Visual Storytelling in the Context of Marshall McLuhan's Media Theory: Rita Leistner and Her Socially Engaged Photography

Kalina Kukielko-Rogozinska
University of Szczecin, Szczecin, Poland, kalina.rogozinska@gmail.com

Krzysztof Tomanek
Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, krzysztof.marcin.tomanek@gmail.com

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Kalina Kukielko-Rogozinska, *University of Szczecin (Szczecin, Poland)*
Krzysztof Tomanek, *Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland)*

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Abstract

The main character of our story is Rita Leistner, one of the most famous Canadian war photographers in the world. She studied at the International Center of Photography (New York) and has a Master of Arts degree in French and English (University of Toronto). For six years Rita taught the history of photojournalism and documentary photography (UoT). She is the co-author of several books, such as Unembedded: Four Independent Photojournalists on Iraq, and *The Edward Curtis Project: A Modern Picture Story*. Her first monograph, *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan*, a work on photography, technology and war, was a finalist for the Marshall McLuhan Award for Outstanding Book in the Field of Media Ecology (2015).

However, her activities are not only related to photography. She defines herself as a "socially and politically engaged" person. And no matter if we speak about her photographs, articles, social media activities or books – there is a spirit of struggle for human rights in them. This is the first of the arguments supporting the opinion that Rita's work is a very important voice in the discourse on contemporary times and the today's meaning of "humanity." This voice often does not need words, since Leistner is above all a photographer. For more than twenty years, she traveled around the world and covered military conflicts: Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. She described lives of soldiers involved in warfare and life of civilians facing results of such conflicts. Thanks to her works we learn stories that we would never otherwise have an opportunity to get to know about, such as the everyday life of female patients from Baghdad's al Rashad Psychiatric Hospital in the war-torn capital of Iraq. However, war is not the only form of combat Leister talks about. She also discusses inner personal and intimate struggles that give testimony to the hidden powers of human beings: she presents drug addicts from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, female wrestlers, people planting trees in northern

Canada, or North American aborigines. When asked why she is involved in all these issues, she answers "to lead many lives."

In this article, we will also present a narrative analysis of Rita's work with Basetrack project. In the first place, we want to show the main subjects she is involved with and how she interprets them.

Key words: Leistner, McLuhan, media, photography, visual storytelling

Introduction

The aim of our article is to present a visual history of the contemporary war in Afghanistan, based on social media and smartphone photographs. The basis of the considerations are photos taken by the Canadian photographer Rita Leistner at the coalition force base in Musa Qala during the implementation of the pioneering media project "Basetrack" and the media theory of Marshall McLuhan, which the artist later used to interpret her works. In her analysis of war photographs, Leistner was the first to apply selected concepts created by this researcher in the second half of the twentieth century, such as: "probe," "extension of man," or the
"figure/background" dichotomy. Her blog and book *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan* show the potential of using this theory to interpret media images of contemporary war, allowing for a significant change in the perspective of their recipients. Instead of focusing on the human aspect of fighting, it allows one to focus on their technological dimension, and thus to look at war from a certain distance, work through the traumas associated with it, perceive the nonobvious beauty of the photographs depicting it, and at the same time understand its cruelty and meaninglessness. To analyze the material consisting of Leistner's photographs and written statements, we use the narrative method that allows the reconstruction of the lived-life-living-track chronology and the subjective toldstory-telling-track. Although Rita's publications devoted to her stay in Afghanistan do not contain a chronology of consecutive events (her narrative focuses on the presentation of various aspects of everyday life of soldiers during their stay in the Afghan base and does not include history), the author's main area of interest remains the same. It is the relationship between the human and modern technology, which is used to wage modern warfare.

Artist, photographer, activist

When photography describes scenes from life during war, reveals the fate of people living in the territories occupied by the enemy army, shows injustice, or becomes a way to improve the situation of a man involved in a military conflict, we can assume that behind the lens there is a photographer whose motivation goes beyond far beyond the aesthetic value of photos, and her sensitivity is derived from humanism and the philosophy of social commitment. This short description aptly describes the heroine of our article: Rita Leistner from Toronto, known primarily for her war photo reports. She herself says that above all she is a socially and politically engaged artist. And regardless of whether we mean her photos, articles, books, or activity in social media, you can find recurring questions about what it means to be human now and what our life should be like among other people. In an interview Leistner gave us, she emphasizes:

> "I am a philosopher first. Everything else I do is to meet some form of intellectual, metaphysical, political investigation. How can we live? How should we live? What can we do to engage ourselves and others in these investigations? Photography, writing, these are vehicles to this end. They are the mediums of the message. Being a highly visual person, it was natural I turn to photography." (Kukielko-Rogozinska & Tomanek, 2017, p. 17).

This is the first of many arguments that the artist's work is an important voice in the discourse on the essence of humanity in the contemporary world. This voice often does not need many words as Leistner is primarily a photographer. For over twenty years, she has been travelling the world, working in the vicinity of various types of armed conflicts, including in Iraq and the Levant countries. She reported with commitment and attention the lives of soldiers caught in the war and the everyday life of the civilian population suffering its burdensome consequences.

> "War photography is a sub-genre of photojournalism. Photojournalism is the most widely practiced politically engaged art of our time. […] There are those who would say that the closer a photograph is to fiction the closer it is to art. But there is a school of politically engaged photography rooted in the real that is crucial to society's grasp on the difference between truth and fiction. […] We are now fighting against absurd statements like «alternate truth». In part, contemporary photojournalism is to blame. There has been a fashionable trend rising over the last years that states that there is no difference between fact and fiction. It is

> semantically naïve, but sexy enough that it has gained a lot of
> traction. It's a dangerous argument when taken too far."
> (Kukielko-Rogozinska & Tomanek, 2017, p. 19).

However, physical struggle is not the only type of conflict she presents in her work. She also often portrays internal struggles, personal and intimate, which testify to the strength which lies dormant in the human being: drug addicts living in an abandoned hotel in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, female wrestlers from Florida, patients at Baghdad's al Rashad Psychiatric Hospital, people planting trees in northern Canada, or the nearly forgotten Native Americans.

Leistner's work, which - as we have already mentioned - she herself describes as socially and politically engaged, is based primarily on the direct experience of the surrounding reality. Attendance at events allows one to create first-hand messages, which often prove to be the most valuable for recipients.

