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Empathetic storytelling in reportage photography by Ryszard Kapuściński: image, text, context

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Introduction: Ryszard Kapuściński's reportage photography

Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007) is widely known all around the world as the author of literary reportage books on Africa, South America, and Asia (mainly the Middle East and the former USSR). However, his legacy is not only literary, as he also left behind an interesting body of photographic work. Kapuściński published in print just a small percentage of his photographs. At first, he illustrated his reportage books with his photos (e.g. *Czarne gwiazdy / Black Stars* [1963], *Jeszcze dzień życia / Another Day of Life* [1976]), then for some reason he abandoned this practice¹ and a couple of decades later his photography returned in the form of two original photo albums: *Z Afryki / From Africa* (2000) and *Ze świata / From the World* (2008). These publications constitute the material base for the following analysis.

¹ Various hypotheses appear in the studies about the reasons for such a decision – from technical issues (the quality of the equipment, films, and print) to world view and artistic issues (“intuitive opposition to the primacy of visuality”, “belief in the inadequacy of the visual code in contextualizing the text”, see: Siewior, 2012, pp. 179–198), however, it is hardly possible to verify them.

In general, the reporter's photographs gathered in a rich archive² are the record of his experiences while performing the tasks of the foreign correspondent of the Polish Press Agency (PAP), but the few of them which were published also played another role: they became a public communiqué³, a visual relation about the events the author had witnessed and decided to report, in parallel with his documentary texts. Like any relation, the pictures, together with accompanying captions, encoded not only the states of affairs but also individualized interpretation of the presented facts and the author's intentions underlying the decision to show this and not another aspect of reality in one and not another way.

1. Interpretation of the world in photography – theoretical remarks

The problem of individualization or subjectification of photography drew the attention of researchers representing various humanities and social sciences. Pierre Bourdieu wrote about this issue as follows:

Thus, it is commonly agreed that photography can be seen as the model of veracity and objectivity: "Any work of art reflects the personality of its creator", says the *Encyclopédie française*. In fact, photography captures an aspect of reality which is only ever the result of an arbitrary selection and, consequently, of a transcription; among all the qualities of the object, the only ones retained are the visual qualities which appear for a moment and from one sole viewpoint. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 73)

French sociologist, philosopher of culture and photographer Jean Baudrillard questioned the very objectivity of photography:

The miracle of photography, of its so-called objective image, is that it reveals a radically non-objective world. It is a paradox that the lack of objectivity of the world is disclosed by the photographic lens (*Fr.* objectif). Analysis and reproduction (*Fr.* ressemblance) are of no help in solving this problem. The technique of photography takes us beyond the replica into the domain of the *trompe l'oeil*. Through its unrealistic play of visual techniques, its slicing of reality, its immobility, its silence, and its phenomenological reduction of movements, photography affirms itself as both the purest and the most artificial exposition of the image. (Baudrillard, 1999; emphasis mine)

Although it is difficult to agree with such a firm stance about "non-objectivity" and "optical illusion", which is often true for fine art photography but rather questionable for documentary photography, Baudrillard's opinion draws attention to an issue that may easily escape the attention: the very technique of image

² The description of Kapuściński's photographic archive with almost ten thousand photos, as well as a discussion of the circumstances of the publication of just a few of them, can be found in the afterword to the album *Ze świata / From the World*, written by I. Wojciechowska, who was the impresario and maintainer of this photo archive (Wojciechowska, 2008).

³ On the difference between private and public photography, see: Goffman, 1976.

preservation influences the outcome which no longer is simply a piece of objective reality. The matter does not end there. Next steps to make the picture “public” (Goffman, 1976, p. 78) can also be considered as consecutive stages of the subjectification in the way of presenting the world: 1) the selection of a particular photo, 2) the choice of a medium for publishing (a photo album, a book, a magazine, an exhibition, the internet etc.), 3) the decision about context of the publication and 4) giving the photo a caption or a title. Having passed all these stages, the photo can be interpreted as an author’s *communiqué* and sometimes as a story about events perceived from a particular point of view and conveyed in the “language of images” (Feininger, 2012, p. 427) or multimodally, i.e. both via images and accompanying words⁴.

