

Riitta Brusila:

Realismista fiktoon. Visuaalisuus ja suomalaiset aikakauslehdet. Väitöskirja (From Realism to Fiction. Visuality and Finnish Periodicals)

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Tampere, 1997, 195 p. (Doctoral Dissertation)

The position of the photograph is important in the mass media. Its level of use and visual prominence are higher than other content elements. Yet it has been studied little in the Finnish mass communication studies. One proposal to estimate and assess the look and credibility of photographs is Riitta Brusila's doctoral dissertation *Realismista fiktoon* where she handles visuality and Finnish periodicals.

The heading of the work is extensive but promises too much. Even if layout and typography are discussed in the work, their analysis is lighter than of the main object: analysis of pictures of people. Because of this, the heading could have been made to stress them and through them, the visual look and genres of periodicals.

The aim of Brusila is to find out in what way pictorial journalism is an expression of the world and the medium where the picture is published. Reality is according to Brusila something that exists, from which each journal chooses forms of representation and pictures typical to its own identity. As her first objective, Brusila has to outline the present state of picture journalism; the second is to examine the setting of photographs and other elements on the pages as a whole.

The source material in examining pictures are Finnish periodicals; general magazines, womens' magazines, financial magazines, elitist general magazines and cultural magazines and special interest magazines, one issue of each. In these, Brusila analyzes 839 photographs. Majority of the pictures are pictures of people (54%). Another large group are pictures of various objects. Other named groups are animal and nature pictures, cultural interiors and pictures depicting events. Most of the pictures are in colour.

On the basis of the relations between text and pictures, Brusila classifies general interest magazines, *Tekniikan Maailma* and *Form & Function* as picture dominated. Financial magazines, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, *Yliopisto* and *MacMaailma* are text dominated. In their use of picture and text, the women's magazines, *Image*, *Suomen Luonto* and the *Monthly Supplement of Helsingin Sanomat*, vary greatly. Generally speaking, politics and economy

were approached through text. General interest magazines and women's magazines give much room to pictures, and the pages of cultural magazines are filled with them, at least when fine arts is the subject. As a particular characteristic of special interest magazines, pictoriality varies quite a bit and depends on the subject.

The Dimensions of a Picture

Brusila analyzes pictures of people in five groups. The first group consists of realistic pictures of people where the aim is to strive for a picture that is equal to a natural visual perception. A picture of this group would depict a situation that would exist even if the photographer was not present. The second group is composed of simulated natural pictures of people which are somewhere between a realistic picture and a portrait. These differ from realistic pictures in the fact that the people photographed are present for the purpose of being photographed. In the picture there is often material, things or objects pertaining to the activities of the photographed person. The third group comprises simulated pictures of people, which are characterized by an effort to seek some positive feature of the portrayed person and to emphasize it. This kind of photograph is always commissioned and accentuates the positive, sometimes to the point of obsequiousness.

The two latter groups have to do with staging and fiction. The fourth form of picture is a pictorially fictionalized photograph of a person where the aim is to depart from reality in some form. The object can be connected with some existing model which nevertheless does not fill the original expectations. An example of this is a photograph of a member of parliament, scantily clad in a pin-up like picture with a caption: "A flirt a day keeps one young".

The fifth group of pictures covers plastically fictionalized photographs of people. In them, the manipulation takes place mainly in the colours and forms of the picture.

Yellow Press: Ironizing the Persons and their Pictures

In addition to the handling of pictures of people, the most interesting part of Brusila's work is in my mind the classification of magazines. Even if the ideal types of pictures of people are not tied to certain kinds of magazines according to Brusila, she finds that inside journalism, they form their own genres. On the basis of them, a distinction can be made between the most visible genres, the yellow

press and quality magazines. Portrait-like pictures are missing in the yellow press. According to Brusila, this is explained by the fact that the function of the yellow press is not to lend support to the status of those in power. The yellow press aims at breaking the stylistic means of image building and mocks and ironizes the powers that be; they want to make the representatives of the elite subjects of entertainment, even peeping.

Another typical feature of the yellow press and women's magazines is a pictorially fictionalized photograph of a person. Their function is to entertain and have a connection with consuming. With the help of fictionalization, roles are built up whose function is to turn the object to a spokesperson for cosmetics or to make him or her otherwise entertaining.

A Tell-Tale Sign: The Layout

The magazines organize their material on their pages in a fashion typical to their own style. The starting point in the layout is its density: how much elements are placed on a page or a spread. If there is a lot of elements, the page looks full and its density is high. This feature divides magazines in two groups. According to Brusila, the more populist the magazine is, the higher its typographical density. Density is typical to general magazines of which *7 Päivää* represents an extreme example.

The density of *7 Päivää* is based on many, partly overlapping elements. The cramped style can be used to denote variety and abundance. The reader gets the feeling of receiving value for his or her money.

In contrast, the elitist style makes use of empty space, which means that magazines of this type emphasize their own prestige with their visual spaciousness and scarcity of elements on the pages.

An Academic Dissertation

The use of special terminology belongs to academic discussion and is facilitated by it. In Brusila's book, there is much of special terminology. This makes it hard and difficult to read for someone not acquainted with this particular field of study. The work is not a picture guide for the layman.

The first part of the work is very detailed. In my mind, some of the most basic and obvious things could have been left out, for instance, the definition of editorial work and basic classification of periodicals. Instead, the author should have concentrated on the central classifications germane to the work. In the first part there is an interesting historical

overview discussing the history of picture. Of this, there ought to have been picture material attached as an appendix in addition to the photographs used in the research.

Riitta Brusila's *Realismista Fictioon* is thoughtfully written. It is a proposal to assess the contents and credibility of photographs. It helps the professional of pictures who wishes to have further means to analyze photographs. As such, the book fills a void in the Finnish journalism research.

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