Most often it deals with those topics that can best show the captivating entanglement of an individual's life in a wider social and political context. The fruit of this attitude are photo essays in which the author tries to sensitize viewers to the "truth of the moment": since they have no chance to experience it themselves, they can at least - of course in a way mediated by the medium of photography - see it as it is. And then, depending on their internal needs, they may try to interpret and evaluate it themselves. The most important role that Leistner assigns to her photographs is to initiate the changes necessary in social and individual life. It is a perspective resulting primarily from personal beliefs, grounded in the ethical system, which entails the basic notions of: good and evil, truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, joy and sorrow, or pleasure and suffering. In her works, the author shows both poles of these dichotomies, placing special emphasis on those elements of the world around us that, in her opinion, require modification. In one of the interviews, commenting on these issues, she stated:

> "I was drawn to photojournalism because of its power to effect
> political and social change. So I believe the impulse to be a
> photojournalist is ethical in itself. If you believe this, then you
> can justify almost anything you do to advance that end.
> Sometimes I have had to keep my mouth shut in order to keep
> covering a story or even for my own safety. I think it's unethical
> to take photojournalistic images and not do anything with them,
> or just use them as portfolio pieces or for entering contests.
> There has to be some kind of sustained effort to make the
> photographs serve a purpose." (words + images, 2001, online).

It is also important what happens to the photos after they have been taken: how they are developed, who will publish them and what their scope will be,

as well as the manner in which the author of the image is responsible for it. Photography is about much more than just taking a picture - there are multiple details that any professional photographer has to consider while working, at the same time trying to create one's own unique professional personality and individual style. Many professionals even risk their own safety to capture a shot that will not only move the prospective viewer as much as possible, but above all will be an eyewitness account, giving direct testimony to the events taking place. This approach also characterizes Leistner's activities:

> "The first time I photographed a firefight I was shaking so badly that […] all my photographs were completely blurred. Before I go into any risky area, I ask myself the following three questions: Why me? Why this? Why now? If I can't come up with compelling reasons, then I won't go. But if I can, and especially if I am the only one there, then I think I have a responsibility to go. The Internet and the smartphone have rendered the act of bearing witness almost universally accessible so there are fewer reasons for specially designated photographers to simply bear witness." (words + images, 2001, online).

The artist took up photography professionally relatively late, just before the age of thirty. Born and raised in Scarborough, Canada, she graduated in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto, where in the late 1980s she completed her MA in Comparative Literature. After graduation, she worked for six years in the film industry as a lighting specialist. The chauvinism prevailing in this environment, however, made her give up this occupation and move to Cambodia, where she lived for a year and a half. It was there that she started working as a photojournalist for the first time.

When she realized that she needed to broaden the skills she had been learning herself so far, she moved to New York to attend the prestigious International Center for Photography, where she first encountered Cornell Capa's concept of "concerned photographer." Since then, her interest has focused on the non-obvious, but at the same time eye-catching topics and subcultures, such as the aforementioned American wrestlers and psychiatric patients in the war-torn capital of Iraq. However, despite numerous artistic achievements, awards, exhibitions and publications in prestigious magazines, she had no sense of satisfaction. She grew tired of soliciting assignments from editorial staff, which always paid too little for the risks she took. This compounded the growing sense of personal crisis. „I spent many nights crying, frustrated, tired and lonely." (McBride, 2010, online). The solution to this situation was to return to her hometown and accept the position of lecturer of history of photojournalism and documentary photography at the University of Toronto. The change in the pace of life, and above all the

transition from the constant risk of photojournalism to more sedate art photography, allowed her to change her creative perspective, which is characterized by the following:

> "As a freelancer without affiliations to any particular news outlet, I am not under pressure to create dramatic Front Page photographs of daily spot news events. The way I see it, my job is to find the stories in between and on the side of the main events—history's luminal moments. These become pieces in the bigger puzzle drawn by all the players in the theatre of war: civilians, journalists, military personnel, NGO and agency workers, artists, writers, etcetera. Freelancers also have a luxury many staffers don't have: time." (Leistner, 2014, online).

In this article, we would like to focus on the *Basetrack* project, in which Rita Leistner participated as a photographer, and show how the author builds her visual story about the human being and the surrounding reality.

The *Basetrack* project

During her long career, Leistner, working on the front lines in all the conflict-torn countries she visited, sought first and foremost the essence of humanity - fragments of what allows us to survive with dignity even in the worst moments of history. The starting point and the main motive of her visual narratives were therefore people and their everyday life during the crisis of war. However, everything changed in 2011, when, at the invitation of the American photojournalist Teru Kuwayama, she joined the pioneering project *Basetrack* as part of the *News challenge* Knight Foundation grant.[1]

 According to the assumptions of the originators of this international initiative: Kuwayama and the photographers Balazs Gardi, Tivadar Domaniczky and designer David Gurman, *Basetrack* was a civilian (of course, as much as this was possible in the case of a project rooted in the middle of the military system) media experiment. Its primary goal was to use social media to ensure free contact between contingent troops on a mission and their families and friends in America. David Gurman characterized him as follows:

> "Basetrack [was] an experimental media project, conducted in 2010-2011, tracking the 1/8– 1st Battalion, Eighth Marines, during their deployment to southern Afghanistan. A small team of mobile media operators embedded with the battalion, transmitted their reports and reflections from Helmand

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[1] A Non-profit organization which supports the development of modern journalism, communication, and art. https://knightfoundation.org.

province as they traveled with the battalion through area of operations. […] The project was defined by the amazing photographs the journalism team made with their iPhones and the Facebook page which was active everyday with families trying to connect with their sons thousands of miles away." (Gurman, 2016, online).

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Kuwayama confessed that although it may seem quite surprising, the first impulse to work on this project did not come

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from the journalistic environment, but from the army itself. In 2010, an American military officer, Justin Ansel, whom he had met during his first stay in this country six years earlier, asked him about his photojournalistic return to Afghanistan. In the Middle East, the coalition forces were introducing the "COIN" (*Counterinsurgency*) strategy, according to which non-military measures were to be the most effective elements of social and political influence, and military operations were to play only a supporting role. Major Ansel was looking for an original and engaging way of communicating information, so that the non-military community was also interested in the assumptions of this new approach. This was profoundly justified because, as Kuwayama noted in the introduction to *Basetrack: one - eight:*

> "Public opinion polls indicate that the majority of Americans believe the Afghan war is not worth fighting. At the same time, the vast majority of Americans have almost no direct exposure to a conflict that has been fought by an all-volunteer military – one that constitutes less than 1% of population. To most Americans, a decade of blood and treasure in an abstract, distant concept." (Kuwayama, 2011, p. 9).

