

# **Reading Pictures, Constructing Narratives**

– A Study upon Pictorial Narrativity and a Narrative Analysis  
of Work Photography

University of Lapland  
Faculty of Art and Design  
EMACIM / Audiovisual Media Culture  
2015  
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### **Summary**

This pro gradu thesis aims to find out how pictorial narrativity can be defined. It also aims to explore photograph's narrative potential through narrative analysis of work photography. The research material consists of 20 black&white photographs taken by Jaakko Alatalo in 1980's–1990's. In addition to the principles of narrative research, the analysis also leans on the tradition of semiotics and stretches some concepts of narratology to be used in analysis of pictorial representations.

The theoretical framework of the study consists of controversial scientific discussion about narratives, narrativity and pictures' ability to tell stories. Many theorists tend to point out that the main problem in narrativity of a single still picture is its inability in representing temporal continuum of events. The author's approach to the subject is interpretator-orientated and it also has emphasis on intentionality; narrativity of a picture is a matter of photographer's intention and receiver's activity as an interpretator.

The research results of the narrative analysis of work photography gave a subjective insight to the work culture of Western Lapland in 1980's and 1990's by categorizing photographs into five different types of narratives. The analysis also showed that there are different levels of narrativity and that the viewer's role in the construction of a narrative is emphasized if the picture's level of narrativity is low.

**Key words:** Narrative research, Photograph analysis, Pictorial narrativity, Semiotics, Narratology

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

My pro gradu thesis is a study upon pictorial narrativity and a narrative analysis of work photography.

When I started going through my photographer father's photo archives I noticed that there were a huge amount of pictures of work; people immersed in their work or posing for the camera at their working environment. Another reason for me to select work photography was that my grandfather used tell his family to take pictures when people are working. According to him there was no point taking pictures of people just posing. It is true that work tells a lot about the person doing it – work is a major part of our identities. Especially back in the old days work was highly appreciated, whereas nowadays people put higher value on their freetime. I do not know whether it was my grandfather's intention, but I think that pictures of work have *much more to tell* than pictures of merely posing people. It seems my grandfather wanted photographs to convey stories about

day-to-day life.

It's interesting to take a look at our recent history. At the same time it feels very close when I only look at 20–30 years to the past. However, since there has been major changes in culture during the past few decades it feels as if there's more than a few decades since the 80's. It's fascinating to realize that 1980's and 1990's has been very meaningful time when my study is concerned. It has been a turning point in photography, working culture, and in scientific research. Digitalization and computers changed both photography and ways of working. In the late 90's memory cards came to replace the analogic films and image processing was done with computers. Also many fields of work changed for good due to information technology. When it comes to scientific research, this was the time when narrative research was acknowledged as a credible method and approach. It had been formerly known within philosophy, linguistics and literature but on the other fields the rise of narrativity took place in 80's and 90's. (Heikkinen 2007, 142).

People are intrigued by stories. Recently it has been understood that using narratives in different fields of life is efficient. They can be used for example in pedagogical purposes, in experience economy, in business, and in research. I am also very intrigued by storylike structures. Stories evoke feelings and one can relate to them. Even though stories are often fully or partly fictional one can learn valuable things about the surrounding reality. This is why I engross in my research material via narrative analysis. In her article *Modernin maailman kokijat* Elina Heikka writes about northern photography. I share her view that photographs can be seen as clues that are waiting for interpretation. Clues that tell the story of the past. She argues that photographs can tell stories just as well as written material. She also states that photographs can be read as an epic story of human experiences and feelings in the chancing society. (Heikka 2000, 1–2). This is exactly what I'm aiming to read from my research material; personal stories about people facing the changing work culture.

Then why do I use photographs as research material when a study of work culture in Western Lapland could have been carried out using only written

material? I think that pictures of people at their work brings the subject closer to the reader and gives the research more tangible and humane touch. Photographs also give the research something that cannot be transmitted by words – original expressions and feelings. I also want to provide a genuine picture of the period. One can have a proper visual insight of the milieu with buildings, clothing etc. I believe that photograph has a strong power of expression. Especially I see lyrical black and white pictures to be very efficient; leaving out the colours the focus of the pictures is concentrated on the contents – the stories. Hence, I see black and white pictures as a tribute to narrativity. I use plenty of pictures among my research. Doing so I let the readers construct also their own narratives and interpretations.

