the painting reminds of the narration by Mehr, with the difference, however, that the reaction of Dinda was closer to opposition than consolation – 'I have been very disturbed ever since I saw the photograph (…) I didn't know what I could do to express my angst' – and additionally, the artist went a step further and put the original image in a symbolic register: 'Omran's numb face is a metaphor of the numbness that the world is experiencing when it comes to reacting strongly about the issue of displacement' (quoted after: Dasgupta 2016)[41].

[41] Sanatan Dinda was also the author of a body painting showing Alan Kurdi, see: http://refugeewatchonline.blogspot.com/2016/07/renowned-artist-from-kolkata-sanatan.html [accessed: 24.09.2019].

Fig. 36. Gianluca Costantini, Omran Daqneesh – I don't Exist!

The painting presents quite a pale Omran (as if of gypsum) sitting on and orange seat, the headrest of which is bleeding. The semicircles of the breast of the model optically deform the back rest and seem as if concave, as if the boy was about to fall into her body. The model's thighs are very important in the interpretation, since Dinda used here the mentioned-above tactics of 'splitting the frame': the split between the legs of the model, invisible due to the photograph being taken against a dark background, introduces a gap dividing the representation of 'what is' (the right thigh with bombs and ammunition painted on it), and 'what should be' or 'what was' (left leg, showing circular coloured lollipops), as a result of which the entirety becomes embedded in an nostalgic or utopian register.

4. AGAINST REPRESENTATION

I retained the last example that I would like to analyse for that moment, as this is the only representation I found – also including the depictions of Alan Kurdi – which derives its critical power from the fact that it problematises (or even questions) its own status. The case concerns the photograph by Italian illustrator and activist Gianluca Costantini published on the artist's blog (fig. 36). The picture shows a crossed-through drawing of Omran Daqneesh as laying on a desk beside art supplies and the fragment of a book (probably an album with old photographs). This image is not only a meta-image (the photograph of a drawing), but it is also a compressed photo-story

(see: Michałowska 2012). Even though – as every image does – it 'freezes' time, it is possible to reconstruct the story of its creation by abductive reasoning. The author, in a sense, invites to it, putting himself in the lower part of the photograph (a fragment of a t-shirt and trouser legs indicates that the creator is leaning over the desk to take the photograph).

Most certainly Costantini first set out to make a drawing of Omran – perhaps motivated by analogous convictions as Mehr and Dinda – however, at a certain point, having already sketched out the boy and coloured (with various shades of brown!) the visible parts of the body, he abandoned the idea, and in an act of anger or resignation he crossed through the unfinished sketch by two strokes of a black marker (also visible in the photograph). It is difficult to determine whether the two inscriptions – 'I don't exist!' and – framed – 'Aleppo is hell'[42] – were created before or after the crossing out (interestingly enough, the drawing is signed, and one usually does it only having finished the work).

It is interesting, why the author did not choose to publish the (failed?, abandoned?) drawing, and instead it just took a photograph of it against the wider backdrop of their workplace. My idea is to treat it as a suggestion to look at the context, in which the image emerged, more closely than at the image itself[43]. The key fact here is the sole gesture of crossing out (or rather: a trace of this gesture, the symbolic and indexable, according to the terminology of Ch. S. Peirce, 'X' mark). Contrary to tearing the sheet apart or crumpling it up and throwing it into the dustbin, the crossing-out is at the same time a *negation of the image* and a *component of the image*, and it is in this double, aporetic character that it is found in the photograph by

[42] Such statements are found in all (several) works of the artist on the bombings of Aleppo and published in „The New Arab". See https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/blog/2016/10/26/gallery-aleppo-is-hell [accessed: 24.09.2019].

[43] We must add that the effect of the abandoned workplace in disarray is most certainly staged – the photograph shows tools that were not used when making the drawing (crayons, pencil, light-blue marker). Hence, we are dealing with a triple, or properly – as will turn out – a quadruple artistic creation: the creation of the drawing, the 'creative destruction' of the drawing, the staging of the scene and the taking of the photograph.

Costatini (moreover, from behind the 'X' we see Omran's sad and reproachful gaze).

The gesture of crossing-out is additionally reinforced by the statement 'I don't exist!'. The semicircular line running from this phrase to Omran's lips would, by convention, assign it to the boy, however this statement includes a performative contradiction: indeed, the condition for making any statement is… to exist. There is something more to this than a next embodiment of Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, as the recognised 'treachery of images' is here the point of department, not the objective. In the end, the sole instance that can pronounce these impossible words is the *crossed-out drawing of Omran Daqneesh* – within the above-indicated aporia, born into existence through the gesture removing it from existence, existing as its own negation, existing. The introduction of the meta-level perspective, the image of the image[44], permits the communication of this aporia (even though it by far does not resolve it): it presents the image as being an internal – being its part – but also an external – being a separate image – component of the scene (similarly to the *story* on the Cretian who believes that all Cretians lie, but not *being* this Cretian and *stating* it).

W.J.T. Mitchell (2005: 18), the visual culture theorist from the United States, noted, referring to the World Trade Center attacks of September 11th, that 'iconoclasm is more than just the destruction of images; it is a »creative destruction«, in which a secondary image of defacement or annihilation is created at the same moment that the »target« image is attacked'. The photograph by Costantini certainly is an example of 'creative destruction' – even if the author hides from the viewer the sole spectacle of destruction (the scene of the drawing being crossed out can only be told and imagined), but he presents its result. The key problem with the application of analytical theories suggested by Mitchell to the case of Costantini, however, stems from the fact that in all examples discussed by the American scholar, the idolaters and iconoclasts are *two sides* of a conflict,

[44] Apart from that, the drawing itself – as showing the photograph – is a secondary sign, which suggests terming it a simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994) Costantini's photograph thus would be a second-degree simulacrum – the photograph of a drawing of a photograph – with an introduced key break in the form of the „X" – a trace of the gesture of crossing out.

however, here we are dealing with a *single person* – the one who created the drawing (the idolater), and the one who destroyed it (the iconoclast), and then took the photograph of the prepared scene of its destruction. Hence, some kind of conversion, metamorphosis, a 'before' and 'after', are necessary. One could say that Costantini, while still being an idolater, at a *certain moment* when drawing Omran Daqneesh became an iconoclast – hence, he abandoned this idea and destroyed his drawing – and it was possible because he was able to gain a perspective (awareness), thanks to which he saw himself as an idolater – somebody who believed in a 'false god'[45] (who, until the moment he believed in him, was God), and then he 'saw the light'. If we agree with this line of interpretation, it will become clear, why the artist publish not the drawing itself, but also the context of its emergence and 'creative destruction' (along with himself as a key component of this context). What did Costantini really see when the 'scales fell from [his] eyes' (Acts 9,18), we do not know, however, the analysis up to this point may make some suggestions: the falsity, stemming from the 'illusion of reference' (Roland Barthes) present in every representation of reality, particularly problematic in the 'pain of others', which are not and will never be adequate to suffering of those who are presented there, and at the same time do not have the power to handle the truth of experience[46]; the obscene, and at the same time, inevitable *aestheticity* of all representations of suffering, based additionally on common conventions and cliché metaphors that negate its singular dimension; the idleness, powerlessness and inefficiency, perhaps even the harmfulness of representation of 'images of the pain of others' (participating in the common indifference, generating a narcissistic slacktivism or hypocritical 'moral carnivals'), etc. 'Aleppo is hell'.

[45] The structure of Costantini's photograph may in this respect be compared to the narrative structure of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine of Hippo, which include a fundamental discrepancy between the perspective of the narrating 'I' and the narrated 'I'. In the discussed case, the narrating 'I' is the one who created the photograph (and, at one point, destroyed the drawing), and the narrated 'I' is the one who did the drawing.

[46] In this context the photograph would not only show the *unrepresentable*, but *unrepresentability* itself.

Costatini's photograph may thus be referred to as the counterpart to Maurice Blanchot's (1973) famous explicit of the *Madness of the Day*. After a suitable paraphrasing, it would sound like: 'An image? No, no images, never again'.

Of particular importance is the fact that in this regard, this does not equal to the call to abandon the creation of any representations or testimony of the suffering of other human beings – just the opposite. In the paraphrased end of Blanchot's story, one can hear the famous *dictum* by Theodor W. Adorno, most commonly quoted out of context: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'. As Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi (1989: 93) shows, this statement 'was made in the context of a discussion which he concluded by saying that »such an abundance of suffering permits no forgetting«, that even if art is in constant danger of betraying the victims, there is no other place where suffering can find »its own voice«'. Hence, the exit from the aporia of the simultaneous *necessity* and *impossibility* of representation of 'the pain of others' leads through *deep ethical responsibility* of the creator[47], the voice of whom must carry the painful burden of the protest-testimony made 'in name' and 'by authority' of the victims.

I'm afraid that of all the artists – professionals as well as amateurs – discussed in this text, only Gianluca Costantini was able to become aware of this burden.

POST SCRIPTUM

In his cycle of photographs from the year 2004 entitled *Positives* (*Pozytywy*), Polish artist Zbigniew Libera presented 'optimistic' versions of a few iconic photographs taken from the visual archives of cultural memory. It cannot be puzzling that four of the five works present corpses (of Che Guevara from the photograph by Freddy Alborta and Russian soldiers killed at Stalingrad from the photo by Dmitri Baltermants) and nearly-corpses (scene from the chronicle on the liberation of the Auschwitz camp and the most famous photograph by Nick Ut). In the photographs of Libera, the Argentinian revolutionary rises from the catafalque and lights up a cigar, the bodies of soldiers turn into tired runners who failed to reach the finish line in

[47] Including the re-creator, by definition, the author of, it would seem, 'frivolous' on-line remixes, if only they undertake the topic of 'regarding the pain of others'.

a race, the camp prisoners smile from behind the fence made of clothes lines, just like Kim Phúc, quite frivolously running naked among walkers and paratroopers. In one interview, the artist quite provocatively stated that 'people prefer coloured reality from the truth, so I decided to give them what they wanted. A world that is good and ordered, and just positive'. Ewa Domańska (2006: 235-236), interpreting his works, noted that 'through them one could show how these image topoi, reproduced in the media, turn into banal images that do not make a big impression; they become domesticated somehow'. In a culture of convergence and remix, this discrete mechanism, indicated by Libera and described by Domańska, gains its fully tangible, reinforced and immediate confirmation. There is no need for a provocation by critical art to experience the truth known otherwise that 'before we are forgotten, we will be turned into kitsch' (Kundera 2009: 278). However, should we not draw from this sentence the conclusion to which both the provocative series by Libera, as well as my analysis of the visual tactics user in on-line remixes of the photographs of Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh draw us – that kitsch is also a vehicle of remembrance; the customs duty paid for the presence in common memory?

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Summary

The aim of this article is to critically analyse the Internet's remixes of Nilüfer Demir's photograph showing the dead body of Alan Kurdi – a 3-year old Syrian refugee – found on the beach near Turkish city Bodrum, as well as the widely-shared shot of the Omran Daqneesh – 5-years old Syrian boy sitting in the ambulance and fully covered by dust with visible traces of bruises and stains of blood – taken from the viral footage which reported damages and sufferings caused by the airstrikes on the Syrian biggest city, Aleppo, during the civil war. The main question here is: how the convergence culture 'regards the pain of the other' and deals with it? Semiotic analysis of chosen examples leads to a conclusion that while some artists undertake a specific visual tactics of protest and objection, more often, and even in clearly critical pictures, the 'rhetoric of consolation' is a predominating one and serves to both artists' and viewers' complacency and consoling. Terror of the pain and death is deleted from those images and replaced by tenderness or even kitsch. Moreover, author discusses not only the visual rhetoric strategies applied in those remixes, but also their ethical dimensions, especially in the reference to the category of 'unrepresentability'.

Keywords: Alan Kurdi, Omran Daqneesh, photography and death, migrant crisis, culture of convergence, political protest, remix, Internet art