Załącznik

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PHOTO-ESSAY AND AROUND

‘I THINK I WILL DIE’

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1.

The first photograph[1] – a sunny October day. Trees on the horizon, blurred, hazy. A meadow – lush, dense, unmown; thistles, various species of grasses. Probably still warm, from the sun, despite it being October – still alive. Maybe it still smells like meadows in late summer; maybe there is still some vibrant life among the tiny leaves. Maybe it would be possible to hide in these tall grasses, huddle down in the soft blades, when it is so difficult to stay on

[1] The photograph was published in: Jeffrey 2008 and 2009: 250. Reprinted thanks to courtesy of TAiWPN Universitas.

one's feet. Touch the hard ground, make sure it is there. What does it feel like, the earth, the bottom of the October meadow – is it still soft, damp, or already overgrown with wheatgrass roots, dry, autumnal? Hard or loose?

Is it easy to dig a hole in it? And what is underneath the meadow? A layer of black earth, clay mud, stones, sand. Mouse burrows, mole arteries. White threads of meadow mycelium, nests of gravedigger beetles, tangled roots. Cold.

How big should the hole be to fit eight people in it?

2.

The hand in the middle of the frame touches the ground, looking for support. Other hands wander around in search of warmth, traces of life, the closeness of skin – one rolled up in a fist, another hidden under a headscarf, in a pocket, in the folds of a sweater, on the shoulder of the person standing nearby, on the neck, in the spot where you can feel the pulsation of blood. Gentle gestures to make sure that the heart is still beating, that the skin on the stomach is still warm and soft, the lining in the pocket so familiar, and the hand of the wooden cane still provides support. Nothing else can be done, only the hands are allowed to venture on these small, almost imperceptible journeys.

Nothing can be done anymore – one can only wait: so they are standing, seven on the right side of the frame and the woman in the middle, on the grass, as if she had sunk to the ground.

'Jews just before the execution'. Just before? What does it mean 'just before'? Seconds? Three minutes? Twenty breaths of the girl who put her hand on her stomach, fifty beats of pulse of the woman with her hand on her neck?

What else needs to be done – ask them to stand in a line? Have them dig the pit? Let them go and shoot them in the back? Or maybe play some other sophisticated joke just to kill time?

How long have they been waiting? How are they waiting? They do not believe in death, nobody believes, but just in case it is better to freeze and not raise your eyes. So they stand, frozen, so as not to touch, not to rock the unimaginable despair, the instinct that makes you scream and run away – because then everything will be lost. But for now, maybe they can still make it, maybe the decision will be changed, maybe something, someone,

at the last moment… Freeze, not to feel too much – and if so just this pulsating piece of skin, just the warmth of a thin woolen coat, the lively softness of the hair.

They are waiting, still on the side of life, on the side of air, but already anxious, already dead in their immobility. The woman who is squatting in the grass is already waiting on the side of death, on the side of earth, and yet still alive in a wild gesture, she breaks out of the stillness of the others. She is already dying, although the shot has not been fired yet. She is already sinking to the bottom, under the ground. The most vivid in the photo and yet the most dead.

Her face: a scratch on her cheek, a strand of hair from under her headscarf. Her face: a mole over her right eyebrow. Her face: lips, eyes, gaze. Her gaze: there are no words.

3.

The second photo – black smoke on the horizon. The road, soldiers' helmets, burning children. Napalm burns. The skin, hair, nails, bones. The children are running, running away, barefoot, burning asphalt, faster, faster – to throw off one's clothes, throw off one's skin. Two on the left: the youngest boy turning around towards the wall of smoke, the older boy's face torn with a cry. Two on the right: a girl who does not have the strength to run anymore and a little boy – at least he has someone to hold his hand. In the middle – a naked nine-year-old girl, a featherless chick, hands like broken wings, like the loose arms of a doll, patches of light, burnt skin. She is running. Between the screams, before she catches another draught of burning air, she repeats: 'Nong qua! Nong qua!' – 'Too hot! Too hot!'.