Moreover, my research is not only an exploration to the working culture. I've put a lot of effort on studying pictorial narrativity. Obviously, narrativity of photographs is emphasized; can photographs tell stories? And if they can, how do they do that?

I dedicate my thesis to three special men and one fine lady; my father Jaakko, who provided me with interesting and beautiful research material, to my grandfather Veikko Robert, to whose ideological statement about work photography my thesis is based on, to my son Matti Robert, the kindest little baby, who let his mother study, and last but not least to my mother Anja, who spent countless hours with my son and with whom I had wonderful conversations about pictorial narrativity.

### ***1.1 Researcher's position, research questions and hypothesis***

My research is implemented from subjective point of view. My voice as a researcher is present throughout the research. I recognize that the set up for the research might be questionable as my research material consists of photographs taken by my own father. Hence I want to emphasize that I approach the material in an analytical way secluding the artistic aspects of the pictures and concentrating purely on the contents. I am, however, aware that

the contents of the pictures are largely affected by the photographer's choices but I don't take those choices into account in my analysis.

The way I look at the pictures is also altered by the pre-existing information I have about the photographs: they are all pictures of work and I've been told the professions of the people in the pictures. The photographs have been taken in Finnish Lapland in, roughly estimated, 1980–1990 (there might even be some photographs from the late 1970's), they represent genre of press photographs but I do not study them in their original context with written part of the story (headlines, captions, the news itself would guide the interpretation a lot). It should also be taken into consideration that I know what happened after the pictures were taken; the great recession of the 90's tormented Lapland, abandonment of the rural areas continued, technology, globalization and the mighty international enterprises changed the work culture.

The nature of my research is rather understanding than explanatory and its structure is two-dimensional. In addition to narrative analysis of photographs my research is also a study about pictorial narrativity. It is rather unexamined area and I want to take part on the controversial debate about picture's ability to tell stories.

My research questions are:

- How can narrativity of a picture be defined?
- What kind of narratives does my research material tell? And what kind of information do these narratives give?

I aim to show that pictures are narrative – some more than others. I present a model which will help to perceive my approach on pictorial narrativity. As Töttö states, theories delineated within qualitative research should be stretched in order to explore for example their validity, reliability, and generalizability (Töttö 1999, 68). Hence, I also test my own approach to pictorial narrativity when I analyze the pictures of work.



## **1.2 Structure of the research**

Narrativity in research, especially narrative analysis of visual material, is very intriguing and even controversial issue. Hence it is rather exciting to implement my research using the principles of narrative analysis. In chapter two I give an overview about narrative research in general.

In chapter three I take a closer look at pictorial narrativity and visual images' ability to tell stories. I also delineate and discuss my own approach to the issue of pictorial narrativity. My aim is not to create a strict method of narrative analysis of visual material. Instead, I want to take part on the scientific and philosophical discussion on the subject and propose a different approach that will help to understand pictorial narrativity from another angle.

When a research is based on narrativity, it's interesting to take a look at the principles of narratology, the theory of narratives. In chapter four I introduce a few narratological concepts that are interesting to examine from a pictorial point of view.

In chapter five I narrow my discourse from the wide scope of pictorial narrativity to concern photographs. I study photograph's special features as a representation and ponder how to approach photographs in research context. My approach is closely related to the tradition of semiotics. To chapter five I also include a few paragraphs about the principles of semiotics and what is its connection to photographs.

Chapter six is dedicated to my research material and the analysis. I introduce the photographer, Jaakko Alatalo and the photo series I've chosen to be analyzed. I process the material in an analytical way that is based on my own understanding about pictorial narrativity. In addition, I study how the chosen narratological concepts appear in the photographs. I'm aware that the tradition of semiotics also have its influence in the analysis, indirectly at least. The aim of my analysis is to find recurring themes that the narratives of northern work

culture of 80's and 90's tell.

Finally, in chapter eight, I wrap up my research process and ponder whether I was able to answer my research questions properly and if my analytical approach was working. I introduce the main findings about the research material. I also evaluate the information value and the generalizability of my study and the need for further research on the subject.