1.1. Storytelling in photography: understanding against the background of culture

The interpretability of photographs in terms of their storytelling potential has attracted the attention of researchers for decades. They point out that the reading of photography consists of inferring from various premises suggested by what is visible in the image and the context in which it is presented. In the 1970s, the sociologist Erving Goffman observed that in the picture: “Narrative-like action is to be read from what is seen, a before and after are to be inferred” (Goffman, 1976, pp. 83–84). The contemporary researcher of the social aspects of visual communication, Lars Lundsten, distinguished four levels of interpretation of the visual message: “object level”, “fact level”, “synthetic level” and “illocutionary level”, and stated that: “All four levels are socially constructed through conventions, i.e. they rely on the cultural context” (Lundsten, 2007, p. 293); “Such meanings are invisible to outsiders but taken for granted by insiders. There is an obvious danger that such meanings will never be brought into discussion” (Lundsten, 2007, p. 303).

The meanings “taken for granted” by members of a given cultural community are based on collective, intersubjectively shared interpretations of reality embedded in semiotic systems of their culture, including language – the most important of them. The role of this implicit, culture-dependent common knowledge (Tomasello, 2002) or “common ground” (van Dijk, 2003) in interpreting the message – quite well described when it comes to verbal communication – can also be relevant in visual communication. In other words, the author’s “Self” in the photographic work can be established not only as an individual but also as a representative of a certain culture and a depository of its values and stereotypes. As Alù and Hill stated: “Any form of visual representation is often

⁴ As Wolny-Zmorzyński stated: “The art of photography is the interpretation of the world and showing it by the author of the photo in such a way that the recipient thinks about what they read and what conclusions the photojournalist encourages them to draw” (Wolny-Zmorzyński, 2007, p. 40; transl. mine).

less realistic than it seems; it distorts rather than reflects social reality. The process of distortion is itself evidence of specific phenomena: mentalities, ideologies and identities. In other words, pictures testify to the mental and metaphorical ‘image’ of the Self and/or of the Other (Burke)” (Alù and Hill, 2018, p. 1, emphasis mine).

In the case of Kapuściński’s reportages, the main axis of the division between “Self” and “Other” were cultural differences:

The theme of the “Stranger” or “Other” has obsessed and fascinated me for a very long time. In 1956, I made my first long journey [...], and from that moment to the present day, I have been concerned with Third World issues, and thus with Asia, Africa and Latin America [...]. I mention all this because here I would like to sketch [...] not a portrait of the Other in general, in abstraction, but a picture of my Other, the one I have met in native Indian villages in Bolivia, among nomads in Sahara, on in the crowds bewailing the death of Khomeini on the streets of Teheran. What is his world outlook, his view of the world, his view of Others – his view of me, for example? After all, not only is he an Other to me, but I am an Other for him, too. (Kapuściński, 2018, pp. 53–54)

The reporter, like Bronisław Malinowski before him, set himself the goal of “translating [...] from culture to culture” (Kapuściński, 2008, p. 21). A key feature of this role of a translator of cultures, as Kapuściński understood it, was a special attitude towards the subject of the description, which is well summarized in the formula proposed by Magdalena Horodecka – “empathetic narrative” (Horodecka, 2010; see also Wysocka, 2016 and 2021). Interestingly, empathy researchers considered the “self–other differentiation” (Coplan, 2004, p. 141) to be crucial for the very existence of the phenomenon: “When I empathize with another, take up his or her psychological perspective and imaginatively experience, to some degree or other, what he or she experiences. [...] however, [...] as I do this, I maintain a clear sense of my own separate identity” (Coplan, 2004, p. 143). Therefore, it is worth looking at whether and how this relationship of mutual “Otherness” is manifested in Kapuściński’s photographic works, which, due to the integrity of the verbal component in the form of the author’s caption, are multimodal, i.e. verbal-visual.

1.2. Images and words: meta-textual relation

In the case of verbal-visual communication, where the “language of images” (Feininger, 2012, p. 427) is complemented by the verbal language (a title, a caption, etc.), both modes often enter a relation analogous to the meta-textual one: the verbal component is used to direct the process of reception of a picture in accordance with the author’s intention. In consequence, the words decrease the ambiguity of the picture. The problem of the ambiguity of the image itself was noted by many researchers, and in extreme approaches, this feature was even equated with complete semantic non-autonomy: “Barthes’ idea [...] should be noted

here: the idea that no picture contains information in itself or, alternatively, that it contains so much contradictory information that a verbal message is needed to fix its meaning” (Sonesson, 2015, p. 420)⁵. Even in more moderate approaches, attention is drawn to the fact, that “the meanings of the image are broader (than the meanings of the text), the scene is taken out of the proper context, so it can have the entire spectrum of them” (Nasiłowska, 2009, p. 8; transl. mine).

As Batziou stated, “Images are particularly polysemic media texts, but their polysemy is limited by framing devices that direct towards a preferred reading” (Batziou, 2011, p. 44). Verbal commentaries accompanying the picture are one of the frequently used “framing devices” – a caption, a title, etc. – suggesting the interpretation is consistent with the author’s aim. Such commentaries can be a key to revealing the illocutionary level of the picture. Even if the image seems to be clear without any comment because it opens itself up to obvious, i.e. stereotypical readings, the author’s intentions can be far from the common-sense interpretation. This mechanism can be observed in Kapuściński’s reportage photography, which will be shown below in selected representative examples⁶.

2. Semantic and illocutionary aspects of Kapuściński’s photography – analyses

Let us begin with following Kapuściński’s photograph published in the appendix to the reportage book *Jeszcze dzień życia / Another Day of Life* (picture 1). Although the technical quality of the publication was not very high, it did not significantly influence the interpretation. A close-up shows the face of a young man wearing a helmet. On the left can be seen his weapon positioned vertically, and below can be noticed the ammunition hanging around the neck. For the Polish viewer in the 1970s, the physical features of the person suggested that the picture was taken somewhere distant from Poland⁷. The objects visible in the photo testify that the man is taking part in military operations –

⁵ Roland Barthes’s old concept of the interdependence between image semantics and language semantics and the dominant role of the latter in the process of interpreting multimodal works was recalled, with a somewhat polemical intention, by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2021, p. 20), which proves that the classic essay “Rhetoric of the image” from 1964 is still an important reference point. Nevertheless, an alternative and, in fact, complementary model for describing multimodal messages seems to be more widely accepted today: it can be called “the model of interference” between the verbal and visual component or, in a slightly reinterpreted form, “the collaboration model”, which makes the assumption about “photo-textual collaboration” (Bryant, 1996, p. 14).

⁶ The tendencies of the interpretation of photos by contemporary Polish students were tested on nearly identical material during the seminar on “Language communication in the media” at the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in the field of study “Media Production” (three seminar groups in the 2019/2020 academic year).

⁷ In Poland after the Second World War, until the turn of 1989, ethnic minorities were sparse and did not differ physically from the average Pole. It was only in large urban centers that you could meet African students.



Picture 1. Byłem, jeszcze wczoraj byłem... [I was, I was there yesterday...]
(*Another Day of Life* [1976])

they function as props in the scene, characterizing the hero (Mandler, 2004). The element that attracts particular attention is the gaze directed upwards, suggesting reflection on something important, perhaps existential or metaphysical. The image itself is, therefore, quite rich in interpretative guidelines, which to some extent is achieved by technical means, such as camera distance and zooming.

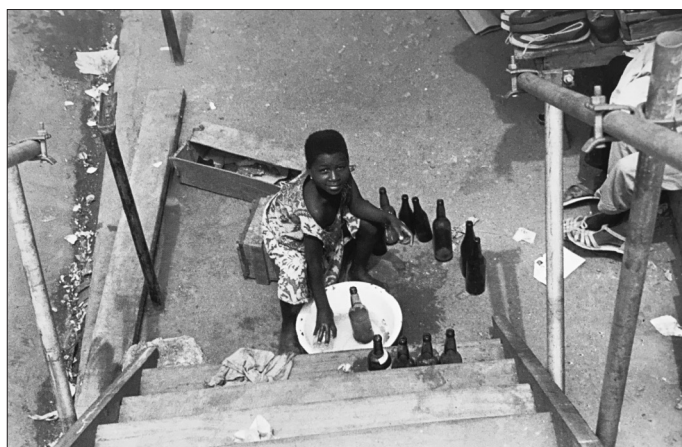
Camera distance or zooming creates a social relationship of various degrees between the viewer and the object. In the physical world, Hall (1966) distinguishes personal distance, implying familiarity and intimacy between people who know each other well, social distance, a safety distance common in social or professional contacts, and public distance, which implies an impersonal relationship. These distances are also used in images. Proximity to the photographed object or person, i.e. shooting from a close distance or zooming in, is considered the distance of personal relation or intimacy. Close-ups communicate the individuality of the depicted person and make it seem like someone from our in-group, like one of “us”. (Batziou, 2011, p. 45)

The camera distance and zooming build a bond with the portrayed man, and the caption under the photo enhances this effect: “I was, I was there yesterday, he took a picture of me, that is how I looked” (transl. mine)⁸. The sentence reveals that the person shown in the photo is no longer alive, which corresponds with the title of the entire book in which the photo was published – *Another Day of Life*. The plot of the literary reportage, constituting the interpretative context of the photo, reveals that although we are dealing with the realities of the war in Angola, the general message remains universal. The way of presenting the portrayed man and the verbal commentary under the photo together make this particular micro-report from the war personalized and strongly emotionally charged because, as visual researchers emphasize, “affective aspects of human

⁸ „Byłem, jeszcze wczoraj byłem, robił mi zdjęcie, o, tak wyglądałem” (*Jeszcze dzień życia*, 1976, p. 159).

beings and practices are not discrete from other cognitive activity, and therefore never separate or absent from representational or communicative behaviour” (Gunther and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 40).

The meta-text accompanying the image not only narrows the interpretative spectrum but can also steer the recipient’s attention by redirecting their gaze to the element of the picture that is important to the author. It can be observed in the following photo published in the album *Z Afryki / From Africa* (picture 2). In the centre of the frame, there is a woman, photographed in a medium shot from above and looking into the lens. Her gaze naturally catches the viewer’s eyes, and the axial symmetry intensified by the linear elements of the environment (stair railing) enhances the effect. However, the caption under the photo draws attention not to her but to the items she deals with: “Bottles – priceless things. The bottles are not thrown away – they are difficult to obtain and always needed.



Picture 2. Bottles (*From Africa* [2000])

Therefore, washing bottles is an important and common activity. Car gasoline is sold in bottles (because sometimes people can only afford one or two litres), oil for dishes, oil for lamps, and most often homemade beer from green bananas” (transl. mine)⁹. In this 21st-century album, we can find more photos portraying Africans as people who save the resources Europeans tend to waste, which corresponds with Kapuściński’s late reportage book *The Shadow of the Sun*¹⁰.

⁹ „Butelki – rzecz bezcenna. Butelek nie wyrzuca się – są trudno osiągalne, a zawsze potrzebne. Dlatego mycie butelek jest zajęciem ważnym i powszechnym. Sprzedaje się w nich benzynę do samochodu (bo czasem kogoś stać tylko na jeden lub dwa litry), oliwę do potraw, olej do lamp, a najczęściej domowej produkcji piwo z zielonych bananów” (*Z Afryki*, 2000, p. 43).

¹⁰ See, for example: “In the large Tambacounda station, the locomotive broke down. Some valves burst, and a stream of oil trickled down the embankment. The local boys hastily filled their bottles and cans with it. Nothing is wasted here. If grain spills, it will be carefully gathered; if a pitcher of water cracks, every drop possible will be saved and drunk” (*The Shadow of the Sun*, 2002, p. 276).

In the case of this photography, decisive guidance allowing to understand what was important for the author in the scene presented in the picture is provided by the caption; however, the knowledge of the book, which potentially constitutes an interpretative context *in absentia*, deepens the interpretation.

Another example of how meta-text determines the meaning of the image is the following picture of an African home (picture 3). For the Polish recipient, a clay house is associated with poverty and a very low level of development. In the distant past, the poorest people in Poland lived in clay huts called *lepianki*.



Picture 3. African home (*From Africa* [2000])

This noun, with strong connotations of ‘poverty’ and ‘primitivism’, appeared in Kapuściński’s early reports and it was usually used with the intention to express the contrast between the living standards of Africans and colonialists, hence the typical contrasting juxtaposition: *willa* ‘villa’ vs. *lepianka* (*Gdyby cała Afryka...*, p. 117; *Jeszcze dzień życia*, p. 52; see also *Czarne gwiazdy*, p. 87; see Wysocka, 2016, p. 60–62). In the later period, however, the way of depicting Africa by Kapuściński changed. It is significant that the caption under the photo published in the 21st century did not contain the noun *lepianka* ‘clay hut’ or any other word connoting ‘poverty’ and ‘primitivism’; the message of the meta-text is very different: “Everything in the desert is built to protect people not only from the sun but also from the heat of the noon hours. Europeans often wonder why these houses and shacks are not airy. Well, because the air also burns, the breeze is as hot as a tongue of fire” (transl. mine)¹¹. The caption expresses appreciation for the traditional African building construction, which is inconsistent with the vision of the clay hut typical for Poles and, more general, with the stereotype of the Africans whose material culture is not admired (Wysocka, 2002). Kapuściński

¹¹ „Wszystko na pustyni jest budowane tak, aby chronić człowieka nie tylko przed słońcem, ale i przed żarem godzin południowych. Europejczycy często dziwią się, dlaczego te domy i szałaszy nie są przewiewne? Otóż dlatego, że powietrze też parzy, powiew jest gorący jak język ognia” (*Z Afryki*, 2000, p. 22).

provides his Polish recipients with information quite new to them: he points out the functionality of the technical solutions and interprets it as a symptom of the builders' wisdom. Without the caption providing this message, stereotypical knowledge would be the most likely interpretative context for the picture, which would lead the recipient to opposite conclusions.

As mentioned before, captions create an interpretative context *in praesentia*, but sometimes, the spectator also requires the context *in absentia*, which is a story of the photographed person or event, in order to fully read the intended meaning of the picture. This is the case of the photo of Carlotta (picture 4).



Picture 4. Carlotta (*Another Day of Life* [1976])

The image of this woman was first published in the appendix to the reportage book *Jeszcze dzień życia / Another Day of Life* (1976, p. 150), and then a similar photo of the same person in the same surroundings (with minor differences in body position and zooming) appeared in the album *Ze świata / From the World* (2008, p. 155). Without the author's caption providing guidelines, the picture would probably be interpreted in a very general way: a smiling female soldier against a savanna background would probably bring to mind some distant war in which women took part. However, the caption under the original picture (published in 1976) enriches this interpretation: "An hour after taking this picture of her, Carlotta was dead"¹² (p. 150, transl. mine), unlike in the 2008 album, where the title is laconic: *Carlotta; Angola, 1975*. The key to understanding the meaning of this photograph, however, is the report *Sceny frontowe / Scenes from the Front*, which is a chapter of the book *Jeszcze dzień życia / Another Day of Life*. Let us quote an appropriate fragment of the documentary narrative:

¹² „W godzinę po zrobieniu jej tego zdjęcia Carlotta już nie żyła” (*Jeszcze dzień życia*, 1976, p. 150).

Carlotta came with an automatic on her shoulder. Even though she was wearing a commando uniform that was too big for her, you could tell she was attractive. We all started paying court to her immediately. [...] Only twenty years old, Carlotta was already a legend. Two months earlier [...] she had led a small MPLA detachment that was surrounded by a thousand-strong UNITA force. She managed to break the encirclement and lead her people out. [...] Carlotta is gone. Who would have thought that we were seeing her in the last hour of her life? And that it was all in our hands? (*Another Day of Life*, 2001 [1976], pp. 52–58)¹³

The context *in absentia* quoted above makes the reception of the photo more personal and enables the recipient to empathize with the author and the people whose lives were described in the documentary text.



Picture 5. Child soldiers (*From Africa* [2000])

Finally, let us consider the semantic and illocutionary aspects of the photo above, which was published in the album *Z Afryki / From Africa* (2000). The message conveyed by the picture seems quite clear even without any caption: children's war game¹⁴. It is worth noticing that the image conjures up two axiologically opposite areas of cultural common knowledge, which are the concepts of childhood and war. These domains, according to the Polish cultural convention, are treated as disjointed: stereotypical childhood is happy and carefree; it consists of playing and learning, which serve the development of a young person. On the contrary, a typical war is the domain of adults, a serious matter associated

¹³ „Carlotta przyszła z automatem na ramieniu i choć miała przyduży mundur komandosa, dawało się wyczuć, że jest zgrabna. Wszyscy natychmiast zaczęliśmy się do niej zalecać. [...] Mimo swoich dwudziestu lat Carlotta miała już legendę. Przed dwoma miesiącami [...] dowodziła małym oddziałkiem MPLA, otoczonym przez tysięczną jednostkę UNITA. Umiała wyjść z okrążenia i wyprowadzić swoich ludzi [...]. Carlotty już nie było, już jej nie ma” (*Jeszcze dzień życia*, 1976, p. 55).

¹⁴ On children as an important subject of Kapuściński's photography see: Mądzik, 2008, p. 183.

with destruction, suffering and death. The result of intertwining these domains is a cognitive construction, which can be called a “conceptual amalgam” (Taylor, 2007). However, such an amalgam may take a slightly different form depending on the individual attitude and the previous experiences of the interpreter. On the one hand, backyard war games were common for Polish boys in the 1970s, but on the other – the costumes and props visible in the photographs seem too realistic for such a game. Therefore, one cannot be sure what kind of situation the reporter captured: amusing or disturbing. The caption under the photo points to the latter interpretive path: “This is a militarized Africa, the one that the world learns about most often. Cadets of the officer school in Kenya and children before going to the front in Angola. Children in the war in Uganda, boys in the war in the Congo. Since so many children and young people are involved in these battles, sometimes they have something of a bloody and cruel game” (transl. mine)¹⁵.

Another element which can be relevant for Polish interpreters of the photo is the cultural context *in absentia*: the well-known Warsaw sculpture, “Pomnik Małego Powstańca” [‘Little Insurrectionist’], which commemorates the Warsaw Uprising against Nazi Germany in 1944. The sculpture depicts a small child wearing an oversized helmet – he is resembled a bit by the sad boy in the lower left corner of the photo. Taking into account this historical context, i.e. the knowledge that also in Poland in the 1940s children participated in the fighting, is not obvious for Polish viewers. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that in *Another Day of Life*, Kapuściński drew analogies between teenage Warsaw insurgents and Angolan fighters: “They are all sixteen to eighteen years old, the age of our high school students or of the fighters in the Warsaw uprising”¹⁶ (*Another Day of Life*, 2001, p. 55; literally: “our high school students, our uprising”). The fragment was most probably written with the intention of manifesting the author’s empathy and arousing the same attitude in Polish readers so that the realities described in the report – although spatially and culturally very distant – could become closer to them. The repetition of the pronoun “our”, which was not reflected in the English translation, in the original version was intended to build a sense of community between the recipients and the protagonists of the documentary text.

Conclusions

The analysis of Ryszard Kapuściński’s photographs has shown three main factors influencing the interpretation of his verbal-visual works: 1) cultural context dependency, 2) metatextual determination, and 3) intertextual associations. The cultural context, which can be identified with the resource of common

¹⁵ „To Afryka zmilitaryzowana, wojenna, taka, o której świat dowiaduje się najczęściej. Kadeci szkoły oficerskiej w Kenii (w albumie sąsiednie zdjęcie) i dzieci przed pójściem na front w Angoli. Dzieci na wojnie w Ugandzie, chłopcy na wojnie w Kongo. Ponieważ w tych walkach bierze udział tyle dzieci i młodzieży, czasem mają one coś z krwawej i okrutnej zabawy” (*Z Afryki*, 2000, p. 47).

¹⁶ „Wszystko młodzież szesnasto- osiemnastoletnia, nasi licealiści, nasze powstanie” (*Jeszcze dzień życia*, 1976, p. 58).

knowledge, usually constitutes the basis for the reading of a visual message by providing the recipient with a certain set of typical prepositions evoked by individual elements of the image, which becomes interpretable but at the same time ambiguous, and thus potentially open to different readings. The meta-text in the form of a caption is aimed to steer the recipient's gaze and redirect the attention as well as to reduce the ambiguity of the image by indicating one of several possible associative pathways or providing the recipient with potentially new information inconsistent with the previous state of knowledge; thus, the role of the reporter as the "translator from culture to culture" manifests itself mostly in the meta-text. Furthermore, the images selected by the reporter for publication often correspond to fragments of his documentary narratives, constituting a potential context *in absentia* and enabling a more in-depth interpretation of the photography available to those who can recognize these intertextual references.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that both in Kapuściński's reports and in his photographs with original meta-commentaries, a specific model of journalism is manifested, in which two apparent contradictions turn out to be possible to reconcile: the objectivity of the message and, at the same time, its subjectification understood as the presentation of a given state of affairs from an individual point of view and with a clear intention – hence the name "intentional journalism", which Kapuściński used in his self-referential statements, revealing his inspirations by the works of Twain, Hemingway and Márquez (Kapuściński, 2013, p. 150): "They are fighting for something; when writing, they always try to achieve something, they are looking for something. This is the essence of this profession – to be good and develop empathy" (*To nie jest zawód dla cyników / This is no Job for Cynics*, 2013, p. 150, transl. mine)¹⁷.

The intentional nature of the report and its subjectification, while maintaining the imperative of truthfulness, are – in Kapuściński's opinion – an antidote to the problems of contemporary standardization of media, about which Batziou, in the context of journalistic photography, writes as follows:

Press photographs are criticized as being homogenized and standardized [...] as they repeat similar and stereotypical patterns of representation. This situation is largely attributed to the context of journalistic production, which has a limited number of news categories and mechanized, standardized, and limiting ways of exposing and processing photographs in newspapers (Rosenblum 1978). [...] As a result, the photograph is not used as a tool for investigating the topic..." (Batziou, 2011, pp. 54–55; emphasis mine)

Individualized pictures selected by the author can become such a "tool for investigating the topic", especially when they are provided with an author's verbal commentary, regardless of the higher or lower technical quality of the image. For this reason, Kapuściński's photographs, whether we treat them as

¹⁷ „Oni walczą o coś; pisząc, starają się zawsze coś osiągnąć, czegoś szukają. To jest istotą tego zawodu – być dobrym i rozwijać w sobie empatię” (*To nie jest zawód dla cyników*, 2013, p. 150).

a complement to his well-known reportages or as an autonomous area of his documentary's activity, deserve attention as a manifestation of "intentional journalism" and a way of storytelling about "Otherness".

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S u m m a r y

This article contains a semantic and pragmatic analysis of Ryszard Kapuściński’s reportage photographs, published in the first editions of his books and in his original photo albums. The findings of cognitive and cultural linguistics are the methodological basis for the study (Mandler, Taylor, van Dijk and others), which, in significant respects, correspond to theories from other humanities and social sciences, describing the meaning of visual messages (Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Feininger, Goffman, Lundsén, Sonesson and others). The aim of the research is to describe the course and possible results of the process of interpreting photography, which, in Kapuściński’s case, is a multimodal (verbal-visual) message with storytelling potential. An analysis of Kapuściński’s photographs has shown three main factors influencing the interpretation of his verbal-visual works: 1) cultural context dependency, 2) metatextual determination, and 3) intertextual associations. The study has also shown the close relationship between his literary reportages and photography in the illocutionary (intentional) dimension and, more broadly, in the way of understanding the most general duties of a journalist.

Fotografia reportażowa Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego jako opowieść empatyczna: obraz, tekst, kontekst

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera semantyczną i pragmatyczną analizę fotografii reportażowych Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego, opublikowanych w pierwszych wydaniach jego książek oraz w autorskich albumach wydanych w formie zwartej. Podstawą metodologiczną są ustalenia językoznawstwa kognitywnego i kulturowego na temat znaczenia i sposobów odczytywania

komunikatów werbalno-wizualnych, korespondujące z wybranymi teoriami powstałymi na gruncie innych nauk humanistycznych i społecznych. Celem badań jest opisanie przebiegu, uwarunkowań kontekstowych i możliwych rezultatów procesu interpretacji zdjęcia traktowanego jako przekaz multimodalny posiadający potencjał narracyjny. Analiza fotografii Kapuścińskiego wykazała, że na sposób odczytania jego dzieł wizualnych wpływają trzy główne czynniki: 1) zależność od kontekstu kulturowego, 2) determinacja metatekstowa, 3) skojarzenia intertekstualne. Badania wykazały ścisły związek fotografii wybranych do publikacji przez autora i opatrzonych przez niego metakomentarzem z jego reportażami literackimi; związek ów zachodzi w zakresie sposobu ujęcia zjawisk, w wymiarze illokucyjnym (intencjonalnym) oraz w manifestowanym sposobie pojmowania ogólnych powinności reportera i korespondenta zagranicznego jako „tłumacza kultur”.