Somewhere up in the air, in the smoke, outside the frame, the roar of plane engines. One of them had dropped napalm bombs on the road a few seconds earlier, where the smoke is coming from. The pilot made a mistake – he thought they were partisans.

4.

On the next frame of the same film the girl is standing with her back turned in a wet spot – a moment ago one of the journalists poured water on her. A little girl with braided hair: one could easily imagine her playing in a puddle on a hot day, if it was not for the soldiers around her, if it was not

for the cameras and microphones, if it was not for the smoke. If it was not for her back – the burnt skin coming off like peeling paint. In a moment, Nick Ut, the author of the photograph[2], a Vietnamese photographer working for Associated Press, will take all the burned children to a hospital and make sure that she is well looked after. Before the photographer takes the girl in his arms and carefully carries her to his car, the nine-year-old will say to her brother (the first one on the left side of the frame): 'I think I'll die'.

The girl's name is Kim Phúc. Nick Ut photographed her on 8 June 1972 near the village of Trang Bang, on the motorway leading from Saigon to the border with Cambodia[3].

5.

The first photograph does not have a next frame. If it had, if we could imagine the possible versions of the next frame – they would differ only in the rhythm of the shooting, the arrangement of the fallen bodies. The woman on the grass does not have a name. Her signature is a yellow patch on her clothes. The photographer is unknown. His signature: 'Juden kurz vor der Erschiessung'. Near Kiev, October 1941.

Time:
First photo – between life and death.
Second photo – from death to life.
Place:
First photo – between air and earth.
Second photo – between fire and water.

6.

The first photograph – a shred of space, a scrap of time, an ash petal. People photographed at the last moment, torn out of the ground in the last moment. Seven faces caught out of focus, their profiles drawn with a blurred line. And the one in the middle, sharp and invisible at the same time – how can we

[2] For the original version of Nick Ut's photograph see: http://zalacznik.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/2016_fotoesej2.szczypiorska.pdf (accessed: 27.12.2019).

[3] Some of the details of Kim Phuc's story are presented after: Dąbrowski 2009: 75.

see her, when it is so difficult to look at her, so difficult to answer her gaze? We can slowly tame the frame. We can try – one look at the photograph, then another. Every time it is the same: the eyes are wandering around the ellipse which marks the limits of sharpness, the gaze is circling around, for a fraction of a second it slips down the middle of the frame, to her face – to look but not to see, to look but not to see. The safe edges of the photograph: a meadow – is the clump on the left a dragon flower? And the dark spot on the right the shadow of the crown of a tree outside the frame? Maybe a cloud? And the trees on the horizon – what kind of trees are they? The shaggy dog next to the soldier's leg is dangerously close to the woman's face, so the gaze quickly moves upwards: buttons of the uniform, the buckle of a belt, and in his left hand? Is that a helmet? A motorcycle helmet? The absurdity of considering such details directs one's gaze to the other side of the photo (in order to safely avoid the centre of the frame, one has to move one's gaze upwards, looking away for a moment). On the right: those standing, unimportant details – a comb in the hair, the folds of warm stockings, wrinkled trousers.

Behind the bright coat of the first woman on the right, the eyes find a moment of rest, a safe hiding place, far away from her, far from her gaze – a narrow strip of the frame, where the eyes can rest. Hide behind their backs, far from her, far from those she is looking at. Two white dots – one of them is a speck on the negative, it diverts our attention to the technical process, the print, allows us to withdraw from the frame, escape from the October sun.

7.

The face of the girl from the second photo is somewhat easier to tame, it smoothly surrenders to the eyes. It is easier to turn it into paper, a photo that can be soothed with a gaze, calmed. You can look at it, polish the painful bumps, the wounding edges with your eyes, until it becomes smooth, matt, silent. Then you can touch the photo, wrap it in words. Moving – yes; shocking – yes; tearing – yes; terrifying – yes, yes, yes. The context helps – the girl is running towards rescue, towards water, towards the photographer who will save her life. This soothes us, it does not draw us into the frame, does not throw us on the road between the rice fields, into the sticky ash of smoke, into the burnt air, into the high, glassy squeal: 'Nong qua!'. It does not require

intervention. In a way, it justifies the vulgar comfort of looking at children screaming in pain from the perspective of one's own armchair. The smell of napalm ('Nothing else in the world smells like that – said Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* – I love the smell of napalm in the morning'), the shreds of burnt skin and the scream remain in the frame.