## **2. METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE APPROACH TO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

In this chapter I introduce the principles of narrative research: how was narrativity acknowledged as a scientific research approach? How is it applied in different fields of research and what kind of results does it produce? I also take a look at constructivism as a science philosophical approach.

### ***2.1 Basis of narrative research***

Narrativity in research means an approach that focuses on stories as constructor and conveyor of information (Heikkinen 2007, 142). Narrative research uses methods developed to analyze fictive stories to interpret "true stories". It is premised on an idea that forming stories is characteristic to people.

(Hänninen 2009).

Interest towards narrative research increased among Finnish researchers during the 90's. Before that narrativity was already acknowledged in certain fields such as literature, philosophy and linguistics. However, in the 90's narrativity spread to various disciplines. The rise of narrative research was so intense that the period is called a narrative turn – narrativity established its existence and status in the wide field of scientific research. (Heikkinen 2007, 142–143).

When talking about narratives and research one comes across many terms that are very much alike but have slightly different meanings: narrativity, narratology, narrative research, narrative analysis, and analysis of narratives. Theory of narratives is called narratology. According to Mieke Bal this theory is used in evaluating, understanding, and analyzing narratives which can be texts, images, or other artefacts that seem to have ability to convey stories. (Bal 1999, 3.) In the next chapters I shall return to the other terms mentioned above. It is, however, also important to understand what narrative itself is. In research context a narrative may appear in different forms and researchers can establish their own understanding of a narrative (Bold 2012, 17). As my research material consists of photographs I am interested on pictorial narrativity which I discuss more detailed in chapter three. One can basically analyze anything, even the phenomenon of nature, from a narrative angle. In research, at least in social context, the interest is commonly on explaining human activity (Bold 2012, 17).

### **2.1.1 Constructivistic concept of cognition and the reliability of the research**

Narrativity is based on the idea that all our knowledge – and identities – are largely constructed by stories. Narratives are meaningful also as they "make the world comprehensible" (Ranta 2011). This approach is linked to concepts of postmodernism and constructivism. Constructivism is a science philosophical approach that sees scientific information and the truth to be constructed by

researchers – there are no immutable truths nor pre-existing information, and there is no right or wrong information but different interpretations and meanings. (Töttö 1997, 37; Jyväskylän yliopisto 2014).

It is said that qualitative research in general is very much about interpretations. Emphasizing interpretations is also characteristic to postmodern approach to research. Postmodernists state that all research is open for interpretations. Even when writing something that is considered as a fact is actually interpretation of a writer. Author's interpretation turns into receiver's interpretation when somebody reads these "facts". (Bold 2012, 144.) Moreover, it is known also that information is altered by receiver's own life experiences and previous knowledge (Heikkinen 2007, 145). This added to the nature of narrative research – that is to say avoiding production of objective information – and the constructivistic approach together may make us wonder if one can trust the information produced in the research process. Heikkinen does admit that reliability of narrative research is problematic. It is hard to evaluate the veracity of narrative research by comparing the narratives to how the phenomenon is in reality. It is hard because the constructivistic way of thinking states that reality itself is constructed by different stories. (Heikkinen 2007, 152.) Therefore Heikkinen (2007) evaluates the veracity of narrative research through Jerome Bruner's concepts of verisimilitude and fabula.

Verisimilitude refers to the idea that instead of trying to convince readers about the truth one tries to convince about verisimilitude, truth-likeness. It cannot not be done by reasonable sentences or justification. Verisimilitude aims to produce a more holistic experience that involves emotions. This happens when the reader is affected by a story for example due to something he/she has experienced in his/her own life. (Heikkinen 2007, 153.) Consequently Heikkinen states that it is not relevant if the story is true or not. The main thing is that it is reliable so that the reader gets a simulation of real life and thus can understand something new. (Heikkinen 2007, 153–154.) This is something I apply in my research – my goal is not to analyze photographs so that I aim to find the truth behind them but to create believable narratives with valuable and credible information.

As I mentioned above, Bruner's other view to reliability is the concept of fabula. Fabula refers to the universal and eternal themes of human life such as birth and death, love, power, jealousy, grudge and so on. In stories these humane emotions are applied in different situations, time, space, and contexts. (Heikkinen 2007, 154.) As I understand these eternal themes add the verisimilitude of the story by making it easier to relate to, hence we all have experienced these basic feelings ourselves.

