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## **World Press Photo in the face of the digital revolution. Competition for the 'quick eye' or slow construction of multimodal narratives?**

### **Abstract**

The article is an attempt to answer the questions: why and how, within the framework of World Press Photo, the current thinking about press photography, treated by the author as an important, effective and independent medium of social influence, is being re-evaluated. The aim of the article is to draw attention to the changes taking place in the World Press Photo competition, which, according to the author, are the result of the digital revolution taking place in the mediasphere. The author sees a change in the approach of the organisers and participants of the competition to the creation and presentation of photographic works. As it seems, the previous paradigm of the 'quick eye' is increasingly being replaced by a new, narrative way of depicting reality.

**Keywords:** Press photography, World Press Photo, Digital Revolution, Multimodality, Artificial Intelligence (AI).

### **World Press Photo w obliczu cyfrowej rewolucji. Konkurs na „szybkie oko” czy powolne budowanie narracji multimodalnych?**

### **Abstrakt**

Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytania: dlaczego i w jaki sposób, w ramach World Press Photo, dokonuje się obecnie przewartościowania dotychczasowego myślenia o fotografii prasowej, traktowanej przez autora jako ważne, skuteczne i niezależne medium społecznego oddziaływania. Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na zmiany zachodzące w konkursie World Press Photo, które zdaniem autora są efektem rewolucji cyfrowej, dokonującej się w mediasferze. Autor dostrzega zmianę w podejściu organizatorów oraz uczestników konkursu do tworzenia i prezentowania prac fotograficznych. Jak się wydaje, dotychczasowy paradygmat „szybkiego oka” coraz częściej zostaje zastąpiony nowym, narracyjnym sposobem obrazowania rzeczywistości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Fotografia prasowa, World Press Photo, rewolucja cyfrowa, multimodalność, sztuczna inteligencja (AI).

## Introduction

On 18 April 2024, the media reported the winning Photograph of the Year – World Press Photo of the Year – in the World Press Photo Award, now in its 67th year. The author of the winning photo was a 39-year-old Palestinian, Mohammed Salem, who works for the Reuters agency on a daily basis and has been documenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for years, which escalated on 7 October 2023, following a series of terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel<sup>1</sup>.

Photo of the Year by Mohammed Salem shows a Palestinian woman named Inasa Abu Maamar. It encompasses the white cloth-wrapped corpse of a five-year-old girl, her niece, killed by Israeli rocket fire on the Nasser Hospital in Khan Junis, located in the Gaza Strip. 36-year-old Inasa, wearing a traditional hijab and an earth-length gown, is bent over kneeling on the stone floor of the morgue, huddled over the body of her dead child. The description to the photo reads that for Salem the photograph has a special meaning – a few days before this dramatic scene was captured, he became a happy father<sup>2</sup>.

The woman's tunic in ultramarine, the mustard-coloured embroidered shawl and the white linen sheet in which the girl's corpse is wrapped create a coolly coloured photo-image. The sophisticated formal play adds to the emotional charge, which in any case has great impact due to the subject matter of the photograph. The award-winning photograph by Mohammed Salem should be seen as a medium of art and a medium of social communication. It is an example of contemporary press photography, for which the World Press Photo, the world's largest photographic competition, has been an important reference point for several decades.

It is worth taking a look at the evolution of the competition over recent editions, as well as at the award-winning photographs themselves. For one can get the impression that both Photo of The Year, as well as other awarded photographic works within the framework of the World Press Photo Award, and the Digital Contest, which was singled out in 2017, highlight tendencies involving a re-evaluation of the hitherto thinking about press photography, photography as a medium, and even the entire, broadly defined mediasphere.

This article is an attempt to answer the question of why and how, within World Press Photo, a fundamental evolution of media messages is taking place, increasingly multi-modal, an important part of contemporary media culture. In the search for an answer to the question of the reasons behind the changes taking place within the photo competition, the issues of globalisation, the digital revolution, media convergence, the re-evaluation of the journalistic profession, and the development of artificial intelligence will be addressed. Subsequent chapters will therefore be devoted to media

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<sup>1</sup> World Press Photo, *A Palestinian Woman Embraces the Body of Her Niece*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2024/Mohammed-Salem-POY/1> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

studies issues: those that examine the social impact of transmitters, i.e. mass media, with a particular focus on the photographic medium<sup>3</sup>.

## Methodology

The article is based on the popular desktop research method, *desk research*, i.e. the analysis of found data<sup>4</sup>. This makes it possible to refer to specific examples, in this case to the competition regulations of successive editions of World Press Photo, which have undergone numerous transformations over the years.

Photography is treated as a medium of art and a medium of social influence. The method of analysing the photographic image, based on the semiotic theory of information, allows us to see photography as an important, effective and independent tool of mass communication<sup>5</sup>. According to the semiotic theory of information, the sender, i.e. the author of the photograph, encodes information in a conscious creative act, which is then decoded by the recipient. The reading of the meanings hidden in the photographic image takes place on successive levels of information: syntactic, pragmatic, semantic. The interrelationships between signs – the means of photographic expression – are explored at the syntactic level. Pragmatics refers to the purpose of the broadcast message, while semantics is responsible for reading the symbols hidden in the photograph<sup>6</sup>.

The competition photographs cited above reveal a media studies perspective. They are treated as information, according to Marshall McLuhan's motto that *the medium is the message*, or, translated into Polish, '*the medium is the message*'<sup>7</sup>. This means that the content of the message depends on its form, i.e. that the semantic content of a photograph depends on formal means, such as chiaroscuro, colour, perspective, format or depth of field, among others.

## World Press Photo in the „age of acceleration”

The Dutch academy World Press Photo has worked to become one of the most important photographic events continuously since 1955. The annual awards ceremony,

<sup>3</sup> T. Goban-Klas, *Media. Historia i współczesność*, Jagiellonian University, [at: [http://users.uj.edu.pl/~usgoban/files/media\\_podstawowe\\_problemy.pdf](http://users.uj.edu.pl/~usgoban/files/media_podstawowe_problemy.pdf)], p. 10 (accessed on: 19.03.2025); quoted by M. Janiak, *Fotografia jako medium sztuki i społecznego oddziaływania. On metaphysics in Ireneusz Żejdździłka's photographs from the album Sedimentation*, „Media-Business-Culture” 2024, No. 1(16), Gdańsk, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> M. Makowska, *Analiza danych zastanych. A guide for students*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2012, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Treppa., *Image as a medium for the initiation of mystery*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 73–74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> M. McLuhan, *Understanding media. Human extensions*, Wydawnictwo Naukowo-Techniczne, Warszawa 2004, pp. 37–55.

of which the World Press Photo of the Year is the most important, is held in the historic Oude Kerk building in Amsterdam and has brought together the press photography community for nearly 70 years<sup>8</sup>. For the 67th edition of the competition (in 2024), an international jury selected, out of some 60,000 photos, the best in specific formal categories: single (single photo), *stories* (series of 4–10 photos), *long-term project* (long-term photographic projects, shot over a period of at least three calendar years, with a total of 24–30 photos) and the so-called *open format*, where “visual journalism is welcome” and participants can create multimedia forms of media in which the dominant part is “the image made with the lens”<sup>9</sup>.

In the last two years, the old thematic categories have been replaced by new ones, subordinated to strict formal rather than content rules, as before. More space has been devoted to multimodal forms, in which the photographic image corresponds with other elements of the visual arts (graphics, photomontage, video), as well as word and sound. As recently as 2022, the categories contemporary *issues*, *nature*, *people*, sports, *spot news* and environment co-existed among these *long-term projects*. The latter appeared for the first time two years ago, replacing daily *life*<sup>10</sup>.

The Digital Storytelling Contest, created in 2017, which was previously part of the World Press Photo competition under the name Multimedia Contest as one of the so-called *open-format* categories, has undergone an interesting evolution. It is worth mentioning that in the 68th edition of the contest, planned for 2025, the *open-format* was suspended due to organisational problems related to the exposure of works<sup>11</sup>.

The Digital Contest created four subcategories: *immersive storytelling* (for projects published on the Internet with the proviso that the projects will have a multimodal form, combining photography or film with graphics, text, animation or sound), *innovative storytelling* (for new, original visual forms, e.g. mobile applications, films made with spherical cameras), and two reserved for filmmakers: *long form* (video up to 30 minutes) and *short form* (video up to 10 minutes)<sup>12</sup>.

As part of the search for an answer to the question about the reasons for these thorough changes in the regulations of the World Press Photo competition, it is worth looking at the processes taking place in the whole, broadly defined, mediasphere. Here, it seems that globalisation, understood as the tendency to tighten social, cultural

<sup>8</sup> World Press Photo, *About us*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/about-us> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>9</sup> M. Luśtyk, *Digital Storytelling Contest, or what you need to know about the new World Press Photo competition*. Fotopolis, [at:] <https://www.fotopolis.pl/opinie/analizy/27933-digital-storytelling-contest-czyli-wszystko-co-musisz-wiedziec-o-nowym-konkursie-multimedialnym-world-press-photo> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>10</sup> World Press Photo, *About us*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/about-us> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>11</sup> World Press Photo, *2025 Contest: Frequently asked questions*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/contest/2025/frequently-asked-questions> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>12</sup> World Press Photo, *About us*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/about-us> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

and economic ties, as well as treating the world as a public whole thanks to the development of new technologies<sup>13</sup>, is at the root. It is globalisation that has contributed to the erosion of the old media system as a result of a fundamental re-evaluation of the role of the media.

The phenomenon of globalisation processes is metaphorically referred to as the 'shrinking of space-time'. The term signifies 'a deep feeling that permeates us to the core', and results 'from the continuous tightening of the bonds of interdependence, above all, but not only, between economic actors. Interdependence means mutual dependence: not only do I depend on someone, but at the same time he depends on me'<sup>14</sup>.

The concept of globalisation is particularly relevant to the media sphere, as modern technologies, such as the Internet, have shortened the time in which communication processes take place. Information arrives almost instantaneously from the remotest parts of the globe and beyond, as exemplified by the 'live' broadcasts of research missions from the International Space Station, orbiting the Earth at an altitude of approximately 400 km<sup>15</sup>. As a result, there is an impression of a shortening of time and space, a phenomenon symptomatic enough, it would seem, to define our reality, which could be described as an 'age of acceleration'.

It seems that it was precisely these processes that forced the organisers of World Press Photo to change the rules of the competition. They introduced numerous innovations, as if moving with the times, and at the same time attempted to create an alternative media space, in which, although the medium of photography still plays a dominant role, it is redefined and adapted to the current expectations of broadcasters and recipients of this medium.

## The revolution „before our eyes”

More than 60 years after the publication of Gutenberg's *Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan's notion of the 'global village', in which, in order to survive, one must learn to use information<sup>16</sup>, still seems relevant. This is *a sine qua non*, because in a global culture, information is a fundamental element of social bonding. It should be emphasised that the "use of information"<sup>17</sup> refers not only to the recipients of the message, but

<sup>13</sup> M. Ziółkowski, *The place of the Polish society in the world capitalist system. Practical and theoretical dilemmas*, „Culture and Society” 1998, No. 42(4), p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> P. Dembinski, *Globalization – challenge and opportunity*, *Globalization*, J. Klich (ed.), Wydawnictwo Profesjonalnej Szkoły Biznesu, Kraków 2001; quoted in K. Stankiewicz, *Globalisation and World Culture*, [on:] *The Rationalist*, <https://www.racionalista.pl/kk.php/s,4167> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>15</sup> ISS Tracker, [at:] [https://isstracker.pl/iss/na-zywo#google\\_vignette](https://isstracker.pl/iss/na-zywo#google_vignette) (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>16</sup> M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1962.

<sup>17</sup> A. Kudłaszyk, A. Małkiewicz, R. Karpiński, *Mass media w systemie komunikacji społecznej w Polsce*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1995, p. 27; quoted

also to the sender who, in a conscious creative act, encodes the information, taking into account the possibilities and limitations, opportunities and threats that result from the use of a given medium – a tool of social influence.

In relation to the medium of photography, including the World Press Photo competition, given the ongoing digital revolution, whose watershed events were the emergence of the Internet and the associated digitalisation of media (including photography), it is worth recalling the words of Umberto Eco. Thirty years ago, the Italian semiologist expressed the view that the degree of sophistication of the use of a new medium – the Internet – responsible for the transfer of information, would become the key factor defining a person's membership of a given social class. According to this theory, the lowest class will be the so-called digital illiterates. Their source of information will mainly be traditional media: radio and television. The middle class will be formed by the so-called dignitariat. New media, such as the computer and the Internet, will be used by members of this group for work and entertainment. The upper class, the so-called cognitariat, will be formed by people whose programming ability will enable them to create media messages. They will thus be at the very top of the ladder as the 'multimedia aristocracy', capable of programming society and creating effective mechanisms to control it<sup>18</sup>.

The development of artificial intelligence observed in recent years, a sign of which was the entry into general use of GPT chat (in 2022), has given Umberto Eco's statement, at least to some extent, a prophetic character. This is confirmed, moreover, by the World Press Photo competition photographs, whose authors, established photojournalists, are increasingly choosing to use various digital editing techniques, combining the photographic image (taken through the lens) with graphics, video, text or sound. This was legitimised by the decision of the 2017 competition organisers to separate new competition categories, including the aforementioned *open format*, and, above all, the establishment of the independent *Digital Contest*. Both actions seem to be a consequence of the technological advances seen in photography in recent years.

With the advent of modern digital cameras, so-called 'mirrorless cameras', as well as cameras installed in smartphones, taking photographs has become easier, faster and cheaper than before. As a result of the new technologies, the profession of photographer has been re-evaluated and its work devalued due to increasing automation. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the profession of journalism<sup>19</sup>. There, too, the digital revolution is at the heart of the changes, resulting in a more dynamic flow

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in M. Szast, *Global village as a new reality of the XXI century*, [at:] <https://www.pedkat.pl/images/czasopisma/pk8/art25.pdf> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>18</sup> M. Wiczorek-Tomaszewska, *Audiovisual cultural texts in media and information education*, [at:] <http://www.ap.krakow.pl/ptn/ref2006/Wiczorek.pdf> (accessed on: 19.03.2025); quoted by W. Kowalik, *Wykluczenie cyfrowe jako nowa płaszczyzna podziałów w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, „Studia Humanistyczne AGH” 2009, No. 7.

<sup>19</sup> M. Gruchola, *Artificial intelligence technology in journalism and the journalist's deanthropocentrism perspective*, [at:] <https://repozytorium.kul.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/a87ac263-d4d-c-441d-aa25-2c6ada9df4e1/content> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

of information. The emergence of advanced tools has made multitasking possible, resulting in cost optimisation, including, among other things, a reduction in the number of full-time positions in newspaper, radio or television editorial offices.

The phenomenon of the changes taking place is so pronounced that a discourse on the future of photography as a medium of art and a medium of social influence has emerged over the past decade<sup>20</sup>. The photographic community has been discussing the role of photography in the modern world with a keen eye on technological changes, including those resulting from the development of artificial intelligence<sup>21</sup>. A computer, based on advanced algorithms, intervenes in the process of creating a photograph in a way not previously possible. The processor installed in the digital camera can generate the effect of a blurred background or, conversely, a perfect depth of field within a fraction of a second, regardless of the aperture value, focal length or size of the camera sensor. For most digital camera users (mostly smartphone-embedded cameras), what matters is the easy result, i.e. taking the best possible photo as quickly as possible. For them, the development of AI (*Artificial Intelligence*) based technology seems to be a positive phenomenon, related to saving time and money – an average camera in a budget smartphone may seem good enough.

However, it is worth looking at the AI problem from a different point of view. The computer, installed in the camera, produces an image of the world that is not true, but only based on reality. Such a picture escapes the classical definition of photography, which literally means drawing (*gr. graphein*) with light (*gr. photo*)<sup>22</sup>. To a large extent, modern photography is based not on light and the technical craftsmanship of the photographer, but on modern algorithms. This is because a computer, using predefined settings, can create, for example, the illusion of a bright room or the surface of the moon. In the latter case, the camera automatically detects an object resembling an Earth satellite and overlays it with textures resembling the characteristic craters<sup>23</sup>.

The digital revolution, epitomised by the development of artificial intelligence, is taking place, nomen omen, “before our eyes” and is undoubtedly affecting the medium of photography, including the world’s largest photographic competition, the World Press Photo Award. Given the galloping changes under which photography has become easier and more commonplace than ever before, where traditional photographic techniques have become a thing of the past, such a state of affairs seems fully justified.

<sup>20</sup> K. Aszyk-Treppa, *Do digital technology and artificial intelligence benefit photography as an art medium?*, “Media-Business-Culture” 2024, No. 2(17), pp. 139–164.

<sup>21</sup> M. Demartin, *Selfie – narcissistic image creation online or a modern notion of aesthetics in photography?*, “Media Business Culture” 2017, No. 2(3), pp. 103–126.

<sup>22</sup> I. Maciusowicz, *A brief history of ,drawing with light’. The evolution of the role of photography and its position in relation to new technologies*, “Open Edition Journals” 2023, No. 23, p. 246.

<sup>23</sup> D. Miśta, *Space scandal with photos taken by Samsung smartphones*, [at:] <https://futurebeat.pl/newsroom/kosmiczna-afeta-ze-zdjeciami-robionymi-przez-smartfony-samsunga/z1246d1> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).



## World Press Photo as a new diagetic space?

As a result of communication processes, the role of the medium of photography, including press photography, has been transformed. In the days before the digital revolution, the value of press photography depended on the photojournalist's ability to be in the right place at the right time. What mattered was the reflex needed to capture a historic moment on film. After all, photography was to fulfil the primary function of the media: to inform. Its task was to inform, as quickly as possible, as many people as possible about a specific event. This approach resulted from the specific nature of the media of the time, including press photography. Photojournalists often used the so-called "decisive moment", the *punctum* of place and time, which was the key to taking a memorable photograph<sup>24</sup>.

A contemporary example of the use of the Bressonian *decisive moment* (in French, *images à la sauvette*, which should literally be translated as 'images on the run'<sup>25</sup>) is a photograph by Doug Mills (The New York Times) from 2023, showing a bloodied Donald Trump, running for the 47th President of the United States, at his rally, in Pennsylvania, making a gesture of a raised, clenched fist, against a background of the American flag<sup>26</sup>. The phenomenon of the photo is that it was taken literally seconds after the attempt on the Republican politician's life. The photograph went viral on the internet within hours. It was viewed by hundreds of millions of internet users worldwide. This simple but undoubtedly symbolic message, which is so clear thanks to the photographer's skilful use of the context of place and time, essentially epitomises the classic school of photojournalism, where, in addition to the photographer's excellent technique, what counts is his or her "quick eye".

However, statements by the organisers of the competition, as well as an analysis of the awarded photographs from the last seven editions of the World Press Photo Award (i.e. after the changes in 2017, between 2018 and 2024) allow us to formulate the conclusion that this 'quick eye' is increasingly being replaced by a new way of depicting reality.

In 2017, Lars Boering, managing director of World Press Photo, gave an insight into the future of the competition. At the time, he said that he was aware that photographers were increasingly using photographic experimentation, for example by multiplying multiple frames or arranging stories<sup>27</sup>. As an example, Boering cited Christina de Mid-

<sup>24</sup> H. Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1952.

<sup>25</sup> H. Cartier-Bresson, *Images à la sauvette*, Verve, Paris 1952.

<sup>26</sup> The New York Times, Doug Mills, *Times Photographer at Trump Rally: 'I Just Kept Doing My Job'*, [at:] <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/14/insider/doug-mills-trump-rally-shooting.html> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>27</sup> M. Luśtyk, *Digital Storytelling Contest, or what you need to see about the new World Press Photo competition*, Fotopolis, [at:] <https://www.fotopolis.pl/opinie/analizy/27933-digital-storytelling-contest-czyli-wszystko-co-musisz-wiedziec-o-nowym-konkursie-multimedialnym-world-press-photo> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).



del's *Afronauts* series<sup>28</sup>. The photojournalist recreates a story from 1964, when Edward Makuka, a Zambian teacher initiated a space programme to send the first African into space. The photo book tells a fictionalised story, recreated from de Middel's imaginings, and includes maps, letters and drawings in addition to traditional photographs.

Another example is the multimedia work *War is personal*, made in 2023 in Ukraine. The author, Yulia Kochetova, created a kind of photojournalism in the form of a personal diary to depict "the harsh reality of war in the subjective experience of the photographer"<sup>29</sup>. To do so, she used not only photographic images, but also graphics, poetry and music.

The organisers of World Press Photo have decided to meet the expectations of contemporary artists by supporting and rewarding them for the best projects that have been published online. Significantly, the rules of the new competition, as in the past, require participants to certify that they are practising photojournalists. Boering added that the jury will not support manipulation and will not reward false stories, and that the Digital Storytelling Contest aims to create "the photographic equivalent of so-called creative non-fiction, which uses fiction techniques to describe true events"<sup>30</sup>.

This contemporary form of illustrating the world admittedly retains its informative character, as evidenced by Boering's words about the photographic equivalent of 'creative non-fiction'<sup>31</sup>. What's more, the competition's jury explicitly opposes the creation of made-up stories (i.e. de facto *fake news*); it also retains the point in the rules that requires participants to be active photojournalists. On the other hand, the new fictional vision opens up space for the creation of narratives, including not infrequently, as the competition entries so far have shown, multimodal narratives, i.e. narratives that are a fusion of image, film, word and sound<sup>32, 33</sup>.

The new form of depicting reality brings to mind the so-called 'diagetic space' – a term from the dictionary of cinematic terminology, denoting 'imaginings planned by the script writer and then reconstructed as narrative facts in the thought processes of the film viewer. The diegetic space encompasses everything that the viewer considers as presented in the audiovisual message, taking place in the fiction of the depicted world'<sup>34</sup>. *Diagesis*, according to its Greek root, means "detailed narrative", in turn the adjective "diagetic" is synonymous with "narrative", i.e. one that constitutes – contains – some kind of narrative<sup>35</sup>. In the World Press Photo competition, a new form

<sup>28</sup> Ch. de Middel, *Afronauts*, [at:] <http://www.lademiddel.com/the-afonauts-1.html> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>29</sup> World Press Photo, *War Is Personal*, [at:] <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2024/Julia-Kochetova-OPFA/1> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> A. Dudziak, *Diagetic space of audiovisual social advertising*, "East European Review" 2013, No. 4, pp. 305–315.

<sup>33</sup> K. Zdanowicz-Cyganiak, *Digital storytelling – the art of sharing a story*, "Perspektywy Wychowania" 2017, No. 2(17), p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

of depicting reality becomes apparent as a tendency to build multi-modal narratives, and as a fashion for *storytelling*, manifested in so-called *storytelling*<sup>36</sup>.

Some of the photographic series awarded at the World Press Photo, such as the aforementioned *Afronauts* by Christina de Middel, bring to mind the notion of the 'sensitive narrator'. It was to its role in contemporary culture that Olga Tokarczuk dedicated her 2018 Nobel lecture. The Polish writer, in the context of her own literary oeuvre, spoke of the need for a 'fourth-person' narrative, which would not be limited to grammatical procedures, but would attempt to bring together multi-person narratives, relating to multiple characters, as well as going deeper, allowing us to describe reality in the way that the author of Genesis did when describing the biblical vision of the creation of the world ('In the beginning was the Word [...]')<sup>37</sup>.

In this context, a 'responsive', multi-person narrator seems to be present in some World Press Photo Award photographic series, including in the *Stories* category, as well as in the Digital Storytelling Contest. This is evidenced by the tendency of photojournalists to create multithreaded stories through series of photographs instead of single photographs, as well as by the way they depict stories, which increasingly resembles a kind of arranged documentary rather than neutral photojournalism devoid of authorial additions. This kind of "counterpart to creative non-fiction" tells authentic events in a non-literal and ambiguous way, for example through the use of metaphor, symbol or understatement.

"Sensitive narratives" would, according to Tokarczuk, reduce the chaos caused by information noise<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, diagetic forms of representing reality in the photographic image, described by the organisers of World Press Photo as 'fiction', could prove to be a recipe for *information overload* – a phenomenon typical of 21st century global media culture<sup>39</sup>.

Olga Tokarczuk referred to Aristotle in The Tender Narrator: "Fiction is always some kind of truth"<sup>40</sup>. A photojournalist's fictional vision, told according to his or her own authorial concept of depicting reality, may show less manipulative potential than works made from start to finish using artificial intelligence. Photographs maintained in the spirit of *diagnosis* seem in line with Plato's epistemological vision in the myth of the cave<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, the investigation of truth, as in the Greek philosopher, takes place at successive levels of information, through its gradual discovery, or decoding.

<sup>36</sup> K. Aszyk-Treppa, Z. Treppa, *New cultural models in World Press Photo and family issues*, "Horyzonty Wychowania" 2020, No. 19(49), p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> O. Tokarczuk, *Nobel speech by Olga Tokarczuk*, The Noble Foundation, [at:] <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2019/12/tokarczuk-lecture-polish.pdf> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> J. Zieliński, *Information overload in the contemporary human educational process*, Culture-Przemiany-Edukacja, [at:] [file:///Users/mikolajjaniak/Downloads/7.Zielinski%20\(2\).pdf](file:///Users/mikolajjaniak/Downloads/7.Zielinski%20(2).pdf) (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>40</sup> O. Tokarczuk, *Nobel speech by Olga Tokarczuk*, The Noble Foundation, [at:] <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2019/12/tokarczuk-lecture-polish.pdf> (accessed on: 19.03.2025).

<sup>41</sup> Plato, *The State*, transl. W. Witwicki, Antyk Publishing House, Kęty 2003, pp. 220–224.

## Summary

Press photography seems to highlight trends typical of contemporary media culture as a whole. These are largely dictated by the technological revolution: the acceleration of information transfer and the multiplicity of media messages.

Based on the changes made to the rules of the World Press Photo Award, the creation of a new Digital Contest in 2017, and the press statements given by the World Press Photo organisers about its future, it is clear that one of the world's largest photo competitions has seen a shift in its approach to the creation and presentation of photographic work. Increasingly, photojournalists are choosing to use multimodal forms. In the competition photographs, the creators make use of individual experiences, introducing an element of narrative into their work. Press photography is thus becoming a new diagetic space.

In global culture, faced with the problem of *fake news*, especially AI-generated images, the so-called 'quick eye' formula has been devalued. The competition rules replaced the old thematic categories with formal ones, thus subordinating the content of the photographic image to its form. Photojournalism done in the *storytelling* formula must, under penalty of disqualification, refer to facts, but the mode of depiction may include a 'fiction' element. This makes some reportage a kind of arranged documentary – 'the photographic equivalent of creative non-fiction'.

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