The army wanted to show the public what the "COIN" strategy really means for the troops of the contingent in Afghanistan and how the actions taken within its framework look like in practice. Kuwayama later noted that the main concern was to create a line of communication between the military and the public, not just photographing the daily lives of the base's inhabitants. Nevertheless, almost immediately he noticed in this surprising proposal an extraordinary opportunity not only to use new techniques of producing and publishing war reports, but above all for the real impact of this work on a specific audience:

> Nobody has more authenticity to talk about this war, its costs, its consequences, and maybe even offer some analysis about how this could be done better. That's effectively what the project is. The stream of photographs we send out is

embedded with news articles, bits of analysis, facts, figures."
(Kamber & Kuwayama, 2010, online).

In his opinion, the reporters accompanying the battalion, who constantly took care of supplementing the content published on the website, were only one of the elements of this initiative. The media part of the project would not be complete without the active participation of the community interested in its content. Obviously, the main recipients of the *Basetrack* messages were primarily family members who desperately wanted to make contact with their Marines, located thousands of miles from home.

Rita Leistner in Afghanistan

As with the other reporters involved in the project, Leistner's participation in *Basetrack* consisted of taking pictures of the everyday life of the inhabitants of the base, located in the Afghan province of Helmand, near the border with Pakistan. Accompanying the soldiers and reporting on their activities was nothing new for her. But the method of taking and subsequent processing of photos was completely new, which in these conditions seemed to her the most useful, but also constituted a completely unexpected challenge. In our interview, when asked about her participation in Kuwayama's project and the expectations related to it, she replied:

> "I was deeply intrigued by the prospect of using smart phones and social media in the context of a military embed in Afghanistan. I had never used a smartphone before going. I had never sent a Tweet. As a historian of photography, I was very aware of the important role of technology in covering war. […] The Basetrack Project in Afghanistan was a historical first for using smartphones and social media in a collaborative mediamilitary project. I can admit I wanted to be a part of that history as much as to witness it." (Kukielko-Rogozinska & Tomanek, 2017, pp. 19-20).

Interestingly, during her stay in Afghanistan, for the first time in her long career, she took photos not only with a smartphone, but also with a mobile phone in general. Using a smartphone as a camera was not obligatory in *Basetrack*, but the photographer admits that when she saw the fascinating photos taken with it by her colleagues, she decided to learn its use and possibilities. Hence, she bought her first iPhone and was surprised to discover that there is no manual for it, and all the activities related to its use are simply intuitive. Another novelty for her was the Hipstamatic application, thanks to which both the phone display and the photos taken with it have an "analog" look. Thanks to this application, one can take square, characteristically "hazy" photos, and the selection of settings is limited to only a few types of films, lenses, filters and flashes. There were some problems

with the use of this application, however, because in the comments under the photos posted on the *Basetrack* website, there were often accusations that they gave war a nostalgic charm because of this old-fashioned setting. But as Leistner openly noted:

> "[…] for professional photographers who had spent most of their lives working with film and printing their own photographs in darkrooms, there is nothing nostalgic about the Hipstamatic. On the contrary, its obvious and aggressive referencing of traditional photography served only to highlight the digitalness of the device and its distance from mechanical cameras and traditional wet darkrooms." (Leistner, 2012a, online).

According to Meryl Alper, the use of Hipstamatic in war photojournalism does indeed raise a lot of technical, aesthetic and ethical dilemmas. In the *War on Instagram* article, the author notes that the app has supporters who zealously defend photos taken with iPhones as innovative and in keeping with the rapidly changing nature of armed conflict, photography and journalism as such. But Hipstamatic also has equally staunch opponents who, in turn, emphasize the ethical dimension, emphasizing that this application, which is too illustrative in style, does not present events as they really are. Accusations of interference with war photos are nothing new, and a photo report using Hipstamatic is just another example of them. Debates about using the Hipstamatic application in professional war reports open up a series of questions about the differences between photography and illustration, the professional and the amateur, as well as about reporting and editing. Controversies are primarily caused by the use of automatic photo settings, imposed by the application, the related deprofessionalization of war photojournalism (anyone can take equally successful photos) and the presentation of the war in a nostalgic retro style (Alper, 2014).

Embedded

Rita Leistner recalls that commanders of the base at Musa Qala, which had hosted *Basetrack* for several months, were reluctant to continue it before she arrived there (in early 2011). The reason for this reluctance was to be the death of many soldiers from Battalion 1-8, but Leistner emphasizes that - as drastic as it sounds - this is not an exceptional situation for units located on the front line and does not explain such a strong reluctance towards project participants. Besides, it was the sixth, penultimate month of the contingent's mission, and thus the accompanying *Basetrack* - the longest incarnation of media representatives in one military unit in the history. According to the artist, the real cause of dissatisfaction with the constant presence of photojournalists in the base could be the overwhelming sense of

powerlessness in the face of the situation in Afghanistan, which was slowly poisoning the air and blood of soldiers. The coalition forces, despite their unimaginable tactical and technological advantage, were not able to achieve their basic goals set in the strategy. On the other hand, *Basetrack* itself, boldly setting a new way of reporting conflict zone events, became a symbol of the army's loss of control over the flow of information concerning it. The main point of the dispute was, above all, the *Basetrack* account on Facebook, where users published many posts that were not approved by the battalion commanders. This unfavorable combination of circumstances also had a strong influence on the mental condition of the Leistner base stationed at that time and had an impact on her assessment of the activities undertaken there:

> "Using social media and smartphones in Afghanistan, I felt myself being replaced by technology and instant uploads that left no time for process, reflection or analysis. It was more about "feeding the beast" as we called it, than telling a story. Without a story, there was no context anchoring the meaning of my experience. Moreover, it seemed to me that the military itself, in the face of its failing mission in Afghanistan, was cracking under the psychological dehumanization and ineffectiveness of its own super-technologies. When the Battalion Commander complained about Facebook and social media as if we were somehow to blame for them, I told him that the media, journalists and war photographers were, just like him, trying to figure things out." (Leistner, 2018, online).

When it turned out that it was impossible to control it, i.e. to simply censor the content published (especially in comments), the commanding officer (CO) and second in command (XO) asked to close the *Basetrack* group on Facebook, but Teru Kuwayama refused. The order to delete the project's social account would of course be justified if its functioning in any way threatened the security of the base or the soldiers themselves. But in the "external" comments, the most frequent words of support were addressed to them by family and friends. Besides, for the sake of comfort for the audience, most of the posts and photos were simply a flattering presentation of the daily life of the base.

According to the artist, the atmosphere around *Basetrack* was not edifying. On the one hand, the command continued to look at them carefully, interfering without mercy with the published content, on the other hand, other journalists accused the project participants of walking on a military leash and creating ordinary propaganda. But, as Leistner points out, in a situation where it is so difficult for the media to gain access to the military, recruiting journalists into units is still the best option for obtaining information. On the other hand, it is also the best way for the army to control media coverage.