Narrative analysis and creating stories as part of research process makes the line between fictional literature and scientific research ficker. Incidentally, Heikkinen states that all scientific research is fictional in the end if we critically think of the research process; a researcher studies different sources, combines them with his/her own statements and ideas. The final product is constructed of these different elements and is, thus, fictional. (Heikkinen 2007, 150.)

Based on principles of constructivism and Heikkinen's interpretations of modern concepts of reliability I can state that my research produces narratives and information that are realistic yet not necessarily truthful. The readers of this research will be provided with alternative narratives that will be part of the process of constructing their world view. This may sound like a very grandiose thought. However, virtually I mean that a person who has no pre-existing information on work culture in Western Lapland in the changing world of 1980 's–1990's will get some kind of insight on the subject – if not exactly truthful, at least very much realistic.

### **2.1.2 Narrative analysis produces personal and intimate research results**

It is important to understand the difference between narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Heikkinen presents Polkinhorne's division that is based on Bruner's theories of paradigmatic cognition and narrative cognition. Paradigmatic cognition refers to logical and scientific cognition that is based on

arguments, reasoning, and justification. Characteristic to paradigmatic cognition is exact definition of different terms and concepts and categorization. Narrative cognition, on the other hand, aims to produce a thematical narrative with a consistent storyline. Polkinghorne's division states that analysis of narratives subjects to paradigmatic cognition; the core idea is in classifying the elements of the story. On the contrary, narrative analysis is based on narrative cognition and the focus is on constructing a new story using the research material, and thus bringing out important themes. (Heikkinen 2007, 148–149.)

To conclude the previous, there are two ways of implementing a narrative research; the story is either used as research material that is categorized and interpreted (analysis of narratives) or, on the other hand, it can be understood that the study itself produces stories using the research material as source (narrative analysis). (Heikkinen 2007, 142.) In my study I see photographs as visual narratives; they all tell a story. However, as they are not in written form, I have had to make interpretations; how do I perceive the stories the photographs tell? Therefore I come to conclusion that my research is narrative analysis and the stories are formed as I analyze the material.

Unlike modernism, postmodernism and constructivism do not seek for one and only truth and reality and do not yearn neither for rational nor objective cognition. (Heikkinen 2007, 144–145.) Narrative research does not aim to provide objective information that could be generalized. Vice versa, the purpose is to form context-bound, subjective, and personal information – so called small stories instead of grand narratives (Heikkinen 2007, 146; 156.)

I assume that my research material provides me with several authentic small stories. Despite the fact that postmodernism gives voice to subordinated and secluded individuals by showing interest to their personal stories, and yet the modernistic idea of general grand narratives is seen obsolete (Heikkinen 2007; 146, 156), I'm willing to try to find a general *grand narratives* that combine key elements and themes from the smaller stories. The grand narratives that will be formed during my study will conclude what the general working culture of 80's and 90's in Western Lapland has been like.

### **3. REFLECTIONS UPON PICTORIAL NARRATIVITY**

#### ***3.1 Different interpretations and definitions of pictorial narrativity***

Narrativity is not the most typical approach when research material consists of photographs. However, as Mieke Bal states, there's no reason to limit narrative analysis to texts only but it can also be applied to visual material (Bal 1991, 161). Also Roland Barthes has suggested that a still image is narrative just as well as any other cultural product, and Klaus Speidel, on the other hand, is convinced that narratology involves study of pictures just as well as that of short stories. (Barthes 1977, 79; Speidel 2013.) Narrativity of photographs – and of pictures in general – is somewhat unexamined area and researchers have very



divergent opinions on the matter. Mieke Bal tells, for example, that apparently some scholars of visual arts find pictures to be so rich in representations, per se, that narrative analysis flattens them into a simply story-line, known as narrative (Bal 1999, 175).

As Michael Ranta says, it truly is a wonder that visual narratives have not gained much attention among researchers. That is peculiar because if we look back at the history we notice that visual stories are actually older than written stories; visual story-telling was already common in ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt, for instance. (Ranta 2011.) Also here in Finland there are rock paintings from the Stone Age in several locations. Klaus Speidel would also expect – assuming that pictures can tell stories – narratological analysis to be much more common than it now is (Speidel 2013).

One reason for the lack of research might also be the fact that the concept of narrative itself is not easily and clearly defined. Others deem a narrative to be an extremely vague concept, others want to keep the criteria for a narrative narrow. There are various opinions on what a narrative actually is. Roland Barthes starts his essay *Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narratives* by defining narratives to be universal, even omnipresent; they occur in every possible forms in every culture and they have existed throughout the history of mankind. Barthes implies that the generality of narratives may lead to their insignificance. Therefore the narrative discussion requires common models or as he says "an implicit system of units and rules". (Barthes 1977, 79–81.) In his paper Michael Ranta introduces a few narratologists' attempts to define a narrative. He tells about Monika Fludernik's view according to which the narrative should have a human (or at least human-like) "hero" or "protagonist" There should also be a goal for the actions of this hero and these actions should take place in an existential time-space setting. Ranta also refers to narratologist Gerald Prince's view stating that a narrative should have at least two sequential events. (Ranta 2011). As Seppänen writes, Kevin Halliwell defined three absolute criteria for a narrative which were flow of the events, chronology, and objective of the actions. Seppänen comments this statement arguing that a single picture can't fill these criteria, whereas a sequence formed

by several pictures can. (Seppänen 2001, 103.) The same remark was acknowledged also by Ryan. Though, she had a little lighter approach implying that with a sequence of still pictures narrativity is *easier* to obtain than with a single still picture. (Ryan 2015, 24.)

Ranta states the current definitions of narratives concern mainly written and verbal narratives whereas visual narratives have not been clearly defined, or at least not with such "solemnity" as verbal ones. As he writes there has been very little research on pictorial narratives, especially concerning the multiple means the artists have used to convey stories and – on the other hand – the viewer's ability to interpret and understand them. (Ranta 2011.) In his essay *Can a single still picture tell a story?* Klaus Speidel wonders if there is a need for strict definition of a narrative (Speidel 2013.) I could ask the same question. I think we can discuss the narrativity of pictures without systematic guidelines or structures for stories.

Surely it is common that the criteria, or the attempts of a definition, of a verbal narrative, have been applied on the pictures as well. Researchers must have taken a look at a picture trying to look for human protagonist defined by Fludernik and try to deduce what the goal-orientated actions in the scene might be or tried to point out "at least two sequential events". However, to me it seems that many of these numerous attempts of defining a narrative feel somewhat far-fetched and artificial. At least when we are talking about pictorial narratives.

Manuel Alvarado's and Kevin Halliwell's much-cited debate on photographs and narrativity was published in *Screen Education* in 1979–1980. The two men share conflicting opinions on the subject starting from the ontological question about the narrative ability of photographs and the role of narrative analysis. Alvarado's article was the first one of the two. He seems to accept the possibility of pictorial storytelling. However, he sets some boundaries stating that: "[...] a photograph's narrative exists only as a trace, a look, an unacknowledged current". As many researcher's see photographs as "frozen moments", Alvarado finds it an important role of narrative analysis of pictures to liberate those moments. (Alvarado 1979–1980, 7.) He divides the function of narrative

analysis in two lines. The first one should study the narrative structure, that is to say, implied order of the events (Alvarado 1979–1980, 8). That is no different from other researchers' views. However, the questionable part is how he deems it important to examine also the production, circulation, and consumption of photographs (Alvarado 1979–1980, 8). This is an issue that also Janne Seppänen criticized. He states that if the production of a picture is part of the pictorial narrative analysis then in case of verbal narrative analysis (of a novel, for example) one should also take into consideration the financial production of the publication. (Seppänen 2001, 102.) While these questions (including e.g. the photographer's actions in the situation when the picture was taken) are undeniably interesting issues to discuss, I argue that the activity behind the picture is not relevant in terms of the narrative content of the picture itself. Needless to say that the context of the photograph e.g. the publishing platform or perhaps the written captions attached to the photograph may guide the interpretations. It's not necessary, though, to include the systematic study of the production as a part of narrative analysis.

Alvarado also wants to make a distinction between advertising images and non-advertising images and his justification on doing so is based on his supposition that the narrative and the world pictured in advertising photographs are more constructed than those in non-advertising pictures. The setup, whether the photograph was intentionally constructed or "captured moment of reality", affects what kind of narrative questions are risen when analyzing the picture. (Alvarado 1979–1980, 12–15.) I find it hard to believe that non-advertising photographs would not be constructed in any way. I think the photographs that really are moments captured from reality are somewhat rare. There is something in Alvarado's article, though, that is easy to agree with; much before the "narrative turn" and the shift from modern to postmodern thinking, he has adopted a constructivistic view according to which approaching photographs from a narrative angle helps in comprehending and constructing the reality without simplified comparison with what is real (Alvarado 1979–1980, 16).

Halliwell's incisive reply to Alvarado fiercely arguments against the narrative potential of a single still photograph, "stillness" being the greatest flaw in single

photographs ability to express sequantiality which according to him, is essential to any narrative. However, Halliwell specifies that photograph's inability on *narrating* doesn't exclude the possibility of performing a *narrative analysis* on the photographs. Analysis should concentrate on unraveling the implicit order of the events, which is challenging due to photograph's static nature that can only imply and describe, not narrate. Halliwell does not approve of Alvarado's idea of including the production history of the photograph in the narrative analysis. It is part of photograph's nature not to show any other than present moment. (Halliwell 1979–1980, 79–81.) Moreover, Halliwell, too, opposes Alvarados division of photographs to advertising and non-advertising pictures stating: "There is no reason why one photograph should be more 'true' than any other, since photography is an operation". That is, I think, well said, as is his other statement on the nature of this question which is not narrative but ontological. The question is, according to him, of the utilisation of the image in different contexts. And when it comes to photography and 'truth' Halliwell states that perceiver of the picture constructs the truth through the mechanisms of communication. (Halliwell 1979–1980, 83.)

I find myself mediating between Alvarado's and Halliwell's views and realizing that my own perception is based on both of them. For instance, in my opinion, when approaching photographs from a narrative angle, the production, consumption, and the circulation of photographs should not be utterly denied, nor should this activity be highlighted as a major part of analysis. Instead, it is something we need to take into consideration, to be aware of; the context of the photograph (whether it was newspapers, art exhibition, or private photo album) affects the perception and interpretation of the photograph and is, thus, affecting the narrative. Just as well as our previous experiences and knowledge are also altering the story generated in viewer's mind.

### **3.2 Comparison of verbal and pictorial language**

In his article *Millainen kieli, sellainen kertomus* Janne Seppänen writes about

photographic narration and the differences between verbal language and photographs. Even though Seppänen admits that in some cases a photograph can bear meanings just as well, or even better, than verbal language, there are some functions that a photograph can not express: tenses or different (grammatical) persons, citations, proper nouns, participial phrases, grammatical cases etc. The most confusing deficiency in photographs according to Seppänen is photograph's nonexistent ability to express temporal stages. (Seppänen 2001, 99.) Semiotics (which I take a better look in chapter 5.4) are discussed both in the context of verbal language and pictorial representations. Semiotic functions show the differences of these two systems clearly. For example verbal language is not indexical or iconic whereas a photograph is. On the other hand, metaphors are more natural to verbal language. (Seppänen 2001, 93; 95.)

However, the criticism towards pictorial narrative seems to be blooming in academic discourse on the subject. While so many flaws and inabilities are detected and the verbal narratives are implicitly crowned to be superior to pictorial ones, it is refreshing to reflect the ideas of Marie-Laure Ryan who manifests some special narrative qualities characteristic only to pictures. In her article *Narration in Various Media* she, quite comprehensively, contemplates the way narratives function in different media. Her statements about the nature of pictorial narrativity is no significantly different from other researcher's observations. Except when it comes to the still picture's strengths in storytelling compared to other media. Ryan mentions some advantages that pictures bear. They can, for example, show beauty directly without having to name this specific feature and leave it up to the viewer's imagination to illustrate beauty in his/her mind. (Ryan 2015, 22.) This, of course, applies with many other visual features like, on the contrary to the beauty, ugliness.

Ryan also states that compared to the language, pictures represent the spatial features of a narrative better than verbal narratives. Moreover, pictures can express feelings by showing facial expressions and body language. (Ryan 2015, 22.) This is, according to my view, one of the very best qualities of

pictures' power of expression. Not always are words enough – or maybe not chosen carefully enough – when describing strong feelings. People have, however, inherent ability to understand the "universal language" of facial expressions and body language. This seems a logical transition to my other argument: pictures have, in principle, no language barriers. There are, obviously, different cultural connotations even about facial expressions, but generally thinking pictures can convey messages of some form to people speaking any language.

In addition to naming pictures' strengths, Ryan also presented some means how pictures can compensate their inabilities. For example while being unable to name characters verbally pictures can show commonly recognised attributes such as horns for a devil. In a same way pictures can also show general symbols like skull for death. (Ryan 2015, 22.)

After all, I'm not fully convinced about necessity of comparing verbal language and pictorial language. They seem to have their very special mechanisms through which they deliver their messages – why should pictures be able to express different tenses of verbs or use other special features of written or oral language?

### ***3.3 Time relations as a challenge in pictorial storytelling***

According to Speidel's essay, most of researches criticizing the narrativity of single still pictures state that the biggest challenge with capability of telling stories is the problem of showing temporal continuum of events (Speidel 2013). Also Seppänen states, that a single still picture is merely a hypothesis that rises the questions of what happened before and what is about to happen next. Seppänen criticizes Manuel Alvarado's supposition according to which it is possible to unravel the order of the events leaning only on the information given by the picture itself. (Seppänen 2001, 102.) Undeniably, representing actions in

time is not as simple for pictorial narratives as it is for verbal ones. Even so, I wouldn't say it's impossible. It's challenging, and requires activity of the viewer, as well.

However, as early researchers as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing have studied this same cause in 1766. Many researches contemplating the problem of pictorial representation of time have come across Lessing's *Laokoon: Oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* which is if not the first then at least one of the first essays dealing with the problem of showing temporal actions. His essay compares features of paintings and poetry. When he comes to think of the time and representation of actions in time, he establishes the concepts of "art of space" and "art of time". He states that when the media of expression in painting and poetry are different, painting uses "form and colour in space" whereas poetry is "articulated sounds in time" (Lessing 1766, 101). He writes: "We conclude, then, that succession of time is the department of the poet as space is that of the painter" (Lessing 1766, 120). Ranta summarized Lessing's idea well writing that "[...] poetry represents actions directly, paintings indirectly" (Ranta 2011). However, Lessing specifies that as a painting is only capable of showing objects in space, not in time, it means that a viewer has to conjecture the action. The objects in the painting are coexisting and can only show one moment of action at a time which according to Lessing means that the painter must choose "the most pregnant" moment. That is how the viewer can most easily gather what happened just before the moment in the picture and what is to happen next. (Lessing 1766, 100–102.) Lessing's essay suggests that poetry's power of expression – that of time, at least – is superior to one of painting's. Nevertheless, I deem Lessing to be ahead of his time recognizing viewer's capability on interpretations.

The concept of time in the pictures can be also discussed by the time spent on viewing the picture. A narrative is understood as a linear continuum of events proceeding in time. Picture, however, is static and the sense of linearity is not easily obtained. Pictures are, as Ranta argues, holistic as they are "almost immediately graspable". However, later in his article Ranta states that viewing a picture itself is a temporal process. (Ranta 2011.) Speidel's essay takes part on

this discussion by bringing in the concept of "double-temporality". He states that not only story events should be located in time, also the perception of the story should be a time-bound process. The fact that a picture shows everything simultaneously doesn't mean that the picture would be taken in at one glimpse. In which order the elements of the picture are perceived depends on the viewer, obviously. (Speidel 2013.)

In his essay *Time in Plastic Arts* Etienne Souriau argues that the temporal dimensions of plastic arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, design, and minor arts) are underestimated. He also criticizes the platitudinous generalization of plastic arts as "arts of space" as a contrast to the "arts of time" (music, poetry, dance, cinema). Furthermore, Souriau aptly argues that the reception of plastic arts requires time, a period of contemplation. That is when the successive events happen. (Souriau 1949, 294.) