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**Algorithmic iconography:
Intersections between iconography and social media image research**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Content warning: This document and its attendant digital component contain several photographs of death.

Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to develop a methodology for examining a large dataset of visual materials coming from social media in a nuanced, historical fashion. Iconography is a qualitative methodology originating in the history of art that identifies, categorises, and interprets works of art, placing the result in historical perspective. This thesis develops a mixed methodology that unites iconography with approaches common in social media studies in order to give the analysis of imagery on social media historical depth and nuance. The method incorporates social media commentary, which provides insights into users' interpretations of the pictures they share, in a level of detail that traditional iconography rarely achieves. An adapted iconographical method can provide evidence for why the pictures users share are interpreted as they are, and why some are shared more than others.

I demonstrate iconography's usefulness with a case study, centring upon an historically important dataset: the most-shared tweets containing pictures of Alan Kurdi and other refugees during a two-week period beginning when Alan was found on 2 September 2015. Reaction to pictures of Alan shared on Twitter spilled into the real world and led to global demonstrations on behalf of, and increased support for, refugees. This thesis explores the mechanisms by which these pictures crystallised popular sympathetic reactions for refugees at an important point in contemporary geopolitics.

To aid in the iconographic analysis of this data, I have created a digital tool called a "datasheet" (<https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>) to help analyse visual and textual patterns.

Working in tandem with data analytics software, the datasheet provides other forms of otherwise difficult-to-discern "top-down" insights. By using these tools, it is possible to uncover pictorial preferences, waves of sharing over time, cross-cultural interpretative patterns, and long-standing interpretative themes such as death as sleep, children as angels, oversized monumentality, standard representations of refugees, the fixing of ambiguous imagery through anchoring text, and hostile representations of refugees as threats. Many of these themes returned after the time of data collection as the political climate surrounding refugees soured in 2016. The iconographic approach and the organisation of this datasheet provide a foundation for future analyses of imagery shared on social media.

Keywords: iconography, iconology, social media, Twitter, interpretation, photography, visual imagery, textual imagery, big data, refugees, refugee crisis, Alan Kurdi, Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky

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Many pictures in this project were collected via Twitter; these will be indicated below as from the “dataset”, or all the structured data downloaded from Twitter for this project. These are often enumerated via record number in the “datasheet”, or the digital tool created to query the dataset’s contents. A redacted version of the datasheet can be downloaded at MMU: <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>. Full-sized figures are placed towards the end of the volume, but for the reader’s convenience, thumbnails have been placed in-text.

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Practically speaking, the pictures supplied in this thesis follow a cascade system. Where possible, I obtained permission to use a picture, including through licensing; failing that, I used versions of pictures available by Creative Commons or the Public Domain; failing that, I provided pictures under the concept of fair dealing as outlined above. I have attributed all works (where possible) to those who made them. To fulfil the spirit of the copyright acts and regulations for fair dealing, works presented under fair dealing are “quoted” in that they are cited, but never form the centre of extended argument. I supply low-resolution or small-sized versions of these works to protect the copyright holder’s rights. Accordingly, licensed photographs and Creative Commons pictures are all displayed at 300 dpi resolution; fair dealing and all image files from the dataset are at a lower 72 dpi resolution. Low-resolution thumbnails of full-sized image files are interspersed into the thesis; their locations, makers, and origins (when discoverable) are listed below. All pictures from the dataset are provided with the record number of their initial appearance (e.g., #10 [Omer Tosun]).

Full-sized figures

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List of charts

There are two types of charts in the thesis: standard charts and thematic charts. All charts were developed in the data analytics software package Tableau.

Charts

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Geschichte zerfällt in Bilder, nicht in Geschichte (History decays into images, not into stories)
(Benjamin, 1982:N11, 4)

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to find a way to examine a large dataset of visual materials coming from the Internet, but to do so in a nuanced, historical fashion. There are several frameworks widely used in the study of visual materials, such as semiotics (section 1.2), discourse analysis (section 1.3), content analysis (section 1.4), and cultural analytics (section 1.5). These different approaches provide keen insights into imagery and sharing, but researchers employing them focus upon the present day and rarely engage with the historical dimension.¹ Such an engagement has been inherent in art-historical methodologies. This is especially true of iconography, a qualitative method that identifies, categorises, and interprets imagery, and places the resulting analysis into a broader history of image-making. This thesis centres upon iconography and as its objective it assesses whether it too could be used to analyse imagery shared on the Internet—specifically, Twitter. I thus address the following research question:

- If one seeks to analyse social media images in a detailed, nuanced way, addressing their historical context and resonances, can iconography be a useful method to aid in such an approach?

This thesis project is a test case for whether iconography's components—identification, categorisation, interpretation, and historical situation—are suitable for such an endeavour. Because social media provides very wide-ranging options for the examination of staggering amounts of imagery, there are two related questions that follow closely on the heels of the first research question:

- Can an iconographic approach accommodate quantitative data systematically, and if so, how?
- What extra components might be developed to perform a systematic iconographic analysis?

Systematic analyses benefit from the supply of data, and because of the potential volume of data available from social media, *structured* data is particularly beneficial.² This project focuses upon

¹ I wish to distinguish between an “image” and “picture” here, along the lines of Hans Belting (2001a). In this project, a “picture” is a two-dimensional example of a *visual artefact*—an unlovely term that I will use in this project because it covers diverse media— which denotes something outside the body in the world, and fashioned by a human: a painting, a photo on a mobile phone, a Photoshopped image, a video, or a three-dimensional object like a sculpture. In contrast, an “image” is something partway between the picture and one's head: it constitutes a collection of forms and likely associations. For example, the “Marlboro Man” was a familiar figure in a longstanding cigarette advertising campaign. The reader may examine a particular advertisement—the “visual artefact”—containing the Marlboro Man, but when she pictures the Marlboro Man in her mind (this is the “image”), what she pictures may not correspond to any particular advertisement containing the figure.

² Structured data (singular: datum or “data point”; plural: data) contain information such as the content an individual shared and the name of the individual who shared the picture, but also

imagery shared on Twitter because Twitter affords the least restrictive access to structured data obtainable (at a price) through one of its Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). When amassed in quantity, such data is often referred to as “big data”, and it is not uncommon for a dataset to contain thousands of pictures or hundreds of thousands of texts, often collected by a user-generated, text-based classification system called a “folksonomy”.³ Iconography is a labour-intensive method, and so cannot yet exploit all the opportunities afforded by a dataset containing tens of thousands of pictures. However, I argue that the method has to be inflected with a mixture of approaches used in the social sciences in order to accommodate the subject matter, digital platform, and large volumes of visual data, which together create a rather different starting-point than that for which iconography was originally conceived. I have thus developed a bespoke digital tool based upon content analysis (a common way to sort through larger sets of pictures) and used data analytics software alongside it to aid in the analysis.⁴ This project thus contributes to the digital humanities by demonstrating how one can engage in a qualitative interpretation of fairly large sets of visual and textual data and identify patterns of interpretation with multiple connections to past imagery.

My project aims to demonstrate iconography’s usefulness as an approach, one which takes seriously the artefacts that people share by identifying—where possible—their makers and the locations online in which their pictures appeared; by heeding the words used by those sharing them; by tabulating which artefacts and utterances accorded the most responses; by recording geographical and chronological patterns of sharing; and by noting, where appropriate, the ways in which comments and artefacts seem to respond to long-standing image-making patterns. The project takes a hybrid approach, gathering insights from art history, visual studies, and the social sciences. This hybrid approach is experimental, but I maintain that it offers a fruitful course for future analyses of imagery shared by people on the Internet today.

In order to test the efficacy of the method, I use a case study approach. The case study focuses upon the intensive picture-sharing that occurred during a two-week period (2–14 September

metadata such as the time at which it was shared. The contents of the data available to the researcher varies depending upon the platform. The data are structured because all items are presented in a uniform way, so that one can always identify, e.g., which datum is the timestamp and that timestamps for each entry are kept within a location containing only timestamps.

³ Linnea Laestadius (2017:576) offers a succinct definition for big data in the context of social media: “Big Data are huge in volume, high in velocity, exhaustive in scope, diverse in variety, fine grained in resolution, flexible and scalable, and relational in nature”. The majority of these characterisations relate to virtually all big data sources, but the relational nature of social media makes researching it rather unique. Users refer to one another and cite one another’s content. This relational nature is also revealed within the content: users can self-organise and self-categorise their content through the use of hashtags, sometimes referred to as “folksonomy” (Thelwall, 2014:133).

⁴ The tool may be downloaded from MMU: <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>.

2015) arising from the distribution of photographs showing Alan Kurdi. Alan was a three-year-old Kurdish Syrian refugee child found drowned on the beach of Bodrum, Turkey, on the morning of 2 September 2015. Alan's corpse was photographed on the beach by Nilüfer Demir of DHA⁵, whose work was quickly described as "iconic", or more broadly resonant in a way that it seemed to speak beyond the circumstances of its capture. Almost immediately, several image makers created pictures reacting to the impact of her photographs. Both Demir's photographs and the "reaction" pictures went viral (i.e., they were shared widely) on Twitter. It was the appearance of Alan's image on Twitter that brought his death to international prominence, and the chain of influence of specific public figures who brought his image to wider public attention—e.g., journalists and senior human rights officials—have been identified in the data (D'Orazio, 2015). Alan's appearance also sparked an intensified discussion about the refugee crisis in general; Alan's visibility seems to have moved people across many countries to protest their governments' restrictive policies and to volunteer their services. Whilst the case study focuses upon Alan, it necessarily takes in much of this other material, as it provides context, comparative visual and textual artefacts, and seemingly demonstrates the power of images to move people, to the point that they demand change.

This introduction explains the approach of the project and why iconography is a worthwhile way to examine the pictures taken by photojournalists and the artefacts inspired by them, whether the latter are termed memes, response images or simply derivative imagery. It also establishes some fundamental information about Alan and the circumstances leading to his death, since the project is permeated with his story. The necessity in doing so has been made clear to me over the time this project came to fruition: mentioning the name "Alan Kurdi" is often met with blank stares, whilst mentioning "the boy who was found drowned on the beach" stirs the memory, in part because people more easily remember the image of Alan lying on the beach than the story behind it. The circumstances and specificities of his death are fading rapidly from public memory.

1.1. Origin of the project

This project arose from work done with the Visual Social Media Lab (VSML), of which I became a member in 2015 upon entering MMU to work under Simon Faulkner, Farida Vis, and Jim Aulich. Directed by Farida Vis, the VSML is an interdisciplinary team from across the humanities, social sciences, and industry. It aims to examine imagery shared on social media from different facets through the various expertise afforded by its members. The VSML published a "rapid research report" on the death of Alan in 2015 (Vis and Goriunova, 2015). The report contained articles concerning the search terms used by people to learn about him, network analysis (i.e., tracking the distribution of the story across Twitter), content analysis (i.e., the types of pictures showing

⁵ *Doğan Haber Ajansı* (Doğan News Agency). The photographs have been distributed by Getty Images in partnership with DHA and *Agence France-Presse*.

Alan, with their respective numbers), sentiment analysis (specifically, an examination of ambivalent comments about the photograph), the ethics of publishing distressing photographs, and image analyses of different photographs and artistic responses; I contributed an article to it, exploring the iconology (i.e., the interpretations) of Alan represented on his own (Drainville, 2015). The report has received favourable international media coverage and has been cited in newspapers and documentaries.⁶ Virtually every academic article referring to Alan Kurdi cites the report.

1.1.1. Origin of the data

Contributors to the report had access to nearly 3 million tweets' worth of structured data arising from Alan's death. This dataset was assembled of tweets that employed any of the following salient terms in the period between 2 and 14 September 2015.⁷

- #refugeeswelcome, "refugees welcome"
- #refugeecrisis, #refugeescrisis, "refugee crisis", "refugee's crisis"
- #nomoredrownings, "no more drownings"
- #dyingtogether, "dying to get here"
- #kiyiyavuraninsanlik, "*kiyiya vuran insanlık*", #humanitywashedashore, "humanity washed ashore"⁸
- #aylankurdi, #alankurdi, #aylan, aylan, alan, kurdi
- #syria boy, "syria boy", #syrian boy, "syrian boy", #syrianboy
- #syria child, "syria child", #syrian child, "syrian child", #syrianchild
- "bodrum beach"
- "drowned boy", "drowned child", "drowned toddler"

The resulting dataset consisted of 2,843,274 tweets in total; 1,236,247 of the posts shared pictures. It was used directly in three of the Alan Kurdi report's articles (Vis, 2015; Thelwall, 2015; D'Orazio, 2015); others used separate data, such as from Google (Rogers, 2015); however, the majority of researchers performed qualitative analyses—including me. It was felt that more could

⁶ Some of the most prominent media citations are as follows: Danna (2015); Higgins (2015); Hussey (2015); Mohdin (2015); Pantry (2015); Press Association (2015a); Press Association (2015b); Silverman (2015); and Withnall (2015). See also the documentary *Een zee van beelden* (Pekel and van de Reijt, 2016). The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) initially funded the VSML and cited the rapid report as an example of a "substantive outcome" (Kolarz et al., 2016:51).

⁷ Farida Vis collected this list of terms using Topsy, a now-defunct online service that presented the frequency with which specified terms and hashtags were used over a discrete period of time.

The data was collected for the VSML by its main industrial partner, the social media analytics company Pulsar. Pulsar's website: <https://www.pulsarplatform.com> [Accessed 21 June 2018].

⁸ "*Kiyiya vuran insanlık*" is Turkish for "humanity washed ashore".

be done with the data, and the VSML very kindly offered me full access to this corpus. Few PhD candidates have access to such a corpus, since it is expensive to acquire; fewer still have access to a dataset containing all the relevant historical tweets of a given subject. This data came from Twitter's PowerTrack API (Twitter, 2017), and as such it covers 100% of the tweets using those terms, and not the more standard (and less expensive) Firehose 1% sample of tweets. Access to this data thus afforded an unparalleled opportunity.

1.1.2. Suitability of the data

However, data availability—including 100% data availability—matters little if the data are not fit for use. The use of large datasets can project a “mythology” of an “aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy” (boyd and Crawford, 2012:663).⁹ Such myths can be dangerous if one does not bear in mind that the data being collected are skewed towards those elements perceived to have financial value by platform owners, that some elements (for example, visual artefacts) are typically discarded during datamining, and that one is unlikely to capture all the content associated with a phenomenon—to say nothing about the potential for spam or “gamed” data to pad metrics or content artificially (Vis, 2013). Basing research on a dataset may limit the questions one may ask, because the parameters of the data are set to measure some things and discard others.

The analysis of visual materials presents particular challenges that elaborate upon these points. Visual artefacts are typically devalued because pictures are less subject to datamining than text: image *links* are thus usually provided in the collection of data, but the artefacts themselves typically are *not* (such was the case in this project, and addressing it required significant attention: see section 3.5). Vague textual accompaniments (such as “how tragic”) may preclude the inclusion of a relevant tweet in the case of Alan Kurdi, since the tweet would not have been collected, underscoring a problem of data collection of visual artefacts via textual terms (see section 2.4.2.2). And users may employ a widely-used hashtag in order to amplify their own interests, irrespective of whether the visual content they share has anything to do with the hashtag in question (see footnote 231 for a rare example of this in the dataset).

Linguistic concerns compound complications surrounding data relevance and representativeness. With the exception of “*kıyıda vuran insanlık*” and its accompanying hashtag, this dataset captures English-language terms and hashtags. This is another potentially distorting effect, as reactions to both the refugee crisis and Alan Kurdi's image were international in scope.¹⁰ However, the

⁹ NB: the author danah boyd chooses to present her name uncapitalized. This project respects her wishes.

¹⁰ Concentration upon hashtags in a single language, or simply upon text, can indeed be distorting—see Wilson and Dunn (2011), who focus upon English-language tweets related to the Arab Spring, and who are aware that Arabic-language materials formed the vast majority of tweets. See also Bruns et al. (2013), who also study the Arab Spring, but sidestep linguistic issues

dataset contains visual and textual content in thirteen different languages, reflecting the fact that the reaction online was also international in scope.¹¹ Twitter users chose to use predominantly English-language terms like #refugeeswelcome: the reasons for doing so are beyond the purview of this project and known only to those who used the terms, but an examination of other tweets by the same posters indicates common usage of widely-employed hashtags.

These are pressing concerns for any data-centred project. Ultimately a researcher must understand that any claims made arising from data are strictly relevant to those data: the data may reflect the wider world, but one must be careful about claims regarding the world. I do not claim that this dataset reflects *everything* stated about Alan Kurdi or the refugee crisis on Twitter, let alone the wider world, because that is patently untrue: the claims I make are about *this* dataset, and what I try to do with iconography is to bring the wider world into that data, not the other way around. Moving beyond the dataset, as I do in chapter 6, is clearly signposted, and the claims necessarily become more speculative at that point.

My purpose for using this dataset is to collect visual artefacts relevant to the subject, since iconography requires such a corpus. Twitter users themselves collected artefacts into a group through their collective use of an emergent folksonomy around Alan and refugees, and thus the corpus of artefacts constitutes what Twitter users, themselves, thought relevant to the conversation. As such it is fit for purpose—particularly if one takes into account that my claims are restricted to *this* dataset. Nevertheless, the iconographic method requires a knowledge of a corpus' content beyond that supplied by users' folksonomy, and beyond the content and metadata typically afforded by APIs. The algorithmically-generated dataset is thus a starting point: it provides a rich trove of imagery for analysis. But an *algorithmic iconography* requires much more, and the bridge for deriving more is outlined in detail in chapter 3.

1.1.3. Ethical considerations

Even though the supply of this data presented me with a tremendous opportunity, I was hesitant to work with it, because the subject matter—photographs of a dead child—raises significant ethical and moral issues. Alan's surviving family wanted to remember the child as he was when he was alive, happy and smiling; an extended presentation of the picture and its effects flies in the face of their wishes. Alan's father, Abdullah, is regularly confronted with the photographs online, which extends his own trauma (Khan, 2015). It has been repeatedly observed that we see pictures of suffering children from the Near East, but far fewer in the West, and as such these

by comparing volumes of sharing in different languages primarily by comparing the relative use of Latin and non-Latin characters (Latin characters and common Latinate accents are placed in the ASCII table in codes below 127, whilst characters with unusual accents such as “ğ” and non-Latinate alphabet characters such as “ق” are assigned higher places in the ASCII table).

¹¹ Footnote 187 provides a list of the languages employed in the dataset.

pictures form one of the backbones of Orientalism; presenting the photographs yet again arguably contributes to Orientalism (Said, 1978; Sontag, 2003; Akil, 2016). And exploring why *this* image of a child resonated with people, when others did not, requires viewing photographs that transgress significant taboos. Sharing the pictures—online, in an article, or indeed anywhere—can cause distress for viewers who have not been mentally prepared for the pictures they encounter, or who did not explicitly request to see them (Gregory, 2015).

Some of the photographs in this collection are difficult to view. Verifying them proved to be more harrowing, as they frequently led to unexpurgated archives of death, murder, and torture, presented by people on the ground in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere, alerting the world to intolerable conditions they all suffered through the documentation of child abuse. I do not refer to these archives, because the process of verification was incidental to this project and to present them needlessly would re-victimise the victims.¹² The task of witnessing is important, but even by presenting the comparatively less brutal collection of photographs in the dataset, I struggle with the fact that I do not *ask* the viewer to look at them; I *force* the viewer to do so.

Finally, I came to consider the effect of relying upon data. As Claire Bishop (2018:126) has warned, “any study that mobilizes Big Data needs to reflect critically on the mechanisms by which this data is gathered: corporate data mining, state surveillance, and algorithmic governance techniques”. By using data in this transdisciplinary project—which I consider to be a digital humanities project—I would be contributing to the “subordination of human activity to metric evaluation”, which has emerged as a prop for the neoliberalisation of higher education of the past several years.

These are difficult concerns with no clear answers. But Alan’s death, and the frenzy of sharing that arose from it, sparked an important—if brief—turning point in an important, and terrible, ongoing story about people escaping misery. Large-scale demonstrations demanded policy changes across the world—particularly in Europe—and individuals donated their time and record sums of money to organisations devoted to helping refugees (Prøitz, 2017; Slovic et al., 2017). In the end, I thus decided to pursue this project, because Alan’s death marked an important moment in the ongoing suffering of Syrians, and indeed of all refugees. As Sam Gregory (2015:62) wrote, we must “balance out imperatives of individual dignity and re-victimisation with a recognition of the iconic power of this image”. I would go farther: understanding how the presentation of pictures on Twitter (however painful and ethically problematic they may be to examine) led to changes in policy and the public reception of refugees and governmental policy,

¹² The information presented via the digital tool provides sufficient information via names, dates, and locations to allow the reader to retrace my steps via searches online—should she wish.

and also why these changes were so brief, may help to achieve more lasting change in the future.¹³

There is another ethical consideration, and that is preserving privacy. Twitter is primarily a public forum: unless the user specifies otherwise, tweets can be viewed by anyone. However, it does not follow that Twitter users are fully aware of the implications of this; nor does it follow that they would be content for a researcher to analyse and publish their tweets in a research project. People write in the heat of the moment: this is a common feature of online commentary. That which is written in haste might be regretted at leisure. In a different forum, with the benefit of emotional distance, they might express different views. This is an extension of “context collapse”, wherein the invisible walls surrounding multiple individual conversations are flattened into a communal space where anyone can listen in and comment (Marwick and boyd, 2011). The *Atlantic* journalist Robinson Meyer summarised this extension well, calling it a “metastasised” version of context collapse, which he saw as a major problem with Twitter’s platform:

Context collapse is what happens when the audience for any online post becomes unstable and untrustworthy—what happens when you don’t know if an offhand Twitter reply, sent to your friend, will wind up on the front page of *Breitbart*.

This outbreak of context collapse weakened the good faith of Twitter users... It turned the service, which had flourished as something *speech-like*, where people could have conversations and test out ideas in public; into something *print-like*, where someone’s tweets were taken as a lasting statement about their core identity (Meyer, 2017).

Twitter content is thus seen as “speech-like”, and most people would be loath to have their speech recorded in print. But it is assumed that public figures and institutions—organisations, politicians, NGO officials, journalists, and celebrities from the world of entertainment or sport—stand by the content published under their names, indeed because they use Twitter as a forum for personal advancement. Therefore, the names of public figures will be associated with the content they presented online, and their textual content will be quoted, as has been done throughout this chapter. Even though identifying these figures means one can locate their accounts and learn more about them, it is also evident that specific individuals—the journalists Liz Sly and Muhammad Lila in particular—were of critical importance to the circulation of Alan’s images, and that this outweighs other considerations. In addition, to give due credit to image makers, I have identified where possible their original picture posts.

For private citizens, however, the exact contents of tweets will not be provided in this project: they will be summarised with the Tweet Summary so that the reader will be less likely to find them. To protect user privacy and anonymise authors, the bespoke digital tool accompanying this

¹³ I argue in section 6.4 that the withdrawal of photographs showing Alan on the beach created a gap in sympathetic portrayals of refugees, leading to the resurgence of long-lasting negative visual themes about the refugee as threat. The long-lasting impact of looking at photographs becomes a theme in section 6.5.

project is scrubbed of the tweet text, tweet translation, post id, and account username. However, all tweets are still quantifiable due to the extracted themes and elements from their pictorial and textual content. Their tweets will be referenced by their record number in the tool.¹⁴

1.2. Studying imagery: in the past and on social media

There are many different ways to study imagery, many of which have been pioneered by art historians who (as the name of their discipline implies) examine imagery from the past. Their subjects are usually fine art artefacts such as paintings or sculpture. Classic examples range from the stylistic analysis of pictorial composition (Wölfflin, 1915), the iconographic study of a picture's subject matter (Panofsky, 1934), and studies of the social environment in which various artefacts were constructed (Antal, 1948). More recent works attempt to combine the style, content, and circumstances underpinning the creation of artefacts (Mason, 2001; Bahrani, 2003; Mathews and Muller, 2016). The development of visual studies, art history's sister discipline, has widened the scope of analysis to contemporary imagery often emanating from outside of the gallery or museum. The subject matter thus covers "everyday" imagery emanating from advertising, infographics, posters, comic books, computer interfaces, political cartoons and other sources (Aulich, 2012; Faulkner, 2003; Gries, 2015; Mirzoeff, 2009; Mitchell, 2011). Much of the subject matter is ephemeral but has inevitably shaped the viewers who encountered them: these studies often place emphasis upon political and theoretical concerns. Studies in art history and visual studies often cover multiple artefacts, but the range is usually quite small because the analytical work is labour-intensive.

Visual artefacts—photographs, video, animated GIFs, digitally-generated artwork, infographics, and much more besides—are shared online on an unprecedented scale. It has been estimated that three billion pictures are shared daily on social media platforms alone (Meeker, 2016). The sheer scale of imagery is something that would seem to resist methods practiced by researchers in art history and visual studies. But the structured data environments of social media platforms offer tantalising prospects for which, in their own domain, art historians can only dream: the potential to locate a visual artefact's source of origin as it is encountered by a group, or network, of viewers, track its progress as it is shared and altered by others in that network, and read the statements left by those who viewed or shared the artefact. Art historians have not historically had such data, but this level of detail is new for any researcher of the visual. There have been visual artefacts on the Internet since before Marc Andreessen proposed the IMG tag for the first graphical web browser, NCSA Mosaic. But perhaps even a decade ago, analytical granularity via structured data would have been impossible.

¹⁴ I also wish to stress that both the project, and this ethical stance, went through ethical examination and approval at MMU.

Research on imagery shared on the Internet—particularly social media—is still at an early state.¹⁵ Perhaps as a reaction to the scale of the artefacts to be analysed, much research employs quantitative, computationally-guided approaches to sift through vast quantities of imagery (see e.g., Coscia (2013); Manovich (2017); Zhenguo et al. (2015) and section 1.5).¹⁶ Other approaches adopt qualitative methods and focus on smaller sets by “drilling down” to specific subjects (see sections 1.2–1.5 and Chapter 2). Research of imagery from social media platforms are often favoured in part because the content has been textually “tagged” (i.e., used hashtags to identify important aspects) by users in an ad-hoc folksonomy of terms (Vis, 2013): textual tagging of content makes it easier to find grouped pictures (see section 2.4). Research can thus drill down via textual search terms, gathered through a platform’s API (Vis et al., 2014); through the platform’s search capabilities (Mortensen et al., 2017); or through “crawling”—i.e., using software to gather details outside of the confines of the API (Seo and Ebrahim, 2016). Alice Marwick (2014:110) has argued that qualitative studies comprise the majority of analysis—textual, but arguably also pictorial—on Twitter: they are often of a smaller scale more familiar to traditional image studies. Providing a qualitative analysis of larger datasets has proven difficult. Murthy et al. (2016) have recently attempted to square the circle and performed a qualitative analysis on nearly 12,000 pictures shared on Instagram and Twitter during the Hurricane Sandy disaster in the U.S.: because of the volume they analysed, they “focused on motif categories rather than trying to interpret the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the images” (2016:119). Therefore, in order to manage the large dataset, Murthy et al. concentrated solely upon broad categories.

¹⁵ The state of research also varies depending upon the history of the platform. Twitter has been able to display pictures and video in tweets since 2013 (Sippey, 2013): for the first five years of the platform’s life, pictures had to be linked to from other services. In contrast, Instagram has always inherently had a heterogenous mix of textual and pictorial data formats because it has supported both pictures and text from its inception. The state of Instagram research reflects this greater sophistication since it was a given from the start. See Laestadius (2017) for an overview of Instagram research.

¹⁶ Researchers wishing to investigate visually-rich events on social media are hampered by mutable Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) or otherwise restrictive access. This is an issue particularly pertinent for “walled gardens” such as Facebook or Instagram, which contain vast amounts of otherwise unavailable data (Rogers, 2013:25). For instance, in October 2017, Instagram severely restricted the data its API could access, and as of 4 April 2018, the company removed virtually all access through its API (Instagram, 2018). Facebook’s API access is restricted to a subset of data available via publicly-available groups and pages—for example, users are anonymised and the text gathered for pages reaches only for the first 200 comments (Facebook, 2018). Twitter’s various APIs have a number a restrictions: for example Twitter provides access only to the first of up to four pictures a given post, or “tweet” can share (Twitter, 2018). Many researchers employ non-sanctioned ways to get around such restrictions—see Chapter 3. There are many ethical issues around the desire for unfettered access: see boyd and Crawford (2012:671–73) and Zimmer (2010) for concise summaries. Ethics pertaining to this project are discussed in Chapter 3, which explains the steps taken to anonymise the identities of most users and their comments.

The approach this project takes to its subject is inherently transdisciplinary. As such, it necessarily effaces the boundaries of disciplinary norms, in particular those of art history, visual studies, and social media research. The approach takes to heart the art historian Aby Warburg's "plea for an extension of the methodological borders of our study of art, in both material and spatial terms... that can range freely, with no fear of border guards" (Warburg, 1912:585). I attempt to fill in what I perceive to be gaps within each discipline with strengths from the others. Much of the work in the first two chapters identifies these gaps, whilst the third chapter operationalises the process to the extent that this can be done. But what are these gaps in brief?

In art history and visual studies, there is little inclination to quantify one's research, suggesting that one's findings are impressionistic and non-representative. In addition, with rare exceptions, art historians are disinclined to engage with contemporary imagery coming from outside of gallery spaces—and imagery emanating from social media spaces and other corners of the Internet certainly constitute a voluminous contemporary case. This disinclination persists despite the long and fruitful history of engaging with image-making practices outside of the "fine" arts. What is more, with rare exceptions, traditional iconographers have often restricted themselves to tracing the paths of motifs (such as the death of Orpheus), forsaking the more wide-ranging approach championed by foundational figures such as Aby Warburg. In turn, visual studies research concentrates on materials from the past century or so, with little inclination to reach for origins beyond the nineteenth century, implicitly suggesting that various images are relatively new phenomena. By not quantifying their findings; by not engaging with contemporary image-making practices; by adopting unnecessarily restrictive approaches; in short, by restricting their scope, art historians and visual studies investigators neglect fruitful modes of enquiry in which long-standing image themes may continue to make themselves felt—albeit in altered form—in the world today. This is where methods and approaches from the social sciences can offer considerable contributions. The first chapter articulates the need for an iconography expanded along these lines.

That said, in social science studies of contemporary imagery and its impact in the world—particularly on social media platforms—there is little inclination to engage in a close reading of the artefacts themselves. They are often reduced to vehicular roles as carriers of rhetorical devices; their contents are tabulated and enumerated; they are regarded as the fulcrum around which ad-hoc publics are built. It is rare in studies of imagery shared on the Internet to engage in the necessary work of identifying the makers of particular pictures. In other words, the employment of these works constitutes a jumping-off point for discussing *something else*, despite the fact that the distribution of particular pictures makes those rhetorical devices and ad-hoc publics possible in the first place. There are exceptions to this observation—Hariman and Lucaites' *No Caption Needed* (2007) comes most readily to mind, although Internet-based imagery is incidental in that study. Even there, however, there is a disinclination to engage with

the deep history of imagery, which can offer insights into the ways that so-called “iconic imagery” often appropriates and builds upon themes that have developed in the arts, both “high” and “low”, sometimes over millennia. Social science studies thus neglect fruitful modes of enquiry by treating the image as incidental to one’s study or neglecting to analyse the mechanisms by which imagery becomes so strongly appealing to viewers in the first place. This is where methods and approaches from art history can offer considerable contributions.

1.3. The operation of iconography within social media

Unlike some viral events—such as any statement tweeted by the sitting American president—the viral reaction to Alan’s death was primarily pictorial in nature: the pictures drove the narrative, and the appearance of the pictures on Twitter spurred the international outcry. This research project focuses upon the photos of Alan and the patterns of visual and textual responses expressed on Twitter, in an attempt to chart the ways in which his image came to resonate for so many people. However, it necessarily draws upon imagery from a broader ecology of picture-making, including pictures circulating about the refugee crisis shared simultaneously on Twitter: the differences with these other pictures highlight what is so distinctive about the photographs of Alan. This broader bank of imagery provides a real-world foundation delineating contemporary renditions of iconographic themes, particularly of family, children, and protection, and as such reaches farther back into history. The reaction to Nilüfer Demir’s photographs underscores centuries of pictorial and cultural practices for a scarcely acknowledged iconography of death, and part of their power derives from violating these broader standards of family and protection whilst accentuating the ways that sacredness has been projected onto the child. Twitter users memorialised Alan, and these commemorations take long-recognisable forms. In short, these pictures would not be comprehensible without the (literal) prior art of image-making practices. Examining pictures within such a context is a fundamentally iconographic approach, and in this project, it is led by the pictorial and textual evidence offered by Twitter users themselves, and the data left in their wake. The frequency of their resharing, or “retweets”, is a metric, however crude, of the resonance of some characterisations over others.

Together, this evidence underscores the utility of iconography as a methodology for the study of images shared on social media and that it is not—as is sometimes claimed—a method suitable solely to the study of fine art, the boundaries of the Italian peninsula, or a truncated period of history. It is a living tradition, perhaps even an interpretative reflex, that informs our reception of imagery today, even though the contents of these categories will be placed within cultural and even personal boundaries.¹⁷ The users of social media platforms provide evidence of specific

¹⁷ By this I mean that the ways in which people categorise images (and everything else) is bound by an intricate web of cultural and personal associations, and it is important to understand that categories are *human inventions*: they are not inherent. See the *Emporio celestial de conocimientos benévolos* which contains categories such as “stray dogs” and “innumerable

ways in which iconographic traditions can operate. Images act as links in a chain, whereupon one influences the next: we may not have direct, conscious knowledge of each link in the chain, but by examining the chain, I argue that we come to a greater understanding of the ways that images incline us to interpret pictures in particular ways and incline us into favouring one rendition of a scene over another.

1.4. Theoretical approach and ancillary research questions

This project presents iconography as a method for querying these interpretations, as it is a method that may address the aim of this project, namely: to find a way to examine a large dataset of visual materials coming from the Internet, but to do so in a nuanced, historical fashion. The objective is to assess iconography as a viable candidate to do so, to propose elements that could be added to iconography in order to do so, and to use a case study to test the approach. The goal of the case study, then, is to understand themes in the presentation of pictures of Alan and other refugees that may have echoed previous image-making practices.

Iconography is a method already well-suited for addressing connections to the broader history of image-making. Theoretically I take a Warburgian approach, which I elaborate in the first chapter as one which considers poses and gestures in imagery as thematically malleable vehicles for multiple readings, and which are imprinted onto the viewer through a combination of practical experience and repeated iterations in visual artefacts emanating from both “high” and “low” registers. I advocate a data-driven approach, not because I think it the only valid method for image analysis, but because data can provide a firm foundation for an iconography that can distinguish the myriad ways people seem to think of images, and untangle which pictures seemed to resonate for Twitter users. A firm foundation can also be a useful corrective to faulty intuitions.¹⁸

The materials of the case study, then, were approached in a grounded and inductive manner (see section 3.1). By this I mean that I examined the contents of the data without assuming the relevance of any theoretical framework or hypothesis, and allowed themes to emerge from the

ones”, referenced by Borges (1942); Borges’ passage also inspired Foucault (1966). The variability of categorisation has been made apparent to me through exercises carried out with a workshop at Barcelona’s *Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona* and during a course at the University of Sheffield. The participants of each were broken into groups, and each group categorised the same visual materials in very different, but entirely logical, ways. See also Deleuze (1968), who argues that categorisation contributes to the “dogmatic image of thought”; this is a much more fundamental version of categorisation of so-called natural kinds (such as identifying a cow and a field) than the higher-order, social categories referenced by Borges and Foucault.

¹⁸ Whilst I advocate a data-driven approach, I am well aware that it cannot provide the “full” story on any phenomenon: see section 2.4.2.2 for concrete examples. See also Chapter 6, which advocates moving beyond structured data. Section 5.5.3 provides an example wherein grounded data counters widely-held intuitions about photographs showing large groups of refugees.

data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Thomas, 2006). Repeated themes emerged through an iterative process of data examination which could then be analysed subsequently for iconographic exploration. Why did I adopt this approach? Because I did not know if iconographic resonances would be present in more than a handful of tweets. They were more plentiful and varied than I anticipated. It was only upon contemplating the imagery through the multiple categorisations made possible with the bespoke digital tool that I came to realise connections to long-standing image-making practices. Relatedly, I did not anticipate that the rest of my art-historical training would be especially relevant: training in close observation, stylistic analysis, and archival research for the purposes of artist identification turned out to be important. The work undertaken in this project implicitly suggests that training in the history of art can bring a rich skillset to the analysis of imagery shared on the Internet.

Because of the size of the collection and the provision of structured data, iconography here is necessarily inflected by concerns that arise in an encounter with algorithmically-generated “big data”. The encounter with big data thus drives the project’s research questions, which again are:

- If one seeks to analyse social media images in a detailed, nuanced way, addressing their historical context and resonances, can iconography be a useful method to aid in such an approach?
- Can an iconographic approach accommodate quantitative data systematically, and if so, how?
- What extra components might be developed to perform a systematic iconographic analysis?

These in turn lead to an elaboration of ancillary questions which will be explored throughout the project. They include: What is the scope of iconography when examining such imagery? How can one organise and expand upon quantitative data for the purposes of qualitative work? What are the limitations of computational approaches for analysing such data? What are the limitations of qualitative approaches for the study of computationally-rich data? How can one pursue equivalent analyses on both image and text, and how do they intermix? How does one adequately reflect a multiplicity of interpretations? What is the relationship between multiple, user-generated interpretations and those provided by me in this project?

1.5. Interpreting photographs iconographically

This project examines photography as an iconographically resonant medium, even though doing so puts a work of photojournalism—a documentary record of a real event—on the same level as a work of art—a fabricated work, perhaps an altarpiece, organised by an image-maker for functional or expressive purposes. It is simply a fact that many photographs engender artistic aesthetic responses: for example, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) have analysed a number of “iconic” photographs from the 20th century, alongside appropriations of those photographs, and W. J. T. Mitchell (2011) has collected a number of pictures that have arisen from the Abu Ghraib torture photographs and the “war on terror”.

The *initial response* to photography can also be iconographically resonant. This may seem to flatten a variegated visual landscape consisting of images depicting fantasy and reality. Yet, if we are honest, this landscape has always been less differentiated than one might expect: the line between real and fabrication is not so stark. It is a commonplace to refer to iconography when iconic photographs are presented in the media. The image of Phan Thị Kim Phúc's outstretched arms in Nick Út's 1972 *Accidental Napalm* is often connected to the crucifixion of Jesus, without any conscious input by Út other than recording the moment. With its dramatic depiction of Minamata disease, W. Eugene Smith's *Tomoko in Her Bath* (1971) has often been compared to *pietà* imagery. Whilst the disease is real, as was Tomoko's suffering, the photograph was staged by the photographer when other photographs of the disease did not elicit a strong enough response (Maddow and Morris, 1985). There are numerous resonances inherent in the use and abuse of the American flag that swirl around Stanley Foreman's 1976 *Soiling of Old Glory* (Masur, 2008). The Abu Ghraib photographs—snapshots documenting the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers—have been identified as visualising an underlying ideology of a master/slave dialectic that reaches back to Greco-Roman Antiquity (Eisenman, 2007).

But the fact that commenters gesture towards iconographic precedents seems to place the issue at the cognitive level, whilst in reality the “confusion” between reality and fabrication starts at the pre-cognitive level. Neurologically, we do not differentiate between, for example, actual movement of a real person in front of our eyes and the visual representation of that movement: they stimulate the same neural networks, and, more, these are the same neural networks that fire if we, ourselves, were moving (Gallese, 2001; Umiltà et al., 2001; Freedberg and Gallese, 2007). This is not to argue we should abandon any claims for truth-telling in photojournalism: far from it. Rather, it is to argue that we viscerally respond to all sorts of images—still, moving, documentary record, and fabricated scene—initially in the same way, and that the sorting out of these differences occurs on a different cognitive level. The issue here lies not between whether a particular photograph is an accurate representation of a real event or not, rather it is to point out the marked similarities between fabricated imagery and the iconic, or resonant, photojournalistic record.

Even then, however, we maintain a false dichotomy between the truth-telling record of photojournalism and the fabricated work of art. A photograph is a construct. Much more than a simple indexical record, a photograph is the product of choices: what the photographer chooses to photograph, what she chooses to include in that photograph, and how to frame it. The photojournalist makes such choices under immense time pressures, with an instinct honed by her experience as practitioner, the images she has seen in her life, and thus what she predicts will make a compelling photograph. The photographer has been guided and nudged to see her subject in particular ways; in turn the photographer guides and nudges the viewer to see the subject in particular ways. A similar process guides photographic editors at newspapers: they,

too, are honed by years of experience, convention, and instinct, which leads them to pick some pictures over others. And the viewer of the photograph, too, will have been guided and nudged to view the subject in particular ways, in part through her experience of other pictures, and in part through her individual experience. These are fundamentally iconographic points.

Further to justifying the use of iconography as a methodology for studying pictures shared on the Internet, many viral pictures are swiftly followed by a number of images based upon that viral source—this constitutes one of the major variations of memes, which I call “response imagery”, because they seem to respond emotively or intellectually to the source (Huntington, 2016; Milner, 2016; Shifman, 2014). These memetic variations appropriate the original image, portray it in a different light, and ultimately respond in some fashion to the resonance in the original photograph. The response pictures arising from Alan’s death have been dismissed as “jejeune” (Durham, 2018:11–12), examples of a “playful aesthetic”, despised to such an extent that researchers often do not bother identifying the image-makers (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1173; Mortensen, 2017:1149), problems that can mar otherwise penetrating analyses. To the art historian, this attitude should be familiar. It was not so long ago that manuscript illustrations and woodcuts were similarly disregarded. Critical figures such as Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, and Ernst Gombrich came to use similarly despised examples of “low” art to shed light on the processes at play in “high” art. The border between the two registers has always been permeable. And in any event, the migration of images into different circumstances and contexts, for example from a viral photograph to an illustration, is a fundamentally iconographic process: when a photograph goes viral, like that of Alan dead on the beach, we witness the iconographic process coming into being under contemporary circumstances. We see iconographic resonance being used as a way to make sense of a senseless event.

Edgar Wind (1930:24) asserted that “every act of seeing is conditioned by our circumstances”. It is argued here that those circumstances include the repeated images that surround us, and which have had myriad influences upon the making of images. Extending outwards in a vast web, each instantiation of an image connects to the next in an intricate network. One of the iconographer’s tasks is to document this network and to demonstrate how the meanings of similar images shift in these different instantiations.

1.6. Setting the scene: who was Alan Kurdi, and what happened?

Alan Shenu—widely identified as “Aylan Kurdi” when he was thrust into prominence, and who will be referred to as “Alan Kurdi” in this research project¹⁹—was a three-year-old Kurdish Syrian

¹⁹ “Alan Shenu” appears to be the name by which the child would be known amongst his family. “Aylan” is a Turkish variant of “Alan”; “Kurdi” is the surname Turkish authorities gave the family to indicate their ethnicity, and Alan’s aunt Tima uses the surname in her adopted home of Canada (Khoury, 2015; Elgot, 2015). However, Alan has become known so widely under the surname “Kurdi” that he will likely remain improperly identified, and whilst it is important to

refugee found drowned on the beach of Bodrum, Turkey, on the morning of 2 September 2015. After fleeing a Turkish refugee camp, Alan's family had decided to escape to the Greek island of Kos—and thus to the European Union—on the evening of 1 September, having purchased illicit transport on a dinghy (Anter et al., 2015). The dinghy was overcrowded and unreliable, and they were equipped with inadequate safety equipment: such conditions are common in the illicit transport of refugees and have led to the deaths of many (Barnard and Shoumali, 2015). Soon after launching, the boat capsized, drowning the majority of the passengers. Of the family, only Alan's father Abdullah survived: Alan's older brother Ghalib and their mother Rehana also perished. Alan, Ghalib, and Rehana were buried in their hometown of Kobane, Syria, on 4 September.

Alan was photographed on Bodrum beach by Nilüfer Demir of DHA, who had intended to document a group of Pakistani refugees (Küpeli, 2015). Demir's photographs were published on the DHA's website and travelled to Twitter very quickly, where they were shared in a rapid and ever-widening radius from Turkey, wider throughout the Middle East and then broad international virality within a matter of hours as the *Washington Post* Middle East correspondent Liz Sly shared one of the photographs (D'Orazio, 2015). In the ensuing outcry—over Alan's death, the ethics of sharing the photograph of a corpse, and the plight of refugees more generally—Twitter users also shared family snapshots of the child, as well as artistic renditions of Demir's photographs, which were favoured in successive waves (Mackey, 2015; Sly, 2015; Bouckaert, 2015).

The image of Alan, in particular Demir's photographs of him, contributed to the pre-existing ecology of pictures and texts relating to the broader refugee crisis and inflected the discussion with a new urgency and emotive power. Based upon a term search, D'Orazio (2015) was able to demonstrate that the visibility of Alan Kurdi on Twitter changed the literal terms of the debate about the status of refugees: previously, they had been referred to as "migrants", whilst after Alan appeared, the term "refugees" was used instead.²⁰ The international outrage sparked a

acknowledge the child's actual name, it is also important to use names with which the world has become familiar.

²⁰ Chouliaraki and Zabkowski (2017:620) analyse the changing coverage of the refugee crisis in European newspapers in three distinct period of 2015, and they confirm a parallel positive turn in reportage on refugees after the death of Alan. However, because their period of analysis extends beyond D'Orazio's, they note that this humanitarian phase did not extend to the end of the year. However, Twitter research conducted by the Visual Social Media Lab on behalf of Oxfam demonstrated that the term "refugees" has still supplanted "migrants" as the main term, suggesting that there is still a broad sympathetic response (D'Orazio, 2016; Kulcsar, 2016). However, the research was based upon a simple measurement between usage of the terms "refugee" and "migrant", and not upon how the terms were *employed*. For example, D'Orazio (2016) shows a graph demonstrating that the term "refugee" spiked in usage—in fact, more than it did upon Alan's death—at the time of the 14 November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. During this point, the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls claimed that the terrorists "slipped in" amongst the refugees (Henley et al., 2015). Given that a chief French governmental official

turning point in political spheres as well, influencing the outcome of the Canadian election and relaxing restrictions for the influx of refugees in a number of European states, with other countries (such as the UK) promising to do more to assist refugees (Austen, 2015; Smith and Tran, 2015; Wintour, 2015).

1.6.1. Understanding the broader context: Why was Alan’s family fleeing Syria?

It is worth reminding the reader why there is a Syrian refugee crisis in the first place. A full analysis is well beyond the scope of this project. Suffice to say that it is perhaps the most acute of several refugee exoduses throughout the world, from Nigeria to Yemen, Myanmar, and well beyond. Stated briefly: Alan and his family were fleeing the danger and devastation that had been convulsing Syria for a number of years. Syria has been engulfed in a civil war that fell upon the heels of neoliberal market reforms initiated by President Bashar al Assad and the Baath Party. These reforms adversely effected agricultural production and depressed employment to the point that by 2011, fully 20% of the population had emigrated to shanty towns surrounding urban centres (Seifan, 2010:95; Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami, 2016). The impoverishment and discontent of the Syrian population under an authoritarian regime mirrored broader regional patterns in the Middle East which had led to the “Arab Spring”. During the early part of this movement, many leaders were toppled from power, from Tunisia to Yemen (Achcar, 2013; Abboud, 2016:32–37). Neither Assad nor the ruling Baath party were among them: their ferocious response to opposition from the Free Syrian Army and Kurds splintered the state and exploited religious and ethnic divisions. Despite these efforts to divide and conquer, the state effectively shattered. Besides Assad and rebel-controlled areas of the country, the *al-Qaeda* influenced *al Nusra* Front and the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (referred to as “*Dāesh*”)²¹ filled the power vacuum and unleashed a kaleidoscope of violence upon the population as each group attempted to consolidate their positions (Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami, 2016:106–110). The violence has led to the worst refugee crisis since the ending of the Second World War: “the staggering number of Syrians who have died, been maimed or disfigured, or been forced to leave their homes, a figure which in 2015 represented at least half of all Syrians”, or approximately 10,000,000 people (Abboud, 2016:191). The humanitarian response has been concentrated in the Middle East—particularly in Turkey, where Alan’s family had sheltered in a refugee camp—but financial and moral support for refugees from the West has been tepid, and

himself elided terrorists with refugees, it is unlikely that all usages of the term portrayed refugees in a sympathetic light.

²¹ The “Islamic State” is alternately referred to as ISIS (“Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”), ISIL (“Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant”), or *Dāesh*. *Dāesh* is a transliteration of the Arabic acronym for ISIL (داعش), or *الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام* (“*al-dawlat al-islamiyya fi al-iraaq wa al-sham*”).

the United Nations' efforts to address the crisis have been overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the humanitarian disaster (Abboud, 2016:204ff).

Over a short period of time, Alan's family had left their home in the Kurdish-dominated town of Kobane, emigrated to Damascus, and thence to Aleppo, and finally to a Turkish refugee camp to escape the violence. The family returned briefly to Kobane after the city's liberation from *Dāesh* (Rayner and Squires, 2015). They left soon thereafter, as Kobane had been half-destroyed in the process of liberation (Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami, 2016:142). The family thus re-entered a refugee camp in Turkey. This pattern of shifting between differing locations within and without the country is a common occurrence for refugees fleeing profound instability and violence (Fisher, 2014). In a bid to escape the cycle, the family had applied to join Alan's aunt Tima for asylum in Canada, but had been denied it under Stephen Harper's Conservative government (Off and Douglas, 2015; Austen, 2015). This option cut off for them, they embarked upon their fateful voyage to Kos.

1.7. Organisation of the research project

Chapter 1 introduces iconography to the reader. It begins by contextualising iconography against what may be termed "sister" visual methods of semiotics, discourse analysis, content analysis, and cultural analytics. However much they differ from one another, they share overlapping concerns with iconography in their various efforts to describe, categorise, and/or interpret pictures. I distinguish iconography from them, but also adapt iconography in the face of important lessons learned from each. I then go on to explore iconography based upon Panofsky's well-known rendition of the methodology but inflect it heavily with the work and approach of Panofsky's predecessor, Warburg. I argue that concentrating upon themes rather than exact antecedents helps uncover a wider lattice of relevant antecedent imagery. I argue that it is necessary to focus also upon the multiple ways that imagery is interpreted. Whilst this is often difficult in the history of art because the surviving record is patchy, evidence collected by social media platforms can provide us with rich data by which to analyse polysemous patterns of reception. I argue for the existence of a "visual *habitus*", a mixture of practical experience and exposure to imagery, both of which, when repeated, shape the viewer's understanding of symbolic imagery.

Chapter 2 examines approaches similar to iconography in the visual analysis of imagery shared on the Internet. They are examined in the light of a common iconographic concern called the "migration of images" which includes the propagation of imagery, their categorisation, and how one may go about this task practically. Researchers have pursued multiple models that contain elements similar to iconography, from extended meditations on iconic photographs and the imagery they have engendered in response, to examinations of the complicated intertextual webs created by images, and finally to big data tracking of pictures and pictorial components. I argue that despite the intensive manual work required by iconography, it fills gaps left by these

other approaches. It thus strikes a balance between what Alise Tifentale (2015:6) has described as “how to reconcile the ‘big data approach’ with a close study of an object and how to balance aesthetic inquiry with sociological analysis”.

Chapter 3 concentrates upon this “intensive manual work required by iconography” by demonstrating how one takes structured data and can turn it into something iconographers can use, which requires expanding well beyond what is provided by Twitter. The chapter aims at being a practical guide for others conducting similar research. Such research is less straightforward than one might think, and acquiring even the baseline material required manoeuvring around significant challenges arising from Twitter’s API and Pulsar’s social media analytics software, challenges met in part through partnership with other members of the Visual Social Media Lab.

The chapter focuses upon the collection and parsing of data arising from the death of Alan Kurdi as discussed on Twitter. To remind the reader, the dataset provided to me by the VSML was the full historical record of specific terms used on Twitter related to Alan and the refugee crisis from 2–14 September 2015. Out of a total of 1,236,247 tweets which shared pictures. I examine the 1,139 most retweeted posts, which contained 1,223 pictures. These 1,139 tweets formed the majority of the sharing volume over the period in question. I argue that the datapoints offered by Twitter’s structured data are insufficient to analyse patterns in the pictures and texts that people share. I started work with 7,273 computationally-derived datapoints for the 1,139 most shared tweets and identified over 22,000 more; this chapter explains the process of identification for these extra datapoints. This extra data is rich and analysable in multiple ways: I argue that the organisation of these data should be open-ended, because this allows for the emergence of unexpected patterns. I furthermore argue that we should also take care to examine the texts users write alongside the pictures they share. Even within the confines of 140 characters, these data are rich and provide valuable insights into interpretative patterns. To my knowledge, no other method advocates examining textual and visual materials so closely together on Twitter. To honour the desire to explore data in multiple ways and to respect the multiple viewpoints offered by the users who shared the pictures in the first place, I developed a digital tool based upon content analysis that allows researchers to filter through the data to investigate multiple lines of enquiry. These enquiries can be further enhanced through the use of data analysis software (in this case, Tableau), and I demonstrate the utility of doing so throughout the thesis.²² As the information presented in the tool forms the evidential and conceptual backbone of the

²² Tableau’s website: <https://www.tableau.com> [Accessed 25 September 2017].

project, the reader is actively encouraged to download it and follow along by employing the “filter recipes” supplied throughout the thesis.²³

Chapter 4 examines the image of Alan Kurdi on Twitter. It analyses the photographs taken by Nilüfer Demir, the pictures made in response to them, and the patterns of text accompanying them both. It demonstrates that different pictures were shared by organisations and individuals, and that different pictures were shared at specific chronological points relating to contemporary events. I focus upon three important visual and textual themes that emerge from the data: the equation of death with sleep, the portrayal of Alan as an angel, and the larger-than-life depiction, in particular the memorial. I argue that these themes have a long history, and that both pictures and texts provide clues for these interpretations. The users themselves, then, provide evidence for longstanding themes in imagery: this evidence is often oblique, but at other points it is very clear.

Chapter 5 continues with a further exploration of the data by examining pictures of refugees as well as responses to the refugee crisis that occurred alongside the distribution of Alan’s image. I focus upon the ways refugees, particularly children, are visualised and argue that the image of Alan violates this standard iconography as practiced by photojournalism and non-governmental agencies (NGOs). More broadly, however, I argue that standard ways to portray refugees—the journeys they make, and the vicissitudes they meet on the way—have a long history, some of it reaching back over 2,500 years. The format of individual and mass responses to the refugee crisis also have their individual histories: I argue that their antecedents inform their presentation as well.

Chapter 6 covers some prominent pictures arising in the aftermath of Alan’s death. The collected data only cover a brief two-week period in September 2015. Pictures that go viral almost invariably have a longer afterlife, and they usually reappear after their viral peak. Immediately after the initial display of Alan’s image in the media, there was a backlash against showing his corpse, and he only appears in a few notable examples by political cartoonists and fine artists. I argue that the gap caused by effectively (and understandably) censoring the continued publication of Demir’s photographs in the media reopened a space for imagery hostile to refugees, and that such imagery had significant impact across Europe, for example in the “Leave” campaign for Brexit. I demonstrate that virtually all the themes visualised by fine artists, political cartoonists, and the Brexit campaign already existed in the dataset. Overly optimistic assessments that the iconic image of Alan on the beach “changed the world” (Kingsley and Timur, 2015) were subsequently met with equally overly pessimistic assessments. I argue that by

²³ Again, this may be downloaded from the following link: <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>. Note that the tool’s content is redacted to protect Twitter users’ privacy (see section 1.1.3 for more).

drawing out affective responses, an iconic photograph can act as a powerful catalyst for social change, but that sustained change requires more.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the research project's findings, reflects upon the value of the method, and proposes ways in which the method could be expanded in future.

Chapter 1: Iconography: sister theories, definition, implications, and practice

1.1. Introduction

Some images appear so striking to us that they can stick in our minds and stay with us, perhaps for a lifetime. It is worth asking *why* some works of art, photojournalism—and, I would argue, pictures shared over social media on the Internet—resonate with us so powerfully. How can we describe the mechanism by which the image communicates and conveys this power?

There are multiple frameworks one may use to ask such questions. Researchers studying imagery shared on the Internet have used visually-oriented versions of semiotics to understand the complex interactions of materials within an artefact (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015; Durham, 2018; Impara, 2018); or discourse analysis to investigate the ways realities have been constructed through a bank of imagery (Burns, 2015a; Zappavigna, 2016; Duerringer, 2016). They have used content analysis to describe *corpora* of artefacts (Seo and Ebrahim, 2016; Ask and Abidin, 2018), or cultural analytics to sift through massive swathes of pictures against which content analysis might struggle (Tifentale, 2015; Manovich, 2017; Pearce et al., 2018). These are the “go to” methods for researchers from the social sciences. There is, however, comparatively little engagement with the discipline of art history, which has a long history of looking at, organising, and interpreting visual artefacts. The multiple methods emanating from art history, iconography perhaps foremost among them, provoke deep engagements with the long history of image-making.

This project uses iconography, a method which explores the identification, categorisation, and interpretation of content in imagery, to examine visual artefacts shared on the Internet, specifically Twitter.²⁴ What, compared to these other approaches, might iconography open to a researcher when confronted with a corpus of data? How does it overlap with these other methods, and how does it differ? In this chapter, I will contextualise it alongside semiotics, discourse analysis, content analysis, and cultural analytics before delving deeply into iconography.

By setting them up alongside one another, I show the ways in which iconography is a “sister method” to each, and thus how they overlap, but with specific foci. I thus present the ways in which iconographers approaches their subjects of study in related, but different ways. In short, iconography is similar to semiotics in that both pay attention to the play of elements, or signs, in

²⁴ This “classical” or “traditional” version of iconography, with its tripartite division of identification, categorisation, and interpretation, is based upon the model presented by Erwin Panofsky (1955). The justification for claiming this as the “classical” model—there are others, as will be discussed below—is that Panofsky’s approach has been very influential, and is the version presented in introductory surveys such as those by Rose (2001), Hatt and Klonk (2006), and Howells and Negreiros (2012), *inter alia*.

a visual artefact, and the ways in which they construct meaning internal to the artefact. Iconography is similar to discourse analysis in that both delve into the structural implications arising from the use of text or imagery for a given subject, and iconological interpretation attempts to show how these artefacts construct a broader understanding of illustrated subjects as they alter over time and space. Iconography is similar to content analysis—or, at any rate, it can be—because before performing any higher-order analysis, it is beneficial to have a solid understanding of the contents of one’s archive and sort through it systematically. Finally, I present cultural analytics, a much newer methodology which attempts to automate some of the basic identification akin to the work performed by iconographers. But whilst iconography shares some similarities with each of these frameworks, it also differs. It is a method that works on imagery at different levels, from micro to macro, classifying them as required. More importantly however, it can connect imagery to the broader history of image-making in different registers, from the “high”—the world of the gallery and museum—to the “low”—the imagery used in illustrations, advertisements, and other forms of everyday imagery.

It is safe to say that no one who has encountered the above frameworks remains untouched by them.²⁵ I highlight lessons learned from each which contribute to a mixed-method form of iconography—to reinvigorate associations between “high” and “low” art, incorporate polysemy and the internalising effects of regimes of truth, systematise the assessment of a corpus, and provide visualisations to help manage a fairly large bank of data. My aim is to demonstrate that iconography—reconfigured as a mixed method and resituated within concerns presented by practitioners such as Aby Warburg—is applicable to the study of contemporary imagery shared on the Internet.

1.2. Semiotics: Investigating the visual via signs and sign relationships

At its most fundamental level, semiotics is the analysis of the relationship between the signs posted in language, and the relation between the words used and their conceptual referents. Semiotics has occupied a central place in both structuralist and poststructuralist thought: as a programme under which the “rules” of signification have been described, it can be seen within the structuralist camp, but because it has also been used to query the very assumptions that formulated its existence, it also falls in the poststructuralist camp. Two figures are most

²⁵ It is important to state that these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Semiotics has inflected discourse analysis, most obviously in the coining of the term “floating signifier” (Laclau, 2005); Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) is inspired from Saussure’s rendition of language as comprising finite rules combined into infinite performances; discourse analysis has inflected social semiotics through its adoption of socially-constructed forms of knowledge to convey meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2005); Philip Bell (2004) conducted a content analysis of magazine covers, using social semiotics as the basis for coding; Alise Tifentale (2015) has contextualised the results of cultural analytics with content analysis, and she has even referred to iconography as seen in pictures sorted through cultural analytics (2014). A revived iconography can, and should, learn from all of these other methods as they have learned from one another.

prominently associated with the development of modern semiotics: the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, although other theorists such as Umberto Eco, Michael Halliday, Gunther Kress, and Theo Van Leeuwen are also influential.²⁶ Both Saussure's and Peirce's theories of semiotics have been influential in the study of the arts and visual artefacts on social media: some examples of which will be presented below. There are parallels between aspects of Peirce's typology of signs and the reconfiguration of iconography presented in this project, but what generally differs semiotics from iconography is that iconographers are interested in the relation of an artefact to the longer history of imagery.

1.2.1. Defining semiotics: Saussure and Peirce

Whilst Peirce's theory was developed first (1867), the influence of Saussure's theory seems to have been greater, and so I will present Saussure first. Saussure (Saussure, 1916) distinguished between two objects:

- The **signifier**: The word, utterance, or picture that refers to the concept.
- The **signified**: The mental concept referred to by the signifier.

Together, these form the **sign** (Saussure, 1916:67). Saussure asserted that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, but that it is fixed by conventional agreement. On the face of it, this point is so obvious as to be trivial—the words *Katze*, *felis*, القطّة, and 猫 are signifiers that all refer to the same signified concept as the English word “cat”.²⁷ All these signifiers clearly differ from one another, but speakers of these different languages understand that the words refer to the concept of cat. However, the significance of Saussure's assertion is far greater, because the signifier-signified relationship exists between any word and its concept

²⁶ Umberto Eco (1976) introduced “type/token” relationships. The type is akin to a concept, and the token to an instance of the type: for example, multiple printed instances of the same word are replicated tokens of a type. Tokens might also have specific characteristics, for example the distinctive way an individual pronounces a word. Finally, types and tokens may be identical, as in the case of a unique work of art. “Social semiotics” will be discussed below (see section 1.2.3).

²⁷ That the assertion seems obvious is modern, although the arbitrary relation between names and their referents is referenced Plato's *Cratylus* and elsewhere. However, in several pre-modern societies, the association between signified and signifier was not held to be arbitrary, but significant and meaningful. The assertion is far deeper and longer-lived than in philosophical thought. Zainab Bahrani (2003) expounds upon the cross-linguistic associations held between Sumerian and Assyrian in Mesopotamian written culture, where the arbitrary usage of the same cuneiform ideogram in multiple languages was thought to reveal a fundamental, magical relationship between the expressed concepts. There are many similar parallels that have been noted in cultures around the world: see Frazer (1922) *in passim*. The typologies of Medieval Christian exegesis were thought to note meaningful relations via the perceived similarities of specific words, events, and concepts between the Old and New Testaments. Many of these are illustrated in editions of the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, both of which are familiar to iconographic studies.

within a language, not just *across* languages. The relationship between signified and signifier thus encodes a basic unit of meaning; but because in a given utterance, signs refer to one another, the relationship between signs is particularly important: “everything depends on relations” (Saussure, 1916:121).

Peirce’s rendition of semiotics differs from Saussure’s. Its scope was meant from the start to be more broadly applicable, and in his account, Peirce explicitly drew out the implications of semiotics for one’s relationship to the world. Peirce saw a tripartite division for “semiosis”:

- The **sign** (also known as the **representamen**, **representation**, or **ground**): A perceptible object. For example, a foot impression in the snow is the sign that someone has passed by. The sign is similar to Saussure’s signifier.
- The **object** (also known the **referent**): The thing that causally determines the parameters of the sign. To continue the example, the foot making the impression in the example above is the object: it is the thing that calls the sign into being. There is no Saussurean parallel.
- The **interpretant**: the mental image, or understanding one reaches, of the sign (occupying a mental position similar to the way the term “image” is used in this project). To finalise the example, the features of the sign—a foot-like shape and the fact that the shape is pressed into the snow—leads the observer to understand the foot as the object that has left the impression, or sign, in the snow. It is similar to Saussure’s signified, although Peirce considered it to also be a sign.

Peirce posited a triadic typology of signs:

- The **icon** (or “likeness”): The items share a likeness of some sort. Peirce offered the example of the likeness between a portrait and its sitter.
- The **index** (or “correspondence in fact”): The two objects have a causal connection. Peirce offered the example of the connection between a murderer and his victim, but perhaps a better example would be footprints in the snow indicating that a person has been walking in the snow.
- The **symbol** (or a “relation of imputed character”): The two objects have a conventional association, such as that between the words *homme* and “man”. Through sheer convention, the two words have a *symbolic relationship* to the concept of “male human” (Peirce, 1984).²⁸

1.2.2. Multiple possible relations

The extended example of the imprint in the snow above points to a single object: a foot that made the impression. The relationship between the sign and object can be far more complex and diffuse, however:

²⁸ See Atkin (2013) for a concise explanation of Peirce’s thought and its development over time. In the final development of his theory, Peirce developed a typology of 66 sign classes, greatly adding to its complexity. See Liszka (1996) for more on this later version.

When one sees a painting, say a still-life of a fruit bowl, the image is, among other things, a sign or representamen of something else. The viewer shapes in her or his mind an image of that something with which she or he associates this image. That mental image, emphatically not the person shaping it, is the interpretant. This interpretant points to an object. The object is different for each viewer: it can be real fruit for one, other still-life paintings for another, a huge amount of money for a third, 'seventeenth-century Dutch' for a fourth, and so on. The object for which the painting stands is therefore fundamentally subjective and reception-determined (Bal and Bryson, 1991:188).

Peirce's theory thus explicitly allows a complication: the possibility of pointing not to one object, but to multiple, varying amongst individuals. In contrast, Saussure theorised the relationship between signified and signifier as stable. However, they have no absolute values but depend upon their relations with other signs.²⁹ By prioritising the *relations between* signs over the *relations between* the signified and signifier—which again, are arbitrary—the chain of signifier/signified relationships may be seen as potentially unstable, or multi-valued, as they are for Peirce's theory, since the chains of referents can drift into various values. Thus, any "text"—be it linguistic or a visual representation—may not only fall into perpetually-deferred meaning; the progressively unsteady chain of referents can in theory go on forever, sometimes called "infinite semiosis", or an "infinite procession of signs". The concern with infinite semiosis seems not to have been a major preoccupation for structuralist thinkers. It is, however, a feature of poststructuralist thought (Derrida, 1972).³⁰

These concerns hold strong implications for the polysemic interpretation of visual materials: when looking at a picture, individuals may associate radically different things from one another. And the relationship between the chains of signs, from picture to picture, may be quite unstable, such that one cannot assume the same meaning (or, more accurately, value) across the pictures.

²⁹ Saussure's differentiation between "meaning" and "value" is worth providing here. "The French word *mouton* may have the same meaning as the English word *sheep*; but it does not have the same value... the English word for the meat of this animal, as prepared and served for a meal, is not *sheep*, but *mutton*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* hinges on the fact that in English there is also another word *mutton* for the meat, whereas *mouton* in French covers both" (Saussure, 1916:114). The domain of associations, then, changes between *mouton* (used for both a type of animal and a meat) and *mutton* (used exclusively for meat).

³⁰ There may be practical limits to infinite semiosis. Peirce (1984) appealed to intuition, which he defined as "a cognition *not* determined by a previous cognition of the same object" (my emphasis). This definition may not make sense baldly stated—if our thoughts are not determined by previous thoughts on the same subject, then how can we think about *anything*, let alone refer to something? However, it seems to make more sense within the context of limiting infinite sign procession, since the intuiting individual cannot be assumed to have access to *all* "previous cognition of the same object". Nevertheless, some pragmatist thinkers believe that Peirce's schema also threatens infinite semiosis; see Liszka (1996) for more. Stuart Hall (1980) noted that the "dominant cultural order" in societies effectively place "preferred meanings" onto signs, which can restrict semiosis.

1.2.3. Social semiotics

“Social semiotics” is a term coined by Michael Halliday (1978), who departed from the standard semiotic view of grammar as a code, inflecting it by considering it a toolbox for producing meaning. It was introduced as an approach by Gunther Kress, Regina Leite-García, and Theo Van Leeuwen explicitly within the context of examining imagery (Kress et al., 1997), and has been subsequently elaborated and advocated by Theo Van Leeuwen (2005). It is “social” in that it interfaces with social uses and fields of study (e.g., office design, conversational styles, or advertising), and thus borrows from discourse analysis (see section 1.3 below). Social semiotic studies of visual design frequently address multiple **modalities**—text, picture, audio, and more—which together produce meanings. These meanings are expressed through a neo-structuralist “grammar” of visual design comprising implied communicative relations via compositional aspects such as the viewer’s perceived position and inter-relations between left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margin (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress et al., 1997; Kress, 2010). It is grounded by examples describing the complex process by which communication takes place via artefacts. This approach has been influential in the study of Internet memes, which often mix text with pictures: see section 2.3.2 below.

1.2.4. Writing on visual artefacts

Semiotic theorists have developed a large technical vocabulary for working out the interaction of signs in a given “text”, be they lexical or visual. This vocabulary, however, seems most highly developed for queries internal to the text at hand, rather than the text’s relationships to preceding texts.³¹ This may reflect Saussure’s distinction between *synchronic* (i.e., the use of signs at the time of the text) and *diachronic* considerations (i.e., the development of the signs over time) and his apparent preference for the former over the latter. His example of an observed chess game is thus apt: one need only know the rules of chess to follow a match.³² As drawn, this distinction seems to have had a profound influence upon the subjects analysed with semiotic interpretation, particularly via Roland Barthes’ influential work on advertisements (Barthes, 1977b) and photography (Barthes, 1977a). The concentration on everyday or “low” art has been subsequently reinforced and enriched in social semiotic considerations of visual design (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), although Van Leeuwen (2005) also considers examples of the “fine” arts.

³¹ Indeed, Gillian Rose (2001:126–27) notes that whilst understanding visual artefacts in relation to one another is a likely vector of additional signification—one picture may be constructed for example as a reaction to, or quoting, another picture—in semiotic theory, it is not clear how to outline those inter-pictorial relations other than under via comparison and difference.

³² For the observer, there is no need to know how the rules came to evolve or how the board’s layout came to be, and no evident value in learning: it only matters how the rules are used at the time of play.

Barthes distinguished between *denotative* and *connotative* aspects of visual artefacts. The denotative aspect is a recognition of the contents of a picture (e.g., window, vase, photo album); the connotative aspects are culturally-encoded associations of these contents. These were expressed through *photogenia*, or the composition of the visual artefact (Barthes, 1977a). Barthes described the chain of connotations as a *syntax*, where the “the signifier of connotation is no longer to be found at the level of any one of the fragments... but at that... of the concatenation” (Barthes, 1977a:24).³³ The syntax constructs widely-known *myths* with which presumably people in a culture are sufficiently familiar (Barthes, 1957).³⁴ Again, as someone conducting a study of everyday art, Barthes had to assume cultural knowledge to “decode” the imagery present in, e.g., advertisements (Van Leeuwen, 2002). And again, since Barthes concentrated upon shared cultural knowledge, he was interested in the synchronic operation of signs, not their origins or evolutions.

Whilst semiotic theory has been used to query “everyday” imagery, it has been employed by art historians as well. Meyer Schapiro, for example, was an early proponent of its use to the study of the “fine arts”. Schapiro (1969) has examined textual illustrations from Classical Antiquity to the 18th century and noted that the relationship between the signifier and the signified in such illustrations was frequently uncoupled as image-makers went beyond the strict confines of textual sources, and added details not present in the source—a process similarly noted by Aby Warburg (1893) 70 years earlier in his work on Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and Peter Mason (2001) in his work on early European imagery depicting indigenous Americans. Warburg noted the *Birth of Venus*’s debt to the poet Angelo Poliziano’s work, but that Botticelli was inspired by the poet’s emphasis on movement, and not specific imagery relating movement. Mason examined the re-use of imagery depicting Native Americans to recreate the face of a giant Englishman whose bones had been uncovered: Mason argues the re-use of the imagery marks both subjects as *renditions of the exotic* (these examples are dealt with at length in sections 1.7.3.1 and 1.7.4.2.3). The re-use or re-situation of visual materials is also a crucial quality of contemporary memes, which will be discussed at length in section 2.3.2. In all these instances, there are certainly complex indexical and signifying relationships between source and subsequent works, although

³³ Barthes’ syntax is strongly related to concepts which have come to be known as *syntagms* and *paradigms*. According to Saussure, meanings arise from the difference between signifiers and their places in longer sign chains. There are two different types of chain relationships. *Syntagmatic relationships* connect chains of signs present in an utterance or visual artefact to a form a coherent whole (e.g., “the cat is sitting on the mat”). *Paradigmatic relationships* differentiate between different possible signs (e.g., “the cat is sitting on the lap”, “the dog is sitting on the mat”). Syntagmatic relationships are particularly relevant to the semiotic readings of visual artefacts, because the combination of signs often contributes to both the artefact’s intent (in terms of what terms are present in the “text”) and reception (in terms of how the represented concepts are “read”).

³⁴ Others have posited constructs similar to Barthes’ mythologies; see Judith Williamson (1978), who refers to “referent systems”, and Stuart Hall (1980), who refers to “codes”.

“influence” is a rather tenuous form of indexical relationship, and the precise signifying relationship between a meme’s source and subsequent works is often unclear.

Elsewhere, Schapiro noted the different signification of Moses in Mediaeval manuscripts, basing his analysis upon compositional cues. When portrayed frontally with outstretched arms, Moses is indicated as a typological prefiguration of the crucified Jesus, whilst later he is portrayed in profile to emphasise narrative over typology: “the reference to the cross is thereby blocked or weakened” and thus “lost much of its force as a Christian typological symbol” (Schapiro, 1996:40, 49). His observation and use of composition in this way is related to iconographical concerns of symbolic interpretation but is informed by semiotics.

Despite Schapiro’s usage, semiotics does not appear to have been favoured as a way to analyse “high” art—that is, highly-valued art produced for the palace, church, or gallery. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (1991) re-introduced semiotics to art historians, exploring it through poststructuralist problematisations of “context”, “author”, and “audience”—in effect by concentrating upon the contested and “potentially infinite regression and expansion” of signs for these terms, exposing their ideological blind-spots along the way. As a consequence of the still-life painting example referenced above, the authors also note that in terms of reception, semiotics incorporates polysemy. Even here, it does not privilege one interpretation over another, but “rather how works of art are intelligible to those who view them, the processes by which viewers make sense of what they see” (Bal and Bryson, 1991:184).

More germane to the subject of this project, however, semiotics has been used as the theoretical underpinning for the study of imagery shared on social media. It has already been noted that Ryan Milner uses a cross of discourse analysis with social semiotics to study memes (his work is discussed at length below: again, see section 2.3.2). Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa have investigated the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement on Twitter. They noted the “sign value” of Trayvon Martin’s hoodie—a garment associated with criminality on both sides of the Atlantic, but which is particularly racialised in the American context—and items such as bags of candy which in police accounts and media reports have shifted to become “drug paraphernalia... reflecting the semiotic power of race and racialisation” (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015:14). The authors also referred to posts by African-American account-holders containing the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown; these posts highlighted the choice of portrait used by media organisations used when identifying racialised victims of police violence. Twitter account-holders posted contrasting self-portraits which, if used by the media after a hypothetical death by police, could portray them looking “respectable and innocent”—i.e., dressed conservatively—or “violent and criminal”—i.e., dressed casually in street fashions, making peace hand gestures. The authors note that this contrast “speaks to an acute awareness among young African Americans of how black bodies are particularly vulnerable to misrepresentation by mainstream media” (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015:8, 9).

Meenakshi Durham (2018) has explored changing significations of Alan Kurdi, arguing that the connotations of ethics and care she identifies in Nilüfer Demir's photographs of the dead child (e.g., Figure 28) are radically undermined in the image's rapid evolution into meme-like response images. Due to the usage of cartoon conventions in an example of the latter (Figure 86, by Yasser



Ahmad), and the connotations associated with the cartoon format, Durham argues that memetic imagery trivialises the ethical considerations in Demir's original photographs.

Elisa Impara (2018) has examined the spread of beheading videos and photographs by members of *Dāesh*.³⁵ She notes that the spectacle of violence they provide the viewer is worked largely through signs. She points out three signs from the series of photographs, which are also used in "response" imagery arising from the photographs: that of threatening the victim with a knife, which reminds the viewer of ancient forms of punishment by execution; of pointing towards the viewer in a confrontational manner reminiscent of Uncle Sam in James Flagg's recruitment poster for the Great War, *inter alia*; and even the orange jumpsuit worn by the victim, which is the "essence of a prisoner" as seen in photographs from Guantanamo Bay and the Netflix programme *Orange is the New Black* (Impara, 2018:34).

It is to be noted in these examples cited above, only Bonilla and Rosa take into account the platform upon which the imagery was shared. Arguably, many different platforms can be viewed as having developed their own forms of syntax and *photogenia*, that is, of creating identifiable forms of signification beyond social semiotics which would be worth exploring (see section 2.4.1 below for considerations of this in terms of stylistic concerns). It is notable that many of the connotative associations Durham and Impara raise—e.g., the cartoon format, pointing at the viewer—are mostly associations for the *author*, with few queries of other viewers' associations. It must be stressed that the authors are correct that the associations they raise likely exist for a number of viewers; however, these are merely a handful of possible relevant connotations for the objects of their study. Each thus places herself as the arbiter of the cultural moment by

³⁵ Whilst Impara gathered her pictures from newspapers, she explicitly notes that they were widely available on social media and that their spreadability on social media platforms makes them particularly potent. These pictures provide the viewer with a spectacle of violence which is "the main ammunition used in this pseudo warfare" (Impara, 2018:36).

offering definite associations, an accusation which has been levelled at some iconographers (see section 1.7.5.2)(Rose, 2001:143; Moxey, 1986–69). Due to the fact that much of their analysis is based upon Twitter users’ posts, Bonilla and Rosa largely escape this observation. But the decision of the other authors to focus upon their own associations seems to undermine the semiotic interest in polysemy, and an explicit polling of others’ associations would be welcome.

1.2.5. Relation to iconography and lessons to be learned

Other authors have examined the relationship between iconography and semiotics, and I will put their observations of iconography in semiotic terms. Christine Hasenmueller (1978) explored the apparent similarities between semiotics and Erwin Panofsky’s rendition of iconography. Whilst she observes that much of Panofsky’s identification of subject and symbols in a work agree with denotative and connotative elements of semiotic thought, there is a problem in iconography’s cross between identifying the sources for a visual artefact and their concatenated “meaning” in the artefact. She notes that

The ‘meaning’ and ‘referents’ of art are closely related, but not necessarily identical. If they are equated, as often happens in practice... then art becomes, willy-nilly, a fundamentally lexical phenomenon. Motifs and images might seem ‘sign-like’ in terms of their relationships to external units of meaning. But the ‘sign system’ thus defined is secondary and incomplete. It is a ‘lexicon’ without a ‘syntax’ (Hasenmueller, 1978:292).

In the above passage, I take Hasenmueller to claim that there has been a tendency among iconographers to identify a literary source for an element in a work and then simply apply the source to the picture, implying a sort of one-to-one association between the two: as she states, “Panofsky’s concepts *reduce* the meaning of art to the *metaphoric* (or *paradigmatic*) association between representation and the represented” (Hasenmueller, 1978:300). This is certainly something to be avoided, and one of the reasons why I will advocate a looser connection between source and meaning than the one supposedly advocated by Panofsky (for further discussion of this, see section 1.7.6.4). It is, however, a methodological issue that can impact *both* semiotic and iconographic interpretations. Judith Williamson claims to investigate the “real” meanings in the advertisements she examines; she then sets out to connect the “unreal” imagery in those adverts to their referents in the “real” world (Williamson, 1978:47). This type of decoded reading of visual artefacts—where the surface distracts from the difficult-to-extract deeper meaning—has strong parallels in iconography as traditionally practiced in art-historical studies. Somewhat obscure theological texts are connected to visual artefacts, despite the fact that—like advertisements—the need to “decode” complicated signs often does not seem warranted.³⁶

³⁶ See for example the debate between Barbara Land and Craig Harbison over the status of symbolically reading Northern Renaissance art (Lane, 1988; Lane, 1989; Harbison, 1989) . Harbison observed that iconographers frequently apply obscure texts, with little evident connection, to works of art: Lane was his example of such an iconographer. This was rather unfair to Lane, who sensitively connected altarpieces as works of art to their function as liturgical

In his comparison of Barthian semiotics to Panofsky's iconography, Theo Van Leeuwen (2002:29) noted that the two "investigate representational ('denotative') and symbolic ('connotative') meanings... included in different kinds of images" and that "both methods provide explicit arguments for determining whether represented elements... can be interpreted as symbolic". For Van Leeuwen, the differences between them lay primarily within the domain of their use: semiotics for contemporary, "everyday" imagery and iconography for "art works of the past". He acknowledged that iconography could be used equally for contemporary imagery, and to illustrate his point provides an example of an exhibition using iconographic techniques to analyse the perpetuation of racist stereotypes of the past century in contemporary European advertisements (Pieterse, 1995). However, Van Leeuwen does not articulate what iconography specifically brings to bear for the analysis of contemporary imagery.³⁷

To reiterate, semiotic readings tend to concentrate upon elements internal to a visual artefact, be those the connotations, *photogenia*, or myths arising from the use of specific signs held to be sufficiently open to all. Semioticians have developed a rich vocabulary for mapping the interaction of signs *within* a given visual artefact, in fact richer than anything iconography has to offer. It appears that to Van Leeuwen, iconography brings to bear associations that may be partly buried in half-forgotten imagery, but which are still echoed—that is, which still resonate—in contemporary imagery. As such, iconographers note connections amongst similar imagery created over time, and by doing so thus broaden the possible sphere of relevant connotations—and perhaps open up insights into multiple connotations. So, in Van Leeuwen's example, he seems to see evidence for half-buried signs. The next question is whether *all* everyday works abound in such signs. It is the position of this project that this is frequently the case, as I hope to demonstrate in following the work on Alan Kurdi.

Iconographers regularly analyse compositions containing symbols in a series of works, usually over a longer period of time. They do so not necessarily to indicate a *stasis* in their expressed values, but often to note their *fluctuations* over time, and studies which do so are therefore in agreement with Saussure's notion of the signified as culturally (and to some degree, individually) bound. Certainly, art historians such as Aby Warburg and Peter Mason have presented imagery where the intended purpose changed radically from its original intent, and this project follows in

objects; nevertheless, Harbison identified a real problem in iconography, which was the general disconnect between a visual work and the text that the researcher associates with it.

³⁷ Gunther Kress, Regina Leite-García, and Theo Van Leeuwen have acknowledged art historians and theorists—specifically, Rudolf Arnheim, Ernst Gombrich, and Panofsky—as influences. Besides noting the interest of these authors in psychology and perception, they also note their interest in embedding their theories into contemporary social concerns. They assert that "whereas in our scheme *communication* is in the foreground, *expression* may be said to be foregrounded in the former" (Kress et al., 1997 1997:266). They thus point to another difference between semiotic and art-historical explorations.

their footsteps. And contrary to Saussure's preferences, there may be benefits to diachronic analysis, because a knowledge of the development of signifying codes may provide insights not merely into the *presence* of those codes, but the *specific ways in which they have come to operate*.

In its attempt to recreate the desires of patrons who contracted works of art with specific purposes, traditional iconography seems to have placed a different emphasis upon reception from semiotics' polysemic reception. As usually presented in iconography, there is a priority on a single, specific interpretation. That said, different iconographers likely highlight different signifiers for the signs present in a given work of art, again e.g. in Botticelli's *Primavera*, primarily due to the different clusters of signs each takes to be the most important (see section 1.7.3.1). Nevertheless, views are often presented as if definitive, and not provisional, whether or not the authors meant to do so. A renovated iconography for social media can learn the value of polysemy as something built in from the start; it is a benefit provided by social media that users offer opinions on the pictures they share.

1.3. Discourse analysis: Surface forms and world-building

In contrast with semiotics, which focuses upon "underlying structures" in language, discourse analysis focuses more upon the "surface forms" of language use (Cook, 1992:71). Discourse analysis encompasses a wide variety of work and can be divided into two major variants. In its positivist incarnation, it is akin to a form of applied linguistics, and thus empirically analyses spoken and written practices—for example, the way people take turns in conversation, or grammatical variation (Sutherland, 2016). This form of discourse analysis will not be discussed below because this variation is not what most people think of when they refer to discourse analysis. However, it is somewhat analogous to traditional iconographic work in that both catalogue the components that build up to form a more complex whole of their respective subjects—although because of its constitutive nature, discourse analysis is more thoroughly descriptive.³⁸ In addition, some of the philosophical background referenced by this form of discourse analysis (specifically, the distinction between semantics and pragmatics) will have a significant influence in the practical work undertaken in this project to analyse the textual utterances people produce when they shared pictures of Alan Kurdi and other refugees on Twitter (see sections 3.3.2 and 3.7).

In addition to the above, the term "discourse analysis" can refer to a social theory that also evaluates utterances—usually written work—but without the same level of granularity as the

³⁸ Both the identification of an iconographic element, and "the appearance of an object for discourse" depend upon similar relational conditions, which Foucault (1969:49) recognised in the case of the discursive object as relations of "resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation". The methodological aim is much the same in iconographic analysis, where one marshals one's evidence in terms of similar conditions.

empirical work in the first version. This second version analyses the ways that cultures, societies, and institutions can be built up by, and in turn impact, the parameters of concepts in speech or writing. It thus turns the first notion of discourse analysis on its head to ask: what is the conceptual background needed in order for statements about a given subject (e.g., sexuality, discipline, madness) make sense?³⁹

The influence of discourse analysis (including writing on visual artefacts) lies in the latter conception, especially through the gravitational effect of Michel Foucault's work. Discourse analysis can thus describe the pervasiveness of how something is understood, to the point that word usage may control one's conception: it is often cited specifically within regimes of truth, or "how we know what we think we know" (Gravells, 2017:vii) about a given subject. The knowledge accumulated under these regimes is often allied with and supports power—which thus defines how one is assigned authority to speak, whose voices are assigned to the periphery or are silenced altogether, and ultimately how people are policed and disciplined when they violate the norms defined by that knowledge. Such discursive acts are not performed in isolation, but refer to one another, in a mutually-reinforcing intertextual web. That which seems part of the natural order is not in fact natural, but is historically contingent: nevertheless, the results of these discursive acts, enacted through power, can feel inevitable. So even though discourse analysis is an approach that supposedly works at the level of "surface forms", because these mutually reinforcing discourses have a profound impact on shaping one's conception of the world, its analysis can be rather penetrative.⁴⁰ They can operate below an individual's consciousness, and there are parallels to the iconological (i.e., interpretative) impact of viewing an artefact as conceived in this project as well, which will be outlined below in section 1.7.6.1.

1.3.1. Types of discourse analysis

Despite modern forms of discourse analysis having been around for decades, it is still an approach in significant flux, and it has been challenging to divide variations of its social theory into comprehensible clusters. Gillian Rose (2001) distinguishes between two forms:

- **Discourse Analysis I (DAI)**, which covers the use of language (and imagery) to create "strategies of persuasion" or *discursive formations* that make a particular notion seem natural or accurate (Rose, 2001:193).

³⁹ It is important to note that a number of these writers on discourse also pursue empirical analyses in tandem with their social theorising: see, e.g., Edley and Wetherell (2001) on competing discourses (both hostile and sympathetic) about feminism.

⁴⁰ An example provided by Foucault may suffice to illustrate how discourse analysis may be penetrative. "It seemed to me, for example, that from the nineteenth century, medical science was characterised not so much by its objects or concepts as by a certain *style*, a certain constant manner of statement. For the first time, medicine no longer consisted of a group of traditions, observations, and heterogenous practices, but a corpus of knowledge that presupposed the same way of looking at things" (Foucault, 1969:36).

- **Discourse Analysis II (DAII)**, which concentrates upon institutional practices that define the subject (for instance, the boundaries of “culture” in a museum) and the way the institution communicates its authority (e.g. through a museum’s information and presentation strategies) and practice for dealing with subjects (e.g., through the identification of authors and the contextualisation of their works beside other works).

Instead of marking the boundary between persuasive discourse and the practices institutions make of them, Göran Bergström, Linda Ekström, and Kristina Boréus (2017) distinguish between three forms of discourse analysis, which slide across a scale encompassing different conceptions of agency for both subjects *and* researchers:

- **Discourse Theory (DT)**. Discourse is *constitutive* of social life; that is, it fully builds the world and the subject’s thoughts about the world. Because discourses are intertextual, less emphasis is placed upon individual voices, and as such the individual is portrayed as a passive product of discourse (Foucault, 1969:232). Both linguistic and non-linguistic acts are seen as contributing to social phenomena.⁴¹ There is a concentration on *hegemonic discourse* (that is, the effects of the dominant discourse), although competing contentious notions—such as “equality” or “respect”—are analysed as *floating signifiers*. Non-hegemonic discourses help constitute the hegemonic discourse through binary opposition to it. Whilst Bergström et al. associate Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe with DT—who use the concept of the “floating signifier” in their studies of hegemonic discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985)—it seems that much of Foucault’s work on the history of ideas falls under this category.
- **Discursive Psychology (DP)**. As the name suggests, this is a form of analysis arising from psychological research. Like DT theorists, DP theorists also see linguistic and non-linguistic acts as co-mingling in the creation of social phenomena. However, they emphasise competing discourses above the analysis of hegemonic discourse. Competing discourses are expressed through *interpretative repertoires* of recognisable “clichés, common places, tropes and characterisations of actors and situations” and are “evident through repetition across a corpus” (Edley and Wetherell, 2001:443). Individuals, then, are seen as causal agents who have the ability to choose between different repertoires (Wetherell, 1998:395), and are not passive products of discourse.
- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**. Pushing beyond a description of social phenomena, CDA theorists aim to actively counter particular discourses: “CDA combines *critiques* of discourse and *explanation* of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for *action* to change that existing reality in particular aspects” (Fairclough, 1989:232). Teun Van Dijk’s work on expressions of ethnic prejudice are notable examples of CDA (Van Dijk, 1984; Van Dijk, 1993). Under CDA, then, hegemonies are perceived as unstable and challengeable, and

⁴¹ Laclau and Mouffe (1990:100) provide the example of a bricklayer who a) asks for a brick and b) lays it onto a wall: it is “the totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic” which constitutes discourse.

the analysis of competing ideologies is important because of their potential contribution to enact social change.

Beyond these categorisations, the influence of discourse analysis—and Foucault’s work specifically—has been very broad. I will pick out one study somewhat germane to this project’s case study, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. “Orientalism” is an antiquated term for the Western (or Occidental) study of the Near and Far East; as a form of study, it was crystallised in the nineteenth century, but as Said noted, its corpus of knowledge and prejudices have informed public and foreign policy debates throughout the twentieth century. Said defined Orientalism in an oppositional manner:

That Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’, in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient (Said, 1978:22).

Said thus presents Orientalism through a Foucauldian form of discourse analysis, whereby Orientalism is a regime of truth that emerges from different disciplines and texts (philological, archaeological, historical, and literary, *inter alia*), but all are structured in similar ways and present similar ends.

Crucially, Orientalism is not just a construct about the Other, but also how the Occident defines itself: as not-Orient. If the Western Orientalist describes the Orient as cruel, lazy, treacherous, and backwards, it is in—often explicit—contrast with the Occident as benign, vigorous, faithful, and progressive.⁴² This oppositional self-definition informs some of the tweets hostile to refugees in the dataset (see section 5.5.3), but Orientalism also colours the interpretations a number of researchers make upon other imagery in the dataset (see sections 4.2.1 and 5.3).

1.3.2. Writing on visual artefacts

Discourse analysis has had a sizeable impact upon the analysis of visual artefacts, particularly focuses on institutional effects and regimes of visibility.⁴³ John Tagg (1988) and Alan Sekula

⁴² See also Cemil Aydin (2017), which examines the “other” side of Orientalism through the notion of the “Muslim world” as one in opposition to the “Western world”, i.e., through the eyes of those living in Muslim-majority lands. Aydin pursues both the political history and key authors who posited the notion of the “Muslim” world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and observes, following Said, that the notion of a separate, degenerate “Muslim” world was a construct that *started* in the West as a justification for colonialism; colonialist racism and practice was built within Orientalist theory. However, the idea of the “Muslim” world was taken up by the Ottoman state and several individuals from Muslim-majority nations in part as an anti-racist movement to counter the Orientalist discourse enacted in colonialist practice.

⁴³ Foucault himself wrote about the visual arts in a number of works. In *The Order of Things*, he used an extended contemplation of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* as a starting-point for his argument that different historical eras have different *epistemes*, or epistemological assumptions. These assumptions are not transcendent but are socially constructed within the thought of their times

(1986) have examined the institutional function of the photographic archive, arguing that classifying between good/desirable and bad/undesirable photographs is a form of social ordering. Friedrich Kittler employed a mixture of Foucauldian discourse and McLuhanesque concentration on the role of technology, arguing that in the nineteenth century, sound and writing came to support one another in a *technologically* intertextual fashion. Kittler thus argues that moving from one technology to another causes a concentration on an increasingly abstract signifier. For instance, the move to the typewriter erases the uniqueness of written communication and rationalises it to uniform letters: “the symbolic has... become a world of the machine” (Kittler, 1986:262). Linda Nead (1988) has examined the depiction of women in Victorian Britain through works of art alongside newspapers, literary, legal, and medical texts that together defined respectable forms of femininity (such as the faithful wife) and deviant forms (such as the “fallen” woman or the prostitute); far from a “reflection” of reality, these textual and visual artefacts actively prescribe acceptable social behaviour for women. And Jonathan Crary (1990) has described the historical construction of the observer, and how visual apparatuses such as the stereoscope & phenakistoscope were presented as realistic reflections of the world where in fact they represent the subjectivity of vision and a very abstract representation of the world.

More closely related to this project, visual artefacts shared on the Internet have been examined through discourse analysis. Anne Burns has produced a classically Foucauldian article, writing about the discourse on self-portraits, or selfies, evident in a series of photographs, cartoons, magazine covers, YouTube videos, and works of art.⁴⁴ She argues that subjects who take selfies experience a gendered form of policing and notes that “criticism of the selfie acts as a thinly veiled means of undermining the subject”, specifically by gendering the practice as feminine, narcissistic, and sexualised (Burns, 2015a:1728). YouTube videos tutoring viewers how to take “good” selfies instruct women to “use photography to display their adherence to a specific form of normative, passive femininity”, by using techniques such as “elongation of the neck, the use of natural light to flatter the skin, and the selective cropping and angling of the image” (Burns, 2015a:1718). Criticism of selfie-taking, then, “conceals a promotion of normative models of

expressed in discourse. Foucault contrasted two forms of representation: the earlier, Renaissance notion of representation as a mirror of reality and the subsequent “Classical” notion (in fact, the *neoclassical* notion) of representation as a subjective experience conjured up by the individual filled with organisations, categories, and differences; with its divided surfaces and heterogenous organisation of space and representation, *Las Meninas* was an example of the latter. It is “the representation, as it were, of Classical representation, and the space it opens up to us” (Foucault, 1966:34). He also used Magritte’s *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* to investigate the relation between representation and reality, noting that representational art long posited “an equivalence between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond”, an equivalence discursively broken by Magritte’s painting (Foucault, 1968:34).

⁴⁴ Disclosure: Anne Burns is a member of the Visual Social Media Lab.

conduct and the punishment of those who do not comply beneath a veneer of photographic discussion”, through mockery, shaming, supposedly neutral photographic tips (Burns, 2015a:1731).

Whilst Burns’ is a straightforward Foucauldian analysis, others mix in other theoretical frameworks with discourse analysis. Michele Zappavigna has used a multimodal discourse analysis—informed by visual social semiotic analysis—to examine the place of the photographer in Instagram feeds. Looking at photographs related to the hashtag #motherhood, she asserts that it is insufficient to rely upon the social-semiotic concept of “involvement” to analyse interpersonal meaning.⁴⁵ Zappavigna proposes *subjectification* as an important component not theorised in Kress & Van Leeuwen’s “involvement” system because it is not predicated on the viewer’s gaze; instead, it engages “a relationship of ‘imagining oneself as being’ or ‘being in fusion with’ the image producer” (Zappavigna, 2016:277). Her discursive analysis of subjectification is realised in the materiality of the photograph via composition, specifically the implied relation of the photographer and viewer to the photograph, with the viewer acting *as* the photographer—as in a selfie, or when the photographer’s legs are showing, or where the viewer implicitly takes the place of the photographer without other clues—or *with* the photographer—as in more traditional pictorial compositions where there are “no clues to the visual structure related to the subjective presence of the photographer” (Zappavigna, 2016:279). Photographers use Instagram’s built-in filters to provide social cues related to nostalgia in pictures that—ironically—can be viewed in near real time. Since her project is descriptive in nature, Zappavigna does not explore the broader discursive effects of “acting as” or “acting with” the photographer, nor the implications of creating instant nostalgia.

In “Who Would Republican Jesus Bomb?” Christopher Duerringer examined a series of “image macro” memes—pictures with overlaid text which are “compact, easily shared, and work by providing a socially useful—typically humorous—unit of discourse that the user can deploy in response to a particular exigence”—that articulate the ideological mismatches between the teachings of Jesus and the U.S. Republican party, whose members usually purport to be Christian (Duerringer, 2016:5). Duerringer allied discourse analysis with a post-Marxist conception of ideology to analyse the dissenting space opened up by these memes, which employ straight libertarian language in religious contexts to underscore the libertarian/religious instability within the party’s ideology.⁴⁶ He argues that sharing such memes—and thus, promoting a process

⁴⁵ Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:136ff) characterise the viewer’s “involvement” in a picture via focalisation or point-of-view, which directs the viewer’s gaze and whether the viewer is subjectively included in a picture or alternately objectively included, e.g., held in a position outside of it, as in a bird’s-eye view.

⁴⁶ These are seen expressly in an action of contention between hegemonic discourse and competing discourses, akin to CDA. “[N]o longer can it be posited that any given element of discourse carries, per force, a particular class valence. Instead, elements are sutured together

wherein they may be shared further by people who “like” them on social media, or even make their own macro meme—creates, or interpellates, a public into being. They speak back *as* a political opposition to the Republican party’s unstable, hegemonic discourse:

Creating a new instantiation also signals interpellation; it positions the former recipient of the meme as ideologically aligned with it. The creator of the new Republican Jesus constructs the meme and then shares it via some social media platform as one in-the-know about that ideological contradiction. In that act, they signal their oppositional subject position (Duerringer, 2016:9).

With the exception of Zappavigna, whose analysis is predicated upon Instagram’s affordances (via its retro filters and real-time feed presentation), these articles usually source their examples from multiple sites. This is by necessity: they wish to argue for the pervasiveness of their respective discourses. In the case of Burns (who collects her examples from the widest spread of media venues), she is articulating the construction and reinforcement of a hegemonic discourse, whilst Duerringer’s examples mobilise *against* an unstable hegemony. Of the three, only Zappavigna attempts a classification of her collection of imagery. Judging from the examples each present in their research, however, this is likely because Burns and Duerringer’s pictures do not fall into easy categories; they are *grouped by their discursive articulations*, and not at all through their visual presentation. This opens up a space for iconography as a method in that iconography predicates the carrying of concepts—discourses, if you will—through composition.

1.3.3. Relation to iconography and lessons learned

A remark in Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* is pertinent to this project, because it implicitly contrasts the assumptions underpinning iconography with the assumptions underpinning discourse analysis. He contrasted the “latent discourse” about an artist, with which one could “try to recapture the murmur of his intentions” or “uncover the implicit philosophy that is supposed to form his view of the world” with an “archaeological analysis” which “would try to discover whether space, distance, depth, colour, light, proportions, volumes, and contours were not, at the period in question, considered, named, enunciated, and conceptualised in a discursive practice” (Foucault, 1969:213).⁴⁷ The “latent discourse” Foucault describes is strongly paralleled

and given new meanings within discourses. And, generally, these sutures (i.e., articulations) are enacted not on the basis of some grand scheme but only under the force of necessity and often by intuition or sheer coincidence. Thus, there is little to be gained in seeking for a generating principle or a principle of coherence within a given discourse” (Duerringer, 2016:2).

⁴⁷ In fact, Erwin Panofsky arguably pursued an “archaeological discourse” *avant la lettre* in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1925). Panofsky observed that figures in Antiquity were placed rather independently within their perspectival settings; in the Middle Ages, figures were more closely associated (albeit clumsily) within their environments; and that finally, in the Renaissance, figures were placed squarely *within* them. This reflects views of the infinite—a conception of which did not exist as such in Antiquity, but which came to be developed in the Middle Ages via discursive conceptions of the divine; conceptions of the infinite thereupon carried over into mathematics. This set the stage for the development of Albertian perspective, that is, the perception of an area as part of an infinite space, with orthogonal lines stretching out to infinity.

to the iconographer's attempt to decipher the intent in an image-maker's presentation of content. However, he clearly advocated the "archaeological analysis", which is restricted to the "surface forms" of effects and techniques. Foucault's intent is clear: he wants to base his analyses on clearly-enunciated materials, and in the case of a visual artefact, the only clearly-enunciated material is the physical composition of the artefact, not its content. However, it seems equally valid to describe the "latent discourse" as that which was considered appropriate to render in a given period of time, and thus seems worth pursuing even within a Foucauldian framework. Indeed, even though such an analysis requires some degree of decoding, in fact it is not nearly as far from Foucault's "archaeological" approach as he claims: he regularly cited passages which required significant interpretation well beyond their "surface forms".⁴⁸

A related issue is what is *done* with these discourses. Foucauldian analysis emphasises the ways in which discursive formations are made to seem "natural", and there is a strong parallel in iconological readings when it comes to the effect of reiterated imagery: it becomes "natural" to view a subject in a given way, to the point that when a subject is rendered in a different manner, it may become difficult to identify. But writers in the Foucauldian tradition often construct overarching, indeed hegemonic, narratives.⁴⁹ Such narratives occur in iconographical readings as well: see section 1.7.5.2. It is not necessarily the case that the assertions contained in these narratives are inaccurate—in fact, I will refer to such a narrative in section 4.6.2—but there is a real danger when other discourses are not admitted to the discussion: the accretion of discourses seems inevitable, as do the construction of these narratives. One can lose sight of the possibility that individual discourses—and images—produce effects that may be best characterised as a

Whilst not conceived as an iconographical work, the interpretation Panofsky places upon the impact of perspectival space seems to fit squarely within his later conception of iconological interpretation, which was based upon contemporaneous documents showing a "worldview" shared by the artist.

⁴⁸ A case in point is his claim in *The Will to Knowledge* about the organisation of eighteenth-century secondary schools: "one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organisation: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation" (Foucault, 1976:27). However, the source he cites as a prime example contains *nothing* regarding the sexuality of children: it specifically instructs instructors to surveil their charges in order to "prevent students who have gone out to relieve themselves from stopping and congregating", i.e., from socialising with one another; to "put them to bed at once" at the end of the day; and that instructors must be sure that students are in bed before they themselves retire for the evening (Foucault, 1976:28). Any parent who has managed—or tried to manage—a sleepover, or an unwilling child's studies, will likely consider these passages to be concerned with policing childhood rambunctiousness and distraction. It takes significant rhetorical massaging to consider these strictures as policing childhood sexuality.

⁴⁹ "At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness [about sexuality] was still common, it would seem" (Foucault, 1976:3). And again, *Las Meninas* is "the representation, as it were, of Classical representation, and the space it opens up to us" (Foucault, 1966:34). "By the beginning of the nineteenth century the camera obscura is no longer synonymous with the production of truth and with an observer positioned to see truthfully" (Crary, 1990:32).

form of agency (Latour, 2005). This is not a point emphasised by traditional iconographers—the focus is often upon continuity rather than disruption—but those interested in the work of Aby Warburg tend to focus on the “survivals” of understood gestures and forms, and—crucially—the differences drawn out when such imagery is used in different contexts, which I will call themes: “what the survivals remember is not the signified, which changes at every moment and in every context, and in every relationship of forces it enters into, but rather the signifying line or feature itself” (Didi-Huberman, 2002:110).

As noted above, there is an emphasis on the intertextuality of discourses, and as traditionally used, iconography shares this concern: for example, in the Middle Ages, narrative imagery (and symbolic attributes) of the saints frequently cleaved closely to their stories as collected in Jacopo da Voragine’s *Golden Legend*. However, in other instances, this mutual reinforcement breaks down, and the intertextual references must be conceived in a far looser fashion. The examples of Aby Warburg on the *Birth of Venus* and Peter Mason’s work on English exotica are again relevant. As mentioned previously, Warburg noted the relation between Poliziano’s poem and Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* is not one of imitation, but of inspiration. According to Warburg, Botticelli was instead inspired by the poem’s emphasis on movement (see section 1.7.3.1). And again, Peter Mason noted the re-use of imagery depicting Native Americans in English contexts as *renditions of the exotic* (see section 1.7.4.2.3). Thus, from the *Golden Legend*, to Poliziano’s poem, to the general depiction of exotica, we see a sliding scale of intertextuality, some of which (using the same imagery as a sign of exotica) is more semiotic in nature.

Such observations about latent and hegemonic discourses highlight an important benefit iconography may offer in comparison to either semiotics or discourse analysis when it comes to interpreting visual artefacts—whether of the artist’s intent or the viewer’s response. The discursive approach can provide a corrective to semiotic analysis, since it regularly covers multiple artefacts—textual or visual—whilst semiotic analysis tends to focus upon single compositions. And whilst semiotic theory admits to polysemy, semiotic writing tends to only present the associations of the *author of the analysis*—actual polysemic responses from others are infrequently recorded, so the nod to polysemy is paid rarely more than lip service. When people share pictures online, they are often accompanied by text; they often share the same pictures, but their utterances differ. These utterances are worth exploring, and discourse analysis offers a way to think about these utterances.

On the other hand, these artefacts are rarely fully readable via their “surface forms”—they must be *decoded*, as is standard practice in semiotic theory. Foucauldian analysis has been influential in the exploration of visual artefacts and visibility in general—to the exclusion of the DP and CDA approaches—and thus its emphasis on the dynamics of power tends to favour hegemonic discourses. The DP and CDA approaches admit the existence of multiple discourses, and in the observations I carried out for this and other projects, the utterances accompanying pictures refer

to different discourses—but whilst these discourses compete with one another, they contribute to multiple regimes of truth, and the seemingly natural effects of such regimes should be incorporated into iconography. It thus seems fitting to strike a balance between semiotic and discourse analyses, and for my own approach to iconography, I will promote a method that decodes polysemic textual responses to pictures shared on social media (see section 1.7.6.4).

Iconographers certainly have a number of parallel interests to discourse analysts. Ultimately, however, iconographers see a value in Foucault's "latent" discourse. Iconographic themes may not be discursive in the sense that any concepts they may contain may not be fully articulated. But iconographic themes also might not be semiotic in the sense that they signify conventional meanings, because the signification may not be agreed. Latent discourses can contribute to perhaps even more insidious regimes of truth because they are not explicit and perhaps play upon unstable decodings. A Warburgian iconography in particular may aid in tracking the use of slipperier images.

1.4. Content analysis: Grounding via empirical research

Content analysis (CA) and cultural analytics differ from theoretical approaches such as semiotics and discourse analysis (at least in its Foucauldian form) in that researchers aim to marshal their research into quantifiable forms. The processing of data is fundamental to their approaches. It is relevant to assess both and their potential relationship to iconography, since the VSML has provided me with Twitter data. I will employ a technique inspired by CA to provide a firm ground for iconographic analysis (see sections 3.4–3.7).