So, it is a system of mutual benefits, but also mutual, often too large, concessions.

> "Embedded, you can get fantastic, up-close photographs of soldiers firing missiles, but you cannot, at the same time, photograph the destruction and death where the missiles land." (Leistner, 2018, online).

According to the photographer, despite the constant attempts to control and censor, the Internet, especially Facebook and other social media, became another technology for the army that did not work as planned. In principle, they were to strengthen and protect the status of the army, and became a generally accessible, open space for exchanging doubts about it.

Canada and the finding of Marshall McLuhan

On her return to Toronto, Leistner wrote:

> "I arrived home from Afghanistan in March 2011 – after being embedded for three weeks as a after being embedded for three weeks as a photojournalist with the United States Marine Corps, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines (1-8), in the remote southern province of Helmand—with an iPhone full of photographs and a bad case of the blues. Walking down the streets of Toronto, I would burst into spontaneous tears. I was so happy to be back in the safety and familiarity of the place where I was born, but my trip to Afghanistan had left me with an unsettled feeling, verging on depression." (Leistner, 2013, p. 18).

This poor mental state of the author resulted primarily from the exceptionally depressing image of contemporary man, which emerged from her observation of this conflict-torn country. Extreme poverty, illiteracy, dehumanization, and hunger are the images of everyday life that caused Leistner to succumb to depression. This crisis situation in the artist's life has found a surprising solution. 2011 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Canadian media researcher Marshall McLuhan. As McLuhan has spent most of his life in Toronto, the city hosted many events to celebrate the anniversary.

Two months after returning from Afghanistan, during which she did not actually leave the house, Leistner went to one of them: a lecture at the CONTACT photo festival. It was a presentation by her friend and university lecturer, semiologist Peter Nesselroth, devoted to the application of the concept of the figure and background of the jubilarian in the analysis of the

events of the Arab Spring. This was, as it turned out, a turning point in her thinking and work.

Admittedly, it was the first time she came across McLuhan's ideas, but the lecture inspired her to use them in the interpretation of photos taken during the implementation of the *Basetrack* project.

> "Listening to Peter, the synapses of my brain were awakened with ideas, and suddenly — and like so many things in life that you don't recognize the reasons for until long after the fact — I understood that somehow Marshall McLuhan was the key to whatever had happened in Afghanistan between me, an iPhone camera and an app called Hipstamatic […] I realized that a big part of what had unsettled me about my experience in Afghanistan was working with the iPhone Hipstamatic app. […] I allowed myself to enter into the resonating intervals of meaning between digital and mechanical, virtual and tangible, that might be discovered inside them." (Leistner, 2012a, online).

After reading the works of the Canadian thinker for the first time - thanks to cooperation with *Literary Review of Canada* - the photographer launched a blog called *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan* in 2012, where she posted twelve posts related to photography, war and the ideas of the title character. Two years later, she published a book with the same title.

Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan

In *War and peace in the global village*, McLuhan stated that: "Every new technology necessitates a new war." (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968, p. 98). Leistner, in the essay *Photography Goes to War* (2018), follows in the footsteps of this perverse claim and adds that almost every armed conflict is an arena for applying the latest technical solutions also in the way it is reported. According to the photographer, it was the Arab Spring (2010 - 2012), about which Peter Nesselroth talked about during the aforementioned lecture, that completely changed the rules of this game for several decades. The reporters were the initiators and participants of the protests (civilians) who, using cameras and smartphone cameras, reported the course of the protests "from within," publishing their messages directly on Facebook or Instagram. Moreover, these generally available platforms, independent of the propaganda messages of the authorities, have become a place of information exchange, contacts and arrangements directly related to the organization of riots. Thus, the Internet and social media of all kinds have dynamically taken over the roles of newspapers and television, not only in terms of spreading news, but also in the way it is used. According to Leistner, this is a change that poses a certain threat to traditional professional journalism, but also offers it many unprecedented opportunities. The author also adds with some irony that:

> "Besides, 172 years of traditional photography doesn't seem
> to have done much to bring an end to war, so it made sense
> to me to try the new technology and the latest social media."
> (Leistner, 2012a, online).

It is this historically unique time, when a smartphone was used for the first time in the framework of the *Basetrack* project to professionally report on warfare, that she describes in her book, which is inspired by McLuhan's concepts. The application of the theory of the professor from Toronto changed her perspective and the way of perceiving not only the photography process itself, but also (or maybe even: above all) the surrounding reality and methods of its description. In her monograph, apart from using theoretical foundations, the artist followed in the footsteps of the famous Canadian, also in the visual sphere of the text and its characteristic composition. According to McLuhan, the linearity imposed on researchers for years, adherence to the academic framework for building a narrative or unified fonts are no longer necessary elements of the publishing game, the rules of which should now be established by the creator himself each time. In Leistner's works, it manifests itself primarily in the original layout of the text, the free use of diagrams, handwriting and drawings.

In her opinion: "Once you start looking for Marshall McLuhan, it's impossible not to see traces of him everywhere." (Leistner, 2013, p. 72). Nothing is as it once seemed. The blog and book *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan* are publications full of photographs, not so much about the war itself as about how to deal with its everyday presence. However, these are not "ordinary" albums simply filled with pictures and author's comments. The use of elements of McLuhan's theory allowed the author to undertake a different way of interpreting the photos she took during the *Basetrack* project. Instead of focusing on the human face of war, as she had been doing so far, she focused on its technological dimension, analyzing in it primarily what the Canadian researcher described as the extensions of man. Such a perspective also enables the recipients to look at the images of war from a different, less emotional perspective, and thus try to undertake some rational reflection on what they see. Traditional war photographs, focused on the human and his or her tragic fate, can often literally paralyze the viewers who want to cut themselves off and distance themselves from them as soon as possible. In her story, Leistner combines considerations on the nature of war with thoughts on the development of various methods of interpersonal communication and the essence of humanity (especially in the context of military interventions). Despite the serious subject matter undertaken by the author, at first glance it is easy to notice the play with convention, so characteristic of McLuhan, and the balancing between the "scientific" and "artistic" content of the presented content. The famous Canadian was a full professor of English literature, but opinions questioning both the "scientificity" of his works and the research

methods used accompanied him basically from the beginning of his career. The researcher himself was convinced that the essence of the activity of all people (regardless of what they do) is a full understanding of the effects of their own actions, as well as openness to new knowledge available in their time. Explaining the meaning of such observations, McLuhan eagerly recalled the story of the protagonist of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom," containing the memories of a sailor from a ship wrecked by a storm. He managed to save himself from the rough waves by observing the principles of the operation of a sea vortex - first pulling objects to the bottom, and then pushing them to the surface. For the Canadian author, this is an interesting metaphor for modern media, which, like sea waves, can be dangerous if you do not know how they operate. Therefore, as in the story of Poe, in order to survive the contact with modern means of communication, one has to get into the very center of the vortex, see how it works and simply enjoy the impartial observation. McLuhan emphasized that the purpose of his publication is precisely: "to set the reader at the center of revolving picture created by these affairs where he may observe the action that is in progress and in which everybody is involved." (McLuhan, 1967, p. V). Leistner's story is constructed in a similar way. The artist also places the reader in the very center of a strong current of images, words and emotions, so that they can observe them carefully and, at the right moment, safely surf to the surface.

Her narrative is based on three main perspectives. First of all, we are dealing here with an approach of a linguist. Leistner notes that:

> "It's safe to say that everything that has to do with Marshall McLuhan begins with language [...] This book, too, is a gloss of things I read in McLuhan, things I'd read before I'd read McLuhan, and things I read because I'd read McLuhan."
> (Leistner, 2013, p. 34).

Following in the footsteps of the title character, the author presents how language, writing, print and typography have shaped - and still shape - human history and culture. In addition to the obvious forms of communication, such as speech and writing, her history also includes other, often surprising ways of communication, including those that we have already forgotten or did not include in this category at all. Unmanned drones, the characteristic buzzing of which accompanies the inhabitants of Afghanistan around the clock; a donkey saving human life when the telephone network is turned off and you cannot call for help, or a soldier's uniform categorically defining the line between "us" and "them."

In addition to language (spoken, written, and printed), other equally important heroes of the transmission of information play a major role in this narrative: images, photos, and above all light and darkness. The statement that light or its absence play an extremely important, even fundamental role

in the work of every photographer is definitely not something revealing. Leistner, however, draws attention to other, less obvious contexts and meanings of these phenomena, relating to various forms of art or religion. The artist recalls McLuhan, who stated in the *Gutenberg Galaxy* that:

> "Scribal culture and Gothic architecture were both concerned with light *trough*, not light *on*. […] This theme enters into the very texture of medieval thought and sensibility, as in the technique of the "gloss" to release the light from within, the text, the technique of the illumination as light *through* not *on*, and the very mode of Gothic architecture itself." (McLuhan, 1969, pp. 130-131).

According to the photographer, this is an idea that surprisingly returns in the 21st century. The screen becomes a modern stained-glass window that emits light in an equally mystical way as in the Gothic one. When we read something on a smartphone or computer, the light does not shine on it, but emanates from it. However, these are devices that, unlike a printed book, need electricity or batteries to function. On the other hand, the energy of copies materialized, for example by printing, will never run out, but they cannot be read in the dark.

Reflection on light shows the second perspective: the photographer's view as a mechanical performer, using an automatic camera, and as an artist for whom photography is a specific sequence of activities (from taking a picture to developing and presenting it).

As already mentioned, Leistner never had an iPhone before leaving for Afghanistan, and she did not take photos with a mobile phone. The artist was really surprised by the extraordinary ease of photographing with a smartphone, and at the same time by the very high quality of the received images. She was also moved by the possibilities that the smartphone gives reporters, although at the same time she was wondering about the future of photography as an art form and an expression of its creator's artistry. In this context, she asked questions about what the "artistry" of photos is now, and about the role that digital photography can play in showing the truth about reality.

The third perspective the author adopts in her story is the view of a human being - the human perspective. The critical situation in the life of the local population in Afghanistan, as well as the functioning of the military base itself, which she visited, became a source of reflection on the moral responsibility of Westerners (especially Americans and Canadians) for what is happening in the East. Much space (both textually and visually) was also devoted to the problem of dehumanization, which is inevitably associated with military operations.

> "That is the job of war: you have to dehumanize someone,
> after all, in order to kill or torture them with a clean
> conscience." (Leistner, 2013, p. 70).

The above threads still intertwine with each other, creating an extremely colorful mosaic of texts and images.

Building a narrative about the war and being tired of compassion

Attempts to describe and understand man's war inclinations have accompanied us at least since the times of Homer's *Iliad*. From the mid-nineteenth century, interpretations of photographs showing armed conflicts became an important tool in this endeavor. Such images, due to the authenticity attributed to them - almost automatically - and the way in which they affect the viewers, can influence public attitudes much more intensely than the text itself does. Since the beginning of the Persian Gulf conflict in the early 1990s, we have witnessed the use of images and accompanying words as a weapon as effective as a rifle or mine.

> "Since the Persian Gulf War in 1991, we have witnessed not
> only the most impressive use of military weapons but also
> the use of words and images as weapons of war, and the
> mass media have become an integral part of modern warfare
> […] visual news images influence people's information
> processing in evaluating social and political environments. In
> particular, when photographic messages are widely used as
> an iconic material for a visually mediated war, visual news
> images may have a huge influence in shaping public opinion
> on the war […].The recent military conflicts in the Middle East
> have offered a unique chance to examine how visual
> messages have been presented to guide interpretation of
> foreign events, places and people." (Fahmy & Kim, 2008, p.
> 443).

In this context, it is clear that photographs do play a special role in the media coverage of conflicts, as they can be used to foster the expected attitudes of the public, preferably without rational thinking and analysis. It is also worth noting that the "truth" of the published image (regardless of whether it shows something that actually happened or not), ultimately has much less importance than the role that its influence plays in building an officially accepted narrative. Indeed, soldiers, civilians, war zones, battlefields, military bases, street protests, uprisings, revolutions, terrorist acts, or the military, etc. can be presented in such a way as to convey specific information to the audience, but also to elicit information from them strictly defined reactions. As a result, the public is usually kept away from the reality of war, and photographs appearing in the official media rarely show death or other

traumatic consequences of the fighting. As a result, most of the time we can only see the "war without blood."

In addition, as a result of the digitization of war photos, the boundary between news and entertainment, media and public diplomacy, professional and amateur journalism, as well as between different genres of photographic representation is slowly blurring. The difference between the photojournalists who have been incorporated and work "with the military" and those who remain independent is becoming increasingly clear. The former are caught up in the imperatives and goals of foreign policy, and their relations influence the sensitivity of Western audiences, separating them from compassionate photojournalism. By contrast, those photographers who are independent of the military often shoulder the burden of "witnessing", especially in the face of human rights cases in international conflicts and the possibility of seeking justice in the event of violations. It is also mentioned by Rita Leistner, who additionally draws attention to other important aspects of embedded and non-embedded journalism:

> "The first rule of journalism is to get to where the story is. It takes enormous personal and financial investment to get to a war zone. Working embedded with the military makes war cheaper for journalists and the outlets they are working for. There are photographers who work for and are paid by the military, and there have always been freelance war photographers who foot their own bills and hope to make their money back through stringing and selling stories and photographs after the fact. The list of photography gear is heavy and expensive enough, but add to that bullet-proof vests and helmets, computers, satellite transmitters, possibly a bivouac tent and sleeping bag and, if you are a woman, an array of culturally acceptable garments - maybe even a fake wedding ring - depending on where you are going. The planning, organization, research and logistics of where to go, what to eat, where to relieve yourself, how to get around, and what to do once you arrive is formidable - before you have even taken a photograph." (Leistner, 2018, online).

We must remember, however, that the official discourse does not dictate that the stories which are related from - as Leistner put it - "where the story is" provide the recipients with reliable information. The stakes in this game are very high, so the main task of the pro-government media is to get the viewers into a state of short term and not too deep agitation, of course in favor of official politics. The dominant way of reporting the war is thus superficial and simplified, and the messages transmitted are constructed in such a way as to prevent deeper analyzes and the anti-government attitudes that may result from them.

War and artists

During the war, art - especially socially engaged art - usually becomes a tool used in two ways. It serves either to show the truth about the fights being fought, or as an element of constructing an appropriate image in the pursuit (on the part of all participants involved in them) to win the favor of public opinion. In such circumstances, artists can be witnesses to war, interpreters of war, historians of war, or those who are the loudest to protest against it. From the moment US troops arrived in Iraq and Afghanistan, American society has attached great importance to both the way in which the war is conducted and the accompanying artistic commentaries. Tanks, drones, or rocket launchers are the main weapons in combat, but art often becomes the most important element in the battle for the "hearts and minds" of American public opinion.

An interesting look at these issues is presented by Peter Campbell in his essay *The Lens of War*. In his view, war photography is a kind of performance art, and the very process of taking a photo may be more "artistic" than its final effect. The roles in this "show" are mixed up: when a photographer looks at a given topic, he is its audience, and when he selects and controls the moment at which a photo is taken - he is the actor. The whole process begins with the pursuit of the subject (it can be a human, light effect, place, animal or just an unusual combination of ordinary things) and ends with the interpretive work of the viewer. According to Campbell, precisely the fact that photography forces viewers to interpret it means that it is photography which, among all the fields of art, has the greatest power to arouse their creative anxiety (Campbell, 2009, p. 71).

A similar approach also appears in the reflections of Rita Leistner, who in *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan* not only looks for a way of artistic self-identification in the era of modern communication devices (taking over the "traditional" tasks of "traditional" photographers), but also openly describes herself as a socially engaged artist. Based on McLuhan's media theory, the author broadens the optics of the above-mentioned considerations and highlights two issues that do not appear in the texts of the cited researchers. First, it recalls one of the most important claims of the Canadian thinker about war, that it always uses the latest technology available in a given culture. Leistner notices the same mechanism in war photographers who, due to strong competition in the profession, in the name of gaining an advantage over others, are somehow forced to follow new media and constantly update the technical solutions used. But with this is the second assumption that Leistner found in McLuhan: photographers - who are artists after all - should enjoy the use of each new means of perception provided by successive innovations. Artists are the ones who see more. This statement results from the concept of artistic creativity formulated by McLuhan, which is

an important element of his theory of media. According to the author, new technologies, art and the functioning of society are closely related. New methods of communication always pose a great challenge for the community, with which only artists can cope. Without art, we will not get full knowledge about everyday life. Without insight into everyday life, we will not get full knowledge about art. Art occupies a very important place in this theory, and the artists themselves are treated as exceptional members of society. Interestingly, in many of McLuhan's statements, the theme of the effects (which seem to be only negative) of the media's influence and the roles played by artists in relation to them, is connected with the theme of war and violence. The author illustrates the essence of this relationship, for example, in relation to the works of James Joyce. According to him:

> "Joyce was probably the only man ever to discover that all social changes are the effect of new technologies (self-amputations of our own being) on the order of our sensory lives. It is the shift in this order, altering the images that we make of ourselves and our world, that guarantees that every major technical innovation will so disturb our inner lives that wars necessarily result as misbegotten efforts to recover the old images." (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968, p. 5).

McLuhan compares the emergence of another technique by which we extend the reach of our senses to a surgical operation that was performed without the use of any antiseptics. The place of the treatment, i.e. the direct impact of the extension, is anesthetized and does not cause pain, but the effects of toxic bacteria, in this case an imbalance between the senses, endanger the entire body. When we introduce a new extension, we must take into account the inevitable contamination of the entire system, unknowingly undergoing changes that disrupt the harmony of our senses. In *Laws of media*, the author emphasizes that:

> "Radical changes of identity, happening suddenly and in very brief intervals of time, have proved more deadly and destructive of human values than wars fought with hardware weapons. In the electric age, the alteration of human identity by new service environments of information has left whole populations without personal or community values to a degree that far exceeds the effects of food-and-fuel-and-energy-shortages." (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1989, p. 97).

According to McLuhan, however, we are slowly beginning to notice that it is art that can provide us with this particular resistance to the dulling effects of the media. Thanks to it, we not only gain knowledge of how to reorganize the human psyche to be able to predict the next "hit" of our extensions, but it also gives us detailed information about the blows that will be inflicted on the

human psyche by measures which alleviate irritation: new technologies. In this context, McLuhan, using the name of the World War II radar defense system, defines art as the Early Warning System, which becomes necessary to make us aware of all the mental, social and technological consequences of each new transmitter and the environment it transforms.

> "The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation and more, has long been recognized. In this century Ezra Pound called the artist "the antennae of the race". Art as radar acts as "an early alarm system", as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic, contrasts with the popular idea of them as mere self-expression. If art is an "early warning system" to use the phrase from World War II, when radar was new, art has the utmost relevance not only to media study but to the development of media controls." (McLuhan, 2003, p.16).

McLuhan does not treat art as an escape from everyday life or a path to catharsis, but as a basic element of attitude towards reality, necessary to understand the place we occupy and will occupy in the world. Every artist, every kind of art regardless of place and time, provides the information necessary for this. According to McLuhan, art is a specific extension of consciousness, and its most important function is to provide information about the world around us.

> "They know that they are engaged in making live models of situations that have not yet matured in the society at large. In their artistic play, they discovered what is actually happening, and thus they appear to be "ahead of their time". Non-artists always look at the present through the spectacles of preceding age. General staffs are always magnificently prepared to fight the previous war." (McLuhan, 2003, p. 324).