It is a photograph that makes us aware that when we look at a photo it is not only through the eyes of the photographer – we look from inside him, identify with him. And with what he will do in a moment, just after. On 8 June 1972, a girl was running towards Nick Ut. In the photo she is running, over and over again, in the direction of whoever is looking. Uh… – we breathe with relief, following the traces of her bare feet on the asphalt – she is running to an adult who will help, who will behave decently. The soothing order of the world, the movement from suffering to salvation, from fire to water, for a moment we forget that just before Nick Ut pressed the shutter of the camera, someone else pressed the button opening the bombshell.

A different perspective on how to perceive this photograph is presented in a documentary film shot between the two frames by Nick Ut. The film shows running children, exhausted, shocked, as if surprised – in color and movement it looks less dramatic than in a black-and-white photo. After watching the film for the first time, one scene from the few-minutes sequence is particularly memorable, a small gesture by a soldier or a journalist who gives the child some water from a water bottle – the way he holds his hand, the way he supports the girl's shaking chin so that she can take another sip.

This touching, barely noticeable gesture allows us to forget why the children had to run for such a long time, passing by soldiers, passing by the cameraman who ignored them when they were running, waving their hands, helplessly trying to tell him something, cry it out, explain. Or another scene: the cameramen film a woman who can barely stand on her feet, carrying an unconscious child, with shreds of burnt skin peeling off his body. She is moving with obvious effort, they are filming, the child slips from her hands, they are framing, she corrects the weight, they fine-tune the close-up. She is grieving, crying and moves on. They are filming. *I Am a Cameraman* – wrote Douglas Dunn:

> They suffer, and I catch only the surface.
> The rest is inexpressible, beyond

What can be recorded. You can't be them.
If they'd talk to you, you might guess
What pain is like though they might spit on you.

And then:

Truth is known only to its victims.
All else is photographs – a documentary.

Christopher Isherwood, in his essay *A Berlin Diary*, to which, as Piotr Sommer notes, Dunn's poem refers, wrote a well-known sentence: 'I am a camera with its shutters open, quite passive, recording, not thinking' (Isherwood 1972: 11). Dunn's poem also corresponds to W.H. Auden's poem *I Am Not a Camera*:

Instructive it may be to peer through lenses:
each time we do, though, we should apologize
to the remote or the small for intruding
upon their quiddities.

And then:

Flash-backs falsify the Past:
they forget
the remembering Present.

Who was the woman carrying the inert child? What was her name? What story did she leave behind, behind the curtain of smoke that divided her life, her time 'before' and 'after'? For the viewer, she is only a flash, a figure of pure despair. Chocking disbelief that what is hanging in shreds from the child's legs are not torn tights, but his skin.

8.

'Even if the photographed person is completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory – or, indeed, precisely because of this – that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten' – wrote Giorgio Agamben (2007: 25).

The first photograph – it does not make things easier, it does not slow down, it does not get silenced. One does not even have to look at it anymore – it is there, it grows into the eyes, it lives under the eyelids like a map of grey

spots. One does not even have to remember it anymore – it is still there, just like the rhythm of a poem when we forget the lyrics.

The unwanted, uninvited memory of the first photo is like an optical successor image – only that the real afterimage is a world in complementary, reversed colors. So maybe this is a photographic afterimage – a negative one instead of positive? No, it is rather a picture that reverses meaning. We tend to remember those fragments which are less loaded with meaning: we see, at the bottom of the eye, with photographic accuracy, a clump of thistles, single mulleins, the contour of a group of people, the outlines of trees, the white hand of one of the women, the dog's black nose. We could draw them 'with our eyelids closed', describe them from memory, hoping that transcribed, translated into human language we will finally be able to bring them back to where they should be – the photograph paper. They are willing to retreat – these people, these mulleins, this meadow and the shaggy dog, ready to leave from under our eyelids, our eyes, fly away like a butterfly to a paper meadow.