Because they deal with data, CA and cultural analytics require a conceptual shift in a general move towards *categorising content in order to discern repeated patterns* (Krippendorff, 1980).⁵⁰ Both CA and cultural analytics therefore focus more upon *how* questions of research than theoretical *why* questions—although, of course, theoretical assumptions underlie these approaches as well. These assumptions are similar, and so are the drawbacks. The main assumptions are twofold:

- That important information can be described explicitly. In the case of CA, these are defined explicitly by the researcher. In cultural analytics, content is defined by algorithmically-detectable properties such as hue and saturation.

⁵⁰ Philp Bell (2004:7) states that "unlike semiotic analysis, content analysis classifies all the texts on specified dimensions (... called 'variables'...) to describe the field or totality. It is not concerned with 'reading' or interpreting each text individually. By contrast, semiotic analysis is qualitative and usually focuses on each text or text-genre in much the way that a critic focuses on a particular gallery painting or on the aesthetics or cultural connotations of a particular film or class of films". He later implicitly contrasts CA with discourse analysis, asserting that CA generally ignores the material aspects of the artefact: "the framing, visual 'angles', scale of photographic 'shot', and so on, that are part of the discourse of visual analysis are seldom incorporated into (visual) content analysis" (Bell, 2004:17).

- That a larger volume of attention devoted to a particular subject or characteristic suggests that this subject is of greater relevance or importance than others.

I will focus upon CA here; cultural analytics will be examined in section 1.5.

1.4.1. What is content analysis?

CA is the formalised, empirical cataloguing of specific items in a corpus of artefacts by an agreed-upon and explicitly-stated identification scheme. The method is useful for large *corpora* of materials. It has a pre-history going back at least to the 18th century and was used during the Second World War to analyse Nazi propaganda, but it is most associated with the exploration of mass-media materials, such as newspapers (Krippendorff, 1980:4–9).⁵¹

The results of CA's cataloguing are tallied for subsequent analysis. CA can focus upon e.g., the frequency with which catalogued items appear in a corpus, or the amount of attention devoted to those items (e.g., column inches), and as such, counting is a central component to it. CA of text may concentrate upon the actual words used in a corpus of literature (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Krippendorff, 1980). As an analogue, visual CA is used in the social sciences to mark the presence of items in a given corpus of pictures: e.g., cattle in one picture, a cowboy in another, and both cattle and cowboy in a third. Alternately, one could measure e.g. the percentage of space devoted to the display of food in depictions of the biblical story of the Wedding at Cana.

In order to perform such an analysis, one needs a defined corpus and scope—in the current project, the corpus is the top 1,000 most-shared, extant tweets containing references to Alan Kurdi and other refugees in text and imagery shared on Twitter from 2–14 September 2015. To assess the corpus consistently, the researcher develops a structure along with a series of supports, and this defines the scope of the CA:

- **Coding frame:** An “analytical instrument” wherein the items in one's study are catalogued and enumerated (Boréus and Bergström, 2017a:27). This instrument is the research goal, but it cannot exist unless it is supported by clearly-defined components. They are as follows:
- **Code units:** Top-level subjects that define what is catalogued, e.g., the presence of a person in a photograph.
- **Variables:** Subsets of code units, e.g., a lone child in one photograph, and a crowd of people in a different photograph.
- **Context units:** This is another form of subunit. Instead of indicating a binary presence/absence of an item, it may indicate the *manner* in which the variable is present, e.g., the child is happy.

⁵¹ The content of a series of hymns published in 1743 as *The Songs of Zion* were thought to undermine the authority of the Swedish church. However, a contemporary analysis of the hymns' word usage betrayed no dissenting stance (Krippendorff, 1980:4).

- **Code:** Traditionally, individual items are assigned numbers in order to differentiate them. For example, the presence of a person in a photograph may be assigned “1” under the code unit; if the person is a child, the code unit may also be assigned “2” under the variable; if the child is happy, it may be assigned “3” under the code unit’s context unit. As one can expect with these examples, code units can be nested.⁵²
- **Coding scheme or coding instruction:** A guide that explicitly defines the items being assessed. Codes are matched with definitions in the scheme.

1.4.2. Expectations of the analysis

The goal of defining codes and applying them in the coding frame is to achieve consistency in the assessment. Because CA is a method used by researchers who frequently aspire to scientific objectivity, its findings aim to be rigorous and replicable. Studies therefore often employ **double coding**—that is, the act of having multiple individuals pore over a percentage of the data to ensure that they produce consistent results. There are a number of different ways to calculate this consistency, which is called **inter-coder reliability (IRR)**.

The impulse to quantify one’s materials—through CA or cultural analytics—has been questioned on many fronts. Geert Lovink (2011:89–90) sees the turn to quantification in the humanities as part of an “uncertainty over the status of any single cultural expression in mass society [which] has further fuelled this trend toward ‘the larger picture’”—a larger picture which he thinks may not be useful. Gordon Hall (2013:801) asserts that the merger of theory and empirical, or “positivist” data “do not ‘complement’ each other... but rather remain incommensurable” because the “impulse to combine theoretical critique with empirical and quantitative analysis is itself a quite traditional one that theory in its many guises worked hard to challenge”. Hall thus considers empirical methods such as CA or cultural analytics to be ends to themselves, not tools *in aid* of theory, tools which can check faulty intuitions. Writing of textual matters, William Connolly (1974) noted that terms germane to the study of society frequently have highly-contested meanings: there is thus the implication that a rote tallying of their frequency in a corpus of texts (or visual artefacts) is unlikely to be useful without a careful consideration of its particular use (Boréus and Bergström, 2017a:47). Recording the varying use of such highly-contested terms or artefacts would require an extensive (and equally contested) series of context units. In her discussion of visual CA, Gillian Rose (2001:88) notes that CA studies do not cover production, circulation, or audiencing, almost certainly because such elements are not coded in the frame unless they are sufficiently explicit. Philip Bell (2004:17) states that “framing, visual

⁵² For the purposes of this project’s CA-influenced utility, there is no nesting. This is from necessity. The utility was designed to perform operations through the filtering of code units in Excel, and the filter system in Excel precludes the presence of nested items. See Chapter 3, starting from section 3.7 for details. In the interests of transparency, I have furthermore opted to replace traditional coded numbers with text.

‘angles’, scale of photographic ‘shot’, and so on, that are part of the discourse of visual analysis are seldom incorporated into (visual) content analysis”.⁵³

The explicit definition of content thus turns out to be CA’s greatest asset, but also its biggest weakness. Part of the issue arising is what, specifically, is expected from the analysis. It is useful to distinguish between **quantitative** and **qualitative CA**.

If the counting or measuring involved is more prominent and complex, the content analysis is more quantitative than if counting and measuring are less prominent methods... qualitative analyses use complex interpretations of texts while less qualitative ones use simpler interpretations... Most quantitative studies have counting or measuring at their heart and interpretation becomes so simplified that a computer application can encode the text. The most qualitative studies use complex interpretations that can only be done by humans and use very simple ways of counting how many times something occurs in a text (Boréus and Bergström, 2017a:24).

According to this view, then, CA research falls along a spectrum wherein complex items requiring interpretation are placed on one end, and simpler, more easily quantifiable items on the other. This has implications for the degree to which CA is central to one’s research project, or whether the analysis alternately acts as a support for deeper interpretation.

1.4.3. Writing on visual artefacts

Research on artefacts—including visual artefacts—using CA thus varies depending upon its use for quantitative or qualitative purposes. Attempts at objectivity limit the scope of CA’s potential, whilst heavily interpretative attempts might abandon CA’s goal of objectivity.

The categories of visual ‘content’ which are most frequently quantified in media research arise from commonsense social categories, such as ‘roles’ depicted, ‘settings’ shown, gender and age of represented participants in images... The cultural complexity of visually coded texts means that either only the most simplistic, socially conventional categories can be studied, or content analysis imports tendentious or highly interpreted abstractions into its ostensibly ‘objective’ definitions of variables and/or values (Bell, 2004:17).

This tension plays out in the following examples.

Hyunjin Seo and Husain Ebrahim (2016) have used *quantitative CA* to examine 333 examples of visual propaganda about the Syrian civil war shared on Facebook over a period of 15 months. The artefacts were presented on pages maintained on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al Assad and a coalition of the Syrian opposition. Seo and Ebrahim justify using CA as an empirical preliminary first step that provides a solid foundation upon which to update subsequent theory, in the light of the fact that propaganda agents can now directly message target audiences through social media:

Empirical research such as this is an important step toward developing solid methodological frameworks for analysing social media-based visual propaganda and

⁵³ However, in the same article he conducts an experimental CA using social semiotics as a basis to study compositional modalities on a series of magazine covers over time (Bell, 2004:21–27).

persuasive messages. It also contributes to building a theoretical model explicating functions and effects of visual propaganda during conflicts (Seo and Ebrahim, 2016:228).

They used CA to analyse prominent themes, the propagandistic framing of positions, and compositional features in their set of visual artefacts, and correlated audience reactions to thematic and structural features via the number of likes, shares, and comments.⁵⁴

The authors discovered seven prominent themes, three forms of propaganda frames, and coded for three different types of visual artefact (photograph, video, or graphic). They observed that Assad's page emphasised unity, meetings with foreign leaders, and the deaths of military personnel, whilst the Coalition's page emphasised civilian threats from the military, presented emotional pictures of civilians crying over war dead, and presented evidence of regime violence and torture. Seo and Ebrahim (2016:242) emphasise that Facebook users of both sides "preferred content that is easy to understand and share" and conclude that theories of visual propaganda during conflicts—which often concentrate upon mass-media policies—need to be updated in order to take into consideration the impacts of propaganda directly distributed to viewers online.

In contrast to Seo and Ebrahim's quantitative study, Kristine Ask and Claire Abidine (2018) used *qualitative CA* to evaluate a series of "Student Problems" (SP) memes shared on the SP Facebook page over a two-week period. SP memes deal humorously with issues of the student experience via three broad, overlapping themes identified as: feeling *overwhelmed, stressed, and ashamed*; *self-deprecating humour, flexibility, and seriousness*; and *procrastination, lack of control, and self-blame*.⁵⁵ In line with the sentiment that CA is a support for other work, the authors then followed up with a nine-month "media watch" of articles about university students published by newspapers and special-interest groups in order to contrast media conversations with the perceptions of students expressed in the memes. Finally, they concluded with a student workshop to double-code their findings and to confirm that the author's chosen themes resonated with students as anticipated. They concluded that collectively, SP memes were portrayed as performative attempts to create humour through shared anxiety in a process they call "competitive onedownmanship": "students strive to ironically outdo each other in performing and conveying self-deprecating inferiority, failure, and struggles", which has "arisen in opposition to the normative attention economy of self-celebratory social media posts, and emerges as an anti-thesis to prestige on social media" (Ask and Abidin, 2018:845). They can only

⁵⁴ Because their aim was to provide a solid foundation for future research, they take care to present numerical summaries of their results, statistical analyses, and their IRR score (Seo and Ebrahim, 2016:235–41).

⁵⁵ The catalogued memes consist of straightforward imagery that require little explanation for the authors' concerns. For example, a screenshot of a fictitious book, "Failing My Way to Success" plays upon self-help books in a clearly self-deprecating way, and a text-only meme contrasts watching Netflix contentedly with watching Netflix stressfully after remembering the imminent due-date of several assignments.

have reached such conclusions qualitatively, specifically by crossing concurrent media reports with their cataloguing exercise.

These research projects—interesting and perceptive as they both are—illustrate the advantages of CA and the drawbacks outlined by Bell above. Seo and Ebrahim provide a highly-detailed schema for their dataset, provide a clear-cut analysis of their artefacts, and showcase examples of imagery tethered to current events. But in order to accommodate the need of a high IRR score, they can only examine the most obvious mechanics of their dataset: their conclusions are thus limited. More speculative analyses lie outside the purview of their chosen approach. Ask and Abidine in turn provide a rich understanding of the ways in which “Student Problems” memes simultaneously counter normative assessments of student miseries in the media, yet regularly ignore structural issues—which surely cause plenty of misery to students—raised by the media. However, the *path* to their conclusions is confusing because the borders of their code units (or if you will, categories) are porous: why is a humorous meme about procrastination not an example of self-deprecating humour? Why is self-deprecating humour combined with seriousness? Why is relatability its own category, and not an inherent component of all their memes? Their category definitions—though present—are unsatisfying, and whilst they claim that their workshop accurately double-coded their categories, it is difficult to understand how.

1.4.4. Relation to iconography and lessons learned

One might be surprised to learn that, despite the fact that iconographers are typically interested in the categorisation of their artefacts, *there is no formal analogue with the work of CA*. The cataloguing of artefacts is implicit within iconography’s descriptive and analytic stages (classically known as “pre-iconographic description” and “iconographic analysis”, respectively). Whilst iconographers typically analyse multiple artefacts, that number is frequently small (within double digits), and so perhaps does not warrant the structure required by CA, or indeed the work required by adopting a method from another discipline. However, given the size of the data to which I have been given access, CA provides definite advantages over iconography: it makes the content of one’s corpus explicit, it forces the researcher to clearly subdivide content via variables and context units, it can help uncover undetected patterns, and it can provide a more transparent process by which to identify those patterns. An updated, mixed-method iconography can use all of this. CA can provide a firm, empirically-based ground upon which to build iconographic readings, particularly if the researcher catalogues textual and visual tweet components alongside the metadata automatically afforded by the platform, such as timestamps, and sharing metrics (Skalski et al., 2017).

But iconography is at least as much about contextualisation and interpretation (classically known as “iconological interpretation”) as it is about description and categorisation (see section 1.7.4.3). The concerns of iconographers are frequently vaguer than would be comfortable for many practitioners of CA. Iconography contains implicit assumptions about the importance of specific

attributes, gestures, and compositions within a work when they are present, and that means that iconographers' attention is selective. These selective targets are likely intuited by the iconographer, based upon years of looking at imagery, because many attributes, gestures, and compositions come from heterogeneous antecedents without explicit links to one another. Iconographers thus act, as Aby Warburg (1995) declared, like "seismographs", or sensitive instruments for detecting otherwise imperceptible shifts underground. For a real-world example from Twitter (Drainville, 2018:18): the "chain of antecedents" may be indicated through clues as subtle as a composition that is *usually, but not exclusively* parallel to the picture plane, combined with a confrontation between a passive figure who is enveloped by threatening, active figures; these components might be repeated and echoed in religious paintings, movies, comic books, and photography of protests, and viewers might vaguely gesture towards the antecedents in their textual commentaries.

Vague connections like these do not lend themselves to the goal of objectivity embodied in double-coding. Such components are insufficiently explicit, and one would arguably struggle to include them even in qualitative CA (see section 3.7). Because the materials identified by iconographers are more contentious than those identified by CA practitioners and thus would be unlikely to pass any form of double-coding, I do not feel that the digital tool that I developed can be called CA. It is *inspired by it*, and to underscore its difference, I prefer to call it a "datasheet". Because iconography as used in this project is a methodology that focuses upon interpretation, the datasheet must not be viewed as an end to itself. It is not a *guide*, which dictates the course of one's investigations, but a *tool* that aids in those endeavours. It is a tool that provides the evidence for those interpretations and categorisations. The tool is not content analysis *manqué*, however, because in other respects it does more than CA: the user can perform operations based upon multiple, open-ended queries.

1.5. Cultural analytics: Addressing artefacts computationally

The approaches outlined thus far have different scopes of analysis. Semiotic analysis may query a small handful of visual artefacts; discourse analysis may look for a pattern through a somewhat larger group which serve as representative indicators for a larger pool of examples; and content analysis may deal with hundreds of pictures. Cultural analytics, however, aims to analyse the content of large datasets. It arises in part from the concern that analysing large volumes of visual artefacts—like those shared on social media, estimated to be shared at the rate of over 3 billion per day (Meeker, 2016)—has far outgrown studying any online phenomenon via a simple "curation" of imagery as recommended by Hariman and Lucaites (2015).⁵⁶ There are legitimate

⁵⁶ I can speak to this concern from personal experience. I sampled data for my VSML "rapid research" article on Alan Kurdi (Drainville, 2015), but the more systematic, data-driven approach documented in the following chapters uncovered patterns which would have been otherwise difficult to detect.

concerns that such “curated” collections are not representative of the datasets from which they come, that investigators may—innocently—pick and choose their examples to bend the data to fit their arguments, and that there is little attempt to contextualise the artefact with the platform’s affordances and how those affordances impact the user.

The cultural analytics approach is one way to address these concerns.⁵⁷ In contrast to visual content analysis, cultural analytics takes a *computationally-led* approach to data—particularly visual data.⁵⁸ This has two major implications: the approach can work on large datasets, some containing tens of millions of visual artefacts. It also algorithmically sorts through the data without the need of the researcher to step in. Like content analysis, cultural analytics also assumes that algorithmically-recognisable characteristics are important, and that the more a characteristic is present in a corpus, the more important it is. At first blush, then, it seems as if has opened a way to detect important patterns from large amounts of data.

1.5.1. What are cultural analytics?

Cultural analytics constitute a new visual analysis methodology most closely developed by Lev Manovich of the Software Studies Initiative (SSI), and is in keeping with his computationally-led advocacy of “post-media aesthetics” and a “science of culture”, which “should adopt the new concepts, metaphors, and operations of a computer and network era [*sic*], such as information, data, interface, bandwidth, stream, storage, rip, compress, etc” (Manovich, 2001:6). In their research, SSI have thus concentrated upon aspects that can be computationally assessed and plotted, such as hue and saturation (Manovich and Deutsch, 2011; Manovich, 2015b). In subsequent work, they have also incorporated algorithmically-generated metadata provided by social media platforms, such as timestamp and geolocation (Manovich et al., 2014)—see section 1.5.2.1 below.

SSI’s assessments are based upon software that they developed with assistance from the US National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), particularly ImagePlot. ImagePlot is visualisation software based upon ImageJ, itself open-source software developed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for the scientific analysis of imagery, e.g. to analyse the size of tumours from a body scan.⁵⁹ ImageJ provides an extensible system via plugins, macros, or scripts. Some of these

⁵⁷ The VSML follows a different approach to the self-same concerns surrounding big data, representative data, and the affordances of platforms. See section 2.4.

⁵⁸ There is a similar approach arising in the study of text called “distant learning”, where computational techniques are used to collate and analyse patterns in large *corpora* of digitised text. See Moretti (2013) for an overview, and Barron et al. (2018) for an intriguing example tracking the burgeoning influence of politicians during the French Revolution, evaluated through the spread of terms they used in a digitised collection of speeches made in the National Assembly.

⁵⁹ ImageJ: <https://imagej.net/>. ImagePlot: <http://lab.softwarestudies.com/p/imageplot.html>. [Both accessed 19 March 2018]. See also Chapter 7.

extensions (like SSI's ImageMeasure) can analyse features such as the hue, saturation, or brightness values in an image. Others (like SSI's ImageShapes) provide a level of edge detection, which is useful for comparing similarities and differences between two pictures, e.g., the change of a tumour's shape over time.

ImagePlot, in turn, is a packaging of macros developed by SSI of software already built into ImageJ's system; these macros concentrate upon the visualisation of datasets containing multiple image files. ImagePlot, then, guides ImageJ in the collection of actionable data, which it then presents visually. Visual artefacts—still pictures and video frames alike—can then be plotted onto a series of graphs according to any criteria supported by the software, for example chronologically, geolocation, via colour values—or a combination of criteria.

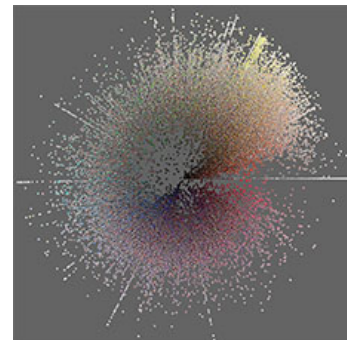
It is important to note that cultural analytics are pursued by others besides members of the SSI. Rose and Willis (2018) have used ImagePlot to examine 9,030 pictures associated with the notion of “smart” cities, all shared on Twitter, and Pearce et al. (2018) examined over 470,000 pictures related to the Paris climate accords shared on multiple social platforms. Pearce et al. used ImageSorter, visualisation software by Visual Computing that provides an exceptional level of sorting via hue, saturation, brightness, and edge detection (Barthel et al., 2008).⁶⁰ The combination of research and new tool development suggests that the method, whilst new, is gathering interest.

1.5.2. Writing on visual artefacts

Some examples of cultural analytics illustrate the methodology, the advantages of using it and the method's shortcomings.

1.5.2.1. Phototrails

In one project called “Phototrails”, the SSI examined millions of photographs from a series of cities across the world.⁶¹ One visualisation (Figure 1) compares photographs taken in central Bangkok with those taken in central Tokyo. This example organises 100,000 photographs alone, a small sample compared to other projects that SSI have investigated (Manovich, 2017:28).



In the Phototrails visualisation, ImageJ/ImagePlot has calculated the average colour values for each image file: that is, a complex of colours in any given picture is reduced to a single colour, which is then plotted onto the graph. So, from the visualisation, one can glean that Tokyo

⁶⁰ ImageSorter: <https://visual-computing.com> [Accessed 1 August 2018].

⁶¹ Phototrails: <http://phototrails.net> [Accessed 14 April 2018].

Instagram users favour more saturated yellow tones compared to Bangkok Instagram users. By basing their analysis upon average colour values, SSI adopt a reductive, computational neo-formalism. The approach cannot follow any deeper analysis of the *subject matter* of the photographs algorithmically (Faulkner et al., 2017:164; Hall, 2013).

Manovich (2010) has acknowledged this, stating that “while the goal of figurative art is communication of meaning, visualisation only shows patterns—it’s up to the researcher to interpret them as meaningful”.⁶² However, as Gary Hall (2013:794) has noted, the role of human interpretation is not emphasised in cultural analytics: “the role of actually interpreting such patterns as meaningful, let alone reflecting critically on the practice of doing so... is one Manovich frequently downplays, if not indeed marginalises, in his accounts of cultural analytics”. Part of Hall’s criticism falls upon iconography as well—patterns are inherently meaningful to iconography, because otherwise we unlikely to recognise the subject presented in an artefact, e.g., representations of Orpheus’ death. However, the criticism lands particularly hard on cultural analytics, because accounts of the method’s use is often overwhelmed by the sheer number of artefacts evaluated by the software. The emphasis is thus on *process* rather than *analysis*. Criticisms surrounding process-oriented analysis are particularly acute because if the software can only process a subset of available material, then the analysis can only evaluate that subset, and the resulting analysis may be limited in its use.⁶³

1.5.2.2. The 2014 Ukrainian “Maidan” revolution

SSI’s researchers clearly wanted to investigate whether they could provide a deeper analysis of their subject matter; they were also curious about “representative” data of photographs and videos which were shared under the parameters of their subject. They thus examined photographs and videos shared on Instagram during the 2014 “Maidan” revolution in Ukraine

⁶² This criticism is also tacitly acknowledged by the SSI elsewhere. For “SelfieCity”, the object of which was to evaluate selfies posted on Instagram, the investigators used a “combination of computational and manual methods” (Tifentale and Manovich, 2016:14). The “manual method” was the use of Mechanical Turk workers and SSI team members, who identified selfies from a sample of data (Tifentale, 2015:11).

SelfieCity also highlights quality concerns about algorithmically-sorted content. Viewers can query the SelfieCity dataset online and can filter through the data via a number of criteria, e.g., geolocation, calculated age of the sitter, the turn and tilt of the sitter’s head, and calculated mood of the sitter. However, even brief queries will turn up false positives: the sitter’s head may be calculated as tilting left if the entire photograph were taken at an angle. Most problematic are the “mood” filters, which often detects neutral facial expressions as “not calm” and “angry”. See <http://selfiecity.net/selfiexploratory/> [Accessed 12 April 2018].

⁶³ See e.g. Pearce et al. (2018:11–12) who state that via their use of ImageSorter “qualitative comparisons of colour-sorted image plots over time and/or between platforms can provide evidence of the shifting emotional registers of climate change”; and that “In terms of interpreting the images themselves, outputs from ImageSorter provide an overview of the styles and colours of images used in connection with a particular search term, offering opportunities for comparing large datasets”.

from the critical days of 17–22 March (Manovich et al., 2014; Tifentale, 2014).⁶⁴ The parameters of data collection were bound by date, time, and geolocation and resulted in the collection of 13,208 visual artefacts, with 21,468 hashtags appended to them in three languages.⁶⁵

The resulting data showed an increase in photographic activity during dramatic moments of the revolution, e.g., the police attack on protestors on 18 February. By performing a cluster analysis—wherein artefacts were algorithmically sorted according to formal similarity—they were able to separate “unusual” files and examine them manually. They thus discovered that most clusters had little to do with the Revolution per se. They are examples of “the everyday”, such as the taking of selfies, in the midst of “the exceptional”, such as critical events during the revolution (Manovich et al., 2014:6). However, a hashtag analysis indicated a displacement of “everyday” subjects during the period of the Revolution, and which then return afterwards.

SSI member Alise Tifentale examined the “iconography of revolution” as it played out in Kiev. For this exercise, she selected 818 artefacts that used the most common hashtags associated with the Revolution, manually placing these artefacts in 29 categories.⁶⁶ In this instance, Tifentale found that the majority of artefacts contained crowds, following by fire/smoke and flags. She concludes that the iconography of urban revolution—crowds, fire, flags—has remained quite stable since the 1789 French Revolution. However, the random fashion selfies—an example of “the everyday” that crowds out “the exceptional” in the dataset—have little obvious relation to the revolution, and so lead her to remark that “we can assume that these images have been significant markers of Maidan experience to certain individuals” (Tifentale, 2014). Finally, she concludes that

Instead of focusing on an edited set of “iconic” images, all images in our dataset appear as equally significant. Thus the documentation of everyday activities can be easily conflated with glimpses of the extraordinary and the exceptional, without any hierarchy, which would prioritize one over the other (Tifentale, 2014).

As Tifentale readily admits, the point of SSI’s exercise is not in *singling out images that define a dramatic experience*, but rather *uncovering representative samples* that cumulatively display the

⁶⁴ The period begins on 17 February, when the opposition called for protests against the government to 22 February, when former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, having been released from prison, addressed crowds after President Yanukovich and his ministers fled the country. The SSI also collected artefacts between 2 February and 15 May in order to establish a baseline and thereby evaluate key differences in dataset or the revolution. The SSI collected only those artefacts specifically geo-tagged in the area around Independence Square (in Ukrainian: Майдан Незалежності [*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*]), the centre of the protests and indeed the revolution. For more, see <http://www.the-everyday.net> [Accessed 14 April 2017].

⁶⁵ The SSI claim that, whilst Instagram is a minor force in Ukrainian social media, the results are nevertheless a representative “visual account” of people in their 20s, which appears to be the main demographic draw of Instagram users (Manovich et al., 2014:2; Patterson, 2015)

⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the link describing these categories leads to a missing file, so further details cannot be supplied.

experiences of those in the vicinity of Independence Square. Many of these artefacts approach iconographic concerns: they show that people understand revolution from other revolutionary images they have seen before. But enumerating, e.g., ±160 fire/smoke photographs ends up little more than a numbers game: are photographs of crowds, which were numerous, clearer indicators of revolution than the comparatively fewer photographs of fire and smoke? It is indeed surprising that some people took fashion selfies two blocks from the epicentre of a revolution. Perhaps this an indication that life goes on. Perhaps it may be an indication that parties interested in the revolution used platforms other than Instagram. Perhaps fashion selfies constitute an oblique recording of presence at the revolution, one that provides “plausible deniability” against claims of participation, given the potential for the revolution’s failure and the dangers of subsequent reprisal. The analysis leaves behind a potentially useful body of evidence: the text and hashtags accompanying the photographs.⁶⁷ It would also be worth manual investigation of clues for the pictures’ significance—for example, by examining other photographs in an individual’s Instagram feed to determine whether the person posts little other than selfies.

We therefore learn little about individual artefacts. But then, that is not the purpose of the approach, because investigation of individual artefacts requires manual analysis, and cultural analytics are dependent upon computational approaches; the sheer number of objects SSI deals with dictates a bird’s-eye view of their data. This is reinforced in the SSI’s study of “Instagramism”, or the stylistic patterns manifest in a large corpus of over 15 million images collected from 17 world cities over a period of years (Manovich, 2017). Cultural analytics can help one uncover neo-formalist aspects of the platform’s use, such as broad stylistic trends—in the case of Instagramism, a tripartite division between professional, casual, and “design” photographers. However, this broad brush leads to conclusions such as “Instagramism does not care about ‘telling a story,’ and it does not feature proper ‘subjects’ (in the sense of ‘subject of a photo’)” (Manovich, 2017:80). An analysis of millions of examples flattens the landscape in sheer quantity, and any “stories” that Instagrammers may care to tell will be lost in that quantity.

1.5.3. Relation to iconography and lessons learned

It is clear that social media platforms provide so many textual and visual artefacts and so much analytics data for examination that algorithmic aids may be beneficial, and even necessary. Like content analysis, however, it is worth considering the tasks for which the technique is used. It rapidly becomes clear that—as currently conceived—cultural analytics cannot provide a model for the iconographic analysis of artefacts on social media.

⁶⁷ Elsewhere in the context of SelfieCity, Tifentale (2015:11–12) notes that SSI regularly deprecates text due to multiple languages and the “incoherent use of hashtags”.

There are four major reasons to come to this conclusion. First, cultural analytics arrange visual artefacts exclusively through algorithmically neo-formalist similarities like hue, saturation, and—depending upon the software—edge detection. Iconographers focus upon content over colour; colour may impact viewers’ reception of pictures, but that impact is often unclear.⁶⁸ Second, in their efforts to plot artefacts on a graph, cultural analytics software separates the visual component of an artefact from its context. Who presented the artefact? What did she say about it? Such analysis, if done, is usually separate, so that the breath-taking visualisations provided by cultural analytics are not fully situated in their interpretive context.⁶⁹ Third, a focus upon the tool’s affordances restricts the sorts of questions one can ask: if all one can examine is hue and saturation, then other aspects of the artefacts may be overlooked. Finally, hue, saturation, and edge detection are unreliable foci for similarity. Iconographers will connect artefacts that use different colours whose compositions are sufficiently different that matching algorithms would ignore their conceptual similarities—because the algorithms have no way to understand “conceptual similarities”.

This is not to say that cultural analytics will never be useful for iconographic work. SSI’s software consists of macros built for ImageJ. Functionality may be developed via its plug-in architecture. Separate tools may be developed as well. There are several recent advances in image recognition and machine learning, although these are at the stage of identifying, e.g., the presence of people and types of environments, not specific people performing specific tasks in specific places (He et al., 2015; Szegedy et al., 2015; Howard et al., 2017). In the near future, it may well be possible to train an algorithm to sort a corpus of complex artefacts according to a set of pre-defined rules. Human researchers will almost certainly provide rich materials to train that algorithm. At that point, cultural analytics may be of great benefit to iconography.

A computationally-based visualisation of an iconographic dataset thus may not be achievable at present. Visual overviews are very helpful, however, and they have been used sporadically by art historians in the past. The most famous example of this is the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a series of 79 boards upon which Aby Warburg placed resonant visual examples of themes and gestures across history, from Antiquity to contemporary newspapers (see section 1.7.3). An overview like the *Mnemosyne Atlas* can very useful for large *corpora* of artefacts: however, currently it requires

⁶⁸ For instance, yellow and white roses have different symbolic meanings, but the colours in themselves do not have consistent symbolism and cannot be assessed through a thumbnail overview which eschews the artefact’s content, particularly when the colours are averaged for the entire artefact.

⁶⁹ Pearce et al. (2018) take pains to provide multiple visualisations of context via different tools offered by Visual Computing, but the fact remains that the pictorial overview of all their pictures can only lead the authors to interpret the spread of imagery exclusively by hue and saturation. Whilst the VSML do not adopt the cultural analytics approach, Vis and Goriunova (2015) provide similar multiple views on through a facet methodology: see section 2.4.2 for more.

manual assembly, because such a visualisation depends upon a recognition of thematic similarities, and not compositional similarities as identified by, e.g., ImageSorter. This project will make use of a number of visualisations similar to the *Mnemosyne Atlas* to provide guides into thematic similarities.

1.6. Summary

Semiotics, discourse analysis, content analysis, and cultural analytics all provide rich frameworks for visual analysis. They offer differing levels of focus and scope. Semiotic approaches excel at tracking the interplay of signs operating within an artefact across multiple modalities. Discourse analysis links visual artefacts with explicit statements that intertextually support the concepts informing those artefacts, to the point that those concepts become so pervasive as to seem quite natural. Content analysis provides a firm ground upon which to build an understanding of a large group of artefacts. And cultural analytics provide a visual overview of a corpus of artefacts the likes of which are offered by none of the others. The advocacy of iconography presented here places it alongside these other methods. It is not my intention to argue that iconography is the *sole* method of value. Rather, I contend that it can be another useful framework which may be added to the researcher's toolbox.

How does iconography differ from these other frameworks? It differs because it links groups of visual artefacts to the history of image-making and adds nuance to their study through close analysis of those artefacts. The combination of close analysis and historical linkage shifts the focus between micro and macro viewpoints: that is, upon the interrelationships between the individual work and its multiple interrelationships with other artefacts, be they visual or textual. Put in other terms, iconography posits the following: that signs in an artefact achieve their connotations partly through accreted exposure to like imagery, and that the resonant influence of that artefact upon both image maker and viewer arises at least as much through latent textual and visual discursive practices as it does through explicit discourse. This is why close analysis, historical linkage, and connections with other artefacts are all required in its scope. As such, iconography offers a possible answer to the project's aim: to find a way to examine a large dataset of visual materials coming from the Internet, but to do so in a nuanced, historical fashion.

Whether iconography can be a *useful* method to analyse social media imagery has not yet been addressed.⁷⁰ The method needs to be updated both theoretically and practically to address the three prime research questions of this project:

- If one seeks to analyse social media images in a detailed, nuanced way, addressing their historical context and resonances, can iconography be a useful method to aid in such an approach?
- Can an iconographic approach accommodate quantitative data systematically, and if so, how?

⁷⁰ Indeed, its relevance may be restricted to subsets of a corpus (see section 4.7).

- What extra components might be developed to perform a systematic iconographic analysis?

Adopting theoretical and practical elements from the above approaches will help address those questions, and the result will be a mixed-method form of **algorithmic iconography** that seeks to incorporate nuanced, historical analysis of imagery shared on social media.

Iconography needs to be updated *theoretically* to address the first of these questions. The method has been employed primarily for the study of “high” art in the gallery, palace, and church—even though it has been used to examine everyday imagery, primarily by prominent figures such as Aby Warburg (see section 1.7.3). Iconography must fully accommodate the register upon which it will operate on social media such as photojournalism, derivative imagery, memes, political cartoons, and graphic design, and see value in all of them. Some such artefacts refer to common iconographic themes, like personification, but many do not, and iconography’s efficacy depends upon recalibrating it to search for broader categories of encompassing themes (see section 1.7.4.2.4). The adoption of Aby Warburg’s conception of iconography (or, more accurately, iconology) helps in this recalibration, but the seeds for iconography as a mixed method have already been sown in what has come previously in this chapter: taking everyday visual artefacts seriously, Incorporating polysemy, and understanding that visual artefacts contribute associated with a given subject can be so pervasive that individual renditions appear natural, even inevitable, and can even colour the viewer’s perception of reality.

But the method also needs to be updated to deal *practically* with a volume of artefacts for which its informal cataloguing was not equipped. My research questions also focus upon a *systematic* examination, and that means delving into the practical issues surrounding such a systematic examination. The sheer variety of imagery on social media suggests that iconography may be useful, but the method offers no obvious practical assistance for dealing with a large corpus. Adopting practices from content analysis will help manage and organise that larger corpus. But organisation is merely one component of iconography, and the objects of its identification are often significantly vaguer than those studied by content analysts. The resulting exercise thus overlays a content analysis to create a tool that helps the iconographer perform operations to sort through the data in multiple, open-ended ways; its construction is covered in Chapter 3. In addition, due to the sheer volume of imagery, I will also incorporate visualisations of the data and cluster the results by thematic similarity not dissimilar to Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*—an exercise that requires a human touch.

1.7. Iconography and iconology

The rest of this chapter explores the methodology and theoretical assumptions of iconography and iconology. I will argue that a modified version of Erwin Panofsky’s methodology can extend its analytical reach to address the artefacts shared on social media platforms. Panofsky’s method has come under sustained criticism, questioning its validity as an approach, however; and

because I am basing my method upon his, any criticisms levelled at his method can be directed at my own. As such I will spend some time examining and addressing these criticisms. I argue that some criticisms can be mitigated by employing a framework arising from that of his predecessor, Aby Warburg, and that the data offered by social media platforms provides a needed corrective for any interpretations the researcher may wish to make.

1.7.1. Iconography or iconology?

To this point, I have been using the term “iconography” to encompass the identification, categorisation, and interpretation of visual artefacts; the result of this work places these artefacts into their historical situation. These components now require an in-depth examination.

Broadly speaking, when we use the term “iconography” today, we mean the methodology that many art historians have used to analyse the sources, history, and spread of specific attributes and forms, or motifs, of content in works of art—be that a two- or three-dimensional work. It is a process devoted to exploring how an image came to be represented in *this way*, and not in *that way*. It is ultimately a *descriptive* and *categorising* approach. In contrast, “iconology” is the *interpretation* of a particular work of art, based upon the evidence arising from iconographic research. Iconology places the work of art in—and these are words pregnant with assumptions and variations—a “broader context”, some permutations of which will be outlined below. In defining iconography and iconology thus, G. J. Hoogewerff wrote that the difference between the two is like that between geography and geology, wherein the former is a descriptive practice, the latter is an interpretative discipline; and the latter envelops and deploys the former, which informs its interpretations (Hoogewerff, 1928).⁷¹

The distinction between iconography and iconology has not always been drawn this way, and a number of people have employed the two terms interchangeably (Gombrich, 1960:9; Lavin, 1993:40): in the following pages, some authors will refer to those who use the methodology as “iconographers;” others will call them “iconologists”. An examination of iconography thus seems to demand that we also discuss iconology. Analysis and interpretation are difficult to separate, as

⁷¹ It is an uncomfortable truth that by comparing iconology with geology—or biology, or anthropology—a number of writers have at the very least implied that iconology (by which they mean both iconography and iconology) is a science (Hoogewerff, 1928; Warburg, 1932; Panofsky, 1955; Gombrich, 1970; Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell, 2015). Most recently, Mitchell (2015:220–21), who is perhaps to be credited more than anyone else for reviving the term “iconology”, has referred to “image science” as a type of “sweet science” that engages in “critical practice”, although there is little that is scientific in his approach. Attempting to describe iconology as a science is thus overly bold; traditionally, the practice seems more akin to the provisional, hermeneutic status of Clifford Geertz’ “thick” description of cultural practices, wherein one operates by “guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (Geertz, 1973:20). Giorgio Agamben (1999) takes a similar hermeneutic approach in his assessment of Warburg’s methodology for his “science of culture” (see 1.7.3 below).

intertwined as the serpents on Hermes' caduceus. For the sake of convenience, I will use the term "iconographic practice" when referring to the methodology that encompasses both iconography and iconology. When referring to iconography as opposed to iconology specifically, I will either distinguish the two (as I have in this sentence) or use the appropriate technical term, which will be defined below.

1.7.2. Antecedents: Ripa, Mâle

Iconography and iconology are both strongly associated with Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968), but he coined neither the term nor the approach. Recognisable elements of the methodology predate him by centuries. Cesare Ripa (1560–1622) employed it centuries earlier, as did Émile Mâle (1862–1954) and Aby Warburg (1866–1929) at the turn of the twentieth century; all are recognisably facets of the same approach. These differing authors use "iconography" and "iconology" alternatively to describe the method they used.⁷²



For instance, Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593 and subsequent editions; Figure 2) described Classical personifications (and several personifications Ripa himself created) for the usage of artists. It was originally a text-only codex, but was illustrated from the second edition onwards, and the subject matter was expanded upon with each edition. *Iconologia* already contains recognisable elements characteristic of both iconography and iconology centuries later: a description of the subject, defining several attributes; an account of variations on the subject; an association with source material for the variations; and an interpretation of the meaning of the elements or figure as a whole. It contains the distinguishing characteristics of a consistent,

interpretative methodology, albeit in a larval form (Zimmermann, 1995).⁷³

⁷² Of them, only Mâle, along with the rest of the French school, referred to the method generally as "iconography" (Gajewski, 2013:22): the others referred to it as "iconology", but these variants all contain a degree of identification, classification, and interpretation.

⁷³ The following is a translated example from the first illustrated edition (Ripa, 1603:1–2), which has been scanned and can be found online at <https://archive.org/details/iconologiaouerod00ripa> [Accessed 9 October 2015].

"ABUNDANCE.

"A gracious lady, with a beautiful garland of flowers about her head, and wearing clothing of a green colour, embroidered with gold, with her right hand a cornucopia filled with many and various fruits, olives, and others; and holding in her left arm a tied sheaf of wheat, millet & similar, from which many of the stalks tumble out, and likewise scattered on the ground.

In *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century* (1913), Émile Mâle employs a metaphor of decipherment for the labour of the artists who worked in the period; and by extension, he, too sees images as objects to be “read.” In addition, he states that artists were to some extent or other bound by previous renditions of a given subject and notes the similarity to the practices and concepts of writers (theological, and liturgical) stretching over a millennium. He draws distinct connections between the style of art and the concerns of the society in which, and for which, it was produced, both being bound in a strong sense of order. Mâle characterises the work of art, then, as tied to a tradition of representation, evoking both stylistically and conceptually the values of the society in which it was produced; and, finally, he suggests that the work of art is subordinate to the symbolism inherent in it. He does specifically mention pre-Christian intellectual traditions, his focus is purely on resonances in Christian art. This is important, as Christian art, along with Greco-Roman art, form two of the most potent branches

“Abundance should be depicted as beautiful, and graceful, as it is good, and one should distinguish it from its opposite, Famine, which is ugly, abominable and hateful.

“Having the garland of flowers, the fruit of which is the harbinger and author of abundance; they can likewise signify joy, and the delights of one’s true companion.

“The green & gold colours of her garment are appropriate, the pleasant verdant representing the fertile production of the countryside; & the gold, the maturation of corn, & fruits, which are in abundance.

“The cornucopia, via the tale of the goat Amalthea by Hermogenes, is related to the birth of Comets in the 7th book of *Meteorology* chap. 2. Achelous, & for what Ovid said of Achelous under the guise of Taurus, in Bk. 9. of *The Metamorphosis*, is a manifest sign of abundance, writing: *‘Naïades hoc pomis, & floris odore repletu. Sacrarunt, diuesque Meo bona copia cornu est.’*

And because Abundance is plentiful, she is represented so that her left arm carries as much bounty as her right, so that some sheaves are scattered on the floor.

‘In praescriptom Abundantie figuram, Dominus Ancaianus. / Aspice terrarum flavescentes undiq. Campos Multiplici complet messe benigna Ceres. / Pomorum vario curvantur pondere rami, / Et bromio vitis plena et liquore rubet. (mor / Cerne bou pecudumq. greges hinc lacteus hu / Hinc pingui sudant vimina vineta lacu. / Sylva feras nutrit, prodeunt aequora pisces, / Aeriis campis laeta vagatur avis. / Quid iam deposcas proprios mortalibus in usus / Nec caelu quicquam, nec tibi terra negat.’

ABUNDANCE.

A WOMAN standing, dressed in gold, with open arms, holding with her hands baskets of ears of corn, which hang from the sides of said figure, & derive from a medal from the time of Antoninus Pius, with letters saying: ANNONA AVG. COS. IIII. & S.C.

MARITIME ABUNDANCE.

Ceres is represented with stalks in her right hand stretched out over the prow of a ship, & at her feet a measure of grain with ears of corn in as above.

MARITIME ABUNDANCE.

A woman with her right hand holding a rudder, & with the left ears of corn.

ABUNDANCE.

A woman with garland of ears of corn, in her right hand a bundle of grain, with leaves, & in the left a cornucopia, & a branch of broom, above which are many silk bottles.

of source material for the iconography of art in the Western tradition (Mâle, 1913:1, 3, 9–10, 14, 22).⁷⁴

1.7.3. Warburg: the irrational pull of images

Perhaps more than any individual, Aby Warburg has been responsible—indirectly—for the dissemination of iconography and iconology as an art-historical approach. His methodology is embodied in a series of works devoted to the survival of Antiquity—in terms of both modes of thought and emotive gestures, called *Pathosformeln* (“emotive forms”)—in the art of the Renaissance. These articles and lectures were collected and republished in a single volume in the original German after his death (Warburg, 1932).

His influence in Anglophone art history, however, is indirect, due as much to linguistic hurdles as to the success of those who learned from him and propagated clearer variations of his approach. Many elements have conspired to limit Warburg’s influence. His reception was hobbled by his difficult writing style, which he himself characterised as *Aalsuppenstil* (“eel soup style”), a rich, densely intertwined writing in which it is disconcertingly easy to become lost (Gombrich, 1970:14–15; Didi-Huberman, 2002:22–23). The only work of his translated into English for sixty years was an abridgement of the famous Serpent Ritual lecture, which Warburg deemed unpublishable (Warburg, 1938–39; Steinberg, 1995b).⁷⁵ What is more, when the scope of Warburg’s research is discussed, his published work and the Serpent Ritual are elided together as if they were coequal versions of his thought process when they are not. The Serpent Ritual

⁷⁴ One may question whether the visual artefacts discussed by Mâle can in fact be considered “art.” Hans Belting (1990) distinguishes in a Kantian fashion between visual artefacts that were considered *functional* objects—i.e., those designed for use in liturgical or devotional contexts—as opposed to objects of aesthetic contemplation in themselves. By considering both types of artefacts as “art”, we might blind ourselves to extra-aesthetic considerations. This warning should be heeded when considering pictures shared on social media: they often seem to be carriers of didactic or functional messages in a broad sense—e.g., *this* is how to vote, *this* is how to consider a particular event, *this* is something you should find amusing—rather than aesthetic objects in their own right.

That said, it is clear that, throughout history, “functional” artistic objects have been appreciated aesthetically—see Bahrani (2014) for multiple examples of *ekphrasis* (writing about art) on *kudurrus*, or carved boundary markers from early Mesopotamia, which contain clear indications of aesthetic appreciation.

⁷⁵ The lecture was only published in full in German in 1988, and in English in 1995 (Steinberg, 1995b:viii; Warburg, 1995). It is ironic that a work Warburg himself considered unpublishable should have been the only accessible introduction in English for so long.

Warburg delivered the lecture as a bid to win his release from Ludwig Binswanger’s Kreuzlingen Sanatorium, where he had been interned for several years following a nervous collapse in 1918. Warburg’s suffering is addressed both sensitively and frankly by Didi-Huberman (2002:235ff), who sees his madness in the context of his life’s work. Didi-Huberman’s approach is in marked contrast to that of Gombrich in the latter’s “Intellectual Biography” of Warburg, who considered it best to not refer to Warburg’s fragmentary writings contemporaneous with his confinement and who thought it inappropriate to romanticise his bout with madness (Gombrich, 1970:9).

provides a “behind-the-scenes” look at his thinking, and is not representative of his methodological process, muddying the very real patterns in the work he deemed publishable.⁷⁶

Further hobbling his reception was the complexity of his thought. His approach encompassed anthropological concerns, empathy, and social memory in the form of “dynamograms”, or imprints of images into the human mind: he aimed for a *Kulturwissenschaft*, or “science of culture”. His emphasis upon the complex interrelationships between figures as the true focus of meaning and interpretation (e.g., the re-use of Orpheus’ defensive gesture in various different contexts, such as defiant gestures, over millennia; Figure 3), rather than more granular studies of individual forms as carriers of meaning over time (e.g., the way Orpheus has been depicted in art), also conspired to limit his influence.



His methods varied over his career and he struggled with writing, particularly after his breakdown. This led to the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, an innovative pictorial tool incorporating imagery from the history of art and contemporary photography used to illustrate what he saw as the continuing seismic aftershocks of forms originating in Antiquity (Gombrich, 1970:286–306; Michaud, 1998–91; Didi-Huberman, 2002:295–330; Johnson, 2012). The panels follow a quasi-iconographic form: similar poses and expressions are clustered together on different axes to visualize the resonances of specific poses and subjects over vast expanses of time.⁷⁷

Finally, Warburg’s influence was deferred in favour of those Individuals who were part of the “Hamburg scene” of art historians at the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (KBW), his voluminous, idiosyncratic library—such as Fritz Saxl (1890–1948), Erwin Panofsky, and Edgar Wind (1900–1971)—all of whom wrote more clearly and perhaps because, as members of the

⁷⁶ The urge to create a grand unified theory of Warburg is evident in recent publications; see Michaud (1998:191ff) [translated into English in 2004] and Johnson (2012:30–38). Didi-Huberman (2002:231–35, 332–33) [translated into English in 2016], ever sensitive to the plasticity of Warburg’s thought, nevertheless attempts to unify Warburg’s published works, the Serpent Ritual, and the writings he attempted whilst suffering and recovering from his collapse.

⁷⁷ The collage-like juxtapositions of the *Atlas* has been seen as influencing the direction of such innovative examples of art-historical outreach as Kenneth Clarke’s *Civilisation* and in particular John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (Finch, 2017).

German-Jewish diaspora into the Anglophone world, they often wrote in English.⁷⁸ Finally, the first in-depth introduction to Warburg's thought in English was Gombrich's (1970) *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, a book in many ways unsympathetic to Warburg's theories. Gombrich's dismissal of the "survival of Antiquity" as "outmoded" and his disinterest in the Nietzschean aspects of Warburg's thought tended to deaden insight into the founder's theories: it amounted to "a strange wish to 'kill the father'" (Didi-Huberman, 2002:53).

1.7.3.1. The "hermeneutic circle"

Warburg was never really forgotten in the German-speaking world: he was an acknowledged forebear of *Bildwissenschaft*—a so-called "science of imagery" which incorporates the study of visual materials from different registers, from "high" to "low" art similar in a number of respects to visual studies.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, a reassessment of Warburg's approach has been well underway for some time. This was accelerated in 1999, when the Getty Institute published Warburg's collected works translated into English by David Britt (Warburg, 1999). More recently, there has been significant recent research tying him to depictions of cinematic movement (Michaud, 1998) and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "rhizome" (Didi-Huberman, 2002:324): these major works have been also recently translated into English. And whilst Warburg's form of iconology is generally regarded as "unsystematic" (Ginzberg, 1986:20)—compared to those who followed him, in particular Panofsky—this characterisation does not do him full justice. Giorgio Agamben (1999:96) perceptively noted that Warburg's methodology follows an "hermeneutic circle"—or, really, spiral—which starts upon a localised problem and expands outwards, examining the implications of the original findings from a "higher perspective".⁸⁰

Warburg's hermeneutic spiral thus can be figured as a spiral that moves across three main levels: the first is that of iconography and the history of art; the second is that of the history of culture; and the third and broadest level is that of the 'nameless science' to which Warburg dedicated his life and that aims to diagnose Western man through a consideration of his phantasms (Agamben, 1999:98).

This is still a fairly abstract formulation, and can be clarified further: however, any clarification is perturbed by the fact that Warburg's thought is intricately interwoven. In order to track the use of motifs in the baseline, art-historical questions that formed the starting-points of his enquiries, Warburg crucially saw that, in the absence of direct literary materials referring to works of art, he could employ other documents as circumstantial evidence, such as histories, wills, astrology

⁷⁸ On the "Hamburg scene", see Michaud (1998:229–49) and Levine (2013), who also discusses the diaspora.

⁷⁹ For more on *Bildwissenschaft*, see Bredekamp (2003).

⁸⁰ Elsewhere in the article, Agamben likens the circle into a spiral, as the subject radiates out into ever-widening implications. It is nevertheless true that Warburg was not forthright about communicating his method. Gombrich (1970:ix) simply stated that "he had no method, but he had a message". Didi-Huberman (2002:332–33) notes that when Warburg attempted to write about his method, he left a handful of words on a sheaf of otherwise blank pages.

texts, woodcuts, and manuscript illuminations: these documents link the work of art to iconographic forebears and the ways in which a document is symptomatic of cultural movements of the author's time (the "history of culture"). Variations of this approach are so common today that it is difficult to see that in Warburg's time, it was a radical step.

That said, Warburg differed from the more received version of iconography—or iconology—familiar to most art historians, to be discussed in detail below. He was interested not so much in iconographic histories—wherein the rendition of a subject is based upon immediate formal precedents—but rather upon those *Pathosformeln*, the formulas of expressive gestures used to convey emotions across a broader constellation of imagery (Warburg, 1905:555). His iconography, then, is of a different sort from that of Mâle, who was more interested in typological forebears for his imagery, and of liturgical documents as the source informing the ostensible intent of the artefact.⁸¹ Indeed, it is symptomatic of Warburg's affective approach: for him, what mattered is not finding an exact formal antecedent, but rather locating the class of images that he deemed would create a similar empathic effect upon the viewer.

And yet for Warburg, images are more complicated than even this looser clustering would suggest. Warburg felt that emotive gestures could be "polarised" into different contexts in different eras, to be used to different purposes: again, for example, the raised hand of Orpheus



as he protects himself from ravaging Maenads can be translated into a gesture of defiance or victory accorded to David in his contest against Goliath (Warburg, 1905). Such a repurposing of figures and gestures into radically different contexts will sound extremely familiar to anyone who is familiar with memetic imagery on the Internet (Milner, 2016).

Three examples may suffice to illustrate Warburg's approach. His dissertation was devoted to the "afterlife of the Antique" in Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*—specifically, how the artist sought inspiration from contemporary textual sources and visual inspiration from Greco-Roman Antiquity. Specifically, for the *Birth of Venus* Botticelli drew upon Angelo Poliziano's poem to

⁸¹ Didi-Huberman (2002:184–90) neatly illustrates the difference between this approach and Warburg's with the different, fundamentally typological iconographic approach of Jean-Martin Charcot and Paul Richier's representations of hysteria in the 19th century. For Charcot, the hysteric *must* go through specified stages in order to be categorised as such. For Warburg, the symptom is what drives the stages in the first place.

Aphrodite—itself influenced by an Homeric hymn—filled with vivid descriptions of movement. These emotive textual and visual forms emphasise kinetic movement, which Warburg considered a “touchstone of ‘antique influence’” (Warburg, 1893:104). The painting, however, is not a slavish rendering of the poem or any classical artwork—in fact there are significant diversions from either of these sources. The point for Warburg is that both acted as springboards to “rediscover the expressive formulas according to which life was represented therein” (Michaud, 1998:71). Details such as billowing clothing and dishevelled hair depict an unstable moment of action, of individuals converging onto a moment charged with importance (Warburg, 1893:90–95).

In his interpretation of Ghirlandaio’s zodiacal frescoes in the *Palazzo Schifanoia* (Ferrara), Warburg (1912) used a mixture of text and image to identify the mysterious figures in the fresco’s central band as personified “decans”, or the tripartite divisions of individual zodiacal signs.⁸² He identified the textual lynchpin as the mediaeval Arab astrologer Abū Ma’šār, who re-introduced symbolic representations for the decans passed from Indian representations of Greek originals; and he identified the programmatic lynchpin as Pellegrino Prisciani, an advisor to the Ferrarese court and “artistic superintendent” at the *Palazzo* who had specific interests in cosmology (Warburg, 1912:569, 581–82). Warburg equally drew upon visual evidence of classical imagery from medieval woodcuts and manuscripts, neither of which were considered artworks particularly worth studying, and neither of which provided precise formal parallels to the decans in the fresco: but both provided elements that formed vital clues allowing for the decans’ identification. As before, Warburg used non-standard materials (court documents, medieval cosmologies, woodcuts, and manuscript illuminations) to draw together the materials to present his case. Again, at the time these were not standard materials to consult, which is one reason why he concludes his lecture with his plea for an iconological analysis “that can range freely, with no fear of border guards” (Warburg, 1912:585).

Another example lies in his essay on Martin Luther, astrological prophesy, and Renaissance propaganda, which tracks the influence of astrology upon Luther’s enemies and those within Luther’s circle (Warburg, 1920). Warburg raised broader concerns about the received notion of the Classical past and the Renaissance as moments of supreme rationality. He noted that the serene, “rarefied” (i.e., Olympian) rendition of the gods was “entirely the creation of humanist scholars”, a creation that purposely ignored the gods’ “‘daemonic’ aspect”, particularly evident in astrological representations which had been reproduced throughout the Middle Ages

⁸² They are called “decans” because each represents a 10° slice of the 360° spherical canopy of the night sky: there are 12 zodiacal signs covering the night sky, and 3 decans per sign, so this amounts to 36 decans covering 360 degrees.

(1920:598).⁸³ Warburg saw, then, a complex interplay between rationality and irrationality at work at the heart of European culture, expressed both through images and practices: for Warburg, this is not merely an expression of a culture at a particular point, but a *schizophrenic symptom* expressed throughout time. He gnomically states it thus in his Luther essay, using “Athens” and “Alexandria” as ciphers for rationality and irrationality:

...This was the age of Faust, in which the modern scientist—caught between magic practice and cosmic mathematics—was trying to insert the *conceptual space* of rationality between himself and the object. Athens wants again and again to be reconquered afresh by Alexandria (Warburg, 1920:650).⁸⁴

This passage is critical for understanding Warburg’s conception of imagery: they exert an irrational pull over us. Despite being supposedly rational creatures, we are swayed by the non- or irrational gestural features of the image which “work us over”, to borrow Marshall MacLuhan’s evocative phrase. The compositional components nudge us in favour of certain interpretations of the image’s subject, to the detriment of other possible interpretations.

⁸³ In modern parlance, Warburg’s referrals to the “daemonic” of the gods seems to coincide very closely with notions of the irrational.

⁸⁴ Here is Warburg’s sentence in the original German: “*Athen will eben immer wieder neu aus Alexandrien zurückerobert sein*”. The sentence in the passage above is not from Britt’s translation, but my own, adapted from the rather stiff version by Steinberg (1995a:69): “Athens always wants precisely to be reconquered anew from Alexandria”. Britt translates this, to my mind incorrectly, as “Athens *has* constantly to be won back again from Alexandria” (emphasis mine). Gombrich (1970:214) translated it as “Athens *must* always be conquered afresh from Alexandria” (emphasis mine). Gombrich (1970:214–15) states that the passage should be read for its “tragic awareness of the threat which the powers of fear and of primitive magic mentality constitute to the realm of reason and reflection.” In contrast, Steinberg (1995a:69) notes that “Warburg speaks of the internal desire of Athens—what Athens wants, which is the continual *desire to control* the ongoing historical and psychological dialectic with Alexandria” (emphasis mine). Steinberg correctly notes the desire in the passage: the critical word here is *want* (*will*), a word connoting desire. But he seems incorrect in describing this as “control”. If anything, the control goes the other way: it is Alexandria by whom Athens wants to be “reconquered anew”. In other words, Warburg sees an emotional pull—and perhaps a retrograde notion of seduction—operating in the struggle between rationality and irrationality, a point lost in both Gombrich’s and Britt’s translations.

There is no space to delve into Warburg’s problematic dismissal of non-European thought as fundamentally irrational. As Claire Farago (2009:199) notes, “the latest generation of Warburg specialists as yet appear unwilling to address the possibility that elements of cultural evolutionary theory linger unrecognised in the master’s innovative work”. Warburg’s thought is riddled throughout with an element of evolution from magical usage to science, in a neat parallel to the thesis of *The Golden Bough* (Frazer, 1922), which he referenced in the notes to his Serpent Lecture. His work contains a number of disparaging comments about “the East”—most notably in his *Palazzo Schifanoia* lecture and the Luther essay—and he thus betrays some of the Orientalist prejudice common of his time. What distinguishes him from Frazer is that Warburg also saw the irrational operating at the heart of the West as well, and that even in an age of dawning enlightenment—or even in an age of science—irrationality is never far from the surface of rationality.

The higher “circles” of Warburg’s hermeneutic, then, were iconological in nature: “the interaction of forms and contents in the clash of traditions”, but “not the study of complex emblems and allegories”, a rationalist form of iconology more common to those who follow the later tradition, specifically in the context of the humanistic art of the Renaissance (Gombrich, 1970:313). This later tradition was promoted by figures who propagated Warburg’s theories in a de-radicalised, less psychological, more circumscribed form: Fritz Saxl, Edgar Wind, Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001), and, foremost among them, Erwin Panofsky.

1.7.4. Panofsky: solidification of a methodology?

The deserved influence of Erwin Panofsky’s interpretation of the methodology can hardly be overstated—this is partly due to the clarity of its expression in contrast with that of Aby Warburg, who never explicitly described his methods of working. This clarity has, in turn, made it a target for some equally deserved criticism. Because of these reasons, I will use Panofsky’s outline as a foundation and touchstone for this chapter.⁸⁵ However, this research project is not intended to be an exegesis on Panofsky. Indeed, to understand his methodology on its own, and to understand how it could be applied to the study of images shared on social media, would make less sense were one not to compare Warburg’s methodological contributions. However unsystematic, Warburg’s contributions to the methodology have been crucial, despite the fact that Panofsky does not cite the influence of Warburg in his formulations. Much of what we take for granted in providing evidence for our interpretations of imagery is based upon Warburg, and in the following section I will highlight those ways in which Warburg contributes, differs from, and perhaps enriches our methodological possibilities when his alternate approach is used in conjunction with Panofsky’s. In addition, I will highlight suggestions for alterations made by some writers and attempt to show that Panofsky’s description offers a strong foundation for responding to his critics in unexpected ways. Finally, I will describe how the methodology can be adapted for analysing imagery distributed on social media, a cultural register radically differing from that which formed it, the study of humanistic art of the Italian Renaissance.⁸⁶

Panofsky initially defines iconography as concerning “itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form”; however, later on, he distinguishes iconography from iconology, the former a “limited and... ancillary study” description of “when and where specific

⁸⁵ Panofsky addressed the subject three times, in 1932, 1939, and 1955, altering and refining his conception and terminology each time: the first attempt being only translated into English in 2012 (Panofsky, 2012; Panofsky, 1939; Panofsky, 1955). I will use the terms in his 1955 version, highlighting the corresponding terms he used in 1932/2012 and 1939 when necessary.

⁸⁶ Panofsky contained his description of the method within the confines of humanistic art of the Italian Renaissance—the phrase is present in the title of the essay. It seems correct to think that Panofsky thus presented a version of the method tailored specifically for this subject. It also suggests that this version of the method was not meant to be used unaltered to study, e.g., seventeenth-century Dutch art.

themes were visualized with which specific motifs” (Panofsky, 1955:26). Iconology, in contrast, is the interpretation of those elements: “I conceive of iconology as an iconography turned interpretative and thus becoming an integral part of the study of art instead of being confined to the role of a preliminary statistical survey” (Panofsky, 1955:31, 32). Ultimately, then, he draws a distinction along the lines outlined at the beginning of this chapter: iconology is what one does when interpreting the data gleaned from iconographic research. There are three phases to his methodology: the *pre-iconographic description*, which is a description of the elements of a work of art; the *iconographical analysis*, i.e., the consideration of attributes and symbolic motifs present; and the *iconological interpretation*, i.e., the meaning one derives from the work (Panofsky, 1955:33–35; 35–38; 38–39).

1.7.4.1. Pre-iconographic description

This is the fundamental level, and comprises identifying humans, birds, plants, angry faces, or whatever is rendered in the artefact. Identifying these objects is part of “the sphere of practical experience”, wherein we may need to consult an expert in, e.g., sixteenth-century armour should that knowledge fall outside of our own expertise. He calls these basic building-blocks of representative forms “motifs” (33).



Already we have come to a problem of interpretation, however: as Rudolf Wittkower (1955:174) wrote, “all perception is interpretation”. Panofsky was only too aware of this—the acknowledgement is present in his initial 1932 characterisation, wherein he calls this stage the “phenomenal meaning”.⁸⁷ In his original paper, he describes the *Resurrection* panel (Figure 4) from Matthias Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-1516): “When I call the accumulation of light and colour in the centre of the picture a hovering human being with holes in his hands and feet, then, to repeat, I breach the limits of purely formal description” (Panofsky,

2012:469). How so? In this description, he has already decided to interpret the figure of the figure as *hovering*. As viewers, we take in that Grünewald has created a sufficiently plausible perspectival



⁸⁷ The tacit understanding that one immediately engages in interpretation perhaps explains why in 1955 Panofsky hurriedly stepped over his phenomenological explanation to concentrate upon what we understand through practical experience.

representation so that it makes sense to interpret Christ as hovering, rather than the alternative possibility that the artist failed to represent space correctly for this one figure. This is an interpretative assumption on our part, but a plausible one: were we looking at a rendition of a city depicted in a 11th-century Ottonian manuscript illustration, floating against its ground (Figure 5), we would likely interpret the image as standing on solid, but non-rendered, ground. There is a plausible assumption, in other words, that the artist creates a sort of world of stylistic unity (Panofsky, 1955:34-35).⁸⁸

In addition, of course, we are unlikely to ever encounter someone hovering in mid-air. Plausible as the rendition of Grünewald's hovering Christ may be, it violates our own experience. As Panofsky continues: "but I still remain within a sphere of meaningful imagination in which the viewer can partake—which is familiar to him from his habitual visual experience, his sense of touch, and other sensory perceptions, in short, from his immediate life experience" (Panofsky, 2012:469).

Warburg's approach—or, rather, his emphasis—already differs from Panofsky's at the pre-iconographic level. This realm of "motifs" was of more importance to him as the level by which one could identify the emotive forms or *Pathosformeln* which were used by artists in such different ways. To return to the raised arm: a gesture of self-defence may turn to a gesture of defiance; and in another example, a pose connoting ecstatic frenzy may alternatively be used to connote grief. In other words, Warburg saw an inherent ambiguity in many aspects of "practical experience" readily exploitable by artists.

1.7.4.2. Iconographical analysis

Iconographical analysis⁸⁹ uses the stuff of pre-iconographic description to identify "images, stories, and allegories." We are no longer operating on a level where we might readily understand the contents of a picture: we need familiarity with something outside the picture, as it "presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition" (Panofsky, 1955:35). These words are pregnant with implications, to which we will return in time. In any event, Panofsky provides an example of "an Australian bushman" who, whilst likely understanding that a given image was of a group of thirteen dour men eating a meal, would less likely identify the image as

⁸⁸ Wittkower (1955) and Gombrich (1960), amongst others, have noted that stylistic conventions of different times and places have a significant influence upon what can be assumed or not. For instance, it is so common to "float" figures and buildings on an invisible ground in 10th-century Ottonian manuscripts, and that these figures and cities are parts of narratives where figures and buildings do not miraculously float, that "floating" representations can be assumed to be a characteristic of the visual style of that period.

⁸⁹ Panofsky originally called this stage "Meaning depending on content" (1932; 2012); he subsequently changed its title to "iconographic analysis in the narrow sense" (1939); in the final version (1955), he settled upon "iconographical analysis".

representing the Last Supper. It would require familiarity with a literary tradition, as well as the conventions of representing that scene (35).

1.7.4.2.1. Traditional iconographic imagery

More concretely, what kind of images are in mind when we talk of iconography—specifically as originally formulated, to study Renaissance art? Roelof van Straten helpfully outlines a number of different classifications of symbolism (Van Straten, 1985:45–65). He divides them into two main sections: figural individuals, and objects. First, the figural individuals:

- **Personification:** an abstract idea personified, with attributes, usually alone (e.g., “Abundance” or “Uncle Sam”);
- **Allegory:** one or more personifications or historical/religious figures participating in a common activity (e.g., the U.S. Statue of Liberty confronted by Donald Trump).

Van Straten distinguishes between objects that convey “deeper” meanings through the following distinctions:

- **Symbols:** an object that conveys a deeper meaning (e.g., keys to symbolise authority, as in St Peter’s charge to lead the church);
- **Attributes:** symbols associated with figures, aiding in identification (e.g., the keys in St Peter’s hand);
- **Symbolic representations:** non-allegorical, non-narrative representations wherein one or more symbols may be used to convey a complex idea (e.g., *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia*, the Medieval representations of the Old Law (*Synagoga*) of the Old Testament as a blinded woman with a broken standard, in contrast to the New Law (*Ecclesia*) of the New Testament, whose vision is unobscured and who carries an unbroken standard);
- **Emblems:** an amalgam of epigram, motto, and image that became extremely popular in the post-Renaissance period. These may refer collections of folk or traditional sayings (e.g., “The big fish eat the little fish”).

It should be noted, briefly, that a similar use of symbolic material is still very much in evident in contemporary imagery, particularly in political cartoons, which use virtually all of the above.

1.7.4.2.2. Documentary source materials

One may note that these classifications tilt strongly towards art containing symbolic meanings that are to a great extent sourceable within literary traditions: Homer, Ovid, Livy, the *Bible*, the *Patrologia Latina*, and other influential books from Antiquity and the Christian tradition are paramount for understanding the content of an image. The list of classifications and sources are strongly biased towards Renaissance and Baroque image-making (Alpers, 1983:xxiii-xxiv; Moxey, 1986:269; Didi-Huberman, 1990:113). This seems inevitable, as the methodology was forged in the crucible of Renaissance art studies; Svetlana Alpers, Georges Didi-Huberman and others have expressed reservations about the degree to which the methodology can be transposed, in a

wholesale manner, to study works from different eras, locations, and traditions (Alpers, 1983:xxi; Didi-Huberman, 1990:156). However, this is not an unassailable critique: the other deep strain of Western iconographical imagery of course is that used for religious images of the Mediaeval period. Some of this imagery engages with and partly stems from the Classical tradition (Grabar, 1968). Other imagery differs considerably: *The Golden Legend* for example is a critical text beyond the standard source material for understanding imagery conveying the lives of the saints.

However, texts need not be followed slavishly. Whilst examining Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*, Warburg crucially saw the broader influence of textual imagery describing movement in Poliziano's poetry. Warburg paid close attention to incidental, "accessory forms"—which might be called "pre-iconographic" elements in Panofsky's schema—such as billowing clothing and dishevelled hair as depicting an unstable moment of critical action (Warburg, 1893:90–95). He thus found the nymph in *Primavera* & the Hora in the *Birth* to be critical examples of the figure in movement, a form expressed in Antiquity and repeated in varying contexts by different artists of the Renaissance (Warburg, 1932:159; Gombrich, 1970:105–27). Warburg, then, saw visual imagery as being a form of source material equal to textual sources in their importance, and that textual imagery could be an oblique influence upon visual representations. The assertion that visual imagery could be the source of new material was confirmed by investigators such as André Grabar (1968), who documented the visual source material for many examples of Christian imagery, such as triumphal imagery used to display the Cross or the early insignia *XP*, (short for Χριστός, or Christ) or the philosopher with his acolytes as a forerunner of Christ and the Apostles.

Nevertheless, one may encounter difficulties in finding source material for imagery, even in literate (or semi-literate) cultures. Paul Taylor analysed a series of unfamiliar representations of a bearded, partially-shod, crucified individual in front of whom a fiddler plays his instrument. Which male saint is this, and what story does it represent? Eventually identifying the figure as the female St Kümmernis, who seems to have been confused with the *Volto Santo* statue in Lucca, Taylor uses the curious series as an object-lesson to illustrate the point that "if we do not know which text is being illustrated, we cannot know which scene is being represented, and if we do not know which scene is being represented, we cannot know which figures are being represented" (Taylor, 2008:7). Earlier, Taylor (1995:28ff) warned against the dangers of reconstructing elaborate iconographic programmes for Dutch flower paintings because so much symbolism is attached to flowers. Much of this symbolism is contradictory, and one can easily cobble together an elaborate iconographic programme—with little proof that anyone of the period would have "read" the painting in that way.

The need for an external textual or oral source becomes more acute should we consider attempts to characterise works such as the carvings at Göbekli Tepe in Turkey. At 11,000 years old, this string of stone circles is the most ancient "cultic city" discovered to date (Schmidt,

2006).⁹⁰ There appears to be no evidence of habitation at the site, and the various ringed structures—created in succession of one another—display various patterns of recurring animal motifs on giant T-shaped pillars presumably for “cultic” purposes. Klaus Schmidt (2000:48), the principal archaeologist on the site, has stated that “beyond ‘ritual’ we don’t know the exact function of the site”. As an archaeological site the age of which far predates any known human writing, there are no texts—and, seemingly, no oral traditions—to assist in interpreting the purpose of this animal imagery.

These examples return us to pre-iconographic description, with the giant caveat from Taylor that what we think we see (in his first example, a bearded man) may not be what is represented (a bearded woman). These examples constitute breaks between the subject (whether an individual or a narrative), which we can perceive to some extent, and the concept behind it. George Kubler thought this a weakness of iconographic analysis: “continuities of theme are its principal substance: the breaks and ruptures of the tradition lie beyond the iconologist’s scope, like all the expressions of civilisations without abundant literary documentation” (Kubler, 1962:27).

1.7.4.2.3. Other iconographic source material: other visual artefacts

Kubler’s pronouncement seems overly pessimistic, however. Whilst the absence of “abundant literary documentation” indeed hobbles the iconographer in her attempt to provide *concrete* proof of what an image is supposed to represent, this does not mean that it is impossible to expand beyond the literary. In his wide-ranging 1939 essay “Eagle and Serpent,” Rudolf Wittkower traced the migration of an image, that of a bird battling a serpent, frequently with a human involved. By associating imagery and using philological analysis, Wittkower’s scope spans from the Near East to the Americas, with a chronology spanning thousands of years. He produces a narrative from these disparate traditions to suggest that the concept represents the struggle between good (the bird) and evil (the snake), with a heroic man sometimes taking part in order to tip the scales in favour of good, and who thus receives a heavenly reward (Wittkower, 1939). This is a story that indeed contains oral traditions, but also so many ruptures that it would appear impossible to connect them to one another: and yet Wittkower does so by noting a series of uncanny visual and linguistic parallels.

Fritz Saxl’s 1947 essay “Continuity and Variation in the Meaning of Images” (1947) is another example that specifically examines the lacuna between text and representation. It is also representative of Saxl’s approach—which is similar to Warburg’s but differs in its narrower scope—wherein works of art attain equal status with historical documents as forms of evidence. In his discussion of the winged angel of Christian art, he notes that Biblical evocations never

⁹⁰ Many pictures of this site can be found online at the Tepe Telegrams, a site operated by the archaeologists who have carried out investigations on the site since Schmidt’s death in 2014. See <https://tepetelegrams.wordpress.com> [Accessed 16 April 2017].

suggest anything visually unusual (e.g., wings) in the impression angels would have on a person they encounter: “the story [of Manoah and the angel, *Judges* 13:12ff]... would be quite pointless if the messenger had been winged, as we imagine every angel to be; for then Manoah would not have doubted his divine nature” (1947:22).⁹¹ He briefly outlines the prehistory of the Christian angel by viewing angels as messengers (which is their role, in the *Judges* story mentioned above, in the Annunciation, and elsewhere, and which is the literal meaning of ἄγγελος). He notes the early history of similar winged semi-divine images in the Near East and lists the winged messengers from the Greeks and Romans: Mercury, Iris, and Victory. But he notes that in their various roles as numinal messengers, their attributes of wings were “revived so effectively as to change the interpretation of the sacred writings” (Saxl, 1947:25).

However, Saxl’s essay also belies the problem with the narrower approach to imagery that he took in contrast to Warburg. Saxl restricts the history of angels back to several winged figures which were held the status of messengers in Antiquity. But he neglects to note the existence of the *genii*, the spirit figures often portrayed in Roman sarcophagi to personify death, sleep, and the soul of the departed: these took the form of winged children (Panofsky, 1964:32–38 *passim*). Given the acknowledged influence of sarcophagi on the development of various motifs in Christian art, it is likely that these formed a separate strain of antecedents that culminated in the *putti* so common in art from Renaissance onwards.⁹²

Recently, Peter Mason (2001) has explored the development and reuse of iconographic forms in the Renaissance to render new and unfamiliar themes, particularly the “New World” of the Americas, from confused depictions of Native Americans to exotica such as turkeys. By mixing and matching totally unrelated attributes such as headdresses from one tribe and insignia from another thousands of kilometres away—or by reusing the head of an Incan ruler for a depiction of a giant skeleton dug up in seventeenth-century England—“sixteenth-century iconography did not always operate along the same lines as those followed by its more recent practitioners... specific geographical provenance was of less importance than the capacity of the singularity to partake in a world of exotica in general” (Mason, 2001:99, 118). It seems that artistic iconographical practice, far from enforcing a strongly demarcated system of discrete signs, instead amalgamated imagery into broader themes, which themselves require less complete

⁹¹ All Biblical references come from the Douay-Rheims version of the *Bible*, the English translation of Jerome’s *Vulgate*. This is significant because the *Vulgate* was the standard Bible for a millennium, and thus the Douay-Rheims expresses metaphors that were carried through different cultures over a long time. More germane to these quotations, it orders books in a different way than the King James Version.

⁹² For the influence of Roman sarcophagi on the development of Christian art, see Spivey (2001:112–35).

background information. Such a heterodox line of antecedents is more in keeping with Warburg's approach than Panofsky's.

1.7.4.2.4. Other iconographic source material: themes

Wittkower, Saxl and Mason's work highlights ways in which it is possible to assemble evidence that spans the ruptures that Kubler identifies. In 1965, Jan Białostocki (1965) identified in Wittkower and Saxl's surveys a need for a criterion by which to incorporate more abstracted, hitherto-unclassified image types, which he called *Rahmenthemen*, or "encompassing themes". Basing his concept upon Jungian archetypes, Białostocki identified broader classifications such as: the ruler, the triumph of virtue over vice, motherhood, and the sacrifice. The virtue—and drawback—of such an approach is that it is infinitely extensible; one may easily include dominance and submission, the man on horseback as an expression of authority, and so on, *ad nauseam*. It must be asked where one stops with such an expansible series of themes, but the value in Białostocki's expansion is that it allows us to discuss specific motifs whose original meanings may no longer be fully recalled in a post-Christian, post-Classical society. It also returns us to Aby Warburg's notion of emotive forms that are repeated throughout the history of image-making, and places greater importance upon an affective experience of such imagery.

One may worry about basing a theory on Jungian psychology, with its heavy dependence upon mysticism.⁹³ As such, Białostocki's theory seems to be on shaky evidentiary ground. The concept may be resurrected, however, if instead of considering narratives or images to be *proof* of the mechanism of archetypes operating in some conception of the collective unconscious, they *are* the mechanism of archetypes *themselves*: that is, they are the agents that produce what have been seen as archetypes. Thus, the *process* of reusing previously-existing, well-received material seen in literature, pictures, sculpture, and movies comprises the method by which such themes develop and maintain cultural resonance.⁹⁴

One may further worry that encompassing themes do not perfectly fit Panofsky's schema: they span his separate stages, because the compositions themselves form the iconographic theme and source, and—supposedly—carry emotive import. In this respect, Białostocki's *Rahmenthemen* are very like Warburg's *Pathosformeln*. Both Warburg and Białostocki identified seemingly important, repeated forms which would be folly to dismiss simply because they did not fit

⁹³ Any theory dependent upon Jungian archetypes falls prey to the same criticisms to which Jungian psychological theory itself is vulnerable: that it is mystical in nature, and concepts such as "collective unconscious", whereby cultural components are transmitted and understood throughout entire societies, can only be realistically interpreted as metaphorical in nature, doing violence to Jung's original conception (Happold, 1964).

⁹⁴ A similar approach was taken by André Grabar (1968:xlvi–xlvi): stressing thematic similarities between pagan Roman imagery and early Christian imagery provides significant insight into the resonance "built in", for example the use of imperial triumph imagery in the display of the "XP" emblem held aloft by angels within a laurel wreath.

Panofsky's schema. Their examples collectively constitute a call for greater flexibility in our use of iconography as a methodology.

One may view encompassing themes as a marriage of practical and symbolic values. Such images may be practical because they are familiar to us. To return to the example of a gesture of defence and defiance: if an angry-looking figure raises his arm, I am likely to understand that as an intent to violence, because I have either seen or experienced this before, much as one interprets Orpheus' gesture as protecting himself from the Maenads. Such an image will gain symbolic value by repetition and context: if such a figure is placed over a demonic figure (as in an example of St Michael overcoming the devil), we may understand it as the triumph of good over evil; if over a mother and child (as in the case of the Massacre of the Innocents), we might understand the figure as denoting cruelty or tyranny. The repetition of encompassing themes functions over time and in specific contexts, then, to accrue meanings and associations, many of which can be grouped in clusters of related meanings.

Indeed, Warburg pursued similar a similar thematic approach in his final work, the unfinished 79-panel *Mnemosyne Atlas* "visual essay".⁹⁵ Warburg placed photographs of paintings and sculpture from Antiquity through the Renaissance and Baroque periods on these panels, juxtaposing them to arrive at an understanding of their empathic resonances. He also incorporated photographs from contemporary news magazines to incorporate the permutation of these themes in the modern era. An early arrangement of a panel devoted to "the Maenad", for example, juxtaposed the ecstatic, frenetic movement of the maenad with the similar, fraught response of Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross (Didi-Huberman, 2002:225, fig. 69). This is concurrently an example of the power of gesture and its "polarisation" into opposite effects—ecstasy and agony, a theme pursued by Wind (1937).

1.7.4.3. Iconological interpretation

Panofsky turned to the Warburg-influenced term of iconology—or, more specifically, iconological interpretation⁹⁶—to square with his definition of iconology as iconography turned interpretative. It is the most interpretative level—ostensibly at least—and the conclusions that derive from it are the most open for debate, as it is the weakest part of his presentation.

⁹⁵ Johnson (2012:xi) aptly describes a definite advantage the "visual" essay has over the "verbal": "Whereas iconology encourages detailed paraphrase, Mnemosyne embraces the concision, ambiguity, and instability of metaphoric expression". The companion website to the volume presents photographs of Atlas panels as a series of programmatic themes, based in part upon Warburg's own notes: <https://warburg.library.cornell.edu/about/mnemosyne-themes> [Accessed 10 May, 2016].

⁹⁶ Panofsky originally (1932; 2012:482) called this "meaning dependent on content". He subsequently (1939) called it "iconographic interpretation" ; in the final, definitive version (1955) he settled upon "iconological interpretation".

In this level, Panofsky calls for an abstraction based upon the themes and concepts—again, backed up by literary sources of some sort—to characterize the “basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation” of all the elements inherent within a work, from the narratives, to the attributes, formal arrangements, down to the “technical procedures employed” (thus defining stylistic analysis and expression as an iconological element). Aggregating data derived from so many different categories (literary sources, formal arrangements, technical qualities of production) is very unlikely to point to a single textual source to supply us with an interpretation of the work, so Panofsky therefore calls for a “synthetic intuition” to interpret this disparate data. How does one arrive at this “synthetic intuition”? He acknowledges that interpretation is inherently subjective in nature, “conditioned by the interpreter’s psychology and *Weltanschauung*” (Panofsky, 1955:38).⁹⁷

Panofsky notes that we need something against which to check our interpretation—which, in computer programming is called a “sanity check”, a vivid term I will use here, which means testing whether one’s interpretation is sensible. The sanity check for the synthetic aggregate of iconological interpretation, then, consists of

an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts. This means what may be called a history of cultural symptoms—or ‘symbols’ in Ernst Cassirer’s sense—in general (Panofsky, 1955:39).

How can one provide evidence of “the general and essential tendencies of the human mind”? On this crucial question, Panofsky—seemingly—falls silent.

However, it seems that Panofsky obliquely offers two solutions to understand what he meant by “the general and essential tendencies of the human mind”. He first mentions “cultural symptoms”, a subject dear to Warburg, and it is possible that, although he makes no mention of Warburg elsewhere in the text, he keeps the door open for a more Warburgian interpretation of materials.⁹⁸

The other solution he offers is an oblique reference to the “symbols” of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), who like Panofsky, Saxl, and Wind, worked together at Warburg’s KBW and was part of the “Hamburg School” (Levine, 2013). There is insufficient space to investigate the details of Cassirer’s thought on symbols, but it can be summarised as follows. Cassirer thought it

⁹⁷ *Weltanschauung* literally means ‘world view,’ although ‘frame of reference’ may be a better way to characterise it.

⁹⁸ That this is a possibility is indicated by an earlier article by Panofsky and Saxl (1933) on the dissemination of classical imagery in Medieval art (chiefly through astrological symbolism, but also through allegory), one of the few works where Panofsky acknowledges Warburg’s influence. However, the article is more akin to the iconographical work pursued by Warburg in his lecture on the frescoes at the *Palazzo Schifanoia*. This was a crucial, but comparatively minor, step in the lecture, a “marginal” activity that was only useful insofar as it helped him identify the symbols that were the focus of his iconological analysis (Gombrich, 1970:144, 301, 312).

impossible for us to experience directly the phenomenology of different subjects—be they the natural world, art, language, myth, science, history, and more. The mind constructs the physical world through forms of expression, which themselves are systematised. Those forms of expression synthesise aspects of the raw phenomenology to us, and thus our experience of them is based upon these systems of synthetic expressions, not upon the phenomena themselves. Cassirer called such syntheses *symbols*. Each symbolic domain (e.g., art, myth, science) was a closed system that orders perception, and, crucially for Cassirer, offered differing perspectives on reality. This is a variant on Cassirer's interpretation of Kant, whereby "human reason creates our knowledge of things, but not the things themselves" (Holly, 1984:118)—and why Cassirer is often considered a neo-Kantian philosopher—but by placing emphasis upon the human intellect's imposition of order upon sense data, Cassirer foregrounds the role of human creativity.⁹⁹ Almost certainly, then, Panofsky means to evoke Cassirer's notion of the synthesis of symbolic forms.

1.7.5. Critiques of the methodology

There have been a number of critiques against the methodology, but of iconography and iconology, the latter receives the most sustained criticism. The criticisms query the range of images to which the methodology might be applied, the period and location of applicable images, the authority of interpretation, and finally whether the methodology allows for polysemic interpretative meanings.

W. J. T. Mitchell saw Panofsky's invocation of Cassirer as a major problem: if our interpretation of something is based upon a synthesis of various elements which has already been filtered by our individual frames of reference, which are sanity-checked against "the general and essential tendencies of the human mind," we are building our interpretation on a shaky foundation indeed, because it is a process of continuous syntheses. Mitchell asked whether the filtered end-product of such a synthesis would be overly homogenised, by which he meant that the messy, contrary opinions of individuals in any given era are removed from consideration because they will not fit our tidy interpretation (Mitchell, 1994:27-28).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ For more on Cassirer's thought and its influence upon Panofsky, see Holly (1984:114–57). The rendition provided above is constructed specifically to be relevant to both Panofsky and Warburg. For an alternative rendition of Cassirer as fundamentally opposed to Warburg, see Didi-Huberman (2002:284–95). For Didi-Huberman, Cassirer's notion of symbolic forms is reductive and is based upon a notion of "the unity of the spiritual domain"; in Didi-Huberman's view, Warburg foregrounded complexity and change in his approach.

¹⁰⁰ However, Mitchell seems to elide the two forms of synthesis: that of the documents one examines in order to arrive at some sort of way the image-maker arrived at a specific conception of an idea, and Cassirer's necessarily synthetic notion of symbolic forms. It is unclear whether Mitchell agrees with the above aspects of Cassirer's synthesis—namely, that it is an action all must perform in order to understand the sense-data presented by one's experience in the world.

Panofsky makes somewhat more concrete suggestions in order to sanity-check our interpretations: although these, too, present difficulties. He states that we should check our interpretation against “the intrinsic meaning of as many documents of civilisation historically related to that work or group of works; of documents bearing witness to the political, poetical, religious, philosophical, and social tendencies of the personality, period, or country under investigation” (Panofsky, 1955:38). What does “intrinsic meaning” mean here? If we are feeling charitable, we might think this is implicit injunction against cherry-picking comments out-of-context in a particular document. And what are the borderlines of this “civilisation”? If I analyse drawings of the Florentine Renaissance, do Venetian drawings from the same period count as from the same “civilisation”? How many documents are considered enough? What about the status of documents that provide contradictory evidence regarding one’s interpretation? Panofsky provides no answers to this. It is unclear that he can, but these questions affect any effort at historical interpretation: the approach as stated lends to a totalising narrative of which we might be warier in a time with more stringent attention paid to methodology. And this is where Mitchell lands his point against Panofsky.

Warburg’s approach to scholarship might be relevant for understanding what Panofsky means here. Warburg’s contribution—so difficult to see in retrospect, since it has become a defining characteristic of art-historical study—was an interest in historical context, i.e., knowledge of the donors or commissioners of works of art. His use of Polizianos’ Homeric ode in his interpretation of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*; his archival research on the Portinari family in his article on Flemish portraiture; and his exploration of centuries of astrological codices in his decoding of the *Palazzo Schifanoia* frescos, all show a keen interest in using original documents in order to understand the art of the Renaissance as embedded within the culture of its time.

Panofsky agrees with this, and advocates that specialists of literature, history, and other disciplines make use of works of art in turn, as “it is in the search for intrinsic meanings that the various humanistic disciplines meet on a common plane instead of serving as handmaidens to each other” (Panofsky, 1955:39). Like Saxl, Panofsky sees the work of art as a cultural artefact on an equal footing with other documents; and that, like Warburg and Saxl, he sees the study of art as intrinsically connected to the studies of other disciplines in the humanities, a transdisciplinary approach which helps form a greater understanding of the period, individual, or region under investigation.

1.7.5.1. Applicability of an ideal model of interpretation

Stephen Bann has argued that the application of iconographic practice can only be limited to specific types of imagery where the author and subject matter is very clear (Bann, 1998). His essay traces the background of Magdalena de Passe’s ca. 1625 print of *Apollo and Coronis*, based wholesale on Adam Elsheimer’s earlier painting of *Cephalus and Procris*—the differing requirements of the two narratives notwithstanding. Bann suggests that the lack of “a stable

notion of authorship” and artistic intent has been obscured in the move from painting to engraving (Bann, 1998:267).

Bann is certainly accurate when claiming that many visual artefacts are authored by more than one individual. To take two well-known examples: teams of individuals created mediaeval manuscripts, and workshops painted altarpieces in the Italian Renaissance, with the master providing the most crucial touches of the work. These, of course, were *programmatic* works, whereby the content was dictated by the patron; and the artists followed to some degree or other the conventions laid out by their antecedents; given the negotiated nature of the commission and production of such works, they will contain ostensibly decipherable meanings.

Nevertheless, Bann raises issues germane to the interpretation of imagery shared on the Internet, where there is often no guiding programmatic presence. The issue is particularly apt when the image has been altered with the addition of text or placed within a montage of other pictures. How does one speak of the author, and can one speak of one meaning, in such an image? How might one negotiate the relationships between multiple authors and meanings? Can iconographic practice handle such issues?

It seems that the problem is that Bann is concerned with how the intent of the original painting has been altered. By referring to its original intent/content, Bann’s notion of iconography becomes unstuck, as it is based upon a single, stable meaning. But this is more a problem for Bann’s notion of iconography than iconography itself. Warburg’s approach was often based upon gestures and how they can make meaning—sometimes contradictory meanings over dramatically different subject matter over time. For Warburg, the dancing Maenad, in her moment of abandon during her literal ecstasy (ἔκστασις, or a remove from her ordinary condition) can be retooled by an artist to convey the out-of-her-mind grief of the Magdalene at the foot of the cross. This re-purposing of gesture and imagery is well known in the history of image-making, and it continues on the Internet today in the form of many different memes: the meaning is not inherent in the original picture, but in the way the pose can be interpreted and reused.

1.7.5.2. An authoritative, terminal role?

Keith Moxey thought that a major problem with Panofsky’s iconology was the joint appeal to the “essential tendencies of the human mind” and his call to check our interpretation of the work against the “intrinsic meaning” of contemporary texts to verify our interpretation of works of art: “it is the rhetoric... rather than the method itself that has invested the system with an air of authoritarian finality. The tone... suggests that the reader is being vouchsafed eternal truths” (Moxey, 1986:268–69). Panofsky’s lesser-known work on tomb sculpture is symptomatic of this. In this overview of the development of tomb sculpture from ancient Egypt to the Baroque, Panofsky inescapably sees the development as a unified process: an incoherence, question, or problem is “solved” by a [much] later generation of artists, e.g., the representation of a figure

rendered on horizontal tomb slabs as if standing vertically (Panofsky, 1964:52–55). The problem with the work is not the classificatory system he devised—he accurately described a number of different classes of tomb sculpture—but rather the interpretation he overlaid upon the subject, as if it were one single narrative over millennia.¹⁰¹

In addition, by focusing on the intention of a work—a single meaning behind it—Moxey thinks iconology

assigns [the work of art] a “terminal” role in the life of culture, a location representing the synthesis of the ideas current in the culture of the patron or patrons who commissioned it. It ignores the life of the work of art after it has entered a social context. By concentrating on the way in which the work of art “reflects” the life of its times, the preoccupation with “intention” fails to recognise the function of the work of art as an actor in the development of cultural attitudes and therefore as an agent of social change (Moxey, 1986:271).

It has to be stressed of course that not all images might be agents of social change: some may well be merely reflections of cultural preoccupations or interests, and still others will be downright reactionary. Nevertheless, Moxey’s critique of Panofsky’s iconology is sound: as formulated, an image is the culmination, and not the starting point, or a middle point, of cultural expression. Moxey’s critique raises a concern for pictures shared on social media, as they appear to go through several permutations as individuals alter elements at will. We cannot speak of them as expressing an “end point” in a cultural dialogue, because such an end point does not exist.

Mitchell called Panofsky’s approach a “totalising” inclination that affords little opportunity for alternative interpretations: a single meaning is offered for a hypothetical, universal observer of the artefact, which does not take into account alternative interpretations based upon “the observer/spectator’s body as marked by gender, class, or ethnicity”—in short, forms of ideology (Mitchell, 1994:20). And Daniel Arasse has strongly criticised iconography and iconology along similar essentialising and terminal grounds:

Now I’m confused. It’s not because these texts exist, or even because they were published at the same time the painting was painted, but that they necessarily contribute to explaining it... Opposing attitudes and viewpoints can exist simultaneously in a given society... I think we have to fight against a line of thought that claims to be “historical” while actually preventing us from thinking, making us believe “incorrect” painters never existed. That is the principle of classic iconography, without which it would be completely at a loss... Iconographers are the firefighters of art history: they are there to calm things down, to put out the blaze that might be lit by something strange because it might force one to take a closer look and admit that everything is not as simple, as obvious, as one would like. (Arasse, 2000:6, 15, 20)

¹⁰¹ That said, Panofsky does introduce in the work the notion of “pseudomorphosis”, or approaches that resemble one another but which were developed independently of one another—or which were, as he termed it, “genetically unrelated” to one another (Panofsky, 1964:26–27).

Like Mitchell, Arasse sees in the search for textual precedents an attempt to construct holistic, totalising visions of society in which a given work was produced. Arasse's characterisation of the methodology is that not only does it portray pictures as expressing a cultural or intellectual endpoint, it is a paint-by-numbers endpoint, one that values consistency over an innovation or difference that it supposedly cannot see.

An alternative formulation of the role of iconology was offered by Warburg, who viewed resonant imagery as part of a continuum of cultural expression. As Philippe-Alain Michaud notes, "The artist sought to represent first and foremost not the narrative contents or legendary tales but the immediately visible form... 'God is in the details': Warburg's motto is primarily a methodological prescription signifying that the work is not a closed totality but a juxtaposition of elements in tension" (Michaud, 1998:80). Warburg's work on the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, displaying the reverberations of forms throughout history, is a wide-ranging example of his research on this notion, where emotional formulae were seen as repeated in postage stamps and golfer's poses (Schoell-Glass, 1999).

In contrast to Warburg, the "terminal" form of iconography was promulgated by other, later art historians. In keeping with Moxey's characterisation of Panofsky, Gombrich thought interpretations were authoritative and final, which he called the "dominant meaning":

to what extent are these and similar examples applications of the principle of several meanings? The event is illustrated, and the things figuring in the event echo and expand the meaning. But this symbolism can only function in support of what I have proposed to call the dominant meaning, the intended meaning or principle purpose of the picture... The picture has not several meanings but one (Gombrich, 1978:15–16).

By hearkening back to Warburg, we can perhaps form an alternative purpose of iconography, which Gombrich thoroughly distrusted—to uncover elements that do not form the dominant meaning, but support, inflect, or even undermine it.¹⁰²

Pictures shared on social media seem to suggest that images are not terminal in any way, and in fact support this alternative proposition for the purpose of iconology. One of the most



reproduced photographs of the 2011 "Occupy" protests recorded an event at the University of California-Davis, when a police officer pepper-sprayed peaceful students at close range (Figure 6). The photograph experienced a life that extended beyond rote replication: it was reproduced with accompanying text to pursue

different political agendas, and the police officer was replicated in memetic form, pepper-

¹⁰² Furthermore, one may question whether Panofsky himself regarded his interpretations as so authoritative: his correspondence strongly suggests otherwise (Nash, 2013:100–01).

spraying such diverse victims as the U.S. Founding Fathers as they signed the Constitution, the Beatles as they crossed Abbey Road, or the children in Nick Út's *Accidental Napalm* (Figure 7) (cardiganweather, 2011; O'Brien, 2011; Huntington, 2016).



Hans Belting (2001a:21) called images “nomads”: he meant that they move to different media, but the observation can be extended to the fact that their intent can range just as freely as their usage in various media. Like Warburg’s images in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, many images on the Internet seem to take part in “ongoing conversations” about their subjects, not firm, terminal statements.

1.7.5.3. Clarifying influence

There is a thorny issue associated with any appeal we might make to documents as providing evidence for our interpretations of the work of art’s or artist’s *Weltanschauung*, which (according to Panofsky at least) is what we are plausibly attempting to claim in any iconological interpretation. As such it may affect any methodological variation or synthesis we might adopt. We may feel the full force of the problem if it is stated as baldly as possible. Gören Hermerén chose to use the phrase “world view” in order to express cultural or contextual elements that might give rise to a work of art (Hermerén, 1969:132):

1. *X* is a work of art
2. *Y* is a world view
3. *X* and *Y* are similar
4. *Y* influenced *X*

We may note that the supposition in (3) is unclear: in what way are *X* and *Y* similar? As Hermerén states, “If *X* is an iconological symbol of *Y*, then *Y* influenced the creation of *X*; similarity between *X* and *Y* is not enough” (Hermerén, 1969:149). Far more problematic, however, is the chasm between the analogy (3) and the conclusion (4). Indeed, we are asking for a causal connection. Hermerén notes that this would involve the analysis of a “chain of counterfactual conditionals and causal statements” such as ‘if the artist who created *X* had not come into contact with the relevant world view, then his work of art would have looked different’” (Hermerén, 1969:150). The criteria by which we realistically might be able to satisfy the conclusion (4) are likely to be so narrow, and so uncommon that “the terrain”, as Carlo Ginzberg says, “is certainly firmer, but also

more barren" (Ginzberg, 1986:43). The demand for ironclad proof would spell the end of most iconological interpretation, which seems far too high a price to pay.

1.7.5.4. Reception of intent

Related to any issues of meaning, of course, is the status of interpretations we conjure up for a picture: did, or do, contemporaries of the work interpret it as we suggest? This issue became highlighted upon the publication of Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953), particularly for interpretation of "disguised symbolism" in the burgeoning naturalism encountered in works of 15th-century Flemish art. Panofsky's theory held that the development of naturalism posed a challenge for the symbolism depicted in it: "a way had to be found to reconcile the new naturalism with a thousand years of Christian tradition; and this attempt resulted in what may be termed concealed or disguised symbolism as opposed to open or obvious symbolism". Symbolic objects were made to look like a natural part of the furnishings of an interior, like the single candle in the chandelier of Van Eyck's 1434 *Arnolfini Portrait* (Panofsky, 1953:141). Because everything was depicted in a naturalistic fashion, then everything is placed under suspicion as potentially symbolic. Thus, in his interpretation Panofsky picked out seemingly naturalistic details as evidence of erudite symbolism cultivated from sources of mediaeval theologians to justify his interpretation of these symbols.

Panofsky's intellectual programme for 15th-century Flemish painting may seem irrelevant to a broader discussion of methodology, but it raises crucial questions that strike at the heart of iconographic practice. Was the symbolism "disguised"? Otto Pächt disputed the rationality of driving "underground" symbolism which had been part of centuries of tradition in favour of the new naturalism (Pächt, 1956). Later on, he criticised Panofsky as suggesting that that "works of art—or at least the truly great ones—are not, as was so long believed, the expression or the guise of an idea: they are its disguise" (Pächt, 1977:71). Jan-Baptist Bedaux noted that "paradoxically enough, we can only speak safely of 'disguised symbolism' if the disguise is inadequate and the symbols betray themselves as such" (Bedaux, 1986:7).

Léon Delaissé wondered whether the "man in the street" could truly understand the theological programme put forward in such interpretations (Delaissé, 1957:14). In fact, Ernst Gombrich privately suggested to James Marrow that no "fifteenth-century text on art or theology... was compatible with the assumptions of Panofsky's formulation." After examining such literature, Marrow confirmed Gombrich's hunch: that "mentions and discussions of works of northern art from the late middle ages show a minimal concern with *what* the art represents; their focus, instead, is overwhelmingly on *how* the art is to be used and experienced" (Marrow, 1986:151–52).¹⁰³ Pächt returned to this, echoing the concerns raised by Hermerén: "the crux, however, is

¹⁰³ In this essay, Marrow promised to publish a list of these materials, but it appears he never did so.

this: there is very rarely proof positive of a connection between the visual evidence and a concept derived from a written source. As a result, interpreters find themselves venturing onto ground far shakier than the terrain of stylistic phenomena ever was" (Pächt, 1977:73). The suggestion, of course, is that the elaborate theological programmes that Panofsky (and many iconographers thereafter) proposed were nothing but chimeras.

Perhaps in the search for a direct textual influence, the net has been cast too narrowly. An approach such as Mitchell's may be more useful here. Mitchell has argued for examining the cultural forces at play between visual and textual images, that is, between textual metaphors and similar representations in visual media (Mitchell, 1986). For Mitchell, textual metaphors and visual representations are assertions of ideology: they are false *because* they assert correspondence between unlike objects.¹⁰⁴ Yet they convince us of their truth by their rhetorical persuasiveness, and they can have real-world effects: they can influence the way we perceive and act in the world. Images, then, have a kind of life in that they continuously "pop up" and have an influence upon viewers. His focus on ideology aside, Mitchell's method is broadly similar to that of Aby Warburg: he claims that images have a kind of life and that they have a certain power over viewers. Even his assertion that textual and visual images mutually reinforce one another finds strong parallels in Warburg, for example in his work connecting Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Poliziano's poetry through their joint emphasis upon movement.¹⁰⁵

Casting our net more widely to catch linguistic parallels, then, could be very useful for uncovering evidence of the way contemporary viewers were likely to interpret a visual artefact. But even if we were intent on pinning down a source for an image it is necessary to accommodate vaguer references. Perhaps it is anachronistic, but it is worth relating this issue to our own experiences when referring to elements in contemporary popular culture. If we are familiar enough with cultural references—if our cultural references are so common that we understand them implicitly—do we feel the need to comment on them to make them explicit? For the sake of argument, let me present a silly hypothetical example: I encounter a picture of an angry-looking black kitten on social media, and the phrase "I find your lack of treats disturbing" has been embedded within the picture, in the style of many memes. I will smile at it, because I understand

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell is referring to ideology along Marx's lines, a position he developed in *Iconology* (Mitchell, 1986).

¹⁰⁵ Despite reviving the elder historian's methodological term and a renewed concentration upon underlying psychological commonality rather than figural exactitude, it is ironic that Mitchell has only credited the existence of Warburg once in his writing in a footnote (2015:7) and obliquely in his talk "Method, Madness, Montage: Aby Warburg to John Nash", given at the "Aby Warburg 150. Work. Legacy. Promise" conference on 14 June 2016, at the Warburg Institute, London. The talk can be viewed on the Warburg Institute's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eQzaENZoHo> [Accessed 8 November 2016]. It is also odd, given that he has even appropriated the term "critical iconology" without attribution, albeit in a different but closely related sense (Mitchell, 1994:28; Warburg, 1912:569).

this phrase as based upon a quote by Darth Vader from the movie *Star Wars* (“I find your lack of faith disturbing”), and I am amused by the incongruity of associating the quote with a kitten. The quote is sufficiently well known that should I share it with my own friends, I am unlikely to write something so pedantic as “this image refers to Darth Vader because the kitten appears to look evil, and the implication is that if we do not feed him treats, he will kill us, much as Darth Vader subsequently killed his interlocutor. The incongruous connection between a picture of a kitten and Darth Vader is the basis of the joke, and you may now laugh at it.” Instead I would be more likely to write something along the lines of “I found this funny”, or even more obliquely, “Ha ha”. In other words, by assuming a shared knowledge of *contemporary cultural references* between my friends and myself, I would be exactly replicating Marrow’s findings: that I have not referenced any interpretation of the image, but instead have recounted my *reaction* to the image. This raises an important structural issue regarding any attempt at finding contemporary verifications for our interpretations: the absence of evidence does not suggest our interpretations are inaccurate; it may rather suggest that our interpretations were so obvious as to not merit comment.

1.7.6. Addressing criticisms

We have seen that iconological interpretation has many serious difficulties. We have also seen that checking our interpretations against the documents of a “civilisation” is broad and difficult to define, and that an appeal to the “general and essential tendencies of the human mind” is insufficiently addressed. By requiring a “synthesis”, checked against “the general and essential tendencies of the human mind”, which is backed up by evidence from “the intrinsic meaning” of as many documents of “the civilisation” as we can find, Panofsky seems to set us up to creating a single, authoritative interpretation. It might seem at this point that Panofsky’s version of the methodology—and in particular, iconology—encounters problems of such significance that its status as a viable method of enquiry is questionable. Later in life, Panofsky evidently distanced himself from it (Lavin, 1993:33). Is there any hope of reviving it?

Iconology has been revived, but in an altered form. Many of the difficulties experienced by iconology and are not intrinsic to the methodology but are instead based upon the *nature of Panofsky’s rendition*. Mitchell’s criticism of Panofsky’s “totalising” inclination becomes the basis for his “critical iconology” (Mitchell, 1994:24): he proposes an iconology that, instead of appealing to a worldview, examines the way that these ideologies work, and considers iconology a method to “trace the process by which the metaphoric becomes literal, and the image becomes actual” (2011:xviii). Mitchell’s move opens up the possibility of multiple readings, and also seems to provide a firmer ground for the supposedly unconscious aspects of iconology, fixing it to the framing process of ideology. This is one way to address the idea of the “general and essential tendencies of the human mind”.

1.7.6.1. “Essential tendencies”: “Visual *habitus*” as an alternative

Such an approach, however, restricts itself to the development of political beliefs, and it falls prey to one of Moxey’s objections: by presupposing that imagery is a manifestation of political and social beliefs, the image may again be treated as a terminal point, and not a factor that eventually contributes to ideology.¹⁰⁶ As such, images can be pre-ideological as well as intrinsically ideological: images can present ways of seeing that, in their accretion, can inform political ideologies much later.

Another way to address the supposedly unconscious aspects of iconology, and to do justice to the notion of these “essential tendencies of the human mind” is to situate both iconography and iconology within what we know about human cognition. On this view, all humans—or more accurately, all sighted humans—look at objects in the world in such a way that we overstep the boundaries between real life and representation. Whether they be the objects themselves or visual representations of them, the more we look at objects in the world, and the more we are familiar with them, the more readily we recognise them.¹⁰⁷ The more readily and quickly we recognise them, the more likely we are to register them unconsciously. By registering them unconsciously, it is thus easier to make irrational associations between objects and emotional states.¹⁰⁸ These turn into habits: a habit of associating things together.

Fundamentally, iconography and iconology are based upon making meaningful associations between different objects—a picture and a story, an attribute and its importance, or—and this is crucial—a series of visually-similar objects, for example two paintings with the same subject, or a

¹⁰⁶ This is partly an issue with the way Mitchell pursues iconology: he enters his discussion *in medias res*. In discussing the *Bag Man* photograph from the Abu Ghraib torture series in *Cloning Terror* (2011), for instance, Mitchell is more interested in permutations of the photograph. When reaching for reasons for resonance, he mentions imagery of the Crucifixion. In contrast, Stephen Eisenman (2007) delves into the history of imagery depicting officially-sanctioned torture to show how state- and divinely-sponsored violence has a long ideological history.

¹⁰⁷ Even though we of course consciously know the difference between a picture and reality, humans do not distinguish between the two pre-cognitively. Whether we watch an action performed in real life—for example, a person throwing a discus—or represented in a static sculpture—say, in the *Discobolus*—the same neurons fire (Gallese, 2005; Freedberg and Gallese, 2007). We base this upon our practical experience: the way a body looks as it prepares to throw a large object is something we are likely to have seen. Furthermore, when we have seen or experienced something, this material is “chunked” into memory in such a way as to make it more readily and easily useable, a process that has been observed in many mammals besides humans (Graybiel, 2004; Graybiel, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ For more on the distinction between quick, intuitive, and frequently irrational thinking, and slower, more analytic conscious thinking, see Kahneman (2012), who describes them as “System 1” and “System 2”. To my knowledge, Kahneman and Tversky’s research is not normally associated with affect theorists such as Brian Massumi or William Connolly, presumably because the interests of the latter two lie fully within pre-cognitive aspects of experience. But it seems to me to provide a crucial middle step in the move from a cognitive engagement with something unfamiliar to nonconscious or precognitive affect. For a strongly-argued evaluation of affect theory, see Leys (2011).

gesture used in two different contexts. They presuppose a landscape wherein both practical experience and repeated exposure contribute to a structuring of that experience. This seems to be the case with individual objects: we recognise, e.g., sixteenth-century armour types by repeated exposure to them. And this also seems to be the case for encompassing themes, which by their nature are more loosely-associated subjects based upon gesture, pose, and context. This seems a plausible replacement for Panofsky's "essential tendencies of the human mind".

Much as we identify objects and quickly interpret them—according to Panofsky's phase of pre-iconographical description—we improve with time, and recognising such patterns becomes a form of "second nature" to us. It seems reasonable to suggest that the acquisition and processing of socially-constructed forms of knowledge—such as the association of a man on horseback with authority—is also likely to be developed in a similar fashion, based upon repeated exposure to, e.g., statues of military commanders on horseback in public parks.¹⁰⁹ And representational imagery plays a large part in this process, essentially by expanding our experience of the world, no matter the accuracy of the representation.¹¹⁰

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* may be useful here. *Habitus* is Bourdieu's attempt to address the question of how we can understand groups of people as behaving in predictable ways, and yet account for individuals as free, independent agents—and as such is a refinement to Foucault's presentation of the individual as fully constituted by discourse. Bourdieu thus presents *habitus* as sociological evidence of un- or semi-conscious, repeated behaviour as a foundation of

¹⁰⁹ The example of the commander on horseback is a telling one. Previously, an association of command with horses may have been the result of practical experience, but the horse is now largely out of the sphere of practical experience. The association is now primarily refreshed by pictures, television, and movies.

¹¹⁰ Psychological research on implicit bias, too, seems to touch upon facets related to this research project: in particular, the power of images to influence human cognition. Implicit bias is the effect by which one displays unconscious behaviour towards a specified group that alters one's interactions (Banaji and Greenwald, 2013). Implicit bias effects race and gender relations: a person of African ancestry may be unable to gain employment because of unconscious biases against black people held more widely in society (Jost et al., 2009). Likewise, because of the societal nature of implicit bias, a member of the side-lined group can evince bias against herself (called "stereotype bias"). However, Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) have shown that exposure to counter-stereotypical pictures of individuals (such as Nelson Mandela, as a positive black figure, and Jeffrey Dahmer, a decidedly negative white figure) changes implicit biases against or in favour of a particular group without changing explicit racial attitudes: that is, attitudes change without the individual realising that she has altered her attitude. Finnegan et al. (2015) have showed that exposure to non-stereotypical pictures can counter negative attitudes of people in discriminated groups.

It has to be stressed that there is nothing rational about this process, but nevertheless, there is a demonstrable impact upon viewers of pictures. Thus, imagery plays an active role in our assessment of the world: it can change our perception of the world (at least in the short term). Biases—which are clearly society-wide, and therefore learned—can be countered by brief glances at pictures, and that implies that the images in our minds are shaped by the society around as us well.

cultural outlook: a “system of dispositions” or habits on a large scale which are not entirely, but mostly predictable (Bourdieu, 1972:214). One might anticipate a parallel between *habitus*’ “dispositions” and some of the claims inherent in iconological analysis, namely artists are inclined to create works disposed to reflect subjects of interest to their societies. This parallel is not coincidental: Bourdieu’s theory of *habitus* was developed upon his reading of Panofsky’s *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (1957). In this book, Panofsky argued that scholastic argumentation produced “cultural habits” that became manifested within architectural practice. Bourdieu wrote a *postface* for the book’s 1967 French edition; in fact, it is in this essay that he first employed the term “*habitus*” (Swartz, 1997:101–02). Indeed, in his theory of *habitus*, Bourdieu presents a systematised version of Panofsky’s cultural habits.¹¹¹

I do not wish to argue for a systematised *habitus* of cultural practice. But I contend that visual artefacts are social objects. As such, their content often portrays images that convey ideological messages: proper respect for the gods; the majesty of the monarch; the authority of a military leader; or alternating notions that women are temptresses or saintly mother figures. These are familiar forms of ideological messages, but other images can provide ideological support without being ideological themselves: the very notion of decorum or what is considered tasteful or appropriate to represent, for example, makes whole classes of images viewable—or virtually invisible, to the point of being taboo. One might conceive of visual artefacts as a *physical manifestation of habitus*: that is, as a concrete way by which social values and prejudices are represented and distributed; indeed, re-produced. This of course includes ideological concerns but goes beyond them.¹¹² And finally, as research into the reception of rhetoric has

¹¹¹ Bourdieu has examined art in very specific ways as evidence of social display: of displaying one’s knowledge and enthusiasm for art as a way of displaying status (Bourdieu, 1979); or alternately how systems reinvent themselves when “Young Turks” challenge and subvert a comfortable Old Guard, much as the Impressionists challenged the Salon artists in the nineteenth century (Bourdieu, 1993). However, he states very little about the *content* of art. He states still less about what (if anything) that content does to the viewer in terms of how it affects the viewer’s interpretation of the world, or upon how the viewer’s experience of the world affects her interpretation of a visual artefact. Finally, his discussion concentrates upon what may be described as “high” art, not image-making in general.

¹¹² One reason why I do not wish to follow Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is that, as a carrier of belief systems and cultural behaviour, visual artefacts present several problems for his theory. He implies that the codes embodied within social *habitus* are perfectly mastered. First, as a cultural product, visual artefacts are among the most widely-represented forms of social structures that one can imagine; they belong together as a class in order to assess their varied, cumulative effect, which violates the silos of his various “fields” where different interests (e.g., economic, social, and cultural interests). Second, we cannot claim that they carry their codes in a perfectly embedded fashion, since viewers seem to respond to pictures in multiple ways. Third, we cannot assume that everyone has a perfect understanding. As Bal and Bryson (1991:186) have rightly noted, “Access to the codes is uneven: codes have to be learned and their distribution varies (and changes) within a group”. Moreover, viewers become unfamiliar with elements of visual artefacts over time due to their disuse.

demonstrated (Domke et al., 2002), we have different responses to what we encounter in the world due to the individual experiences we have had, leading inevitably to a degree of polysemic interpretation. We can conceive of a visual *habitus*, then, but it differs from Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: it is messier and cannot perfectly convey dispositions of interpretation.

1.7.6.2. Dividing iconological interpretation

It seems undeniable that iconological interpretation is the major sticking-point for many writers. To sum: how can we interpret the "intrinsic meaning" of works with the not uncommon problem when works claim multiple authors and mixed themes (Bann, 1998)? How can we speak of an interpretation that returns an active role in the creation of meaning in an image (Moxey, 1986)? Is it realistically possible to link a work of art with a world view (Hermerén, 1969)? Is it correct to view images as the "disguise" of an idea (Pächt, 1977; Bedaux, 1986)?

It seems to me that part of the problem for iconological interpretation, as defined by Panofsky, is that it does too much: it must provide an interpretation appropriate for the time period, it must situate the work in a broader context (however that may be defined: intellectual, social, production, etc.), and it must do this in a fashion that reflects the artist *and also* goes beyond the artist, suggesting that the artist is expressing some elements unconsciously. And it must bear a sufficient burden of proof.

One might begin to untangle these questions, and extricate iconology from some problems, by following Roelof Van Straten's suggestion and divide it into two, between an *iconographical interpretation* and an *iconological interpretation* (Van Straten, 1985:10–18). Van Straten sees iconographical interpretation as oriented around *conscious* meaning: "what secondary or deeper meaning did the artist intend?"—which presupposes that we can discern a deeper intent. In contrast, an iconological interpretation asks cultural & historical questions: "why has a certain work of art arisen in a particular way? How can it be explained in the context of its cultural, social, and historical backgrounds; and how can the possible hidden meanings that were *not* explicitly intended by the artist be brought to light?" (Van Straten, 1985:18).

Bifurcating iconological interpretation provides considerable benefits. It untangles conscious from unconscious intent, seeing them for the separate questions that they are. It also provides us with a dividing point for the burden of proof: the conscious meaning, which may be ascertained; and the unconscious meaning, which is significantly more speculative and open to interpretation,

That said, Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* seems to offer some response to these concerns specifically due to his notion of fields. Visual media provide one of several mechanisms by which we are taught societal structures, the images of which are used by people in varying fields to convey competing concepts. Since people competing in various fields use imagery—perhaps the same imagery—for their own ends, of necessity any strong connection between an image and any intrinsic meaning can degrade, if one could say it had one in the first place.

as it covers the hazy subject called “society”, with all its contraindicated patterns of thought and behaviour. Thus, we can side-step the chasm between Hermerén’s worldview and influence.

By dividing them, we can also re-assign imagery an active role of carrying intention forward, something for which Moxey calls and which Warburg saw inherent in the works he studied. We can further remove some of the “stigma” (if that is the way we see it) that Moxey sees in the issuance of unimpeachably authoritative meaning. We can tease apart the conscious efforts of the artists at the centre of Bann’s query and speculate separately on the implications of reusing the same composition for two different narratives. We need no longer force images into a position where their meaning is solely to be uncovered and understood in a single way, like clues in a detective novel.

It also allows us to retain some interpretations which have been superseded. In *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (1958), Edgar Wind also examined the works that had been the focus of Warburg’s thesis, Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*. As mentioned before, Warburg saw the influence of Poliziano’s contemporary recreation of an Homeric ode as a critical source for the *Birth of Venus*—despite some pronounced differences between the poem and the details of the panels (Michaud, 1998:69). For Warburg, it was the evocation of movement in literature and in a parallel, visual form, which evinced the influence of Antiquity and provided the basis for his iconological interpretation.

In contrast, Wind’s interpretation of the same panels places greater emphasis on contemporary philosophical interests, seeing substantial evidence of Neoplatonist concepts elaborated by Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino, whose patron was Lorenzo de’ Medici: central to Wind’s interpretation was that the panels were painted for the main branch of the Medici family and displayed together some years after their creation (Wind, 1958:131–41). In *Pagan Mysteries*, Wind employs iconographic analysis and archival research to comprehend the activities of the various figures in the panels: the text provides the mechanism for understanding, Wind seeing them in the context of Lorenzo’s great interest in Neoplatonism, and concluding that the two panels distinguish between “sacred” and “profane” love.

Unfortunately for this interpretation, it has since been established that the two panels were not originally displayed together, and that the *Primavera* was not painted for Lorenzo, but his cousin from a subordinate line of the family, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici (Shearman, 1975; Smith, 1975). Instead, Zöllner (1998) has established that that the *Primavera* was paired with Botticelli’s *Camilla and the Centaur*, and that both were displayed in the bedchamber of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s wife Semiramide Appiani, as a wedding image displaying the virtues of an ideal woman.

In the original rendition of iconological interpretation, we would have to throw out Wind’s conception wholesale, as the facts simply do not accept his erudite analysis. However, by splitting

iconological interpretation between iconographical and iconological interpretations, we can apply Zöllner's analysis to the iconographical interpretation—since this appears to have been the intent of the artist, through the programme that was likely developed for him. And we can retain much of Wind's analysis as an iconological interpretation, since the images can still be viewed to an extent as illustrative of the revival of Neoplatonist thought in fifteenth-century Florence; and furthermore, since the two panels were displayed beside one another later in the sixteenth century, it is likely that many viewers would interpret the panels along the lines that Wind suggests.

1.7.6.3. Panofsky's hat: clues for updating the methodology

Panofsky's introduction to his methodology is worth close examination. He relates an everyday event—an encounter with someone whom he knows, and who lifts his hat in acknowledgement. It has been usually passed over swiftly by most critics, with the notable exceptions of W. J. T. Mitchell, Stephen Bann, and Georges Didi-Huberman.

Mitchell noted that in its banality, the scene “is not dignified enough to be the subject of a painting—no great history, epic, or allegory is being enacted. It is just there to exemplify the *minimal* features of visual communication and representation; it provides a baseline from which to measure more complex, more important forms of visual representation” (Mitchell, 1994:26).

Here is the scene as rendered by Panofsky, which is worth quoting in full:

When an acquaintance greets me on the street by lifting his hat, what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of colour, lines, and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an object (gentleman), and the change of detail as an event (hat-lifting), I have already overstepped the limits of purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning. The meaning thus perceived is of an elementary and easily understandable nature, and we shall call it the factual meaning; it is apprehended by simply identifying certain visible forms with certain objects known to me from practical experience, and by identifying the change in their relations with certain actions or events.

Now the objects and events... will naturally produce a certain reaction within myself. From the way my acquaintance performs his action I may be able to sense whether he is in a good or bad humour, and whether his feelings towards me are indifferent, friendly, or hostile. These psychological nuances will invest the gestures of my acquaintance with a further meaning which we shall call expressional. It differs from the factual one in that it is apprehended, not by simple identification, but by “empathy”. To understand it, I need a certain sensitivity, but this sensitivity is still part of my practical experience, that is, of my everyday familiarity with objects and events. Therefore, both the factual and the expressional meaning may be classified together: they constitute the class of primary or natural meanings.

However, my realisation that the lifting of the hat stands for a greeting belongs in an altogether different realm of interpretation. This form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of mediaeval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others. Neither an Australian bushman nor an ancient Greek could be expected to realise that the lifting of a hat is not only a practical event with certain expressional connotations, but also a sign of politeness. To understand this significance of the gentleman's action I

must not only be familiar with the practical world of objects and events, but also with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilisation. Conversely, my acquaintance could not feel impelled to greet me by lifting his hat were he not conscious of the significance of this act. As for the expressional connotations which accompany his action, he may or may not be conscious of them. Therefore, when I interpret the lifting of a hat as a polite greeting, I recognise in it a meaning which may be called secondary or conventional; it differs from the primary or natural one in that it is intelligible instead of being sensible, and in that it has been consciously imparted to the practical action by which it is conveyed.

And finally: besides constituting a natural event in space and time, besides naturally indicating moods or feelings, besides conveying a conventional greeting, the action of my acquaintance can reveal to an experienced observer all that goes to make up his 'personality'. This personality is conditioned by his being a man of the twentieth century, by his national, social, and educational background, by the previous history of his life and by his present surroundings; but it is also distinguished by an individual manner of viewing things and reacting to the world which, if rationalised, would have to be called a philosophy. In the isolated action of a polite greeting all these factors do not manifest themselves comprehensively, but nevertheless symptomatically. We could not construct a mental portrait of the man on the basis of this single action, but only by co-ordinating a large number of similar observations and by interpreting them in connection with our general information as to his period, nationality, class, intellectual traditions, and so forth. Yet all the qualities which this mental portrait would show explicitly are implicitly inherent in every single action; so that, conversely, every single action can be interpreted in the light of those qualities (Panofsky, 1955:26–28).

Bann pointed out that Panofsky starts his methodology on shaky grounds, noting that Panofsky's initial raw, phenomenological reception of colours, shapes, and textures is a controversial portrayal of a complex cognitive process (Bann, 1998). In his final renditions of the methodology, Panofsky himself rushes over his phenomenological description to describe the scene in a more meaningful way, possibly because the initial phenomenological step is not necessary for his methodology.

According to Didi-Huberman, Panofsky's "semiological fable" travels from one certainty and culminates in another: from the "automatic" identification of the man lifting his hat to understanding the symbolism of the gesture as a "cultural symptom". He argues that Panofsky's rushing past the phenomenological impression is a critical elision:

It would have been impossible to attain without the permanence and stability of the first one, in other words without the *identification*, never called into question, of a man lifting his hat... The opposite happens when I look (without encountering it by chance, which is to say for a long time) at a painting: the progressive deduction of a general symbol is never wholly possible, insofar as the image often proposes to me only thresholds to shatter, certainties to lose, identifications to, at a blow, call into question. Such is the efficacy of the symptom... that it *pulverises the identification of symbols* in order to disperse them in a worrying fashion (Didi-Huberman, 1990:180).

Mitchell (1994:28) asks, "what stands between this scene, its extrapolation, and the hoped-for 'science' of iconology... what can we learn from [the hat example]? How can this scene be revisited by... a *critical* iconology?" Mitchell starts listing his criterion for a critical analogy: first of all, "the resistance of the icon to the logos," a phrase which seems to mean that interpretations should not be placed through a tidy synthesising process. Interpretations, in his

mind, should be messy, not tied up in a nice package with an authoritative imprimatur stamped upon them; in this, he echoes both Moxey and anticipates Arasse. He also recommends that iconologists subject themselves to an analysis of their ideologies; an ideology to Mitchell is something “that masquerades as a universal, natural code.” Panofsky’s normalisation of closed, totalising interpretations betrays him as “an iconologist who has an ideology and doesn’t know it” (Mitchell, 1994:33). According to Mitchell, then, Panofsky’s scene fails to address these concerns: it betrays a large number of blind spots.

However, Panofsky’s hat example is remarkable and is pregnant with implications beyond what he describes elsewhere as the purpose of iconography and iconology. Not only does the example appear to be crucial to Panofsky’s understanding of his subject, there are several elements within his example that contain likely unintended consequences—and yet which provide implicit replies to later criticisms of the method. It underscores a number of points of his methodology and discloses a number of assumptions in a concrete fashion, closing off several worries raised earlier. What might we derive from it? I will try to abstract the observations away from the example in order to indicate their wider applicability:

1. He notes that even by identifying the objects and event as a man who lifts his hat, we have already passed beyond a strictly formal description of visible phenomena to a meta-formal description. It is already an interpretation, but it is one that, one might claim, contains elements of universal human cognition: it is plausible that we would all recognize the object as a man and the action as lifting something; and depending upon our familiarity with hats, we would likely recognize the object as a hat.
2. The action coldly described relates very little; it is in the details of the man’s actions and disposition that tells us the manner in which the action is carried out, which in turn is based upon our own psychological perceptions. In other words, we are informed *less by the rendition of an act than by the way that the act is performed*: the intent cannot be derived from a “thin” description of the act, but from a “thick” description of the way in which the act was carried out.
3. There is a sociocultural derivation of the gesture, a “deeper” history. Knowledge of this deeper history is unnecessary for understanding the gesture, but knowing it provides a richer understanding of the mechanisms by which the gesture operates to convey meaning.
4. The original gesture held a different meaning than the action, as practiced at the time, does not contain. There is, in other words, a rupture, but the rupture does not preclude significance to the action.
5. His acquaintance (and, by extension, he, or indeed anyone else) may be unaware of the act’s history and yet nevertheless be able to perform the action and convey a mutually-comprehensible meaning.
6. The act as performed in the past and its current variation have different meanings, but they are distantly related. The rupture has changed the intent, but there is an underlying “family”

resemblance, a clustering of similar intents that change over time. Nevertheless, neither the behaviour nor its origin is a fixed element, as Didi-Huberman suggests; they are in flux.

7. He implies that whilst the physical action may be comprehensible to all, interpreting it has cultural boundaries; that, therefore, there is a subset of conventions and behaviour that is culturally specific, and that familiarity with the culture in some fashion is required for successful interpretation.
8. He states that the manner in which his acquaintance performs the act conveys a broader background of national origin, educational status, “the previous history of his life”, as well as the specifics of the time, location, and conditions under which he performs the act. These are all dispositions emanating from, in Bourdieu’s terms, the acquaintance’s participation in various fields of social life.
9. He notes that in any given act, not all of these indicators may be present, but claims that those indicators that reveal themselves are symptomatic of the individual. Repeated observations will reveal other indicators that are also symptomatic.
10. He claims that by aggregating these indicators within a greater observed context: of “his period” (the time period), nationality, class, “intellectual traditions”, etc.—we would gain a more nuanced and detailed comprehension or impression of his personality (he calls it a “mental portrait” of the individual in question).
11. He claims that the details of this more nuanced and detailed impression should show themselves “implicitly” through virtually every action the acquaintance might—and, we might assume, conceivably and realistically—perform.
12. He furthermore claims the reverse: that every action the acquaintance might conceivably and realistically perform can be viewed in light of our nuanced, detailed impression of him.
13. Panofsky has described an everyday event, of an action in the world—a cultural product. Whilst the title of the essay explicitly ties the methodology to the study of art, and Renaissance art in particular, the implication is that the levels of interpretation he outlines in the article are suffused into the very fabric of our social world, well beyond visual artefacts in general, or the Italian Renaissance in particular.
14. This everyday act is automatically recognised as a natural, and therefore unquestioned, behaviour. It is only by stepping back, and seeing through its banality and insignificance, that we see that it is suffused with ideology as defined by Mitchell. In the present case, the act indicates a lack of hostile intent.
15. Finally, Panofsky’s acquaintance is classed and gendered. There is, at least, some level of awareness that actions are based on class—he consciously acknowledges the individual as a “gentleman”—but also gender: the individual is identified as a male, which he does not explicitly state as important, but which is at least tacitly acknowledged.

We can adduce from the first point a claim about human cognition: that we rapidly classify visible objects and movement in order to comprehend what we see. This of course implies that we recognise the things we classify: we know we see a man because we have encountered other men previously, and likewise with his hat and his hat-tipping gesture. In addition, it seems fair to claim that point 7 can be accepted without controversy as a sociocultural fact.

But we should note that there is little else here that one could characterise as objective: interpretation is riddled throughout, which to my mind supports the notion that Panofsky did *not* consider iconology a scientific enterprise. Panofsky explicitly acknowledges this in the first point above, but it is also present in points 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and plausibly 3 and 4. Iconology is significantly more interpretative—and perhaps less monolithically authoritative—than many critics have made it out to be.

Within these points, however, we can note that Panofsky has outlined a number of nuances relevant to interpreting an act—be that a gesture performed in the real world, or, by implication, within any cultural product—which are not normally associated with him: that the meaning or purpose for something can change over time; that there can be a rupture in that meaning or purpose; that meanings are not immutable; that we communicate through partly-comprehended code systems subject to degraded levels of interpretability on individual levels; that behaviour may be associated with a defined period of time; that behaviour and the things we produce betray traces of unthinking habits bound by effects of class, age, location, gender, education, and experience; and that these effects can give rise to some level of predictability. We can further adduce that if the behaviour of the observed individual or cultural product is susceptible to these factors, so is the observer, since that observer is subject to the same forces. Finally, we see that an event presented as a straightforward, mundane act that is, by its invisibility, a carrier of ideology.

Few of these characteristics are associated with Panofsky, or indeed of iconology as traditionally practiced: but as a group, they address many of the issues raised by Mitchell, Moxey, Arasse, and others. Collectively, they rebut their critics' characterisations of the methodology as an inflexible, ossified form of connect-the-dot detective work that necessarily arrives at a single interpretation. Panofsky's hat example raises strikingly modern concerns. To be sure, Panofsky did not insert all of them as conscious concerns. And yet they are present in the text.

Thus, we can see that from a mere example of an individual tipping his hat in acknowledgment of a passing acquaintance, Panofsky has added a huge pile of factors that we can consider in our interpretations: gender, class, the effects of unthinking habits, the shifting of meaning, and more, even to the possibility of statistical interpretation of demographic markers with his reference to nation and class.

It should be noted, however, that his example provides little guidance for interpreting these extra elements, merely the outlines of properties that can be considered. When Panofsky refers to coming to an iconological understanding of a work of art, he seems to fall prey to semi-mystical waffle, “the general and essential tendencies of the human mind”. But even here, we might derive from points 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 that these are acts of habit that we learn, unthinkingly, from those around us and the objects we encounter in the world: and that is decidedly not mystical waffle. There is, therefore, a hint of what can be used to sanity-check our interpretations, which is admittedly more plentiful in researching the world of social media than, say, Renaissance Italy: texts directly accompanying imagery.

And this is where investigators of social media are better-placed than art historians. Art historians are often left with patchy evidence linking specific commentary to specific images. It is often difficult to evaluate the response to imagery because few documents refer to specific, extant works of art. It is difficult to give primacy to the response of viewers, or “audienicing”, which Rose (2001:38–46) considers one of the main pillars of a well-rounded visual methodology. Perhaps because of these breaks in the evidence, the iconographer’s approach has traditionally privileged the iconographer’s conclusions: we rarely hear contemporary voices of those who commissioned, made, or looked at specific, identifiable visual artefacts, because such records have rarely survived.¹¹³

To that end, I would like to describe an iconographic methodology relevant to the study of images shared on social media, with perhaps broader relevance as well: one whose “bolts,” as it were, are loosened a bit to accommodate a less homogeneous world teeming with a wild variety of source material represented in a broad range of media, and drawing—perhaps indirectly, perhaps not—from the longer history of images. I would like to offer an iconographic approach based upon Panofsky and Warburg that derives structural support from a visual *habitus*, and that gives voice to those who have had a hand in propagating imagery.

1.7.6.4. Guidelines for an iconographic practice of social media

Object-oriented description. Panofsky’s pre-iconographic description—i.e., identifying what is represented in a picture—remains a fundamental first step, but its remit should be extended to consider various aspects of the picture in the physical realm—or, more accurately, a cognate of the physical in the virtual realm. By this I mean that we should describe not only *what* is being

¹¹³ It will be recalled that contemporary documents “show a minimal concern with what the art represents; their focus, instead, is overwhelmingly on how the art is to be used and experienced” (Marrow, 1986:152–53). This overstates the case: a number of extant contracts drily list the expected contents of their commissioned work, whilst others express admiration for the technical skill of the image-maker. Many of these can be read in Vasari’s *Lives*, in fact. Nevertheless, this tripartite categorisation—between use/experience, content, and technical appreciation—pays little regard to whether the artefact under discussion has survived and is identifiable.

represented, but *how* it is being represented: that is, we should display a sensitivity not only to the form and composition of an image, but the way the image-maker has used the tools at her disposal to focus our attention within the picture. In his rendition of interpretation, Wittkower (1955) added an *expressive meaning* to his guidelines. Extending the pre-iconographic remit to address explicitly stylistic elements allows one to consider *how* an image-maker has rendered an image, and how this rendition interplays with conscious implication and unconscious intent.

In addition, we should be sensitive to the locus of a picture's presentation: Who made it? Where was it presented? Are there norms of image-making practice that come into play? Does the artist reproduce or struggle against these norms? What was the picture's "nomadic journey" through media? Did it jump from one locus to another, say an image-presentation site such as Imgur and then pass onto a social media site such as Facebook or Twitter? Thus, pre-iconographic description turns into a form which examines the formal, expressive, and situational aspects of the artefact.

Iconographic analysis. In order to understand how people connect concepts with images, we would do well to remind ourselves of Warburg's call to extend our methodology "with no fear of border guards". We should broaden the scope of what we consider "source material" in order to discover iconographic antecedents. The Bible and Classics remain important source materials, but significant—perhaps more significant—resonant imagery is produced in a wide variety of media, which include paintings, sculptures, prints, movies, television, photographs, magazines, cartoons, and even advertisements; moreover, these visual images have counterparts in textual imagery, and they reinforce one another. And crucially, in a less culturally homogeneous world, encompassing themes upon which people can project their own interpretations must be added to this mix of sources. Many of these sources present to the researcher what Hariman and Lucaites called a "middlebrow aesthetic familiarity" (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007:29–30); some present an anti-aesthetic (Douglas, 2013). We should not set up false walls between what we might deem "good" imagery and "bad" imagery or "high" and "low" art: by doing this, we blind ourselves to the influences that artists encounter, and with the predominance of the Internet as a medium for serving visual materials, it is increasingly likely that imagery first seen on the Internet will find itself embedded in an artist's *oeuvre* in some fashion or another.

Iconographic interpretation. Following Van Straten's division of iconological interpretation, iconographic interpretation is where we might draw clearer evidentiary material that tells us the intention of the image-maker: e.g., that *this* clearly refers to *that* concept. We can establish a variety of contexts for evidence, grounded in what we have derived from our object-oriented description: how and where did the image-maker present her work, and does this in part define the boundaries of what she says and the way that she says it? What are the bounds for "acceptable" or "representative" imagery on the forum of presentation? What stylistic or textual evidence points towards to our interpretation? What source material is referenced: a movie, a

television show, another photo, etc? If the image-maker alters a pre-existing image, how does her alteration further aestheticise its subject (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007:31)? What is the image's ideological stance: does it reproduce or query its ideology, and how so?

Iconological interpretation. This is the more speculative branch of Panofsky's original formulation for iconology. It is concerned with potentially unconscious aspects of imagery and the implications of its use in the given particular context. It necessarily has less strict evidentiary requirements. By situating images within a broader visual and conceptual context of iconographic antecedents, and by comparing those with other artefacts ostensibly showing the same subject, we can see how a given image plays out in a larger continuum of pictures. This does not mean that the image of today inevitably repeats the "message" of similar images from the past: it is to demonstrate how these various links in a chain differ from one another. It provides an account of how we got to the present moment, and in part why we characterise imagery as we do. To borrow from Clifford Geertz: How does a particular image represent the stories we tell about ourselves to ourselves? How does it fit into a visual *habitus* of imagery? How do current instantiations of resonant images "actively re-inflect their circulation, even mobilisation" in the future (Mortensen et al., 2017:3)?

These questions suggest that we should look to those who have looked at the artefacts for guidance. The comments people make when they share an image on social media platforms may well provide crucial evidence for their interpretations: this consists of a form of "audiencing". Different groups—be they demographically, linguistically, or culturally defined—may share, comment upon, and even alter the same bank of images, but for their own purposes. The way they do so sheds light on how those antecedents—along with the ideologies and concepts embedded within them—colour a viewer's perception of new, similar material. In other words, the viewer's experience shapes her encounter with an artefact, but the artefact shapes her subsequent experiences as well.

1.8. Conclusion

By examining the images that are shared on social media, and the Internet more widely, we take seriously the notion that pictures are expressions of social concerns; and that just as members of a constitutive unit (be that a country, a religious sect, a profession, a loose network of like interests, etc.) require a common language to communicate with one another, it also needs readily-comprehensible and familiar images to communicate with one another in a visual manner. This behaviour implies that iconography and iconology are fundamental to that process.

It may be best to refer to this methodological approach as iconographic practice inflected by hermeneutic, anthropological, and sociological concerns. It is an analysis of the content, whereby the "face value" of an image is taken seriously, but points to underlying concerns and interests of

the community—national, political, occupational, interest- and even platform-based—in which it was produced and shared.

There is a stock of imagery that expresses emotions or ideas—or, crucially, can be interpreted as such—that stretches back through Antiquity and well beyond, all of which can be called upon to express, or give voice, to what the image-maker attempts to say or what the viewer of that image thinks it says. A certain level of consistency of imagery and interpretation is achieved through repetition over time, which may be termed a type of *habitus*—and iconography is the visual manifestation of that *habitus*. Some images may come to the fore at times, and others will recede, due under this view to their lack of utility: this partly explains why certain forms become less familiar, and why our consistency of interpretation is haphazard. Yet the use of an image is mediated through an individual who makes or distributes an artefact, and we should show sensitivity to the materials and conditions by which the artefact has been created, distributed, and received.

So, the image-maker chooses among a constellation of images to express something: a feeling, a concept, etc. The implications of that choice of imagery are immense however, and perhaps unconscious. It is worth exploring the boundaries of those implications.

Chapter 2: Imagery on the Internet: Methodological approaches similar to iconography

2.1. Introduction

There is a family resemblance in the pursuit of iconography by art historians as diverse as Aby Warburg, Rudolf Wittkower, Fritz Saxl, Erwin Panofsky, André Grabar, Hans Belting and many more, although they place emphases on significantly different elements of their research. Each considers the interrelation between images, visual artefacts, and textual documents in the culture. Each delineates how one might categorise the image. Each presents documents, visual artefacts and cultural practices as evidence for the connection between imagery and ideas percolating in the culture. And finally, each presents the visual artefact as in some sense symptomatic of those cultural ideas, albeit in very different ways from one another. They also tie the subjects of their studies to the longer history of images in an attempt to illustrate the mechanics by which imagery has come to develop particular characteristics.

Following their lead, then, one can generalise the iconographic approach as tracking the *migration of images*. This notion has been expressed in different forms, e.g., as the *Nachleben* (“afterlife”) of Antiquity, long associated with Warburg (1895; Didi-Huberman, 2002; Raulff, 2016); Wittkower’s “migration of symbols” (1939); Belting’s notion of images as “nomads” by (2001a); Peter Mason’s “lives of images” in his study of early European conceptualisations of the Americas, and the interesting re-use of many of these same images in different contexts (2001); and finally by Mitchell’s “life of images”, which he characterises as “a *social life*” (2005b:93). Thus, many art historians have adopted the concept of the image as an entity that in some sense has life and moves through time. But if we wish to see whether some form of iconography is applicable to the study of images shared on the Internet, this concept needs to be unpacked in a way relevant to the study of a very different range of artefacts.

2.1.1. Drawing out the meaning of “the migration of images”

In the hands of the above writers, iconography is intended to anchor the concept of the “migration of images”. The objectives encapsulated by the term, however, are vague. One can illuminate them by expanding the term in the following ways:

- **How do images propagate?** This is the attempt to track their movement across space, time, and different media, e.g., from Florence to Nuremberg; from 1430 to 1518; or from a textual description, and on through a manuscript illumination, painting, to photography.
- **How might we classify the imagery?** This is the organisation of the materials according to formal and/or thematic lines of enquiry. This is an exercise in *distinguishing* between ostensibly similar

imagery. For example, one might differentiate between depictions of *Judith* with Holofernes' head and *Salome* with St. John the Baptist's (Panofsky, 1955) (Figure 8).¹¹⁴

- **How do we track the life of images?** Here, instead of distinguishing between images, we focus upon *commonalities and mutations over time*. In some sense, it is an archaeology of the image: in an archaeological dig, the investigator unearths evidence for how a site's use has changed over time. For tracking the life of images, the idea is much the same. Tracking the life may cover thematic continuities over time and space, again such as the use of Roman triumphal imagery in early Christian depictions of the *XP* symbol for Christ (Grabar, 1968:xlvi–xlvi).¹¹⁵ Alternately, tracking the life of images might track the ways in which images contribute to the evolution of themes or concepts, e.g., the conversion of the raised-arm gesture of a fearful Hellenistic-Roman Niobid to that of a defiant David in the Renaissance, which morphs back into a gesture of self-protection in a print depicting the death of Orpheus (Warburg, 1905) (Figure 3).



- **How do we go about this practically?** As offered by Panofsky (1955), and reconfigured in this research project as a mixed methodology, iconography offers a practical, consistent methodology for the examination of artefacts: specifically, one describes the content of the artefact (pre-iconographic or “object-oriented” description), looks for antecedents to the image contained

¹¹⁴ The example is apt only if one wishes to *distinguish* between Judith and Salome. In other circumstances, one may wish to retain the two in the same category, since there are often significant overlaps in the presentation of both.

¹¹⁵ Grabar (1968:I) suggests that one advantage of tracking the life of images is that “the initial significance of an image can clarify the meaning given to the same image at a later time”. This suggests a degree of fixedness in the underlying themes and a denial of drift over time. Fixedness may be true for the transfer of imperial triumphal imagery to a Christian context, but it is less true for, e.g., imagery of the Crucifixion over a period of a thousand years. In the latter case, tracking the life of an image provides insights into the ways in which the approaches to imagery drifts from its original context—sometimes dramatically—over time. Elsewhere, Grabar explicitly endorses the possibility that the thematics of imagery drifts over time.

within it (iconographic analysis), and then examines the implications of its use in particular instances (iconographic and iconological interpretation).

2.1.2. Linking iconography to visual artefacts on the internet

Iconography has been established as a useful methodology for looking at works of art. In Chapter 1, I have argued that it also can be updated to address several contemporary concerns and adopt practices from other methods. Research on imagery appearing on the Internet has frequently referenced iconography. However, despite the fact that they usually form the lynchpin of their arguments, these iconographies are almost universally presented as self-evident and are mentioned *in passim*: they are *asserted* rather than *established*. They have identified, e.g., multiple iconographies of protest on websites (Mattoni and Doerr, 2007; Kohns, 2013; Milner, 2013), of hyper-sexualised femininity on MySpace (Dobson, 2011), of youthful, virile presidents (Losh, 2012), of Madonna-and-Child imagery employed in the portrayal of celebrity humanitarians on the Internet (Mostafanezhad, 2013), of *jihad* on social media (O'Callaghan et al., 2014), of martyrs on the web (Halverson et al., 2013), of a gesture mocking marginalised Others on the web (Hristova, 2013), of celebrity and riches on Instagram (Marwick, 2015), of the selfie on Instagram (Frosh, 2015), of Tiananmen Square on social media (Ibrahim, 2015), of girls suffering from depression on YouTube (Johansson and Sternudd, 2015), and even of the recognisable stylistics of manga comics distributed on the web (Manovich, 2015b).¹¹⁶ With rare exceptions, these iconographies are only considered within their current context, such that they do not connect to the broader resonances contemporary imagery takes on from longstanding image-making practices, a point raised by Doerr et al. (2013).¹¹⁷

Thus, whilst iconography has been used in service of other modes of addressing visual artefacts on the Internet, its status as a full-blown tracking of the migration of images across the Internet has not been established. Moreover, even were it established as such, it is hardly the only methodology available. Images shared on the Internet have been viewed frequently as rhetorical

¹¹⁶ This is not to say that their assertions are incorrect. For example: the Obama campaign certainly worked to draw parallels to the youthful, optimistic Kennedy (Losh, 2012). Imagery of the Muslim martyr certainly seem to take on very specific, readily-identifiable features (Halverson et al., 2013). The origin of female celebrities holding children in the third world is probably the Madonna and Child, albeit mediated through centuries of secularising images of motherhood (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Tiananmen Square has certainly come to be a symbol of freedom, to the point that even oblique references to the *Tank Man* photograph encounter blocking attempts from Chinese authorities (Ibrahim, 2015). And it is certainly the case that many celebrities and micro-celebrities wear expensive clothing and jewellery as indicators of status (Marwick, 2015).

¹¹⁷ Davison (2009) argues that the bowler hat has migrated to the Internet and has been reinforced as a symbol of the financial industry, despite the fact that bowler hats are decidedly anachronistic. Mattoni and Doerr (2007) observe that imagery created for a Euro May Day Net-parade makes use of resonances found in Catholic saints and superheroes to valorise the work of the precariat.

objects, such as the memes (Figure 7) arising from Louise Macabitas' "Pepper-Spray Cop" photograph (Huntington, 2016). Visual content analysis has been used frequently, e.g., the ways



US "Wild West" tourist attractions have been represented on Pinterest (McMullen, 2017).¹¹⁸ A loosely-defined version of iconology in the style of W. J. T. Mitchell has been used to analyse the ultraviolent imagery created and disseminated by *Dāesh* on the Internet (Kraidy, 2017). And outside of the humanities and social sciences, pictures have also been subject to a number of computational techniques, e.g., semantic text analysis and computer vision techniques to predict whether a given meme will be widely shared (Coscia, 2014).

All that said, there are a number of different methodologies that parallel iconography in a number of different ways. As such, I will present those authors and laboratory collectives whose methods seem to be most similar to iconography in their studies of studying visual artefacts shared on the Internet. I point out where an iconographic approach aligns with their analyses—and where iconography can augment the study of images on social media. These authors and labs include Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, Laurie Gries, Limor Shifman, Ryan Milner, and Farida Vis alongside her lab the Visual Social Media Lab (VSML). They are divided into two main sections: those who investigate a resonant or iconic image, along with its subsequent permutations, as its focus (this includes Hariman and Lucaites, Gries, and the VSML); and those whose research concentrates upon variations of pictures or picture types and not upon some important starting point, because the origin is often obscure or non-existent (this includes Shifman and Milner). I argue that iconography contributes a richer understanding to both approaches to imagery shared on the Internet.

All track the migration of images in some sense of the permutations listed above, but their objectives were not to track them over the broader history of image-making. If the investigator's goal is to make connections to this broader history of image-making, then, a different approach is needed, because they would need to sanity-check the associations they note. In this context, the iconographic approach fills a number of gaps that these other approaches leave open. Indeed, posing the question of the "migration of images" clarifies this notion considerably. In this chapter, I assert that iconography's "long view" can add some extra richness to the discourse on

¹¹⁸ Visual content analysis is in many ways like pre-iconographic analysis: it is a record of the contents of a visual artefact, although of the two, content analysis is almost certainly more exhaustive. For more on content analysis and its relation to this project, see Chapter 3.

contemporary imagery. I also want to emphasise that there are many things from each approach that can and should be incorporated into iconography, and I will highlight what I will attempt to adopt in the remainder of this research project.

2.1.3. Limits of iconography on social media

This is not to suggest that all visual artefacts on the Internet *can* be linked to the broader history of art, however. The vast majority of artefacts on social media are photographs or derived from photographs, for example, memes or political posts that might use photographs as the basis of new imagery. As Hariman and Lucaites (2016:100) state, “the single more important characteristic of photography is that *its distinctive content is modernity itself*” (their emphasis): that is, its ability to chronicle the everyday and the extraordinary in the world around us. Thus, many photographs may be the *starting-point* of their own, brand-new, iconographies, and not evoke a longer history of pre-existing imagery, such as artefacts inspired by photographs of the Hindenburg airship crash (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007:258–64). Alternately, family photographs of a hot, grouchy family in front of the Disney World gates do not appear to partake of or create any iconographic resonance at all—unless the viewer concentrates upon the uncanny resemblance of family photography created by people in widely disparate cultures.¹¹⁹ Rather, it seems that iconography is most useful when looking at imagery of people in conflict: “iconic” instances of photojournalism in particular.

Many pictures on the Internet, then, may resist iconographic analysis; but we must also acknowledge the numbers involved. The sheer volume of visual artefacts shared on social media—estimated to be over 3 billion pictures and videos shared daily (Meeker, 2016)—suggests that it is unrealistic to process large numbers of files iconographically, or it is unrealistic until iconographic methods are paired with assistance from artificially-intelligent computer-led sorting tasks (known as “machine learning”), which does not—yet—appear up to the task.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ For more on this, see Rose (2010:23), who argues that “your family photos will look a lot like mine... how they are pictured, where they are pictured and what they are pictured doing”. This commonality of visual approach notwithstanding, Rose argues that the disregard for family photography is part of a broader general disregard for women’s work, since mothers are usually the family member who takes on the role of family recordkeeper. The pictures taken by Alan’s mother will have profound implications for the visibility of victims in the dataset (see Chapter 4). See also Hand (2012:143ff), who argues that family photography is key to the process of contemporary memory making, even though the proliferation of digitally-sourced imagery suggests that the majority of these photographs will never be seen.

¹²⁰ For this project, I attempted to pass some images through “Clarifai”, a web-based machine learning service which can be trained via a bespoke set of pictures to identify other a dataset of image files. However, the software failed to distinguish between photographs of Alan Kurdi taken from distinct perspectives (one in which the child was facing away, and one in which Alan faced the camera). For more about Clarifai: <https://www.clarifai.com> [Accessed 21 September 2017].

2.2. Approaches with an anchoring iconic or resonant image

The following approaches use particular pictures as their starting point. These pictures may be resonant or “iconic” in some fashion, and the following studies almost invariably use their “iconic” pictures as the starting point of their investigations. They are qualitative meditations on the ways that powerful pictures develop a life beyond their original confines. As such, both the scope and approach are similar to iconography, but the facets by which they explore their subject matter are spelled out more thoroughly.

2.2.1. Iconic photography: Hariman and Lucaites on civic identity and public culture

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites have investigated the role of “iconic” photojournalism as an “articulation of a model for civic life” in the American polity during the 20th century (2007:11). After acknowledging that “photojournalism is undergoing a renaissance as it is being remediated into the digital media environment”, they have broadened their original approach to address this larger field beyond “iconic” photographs (Hariman and Lucaites, 2015:12; Hariman and Lucaites, 2016). Both will be addressed here, but their approach to iconic photography will be emphasised. As a precursor to understanding their parallels with and divergences from iconography, it is important to take two brief detours to lay out the critical landscape and explore their definition of iconicity.

2.2.1.1. The critical landscape before Hariman and Lucaites

There is a significant strand in photography criticism that harbours significant distrust for the medium. Such criticism asks whether the photograph in general can represent anything other than what it is: something snapped in the fraction of a second, an unconnected slice of reality with little power to refer to anything beyond its existence as a record of a particular slice of time in a particular location. It can “give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal” (Sontag, 1977:9). It is “somehow stupid” and “undialectical”, an “*arrest* of interpretation” that “teaches me nothing” (Barthes, 1980:4, 90, 107).

It has also been claimed that photographs provide no context. Susie Linfield (2010:21) has summarised this claim thus: “photographs don’t explain the way the world works; they don’t offer reasons or cause; they don’t tell us stories with a coherent, or even discernible, beginning, middle, and end. Photographs can’t burrow within to reveal the inner dynamics of historic events”. This is a sentiment echoed by some journalists regarding the photographs that accompany their stories: only the words of their articles matter, because they feel that the photograph cannot convey the more complex issues at hand (Zelizer, 2010:3–4). Indeed, any attempt to make a coherent narrative—in short, any interpretation—of a photograph is a “projection, a refusal of an impoverished reality in favour of an imaginary plenitude” (Burgin, 1982:147); it is “nothing other than a discontinuous series of representations, copies, fakes”

(Crimp, 1980:99). Hariman and Lucaites describe this push to accept only the most “radically reductive” claims for photography as a form of “literalism” (2016:63, 67). Even Susie Linfield, who otherwise states that “the camera has been a key tool—perhaps *the* key tool—in enabling... empathic leaps” in the defence of human rights, asserts that photojournalism is poor at providing the viewer with a balanced context for its setting: their products are “utter failures at providing answers to the tangled politics” they attempt to capture (2010:46–47, 29). The cumulative effect of these criticisms is for some critics to emphasise the denotative aspect of the photograph: that is, what it shows, rather than any or associative, symbolic qualities a picture may hold for a viewer.

When attached specifically to photography of political import—particularly images of politically-motivated violence, or to particularly distressing photographs—these criticisms take on a moral dimension. If a photograph can only capture a moment, then a picture of political violence does nothing to help the victim in the photograph or explain the tragedy unfolding before the lens. At best, it makes the viewer complicit in voyeurism at the victim’s expense: it is thus “war pornography” or “victim pornography” (Sontag, 1977:12; Linfield, 2010:40ff), particularly if viewing them is unaccompanied by action (Sontag, 2003).¹²¹ And—following a common criticism of pornography—it can dull the senses, “making the horrible seem more ordinary” (Sontag, 1977:21).¹²²

This line of reasoning has not gone unchallenged. If photography can open “empathic leaps” to the suffering others, then a distrust of the persuasive aspects of photojournalism needs to be met with an approach that aims to “integrate emotion into the experience of looking” (Linfield, 2010:30), particularly in the encounter with photography of politically-based violence. This can be based upon the critic’s own emotive response, but it can also form the basis for taking seriously the emotive responses of audiences who view photography. This project will adopt Linfield’s call to take into account emotional responses to imagery, both because these are common in textual responses on the Internet, and because they provide a rich source of documentation revealing clues about viewer interpretations.

¹²¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1994:176) stated that documentary photography commits a “double act of subjugation”: the victim is first oppressed by the oppressor, and then again by the “regime of the image”. Jim Lewis (2003), wrote that “I really don’t think that a picture of an atrocity should be a good picture, a beautiful picture, a well-composed picture printed on good paper stock, rich in tonal variation, etc., etc. Instead, and for starters, these days such a picture had better be in colour because black and white virtually screams ‘lovely and artistic artifact’. What’s more, it should be casually composed, hastily framed, only competently printed”.

¹²² The moral dimension of viewing photographs of suffering humanity has been explored by Roger Silverstone (2007), who has argued that the mediated visibility of suffering needs to be accompanied by attempts to increase human empathy. This book has been very important for approaches adopted by Mortensen (2015); Mortensen (2017); Chouliaraki (2015); Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), amongst others.

2.2.1.2. How Hariman and Lucaites differ

Linfield's call has profound implications as a mid-point leading to more emotive, personal interpretations of photography, a call since adopted and extended by Hariman and Lucaites (2016:29–56) in favour of interpreting photographs in very broad terms. Fortunately for them—and us—there is plenty of evidence showing that interpreting photographs is a common activity. Hariman and Lucaites' approach represents a significant divergence from earlier critics, instead pointing towards the very real enthusiasm evinced by, and resonance for, many viewers for photography. Their first study, *No Caption Needed*, focused upon a particular, concrete form of interpretation—the reuse of imagery from “iconic” photographs of the twentieth century—concentrating upon examples that shaped American civic ideals such as Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* (1936).

2.2.1.3. Hariman and Lucaites define “iconic” photography

It is worth understanding their notion of iconicity because they provide a useful, albeit incomplete definition of the iconic that pertains to many pictures shared on the Internet and social media platforms—prominent recent examples include those of Jonathan Bachman's *Arrest of Ieshia Evans* (2016), Nilüfer Demir's *Alan Kurdi on Bodrum Beach* (2015), and Louise Macabitas' *Pepper-Spray Cop* (2011).¹²³

Hariman and Lucaites define the iconic photograph as an aesthetically conventional image featuring recognisable subject matter that is framed in such a way as to performatively, emotively emphasise conflicts of the society in which it was produced (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007:30–37). The photographs of Ieshia Evans, Alan Kurdi, and the Pepper-Spray Cop seem to fit this definition well. What is more, each has prompted strong textual and graphical viewer responses, much as their iconic twentieth-century examples had been replicated in political cartoons, advertisements, and other venues.

Ultimately, Hariman and Lucaites' definition of “iconicity” seems a civically-oriented elaboration of Barthes' *punctum*, i.e., the poignancy that affects the viewer and pierces through mere *studium*, or her basic cultural appreciation of the photograph (Barthes, 1980:26–28). It must be emphasised that the authors focus upon photographs related to the creation of civic identity. These provide the “resources for thought and feeling that are necessary for constituting people as citizens and motivating identification with and participation in specific forms of collective life”; in short, they “provide a civic education, for better or worse” (2007:13, 17). Plenty of compelling imagery may thus escape their definition of iconicity simply for being unreal (although there is no reason why this may be): for example, many images emanating from movies, such as *Star Wars* or *The Sound of Music*, all of which hold “iconic” moments for many cinema fans. When we look

¹²³ NB that these titles are not the original titles given to the photographs—if titles were even originally supplied. They are the names that have become subsequently attached to them.

upon the contemporary media landscape, we might do well to remember that images from many different sources provide cultural touchstones: this is one of the foundations of memetic “grammar” (see section 2.3 below).

Hariman and Lucaites' definition of iconicity is thus tied to life in the polity and—implicitly—truth telling. As such, it cannot accommodate iconic imagery from popular culture: it *can only feed into* popular culture. This is a critical problem when examining imagery on the Internet because people explicitly compare real events with fictitious events in cinema, television, and comics.¹²⁴

Instead of tying iconicity to the polity, then, it might be better to hearken back to the original notion of the icon, which has a degree of overlap with Hariman and Lucaites' conception of it. Icons are often simple, even starkly-composed, images.¹²⁵ Even if they represent narrative scenes (often on side panels incidental to the main icon itself), they are sufficiently abstracted from that narrative that they stand on their own. For example, an image of Christ entering Jerusalem will contain Jesus on an animal, with onlookers honouring him as he enters the city gates—but only the minimum required to represent the scene is represented, and the background is largely effaced into a wash of flat colour. This has the effect of taking the narrative out of standard time; in effect, to make it a timeless act. Because of this minimalist composition artists relied upon a corpus of pre-existing representations into make the scene recognisable to their audiences.¹²⁶ And, *pace* the claim that only unique works of art contain an “aura” that mass-reproduced works cannot achieve (Benjamin, 1936:221), the “aura” for an icon was not always centred upon its uniqueness: the “aura” of particular icons were thought to be “transferred” to copies. As is the case with knowing the origins of Panofsky's famous hat-tipping example, knowing more of the content enriches one's engagement with the narrative icon: but the icon stands on its own without that enriching detail.

By describing the iconic image in this way, one might perceive similarities to Hariman and Lucaites' definition: they are simplified; they rely upon familiar modes of representation; they are timeless, or at least less time-bound; and they seem relevant beyond their specific moment and

¹²⁴ See Drainville (2018) for a study that outlines social media users' responses to Jonathan Bachman's 2016 *Arrest of Ieshia Evans*, where these users *specifically cited popular culture* in their interpretations of the photograph.

¹²⁵ In attempting to merge Christian icons with their pagan votive antecedents, Mathews and Muller (2016:16) define icons as “nonnarrative compositions of frontally-composed figures” with characteristics germane to religious iconography: the figures are “distinguished as divine by their attributes”. This definition fits their goal of locating continuities from pagan religious imagery, but it ignores the inclusion of narrative or semi-narrative aspects in several icons (such as the Entry into Jerusalem as a quasi-abstracted scene in a side-panel of an icon). In the following, I am attempting to incorporate such quasi-narrative scenes in my definition.

¹²⁶ These pre-existing representations often took on thematic enrichment from imagery in very different contexts: for example, they have been connected to imagery of Imperial majesty (Grabar, 1968) and standard depictions of other deities (Mathews and Muller, 2016).

context of production, in that they straddle the specificity of documentary fact and symbolic components beyond that (Mortensen et al., 2017:11). One might also perceive similarities to some of the objections to photography mentioned above: they provide whittled-down versions of an event; they seem, or are purported, to represent something beyond the moment at hand; they do not provide the full context of the event. But there are other important advantages of this looser definition. For example, it emphasises connections to pre-existing representations, which provide sufficient background support to make sense of the decontextualised icon. And the icon is not explicitly tied to ringfenced sources: it is well established for example that much of Christian iconic art is based upon pre-Christian imagery, whether that be the dead Christ sourced from the dead Meleager, the mourning Magdalen sourced from the ecstatic Maenad, or Christ and the Apostles sourced from the Philosopher and the Academy, to name but a few well-known examples (Grabar, 1968; Spivey, 2001). Removing the demand for civically-oriented work creates space for elements sourced from very different materials to make their presence.

Hariman and Lucaites have subsequently broadened their approach to cover other photos that do not reach iconic status, but which instead merely “ask you take a second look” (2016:45). This looser confederation of imagery still has an orientation towards the polity because it contributes to a “public art”: they consider photography to be a democratic art whose ultimate worth—critically—will be based upon interpretation, part of an interrelationship between this “public art” and its “spectators” (2016:59). Because spectators bring a wide variety of attitudes with them as they view and interpret a photograph, the act of reception is “radically plural: it cannot be contained in any one interpretation” (2016:48).

They justify interpreting photojournalism because—as in the best-case scenario, they are accompanied by the briefest of captions explaining the subject—these photographs are largely decontextualized (2016:43). By being separated from a larger context, they argue, the photograph aestheticises its subject and contributes to symbolic interpretation. This builds upon their notion of framing and aestheticisation of the image that arises from their analysis of iconic photographs (2007:31). As such, their initial approach, already a departure from much standard photography criticism, takes a broader interpretative turn when they address photography that is not iconic, but merely of a sufficiently compelling nature that the viewer will “take a second look” (2016:45).

2.2.1.4. Hariman and Lucaites’ methodology

Thus, in *No Caption Needed*, Hariman and Lucaites’ choose photographs fitting their definition of iconicity in the civic sphere; they then place these photographs under methodical scrutiny. In brief, Hariman and Lucaites make sure to recontextualise the photographs they examine by providing the circumstances of their initial capture. They examine photographs to analyse how they produce an ideological impression of the world that seems completely factual and straightforward. They analyse how they impart understandings of how to behave and [re]act in

the civic sphere; how they shape both our understanding of the photographed event through its frequent reproduction; and finally, how they affect the understanding of future events through their re-use (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007:9–12).

Their method has a number of parallels with iconography. They track the propagation of iconic imagery; their classification of derivative imagery is based upon medium rather than theme or formal considerations such as alterations. Their main concern, as will become clear below, is the life of images, but it is a very limited conception of life: it almost invariably starts with the iconic image itself.

2.2.1.5. Propagation and classification

For Hariman and Lucaites, as an image is recognised as iconic, it becomes part of the persuasive rhetoric of modern life. Reproductive media tap into images' inherent power in order to siphon off some of their cachet for derivative works: these may be in newspaper cartoons, "high" or "low" art, reappropriation in news magazines, merchandise, or the Internet. They call this the "provision of figural resources for collective action" (2007:12). These "figural resources", then, constitutes a propagation and are part of the evidence that the photograph has become iconic; the collective action may be a push for a policy change, or simply a change in the way an event is viewed by the public. Moreover, they track the propagation of the iconic image across time and space as it shares its resonances with various derivative artefacts.

Hariman and Lucaites pursue an ad-hoc thematic classificatory system for each photograph under consideration: e.g., the photograph and its derivatives comment upon dissent or trauma. They do not classify their imagery according to intent, such as critiques of the original, parodies, or alternately on formal connections, such as close reproduction or ways in which the original has been adapted for its new purpose.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ In their subsequent assessment of photography as a "public art" (Hariman and Lucaites, 2015; 2016), the authors again take up the problem of classification, noting that standard journalistic categorisations such as "Sport", "News", or "Entertainment" are insufficient: these bland denotative categories contribute to making the image "dispensable" as the public will "forget them" quickly, implying that meaningful classification makes imagery stick in the viewers' minds more easily (2016:45). They instead propose a considered, "curated" approach (2015:11–12). This curation, they argue, is guided by intuition, not by a desire to represent fully the photographic archive—an impossible task, at least without the aid of sophisticated machine intelligence, the likes of which do not yet exist.

Thus, instead of trying to understand the photograph and its effect on "civic performance" (2016:46) through a consistent classification of the imagery it represents and engenders, their approach is far more diffuse. Instead they adopt ad hoc classifications when interpreting their photographic choices. For example, a photograph of a bird suffocating in an oil spill "incorporates many of the conventions of portrait photography" (and thus is classified as a type of portraiture): because the photograph is rather like a portrait of the bird, it "invites anthropomorphic projection" (Hariman and Lucaites, 2016:85). This is a very interesting observation, one that, if pursued, would have provided intriguing insights into the mechanisms by which portraiture creates the impression of personality, its extension into unexpected subjects, and the

2.2.1.6. Tracking the life of iconic photographs

The majority of Hariman and Lucaites' approach is concerned with the tracking the life of images in two ways: through the generation of collective memory by reproduction of the original photograph itself, thereby helping "shape understanding of specific events and periods" (2007:11); and through the appropriation of the original image in derivative works. The first is part of the phenomenon of industrial reproduction, and any art history student is familiar with many famous works of art, even though she may not have seen them in person. The second is more in keeping with iconography as it has been practiced in the examination of art.

They limit their examination of the "life" of images by showing how the iconic photograph has been used for vastly different purposes than its original intention as a chronicle of its time. For example, they track Alfred Eisenstadt's 1945 *Times Square Kiss* and its reuse in a clothing advertisement, a kitsch statue of Bugs Bunny in a Universal Studios Store, and a *New Yorker* cover published during the American debate over homosexuals serving openly in the military (2007:67–80). In each derivative example, the original photograph has been appropriated for different purposes: for example, to define clothing as "Classic" and "All American", and to normalise the supposedly "deviant" affection between homosexuals within the context of a classic romantic image. They effectively show how the iconic image's reuse provides a patina of associations attached to the original photograph upon derivative works.

This is, however, a limited understanding of the "life" of images. With the exception of Lange's *Migrant Mother*, Hariman and Lucaites do not consider that the imagery in their iconic photographs may have a life prior to their capture in-camera. For the authors, their iconic photographs are the *starting-point* of imagery. This is problematic. For example, they cite the "reproduction of ideology" as an important element in their studies, examining its "mainstream recognition, wide circulation, and emotional impact" (2007:9); the iconic photograph thus presents itself as a natural reproduction of the reality around them, and not a constructed version of that reality. However, ideology does not arise out of thin air: there are very often, if not invariably, antecedents to the construction of ideology. For instance, Eisenstadt's *Times Square Kiss* has a prehistory of resonances that it taps into to establish its own iconicity—to cite only its immediate prehistory of kisses in Hollywood movies, and the patriotic images of the armed forces and women on the "home front" reproduced in magazine photographs, illustrations, and posters. The fantasy of movies and the propaganda of wartime exhortation combine with the end of the war to make the photograph suggest that the end of the war was the happy ending of a movie, or indeed a fairy tale: "And they lived happily ever after. The end".

implications of doing so: indeed, of how the portrait creates intimacy and invites the viewer into a communion of shared humanity. But the authors abandon the observation without delving deeply into the iconological implications of its use.

2.2.1.7. How iconography can enrich Hariman and Lucaites' approach

Hariman and Lucaites are clearly gravitating towards a methodology approaching iconography: they are interested in the life of images as they travel from their iconic imagery, and their recent comments on curation and allegory are strongly allied with iconographic concerns. But however powerful, clear, and eloquent their methodology, it is less well equipped to address imagery that falls outside political or civil realms, and they cannot adequately address the role of antecedent imagery in forming formal and thematic foundations. In addition, whilst they champion interpretation of photographs, they take comparatively small steps in doing so. These weak spots are precisely where iconography can assist and, allied with their perceptive dissection of iconicity, provide effective analysis of imagery shared on social media.

Seen in this light, Hariman and Lucaites highlight the *need* for interpretation of photojournalism, but they provide neither *guidelines* to its interpretation, nor the boundaries of that interpretation. Most importantly, whilst they view photography as a kind of public art, and they recognise the value of (some) antecedent imagery, they do not fully engage with the implications of this antecedent imagery. Although they acknowledge that the Internet has become a key locus for the spread of compelling photography and cite the polysemic interpretations which they correctly suggest exist, they have not offered any way to approach these polysemic interpretations. By viewing photograph as one link in a long chain of imagery based upon similar formal and thematic codes, we might derive a richer understanding of its power.

Let us again remind ourselves of Warburg's call to "range freely, with no fear of border guards" (1912:585), by accepting no impermeable barrier between "high" and "low" art, or between "manufactured" pictures like paintings and the supposedly unmediated realism of photographs, a point Warburg made most forcefully in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Equally, it is important to heed Hariman and Lucaites' call to examine the framing and ideology of a photograph. It is important to recognise that the framing and—for lack of a better word—baggage of similar imagery nudges the viewer to a constricted set of interpretations of the photograph. Indeed, this is fundamental to iconographic interpretation, and recognising these elements leads to a potentially enriched understanding of the photograph and its resonances.

2.2.2. "Iconographic tracking": the Gries model

Laurie Gries (2015) studied permutations of the *Obama Hope* (Figure 9) poster through a process she has called "iconographic tracking".

Created by Shepard Fairey during the 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign, *Obama Hope* was quickly recognised as iconic. It rapidly spread from the physical world to the online world, and, like many of Hariman and Lucaites' examples, it inspired a number of derivative responses.



Gries adopts a new materialist approach to the study of “visual rhetoric”, or the ways in which a visual artefact has been contrived to communicate a persuasive message. Instead of viewing a visual artefact as a matter of fully-formed communication delivered for a specific purpose and time, she calls for tracking the ripples of an artefact’s rhetorical effect over time:

Rhetoric prevails beyond its initial moment of production; once unleashed in whatever form it takes, rhetoric transforms and transcends across genres, media, and forms as it circulates and intra-acts with other human and nonhuman entities (Gries, 2015:7).

Thus, *Obama Hope* does not merely portray Obama in an inspiring light but unleashes a force of unseen actions and reactions. These all have agencies of their own and so in turn affect various environments, including digital spaces, in which the image and variations of it are spread.

She places great emphasis on the ways that images take such unexpected paths, which she calls “futurity”, or “the time spans beyond a thing’s initial production and delivery—and create risky accounts of how rhetoric unfolds as things enter into complex associations and catalyse change” (Gries, 2015:8). She argues that investigators need to be able to let go of the artificial constraints they have placed in their stress upon an artefact’s original message, intent, and time of delivery. This constraint has rarely been a problem for some iconographers like Warburg, given that their focus of study has often been the ways in which images have been reused throughout history. Warburg took this farther, seeing the aftershocks of powerful images insert themselves in contemporary vernacular pictures, such as the repetition of an Antique pose by a golfer shown within the *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

Her method is clear: collect the image data by searching on Google; and then organise the result into recognisable patterns, perhaps in folders on one’s computer. This is an iterative process, so this process is repeated as new patterns and associations emerge (Gries, 2015:106–32). These patterns are then laid out in a mind map.¹²⁸

She addresses the pictures through seven characteristics. Not all of these receive the same degree of attention:

- their rhetorical compositions;
- the means by which they were produced;
- their transformations in their encounters with new groups, individuals and concerns;
- their distribution over time and space;
- their circulation, e.g., how they changed from one given context to another;
- the ways in which they encourage the emergence of new associations, or “collectivity”;

¹²⁸ A characteristic line of associations from the mind map is: “Obama Hope” – “Commodification” – “eBay” – “Wall Street Journal”. Not all of the associations in the mind map are followed up in the text.

- and their impact, or “consequentiality”.

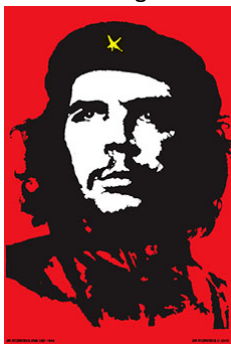


These considerations will be familiar to an iconographer, and importantly, Gries applies them to a raft of often-ignored examples. So, for example, she tracks the ways in which *Obama Hope* appeared in graffiti and ephemera such as bottle caps, propelled into a new life within popular culture—especially online—in parody



versions and “Obamicons”, or semi-automated ways to “Obamaise” one’s own pictures (Figure 10); Finally, she also tracks how the image was also used by those critical of the new president on both the political left and right (Figure 11).¹²⁹

This is certainly a “life of images”. However, as for Hariman and Lucaites, it is a life that *starts* with *Obama Hope*. Apart from noting that Fairey takes his visual style in part from 1930s U.S. Works Progress Administration posters, Gries fails to explore the many precursors that constitute



the prehistory of *Obama Hope*, particularly posters of socialist realism which place an inspirational figure onto a field with bold splashes of colour, and perhaps even more *Viva Che*, Jim Fitzpatrick’s 1968 print of Che Guevara based on Alberto Korda’s famed portrait (Figure 12). This connection has not gone unnoticed by a number of people who made variations of *Obama Hope*. For example, the right-wing author of an anti-Obama parody (Figure 11) goes so far as to make the connection explicit by using a different source picture for Obama that is more reminiscent of Fitzpatrick’s *Viva Che*. By not engaging with this longer history of images, Gries cannot explain how *Obama Hope* gathered much of its resonance in the first place.

2.3. Memes: derivatives with no anchoring original

In contrast with pictures based upon well-known originals, Internet memes are often less focussed upon connections with its source material, the origins of which may be rather obscure. As such, many memes may seem like pop culture illustrations of Baudrillard’s simulacra: they are copies with no original. Both Limor Shifman (2014) and Ryan Milner (2016) have constructed understandings of the textually and visually discursive “conversations” so pervasive in memes, but both undertheorise the visual aspects of memes.

Inevitably, any definition of the meme contends with the genetic definition initially offered by Richard Dawkins: it is a discrete “unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation”

¹²⁹ NB the examples presented here are my own, and not Gries’. However, they are in keeping with Gries’ own examples.

(1976:192).¹³⁰ In keeping with his biological metaphor, the unit experiences perpetual mutation; at its core, however, it remains recognisably the same thing. But cleaving to Dawkins' definition provides little insight into *how* or *why* something becomes a "unit of cultural transmission"—it simply *is* one. And despite the issues raised by Shifman and Milner with regard to this definition, both are still bound by one aspect of it: they find themselves identifying memetic patterns as they are, and not how they arise.¹³¹

Memes are relevant to this research project precisely because they constitute a visible mode in which people on the Internet extend the life of certain images and express the myriad ways they interpret their source material, whether that source is iconic or not. The reuse of imagery is at the very least a cognate to iconographical and iconological patterns of use, sharing, and resonance; I hope to demonstrate below that both may be relevant to understanding memes.

2.3.1. Shifman: the participatory nature of Internet memes

Shifman provides a foundation for understanding memes beyond Dawkins' definition. She distinguishes between a "viral" (a viral artefact), which she describes as a "single cultural unit... that propagates in many copies" and an Internet meme, which "is always a collection of texts", where by "texts" she means a mixture of visual, textual and audio elements that can be read (Shifman, 2014:56). Viral artefacts, then, are *single* items shared intensely, whereas memes are always multiple instances of separate objects with shared characteristics, each of which may be shared widely. By stating that they can be read, she sees memes primarily through their communicative functions. Thus for Shifman, the three major dimensions of a memetic work is its content, form, and stance: only the form relates to "the physical incarnation of the message" (Shifman, 2014:40–41).

In contrast to Dawkins' deterministic biological model, Shifman emphasises that individuals make and spread memes, and that memes are, collectively, created with an awareness of one another: indeed, for her, viral artefacts are commented upon, whilst memes are inherently participatory, implicitly calling upon others to add to the pile of variations (Shifman, 2014:56–60).¹³² The emphasis on collective work is crucial here, because for many memes, there is no iconic source material—or, at least, the specificities of the source material is not in itself particularly

¹³⁰ NB unless otherwise specified, from this point on all references to "memes" refer to "Internet memes", not to the broader cultural unit.

¹³¹ Both Shifman and Milner find Dawkins' definition problematic: under it, people are "helpless and passive creatures, susceptible to the domination of meaningless media 'snacks' that infect their mind" (Shifman, 2014:11). The definition "favours a biological or cultural determinism instead of valuing the agency of social actors" (Milner, 2016:20).

¹³² This begs the question: *who participates?* The vast majority of people do not create their own memes but participate in the process purely by disseminating them. Milner (2016:115–49) delves into this, particularly in terms of hostile imagery. For an insightful discussion of the Reddit platform as a "playful" meme source, see Massanari (2015:95–125).

important, but rather the uses image-makers make of the source material.¹³³ This differs from the iconic model followed above by Hariman and Lucaites, for whom derivative works—many of which are arguably memes *avant la lettre*—strongly depend upon recognition of the source image to make sense of the derivatives. Memes then are relational: she emphasises the collective’s recognition of commentary or joke patterns as the memetic foundation, not the pictorial source. Finally, she emphasises both the ephemeral character of memes and their context dependence, both of which run counter to Dawkins’ conception of memes in general.

The pictures used in memes—and why they are used—are only discussed *in passim*. This is problematic because pictures provide important ways to investigate the dynamic between Dawkins’ and Shifman’s conceptions of memetics. A biological definition suggests that a “successful” meme is one that lasts longer than others: it is, in other words, a marker of biological advantage. Internet memes, in contrast, are ephemeral: no widely-shared example is shared for a longer time than infrequently-shared variants, and by the biological model, none would be considered “successful”. What *marks* success for a meme, however, are the usage of *specific pictures* which get used throughout memetic permutations, and *particularly resonant alterations* by users, be those textual or visual. Why do users share photographs of animals in so many memes? Why do meme-makers focus on gestures and place the figures into new contexts? The individual memetic example may live or die, but what it is *based upon*—the picture—has a much longer life. Part of the agency of Internet users, in these terms, lies in recognising the applicability of the underlying imagery in a peculiar context—and this “peculiar context” is usually a critical factor in humour. Concentrating upon the images used in memes, then, concentrates upon specifically what it is that starts the memetic process rolling in the first place. It also opens the door for iconographic enrichment in understanding the life of the image that becomes the subject of a meme.

2.3.2. Milner: the conversational nature of memes

Milner follows Shifman’s distinction between viral and memetic artefacts, and broadly follows her definition of the meme—within the scope of Internet memes, that is, for like Dawkins, he

¹³³ This of course varies: Shifman herself discusses several examples of the “Pepper-spray cop” meme, all of which refer back to its viral starting-point, Louise Macabitas’ photograph (Shifman, 2014:50–53). But many other examples are based upon ephemeral sources, the specific origin of which is only known to an informed few. Sources include stock photography (e.g., “Distracted Boyfriend”), celebrity imagery (e.g., “Strutting Leo DiCaprio”), pop-culture imagery (e.g., “Futurama Fry ‘Not Sure If’”), or memes arising from minor examples of virality on platforms such as Reddit or 4chan (e.g., “Ridiculously Photogenic Guy”). For examples of the “Pepper-Spray Cop” meme, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/casually-pepper-spray-everything-cop>. For the “Distracted Boyfriend”, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/distracted-boyfriend>. For the “Strutting Leo DiCaprio”, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/strutting-leo>. For the “Futurama Fry ‘Not Sure If’”, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/futurama-fry-not-sure-if>. For the “Ridiculously Photogenic Guy”, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/ridiculously-photogenic-guy-zeddie-little>. [All accessed 4 April 2018].

sees memetics as a broader cultural phenomenon. Both Shifman and Milner examine memes through a primarily linguistic approach; Shifman focuses more on the meme's communication to the audience, whilst Milner considers the back-and-forth of memes, particularly as Internet memes stem from elements from the broader world of popular culture and then "leak" back into that broader culture.

Thus, Milner's definition of the meme extends beyond Shifman's by hearkening back to its broad, Dawkins-like cultural role and concentrating on the meme as a discursive element, whilst at the same time refuting Dawkins' deterministic stance. He states that "a consistently shared, innovatively applied inside joke between two friends could be a *meme*—their meme—even if the spread stops there" (2016:38; his emphasis). He therefore sees memes as playing out on the wider stage of general public conversation, whereas Shifman limited her scope to digital culture. Nevertheless, whilst Milner cites myriad sources for memetic material, and argues that even a shared joke might be a meme, he concentrates upon memes as practiced upon the Internet. And instead of considering the meme as imparting communication, it is an "intertextual interweaving" of multiple semiotic codes (2016:26).

Milner follows a discourse-inflected version of social semiotics in his study of memes. He takes after Van Dijck (1997:3), who defines "discourse analysis" in as "talk and text in context", which incidentally explains why Milner consistently refers to his visual examples as "texts", in particular multimodal, media, or visual "texts" (Milner, 2016:14, 37, 224). And whilst he examines the visual qualities of his examples more than Shifman, who only notes that as viewers, we examine memes "thorough our senses" (Shifman, 2014:40)—Milner's emphasis upon the visual artefact as a "text" places limitations upon his ability to explore the resonance of his examples (see below).

2.3.2.1. Methodology: "logics" and "grammar"

Milner sees fundamental "logics" operating in the creation of memes: multimodality, reappropriation, resonance, collectivism, and spread (2016:23–38). They operate within a "grammar" consisting of bricolage, poaching, reappropriation, imitation, and creation (2016:61–66). He examines memes through these facets.

Memes are *multimodal*—that is, they are mixtures of image, audio, written language, and others besides. It is "a lynchpin logic of memetic media", and their "meanings are realised" through the mixture of these codes despite their brevity (2016:25). Memes then take these multimodal elements and *reappropriate* them: they "spread by weaving novel texts into existing contexts" (Milner, 2016:26). Such concerns—the identification of sources for visual artefacts and the analysis of their usage in particular instances—are familiar to iconographers.

Milner describes specific memes as being *resonant* to their communities, positing that members of this community experience a *punctum*, or a "connection with an image at a personal level"

(2016:30). This is potentially another cognate to iconographic interests—at least in the Warburgian tradition of examining the *Nachleben* of resonant expressive forms carried over time and space. Here, however, it is tied more closely to communities’ particular interests, e.g., the music of Kanye West, the films of Wes Anderson, or a crossing between the two, a central example for Milner (2016:23–26).

As “the product of buzzing *collectives*” (his emphasis) which “foregrounds social experience” found on “participatory media sites” such as Reddit and 4chan and “relational networks” such as Facebook and Twitter (2016:33, 48), a meme’s success or failure is dependent upon sharing. Jenkins et al. (2013) coined the phrase “If it doesn’t *spread*, it’s dead”, meaning that certain media artefacts only have “life” if they are shared, and this an apt description of the uneven distribution of memes: success depends upon “the pervasive circulation and sharing of resonant media texts” (2016:37).

This circulation, however, seems to follow patterns of initial rapid spread and a sharp drop in interest, which follows a “power-law distribution”, meaning that the cultural currency of even successful memes is brief.¹³⁴ Successful and unsuccessful memes alike pass into the “long tail” of the distribution such that they never fully disappear. Following Nahon and Hemsley, memes may have an extended “afterlife” like that of viral artefacts and which “can be revived and return to the centre of attention at any given moment” (Nahon and Hemsley, 2013:129).¹³⁵

¹³⁴ A “power law distribution” describes the shape of the contrasting spike-and-flattening line described on graph. Power laws of distribution are common online, for example in the sales of music: since there is no danger of scarcity for a digital product, any item in a producer’s catalogue can be sold as and when there is a customer for it. For example, a large number of people will have bought Beyoncé’s album *Lemonade* when it was released on 23 April 2016, since she is a very popular singer. She would have sold more on that day and the days immediately following, but within a short period, sales will have slowed down. When graphed as sales plotted against time, there would be a spike of sales at its initial release, and then they would dwindle over time—but never disappear. People can still continue discovering and purchasing it, and because they can do so, those small purchases can add up to a considerable sum. The dwindling of sales—which never quite ends because the product can always be encountered by a new consumer—is called the “long tail”.

Consider another example, of another musician whose sales will *not* have followed a power-law distribution. Few will have bought Hunter as a Horse’s album *The Two Magics Vol. I*, released one day before Beyoncé’s album, because the band is virtually unknown—but again, because its music can be purchased over a long time, this group can also sell a considerable number of sales in the long tail. Power-law distributions are relevant to exposure to news articles, imagery, and much viral content, where the “currency” is attention. Nahon and Hemsley (2013:24–29) refer to the decrease in attention over time as *decay*. For a rendition of the power-law distribution and the long tail written for a lay audience, see Anderson (2006).

¹³⁵ This is a very important point. Since widely-shared content will follow a power-law distribution, there is always a long tail of attention, meaning that sharing *continues*. However, the economics of data collection—data acquisition from Twitter, for example, can be expensive—often dictates that investigators only concentrate upon the spike due to its brevity. As researchers, then, we therefore only reinforce attention upon a viral or memetic artefact’s moment of popularity. That viral or memetic artefact may be subject to a long period of

Other components guide the creation of memes: *bricolage* and *poaching*, which mix materials from a number of different media to “make do” with those materials: “meanings can shift in those small annotations” that come about from their mixture (Milner, 2016:62), and similar shifts have been recorded by iconographers, albeit over a much longer time span. Finally, Milner assigns differing roles of *imitation*, *reappropriation*, and *creation* whereby successful memes must balance between adherence to the source material and striking new ground: “it’s based on socially situated expression” (2016:66). This, also, has parallels with iconography: the majority of examples are quite conventional, whilst a few which evoke the original subject but are sufficiently different can move the way in which a subject is represented.

Milner, then, views the meme via a complex mixture of elements that come together to make it, and also its place in the larger conversational culture on participatory media. As such, Milner’s initial analysis is similar to traditional iconography’s interest in description and sourcing material, or pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis. His interest in the cultures in which the meme spread also bears parallels with iconography as well.

But whilst there are parallels with iconography, there are significant problems with Milner’s view when discussing the *visual* aspect of his examples, namely its reduction to a semi-linguistic role. This will be discussed in section 2.3.2.4, as it overlaps with the notion of tracking the life of images.

2.3.2.2. Propagation of memetic content

Milner’s focus on multimodality means that he is inherently interested in tracking the propagation of memetic content in different media, since different components are sourced from different media. One of his central examples, the “Imma let you finish” series, illustrates this. Based upon an outburst involving the musician Kanye West at a music awards ceremony, the meme requires knowledge of a video recording of the incident and the phrase West used.¹³⁶ Exploitation of the meme requires knowledge of the ways in which it can be permuted into new textual or visual artefacts and still be relevant and humorous. What is more, West and other people have subsequently capitalised upon the catchphrase’s popularity by actively re-using it in the real world. Memes, then, often explicitly reference multiple media, and resonant memes extend beyond their initial borders to broader communities. After their initial success, they often percolate under the surface until some event causes them to rise to the public’s attention again: it is a process similar to Warburg’s *Nachleben*, albeit without need for a reference to Antiquity.

fermentation, after which it might return—long after the data has stopped being collected. See chapter six for examples related to Alan Kurdi.

¹³⁶ For the meme, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kanye-interrupts-imma-let-you-finish> [Accessed 18 March 2018].

Milner identifies the sources of different “media texts” that make up memes, e.g., specific movies or pieces of music that recombine to create a new item. Because of memes’ focus upon contemporary culture, in particular pop culture, source materials of course differ from those in traditional art history: yet in both, the sourcing of “texts” is important to understand the point of departure for the image maker.¹³⁷ Whilst Milner sources the content of memes in a casual manner (a meme was found, e.g., on 4chan, Quickmeme, Reddit, or specific sites on Tumblr, known as Tumblogs), at heart a more rigorous sourcing of origins is a standard component of iconographic analysis. Finally, Milner follows the propagation of memetic content for those few examples that “leak” into the real world, e.g., television interviews with the “Ridiculously Photogenic Guy”, and self-exploitation, such as the “Imma let you finish” meme revived by Kanye West.

2.3.2.3. Classification of memes

Milner carves up the memetic landscape into memetic *catchphrases*, *videos*, *performances*, and *images*. *Memetic images* (or, in the parlance of this research project, memetic visual artefacts) are the focus here, but all these subgenres interweave—indeed, they must, because of the memetic focus on multimodality.

Milner’s focus on the visual aspect of memes, however is problematic. For example, he identifies *image macros* as one of the most prevalent forms of *image* memes.¹³⁸ The macro organisation is so common as to permeate many different memes, such as LOLCats, stock character macros, and even more complicated reappropriations (see Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 17 for examples). Apart from the mechanics of their layout—setup text at the top, punchline at the bottom, and picture in the centre—these are usually visually disparate, once again echoing the fact that Milner is more interested in the “grammar” of memes than their resonance.¹³⁹



¹³⁷ Milner’s—and Shifman’s—referencing of contemporary popular culture stand in contrast to Hariman and Lucaites’ focus on civic culture. Contemporary culture—particularly merchandised content—is a significant source of ideological materials that can feed into the memetic reseating of iconic photographs.

¹³⁸ The image macro is a heavily conventional visual format of memetic content and consists of a line of text at the top, a line of text at the bottom, and a picture in the background. The “Futurama Fry ‘Not Sure If’” meme is an example of this.

¹³⁹ Milner’s “grammar” of memetics is employed by the meme-maker to tie “their creative expression to a socially understood premise” (Milner, 2016:28). Both Shifman (2014:40–41) and Milner (2016:142ff) rightly emphasise the difficulty of understanding *keying*, or the aspects of ironic or ambivalent positioning that might problematise any interpretation of the meme

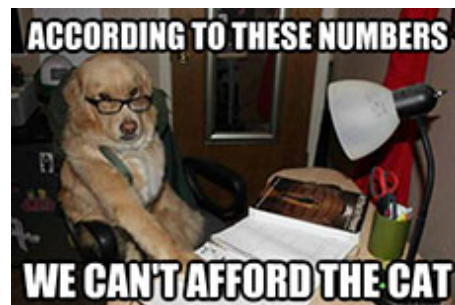
Milner identifies other memetic types through their rhetorical functions and not from their visual characteristics.¹⁴⁰ The major exception to this are *resonant* images, which employ reappropriation to make their memetic point. Commonly, resonant images are extracted from other popular artefacts (e.g., Macabitas' *Pepper-Spray Cop*) and inserted into new contexts for the sake of humour. Instead of embedding a popular artefact, other examples use other famous imagery for the sake of contrast or comparison—a type not discussed by Milner. In one example from my own research (2018), an image-maker has created a collage comparing Ieshia Evans' arrest with the "Tank Man" of Tiananmen Square and Maria-Teresa Asplund's protest of Swedish neo-Nazis: the maker has clearly seen formal thematic and formal parallels in these photographs (Figure 18).



2.3.2.4. Tracking the lives of memes: the limits of a conversational model

Milner tracks the lives of memes in two different ways: continuity, i.e., through the ways in which memes continue their "conversation" through variations; and reaction, i.e., examples by which the original intent—for example, the "I am the 99%" Occupy Wall Street meme—is curled into "agonistic", snarky critiques of the movement (2016:151–64). Tracking them via continuity and reaction emphasises the discursive aspect of memes. However, this is to the detriment of the meme's visual aspect.

The strength and limitations of Milner's approach may be seen via some memetic examples. A common type of meme is based upon anthropomorphism: that is, of animals acting like people (Figure 13).¹⁴¹ A dog is seated at a table of



creator's intent. It is certainly the case that a meme maker may intend something other than the obvious rhetorical claim embedded within her artefact. This seems a moot point. Ultimately, when we highlight the survival of image-types from the Antiquity to the digital age, we are merely demonstrating that the user is affected by that resonance, not whether they genuinely mean it. Nevertheless, if we are interested in understanding whether the user intended that response or not, it should be remembered that this response is not the only textual or visual artefact left behind. The investigator may look at other posts from the same user (perhaps during the same period) to see whether she adopts a similar stance in order to build a more three-dimensional understanding of that person.

¹⁴⁰ Other meme types include *vernacular expression* (using contemporary terms or concepts with incongruent imagery, such as Reaction GIFs), *agonisms* and *antagonisms* (relations between adversaries and enemies, respectively), and *civic polyvocality* (multiple voices which converse collectively upon a subject, for example, the various memes that arose out of the Occupy Wall Street movement).

¹⁴¹ Source: Quickmeme. <http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/3sj71f> [Accessed 23 December 2016].

papers, books, and a light; glasses have been placed upon its face. The dog looks at the camera, over the glasses, and the accompanying text reads: “According to these numbers / We can’t afford the cat”. In this example, the joke is obvious, but the *way* in which it is told is not; as such, it closely follows the approach proposed by Shifman and Milner. The pose of reading over glasses recalls moments when a parent turns from reading material to the viewer, explaining a decision that the viewer (perhaps a child?) does not want to hear. As such, example takes advantage of a number of signs and likely resonances from childhood.

This example is consistent with Milner’s “image macro” (2016:28). And whilst Milner notes that there is a history of mocking imagery and multimodal materials of various types stretching back to pharaonic Egypt, his references to such examples again refers only to the *rhetorical* function of the meme, rather than its visual form. His visual analysis of such “macro” memes extends merely to the observation that a picture acts as a “‘visual action verb’ that indicates process by moving the eye through the image” (2016:68). Such a characterisation short-circuits any attempt at visual analysis. It might suffice for the details of the most stripped-down of memes, such as the “advice animal” series, where understanding the humour is entirely dependent upon basic identification of the rhetorical purpose the particular advice animal the viewer is examining (Figure 14: in this case the “Advice Dog”, which proffers advice of dubious worth).¹⁴² Characterising the picture’s purpose as that of an “action verb” is far too reductive, because in many memes, the picture’s purpose goes beyond acting as an accelerant for a punch line. This is certainly in the case for Figure 13. Reducing a picture to the status of an “action verb” effectively cancels out the ability to analyse both its position as the kernel around which the meme operates and its social reception. Even a moderately successful meme operates by way of iteration, and that iteration is based upon visual recognition: a meme maker recognises something in a picture that can be exploited, others understand the picture in a similar fashion, and pursue the meme as far as they can. These are frequently based upon gestures and facial expressions, such as the “Strutting Leo DiCaprio” series.



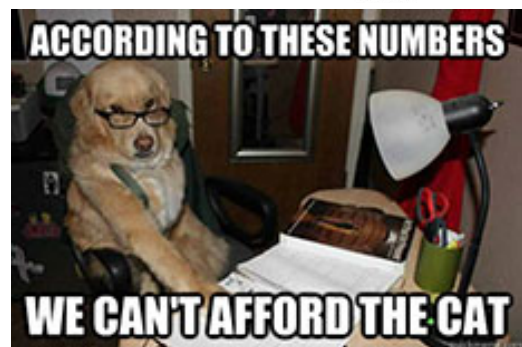
¹⁴² Source: Know Your Meme. <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/28386-advice-dog> [Accessed 23 December 2016].



We might see greater value even in animal-based memes, however, were we to step back and look at the history—not merely at the rhetorical intent of antecedents, such as the mockery of pharaohs, but of more formal equivalents to the subject at hand, namely animals acting as people. The history of such imagery reaches back 4,000 years (Figure 15, detail). There are many examples of anthropomorphic animals in the marginalia of mediaeval manuscripts, described by Camille (1992) as



attempts to break free of the strictures of a conservative society. More generally, however, one may simply find such pictures amusing distractions: “he thinks he’s people”. There is strong evidence of the history of such appreciation over the intervening centuries: the depiction of animals acting as people has been a common trope in popular books and movies like the White Rabbit and Mickey Mouse (Figure 16). In other words, the use of animals in memes—from LOLCats to examples like Figure 13—has a long visual backstory, the demonstration of which significantly colours our understanding of *why* a meme creator can make a safe bet that anthropomorphism will elicit a positive reception.



Consider another memetic artefact from the artist Liz Larabee’s tumblog *Saved by the bell hooks* (Figure 17). In the series presented on the blog, Larabee has juxtaposed quotations from African-American feminist critic bell hooks and screenshots from *Saved by the Bell*, an American sitcom from the late 1980s about teens in senior school. In this example, the highly made-up girls cast fawning looks towards two

boys in their school; one of the boys does not look at the girls, and because of the accompaniment of hooks’ text we read him as reinforcing the negation of her value. The viewer needs in-depth knowledge of neither hooks nor the television show in order to understand the point of the joke: even the most innocuous, vapid cultural product may unwittingly underscore acute observations of American society. As such, the picture does a lot more than act as a mere “visual action verb”: it is central to the joke.

2.3.2.5. The boundary of memes

There is a larger issue here, however, regarding the definition and characteristics of memes, particularly Milner's elaboration of the subject. One may well ask: what is the boundary of memetics? As Milner states, "a consistently shared, innovatively applied inside joke between two friends could be a *meme*—their meme—even if the spread stops there" (2016:38; his emphasis). He acknowledges that there is a "temptation to inflate memetics to inevitable meaninglessness" but indicates that his foundational logics "already help limit the conversation" (2016:77).

But this is far from the case. Milner's focus on multimodality, resonance, reappropriation and other memetic logics apply equally to *Pathosformeln*, those formulae of poses and expressions that convey such power that they have been repeated in very different contexts throughout the history of art. Warburg (1905) demonstrated the migration of *Pathosformeln* with the self-protective gesture of a Niobid figure succumbing to the blows of Apollo and Artemis, the radical reuse of the same gesture as an act of defiance in David after the slaying of Goliath, and again as a self-protective gesture in a very different context in the death of Orpheus (Figure 3). Edgar



Wind saw a similar recurrence and reappropriation of Dionysian maenads in the depiction of the wildly mourning Mary Magdalene at the Crucifixion as the "maenad under the cross" (Wind, 1937).¹⁴³ Indeed, common iconographic subjects and representations of the Virgin and Child, Christ in Judgment, *Venus Pudica*, and Uncle Sam all follow Shifman and Milner's definition of the memetic, these older products spreading according to pre-digital technological constraints.

¹⁴³ Wind draws upon Sir Joshua Reynolds' observations and practice upon the very same example; the similarity between the maenad was also noted by Warburg in the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (see Chapter 1). Reynolds, Wind, and Warburg all miss the closer connection to the *conclamations*, the mourners hired to follow the funeral cortege of the wealthy in Rome. They were paid to dramatically express the degree of loss suffered by the community by the passing of the great individual. When represented in Roman art, these figures have expressive gestures and dishevelled hair in keeping with the mourning Magdalene. Incidentally, representation of groups of mourners—similar in form and purpose to the *conclamations*—stretches back to pharaonic Egypt for the king and his family (See, for example, the *Book of the Dead*). Ritualised expressions of extreme mourning still exist in Orthodox Judaism, as male mourners are supposed to rend their shirts in grief. This is now often symbolically performed by cutting the mourners' ties with a scissors.

Seen in these terms, a hybrid Milnerian-Warburgian “collective” is the band of artists who have examined and responded to one another’s formal and thematic devices. The “resonance” is the evident recognition by artists of their adopted forms as potent portrayals of their subject matter, which they “reappropriate” in wildly different contexts. The “spread” of these motifs is the self-evident “afterlife” of these motifs throughout the history of art, which have a “multimodal” quality as the motifs are repeated in sculpture, painting, illuminations, medals, prints, and more.

This is not to say that Milner—or Shifman before him—has missed the mark in attempts to pin down memetics; if anything, it demonstrates that the components of memetics have profound roots.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it underscores the necessity of fully addressing the visual aspect of memes. It also underscores treating the history of visual artefacts—from the grandest artistic masterwork to the most slipshod meme—as placed along a common path, and that rhizomatic connections can emerge, demanding exploration.

2.4. The analysis of big data: The Visual Social Media Lab

2.4.1. The role of individual platform dynamics

The reader may have noticed that thus far little has been said about the Internet or the effect that the affordances of social media platforms may have upon the users that people them or the artefacts shared upon them. Hariman and Lucaites obliquely refer to the Internet in general (2015:2, 3). Shifman acknowledges the existence of differences between platforms, but concentrates upon the generalities of memes across social media (2014:118). As previously mentioned, Milner usefully distinguishes between two broad cultures of social media: “participatory collectives” such as Reddit or 4chan, and “relational networks” such as Facebook and Twitter (2016:48, 33). He refers to “the vernacular of memetic subcultures” in general terms when ascribing differences between social media platforms such as 4chan, Reddit, Tumblr and Imgur, whilst also highlighting cross-platform antagonism (2016:102, 137). Yet Milner also neglects to situate the spread of the meme on the platforms where he found his examples, which flattens any consideration of the effects individual platform dynamics may have upon the creation, or reception, of the artefact.

This is problematic, because the character, limitation, and affordances of a platform can affect what is shared upon it. A particularly clear example may be found in 4chan, the origin of many early memes. The platform has an antiquated, forum-like interface: the user must manually refresh the page to update content, and by the time she has done so, torrents of new content will have been added to the feed, so adding to a topic is turned into a frenetic affair. This is in

¹⁴⁴ This observation is not new: in one of the seminal “neuroaesthetic” articles linking neurological research with the study of art, Jean-Pierre Changeux (1994:197) referred to the repeated poses of Meleager’s and Jesus’ corpses—cited by Spivey (2001) as an example of a *Pathosformel*—as an example of a “cultural meme”.

contrast to e.g., Twitter, where participating in a “conversation” is easier because it is necessary only to include a hashtag; moreover, Twitter, Facebook, and most other major social media platforms automatically refresh the content so that the user see the most recent comments and pictures. What is more, on all platforms, content threads appear, live their brief lives, and the platform’s users move on; but for those who use 4chan, whole sections of the platform are wiped after a handful of days (Dewey, 2014). Accordingly, if one wants to add a picture to a thread on 4chan, one cannot spend much time finely honing one’s work: the user is implicitly encouraged to upload her contribution in a rough state, concentrating upon what the contribution *says* rather than how it *looks*. This in part explains two aspects of memetic imagery: macros and anti-aesthetics. The first automates the process as much as possible by supplying pictures and organising the layout so that the meme-maker can concentrate upon the message. The second is the so-called “Internet ugly aesthetic”, summarised as “it’s supposed to look like shit” (Douglas, 2013): it is not inherent to Internet-based collective imagery, but rather collateral damage from one platform’s limitations, the results of which are shared on other platforms. The anti-aesthetics of that platform have spread beyond the original platform as well.

This dynamic of timeliness crossed with relevance—the ability to participate in the “conversation” about a subject by submitting an artefact—certainly impacts all platforms to some degree or another. Nahon and Hemsley (2013) point to timeliness as a common feature of the response to viral events: if it takes a long time to hone one’s visual contribution, the moment will have passed. However, the combination of 4chan’s antiquated structure and its systematic deletion of old posts accentuates the effect of timeliness for its content and will have a consequent effect on the characteristics of the artefacts shared on it.

4chan is merely an acute example. Understanding the dynamics of a platform, who uses it, and how they use it, can enrich our understanding of the type of imagery shared by the platform’s users. It also might provide clues about the content of any given imagery: if Milner (2016:102ff) is correct that many social media subcultures police boundaries of acceptable materials—and for many participatory collective subcultures, this does indeed seem to be the case—then we might have a better understanding for those items meant as genuine, ironic, or ambivalent.

2.4.2. Accommodating big data: the VSML facet approach

Two relevant big data approaches focus upon different components as the foundations of their studies. Visual artefacts form the foundational focus of cultural analytics, a computational approach discussed at length in section 1.5. Another approach, championed by the Visual Social Media Lab, places its initial focus upon text. Both the cultural analytic and VSML approaches stem the flow of visual artefacts by circumscribing the collection over a specific period of time and location (if identifiable). Both cultural analytics and the VSML approach (which I will term a “facet” approach below) examine phenomena spread upon single platforms and the impact of those platforms have upon the visual artefacts presented upon them; but by focusing initially

upon text, the VSML acknowledges that, visually-based search is generally unavailable on social media.¹⁴⁵

Headed by Farida Vis, the VSML has investigated political event based upon the collection of data from Twitter. Like the SSI, the VSML also examine large datasets, but their approach differs. In terms of representative data, instead of trying to capture the entirety of a large dataset, the VSML concentrated upon a subset: the “spike” of the power-law distribution of sharing, which constitutes the bulk of shared artefacts. This is represented in studies of, e.g., the 100 most shared pictures of Alan Kurdi (Vis, 2015).

2.4.2.1. The Alan Kurdi report

A representative example of the VSML’s is their “rapid research report” relating to the death of Alan Kurdi on Twitter (Vis and Goriunova, 2015).¹⁴⁶ Like the SSI’s study of the Maidan Revolution, the VSML’s study was bound by timestamp (2–14 September 2015). Whereas SSI delimited their study further by geolocation, the VSML centred the study upon specific terms and hashtags—that is, the principle for data collection consisted of *textual components supplied by the users*, rather than metadata.¹⁴⁷ This is in sharp contrast with the SSI’s approach, where far from being central, such textual artefacts were incidental. Thus, the users who ultimately supplied the data to the VSML opted in to a conversation about Alan and refugees, because they also used terms and hashtags used by others when discussing the child. This resulted in the collection of 2.8 million posts, from Twitter; nearly half of these (1.2 million) contained images to analyse.

Individual members of the VSML team and invited authors—a total of nineteen investigators—used a variety of methods, analysing the dataset according to their expertise. The result echoed Jennifer Mason’s “Facet Methodology”, an approach which encourages a team of investigators to provide insights upon a single issue examined from multiple perspectives, akin to examining a cut gemstone through its various facets. Such analyses can provide “a blend of scientific and artistic or artful thinking, involving not only *deductive* but also *imaginative, inventive, creative* and *intuitive* reasoning” (Mason, 2011:80). The essays covered many subjects, attempting to provide a representative sampling of the larger dataset and provide more in-depth, qualitative analyses. The following subjects were most germane to tracking the life and migration of images:

¹⁴⁵ The only exception—at present—is available on Pinterest, and its focus is primarily commercial (Jing et al., 2015; H., 2017). Google Images can of course perform visual search, but it is not a social media platform.

¹⁴⁶ To remind the reader, I contributed an iconological analysis to the VSML report (Drainville, 2015).

¹⁴⁷ The VSML typically eschewed geolocation. On Twitter, geolocation is turned off unless the account holder specifies otherwise. The account profile typically identifies the user’s self-reported location, but that can be disingenuous.

- Mapping networks to identify those individuals critical to making the photographs jump from local news to the international spotlight.
- Mapping of the geographical spread of the photographs over time.
- Categorising the top 100 most shared pictures depicting Alan.
- Analysing the most popular artefacts circulated within different regions: Europe and the UK, North America, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Asia, and South America.
- A number of qualitative studies upon specific groups of pictures.

More recently, members of the VSML outlined the Lab's approach, not in terms of examining different facets, but rather in terms of providing different levels of image analysis: from the macro-level which follows the travelling of pictures across account holders in extended networks, to the micro-level where one performs analysis on a subset of pictures (Faulkner et al., 2017).

2.4.2.2. Limitations and strengths

This example provides broad practical suggestions for iconographic research from a Big Data resource. This includes the collection of artefacts based upon an event—timestamp, hashtags and keywords—and guidance for whittling down large datasets down to more manageable sizes—content analysis, top 100 shared images, and representative samples.

As with cultural analytics, there are limitations to the VSML's facet approach as well. The most significant is that the categorisation of visual artefacts is a manual process, which seems—for the present, at least—unavoidable.¹⁴⁸ This approach becomes increasingly unwieldy as the dataset increases in size and variability.

In addition, any judgments made about the research subject are strongly tied to the textual and chronological parameters of the dataset. The investigator is dependent upon collecting the “right” keywords and hashtags. Should a user share an image relevant to the investigator's dataset but employ a term outside of the collected search terms—or, even worse, employ a vague phrase like “how tragic”, which could be applied to comment upon any number of artefacts—then that data point will not be integrated into the set. Likewise, antagonistic opinions that do not employ one's expected terms will also not be included, meaning that one can get the wrong impression of, for example, the change in popular opinion over a topic. Users employ the folksonomy of hashtags only when they wish to be included in that folksonomy, it is the same for standard text as well. Racist organisers wishing to escape surveillance carry on conversations wherein innocent-sounding words stand in for different ethnicities (e.g., “Bing” represents an ethnic Asian); triple parentheses are placed around targeted individuals of Jewish origin. These

¹⁴⁸ Conversely, this is where the SSI's cultural analytics approach shows its strength: by focusing upon visual elements such as hue and saturation, the visual data is organised algorithmically. However, this appears to come at the expense of finer-grained understanding of individual examples from the dataset.

escape searches on social media, because racist usage of the term “Bing” will be hidden among discussions of the Bing search engine, and search engines remove grammatical marks such as parentheses (Magu et al., 2017; Moshin, 2018).

The results one may draw from such a dataset, then, are not necessarily representative of the conversation on Twitter, but rather those conversations which used the terms one expects. Thus for the VSML report, D’Orazio (2015:11) noted that after the image of Alan, Twitter users discussing the Refugee Crisis changed their terminology from “migrants” to “refugees”. This seems like a sea-change, but the analysis does not cover other hostile terms that do not directly use the terms “migrants” or “refugees”, but which clearly refers to them.¹⁴⁹

Finally, any artefacts uploaded outside of the timestamp will of course not be collected. Nearly a year after his death, Alan Kurdi’s image reappeared prominently when a young Syrian child named Omran Daqneesh was photographed shell-shocked, bleeding, and covered in dust, in an ambulance during the siege of Aleppo

(Figure 161). The life of images extends beyond the timestamp and the context for any event likely extends beyond the terms used to establish the dataset. Investigators have to acknowledge that whilst big data approaches such as VSML’s and SSI’s take care to be representative, they are inevitably selective and incomplete, albeit less so than the “curatorial” approach more common in the humanities.



Despite these limitations, the VSML’s approach retains a significant advantage over that of the SSI. Because the dataset is based upon specific phrases and hashtags social media users have made, one might be able to understand how the user herself understood (or wished to portray her understanding of) the shared artefact, and also pool together a number of those interpretations to discern larger patterns in them.

¹⁴⁹ An example might be “deport them all”, an example which comes directly from the VSML dataset.

In the VSML report, Mike Thelwall (2015) investigated tweets which seemed unsympathetic to Alan’s plight. He notes that Turkish-language tweets seem more critical of the story, for example reporting allegations that the child’s father was a smuggler. He suggests that this is possibly because Alan was Kurdish, an ethnic minority that has engaged in a decades-long struggle with the Turkish state. Another possibility is due to the fact that Alan died on the Turkish shoreline, and that news aspects of the story emerged first in Turkey before they spread to other language groups.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has assessed a number of approaches that share many of the goals of iconography: of providing a clear methodology, of following the ways artefacts spread and of classifying them. These approaches often diverge, however, in understanding the life of images: particularly how, or even if, they connect to the broader history of imagery.

Every one of the approaches provides insights into their subject matter, but only one attempts to delve deeply into antecedent imagery. Hariman and Lucaites gesture towards some antecedents but decline to pursue this line of enquiry further. Gries does much the same. Milner cites imagery dating back to ancient Egypt, but such examples merely represent one aspect of memetics. Finally, the VSML's report has taken seriously possible engagement with the broader history of image-making, having included three essays addressing iconography (Faulkner, 2015; Aulich, 2015; Drainville, 2015). But they did not engage fully with the quantitative aspects of the data. Neither did they make use of the most directly relevant texts: the tweet text that accompanied the pictures.

However, the enumerated considerations called for by Hariman and Lucaites, Gries, Shifman, and Miller are all more far more explicit than any iconographic method. Big data approaches like those of the SSI and the VSML are equally important: they take seriously the volume of artefacts shared daily on social media, and they implicitly, and legitimately, criticise the intuitive, curatorial selection of samples some present in their research. And they take seriously the affordances of different platforms—in the SSI's study of "Instagramism", the visual feed of Instagram that reinforces pictorial norms (see section 1.5.2), and in the VSML report, the centrality of Twitter as a news maker and the importance of timeliness. And in their different ways, they provide practical guidance for collecting a visual dataset from social media in the first place. But ultimately their aims are to understand social movements, such as the development of a platform-wide style or the ways people reported an event: these are questions that require representative data. Iconography may incorporate moderately large datasets, but if an iconographer wishes her results to be representative, she will ultimately need to devise a system arising from an encounter with the data in order to understand the iconological implications of the call-and-response of image migration, viral events, and memetic exploration.

Chapter 3: Practical methodology

3.1. Introduction

As stated in the project's introduction, the dataset was initially identified through a folksonomy of terms and hashtags used to refer to Alan Kurdi and the refugee crisis; the technical affordances of the platform itself, then, provided a first "filter" through the data. The data were subsequently collected by Pulsar Platform based upon those terms: this is covered in section 3.2. An iconographic analysis, however, requires more than the existence of a large body of tweets related to one's subject by the parameters of a folksonomy, and the journey to creating a practical method is outlined in this chapter. This chapter, therefore, does not focus upon iconography, which forms the broad theoretical underpinning of the research project: rather, it focuses upon the practicalities of analysing the contents of a fairly large dataset, along with the theoretical justifications for that analysis. The goal is to detect patterns in both visual and textual content so that, subsequently, the results can be examined for iconographic resonances, should they exist. It is the combination of theoretical approach with the practical application that makes this approach an **algorithmic iconography**.

Before imagery can be analysed iconographically, it must be broken down—or, in computational terms, "parsed"—into identifiable, repeatable units. How might one do this? I take an inductive, grounded-theory approach in the following. Grounded theory prioritises data over theory. Instead of basing research upon a hypothesis to be tested, the idea is to evade preconceptions about the data's content: theory-guided research may provide conceptions that "do not fit, or do not work, or are not sufficiently understandable" in an encounter with data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:11).¹⁵⁰ Grounded theory informs the whole, but an inductive approach delves into the data. I identify emergent themes in the data which in turn can feed into a development of iconographically-based theories that account for "the underlying structure of experiences or processes" that become evident in that data (Thomas, 2006:241, 238). Inductive analyses encourage the development of abstracted themes, and so it dovetails with the thematic approach advocated in Chapter 1 (see section 1.7.4.2.4).

The work performed here aims to inflect a qualitative analysis with quantitative data for the express purpose of making the project's claims of resonance more representative of the dataset as a whole and less idiosyncratic. The work is less idiosyncratic because it more systematic; and even though the analysis was carried out on a small numerical subset of the data (1,139 out of 1,236,247 tweets containing visual artefacts), it is representative because the analysis was

¹⁵⁰ That said, there are two hypotheses explored in this project: the first is my research question, i.e., whether iconography can be used as a method for the study of social media. The second is a small experiment run to test sharing patterns for specific pictures shared via mobile and desktop interfaces (see section 4.3.1).

carried out on that section of the data that formed the bulk of viewer attention as measured through retweets and impressions (see sections 3.8.1.1.1, 4.2, and 5.2).¹⁵¹

The method outlined in this chapter arose from previous work with the VSML’s “rapid response report” following the death of Alan Kurdi (Drainville, 2015). The analysis performed in that article will not scale beyond a handful of pictures, however, because it was not a systematic approach, and large numbers of pictures benefit from a more systematic approach. This chapter addresses the follow-up research questions in order to contribute towards a mixed-method form of iconography:

- Can an iconographic approach accommodate quantitative data systematically, and if so, how?
- What extra components might be developed to perform a systematic iconographic analysis?

One may think that since APIs present data in a uniform, systematic fashion, the systematicity called for is built in. However, as noted earlier, data collected by APIs focus upon elements deemed valuable to the platform’s owners—and to analytics companies who have built their businesses on the resale of such data. As such the data proliferates *metadata* for a given post—that is, not simply who posted it and what they posted, but their location, the language used, the time posted, whether the post was a reply to another post, and if so, which post—all of which can be used by the platform owners to send targeted advertisements. The *content* of the post is more haphazard: text is provided in its own structured section, but again, visual data is not provided directly through APIs. Data gleaned directly from Twitter’s PowerTrack API and Pulsar Platform thus formed the *minority* of analysis for this research project, because iconography requires more information about the content of the post than that which is provided automatically.

The resulting intensive work, then, is the equivalent of archival research: the data provides the raw material, and the historian must make sense of that material. Thus, the dataset expanded from 7,273 discrete data points derived from the API for 1,139 separate tweets. Through qualitative work—outlined below—I have manually identified over 22,000 additional data points.¹⁵² There appears no obvious way to derive this extra data computationally, because reliable, accurate computational methods do not seem to exist to derive specific types of

¹⁵¹ Iconography demands intensive qualitative work. Because the entire dataset is too large for such work, I examine the most-shared 1,139 tweets. This smaller corpus of retweeted posts formed the bulk of sharing—if charted out on a graph, these highly-retweeted posts are the spike of sharing (covering a range of over 18,000 retweets to 124 retweets) which is followed by a “long tail” of rarely-retweeted posts. Since this corpus of tweets commanded the vast majority of attention, it is reasonable to claim that their contents are representative of the larger dataset.

¹⁵² Each record can contain up to 51 data points: for 1,139 records, that amounts to a potential of 58,089 data points, although no record fills all 51 potential slots. 7,273 of those points were provided by the API, and nearly 29,000 of the slots were marked as lacking relevant data (indicated by ‘-’ in the datasheet). Thus, over 22,000 new data points were identified.

content-based information required to perform iconographic analysis.¹⁵³ The additional data points were identified based upon the following main assumptions:

- Imagery and text can be subdivided, or “parsed”, for thematic constitutive elements (see sections 3.6 and 3.7);
- Semantic textual content of tweets can be abstracted into patterns (see sections 3.3.2 and 3.7);
- It is important to retain the connection between text and imagery (see section 3.7.3); and finally,
- The text provides clues for Twitter users’ interpretation of the imagery they present, highlighting their interpretative repertoire (see sections 3.7.2 and 3.7.3).

What, specifically, was done with the data, and how does it contribute to a mixed-method form of iconography? I identified the presence of visual and textual themes in an iterative process through repeated examinations of the pictures and text. The presence of elements in a picture, or the focus of a photograph (all of which may be termed *photogenia*), were tabulated based upon salient repetitions in the visual artefacts shared by Twitter users. A similar process was undertaken for repeated references in text.¹⁵⁴ This process served the project’s goal, which was to understand themes *common* in the presentation of pictures of Alan and other refugees that may have been echoed previous image-making practices. For example, many visual artefacts focus upon children. This only becomes evident upon iterative observation, and in turn further patterns emerge: they are photographed alone, or nearby adults are cropped out of the frame so that children are clearly the focus of the photograph; or, alternately, children may be shown carried in the arms of an adult or holding an adult’s hand. The situation is similar with text: Twitter users make multiple references to sleep when they shared pictures of Alan, alive or dead. These themes are tallied systematically in a digital tool that I have created based upon the principles of content analysis, called the datasheet (again, downloadable from <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>). The datasheet gives the researcher an open-ended, operationalised guide to the data through which one may begin the iconographic process. On their own, such elements state very little, but exploring the data through the datasheet allows patterns to emerge, and iconographic training comes into play: parallels to multiple image subjects and motifs created over a longer period of time gradually become more apparent. This work is based upon the researcher’s familiarity with this longer history of image-making.

The level of data enrichment presented here is rare, as is combining visual and textual analysis on Twitter. The assumptions and justifications for the data-parsing approach will be expounded

¹⁵³ This is similar to the situation in which Bruns and Hanusch (2017:1133) encountered in their analysis of social media responses to the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks.

¹⁵⁴ This process privileges the *presence* of themes over their *absence*. It also privileges *repeated themes over rarely-presented themes*. Both constitute an equally legitimate approach which would pick out heterogeneous pictures.

upon at length below, in part because the approach differs from standard Twitter analyses. This chapter has been written with an eye for practical methodological replicability by other researchers. It is peppered throughout with “filter recipes” that assist the reader in following my every step in the datasheet. At the very least, the approach below provides guidelines for parsing data for subsequent computational analysis, but the resulting expanded dataset forms a firm foundation upon which to build iconographic analysis later in the research project.

3.2. Origin of the data

The evidence for this research project was collected and initially processed for the VSML by Pulsar, a commercial partner with the Lab and the creator of Pulsar Platform, web-based commercial social analytics software. Pulsar Platform has the ability to collect keyword- and hashtag-based content across social media platforms, blogs, forums, and news sources (Benello, 2017b; Benello, 2017d).¹⁵⁵ Since the overwhelming amount of data came from Twitter, this project focuses upon Twitter. Data emanating from other sources would need to be structured differently, based upon the affordances of those sources.

In keeping with the VSML’s approach for data collection (see section 2.4.2.1 above), Farida Vis used “Topsy”, an online service subsequently purchased and then closed by Apple. The service measured the frequency by which specific terms and hashtags are used over a specified period of time. Thus, by looking through tweets featuring Alan, Vis was able to build up a profile of high-frequency terms and hashtags that Twitter users employed in the period. She then instructed Pulsar Platform to collect all tweets containing the following keywords and hashtags for the period 2–14 September 2015, i.e., from the day that Alan was found on the beach and for the next several days.¹⁵⁶ Again, the terms were:

- #refugeeswelcome, “refugees welcome”
- #refugeecrisis, #refugeescrisis, “refugee crisis”, “refugee’s crisis”
- #nomoredrownings, “no more drownings”
- #dyingtogether, “dying to get here”
- #kiyiyavuraninsanlik, “*kiyiya vuran insanlık*”, #humanitywashedashore, “humanity washed ashore”¹⁵⁷
- #aylankurdi, #alankurdi, #aylan, aylan, alan, kurdi
- #syria boy, “syria boy”, #syrian boy, “syrian boy”, #syrianboy
- #syria child, “syria child”, #syrian child, “syrian child”, #syrianchild

¹⁵⁵ Terminologies specific to Pulsar Platform, and the ways these capabilities are defined and implemented, are referenced with articles from the company’s support database of articles.

¹⁵⁶ Because the data was collected not in real time, but approximately a month later, it was collected via Twitter’s Historical PowerTrack API (Twitter, 2017).

¹⁵⁷ “*Kiyiye vuran insanlık*” is Turkish for “humanity washed ashore”.

- “bodrum beach”
- “drowned boy”, “drowned child”, “drowned toddler”

This collection of terms resulted in a dataset of 2,843,274 tweets, or posts on Twitter (Goriunova, 2015). Of these tweets, 1,236,247 posts (44% of the total dataset) contained at least one image file (out of a maximum of four image files). Of these 1.2 million tweets, 36,776 were retweeted at least once.¹⁵⁸ Many of these posts address the broader refugee crisis, and not the death of Alan Kurdi directly: the data records the ongoing discussion of the refugee crisis as inflected by the image of a single drowned child on a Turkish beach.¹⁵⁹

To remind the reader, the VSML offered me use of this data—I did not provide input in the terms for data collection (see section 1.1.1). My instinct would have been to collect a more circumspect group of terms (such as “Aylan”, “Kurdi”, #aylankurdi and “bodrum”), which would have virtually guaranteed the contents would have been relevant to the subject. However, doing so would miss out on analysing this phenomenon as an *emergent* phenomenon, e.g., when Alan’s name was not widely known. This strategy would also have missed out on intersections between Alan and the broader refugee crisis. Comparing tweets containing pictures of Alan with those containing pictures of other refugees emphasises what makes those of Alan so different (see sections 4.6.1 and 5.4).

On the other hand, other terms and hashtags could have been collected as well. Given the breadth of the above terms, however, many are likely already in the data and through less frequent use are simply located deep within. This is illustrated by #CouldBeMyChild, referred to by Nadine El-Enany (2016:14) in her analysis of the European response to Alan’s death.¹⁶⁰ None of the posts using this hashtag are to be found in the 1,139 analysed in this project. Judging from a search for #CouldBeMyChild on Twitter, all these picture-bearing tweets share other terms in Vis’ collection (e.g., “Syrian boy”), and so will be present in the dataset—there would have been thus no need to specify its collection. The most widely-shared post containing a picture and this

¹⁵⁸ These 36,776 tweets consist of just under 3% of those posts containing at least one image file. The maximum number of retweets was 18,487. 27,408 of these posts received fewer than 10 retweets; 10,634 received but a single retweet.

¹⁵⁹ There are two posts relevant to neither Alan Kurdi nor the refugee crisis. The content of one post (record #998) concerns the singer Yasmien Kurdi, whose surname guaranteed that she would be caught in the search. The second (record #84) relates an unrelated incident of police brutality in Malaysia and employs the hashtag #humanitywashedashore in an example of “hijacking”. Hijacking a conversation through the use of pre-existing hashtags is a well-known tactic on Twitter, often in an attempt to counter a predominant PR-friendly narrative, as in the reaction to the New York City Police’s ill-fated #myNYPD campaign (Jackson and Welles, 2015).

¹⁶⁰ El Enany finds it a revealing hashtag and interprets its use as an opportunistic insertion of the European viewer into a Middle-Eastern tragedy due to the “fair hue” of Alan’s skin. Hers is one of several pieces that occupy the intersection between racism and ethical considerations of showing Alan’s body: see section 4.2.1.

hashtag has but 12 retweets, so it will be present in the current dataset, but simply be far down the stack of posts.

3.3. Processing the data with Pulsar Platform

Pulsar's software provides various tools for different forms of automated analysis:

- **Network analysis:** The software can track the trajectory of content travelling from account to account, and the connections between groups of accounts;
- **Sentiment analysis:** Pulsar can rate the positivity or negativity expressed in a comment;
- **Textual content analysis:** This provides a keyword-based summary of textual posts' subject matter, viewable as tags, with the ability to add bespoke terms as tag;
- **Visual content analysis:** This is an identification of picture subjects appended to posts, viewable as tags, with the ability to add bespoke terms as tags;
- **Graphs:** Finally, the software can provide graphs analysing the data it collects (Pulsar Platform, 2017).¹⁶¹

Some of these tools provide the digital equivalent of something familiar to iconographers: tracking the migration of imagery over space and time. All, however, have the potential to aid iconographic research by collating the contents of a dataset. By using Pulsar Platform, Francesco D'Orazio (2015) tracked the waves of virality—from local to regional prominence, thence to international virality and a transition to traditional press—of the original photographs of Alan Kurdi in a period of approximately 5 hours on 2 September 2015. He was able to identify specific public figures (such as journalists and human rights activists) instrumental in pushing the tragedy into a viral event:

- **08:42:** The Doğan News Agency (DHA) website published four photographs of Alan by photographer Nilüfer Demir. This was not identified by d'Orazio, but I have subsequently identified the source (Anter et al., 2015).¹⁶²
- **10.23:** The photographs appeared on Twitter via the account of Michelle Demishevich, a Turkish journalist.
- **Before 12.15:** the story spread to the Middle East via the accounts of the Free Syria Media Hub, Basim Naim (a former Lebanese minister), and Martin Jay (Newsweek Middle East correspondent)

¹⁶¹ Pulsar is a partner in the VSML on top of being the provider of the Alan Kurdi data. Pulsar's director, Francesco D'Orazio, is a member of the VSML and contributed to the VSML's report on Alan Kurdi.

¹⁶² DHA also tweeted the story on 2 September 2015: <https://twitter.com/dhainternet/status/638966804585574401> [Accessed 15 May 2017]. The text on the image reads "In Bodrum, 2 refugee catastrophes! 11 dead, 5 missing! The most painful picture of the day".

- **12.15:** Peter Bouckaert (Emergency Director of Human Rights Watch) in Geneva posted the pictures. Bouckaert's account is followed by several prominent individuals: he was retweeted internationally 664 times, but many more influential people saw his post.
- **12.49:** *Washington Post* Beirut Bureau Chief Liz Sly produced a tweet, and was retweeted 7,421 times. The story exploded internationally, previously having been shared primarily within the Middle East.
- **13.10:** The UK *Daily Mail* was the first traditional media source to publish the story. The international press (BBC, CNN, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Le Monde*, *The New York Times*, and others) reported subsequently.

In a matter of hours, then, the photographs went through a quick progression from website to social media, and from there to print and broadcast media. It was due to the influence of Twitter—and in particular the prominent politicians, activists, human rights workers, and journalists who use it and who have extensive networks that interconnect with one another—that the story became so well-known so quickly. Pulsar Platform can help the investigator follow the trail as pictures move from individual to individual at a degree of granularity and precision of which art historians can only dream. However, it can only do so with the data that it collects. The data must have a sufficiently broad spread of search terms in order to capture the phenomenon under study as an emergent phenomenon: for instance, before Alan's name was known he was referred to as a "Syrian child". Concentrating upon his name alone would miss the story as it broke.

Iconographic researchers also investigate the change of imagery over time, and Pulsar's software proved its value here as well. There are different kinds of imagery of Alan in the dataset, and they seem to result from a backlash over the presentation of a child's corpse. By using the software's bespoke tagging feature, D'Orazio went through the first 100 most shared pictures of Alan and differentiated between pictures by Nilüfer Demir (tagged "Alan"), and subsequent imagery: artistic response to Demir's photographs and family snapshots of the child (the latter two were tagged "Alan+"). He was thereby able to note that the story of Alan followed two successive waves of images. First, people shared Demir's photographs of the child on the beach, and soon afterwards switched to sharing pictures of the child alive and commemorations by artists (Chart 1).

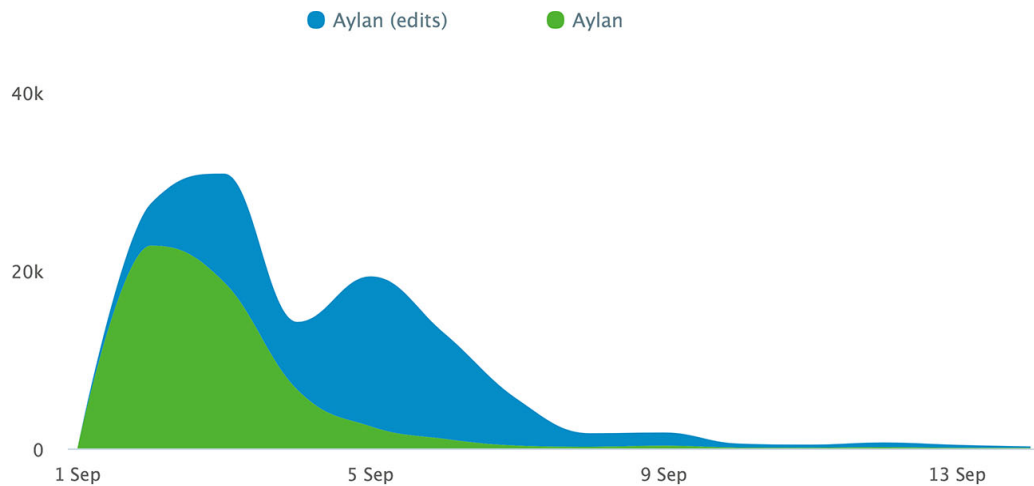


Chart 1: Distribution of picture categories across time: sharing of Nilüfer Demir’s photographs (tagged “Aylan”), contrasted with family snapshots and artistic responses to Demir’s photographs (tagged “Aylan (edits)”). Graph created in by Francesco D’Orazio (2015) in Pulsar Platform.

3.3.1. Original plan for image analysis

Because of these capabilities, the original plan for the research project was to use Pulsar to scroll through the posts to understand the breadth of imagery and text present in the dataset. I would download images and note discernible patterns. The software would act as a launching board for early pattern recognition, and then I would proceed with more traditional iconographic work outside the software.

This approach does not scale, however. After 100 images or so, it is difficult to retain connections between imagery and text, and at first it seemed that I was attempting to create a poor variation of Pulsar’s own interface. Accordingly, it was decided to explore the Pulsar interface in depth to evaluate the amount of work I could do within the software.

3.3.2. Challenges with Pulsar

Accessing the data via Pulsar’s interface presents significant opportunities with equally significant limitations: primarily, it seems, because Pulsar was not designed to handle such large datasets and the type of analysis I have used to explore its content. It relies upon Javascript to load more entries as one scrolls to the end of the page, so that there is in effect no “end of the page”. It thus employs the “endless scroll”, a strategy of continuous engagement familiar to users of Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms. By only loading extra entries when the user approaches the “end”, the software limits the amount of data loaded at any given point. However, after scrolling through approximately 400 entries, the software runs into memory issues and starts skipping entries, destabilising one’s understanding of the data.

Also, due to the nature of social media sharing, there is a lot of repetitious imagery: many individuals will share the exact same pictures; effectively, this means that many pictures have multiple entry-points in the dataset. In the software, it therefore becomes difficult to understand

the breadth of pictures present, and further to visualise e.g., the number of times a particular picture was shared, in contrast to the number of individual posts of an individual picture. To get a better feeling for the artistic response to Alan's death, I also consulted the *Bored Panda* website (Nèjè, 2015), a solution also pursued by Holly Ryan (2015)—meaning that there was already motivation to work outside of the software and to develop a system which provides a better overview to understand the pictures in the dataset.

Finally, Pulsar's algorithmic visual and textual content analysis capabilities sometimes present more challenges than they are able to solve. For instance, a series of video stills showing the Hungarian camerawoman Petra László tripping and kicking fleeing refugees was automatically identified as an image of "sport"—the software evidently misidentifying László's raised leg and the tumbling refugees and as pictures representing a football match.¹⁶³ And consider the textual content of the following tweet:

Just spoke with Aylan's aunt. Asking people to stop using drowning photo. Wants world to remember him smiling
—Muhammad Lila, news correspondent, 4 September 2015 (record #2)

This turns out to be a critical tweet in the dataset: Lila was perhaps more responsible than anyone for distributing the most popular image of Alan alive, and indeed he appears to have dictated the form of response for a number of people wishing to share a less emotionally distressing image of Alan.

Pulsar's software identified the literal textual content of this tweet with the automatically-generated tags of "Aylan", "people", "photo" and "world". It is undeniable that the tweet contains those words, but subsequent analysis of the dataset shows that the phrase "remember him smiling" is far more important. That phrase repeatedly matches up with closely-matching expressions: these are patterns of expressions that could only be captured and collated were the software able to analyse the pragmatic content of the statements—i.e., the intent behind the statement—and not their literal, semantic content—i.e., the specific words used to construct the

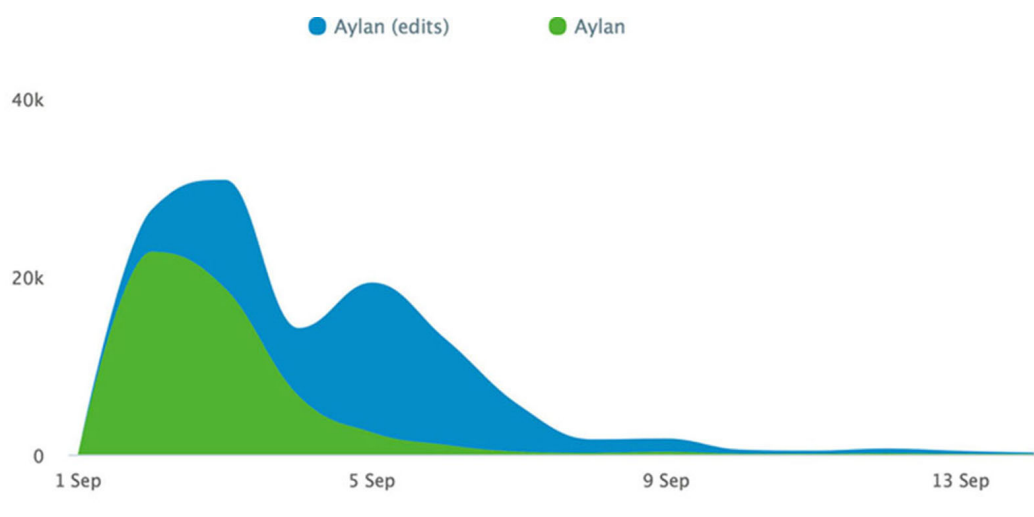
¹⁶³ The tool's guess for this example is instructive: automated visual analysis is based upon learning from a library of pictures, and so the tool estimates the similarity of a given picture to those in its library. As Pulsar is a commercial enterprise, its library is oriented towards commercial concerns: e.g., sport, food and drink, and leisure. In a separate body of research since published (Drainville, 2018), the software identified the subject of Jonathan Bachman's photograph *The Arrest of Iesha Evans* as that of a "wedding", another common commercial category.

The visual content analysis tool was also inconsistent. When presented with multiple instances of the same picture of Alan, for example, it identified the subject as a "boy", "child", "girl", and sometimes "beach". These results provide an insight into Pulsar's artificially-intelligent system: it does not revisit the dataset to improve its understanding about picture contents, but provides its best guess at any given point, meaning that it does not apply new lessons as it goes along.

statement.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, the software does not translate tags for other languages, so that parallels across languages (and the sentiment “remember him smiling”, or close cognates, are repeated in many languages) are thus missed.

Analysis of the textual content thus indicated the need for a very qualitative form of content analysis: one based not upon exact wording, but upon similarly-expressed sentiments. The software is not designed for this, and indeed, understanding the pragmatics of a sentence often presents interpretative difficulties for people, let alone computers.¹⁶⁵ Thus, to capture accurate renditions of textual patterns, the software would need to be able to a) translate content and b) abstract away from the literal meaning of words. Such thorny problems, then, suggest critical points where automated software analysis has to give way to human intervention.

D’Orazio (2015) used bespoke, human-generated tags within Pulsar to good effect in order to track the variety of images (“Alan” vs “Alan+” the latter called “Aylan Edit” in Chart 1) over time. However, this bespoke tagging system is limited by an interface where ticked boxes are only



¹⁶⁴ The difference between the semantic and pragmatic content of a phrase is perhaps best illustrated by what may be the ultimate dad joke: at a meal, a child asks, “Can you pass the salt?” and the father responds, “I *can*”, and then fails to pass the salt. Here, the child *literally* asks whether the father is *able* to pass the salt, and the father’s wearisome joke is based upon answering the literal content—called “what is said” or the “semantic content”—of the question: yes, he is able to do so, but since he has not received a literal request to actually pass the salt to the child, he does not do so. However, the child clearly intends something else, in effect politely demanding the father to “pass the salt”. This meaning behind the literal phrasing of the child’s question is the “pragmatic content”. For more, see Paul Grice (1975), who used the term “what is said” for “semantics”, and Kent Bach (1997), who established “semantics” as the standard term to refer to the literal content of a sentence in analytic philosophy of language. NB the usage of the terms “pragmatics” and “semantics” in poststructuralist theory do not fully align with the analytic definitions presented here; see, e.g., Bal and Bryson (1991:189) for more.

¹⁶⁵ In their guide to computational analysis of imagery, Manovich and Deutsch (2011:326) state that “the trick is to concentrate on visual form... and not semantics”. Computational analysis of the semantic content of text has been conducted for decades, but nevertheless, software can struggle with the semantics of sentences, let alone the pragmatics. See Gokcen et al. (2018) for more on this.

sometimes, or at any rate slowly, registered. This limits the types of connections one may effectively draw between different posts.

Also problematic is the fact that Pulsar's software only depicts the first image file appended to a tweet. Since April 2014, tweets may have up to four pictures appended to them (Twitter, 2014). Of the tweets examined in this project, 12% contain multiple pictures. This appears to be a limitation not of Pulsar directly, but of the API it uses to hook into Twitter's historical data. Nevertheless, lacking these extra image files can lead to significant misinterpretations.

So ultimately, to take full advantage of this data, it was decided that Pulsar needed to be used in conjunction with other methods of analysis. Fortunately, Pulsar allows the downloading of data in a structured Excel spreadsheet. The default is to download the entire dataset, but large datasets must be broken manually into segments of fewer than 200,000 entries, otherwise the resulting file may be corrupted.¹⁶⁶

It is important to note that few Pulsar customers would encounter the limitations outlined above. This is due to a combination of an unusually large dataset and the fact that the software was designed for commercial—in particular, marketing—needs. Pulsar's tool is very powerful when put to the commercial purposes for which it was designed but has limitations when used as an academic tool.

3.3.3. Drilling down and the practicalities of moving away from Pulsar

To examine the imagery in this dataset, this research project will use iconography, a qualitative methodology that typically involves significant manual analysis. The full dataset of nearly 3 million posts was too large for qualitative analysis. Since this project focuses upon images, the first decision was to focus only upon those posts containing images. Pulsar indicated that 1,236,247 posts (44% of the total dataset) had pictures appended to them, an amount still too large for qualitative analysis. Another option would be to cover all those tweets that were retweeted at least once, but that number—36,776—is also too large.

The first real attempt at reducing this number occurred within Pulsar's toolset. I decided to concentrate upon the most retweeted posts, positing that this metric highlighted evidence of the most resonance of the tweets in question for Twitter users, whether for their imagery or textual content—a position also adopted by Hjorth and Burgess (2014). The software provides filters for focusing upon particular aspects of collected data. In this instance, it was initially decided to examine the top 1% of the most retweeted posts containing images (in Pulsar parlance, these are “engagements”; in Twitter parlance, these are retweets). Pulsar thereupon delivered 1,579.

¹⁶⁶ It is also strongly recommended to download datasets purely as a backup measure. Partway through the development of this project, it was discovered that the data had been deleted without warning. Fortunately, I had downloaded the data beforehand. However, due to the Excel corruption problem mentioned above, approximately 40% of the data was lost.

Finally, it was decided to focus upon the 1,000 most retweeted posts containing pictures: it is a round number and covers the vast majority of retweeted content. However, more than 1,000 posts needed to be assessed, because Pulsar collects the textual content of the tweet, but refers back to Twitter for the image files, and a number of tweets were deleted prior to my data collection. 139 posts were “orphaned”—deleted since Pulsar originally collected the data, meaning that the texts had been collected, but the accompanying pictures were unavailable. It was thus necessary to assess 1,139 posts in order to cover 1,000 posts which contained retrievable pictures.¹⁶⁷ Pulsar was then instructed to export the data to an Excel spreadsheet. Analysis could then concentrate upon the 38.6% of pictures of Alan present (386 of 1,000 posts), with a side focus upon imagery of the refugee crisis (612 of 1,000 posts).¹⁶⁸

3.4. Subsequent plan: An operationalised “datasheet”

Pulsar’s exported data contained 44 column entries, ordered upon the number of times posts were retweeted in descending order. For my own spreadsheet—called the “datasheet” from this point on—I copied the export spreadsheet and excised 38 of the columns: some were empty and others were deemed irrelevant to the research (see Table 1 for details).¹⁶⁹ The surviving nine columns—*content*, *ID*, *impressions*, *language*, *published_at*, *reaction_count*, *url*, *user_name*, and *visibility*—formed the kernel of the datasheet, which would become augmented by qualitative data points which I would subsequently identify. I added a numerical ordering system, organised in descending order of the number of retweets, as in the original data export (Table 2).¹⁷⁰ This

¹⁶⁷ This requires some explanation. Pulsar’s software links back to Twitter to reload visual content, but even then, only the first of up to four pictures. The dataset therefore contains 139 posts, the contents of which have since been deleted before I encountered the data. The reasons for this deletion vary: the user may have deleted the tweet since the data was collected, the account-holder may have shut down the account, or Twitter may have shut down the account. In order to reach 1,000 posts with surviving images, the analysis thus had to cover 1,139 posts. To make matters more complicated, because posts can display multiple image files, there are not 1,000 pictures in the dataset, but 1,223. 879 tweets contained a single image file, whereas 121 of the tweets contained multiple images. 38 of the records were of a single image file with two or more pictures merged into a single image file. Of those tweets with multiple image files, 52 posts contained two image files; 24 posts contained three image files; and 44 posts contained four image files.

¹⁶⁸ The mathematically-inclined reader will note that these numbers do not add up to 1,000. Two tweets (records #597 and #917) contain pictures not demonstrably connected to the image of Alan on the beach, but which may have been influenced obliquely by that image.

¹⁶⁹ In some instances, the data was not relevant to the research: an example being sentiment scores, the vast majority of which were negative. This makes sense, given the nature of the subject, but it suggests that sentiment analysis would provide little insight into the data. In other cases, the columns contained untrustworthy data. An example of this is geolocation information, which is partly based upon the user’s self-described location. For example, the account for the online magazine “The LADBible” identified its location as Morocco, which seems unlikely.

¹⁷⁰ The datasheet was also cleansed of errors. The most numerous concerned improperly escaped non-ASCII characters. The software stripped out the semicolon at the end of these characters, which rendered them incorrectly both in Pulsar’s interface and the spreadsheet. The most

allowed for parity between the export and the datasheet, should there be any need to return to the original export. A ninth column was extracted from this dataset but was not used directly in the datasheet; instead it was used as a guide in image processing (see 3.5 below).

The datasheet was converted into a table in order to facilitate filtering and reordering of data in different columns. This allows for selective visibility of multiple variables in search results.¹⁷¹

Besides presenting exact correlations in tabulated data, filtered tables also provide the opportunity to search columns based upon strings of text, which is useful for searching descriptions and the literal content of tweets. The datasheet is thus a digital tool in which the user can perform operations.

Structuring a spreadsheet thus facilitates its ability to be passed over to other applications such as Tableau (data analytics software) for subsequent analysis.¹⁷² Indeed, passing over this modified datasheet into Tableau is a particularly useful exercise, because it is possible to join multiple datasets together—effectively re-integrating all the excised data with the datasheet, should that prove useful to the researcher. A copy of the datasheet may be downloaded at <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMUDR.00621172>. It has been redacted to retain Twitter users' privacy (see section 1.1.3).

3.5. Image processing

The reader will note that none of the entries in Table 1 make a reference to any pictures appended to the tweet. Collection of imagery must be done separately. Initially, they were downloaded manually via Pulsar's interface and attached to a cell in the spreadsheet. However, this plan had to be abandoned due to the memory problems described above in section 3.3.2, and to the discovery that Pulsar did not reference all the pictures presented in a given tweet.

In order to download all the pictures, I turned to Webometric Analyst (Thelwall, 2014:103ff).¹⁷³ The creator of this Windows-based software is Mike Thelwall, another member of the VSML. He was kind enough to accommodate my particular needs in a private beta of the software: specifically, the ability to process an arbitrary number of Twitter status messages (via the URLs

common errors were the misrepresentations of double quotation marks (“"”), single quotation marks (“'”), ampersands (“&”), and various accents. The other main error was concerned with misidentifying the language of posts mixing languages: for example, in a tweet of Arabic text with English hashtags, the text was identified as being written in English when the salient language was in fact Arabic with English hashtags.

¹⁷¹ It should be noted that this work was done in Microsoft Excel. Whilst Google Sheets and Apple Numbers (amongst others) provide the ability to create filters, Excel's are more straightforward and flexible.

¹⁷² Tableau's website: <https://www.tableau.com>. One could also use MaxQDA (qualitative data analysis software), but there was no time for this. MaxQDA's website: <http://www.maxqda.com> [Both accessed 25 September 2017].

¹⁷³ Webometric Analyst's website: <http://lexiurl.wlv.ac.uk> [Accessed 25 September 2017].

for individual posts) from a list in a text-file, and the collection of all image files associated with any given tweet. Thus, thanks to him, I was able to forge a way around the limitations of Twitter's API and not only get 100% of the posts related to an historic event, but 100% of the event's surviving image files as well.

The procedure to download 100% of the image files associated with a dataset is as follows:¹⁷⁴

- I prepared a plain text-file of the tweet URLs—one URL per line—which were extracted from the "url" column of the exported spreadsheet from Pulsar. In the following example, the text-file is named "Foo.txt".
- In Webometric Analyst, I clicked the "Pics" menu and select the 2nd option ("Download Twitter pictures from tweet (not image) URLs [this first downloads the tweets, then the images]")
- The user is prompted to locate "Foo.txt".
- The software then creates a number of different files and folders, all of which are dependent upon the name of the text-file. The software will generate the following files and folders:
 - "Foo.log" (a tab-separated file)
 - "Foo URLs.txt" (a tab-separated file)
 - Folder: "Foo URLsHTML" (contains individual HTML copies of the tweets in Foo.txt and placed in the same order)
 - Folder: "Foo URLsPics" (contains all the pictures associated with the tweets in "Foo.txt")

Webometric Analyst then notifies the user that the job is complete. However, the user will not be able to match the pictures from the "Foo URLsPics" folder with the individual tweets (either in the original "Foo.txt" text-file or the "Foo URLsHTML" folder), because the numbering order of the images and URLs are entirely separate from one another. In order to match the images with the tweets, one must merge two files through the Webometrics Analyst interface:

- Back in Webometric Analyst, I clicked the "Tap-sep" menu, selected "Merge files", and then selected "Merge 2 files when nth col of file 1 line matches nth col of file 2 line..."
- I then selected the log file ("Foo.log"). When asked to indicate which column number should be the target for matching, I entered "2". This column contains the URL pointing to the tweet. These URLs are in the same order as the content from the original "Foo.txt" text-file.
- I then selected the URLs file ("Foo.URLs.txt"). When asked to indicate which column number should be the target for matching, I entered "1". This column contains the URL pointing to the tweet. However, they are in an entirely different order and the URL may be repeated, as tweets can contain multiple images (up to four per tweet).

¹⁷⁴ NB: These instructions will not work until this version of Webometric Analyst emerges from private beta.

- I was then prompted to click the OK button a number of times to confirm the above directions point by point.
- Webometric Analyst then created a new file: “Foo URLs_combined.txt”.

“Foo URLs_combined.txt” is a critical file that links the individual tweets (the “Foo URLsHTML” folder) to the pictures (the “Foo URLsPics” folder). Importing this merged file into Excel and then converting it into a table allows for efficient use of its contents.

The investigator will be interested predominantly in the first and last columns. The first column’s name is garbled (“i»z”). The numbers in this column correspond to the ordered numbers of tweets in the “Foo URLsHTML” folder. The “TweetPicURLNumber” column corresponds to the picture numbers in the “Foo URLsPics” folder.

Having thus been able to match image files with the tweets in which they were appended—keeping in mind that some tweets’ image files will be missing, and other tweets will have multiple image files—I could then add the appropriate image files to the appropriate tweets.

3.5.1. Optimisation necessities

However, it is necessary to create separate resized, compressed thumbnail copies of each image in order to avoid destabilising Excel and corrupting the datasheet. I used a Mac-based tool called “BatchImageResizerLite” to resize the images to 71 pixels in height, indicating that output copies should have extra text (“-thumb”) appended just before the file’s suffix.¹⁷⁵ These thumbnail images were then processed through the Mac-based tool called “ImageOptim” to optimise compression, reducing the file size on average by 88%—leaving the originals untouched.¹⁷⁶

The resulting optimised thumbnail images were then imported manually into a new “Image” column in the spreadsheet. The above efforts in resizing and compression reduced the spreadsheet’s size from over 55MB very early on in the development process (containing only 250 images with just a subset of the data point count) to 4.3MB (containing 1,233 pictures) at the end, which results in significant enhanced speed and reliability. To aid in filtering, I appended text to each entry in the “Image” column: “Image” if the tweet appended a single image-file, “Images” if the tweet appended multiple images, and “Missing” were the image-file no longer accessible (see Table 3). This text is obscured by the thumbnail[s], but its presence helps the investigator filter through two fundamental tasks: indicating the presence or absence of images and whether there is a single image, or multiple images.

¹⁷⁵ More on BatchImageResizerLite: <http://linxmap.com/mac-os-apps/batch-image-resizer-lite/> [Accessed 25 September 2017].

¹⁷⁶ More on ImageOptim: <https://imageoptim.com/mac> [Accessed 25 September 2017].

3.6. Parsing the imagery

The datasheet thus far contained individual entries with the tweet's ID, the tweet's text, the image[s] appended to the text, the author's username, the date it was published, and three metrics supplied from Pulsar:

- **Visibility**, i.e., an algorithmically-generated estimate of a post's impact, based in part upon the influence of the poster. For example, a tweet posted by BBC News will have infinitely greater visibility potential than if the same post had appeared on my own feed.
- **Impressions**, i.e., the number of times a particular tweet will have appeared in subscribed users' Twitter feeds.
- **Retweets**, i.e., the number of times a particular tweet was retweeted by other Twitter users.

Other than searching for strings of text in the tweets, this state provides little scope to filter through the data to discover patterns. Accordingly, I identified a number of data points distributed amongst various columns in the spreadsheet in order to parse image data in meaningful ways. The first step was to identify whether Alan was present in the pictures appended to any tweet, and if so, how he was portrayed. I added a number of gross image parser columns (Table 4) akin to code units in content analysis in order to address the following questions:

- **Alan in it?** Is Alan present in a tweet's picture?
- **Demir?** Does the tweet contain a picture by, or influenced by, one of Demir's photographs?
- **Family?** Does the tweet contain a family snapshot?
- **Art?** Does the tweet contain artistic imagery? That is, was the picture drawn, painted, sculpted, or Photoshopped?
- **Alive / Dead?** Does the tweet contain a picture of Alan alive, dead, or a mixture of the two?
- **Similar to?** e.g., Is the tweet's appended imagery similar, thematically or compositionally, to imagery found elsewhere in the dataset?

The presence of these columns lets the researcher variously filter, e.g., all tweets that contain a family snapshot, exclude all pictures linked to the Nilüfer Demir photoset, or view all the pictures that are similar to record #7. The similarity filter is also useful for comparing the commentaries that are shared alongside repeated imagery in order to sample the variety of comments associated with the same image.

3.6.1. Attributions, family snapshots, Demir variations, and image type

There are also a number of columns that aid in differentiating between individual pictures in a tweet (Table 5). "Attribution" identifies the maker of the picture (if possible). Many were identified by a reverse image search on Google Images until a name could be associated securely to the picture, a process which frequently included examining other work by the same person to ensure consistency in style, content, and/or context. Some makers could not be identified at all,

whilst others could only be attributed to the photographer's press agency or organisation (e.g., Reuters). There are dozens of individuals and organisations in the list. In addition to "Attribution", there are "Family Snapshots" and "Demir", which identify the particular family snapshots (amongst six shared) or photographs by Demir (five options, one of which had a further two variations) shared by Twitter users.

Because 12% of the tweets contain multiple image files, extra variations must be accounted for in the dataset, up to four times (e.g., "Demir1". "Demir2", "Demir3, and "Demir4"; the same goes for attributions and family snapshots). These variations are listed in order of presentation.

3.6.2. Textual necessities

Spreadsheet tables cannot filter image data; they can only filter text and numbers. To aid parsing the content of imagery through filters, images were given a "Pictorial Description"—in practice a rough version of pre-iconographic analysis (Table 6). The text in this column is based upon repeated phrases that simplify searching for multiple variants via filtering, e.g., "Alan, alive and happy", "held in arms", "crowd of people", "holding sign", "at a demonstration".

In addition, there are a number of different picture types presented in the dataset. An attempt has been made to differentiate between, e.g., professional photographs and artistic imagery, amongst others (Table 7). Parsing image type helps identify the variations (or lack thereof) available in the dataset. This filter allows one to instantly view the differences between, e.g., an original picture of Alan and the artistic responses based upon that photograph.

Another filter of some utility differentiates between pictures showing an individual, a group, a family, or a mass of people (Table 8; Figure 19 is a screenshot of the datasheet). It was

No	Image	Stat	Alt	Alt2	De	Ar	Fa	I/G	Pic Type	Pic Descr	Attrib1	Attrib2	Attrib3	Attrib4	Fam1	Fam2	Fam3	Fam4	Demir1	Dem2	Dem3	Dem4
2		2	Y	Alive	N	N	Y	I	Family snap	Alan, alive and happy, on slide	Alan's Family	-	-	-	Slide	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3		3	Y	Dead	Y	N	N	I	Professional photograph	Alan, dead, alone	Nilüfer Demir	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem2	-	-	-
4		4	N	-	N	Y	N	G	Graphic design	Covering child with 'migrant' and 'refugee' crossed out, 'child' not	Save the Children / Hedin Halldorsson	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5		5	Y	Alive	N	N	Y	F	Family snap	Alan, alive and happy, w/ Ghalib	Alan's Family	-	-	-	w/ Ghalib (white shirt)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6		6	Y	Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Sand sculpture of Alan, dead and giant, with text: humanity washed ashore shame, shame, shame	Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem3AI	-	-	-
7		7	N	-	N	N	N	F	Professional photograph	Laila Majid, distressed, with child in arms, near crowd of people emerging from boat	Daniel Etter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8		8	N	-	N	N	N	-	Screenshot	Text: definition of migrant	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9		6	Y	Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Sand sculpture of Alan, dead and giant, with text: humanity washed ashore shame, shame, shame	Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem3AI	-	-	-

hypothesised that different sizes of groups would evoke different responses, from sympathy for individuals to antipathy for masses of people, paralleling psychological research carried out by Dickert et al. (2016) and content analysis research by Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017). However, the filter showed that this was not the case: text accompanying photographs of the largest groups rarely evinced antipathy, but often suggested that helping refugees reflected the popular will. Indeed, the most common imagery clearly intended to provoke hostility towards refugees showed a single individual—supposedly a *Dāesh* insurgent—attempting to enter Europe (records #37 and #71; see Chapter 5 for more).

3.6.3. Emphasis upon open-ended analysis

The creation of these textual filters may seem like overkill, but they allow for powerful combinations to drill down into the data. For example, we can identify all artistic representations based upon Demir's second photograph containing angel's wings and depict at least two people (there are 2 examples of this, records #238 and #462, shared 360 times and 240 times respectively; Figure 20).¹⁷⁷

AutoSaveOFF

Alan Iconographic datasheet-Version 4

Search Sheet

HomeInsertDrawPage LayoutFormulasDataReviewViewTable

C2

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Perhaps more importantly, however, the preponderance of these filters (and other filters described below) allows researchers multiple paths into the data. Looking through the data, it becomes immediately apparent that people evince multiple responses from the same picture. Regardless of the intent of the image maker, images are interpreted by viewers in polysemic

¹⁷⁷ This query is created by following the following Filter recipe: "Pic Type" is set to show "Art" and "Multiple"; "Pic Descr" is set to search for entries containing the term "wings"; for "I/G/F/M" (Individual, Group, Family, Mass), "I" is deselected; and "Demir1" is set to show "Dem2".

patterns. This is not an observation solely exclusive to this dataset, or indeed to other datasets: it is relevant to the analysis of any imagery whatsoever, e.g., for photography (Berger and Mohr, 1982). I have conducted image categorisation exercises (with physical copies showing artistic response pictures of Alan Kurdi) in workshops and lecture halls and the participants often find new ways to organise the imagery.¹⁷⁸ The subsequent explanations for their decisions were always logical and they often pursued novel ways in categorisation, interpretation, and presentation. This filtering system, then, is designed so as not to privilege one form of interpretation or classification to the detriment of other interpretations, but to allow researchers to investigate other patterns using the same tool.

3.7. Thematic parsing in imagery and text

In order to discover patterns in tweeted content with the aid of computers, I have adopted an approach to achieve a level of abstracted parity in both visual and textual information, and which is akin to the inductive approach advocated by David Thomas (2006) for the analysis of text. This approach is informed by a distinction made by philosophers of language following the work of Paul Grice (1975): between the literal, or semantic, content of text and the pragmatic implicature, or meaning, of their statements. This distinction has had a major influence upon linguistic analysis as well, perhaps most visibly in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work on metaphor, wherein they abstract the concepts underlying the literal content of metaphors. An example they provide of an underpinning concept is "*life is a container*": individual instantiations of this concept are present in phrases such as "I've had a *full* life. Life is *empty* for him. There's *not much left* for him *in* life. Her life is *crammed* with activities" (1980:51). By placing emphasis upon the underlying structure of content, conceptual patterns are more readily identifiable. Accordingly, I have been inspired by the willingness of the analysis of metaphor and pragmatics to dig within individual texts and categorise them by their concepts. I examine both pictures and text for thematic patterns. Adopting coding practices from content analysis, I rationalise these themes (such as "*life is a container*" in the above example), note the appearance of specific salient elements (for example: "held in arms"), and note their frequency of use and retweets, on the assumption that both their frequency of use and the number of retweets are indicative of the concept's resonance within the culture, and perhaps across multiple cultures.

The textual and visual themes that follow are recorded in ways similar to qualitative versions of content analysis, but they differ significantly. How? Pursuing an iconographic approach requires a shift in what is recorded. The items enumerated in content analysis are very clear (see section 1.4). Content analysis of text may concentrate upon the literal content of the artefact—that is,

¹⁷⁸ Visual Social Media Workshop held at CCCB (*Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona*) on 18 February 2017; and a guest lecture for Farida Vis' "Researching Social Media" postgraduate course at the University of Sheffield on 9 May 2017.

the semantic content—but not their generalisable pragmatic patterns. Content analysis of imagery, in turn, is used to list the presence of items in a given corpus of pictures, as in the example given in section 1.4, cattle in one picture, a cowboy in another, and both cattle and cowboy in a third; but not perhaps other details, such as whether the cowboy carries a cow, or whether the cowboy and cow occupy a small proportion of the artefact, all of which may have an effect upon how one views the picture.

Other aspects of text are worth abstracting to tie a tweet's text to the pictures presented, but such methods also require adjustment for iconographic purposes. Framing analysis seems to be used for summarising the broad standpoint of texts, rather than analysing the (hopefully discernible) intent of a given text (Entman, 1993). Metaphor analysis delves into the text, examining the use of specific phrases—particularly with a regard to understand the semi- or unconscious assumptions made by the author—but as its name suggests, it is concerned exclusively with the use of metaphor, and not with other aspects of textual analysis (Boréus and Bergström, 2017b). Primarily for basic sorting purposes, I use a simple version of framing analysis to create a summary of the tweet. Inspired by Barthes' relay, I attempt to indicate the way authors' texts specifically connect to the artefacts they share. But whilst Barthes' (1977b:41) notion of the relay is "the unity of the message [of word and image]... realised at a higher level", this suggests that the relay is the product of a conscious decision process, and that its analysis picks out the individuality of messages and not necessarily the generalisable aspects of a group of messages.

Conceiving of textual and visual themes thus differs from standard content analysis—the concepts in each case are vaguer. In addition, there is no real equivalent to summaries or relays in content analysis. Because they are vaguer, they are less open to objective quantification. The result thus cannot be called content analysis, but it is not intended to be: it adopts the recording inherent in content analysis by looking for patterns recorded akin to code unit variables. This approach helps answer: What clues, however inchoate, do users provide for their pictorial interpretations? What patterns can one detect? Abstracting from the semantic content of words—or their equivalent in imagery—aids in looking for such patterns. This process of individuation, synthesis, and categorisation will not be unfamiliar to the iconographer. They are not applying to broad cultural patterns but are rather applied at the micro level to individual posts, the results of which are recorded in a spreadsheet.¹⁷⁹ The spreadsheet is merely a tool to ease the labour of acquiring more easily discernible results. The fruits of this labour are passed

¹⁷⁹ A classic example of the broad-brush approach may be Panofsky's analysis of the articulation of Gothic architectural style in terms of parallels with scholastic argumentation (1957). Mitchell (1994:16–34) provides a thorough critique of such "overgeneralised master-narratives".

on for iconographic work and understanding patterns of visual resonances. It is often in the use of repeated themes and phrases that one may understand how a user has interpreted a picture.

3.7.1. The visual aspect of tweets

W. J. T. Mitchell (2005a) has claimed that there are *no* visual media: no medium is constitutive of a *purely* visual experience, because there is often a lexical component accompanying or informing the image, e.g., a Biblical narrative or the text on a monument. This is certainly true of Twitter, where users present images alongside text; but it is also true of several individual pictures in the dataset (most frequently those that treat the broader refugee crisis) which mix visual imagery with text.¹⁸⁰ This implies the expansion of discretely-defined elements for visual analysis, as well as the apparent intention to raise other themes in a purely visual manner.

In order to encompass the variety of visual content, themes, and text within the pictures, the spreadsheet divides subject matter into nine umbrella filters which I have identified as occurring frequently in the dataset (Table 9).¹⁸¹ The criterion for registering the presence of a given element under one of the filters is simple: that it is a major constituent of the picture. As such, it follows a conservative approach for registering the presence of any elements in a picture.

The filters thus allow us to query the data for the presence of the following:

- **Appeal:** Does the picture contain an explicit form of appeal? (three options)
- **Censure:** Does the picture take someone or something to task, and if so, how? (nine options)
- **Child:** Is a child present? If so, how are they depicted? (four options)
- **Context:** What is the surrounding context for a figure or figures in the picture[s]? (fourteen options)
- **Crowd:** What is the discernible constitution of the crowd, e.g., is it a demonstration, are they refugees? (six options)
- **Empathy:** What elements specifically call upon the viewer's empathy? (seven options)
- **Family:** Are there elements of family life—e.g., an indication of parents, or childhood—in the picture[s]? (two options)
- **Spiritual:** Are supernatural elements present in the picture[s]? (three options)
- **Other:** Are repeatable, other otherwise unclassifiable, elements present? (six options)

Because of the presence of multiple pictures in some tweets, unfortunately not all themes could be recorded adequately. For instance, in a group of pictures, there may be an instance of the

¹⁸⁰ Earlier, Mitchell (1994) identified the “imagetext”, tracking different interrelations between text and the visual. See especially 91–94 for his discussion of “imagetext” in comic books, which presents parallels with many examples in the data.

¹⁸¹ The development of this spreadsheet was an iterative process; accordingly, as new patterns were discovered, new filters were added, and the entire corpus was re-evaluated.

presence of an authority (often Sgt Çıplak with Alan) *and* an image of sleep (a rendition of Alan in an artistic response): the presence of both in the “Other” filter means that one of these tags will lose out. This is a fairly rare occurrence, but it highlights a limitation in the approach.

3.7.2. The textual aspect of tweets

Even though tweets are brief—at the time of Alan’s death, they could be but 140 characters long—users can pack a lot of information in them. It is useful to dissect them to parse their content. Whilst there are many studies of the textual aspects of tweets, they are rarely seen as windows into the ways in which Twitter users interpret pictures. In a parallel project on responses to the death of Alan Kurdi in the comments sections of various newspapers’ Facebook accounts, Jens Kjeldsen and Ida Andersen justify their analysis of commentary by stating that

Whereas qualitative interviews and focus group conversations are artificial and constructed research situations, the responses in the commentary sections occur in real time and without the influence of researchers. Thus, the comment sections provide us with access to the more immediate real-life reactions the photos evoked (Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018:317).

Kjeldsen and Andersen’s analysis, however, is concerned with very broad framing of the death of Alan and the Refugee Crisis. The purpose of examining tweets in this research project is to examine, in depth, patterns in the modes of expression.¹⁸²

Based upon the overarching umbrella concept present in pragmatics and the analysis of metaphor, tweets have been divided into summaries and themes (Table 10). Summaries and themes are almost virtually identical, with the exception of specific repeated content (most notably centring upon Alan’s father, Abdullah Kurdi). The difference between summaries and themes is that summaries attempt to encapsulate the total textual content, whereas themes list subordinate elements present in the text. There are seven major divisions in the textual content of the tweets:

- **Affect:** The text relates emotional reactions (ten options).
- **Appeal:** The text makes an assertion that action must be made (two options).
- **Censure:** The text condemns attitudes or behaviour (nine options).
- **Commemoration:** The text pays honour to Alan’s memory (four options).

¹⁸² This project necessarily operates only on one of the three structural layers of Twitter communication as proposed by Bruns and Moe (2014). Bruns and Moe propose a tri-layer form of communication on the platform: the micro-level, which contains interpersonal communications; the meso-level, which comprises follower-followee networks; and the macro-level, which is based upon hashtag-based exchanges. The dataset was predicated upon hashtags and specific terms, so operates on the macro level. However, the three levels are comingled, and in a few rare instances I will follow down micro- and meso-level threads purely for illustrative purposes.

- **Context:** The text supplies information that is relevant to a broader understanding (thirteen options with four extra options for tweet summaries).
- **Spiritual:** The text makes explicit references to the supernatural (two options).
- **Support:** The text explicitly references individuals or groups that support refugees (four options).
- **Other:** The text contains expressions not otherwise present in the above categories or enumerates additional options for categories already filled (minimum of six options, spread across two columns).

These categories, then, are similar to two of the umbrella topics covered by Boltanski (1993): the denunciation of those deemed responsible and the sharing of sentiment.¹⁸³ The divisions presented here are, however, further subdivided in order to discover multiple, finely-gradated patterns of expression.

All tweets have been parsed for their textual content, regardless whether their accompanying pictures have survived. Because nearly a quarter of all tweets in the dataset (271 of 1,139 records) are in languages other than English, the spreadsheet also contains an extra “Tweet Translation” column, which is populated as needed. Tweets in other languages often follow the same pattern as tweets in English, with specific regional variations.

3.7.2.1. An example of thematic parsing

It is useful to provide an example to understand the manner in which tweets have been summarised and their themes identified. Consider the following five tweets by public figures, one of which has been translated:

Just spoke with Aylan's aunt. Asking people to stop using drowning photo. Wants world to remember him smiling

—Muhammad Lila, news correspondent, 4 September 2015 (record #2)

Aylan Kurdi, the 3 yr old who washed up at Antalya and captured the world's attention, as he should be remembered

—Michael Weiss, CNN Security Analyst, 2 September 2015 (record #5)

Aylan Kurdi's family have asked people to stop using THAT photo of him. They want the world to remember him smiling

—The LADBible, Online magazine, 5 September 2015 (record #23)

Mejor recordar #AylanKurdi así Buenas noches [Better to remember Alan thus. Good night]

—Raquel Ecenarro, Spanish journalist, 3 September 2015 (record #342)

This is how Aylan & Galip, who drowned fleeing #Syria for #Europe, shld be remembered. Now please say #RefugeesWelcome

—Lotte Leicht, EU director of Human Rights Watch, 3 September 2015 (record #1,096)

¹⁸³ A third umbrella topic for Boltanski, the contemplation of aesthetic aspects, also exists under the major divisions presented here, but spread over a number of different filters.

The tweets shared different photographs of Alan alive. Only two of the texts mention Alan smiling. In all their different forms, however, they all clearly reference the same notion that can be summarised as *Alan should be remembered alive, and not dead*.

However, a number of these small missives contain other themes as well, which might be best called “subthemes”. They consist of specific repeated phrases or sentiments. In the above sample tweets, Lila refers to Alan’s aunt, a reference to the widespread theme in both imagery and text of *family*. Ecenarro writes “good night”, a comment closely related to the widespread theme of *sleep*. The LADBible refers to “THAT photo”, a loaded reference suggesting a kind of *haunting* by Demir’s imagery, since it refers to a different picture in a particularly indicative fashion: this is a minor theme in a number of texts and images in the dataset. Weiss *describes the death factually*, something done by several accounts. And Leicht makes a general *appeal* for readers to welcome refugees into the EU, an action that accompanies only some posts explicitly mentioning Alan, but which is a much more major theme in the broader refugee crisis.¹⁸⁴

3.7.3. The intersection: capturing the relation between textual and visual content

The “intersection” between the tweet’s textual and visual content is similar to Barthes’ concept of the “relay”. For Barthes, the relay was evidence for a richness of meaning differing from that which one could otherwise derive from looking at either text or picture in isolation: the combination nudges the potential polysemic interpretations of image and text into a specific direction. However, the relay is generally both more complex and ephemeral than the purpose of the intersection here. The intersection is a summary window, and it is based upon the way the textual content seems to provide insight into the author’s presentation of pictorial content. Again, Kjeldsen and Andersen pursue their project in a parallel fashion, stating that “the full rhetorical potential of pictures is thus exercised when their discursive ability to create utterances, propositions, and arguments is united with their aesthetic materiality and sensual immediacy” (Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018:314). However, this research project takes such sentiments in a different direction. It attempts to tie more concretely the ways users’ utterances build up an interpretative picture of the pictures they shared.

Consider the following example:

¹⁸⁴ It should be noted that many tweets commonly append a general statement of support in the form of the hashtag #refugeeswelcome. The distinction I am drawing here, however, is something extra, where—at the very least—the hashtag is part of a sentence and not merely appended to the end of the text. But they often extend beyond that. Often, a number of authors make specific appeals that imply more conscious thought about the subject. In addition, a number of people hostile to, or dubious about, refugees used the same hashtag when posting their opinions: thus, hashtags seem an unstable foundation to build notions of support or solidarity.

. @fcstpauli and @BVB, last night. Great to see #RefugeesWelcome
—The SPORTBible, an online magazine, 9 September 2015 (record #220)

The tweet is a record of an event that occurred during a football match. The textual content refers to German football clubs (a reference to *sport*), then adds that it is “great to see refugees welcome”, which suggests that the author found this *inspirational*. The accompanying photograph, however, does not depict football players, but fans in the stadium holding up a banner reading “Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here” (Figure 21). The tweet itself does not explain that the photograph shows fans, and not players: the expressed sentiment could be applied equally to a photograph of football players proclaiming refugee support.¹⁸⁵ As such, the pictorial content inflects the meaning of the text, and in turn the text hints at an interpretation of the photograph: that masses of ordinary people recognise the plight of refugees, and that the author finds this inspirational. As such, it seems that this tweet provides the photograph as evidence of the *popular will* in favour of supporting refugees, and as such, *popular will* is identified as the intersection.



3.7.4. Limitations and strengths of the approach

The approach is, however, limited. It is time consuming, and as described above, it does not appear that computer-led analysis is ready to perform this task for the researcher.¹⁸⁶ It requires a facility in multiple languages, as the dataset is international in scope.¹⁸⁷ Content analysis typically follows a system whereby elements are hierarchically presented, e.g., “alone” might be a subset of “child”, which in turn might be in the category of “type of people in picture”. A non-

¹⁸⁵ There are three pictures in the datasheet that meet this criterion. Filter recipe: “PicDescr” set to display entries containing the phrase “refugee”; “PicTh-Content” set to “Sport”.

¹⁸⁶ An abortive avenue of research included using Clarifai’s machine-learning image identification software. It was discovered that foundational task of distinguishing between individual example of Demir’s photoset proved impossible: two shots from entirely opposite angles were consistently interpreted as being the same image. This suggested the impossibility of identifying the source photograph for various artistic responses to the death of Alan, a fundamental step in understanding the resonance of specific photographs by Demir. And even if Clarifai’s software proved capable, it appeared impossible to retain the connections between tweets and the images shared with them.

¹⁸⁷ The dataset contains content in Arabic, Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Japanese, Italian, Malay/Indonesian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish. My Portuguese and Swedish vocabularies are limited; furthermore, I am unfamiliar with Japanese, Malay/Indonesian, and Turkish. Content in Japanese and Malay/Indonesian required judicious use of Google Translate to extract sufficient results. Google Translate was less helpful with Turkish; I have relied upon Zeynep Yilmaz of Manchester Metropolitan University, who kindly helped me with them.

hierarchical tagging system (such as Twitter's hashtag) would likely prove a superior way to parse filter through content, but the use of a spreadsheet precludes such a system, as it requires discrete items in individual cells.¹⁸⁸

And even though the interplay between image and text is a kind of dialogue, a variant of what Van Dijck (1997:3) referred to as "talk and text in context", this approach does not cover replies to tweets, or conversations at the micro- and meso-levels of communication (Bruns and Moe, 2014): these constitute a rather more literal meaning of Van Dijck's phrase. This is unfortunate, because replies constitute another level of interpretation and sharing: many people seemed to "trade" artistic images back and forth as if comparing the various ways in which the image of Alan, dead, could be viewed.¹⁸⁹ Also, examination of textual responses (as viewed via the tweet's URL) appear to include themes lacking in the dataset. For instance, some people who posted Alan's picture were taken to task for doing so. Whilst "censure" and "outrage" are categories in the datasheet, they were designed to record censure and outrage about the death of Alan, not about sharing his picture; so some fundamental changes would be required to accommodate new, but similar, sentiments.

Finally, a major limitation is that the filtering system is restricted to Boolean AND operations across different filters—that is, one can search for the more restrictive set of "images of Alan alive" AND "text containing the word 'last'".¹⁹⁰ There does not appear to be a way to display Boolean OR operations across filters, which would present less restrictive search results.

¹⁸⁸ The original design of the datasheet was indeed based upon such nonhierarchical categorisation. As a web developer, I helped create just such a tagging system for an academic database, but time constraints precluded developing one for this research project.

A vocabulary point: Excel supports a very different concept of "tags". That is, cells can be tagged with identifying text, e.g., "VAT Total"; but they cannot have multiple tags (e.g., "VAT total" *and* "outgoing").

¹⁸⁹ It is arguable that because many replies will be textual, and so will present difficulties restricting the scope of the research: are text-only replies considered appended, somehow, to the image presented in the parent tweet? What if they do not address the images directly in text? Should it be removed? What if a reply to the reply addresses something in the original picture? In any event, assuming that the research could be delimited adequately, the way to organise the tweets is clear: through the addition of two filters based associated with the tweet's id and the responding tweet's parent_id, both of which are found in the original data export (see Table 1). The researcher would need to trawl deeply into the exported dataset, given that the data a) may be split over multiple files and that, and b) is organised via the number of retweets. Many of the replies are unlikely to have been retweeted, and so would figure very low in the hierarchy of the data.

¹⁹⁰ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Tweet txt" ("Tweet txt" unavailable in the redacted version of the datasheet) set to search records containing the word "last". The result yields five tweets, three of which claim to show the last picture of the child alive. The tweet text term is set to "last" because the three tweets use different terms: "last image", "last photograph", and "last photo".

These limitations aside, the datasheet provides a solid foundation for subsequent analytics and qualitative assessments. It was developed to be used in conjunction with other tools and methods, such that it could yield rigorous, demonstrable results.

3.8. A summary of major elements in the datasheet's contents

It would be useful to get an overview of the dataset prior to delving into the iconographic specificities in later chapters. There are 1,139 tweets in total containing 1,233 pictures. The image files for many tweets were no longer available by the end of December 2015; by the time they were downloaded in May 2017, 139 tweets lacked their image-files, and these “orphans” will be described last. 1,000 tweets retained their image-files: this forms the core of the data, and unless otherwise specified, calculated percentages are based upon these files.¹⁹¹

3.8.1. Tweets containing images of Alan

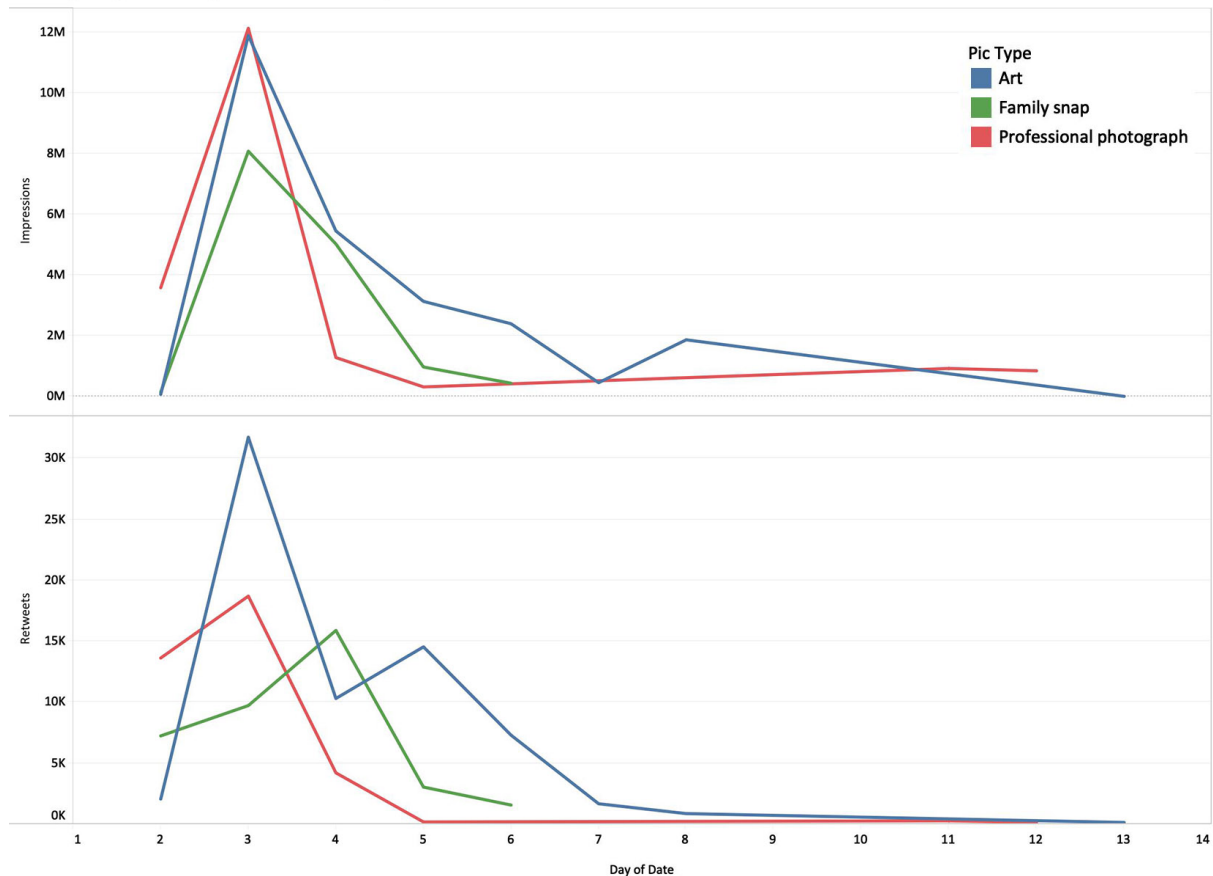
Alan is present in 386 of the tweets in the datasheet, or 38.6% of the total.¹⁹² Viewed from the perspective of retweets, Alan is present in 48.7% (181,257 retweets) of the datasheet (372,262 total retweets). In a dataset containing a substantial portion of content about the refugee crisis in general—mostly through permutations of the phrase “refugees welcome”—that is a remarkable proportion of concentration upon a single person.

There are three main image types of Alan Kurdi: the photographs by Nilüfer Demir, artistic responses to that photoset, and family snapshots of Alan supplied by the family. The rise and fall of these different image types is represented in Chart 2. The red line represents Demir’s photoset, the blue line represents artistic responses, and the green line tracks the sharing of family snapshots of Alan).

¹⁹¹ Filter recipe: “Images” filter: “Missing” deselected. The spreadsheet provides an automatic tally for filter results at the bottom left of the window’s file.

¹⁹² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”, equalling 386 automatically-tallied records. Selecting all the retweets provides the automatically-computed result of 181,257. The number of total retweets is achieved by deselecting all filters and selecting all the retweets.

Sharing images of Alan (number of retweets)



The trends of sum of Impressions and sum of Retweets for Date Day. Color shows details about Pic Type. The data is filtered on Alan in it?, which keeps Present. The view is filtered on Pic Type, which keeps Art, Family snap and Professional photograph.

Chart 2: Sharing patterns over time. The number of retweets of the original photographs as opposed to family snaps and artistic responses to the death of Alan. NB: this chart is based upon examples that are exclusively of one or another type (i.e., only family snapshots, only professional photographs, or only artistic images of Alan), not mixtures of these, montages of different pictures, and newspaper screenshots, all of which are negligible (just over 2% of the top 1,000 pictures apiece). Chart developed in Tableau.

3.8.1.1. Nilüfer Demir's photographs

In her overview of the 100 most shared pictures of Alan Kurdi in the dataset, Farida Vis (2015) noted that 21% of the top 100 pictures shared of Alan showed the child dead. Looking through the top 1,000 most shared tweets, however, the situation is more complicated. If one tallies simply those pictures which show Demir's photographs exclusively, this constitutes just under 20% of all the pictures of Alan (77 of out 386 tweets).¹⁹³ However, the image of Alan dead on the beach is replicated not only on its own, but also in various mediated contexts: in renditions of newspaper covers, in graphics of information about the Syrian refugee crisis, in screenshots of mobile applications, and alongside poems. Of all the tweets containing pictures of Alan,

¹⁹³ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" set to "Professional Photograph".

photographs by Nilüfer Demir are present in 131 of them, or just under 34%.¹⁹⁴ This amounts to 112,260 retweets (constituting 61.9% of the Alan retweets, or 30% of all retweets contain at least one of Demir 's photographs of Alan).¹⁹⁵

These mediated versions of the Demir photographs can be broken down into a number of categories:

- 20 tweets show the photographer's work on the **cover of a newspaper**.¹⁹⁶
- 12 of Demir's photographs are shown in **montages** with multiple examples of Demir's photographs or with other photographs, such as other iconic photographs of suffering children, or other refugee families.¹⁹⁷ In this category, multiple things appear to be occurring visually. There is evidence almost of contrasting or evaluating the various photographs of an event (such as when multiple versions of Demir's photographs are presented), but also an evaluation of Demir's imagery within the canon of other iconic photographs. Finally, Alan's image is contrasted with dead, mutilated children in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, in a clear rebuke to those who care about the death of one child, but do not care about the deaths of others.
- 7 tweets appear to be **screenshots** showing Demir's photographs, i.e., the photograph is shown with tell-tale signs of mobile phone interfaces or other clues.¹⁹⁸ These suggest that these images are the avenue through which these Twitter users encountered the image of Alan.
- 4 tweets show a **Demir photograph with text** accompanying it in a style consistent with graphic design.¹⁹⁹ Two of the cases provide statistics about refugees attempting to reach Europe; one places the photo in an evocative setting of a poem composed by the author; the final has text atop photographs comparing two dead children.
- 2 tweets appear to be **stills of video captures** showing Demir's photographs.²⁰⁰ Such examples have been interpreted as a way of expressing the user's witnessing of a newsworthy event (Vis et al., 2014). These appear to be slightly different, however: instead of a photograph of a television

¹⁹⁴ Whilst there is a degree of variation in the datasheet, the likely reason for the discrepancy between Vis' and my tallies is due to the limitations of Twitter's API coupled with Pulsar's use of that API: the API only presents the first picture. My account presents all the pictures, which complicates the picture considerably.

¹⁹⁵ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Alive / Dead?" set to "Dead"; "Pic Type": all options ticked with the exception of "Art" and "Photoshop". This amounts to 112,440 retweets. Record #719 (180 retweets) is discounted because it does not have a rendition of a photograph by Demir, even though it otherwise meets the criterion for the filter; thus, the total is 112,260 retweets.

¹⁹⁶ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Newspaper".

¹⁹⁷ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Montage".

¹⁹⁸ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Screenshot".

¹⁹⁹ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Graphic design". In addition, record #795 ("Pic Type" instead set to "Multiple") contains the fifth example.

²⁰⁰ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Video still".

screen, these appear to be direct screenshots from a video feed. Thus, as above, it suggests that these video feeds are the way the users encountered the image of Alan.

- One further tweet shows a nonprofessional photograph with a photograph by Demir in it.²⁰¹
- 12 tweets place a photograph by Demir with a mix of other pictures (still or otherwise), such as amateur photographs of newspaper clippings, capture of video footage, or a screenshot of text of unknown context defending the showing of the picture.²⁰²

Demir's photographs are placed into various contexts in 56 (14.5%) tweets.²⁰³ These mix in a wide variety of pictures, including art works based upon Demir's photographs, family snapshots, other children whom the author wishes to commemorate, and others.

There are 12 posts containing heterogeneous picture types that are "haunted" by the photographs of Nilüfer Demir.²⁰⁴ The pictures—professional photographs, art, and journalistic photography alike—would make no sense whatsoever were it not for the existence of Demir's photographs, but these photographs are referenced obliquely. In most of these pictures, Alan is often not represented, but the photograph is "quoted" by placing other figures in Alan's pose on the beach. In some, the snakelike shoreline in Demir's photographs is reproduced without any body shown: this appears to be done in order to remind the viewer of Alan's image in as gentle a way as possible. In some examples, none of Demir's photos are directly referenced, but it is clear that the picture is supposed to be Alan.

3.8.1.1.1. Resonance of individual photographs: impressions vs. retweets

Chart 3 below provides an overview suggesting which of Demir's pictures evoked the most retweeted reactions, arguably a measurement of resonance.²⁰⁵ The chart appears to tell two different stories: the visual preferences of organisations as opposed to individuals.

²⁰¹ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Nonprofessional photograph".

²⁰² Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" instead set to "Multiple".

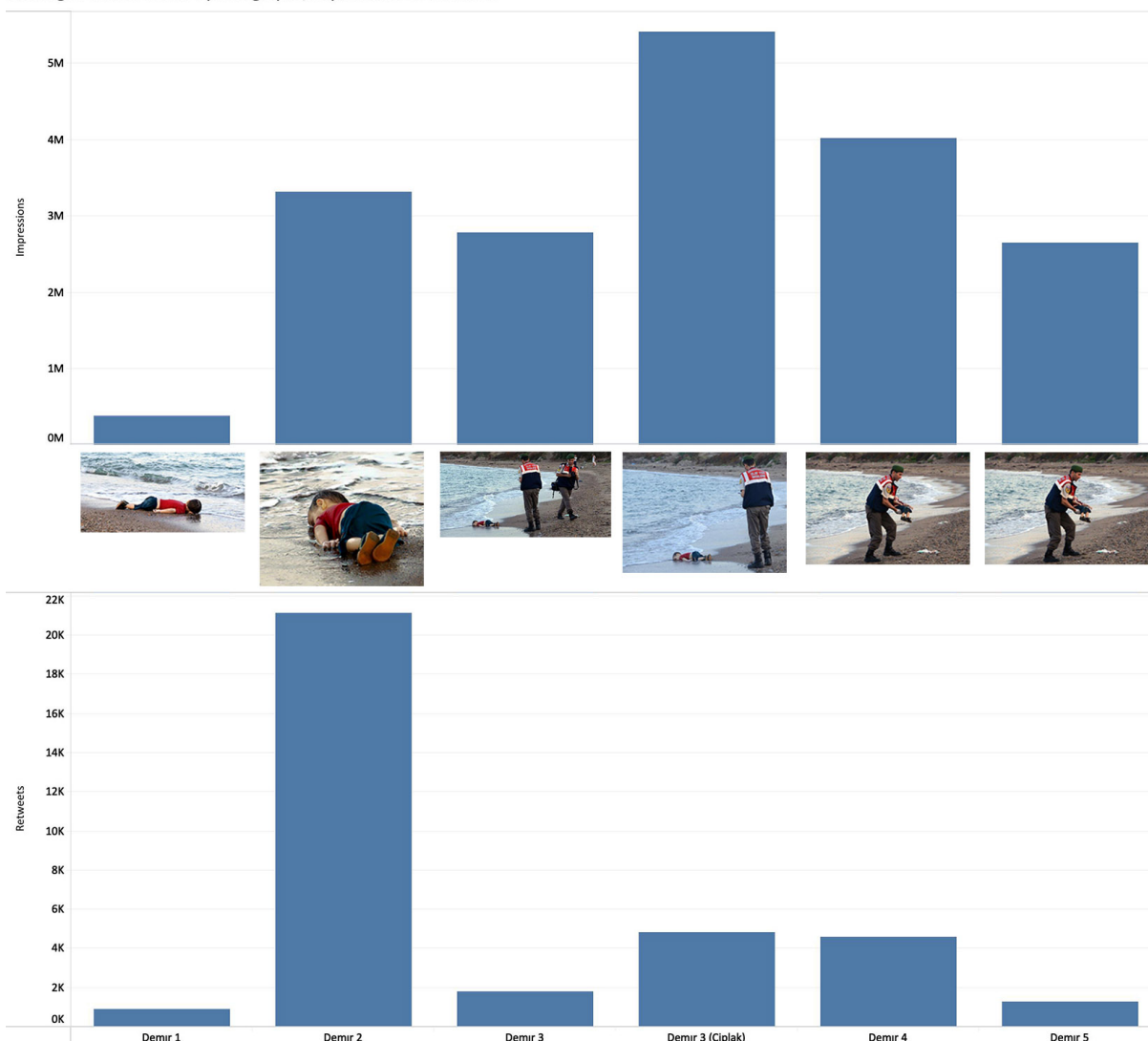
²⁰³ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Demir?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" has all options ticked except for "Art"; And "Attrib2" is set to "Does not begin with" with the value of "-" (not present). Records #180 and #271 are discounted from this tally, because they are montages that display other iconic photographs (the attributions for which are present in "Attrib2").

²⁰⁴ Filter recipe: "Demir?" set to "H".

²⁰⁵ The emphasis on retweets as a measure of resonance provides an understanding of the relative perceived importance of different pictures and texts. This provides a different insight into the provided data than a representative spread of sentiment or subject matter. For example, Çiğdem Bozdağ and Kevin Smets examined Turkish and Flemish tweets reacting to the death of Alan Kurdi but chose to set aside the question of relative importance in favour of giving each tweet equal weight. They could thus characterise the "maximum variation" of responses (Bozdağ and Smets, 2017:4053). A post with one retweet, then, carries the same weight as a post with 10,000 retweets. They conclude that the responses show a *lack* of change in the discourse about refugees, given that the spread included a large number of anti-Kurdi and anti-immigrant responses in the two contexts. It is difficult to agree with this conclusion, however, since their

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Sharing of Nilüfer Demir's photographs, impressions vs. retweets



Sum of Impressions and sum of Retweets for each Demir (all slots) broken down by Pic Type. The data is filtered on Demir?, which keeps Y. The view is filtered on Pic Type, Demir (all slots) and sum of Retweets. The Pic Type filter keeps Professional photograph. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 34 members. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 700 to 23,940.

Chart 3: Distribution of Demir photography: impressions (favouring the reach of accounts with large follower bases) vs retweets (showing those images actually passed along by users). Noteworthy: the impressions view heavily favours Alan accompanied by Sgt Çıplak, whilst the image of Alan, alone, is by far the most commonly-retweeted image of the child. Equally noteworthy: the crop of Demir 3 referred to as the “Alone” crop figures so little that it does not register (it occurs twice in the entire dataset), but it is a major source for artistic renditions. Chart developed in Tableau with photographs added.

The chart is divided between “impressions” (the top metric) and retweets (the bottom).

Impressions favour Twitter accounts with large followings, such as news organisations.²⁰⁶ Twitter

methodology aims at the spread of response rather than the relative value different utterances were accorded by their respective audiences.

²⁰⁶ In their rendition of tweeted responses to the death of Alan emanating from Turkey and Flanders, Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4050) identify “citizens, NGOs, politicians, and professional media outlets as the four major groups”. This research project does not formally identify different actor types, but this list reflects the types of groups found in the datasheet. In the

users subscribing to these feeds are *likely to have seen* the pictures presented on those accounts. Indeed, if one reorganises the datasheet into an ascending order of impressions (i.e., larger numbers of impressions first), one sees that the list is dominated by news organisations and celebrities. In contrast, retweets highlight the attention particular posts received in a concrete way, that is, by the act of retweeting them: this arguably represents a better metric of Twitter users' preferences.

Judging by the "impressions" metric, photographs with Sgt Çıplak featuring in them are more widely shared, although one of the pictures of Alan alone (Demir 2) was the third most-shared. Given the preponderance of news organisations amongst those with high impression numbers, this photograph's widespread sharing is a validation of Aulich's (2015) observation that the inclusion of an authority figure in a distressing image is a long-standing practice by media organisations.

One's conception of sharing patterns changes, however, if one evaluates sharing by the number of retweets the post engendered. By this metric, the image of Alan alone (Demir 2) utterly dominates the retweets. There are many possible reasons for this: several revolve around the interpretation of the photograph of Alan alone, and this will be explored in Chapter 4.

3.8.1.2. Images of Alan: artistic responses

In her study of the top 100 pictures shared of Alan, Vis (2015) discovered that 17% of the pictures were "response pictures", that is, artistic responses to the death of Alan. As in the case of representations of the Demir photoset, the situation is more complicated, but also much more extensive. Alan is represented exclusively in artistic representations in 165 tweets, or 42.75% of all the tweets showing a picture of Alan.²⁰⁷ More generally, Alan is rendered in artistic works in 186 of the 386 tweets (just under 48%).²⁰⁸ This more general category frequently mixes other pictures, including Demir's photographs and family snapshots of Alan alive. Judging from these pictures alone, Twitter users were interested not only in the facts of the event, but also how the child's death was interpreted. There are over 60 separate artistic responses in the datasheet.

datasheet, citizens are most likely prominent individuals (see Chapter 5 below, which provides the only examples of visual differentiation between prominent and ordinary citizens).

²⁰⁷ Filter recipe: "Alan in it"? set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" set to "Art".

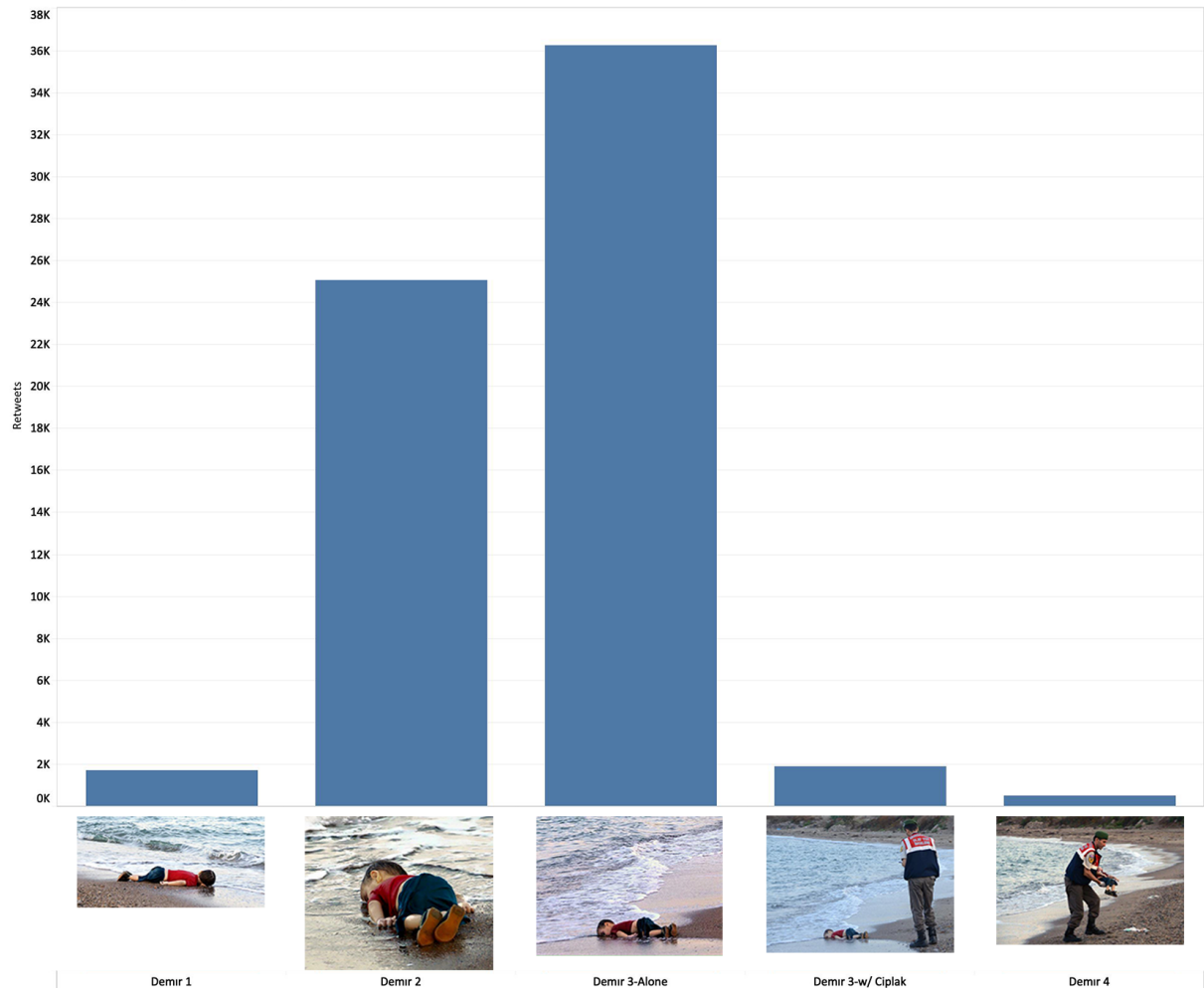
²⁰⁸ Filter recipe: "Alan in it"? set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y". These were retweeted 74,779 times in total: that is, just under 42% of all Alan-oriented retweets contained artistic responses (or approximately 17.5% of all the retweets in the datasheet).

It appears that the reason why there such a big difference in numbers between Vis' and my own is due to the fact that Vis conducted her tally through Pulsar Platform, which operates via Twitter's API. Since Twitter's API currently only provides access to a single picture, any tally based upon this limitation may be suspect.

3.8.1.2.1. Resonance of artistic responses

All artistic responses except for two (records #206 and #318) are based upon the Demir photoset: the sources for all artistic responses has been mapped in Chart 4 below.²⁰⁹

Distribution of source photography for artistic works



Sum of Retweets for each Demir broken down by Pic Type. The data is filtered on Demir?, which keeps Y. The view is filtered on Pic Type and Demir1. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir1 filter has multiple members selected.

Chart 4: Source imagery for artistic responses to the image of Alan, measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau with photographs added.

Of these, a particular photograph was shared particularly widely: Sudarsan Pattnaik creating a sand sculpture of Alan (Figure 35; photographed by Asit Kumar of *Agence France-Presse/Getty*). 29 separate tweets contain this photograph.²¹⁰ 144 tweets

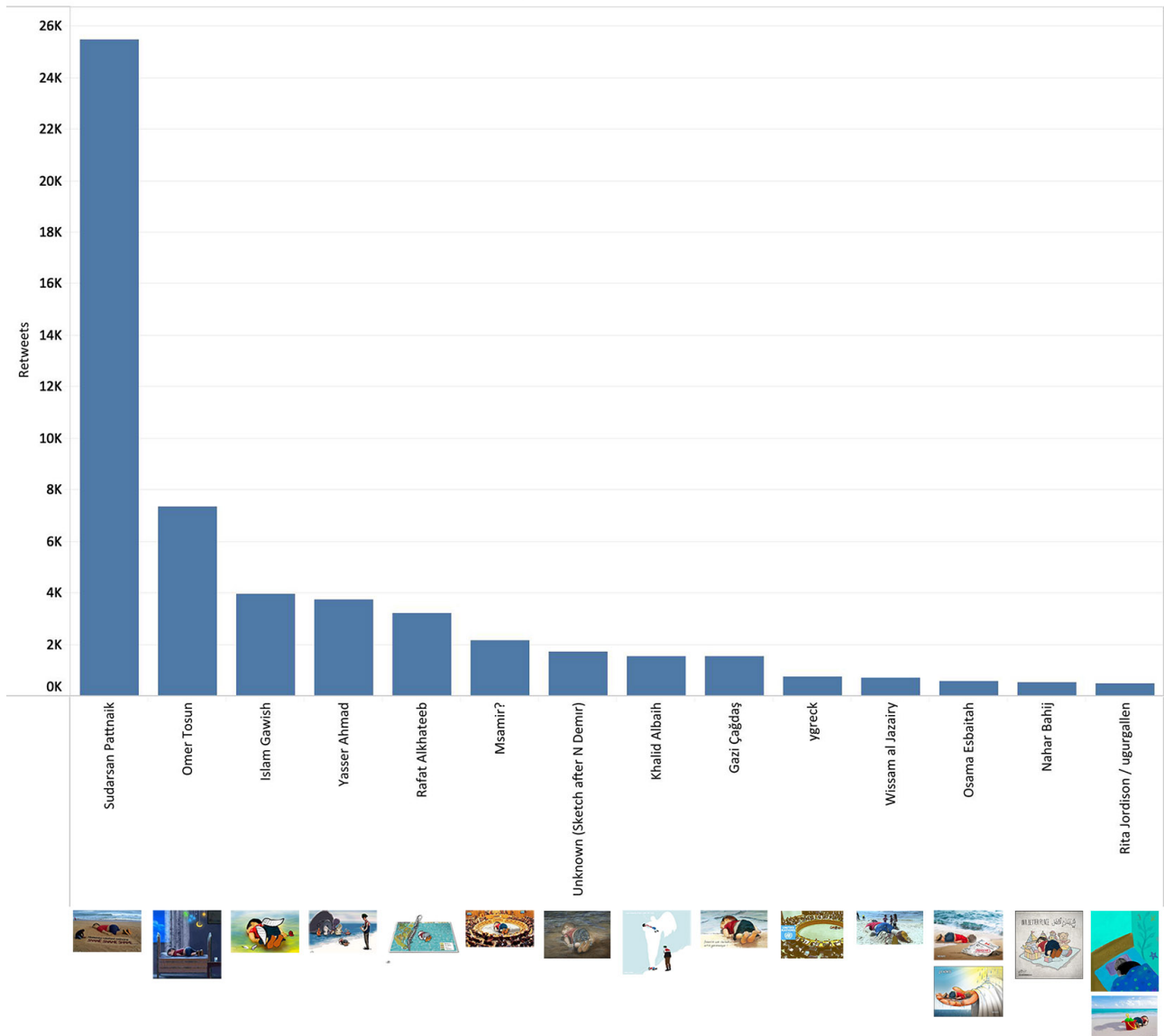


²⁰⁹ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y". To verify that all the pictures are based upon the Demir photoset, the filter "Demir?" may also be set to "Y".

²¹⁰ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; "Attrib1" set to "Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar".

contained interpretations by other artists. The 14 most widely retweeted artistic mediations of Alan are mapped out in below. The artistic renditions follow specific thematic patterns, all of which are represented in these most retweeted pictures. The patterns are not mutually exclusive: several incorporate multiple themes.

Artistic works based upon the Demir photoset (retweets)



Sum of Retweets for each Attribution broken down by Art? vs. Alan in it?. The data is filtered on sum of Reaction Count and Exclusions (Alan in it?,Art?,Attrib1). The sum of Reaction Count filter ranges from 500 to 29,570. The Exclusions (Alan in it?,Art?,Attrib1) filter keeps 310 members. The view is filtered on Alan in it? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Art? filter keeps

Chart 5: The most widely-shared artistic responses to the image of Alan, measured by number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau with pictures added. Details from this chart follow below.



Sudarsan Pattnaik



Omer Tosun



Islam Gawish



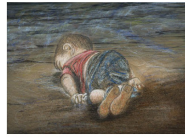
Yasser Ahmad



Rafat Alkhateeb



Msamir (attr)



Unk-Sketch after Demir



Khalid Albaih



Gazi Çağdaş



ygreck



ugurgallen



Wissam al Jazairy



Osama Esbaitah



Nahar Bahij



Rita V. Jordison



ugurgallen

- **Placing blame** (90 tweets).²¹¹ Blame for the death of refugees—Alan specifically, or symbolically representing all refugees—is placed upon humanity in general, or specific people or institutions in particular. The emotive emphasis varies between placing specific blame to accusing actors of duplicity, wilful blindness or otherwise shameful behaviour. The targets for opprobrium also vary considerably, including humanity in general, anti-refugee border policing, the European Union, the *Ummah* (the Muslim community, أمة), the Arab League, the Canadian government, the Australian and Italian Prime Ministers, Syria's Assad, and Iran's Khamenei. Examples include those by Sudarsan Pattnaik, Rafat Alkhateeb, Msamir (attributed), Gazi Çağdaş, ygreck, Wissam al Jazairy, Pat Chappatte, Salvatwitts, Lina Abgaradeh, Joann Sfarr, Tjeerd Royaards, Pito Campos, Alfio Krancic, Dave Pope, Gathon, Foufigh, Harm Bengen, Plantu, and four Unknown artists (identified as “After N. Demir”, “Ummah”, “Arab Conscience”, and “Assad, Khomeini Wedding on the Beach” in the datasheet).
- **Monumentality** (60 tweets).²¹² Alan is depicted larger than life. Examples include those by Sudarsan Pattnaik, Rafat Alkhateeb, Msamir (attributed), Wissam al Jazairy, Osama Esbaitah and Kichka.
- **Sleep** (56 tweets).²¹³ The image of Alan dead on the beach is either partly or fully domesticated to suggest that he is asleep. There is a significant overlap with evocations of childhood. Examples

²¹¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicTh-Censure” set to include everything except for “Other” and “-” (not present). Records #66, #287, #765, are #987 are excluded from this tally because the actions of the figures depicted appear to be *after* Alan’s death: they are not blamed *for* his death. The media figures prominently among these exceptions.

²¹² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicDescr” set to search for entries containing the word “giant”. Records #363 and #405 are discounted, because Alan is not rendered in a gigantic size; rather, it is the hand holding him.

²¹³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicTh-Other” set to “Sleep”.

include those by Omer Tosun, Nahar Bahij, Rita Jordison, Yante Ismail, Pito Campos, Monsieur Kak, Khaled Kharajah, Lina Abgaradeh, and an Unknown artist (identified as “Sleeping Family Beach” in the datasheet).

- **Evocations of childhood** (42 tweets).²¹⁴ Elements are added to the picture to evoke characteristics of childhood. Examples include those by Omer Tosun, Yaser Ahmad, Nahar Bahij, Ugurgallen, Joyce Karam, Gunduz Aghayev, Pito Campos, Murat Sayin, Ulystrations, Lina Abgaradeh.
- **Supernatural elements** (33 tweets).²¹⁵ The picture includes angel’s wings, the presence of supernatural figures such as angels, a deity, or ghosts—frequently larger than life—or explicit references to heaven. These include pictures by Islam Gawish, Khalid Albaih, ygreck, Zezo, Inkquitive, Naser Jafari, and two Unknown artists (identified as “Divine Hands” and “Sleeping Family Beach” in the datasheet).
- **Indifference** (18 tweets).²¹⁶ The death of Alan is viewed with unconcern, indifference, or a disproportionately minimal response. When the accusation is directed at the public in general, it is viewed through the lens of technological preoccupation or distraction. Indifference has a significant overlap with the “Placing blame” category above: in such examples, individuals or organisations are blamed for the death of the child but react inappropriately. Examples include Msamir (attributed), Wissam al Jazairy, Abdullah Jaber, Aimantoons, Pat Chappatte, Harm Bengen, and an Unknown artist (identified as “Assad, Khameini Wedding on the Beach” in the datasheet).

3.8.1.3. Images of Alan: family snapshots

Alan’s image was also circulated via family snapshots. As indicated earlier, the surviving family wished the child to be remembered alive and smiling. Vis (2015) noted that Alan, alive, takes up 17% of the top 100 Alan pictures. Again, as above, the situation is more complicated due to the presence of multiple pictures. Tweets exclusively showing Alan alive in snapshots take up a smaller percentage, 53 of 386 pictures (13.7% of the pictures of Alan, which is 5.3% of the total datasheet; this constitutes 37,495 retweets, or 20.7% of all posts retweeting pictures of Alan).²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicTh-Fam” set to everything except for “-” (not present).

²¹⁵ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicTh-Spirit” set to include everything except for “-” (not present).

²¹⁶ This must be tallied manually, as several examples overlap considerably with placing blame. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “PicTh-Censure” set to “Other” yields two results (records #172 and #218). 16 examples from “Cruelty” and “Shame” also seem to be relevant, including pictures of Alan amongst representatives of the European Union and Arab League (records #81, #121, #134, #241, #387, #411, #573, #600, #949, #1001, #1029, #1034 and #1095).

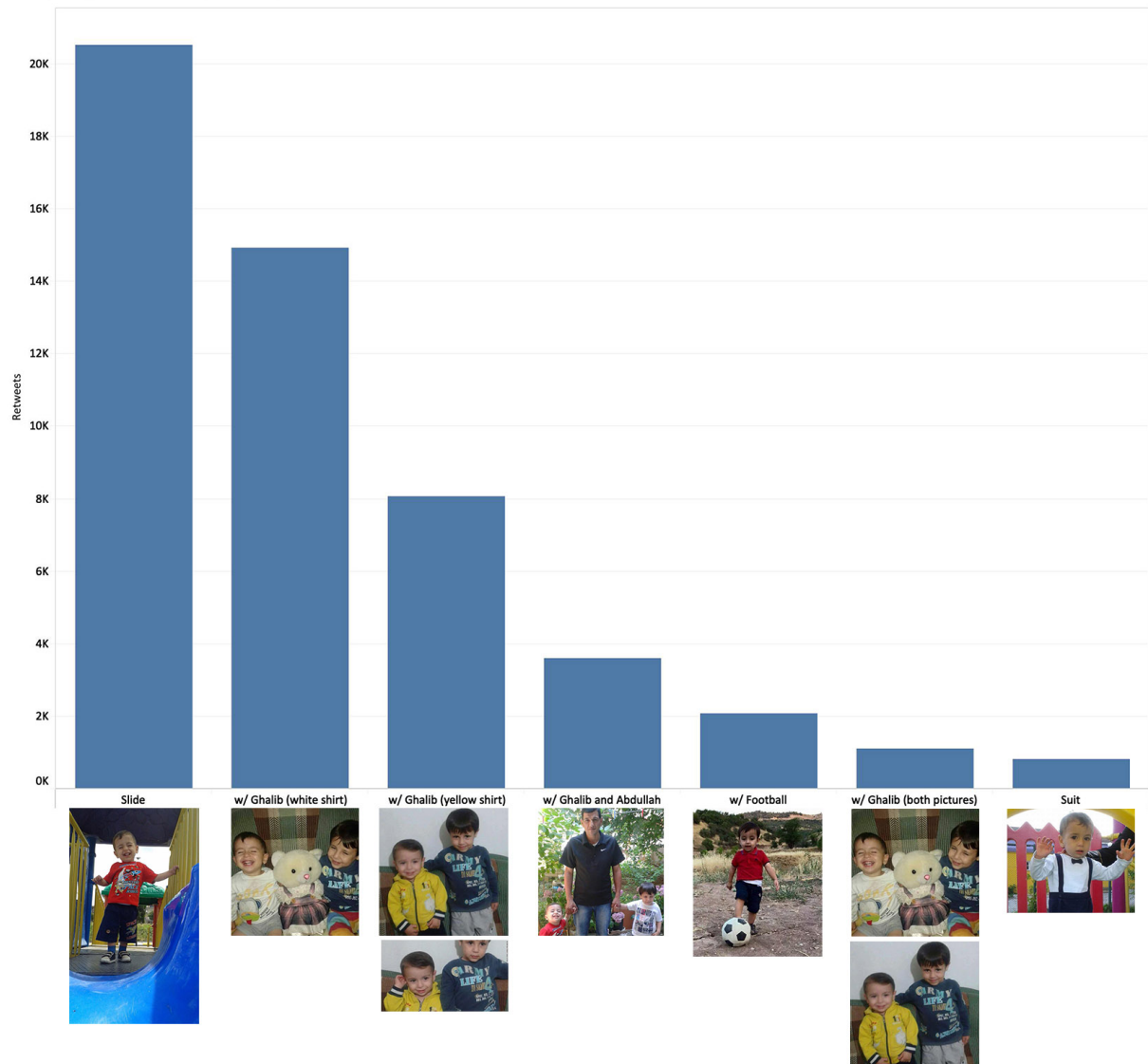
²¹⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “N”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; and “Pic Type” set to “Family snap”.

But Alan is shown alive in family snapshots alongside other contexts in 64 posts (16.6% of the tweets showing Alan, which is 6.4% of the total datasheet; consisting of 45,390 retweets or 25% of all retweets with Alan in them).²¹⁸

In the datasheet, there are seven separate family snapshots:

- **Alan alone.** Alan was photographed at the top of a slide, kicking a football, or wearing a special suit during some sort of celebration. The most retweeted family snapshot is that of Alan, smiling, on top of the slide (Chart 6 below).

Family Snapshots of Alan (retweets)



Sum of Retweets for each Family Snaps broken down by Alan in it? and Fam?. The data is filtered on Fam1, which has multiple members selected. The view is filtered on Alan in it?, Fam? and sum of Retweets. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Fam? filter keeps Y. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 750 to 20,521 and keeps Null values.

Chart 6: Family snapshot distribution via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau with photographs added.

²¹⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”.

- **Alan with Ghalib.** Three photographs show him exclusively with his brother Ghalib. In one, Alan wears white, and there are two variations in which Alan wears a yellow top. Both undergo a number of crops in the datasheet. The two individual pictures of Alan with Ghalib were widely shared by accounts with large numbers of subscribers.
- **Alan with Ghalib and Abdullah.** One photograph shows Alan smiling with his brother Ghalib; both of them hold the hands of their father, Abdullah.

None of the photographs in the datasheet show Rehana, the children's mother: a "notably visible absence", she is the likely photographer, which is a common role for mothers within families (Vis, 2015:28; Rose, 2010).²¹⁹

It is evident from Chart 6 that there appeared to have been a definite preference for photographs of Alan smiling broadly. The pictures of Alan filed with concentration or in the midst of saying something (that is, with the football or in his special suit) are far less widely shared.

As before, the family snapshots can be broken down further.

- 52 of the tweets (13.5%) exclusively show family snapshots.²²⁰ 32 tweets show both Alan and his brother Ghalib;²²¹ 13 of those expressly mention that Ghalib died as well, and only one of these explains that their mother perished in the incident.
- 17 (nearly 4.5%) depict Alan alive and dead: that is, the tweet contains at least one photograph by Nilüfer Demir as well as one family snapshot.²²²
- 11 of the tweets (2.8%) contain multiple types of images, for example placing Alan upon newspaper covers and amidst news items about the surviving family's reaction to their loss.²²³
- 4 of the tweets have family snapshots shown on newspaper covers exclusively.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Only 10 tweets in the entire datasheet explain that Rehana died as well. 4 tweets refer to the mother by name; 6 further tweets, referring to her as the children's mother, note her death. Filter recipes: 1) "Tweet txt" set to search entries which contain either "Rihan" or "Rahan" ("Tweet txt" unavailable in the redacted version of the datasheet); 2) Two filter recipes: "Tweet txt" set to search entries containing "mother"; "TweetTransl" set to search entries containing "mother".

²²⁰ Filter recipe: Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Fam?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" set to "Family snap".

²²¹ Filter recipe: as before, with "Pic Type" set to "Family snap"; "Pic Descr" set to search entries which contain "Ghalib".

²²² Vis (2015) noted only one example of Alan depicted both alive and dead in the top 100 pictures in the dataset, but this is because there is one image file depicting Alan both alive and dead in that section; elsewhere, Twitter users supply multiple image-files.

²²³ Filter recipe: Filter recipe: Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Fam?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" has all selected with the exception of "Family snap".

²²⁴ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Fam?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" instead set to "Newspaper".

- 2 of the tweets appear to be screenshots from online photo galleries with tell-tale clues of a cleared-out background.²²⁵
- One tweet appears to be a still from a video.²²⁶
- The origin of a picture from one further tweet is unknown—it may have been by a professional photographer or a professional photograph captured from a video still.²²⁷
- 24 (6.2%) of the tweets containing a family snapshot of Alan display multiple image files.²²⁸
- 16 of these are paired with a photograph by Nilüfer Demir.²²⁹
- 4 of the tweets contain a family snapshot on newspaper covers.
- 1 contains photographs of both Alan and Ghalib lying on the beach.
- 1 contains an artistic response image based upon Demir’s photography.
- One tweet contrasts Alan with his father and a photograph of Alan’s father crying.
- Finally, one tweet contains a newspaper with Alan’s face on it paired with a photograph of Alan’s destroyed home town, Kobane.

3.8.2. Tweets about the refugee crisis

612 (61.2% of the full datasheet, consisting of 210,158 retweets, or 56.45% of the total) of the top 1,000 image-containing tweets in the dataset do not represent Alan at all.²³⁰ 610 are about the refugee crisis and the international response to it.²³¹ This portion of the data is more heterogeneous than that containing images of Alan Kurdi. Categorisation is thus less clear. The following is hardly a complete list—there is considerable overlap in categories—and only provides an introduction to the majority of the contents of this section.

²²⁵ Filter recipe: as before, with “Pic Type” instead set to “Screenshot”.

²²⁶ Filter recipe: as before, with “Pic Type” instead set to “Video still”.

²²⁷ Filter recipe: as before, with “Pic Type” instead set to “Unknown”.

²²⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; and “Attrib2” is set with a filter that does not begin with a “-” (not present).

²²⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Fam” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “N”.

²³⁰ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” is set to “N”.

²³¹ There are two exceptions: one (record #84) describes an incident in Malaysia wholly unrelated to the crisis (but uses #humanitywashedashore to amplify its message) and the other (#248) unfavourably compares Twitter’s use of sensitivity filters on an image of dead Palestinian children. Record #148 is of a cartoon of an EU diplomat, but the diplomat is clearly posed like Alan, and thus it is unclear whether this is an “image of Alan”, given that it clearly refers to it. In addition, it is unclear whether the aforementioned records #597 and #917 reference Alan (however obliquely). It is arguable that they should be placed here, raising the number of tweets about the refugee crisis in back to 612.