According to the author, art equips us with the tools necessary to analyze both the existing and the coming reality. In his opinion, art is a new perception and has the power to direct human society to new relationships and attitudes. Therefore, it provides the society with an accurate description and possible interpretations of the reality created by the media.

Narrative method and iProbe analysis

For the visual analysis of Leistner's story, we were looking for a tool that would allow not only to focus on the photographs and the text, but also to look at the structure of the story as a whole and the way in which its threads

are connected. Our choice was the narrative analysis (which is one of the stages of the narrative method), which is usually used to interpret the materials collected during narrative interviews. Nowadays, it is also used more and more often for other forms of narration, such as, for example, series of publications posted on the Internet as blogs or posts on social networks. It allows one to notice the means of expression which they use, the way of writing and the logic that governs the story. In blogs, we encounter a loose structure and variable sequencing of story elements, as well as the spontaneity of the story (in terms of publication frequency, subject matter, and the multiple plots which dominate in it). An important feature differentiating the narrative found in blogs or series of posts is that it enriches it with additional elements such as interactive, visual, and audio materials, as well as links to other narratives in the virtual world. It is them that pose new questions for the researcher about how to analyze the narrative.

Based on some ideas of McLuhan, Leistner first created a blog and then a book about her experiences in Afghanistan. She published photos and wrote about her impressions and observations related to them. To create these stories, she used self-constructed iProbes (a combination of the words "iPhone" and "probe") referring to the McLuhan probes. Although the source of their creation is different (the probe in this original understanding results from words, not from the image), each iProbe created by Leistner also presents facts metaphorically, showing that each object can be something different than what is revealed to us at first glance eye. The author created 12 iProbes (whose titles differ slightly in the blog and in the book): The Process; The iPhone and the Hipstamatic App, Body Armour; MRAP (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected) Vehicles; Figure/Ground; Improvised
Explosive Devices (IEDs) Made of Wood; Fuel Dispensers; Loudspeakers and Sermons from the Mosque; Can You Hear Me Now?; The Written Word – Proceed At Your Own Risk; Reaper and Predator Drones; Sandbags and HESCO Concertina Barriers.

The starting point of our story about iProbes is the narrative offered in them by the author, based primarily - which results from the essence of the *Basetrack* project itself - on reporting various aspects of everyday life in the Musa Qala base. Interestingly, it is difficult to talk about a single leading story, because there is no chronology of successive events. On the other hand, while each iProbe has a different theme, Leistner's main focus remains the same: the relationship between man and modern technology.

In each iProbe, Leistner uses new images and citations, but the content is similar in structure. They include: a theme referring to the discussed artifactextension, photo visualizations, quotations from the works of Marshall McLuhan and other media theorists, statements by soldiers, experts, journalists and, of course, the author's main text. Thus, two main elements of

her story are clearly visible here: the text (the main text, i.e. the reflection presented in a given iProbe, as well as quotes and references, often expressing the author's attitude to the topic in question) and the image (mainly Leistner's photos, but also graphics, diagrams and region map). Contrary to her earlier works and publications, this time the artist presents a "war without blood," but this does not mean that her message serves the purpose of propaganda to legitimize military actions or that it is devoid of emotions. Rather, they are semi-private accounts that show the audience how this bloodless part of everyday life during war looks like in the eyes of the base's inhabitants.

The text is based on the photos contained therein, which most often literally illustrate what the author writes about. iProbes mainly concern the technologies that surround the inhabitants of the base in order to create a sense of security in these extreme conditions, and then (remotely) share it with the loved ones in America. The author describes various methods of communication which, on the one hand, serve to ensure comfort and connectivity with the family home, but on the other hand, may expose their users to serious danger (e.g. due to the possibility of locating an active mobile phone, or exposure to a sniper's sight).

In line with the idea of the *Basetrack* project, the photographs she took show soldiers during their daily duties (both trivial, such as working out or eating, and serious ones related to warfare, such as patrols), thanks to which their observer has the impression that it is a safe place that might as well be in an ordinary training ground rather than in a war-torn country. After all, the main task of these photos was to calm down the families of soldiers who could observe the life of the base on a computer screen, seemingly with a rather low risk. But the means of communication are not the only extensions Leistner is interested in. Equally important in this story is the lethal technology for waging war effectively, securing soldiers, and ultimately gaining an advantage over the enemy and victory. This technology serves to provide security, in the literal, physical sense. But it also deprives everyone within its range of humanity.

Apart from the image and the text, one more element constructed by Leistner's iProbe must be mentioned. The analysis of the photos themselves without context - in this case references to the specificity of the language and topics coexisting with them in individual texts - does not reflect the full dimension of its narrative: it does not describe the emotions contained in them. And it is precisely their comprehension that allows for a better understanding of the correspondence of the elements with which the story was built. They are not expressed directly, but they swirl and brew just below the surface, giving their messages incredible power, and at the same time allowing the artist to work through the Afghan trauma.

"War photographers spend a lot of time looking into the eyes
of injured souls. Trauma is all around. But the practice of
reviewing and revisiting what we have seen, which is
inherent to the job, is a kind of self-talk prophylactic therapy.
In this way, part of our self-care is built into our work."
(Leistner, 2018, online).

An attempt to identify and combine the emotions contained in the iProbes
with the topics discussed in them may therefore be a procedure that allows
for a deeper understanding of Leistner's multidimensional narrative. The
photographs in the publication - somewhat contrary to the declarations she
expressed about focusing on technology, not humanity - express the emotions
she felt while observing reality in Afghanistan, but they can also be seen in
the accompanying text, especially in the McLuhan quotes cited by the author,
supporting her reflections on the relationship between technology and the
human. The photographer uses many words that can be described as
expressing emotions, both positive (e.g. *seduced; amazing; winning war over
hearts and minds*) and negative (*damned; dehumanize; kill; torture*).

In search for the points of coherence and the differences that appear in the
iProbes (image and text) presented by Leistner, we propose an example of
"structuring" the stories they contain. We organize the results obtained in this
way in such a way as to allow for the identification of the key elements of the
story and the recognition of the relationship between them. Bearing in mind
that the photographs served the author as a form of therapy in reducing post-
traumatic stress, we try to draw attention to the emotions present in them
and their role in the presentation and victory of humanity over the darkness
of warfare. The analysis of the relationship between McLuhan's concept and
Rita's photos allowed us to reconstruct some of the meanings of the objects
appearing in her photos. Below we present a visualization showing which of
McLuhan's reflections appear in Rita Leistner's photos.