The centre of the frame, the woman, her gesture, her face is a completely different picture: frayed, inconsistent, sometimes transparent. The least pronounced, but the most stubborn, rooted, not eager to negotiate.

So we return to the photo. What for? So that we can get used to it? Name it? Make her go away? So that we are able to look at the photo without wanting to escape, without wandering around the meadow behind the back of the remaining seven, without pretending that the centre of the frame is empty?

To get used to her proximity, examine the narrow frame around her. A dent in the texture of the meadow, the background behind her head, the pattern on the skirt of the woman standing behind her. Closer: several layers of clothing, a rolled up sleeve. Still closer: a scarf on her head, a strand of hair. Still closer: a scratch on her cheek, a drawing of bent eyebrows, her lips as if she could not swallow the air. And here we go: her eyes, her eyes, her gaze.

'It is not possible to even *imagine* one's death. It seems unreal. It is the most unreal thing' – wrote Elias Canetti (2007: 67).

Her gaze: she believes in death.

Her faith: it is contagious.

9.

Under the October sun, in this photograph, death is not unreal. Under this sun, death is nothing new. Nothing new for reason, but not for – everyone knows, nobody believes. She seems to believe. This fraction of a second, a snapshot of a photograph, captured the gaze that is looking at death. It is her death, her own personal death, death for her alone – death of her face, her scratched cheek, the strand of hair falling from under her headscarf, death of her lips, her left hand touching the ground, sliding underground. Death, in defiance of which she is collecting all the bits and pieces of life falling apart, the effort of a weak body, the courage of a stubborn gaze. Her own death is the reality, the reality of this photograph.

10.

From the perspective of the viewer, the shocking unreality of this photo strikes from beyond the frame, from what Barthes describes as the 'hidden field'. The photographer seems the most unreal element in this picture. Who was this German soldier? An amateur with a camera? A professional in uniform? This picture differs from other German photographs taken after the invasion of the East – images of dead horses, field kitchens, derailed trains. This carefully composed frame, with the texture of a lush meadow is not merely a snapshot documenting the achievements of the German army. Why did he photograph her, this woman slipping onto the grass? Did her gesture seem moving to him? Funny? Did he want to leave a trace of her? To see her through the lens, so that at least for a moment it was not real? What was he aware of and what did he not know? Who pressed the shutter? An amused sadist who later put the camera down and reached for the gun? Someone who was not able to do anything for her, so this was all he could do? Whatever his intentions, he did a lot – he left her face, her image, the last one, perhaps the only one.

He left two traces of himself (what happened to him, did he survive the war?). One is the signature on the back of the photo: 'Jews just before the execution'. The cold horror of this sentence is shocking, the incomprehensible nonchalance of the phrase 'just before'. The second trace is his gaze, this spot – the place where he was standing, in the tall grass, under the October sun. The place from which he looked at the scene, at her, at them, at their yellow patches, at the trees on the horizon. The tramped grass

in the spot where he stood when it was 'all over'. The place from which he took the picture and from which we look at it today – the trampled grass, at the level of his eyes. Perhaps this is also the reason why it is so difficult to look at this photograph, at the woman. The reason why the gaze falters, withers, dies. Standing in the photographer's place, in the grass, in the thymus and snapdragon, we look at the scene from the level of his eyes, that precisely adjusted the focus through the camera's viewfinder and then repeated this gesture – setting the rear sight and the bead on the barrel of the gun.

This is not a photo you can experiment with, that you can unpack, break down into elements, open to imagination. It needs to be gently touched, described with careful words, if any can be found. But perhaps the perception of the photo would change if the history of these eight people, her history, had a different ending? If there was no signature, if not for the incomprehensible 'just before'?

11.

Meanwhile, a few frames later: the meadow – opened, closed. Some confusion on the surface, regrouping in the clumps of grass. The gaps and crevices are quickly covered by wheatgrass – fearless and ubiquitous, it instantly replenishes the open spaces and intertwines the torn roots. Immediately afterwards, the mulleins – regain their torn abutments, the snapdragons – entrench in their former positions, the broken thistle grows into the ground, the thyme crawls on top.

The day after: the sun is shining at the same angle.

The day after: *A Clear Day and No Memories* by Wallace Stevens:

> Today the air is clear of everything.
> It has no knowledge except of nothingness
> And it flows over us without meanings,
> As if none of us had ever been here before
> And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,
> This invisible activity, this sense.

12.

'Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention. (…) The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene' – as Susan Sontag (2005: 8) observes.

If we were to reformulate Sontag's observation, we would note that photography is an act of non-intervention in another sense – in the simplest sense, the most moving experience of a viewer looking at a photograph. You cannot put your hand into the frame, you cannot, like Gulliver, grab the eight people, together with their shaggy dog, and take them away 'just before'.

Looking at a photograph is a mixture of illusions. The perspective of the photographer – his 'here' and 'not-here', being inside the situation and at the same time outside – leaves a margin of freedom, a margin of choice. You can do a lot, you can do less, you can do even less, or you can do nothing. The perspective of a viewer looking at a picture is voiceless – we are not able to do anything, we do not have a choice.

> Film has no words of its own.
> It is a silent waste of things happening.
> Without us, when it is too late to help

– wrote Douglas Dunn (*I Am a Cameraman*). To be condemned to look, to lend a place in memory. The perspective of an observer from behind a thick window, the perspective of a diver descending into the strange underwater world in a safe suit is always the fate of the viewer; sometimes: the choice of a photographer.

13.

Looking at the photos of people photographed at the last moment, 'just before', 'just after', on the borderline – is like accompanying someone in dying. But real death, someone else's death, finally ends, and then you have to go out, breathe in the living air, glue your memory together, live. The photographic 'just before' stretches over years, over the gazes, becomes and continues, it never ends as long as there is the photograph. It is not a process, it is not an experience, it is a repetition of one event, a stoppage in time, an incomprehensible paradox, a bad dream.

Susan Sontag (2005: 15) writes about the photographs from Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, which she saw as a 12-year old girl: 'They were only

photographs – of an event I had scarely heard of and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying'. And further on: 'Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw these photographs (…) and after'.

14.

Something is still crying – and it does not want to stop. The images in the photographs – they do not want to leave.

It is not *really* happening, that is obvious. It is *not happening* at all – again, that is obvious. But memory is not logical, there are frames that cannot be removed from behind our eyelids, even though (or maybe because) it is so difficult to look at them. There are photographs which, contrary to the logic of events (it was a long time ago, it has already happened), contrary to logic in general (it is just a photo, it is only paper), demand something, want something.

Agamben (2007: 27) wrote about 'the exigency that animates every photograph and grasps the real that is always in process of being lost, in order to render it possible once again'.

Photographs that do not want to leave: everyone has their own private set of frames, their own slideshow – behind closed eyes.

What does Regina Fisz's photo want? How can we look at it? Among the other photographs presenting the victims of the Kielce pogrom, among the images of tangled hands and legs, lashed stomachs, bruised faces – this photo, which in a sense is the least drastic, hurts the most.

A young woman murdered together with her several weeks old son, buried, exhumed after a few days. She is lying on the floor, on black and white chessboard tiles. Her hands are lying on her chest, her eyes are closed, her black hair is loosened, a delicate face, with no signs of death. Regina Fisz is asleep. A baby is cuddled up on her stomach. If you look at the photo from a different angle, turn the frame vertical, Regina's body, her frozen gestures, folds of fabric that look as if they had been carefully draped – all this reminds us of one of the paintings of Madonna. Regina Fisz – you cannot look at the picture without hearing the following words: 'I came up to the chauffeur

and told him that we had some Jews and we wanted to take them out and kill them. The chauffeur agreed, but demanded payment of a thousand zlotys, so I said: »That's ok«' (Gross: 2008: 162).

What does the photograph of little Anne Frank want? It is not scary, not cruel, not 'just before', not even a war picture from 1941, but a picture taken with her sister, Margot. An ordinary childhood photo: 'Anne, Margot and Kathi, the maid' from 1929. It is impossible to look at it without thinking about the mass graves in Bergen-Belsen, where the bodies of Anna and Margot were thrown, together with the other victims of the typhus epidemic, a month before the liberation of the camp. How can we look at her photographs, at a twenty-second documentary film, the only one in which we can see her face if only for a short moment, without thinking about the words 15-year-old Anne wrote in her diary ten days before her arrest: 'It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart' (Frank 2001: 333).

What do the photographs from Auschwitz, described by Georges Didi-Huberman, want? The four photographs taken by Alex, a Hungarian Jew whose surname remains unknown. Chaotic, not framed, taken with a camera smuggled into the camp in a double bottom of a soup pot, on a piece of film that was later taken outside in a tube of toothpaste.

These photos: two taken from inside the gas chamber, just after it has been emptied, and two made with a camera hidden in the hand or underneath the clothes. The first two: burning of the corpses, and this sentence: 'Once the pits had been emptied and the ashes taken to the ash depot, they were pilled up in man-high heaps' (Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, quoted after: Didi-Huberman 2008: 9). Two more: naked women just before entering the gas chamber, and the sentence: 'The most horrendous moment was the opening of the gas chamber, that unbearable vision: people, pressed like basalt, compact blocks of stone' (Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, quoted after: Didi-Huberman 2008: 39). What do these four photographs want, when it is impossible to even cry over them, to say anything, when the only thing we feel is cold bewilderment, the absurd triviality – Is that where the trees grew? Was it summer? It that possible?

What does Didi-Huberman (2008: 3) want when he writes:

> In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves. We must attempt to imagine the hell that Auschwitz was in the summer of 1944. Let not invoke the unimaginable. Let us not shelter ourselves by saying that we cannot, that we could not by any means, imagine it to the very end. We *are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable. It is a response that we must offer, as a dept to the words and images that certain prisoners snatched, for us, from the harrowing Real of their experience. So let us not invoke the unimaginable. How harder was it for the prisoners to rip from the camps those few shreds of which now we are trustees, charged with sustaining them simply by looking at them.

Is that what the photographs want? Is that what Agamben means when he writes: 'this person, this face demands a name'? You have to *imagine* – take *their* place? Be *there*? On the meadow near Kiev? In the smoke on the highway to Cambodia? On the chessboard floor at the Kielce police station? In Frankfurt, on the terrace of the Frank family house, look into the eyes of the little girls? In Auschwitz? Take off your clothes before entering the gas chamber? Stand above a burning pit in which the corpses are glowing, the hair is melting, the skin is cracking? Take on their names for a moment? Lend them your own? Imagine something against which the entire body, all the senses are defending themselves?

'We *are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable'.

To close one's eyes, have no imagination.

15.

'Photographs testify to all those lost names, like a Book of Life that the new angel of the apocalypse – the angel of photography – holds in his hands at the end of all days, that is, every day' – wrote Agamben (2007: 27).

Who is this? – we ask when looking at old photographs.

'Whose face is this' – wrote Jerzy Ficowski in a poem *Dedykacja* [*Dedication*]:

> We need to introduce ourselves
> to these times as quickly as possible
> and let it be known
> by what names
> we had known each other.

Photographs signed and not signed – this distinction is very important in private photography, family tradition, in merging the collective memory. The ritual of signing photographs is a gesture of transferring the deposit of memory, fulfilling an obligation towards the deceased. In her book *Z pamięci* [*From Memory*], Maria Iwaszkiewicz (2005: 257) writes about this ritual, recalling her family album: 'In the last years before his death, Father wrote the names of the people he photographed. I would not be able to say who was on them, because those people lived at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century'.

According to Agamben's (2007: 35) requirement to keep the distant past alive ('that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten'), name is a metaphor, something that lasts longer than the body. The name is memory, it is marked with the gaze that it creates, which – as Agamben wrote – restores the validity of reality plunging into non-existence.

Does it matter what was the name of the woman in the first photo? It is important – from the point of view of personal, private memory. Very important – from the perspective of the Jewish tradition, in which preserving and remembering the name of the deceased is a religious imperative. But the requirement of memory, which Agamben writes about, has nothing to do with the name of the woman in the first photo. Which name is it out of the one and a half million Jews murdered in Ukraine during the Second World War? Which name is it from among the names of those buried in two thousand mass graves? What was her name? Chaja, Estera, Gołda? Rojza, Małka, Sara?

Would knowing her name make the memory of her easier, more complete? Is the feeling of commitment to her, to her gaze, stronger, more personal, precisely because she is deprived of everything, deprived of her name, defenseless?

Agamben mentions the 'certainly pretentious' dedication that Edgar Aubert wrote on the back of his photograph given to Proust. The dedication is a quotation from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet *A Superscription*: 'Look at my face: my name is Might Have Been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell' (quoted after: Agamben 2007: 27).

The names of all the anonymous.

16.

The name of the dead man. His face, his story, his memory.

'So long as I do not know his name perhaps I may still forget him, time will obliterate it, this picture. But his name, it is a nail that will be hammered into me and never come out again. It has the power to recall this forever, it will always come back and stand before me' – says Paul, the hero of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque (1975: 101), when he hesitates over the body of a French soldier whether to look into his documents, wonders whether he wants to know his name. Sent on a night patrol, Paul is stuck in a bomb crater, unable to get out because of the thick fire of the bullets. When another soldier slips into the hollow of the crater, Paul without hesitation stabs him with a knife. He is then forced to accompany the dying man. From a reflex: 'I want to stop his mouth, stuff it with earth, stab him again' (ibid.: 97), to the look in his eyes: 'the eyes cry out, yell, all the life is gathered together in them for one tremendous effort to flee, gathered together there in a dreadful terror of death, of me' (ibid.: 98). From a readiness to throw himself at the wounded man knife in hand 'if he stirs', to giving him water from the bottom of the crater and dressing him with bandages. Paul looks at the process of dying, which is his doing, he is the perpetrator. 'This is the first time I have killed with my hands, whom I can see close at hand, whose death is my doing' (ibid.: 99). When the wounded man dies, Paul reaches for his military pocket book – he reaches out and then hesitates. The dead man's wallet slips out of his hands, letters and photographs fall out: 'There are portraits of a woman and a little girl, small amateur photographs taken against an ivy-clad wall' (ibid.: 101). Paul tries to save himself by thinking about sending money to the widow and the child: 'So I open the book and read slowly: Gerard Duval, compositor. With the dead man's pencil I write the address on an envelope, then swiftly thrust everything back into his tunic. I have killed the printer, Gerard Duval. I must be a printer, I think confusedly, be a printer, printer' (ibid.).

Paul plays a game with memory, on the verge of risk – should he know his name? Enter deeper into the circle that already connects and will always connect them? Or withdraw, walk past the dead man on tiptoes? If he does not learn it now, he will never know.

'This dead man is bound up with my life, therefore I must do everything, promise everything in order to save myself' (ibid.). The dead man is a threat.

In the ambivalence of Paul's feelings, in the way he speaks of the French soldier, one can hear the distant echo of the prohibitions and orders related to the taboo associated with the dead. As Freud (2001: 63) observed: 'One of the most puzzling, but at the same time instructive, usages in connection with mourning is the prohibition against uttering the name of the dead person. [It seems that saying the name is like a spell that would make the deceased come back][4]. Paul wants it and does not want it at the same time. Or maybe he wants the name to forget it? To put Gerard Duval in the album of war memories, to give him a form and a proper measure, so that he does not develop into an amorphous autonomous creation, attacking his memory, depriving it of the possibility of defense.

To give a name, describe, photograph – send it back to the archives.

Maybe Franz Kafka was right when he said that: 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds'? That his stories were 'a way of shutting my eyes' (quoted after: Barthes 1982: 53)?

It seems that Paul quickly forgets and consciously registers this process: 'I think no more of the dead man, he is of no consequence to me now'.

He calms down by saying his *own* name: '»No foolishness now, Paul… Quiet, Paul, quiet… then you will be saved, Paul«. When I use my Christian name it works as though someone else spoke to me, it has more power' (Remarque 1975: 102).

17.

Paul also calms himself in a different way:

> The dead man might have had thirty more years of life if only I had impressed the way back to our trench more sharply on my memory. If only he had run two yards farther to the left, he might now be sitting in the trench over there and writing a fresh letter to his wife. But I will get no further that way; for that is the fate of all of us: if Kemmerich's leg had been six inches to the right: if Haie Westhus had bent his back three inches further forward (ibid.: 100).

What is that? Half a meter to the left, two steps to the right? Higher, lower? Closer, further?

[4] The bracketed fragment is missing in the English translation of the Freud's work (editor's note).

People photographed on the borderline, on the edge – with a trace of nightmare on their faces, with a trace of something that eludes words, casual and unimaginable, common and sublime, something like the Under Toad in *The World According to Garp* by John Irving – a threat that comes suddenly, appears in the crevice between fragile stability and the unpredictable, the 'treacherous whirlwind', the 'Under Toad' for little Walt Garp.

> Garp tried to imagine it with him. Would it ever surface? Did it ever float? Or was it always down under, slimy and bloated and ever-watchful for ankles its coated tongue could snare? The vile Under Toad. (…) Long after the monster was clarified for Walt ('Undertow, dummy, not Under Toad!' Duncan had howled), Garp and Helen evoked the beast as a way of referring to their own sense of danger (Irving 1978: 337).

After little Walt's death, Duncan reminded Helen and Garp how the boy had asked whether the Under Toad was green or brown. 'Both Garp and Duncan laughed. But it was neither green nor brown, Garp thought. It was me. It was Helen. It was the color of bad weather. It was the size of an automobile' (ibid.).

The Under Toad, Benjamin's hunchbacked dwarf, chance, necessity. Sometimes it has the face of a pilot who mistakenly dropped a bomb with napalm, sometimes the face of a photographer. For Regina Fisz, it had the face of her neighbors, for Anne Frank, the uniform of Grüne Polizei. Gerard Duval met him in a bomb crater. For Franus Kemmerich it had the voice of a buzzing bullet, for Private Tella from *The Red Thin Line* – the whirr of a machine gun. What was it for the woman from the first photo, who was it – we do not even know that about her.

What about the rest of them? And everyone else? How many times did we manage to escape?

Again, Remarque (1975: 8-9):

> Often we lay aside the cards and look about us. One of us will say: 'Well, boys…' Or 'It was a near thing that time…' And for a moment we fall silent. There is in each of us a feeling of constraint. We are all sensible of it; it needs no words to communicate it. It might easily have happened that we should not be sitting here on our boxes today; it came damn near to that. And so

everything is new and brave, red poppies and good food, cigarettes and summer breeze.

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Summary

This paper makes an attempt to reflect on the relation between photography and death – it consists issues connected to the perception of photos representing people in extreme situations, between life and death. It raises

the problem of the role and the status of the photographer – an observer and witness of the human suffering. The article also addresses issues related to ethical contexts of the photojournalist's work (photography versus intervention) and to ethical requirements of keeping the memory of those that were captured in terminal situations as well as to ethical dilemmas of viewers positioned as witnesses.

Keywords: photography, death, gaze, Holocaust, Kim Phuc, intervention, witness, memory