155 of the tweets contain pictures of refugee crowds.²³² 31 of these show the refugees in clear indications of distress: children and adults alike cry out.²³³

- **Professional photographs of refugees.** 65 tweets show professional-quality photographs of refugees.²³⁴ 55 of them have children present; only 7 show the children happy as well.²³⁵ These pictures favour a number of different shots:
 - Wide-angle shots depicting very large groups of refugees;
 - A large crowd of refugees walking;
 - Medium-shot pictures of adults, usually with children, overcome by emotions;
 - Children held aloft as they disembark from dinghies;
 - Close focuses upon children, framed such that surrounding adults are faceless.
- **Refugees as vulnerable people.** 65 of the tweets depicting refugees show signs of vulnerability: parents clutching children, children grasping at adults, and children isolated from family. These pictures are spread across different pictorial types, including professional photography, graphic design, journalism, and montages.²³⁶ 15 of the tweets overlap with expressions of distress.²³⁷
- **Mediated calls to action.** 34 of the tweets with refugees contain graphic design. It is notable that the majority of these are appeals and calls to action. Many come from organisations such as Save the Children, but *the Independent* figures prominently as well, given that the newspaper campaigned for viewers to sign their petition welcoming refugees.²³⁸
- **Art about refugees.** 14 are pictures of art, covering political cartoons and two historical paintings.²³⁹

²³² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

²³³ Filter recipe: as above, with “Pic Descr” set to search for entries that contain “distress”.

²³⁴ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photograph”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”. It is notable that amongst this group, the one picture of refugees struggling accompanies a tweet that suggests refugees are a danger to the West.

²³⁵ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photograph”; “PicTh-Child” set to display both “Alive” and “Alive and happy”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

²³⁶ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Context” set to “Vulnerability”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

²³⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”; “Pic Descr” set to search for entries that contain “distress”.

²³⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicType” set to “Graphic design”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

²³⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Art”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

- **Archival parallels.** 7 tweets contain archival photos; their accompanying text implicitly (and twice, explicitly) contrast the assistance refugees received in the past and to the perceived indifference meeting them today.²⁴⁰
- **Images in action.** 7 tweets are tweets containing video stills depicting refugees. Most of these show the Hungarian camerawoman Petra László tripping refugees as they attempted to flee across a field.²⁴¹

Other prominent themes include:

- **Signs.** 96 tweets contain photographs which contain prominent displays of signs.²⁴² The surrounding context varies significantly, including demonstrations, football matches, individuals, and parodies. The vast majority are in favour of refugees.²⁴³
- **Masses of people at demonstrations.** 49 tweets contain pictures of demonstrations.²⁴⁴ 47 of these are demonstrations calling upon governments to welcome more refugees into their respective countries, whilst two produce images of demonstrating Muslims suggesting that they are a danger to Western values; 3 recreate Alan's posture on the beach.
- 32 of the tweets contain artworks: the majority are political cartoons, but they also contain older paintings and a work from the Banksy-organised *Dismaland* exhibition which was on display at the time.²⁴⁵
- 31 tweets (2 with refugees) contain images of the destruction of cities.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "Pic Type" set to "Archival photo"; PicTh-Crowd" set to "Refugees". If one alters this recipe to search for the "Pic Type" of "Montage", one will find two more explicit comparisons.

²⁴¹ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "Pic Type" set to "Video still"; PicTh-Crowd" set to "Refugees".

²⁴² Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "PicTh-Context" set to "Sign".

²⁴³ This filter provides an object-lesson in examining the tweet for broader context. One tweet (record #518) shows a man with a sign claiming that Gulf States have not provided any support for refugees (a claim echoed in other tweets in very different contexts); the photograph is neutral about the sign-holder's attitudes towards welcoming refugees in his own country. However, the accompanying text makes it clear that the author of the tweet considers this a threat, adding the hashtag "#whitegenocide": this hashtag is often used amongst racist groups and individuals. Another tweet (record #441) displays a newspaper cover with prominent UK citizens displaying signs welcoming refugees, but the accompanying tweet suggests the tweet is a parody: refugees can stay with these people specifically and, it is implied, refugees are not welcome in the UK more broadly.

²⁴⁴ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "PicTh-Crowd" set to "Demonstration".

²⁴⁵ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "Pic type" set to "Art". For more on the *Dismaland* exhibition, which ran from 21 August–27 September 2015: <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/08/dismaland/>. [Accessed 31 October 2017]. Nearly 30% of these tweets contain a single cartoon. Filter recipe: as above, with "Attrib1" set to "Simon Kneebone".

²⁴⁶ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "PicTh-Context" set to "Destruction".

- 19 pictures show elements directly relating to football: the overwhelming majority of these are of football fans unfurling banners in support of refugees.²⁴⁷ 17 tweets display elements of sport directly.²⁴⁸ Whilst these are all related specifically to football, only a handful show football players: others include club logos, photographs of stadia, football clothing, and football managers.
- 19 tweets asserting that refugees pose an imminent threat.²⁴⁹
- 17 tweets show images of cruelty to refugees.²⁵⁰
- 17 show images of people with statements from the person represented. They include the Pope, politicians from different countries, media commentators, and also include Abdullah Kurdi, Nilüfer Demir, and the poet Warsan Shire, whose words are quoted frequently in the dataset.²⁵¹
- 12 tweets contain images that point the finger at specific people or countries as having caused the crisis.²⁵²

3.8.2.1. “Orphaned” tweets

As mentioned above, 139 tweets no longer have pictures attached to them because the tweets themselves have been removed since their original publication.²⁵³ Their contents may have been made private by the owner, the account owner may have closed the account, or the account may have been shut down by Twitter. These are strictly speaking outside the purview of this research project since they lack any imagery. They are worth a brief introduction, however, because they follow their own patterns. Because they lack images, thematic parsing is based upon the datasheet’s textual filters.

Many are clearly about Alan: they describe his death, they mention how they feel about Alan, they describe both Alan and Ghalib, or they describe the picture in some meaningful way. Because they are like other tweets that still retain their image files, it is tempting—but futile—to guess which specific pictures they shared. For instance, record #213 claims it presents the last photo of Alan alive before he was murdered; the author apports blame to the world in general and to Assad in particular. A handful of other tweets in the datasheet claim to share the “last”

²⁴⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Football”.

²⁴⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Context” set to “Sport”.

²⁴⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Censure” set to “Danger”.

²⁵⁰ Filter recipe: as before, with “PicTh-Censure” instead set to “Cruelty”.

²⁵¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Graphic design”; “PicTh-Context” set to “Headshot”.

²⁵² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; PicTh-Censure” set to “Placing blame”.

²⁵³ Filter recipe: “Images” set to “Missing”. For a matter of record, the retweets amount to 34,525 retweets, or 8.5% of the entire datasheet of 406,787 retweets.

photograph of Alan before his death: they all show Alan kicking a football.²⁵⁴ In other instances, authors state the theme that it is better to remember Alan alive and not dead. Almost certainly they presented a photograph of Alan alive, although it is not cannot be guessed which family snapshot, specifically, would have been shared.²⁵⁵

10 tweets appear to be **statements of support**.²⁵⁶ Because many are like other tweets (e.g., describing Palestinian children demonstrating in support of Alan, or referring to the Borussia Dortmund football match), these are almost certainly statements of genuine support. But others containing only hashtags cannot but trusted: other examples in the datasheet play upon the difference between the statement and the picture to place themselves at a critical distance to support.²⁵⁷

7 of the deleted tweets are **critical of the refugee crisis**. There is a distinct rightward slant to these tweets—some were tweeted by a no-longer-existing account called “Alt Right”, and others use the hashtag #deport. These uniformly cast the refugee crisis in a very negative light, often suggesting that it was an “invasion” of Europe. One adversarial tweet (#754) may have been about Alan: making a claim about propaganda as opposed to the reality of the situation, it states that “that child” was safe in Turkey. It is notable that this is the only tweet that is conceivably about Alan that is critical about refugees. These account owners, eager as they were to portray refugees as invaders, clearly saw the affective power of Alan’s image as radioactive to their cause.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a practical way to organise pictures shared on social media for iconographic analysis. It has identified the substantial benefits—and problems—associated with using Pulsar Platform, an online tool for social media analysis. In order to benefit from the affordances of social media phenomena and yet achieve replicable results, it outlines multiple practical and theoretical steps required to query and parse data meaningfully. It argues for the need for significant human intervention, in particular for the identification of replicated textual and pictorial themes and the concomitant intersections between text and image. This process

²⁵⁴ Filter recipe: “Fam1” set to “w/ Football”. Records #103 and #1013 claim this is the last photograph; Record #319 claims that in the football picture, Alan is wearing the same clothing as when he was found on the beach, implying that this is one of the last photographs of the child alive.

²⁵⁵ Compare the spread of family snapshots with the filter recipe: “Tweet Summ” set to “Remember him alive, not dead”.

²⁵⁶ Filter recipe: “Images” set to “Missing”; “Tweet Summ” set to “Support”.

²⁵⁷ Filter recipes: “Images” set to “Missing”; “Tweet Summ” set to “Unknown”. Compare with everything selected for “Images” and “Tweet Summ” set to “Parody”, especially records #75, #94, #368, and #471.

was instantiated in the creation of a datasheet, but it can be abstracted for other projects. However, it was tailored for the peculiarities of this particular dataset and the Twitter platform.

In this instance, the data was organised into a spreadsheet because spreadsheets offer useful tools for filtering their contents; however, another system, such as a full database, might well be more powerful, given that it is not subject to a spreadsheet's constraints. No matter the exact form of presentation, however, this is not the end-product of the research: it is merely a tool to provide a clearer visualisation of patterns. On its own, it is insufficient, e.g., for tallying the relative popularity of individual pictures or themes; it needs to be passed onto other tools such as Tableau for such overviews. To visualise the ways pictures share overlapping iconographic elements, I will supply a number of montages, jointly inspired by Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Venn diagrams. The larger lesson to be gleaned from this process is that no single piece of software provides the full toolset for the complicated queries one may wish to make of the data.

Even after having assembled this toolset and data, however, the real work of this research project has not yet begun. The datasheet is part of a larger assemblage, the purpose of which is to lay bare multiple patterns of visual and textual expression and resonance. In this project, the toolset will be passed through the (very human) methodology of iconography for analysis. This datasheet helps provide demonstrable evidence both for categorising imagery—an essential component of traditional iconography—and the textual responses to that imagery—the accounting of which I have earlier argued is essential for an updated form of iconography. Whilst it does not fully replace the steps of object-oriented description or iconographic interpretation, it provides support for making the process of interpretation stand upon a firmer ground in subsequent chapters. Allying the datasheet with data analytics software will provide different levels of analysis, connecting specific phrases with specific pictures, and ultimately providing significant textual and visual evidence for connections to long-standing imagery.

Chapter 4: Alan Kurdi: viral photography and visual and textual responses

4.1. Introduction

This chapter concentrates upon the images of Alan Kurdi shared on Twitter in the two-week period following his death on 2 September 2015. The chapter begins by describing the chronology for different images of Alan over the two-week period from 2 September through 14 September 2015. Three separate image types—the original photographs, meme-like “response” images based upon those photographs, and family snapshots of Alan alive—became popular at different points, but all types were present nearly from the start. The chapter continues with an introduction to the photoset taken by Nilüfer Demir on Bodrum Beach that morning, along with briefer introductions to the family snapshots and response imagery made by image makers. It will then focus upon three particularly evocative themes invoked by both visual and textual responses to the Demir photoset: the interplay of death and sleep, children as angels, and the larger-than-life monument. All three are situated in the broader history of image making, both visual and textual. These are examined for the implications of the theme’s use in these particular instances.

This chapter adopts an approach that differs from the majority of research on Alan Kurdi. Previous research concentrates upon the reactions of newspapers and/or citizens to Demir’s photographs, rarely engaging with the photographs themselves (Van Schaik, 2015; Bozdağ and Smets, 2017; Chouliaraki and Zabarowski, 2017; Ramírez Plascencia, 2017; Topinka, 2017; Mortensen et al., 2017; Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018).²⁵⁸ Others use the photographs as a jumping-off point for other discussions of affective or moral considerations: in the main, these

²⁵⁸ The fullest engagement with the imagery is by Topinka (2017), who does not engage with the original photographs, but fully engages with response imagery whose mockery of Alan on the subreddit *r/ImGoingToHellForThis* acts as indications of nationalist/racist tendencies. See particularly Topinka (2017:1415) for his analysis of a *Buzzfeed* parody, which focuses perceptively on the mechanics of the image. Bozdağ and Smets (2017) examine the texts of Twitter responses emanating from Turkey and Flanders, whilst rarely specifying which photographs of Alan were shared: they do not weigh these posts according to numbers of retweets, and conclude that there was little shift in the conversation about refugees. Chouliaraki and Zabarowski (2017) and Van Schaik (2015) both study coverage of refugees in a number of European newspapers over a year, noting that the death of Alan signified a brief sympathetic turning-point. Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018) study the responses by readers posting reactions on the Facebook pages of a number of European newspapers and follow up with interviews a year afterwards. They note that iconic photographs initially evoke strong responses; fade from view as their veracity is questioned; and enjoy an iconic renaissance afterwards as they are remembered more for their symbolism of particular events rather than for their specificity. Mortensen et al. (2017) examine the editorial justifications for printing Demir’s photographs published in a number of European newspapers, noting a significant degree of self-reflexivity. Ramírez Plascencia (2017) examines the different framing of the story by German newspapers across the political spectrum; those on the left demand support for refugees, whilst those on the right question the ethics of showing Demir’s photographs.

cite Demir's photographs and swiftly move on (Grain and Lund, 2016; Mortensen and Trenz, 2016; Pedwell, 2017; Slovic et al., 2017; Pliskin et al., 2018).²⁵⁹ Studies focusing upon visual representation engage more fully with the photographs and—occasionally—with the response pictures, but do not engage with the specificities of the platform upon which they were shared (Fehrenbach and Rodogno, 2015; Lenette and Cleland, 2016; Lenette and Miskovic, 2016; Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017; Durham, 2018; Mortensen, 2017; de Lima and de Carvalho, 2018).²⁶⁰ My initial essay on the death of Alan (Drainville, 2015) followed this third pattern. This chapter bases its claims on representative data. It considers the characteristics of the photographs and response images, the reactions to them both, and their emergence on social media as powerfully intertwined. Together, they provide significant evidence for interpretative response patterns: why certain pictures were shared at all, when they were shared, and what Twitter users wrote and responded to in reaction to the sight of these pictures.

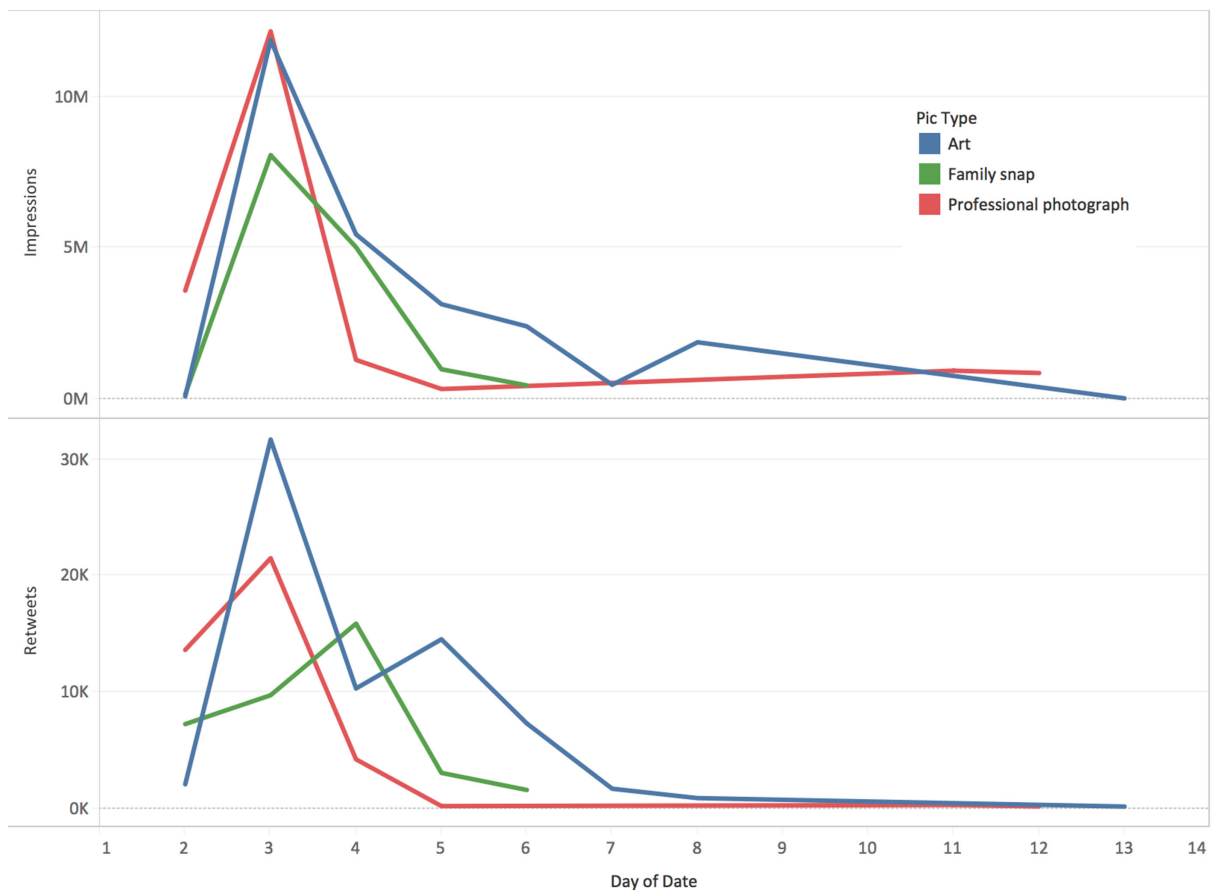
4.2. Chronology of imagery

As stated in the previous chapter, Alan is represented in 386 of the datasheet's 1,000 extant picture-bearing tweets. There are three image types depicting Alan Kurdi: the photographs by

²⁵⁹ The fullest engagement is by Mortensen and Trenz, who study the rise of impromptu publics, moral spectatorship and the emergence of "shared reflexivity", in which pictures of Alan are emotionally recontextualised into previous stories or "old news" (Mortensen and Trenz, 2016:351–52). The rest treat the photographs as the source of reaction. Grain and Lund (2016) and Pedwell (2017) both query how one might operationalise affect in service of social change: the former concentrates more practically on NGOs, whilst the latter creates an underlying theoretical structure. Pliskin et al. (2018) conduct psychological investigations of the effects left-right political positions have upon sympathy, noting the impact of ideological bias (justice for those on the left, in-group protection for those on the right). Slovic et al. (2017) centre their study on the emergence of the Demir photographs and their affective impact but assess the psychology of sympathy whereby the death of one person creates stronger empathic connection than the deaths of large numbers.

²⁶⁰ Of these, Fehrenbach and Rodogno (2015) engage with the Demir photoset least, but they place the photoset in a firm context of missionary and NGO imagery of suffering and dying children. Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) provide a taxonomy of refugee imagery with regard to the public's responsibility to act (see below and Chapter 5). Durham (2018) conducts a semiotic interpretation of one of the Demir photographs and two of the response images, arguing for a trivialisation of the photograph's iconic power in the latter. Following the VSML's report, de Lima and de Carvalho (2018) explore thematic resonances in the original photoset and response imagery, noting the reuse of Alan in a Central American context a year later. Lenette and Cleland (2016) concentrate on properties of the image of Alan, comparing it to pictures of other suffering refugees in order to query why it went viral and they did not: they conclude that Alan's image differed from standard visual tropes of refugees. Lenette and Miskovic (2016) note the paucity of imagery depicting the deaths of refugees at border crossings, and suggest that Alan's image went viral because details of his life (his name, age, and the like) became known to the public, converting him from an anonymous victim to a specific person. Mortensen (2017) examines the appropriation of the Demir photographs in terms of both de- and re-contextualisation, and claims that the reappropriation of imagery "in the modern sense" is a 20th-century phenomenon, citing "avant-garde movements" and "pop art and appropriation art" (Mortensen, 2017:1144)—ignoring several millennia of artistic practice. She argues de- and re-contextualisation of iconic imagery fixes the status of iconic imagery.

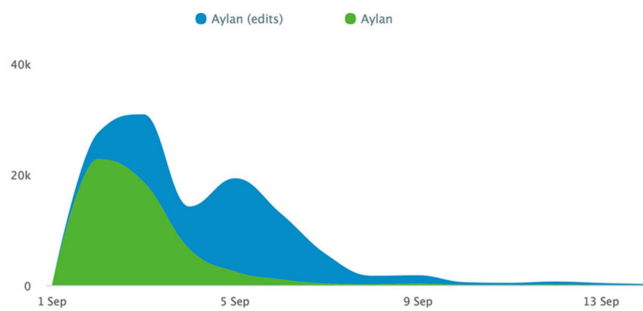
Nilüfer Demir, artistic responses, or mediations of the original photoset, and family snapshots of Alan supplied by his family. The waves of sharing of these different image types are represented on Chart 2; the red line represents Demir’s photoset, the blue line represents artistic responses, and the green line tracks the sharing of family snapshots of Alan. The chart is divided between “impressions” (the top metric) and retweets (the bottom). Impressions favour Twitter accounts with large followings, such as news organisations or celebrities. Twitter users subscribing to these feeds are *likely to have seen* the pictures presented on those accounts. Indeed, if one reorganises the datasheet into an ascending order of impressions (i.e., larger numbers of impressions first), one sees that the list is dominated by news organisations and celebrities. In contrast, retweets highlight the attention particular posts *received in a concrete way, that is, by the act of retweeting*: as mentioned in the previous chapter, this arguably represents a more organic metric of Twitter users’ preferences.²⁶¹



The trends of sum of Impressions and sum of Retweets for Date Day. Color shows details about Pic Type. The data is filtered on Alan in it?, which keeps Present. The view is filtered on Pic Type, which keeps Art, Family snap and Professional photograph.

In his overview of image sharing, D’Orazio presented a chart (Chart 1) showing the separate rises of two different image types: “Alan”, which covers both Demir’s photographs and family

²⁶¹ However, it should be recalled that counting via retweets remains a crude metric, for it is not possible to ask whether a user retweeted a post because they found the picture compelling, fully agreed with the sentiment expressed in the original post, or some other consideration.



snapshots, and “Alan edits”, which are the artistic responses to Demir’s photographs. He summarised the early chronology thus: “whereas the original images of Aylan Kurdi have dominated the first 48 hours of the diffusion

cycle, from September 4th onward they have been replaced by user-generated variations on the original images designed by illustrators and graphic designers” (D’Orazio, 2015:17–18).

Chart 2 shows a slightly different chronology, however, in part because it divides D’Orazio’s original two image types into three. The intensity of sharing peaked earlier, on 3 September: Demir’s photographs of Alan indeed dominated on 2 September (24 separate records, 13,638 retweets, over 3.5 million impressions, a number that increases if one takes into account representations of Demir’s photographs on, e.g., newspaper covers). On 3 September, artistic mediations rival Demir’s photographs in terms of impressions, and surpass them in terms of retweets and individual records.²⁶² Sharing then entered a decline, a familiar pattern of virality extending into the “long tail” of continuous but low-level sharing after an initial burst of attention (Nahon and Hemsley, 2013). There are revivals of interest on specific days: on 4 September, family snapshots of Alan are shared on the day he, his brother, and mother were buried; on 5 September, artistic works spike again when Sudarsan Pattnaik’s sand sculpture of Alan was shared widely, and 8 September artistic imagery spikes again, when Osama Esbaitah’s sand sculpture was shared.²⁶³ These chronological flashpoints are consistent with the “volatility in terms of frequent discursive shifts and unstable attention cycles” of “moral spectatorship” described by Mortensen and Trenz (2016:346). However, the chart also shows differences of behaviour between posts presented by accounts enjoying large numbers of impressions and more organic retweets. Impressions—a measurement of “likely exposure” to the photograph, given that the poster (likely a news organisation, celebrity, or politician) has a significant number of followers—spike early, with virtually coequal displays of Demir’s photographs and artistic mediations of these photographs. This is a phenomenon described by Chouliaraki (2013): news organisations report not just current events, but stories about affective content that people have

²⁶² Professional photographs on 3 September: 41 records, 21,529 retweets, and 12.2 million impressions. Artistic mediations on 3 September: 92 records, 31,747 retweets, and 11.9 million impressions. Family snapshots: 31 records, 9,733 retweets, and 260,743 impressions. These metrics are based upon sharing of exclusive picture types (professional image, art, or family snapshot), not mixtures, of which there are few.

²⁶³ Filter recipes: For 4 September: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Pic type” set to “Family snap”; and “Date” set to 4 September. For 5 and 8 September: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Pic type” set to “Art”; “Date” set to 5 or 8 September. Pattnaik’s sculpture initially appeared in the evening on 4 September, but it was only shared more widely on the following day.

posted, and in the datasheet, large-scale presentations of artistic mediations are framed in terms of the global response to the death of Alan.

As a block, the most retweeted pictures were artistic mediations of the original photoset, as if people were attempting to assign some meaning to the child's death: how to commemorate him, who to blame for his death, and how things might have ended differently.

4.2.1. Ethics of showing the body

Retweets of Demir's photograph do not recover their initial prominence, and this likely reflects broader ethical and racial considerations. This is likely due to the ethical controversies surrounding the image that were widely reported in print news at the time (Wardle, 2015; Ramírez Plascencia, 2017; Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018). Very early on, prominent people such as Peter Bouckaert of Human Right Watch and Liz Sly of the *Washington Post* felt called upon to justify showing the photograph of a dead child (Bouckaert, 2015; Sly, 2015). Both emphasised that they felt justified sharing the photograph because of the growing crisis, suggesting a laying-aside of standard ethical considerations in the course of an extraordinary event. As Anne Burns (2015b:38) has noted, the political justification to show the image of Alan on the beach "is cited in order to redeem the image's circulation".

Aside from the ethics of showing a corpse, the acceptability of showing Alan, dead, was viewed through racial lenses, in mutually contradictory ways. Nadine El-Enany (2016) thought that it was deemed acceptable to view Alan's body because of his light skin colour, allowing him to overcome a European distancing of the Muslim or dark-skinned Other familiar from Orientalism; this sentiment is echoed in the datasheet a number of times by those who criticise sharing Alan's picture in contrast to the silence surrounding the deaths of darker-skinned children worldwide.²⁶⁴ Alternatively, however, the author Mona Eltahawy criticised the presentation of Alan, dead, because the child was brown-skinned. She noted (record #589, 3 September 2015) that in both life and death, white-skinned bodies are afforded dignity whereas black- and brown-skinned bodies are not, an observation with a long pedigree in literature on race, colonialization, and visibility in general.²⁶⁵ In a subsequent series of tweets, Eltahawy wrote:

²⁶⁴ Filter recipe: "Tweet Summ" set to "The world ignores other deaths".

²⁶⁵ See in particular Fanon (1952), who presents perhaps the classic formulation of this phenomenon, and more recently, (Sontag, 2003:63) who notes that "the more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying"; Mbembe (2003:17), who coins the term "necropolitics" to describe the technologies that "regulate the distribution of death"; and Butler (2009), who concentrates upon who is considered grievable. In the current discussion, observations on the light or dark colour of Alan's skin—to say nothing of his status as a child—make Butler's comments especially pertinent, particularly her observations on the frames of norms—established in the West—which dictate whether a person's life is deemed worthy of grief or, alternately, is ultimately considered disposable. The instability of identification with Alan as a member of the [prospective white Western] "in" or "out" group may have contributed to the volume of social media responses: people appear more likely to care

But when's the last time you saw a pic of a dead white baby on the front page? For those wondering about when/if media publish pics of dead children: did you see pics of any of the children shot dead in Newtown? Newtown was supposed to represent the horror of guns in the US. Not a single picture of a dead child was published, anywhere.²⁶⁶

Apart from the ethics of sharing a photograph of a corpse in the first place, or the unacknowledged, comparative considerations (or lack thereof) of showing dark- and light-skinned bodies, was the question of consideration due to the feelings of surviving family members. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the journalist Muhammad Lila forwarded the family's wishes that Alan be shown smiling and alive (record #2). Even though family snapshots showing Alan alive were shared several times by the evening of 2 September, Lila's tweet on 4 September established a family-sanctioned tone, literally expressed in much subsequent sharing: that Alan should be remembered alive and smiling.²⁶⁷

The charts appear to follow the trajectory of some of these ethical, racial, and familial considerations in the flow of imagery over time: both the impressions and retweets views show a distinct shying-away from showing Alan dead in favour of artistic mediations and family snapshots by 4 September. Taken as a whole, it seems as if Alan were shown initially as a shock, and that after the initial shock wore off, there was a greater consideration of the ethical issues involved.

4.3. Nilüfer Demir's original photoset



There appear to be six published photographs of Alan taken by Nilüfer Demir. The sequence of shots seems clear, given



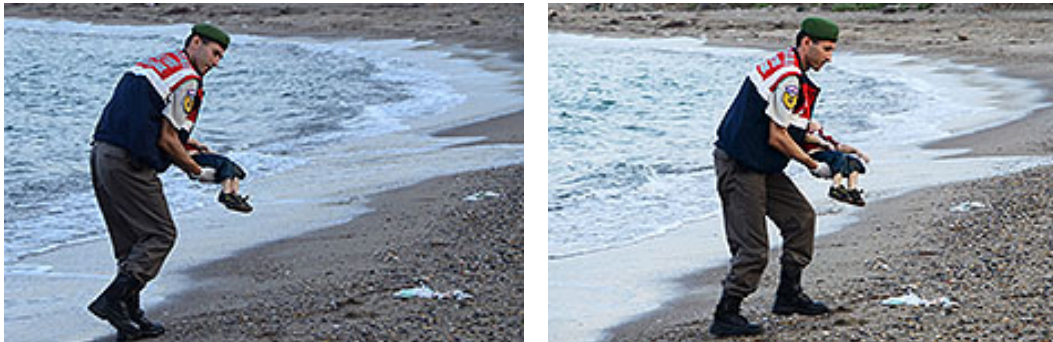
that the series ends with the body being removed from the edge of the surf. Demir appears to have approached Alan from behind, on the right

(and therefore disseminate information) about those with whom they identify common traits, such as similar values, histories, or languages (Hanusch, 2007).

²⁶⁶ The tweet sequence, with all the relevant quotes, may be found here: <https://twitter.com/monaeltahawy/status/639360329894490112/photo/1> [Accessed 22 November 2017]. There are of course important differences between Alan's death and those of the Newtown children. Journalists did not have access to the massacred Newtown children, and the circumstances of their death were bloodier than Alan's, making Eltahawy's comparison between the two events problematic. Nevertheless, her broader point stands up to scrutiny: the bodies of white people—particularly children—are accorded far greater respect than those with black or brown skin. This is nowhere more clear than in Western encounter with imagery of refugees, where "defining them in terms of their corporeal vulnerability alone degrades them to the status of 'sub-citizens'" (Chouliarakis and Stolic, 2017:1164).

²⁶⁷ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Pic type" set to "Family snap"; "Date" sorted as "Ascending" (i.e., chronologically).

(Figure 22) and then walked around the body in an anticlockwise direction (Figure 23); in these two initial photographs, Demir focused upon the child's body in isolation, and Alan's face is turned away. She then appears to have walked to the left of the body and stepped back as the



Turkish police recorded the scene. The first policeman, having photographed the body, turns away whilst the second waits to remove the body (Figure 24; from record #89, not for purchase). In the final photographs, Demir focused upon the figure of the second policeman carrying the body up from the surf (Figure 25 and Figure 26; there are two virtually identical versions of Figure 25, only one of which is supplied here). This second policeman was subsequently identified as coast guard crime scene investigator Sergeant Mehmet Çıplak (Squires, 2015).²⁶⁸



Based upon the waveform pattern in the background, it can be stated definitively that Record #89 has been cropped twice (Figure 27) and is the source of other pictures in the dataset—most prominently those two which will be called the “Çıplak crop” and

“Alone crop” (Figure 28, Figure 29). These two cropped variants are important in different



²⁶⁸ It is only possible to purchase the rights to four of the pictures via Getty Images: see <http://perma.cc/689Z-DWNN> [Accessed 8 November 2017; the “Perma” service is used to retain a likely temporary URL]. It is noteworthy that what I deem “Demir 3” (Record #89) is only available in the more closely-cropped “Çıplak crop” version (Figure 28; see below), despite being present in the datasheet. The photograph called “Demir 4” (Figure 25) in the datasheet is reproduced in both the original and a cropped version; “Demir 5” (Figure 26) is unavailable.

contexts: Figure 28 (the Çıplak crop) was widely published in traditional broadcast and print media (see below), and Figure 29 (the Alone crop) was the primary source for many of the most widely-shared reaction images (see below). This is an illuminating instance of “framing” as put forward by Hariman and Lucaites (2007): that which is retained or excluded from the physical boundaries of a photograph can change the effect—or, in Warburgian terms, the “charge”—of the photograph (see below).²⁶⁹

Given that record #89 provides the fullest context, one might call it the “documentary” source; it is telling that it received so much editorial attention in the form of cropping. There are extraneous details—other people on the beach, a van on the road above, rubbish strewn about—that might distract the viewer from the tragedy. But there is also something troubling about the unidentified policeman turned away from Alan. Holding a camera in his hand, he had clearly finished taking photographic evidence, so he turns to walk away. In the face of such a tragedy, having an authority figure—someone trained to aid those in need—facing away from the tragedy seems callous.

4.3.1. Alan with Sgt Çıplak and Alan, alone: two stories and an experiment



In the “Çıplak crop” (Figure 28), the role of Sgt Çıplak appears to have shifted, and with his role, the charge of the photograph has shifted. In the original, he is waiting to perform his task of removing the body after his colleague has finished his work. In the cropped picture, however, we have lost that broader context,

and are left with two figures—a person trained to aid those in need, and a dead child. By facing away from the viewer and looking at the child, Sgt Çıplak becomes a proxy for the viewer, acting as witness to a tragedy.²⁷⁰ Figure 25, and Figure 26, and Figure 28 seem to have been the most

²⁶⁹ In this sense, “framing” is literal and not metaphorical, as in the more widely known framing analysis espoused by Entman (1993) and recently used by Seo and Ebrahim (2016) in their analysis of propaganda imagery forwarded by pro- and anti-Assad movements in the Syrian Civil War. In this instance, the cropping of the original photograph has a real effect upon how one may reasonably interpret the two variations.

²⁷⁰ Lenette and Cleland (2016:76) go so far as to state that Çıplak’s presence in this photograph “can be seen as a plea to *witness* his death”. This observation is made immediately after the authors ponder the policeman’s presence as a helping, and not an oppositional or threatening, force, and reinforces the notion that the presence of military or paramilitary figures in representations of refugees commonly treats them as hostile to refugees (see Chapter 5 for examples). In contrast, Durham (2018:11) states that “the figure of the policeman, towering over the child’s tiny body, contributes to the ominous tone”, although this characterisation is not in grounded in the conventions of showing aid figures.



reproduced examples in print media (with Figure 23 being the fourth-most shared photograph).²⁷¹ It also appears to be the case that Twitter accounts with high numbers of impressions also shared these pictures as well, suggesting that news organisations have shown the same types of photographs both online and off (see Chart 3). Given the preponderance of news organisations amongst those with high impression numbers, this photograph's widespread sharing is a validation of Aulich's (2015) observation that the inclusion of an authority figure in a distressing image is a long-standing practice by media organisations, and that such photographs often establish significant resonance by employing the *Pietà* theme.²⁷²



In comparison to the source image, the "Alone crop" (Figure 29) is the most uncompromising, since there is no mediating figure between the subject and the viewer.²⁷³ Having been removed from any context, the photograph's charge has changed yet again. Alan appears alone on a beach,

seemingly with no one to help him: a framing which is likely to increase the affective sympathy of the viewer (Lenette and Miskovic, 2016:116). This cropped version, then, is more in keeping with Figure 22 and Figure 23, where Alan is removed from any broader physical context. It seems important that the image of Alan, alone—particularly the cropped, warmed version shown in

²⁷¹ This conclusion has been drawn by looking at the contents of the datasheet (filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" set to "Newspaper") and from a Google Image search (search term: "aylan kurdi newspaper covers").

²⁷² There are other crops of Record #89, but they do not seem to have been shared as widely. Record #554 is cropped much like Figure 28, focusing more tightly upon the two figures: this is likely because it is paired with Figure 23 for comparison's sake. Record #301 crops out Alan except for his feet, likely in a nod to the ensuing controversy surrounding the wide circulation of a corpse in the media. The crop of record #685 is particularly unusual in that it focuses upon the dead child, further anonymising the witness in the photograph.

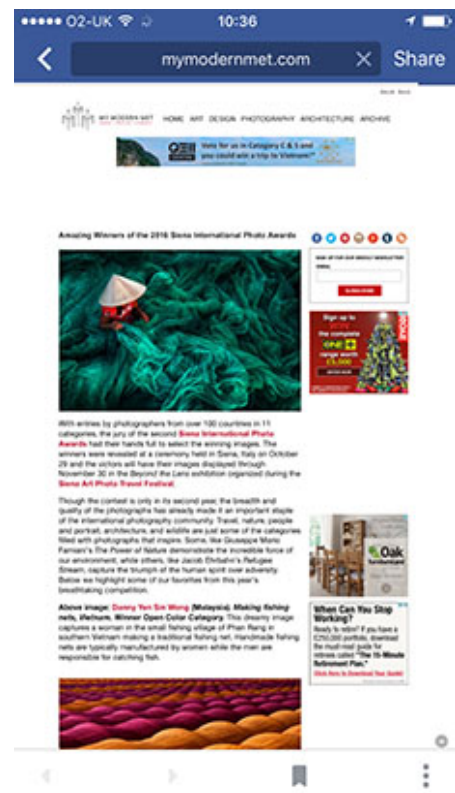
²⁷³ It is also rare as a photograph, appearing only three times. Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Pic Type" set to display all except for "Art"; and "Demir1" set to show "Dem3AI". The results yield records #63, #117, and #738, alongside some "false positives" of response images based upon the "Alone" crop.

record #3—utterly dominated as the most retweeted image (Chart 3). There is, in other words, a large gap between the pictures news organisations wanted to present and the single picture that Twitter users found most resonant. This mismatch corroborates the notion that, whilst images



forwarded by mass media are “recognized and remembered... they are not always the ones that are considered *most salient* in regard to iconicity in the collective consciousness of audiences” (Dahmen and Morrison, 2016:674). As Mette Mortensen et al. (2017:3) state, “social media users may uphold—or, equally possible, subvert—pertinent social relations of signification by ascribing certain images iconic status, and in so doing actively re-inflect their circulation, even mobilisation”. In the current case, social media users appear to have asserted their own visual preferences.

But why is there such a mismatch? There are many possible reasons for this: several revolve around the interpretation of the photograph of Alan alone, and they will be explored below. However, it is worth pointing out how technological adoption may affect viewing patterns and picture reception. The size of the viewable window (the “viewport”, or the “window” through which one views items such as blocks of text or pictures) has shrunk rapidly: in 2008, desktop computers were still the dominant way to access the internet (Arthur, 2009); by 2015 in the UK alone, the sale of smartphones overcame the total sales of all other computing devices (Ofcom, 2015). The progressive miniaturisation of the viewport on the physical device presents users with an increasingly intimate viewing experience in the shift to a world dominated by handheld computing devices. There is a considerable experiential price to be paid for the miniaturisation of the picture on such devices. A complex, detailed artefact, redolent of traditional professional quality, will lose much of its detail—and thus, I think, its appeal—on a small screen, the more so when the artefact occupies but a fraction of the viewport (Figure 30). In contrast, an artefact consisting of less detail or less complexity—such as Alan, alone—will suffer less from such



miniaturisation. If an artefact is to capture the user's attention fully—to the degree that it motivates retweeting a distressing photograph—it must capture her notice in the first place. It is far more difficult for an image to capture a user's notice if the very elements that would capture her interest are ill-served by a small viewing area.

It is possible to conduct a small experiment to test this hypothesis using the original data export from Pulsar and the datasheet. The data analytics software Tableau allows one to establish ties between multiple datasets. I created a bespoke export of the available data for this experiment, linking the unique identification numbers (*id*) of the datasheet's tweets that featured either an image of Alan alone (Figure 23), and also the most widely-shown image of Alan with Sgt Çıplak (Figure 28).²⁷⁴ It is possible to query the interfaces used to repost the original tweet—for

example the Twitter app for iPhone, or the web interface on a desktop computer— by collecting as many posts as possible from the original corpus of image-sharing



tweets that retweeted these particular records.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ To remind the reader, Figure 23 is referred to as “Demir 2” in the datasheet; Figure 28 is referred to as “Demir 3 (Çıplak)”.

²⁷⁵ The data export which formed the foundation of the datasheet only contained the original tweets, i.e., no retweets. To obtain the retweets, I tried to export the full 1,236,247 corpus of image-sharing tweets: however, this was only a partial success. Only 755,487 records were exported, due to export corruption issues outlined in the Practical Methodology chapter (section 3.3.2). Nevertheless, since the new export constitutes over 60% of the original corpus, it seems sufficiently representative of the larger corpus.

Like the older data export, the newer export from the original corpus retains the relation between the *id* and the *parent_id*— that is, the connection between specific tweets and the posts that retweeted them. It is therefore possible to connect retweets in the 60% data export to specific tweets in the datasheet by matching the *parent_id* of the retweets to the *id* of the original tweets. Crucially, the data export also retains information about the applications used to post the tweet, e.g., Twitter Web Client, Twitter for Android, or Twitter for iPad.

However, because the 60% data export weighs in at well over 300MB, this investigation requires significant RAM. In order to pursue this, I had to divide this into manageable chunks. I needed to maintain knowledge of the pictures shared by individual tweets, discover the *ids* of these tweets, and match those *ids* up with the *parent_ids* of relevant retweets.

I extracted the *IDs* of all posts in the datasheet which displayed “Demir 2” and “Demir 3 (Çıplak)”: this amounted to 79 posts in total and was saved as a separate file containing the record number (as identified via the datasheet), the *ID* of the post, and image contents of the post. The image contents were separated into two piles apiece: “Demir 2” and “Demir 2, with others” (that is, “Demir 2” shown alongside other pictures, as in a gallery), and “Demir 3 (Çıplak)” and “Demir 3 (Çıplak), with others” (again, the latter showing the particular Demir photograph with other images). I then searched through the original data exports to match the original *IDs* with the

The results are inconclusive and are presented in Chart 7 below. It is clear that that Alan, alone was shared most often by mobile applications: Twitter for iPhone and Twitter for Android. The web interface formed a distant third. The photograph of Alan with Sgt Çıplak, however, was *also* shared most often by these self-same interfaces, albeit far less often. The data, then, seemingly correlate miniaturisation with the stark imagery of Alan, alone. This correlation is further corroborated by the volume of sharing via mobile apps. Judging on the basis on sales alone, 2015 was the year in which it was likely that mobile internet usage overtook desktop/laptop computer usage, and sharing lies overwhelmingly in favour of mobile apps.

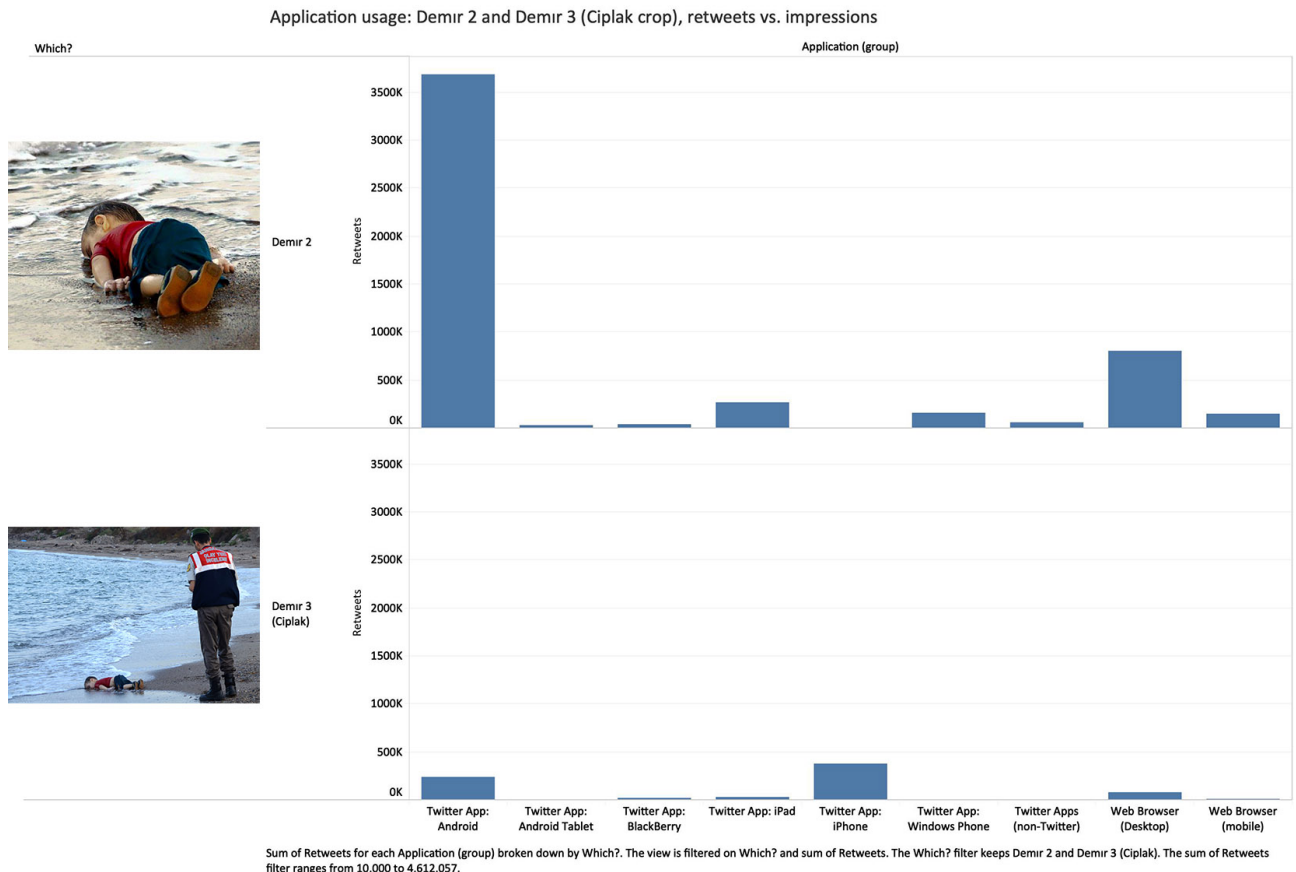


Chart 7: Applications used to retweet two different pictures by Nilüfer Demir: Alan alone (“Demir 2”; Figure 23) and Alan with Sgt Çıplak (“Demir 3 [Çıplak]”; Figure 28). Chart developed in Tableau with photographs added.

parent_id of retweets. This resulted in 13,672 entries; they included the interfaces used to retweet the posts. These 13,672 entries were saved as a separate file.

These three files—the datasheet, the 79-record dataset, and the 13,672 retweets—then needed to be linked together. This is a task well suited for Tableau, which can join the contents of multiple datasets, and then provide a visualisation of the result. For the purposes of simplicity, all the “with others” records were set aside: they form a distinct minority. Also, for simplicity’s sake, I restricted the view to show those interfaces which forwarded the image of Alan a minimum of 15,000 times, since there are many interfaces and the majority of them were rarely used.

However, it is *not* clear that the image of Alan with Sgt Çıplak suffered from a miniaturised interface: there was simply less engagement with the latter picture. The experiment, then, does not disprove the hypothesis; but neither is it proven.

4.3.2. Responses to the Demir photographs

Theme Chart 1 provides a breakdown of responses to the Demir photographs, showing correspondences between the picture that was shared, an overall summary of the tweeted text, and a list of the themes expressed in the tweets. Of the photographs, the image of Alan, alone (Figure 23) has the greatest range of responses. This is perhaps unsurprising, as it garnered the most attention overall.



One of the most common sentiments—at least measured by retweets—viewed Alan’s death as *symbolic* of the world’s failure to address the crisis. This is due in part to the pull of Liz Sly’s widely-retweeted response (record #3: Figure 31) to Alan on the beach.²⁷⁶ Whilst they sometimes contained affective terms, this group primarily viewed the photographs in political terms—the world’s, or the West’s, or the European Union’s, efforts to address the refugee crisis are condemned as inadequate.²⁷⁷ Specific countries and leaders are also singled out for censure, e.g., the United States (President Barack Obama), the United Kingdom (Prime Minister David Cameron), the Canadian government (Prime Minister Stephen Harper). Alternately, Alan’s death was also interpreted as being emblematic of the scale of the crisis.



In contrast, another line of interpretation strongly cleaved towards identifying Alan as an individual, and not as a symbol. In these examples, the authors employed a variation of the phrase “His name is Alan Kurdi”.²⁷⁸ It is striking that of the tweets employing this term, none of them also refer to him as a symbol. This is an odd and notable parallel to the literature on photojournalism referenced earlier: a number of critics have doubted whether a photograph can ever be more than a record of an event that happened to specific people, at a specific time, and at a specific location (Sontag, 1977; Linfield, 2010).

²⁷⁶ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”? “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display everything except for “Art”; “Th-Other1” set to “Symbol”.

²⁷⁷ Filter recipe: Alan in it?” set to “Y”? “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display everything except for “Art”; “Th-Censure” set to search for all entries which contain the word “Inadequate”. This recipe should be modified to query “Th-Other1” for the term as well. In addition, one can examine “Tweet Summ” for all entries which contain the word “Inadequate”.

²⁷⁸ Filter recipe: Alan in it?” set to “Y”? “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display everything except for “Art”; “Th-Commem” set to “His name is Alan”.

Unsurprisingly for the subject, affective responses are very common, ranging from grief to rage.²⁷⁹ One might consider these responses as instances of “affective contagion” (Papacharissi, 2014:14), whereby individuals develop a sort of solidarity through their shared emotive response to the photographs. They concentrate upon how they, as viewers, feel looking at the photograph; they take pains to assert bonds of common humanity; and a number make religious sentiments, ranging from prayers to emojis of praying hands. Some commemorative posts contain affective triggers, for example noting the child’s age. Specific affective phrases such as “heart-breaking” (or a variant on this) are used, as are “haunting”, “grief,” and “mourning”. Expressions of affect are often paired with morality: his death was indicative of a failure of humanity.²⁸⁰ They state that in the photograph, they see neither a terrorist nor a thief, but simply a child. Emotionally-charged responses are also notably paired with references to Alan as an angel and to religious references: to praying, to god, to heaven or الجنة (*al Jannah*, or paradise). And, like, many of the political responses, they frequently demand, in a generalised way, political action; others express despair and hopelessness. This parallels the findings observed by Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018:323) in their research on comments left by users on European newspapers’ Facebook posts.

Alan is often referred to as an “angel”. The term “angel” is indicative of a problem for terms that can be employed in multiple usages. Whilst literally a religious phrase, many people refer to children metaphorically as “angels”. A similar term—in various languages—is “Rest in Peace” (RIP): this refers literally to sleep, but it is meant metaphorically, and culturally it is used in memorial services for the dead.²⁸¹ The same is true of the term “sleep”, another common phrase. The ambiguity of various intentions—literal/metaphorical, religious/familial—is often used by Twitter users. This is a concrete example of the inchoate nature of Twitter comments: it is often not clear whether references are meant literally or metaphorically. This, however, points to the power of everyday metaphor in their responses: they stand astride multiple meanings. These examples will be expanded upon in section 4.6 below.

²⁷⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”? “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display everything except for “Art”; “Th-Affect” set to show all except for “-” (not present). In addition, one can set “Tweet Summ” to “Affect”.

²⁸⁰ Filter recipe: Alan in it?” set to “Y”? “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display everything except for “Art”; “Th-Censure” set to “Failure of humanity”. This recipe should be modified to query “Th-Other1” for the term as well. In addition, one can examine “Tweet Summ” for all entries which contain the word “Failure of humanity”.

²⁸¹ “Rest in peace”, “RIP”, “*Repose en paix*”, “*Descansa en paz*”, “DEP” and “QDEP” all make reference to the same notion. “RIP” tag exemplifies the importance of understanding multiple languages. It also underscores why such work cannot yet be left fully to algorithmic sorting, or at least cannot unless the software is more adept at translation.

4.4. Artistic responses to the Demir photoset

The second major category of pictures containing Alan are artistic responses to his death.

“Artistic response” here indicates some sort of intervention upon the source imagery by the image-maker.²⁸² These interventions range from total reproductions of a source photograph in chalk (or, more likely, an application that can imitate chalk digitally: record #123 (Figure 32) to the simple addition of text to the photograph in record #45 (Figure 33).



Only a few of the authors remain unknown. In her study of some of the response imagery showing Alan Kurdi, Mette Mortensen (2017:1149) states that “in most cases, establishing the artist or producer as well as the original source was difficult”. Sharing without attribution is vexing, but common on the Internet. Much like encountering a forgotten work by an artist in an out-of-the-way church, identifying the image maker requires investigation. Some artists’ names are mentioned in the datasheet, such as Wissam al Jazairy. Other works were investigated to verify their authorship: whether they claimed authorship and/or whether they present other work that is stylistically similar to the picture in the datasheet.²⁸³ They were sourced via a reverse image search on Google Images until a stable identity could be ascertained through stylistic and/or thematic similarity to other works by the same artist.

²⁸² The only intervention excluded from this definition—for this datasheet—is the application of filters on the source photographs. There are only two records in the datasheet that apply any filters to the image of Alan: #132 (a sepia filter) and #252 (a black-and-white filter). In terms of number and application, these are minor interventions, and do not seem to warrant being considered “artistic”.

²⁸³ One prominent example illustrates the value of this: the author of the picture in record #10, one of the most widely-shared response images. Broderick (2015) is common in attributing the image to Steve Dennis, who is the author not of the *picture*, but of the *post* (<https://twitter.com/SteveDennis71/status/639304898782232576/photo/1> [Accessed 25 November 2015]). Mortensen (2017:1153) repeats the misattribution. However, Steve Dennis is a ghost-writer, and does not display any other stylistically similar imagery in his Twitter feed. The actual author, Omer Tosun, signed the piece in the bottom right, and on his Twitter feed, he displays other pictures that show a similar chalky style. Examining other works by Tosun thus confirmed that the picture was stylistically consistent with his work. Khoo (2015) identified the work as by Tosun early on, as did Drainville (2015:47).

Whilst difficult and occasionally uncertain, identification is a necessary step. Failure to pursue this detective work can lead the viewer to inaccurate conclusions. Lina Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic characterise the artistic remediation of Alan as a “self-reflexive” act, because

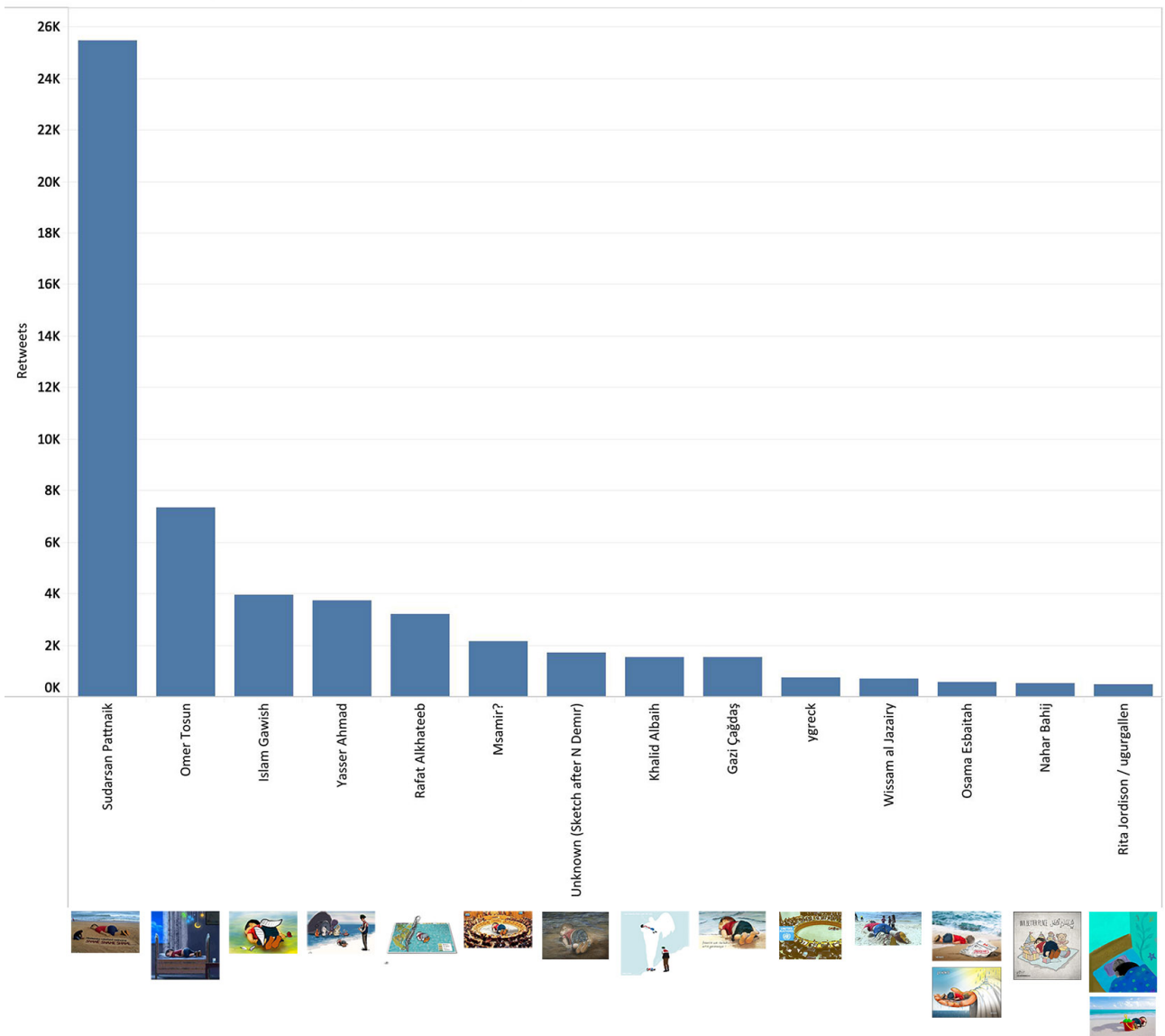
it is, instead, ‘our’ own representations of them, in drawings, collages or retouched photographs, which become the vehicles for ‘our’ agency... Its aim is digital connectivity with others like ‘us’ instead of connectivity with the refugee either as victim or as threat” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1172–73).

These so-called “self-reflexive” pictures, then, reinforce colonialist attitudes towards refugees: they represent Others who lack their own voice. Whilst many of the artistic renderings of Alan are indeed by Westerners, and whilst Chouliaraki and Stolic decline to identify any of their referents, I have firmly established that the vast majority of works shared by Twitter users are artists from India, the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (Chart 5).²⁸⁴ By failing to identify the image-makers and assuming that their authors are all Western, Chouliaraki and Stolic inadvertently fall prey to the same neo-colonialism they identify in these works.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ In order of most retweeted response imagery: Sudarsan Pattnaik is from India; Omer Tosun is Turkish; Islam Gawish is Egyptian; Yasser Ahmad is Syrian; Rafat Alkhateeb is Jordanian; Khalid Albaih is from the Sudan; Gazi Çağdaş is Turkish; Wissam al Jazairy is Syrian; Nahar Bahij is Saudi; Ugurgallen’s use of Turkish suggests he is a Turk. ygreck is Québécois; Rita Jordison’s origins are unclear: on her DeviantArt account she states that she is from Greece, but on her Twitter account she states that she is from Finland. The origin of Msamir (attributed) is unknown, but the use of an Arab League image suggests the author is also from the Middle East or North Africa. The origin of “Unknown-(Sketch after Demir)” is unknown because the artist has not been identified.

²⁸⁵ I am grateful to Jennifer Saul for observing this. Even though the artistic responses constitute a major source of evidence, they are held in a degree of contempt. Parkhill (2015) states that Alan “drowned a second time, in an ocean of schmaltz, as cartoonists from around the world race to generate the most sharable take on his tragic death”; “Each of these derivative images, whether its creator means to or not, saps power from the original. The cartoons and the memes proliferate, copies of copies, and the original disappears from view, reduced to yet more fodder for internet #content”. Boudana et al. (2017:1214) echo this point about artistic responses in general: “the more a photograph is recycled, the more it may influence the public—yet the more the original referential context may be lost in the process”. Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017:1173) identify the Kurdi response images as incorporating a “new, playful aesthetic”, when there is nothing playful about them in the first place. Durham (2018:11–12) characterises Yasser Ahmad’s picture as “patently cartoonish... jejune and [carrying] clearly fictional elements”. She recognises that Ahmad is a Syrian but “this [pro-refugee] stance is attenuated by the generic conventions of the cartoon form... widely understood to be a ‘humour-carrying visual/visual-verbal picture” (Durham, 2018:12). This is not an unreasonable interpretation of the picture *on its own*, but it is only one of many semiotic readings. Seen in the context of other response pictures, Ahmad’s picture evokes childhood elements to emphasise the youth of the victim. Such response images may instead constitute reverberations which “work to amplify affect” (Pedwell, 2017:160).

Artistic works based upon the Demir photoset (retweets)

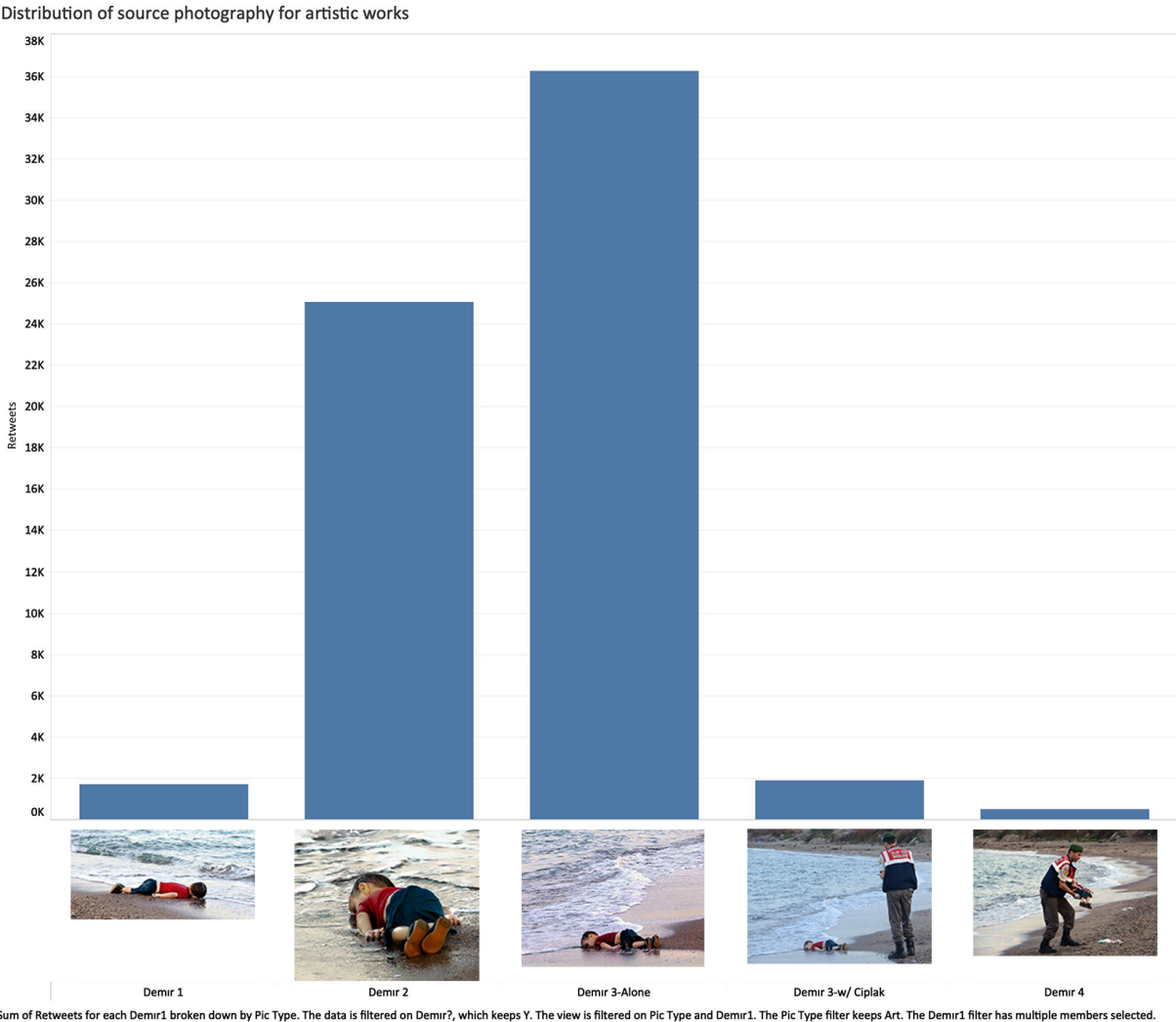


Sum of Retweets for each Attribution broken down by Art? vs. Alan in it?. The data is filtered on sum of Reaction Count and Exclusions (Alan in it?, Art?, Attrib1). The sum of Reaction Count filter ranges from 500 to 29,570. The Exclusions (Alan in it?, Art?, Attrib1) filter keeps 310 members. The view is filtered on Alan in it? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Art? filter keeps

It is important to note specifics of the most widely shared artists. The majority of them work as cartoonists: their work demands a quick turnaround in order to remain topical, and they are used to inflecting their work with readily-understood, fixed meanings. The comic artist Will Eisner likened the cartoon to a kind of visual reading, as an encounter between artist and reader; and to be intelligible, the artist has to rely upon common experiences. The artist employs a toolkit of familiar gestures and recognisable symbols, which with repetition becomes a “distinct language” (Eisner, 1985:1, 7–9, 20). The use of recognisable symbols is conducive to classical Panofskian iconography, as such pictures gravitate towards more fixed meanings.

Related to this, these artists were able to convey emotions and outrage sufficiently that people from across the world, particularly in Western Europe and the Anglophone world, evidently found their work resonant. They did this despite linguistic and cultural divides. They operate not

just upon the level of articulable, fixed symbols—which often have more fixed social and cultural boundaries—but also operate in a register more akin to Warburgian iconology: the more ineffable realm of empathic gesture or suggestive pose. In other words, these artists base their imagery upon elements of more universal, affective experience and—often—inflect them with specific, fixed symbolism, much as artists in the West have done for hundreds of years. These mediations, then, form a record that shows the ways the artists have viewed and interpreted the image of Alan on the beach, and they are filled with iconographic and iconological details. By necessity, they must refer to familiar objects in the world, and familiar feelings and experiences. Many, if not all, of these have can be traced in other photographs and works of art.

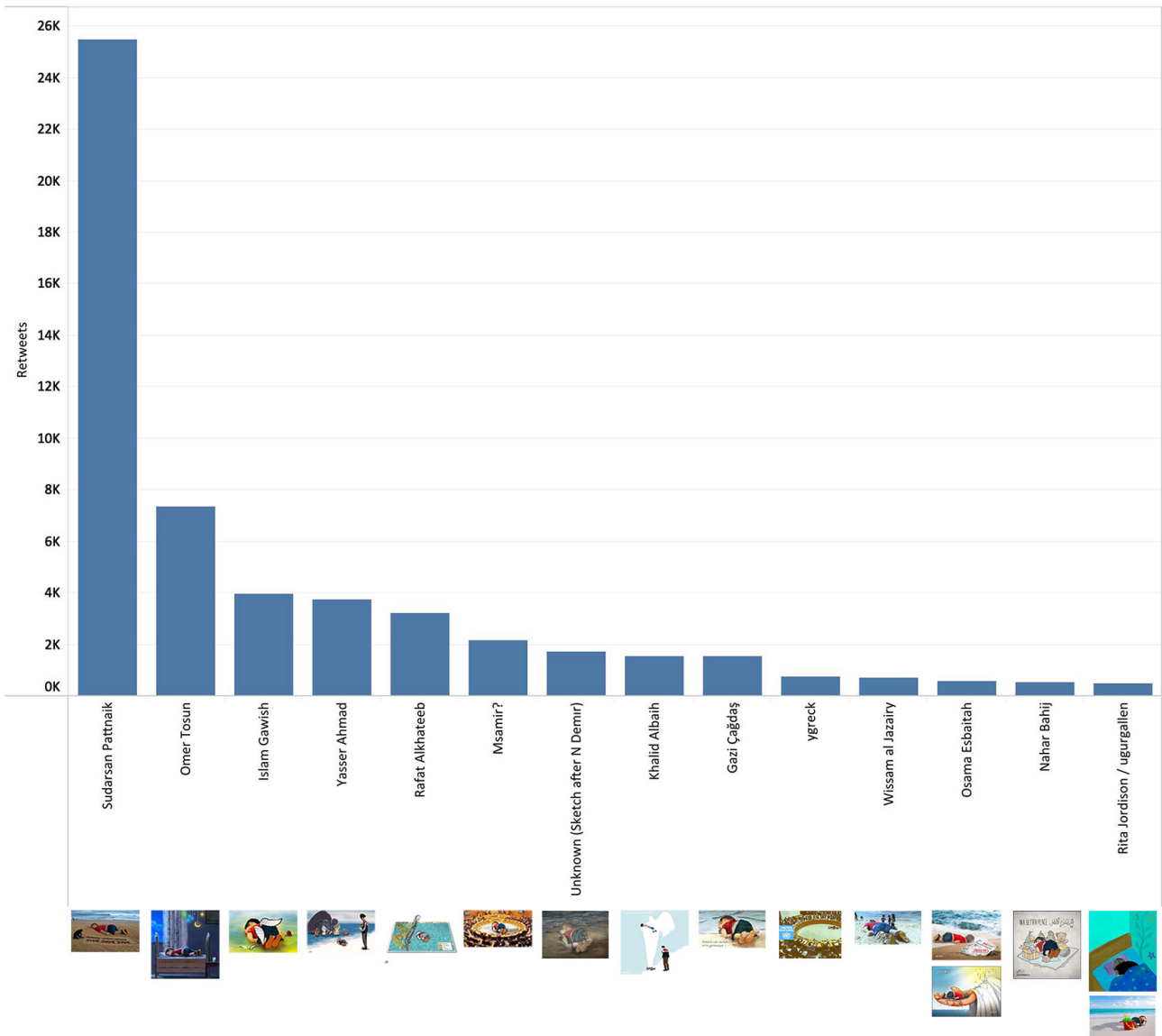


In total, there are over 60 separate artistic renditions of Alan in the datasheet. All of them are based upon the Demir photoset.²⁸⁶; Chart 4 outlines the source images for the artistic responses, whilst Chart 5 outlines the 16 most retweeted artistic images depicting Alan. It is notable that the

²⁸⁶ There are other artistic responses to Alan based upon family snapshots (see below for this category), but none of these pictures are present in the top 1,000 extant tweets. Some are provided in a list of images compiled by the website *Bored Panda* (Nèjè, 2015).

“Alone” crop (Figure 29) from Record #89 was the most common source photograph, followed closely by Figure 23. Whilst media companies favoured sharing photographs of Alan with Sgt Çıplak, it is clear that like most Twitter users, artists found the image of Alan, alone, most resonant.

Artistic works based upon the Demir photoset (retweets)



Sum of Retweets for each Attribution broken down by Art? vs. Alan in it?. The data is filtered on sum of Reaction Count and Exclusions (Alan in it?, Art?, Attrib1). The sum of Reaction Count filter ranges from 500 to 29,570. The Exclusions (Alan in it?, Art?, Attrib1) filter keeps 310 members. The view is filtered on Alan in it? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Art? filter keeps

In his review of the images shared of Alan, D’Orazio (2015:18) described the artistic responses to Alan’s death as “designed to mitigate the brutality of the original images in order to sustain the visual narrative of the story and its diffusion”. This may be why some Twitter users *shared* artistic responses instead of the original photographs—it is a way of sharing the image of Alan, dead, without directly showing the actual photograph. But apart from the comparatively few straightforward artistic renditions of Alan, most of the artistic responses *themselves* suggest rather that the majority of image-makers wished to append some sort of meaning to the death of a child. The themes for the most widely shared artistic images have been outlined below, but

they are by no means the only ones that depict those themes. Three of them will be explored in-depth in section 4.6.

There are five major themes of Alan represented in the datasheet. These are monumentality (Figure 34), death and sleep (Figure 36), childhood (Figure 37), spiritual / haunting (Figure 38), and politics (Figure 39).²⁸⁷ There is a considerable overlap between them: Figure 40 breaks down the five major themes as a Venn diagram to illustrate the degree of overlap, similarity, and dissimilarity.²⁸⁸ For example, there is a considerable overlap between the themes of sleep and childhood, or between politics and monumental representations of Alan.

²⁸⁷ The renditions in the figures follow Warburg's approach in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, but the approach is different in that more thematically similar images are placed nearer to one another, whilst thematically dissimilar images are placed farther away.

Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018:327) follow a similar categorisation as suggested above, stating that "The simplicity of the photo invites a response that focuses on the contrast between the position of the boy in the edge of the water, as a piece of wreckage, and his posture connoting sleep, childhood, and innocence". These are instantiated by pictures of Alan or other children playing; Alan sleeping; Angels/religious; political comments; and placing the body in front of political officials.

²⁸⁸ Two of the top shared artistic images of Alan reintroduce the image of Alan on the beach straightforwardly, in an artistic manner, but they do not seem to fit into any other theme. Each might have been simply an act of commemoration or an attempt to deflect possible outrage. An unknown artist rendered Alan on the beach in chalk; in two instances, lines from Warsan Shire's poem *Home* are added to it. The Turkish artist Gazi Çağdaş rendered Alan with the caption *İnsanlık çok ilerledi, artık görünmüyor!* ("Humanity has advanced, but not so much!").

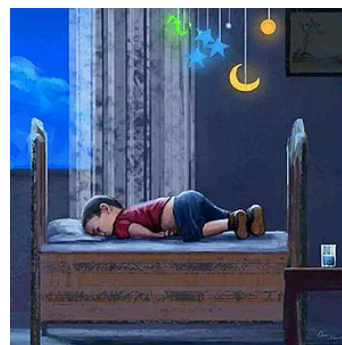
To view these entries in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; and "Attrib1" set to "Unk-Sketch after N Demir"; then set "Attrib1" set to "Gazi Çağdaş".



4.4.1. Retweeting of artistic versions

Mette Mortensen (2017:1143) refers to such artistic responses as “appropriations” of the original imagery, describing them as “instrumental in iconisation processes. They confirm and consolidate the iconic status by recycling the image in question”. It is debatable whether artistic responses can be deemed to be “instrumental” in cementing the iconic status of Demir’s photographs, since they were shared at the same time as Demir’s photographs, and their iconic status was immediately recognised by several viewers. It might be more accurate to state that they helped *cement interpretations* to the original photographs, which is part of Mortensen’s argument. And whilst it is undeniable that these are appropriations of the original photographs, characterising them as such implies viewing them on their own in a decontextualized register. Terming the artistic versions as “responses” underscores the fact that they can be seen as visual counterpoint to the textual responses of the original photographs. Viewed in this manner, the pattern of image-sharing on Twitter becomes rather clearer.

It is illuminating to examine Steve Dennis' sharing of Omer Tosun's picture (record #10; Figure 41).²⁸⁹ The pattern of responses to a post are less graspable in the datasheet or indeed in the original data export. It is much clearer to view the post online alongside the accompanying thread.²⁹⁰ In the thread of responses to Dennis' post, others post not just textual responses, but also additional visual responses. These pictures form a different level of response, as if they were sharing alternate ways of interpretation including about the underlying causes of the refugee crisis itself. Taking the cliché that "a picture is worth a thousand words" to heart, these posters clearly find images conducive to expressing multiple, complex responses to an event beyond the 140-character limitation of the platform.



Restricting ourselves to the datasheet itself, however, we can grasp clear patterns in the commentary appended to artistic images shared on Twitter (Theme Chart 4–Theme Chart 9).²⁹¹ These patterns are akin to those appended to the presentation of Demir's photographs. People commemorate the child; they see his fate as symbolic of the larger issue of refugees and human failure; and they often use emotional terms in their texts. Alan is referred to as an "angel"—not attached to Islam Gawish's picture (record #59; Figure 42), which literally depicts him as such, but instead to Tosun's picture, which suggests the endearment often used for children. And whilst "sleep" is appended to Tosun's picture—a literal picture of Alan as a sleeping child—it is very much a minor textual theme. People, then, seem to intermix text and image, using each to fill in the blanks for the other in an attempt to articulate their response to the child's death.



²⁸⁹ <https://twitter.com/SteveDennis71/status/639304898782232576/photo/1> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

²⁹⁰ Indeed, an unknown number of the responses to a tweet will not have been captured by Pulsar in the first place, because they will not have used any of the terms used to collect the data.

²⁹¹ NB: in the two charts accompanying this analysis, the special case of Sudarsan Pattnaik's sand sculpture has been extracted on its own. The photograph of Pattnaik's sculpture was shared so often that it dwarfs any understanding one might glean from the rest of the artistic responses. Commemorative sentiments most often accompany Pattnaik's sand sculpture (Theme Chart 10).

4.5. Family snapshots of Alan

The third and final image-type consisted of snapshots provided by surviving family members. In all, seven snapshots are present in the dataset: three snapshots of Alan on his own, three with his brother, Ghalib, and one with his brother and father, Abdullah (see Chart 6). Rehana is not present in any of the snapshots: a “notably visible absence”, she is the likely photographer, which is a common role for mothers within families (Vis, 2015:28; Rose, 2010).

4.5.1. Alan smiling and standing on top of a blue slide



This is the most widely-retweeted snapshot with 20,521 retweets and 2.2 million impressions (Figure 43). Alan has a wide smile and wears a shirt with an astronaut and rocket on it and the text “Mystery Space Riders”; the matching shorts have a rocket and “Space Riders” on the left leg, and a large beige button on the right.²⁹² This picture first made its appearance in the datasheet on 3 September.²⁹³ It was also the most widely-retweeted picture of Alan alive, due in large part to Muhammad Lila’s sharing of the photograph (record #2); further evidence for this is that many sharers reiterate that Alan’s surviving family members want the child to be remembered alive and smiling, a sentiment first

forwarded by Lila.



Lila also observed (record #881) that these may have been the clothes Alan was wearing when he was found on the beach. Indeed, Vis (2015:27) suggests the same, noting that “the viewer might be encouraged to imagine this scene as the child just before death: happy, smiling, full of life”. It appears that these are in fact the clothes he wore on his journey: the tip of the rocket is visible on the shorts in Figure 29, and the trail of the rocket and the light-coloured “swoosh” on his shirt are just

visible in Figure 26 (Figure 44).²⁹⁴

²⁹² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; “Fam1” set to “Slide”. This recipe should be modified to query “Fam2” and “Fam3” as well.

²⁹³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; “Pic Descr” set to search for entries which contain the word “slide”; and “Date” set to order the results through “Ascending”. NB: by searching for the term “slide” instead of filtering by “Fam” variations, we can capture records #786 and #839, which place the slide photograph in a separate gallery slot.

²⁹⁴ The shoes appear to be different: in Demir’s photoset, they are blue shoes with brown soles and yellow highlights, whilst the family snap shows blue shoes with white soles and tan highlights. The picture of Alan kicking a football, in contrast, has figured prominently in the public imaginary: the text of entry #103 suggests that this was the last picture of Alan taken before his death.

4.5.2. Alan with his brother Ghalib



Three of the snapshots contain Alan sitting with his brother Ghalib: one in which Alan wears a white top and two variations in which he wears a yellow top (Figure 45, Figure 46).²⁹⁵ They are presented in the datasheet in multiple crops, some of which remove Ghalib from the picture. Cumulatively, they represent 21,988 retweets and 13,508,848 impressions in the datasheet: snapshots of the two brothers were displayed in tweets with high impression ratings, the “yellow shirt” versions being the most popular in this context. Alan is always smiling in these photographs. The placement of the teddy in the “white shirt” photograph emphasises the innocence of the two children, whilst the “yellow shirt” variations emphasise Alan’s youth compared to his brother.

The “white shirt” photograph, which contains a teddy placed between the two brothers, is the first family snapshot to appear in the datasheet.²⁹⁶ It is possible that it is the first family snapshot to have appeared.²⁹⁷

4.5.3. Other photographs

The following three snapshots were shared far less widely: Alan with his brother Ghalib and father Abdullah (3,610 retweets and 1,747,059 impressions), Alan kicking a football (2,083 retweets and 388,784 impressions), and Alan wearing a fancy suit (815 retweets, 354,491 impressions).

²⁹⁵ Filter recipes: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”. For the white shirt snapshot, “Fam1” set to “w/ Ghalib (white shirt)”; for the yellow shirt snapshot, “Fam 1” set to “w/ Ghalib (yellow shirt)”. The two queries should be modified to query “Fam2” as well.

²⁹⁶ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; “Fam1” set to search for all entries with the exception of “Slide” and “w/ Football”; and “Date” set to order the results through “Ascending”, i.e., chronologically.

²⁹⁷ This claim is based on the assumption that earliest uploads of the photograph will garner more attention via retweets. Proof for this assumption would require manually matching imagery throughout the entire 2.8 million tweet corpus, which is impossible since the original data has been destroyed. It is therefore unproven in this case. It is certainly *not* the case in other instances. For example, Omer Tosun’s post of his picture garnered 16 retweets, meaning that his post does not appear in the datasheet; Steve Dennis, who reposted Tosun’s picture without attribution, received over 3,000 retweets, making his the 10th most widely-shared post in the datasheet.

4.5.3.1. Alan smiling with his brother Ghalib and father Abdullah

Standing in a garden, Abdullah holds his children's hands (Figure 47). Alan wears the same shirt as in the "slide" photograph; both children smile distractedly, in keeping with the impromptu nature of family snapshots. Twitter users most often shared this snapshot with other photographs, in an attempt to create a context.²⁹⁸ They shared the snapshot with a photograph of the family's hometown Kobane in ruins, in order to point out that the family had no choice but to flee the country. The snapshot was also paired with a picture of Abdullah weeping after having identified his children in the morgue, emphasising the family and the scope of Abdullah's loss. Finally, it was shared both with the "slide" snapshot and Demir's most widely-shared photograph of Alan on the beach, alone (Figure 23).



4.5.3.2. Alan kicking a football

In this snapshot, Alan wears a red shirt and blue shorts, and, concentrating, kicks a football (Figure 48).²⁹⁹ Three of the seven tweets sharing this photograph claim that this was the outfit he was wearing when found on the beach: two of these posts pair it with Figure 23 as evidence.³⁰⁰ The assertion seems incorrect (see above), but it is clear that for these authors, the thought that these were the same clothes heightens their affective response to the snapshot.³⁰¹



²⁹⁸ Filter recipe: Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Fam?" set to "Y"; "Fam1" set to "w/ Ghalib and Abdullah".

²⁹⁹ Filter recipe: Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Fam?" set to "Y"; "Fam1" set to "w/ Football".

³⁰⁰ Records #103, #319, and #1013 make this claim.

³⁰¹ It would have been difficult for the authors to comparatively analyse the details between this snapshot and one of Demir's photographs, because all three tweets were posted with the Twitter app for Android. This was found by looking at these three tweets in the original raw data export. This also assumes that the authors would have taken the time to make such an analysis; this is unlikely.

4.5.3.3. Alan wearing a fancy suit

In this snapshot, Alan wears a fancy-dress suit, presumably at some festival or family function (Figure 49).³⁰² An arm props up the child, and he looks at the camera. It was only shared 3 times.



4.5.4. Responses to the family snapshots

The family snapshots do not appear to be related to iconographical concerns, other than the fact they follow standard visual tropes for family snapshots: the subjects are centred in the frame and photographed during pleasurable moments in family outings or special events, and the children usually smile for the camera. It is arguable that these characteristics do, indeed, constitute a modern form of domestic iconography. Gillian Rose (2010:23) has observed that “your family photos will look a lot like mine... how they are pictured, where they are pictured and what they are pictured doing”. Rose argues that family photography should be defined by more than its visual properties, however. The display of such snapshots in a public sphere often has the effect of drawing out affective responses to them. This will be familiar to those who have seen domestic imagery in the aftermath of disasters, such as commemorations of the victims of the 2005 London bombings. Despite the commonality of composition and expression, photographs that mean something to one’s family have little value to others—until the occurrence of an emotive event that thrusts family photographs into public view, whereupon they come to signify more than domesticity: by association with a tragic event, they come to signify loss.

Texts that accompany the snapshots focus upon the *visibility* of what has been lost: the lives of two children, not the mother who presumably took the photographs.³⁰³ Even of the 48 posts showing the two brothers together, 19 refer to Alan exclusively.³⁰⁴ As in the public display of missing people or victims after the London bombings, the pattern of naming Alan exclusively makes it clear that the visibility of the family snapshot on social media is contingent upon the image of Alan on the beach. This sentiment is made explicit in certain circumstances, where the

³⁰² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; “Fam1” set to “Suit”. This recipe should be modified to query “Fam4” as well, where the snapshot is reproduced in a collage of newspaper covers.

³⁰³ The visibility of what has been lost is critical: as noted in the Methodology chapter (section 5.1.3), only 10 tweets in the datasheet note that Rehana died as well.

³⁰⁴ Filter recipe: “Pic Descr” set to display all posts containing the term “Ghalib”. 19 of these 48 posts mention Alan, but not his brother. 23 of the posts mentioning Ghalib do not refer to his name, but merely via his relation to Alan. A handful of others also mention the family in general, for example being denied asylum in Canada. Ironically, one post states that in four days, the public will have forgotten Alan and moved on to some new distraction. In its bitterness, the comment fails to record Ghalib’s name and death.

user writes that we should not use *that* photo (i.e., a photograph of Alan on the beach, but a family photo instead (emphasis in the original)).³⁰⁵

There are patterns to the comments that accompany these photographs. When shared on their own, the family snapshots are often appended to commemorative sentiments, e.g., “remember him alive, and not dead”, and “his name was Alan” (Theme Chart 11). 10 of these posts use emotional terms such as “heart-breaking” and “awful”, despite the fact that nothing heart-breaking or awful is shown in them. Again, users display family snapshots, but what they clearly have in mind is Alan on the beach, and they are thus haunted by the latter image.³⁰⁶

When shared with one of Demir’s photographs, or when shared with one another, the situation turns, and the sharers attempt to provide context: e.g., that the family were trying to escape to a better life; the number of refugees who drowned in the Summer of 2015; that the children’s mother died as well. In these, we can see efforts to contextualise the child’s death.

4.6. Thematic interpretations in the dataset

The response to the image of Alan on the beach was of course overwhelmingly emotive in nature; it was sufficiently haunting that even tweets exclusively posting photographs of the boy alive and smiling were inflected by the experience of seeing Demir’s photographs. Just under 40% of the posts are emotive in nature and enjoin the reader to engage with the photographs to acknowledge humanity’s collective failure; they write of broken hearts, tears, and grief.³⁰⁷ Due in part to its simplicity, the image of Alan “was experienced as a simple emotional visceral moment” for many internationally (Prøitz, 2017:9). When viewed in patterns, their comments suggest attempts at articulating mutually familiar experiences between the author and reader over the particular pictures they share.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Record #23.

³⁰⁶ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Fam?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “N”; “Th-Affect” set to display all except for “-” (not present).

³⁰⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display all except for “Art”, “Family snap”, and “Multiple”; and “Th-Affect” set to display all except for “-” (not present). Other common themes are to describe the picture, or the circumstances of Alan’s death, factually. Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4055) note a similar range of responses in their account of Turkish and Flemish tweets arising from Alan’s death: the response range from “sadness and benevolence to shame, anger, and pleasure”; and a “varying tonality... from a sympathetic to an angry and hateful one... we also observe a more factual, detached style... which mainly ‘report’ on refugee-related issues rather than ‘commenting’ on them”; the current datasheet has a number of tweets with religious content as well.

³⁰⁸ Tying the commentary to the pictures more tightly highlights the value of the approach taken in this research project. In their account of audience response on Facebook, Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018:327) note that “The forms of audience analysis mentioned above have been carried out through the medium of verbal language, making it difficult to capture the power of visual form and aesthetic salience”. This is in part because the authors do not note which pictures of Alan were present; this lacuna is used as a justification for looking at the range of response

Theme Chart 1–Theme Chart 3 show the textual themes accompanying Demir’s photographs. The most widely-shared sentiments refer to Alan as a symbol, recognise the power in Demir’s photographs, and emphasise a shared common humanity with the child. More broadly, however, the details of comments upon Demir’s photographs reflect affective responses: many express affective phrases, empathy, describe the picture as haunting, refer to heartbreak, prayer, heaven, and angels.

Looking at Twitter responses to the death of Alan Kurdi, El-Enany (2016) noted the presence of the sentiment “this could have been my child”, a comment which is close to a number of affective statements in the current datasheet, particularly those that assert common humanity.³⁰⁹ She interpreted this sentiment as a stubborn refusal by Europeans to accept their own part in setting the foundations for the misery of refugees. Identification of similarities to their own children are, then, dismissed out of hand: “their children could not of course have met Aylan Kurdi’s end. It was, after all, the ancestors of the white Europeans tweeting selfies taken with their babies as they headed for their nearest #RefugeesWelcome march who colonised the lands from which these desperate people come” (El-Enany, 2016:14). Reception of the photographs have also been interpreted as a “sense of failure that challenged Western self-description of the caring parent and shifted the news narrative of the ‘crisis’ towards sentimental pity—a self-oriented emotion that celebrated ‘ourselves’ as a benevolent public” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1168). However, the datasheet suggests that these analyses are ill-targeted: based upon the names and biographies of the people who shared pictures of Alan, a disproportionately large number of posts come from North Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey. Their responses may be sentimental in nature, but they are less oriented towards the West than either of these analyses suggest.

Whilst these condemnatory interpretations may have some merit—a large number of posts concentrate more on the failures of the West to addresses the crisis—they also miss the resonance of the pictures. *Pace* El-Enany, it is unlikely that the sentiment “that could be my child” was *literally interpreted to mean* that one’s child could have ended up on that beach: rather, it is an *implicit recognition of the child’s pose that one has seen one’s child looking like Alan on the beach*. In other words, the form of identification is very different: “that could be my child” because I have seen my child in that position.³¹⁰ A combination of practical experience—

imagery shown on *Bored Panda* (Nèjè, 2015), but this list of imagery lack context for understanding which pictures were considered the most resonant.

³⁰⁹ El-Enany examined tweets containing the hashtag #CouldBeMyChild, which were not collected in this dataset. However, similar sentiments exist in the datasheet. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “Y”; and “Th-Affect” set to “Common humanity”.

³¹⁰ In their rendition of European newspaper responses, Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018:323–24) note the presence of emotional evocations related to childhood, innocence, and playing. In such a context, newspapers asked viewers to imagine if Alan were the viewer’s child. Individuals

one's experience of one's child sleeping in a similar position—and symbolic aspects—the viewing of similar imagery in the past—develop iconographic resonances in the response to the image of Alan on the beach that seem to have transcended Orientalist formulations of the Other as distinctly different. This combination of practical experience and symbolic familiarity forms the basis for perhaps the most widely-expressed iconographic theme in the dataset: the equation of sleep and death. This fundamental theme provides the underlying support for the other themes explored here: Alan as an angel, and Alan as a monument.

4.6.1. Death and sleep

It is worth asking why *this* child was so visible on Twitter and in the broader media, and not the many others who have died—including Ghalib, Alan's brother. After all, many other children have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean; many children are killed across the world; many of them have been photographed; nine of the records in the datasheet show other dead children.³¹¹ In fact, the most widely-retweeted post is not of Alan, but of a different refugee child, one of many people who washed up on the Libyan shore on 28 August (record #1; first entry in Figure 50), a scant five days before Alan was found at Bodrum (Fahim, 2015).³¹² The authors of tweets showing these other children want to commemorate their deaths too, often accusing viewers of double standards: the viewer is willing to look at the one photo, but not the other. They thus anticipate the criticisms forwarded by El-Anany, Chouliaraki, and Stolic.



responding on the newspapers' Facebook pages referred to nieces and sons whose age was similar to Alan's. In that instance, the evocation of identification seems prompted by the medium itself; in the datasheet, it seems to bear an internal origin (Slovic et al., 2017:3).

³¹¹ The viewer should be particularly wary of this filter: some of the photographs are particularly distressing. Filter recipe: "Pic Type?" set to display "Montage", "Nonprofessional photograph", and "Unknown"; "PicTh-Child" should be set to "Dead". Alan needs to be present because a number of the photographs show the body of Alan with that of another child (records #140 and #546 show multiple photographs of Alan by Demir with another child's corpse being dragged on the same beach; Alan is contrasted with other children in records #173, #289, #795, and #850). However, retaining Alan means that three of the tweets (records #203, #502, and #824) are captured which only show Alan, and they should be discarded for the purposes of this query. A further picture is not captured by this query (record #93), because the tweet displays both live and dead children (Alan and Ghalib).

³¹² By rights, the photograph in record #1 should be deemed one of the "missing" images in the datasheet—the author has long since deleted the tweet. However, it had been captured manually before the author deleted it.

In other words, these critical authors—those on Twitter, El-Anany, Chouliaraki and Stolic—implicitly recognise that there is something about the image of Alan that drives the viewer’s affect in a way that other photographs fail to do. The other pictures of dead children in this datasheet—including that of Alan’s own brother, Ghalib (record #93c, third entry in Figure 50)—differ considerably from Alan. Their bodies roll in the surf, their nappies soaked with seawater; they lie with their limbs at unnatural angles and their clothes partly dragged off of them; strapped to a gurney, their backs arch as they gasp their last breaths; missing limbs, they are propped up, staring lifelessly; their heads contain wounds oozing blood; they are stacked like firewood in a morgue; they are split nearly in half down the sternum; blood pouring from their bodies, they lie as they fell, bowed over in an obscene parody of السُّجُود (*al sujūd*), or the pose of prostration in the Muslim ritual of prayer (remainder of children in Figure 50). The highlighted details of any of these may qualify as examples of *punctum*, or the element which causes an affective response that “pierces” the viewer through the *studium*, or general reception of a photograph (Barthes, 1980:26).



In contrast, the integrity of Alan’s body is not violated: there are neither wounds nor blood. He is near the surf, but not partly submerged by it, in contrast to the child in record #1; nor does he lie with his head or limbs canted at unnatural angles, like his brother. Alan’s physical condition and bodily position make all the difference. Unlike these other photographs, the image of Alan is “tolerably shocking” (Grant, 2015): it provides viewers the space for sympathetic affective responses without driving them away in horror or even in a reflex of disgust. Simply put: he does not look dead, despite the fact that he had drowned, and his body had been tossed about in the Mediterranean for hours until it landed upon a rocky shore.

A corpse in water suffers many indignities. In cold water, it has been established that a body visibly decomposes within two days, a process that would only accelerate in the warm Mediterranean of early September (Boyle et al., 1997). The skin starts to peel off, and worse, a number of scavengers feed upon dead flesh, starting with the very things humans look to first to identify others of our own species: the softer tissue of the face, particularly around the eyes, nose, and mouth (Sorg et al., 1997). Upon reaching the shore, a body (particularly the face and teeth) likely will be damaged further by abrasion against rocks, and may be deposited in unnatural positions, like the bodies in records #1, #93, and #372 (Haglund and Sorg, 2002). Alan’s body does not appear to suffer any of these injuries or indignities.

But not only is Alan’s body whole, his bodily position is unnervingly familiar. Many parents will have seen their own children sleeping in such a position. Toddlers frequently sleep in odd positions where their faces are virtually buried by the pillow underneath. I have seen my own child at that age in the same position: at the time, the thought “he looks like he’s dead”

inescapably entered my mind. In contrast, with Alan—particularly Alan alone on the beach—the situation is fully reversed: he is dead but looks alive. One can easily project a safe, alternative, and familiar interpretation of sleep upon the image: “that could be my child”, sleeping. One cannot project an image of sleep upon the photographs of other dead children in the datasheet. This twinning of sleep and death, too, is an example of *punctum*, but this very different example demonstrates that the invocation of *punctum* is too blunt a concept to understand the response to these photographs. And whilst one can point to the fact that media figures still have the power to propel a story to virality, as *Washington Post* Middle East correspondent Liz Sly did in this instance (D’Orazio, 2015), we are still left with the question *why* this photograph was so resonant. We have established a practical similarity—that Alan’s pose is eerily familiar to parents. How might this pose be symbolic?

It may be more helpful to turn to cultural practices to understand its impact. The relationship between sleep and death is more than euphemistic. If anything, it is culturally overdetermined. For the ancient Greeks, the gods Θάνατος (Death) and Ύπνος (Sleep) are brothers, and they were frequently depicted as identical twins, as in the *Euphronios Krater*.³¹³ On Roman sarcophagi, *Mors* (Death) and *Somnus* (Sleep) are frequently depicted as twin *putti*, bearing inverted torches (Panofsky, 1964:cf. figs 102, 105, 115, and 123). The connection between sleep and death has held true in the three major monotheistic traditions, in both scripture and practical beliefs. Sleep and death are twinned in the Old Testament: “Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death” (*Psalms* 12:4); “Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake” (*Daniel* 12:2), and upon death, the king “slept with his fathers” (*3 Kings* 11:43, 14:20, 16:6, 22:51; *4 Kings* 14:16, 15:7, 16:20, 20:21, 21:18), a phrase used so often that it was clearly a standard metaphor. The process continues in the New Testament: upon hearing of Lazarus’ death, Jesus announces his intention of raising him from the dead: “Lazarus our friend sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep” (*John* 11:11). In the midst of arguing that the bodies of holy figures are incorruptible, St. Jerome describes saints as “sleeping” (Bynum, 1995:93). St. Jerome’s argument is strongly paralleled in North African Islamic traditions of the holy man, or المرابط (*al marabout*): “strictly speaking, the Islamic *marabout* does not die, he merely slumbers in his tomb”, a notion of entangled sanctity and embodiment integral to Sufi Islamic thought (Turner, 1974:68; Kugle, 2007:16–21).³¹⁴ These long-standing beliefs and traditions obliquely inform more contemporary

³¹³ In the *Iliad*, Apollo is charged with handing the body of Sarpedon over to “Sleep and Death, who are twin brothers...” (Homer, 750 B.C.:Book 16, lines 680–81). In the *Theogony*, “Night gave birth to... Death and Sleep and to the brood of Dreams” and “harmful Night, veiled in dusky fog, carries in her arms Sleep, Death’s own brother” (Hesiod, c. 700 B.C.:lines 250–51, 778–79). For the *Euphronios Krater*, see Von Bothmer (1972–35).

³¹⁴ N.B. in contemporary transliterations of Arabic based upon Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), المرابط should be rendered as *al murābit*; the difference in the quote above is possibly due to varying pronunciation between MSA and *Maghribi* Arabic.

literature and daily practice as well. Shakespeare writes of the “sleep of death” in the famous soliloquy of *Hamlet* (Act 3, scene 1). Today, when we speak of a relative who has died, we say she has “gone to rest” or “gone to sleep”. Even when a terminally-ill pet is brought to the veterinarian to be euthanised, we say we had her “put to sleep”. The standard phrase chiselled onto tombstones is RIP—*Requiescat in Pace* (“Rest in Peace”), so familiar that it has become a common visual shorthand in cartoons and also on the Internet today, e.g., “RIP my wallet”, uttered by someone who has spent too much money on something.

Unlike the other children in the datasheet, then, Alan’s bodily integrity and position provides a sufficient illusion of sleep to reinforce the metaphor. Many in politics and the media have linked sleep and death in the image of Alan. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper—whose government denied asylum to Alan’s family—tearfully commented upon the fact that the photograph immediately made him think of his own son at that age (Peat, 2015). Liz Sly (2015) made reference to the connection in her justification for sharing the photograph. Nilüfer Demir’s editor at DHA, Uğur Cebeci, remarked upon the equivalence, as did Christiane Baart, the photo editor at the Dutch newspaper *De Trouw*.³¹⁵ A number of users in the datasheet remarked upon the connection between sleep and death, but most often they stated it in multiple, oblique ways, using phrases referring to sleep, wakefulness and opening eyes. They write “Good night, Alan”; “We put him to sleep, but we’re the ones who have to wake up”; “this is a picture that will open your eyes”, presumably because we, the viewers, are asleep (Theme Chart 12).³¹⁶ Most prominently, they use the metaphorical phrase “Rest in peace”.³¹⁷ This phrase, commonly used in commemorative services and on tombstones, is thus seen like the image of Alan himself: straddling the liminal space between sleep and death. Sharing a response image by Gathon based upon Figure 23, one user baldly stated that the photograph is unbearable because it “reflects a

³¹⁵ *De Trouw* was one of the few newspapers to print the image of Alan alone in place of the more commonly printed photograph of Alan with Sgt Çıplak. See the documentary *Een zee van beelden* (Pekel and van de Reijt, 2016). Cebeci notes the equivalence at the 3:30 mark; Baart speaks of it at the 10:15 mark.

³¹⁶ Filter recipes: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “Tweet Txt” set to search for records containing the term “eye” (“Tweet txt” unavailable in the redacted version of the datasheet). This receipt should be modified to query “TweetTransl” for records containing the term “eye”. In their research on user responses to the death of Alan on Facebook, Jens Kjeldsen and Ida Anderson note multiple references to waking and opening one’s eyes. Newspaper “Headlines framed the images as a wake-up call and suggested the images had the potential to change attitudes, policies, and history. Citizens and politicians were told to ‘wake up’ and deal with the crisis” (Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018:320). However, they characterise the metaphor’s use solely to describe “the urgency of a critical situation” (Kjeldsen and Andersen, 2018:325). They do not explore its use in relation to the pictures as such, nor do they explore alternative readings of the term’s usage.

³¹⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Demir?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; “Th-Other1” set to display “RIP” and “Sleep”. This recipe should be modified to query “The-Other2” for “RIP” as well.

living, sleeping child” (Figure 51).³¹⁸ The long-standing practices and statements outlined here constitute critical examples of textual imagery linking sleep and death. As such, they are much in keeping with Mitchell’s (1986) notion that iconological study should envelope both visual and textual imagery. Here however, the analysis is embedded in long-standing cultural practices and expanded beyond Mitchell’s narrower confines of political ideology.



It is worth stepping back to consider the fact that the close cultural connection between sleep and death is artificial. For those who have not died peacefully—like Alan—death rarely resembles sleep. As the photographs of other dead children in the datasheet show, death often looks uncompromisingly like nothing other than itself. And yet whilst people die unnatural deaths all the time—for example, from car crashes, accidents, murders, suicides—our *visual impression* of death is closer to the cultural and textual connections to sleep drawn above. This is no accident. In the West and the Near East, at the very least, the visual representation of death is most frequently peaceful even when the death it represents is not. It is usually both aestheticised—that is, it is portrayed as an object made worthy in itself for view, even perversely beautiful in its way—and made hygienic—it is cleansed of nearly all indications of the brutality that caused the death. This is most easily indicated by one of the most common representations in the West in the past two millennia: that of the crucified Jesus. This is not to say that Alan is somehow Jesus: both are instead connected through the multi-millennium depiction of aestheticised corpses.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Record #749. This example is particularly interesting because the author draws out the connection to sleep, whilst in the image’s text, Gathon draws out an identification between his own child and Alan (“j’imagine mon enfant à sa place”).

³¹⁹ Sontag (2003:71) sees Christian iconography as the source of many photographs of suffering. The situation is likely reversed: the suffering of Christ is an example of a person suffering. The longstanding assertions of devotional literature aside, an image of a suffering person is not a mirror of Christ’s suffering. Resonant imagery is used in both cases; the point, simply, is that there are more examples depicting Christ suffering than other humans suffering; at best, the “gravitational pull” of representations of Christ suffering inflects the representations of those that follow. This is a Warburgian point: emotional formulae are employed in the imagery of Christ, and we recognise his suffering in part because we understand how bodies move and feel.

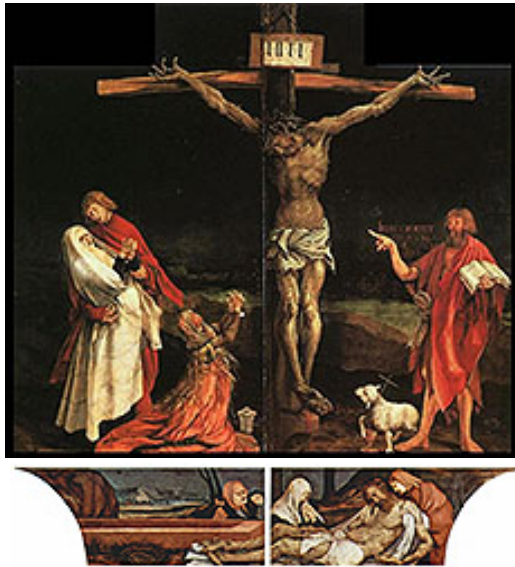
4.6.1.1. The aestheticised corpse



Generally speaking, Jesus' body has been displayed with few of the wounds associated with the Passion, with but a small trickle of blood and a slight discolouration of the body. Consider Giotto di Bondone's *Crucifixion* (c. 1300; Figure 52), Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (c. 1435; Figure 53), or Anthony van Dyck's *Deposition / Lamentation* (c. 1634; Figure 54). The first

two were well-known, influential paintings in their own time, and the third is a representative Baroque rendition of the scene. Giotto's represents the moment of Jesus' death: blood and water trickling from the wound in his side, he bows his head. His supporters mourn, and the angels themselves evince paroxysms of grief. Van der Weyden's panel and Van Dyck's canvas are both renditions of the collection of Jesus' body from the cross immediately following his death: the stillness of Jesus' body is contrasted with the mourning of the figures around him. All three paintings depict Jesus prior to his ritual washing before burial. After the multiple traumas to which his body was subjected in the Passion and the crucifixion, and prior to his ritual cleansing, his corpse should be a bloody mess. In the standard art-historical literature, Giotto and Van der Weyden have been particularly noted for the "naturalism" with which they depicted their figures.³²⁰ Yet these are not natural renditions: they are whitewashed, sanitised: they are images of death made aesthetically appealing.

³²⁰ Giotto "deserved to be called a disciple of Nature rather than of other masters" according to Vasari (1549:19). Gombrich (1950:167) discusses Giotto under the rubric "the conquest of reality". Hartt (1987:72) refers to the naturalism of Giotto's *Crucifixion*, contrasting it with what he describes as the Mediaeval liturgical Christ "triumphant over death" (called the *Christus triumphans*) or the "agonised victim in the Italo-Byzantine traditions"—which in fact rarely depict truly bloody or bruised Christs. Van der Weyden "could faithfully reproduce every detail"



There are more violent renditions of Jesus' corpse.³²¹ Viewing them and acknowledging their comparative unfamiliarity highlights the standard iconography of the corpse represented in the above renditions. Consider Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion*, the central panel from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (c. 1512–16; Figure 55). His body taut in his death agony, Jesus is pierced throughout by thorns, and is depicted as dirty and drained of colour.³²² The altarpiece's *predella* (Figure 56), showing a lamentation scene immediately prior to Jesus'

burial emphasises his difference from the living figures around him: the thorns have been removed, but he is greenish and covered with wounds. Similarly, Hans Holbein's *Entombment of Christ* (1521; Figure 57) emphasises the uncompromising difference of death: cleansed, Jesus lies in his tomb with discoloured face, hands, and feet; his eyes lie open, staring lifelessly. By concentrating on the materiality of death, both artists have made it far more difficult to focus

(Gombrich, 1950:209), but eschews a naturalistic setting in order to heighten the emotionality of the scene (Snyder, 1985:124). Another classic spokesman of this "conquest of reality" is Clarke (1956:223–25), who describes the 10th-century *Gero Cross* as a "hieroglyphic of pathos". Whilst Jesus' body sags on the *Gero Cross*—suggesting the lack of animation inherent in living flesh—it again bears virtually none of the violence done to the body. This famed example too sanitises and aestheticises death, even whilst opening the door to other aspects of the reality of death.