Diagram 1. Correspondence of McLuhan's reflections and Rita Leistner's associations
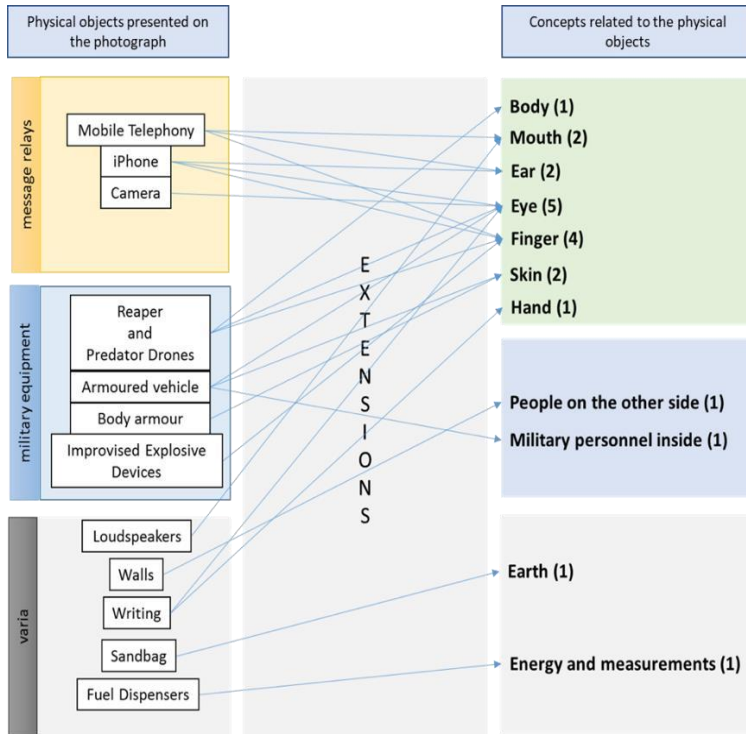
The diagram clearly shows that the author's texts most often refers to "body extensions," one of the most important concepts proposed by McLuhan. This procedure allows her to focus on the technical (and less emotional) dimension of the war and the forms that are taken by subsequent extensions that constitute the equipment of a modern army.

The interpretive approach to the photographed objects harmonizes with the content, which in the course of the analysis reveals the subject of the posts published by Leistner on the blog and then developed in the book.

Diagram 2. Sequence of topics and interpretations of visual material (keywords play this role)

Date	Topic	Interpretation
02-Luty	Lookin for McLuhan in Afghanistan	About the project and method
07-Luty	iPhone and Hipstamatic	
09-Luty	Body and armor	On armor defending against threats
14-Luty	Armored vehicles MRAP*	
16-Luty	World behind MRAPs' window	Armor and perception of the world against which he defends
21-Luty	Explosive charges	Threats
23-Luty	Transport - fuel distribution	Transport
28-Luty	Mosques and communication	About communication
01-Mar	Telephones - the risk of being heard	
06-Mar	The written word - the risk of misunderstanding	
08-Mar	Drones - safe observation of the world	How to increase security and reduce the risk
13-Mar	Wall - the border between two worlds	

The text is always enriched with visual material, in each post there is a clear correspondence between them. At the beginning of images and written texts, there are many positive and negative emotions.

Travel and exploration release emotions related to freedom and curiosity, and the forms of imaging available in the technology provided by the iPhone enhance these emotions.

Leistner commemorates the first meeting with Marines in photos, which are filled with peace, self-confidence, and self-control. The technology surrounding the heroes of her story is impersonal, cold - and with these photos the emotions described in the text also subside. When the Marines meet with the local community, they have stories of charges, traps, dangers, and the need to defend the soldiers with the armored vehicles in which they move and the bulletproof vests they wear.

Communication stands out in the foreground of subsequent statements and photos. With it comes the risk of being heard, overheard, tracked. It is a picture of another threat. But communication is also a chance to talk to the loved ones that the Marines miss.

The last clear theme of *Basetrack*'s story is: drones, physical exercise - on the one hand, the pursuit of constant control of the hostile world around it, and, on the other hand, the pursuit of strengthening, strength and readiness to face a threat.

> "It was important for the Marines to believe they would win at war because of their superior technologies, and drones, with their remotecontrolled, super-accurate targeting and high-resolution cameras, are a perfect symbol of everything that can make humans capable of fighting a war without actually putting their physical selves at risk." (Leistner, 2012b, online)

In this plot, Rita also allows herself a kind of bitter irony when she presents a drawing of a mouse sitting at the controls of a drone. This picture can symbolize the "laboratory" conditions of modern combat, in which there is no longer even physical contact with the enemy - the drone operator may be in a building thousands of kilometers away from the target.

> "The distance between [a bomber pilot a few hundred feet above a village] and the people he is bombing makes them into an impersonal target, no longer human beings like himself with whom he can identify." (Leistner, 2012b, online).

Conclusion

The use of the narrative method in the analysis of Rita Leistner's blog and book *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan* shows, in our opinion, promising potential. It allows for capturing the means of expression used in them, ways of writing and logic of the story, as well as the loose structure and sequential nature of the presented content. The way in which the author creates her visual stories is also interesting, using in them, apart from the text, additional elements, such as photographs and drawings. It was the combination of these various forms of communication that raised questions

about a new way of applying the narrative method. The focus on both the text and the images allowed for the reconstruction of the narrative and for determining the specificity of Leistner's statements. As a result, we created a synthetic description and sequence of topics appearing in her publications.

As a method of interpretation that allows us to define the correspondence of images with written statements, we used the reconstruction of the dialogue taking place between the text and the image. On the other hand, understanding the multidimensionality of the author's narrative required associating the dominant subject of the blog, i.e. extensions of man serving the war with emotions. To this end, we used sentiment analysis, identifying the words that emotions express.

A story built through photography, drawing, with an engaged verbal narrative and the author's reflection allows us to look at the reported events from many cognitive perspectives. Leistner is not only one of the participants in the events, but also constantly observes the world she talks about, senses the emotions and moods of the soldiers she accompanies and constantly looks inside herself, trying to understand her experiences and emotions accompanying them. This thicket of stimuli makes the story, the form of the narrative, the wealth of observations and accompanying emotions an unusually rich testimony about a human being. This is precisely how Rita Leistner's visual storytelling is achieved. They are based on conflicts important to every human being (good - evil, security - threat, enemy - friend). They look for a solution by showing the world what violence leads to and the state in which it leaves the victims of war (and therefore also those who survived the war). It engages the viewer not only with words, the gradual intensity of emotions when we go deeper into the narrative, but also and above all with a moving image. Visual storytelling by Leistner is a multidimensional story, to which we return many times to discover its new and "hidden" meanings.

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