³²¹ These can be very violent indeed: there is a rival tradition that concentrates upon the bloodiness of Jesus. These are most common in German art from the fourteenth century, but examples exist throughout Europe. This is known as the *Christus patiens*, the suffering or enduring Christ, as opposed to *Christus triumphans* (Spivey, 2001:63). The majority of examples of *Christus patiens* are primarily devotional in nature and are representative of the quasi-mystical desire to be present during the Passion, and as such are part of the devotional movement that saw its greatest expression in Germany with the publication of several "eyewitness" versions of Passion, such as Ludolphus of Saxony's *Vita Christi* (Marrow, 1979). In keeping with a concentration upon suffering, however, these bloody devotional scenes more often Jesus in the midst of the Passion, although there are indeed some examples of the wounded corpse of Jesus as well—see particularly the *Röttgen Pietà* (*Rheinisches Landesmuseum*, Bonn). An intriguing series of sculptures had movable arms so that for Good Friday celebrations, they could be removed from the cross, the arms could be retracted, and the body could be "buried" until Easter (Powell, 2012).

In addition, there is the whole corpus of violent depictions showing the martyrdoms of saints. However, as with devotional imagery of Jesus, they are shown suffering: dying, perhaps, but not dead. They are almost never shown after death, except in depictions of the communion of saints in Heaven. This, however, is a space out of narrative time, similar to that depicted with Man of Sorrows imagery.

³²² Hayum (1989) has plausibly argued that the unusual depiction of Jesus in this altarpiece is due to the altarpiece's function as a chapel in a hospital which treated victims of St. Anthony's Fire.

upon any hope for an afterlife.³²³ Indeed, in Dostoevsky's *Идиот* (*The Idiot*; 1869), Myshkin exclaims whilst looking at a copy of Holbein's panel: "Some people might lose their faith by looking at that picture!"³²⁴ These depictions of death differ dramatically from the standard images of Jesus: the aestheticised, hygienic dead body.



Of course, Jesus' aestheticised, hygienic body is not the only corpse depicted in paintings and sculpture. It is not the iconographic source for the image of death: it is rather the most common and most influential, bearing witness to the notion that some images carry a greater iconographic "mass", attracting other representations to it (Białostocki, 1965:146). Painters, sculptors, and photographers have depicted other corpses: how do they differ? How are they similar?

Representations of the death of Meleager (Figure 58) were almost certainly the inspiration for a



number of renditions of the Deposition, including that by Rogier van der Weyden—and depict the hero carried and mourned over by his relatives. Meleager did not die a violent death. The depiction, then, concentrates upon the hero's beautiful, unviolated form and the grief of those around him. A similar rendition is evident in David's *Death of Bara* (1794: Figure 59), representing a youth who single-handedly resisted Royalist sympathisers during the convulsions of the French Revolution. The murdered youth lies naked on the ground with no indication of the violence done to him. Bara's aestheticised corpse is presented as a martyr for the Revolution, in an



³²³ A more recent image of the death of Jesus in the tradition of Grünewald and Holbein is Arnold Böcklin's *Deposition* (1874; *Alte Nationalgalerie*, Berlin). Here, Jesus stares lifelessly upward, mouth open; his skin bears the greenish pallor of death.

³²⁴ Myshkin's exclamation makes an interesting counterpoint to the moment of the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox churches: in the Middle Ages, a representative of the Latin church criticised Orthodox crucifixions which presented Jesus as a dead human rather than as a supernatural being that defies death (Belting, 1990:1). Looking back upon the long history of representations of the dead Jesus, there are generally fewer differences between the *Christus triumphans* and the *Christus patiens* than there is between all of them and Holbein's representation.

example of David's willingness to mix familiar religious iconography into revolutionary content.³²⁵



In representations of the Massacre of the Innocents—based upon the narrative in *Matthew* 2:2–18—there are certainly many child corpses as soldiers fulfil Herod's order to kill all the male children in Bethlehem under the age of 2. But depictions of the massacre usually focus upon the orgy of violence, the study of figures in motion, and the pathos of the mothers who try to save or otherwise mourn their young (Figure 60).



In contrast, Timothy O'Sullivan's *Harvest of Death* (1863: Figure 61) shows the dead strewn about the field following the Battle of Gettysburg. This is a pointed contemplation of death as such: its representation of bloated corpses is "quite distinct... from the more studiously heroic or hygienic images" produced by illustrators in the popular press, and its production was aimed at preventing any such future butchery (Spivey, 2001:204). But this representation of death is that of a by-product of war: we are meant to contemplate war at least as much as we are to contemplate bodies on the ground. In Sergei Ponomarev's 2014 photograph of Palestinians mourning the Nigim family after an airstrike in Gaza (Figure 62), the focus of the grief—the bodies of the dead—are barely in the frame. The focus of the photographer is, rather, the mourning of the those who are still alive.



(Figure 62), the focus of the grief—the bodies of the dead—are barely in the frame. The focus of the photographer is, rather, the mourning of the those who are still alive.

It is more common for both painters, sculptors, and photographers to depict the *liminal state* between life and death: to put it crudely, the dramatic moment that leads to death, the "death in process" (Zelizer, 2010:28). This is the case with the vast corpus of narrative works depicting the martyrdom of saints. St Stephen is shown just at the moment the stones are about to be thrown in his martyrdom; SS Paul and Catherine of Alexandra kneel as their executioners lift their blades; St Lawrence writhes on the grill; the blade hovers over St Lucy before entering her flesh. Representing this liminal moment continues in photography as well, as observed in Barbie Zelizer's *About To Die* (2010). Zelizer divides her examples between "presumed", "possible", and

³²⁵ See Ginzberg (2017:77–116) for an extended reading of David's *Death of Marat* (1793; *Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, Brussels) in a very similar vein.

“certain” death, but the majority of her “certain death” examples are in fact photographs taken split-seconds before death occurs: they are, as she describes them, images of “impending death”.

Representations of Jesus aside, the image of death itself is taboo and not widely distributed.³²⁶ This taboo is not broken lightly, as it flies in the face of a long-standing collective denial of the insuperable finality of death and (more immediately) negative affective responses of disgust and fear. Editorially, withholding the image of the corpse is a matter of “good taste”, which acts as a form of repression (Sontag, 2003:61–62; Zelizer, 2010:28–29). As a species, we appear to have often struggled with the idea of death as the ultimate Other, something that seemingly looks like us but is inescapably different from us. We appear to have dressed graves for 130,000 years, providing gifts to care for loved ones in the person’s purported afterlife (Von Petzinger, 2016:46); there are furthermore a large number of widespread taboos about the corpse and hygiene (Frazer, 1922:166ff). If we must look upon death, then, it appears that we most often look upon it in the oblique image of a body *potentially* alive, either in this world or in the afterlife. Indeed, positing an afterlife is crucial for a subset of the artistic responses to the death of Alan.³²⁷

³²⁶ There is a taboo depicting death in contemporary journalism, but Fehrenbach and Rodogno (2015:1124) state that this was not always the case. Suffering or dying children were regularly photographed in the Belgian Congo, the massacre of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, the deprivations of post-revolutionary Russia, and Europe in the aftermath of the Great War. These pictures, however, were often distributed in the context of missionary or NGO work. The issue at issue in this research project, however, is the unprecedented distribution of photography of death—particularly of Alan as opposed to other, maimed dead children, in a time where ethical standards have shifted considerably since at least the 1980s.

This point aside, visual representations of death are extremely rare in contemporary mass media: the majority of victims are shown alive (Hanusch, 2007; Zelizer, 2010). Lenette and Cleland (2016) speculate that because of this, the violation of the taboo against showing death is an important factor in the virality of Alan’s death: it violates the taboo. Yet the taboo is maintained despite the potential urgency of uncovering it: the trove of 55,000 photographs from the Syrian military photographer identified as “Caesar” showing over 11,000 corpses that endured systematic torture on behalf of the Assad regime have been subject to very little public or academic scrutiny (Güçtürk, 2014:36–37). I would argue that this is at least in part because these corpses embody taboos about death.

³²⁷ The desire for an afterlife is readily on display in many of the “supernatural” artistic response pictures (Figure 38). Zezo portrays the body of Alan carried by a giant hand—perhaps a personification of the water, perhaps a deity—from the bloody left of the picture to the placid right (signposted as الجنة, e.g., *Jannah*, or “paradise”). The Québécois artist ygreck places a dripping Alan in the gigantic hand of a haloed figure, again clearly a god: in parallel with the child, the god also “drips”, but tears instead of seawater. Inkquisitive places a ghostly figure of Alan looking down on his body. See below for a discussion of Alan and angels.

Seeing the body as potentially alive—through likening it to a sleeping body—is precisely what one sees in artistic recreations of Alan on the beach. Like the “low art” iconographic sources of old, the pictures made in response to the death of Alan are comparatively straightforward in drawing out this potential (Figure 36 contains response images using permutations of the sleep theme; see also Theme Chart 13–Theme Chart 17 and Theme Chart 18–Theme Chart 19 for an overview of image distribution).



Nahar Bahij



Pito Campos



Omer Tosun



Rita Jordison



Monsieur Kak



Lina Abgaradeh



Khaled Kharajah



UNHCR



Yantê Ismail



Gathon



Unknown-Sleeping Family Beach



Mahnaz Yazdani



Islam Gawish

Some of the most widely-retweeted pictures use the resemblance to switch sleep for death directly: for instance, those by Omer Tosun, Rita Jordison, Nahar Bahij, and Pito Campos. Islam Gawish arguably portrays Alan as a sleeping angel, although this piece is more ambiguous.

Omer Tosun remediated the image of Alan, alone, by showing him sleeping in a bed at night-time, thoroughly domesticating the context in which the child's body was photographed (Figure 41).³²⁸ The accompanying text from Steve Dennis' tweet states that the picture states “how his

³²⁸ This is the second-most retweeted artistic response picture in the dataset. Its author has been misidentified as by Steve Dennis, despite the fact that at the bottom right the author's name—Turkish illustrator Omer Tosun—is plainly visible (Nèjè, 2015; Mortensen, 2017:1152). <https://twitter.com/omertos/status/639122475826212864> [Accessed 27 September 2015]. To

story should have ended”.³²⁹ The surf that bubbled against Alan’s face has been turned into a pillow. By directing the viewer’s attention to a glass of water lit more brightly than the surrounding gloom, Tosun has created an *ad hoc* symbol obliquely referencing Alan’s death. Tosun has established a connection between sleep and death; other image makers have done this as well, perhaps drawing the connection even more closely.



Rita Jordison also placed Alan in a domestic setting, inscribing the span of Alan’s life on the headboard (Figure 63).³³⁰ On her DeviantArt submission, she provided the title “This is Where He Should Be”, and this sentiment is echoed by the person who posted the image on Twitter (record #154), but by inscribing Alan’s headboard with his lifespan, Jordison also obliquely references standard information placed on tombstones.

The Saudi artist Nahar Bahij places Alan’s body amongst toys, as if he had fallen asleep whilst playing, captioning the image “In a Better Place” (in English and Arabic; Figure 64). The Turk Ugurgallen has changed the image of Alan on the beach, reversed and domesticated it by adding a sand pail (Figure 65).



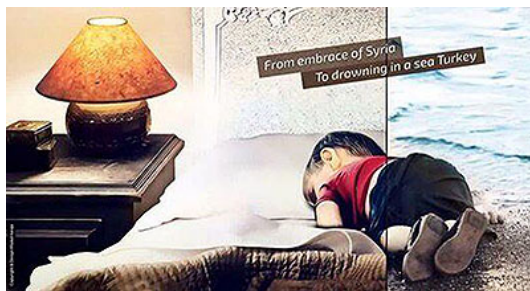
The shadow cast by Alan instead shows the child playing with the pail, making it unclear whether the image-maker intended Alan to be

view all 21 entries in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; and “Attrib1” set to “Omer Tosun”. This recipe should be modified to query “Attrib2”, “Attrib3”, and “Attrib4” as well.

³²⁹ <https://twitter.com/SteveDennis71/status/639304898782232576/photo/1> [Accessed 25 November 2015]. Dennis forwarded the image without attribution to Tosun. This is very common on social media, as people share quickly without bothering with attribution: they are interested in visual expressions of their sentiment, and not in the provenance of the sentiment itself. Dennis, however, was instrumental in spreading Tosun’s image into various different networks, making it the tenth most widely-shared image in the datasheet (see record #10). Mortensen (2017:1152) claims that this post was circulated more than “25 billion” times, a number only qualified by being derived from a reverse Google Image search. In the datasheet, its reach is a more modest 3,091 retweets.

³³⁰ <https://www.boredpanda.com/author/varjordison/> [Accessed 14 May 2016]. See record #154.

viewed as alive or dead, again contrasting “what should have happened” with “what actually happened”.³³¹



Other examples of the theme explicitly compare sleeping to death: for instance, those by Lina Abgaradeh and Khaled Kharajah contrast sleeping in a bed to lying on the beach (Figure 66, Figure 67). Monsieur Kak’s illustration (for the journal *L’Opinion*) explicitly draws a connection between a parent’s sleeping child and Alan lying on the beach (Figure 68). Still others acknowledge death but heighten affective elements. Some depict death, but with strong evocations of sleep. In Yantë Ismail’s piece, the waves act as a blanket, but Alan’s head is on a pillow (Figure 69). Gathon’s illustration is ambiguous in its

depiction, but the accompanying text is straightforward in its claim that Alan looks like he is sleeping (Figure 51).³³²



³³¹ <https://twitter.com/ugurgallen/status/639109202011660288/photo/1> [Accessed 3 August 2017]. Jordison’s and Ugurgallen’s images were presented alongside one another (record #154). This Twitter poster, at least, fixed the meaning of Ugurgallen’s image, contrasting what *should* have happened to Alan as opposed to what *actually* happened. However, as noted above, the lines demarcating the two images are far blurrier than this suggests.

³³² The text, originally in French, is as follows: “I say to myself that one could believe he’s sleeping, that he’s going to awaken, that he’s alive, that the sea didn’t throw him back like that, a child so young. I imagine my child in his place, my heart is sick, my stomach hurts, I can’t get this image out of my head. It’s an image of shame which states to us that it’s time to stop CLOSING OUR EYES”.

Three pictures playing on the theme of sleep may be fairly described as “haunted” by the original image. Perhaps one of the most intriguing pictures is by an unknown artist (called “Unknown—Sleeping Family Beach” in the datasheet) who acknowledged Alan as dead by retaining him



within the context of lying at the edge of the waves (Figure 70); however, the artist has inserted a phantom couple cuddling the child, effectively straddling the liminal space between sleep and death. The account for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) distributed the second ‘haunted’ picture, one depicting the now-familiar Bodrum coastline (Figure 71). Alan’s body is

missing, replaced by a handheld note stating, “Sleep tight little boy”. Like Yantë Ismail, Mahnaz Yazdani uses the sea as a blanket for her figures, but Alan is not present, instead replaced by a jumble of sleeping children (Figure 72).³³³



None of these representations linking death and sleep refer to specific artefacts either from the history of photography or the history of art. Alan is likened neither to Jesus nor to Meleager. Alan’s body on the beach does not follow any specific depiction. The iconological point is larger than any of these: that collectively, all of these show a repeated adherence to the representation of death as akin to sleep, reinforced to such an extent that the connection seems a natural one.

The ability to codeswitch between sleep and death is fundamental for the two other themes explored in this chapter: the portrayal of Alan as an angel and the depiction of the body as an oversized monument. Without the ability to codeswitch, these other interpretations would not be possible.

³³³ It is arguable that Yazdani does not refer to Alan specifically, but to all the children who have drowned crossing the Mediterranean. However, the timing suggests that it was made in response to the death of Alan. Yazdani originally posted this picture on Facebook on 2 September: <https://www.facebook.com/ainazcartoon/photos/a.1526963024192860.1073741832.1454317661457397/1526963090859520/?type=1&theater>. The following day, she reposted it on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MahnazYazdani/status/639507796271214593> (both accessed 5 August 2017).

4.6.2. Alan and angels

A number of Twitter users commonly associated Alan with angels. These associations are both textual and visual in nature; only a few referred to Alan as an angel *and* posted a picture of him as one.³³⁴ Alan is the only person equated with angels in the datasheet, and always as such in texts: “Rest in peace, little angel”; “one more angel in heaven”, and “sweet little angel” are representative examples (Theme Chart 20). Turning to visual representations, Alan is most often turned into an angel, with but one exception (see the theme in Figure 38, which focuses upon supernatural themes, angels being a major part of this. Theme Chart 21 lists the pictures and terms used when sharing pictures of Alan as an angel).³³⁵



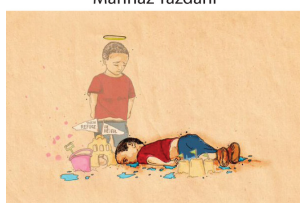
Mahnaz Yazdani



UNHCR



Unknown-
Sleeping Family Beach



Inquisitive



Khalid Albaih



Islam Gawish



Naser Jafari



ygreck



Zezo



Unknown-Divine Hands

The term “angel” is often a metaphor for innocence and sweetness, spoken by parents to their children: it seems not uncommon to describe a sleeping child as a “sleeping angel”. Portraying the child as an angel—sweet and innocent—is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the move to portray the child as an angel is confined to Western art stemming from the Roman tradition.³³⁶ Amongst the middle classes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and France, childhood came to be seen as a time separate from the rest of life, a period characterised by innocence.

³³⁴ Filter recipes: “PicTh-Spirit” set to “Angel” (for visual portrayals); “Th-Spirit” set to “Angel” (for textual references).

³³⁵ Instead of turning Alan into an angel, Khalid Albaih (records #34 and #189) place him in the arms of a silhouetted angel.

³³⁶ As mentioned before, Roman antique art employed winged *putti* on sarcophagi and in other settings, a practice which fed into one of the Christian representations of angels. The Islamic visual tradition differs: when depicted—for example, in Persian manuscripts—the *malāk* (*al malāk*, or the angel) does not appear to be ever rendered as a child, but as an adult.

This change came hand in hand with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's raising of the state of childhood to an exemplar of the ideal state of humanity. Rousseau rejected both the Christian view of humanity as fundamentally tainted by original sin, and the secular, Hobbesian view of the State of Nature as one characterised by violence and struggle: "red in tooth and claw".

Correspondingly, we become corrupted in adulthood, and as such the innocent child became an increasing focus of sentimentality and political campaigns, particularly against child labour (Ariès, 1960; Cunningham, 1995:58–80). Not coincidentally, one of the most widely-regarded works of art during this same period was Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (also known as the *Dresden Madonna*; 1512).³³⁷ This panel had been held up by J.J. Winckelmann as an ideal work of art—as Hans Belting (2001b:50–61) has put it, it was one of the first panels to be deemed a "masterpiece" in the modern sense of the term—and as such it came to play a large part in the nineteenth-century European imaginary, particularly the German imaginary. Appreciation of the work has strayed from aesthetic concerns to more sentimental ones due in part to the now-familiar portrayal of the two cherubs (angels depicted in the form of young children) at the bottom of the frame: they lean out from the bottom of the frame and observe the vision above (Figure 73). Thus, in a parallel track at the time children in general were perceived in increasingly sentimental terms, these cherubs came to be sentimental favourites



(Emison, 2002:242–43). The two cherubs remain popular today, and are represented on greeting cards, posters, wrapping paper, and notebooks.

There are more recent antecedents to such angel-based sentimentality in more popular culture. Works by Salon or *Art officiel* artists carried on similar sentimental depictions, and whilst these works are generally disregarded today in favour of Courbet and the Impressionists, they are worth investigation for their possible connections to popular culture.³³⁸ William-Adolphe

³³⁷ There are of course many examples of child angels (cherubs or *putti*) prior to Raphael. Here, however, we are interested in the confluence of sentimentality, angels, and children as it feeds into contemporary imagery.

³³⁸ This is not a new observation: it has been noted before that cinematic depictions of ancient Rome have less to do with surviving imagery from Antiquity than from the work of Salon artists such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema (Prettejohn et al., 2016). Gombrich (1963:37) noted that stylistically, Bouguereau continued on in the tradition of Raphael and Titian, albeit with a more saccharine flavour in his work. Popular culture, then, seems to take its visual cues from *Salon* imagery

Bouguereau's *Chansons de printemps* (1889; Figure 74) is a curious example of the sentimental



equation of young children with angels: the seated woman stares emotionlessly at the viewer, seemingly approaching the end of her patience with the *putti* who whisper in her ear and play with her hair. The identification of children with angels in this period also informs funerary sculpture: sleeping child angels were also depicted on tombs, thus crossing back to the line between sleep and death (Figure 75).

Notwithstanding the vagaries of individual examples from the history of Western art, a visual connection between innocence and angels is evident in the datasheet. Several of the pictures connect Alan and angels (they are viewable in the “supernatural” umbrella theme in Figure 38).



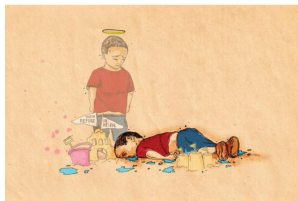
Mahnaz Yazdani



UNHCR



Unknown-
Sleeping Family Beach



Inkquisitive



Khalid Albaih



Islam Gawish



Naser Jafari



ygreck



Zezo



Unknown-Divine Hands

The third most widely-shared image is that by the Egyptian artist Islam Gawish (Figure 42).³³⁹

Gawish's picture of Alan with angel's wings. Alan grasps a rose in his hand, and a few feathers have fallen from the wings. The context of the background has been abstracted into washes of

³³⁹ <https://twitter.com/islamgawish/status/639107715063775233/photo/1> [Accessed 27 September 2015]. To view all 22 entries in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; and “Attrib1” set to “Islam Gawish”. This recipe should be modified to query “Attrib2”, “Attrib3”, and “Attrib4” as well.



colour that obscures the circumstances under which Alan was found.³⁴⁰ An unknown artist (the signature is illegible, and so the work is attributed to “Unknown—Divine Hands”; Figure 76) depicts Alan, dripping and with angel’s wings, picked out of the water by gigantic hands dropping from the sky, clearly a reference to a deity; The title states غرق طفل سوري, e.g., “drowned Syrian child”).



Departing from the photoset, Naser Jafari depicts Alan as an angel, flying away (Figure 77). Instead of considering Alan as an angel, the Qatari artist Khalid Albaih places a doubled image of Alan—presumably his spirit—in the arms of a silhouetted angel (Figure 78).³⁴¹ This angel appears to be related to angelic figures of mourning found on Victorian



³⁴⁰ All copies of the illustration in the dataset have been cropped from the original, which contains the word...سوريا (Syria...) written at the top right (as well as the artist’s signature at the bottom left). The addition of this single word suggests that Gawish saw Alan less as an individual, but more as a symbol of Alan as an angel, syncretically drawing upon both the cherub and the myth of Icarus, who fell to earth.

³⁴¹ <https://twitter.com/khalidalbaih/status/639443413234880512> [Accessed 15 March 2016]. See records #34 and #189.

Albaih included Sgt Çıplak in his rendition, one of only four pictures in the dataset to do so. Filter recipe: “Pic type” set to “Art”; “Pic Descr” set to search for entries which contain the word “Çıplak”. The other images are by Dave Pope (record #601), and Christian Adams (records #744 and #957), and most widely, Yasser Ahmad (filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Art?” set to “Y”; and “Attrib1” set to “Yasser Ahmad”. This recipe should be modified to query “Attrib2” and “Attrib4” as well.).

memorials, similar to those in London’s Highfield Cemetery (Figure 75).³⁴²

Like the connection between sleep and death, the creation and reception of these pictures do not rely upon specific formal antecedents, nor upon knowledge of specific examples; as these antecedents accrete associations over time, they create their own iconological momentum that is viewed in both textual and visual imagery. It is, however, notable that so many artists born and operating within the Middle East and North Africa use imagery that has long been associated with European visual history, such as angelic *putti* and deities with large, disembodied hands. It is difficult to explain this without knowing more about the visual culture of their respective homelands, but speaking speculatively, they have come from lands which contain art from the Roman Empire and have all honed their skills in a globalised marketplace.

4.6.3. Alan as oversized monument

Seven of the response pictures portray Alan as larger than life, including the single most widely-shared response picture, Asit Kumar’s photograph of Sudarsan Pattnaik making his sand sculpture (Figure 34).³⁴³ Most of them are inflected by blame for Alan’s death, and it is likely that enlarging him is a cipher for that blame (Theme Chart 22).



Msamir?



Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar (AFP)



Kichka



Wissam al Jazairy



Osama Esbaitah
Mohammed Abed (AFP)



Rafat Alkhateeb



Unknown-Graffito

³⁴² <https://twitter.com/khalidalbaih/status/639443413234880512> [Accessed 15 March 2016]. See records #34 and #189.

³⁴³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Pic Descr” set to search for all entries containing the word “giant”.



The Syrian artist Wissam al Jazairy placed Alan's body in the centre of a United Nations' Security Council meeting (Figure 79).³⁴⁴ An unknown artist—tentatively identified as "Msamir"—has placed an outsized Alan lying in the middle of an Arab League meeting, which has been understandably misidentified by some as a United Nations Security Council meeting (Figure 80).³⁴⁵ Al Jazairy and Msamir enlarge Alan to emphasise the wilful blindness of politicians: Alan is the proverbial elephant in the room, and yet they still cannot acknowledge his presence.



The Jordanian Rafat Alkhateeb created the most widely-shared political illustration, which he called the "New World Map" (Figure 81).³⁴⁶ In this picture, a monumentally large Alan is lying in the water, with a barbed wire fence barring him from safety. Alkhateeb enlarges Alan to place a

spotlight on inhumanity in general.

³⁴⁴ It appears that al Jazairy withdrew the picture from circulation. The evidence for this is scant and unverifiable—a screenshot of a post from a since-deleted Facebook account—but the post states [translated] "The UN design has been deleted in respect for the dead. I apologise to everyone... (its emotional motivation was virtually sinful). The tenderest of apologies from an aching soul..." This is the text of the original post:

تم حذف تصميم الأمم المتحدة احتراما لحرمة الموت بعذر من الجميع... (كان خطأ ذو دافع عاطفي يكاد أن يكون خطيئة)
الأعتذار أرحم بكثير من صديق الضمير...

Al Jazairy's withdrawal of this picture puts the researcher in an ethical quandary: it was a widely-shared picture, and as such is an important document that seemed to resonate with people in its interpretation of the tragic event. It is still easily found on the Internet, and still attributed to al Jazairy. The decision has been made to reproduce the picture in this research project because of its importance, but only in a small format in an attempt to honour the artist's wishes yet acknowledge the picture's place in shaping interpretations of Alan's death.

³⁴⁵ It has not been possible to identify the artist, but a watermark that seems to read "Msamir" in the Arial font has been placed to the left of Alan. It can be discerned by adjusting Levels in Photoshop (left-hand dark slider to 149; middle slider to 0.24). To view all 10 entries in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; and "Attrib1" set to "Msamir?". This recipe should be modified to query "Attrib4" as well.

³⁴⁶ <https://twitter.com/RAikhateeb/status/639235058742661120> [Accessed 15 March 2016]. To view all 16 entries in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; and "Attrib1" set to "Rafat Alkhateeb". This recipe should be modified to query "Attrib3" and "Attrib4" as well.



By far the most widely-shared artistic response to Alan's death was that of the Indian artist Sudarsan Pattnaik's sand sculpture (Figure 35), which was shared by news organisations such as *Agence France-Presse* (whose photographer, Asit Kumar, took the photograph) and

ordinary Twitter users alike.³⁴⁷ The caption to Pattnaik's sculpture attributes shame to all of humanity for Alan's death. Another individual, the Palestinian Osama Esbaitah, also formed a monumental sand sculpture commemorating Alan (Figure 82).³⁴⁸ Both artists were able to take advantage of their chosen medium—sand, on a beach near the water's edge—to provide additional resonance linking to the context in which Alan's body was found.



Kichika's cartoon for *Le Monde* shows Alan surrounded by a Lilliputian group of media figures recording his corpse, likely an oblique condemnation of the media spectacle surrounding the child's death (Figure 83). An unknown Brazilian artist's graffito of Alan lying on the beach depicts him with the words *Abandonados* ("the forsaken ones") alongside repeated intonations of *Paz* ("peace"; Figure 84).³⁴⁹



The texts accompanying these pictures vary in their apparent intent, but there are discernible patterns (Theme Chart 23). Flat descriptions accompany virtually all sharing of Pattnaik's sculpture: "Indian artist creates a sand sculpture in memory of Alan". However, slightly over one third add "RIP": many of these tend to be the most-shared tweets and adding "rest in peace" accentuates the flat description of the artist's intention, reinforcing the memorial nature of

³⁴⁷ <https://twitter.com/sudarsansand/status/639848877395349504/photo/1> [Accessed 27 September 2015]. This picture is widely shared. To view all 28 records in the datasheet, use the filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; and "Attrib1" set to "Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar".

³⁴⁸ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; "Attrib1" set to "Osama Esbaitah".

³⁴⁹ The author of record #487 identifies Brazil as the location of this graffito. A subsequent search has shown that Nelson Almeida (*Agence France-Presse* / Getty Images) also photographed this work in São Paulo, Brazil on 6 September 2015; Almeida's photograph also confirms the term behind the walking figure is *Abandonados*.

Pattnaik's sculpture. The texts accompanying Osama Esbaitah's sand are similarly flat, caption-like descriptions.

The three other major monumental pictures evoked emotive, condemnatory responses. This is unsurprising since each of them made very pointed statements about Alan's death. Wissam Al Jazairy's picture is accompanied by texts stating that the world is a "moral abyss" and that the picture is a "dose of realism". Msamir's picture is most often accompanied by the phrase "Do you see it now?", suggesting that magnifying Alan is the only way to force wilfully blind politicians to address the crisis. Rafat Alkhateeb's cartoon seems to evoke a significant number of affective responses, as people are moved to tears, to reciting poetry, and to acknowledging what they see as imagery's expressive power.³⁵⁰

It is notable that all of these renditions are based upon Demir's photography and not upon any family snapshot.³⁵¹ It seems that this is an explicit acknowledgement of the magnitude of the child's death, seen through Demir's lens. As such, Alan himself is enlarged. In Al Jazairy's and Msamir's pictures, the text "do you see *it* now?" (my emphasis) suggests that Alan has become symbolically representative of all refugees suffering in their attempts to flee intolerable conditions. Pattnaik made this symbolism explicit with his caption "*Humanity* washed ashore" (my emphasis)—a widely-used phrase and hashtag associated with Alan, symbolising him from the start—and such symbolism seems implied by Alkhateeb's cartoon as well.

The act of commemorating a death by rendering a body on a scale larger than life is recognisable from funerary sculpture.³⁵² The body is also often depicted dead in such a way as to continue the idea of death as sleep, rather than rendering a biological state of decay—thus partaking of the broader iconographic theme of sleep and death.³⁵³ An example by the British Victorian artist

³⁵⁰ Kichiko's picture was shared twice; the unknown Brazilian artist's picture was shared once. The small sample size does not warrant inclusion in a pattern analysis.

³⁵¹ Art based upon the family snapshots exist, but outside of this datasheet: see Nèjè (2015), #84.

³⁵² Panofsky (1964) distinguished between "prospective" tomb sculpture and "retrospective" funerary sculpture. The former looked towards the afterlife; the latter represented the life of the individual. It is forced to view monumental representations of Alan, such as al Jazairy's or Msamir's, as examples of retrospective funerary art, even though they contextualise the death of the child. But many other examples in the dataset that are placed under the "supernatural / haunting" rubric certainly imply the prospective theme: see illustrations by Zezo, ygreck, Naser Jafari, and the unknown artist identified as "Unk-Divine Hands".

³⁵³ This has not always been the case. The era of the Black Death saw the emergence of a new form of funerary sculpture called the *transi*, which emphasised the transition of the lying, hale body—differentiated from the *gisant* or recumbent figure, which may not display any decay, or the *priant* which portrays the figure kneeling in prayer—to various degrees of biological decay in the *transi* (Panofsky, 1964). The *transi* was covered with indications of decay: worms are shown slithering in and out of the body's cavities; frogs often cover the eyes (as in the case of the tomb for François de la Sarra); the figure's body may be portrayed sutured, as if its intestines had been removed for embalming. A particularly well-known example is the *transi* of René of Chalons (c. 1547; church of St-Étienne, Bar-le-duc, France), attributed to Michelangelo's student Ligier

Violet Manners, who sculpted the memorial for her son Robert, represents all these characteristics (Figure 85). The child, who died at the age of nine, is depicted over life size; his eyes are sunken, he is dressed in a shroud, his arms and feet are crossed, and his head rests on a pillow. These details employ the characteristics of sarcophagi accreted over millennia from multiple cultures around the Mediterranean (Panofsky, 1964).



This is not to say that these pictures were consciously created as contemporary funerary monuments: in keeping with many of the texts, they were more likely interpreted as monuments, pure and simple. The very idea of presenting a large corpse, however, is unimaginable without funerary sculpture. That this was recognised by a number of Twitter users is underscored by the use of the term “RIP”—“rest in peace”—a term often used upon tombstones and intoned in funerals: the sentiment of commemoration, the monumental body, the ability to see the child as sleeping, and the use of the phrase “RIP” together appear to have nudged Twitter users to have viewed such portrayals as funerary monuments.

4.7. When is a theme not an iconographic theme?

Some alternative responses

There are many cases in which user comments do not appear to interpret the pictures they share in a direct manner. They do not provide any textual clues, e.g., in terms of metaphor usage. They seem to use the image of Alan—whether Demir’s photographs, artistic responses, or family snapshots—as a tool, or alternatively they simply comment on it as a mirror to the world. They use Alan’s image in a number of different contexts. For example, a picture of Alan accompanies the latest news: that the child was found on the beach, or that he had been returned to Kobane to be buried, or that a fellow surviving passenger accused his father Abdullah of collusion with the smugglers. They relate that the Canadian government had refused their request for asylum. Still others use the image as a polemical tool; to assign blame to different parties for the child’s death, to appeal to readers to sign petitions, or in some of the most graphic cases to highlight the deaths of other children barely acknowledged by the public or media.³⁵⁴ A small number of Twitter feeds related Nilüfer Demir’s photographs to iconic examples in the history of

Richier. See Kathleen Cohen (1973) for more—keeping in mind that several of her examples depart significantly from the newfound focus on decay, and instead present a healthy body. See particularly Cohen (1973:96-119) for the varied symbolism behind the *transi*.

³⁵⁴ Filter recipe: “Tweet Summ” set to “The world ignores other deaths”. See especially records #289, #795, and #850. Warning: very graphic content.

photojournalism, emphasising either humanity's failure to protect vulnerable children or the cruelty of humanity in general.³⁵⁵ This list is not exhaustive.³⁵⁶



Put another way: the three most common themes accompanying the most widely-shared photograph of Alan (Figure 23) and response images based upon it are outrage (almost exclusively, the response image attributed to Msamir;

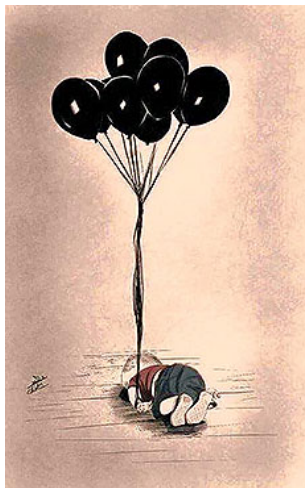


Figure 80),³⁵⁷ commemoration (a variety of pictures, but most often Yasser Ahmad's; Figure 86)³⁵⁸, and the power of imagery (a variety of pictures, but most prominently Figure 23, Islam Gawish's (Figure 42), Yasser Ahmad's, and Joyce Karam's; Figure 87).³⁵⁹ Thus, whilst it is clear that some users drew connections to other imagery and made oblique references to them, others seem to have cleaved towards reportage, or in a type



³⁵⁵ See records #180, #336, and #271. Records #180 and #336 emphasise humanity's indifference to the ongoing cruelty towards suffering children contrast Demir's photograph of Alan with Nick Út's *Accidental Napalm* (1972) and Kevin Carter's *Starving Child with Vulture, Sudan* (1993). Record #271 uses iconic photographs to make a more general point about humanity's cruelty. It contrasts Demir's with Út's and Carter's photographs as well, but also with Robert Capa's *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death* (1936), Eddie Adams' *Saigon Execution* (1968), Stuart Franklin's *Tank Man* (1989), Malcolm Brown's *Burning Monk, Saigon* (1963), Mike Wells' *Starving Boy and Missionary, Uganda* (1980), and Marc Riboud's *Ultimate Confrontation: the Flower and the Bayonet* (1967).

³⁵⁶ A useful way to sample some of these entries in the datasheet is to set "Alan in it?" to "Y" and then examine a number of the following "Pic Text Intersection" options: "Call to action", "Censure", "Comparison", "Context", "Duplicity", "Evidence", "News", "Other", and "Placing Blame". Necessarily, some of these searches will contain records that comment directly upon the pictures shared by the user.

³⁵⁷ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Th-Censure" set to show "Outrage" exclusively. This filter shows the spread of pictures and other themes expressed alongside outrage.

³⁵⁸ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Th-Commem" set to show all except for "-" (nothing). This filter shows the spread of pictures and other themes expressed alongside commemoration.

³⁵⁹ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Th-Context" set to show "Power of imagery" exclusively. This filter shows the spread of pictures and other themes evinced alongside expressions regarding the power of imagery.

of emotive or “connective” witnessing of a tragic event: “participants contribute to the flow of information... by producing and distributing images on a large scale” (Papacharissi, 2014; Mortensen, 2015:1394).

What to make of such posts? On the face of it, texts such as those that report the events factually do not appear to provide iconologically interpretative clues. They might then seem to provide evidence for a “null hypothesis” countering the entire thrust of this research project: that is, they might indicate that many users, perhaps even the majority, do *not* view pictures iconographically. However, this may be more a case of the absence of evidence, and not evidence of absence: after all, these users still shared certain pictures (for example, Figure 23) more than others. This



suggests that they, too, feel a certain pull towards certain photographs and not others. It is simply unclear what motivates them to do so.

So instead of insisting upon iconographic readings as the royal road to understanding all sharing patterns for pictures of Alan—an untenable assertion—it is better to conclude that people on Twitter employed pictures in multiple ways, and that iconographic readings are only clearly tenable for some cases, and at best are implied in others. Other frameworks would likely make far more sense for decoding the

relations between text and picture (or a set of pictures) where the user seems to intend some implicit comparison between them. That said, thematic categorisation and visualisation—components of iconography used in this project—remain useful for the researcher, even without clear links to iconologically interpretative clues coming from users.

4.8. Conclusion

It is hoped that this chapter provides a demonstration of the advantages offered by the curious mix of art-historical and social science approaches. Art-historical approaches provide the close analysis of pictures, the recognition of the necessary detective work to identify the maker of a picture and the utility of doing so; the iconographic approach helps identify themes in a set of pictures and connects them to the longer history of image-making, adapted to a digital space. The social sciences provide the exploration of data and the potential for granular analysis that such data provides, particularly within a structured data environment such as that of social media. It is a transdisciplinary approach that allows the investigator to gain a different perspective upon representations of the death of Alan Kurdi, a tragic event overflowing with multiple textual and visual resonances.

But while varied, the visual and textual evidence forwarded by Twitter users is hardly random. These responses follow definite, clustered patterns, and as suggested in the Iconography chapter, they should guide us in our interpretative analysis. They provide oblique, and occasionally direct evidence of long-standing cross-cultural associations, some of which have lasted for thousands of

years. This culminates in the very specific parameters of an iconography of death: the corpse must be hygienic, such that it is capable of aesthetic contemplation. The effect of these constraints makes it easier, for example, to codeswitch between death and sleep. This iconography is loose—it does not repeat specific forms, so much as represent a recurring theme that informs and encompasses the context in which it is presented. It is the foundation for the other themes explored in this chapter—the child as an angel, and the body as oversized memorial—because the ability to codeswitch between sleep and death eases the path to the creation of these other images.

Chapter 5: Visualising refugees: visual and textual patterns

5.1. Introduction

This chapter contains an examination of the ways refugees other than Alan are represented in the dataset: particularly how one might usefully categorise representations of refugees and the connections they might have with prior imagery.³⁶⁰ The tweets containing these pictures were collected using the same search terms and covering the same period—between 2 September 2015 and 14 September 2015—as were the tweets that contained pictures of Alan. They constitute an overview of the broader concerns about the refugee crisis. However, because they were shared at the same time, the image of Alan haunts virtually all of them. It will be seen that the pictures people shared were—with some notable exceptions—ones that were very contemporaneous to events: in the course of events, few individuals searched for precedents. Nevertheless, the pictures they shared will be iconographically familiar. Some of the themes represented in this dataset, like refugees or the refugee family *en route*, have origins stretching as far back as the Mesopotamians. Others, such as photographic portraits with signs, are contemporary twists to long-standing traditions of fixing ambiguous imagery with text. Still others shed light upon one reason why the image of Alan was so jarring. For instance, young children are usually depicted in the arms of, or holding the hand of, an authority figure such as a parent or aid worker; alternately, if they are depicted alone, they are depicted such that they make demands upon the viewer.

5.2. Timeline

In the weeks prior to the discovery of Alan on the beach, there were many stories about refugees attempting to make it into the European Union as the refugee crisis appeared to build to a crescendo. In the datasheet Twitter users did not refer to all these stories equally, nor did they relate the most recent stories the most. It seems that the very visibility of the events in question are dependent upon sufficiently compelling photography.

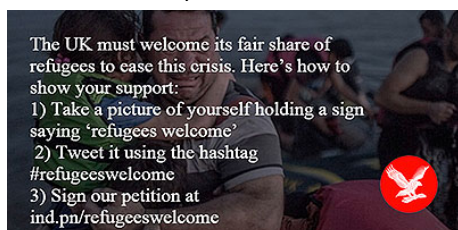
On 16 August 2015, an overly-populated, quickly-deflating dinghy containing 15 refugees barely



survived the crossing from Bodrum to the Greek island of Kos—the same journey Alan’s family would try to make weeks later. Daniel Etter (Figure 88) photographed the Iraqi refugee Laith Majid clutching two of his children and crying (captions refer to him “crying in relief”, but it appears instead that he is

³⁶⁰ Filter recipe: “Image” set to show all records except for “Missing”; “Alan in it?” set to “N”.

in distress) as he disembarked onto the shore: he told reporters he was certain they would die (Yeginsu and Hartocollis, 2015).³⁶¹ Etter's photograph went viral, and it is easy to see why: it concentrates upon an individual's emotional response to a situation virtually anyone would find



harrowing. It also communicates easily-understood, primal instincts: the desire to protect one's children (Buchanan, 2015b). This picture sufficiently stirred public sympathy that journalists followed up the story with its "happy ending" in Germany (Jenkins, 2015;

Dearden, 2015). The crying Majid clutching his children appears often in the datasheet, in large part because *The Independent* used Etter's photograph extensively as the backdrop for an appeal for readers to sign a petition demanding that the UK government welcome more refugees into the country (Figure 89).³⁶²

However, two events involving refugees nearer to the date of Alan's death are less well represented. On 28 August 2015—a scant four days before Alan's death—city workers in Eisenstadt, Austria found an abandoned refrigerated lorry oozing a foul-smelling liquid on the verge of a motorway. The lorry's storage contained the partly-decomposed bodies of over 70 refugees of various ages, all of whom having suffocated (Harding, 2015). The story made the international press, but perhaps because of the gruesome nature of the discovery, the only photographs accompanying the story were amateur snapshots of the lorry, taken *in passim*. Despite occurring four days before Alan's death, there are no references to this event in the dataset. On the same day, a refugee boat leaving from Libya capsized, drowning approximately 150 refugees in the process (Fahim, 2015). Few pictures accompanied the story.³⁶³ Two photographs in the dataset (records #1 and #372, i.e., the first two photographs in Figure 50) are related to this event, one of which accompanies the single most widely-retweeted post: both are of children whose waterlogged bodies roll about in the surf, their clothes dragging off them, and the authors of both tweets pointedly express the sentiment that the world has ignored these other deaths.



³⁶¹ Picture #4 in the accompanying slideshow. As the *New York Times* corrections at the bottom of the article makes clear, Majid was initially identified as Syrian, and not Iraqi. Etter published the photograph on his own Twitter feed on 17 August:
<https://twitter.com/DanielEtterFoto/status/633184726912737280> (Accessed 27 March 2017)

³⁶² Filter recipe: "Pic Descr" set to retrieve entries containing the word "Majid".

³⁶³ Two the pictures from this disaster—including the most widely-retweeted post—are in the dataset. They can be found with the filter recipe: "Pic Descr" set to retrieve entries containing the word "Libya". Warning: graphic content.



Other, contemporaneous events are better represented in the timeline, exemplars of the use of Twitter to keep up with current events. On 4, 8, and 9 September, the treatment of refugees in Budapest was put in the spotlight as refugees were initially placed in cages (records #253 and #352; Figure 90) and then crowded onto trains in an attempt to deport them (records #413, #471, and #619); the camerawoman Petra László was recorded tripping a refugee and his son as they fled across a field, causing international outrage (Figure 91).³⁶⁴

Demonstrations also garnered a lot of attention. A rally in London scheduled for 12 September appears to have been first advertised the day Alan was found on the beach (records #976 and #1039). One of the first marches photographed took place in Turkey on 3 September (record #1055); a large number of Canadians marched in Toronto on 4 September (records #625 and #1064); by 5 September, Vienna was the host of a huge rally (record #495), Dublin of a smaller one (records #638 and #1007). 6 September saw a huge rally in Stockholm (record #1133), and big ones in Birmingham (record #1122), and Oxford (record #1091); on 7 September, there were large demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne, and a performative rally in Rabat, where the demonstrators recreated the image of Alan on the beach (records #53, #361, #566, and #1008; Figure 92); 12 September saw huge rallies in London (records #17, #226, #233, #569, #693, #694, #733, #831, #1081) and Copenhagen (records #58, #194, #620, #628, #631, #726; Figure 93), with smaller ones in New York (records #617 and #1137), and Madrid (record #712).³⁶⁵



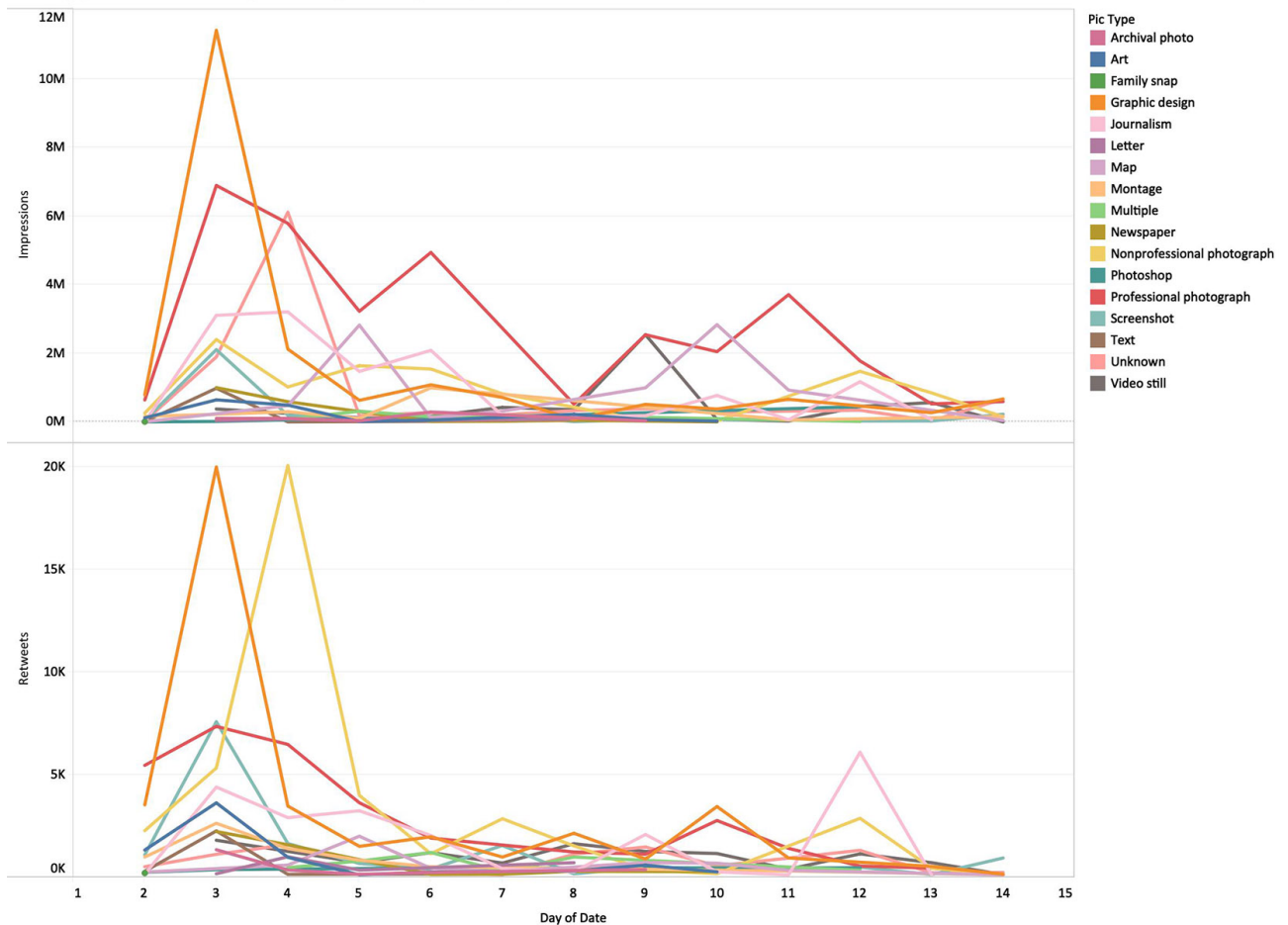
The above events are recorded in the datasheet with varying degrees of engagement, again divided between metrics charting impressions and retweets. Chart 8 below shows an explosion of

³⁶⁴ Filter recipe: “Pic Descr” set to display all records containing the phrase “Petra László”; “Date” set to view by “Ascending” (i.e., earliest to latest).

³⁶⁵ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Demonstration”; and “Date” set to “Ascending” (i.e., earliest to latest).

posting immediately after 2 September, suggesting that the death of Alan significantly increased the discussion of the refugee crisis in general, with impressions and the top and retweets at the bottom. As mentioned previously, a metric based upon impressions favours Twitter accounts with large followings, such as news organisations or celebrities, whereas a retweet view is an arguably more organic metric, given that it measures those records in the datasheet Twitter users actively decided to repost.

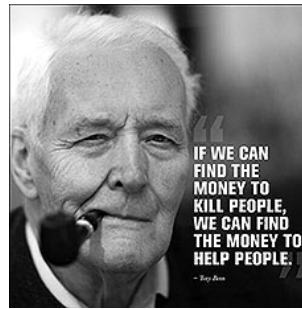
Sharing pictures of the refugee crisis (excluding Alan), impressions vs. retweets



The trends of sum of Impressions and sum of Retweets for Date Day. Color shows details about Pic Type. The data is filtered on Alan in it?, which keeps Not present. The view is filtered on Pic Type, which has multiple members selected.

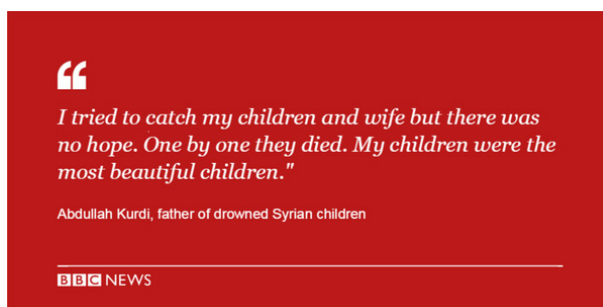
Chart 8: Pictures in the datasheet that do not contain Alan: impressions versus retweets. Graphic design spikes on 3 September under both views; on the same day, the Impressions view also spikes with professional photographs. The Retweets view has a second equally strong spike of nonprofessional photography on 4 September. Chart developed in Tableau.

Distinguishing between impressions and retweets tells different stories about interest in respective subjects. In both views, elements deemed “graphic design” are the most widely-shared. 45 graphic design posts were shared on 3 September, the day of the most frenetic



sharing of such posts.³⁶⁶ It is immediately noticeable that Daniel Etter's photograph of Laith Majid clutching his children is reproduced multiple times, due to *The Independent's* use of it.

Children are very common in the "graphic design" view: children disembark, frightened, from boats (record #46); or cower at an adult's feet (record #4; Figure 94); are held in the arms of an adult (record #444); stare at the viewer (#record 416); cover their faces (#120); smile and hold the hand of the photographer, acting as a proxy to the viewer (records #67 and #379). Many were posted by accounts held by advocacy organisations such as Amnesty International, the UN Refugee Agency, and Save the Children UK; as examples of graphic design, these are intended to appeal to the viewer and contain phrases such as "#refugeeswelcome", "Migrant Refugee Child", "Migrant Refugee Child Crisis", and "Child Refugee Crisis Appeal". Others show teeming groups of refugees on boats alongside quotes supporting them (records #198, #299, #918); or in train stations alongside quotes deeply suspicious of their motives (#291, #1042). There are also many headshots of prominent individuals with quotations: the late Tony Benn MP is shown alongside a quote asking for compassion to be a national priority (records #115, #390; Figure 95); Jeremy Corbyn MP issues a statement supporting refugees (record #122); Nilüfer Demir is shown with a quote stating that she felt Alan's cry should be heard (record #331). There are text-heavy pictures in support of refugees (records #256, #298, #835, #963). One set of pictures concentrates upon Abdullah Kurdi's rendition of his children's deaths (records #143, #357, #484; Figure 96). The



"graphic design" group is clearly heterogeneous in nature: the pictures are assembled here based upon formal qualities (photograph or graphic allied with text in the picture) and show that Twitter account-holders use such pictures for multiple purposes: to

provide context to the crisis, to drum up political support, to get people involved, to increase viewers' emotional responses towards refugees (whether positively or, to a lesser extent, negatively).

³⁶⁶ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "Pic Type" set to "Graphic design"; "Impressions" set to view by "descending" order, i.e., most-to-least impressions; and "Date" set to only show posts dated 3 September 2015.

From this point onwards, however, impressions and retweets diverge and tell different stories: those told by media organisations, and others which elicit higher response by Twitter users in the form of retweets.³⁶⁷ The impressions view also shows a strong showing for “professional” photographs again on 3 September 2015: 27 records show a mixture of pictures, and they are predominantly pictures of refugees in distress, the destruction in Syria, and Abdullah Kurdi crying after having identified his children at the Bodrum morgue.³⁶⁸ In the retweets view, “nonprofessional” photographs were widely shared on 4 September 2015.³⁶⁹ This is overwhelmingly due to a single post sharing a photograph of a child who drowned off the Libyan coast on 28 August (record #1).³⁷⁰ The nonprofessional photograph group is equally heterogeneous: many show signs (whether by the roadside, held by an individual, or held by groups; records #687, #761, #819, #844, and #852), or they show encounters between authorities and refugees (records #463 and #529); scores of refugees attempting to sleep at the Hungarian capital’s train station (record #800); and the Toronto demonstration in support of refugees (#1064).

On 6, 9, and 11 September, the impressions view again shows resurgences of professional photographs.³⁷¹ The accompanying tweets on 6 September show a shift in the subject matter: politicians begin to respond *en masse* to the international outcry (record #320); the welcoming of refugees is recorded by financial magazines and individuals (records #327 and #907); and blame for the crisis is apportioned out to different parties (records #486, #829, and #888). By 9 September, celebrities, football



³⁶⁷ In their rendition of tweeted responses to the death of Alan Kurdi as recorded in Turkish and Flemish tweets, Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4050) identify four major user types: citizens, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), politicians, and professional media outlets. This spread broadly reflects the user types in the datasheet, and the progression from individuals to media outlets generally reflects ever higher likelihood of impressions.

³⁶⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photograph”; “Impressions” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least impressions; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 3 September 2015.

³⁶⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Nonprofessional photographs”; “Retweets” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least retweets; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 4 September 2015.

³⁷⁰ This claim is based upon the difference in the number of tweets between the first post in this series (record #1, shared 18,487 times) and the second (record #463, shared 244 times).

³⁷¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photographs”; “Impressions” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least impressions; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 6 September 2015. Other dates can be pinpointed by substituting their respective dates.

clubs, and football fans make public statements in support of refugees (records #220, #385 and #681; Figure 21); UN relief agencies post emotive pictures of children on their journey (records #710, #857, and #1125), urging support both from individuals and governments; *Russia Today* tweeted about Denmark blocking trains from Germany in a bid to stem the tide of refugees (record #619). On 9 September, account holders also share footage of football supporters holding up signs in favour of refugees (record #220) and of László tripping the refugees.³⁷² Finally, on 10 September, the account for *TIME Magazine* repeatedly tweeted a map indicating the diaspora of Syrians to different countries (records #330, #820, and #793).³⁷³ It is important to note that, whilst these records constitute the content that peaked later on in the timeline, the largest engagement appeared to occur on 3 September, i.e., the day after Alan was found.

Like impressions, retweet numbers also do not repeat the peak of engagement reached on 4 September. There are, however, two smaller peaks on 10 and 12 September.³⁷⁴ On 10 September, there is a small peak in posts containing graphic design and professional photography. Many of these contained contexts which indicated how much more Western countries, and the U.K. in particular, could do for refugees (records #31, #65, #290, and #1093). Pictures of children were also widely shared (records #42, #511, #684, and #736). Other themes included support by football managers and celebrities (records #224 and #567). And finally, on 12 September individuals widely retweeted pictures of Jeremy Corbyn MP speaking to a crowd during the London demonstration (records #17 and #367) and photographs of the massive Copenhagen demonstration (records #58, #72, #194, #244, #620, #628, and #631).

Impressions and retweets, then, present heterogeneous peaks for picture types and subjects, but speaking practically is it useful to negotiate between the chart and the datasheet: the chart provides information for specific days and subjects, and the datasheet provides pinpoint accuracy for the specific content shared on those days and subjects. Finally, one may derive two important points from the chart: that the general interest in refugees exploded the day after Alan was found on the beach, and that cumulatively, these tweets appear to be attempting to understand the broader context of the refugee crisis: what conditions at home caused them to move, what conditions refugees experience in their travels, how Twitter users might help them, and

³⁷² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Video stills”; “Impressions” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least impressions; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 9 September 2015.

³⁷³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Map”; “Impressions” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least impressions; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 10 September 2015.

³⁷⁴ Filter recipes: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to display both “Graphic design” and “Professional photograph”; “Retweets” set to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least retweets; and “Date” set to only show posts dated 10 September 2015. For 12 September, set “Pic Type” to “Journalism” and the date to 12 September.

declarations of support or solidarity with them. There is, however, a small but important undercurrent of a number of posts expressing suspicions about the “true” motives of the refugees. All of these subjects play out in the datasheet as a whole, albeit in different proportions.

5.3. Dividing the content thematically: focusing upon theory or content?

Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic (2017) have developed a visual typology of refugees. Based upon an examination of the pictures shared by European newspapers of the Syrian refugee crisis during July–September 2015, their analysis also includes examples from Twitter—particularly images of Alan Kurdi, almost certainly the most familiar of refugees. Their categories interact with notions of the spectator’s responsibility upon encountering pictures of suffering as set forth by Leo Boltanski (1993) and the media’s responsibility for presenting this suffering as set forth by Roger Silverstone (2007)—in keeping with the previously-recounted strain in photography criticism that considers viewing imagery of suffering as “pornographic” unless it is met with action to alleviate that suffering (Sontag, 1977; Sontag, 2003). Thus, Chouliaraki and Stolic’s typology investigates the way photojournalism informs and reinforces the public imaginary about refugees and is intimately tied both to the concomitant moral responsibility of the viewer to respond, and how that viewer should respond: “Regimes of visibility, in other words, are key spaces of moralisation that produce and regulate the public dispositions by which we collectively take responsibility for the plight of distant others” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1172). Their typology rests on five pillars. As one moves from one to the next, the focus progressively shifts from what they term a problematic regard of the refugee to the still more problematic self-regard of the viewer. Their typology is as follows:

- **Biological life**, i.e., refugees as helpless masses of people.
- **Empathy**, i.e., the innocent, helpless vulnerability of children, chief among them Alan Kurdi.
- **Threat**, i.e., masses of refugees on motorways or boat, encouraging the closing of borders.
- **Hospitality**, e.g., demonstration images of Europeans with few refugees given any political voice. And finally,
- **Self-reflexivity**, e.g., images of celebrities or remediations of Alan Kurdi, where the emphasis is more on “us” and “our” responses than on the refugee or Alan.

The authors present their evidence from newspapers but shift over to Twitter for examples of self-reflexivity. There are many parallels between their work and the contents of the datasheet—including many examples concentrating on how the media have presented the death of Alan Kurdi—and so their research is very relevant to the thesis.³⁷⁵ Chouliaraki and Stolic provide a

³⁷⁵ Filter recipe: “Pic Type” set to “Newspaper”. This yields 41 results. The people sharing them are very interested in comparing media coverage in different contexts and countries.

form of iconography—or more accurately, iconology, since it is strongly driven by their interpretations and less upon the pictures themselves, and not at all upon the comments accompanying their presentation on Twitter.

The datasheet of Twitter posts provides ample evidence supporting their typology, but that evidence is uneven, and suggests that individual posters are at best imperfect mirrors of “typical” media visibility as they posit it. When viewed most restrictively, one can find 22 examples depicting refugees as large groups of vulnerable people, and these are consistent with the biopolitical component of their typology.³⁷⁶ 76 examples work on the empathy of the viewer by



focusing upon the suffering of children, and as indicated by the authors, many of these come from aid agencies (Figure 94; see section 5.4 below).³⁷⁷ Hospitality is also a common theme in the datasheet: 67 posts contain pictures of demonstrations and volunteers, football fans, and sports figures demonstrating support for refugees, both practically—e.g., in the collection of goods—and symbolically—e.g., in carrying banners expressing support (see section 5.5.2 below).³⁷⁸

Matching the authors’ work to the Twitter data becomes murkier when turning to their characterisation of threat, however. The majority of the 22 posts that unequivocally present the refugee as a threat display instead individuals, whom the Twitter users claim to be “Trojan horses”, or seemingly innocent figures entering the European Union intent on causing harm (see section 5.5.3 below). 6 entries however, do show threatening crowds and boatloads of refugees.³⁷⁹ The 69 records containing photographs fulfilling their criteria—masses or large groups of refugees on motorways or boats—seem to be presented by the Twitter users in a

³⁷⁶ The most restrictive view of this may be seen by with the following filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” to display “G” (group); “PicTh-Context” set to “Vulnerability”; and “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

³⁷⁷ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Alive”; “PicTh-Context” set to “Vulnerability”; and “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

³⁷⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to display “Demonstration”, “Football”, and “Volunteers”. This yields 73 results, but for the present purposes inappropriately captures a demonstration in Morocco recreating Alan’s death (records #53, #566 and #1008), a poster advertising a demonstration (record #787) and a picture accusing demonstrating Muslims of hypocrisy (#870).

³⁷⁹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; PicTh-Censure” set to display both “Danger” and “Terrorism”. This yields 23 results, but one (record #1092) is an historic cartoon from the time of the Spanish Civil War.

rather more sympathetic light than the authors would have predicted: they are not helpless, but rather in need of help (see section 5.5.1 below; Figure 97).³⁸⁰



Finally, the authors' inclusion of self-reflexivity is problematic on a number of levels. The authors focus upon celebrity endorsement and remediations of Alan. They separate expressions of hospitality, such as photographs of demonstrations, from this equation, which arguably constitute the most prominent form of reflexivity, given that the photographs are about local response to the refugees and not the refugees themselves.³⁸¹ There are comparatively few celebrity endorsements in the datasheet. Their typology also excludes other forms of self-regard that arguably belong to the equation. A prominent theme in the datasheet is of individuals, usually prominent citizens, and most frequently politicians, who hold signs indicating refugee support (see section 5.5.2.1 below).³⁸² Unless Chouliaraki and Stolic consider politicians as celebrities, they do not explicitly cover this type, even though examples were prominently displayed on newspaper covers.



The most problematic aspect of their notion of self-reflexivity, however, is their placing of remediations of Alan—called “artistic responses” in this thesis—under this rubric (Figure 86). The authors dismiss them as “idealised... amateur illustrations of Twitter” that, rather than focusing upon the plight of refugees, places “instead, ‘our’

own representations of them, in drawings, collages or retouched photographs, which become the vehicles for ‘our’ agency”; this is indicative of a “new, playful aesthetic and subordinates it to a moral discourse of self-expression” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1171, 1173). The authors do not identify any response pictures, but presumably they cover several of the 58 records in the

³⁸⁰ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” set to display “G” (group) and “M” (mass). “Pic Type” set to display all save “Archival photo”, “Art”, “Graphic design”

³⁸¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Volunteers”. This yields 6 results. A further 6 results may be found with the recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Th-Support” set to “Volunteers helping”. Most of these examples are amateur photographs (record #595 is a video still), and the accompanying text marvels at the mobilisation of resources and volunteers for the practical support of refugees.

³⁸² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” set to display “I” (individual) and “G” (group); “PicTh-Context” set to “Sign”. This yields 49 results, but 7 are inappropriate for our present purposes, such as a parody of the British Royal Family (records #393 and #547), the selfie critical of refugee support in Gulf countries (record #518), the demonstration sign referring to neo-colonialism (record #520), the “Refugees Welcome” poster (records #526 and #584), and the sign on its own (record #768).

datasheet presented by Twitter users in some form of the phrase “Artists commemorate” (See Record #79).³⁸³ As indicated in the previous chapter, the vast majority of artistic pictures featuring Alan were created by practicing illustrators and artists from India, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.³⁸⁴ In other words, the majority of the remediations of Alan are not made by “us”—clearly intended to be “Western” in some form or another—but rather by “them”, including some who have specifically escaped Syria. By assuming that these remediations were made by “us”, the authors inadvertently dismiss the voices of the very people whom they claim the media “deprives... of agency and voice” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1168).



Equally problematic, by failing to identify the makers to whose works they refer, Chouliaraki and Stolic gravely misinterpret the pictures. The intention of these pictures is not “self-reflexive”, or at least not in the sense they mean. They are hortatory in nature: they commemorate the child, assign blame for his death, project a safe alternative ending, or delivery to heaven (Figure 41). The authors fail to acknowledge that the majority were made by working professionals, such as political cartoonists who operate

under very specific constraints, or artists who come from individuals who come from the self-same groups suffering in the crisis. They thus infantilise the remediations by referring to them as “amateur illustrations”.

The vast majority of the most remediated pictures, then, cannot be placed under the rubric of self-reflexivity, because—in the case of Alan Kurdi at least—the identity of the picture makers as part of the Other is utterly crucial to interpreting their work and thus whether the pictures should be situated in their typology.³⁸⁵ Chouliaraki and Stolic’s typology is not merely guided by theory; rather, it is too fully suffused in it and taints their interpretations of the content they examine. This weakens their typology, and unnecessarily so, because it is far from unacceptable. The majority of it is useful, and as noted above they could considerably expand their notion of self-reflexivity. Whilst necessarily guided by theory, the approach taken in this thesis rests upon the data itself. Because of the way both pictures and accompanying text have been parsed, they can be classified in multiple ways. It makes for messier and intertwined, but ultimately more rewarding, patterns.

³⁸³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “Y”; “Pic Type” set to display “Art”, “Multiple”, and “Screenshot”; and “Tweet Summ” set to “Artists commemorate”.

³⁸⁴ See Chapter 4, sections 4.3.2, 4.4, 4.4.1; and also Chart 5.

³⁸⁵ One may argue that remediated pictures of Alan by people from the Middle East are, indeed, self-reflexive—the artists commemorate “one of their own”, as it were—but this is far from the definition of self-reflexivity forwarded by Chouliaraki and Stolic.

5.4. Representations of children: professional and amateur

Since this project concentrates upon the death of Alan Kurdi as represented on Twitter, it is useful to see how pictures of other refugee children are presented on the platform. Doing so presents very clear iconographic patterns and equally clear differences between sources. Much of it underscores observations previously made in the literature on the depiction of refugees and children.

Children are portrayed in the datasheet in the following ways: as alive (102 times),³⁸⁶ as alive and happy (13 times),³⁸⁷ as dead (9 times),³⁸⁸ and as contrasting living children with dead children (12 times).³⁸⁹ Posts showing dead or contrasting living with dead children frequently do so by contrasting a picture of Alan.

61 of the entries contain professional photography of children either alive or alive and happy.³⁹⁰ Over half of these (35) are from news media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly UNICEF: no NGOs showed Alan Kurdi.³⁹¹ 17 show children held in the arms, held by the hand, or in close proximity to a family member or an authority figure (usually an individual helping refugees disembark).³⁹² Whilst it is not fully legitimate to contrast professional photography with nonprofessional photography—there are only 8 records with nonprofessional photographs showing children—it is nevertheless notable that *none* of the nonprofessional

³⁸⁶ These are living children other than Alan. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; PicTh-Child” set to “Alive”.

³⁸⁷ Again, these are other than Alan. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Alive and happy”.

³⁸⁸ Eight of the results are of children other than Alan. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Dead”. A ninth result (record #795) contrasts Alan, dead, with a dead child, whom the author states was killed in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

³⁸⁹ Five of the results are of children other than Alan. Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Alive / Dead”. There are seven other pictures (records #93, #180, #271, #336, #461, #730, and #1000) that contrast other children with Alan. Most of these children are shown as alive, whilst Alan is shown dead, but record #93 is a special and unusual case: it contrasts a family snapshot of Alan and his brother Ghalib alive and then pictures of the two children dead. It is the only record in the datasheet to supply a picture of Ghalib dead. One might arguably add a 13th picture to this selection: record #994 is a recreation of Alan’s posture on the beach performed by Palestinian children. Whilst they are alive, they are presented as dead.

³⁹⁰ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photograph”; “PicTh-Child” set to display “Alive” and “Alive and happy”.

³⁹¹ The simplest way to ascertain this is to modify the previous filter recipe by setting “Impressions” to view by “descending” order, i.e., most-to-least impressions. Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4061) noted that “Most analysed NGOs avoided the direct use of images of Kurdi and used this moment to legitimise and advocate their causes”.

³⁹² Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Professional photograph”; “Pic Descr” set to search for entries containing the phrase “held in arms”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Alive” and “Alive and happy”. The majority show children in distress or emotionless; only 7 show happy children.

photographs portray children held in an adult's arms.³⁹³ It is clear, then, that a major feature of professional photography of children—and certainly of refugee children—is to show them *actively cared for and protected* whilst disembarking from boats, journeying on foot, being detained, encountering authority figures, becoming distressed by fearful situations, getting injured, and held whilst dead (Figure 98).



When children are not shown in the arms of an adult, they are frequently depicted standing alone or apart from others, often looking directly at the camera or into the middle distance: that is, *they are vulnerable and make a demand upon the viewer to step in and act as a protector in the absence of a closer authority*. They are in distress as they are isolated from adult figures, holding signs asking for help, staring exhausted, and again encountering authority (Figure 104). Some children are depicted injured or dead, as if this is the consequence of the viewer's inaction; these pictures are only presented by citizens, and not by media outlets. Finally, a minor theme in the dataset shows children neither with adult protectors nor looking directly at the viewer: these children are often shown in poses of exhaustion or—and this is a likely projection—gestures or poses of being emotionally overwhelmed.³⁹⁴ Here, in the absence of help from other adults or the viewer, the children are *compelled to act or perform tasks beyond their years*.

³⁹³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Type” set to “Nonprofessional photography”; “PicTh-Child” set to “Alive” and “Alive and happy”.

³⁹⁴ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Descr” set to display all entries containing the phrase “exhausted”. This yields 4 results, two of which are from NGOs, one of which is from *Agence France-Presse*, and one from an unknown source. Note that a number of pictures of refugee children are in both the “actively cared for” and “alone” categories: for example, Christof Strache’s photograph contains an adult close to the child, but the relationship in focus is more between the refugee child and the authority figure (record #613). It is therefore a more liminal photograph, and as such is relegated to the periphery of the “on their own” batch of pictures (Figure 104).



Concentration on the vulnerable child is a critical component of photography used by NGOs (Fehrenbach and Rodogno, 2015:4060). “Children have become *the* moral referent... Children are a synecdoche for a country’s future, for the political and social well-being of a culture” (Moeller, 2002:38, 39). These images work upon the modern Western conception of childhood as a time of innocence and dependence upon adults (Ariès, 1960; Cunningham, 1995). As these pictures were heavily promoted by both NGOs and media outlets in English, it is safe to say that their target is Western, and that they thus very consciously play upon these sentiments: “... commitments are effectively shored up—that is to say, visually anchored—in normative terms to the extent their emotional expression is contained within certain narrative conventions intended to engender sympathy for distant others” (Dencik and Allan, 2017:1186). NGOs are well aware of photographic composition at a granular scale: pictures of single children without recourse to other help are particularly useful, because when the number of sympathetic individuals in the photograph increases to just two, there is a substantial decline in donations, a drop ascribed to “psychic numbing” (Slovic et al., 2017:642).

Problematically, these conventions reinforce older colonialist stereotypes based upon missionary work (Manzo, 2008:643; Fehrenbach and Rodogno, 2015; Grain and Lund, 2016). In doing so, they—sometimes literally—infantilise refugees and reinforce an image of refugees as helpless, stressing a need for “reassurance, comfort and sustenance rather than disruption of the existing social order... representations of oppression and exploitation that potentially might be disturbing to spectators are consequently being obscured” (Orgad, 2015:130). The consistency of these representations are likely due to the [understandably] strict briefs issued by NGOs to photographers in the field, which cause photographers to “switch off creative input and merely deliver as requested”, according to interviews conducted by Dencik and Allan (2017:1189). The result is that imagery of children in readily-understandable poses becomes an unassailable symbol of the need for aid—and thus become “a sort of brand logo that advertises NGOs’ encoded humanitarian principles, reflecting back their organisational ideals as much as their

purposes and objectives” (Manzo, 2008:635). But it is important to note that such photography is not only used by NGOs, but also media organisations, and photographers often appear to take their pictures with an eye towards both clients. There is a “weaving of varied genres of photography from one multimedia platform to the next, and thereby blurring ‘hard’ with ‘soft’ or ‘human interest’ news values and priorities” (Dencik and Allan, 2017:1181–82).

As far as this project is concerned, however, photographers regularly employ a standard iconography of childhood—wherein children are shown as actively protected, or if an adult is not present, by staring directly at the viewer who is called upon to fulfil that protective role. This iconography is pregnant with connotations of vulnerability and the need for assistance and is based upon a long-standing Western preoccupation with the child as innocent, vulnerable, and in need of adult support. Its use in these photographs highlights one of the fundamental reasons why Nilüfer Demir’s photographs of Alan inspired such a strong emotive response: Demir’s photographs *explicitly violated strongly-held contemporary iconographic expectations for the depiction of children* (Lenette and Cleland, 2016:74) (Figure 23, Figure 88).

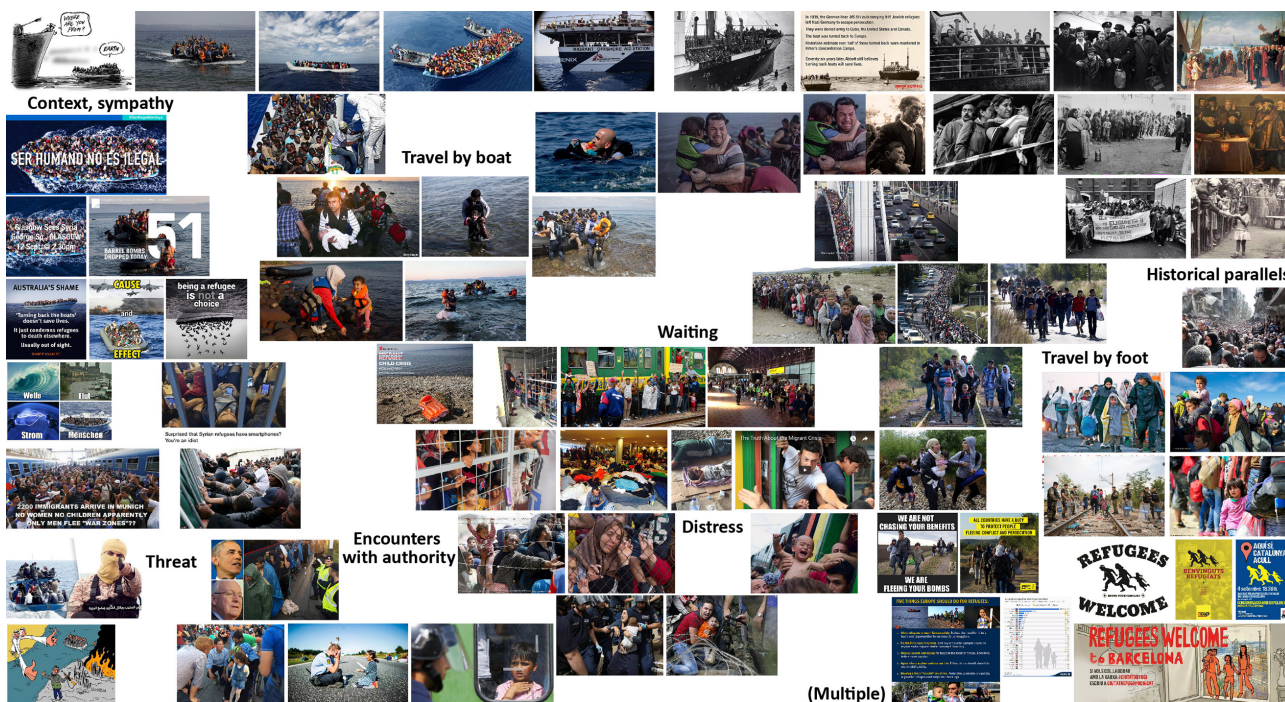


5.5. Other important themes in the datasheet

The following section focuses upon three themes in the datasheet. The first two were widely shared: representations of the refugees themselves and representations of support for, or solidarity with, the refugees. The third theme was not widely shared but nevertheless provides an insight into the hostile pictorial representation of refugees that sustained the backlash started in the latter part of 2015.

5.5.1. Refugees and the refugee family *en route*: a long-standing iconography

More broadly, the depiction of refugees in the dataset repeats a number of iconographic themes concentrating upon not the cause of the flight, but the voyage and travails encountered during it (Figure 110).



Following in the path trodden by Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Martin Warnke (2016) visually presented a number of relevant themes from the Warburg Institute's archive of political iconography in statuary, prints, posters, and photojournalism.³⁹⁵ The five themes he exhibited have significant overlaps, and are reduced below:

- **Exodus.** Large groups of people walk and carry whatever goods they can.
- **Travel by dinghy and train.** Large groups huddled on overcrowded dinghies or preparing to board a train *en masse*.
- **Reactions.** These include both sympathetic renditions (pictures of individuals looking downcast and exhausted) and antipathetic renditions (caricatures poking fun at foreigners).

It is a brief photographic essay—there are only 19 pictures—and Warnke's examples only reach as far back as 1696 with Jan Luyken's rendition of Huguenots fleeing France with whatever they could carry (an example similar to Warnke's is found in Figure 120).³⁹⁶ However, there are many examples depicting similar exoduses that reach back further in time. Mass



³⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that this project excerpted material from the Institute's collection of imagery, but that its own iconographical guide (Fleckner et al., 2011) contains no entries on refugees, or indeed of flight in general.

³⁹⁶ In research on refugees entering Australia in the 1970s, Lenette (2016) discovered similar categories. Wright (2002:64) argues that representations of refugees draw upon an "iconography of predicament" emanating "from the Christian iconographic tradition" (64)—including the Expulsion from Paradise and Madonna and Child—but also, less plausibly, from images such as the "road movie".

deportation was a “biopolitical” policy used by the Assyrians as they conquered territory (Bahrani, 2008:175–78). For instance, one of the Nineveh reliefs created during the reign of Sennacherib (circa 700 B.C.) depicts citizens of the conquered city of Lachish carrying their goods on foot, in carts, and on camels as the Assyrian army drives them to exile (Figure 121).



These few figures act as a “shorthand” for an entire population experiencing enforced departure, abbreviating the action to a few emblematic individuals. This is much as one sees in the limited space of Medieval manuscripts when the artist was called upon to depict, for example, the Israelites during the Exodus or an entire army preparing to enter battle. It seems such “shorthand” informed the standard representation of the “Flight into Egypt”, or the Holy Family’s escape from the imminent Massacre of the Innocents (*Matthew* 2:2–18). In such renditions, Mary clutches the baby Jesus on a pack animal as Joseph leads them into exile, carrying a few paltry goods. The iconography for this scene was quite stable from the Middle Ages up through the

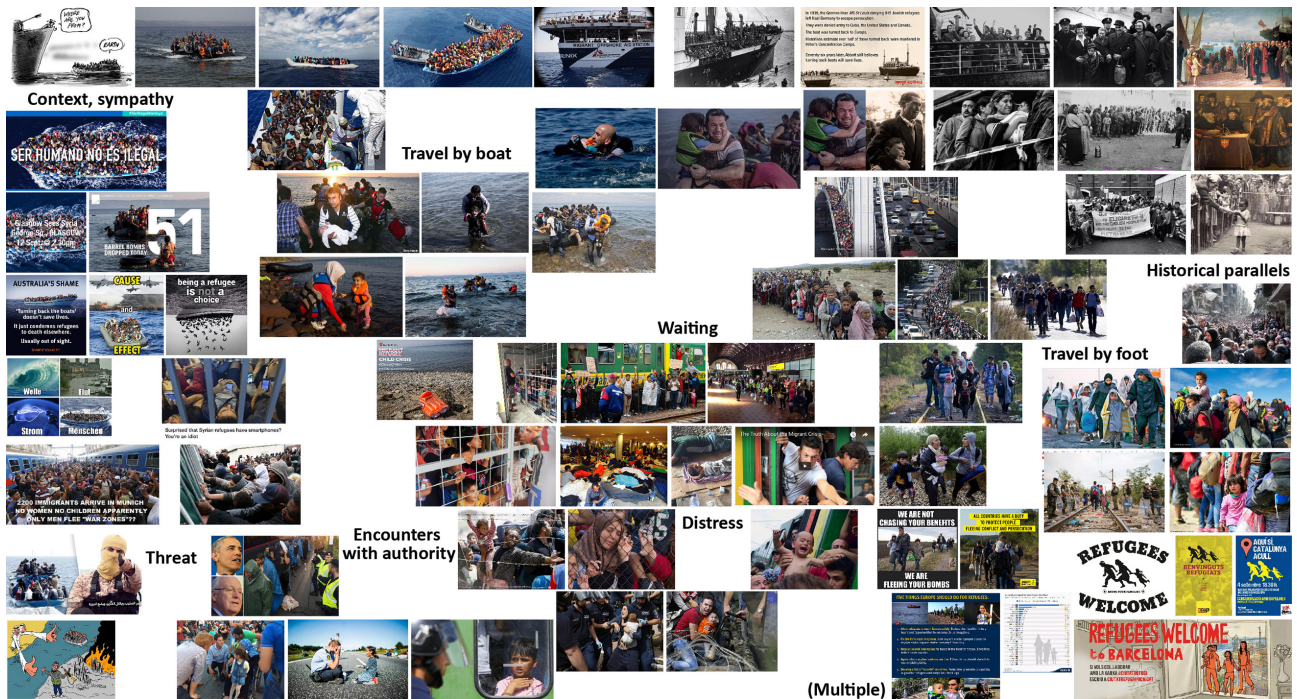


nineteenth century (Figure 122, Figure 123). 20th-century photographs of the mass movement of peoples also seem to stem from such examples, but instead emphasise the scale of the problem, for example during the Belgian refugee crisis during the Great War, the evacuation of Smyrna in 1922, the 1947 partition of India, Palestinians fleeing the newly-formed state of Israel in 1948 (Figure 124), and most recently the flight of the Rohingya from Myanmar. These examples do not follow one another in some supposed chain of influence: rather, I argue, they are representative of practical experience—of seeing trains of people carrying what they could—repeated often enough that their rendition becomes familiar

and symbolically resonant (Figure 88). Put another way, this rendition has become part of the visual discourse of refugees.



Both “shorthand” and mass exoduses depicting the refugee *en route* are common in the datasheet, but the categories are more extensive than those identified by Warnke and others (Figure 110). There is indeed a concentration upon travelling by boat and to a lesser extent by



rail; but travel by foot is more critical and, as described, has a long history.³⁹⁷ Other aspects of the refugees’ journey are also represented in the datasheet: long waits, distress at critical moments, encounters with authority (both good and bad), and attempts at anchoring the pictures by directly imposing an interpretation upon them (both positively and negatively). The aforementioned photograph by Daniel Etter is a prime example of the “shorthand” style of depiction, wherein the travails of one family is made symbolically representative of a larger problem, particularly in the portrayal of Majid and his family as victims traumatised by their

³⁹⁷ Writing of tweets presented at the same time as the current research, Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4062–63) note a shift in focus from refugees in general to refugee children and refugees in boats. This likely reflects the influence of Alan Kurdi’s death.

ordeal.³⁹⁸ It is particularly interesting that in terms of graphic design representations, refugees are always depicted as heteronormative, cissexual nuclear families, with children being held by the hand or in the arms of an adult—evidence that this is the standard, indeed acceptable, form of refugee visibility.³⁹⁹

There are a number of “shorthand” examples in the datasheet. Two Spanish speakers identified a parallel between Laith Majid and Manuel Ferrol’s 1957 photograph of a weeping father and son as they prepared to leave Spain (records #306 and #406; Figure 125).⁴⁰⁰ *The Independent* posted Ognen Teofilovski’s photograph of a distressed family running near train tracks as they attempted to outrun Hungarian authorities (record #447). The International Red Cross’ post in support of refugees is thematically similar to “Flight into Egypt” pictures (record #1006; Figure 126). Using the shorthand is a prime example of a recent movement by NGOs to test out pictures on social media that “humanise and dignify ‘the other’ as a way to instil affective connectivity” and reduce the detrimental effects of psychic numbing (Dencik and Allan, 2017:1186; Slovic et al., 2017). The text accompanying every picture of refugees in smaller, familial units invariably conveys sympathy for the refugees.



³⁹⁸ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” set to display “F”, or “Family”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

³⁹⁹ Particularly interesting is the reuse of the “Immigrants crossing” graphic sign that had been used on California’s motorways since the 1980s (records #526, #787, #806). For more about this sign, see Morrissey (2018). See also records #683 and #748, for further examples which use renditions of the nuclear family in graphic design. For critiques of refugees based upon this heteronormative assumption, see section 5.5.3.

⁴⁰⁰ The pairing of Etter’s and Ferrol’s photographs is a particularly interesting example of Twitter users noting historical parallels, an activity most frequently associated with comparisons between the indifference accorded Syrians at the time and past demonstrations of hospitality. 8 examples of this minor theme (records #80, #183, #262, #488, #509, #799, #841, #964) are from an account purporting to be authored by “Sir William Davenant” (died 1668), the Civil War era poet and playwright.

However, refugees are more often rendered as a large mass of people in the datasheet (71 records), and many of these naturally follow Warnke’s “travel by dinghy and train” category (record #198; Figure 97).⁴⁰¹ Iconographically, these collectively constitute an example of how the repetition of a practical experience—large groups travelling via mass transportation—becomes symbolic with repetition. Travelling by boat (whether dinghy or a larger boat) is the most common rendition in the datasheet; in addition, there are a number of



photographs showing refugees walking *en masse* alongside roads, which could be added profitably to the Warnke’s “travel” category.⁴⁰² Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017:1169) have stated that depicting refugees in masses is “instrumental in the mobilisation of fear” amongst Europeans, where “visualities of threat rely on the racialisation of refugees... [and] the proximity of dark-skinned men turns them into ‘les enragés’”. However, refugees as threat is *not* a major theme in the datasheet. Of the 71 depictions of refugees as a mass, only 6 records characterise them as threatening. Hostile posts will be discussed below in section 5.5.3.

⁴⁰¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” set to display “M”, or “Mass”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

⁴⁰² 47 records depict refugees with boats; 17 depict refugees with trains; 7 depict refugees, usually a mass of refugees, on roads or bridges. For dinghies and boats, for filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Descr” set to display results containing “boat”; and “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”. For trains, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Descr” set to display results containing “train”; and “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”. For roads and bridges, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Pic Descr” set to display results containing either “road” or “bridge”; and “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”.

Support for refugees is pictorially indicated in four main ways: through the brandishing of signs expressing solidarity; through portraits illustrated with a pull-quote; through stock photography paired with textual component of the tweet; and through groups—from large groups to huge masses—of people marching, sometimes holding banners.

The collage is divided into two main sections: 'Demonstrations' and 'Sport'.

Demonstrations:

- Madrid Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city street holding a banner that reads '¡NO PASAD UN PAZ Y LIBERTAD NO A LA DEMOCRACIA Y LIBERTAD'.
- Dublin Demonstration:** A crowd on a bridge over a river, with a banner that reads 'AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'.
- UK Demonstration:** A crowd holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Birmingham Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Oxford Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- London Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Vienna Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Copenhagen Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Stockholm Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Sydney, Australia Demonstration:** A large crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Turkish Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- New York City Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Melbourne, Australia Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Toronto Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Budapest Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- German Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Lavapiés, Spain Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Rabat Demonstration:** A crowd in a city square holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.

Sport:

- English fans:** A crowd of football fans holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- German fans:** A crowd of football fans holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Scottish fans:** A crowd of football fans holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.
- Spanish fans:** A crowd of football fans holding a banner that reads 'WELCOME REFUGEES'.

5.5.2.1. Support from the prominent: fixing iconographic ambiguity

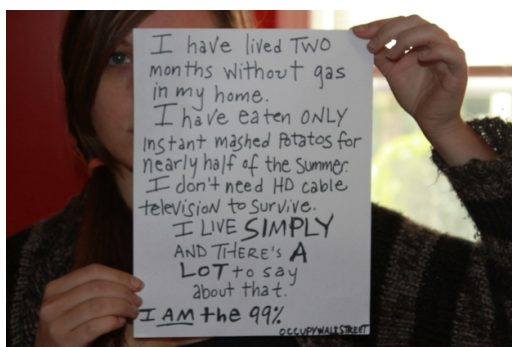
In the datasheet, many individuals—the vast majority of them prominent Britons, particularly politicians of the centre and left—present themselves demonstrating their support for refugees by holding up a sign in a format akin to a selfie (Figure 127). In the datasheet, these pictures appear impromptu and shot with amateur, informal values. The figure holds up a sheet of paper or a small sign with a phrase of support, usually “Refugees Welcome” or “#refugeeswelcome”.⁴⁰³ Most of these are presented from the individuals’ own accounts.



Given that the data was collected with predominantly English-language terms, it is unsurprising that the majority of politicians appearing in the datasheet are British. Members of Parliament are prominent in these examples, and Labour politicians predominate: they are Jeremy Corbyn MP, Yvette Cooper MP, Liz Kendall MP (Figure 131), and Sadiq Khan MP. This is perhaps



unsurprising: in the Summer of 2015, Corbyn, Cooper, and Kendall were running for the Labour party leadership. Members of the Green Party are also prominent, particularly the party’s sole MP, Caroline Lucas (Figure 132); Lucas tweeted her support for refugees the day that Alan was found on the beach and figured prominently in PMQs querying the government’s policies towards refugees. Other politicians include Scottish SMPs.⁴⁰⁴

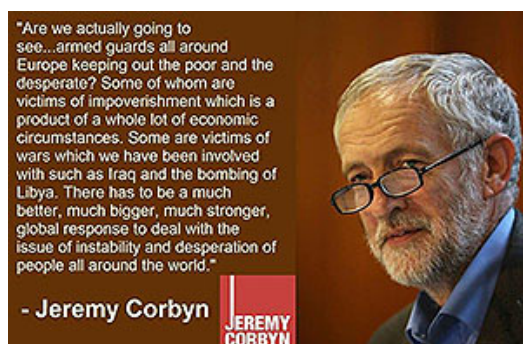


These pictures look very similar to the “I am the 99%” movement emanating from the “Occupy Wall Street” (OWS) protests of 2011 (Figure 133). Initially aimed at personalising and democratising political expression in the OWS movement, the format took off as a meme on Twitter and elsewhere, branching off (as memes do) into other protests, antagonistic responses,

⁴⁰³ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “I/G/F/M” set to display “I” (Individual) and “G” (Group); “Pic Descr” is set to display all records containing the phrase “with sign”. This returns 23 results, of which 3 are to be discounted: records #518 (containing a picture of a person critical of the refugee crisis), #544, and #1081 (individuals singled out in a demonstration; both of these are posted by Amnesty UK). Record #243 displays a couple singled out in a demonstration, but the photograph contains the actor Douglas Booth and is from his account: whilst visually this example is unique, by focusing upon a prominent individual it is more in keeping with the support evinced by prominent individuals described above. The figures in records #727, #1035, and #1073 have not been identified; they were posted by Amnesty UK and Australia, which have featured ordinary individuals.

⁴⁰⁴ Three sport photographs may be appropriate for categorisation here, as they focus upon football players unfurling banners (records #113, and #174) or accompanied onto the pitch by refugee children (record #385).

and subjects (Milner, 2016:174–80).⁴⁰⁵ The examples above, then, follow the format, but comprise a co-opting by the political élite of a democratising form of expression visible online.



The support of prominent individuals is also indicated in an alternative manner. These consist of headshots, usually of professional quality, with pull-quotes expressing support for refugees or for oppressed peoples more generally in a way that is readily applicable to the refugee crisis (Figure 134).⁴⁰⁶ These are similar in intent to the initial variation, but

instead of assemblages created by (or more likely on behalf of) the individual, they are more often created by media organisations, and thus reflect graphic design conventions familiar from party political materials, news magazines, and article illustrations. This type of picture is very much in keeping with Chouliaraki and Stolic’s typology of self-reflexivity: whilst expressing solidarity with refugees in many different ways (even if only through providing context, as in records #437 and #859), the focus is upon the person declaring support, not those who need the support.

More germane to this thesis, however, is the format of the pictures. They might or might not depict prominent individuals. They might bear signs reading “Refugees welcome”, “I am the 99%”, or something else entirely. They might alternately consist of slick, professional photography accompanied by a well-chosen quotation. The figures stare, emotionless, at the camera; are caught in mid-speech; or smile with a genuine warmth at the camera, whilst others

⁴⁰⁵ A prominent branch of the “sign holding” meme has been the “I am Trayvon Martin”, a series of similar images commemorating the life of the African-American youth killed by George Zimmerman. Like “I am the 99%”, these also express solidarity by self-identification, and they featured prominently in the Black Lives Matter movement. There are many appropriations of signs held by individuals, and a number of them can be seen on *Know Your Meme*: <http://knowyourmeme.com/search?context=entries&q=sign> [Accessed 27 February 2018].

⁴⁰⁶ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Context” set to “Headshot”; “Pic Descr” set to display all records containing the phrase “with pull-quote”. This yields 16 results, 4 of which are to be discounted because they do not express support for refugees: records #331 (Nilüfer Demir), #348 (TV presenter Jorge Lanata, who hijacks the discussion to concentrate upon the suffering of Argentine children); #357 (of Abdullah Kurdi), #514 (of media figure Katie Hopkins expressing disdain for refugees).

A further 6 records display a version of this theme: they are often based upon stock photography and lack a pull-quote, but the tweet’s text clarifies the intent of the picture, thus fulfilling the purpose of a pull-quote. These are records #320 (German Chancellor Angela Merkel), #390 (Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger), #410 (Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby), #655 (actor Benedict Cumberbatch), #665 (actor Angelia Jolie), and #782 (musician and humanitarian Bob Geldof). In addition, there are 3 sport-related pictures in support of refugees: these examples show football club members bearing banners welcoming refugees, or escorting refugee children onto the pitch (records #111, #174, #385).

smile in reaction to the [cropped] scene surrounding them. In all these cases, the pictures are *utterly ambiguous for the purposes to which they are put*. The intent (or if you will, meaning) of the picture in this content is *only fixed by the inclusion of the sign or the accompanying pull-quote*.⁴⁰⁷



As such, one may see this as an attempt to fix the meaning of the photograph, similar to the purposes of captioning (Barthes, 1977a:15). But they partake of a much older tradition than photographic captioning. These photographs take part in a longstanding tradition of image-making wherein exclusively pictorial content is unable to convey the “message” of the picture, since the picture is in itself ambiguous. A prominent example of this tradition may be found in the popular and influential medium of graphic novels (comics) and cartoons strips (Figure 135). Artists making these have typically relied upon readily-understandable



gestures, anchored by contextually-clarifying textual content (Eisner, 1985).⁴⁰⁸ However, in the case of comics, text balloons are used particularly when figures are portrayed speaking to one another—that is, when the pictorial content is communicatively ambiguous and cannot otherwise convey the characters’ emotional or verbal states. The text balloon itself has a longer history, however, often depicted as a ribbon held by a figure: again, it was often used in service of de-ambiguating an otherwise ambiguous image. For example, Nicolaus Gerhaert van Leyden used the standard contemporary format of the Madonna and Child with praying donor to create

⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, for the second variation—examples using graphic design conventions and pull-quotes—the image makers almost certainly employ photographs taken within other contexts and retool them to fit the context of the refugee crisis.

⁴⁰⁸ Will Eisner is particularly relevant to this observation: a comic-book artist since the 1930s, he spent much of his career exploring alternative ways to convey narrative or emotion purely through expression and exaggerated anatomy. Extracts from his *New York: The Big City* (1986), a well-known collection of experiments in purely visual narrative expression, are reproduced in Eisner and Popalski (2008). He spent much of his later life as a lecturer at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and towards the end of his life published a series of volumes exploring graphical and narrative conventions along with their histories.

an epitaph: the ribbon of accompanying text distinguishes the epitaph from its iconographic source (Figure 136).⁴⁰⁹



5.5.2.2. The crowd as demonstration of the popular will

The most numerous expressions of solidarity in the datasheet shows masses of people demonstrating on behalf of refugees (Figure 137). This category mixes photographic types: professionally-shot, video-stills, amateur photography, and screenshots. Instead of focusing upon prominent individuals, these portray large groups of unnamed citizens, many of whom hold signs; and they are alternately shot from a bird's-eye perspective to capture the scale of the crowd or, less often, from within the crowd itself.⁴¹⁰ These demonstrations took place across the world, but most of the ones in the datasheet occurred in Europe. A variant of this category portrays football

⁴⁰⁹ Gerhaert van Leyden's statue is a funerary epitaph for the deceased canon Conrad von Bussnang and is of a specific new epitaph type of funerary monument that proliferated in the 15th century. Panofsky (1964:58) notes "funerary monuments of this kind are hardly distinguishable from nonfunerary ones". This example closely matches standard donor imagery of the period—compare, for example, with Jan van Eyck's *Madonna and Child with Canon van der Paele* (c. 1436; *Groeningemuseum*, Bruges). What distinguishes this works as an epitaph from the standard image of the Virgin and Child with a donor is the ribbon of text held by the canon: *Ora prece pia pro nobis, virgo Maria* ("Pray for us with pious invocation, O virgin Mary"), which fixes its funerary context. One may also find similar renditions in advertisements, where the intent of the advertisement is ambiguous until fixed by the presence of text.

⁴¹⁰ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "N"; "I/G/F/M" set to display "G" (Group) and "M" (Mass); "PicTh-Crowd" set to "Demonstration". This yields 45 results, of which 5 are to be discarded, usually because they are not demonstrations in support of refugees. These are records #243 (of the actor Douglas Booth at a demonstration), #520 (which focuses upon a sign about the effects of neo-colonialism on refugees, not refugees themselves); #870 (two photographs of Muslim protestors, with text accusing them of hypocrisy), and #999 (of Muslim demonstrators, claimed in the accompanying text to be terrorist sympathisers).

fans: large numbers of them populate stands, bearing banners in support of refugees.⁴¹¹ German and Scottish fans are the most prominent and numerous among them; again, this reflects the period in which the data was collected, as German and Scottish teams were engaged in a friendly match during the collection period.

Many of these demonstrations, particularly those in London and Copenhagen, were massive affairs. In all cases, they emanated from a desire to put pressure on various national governments to loosen restrictions against refugees and provide support for them.⁴¹² However, it is important to note that whilst there were demonstrations in support of refugees before the period covered by the data, the sheer scale of the demonstrations displayed here were likely a direct result of seeing the picture of Alan (Figure 93): many who marched and volunteered their time have cited the impact of seeing Alan as the impetus for their engagement (Prøitz, 2017).⁴¹³



These pictures are frequently accompanied by texts marvelling at the scale of the demonstrations and deriving inspiration from the display of solidarity. Moreover, several equate these groups with the city, country, or humanity in general: “*Copenhagen says #refugeeswelcome*”; “*Our hearts are open*”; “*People power: nothing can stop it*”; and “*Belfast, Dublin, London, Copenhagen and elsewhere say #refugeeswelcome*” (emphasis mine). The textual content of these tweets makes clear what seems to be intended in the photographs themselves: that the large crowds are *indicative of the popular will*, in contrast with the activities of national governments.

⁴¹¹ Filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Football”; “Pic Descr” set to display all records containing the word “banner”. This yields 16 results. The overwhelming majority were posted by football team accounts, sport broadcasters and writers, MPs and mayors, and media organisations.

⁴¹² The demand for various governments to change their policies is indicated in the datasheet through the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Tweet Summ” set to retrieve all entries containing the phrase “Inadequate response”. This yields 40 results, which condemn a wide array of governments: those of the UK, the US, the European Union, Canada, the Gulf states, Australia and the world in general are all implicated.

⁴¹³ Circumstantial evidence from the datasheet supports this notion as well: the large London rally (scheduled for 12 September) was first advertised the day Alan was found on the beach (records #976 and #1039). One of the first marches photographed took place in Turkey on 3 September (record #1055); Canadians marched in Toronto on 4 September (records #625 and #1064). More and larger rallies followed (see section 5.2 above). The timeline is clarified via the following filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Demonstration”; and “Date” set to “Ascending” (i.e., earliest to latest).

To return to Chouliaraki and Stolic's typology: are these manifestations of support—whether prominent individuals or large groups—examples of hospitality? Some certainly are: pictures of the prominent holding “refugees welcome” signs are clear indications of hospitality. But the text *accompanying* these pictures often removes this clarity. Arguably, however, the text accompanying prominent individuals focuses upon goals, e.g., “Let’s urge David Cameron not to turn his back on refugees” or “Please sign the petition urging the government to act”. *These obliquely swing back to the individual who makes the call to action*: in effect, you will also want to do this thing because I have done and/or initiated this thing. The complication of the accompanying text—part hortatory, part self-promotion, part gesture of hospitality—seems to straddle multiple categories in Chouliaraki and Stolic's typology.



One can say much the same about pictures showing mass demonstrations of support: oftentimes the pictures themselves show no indication of the intent of the crowd (Figure 93). It is only through the accompanying text that the viewer understands the photograph's subject. And the accompanying text adds other elements as well, such as “This makes me proud” and “it

renews my faith in humanity”. Whilst ostensibly images of hospitality, the inclusion of the accompanying text alters the photograph's usage to fit more squarely under the rubric of self-reflexivity.

That said, the intent does not stop at the user's feelings or some expression of self-regard. A component of reflexivity of course exists in the tweets: but it is *used in the service of something else*. The prominent individuals holding “refugees welcome” signs used their prominence to amplify the message, namely that refugees need support (Figure 132). Are these individuals not



modelling behaviour in their photographs? When a user states that the size of a demonstration “makes me proud”, what was it that made her proud? Was it not because ordinary humans demanded that their representative governments address a humanitarian crisis? In this case, were ordinary citizens themselves not *modelling behaviour* both to their fellow citizens and to their own governments? Indeed, ordinary

citizens modelled behaviour not only in symbolic gestures, such as mass demonstrations, but also in material support: by a surge in donations to refugees (Merrill, 2015). The datasheet mirrors

this: 24 records focus upon volunteers actively assisting refugees in practical efforts and expressions of inspiration emanating from popular indications of support.⁴¹⁴

The typological model proposed by Chouliaraki and Stolic does not adequately capture expressions of modelled support or inspiration, potential forms of “affective contagion” seen as the beginnings of responsibility in the light of viewing photographs showing refugee suffering (Papacharissi, 2014:19). Indeed, the history of similar depictions more closely approaches the formal qualities of these pictures *as well as the textual expressions accompanying them*. When a figure speaks to an overwhelmingly large crowd—such as Dr Martin Luther King in the March on Washington in 1963, or Barack Obama during his run for U.S. President in 2008—the photographers inevitably showed the crowd size. When masses of Germans marched in 1989 and the Berlin Wall was breached, it was seen as indicating an historic turn. When football fans pack a stadium, singing and chanting, it is regularly seen as indicative of the city or nation’s support for the team, indeed as inspirational to the team they support. The concentration on crowd size suggests the picture supposedly captures an important—and inspiring—moment for the viewer to witness. The data strongly suggests that those who posted pictures of mass demonstrations in favour of refugees thought history was occurring before their eyes, and that by posting this, they acknowledged this history: posting was thus a form of remote witnessing (Vis et al., 2014).

5.5.3. Hostile reactions: the “Trojan Horse” narrative

There is a comparative paucity of hostile responses to refugees in the data (Figure 145). 23 posts contain pictorial indications of threat and the form is akin to the “Trojan Horse”: they suggest terrorists are posing as refugees, sneaking past borders in order to cause damage. The terrorists are rarely shown as groups, but as pairs or (usually) individuals. 5 posts depict groups of refugees as threats, and one of those is a cartoon from the 1930s.⁴¹⁵ Including “orphaned” posts—records with missing pictures—whose texts are clearly hostile towards refugees, adds little to this total: there are only 8.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ Filter recipes: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Th-Support” set to “Volunteers helping”; also: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “Tweet Summ” set to “Inspirational”.

⁴¹⁵ 4 of the results make refugees a threat on the basis of pictures. A further 2 are based upon the accompanying text. For pictorial threats, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”; and “PicTh-Censure” set to “Danger”. For the accompanying text examples, use the filter recipe: “Alan in it?” set to “N”; “PicTh-Crowd” set to “Refugees”; and “Tweet Summ” set to “Warning”.

⁴¹⁶ Filter recipe: “Image” set to “Missing”; “Tweet Summ” set to display both “Danger” and “Warning”. The text of two of these tweets follow a similar theme to other tweets that show masses of refugees either in train stations or on boats, and so would likely have been included in a group showing masses of refugees (records #397 and #1025). One tweet (record #1026) is clearly similar to other tweets in the datasheet which depict two masked terrorists. The specific pictorial subjects of the remaining 5 tweets cannot be predicted.

skinned man in military garb with a scar/birthmark on his left cheek on the left, and on the right,



it shows the same man in civilian clothing. The texts accompanying this picture claim the man is a *Dāesh* insurgent come to infiltrate Europe. However, it is demonstrable that these pictures are of an *anti-Dāesh* fighter, Laith Al Saleh, first as a soldier and later as a refugee.⁴¹⁹ A second example (Figure 151) pursues the same



comparative strategy: these tweets contain two photographs (records #70, #77, and #468).⁴²⁰ The accompanying texts claim that

one photograph shows an Estonian reporter with a *Dāesh* fighter in 2013, and the other shows the reporter meeting same man sneaking into the European Union. These “before-and-after” pictures (although the latter is an “after-and-before” contrast) are clearly displayed as demonstrations of proof. As such, they belong to a broader category in contemporary visual



culture: other examples include before-and-after comparisons of weight loss and muscle gain (Figure 152). This might be called *self-evident evidence*, wherein the author makes some sort of claim and the photographs bear the burden of proving that claim. In the first example above at least, the “proof” is a bait-and-switch: the two photographs indeed show the same individual, but he was not who the authors claimed him to be.

⁴¹⁹ The photographs were taken by Alexander Zemilianichenko (AP) and can be found on the AP’s website: <http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Greece-Migrants-Syrian-Fighter/7c1739dd34de42fabefde91376f0b07b/1/0> [Accessed 13 February 2018]. The photograph appeared on 17 August 2015 in a photo essay about Syria by *The Atlantic*: <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/08/escaping-from-war-torn-syria-to-western-europe/401510/#img40> [Accessed 13 February 2018].

⁴²⁰ These photographs have proven impossible to source, but a reverse-image search for each of these on Google Images demonstrates that they, also, were shared amongst a far-right network of websites beyond Twitter.

A similar use—or rather, misuse—of photography as evidence is also seen with another example of a “Trojan Horse” warning shared by right-wing accounts (records #275, #552, and #709; Figure 153). Instead of depicting specific individuals purported to be *Dāesh* insurgents, these posts show unidentifiable masked individuals with automatic weaponry, and the accompanying text claims that these individuals are preparing to infiltrate the West as refugees. Whilst the source of this photograph has not been definitively identified, it is strongly consistent with another photograph taken by Mohammed Salem (Reuters) of women from the “*Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade*” during the Second *Intifada* in Gaza in 2007.⁴²¹ The posts are careful not to claim that these figures are from *Dāesh*, but the intent is clear: to instil fear of a covert, Islamic insurgency with violent intent.



The narrative of the “Trojan Horse” drives other photos of large groups of refugees: the photographs are deemed a form of proof of insurgency because the authors claim the crowds contain “NOT ONE woman or child” but instead “all military aged men” (records #291, #354, #413, #644, #823, #999, and #1042; quote from record #354; Figure 154). Such hostile



interpretations of refugees’ intent, then, depend upon the fact that these representations contradict the stereotypical representation of heteronormative nuclear families noted above. When the expectations of this typology are violated, then these posts claim it

is evidence of an insurgent invasion.

Only a handful of the pictures (records #291, #644, #1042, and arguably #612) are explicitly anti-refugee: it is only upon reading the accompanying text that one can understand that the majority

⁴²¹ See <http://pictures.reuters.com/archive/PALESTINIANS-GAZA--GM1DVHRXQUAA.html> [Accessed 14 February, 2018]. The text-laden *niqabs* are the same in both photographs; one can see the eyes of the woman on the left, but not the woman on the right; the woman on the right wears an olive-green vest in both pictures. The woman on the left bears the same black automatic weapon (likely a Kalashnikov rifle); the woman at the right bears the same wood-stocked automatic weapon. Both pose against a cream-coloured wall, and their shadows are equally sharp; both pictures have a curtain at the right. Both pictures have another black-robed figure present on the extreme right. The picture in the datasheet is comparatively blown-out, so it is unclear whether the indistinct object in the centre of the picture is the cream-colour niqab worn by the woman in Salem’s photograph.

of hostile posts' pictures purportedly constitute evidence.⁴²² Remarkably similar pictures exist in the datasheet that show sympathy to refugees, highlighting the need for the textual context to differentiate between the intents of the sharers.⁴²³ Only some of these, then, follow the typology of threat as outlined by Chouliaraki and Stolic. Yet whilst few were widely shared in this datasheet, they are examples of a wider phenomenon and are demonstrative of a counter-narrative that refugees are untrustworthy: they are either threats to their host countries or cowards running from the problems in their native lands (Rettberg and Gajjala, 2016). They are thus rare examples in the datasheet of a broadly representative strain of contemporary iconography depicting insurgent threat, which ultimately stems from Orientalist conceptions of the Other.

It would be well to remind the reader at this point that this thesis is about the reception of Alan Kurdi on Twitter. Only two of these hostile tweets refer to Alan, and only by name as a hashtag.⁴²⁴ Interestingly, these two tweets sit astride two different portrayals of refugees as a "Trojan Horse": one (record #291) refers to the refugee crisis as an "invasion" and uses the "alt-right" hashtag #WhiteGenocide. The second (record #853) shows no refugees, but instead a map purporting to uncover a Byzantine "master plan": that the refugee crisis is a front for the creation of a "Greater Israel".

It appears, then, that none of the extant tweets exhibiting hostility to refugees show Alan.⁴²⁵ They studiously avoid sympathetic renditions of refugees, and the image of Alan—perhaps the most emotionally sympathetic picture of all—appears radioactive to their desires to portray refugees as hostile Others bent upon destroying the West from within.⁴²⁶ This impression,

⁴²² Record #612 is a cartoon depicting a stereotypical armed *mujahid* burrowing out from the European map; record #644 contrasts a boatload of refugees with a masked *Dāesh* insurgent pointing a knife at the camera. Records #291 and #1042 contain images of a large group of refugees between train cars: the text placed on the image explicitly states that the group consists exclusively of men.

⁴²³ Filter recipe: "Sim. to" set to "196", all of which show overloaded dinghies.

⁴²⁴ Filter recipe: "Tweet Txt" set to display all records containing "Aylan" ("Tweet txt" unavailable in the redacted version of the datasheet); "Tweet Summ" set to collect both "Danger" and "Warning".

⁴²⁵ It is likely that a deleted tweet contained a picture of Alan. The text of record #754—from an account since suspended—states "Propaganda vs Reality: That child was SAFE in Turkey! #refugeeswelcome #refugeecrisis #NoMoreMigrants #Deport". It is hypothesised that "that child" is Alan, given that he had been in Turkey. Given that the author contrasts propaganda and reality, it is also hypothesised that the post shared either two pictures or a montage merging two pictures.

⁴²⁶ In contrast, see Topinka (2017), who charts the flourishing of racist speech on the Reddit social media network in his examination of commentary arising from "parodic" images of Alan on the subreddit r/ImGoingToHellForThis. 30 of the 40 posts about refugees in the period were about Alan. 593 comments were attached to these posts, many of which containing sentiment substantially hostile to refugees.

however, is built upon an exceedingly narrow—indeed, direct—expression of hostility. Days after the death of Alan, a story emerged that the child’s father, Abdullah, was the driver of the boat that capsized and killed his family and others, and it was claimed that he was in fact one of the smugglers (Khan, 2015).⁴²⁷ Four of the records relate this story: it is surely not coincidental that three of these were posted by figures and media outlets such as Tommy Robinson, *Breitbart*, and the *Daily Mail*.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, they were posted over a week after Alan’s death, when the initial outcry had died down, and when Twitter users virtually stopped posting Nilüfer Demir’s photographs. Even here, however, only *Breitbart* (record #975) dared accompany their post with a picture of the dead Alan. This is the beginning, then, of using the most emotive story emerging from the refugee crisis against the refugees themselves: they are complicit in the deaths of their own, and in the death of the most sympathetic among them (Thelwall, 2015). However, whilst few pictures in the datasheet evince hostile attitudes towards refugees, they are nevertheless important: they form a visual continuity with the hostile images of refugees that appear subsequent to the time period covered in the datasheet (see next chapter).

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter presents some common imagery in the datasheet about the refugee crisis: pictures of refugee children, refugees in general, exhibitions of solidarity with refugees and antipathy towards them. These photographs follow long-standing pictorial practices, some stretching back over 2,500 years. These practices are borne out in a wide variety of registers: palace art, diet adverts, ambiguous imagery, photojournalism, and sports photography. The pictures frequently follow typological patterns as set out by Lilie Chouliaraki, Tijana Stolic, and Martin Warnke, but they depart from these typologies in important, and at times critical, ways. Where possible, I have endeavoured to show how the data collected by the Visual Social Media Lab can enrich and modify those typologies.

It is important to underscore the fact that these pictures were collected concurrently with the pictures of Alan Kurdi. The data thus cannot prove whether they are representative of pictorial representation of refugees more broadly but given the continuity with several different pictorial practices and the parallels with the research projects of other investigators, it is strongly suspected that they do so. Nevertheless, it is likely that pictures of refugees, and pictures of Alan Kurdi, are strongly intertwined: the pictures of Alan strongly violate standard depictions of

⁴²⁷ As Khan relates, refugees are often made complicit in the circumstances of their own escape. Their knowledge of languages makes them intermediaries between other refugees and the smugglers who profit from them. Furthermore, the smugglers often force the refugees to make the journey without their help: Abdullah stated that the captain of the dinghy jumped off the boat early on in the trip, and he felt compelled to take over (Weise, 2015).

⁴²⁸ Filter recipe: “Tweet Summ” set to “Abdullah accused of being a smuggler”.

refugee children under the care of adults, and the pictorial standards of NGOs strongly reinforce images of care and empathy in order to draw sympathy from viewers in light of the death of Alan.

Chapter 6: Aftermath

6.1. Introduction

The image of Alan Kurdi on the beach appeared beyond the confines of Twitter, and beyond the two-week period captured in the data. Confining one's self to the dataset—and thereby to a specific timeframe and platform—restricts potential insights into the ongoing life of Alan's image, that is into how the image becomes inflected by ongoing events and in turn inflects reaction to those events. How did Alan reappear afterwards? This chapter examines prominent examples, virtually all from the following year. Since I started this project, I have been sensitised to the moments when Alan's image has reappeared on social media or the mass media. Because of the expense involved with data collection, this chapter cannot be based upon data. But also, Alan's image became so well-known that it was referenced well beyond the confines of Twitter. This chapter is therefore more impressionistic and departs from the data-centred approach taken elsewhere in the project. However, there is an underlying continuity with the rest of the project in that it underscores formal and thematic connections with long-standing image-making practices.

First, the chapter outlines the political impact Alan's image initial appearance seemed to have. It then examines the circumstances under which the image reappeared; Nahon and Hemsley (2013) observed that viral subjects reactivate when they are relevant to salient events. I demonstrate that Alan's reappearance was triggered by related events—flashpoints in the news about refugees, the level of refugee accommodation (or lack of it) forwarded by the West, and the ongoing carnage in Syria. I argue that these reappearances employ similar formats to those seen in the artistic remediations discussed in Chapter 4, and that the image of Alan became weaponised in what W. J. T. Mitchell (2011) and Hatem Akil (2016) have both called a “war of images”, here a field of contention about the visual characterisation of refugees where different interpretative repertoires were employed by different image makers. In parallel, the image was also appropriated by artists in galleries and in performances. I argue they did not come to their own, independent terms with it, but instead follow patterns of representation common in the dataset.

Finally, the chapter considers the effect the iconic image of Alan had in the world. Early on in the media, it was claimed that the image “changed the world” (Kingsley and Timur, 2015). I argue that the image had a real effect in the world, but that its influence was limited and hobbled in part by acts of media self-censorship.

6.2. Moving beyond the datasheet

Of course, there are many important events related to Alan and the response to his image absent from the datasheet, whether because they were not captured by the terms ringfencing the data, not shared sufficiently widely to be captured by the subset examined by this thesis, not

referenced on Twitter at all, or occurred outside the period of data collection (2–14 September 2015).

An important example of an event outside the data occurred by 9 September: *Dāesh* had used one of Nilüfer Demir's photographs in its glossy magazine *Dābiq* (Figure 155).⁴²⁹ The image's use implies that death is the fate of those who leave their self-styled caliphate. The accompanying article takes care to ostensibly claim that the possibility of death is a "danger" of leaving



Islamic lands (*Dār al-Islām*, or دار الإسلام), but juxtaposes this danger with the threat of eternal damnation (Ackerman, 2015; Paraszczuk, 2015b; Paraszczuk, 2015a).⁴³⁰ This instance is the earliest example outside of the datasheet I have found of the use of Alan as a weapon: thrown down in a symbolic struggle, "where the image is used as an instrument of war" (Akil, 2016:3).⁴³¹ It will be demonstrated that *Dāesh* was not alone in weaponising Alan; indeed it is arguable that when Alan was placed in political contexts, thrown down in front of the United Nations or Arab League, he had already become weaponised.⁴³²

As noted in the previous chapter, several Twitter users shared images of crowds gathered in various cities and banners unfurled at football games. Judging from their comments, they evidently thought they were witnessing an historic moment: a sea-change in favour of welcoming refugees in the face of hostile policies promoted by EU countries for the past 30 years

⁴²⁹ *Dābiq* (دابق) is the name of a town in Syria. One of the *Hadiths* (أحاديث), or statements, attributed to the Prophet Muhammed was that Armageddon would occur after a Muslim army encountered a Roman [assumedly Christian] army in that town. The name of the magazine thus takes advantage of the confrontational, clash-of-civilisations tone of this *Hadith* and points to Islamic eschatology.

⁴³⁰ The *Dābiq* article transliterates the phrase as *Dārul Islām*, but standard Arabic transliteration under MSA rules would transcribe the phrase as *Dār al-Islām*. Cemil Aydın (2017:18) explains that traditionally, there is a tripartite division of the geopolitical world in Islamic religio-legal thought: *Dār al-Islām* (دار الإسلام), which are "realms of Muslim authority"; *Dār al-Harb* (دار الحرب), "hostile places, where a Muslim lacked legal protection and safety", and *Dār al-Amān* (دار الأمان), also known as *Dār al-Ahd* [دار العهد] or *Dār al-Sulh* [دار الصلح], "lands of peace, where Muslims practiced freely, though they did not rule". Aydın (2017:18) notes, however, that "these were theoretical distinctions, far removed from practice. There was no effective binary of Muslim and non-Muslim lands, which makes sense since *ummah* [i.e., the community of believers] described a faith community, not a geopolitical entity". In the *Dābiq* article, then, *Dāesh* is capitalizing on this theoretical concept.

⁴³¹ This is not an isolated instance of *Dāesh* weaponising imagery: Marwan Kraidy (2017) has examined the organisation's effective usage of slickly produced video footage to terrify both internal and external opponents, describing the images as "projectilic".

⁴³² The concern of using Alan as a weapon may be part of Wissam al Jazairy's motivation for withdrawing his illustration from circulation (see above).

(Guiraudon, 2018). The dataset reflects the pressure put on governments by both prominent individuals and large demonstrations—but it does *not* reflect many of the governmental responses announced at the time, most of which were inadequate to the scale of the refugee crisis. For instance:

- On 3 September 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, immediately recognising the gravity of the situation for his own political career, tearfully discussed the death of Alan and stated that the refugee crisis would be mitigated by fighting *Dāesh* (Peat, 2015). He did not offer any policy changes. He subsequently lost the election to the Liberals under Justin Trudeau on 19 October (Messamore, 2016).
- On 7 September 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the U.K. would take up to 20,000 Syrian refugees (Wintour, 2015). By 2018, it has fulfilled half that small quota (Home Office, 2018).
- On 8 September 2015, the German government under Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that it would accommodate 500,000 Syrian refugees per year (Smith and Tran, 2015).
- On 9 September 2015, Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced Australia would take in 12,000 more Syrian refugees (Hurst and Medhora, 2015; Lenette and Cleland, 2016:78), although by April 2016, only 187 refugees had been accepted (Lenette and Miskovic, 2016:117).

Only the German effort is recorded in the datasheet: from the *Economist*'s account, which promotes an article on Chancellor Merkel's response to the refugee crisis (record #320). This article presents different figures—according to it, 800,000 refugees had been accepted into Germany that year, suggesting that the 8 September quota announcement represented a nearly 40% *reduction* in acceptance rates.⁴³³

Dated 5 September 2015, that *Economist* article already noted that “voter disquiet is growing”. Grow it did. German refugee centres were repeatedly attacked in the following months (Dockery, 2017). The mood darkened considerably after 13 November when a series of coordinated terrorist attacks took place in Paris, killing 130 people: *Dāesh* claimed responsibility for the attacks. The French Prime Minister Manuel Valls claimed some of the killers were able to “slip in” to Europe during the refugee crisis (Henley et al., 2015). It appears, however, that the terrorists were not refugees, but European-born Muslims radicalised in prison and by their experiences fighting for *Dāesh* in Syria (McDonnell and Zavis, 2015). Nevertheless, by 17 November, Stanley “Mac” McMurty, cartoonist for the *Daily Mail*,



⁴³³ <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21663228-refugees-germanys-chancellor-brave-decisive-and-right-merkel-bold> [Accessed 6 March 2018].

published a cartoon depicting predominantly Muslim refugees crossing the European Union's borders (Figure 156).⁴³⁴ One silhouetted figure in the stereotypical garb of a *mujahid* has a rifle slung across his back, a clear reference to a veiled threat. Moreover, as the refugees cross, they are accompanied by rats, an even clearer equation of refugees with a generalised threat: equating them with disease and pestilence.

After it was published, McMurty's cartoon was widely condemned for the rats, as it uncannily hearkened back to similar Nazi depictions of Jews (Buchanan, 2015a).⁴³⁵ More broadly, however, the equation of the refugee with a hidden—indeed, a veiled—threat, with a rifle-bearing *mujahid*, and with a danger to European borders, will be familiar to the reader of the previous chapter. Individuals on the far right shared very similar imagery (records #275, #408, #552, #612, and #709): in intent, Mac's cartoon is one with them. There had been plenty of anti-refugee sentiment across Europe before the death of Alan Kurdi—much propagated by the *Daily Mail* itself, as pointed out by some Twitter users remarking upon the newspaper's swift and brief *volte-face* (see records #162 and #280). However, adopting visual themes from Nazi propaganda and far right Twitter feeds constitutes a significant ramping-up of hostility, all of which employ specific Orientalist tropes of the Other as fundamentally different and dangerous.

6.3. The image of Alan reappears

6.3.1. As a weapon in a changing climate

In the midst of terrorist attacks and more palatable, even anodyne, imagery of Alan in the form of family snapshots, the new-found hospitality towards refugees was already on the wane. The mood darkened still more after several women were sexually assaulted within crowds celebrating New Year's Eve in Cologne and other German cities: gangs of men having "'a North African or Arabic' appearance" were accused of perpetrating the attacks (Eddy, 2016). The assaults further fuelled the rise of the anti-immigrant PEGIDA movement, which had been a relatively local phenomenon beforehand (Dostal, 2015; Smale, 2016).⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Archived on <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3321431/MAC-Europe-s-open-borders.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

⁴³⁵ The social media response concentrated upon its similarity to a 1939 political cartoon in *Das Kleine Blatt*. To my eyes, however, it is closer to the infamous rats/ghetto montage in the 1940 German film *Der Ewige Jude*. As the image switches to a mass of rats running over foodstuffs, the voiceover intones, "like teeming rats, they are a danger to human health". For more on the film, see Mannes (1999). The film is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/176365669> [Accessed 6 March 2018]; the rat scene starts at 16:54.

⁴³⁶ PEGIDA is an acronym which stands for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, or "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West". Probst (2017) has argued that PEGIDA and the right-wing political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) both increased polarising anti-refugee rhetoric, portraying the presence of refugees in Germany as one of "non-negotiable, existential conflict". The ramping-up of such rhetoric has influenced the imagery used in news programmes on television channels such as ARD, which have portrayed



This was the context in which the iconic image of Alan reappeared. Weeks after the Cologne attacks, the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* invoked Alan on the beach in a cartoon by Laurent “Riss” Sourisseau: “What would little Alan have become had he grown up? Arse-grabber in Germany” (Figure 157).⁴³⁷ Tucked away in the corner of the cartoon, Alan lies face-down in the surf. In contrast, had he lived, he would have chased women about with his tongue hanging out. In this



Record #10 text: “How it should have ended”
(picture: Omer Tosun)



Record #152 text: What could have been
vs what happened”
(picture: Rita Jordison)



Record #208
(picture: Lina Abgaradeh)



Record #670
(picture: Unknown-Sleeping family beach)



Record #804 (source)
(picture: Khaled Kharajah)

cartoon, then, Alan is depicted in a parallel scenario depicting “what happened” versus “what would have happened instead”. Visually, it is thus in keeping with the format of one of the most

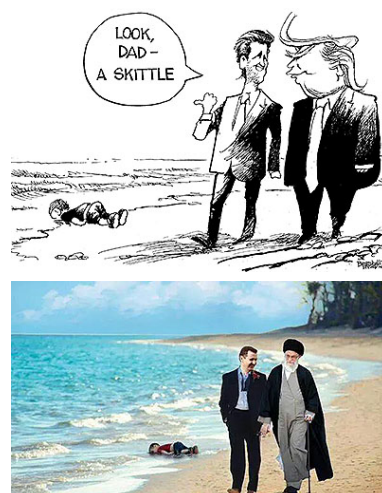
Chancellor Merkel wearing a hijab with minarets rising in the Berlin skyline in the graphics behind speakers (Probst, 2017).

⁴³⁷ Riss had portrayed Alan before and appears in the datasheet (record #512): next to a McDonald’s sign reading “Two children’s meals for the price of one”, Alan lies dead on the beach, with the caption “So close to the goal...”.

resonant themes amongst the artistic responses to Alan's death: those that depict him asleep, and contrast "what *actually* happened" with "what *should* have happened" (Figure 158).⁴³⁸ Unlike those remediations, this one is, of course, a parody, and elicited substantial outrage, much of it based on the fact that it played upon the refugee as threat (Meade, 2016).⁴³⁹ Thus, even when Alan reappears and takes a familiar compositional form, it is informed by an older trope of the refugee as threat, inflected by the specificity of the threat.

Alan also appeared in the context of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. In the midst of the Republican candidate's anti-immigrant stance, Muslims in particular were invariably framed as threats. On 20 September 2016, Donald Trump Jr., the son of the Republican candidate, tweeted a photograph of a bowl of Skittles (an American sweet), with the appended text placed on it: "If I had a bowl of Skittles and I told you just three would kill you. Would you take a handful? That's our Syrian refugee problem".⁴⁴⁰ The analogy was roundly condemned and its claims swiftly debunked (Crockett and Zarracina, 2016).

Bill Bramhall of the *New York Daily News* produced a political cartoon of the controversy. In it, Alan lies on the beach, familiar from Nilüfer Demir's photographs; Donald Trump and his son walk along the beach, and as Trump Jr insouciantly gestures back at Alan, he states "Look, Dad—a Skittle" (Figure 159). The cartoon uncannily mirrors a Photoshop montage in the dataset: Alan lies in the surf as Bashar al Assad and the Iranian Supreme Ayatollah Khomeini walk hand in hand (record #1034; Figure 160).⁴⁴¹ Both Bramhall's cartoon and the Photoshop montage



⁴³⁸ Filter recipe: "Alan in it?" set to "Y"; "Art?" set to "Y"; "PicTh-Other" set to "Sleep". See especially records #10, #154, #210, #672, and #804, which explicitly contrast what happened/what should have happened.

⁴³⁹ Abdullah Kurdi reportedly scans the Internet for mention of Alan obsessively. He evidently wept upon seeing the cartoon, due to the violation of the child's memory (Allegretti, 2016). This is a sobering reminder that reproducing Alan's image can do very real psychological harm to surviving family members, and that its display should not be taken lightly.

⁴⁴⁰ <https://twitter.com/DonaldJTrumpJr/status/778016283342307328> [Accessed 8 March 2018]. The photograph used in the graphic was redacted over a copyright claim: ironically, the photograph was taken by David Kittos, a Greek Cypriot refugee living in the UK (Walker, 2016). The original can be seen (with a picture of Trump, Jr superimposed) via Chu (2016).

⁴⁴¹ This Photoshop montage is based upon a stock photograph of a wedding on a beach (this was discovered by performing a reverse Google Image search with record #1034: the source for the original stock photograph was not found, but Google Images retrieved several examples of the original. Almost certainly the implication of the unknown image-maker is that Assad and Khamenei are, as it were, "in bed together" since the Iranian government has long supported the Assad regime. It is unlikely that the viewer would grasp the maker's full intent without knowing the source, but even without this knowledge, the intent is sufficiently clear.

employ the same format to comment on *gross political indifference* to human suffering. Bramhall highlights Trump Jr's blithe indifference to the grim realities facing refugees, contrasting the Trump family's framing of refugees as threat with an innocent victim. But Alan is again used as a weapon in the war over the way refugees can or should be represented. Unlike Riss' cartoon, however, Bramhall presents Alan in a sympathetic light.

On 17 August 2016—almost a full year after Alan was found on the beach—another Syrian child briefly shot to world attention and online virality (Barnard, 2016). Omran Daqneesh was five years old when an air strike dropped bombs upon a building in rebel-held eastern Aleppo. Photographed by Mahmoud Rasan in a video for the Aleppo Media Centre, the injured, dust-covered child was placed into an ambulance and left alone as rescue workers hurriedly collected more victims to bring to hospital (Hunt, 2016; Gizbert, 2016). In the brief video, Omran sits in the ambulance and looks down; his face briefly contorts as he nearly burst into tears, but he returns to his preternatural calm. For a parent, the video is unnerving, not only for his injuries, but for that calm: young children struggle to adjust their emotions successfully to their environments and typically emote freely. Omran is in shock.



The illustrator Khalid Albaih—whose work appears in the datasheet (Figure 78; records #34 and #189)—invoked Alan in a comparison with Omran. Entitled “Choices for Syrian children”, Albaih contrasts Omran sitting in the ambulance over the caption “If you stay”, with Alan on the beach over the caption “If you leave” (Figure 161).⁴⁴² Like many of the pictures in the datasheet,

Albaih's picture depends upon comparative imagery: if you stay/if you leave, in a world with humanity/in a world without humanity, how it should have ended/how it did end. The choice Albaih presents, of course, is impossible: danger and death are commonalities in either case, underscoring the very precariousness of refugee life. But in a climate where refugees have been increasingly viewed as dangerous threats, Albaih



⁴⁴² Albaih published the cartoon on Facebook on 18 August 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/KhalidAlbaih/photos/a.234762049873663.82267.198564773493391/1470144856335370/?type=3&theater> [Accessed 20 August 2016].

In another parallel between Alan and Omran, Omran's older brother died as well (Kennedy, 2016). This fact barely registered in international news, highlighting the fact that attention is selective and strongly based upon visibility.

shifted focus back upon the fact that innocents are suffering in a war not of their making. And as discussed in Chapter 5, the concentration upon children in refugee imagery makes the equation uncomplicated: they cannot be held responsible for the war, so they are the ideal victims to portray in the visual space contested by NGOs, political cartoonists, and right-wing ideologues.

6.3.2. As art

Political cartoonists and illustrators were not the only artists who employed the image of Alan Kurdi. The work of such artists is arguably based upon half-intuited reflexive responses honed by the time pressures inherent in reacting quickly to the scrum of news events. At least two different artists accustomed to displaying work in galleries—the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei and the Finnish sculptor Pekka Jylhä—also invoked Alan. In contrast with the political cartoonists and illustrators mentioned above, they presumably have the luxury of spending more time contemplating the import and effect of imagery and the image of Alan in particular. The ways in which they invoked Alan are telling.

On 23 January 2016, Rohit Chowla photographed Ai lying on the island of Lesbos as part of a portrait series for the India Art Fair in Delhi (Figure 162). Ai clearly intended to imitate Alan on the beach. Substituting his own body for that of Alan was not well received. It has been argued that he attempted to hitch his star to Alan's in a ham-



fisted attempt to draw attention to his own victimhood at the hands of Chinese authorities (Ratnam, 2016). Toby Fehily (2016) mirrored this interpretation, stating that “Weiwei wants to be the face of refugees, as he quite literally does in his *India Today* photograph”. Hamid Dabashi (2016) called it a “fake death”, stating that “no decent artist must ever go near that sacred, forbidden, hallowed demarcation where humanity is held accountable”; and that by this sacrilege, “Ai the artist died in—and with—that fake death”. Ai is certainly not above self-promotion, but how sound is this interpretation?

Ai was likely photographed in the course of filming his 2017 documentary *Human Flow*, which follows the journey of refugees in different parts of the world (Bradshaw, 2017). Just before being photographed, he had decided to shut down *Ruptures*, his exhibition in Denmark, in protest to the Danish government's decision to seize the assets of incoming refugees (Crouch, 2016). He thus has a demonstrable interest in the status of refugees. His mimicry of Alan—a type of performative gesture—appears to have been intended as a “tribute” (Dabashi, 2016). Indeed, one can clearly see his performance as an attempt to highlight the plight of refugees by both invoking Alan and using his own celebrity. Seen in this light, lending the spotlight of his own celebrity is very similar to the photographs of individuals who used their own prominence to apply pressure to the British government (see Chapter 5). The performance, and thus the

photograph, are part of this wider pattern of image-making: the use of celebrity to amplify an issue.



Imitating Alan, however, is far from an original idea. Citizens of Rabat, Morocco recreated Alan's death through performance in perhaps in one of the most widely-shared protests of the datasheet (Figure 92).⁴⁴³ Chowla's photograph of Ai differs from this protest because it is a portrait taken for promotional purposes and because it was cast in black and white. Chowla's

choice to compose the picture in high-contrast black-and-white strongly aestheticises the photograph, pushing the reference to the child to the background as we contemplate the formal qualities of the photograph *qua* photograph. Whilst not an example of photojournalism, Chowla's photograph nevertheless references photojournalism, and as such is open to the same criticisms levelled at Sebastião Salgado's photography: the lighting effects "can appear arty" and "self-conscious", which supposedly distracts from the seriousness of the photograph (Linfield, 2010:43). In Chapter 4 I argued that Demir's photographs also show a level of aestheticisation as well: but hers take a different form. There, Demir tapped into a long-standing aestheticisation of the subject of death; in contrast, the whole experience of Chowla's photograph is mediated through considerations of what is expected of gallery-worthy, professional photography.⁴⁴⁴

As a performance, then, imitating Alan had been done before, just days after Alan's death. And prominent individuals had long added their celebrity to the cause of refugees. Ai's portrait thus combines performance and celebrity, showing that the artist makes use of common image practices. Combined with the aestheticizing influence of black-and-white photography, Alan is

⁴⁴³ Filter recipe: "Pic Desc" set to display all entries containing the word "Rabat". This displays four records. As widely-shared images of protests, the first (record #53) is only beaten out by a photograph of Jeremy Corbyn MP speaking to the London demonstration (record #17). The latter picture, however, is concentrated far more upon the figure of Corbyn, who dominates the frame. There is a further example of Palestinian children imitating Alan; all these pictures may be seen altering the filter recipe: "Pic Descr" to display all entries containing the word "re-enacting".

⁴⁴⁴ See Sontag (2003:68), who argues that pictures of suffering people should not be beautiful, as this would draw attention away from the subject to the medium. The argument appears to be that photography should be merely a communicative medium in such circumstances. But displaying aesthetic preferences or interests, however, does not mean that the photographer is somehow unserious: if anything, such an accusation is reminiscent of what Hariman and Lucaites (2016:67) call a type of "fundamentalism", a puritanical demand for the factuality of a photograph to the exclusion of any aesthetic consideration because it somehow sullies the picture. Linfield's defence of Salgado is relevant here: "Salgado has documented the workers of the world with more perception, care, and sheer *interest* than any photographer I can think of... Salgado's subjects trust him, as they must for him to take such intimate pictures" (Linfield, 2010:43).

pushed farther into the background. It is less an image of the precarity of the refugee's existence, and more an after-memory of horror. Alan is not the focus, nor is he commemorated: he is visually "quoted".

Ai Weiwei returned to the image of Alan Kurdi in an exhibition of porcelain works containing refugee motifs. These were shown at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul from 12 September 2017–28 January 2018 (Vartanian, 2018).⁴⁴⁵ One of the works on display was a plate showing Alan Kurdi lying on the beach surrounded by a recurring motif of a refugee on a raft (Figure 163).

The plate design is reminiscent of so-called "*Kraak* porcelain" or "*Chine de commande*", works by Chinese craftsmen incorporating motifs popular in the West such as architectural decorations, hanging fruit, and coats of arms, which were expressly designed and made for Western audiences (Vainker, 1995; Hesemann, 1999:208–10). Unlike traditional Chinese porcelains which usually contain a significant degree of white space, such works



destined for foreign markets are characterised by *horror vacui* through a comparatively heavy use of cobalt blue. These works were migrant objects, produced in one location and sent to another; Ai's plate replicates the same process, portraying a motif (the death of Alan) originally made in one location and rendered in a radically different style from an entirely different location. Ai thus manages to reference the history of such intercultural interaction, the disjointed experience and danger of such movement, and how the object itself has been a medium that covered the migration of imagery and styles across the globe.⁴⁴⁶

Alan was also invoked by the Finnish artist Pekka Jylhä in a piece called *Until the Sea Shall Set Him Free*, part of an exhibition entitled *We Have Inherited Hope—A Gift of Forgetting* for the Helsinki

⁴⁴⁵ I am grateful to Farida Vis for bringing this exhibition to my attention. More information is available from the museum's website: <http://www.sakipsabancimuzesi.org/en/page/exhibitions/ai-weiwei-porcelain> [Accessed 29 March 2018].

⁴⁴⁶ In the plate, Ai however removes the specificity of Alan as a Syrian Kurd by the incorporation of an Egyptian sun motif. This sun—with its extension of life-giving rays, ending in multiple hands—stems from the iconography associated with the heterodox, monotheistic pharaoh Akhenaten.

Contemporary Gallery in 2016 (Figure 164).⁴⁴⁷ The title of the exhibition is a quotation from “Notes from a Non-Existent Himalayan Expedition” by the poet Wisława Szymborska (1996). In the midst of imagining the mountain range, Szymborska addresses a yeti (a mythical primate that supposedly stalks the mountains):



Yeti, crime is not all
we're up to down there.
Yeti, not every sentence there
means death.

We've inherited hope—
the gift of forgetting.
You'll see how we give
birth among the ruins.⁴⁴⁸

Writing in the 1950s Poland, Szymborska was almost certainly making a veiled reference to the destruction of the Second World War and the executions, mass imprisonment, and general oppression throughout the Warsaw Pact countries during Stalin's time. The section of the poem picked for the exhibition's title, however, suggests that a too-acute cultivation of memory hinders rejuvenation amongst the decayed remnants of the past: forgetting is a necessary condition for the flourishing of new life. In an interview with Mikaela Løstet accompanying the exhibition, Jylhä stated that “the ability to forget even the worst matters and head towards hope... has refined us into masters of survival”.

It is fair to claim, then, that Jylhä is perhaps more interested in the process of forgetting than he is in the process of commemoration. Yet the press material released by the gallery for the exhibition states that “The utterance ‘so we would not forget’ was on Jylhä's mind while working on the sculpture”. This statement calls upon us to ask just what, specifically, we are forgetting and what, specifically, is being remembered and birthed.

⁴⁴⁷ More information about the exhibition may be found on the gallery's website: <https://helsinkicontemporary.com/exhibition/we-have-inherited-hope-the-gift-of-forgetting> [Accessed 4 June 2017].

⁴⁴⁸ The poem was written in the 1950s. It may be found here: <http://www.lizziederksen.com/blog/2016/11/11/notes-from-a-nonexistent-himalayan-expedition-wislawa-szymborska> [Accessed 10 March 2018].

Unlike the other works in the exhibition, Jylhä's sculpture of Alan is separated from the rest: Alan is placed under glass. Judging from the size of another work in the exhibition, a dinghy made of feathers (called *Journey*), the sculpture appears to be slightly larger than life-sized (Figure 165).



Alan's features are indistinct, as if the material used to make the sculpture were partly eroded. The defining features of individuality are worn away as Alan becomes a more generalised figure. The viewer is physically separated from him in an ambiguous process: in one way, Jylhä has objectified him as an object of contemplation, as an aesthetic object, an

object whose context is lost except for the references in the viewer's memory. We look at Alan, but he is indistinct, and he is physically separated from the viewer. This pushing away, robbing of context, and abrasion of individualising detail are formalised ways to acknowledge the process of forgetting.

Yet *Until the Sea Shall Set Him Free* obliquely uses some aspects of the iconography of commemoration in the midst of this process of forgetting. Alan is larger than life, made into a physical object of contemplation, very similar to the way he was commemorated by Sudarsan Pattnaik (Figure 35)—a work which, incidentally, was also subject to abrasion and the loss of distinctive detail. Jylhä's sculpture is similar to that of Pattnaik's in another way: both seem to reference tomb sculpture. Pattnaik's is reminiscent of the "retrospective" tomb imagery highlighted by Panofsky (1964:16). Jylhä's sculpture perhaps even more so, as Alan is literally placed inside a coffin-like box: but one which set for display, at once tomb and monument.



But ultimately, both Jylhä and Ai lie along a continuum of imagery that appears in the datasheet: Ai of the Rabat protests, and Jylhä of Pattnaik's sand sculpture. It is as if both artists have found it difficult to derive something out of the image of Alan that was not already expressed by other, lesser-known people. For all the drift into the weaponisation of Alan's image, political cartoonists and illustrators seem to have found it easier to grapple with the image and address the myriad ways it could be interpreted by the viewer. Perhaps this is because they are used to the pressures involved in making timely imagery, and that they are equally used to using, as it were, "off-the-shelf", readily available connotations. And perhaps Jylhä and Ai's failure to go beyond these familiar iconographic themes derives from the fact that they have addressed the image too soon in its lifespan. Perhaps, to continue with Jylhä's appropriation of Symborska's verses, the image of Alan had not yet sufficiently abraded to see something beyond the specificities of the child on

the beach: that the context has to be lost further for something to be birthed from a horrible image. And perhaps, ultimately, this is a tacit admission that, despite being works of photojournalism, Demir's photographs constitute aesthetic objects in and of themselves, filled with centuries-long resonances that guided Twitter user's interpretations of them. After all, "it is in the distinctive features of the image, and not of its supposed objectivity, that we find, still in latent form, its potential for iconisation" (de Lima and de Carvalho, 2018:44).

6.4. The changing climate and the absence of Alan

The rare exceptions outlined above notwithstanding, the image of Alan on the beach was not employed often. As discussed in Chapter 4, already during the time covered by the data collection, Nilüfer Demir's photographs had been replaced by artistic remediations and family snapshots. It was noted that there was a backlash against publishing the image of Alan on the beach (Bouckaert, 2015; Sly, 2015; Gregory, 2015). When newspapers and broadcast media referenced Alan in the months following the child's death, they seem to have always accompanied their stories with family snapshots—very much in keeping with the use of family snapshots in other tragic events (Rose, 2010). Less often, the story appeared with an artistic remediation. With the exception of articles commemorating the anniversary of Alan's death, the stories do not appear to have displayed Demir's photographs (Kingsley, 2016). There were legitimate ethical concerns raised by publishing photographs of Alan on the beach, not least among them the continuing psychological damage done to surviving family members such as Alan's haunted father, Abdullah (Khan, 2015). However problematic it is to symbolically represent refugees by the use of individuals, particularly children, and particularly *dead* children, this act of media self-censorship created a chilling effect which denied visibility to the most iconic image showing the consequences of inaction in the refugee crisis. Perhaps the most powerful image employed in a war of images was removed from contention; in the resulting vacuum, the pre-existing narrative of the refugee-as-threat rushed back in, in much the same terms it had when refugees were couched as "asylum seekers" in the past (Faulkner, 2003).

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the datasheet itself contained a number of examples forwarded by right-wing accounts equating refugees with menace—indeed, as an invasion (records #291, #354, #413, #644, #854, #999, and #1042; quote from record #354). The *Daily Mail's* Mac picked up on this narrative in November 2015 (Figure 156). *Charlie Hebdo's* Riss also employed the threat narrative, along with a joke at Alan's expense in January 2016 (Figure 157). In the absence of Alan's iconic image, the narrative of the refugee as threat returned to the mass media, confirming one of the pillars of representation as outlined by Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017:1169). Images of the refugee as threat—particularly as an invasive threat—also entered the U.K.'s 23

June 2016 vote regarding its economic status in the European Union, the so-called “Brexit” referendum.



I have argued elsewhere that such imagery helped provide an ideological support for the 500% increase in racial hate crimes against foreigners and British Muslims deemed to be “not British” immediately following the referendum (Drainville, 2016). In that article, I noted that the *image* of refugees and migrants turned out to be critical: those most likely to vote Leave had the least experience of them, whilst those most who voted Remain were most likely to have experience with them (Travis, 2016). It was *fear of an image*, not *real, direct experience*, that drove the vote. Some of the imagery distributed by those backing the Leave campaign are germane to this thesis and demonstrate that the Leave campaign used imagery emanating from the same cognitive space as the anti-refugee imagery shared in the datasheet.

In June 2016, the U.K. Independence Party (UKIP) unveiled a billboard image entitled “Breaking Point” (Figure 166). Due to the complaints levelled against it, the billboard was barely unveiled

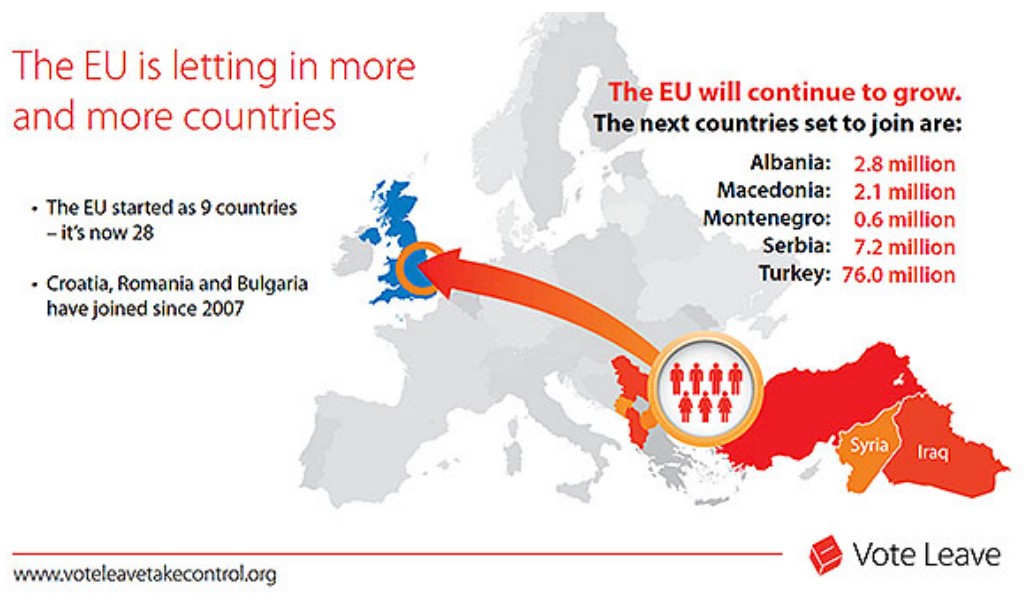


when it was withdrawn (Stewart and Mason, 2016). The ensuing furore ensured that the billboard’s exposure was likely broader (and certainly less expensive) than had it been distributed as (nominally) intended. The photograph shows a densely-packed queue of brown-skinned people stretching beyond the picture frame. The implication is that these are refugees coming to British shores: “We must... take back control of *our* borders” because “The EU has failed *us* all” (my emphasis).

The image is deceptive on two grounds. These refugees were not queueing up to enter the U.K.: they were photographed as they were shuttled between different countries on the Slovenian border. The only way to make the billboard's claims true and square them with the photograph, then, would be to make the "us" in the phrase "the EU has failed us all" refer to *all* European Union citizens, which would render the intent of the billboard—that British voters should vote to leave the European Union—incoherent.

But the billboard's intention was not to be coherent or accurate. The billboard was intended to evoke long-standing fears, specifically of an uncontrollable "swarm" of dark-skinned people coming to "swamp" the U.K., to use specific phrases invoked by Enoch Powell, David Blunkett, and David Cameron in different decades. The placement of the ballot graphic obscured the pale face of one of the refugees, thus homogenising the group into a brown-skinned collective Other (Beaumont-Thomas, 2016). The billboard was immediately compared to Nazi propaganda.⁴⁴⁹ More recently, however, it squares with the—comparatively few—images of mass threat forwarded in the datasheet (see Chapter 5, section 5.5.3). Such images, then, gain associations with threat from their content, the associations built upon them, and their distribution at specific moments. They are used as weapons, but the process of association and the lifecycle of the image itself are both fundamentally iconographic: they lie dormant when not required and suddenly reappear to apply pressure when they are needed, but their use is only understood through past exposure.

Whilst one might consider UKIP-derived imagery an easy target for such conclusions, the official Leave campaign worked with other themes present in the datasheet in various forms: the seemingly objective format of maps and figures (Figure 167). This deceptive infographic was



⁴⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/brendanjharkin/status/743391026413461504> [Accessed 3 July 2016]. The screenshots were evidently taken from a BBC documentary entitled *Auschwitz: the Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005) but this has not been verified.

distributed via “old school” virality: through letter slots. Atop a map of Europe and the Near East, the graphic highlights a number of candidates for membership of the E.U. Syria and Iraq are also highlighted in colours barely differing from the candidates, as if these warzones were also candidates. They are not. They are, of course, tinted to highlight the proximity of warzones to the E.U. and candidate states, and to imply an increased number of Muslims “set to join” the E.U. into the viewer’s mind. Moreover, the graphic suggests that this increased population—and, suggested by the key, the *entirety* of national populations—is coming exclusively to the U.K. Critically, it implies this with an arrow. An arrow on a map is a familiar symbol of the direction of invasion forces: anyone who has seen a documentary about the Second World War, or even the opening credits of *Dad’s Army*, will be familiar with it. The graphic, then, literally portrays a massed entry of a brown-skinned, Muslim Other in the form of an invasion.

In various forms, these notions are replicated in the datasheet, shared by right-wing accounts.⁴⁵⁰ In parallel, different factions of the Leave campaign visually portrayed the U.K. as susceptible to queues of refugees and overwhelming numbers of Muslim entries, against which the E.U. was disinclined to offer protection. These images would not have been intelligible without the history of similar images, many of which are in the datasheet. In a climate where the most potent sympathetic image of a refugee had come to be considered taboo, virulent anti-refugee imagery returned to dominate the war of representation—to the point that it appeared in the Brexit campaign and even came to influence the perception of British citizenry.

6.5. Alan’s practical impact: the efficacy of images

In the years following Alan’s death, the plight of refugees intensified. The numbers of refugee deaths in transit increased by 20% in the year following Alan’s death; two years afterwards, 8,500 refugees had died whilst attempting to cross the Mediterranean (Kulcsar, 2016; Dehghan, 2017). Despite the demands of many citizens and the promise of many different governments, refugees encountered not the opening, but the closing of many doors.

After refugees were used prominently in the Brexit campaign, the U.K. seemed to walk back its promise to take in 20,000 refugees, having only fulfilled half the number by 2018 (Home Office, 2018). As the tabloid press whipped up hostility, government claimed they would not accommodate refugees but instead set up more detention centres and imposed ever-stricter preconditions for entry; they thus accepted a smaller number of refugees.⁴⁵¹ In France, Marine le Pen of the *Front National* progressed to the second round of the 2017 Presidential election on an anti-immigrant platform, ultimately losing to Emmanuel Macron. In the wake of an attack on a

⁴⁵⁰ Filter recipe: “Tweet Summ” set to display “Danger” and “Warning”. See in particular records #291, #408, and #612.

⁴⁵¹ This pattern is very familiar from the mid 1970s: the government of the time followed the same course with refugees from Bangladesh (Dummett, 2001:89–136).

Christmas market in 2016, the German government started to reconsider its open-door policy and began to deport some refugees (Dockery, 2017; Knight, 2017). In Germany, the anti-immigrant PEGIDA movement fed into the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) political party, which became the official opposition after their third-place result in the 2017 federal elections (Connolly, 2017).

Exposure to harrowing images does not evidently lead to permanent engagement with the critical social issues of our time, to the point that a practical response “remains fleeting and unstable” in part due to “compassion fade” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017:1169; Slovic et al., 2017:3). Parallel sentiments were voiced at “Impact of an Image”, a seminar in Norway about the impact of Alan Kurdi’s image.⁴⁵² Individuals in the concluding debates came from refugee aid NGOs and the press. Yes, they agreed, after viewing the image of Alan Kurdi, many people donated time, goods, and resources to relieve the sufferings of refugees. Yes, they agreed, after viewing the image of Alan Kurdi, citizens successfully pressured the government to welcome more refugees (although the government subsequently tightened its refugee policies). Yes, they agreed, many refugees received relief in Norway. But when the seminar’s organiser, Lin Prøitz then asked them whether viewing Alan’s image had changed anything, they unanimously replied: no, it did nothing.

On the face of it, this response seems incoherent: after all, they had all just agreed that the image did in fact spur people to donate resources and pressure the government, which has been verified in a number of different countries (Merrill, 2015; Prøitz, 2017:11; Slovic et al., 2017). A coherent response depends, then, upon their definition of “change”: for them, change was a *permanent* condition, wherein resources are rationally and consistently allocated to the task at hand. By this definition, since people could not be counted on to donate regularly, and the government could not be counted upon to deliver coherent policy, there was no change. For them, the relief of refugees amounted to a momentary spike in interest: they implicitly called for the development of a *virtuous habit* activated upon encountering strongly affective imagery, a “materialisation of affect” (Pedwell, 2017:149) which would “effectively integrate emotions and slower, more analytic thinking into decision making” (Slovic et al., 2017:4).

However, such a wholesale dismissal of the impact of affective response—however short-term the effect may have been upon material benefits for refugees—ignores the fact that the suffering of refugees was, indeed, alleviated. Reaction to the photograph acted as a catalyst, not for permanent change, but as an awakening to consciousness “on a short-term basis” (Prøitz, 2017:9). Submissions to aid organisations increased seven-to-tenfold (Slovic et al., 2017; Kulcsar,

⁴⁵² “Impact of an Image” was run by Lin Prøitz and held at the *Forskerkollektivet* in Oslo, Norway on 2 September 2016; I attended as a speaker. An archived page for the seminar is held on the Wayback Machine archive: <http://web.archive.org/web/20160906092504/http://www.forskerkollektivet.no/seminar/> [Accessed 13 March 2018].

2016). Photographs, in other words, are unlikely to form a foundational basis for long-term social change but may instead act as spurs at particularly acute moments, because emotional responses themselves are fleeting. It is difficult to establish virtuous habits of welcoming and support which translate into concrete actions, and expecting a wholesale revolution in response may be the wrong model: “micro interactions, gestures, and habits may be just as (or more) significant than ‘revolutionary’ events... we must ask not only *how change works*... but also *what counts as change*” (Pedwell, 2017:164–65). In other words, instead of expecting the impact of an image to be one that wholly overturns the *status quo*, it is more achievable to understand it as nudging the viewers towards a new, more socially conscious position.

A child drowned and was photographed where he lay: people responded with horror, grief, and outrage, and they marched and donated money, goods, and time to help refugees, due in no small part to the resonances they felt emanating from those photographs. It is unclear how much more effect anyone can legitimately demand of that image, in no small part because political leanings have demonstrable bias effects upon the sympathies evinced for people in distress.⁴⁵³

Difficult, long-term decisions need to be debated and implemented to alleviate the conditions in Syria and elsewhere which cause refugees to flee in the first place, establish policies to integrate refugees in various host countries, and blunt the hostility many citizens feel towards those refugees. None of these issues will disappear on their own, and appeal to the development of individual virtuous habits is insufficient: they require political will at the governmental level to create, implement, and persuade the citizenry of the value of those policies.

Moreover, assessing the impact of a single photograph—or group of photographs—assumes a stasis in representation. That is an untenable position, since the conditions of representation change over time. It has been demonstrated that the representation of refugees is a contended and mutable field. The iconic image of Alan was withdrawn from this field, but it still left aftershocks: not merely the visual manifestations of references to Alan, but also aftershocks in the minds of those who saw the pictures, to the point that many devoted time and money to

⁴⁵³ Left-leaning viewers seem to show more sympathy for people in the “out” group (i.e., outside one’s own group), whilst right-leaning viewers have more sympathy for people within the same group (Pliskin et al., 2018). This appears to reinforce the well-known findings by Domke et al. (2002), which concluded that viewers’ political predispositions and values influenced their processing of news photography, but the authors also left open the possibility that imagery can alter viewer’s evaluations of other events. Doing so would require abstracting away from the specificities of an individual photograph. Chouliaraki and Zabarowski (2017) have suggested that such an abstraction had not yet occurred in 2016. In their analysis of newspaper framing of the refugee crisis, the authors continue that personalisation of refugees in news stories resulting from the interest in Alan’s death “did not reflect a generalised trend for *all* refugee descriptions, but was linked to repeated descriptions of this particular victim and his family” (Chouliaraki and Zabarowski, 2017:623). In this view, the emotional response to Alan’s death had not yet been “operationalised” to personalise other refugees, and thus failed to create the circumstances under which citizens’ virtuous habits could flourish, *per* Pedwell (2017).

assist refugees. But the impact of these pictures appears insufficient in the face of a sustained campaign of anti-refugee imagery, one which in fact pre-dates Alan's death.⁴⁵⁴ The effect of Alan's image in the public imaginary is, as yet, unclear since "the social relations of iconicity emerge in and through public engagement over time" (Mortensen et al., 2017:2).

6.6. Conclusion

In the meantime, old images continue their associations with Alan. Two years after Alan died, the journalist Muhammad Lila remembered Alan in a tweet (Figure 168):

Two years ago, this image of an innocent young boy woke up the world's conscience.

Let's not go back to sleep.



The tweet presented two pictures alongside this text: one of Sgt Çıplak looking over the body of Alan on the beach, and the other of Alan, smiling, at the top of a slide. In 2015, Lila was perhaps more responsible than anyone else for propagating this snapshot of a smiling Alan, laughing and full of life. His original post (record #2) nestled easily alongside the wishes of surviving family

members and avoided all the ethical considerations of presenting the picture of a young life cut short on the edge of a lonely beach. And yet, two years on, those controversies appear to have faded: Lila himself seems to ignore both those family sensitivities and ethical considerations and presented the child both alive and dead, as many others did back in September 2015.

Consciously or not, Lila picked up on the theme of sleep and death, as obliquely as so many others did two years ago: Alan "*woke up* the world's conscience"; "*Let's not go back to sleep*" (my emphasis). Alan is still firmly embedded into the longstanding iconography of death-as-sleep. His image has started to inflect other images, but thus far it appears to evoke the most salient, up-to-date version of longstanding iconographic themes.

⁴⁵⁴ Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4048) have argued that Alan was a new symbol that was then placed into pre-existing narratives: "Kurdi became an individual example that serves as evidence of already established ideas about refugees, about the (in)competence of certain politicians, about the state of the world, about Islam, about the work of NGOs, and so on" (2017:4062). The current dataset provides several parallels to this conclusion, but by not weighting their data, the authors reinforce the sheer numbers of pre-established narratives; in this dataset, weighting the data in terms of the number of retweets suggests a pronounced emphasis upon affective response, a conclusion which they do not entertain.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Social media is new as a platform for sharing and commenting upon pictures; iconography is an old methodology. Nevertheless, iconography—or the updated, mixed-method algorithmic iconography presented in this project—is useful for the study of imagery shared on social media because it takes a long view about image-making practices, emphasising not continuity throughout history (i.e., positing that imagery conveys the same messages), but a linkage to the longer history of image making (i.e., that imagery can be clustered into meanings that have “family resemblances”). The data seem to suggest that audiences still respond to very old image themes. This should not surprise us: social media is but one place where we encounter images in the world. It is part of a wider ecology of imagery. We encounter them as we walk down the street, in our engagement with print and broadcast media, and in the books we read. We encounter imagery in both visual and textual formats, and they mutually reinforce one another. This broader ecology, with its reiterated themes is part of a “visual *habitus*”. Were it not for iconographic resonances built up from encounters with other images, which in turn are fed by still older images, many pictures would be unintelligible. This, I think, is what separates iconography from semiotics and discourse analysis, approaches which otherwise share many similarities: iconography looks at the processes by which images take on meaning over time, whilst semiotics looks at the way meanings are produced at a given point in time with little interest in their historical background. The accretions arising from this background provide the discursive support for an image’s ideology and resonance—to the point that, for example, it seems perfectly natural to equate sleep and death—and examining an image’s varied history illustrates the mechanisms of its construction, and how the image has wended its way to the present day. Iconography can thus complement other methods.

W. J. T. Mitchell (1986) rightly observed that imagery is created and shared both pictorially and textually. It seems obvious on the face of it to include textual commentary into any analysis of picture sharing on social media, to parse those texts for clustered themes, *and* to translate all associated texts so that patterns can be identified across languages. But to my knowledge such links between picture and accompanying text have not been hitherto examined on Twitter. This is a lost opportunity. After all, two people may share the same picture, but approach it in entirely different ways: they might call upon it as evidence to ascribe blame, invoke the deity of their choice, cast suspicion upon the picture’s truth in some way, or simply to relate the news. They also provide valuable clues—sometimes—to the ways in which they interpret the pictures they share. To treat the sharing of the same picture as the same in each case, when they clearly have different intents, misses out on rich, differentiating context—context which is already present in the data.

Purist approaches to the study of online media which focus exclusively upon examining “natively digital objects” (Rogers, 2013:1) or computationally-assessed components such as cultural

analytics (Manovich and Deutsch, 2011; Manovich, 2015a) miss out on a lot of the messiness and richness of image-making that stubbornly refuses to remain within arbitrary digital/analogue borders. By definition, such approaches address only computationally-presented or -analysable properties. The iconographic approach as taken in this thesis demonstrates that whilst social media platforms certainly provide significant important data in and of themselves, useful, indeed *crucial* data await identification. But these rich data points need to be identified manually, and it is unlikely that computational techniques will supplant human judgment any time soon. As Manovich and Deutsch acknowledge, computational techniques struggle to identify “semantic” data (2011:326): many of the themes present in visual and textual imagery are paradigmatic examples of semantic data. The steps to identify the pragmatic content behind the elements present in picture and text is that much more difficult.

7.1. Future directions

That said, it is important to fully recognise the value that quantitative data provides the researcher, and the ways in which the research carried out in this thesis could be expanded in future by these very same digital approaches. The systematic preparation of social media data for iconographic analysis—made possible through inspiration from techniques of content analysis—marks the beginnings of an attempt to address larger datasets. This preparation classes groups of pictures and texts into larger constellations—multiple, overlapping constellations. Time constraints have curtailed attempts at using computational techniques and tools, such as writing macros to use ImageJ/ImagePlot, or exploring Artificial Intelligence (AI)/machine learning/neural nets, such as that offered by Clarifai, to expand the reach of the analysis beyond the 1,000 most shared, extant tweets. Such approaches might allow a deeper dive into the larger dataset.

For instance, the vast majority of posts were tweeted at very low volumes: approximately 10,000 posts were retweeted only once. Speaking conservatively, a computational approach would be useful for compiling records of pre-identified pictures—such as further instances of Omer Tosun’s illustration or Sudarsan Pattnaik’s sculpture. These could then be populated with the pre-identified clusters of identifying data, and image files which do not match previously-identified pictures could then be set aside for manual analysis. This would significantly reduce the amount of work necessary to identify the contents of a dataset, and analysis’ reach could thus possibly incorporate all retweeted posts. However, it is very likely that the use of computationally-based text analytics (sometimes referred to as “text mining”) and grouping of texts into the datasheet would be far more difficult: the vagueness of metaphor usage, the interaction between text and picture, the multiplicity of languages, the use of emojis, and variations of phrasing and spelling together would make identification and clustering rather error-prone.

Because of the space required to establish iconography as an effective methodology for the study of social media imagery, only some constellations were analysed in this thesis, and they were associated with longstanding image themes. Other patterns have not been examined, and they

point to a multiplicity of ways in which people interpret and use imagery, a number of which resist iconographic readings and would be better served by semiotic or discursive readings. They are worth exploring, and the multi-faceted approach employed by the Visual Social Media Lab in its “rapid report” on Alan might be taken as a model (Vis and Goriunova, 2015). Here, a team of people addressed a phenomenon using their individual expertise and skills. A report focused upon the multiple ways in which people interpreted and shared pictures of Alan Kurdi—including iconographic, relations of news, affect, image-as-evidence, and political pressure patterns, to name but a few—may do justice to many of the constellations identified in the creation of the datasheet.

Whilst the datasheet may present technological limitations, it nevertheless remains a useful tool. But anyone wishing to pursue her own research should be aware that the organisation of the datasheet reflected a dataset specific to Alan Kurdi and refugees, one founded upon a large collection of search terms and which thus contained a heterogeneous collection of imagery. Other datasets will require different organisations. For instance, I created a datasheet to research response to photographs showing the arrest of Ieshia Evans at a Black Lives Matter protest (Drainville, 2018). Because of the search terms used for the collection of data in this instance were far narrower, the results were much more monolithic: approximately 90% of the posts presented Jonathan Bachman’s *World Press Photo*-winning photograph of Evans. Since the Kurdi dataset was far more heterogeneous, it required more differentiation for parsing and describing the contents of pictures than did the Evans datasheet. The datasheet, then, presents a model, but it is a model that requires moderation depending upon the context and search scope.

7.2. What did the thesis discover about responses to the death of Alan Kurdi?

All that said, the focus of the case study is Alan Kurdi: how his image was shared online, which pictures of him were shared, what people stated about those pictures, how his image differed from other images that people shared about refugees in general, and how these pictures related to the longer history of image making. What unfolded from the data?

The pictures shared by Twitter users are usually current ones; whilst some users consciously refer to previous imagery in order to acknowledge resonances, the majority will consciously reference only very recent ones.

Twitter users’ idea of resonant photography differs from the judgement of news editors. Twitter



users showed a pronounced focus upon Nilüfer Demir’s uncompromising image of Alan, alone (e.g., record #3; Figure 31). In contrast, news editors

followed pre-existing standards and preferred to show Alan with the mediating presence of Sgt Çıplak (record #74; Figure 28). Artists preferred to use a specific Demir source image of Alan, one with Sgt Çıplak. However, they appear to have recognised the power of Alan, alone, and almost invariably removed Sgt Çıplak from their new pictures (record #63a; Figure 29).



These artists and the users who shared both their works and Demir's original photographs seem to evince interpretations well in keeping with long-standing image themes. This thesis covered three of them. One is the major visual theme of sleep-as-death, a manifestation of an extremely common iconography of death reaching back at least to Greco-Roman Antiquity (e.g., record #10; Figure 41). The second major visual and textual theme is Alan as an angel, reflecting the sentimentalisation of childhood since the late eighteenth century (e.g., record #59; Figure 42). The final theme is commemoration, which is a major textual theme, and which is manifested most visibly by Sudarsan Patnaik's sand sculpture (record #6; Figure 35). Other themes include childhood, the presence of spiritual forces, and political disinterest (e.g., records #218 [Figure 64], #646 [Figure 169], and #172 [Figure 170]). All of these overlap one another to varying degrees.

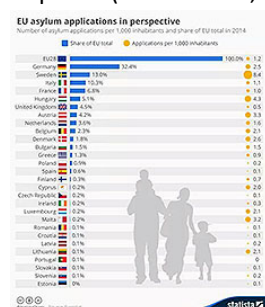


People shared family snapshots of Alan, alive in almost equal numbers to those of Alan, dead, but none were rendered artistically as response images in the datasheet (e.g., record #2; Figure 43). An examination of the textual themes accompanying their sharing reveals strong sentimental statements. They were thus used very much in keeping with previous research about the public display of sentiment for those who died in nationally-recognised tragedies (Rose, 2010). As in these other cases, the sharing of the family snapshot is haunted by the loss of the individual photographed in a domestic setting.





Many of the pictures shared in the datasheet were not of Alan, but of other refugees (e.g., record #7; Figure 88). Visually, there is a strong preference to show the refugee child, the blameless victim of war (e.g., record #158; Figure 171). Photographs shared by NGOs prefer that the refugee child be held in the arms of a protective adult, usually a parent, or alternately that the child's hand is held by that adult. This preference is so strong that it is the convention for depicting refugees even in illustrations or clip art (record #748; Figure 172). Conversely, when the signs of this representation are absent, the refugee's "true" motives become the focus of suspicion (record #291; Figure 154).



There are visual connections with past imagery of refugees in terms of journeying by boat and train, but the datasheet presents specific major inflections: disembarking from a dinghy; the journey by foot; encounters with authority; and moments of acute distress. Many of those depicting the journey have a very long visual history. A number of pictures show the refugee child alone or amongst other refugee children: they mirror many of the same themes as those for refugees in general, but they directly appeal to the viewer to stand in for the missing adult protector. Many of these were distributed by NGOs, and the use of similar pictures has a history connected to missionary work in colonised lands.

Another body of images in the datasheet consists of the public's response to the refugee crisis—as I have argued, likely arising in response to the death of Alan himself. This is divided into two major themes: support of prominent individuals and support of the wider public. The interpretations of some of these pictures are reflexive in nature, focusing upon the response to the refugee crisis. Others seem to be presented as modelling citizenship or providing inspiration for ordinary citizens to join the cause.



When prominent individuals wished to declare their solidarity with refugees, they almost invariably did so by holding up a sign in an informal, impromptu snapshot shared from their own accounts (record #39; Figure 132). A variation of this category consists of professional photographs with pull-quotes: these follow graphic design standards and were invariably shared by third parties. In

both of these instances, the image of the prominent individual is ambiguous, and is fixed only by the accompanying text, in a dim reflection of past image practices.



Mass support is indicated from photographs of huge demonstrations. The accompanying text frequently marvels at the size of the crowds: together, they build up a picture suggesting that large crowds indicate expressions of the popular will (e.g., record #58; Figure 93). Smaller themes concentrate upon banners or performative

demonstrations, specifically imitating Alan on the beach. Finally, mass support for refugees is also manifested by the unfurling of banners at football matches; the accompanying text often declares this demonstration of support inspiring.

There is a small, but important, corpus of pictures hostile to refugees shared by right-wing accounts: these portray the refugee as a kind of Trojan horse, either an implicit cultural threat or a direct, grave threat. After the image of Alan on the beach was consensually withdrawn from circulation, images bearing hostile themes come to dominate the visual representation of refugees, and they are very similar to the datasheet's set of hostile imagery. I have termed this a "war of images" over the portrayal of refugees. When Alan does reappear, he is used as a weapon in this war, but he is always portrayed in mediated versions, and never by Demir's photographs. Alan was also referenced by two fine artists whose work shares a number of affinities to works extant in the datasheet. They repeat the iconographic themes but break little new ground. It seems that Nilüfer Demir's photographs are themselves aesthetic objects: raw, rending, resonant. They are iconic: they themselves speak beyond the moment, and do not seem to require the mediation of artists to do so.

Analysing texts with the pictures forwarded alongside them proves to be a valuable corrective against what may appear to be self-evident truths. When I first encountered this data, I assumed that people from different countries, faiths, and language groups would encounter imagery in very different ways. However, the data here indicate some strong cross-cultural patterns. To be sure, there are cultural differences. People from different countries engage in a degree of localised reflexivity: they speak in some fashion or another to local concerns inflected by Alan's image. A French speaker lashes out at a dismissive comment made from a *Front National*



La mort d' #AyianKurdi est triste mais pour mémoire chaque jour 1 à 2 enfants meurt noyé en France . L'émotion au service de l' #invasion.

SOCIEDAD | Despoblamiento del rural

La Galicia de los pueblos abandonados

- 30 aldeas gallegas se quedan vacías cada año
- Galicia concentra casi el 50% de los aldeas abandonadas en toda España
- La comunidad sigue sin saber cómo explotar su medio rural



cultures reference very similar themes, suggesting a greater degree of cross-cultural reception than is usually thought.⁴⁵⁶

As for the pictures themselves, it is often crucial to attempt to identify the image makers where possible, an exercise largely neglected in social media literature. Yet identifying them helps one avoid critical interpretative errors of the pieces they present. Equally important, identification puts these image-makers' work in a new, and more complex light: virtually all the most widely-shared response images invoking Alan were the works of professionals from the Middle East. These are people often spoken *of*, not who *speak*. But speak they did—visually—and their works resonated across the porous, hyper-accentuated border between “the West” and “the Islamic world”, achieving a long-desired “will to visibility” in a climate often hostile to people from Muslim-majority countries (Akil, 2016:40).⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4064) argue that “meanings of the images of Alan Kurdi diverge significantly” in different national contexts, and they claim that “Tweets about Kurdi... only garner meaning when they take into account the national contexts, mainly at three levels” which are: “distinct national political landscapes”, “religion”, and “national migration history”. Those *details* certainly matter and differ in each national context, but as is demonstrated above, thematically there is a significant degree of similarity. The difference between our conclusions, however, may be due to the fact that their dataset covers a yearlong period (July 2015–July 2016), whilst mine covers an intense two-week period.

⁴⁵⁶ One way to get a flavour for cross-cultural patterns is to use the datasheet: select particular themes in the text and note the different languages (under “Lang”) indicated by their two-letter ISO 639 codes, e.g., “en” (English), “es” (Spanish), “tr” (Turkish), “ja” (Japanese) or “ar” (Arabic).

⁴⁵⁷ It is important to note that the Western world/Muslim world dichotomy is an artificial construct, well explored by Cemil Aydin (2017). The two have always intermixed and intermingled; geopolitics, trade, and intellectual exchange have always overlapped. That said, there has been a dual-forked attempt at portraying a monolithic West against a monolithic East, and this has had real-world effects. With the advent of racialised, Orientalising Imperialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century—which denigrated Muslim cultures and peoples—many Muslim intellectuals worldwide laid a claim to a “Muslim world” in part as a positive counter to the negative characterisations made by Western politicians, scholars, and journalists. Much of

It is at least as important to take their works seriously as manifestations of cultural practices. Images shared online are often dismissed out of hand as throwaway objects—as examples of a “playful aesthetic”—but it has been demonstrated in this thesis that they provide complementary insights into the way people absorb image themes—not just within the datasheet, but more broadly in their experiences, because some of these themes are widespread, have existed for thousands of years, and are manifested in many ways. It was not so long ago that medieval illuminated manuscript illuminations, woodcuts, and works of art outside the “canon” were dismissed, but today their worth has been recognised. It is long past time to engage respectfully with the images shared on the Internet.

It is seductive to think that with such a torrent of data we have the “full picture”. We most emphatically do not: the data is circumscribed by the search terms that formed the parameters of its collection. Because the data collection approach here is text-based, there will always be relevant posts not collected because they do not employ those terms. The data collected on Twitter only captures the expressions of those who commented and retweeted those terms. This stream of data in turn is a snapshot of only a fraction—albeit an important fraction, since it propelled the story to worldwide prominence—of all the conversations about Alan that occurred in the world. We have dipped into that stream, and due to the costs of data collection, we cannot readily dip into such streams anew and continuously poll reactions in the same way. After the period of data collection, I have taken a necessarily impressionistic approach to then turn to prominent examples of Alan reappearing in subsequent pictures: but this aftermath supplies an important corrective to any narrative that suggests that the image of Alan “changed the world”—or, alternatively, that it “changed nothing”. It changed *some* things: for *some* refugees, who received aid, and *some* viewers, who gave of themselves and demanded more from their governments. But the contentions of politics never end, and a picture—however resonant, however rending—is but one variable in that swiftly-fluctuating contest. It is unclear whether affect arising from a resonant image can be forged into a virtuous habit that applies continuous political pressure to improve the plight of refugees. A child, fleeing from the devastations of war, drowned at sea and washed up on a beach. He was photographed, and the photographs horrified much of the world because lying there, he looked like so many other things that are familiar to them. The response to his image improved the lot of many refugees. Is it legitimate to expect that his image can change the world as well? Surely such responsibility lies on the shoulders of

the debate in the later 19th century still informs the concept today. Furthermore, Aydın (2017:69–70) notes that the development of globalising technologies—railroads, steamships, telegraph lines, and newspapers—connected people as never before, so that people as far away from one another as western Africa and Indonesia began to look to the Ottoman Sultan as a unifying figure in his role as Caliph. Many of the claims made in the 19th century have been reiterated by *Dāesh* as they laid claim to a globalised caliphate that has never, in fact, existed.

individuals and, more, governments, who have the organising capacity and wherewithal to enact sustainable change.

In the *Passagen-Werk*, Walter Benjamin wrote that “history decays into images, not into stories” (Benjamin, 1982:N11, 4). By this statement, I take him to mean that as time progresses, the details of any historical event will moult off, like the skin or carapace of animals that undergo radical transformation in their lifecycles. As the details are forgotten, the context is lost, transforming what was an historical event into—perhaps—a shining image that remains embedded, contextless, in social memory. In all of the examples cited above, Alan’s role has shifted considerably: he is still remembered as a refugee, but virtually all the context or intimate memory of his humanity, his particularity, is eroding. The story is falling away. The image, in turn, burns into the mind, until Alan becomes a symbol: a malleable one, but a symbol all the same. Ask someone about Alan Kurdi. They will meet your query with a blank stare. Mention “the boy found drowned on the beach”, however, and they instantly remember.⁴⁵⁸ Images repeat in various media; we see them, and they are embedded in our memories, mixed with other images, creating and reinforcing a lattice of longstanding associations: sleep and death (record #10; Figure 41), for example, or the child as an angel (record #59; Figure 42), or the larger-than-life commemorative monument (record #6; Figure 35). However, as a powerful image, seemingly



loaded with multiple associations, Alan has also inflected other powerful themes in contemporary politics, for example the portrayal of other refugee children: the combination of a red shirt and blue shorts are sufficient to reference the image.⁴⁵⁹ But Alan has also inflected other image themes: the disappointment in someone who starts out life filled with promise but ends

⁴⁵⁸ A similar process of forgetting the specifics surrounding iconic photographs has been noted by others. In their review of the Scandinavian responses to the Alan Kurdi photographs, Kjeldsen and Andersen (2018:328) noted that interviewees referred to Nick Út’s *Accidental Napalm*, saying it reminded them of “the naked child, the Korean girl I think it is, or the Vietnamese girl?”

⁴⁵⁹ Bozdağ and Smets (2017:4063) noted that immediately upon Alan’s death, there was an increase in references to refugee children and refugees in boats. “This effect vanished after a few weeks for most users, but (subtle) references to Kurdi occurred throughout the studied period—for instance, in cartoons where young refugees wear blue pants and red T- shirts similar to his”.

up becoming a menace (Figure 157); the fatuous racism of opportunistic politicians (Figure 159); and the impossible choice during war, to stay or to leave (Figure 161).



The case study has been a proof-of-concept for using iconography, an image-centred approach, to the study of pictures shared on social media. Taking a rich approach to such imagery is required if investigators wish to take seriously the very reason why social media users posted: because they wished to share imagery that resonated with them. The specific pictures they share, and the comments they make alongside them, provide evidence for a continuing migration of old imagery into new contexts.

Figures

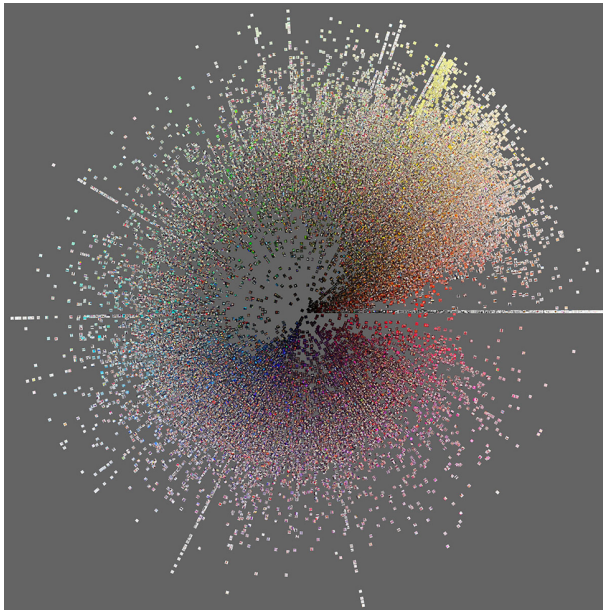


Figure 1: Visualisation of a massive dataset (100,000 photographs) from the Software Studies Institute's "Phototrails" project. Sharing of 50,000 photographs on Instagram from the centre of Bangkok (left) compared to 50,000 photographs from the centre of Tokyo (right).



Figure 2: *Abondanza* (Abundance), page 1, from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (2nd edition from 1611, first illustrated edition).



Figure 3: Reuse of gestures to different ends. 1: "Death of Orpheus" (detail), *Bell Krater* by the Curtius Painter, c. 440 BC (Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Boston). 2: "Pedagogue" *Niobid*, Roman copy of Hellenistic original (*Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence). 3: *David* by Andrea del Castagno, c. 1450 (National Gallery, Washington). 4: *Death of Orpheus* by Albrecht Dürer, 1494 (*Kunsthalle*, Hamburg).



Figure 4: Intuiting that a figure is floating: *Resurrection* from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald, c. 1512–16 (*Musée d'Unterlinden*, Colmar).



Figure 5: Intuiting that a city is not floating. “Jesus heals the man from Gerasa”. *Gospels of Otto III*, Ottonian, c. 1000. (Munich, *Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek*, BSB Clm. 4453 fol. 103v).



Figure 6: A viral phenomenon. Lt John Pike of the University of California-Davis campus police pepper-sprays students during an “Occupy” protest. By Louise Macabitas, 18 November 2011.



Figure 7: Three examples of the “Pepper-Spray Cop” meme based upon famous progenitors. 1: *The Declaration of Independence* by John Trumbull, 1819 (U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.). 2: *Accidental Napalm* by Nick Út, 8 June 1972. 3: The Beatles’ album cover *Abbey Road* by Kosh, 1969. All authors of the memes unknown, 2011.



Figure 8: Classification of imagery: similarities and differences. 1: *Judith and Holofernes*, 1530 (Metropolitan Museum, New York). 2: *Salome and St. John the Baptist* (Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest), both by Lucas Cranach the Elder, both dated 1530.



Figure 9: Obama *Hope* by Shepard Fairey, 2008.



Figure 10: *Hope for Chocolate* “Obamicon” by Ray Drainville, 2008.



Figure 11: Criticism/Parody. *Chump*, Author unknown, 2008.



Figure 12: Antecedents. *Viva Che* by Jim Fitzpatrick, 1968. Based upon Alberto Korda’s photograph of Che Guevara, known as *Guerrillero Heroico* (5 March 1960).

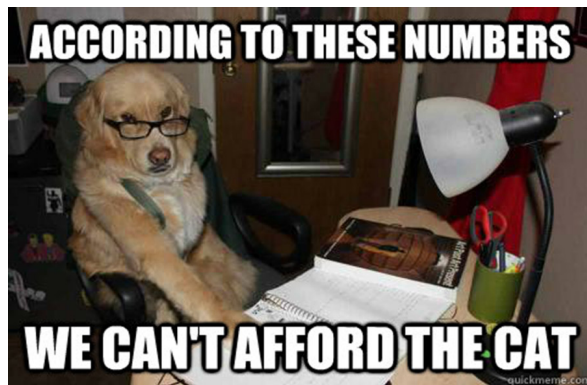


Figure 13: A common animal-based meme. "Financial Advisor Dog", author and date unknown.

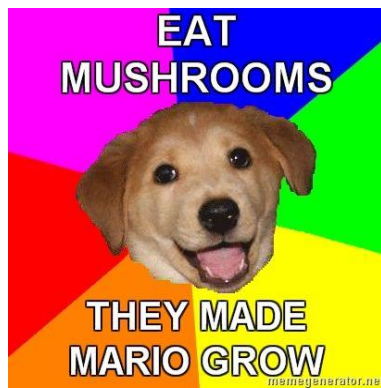


Figure 14: The memetic picture as "visual action verb". "Advice Dog" example, author and date unknown.



Figure 15: Animals acting as people. *The Lyre of Ur*, Mesopotamian, c 2550–2450 BC, with detail (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia).



Figure 16: Animals as people. “White Rabbit”, illustration by Sir John Tenniel from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 1866.

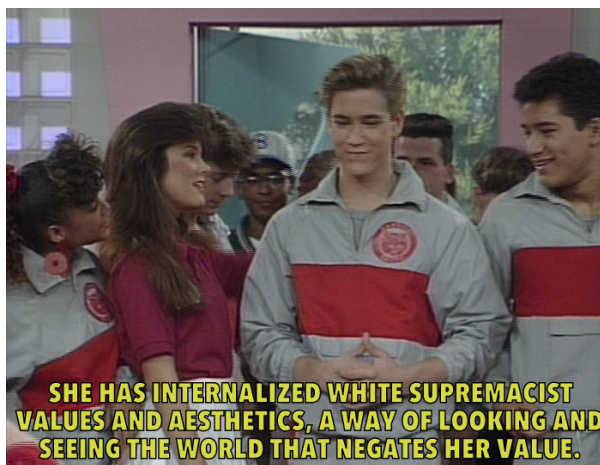


Figure 17: The complexity of reappropriation: a screen capture from the 1980s television sitcom *Saved by the Bell* and text from bell hooks’ *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). *She has internalised white supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value*, by Liz Larabee, 2016.



Figure 18: Thematic comparison. Montage comparing Ieshia Evans to the “Tiananmen Square Tank Man” and Maria-Teresa Asplund; author unknown, 2016.









Alan Iconographic datasheet-Version 4 — Saved to my Mac																			
Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Table																			
No	Image	Slf	Alf	Alf	De	Ar	Fa	I/G	Pic Type	Pic Descr	Attrib1	Attrib2	Attrib3	Attrib4	Fam1	Fam2	Fam3	Fam4	Dem1
2		2	Y	Alive	N	N	Y	I	Family snap	Alan, alive and happy, on slide	Alan's Family	-	-	-	Slide	-	-	-	-
3		3	Y	Dead	Y	N	N	I	Professional photograph	Alan, dead, alone	Nikifer Demr	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem2
4		4	N	-	N	Y	N	G	Graphic design	Cowering child with 'migrant' and 'refugee' crossed out, 'child' not	Save the Children / Halim Halifson	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5		5	Y	Alive	N	N	Y	F	Family snap	Alan, alive and happy, w/ Ghalib	Alan's Family	-	-	-	w/ Ghalib (white shirt)	-	-	-	-
6		6	Y	Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Sand sculpture of Alan, dead and giant, with text: humanity washed ashore shame, shame, shame	Sudanese Patriak / Ait Kumar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem3AI
7		7	N	-	N	N	N	F	Professional photograph	Lath Majid, distressed, with child arms, meat crowd of people emerging from boat	Daniel Etter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8		8	N	-	N	N	N	-	Screenshot	Text: definition of migrant	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9		9	Y	Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Sand sculpture of Alan, dead and giant, with text: humanity washed ashore shame, shame, shame	Sudanese Patriak / Ait Kumar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem3AI

Figure 19: The Alan Kurdi iconographic datasheet, with no filters applied. Screenshot by Ray Drainville.



Alan Iconographic datasheet-Version 4																			
Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Table																			
No	Image	Slf	Alf	Alf	De	Ar	Fa	I/G	Pic Type	Pic Descr	Attrib1	Attrib2	Attrib3	Attrib4	Fam1	Fam2	Fam3	Fam4	Dem1
238		238	Y	Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Alan, with angel's wings, lifted from surf by divine hand w/ text: Syrian children drowned	Unk-Divine Hands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Dem2
462		462	Y	Alive / Dead	Y	Y	N	G	Art	Alan, lying on ground with angel's wings, holding a rose; feathers nearby; Alan with Ghalib and animals; Alan, dead, lying on grave of Arab Conscience w/ text: 'The End'; Alan, dead, giant, in centre of Arab / Muslim mosque	Islam Gawish Yasser Ahmad	Unk-Arab Conscience	Misami?	-	-	-	-	-	Dem2

Figure 20: The datasheet with a restrictive filter applied. Screenshot by Ray Drainville.



Figure 21: An example of the “intersection”: football fans unfurl a banner in support of refugees; the accompanying tweet does not reference the photograph in a direct fashion. From record #220, *inter alia*. Photograph by Daniel Bockwoldt.



Figure 22: Alan, alone, seen from behind on Bodrum beach, by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 23: Alan, alone, seen from the feet, by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 24: Alan lying on the beach with Police Sergeant Mehmet Çıplak looking over him and another unidentified policeman with a camera walking away, by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015. From record #89, unavailable for licensing.



Figure 25: Turkish Police Sergeant Mehmet Çıplak carries Alan's body up Bodrum Beach, by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 26: Sgt Çıplak carries Alan's body further along up Bodrum Beach, by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 27: Crops of Record #89 that changed the picture's charge: Analysis performed in Photoshop by Ray Drainville of a photograph (unobtainable) by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 28: Sgt Çıplak as proxy witness (Record #89, cropped), by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.



Figure 29: Alan, alone (Record #89, cropped) by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015.

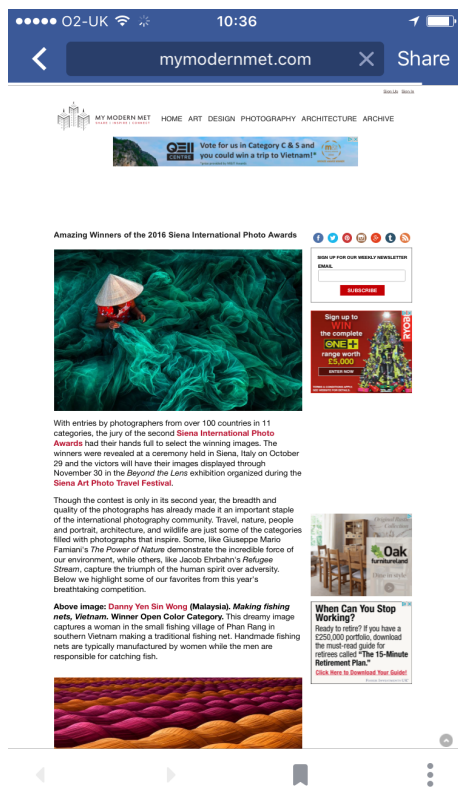


Figure 30: Limitations of the mobile view. Mymodernmet.net displays winners of the Siena International Photo Competition, 2016. Screenshot by Ray Drainville.



Figure 31: Alan, alone, seen from the feet. The tinted, cropped picture by Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015 shared by Liz Sly (record #3 *inter alia*).



Figure 32: Alan, rendered in a chalky medium, artist unknown. From record #123.



Figure 33: Alan, mediated with the text "I have fled War, I have finally found Peace. Thank you, peoples of Europe", artist unknown. From record #45.



Wissam al Jazairy



Msamir?



Rafat Alkhateeb



Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar (AFP)



Kichka



Osama Esbaitah
Mohammed Abed (AFP)



Unknown-Graffito

Figure 34: Alan Kurdi response image themes: monumental imagery. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Figure 35: The most widely-shared artistic response image. Sudarsan Pattnaik makes a sand sculpture of Alan on Puri Beach, Odisha, India, by Asit Kumar, 5 September 2015.

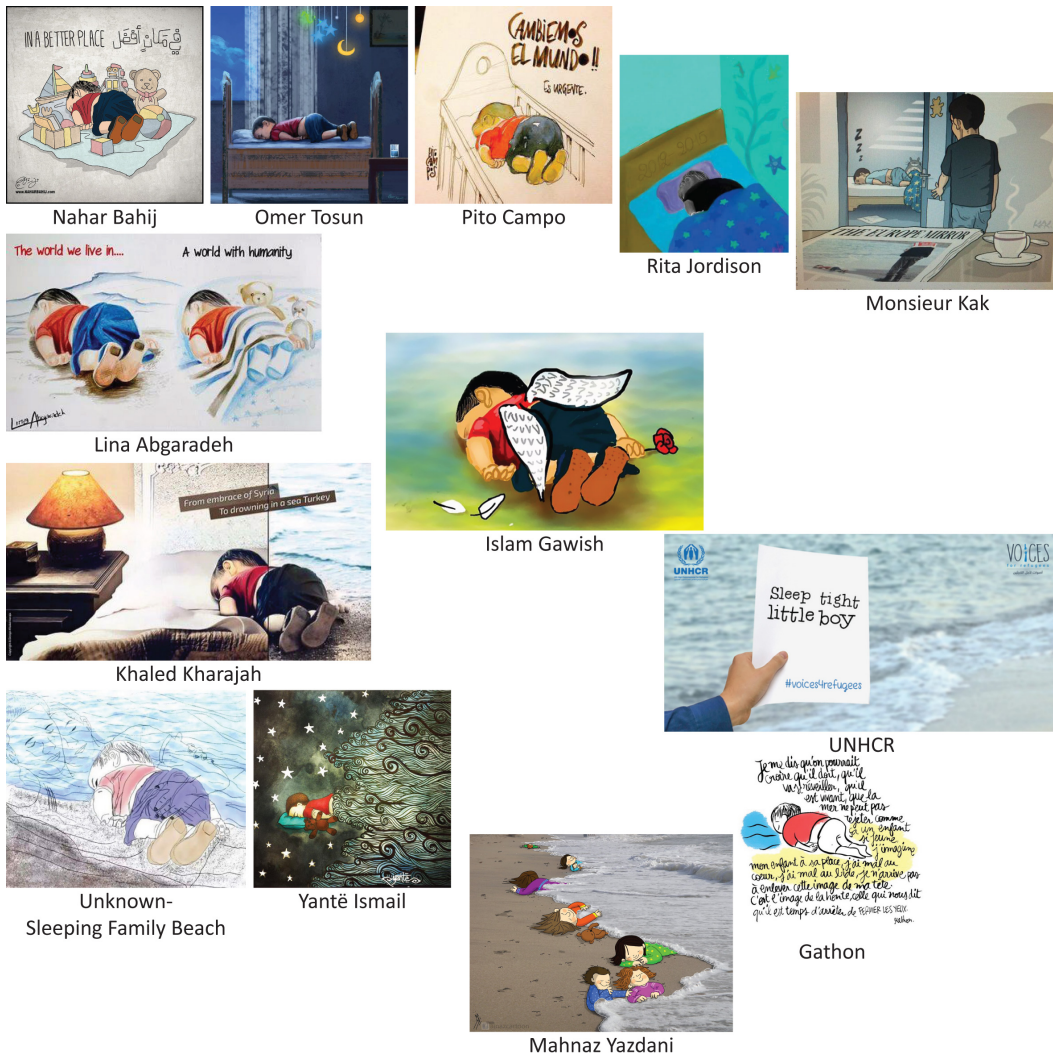


Figure 36: Alan Kurdi response image themes: sleep. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Figure 37: Alan Kurdi response image themes: childhood. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Zezo



Khalid Albaih



ygreck



Unknown-Divine Hands



Inkquisitive



Naser Jafari



Unknown-
Sleeping Family Beach



Islam Gawish

Figure 38: Alan Kurdi response image themes: supernatural and/or spiritual imagery. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Msamir?



Wissam al Jazairy



Rafat Alkhateeb



Foufigh



Unknown-Ummah



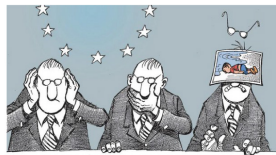
Harm Bengen



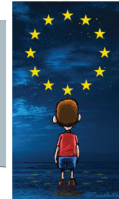
Tjeerd Royaards



Unknown-Assad, Khameini
Wedding on the Beach



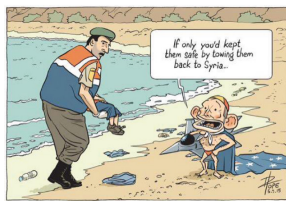
Pat Chappatte



Salvatwitts



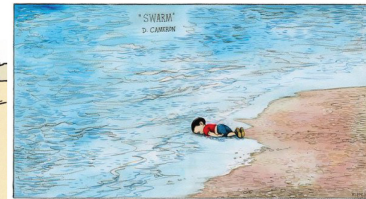
Alfo Krancic



Dave Pope



Ulystrations



Chris Riddell

Figure 39: Alan Kurdi response image themes: political imagery. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset.



Figure 40: Venn diagram showing overlaps among the five major Alan Kurdi response image theme clusters. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Figure 41: Response image by Omar Tosun. From record #10, *inter alia*.



Figure 42: Response image by Islam Gawish. From record #59, *inter alia*.



Figure 43: Alan on a slide. Family snapshot. From record #2, *inter alia*.

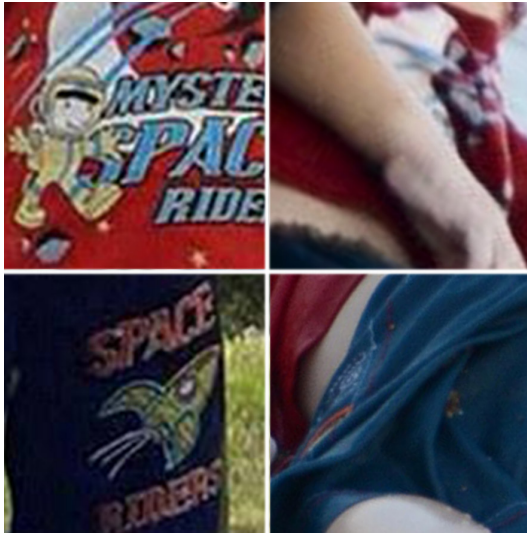


Figure 44. Comparison between Alan's clothing in the "Slide" family snapshot (Record #2) and two photographs by Nilüfer Demir (Figure 23 [Record #3] and Figure 26 [Record #61]). Comparison in Photoshop.



Figure 45: Alan (in a white shirt) with Ghalib and a teddy. Family snapshot. From record #5, *inter alia*.



Figure 46: Alan (in a yellow shirt) with Ghalib. Family snapshots. From records #93a and #152, *inter alia* (multiple crops).



Figure 47: Alan with Ghalib and Abdullah. Family snapshot. From record #15, *inter alia*.

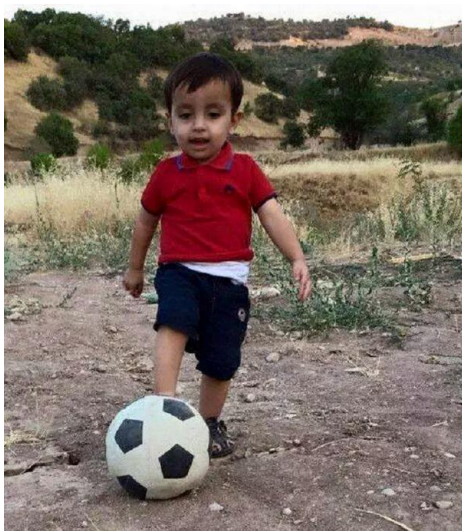


Figure 48: Alan kicks a football. Family snapshot. From record #103, *inter alia*.



Figure 49: Alan in a fancy suit. Family snapshot. From records #153 (cropped) and #317.



Figure 50: The other dead children in the datasheet. From top left: two Libyan children drowned 28 August 2015 (attributed to Khaled Barakeh; records #1 and #372); Ghalib on Bodrum beach (attributed to Nilüfer Demir, 2 September 2015; record #93); Argentine child from the Chaco region of Argentina breathing on an apparatus (attributed to Sólo Chaco; record #44); Yemeni child with multiple amputations (unknown photographer; record #82); Baloch child large chest wound (unknown photographer; record #591); Baloch child lying on ground (unknown photographer; record #850); dead Kashmiri child (unknown photographer; record #847); Alan and a dead Baloch child compared (Nilüfer Demir and an unknown photographer; record #795).



Figure 51: Response picture by Gathon. The accompanying text reads "I say to myself that one could believe he's sleeping, that he's going to awaken, that he's alive, that the sea didn't throw him back like that, a child so young. I imagine my child in his place, my heart is sick, my stomach hurts, I can't get this image out of my head. It's an image of shame which states to us that it's time to stop CLOSING OUR EYES". From records #749 and #851.

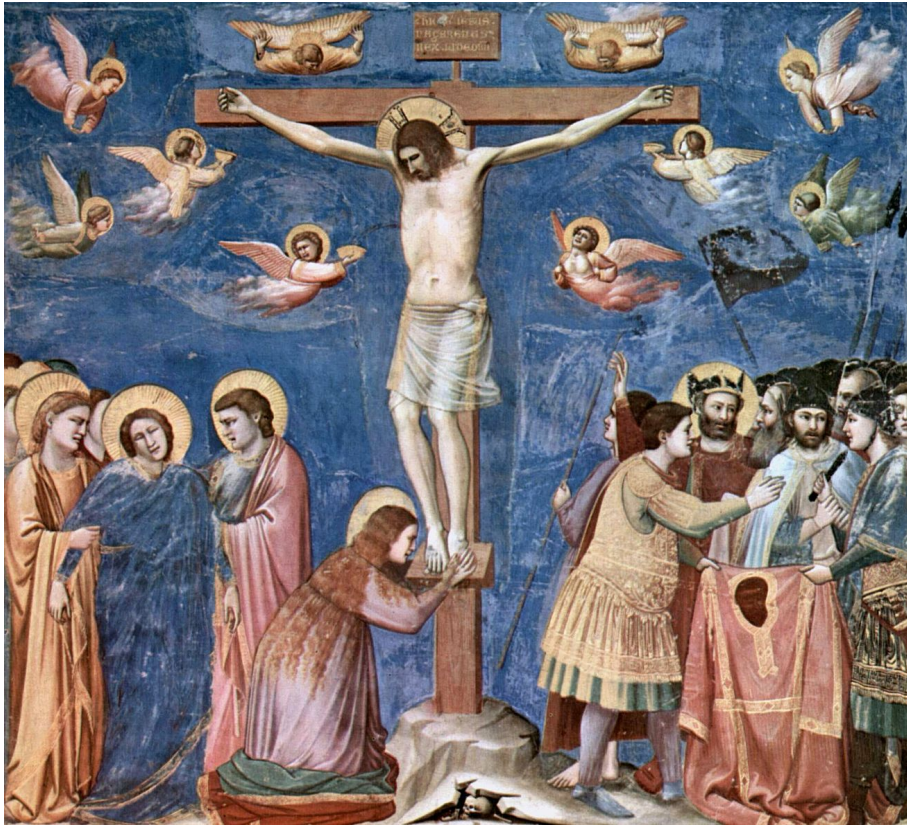


Figure 52: *Crucifixion* by Giotto, c. 1300 (Arena Chapel, Padua).



Figure 53: *Descent from the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden, c. 1435 (Museo del Prado, Madrid).



Figure 54: *Deposition* by Anthony van Dyck, c. 1634 (*Alte Pinakothek, Munich*).

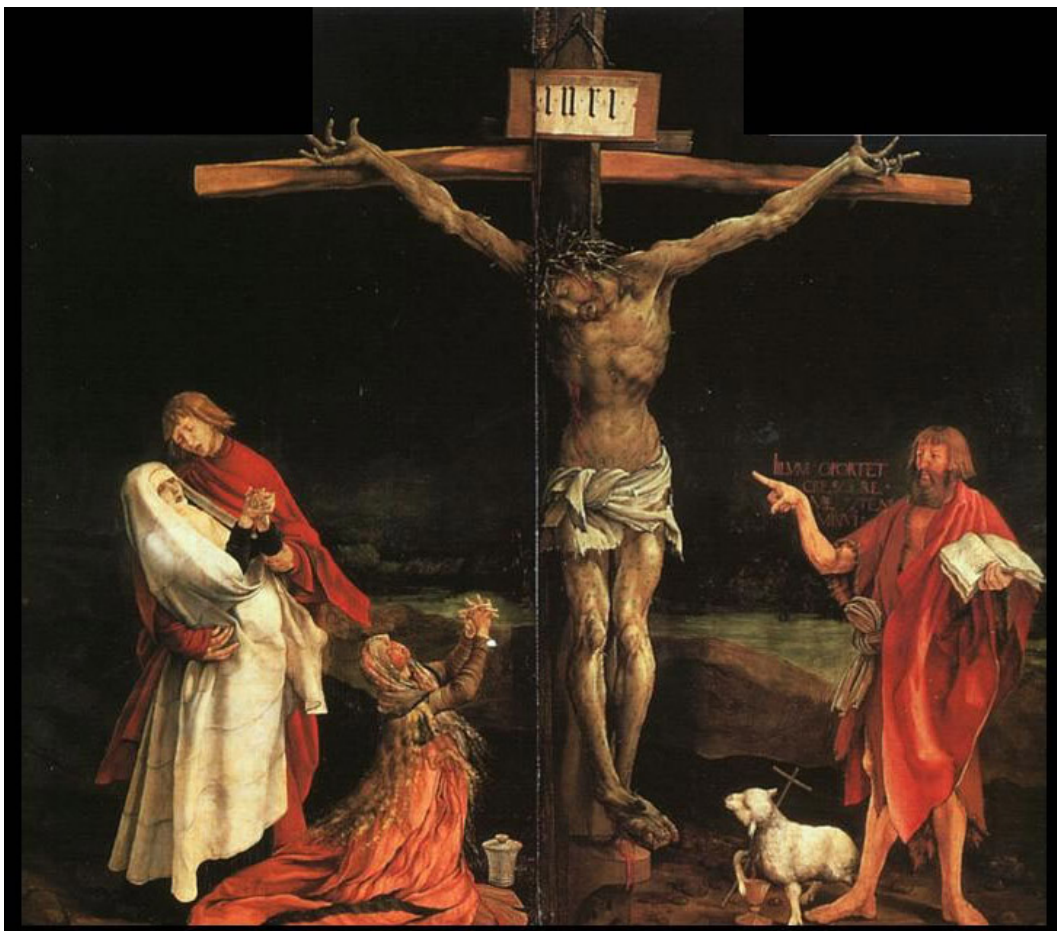


Figure 55: *Crucifixion* from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald, c. 1512–16 (*Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar*).



Figure 56: *Mourning of Christ* predella from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald, c. 1512–16 (*Musée d'Unterlinden*, Colmar).



Figure 57: *Christ Entombed* by Hans Holbein the Younger, 1521 (*Öffentliche Kunstsammlung*, Basel).



Figure 58: *Death of Meleager*, Antonine, c. 140 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City).



Figure 59: *Death of Bara* by Jacques-Louis David, 1794 (*Musée Calvet d'Avignon*).



Figure 60: *Massacre of the Innocents* by Peter-Paul Rubens, c. 1611 (Thompson Collection, Art Gallery of Toronto).



Figure 61: *Harvest of Death* by Timothy O'Sullivan, 1863.



Figure 62: Palestinian mourners of the Nigim family after an airstrike in Gaza by Sergei Ponomarev, 2014.



Figure 63: Response picture by Rita Jordison. From record #154.



Figure 64: Response picture by Nahar Bahij. From record #218, *inter alia*.



Figure 65: Response picture by ugurgallen. From record #154.



Figure 66: Response picture by Lina Abgaradeh. From record #1061.



Figure 67: Response picture from Khaled Kharajah. From records #804 (montage) and #928.



Figure 68: Illustration by Monsieur Kak for *L'Opinion*. From record #594.



Figure 69: Response picture by Yantë Ismail. From records #297, *inter alia*.



Figure 70: Response image by an unknown artist (referenced as “Unk-Sleeping Family Beach”). From records #672 and #1057.



Figure 71: Response image made on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). From record #983.



Figure 72: Image (possibly a response picture) by Mahnaz Yazdani. From records #405, #597, and #917.



Figure 73: Cherubs (detail) from the *Sistine Madonna* (also known as the *Dresden Madonna*) by Raphael, 1512 (*Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister*, Dresden).



Figure 74: Young children as angels. *Chansons de printemps* (Songs of Spring), by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1889 (Seattle Art Museum).



Figure 75: Funerary architecture: the sleeping angel. *Tomb of Mary Nichols* by an unknown author, after 1909 (Highgate Cemetery, London).



Figure 76: Response image by an unknown artist (attributed to "Unknown—Divine Hands"). From record #238.



Figure 77: Response image by Naser Jafari. From record #828.



Figure 78: Response image by Khaled Albaih. From records #34 and #189.



Figure 79: Response image by Wissam al Jazairy (subsequently withdrawn by the artist). From records #134 and #1001.



Figure 80: Response image by Msamir (attributed). From record #121, *inter alia*.



Figure 81: Response image by Rafar Alkhateeb. From record #126, *inter alia*.



Figure 82: Response sculpture by Osama Esbaitah, photograph by Mohamed Abed. From records #422, #732, and #848.



Figure 83: Illustration by Kichika for *Le Monde*. From records #288 and #987.



Figure 84: Response graffito by an unknown artist (attributed to "Unk-Graffito"). From record #487.



Figure 85: The oversized death monument. *Tomb of Robert Manners* by Violet Manners, after 1894 (Haddon Hall Chapel, Derbyshire).



Figure 86: Response image by Yasser Ahmad. From record #79, *inter alia*.



Figure 87: Response image by Joyce Karam. From record #88 and #144.



Figure 88: One of the most widely-shared refugee pictures not showing Alan. Laith Majid disembarks from a dinghy, Kos, Greece, by Daniel Etter, 16 August 2015.

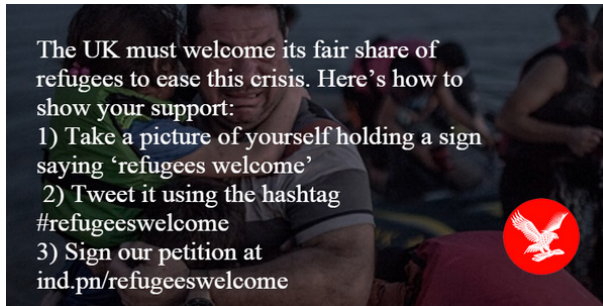


Figure 89: *The Independent* uses Daniel Etter's photograph for its petition. From record #114, *inter alia*.



Figure 90: Refugees placed in cages, Budapest, Hungary, by an unknown photographer. From record #253 and #352



Figure 91: Hungarian camerawoman Petra László trips fleeing refugees. From record #90, *inter alia*.



Figure 92: Protesters in Rabat, Morocco imitate Alan, 7 September 2015, by Fadel Senna. From records #53, *inter alia*.



Figure 93: Demonstration in Copenhagen, 12 September 2015, by Mark Knudsen. From record #58, *inter alia*.



Figure 94: Cowering child in a “Save the Children” campaign graphic, by Hedinn Halldorsson. From records #4, #456, and #1115.

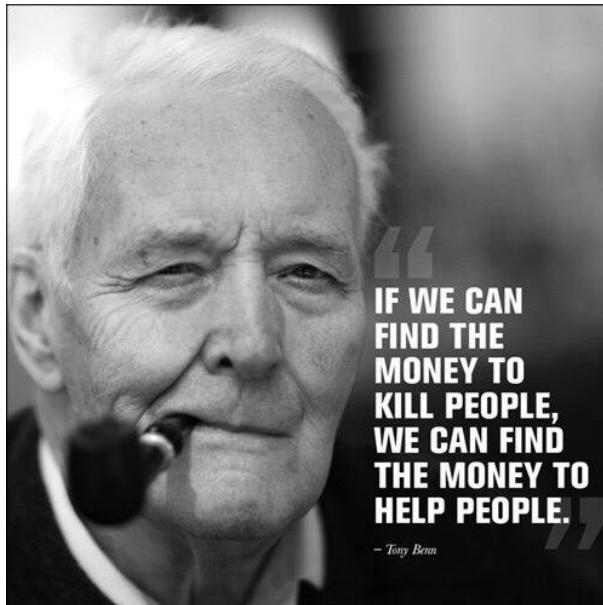


Figure 95: Tony Benn MP shown alongside a quote, a common way to present prominent figures. From record #115.



Figure 96: Abdullah Kurdi, quoted in a BBC news item. A pull-quote without accompanying pictorial content is a common way to provide quite updates in a graphical format. From record #143.



Figure 97: Sympathy for refugees in large groups: Argentinian politician Santiago Montoya uses a photograph by Massimo Sestini to state that “Being human is not illegal”. From record #198.



Figure 98: Themes clusters of care for refugee children. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.

FIVE THINGS EUROPE SHOULD DO FOR REFUGEES:



1. **Allow refugees to reach Europe safely.** Reduce the need for rickety boats and opportunities for unscrupulous smugglers.
2. **Fix the EU's asylum system.** Give asylum seekers proper access to asylum and adequate shelter in every EU country.
3. **Step up search and rescue** for boats in the Mediterranean. Save lives before boats capsize.
4. **Agree where asylum seekers can live.** EU countries should share this responsibility fairly.
5. **Develop a list of "unsafe" countries.** Protection granted more quickly is good for refugees and helps limit backlogs.



(Multiple)

Disembarking



Authority



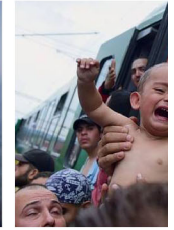
Figure 99: Magnified samples from Figure 98: Top left (Disembarking).



Figure 100: Magnified samples from Figure 98: Bottom left (Authority and distress).

(Multiple)

Disembarking



Authority

Distress

Figure 101: Magnified samples from Figure 98: Centre (Held in arms and distress).



Death



Detainment



Distress

Figure 102: Magnified samples from Figure 98: Top right (Distress, detainment, death, and the journey).



Figure 104: Themes clusters of refugee children on their own. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset.



Consequences of inaction



FIVE THINGS EUROPE SHOULD DO FOR REFUGEES:

1. **Allow refugees to reach Europe safely.** Reduce the need for rickety boats and opportunities for unscrupulous smugglers.
2. **Fix the EU's asylum system.** Give asylum seekers proper access to asylum and adequate shelter in every EU country.
3. **Step up search and rescue** for boats in the Mediterranean. Save lives before boats capsize.
4. **Agree where asylum seekers can live.** EU countries should share this responsibility fairly.
5. **Develop a list of "unsafe" countries.** Protection granted more quickly is good for refugees and helps limit backlogs.

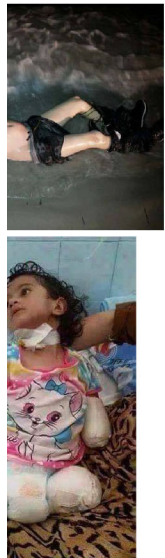
(Multiple)



Direct
appeal



Figure 106: Magnified samples from Figure 104: Bottom left (Consequences of inaction, direct appeal, and multiple).



Help and happiness



Distress

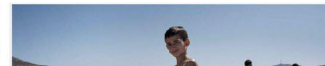
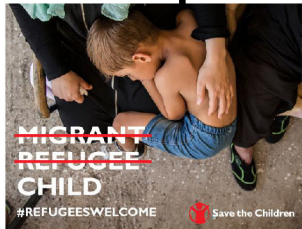


Figure 107: Magnified samples from Figure 104: Centre (Distress, help, and happiness).



Help and happiness



Encounters with authority



ress

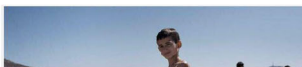


Figure 108: Magnified samples from Figure 104: Top right (Help, happiness, encounters with authority, direct appeal, and weariness).



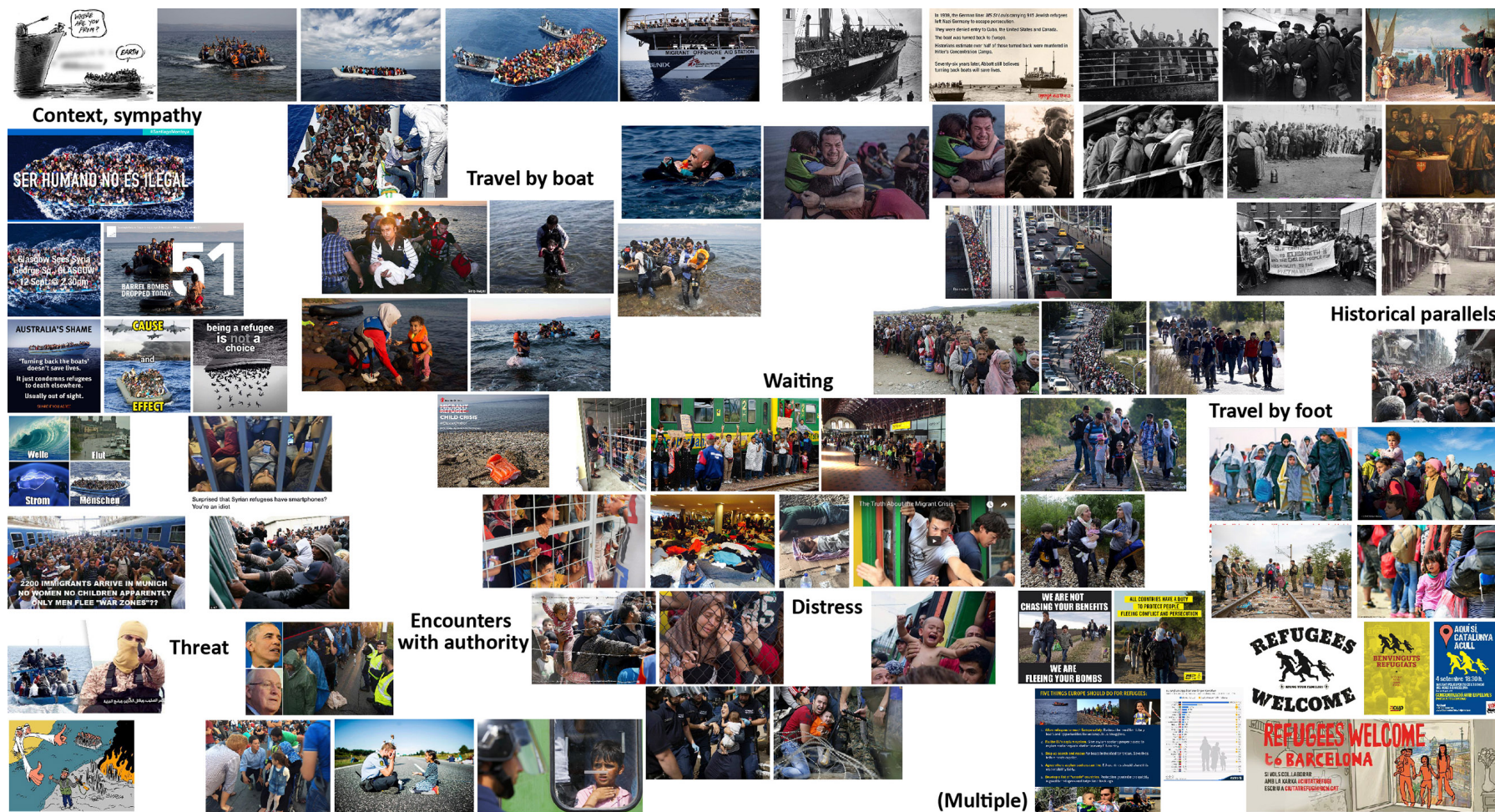


Figure 110: Themes clusters of refugees *en route*. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Context, sympathy



Travel by boat

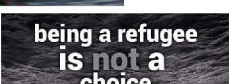
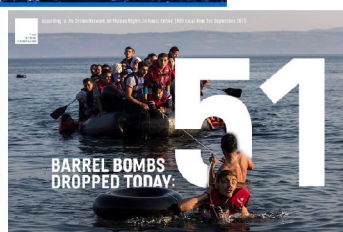
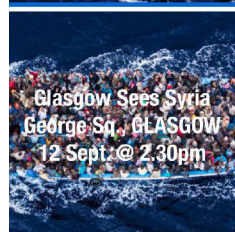
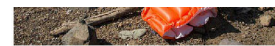


Figure 111: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Top left (Context and sympathy, travel by boat).



Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones?
You're an idiot



Encounters
with authority



Threat



Figure 113: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Bottom left (Threat, encounters with authority, distress, and waiting).

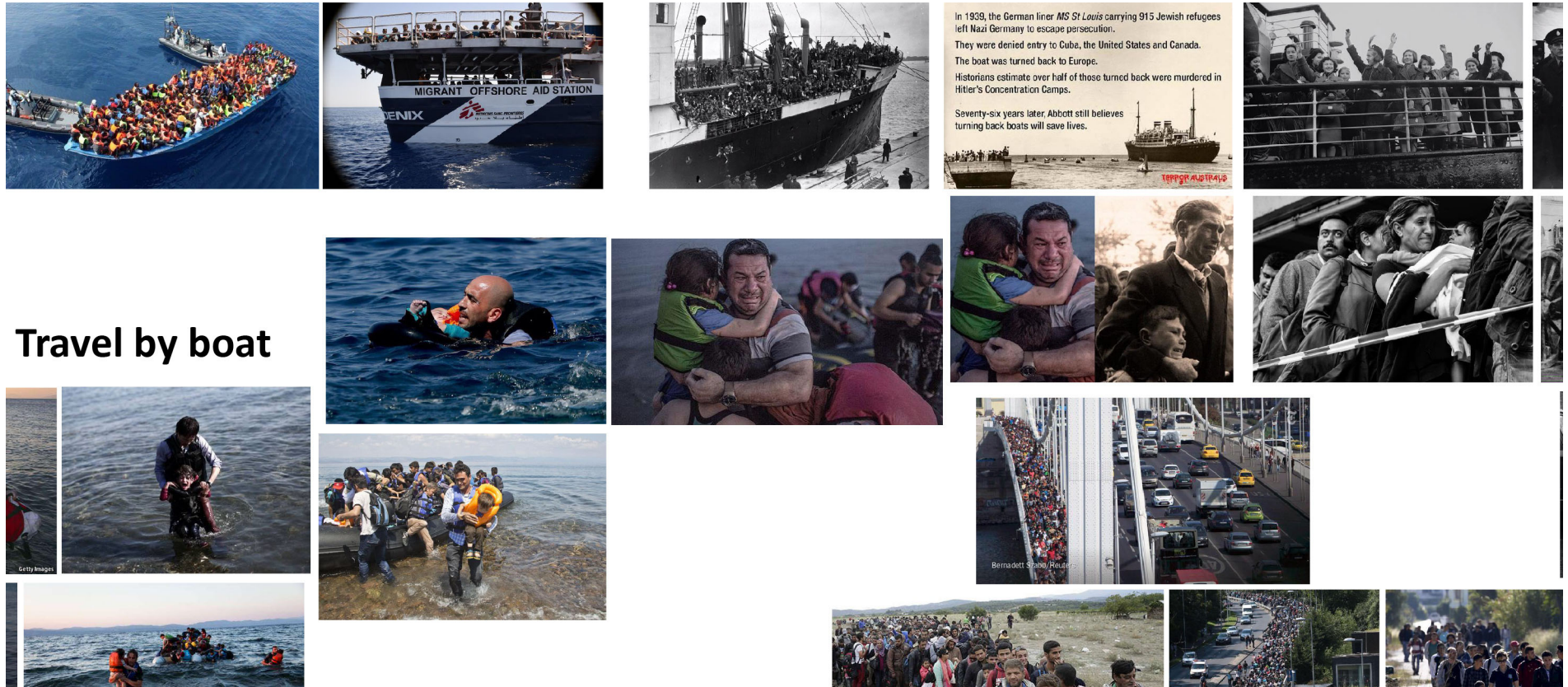
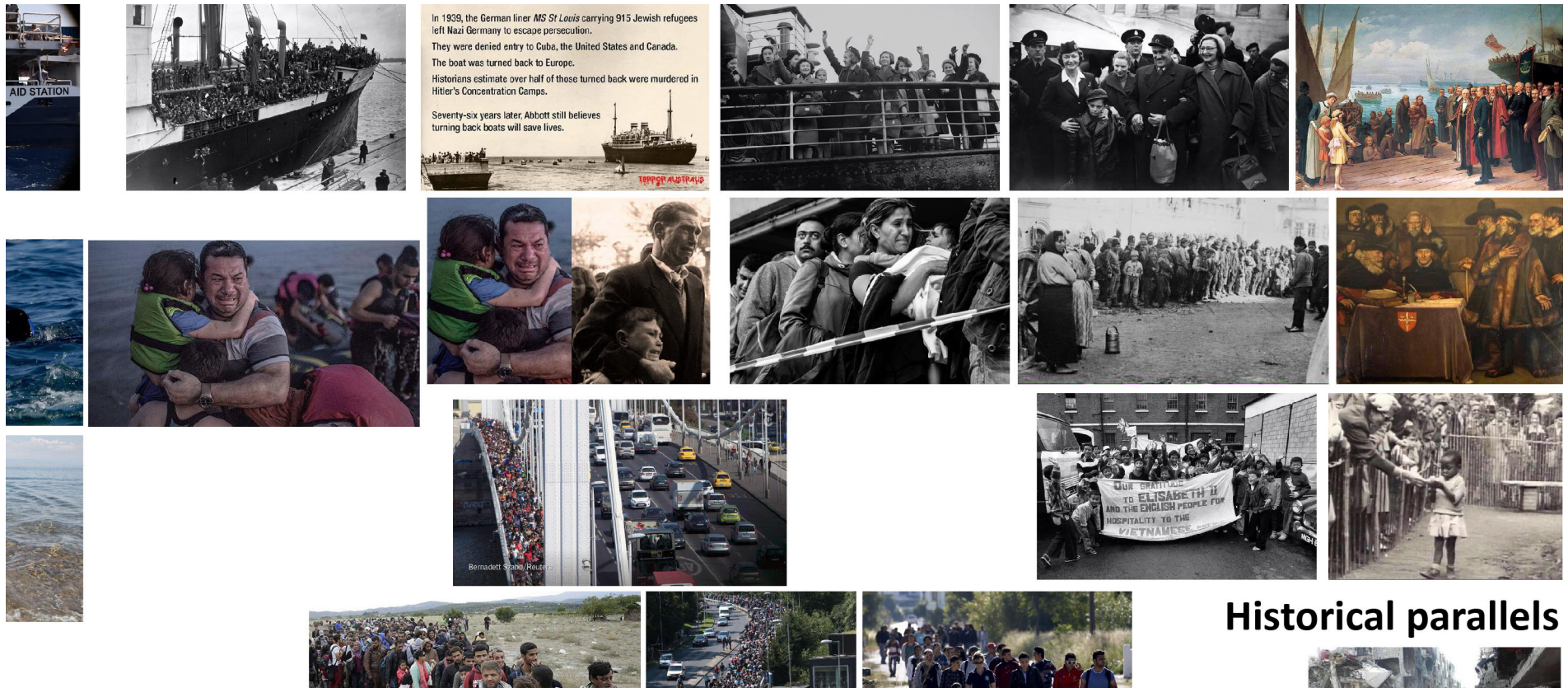


Figure 114: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Top centre (Travel by boat, distress, historical parallels, and travel by foot).



Figure 115: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Middle centre (Waiting, distress, and travel by foot).



Historical parallels

Figure 117: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Top right (Travel by boat, historical parallels, and travel by foot).



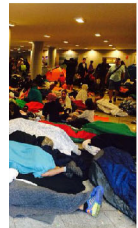
Waiting



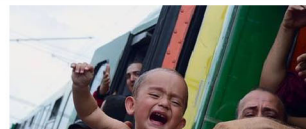
Historical parallels



Travel by foot



Distress



REFUGEE



Figure 118: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Middle right (Distress and travel by foot).



(Multiple)

Figure 119: Magnified samples from Figure 110: Bottom right (Distress, travel by foot, and multiple).



Figure 120: *Expulsion of the Huguenots from La Rochelle* by Jan Luyken, c. 1696.



Figure 121: Reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib, Nineveh, *Expulsion of the inhabitants of the city of Lachish*, Assyrian, c. 700 BC (British Museum).



Figure 122: "Flight into Egypt", from the *Book of Hours for the Use of Rome*, French, c. 1450 (Morgan Library, New York City, M282, 77r).

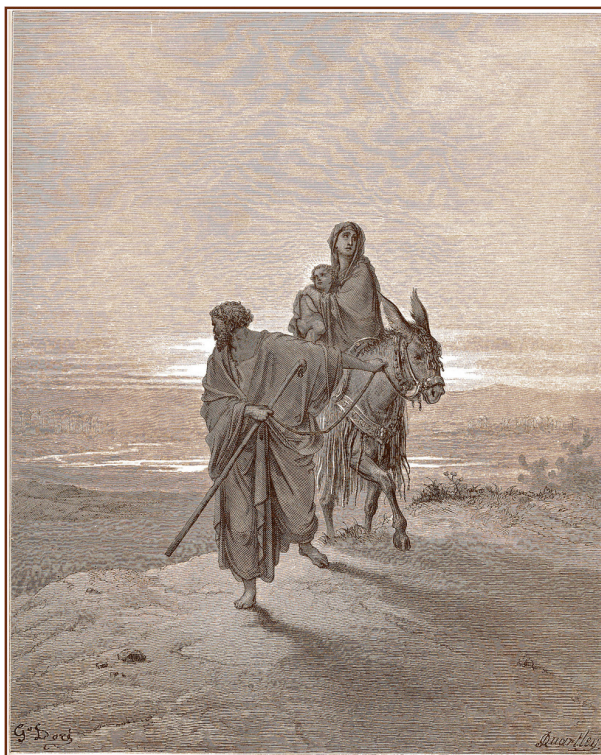


Figure 123: "The Flight into Egypt" by Gustave Doré, from *La Grande Bible de Tours*, 1865.



Figure 124: Palestinian Refugees, by Benny Morris, 1948.



Figure 125: Noting thematic parallels between photographs by Daniel Etter and Manuel Ferrol. From record #306 and #406.



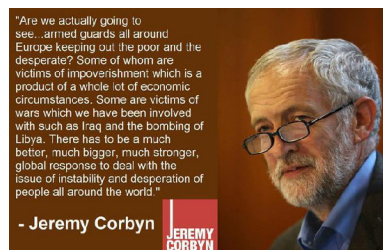
Figure 126: Employing the iconographic refugee shorthand. From record #1006.



Figure 127: Theme clusters of support for refugees by prominent individuals. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Figure 128: Magnified samples from Figure 127: Holding signs.



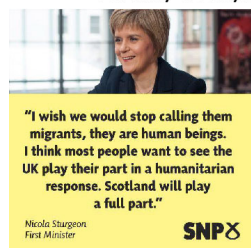
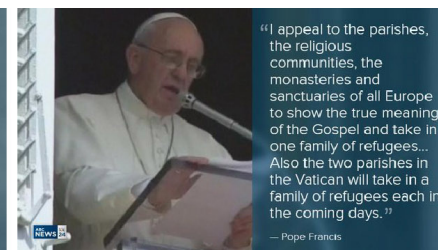
Jeremy Corbyn MP



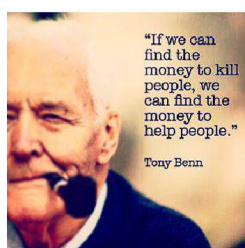
Louise Arbour MP (Canada)



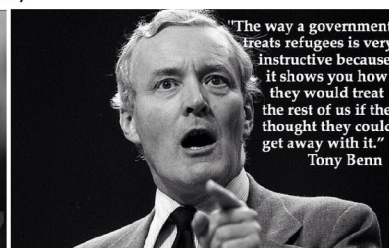
Pope Francis



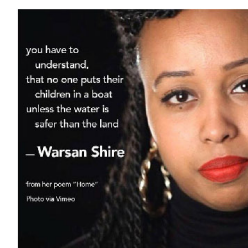
Nicola Sturgeon



Tony Benn MP



Julian Burnside QC



Warsan Shire



Christiane Amanpour



Caren Mioska

Figure 129: Magnified samples from Figure 127: Pull-quotes.



Angela Merkel



Justin Welby



Arsène Wenger



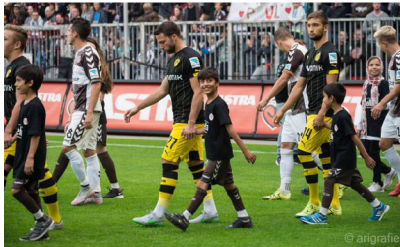
Sir Bob Geldof



Angelina Jolie



Benedict Cumberbatch



Football players



Douglas Booth

Figure 130: Magnified samples from Figure 127: Stock photography and group photography.



Figure 131: Support from the prominent demonstrated by a piece of paper and an informal portrait. Labour MP Liz Kendall. From records #370 and #661.



Figure 132: Support from the prominent demonstrated by a piece of paper and an informal portrait. Green MP Caroline Lucas. From record #36.

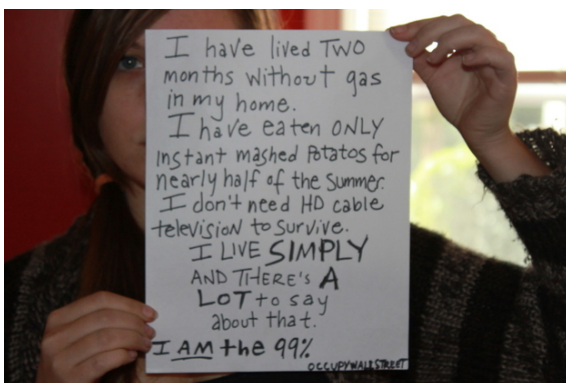


Figure 133: Example of "I am the 99%" meme during the Occupy Wall Street protests, by an unknown author, 2011.



Figure 137: Theme clusters of popular support for refugees. Visual and/or thematically similar pictures are clustered next to one another, whilst more tangential pictures are placed farther away. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.

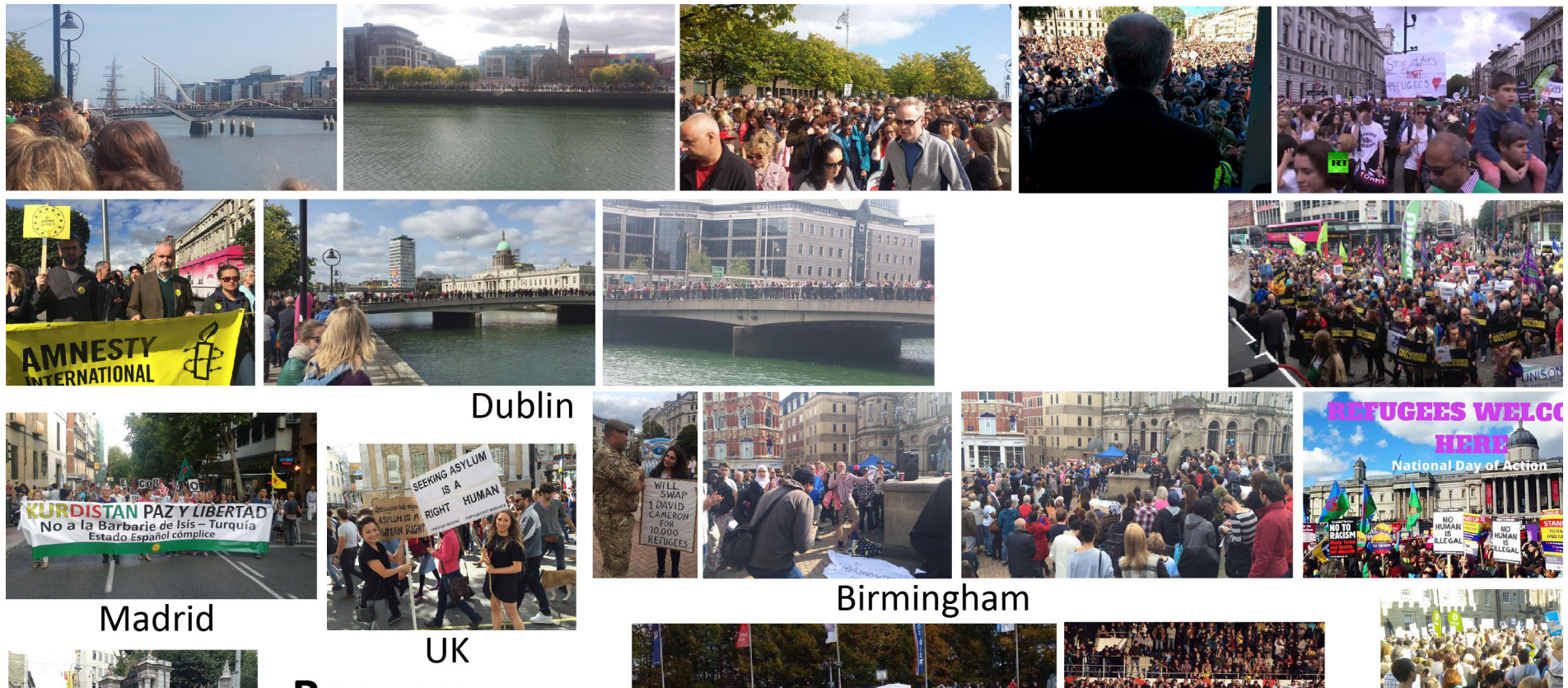


Figure 138: Magnified sample from Figure 137: Top left (Large groups, banners, and masses: Dublin, London, Madrid, UK, and Birmingham).



Figure 139: Magnified samples from Figure 137: Middle left (Groups to masses: Turkey, Budapest, New York City, and sport).



Figure 140: Magnified samples from Figure 137: Bottom left (Groups to masses: Budapest, New York City, Germany, Spain [Lavapiés], and sport).



View

im

London

Masses

Figure 141: Magnified samples from Figure 137: Top centre (Masses: London).



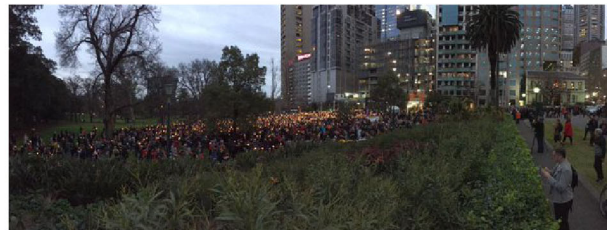
Oxford



Masses



Australia (Sydney)



Australia (Melbourne)



Figure 142: Magnified samples from Figure 137: Middle centre (Masses to smaller groups: Australia [Sydney and Melbourne], Morocco [Rabat]).





Morocco (Rabat)



Australia (Sydney)



Australia (Melbourne)



Toronto

Figure 144: Magnified samples from Figure 137: Bottom right (Masses to smaller groups: Australia [Sydney and Melbourne], Morocco [Rabat], and Toronto).



Figure 146: Magnified samples from Figure 145: Top left (Active and cultural threat).

RedFlag News
MEDIA BLACKOUT -- Ship with "Aid" for Refugees Arrives in Greece Full of Weapons and Ammunition (Video)



Article from
 RedFlag News

Read it

THE GATEWAY PUNDIT A container full of help for Muslim "refugees" arrived in Greece and guess what was in it? It was full of weapons and ammunition. Why isn't media reporting about this? The cargo ship Haddad 1 was intercepted with a shipment of arms heading to ISIS. (IBT) Greek officials intercept •



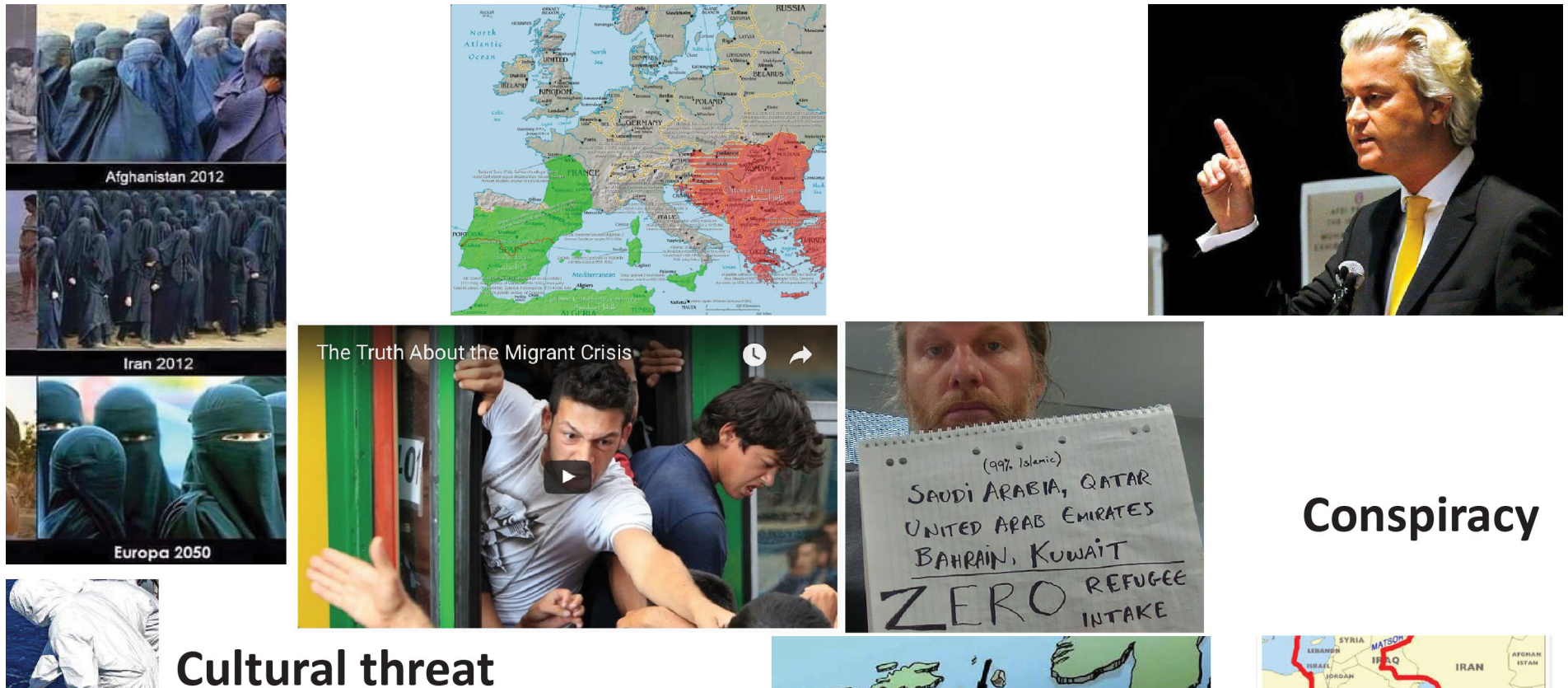
Cult



Active Threat



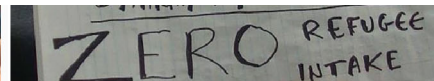
Figure 147: Magnified samples from Figure 145: Bottom left (Active and cultural threat).



Cultural threat

Conspiracy

Figure 148: Magnified samples from Figure 145: Top right (Cultural threat and conspiracy).



Cultural threat



Trojan Horse



If there is to be a **Greater Israel**, the Jews will not want to be outnumbered within that Greater Israel.

Thus Israel will want to drive Syrians and other Arabs into Europe as **refugees**.

At least 4 million Syrians are already refugees.

There are 5 million Palestinian refugees.

And, Israel will want to promote anti-semitism in Europe and America, so that Jews will be driven out of Europe and America and into Greater Israel.

ISIS is one of the tools being used by Israel. / [The Syrian Refugee Crisis](#)

What is the solution to the problem?

Recognise that Israel, and its supporters, are the enemy.



Figure 149: Magnified samples from Figure 145: Bottom right (Trojan horse and conspiracy).



Figure 150: Suspicion drawn upon refugees in a false comparison. Laith Al Saleh whilst fighting *Dāesh* and afterwards as a refugee. Photographs by Alexander Zemilianichenko. From record #37.



Figure 151: Suspicion drawn upon refugees through comparison. From record #70, *inter alia*.



Figure 152: “Self-evident evidence”. A typical example of the before-and-after picture, by Joel Kramer, 2015.




Figure 153: Refugee as Trojan horse. Claims of an incipient refugee threat use this 2007 photograph (possibly by Mohammed Salem, Reuters) of the *Al Aqsa* Martyrs Brigade to suggest they are infiltrating Europe. From records #275, #552, and #709.



Figure 154: By not conforming to expected stereotypes, refugees are cast as Trojan Horses. Photograph by Laszlo Balogh. From record #291.

THE DANGER

Of Abandoning Dārul-Islām



The repeated events of Syrians and Libyans dying on the shores of Turkey, Libya, and Italy, or even on the highways of Austria, is one that should awaken the heart into reflecting upon the issue of hijrah.

{Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, “In what [condition] were you?” They will say, “We were oppressed in the land.” The angels will say, “Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?” For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination. Except for the oppressed among men, women and children who cannot devise a plan nor are they directed to a way – For those it is expected that Allah will pardon them, and Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving} [An-Nisā: 97-99].

implemented somewhere, it is not Dārul-Islām” [Ahkām Ahl adh-Dhimmah]. This is evident, as the Sahābah did not consider the lands overcome by the false prophets or the resistance against zakāh to be anything but dārul-harb. The fuqahā’ after them did not consider the lands ruled by the Tatar or ‘Ubaydī rulers to be Dārul-Islām, for although these rulers claimed Islam and ruled by some of its laws, they committed apostasy by abandoning some of its laws or teachings. Accordingly, moving to the lands of Āl Salūl or the Sahwāt is not hijrah, as the rulers of these lands – in addition to them allying with the crusaders and apostates against Islam – abandon and resist many of the laws of the Sharī’ah. ‘There is no wālā’ and barā’ there except on a nationalist basis.

Figure 155: Alan, weaponised. “Of Abandoning Dārul-Islām [Islamic lands]”, from the *Dāesh* magazine *Dābiq*, 9 September 2015.



Figure 156: The refugee as vermin. Cartoon for the *Daily Mail* by Stanley “Mac” McMurty, 17 November 2015.



Figure 157: Alan’s future. “Migrants: What would have become of little Alan had he grown up? Arse-grabber in Germany”, for *Charlie Hebdo* by Laurent “Riss” Sourisseau, January 2016.



Record #10 text: “How it should have ended”
(picture: Omer Tosun)



Record #152 text: What could have been
vs what happened”
(picture: Rita Jordison)



Record #208
(picture: Lina Abgaradeh)



Record #670
(picture: Unknown-Sleeping family beach)



Record #804 (source)
(picture: Khaled Kharajah)

Figure 158: Examples of “what happened” vs. “what could have happened”. Sourced from Twitter dataset and assembled by Ray Drainville.



Figure 159: Exposure of casual indifference or racism. “Look, dad—a Skittle”, cartoon for the *New York Daily News* by Bill Bramall, 21 September 2016.



Figure 160: Casual indifference. Syrian President Bashar al Assad and Iranian Supreme Ayatollah Khomeini walk hand-in-hand past Alan. From record #1034.

Choices for Syrian children ...



if you stay



if you leave

Khalid Albaih

Figure 161: The symbolic choice for Syrian children. Cartoon showing Omran Daqneesh as “If you stay”, and Alan Kurdi as “if you leave” by Khalid Albaih, 2016.



Figure 162: Appropriation and performance. Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei on the island of Lesbos, by Rohit Chowla, 2016.



Figure 163: *Plate with Alan Kurdi on it* by Ai Weiwei, 2016. From the exhibition *Ai Weiwei on Porcelain*, displayed at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul, 12 September 2017–28 January 2018.



Figure 164: *Until the Sea Shall Set Him Free*, by Pekka Jylhä, 2016. From the exhibition *We Have Inherited Hope—A Gift of Forgetting*, displayed at the Helsinki Contemporary Gallery, 4 March–3 April 2016.



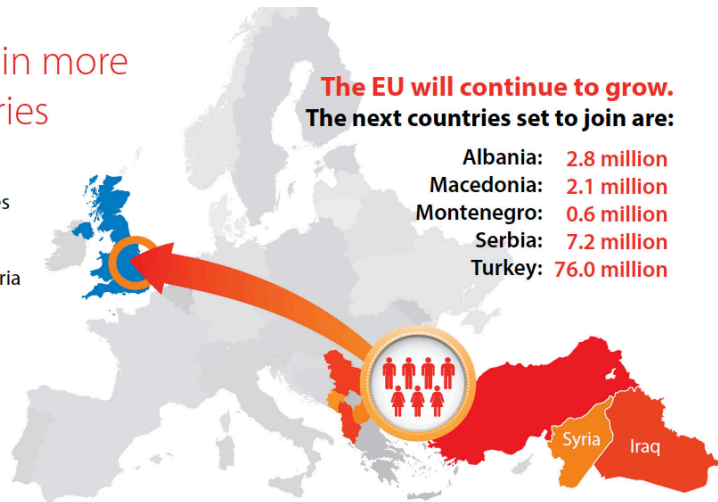
Figure 165: View of Pekka Jylhä's exhibition *We Have Inherited Hope—A Gift of Forgetting: Until the Sea Shall Set Him Free* shown in situ besides *Journey*, and *We Have Inherited Hope—A Gift of Forgetting*. Displayed at the Helsinki Contemporary Gallery, 4 March–3 April 2016, by Ilpo Vainionpää, 2016.



Figure 166: Refugees as a massed "Other". "Breaking Point" billboard by UKIP, June 2016.

The EU is letting in more and more countries

- The EU started as 9 countries
– it's now 28
- Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria have joined since 2007



www.voteleavetakecontrol.org

Vote Leave

Figure 167: Invasion of the U.K. “The EU is Letting in More and More Countries”, graphic by the official Vote Leave campaign, 2016.



Muhammad Lila @MuhammadLila · Sep 4

Two years ago, this image of an innocent young boy woke up the world's conscience.

Let's not go back to sleep.



8 13

Figure 168: Commemorating Alan's death, two years later. Muhammad Lila tweets about Alan, 4 September 2017.



Figure 169: Response image by Québécois cartoonist ygreck. Cropped, it originally had the title *La honte* (The Shame). From records #646, #729, and #731.

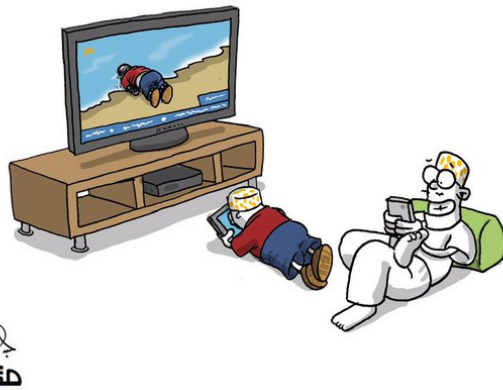


Figure 170: Response image by Abdullah Jaber, commenting upon indifference (and making a compositional parallel between the child and Alan). From record #172.



Figure 171: Emphasis upon the child as the blameless victim. Photograph by Georgiev for UNICEF. From records #158, #553, #971.

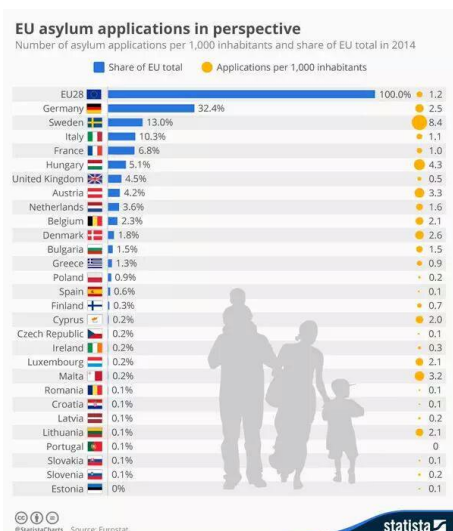


Figure 172: Infographic reinforcing a heteronormative conception of refugees. From record #748.



Figure 173: Screenshot of a *Front National* member's tweet, accompanied by text condemning the sentiment. The tweet reads "The death of Alan Kurdi is sad, but remember that each day 1–2 children die by drowning in France. Emotion in the service of invasion". From record #635.



Figure 174: Screenshot of an article regarding the emptying of Galician villages; the accompanying text sarcastically writes that there is "No room" for refugees. From record #140.



Figure 175: Photograph of a *Sun* headline encouraging the bombing of Syria “for Alan”; the accompanying tweet text condemns the newspaper. From records #11, #147, #574, and #598.

Thematic charts (details)

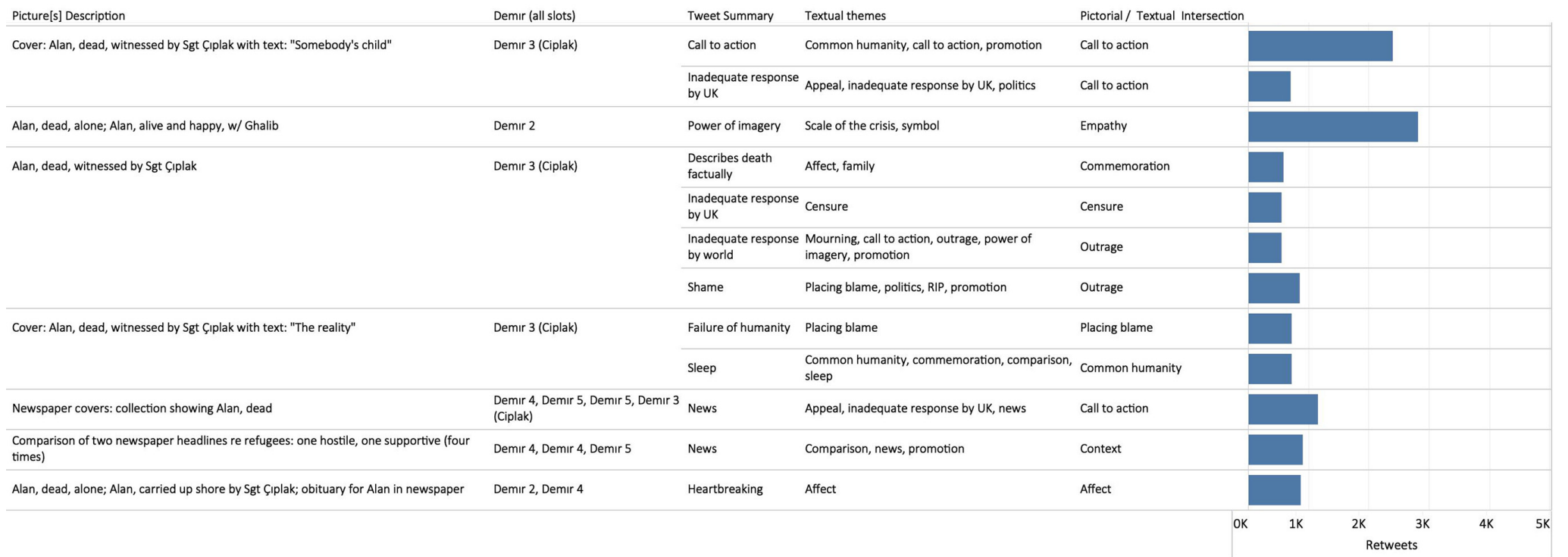
Textual themes featuring Demir's photographs of Alan (retweets)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Alan in it?, Demir? and Art? vs. Picture[s] Description, Demir (all slots), Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Alan in it?, sum of Retweets, Demir? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 500 to 25,993. The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Art? filter keeps N.

Theme Chart 1: Breakdown (part 1 of 3) of tweets accompanying the Demir photographs, via retweets, showing two contexts: the photographs shared and the authors' reactions. Chart developed in Tableau.

Textual themes featuring Demir's photographs of Alan (retweets), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Alan in it?, Demir? and Art? vs. Picture[s] Description, Demir (all slots), Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Alan in it?, sum of Retweets, Demir? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 500 to 25,993. The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Art? filter keeps N.

Theme Chart 2: Breakdown (part 2 of 3) of tweets accompanying the Demir photographs, via retweets, showing two contexts: the photographs shared and the authors' reactions. Chart developed in Tableau.

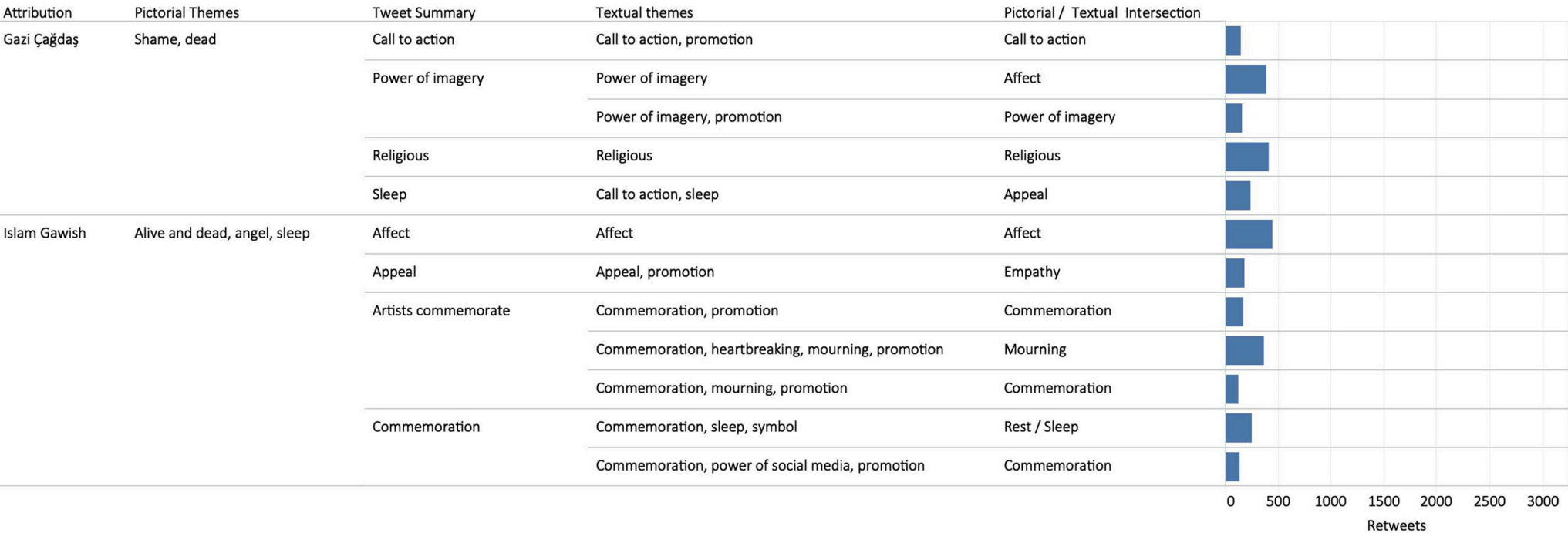
Textual themes featuring Demir's photographs of Alan (retweets), continued

Picture[s] Description	Demir (all slots)	Tweet Summary	Textual themes	Pictorial / Textual Intersection	
Newspaper cover: Alan, dead, carried up shore by Sgt Çıplak with text: "The shocking, cruel reality of Europe's refugee crisis"	Demir 5	Inadequate response by EU	Placing blame, news, promotion	Evidence	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, dead, with Sgt Çıplak and other policeman	Demir 3	Power of imagery	Power of imagery, sleep, promotion	Power of imagery	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, alive and happy, w/ Ghalib; Alan, dead, alone; Ghalib, dead, alone	Demir 2	Describes death factually	News, family	Commemoration	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, dead, alone; Alan, happy and alive, with Ghaleb (cropped; twice)	Demir 3 (Alone)	His name is Alan	Failure of humanity, his name is Alan, family, RIP	Censure	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, dead, alone, with sepia filter	Demir 2	Heartbreaking	Affect, religious	Affect	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, dead, alone; Alan, dead, witnessed by Sgt Çıplak; Alan, dead, carried up shore by Sgt Çıplak; child, dead, similar to Alan, picked up by passersby	Demir 1, Demir 5, Demir 3 (Cıplak)	Outrage	Inadequate response by EU	Outrage	<div><div></div></div>
Alan, alive, in a special suit; Alan, dead, carried up shore by Sgt Çıplak; Alan, dead, alone	Demir 5, Demir 2	Affect	Heartbreaking, power of imagery, religious	Affect	<div><div></div></div>
					<div><div>0K</div><div>1K</div><div>2K</div><div>3K</div><div>4K</div><div>5K</div></div> <div>Retweets</div>

Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Alan in it?, Demir? and Art? vs. Picture[s] Description, Demir (all slots), Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Alan in it?, sum of Retweets, Demir? and Art?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 500 to 25,993. The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Art? filter keeps N.

Theme Chart 3: Breakdown (part 3 of 3) of tweets accompanying the Demir photographs, via retweets, showing two contexts: the photographs shared and the authors’ reactions. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 4: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 1 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

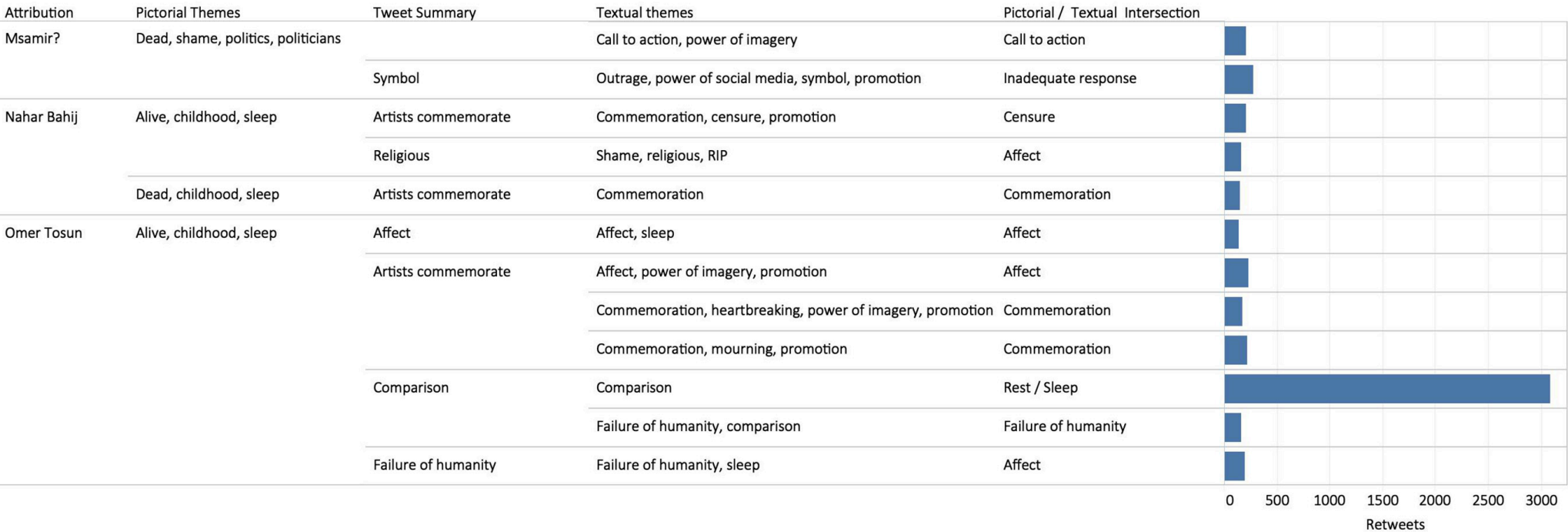
Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 5: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 2 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

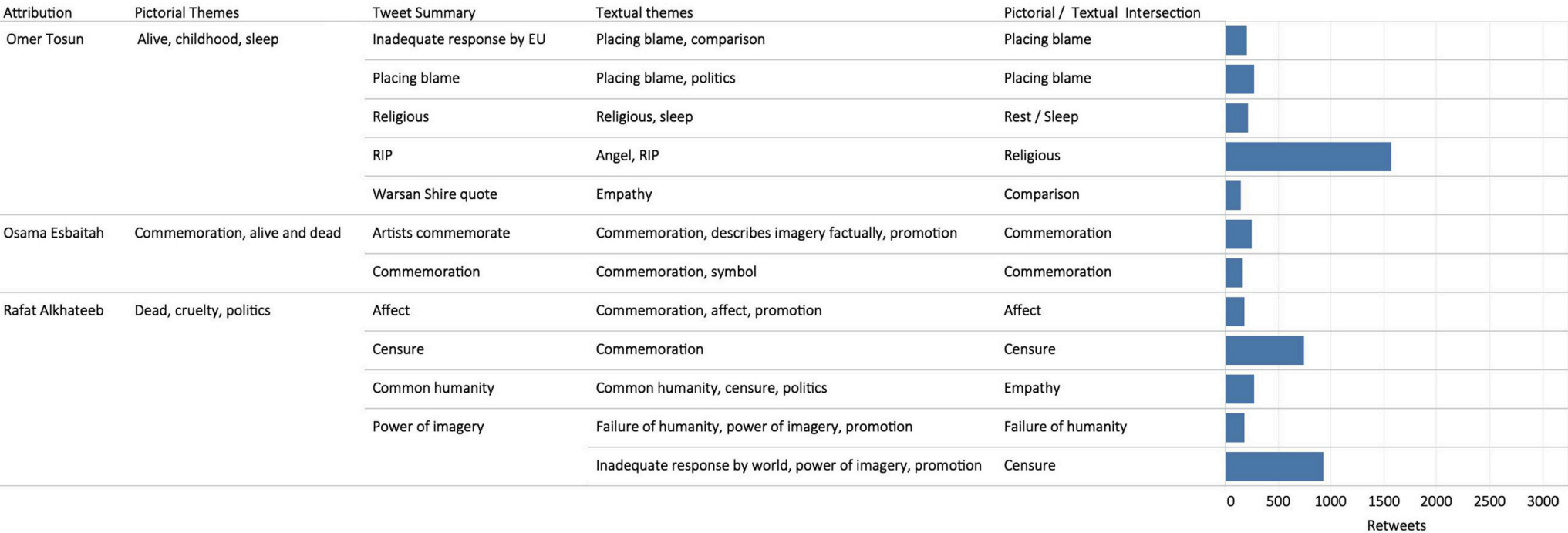
Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 6: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 3 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

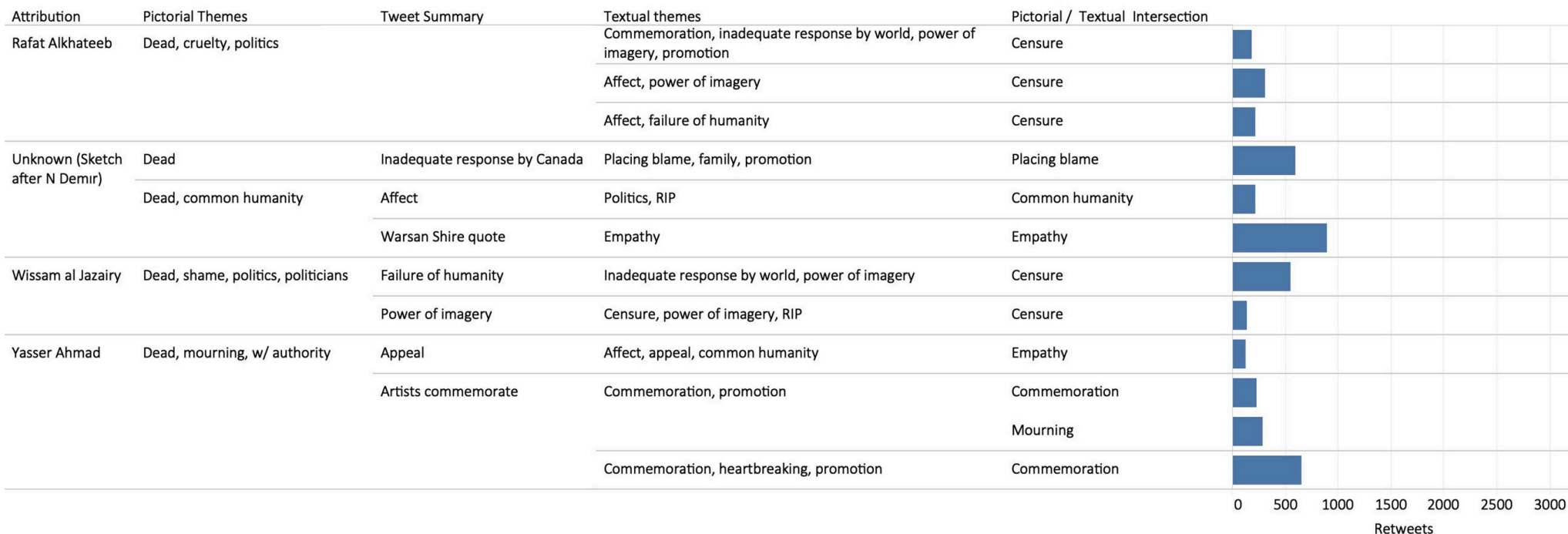
Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 7: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 4 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 8: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 5 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

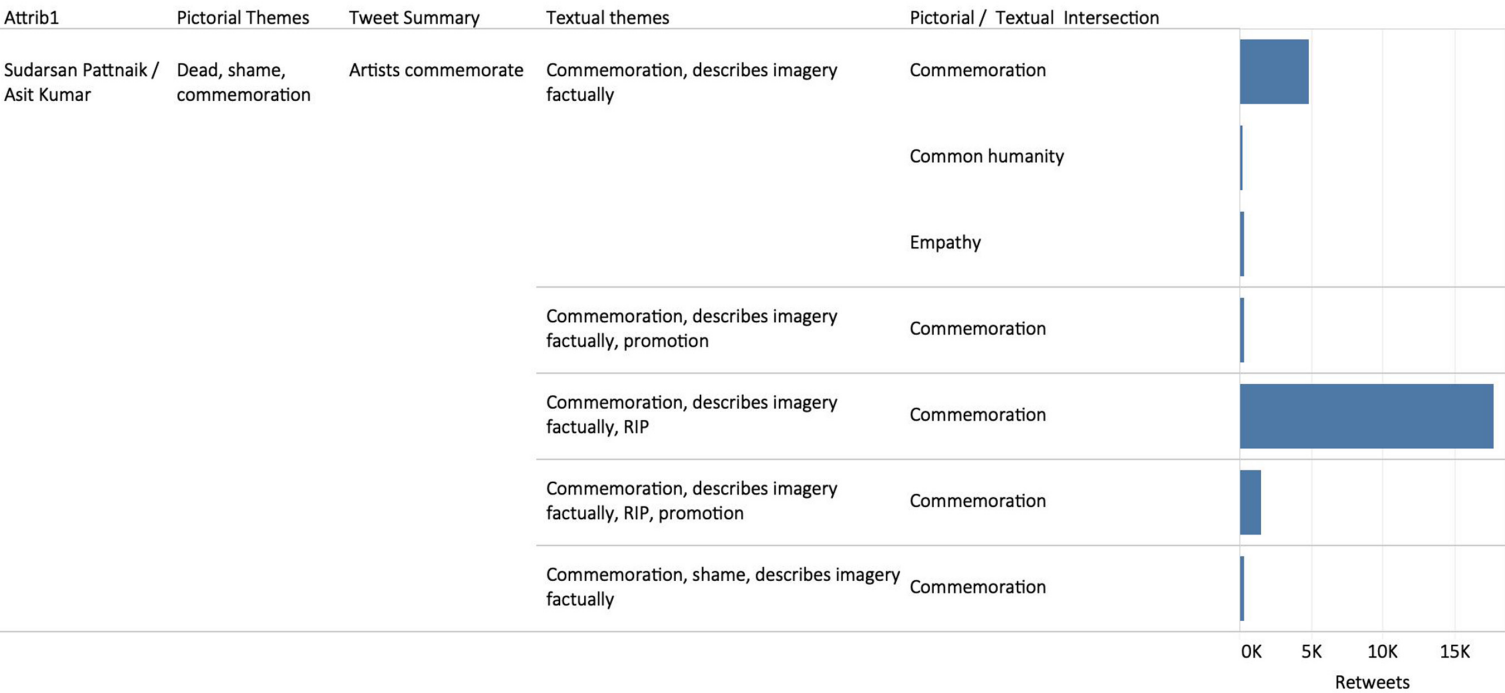
Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections of the most widely-shared art-based imagery (single shared images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Pictorial Themes. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The Pictorial Themes filter keeps 318 members.

Theme Chart 9: Textual commentary accompanying artistic responses: main imagery (part 6 of 6), ordered via retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

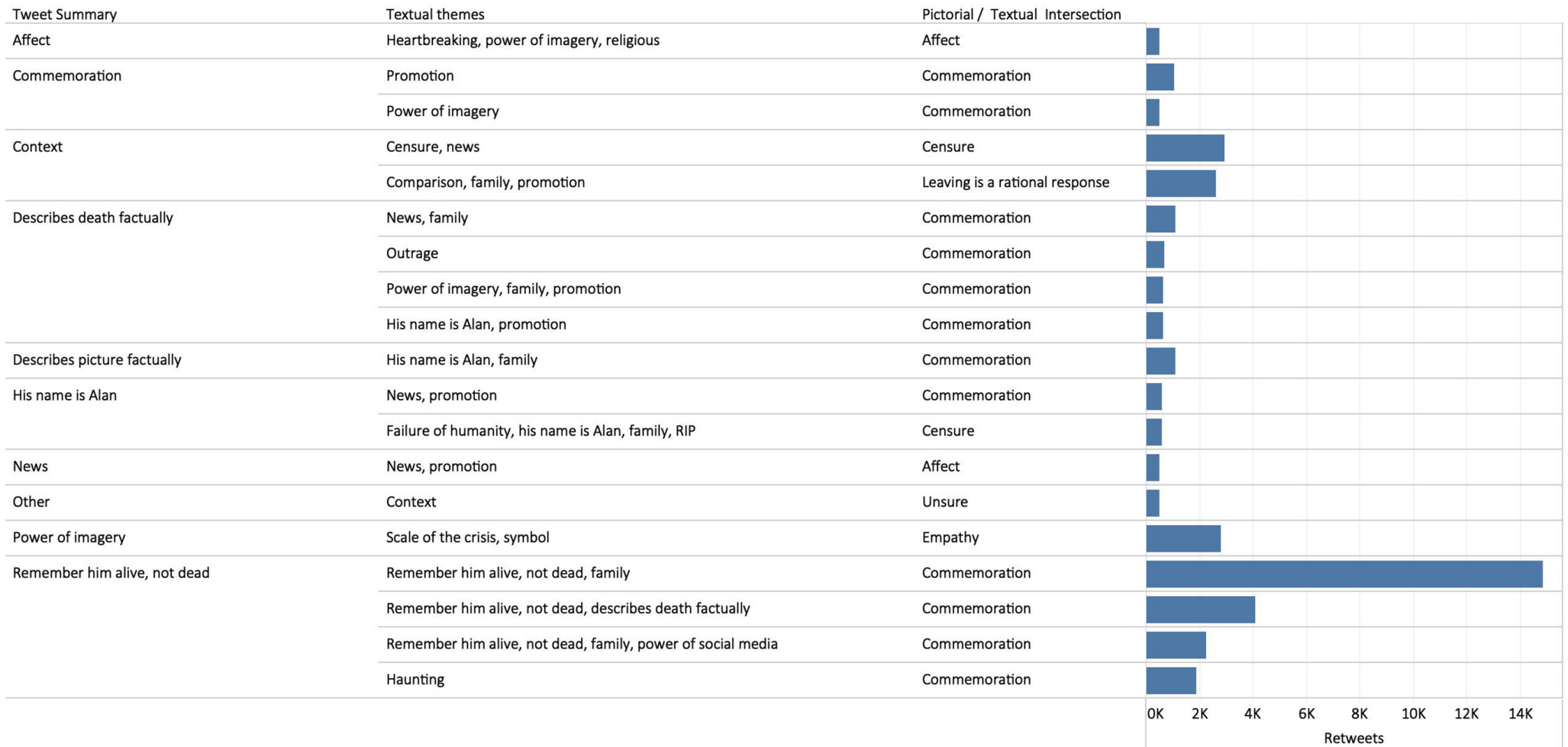
Alan: pictorial themes, tweet summaries, and pictorial / textual intersections for Sudarsan Pattnaik's sculpture



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attrib1, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type, Demir (all slots) and Attribution. The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The Attribution filter keeps 350 members. The view is filtered on Attrib1, which keeps Sudarsan Pattnaik / Asit Kumar.

Theme Chart 10: Textual commentary accompanying Sudarsan Pattnaik’s sand sculpture. Chart developed in Tableau.

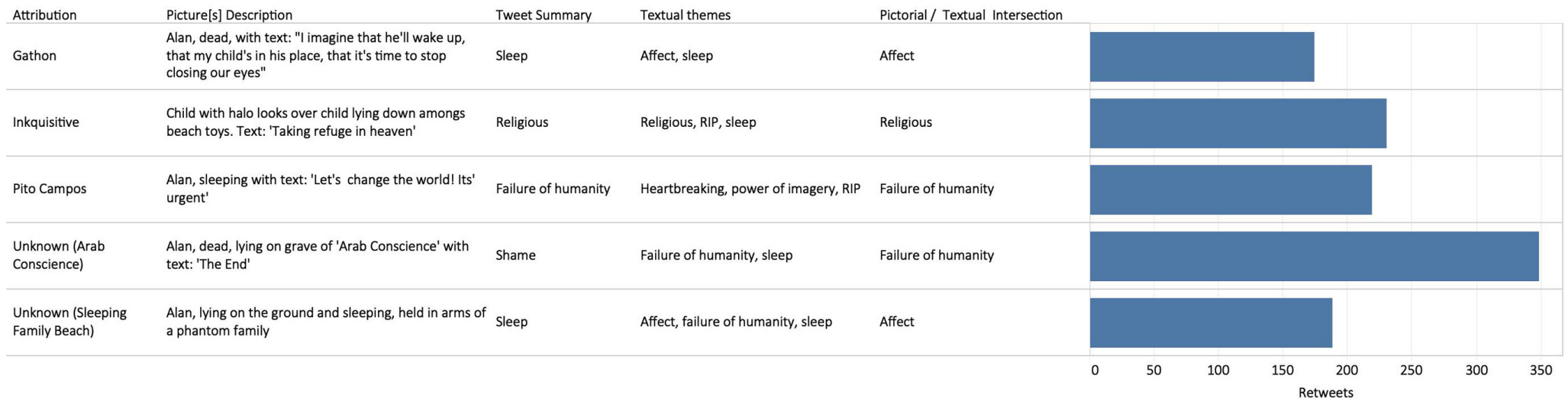
Textual themes of family snapshots with Alan (retweets)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Alan in it? and Fam? vs. Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Alan in it?, sum of Retweets and Fam?. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The sum of Retweets filter ranges from 500 to 25,993. The Fam? filter keeps Y.

Theme Chart 11: Comments accompanying family snapshots. Chart developed in Tableau.

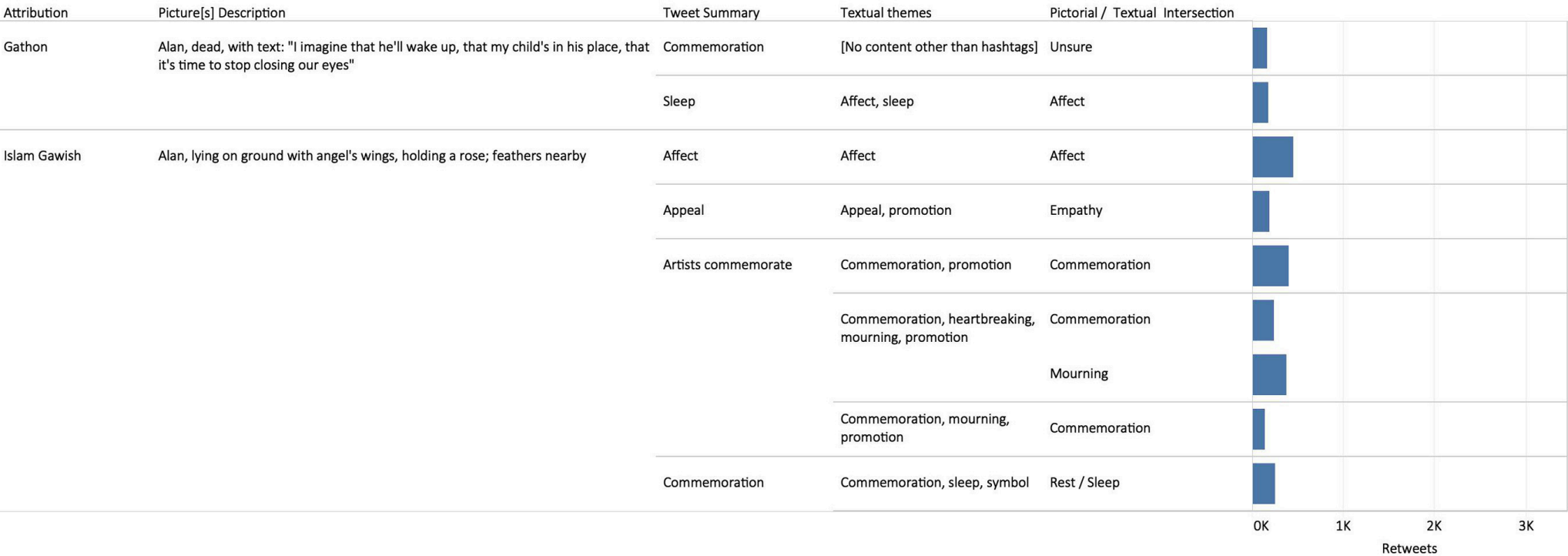
Alan: sleep theme (textual)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Th-Other (both), Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Demir?, Pic Type and Demir (all slots). The Demir? filter keeps Y. The Pic Type filter keeps Art. The Demir (all slots) filter keeps 33 members. The view is filtered on Attribution and Th-Other (both). The Attribution filter keeps 349 members. The Th-Other (both) filter keeps 9 members.

Theme Chart 12: Alan described as asleep: use of sleep-associated phrases, measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

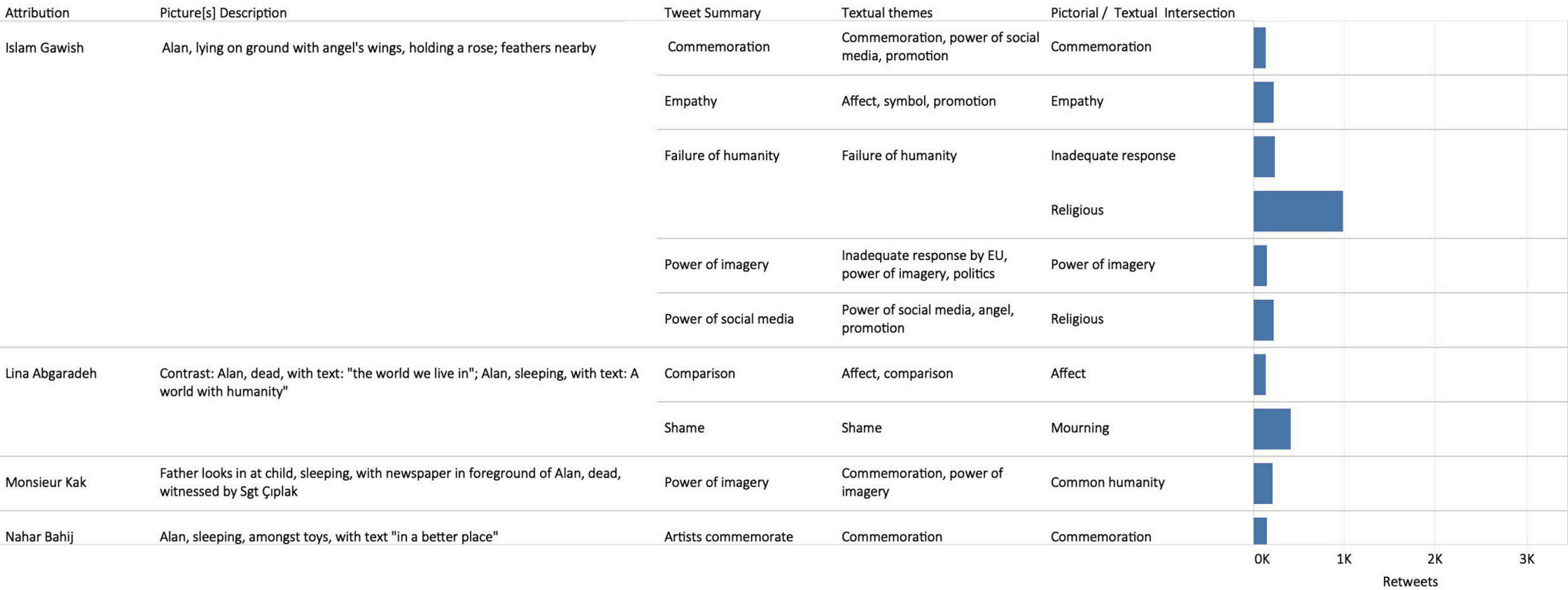
Alan: sleep theme (image)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 338 members.

Theme Chart 13: Alan visualised asleep (part 1 of 5: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

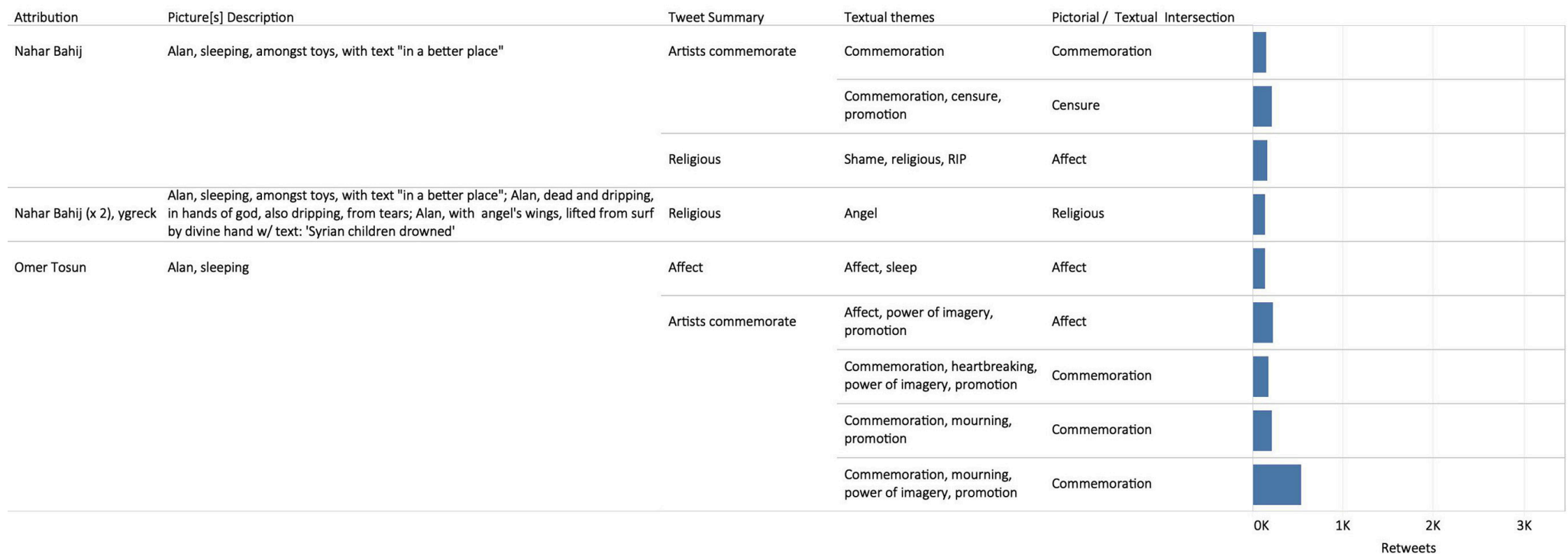
Alan: sleep theme (image), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 338 members.

Theme Chart 14: Alan visualised asleep (part 2 of 5: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

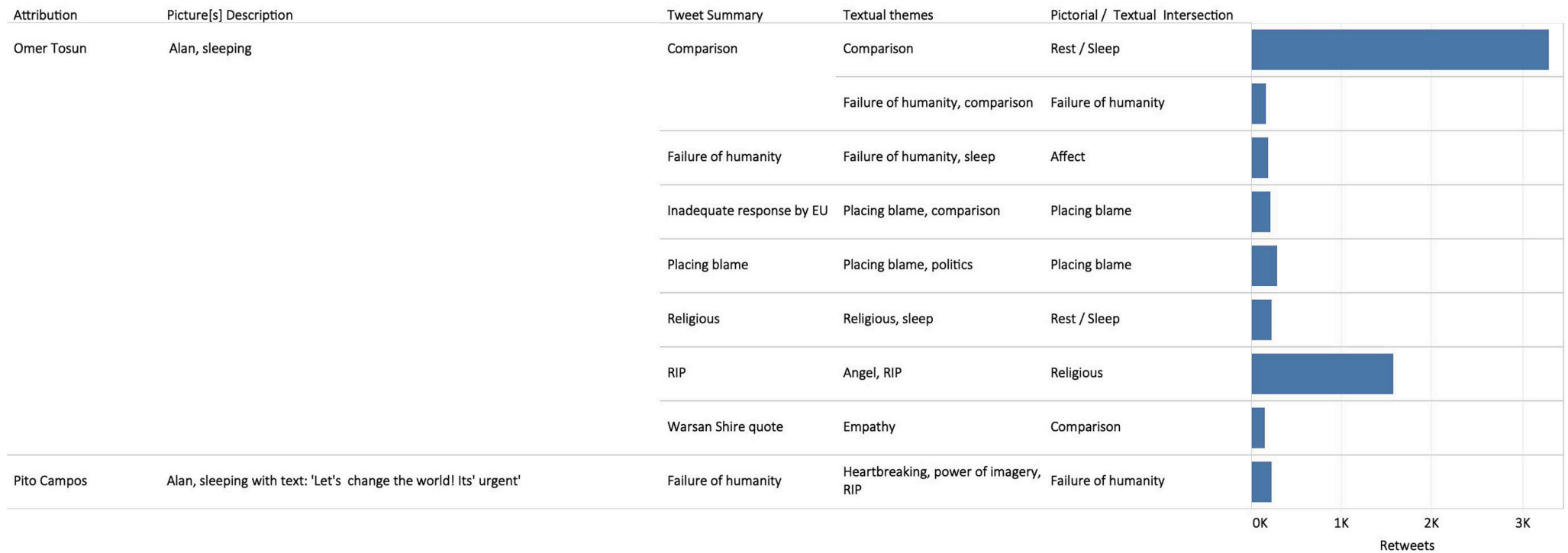
Alan: sleep theme (image), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 338 members.

Theme Chart 15: Alan visualised asleep (part 3 of 5: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

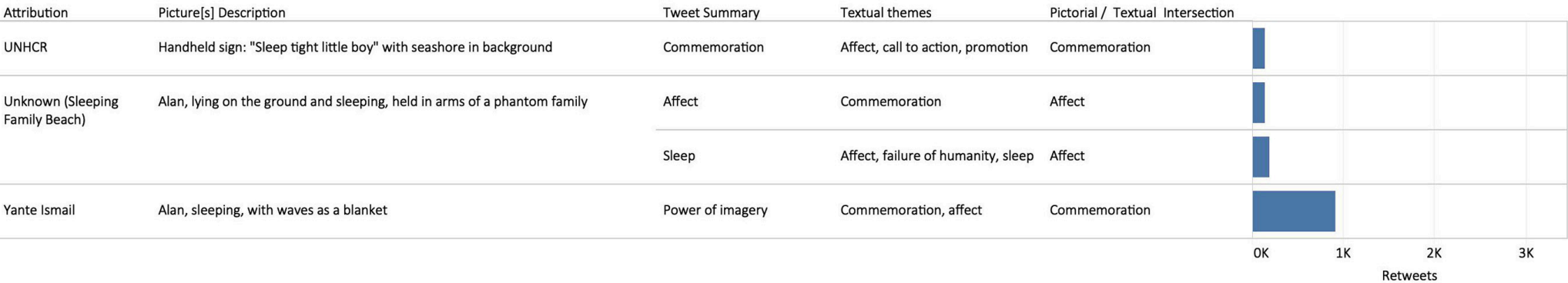
Alan: sleep theme (image), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 338 members.

Theme Chart 16: Alan visualised asleep (part 4 of 5: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

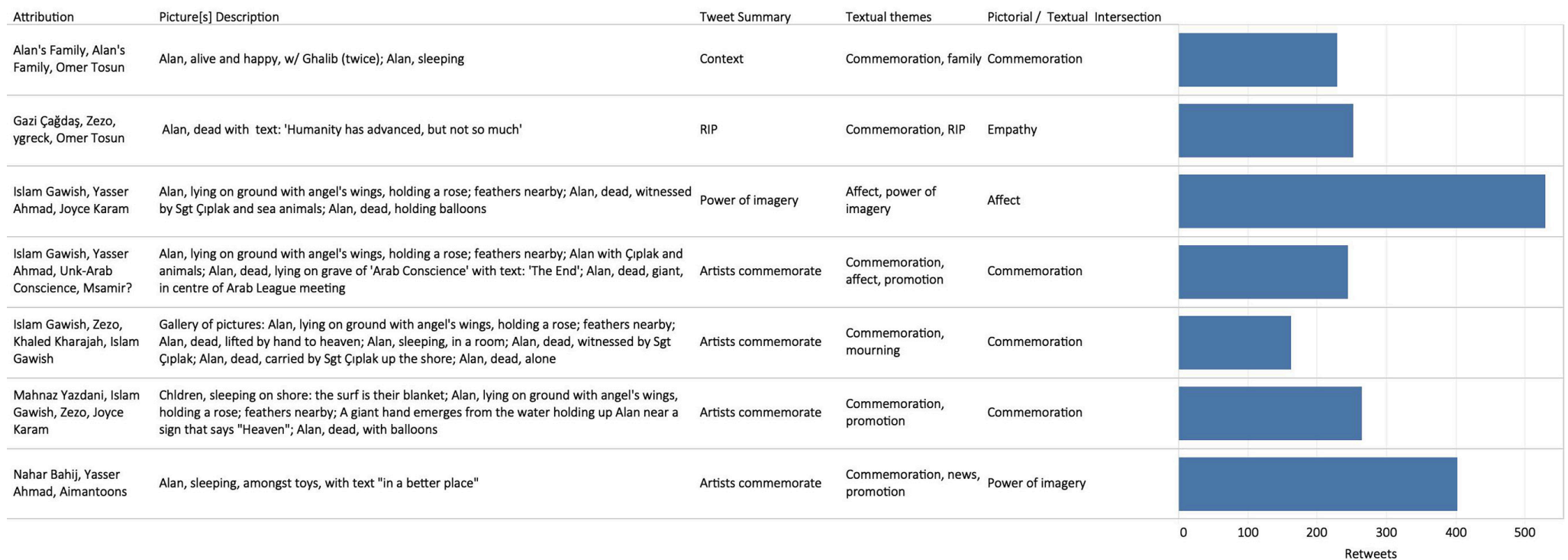
Alan: sleep theme (image), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 338 members.

Theme Chart 17: Alan visualised asleep (part 5 of 5: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

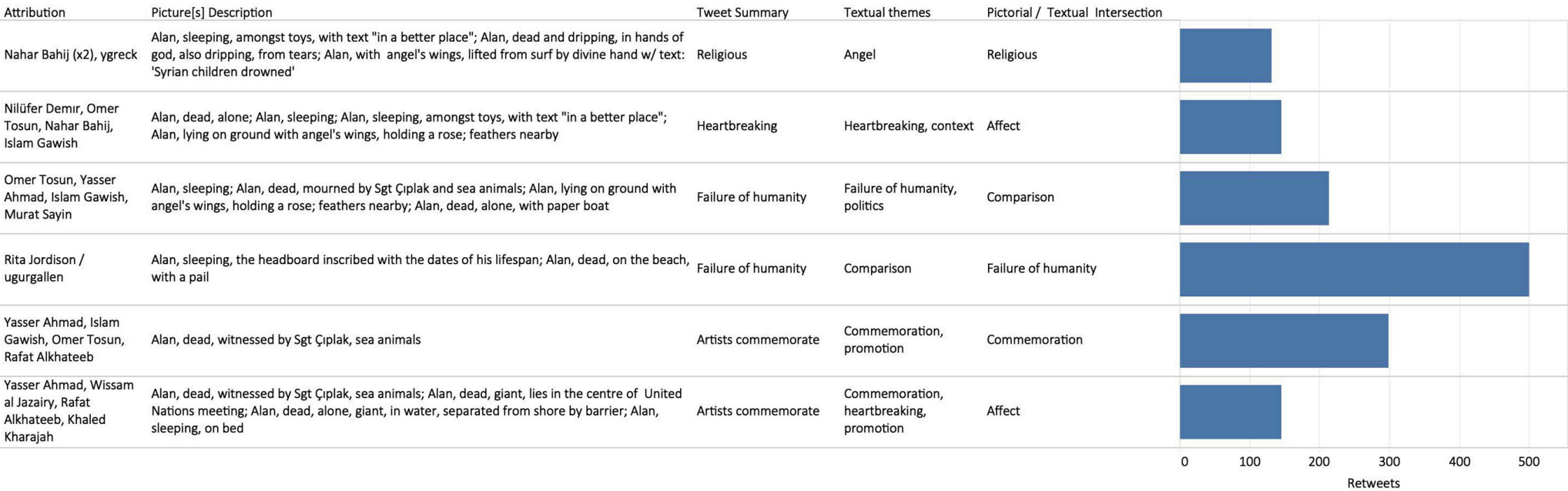
Alan: sleep theme (multiple images)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 340 members.

Theme Chart 18: Alan visualised asleep (part 1 of 2: sharing of multiple pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan: sleep theme (multiple images), continued



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other, Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The view is filtered on Art?, Alan in it?, PicTh-Other and Attribution. The Art? filter keeps Y. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Other filter keeps Sleep. The Attribution filter keeps 340 members.

Theme Chart 19: Alan visualised asleep (part 2 of 2: sharing of multiple pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan portrayed as an angel (textual)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Alan in it? and Th-Spirit. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Th-Spirit filter keeps Angel.

Theme Chart 20: Alan described as an angel, measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan portrayed as an angel (visual)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Alan in it?, PicTh-Spirit and Pic Type. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Spirit filter keeps Angel. The Pic Type filter keeps Art.

Theme Chart 21: Alan visualised as an angel (part 1 of 2: sharing of single pictures), measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

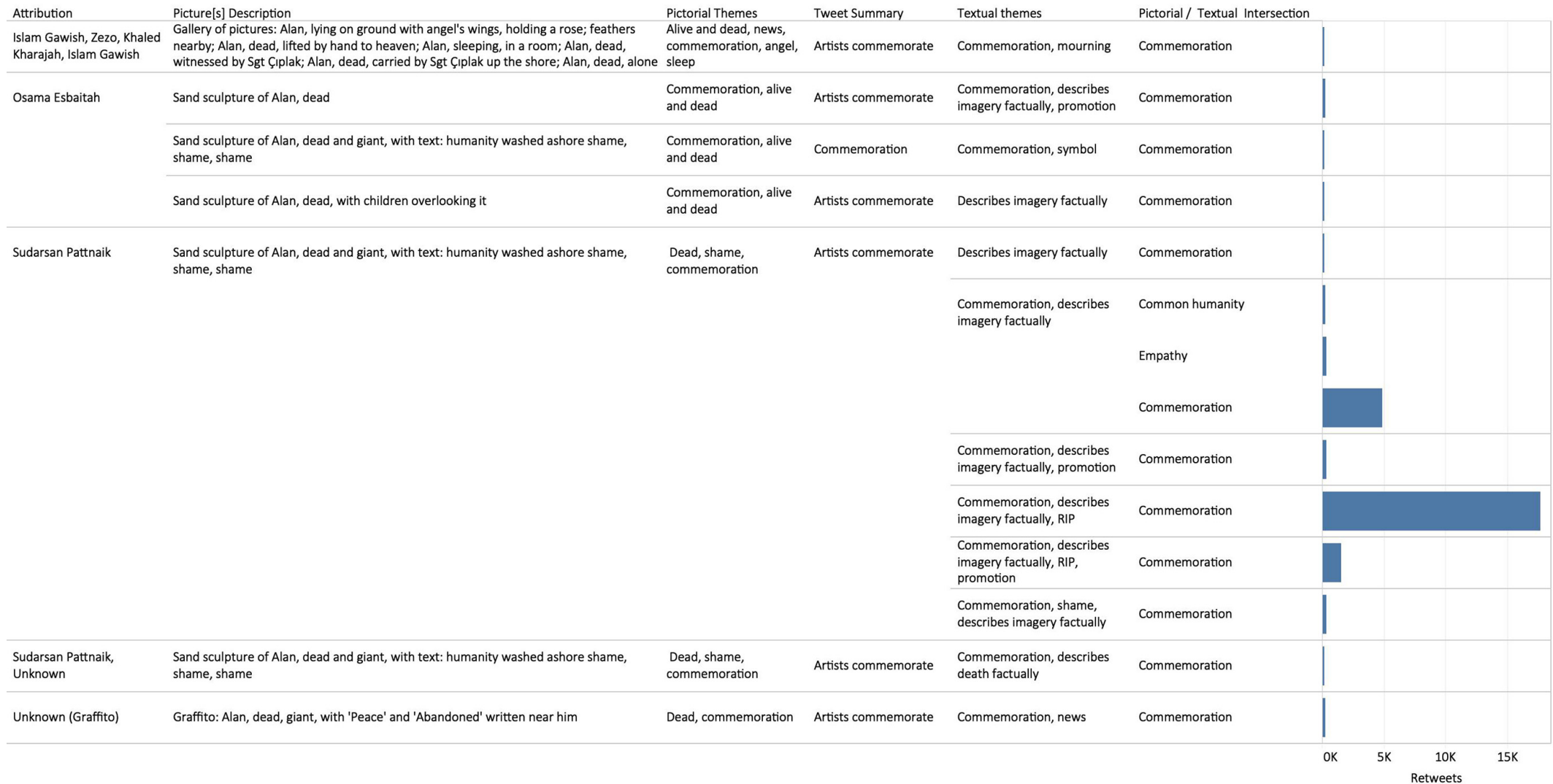
Alan commemorated (textual)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Alan in it? and Th-Commem. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The Th-Commem filter keeps Commemoration. The view is filtered on sum of Retweets, which ranges from 350 to 17,656.

Theme Chart 22: Alan commemorated textually, measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Alan commemorated (visual)



Sum of Retweets for each Pictorial / Textual Intersection broken down by Attribution, Picture[s] Description, Pictorial Themes, Tweet Summary and Textual themes. The data is filtered on Alan in it? and PicTh-Empathy. The Alan in it? filter keeps Present. The PicTh-Empathy filter keeps Commemoration. The view is filtered on sum of Retweets, which ranges from 157 to 17,656.

Theme Chart 23: Alan commemorated visually, measured via number of retweets. Chart developed in Tableau.

Tables

Table 1: Contents of Pulsar Data, exported to an Excel spreadsheet, with indications whether the content was retained for research and if so, the name used

Column Title	Description	Retained?
id	Identifying number for the post.	"ID"
search_id	Pulsar search query number (all "6709").	No
source	Domain source (all "Twitter").	No
application	Application used to post the tweet.	No
title	[Blank]	No
content	Textual content of the tweet, with shortened URLs pointing to the tweet.	"Tweet txt"
published_at	Time of publication, down to the second.	"Date"
parent_id	[All "0"]	No
language	Two-letter language code identifying language used.	"Lang"
url	Fully-expanded URL of the tweet.	Extracted for use with Webometric Analyst, but otherwise not retained (see section 3.4)
source_identifier	[Blank]	No
parent_source_identifier	[All "id:"]	No
domain_name	Domain source domain name (All "twitter.com").	No
topics	Pulsar tags identifying textual content.	No
image_tags	Pulsar tags identifying visual content.	No
tags	Pulsar bespoke tags ("Aylan" or "Aylan+" are the only two options).	No
sentiment	Sentiment score.	No
sentiment_class	Sentiment classification ("positive", "negative", "neutral", "not evaluable").	No
sentiment_by	Sentiment evaluation tool (all "Alchemy").	No
main_emotion	[Blank]	No
emotions	[Blank]	No
visibility	Pulsar-generated score to measure a post's impact, based in part upon PEI and AEI (Maravic, 2017; Benello, 2017c).	"Visibility"
pei	Potential Estimated Impressions: An aggregate of the number of times a tweet may have been seen by a user's followers in their Twitter feeds plus (potentially) the number of times it would have been seen by the followers of others who retweet it (Benello, 2017a).	No
aei	Actual Estimated Impressions: the "actual number of times" that a tweet has appears in a	"Impressions"

	timeline. This is approximately “11% of the PEI” and is “a much more realistic view of your audience’s behaviour” (Benello, 2017a). Judging from the varying numbers for accounts posting multiple tweets in the dataset, this number is generated algorithmically.	
buzz_location_city	City name. Attempt to identify location tweet vis-à-vis user_buzz_location_city and clues from tweet (see below).	No
buzz_location_country_code	Two-letter country code. Attempt to identify country vis-à-vis user_buzz_location_country_code and clues from tweet (see below).	No
buzz_location_latitude	Latitude coordinates. Attempt to identify physical location of tweet vis-à-vis user_buzz_location_latitude and clues from tweet (see below).	No
buzz_location_longitude	Longitude coordinates. Attempt to identify physical location of tweet vis-à-vis user_buzz_location_longitude and clues from tweet (see below).	No
user_buzz_location_city	City name. Location of user based upon user-supplied location in user bio. May struggle to differentiate between similar names (e.g., Manchester, UK and Manchester, New Hampshire), and may struggle if the user supplies false or outdated information.	No
user_buzz_location_country_code	Two-letter country code. This is based upon user-supplied information in user bio. Same caveats apply as above.	No
user_buzz_location_latitude	Latitude coordinates. Attempt to identify latitude based upon user-supplied information in user bio. Same caveats apply as above.	No
user_buzz_location_longitude	Longitude coordinates. Attempt to identify longitude based upon user-supplied information in user bio. Same caveats apply as above.	No
user_klout_score	Measurement of user’s social media influence based upon the user’s score from analytics firm Klout.com.	No
user_followers_count	Number of followers subscribed to user at time of tweet collection.	No
user_friends_count	Number of accounts the account follows.	No
user_gender	Gender identification, based upon user identification or estimate from account content.	No
user_bio	Text from the user’s own biography.	No
links_url	Expanded URLs of any links placed in tweet by user.	No
reaction_count	Number of times a tweet was retweeted.	“Retweets”
get_likes_count	[All “0”]	No
get_shares_count	[All “0”]	No
user_name	Name of user as supplied by user (e.g., “Donald J. Trump”)	“Username”

user_screen_name	Account name / URL (e.g., "realDonaldTrump")	No
user_source_id	User ID number.	No

Table 2: Number column

Content options	Description
[Integer]	Number for ordering purposes (ordering based upon descending number of retweets)

Table 3: Image column: this contains the image[s] appended to a post. Text is appended to the column in order to filter between different options

Textual content options	Description
Image (image appended)	A single image is appended to the post
Images (images appended)	Multiple images are appended to the post
Missing	Image content is missing

Table 4: Gross image parsers

Column	Query	Options	Description
Alan in it?	Does the tweet contain a picture of Alan?	Y	Alan is present
		N	Alan is not present
		Unknown	It is not clear whether the image of Alan is referenced
		-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Alive / Dead?		Alive	Alan is alive
		Dead	Alan is dead
		Alive / Dead	The tweet contains imagery of Alan both alive and dead
		-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing or the picture does not show Alan)
Demir?	Does the tweet contain a picture by, or influenced by, Nilüfer Demir?	Y	Yes
		N	No
		H	Haunting: the picture only makes sense because it would not have been comprehensible without the existence of Demir's photographs
		-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Family?	Does the tweet contain a family snapshot?	Y	Yes
		N	No
		-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Art?		Y	Yes

	Does the tweet contain artistic imagery?	N -	No Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Similar to	Does the tweet contain imagery similar to others in the dataset?	[integer]	Groups for overall thematic or compositional similarity

Table 5: Attributions, Family, and Demir filter columns. Given that there may be up to four images per tweet, each filter column is replicated four times

Column	Option	Description
Attrib [1, 2, 3, 4]	[Name or organisation]	Individual who made the picture / took the photograph, if identifiable. Otherwise, press agency identified. In the worst-case scenario, the attribution is set to “Unknown”
	-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Fam [1, 2, 3, 4]	Slide	Alan, happy, standing at the top of a blue slide
	Suit	Alan, standing in a fancy suit during a celebration
	w/ football	Alan, kicking a football
	w/ Ghalib (white shirt)	Alan, wearing a white shirt and with his brother Ghalib, both happy, with a white teddy
	w/ Ghalib (yellow shirt)	Alan, happy, wearing a yellow top and with his brother Ghalib
	w/ Ghalib and Abdullah	Alan, happy, with his brother Ghalib, both holding their father Abdullah’s hands
	-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)
Demir [1, 2, 3, 4]	Dem1	Alan, alone, lying on the beach. He is facing away
	Dem2	Alan, alone, lying on the beach. He is viewed low, at an oblique angle
	Dem3	Alan, lying on the beach, with two policemen standing over him
	Dem3Cip	A crop of Dem3, Alan, lying on the beach, with a single policeman (Sgt Mehmet Çıplak) standing over him
	Dem3Al	A further crop of De3, Alan, alone, lying on the beach
	Dem4	Sgt Çıplak carries Alan up the beach. Çıplak’s legs are together
	Dem5	Sgt Çıplak carries Alan further up the beach. Çıplak’s legs are spread apart
	Other	Seemingly based upon Demir’s photographs, but unclear which is the inspiration
	-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)

Table 6: Pictorial description column

Content options	Description
[Text]	Description of the picture[s] with repeated phrasing for searching and filtering, e.g., “Alan, alive and happy”, “crowd of people”, “holding sign”, “at a demonstration”

Table 7: Picture types column

Type	Description
Archival photo	Frequently black and white, this photograph reflects past events
Art	An artist or illustrator has rendered the picture
Family snap	A type of nonprofessional photograph, devoted to family subjects
Graphic design	Use of different fonts and colours, often alongside photographs
Journalism	A type of professional photograph. It is businesslike and unconcerned with aesthetic issues in its presentation of information
Letter	Text presented in the form of a letter
Map	A map of a country or region
Montage	A number of photographs placed together in one image-file
Newspaper	Representation of newspaper cover[s]
Nonprofessional photograph	Photographs taken by nonprofessionals in such a way that it does not hold to professional standards of colour, composition, or emotive content
Photoshop	A picture, the elements of which are taken from an assorted variety of sources and placed into a scene
Professional photograph	A photograph that adheres to professional standards of colour composition, and emotive content
Screenshot	Imagery taken directly from a screen
Text	A block of text rendered on the screen
Video still	A still from video footage. Standard elements can include: logos, tickertapes, video player interface widgets, blurred imagery, muddy colours, and letterbox formatting
Multiple	The tweet supplies multiple image types alongside the text
Unknown	The picture type cannot be differentiated adequately
-	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)

Table 8: The Individual, Group, Family, or Mass column

Initial	Name	Description
I	Individual	A single individual is shown
G	Group	More than one individual is shown; it is small enough that individual faces can be seen
F	Family	Groups with children; family connection is indicated by gestures of intimacy with specific adults or other children, such as holding hands or standing close by one another
M	Mass	Very large groups of people, to the point that individual faces cannot be seen
-	n/a	Not applicable (because the picture is missing)

Table 9: Pictorial themes columns, indicating the explicit presence of elements in the tweet's appended picture[s]

Column	Option	Description
Appeal	Appeal	Picture has text explicitly appealing for assistance or compassion
	Call to Action	Picture has text explicitly appealing for specific actions
	Other	Picture has text with very generic expressions of support
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Censure	Censure	Text within the picture marks people for doing or thinking something deemed offensive
	Cruelty	People depicted acting with cruelty towards one another
	Danger	The picture presents imagery or text warning of danger
	Duplicity	Contrasts behaviour of people: either outright hypocrisy, or merely self-contradiction
	Failure of humanity	The tweet contains picture[s] that imply via the imagery that humanity in general is at fault for the events represented
	Placing blame	Specific individuals, groups, institutions, or countries are singled out for having contributed directly to the crisis in general or Alan's death specifically
	Shame	Bad behaviour (moral or physical) is condemned
	Terrorism	Presence of a clear indication of terrorist activity
	Other	More vague implications of inappropriate physical or moral behaviour
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Child	Alive	Only living child[ren] present in the picture[s]
	Alive and Happy	Smiling child[ren] in the picture[s]
	Alive / Dead	Some of the children in the picture[s] are alive, whilst others are dead
	Dead	Only dead child[ren] present in the picture[s]
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)

Context	Boat	A boat is the significant focus
	Building	A building is the significant focus
	Comparison	The user present multiple pictures for the sake of comparison
	Context	The imagery presents general information about the current refugee crisis or similar past events
	Destruction	The focus is upon destruction of buildings
	Domestic	Context is a domestic setting
	Headshot	Image focusing upon head of figure, often a politician
	News	The focus is upon news elements in the picture[s]
	Politics	Politicians are the focus in the picture[s]
	Scale of the crisis	The sheet number of people in the refugee crisis is indicated
	Sign	Signs are prominently displayed in the picture[s]
	Sport	Sport is the focus for the picture[s]
	Other	Indicates the presence of unclear contexts or contexts not falling under other available options
	Vulnerability	Expresses a degree of vulnerability
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Crowd	Demonstration	A mass of people organised for a purpose
	Football	Football fans are the focus of the picture[s]
	Politicians	Politicians are the focus of the picture[s]
	Refugees	The presence of refugees is clearly indicated
	Volunteers	Volunteers helping refugees or stocking goods for refugees
	Other	Indicates the presence of unclear crowds or crowds not falling under other available options
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Empathy	Commemoration	Commemorates an event or life
	Common humanity	Suggests that people of different times, cultures, events, are essentially the same
	Held in arms	A figure holds a child in her/his arms (or, alternately, holds the child's hand)
	Mourning	The figures are mourning
	Support	There is an explicit statement of support for refugees or Alan in particular
	Witness	A figure is shown looking on, indicating that s/he acts as a witness to events
	Other	Indicates the presence of unclear expressions of empathy or expressions of empathy not falling under other available options
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Family	Childhood	
	Family	The focus is upon representation of a family
Spiritual	Angel	Elements of childhood are present, e.g., balloons, playing, sandcastles, toys

	Haunting	There is a ghost in the picture, or otherwise the picture makes a clear yet oblique reference to another picture
	Other	A supernatural element is present, but its nature is unclear
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)
Other	Parody	
	Shaking hands	
	Sleep	
	w/ Authority	
	-	Not applicable (this characteristic is not present or image is missing)

Table 10: Textual summaries and themes

Category	Option	Description
Affect	Affect	Emotional reactions
	Common humanity	Expressions that emphasise common concerns or needs
	Danger	Expressions of imminent danger
	Empathy	Expressions that attempt to invoke empathetic response
	Haunting	Explicit reference about how the image haunts people
	Heartbreaking	An affective comment that refers to a broken heart
	Inspirational	Praise for specific actions or public demonstrations of support
	Mourning	Reference to burying or mourning
	Warning	Raising of a concern
	Warsan Shire quote	Use of quote from the poet's "Home": "You have to understand / No one puts their child in a boat unless the water is safer than the land"
Appeal	Appeal	General assertion that action must be made
	Call to action	Specific demands to act or participate
Censure	Censure	Condemnation of attitudes or behaviour
	Duplicity	Contrast between stated values and behaviour
	Exposé	Revelation of surreptitious activity
	Failure of humanity	Highlights the terrible condition of the world and its citizens

	<p>Inadequate response of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arab world • Australia • Canada • EU • Turkey • USA • World 	People (particularly politicians) of country, region, or the world, condemned for their inadequate response to the refugee crisis
	Outrage	An extreme form of censure for particularly blameworthy behaviour
	Parody	A comment parodying politicians or other public figures
	Placing blame	An individual, group, or country is accused of having caused the crisis or of having caused Alan's death
	Shame	Explicit reference to shame
Commemoration	Commemoration	Paying honour to Alan's memory
	Artists commemorate	Artists or illustrators in particular are referenced commemorating Alan
	His name is Alan	A particular form of commemoration with a variant of this phrase. These appear to resist turning Alan into a symbol
	Remember him alive, not dead	Explicit comments highlighting the preference to use family snapshots of Alan, alive
Context	Context	Supplying information that is relevant to a broader understanding
	Comparison	Events, attitudes or other elements contrasted with one another
	Describes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death factually • Picture factually 	Description of event, or the picture accompanying the text, in a straightforward, factual manner
	Family	Explicit references to family members
	Kurdi's story isn't unique	A form of context that attempts to broaden the understanding of the crisis
	Leaving is a rational response	Highlights the intolerable conditions suffered by refugees in their home countries, and that fleeing is a very rational response to those conditions
	News	News media are mentioned, or tweet is used to update followers on the subject
	News specifically about Abdullah Kurdi: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is accused of being a smuggler • He describes how he lost his family • He is the sole survivor of the family • He speaks to the press 	Specific news stories related about Abdullah, the father of Alan Kurdi
	Politics	Politicians and political events are referenced

	Power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of imagery Of social media 	Explicit statement that an image is powerful; alternately, that social media is a powerful amplifier
	Scale of the crisis	An attempt to inform the viewer of the numbers involved in the refugee crisis
	The world ignores other deaths	Whilst the world mourns Alan, it has ignored the deaths of others equally worthy of consideration
Spiritual	Angel	Explicit reference to angels
	Religious	The tweet references a deity, or prayer
Support	Support	Explicit references that individuals support refugees
	Football club supports refugees	Football clubs announce measures to assist refugees
	Popular will	Size of demonstrations emphasised to suggest that supporting refugees is the majority view
	Volunteers helping	Instances of volunteers performing actions to help refugees
Other	Other	Expressions in the tweet that do not fit in other categories
	Promotion	Promotes a link to a story elsewhere
	RIP	Explicit reference to the phrase “Rest in Peace”
	Sleep	Explicit reference to sleeping, waking, resting
	Sport	Sport is referenced
	Symbol	Alan is viewed as a symbol

Table 11: Picture / Text Intersection, a simplified form of Barthes’ “relay”. The categories are not used; only the options are used in the intersection

Category	Option	Description
Affect	Affect	Imagery is viewed emotionally
	Common humanity	Imagery indicates common concerns or needs
	Empathy	Imagery inflects the meaning of the text towards greater empathy with the plight of refugees
	Inspirational	Otherwise unremarkable imagery is highlighted by the author for its inspirational content
	Mourning	The text is commemorative and is often mixed by imagery that emphasises loss
Appeal	Appeal	Text calling for assistance is combined with imagery that emphasises empathy
	Call to action	The imagery appears to be used as a catalyst to prompt the viewer into action
Censure	Censure	The picture is held up as evidence of wrongdoing
	Duplicity	A contrast is established between different acts: past and present, actions and words, reactions to different actors

	Failure of humanity	The text makes global condemnatory comments about Alan's death, suggesting that the accompanying imagery triggers an outpouring of affect
	Inadequate response	The imagery clarifies the inadequacy of the response to the refugee crisis
	Outrage	Expressions of outrage or offence, either because of the imagery or because of the story behind the imagery
	Parody	The text and accompanying imagery pokes fun at an individual, group, or organisation
	Placing blame	Some individual or institution is singled out for culpability for Alan's death or the crisis
	Warning	There is imminent danger due to unnoticed activities; almost exclusively used by people who claim that terrorists have slipped into the West posing as refugees
Commemoration	Commemoration	The imagery is a support for an expression of commemoration
Context	Context	Information presented about the broader refugee crisis
	Authority speaks	A public figure, shown in a headshot, makes a statement; the tweet does not take issue with the statement
	Comparison	A comparison is made between multiple pictures, or between imagery and the text, highlighting a significant problem
	Leaving is a rational response	Explanatory text coupled with powerful imagery drives home the notion that refugees have no option but to flee
	News	Imagery is presented as subordinate to the news item rather than as an emotive component to the story
	Power of imagery	Explicit reference to the power of the image to explain or provoke affect
	Scale of the crisis	Emphasis in text and imagery about numbers, destruction, or large, unhappy groups or people
Spiritual	Religious	Imagery contains supernatural elements, and the text emphasises religious elements
Support	Support	Explicit references to support in both pictures and text
	Popular will	Imagery showing crowds accompanying expressions in favour of refugees reflect the popular will to support them
Other	Other	The subject is wholly or mostly unrelated to the refugee crisis
	Evidence	The imagery is used as evidence for a claim made in the text
	Rest / Sleep	Heavy emphasis is placed on rest or sleep in text and imagery
	Unsure	The intent of the author is unclear

-	Not applicable (image is missing)
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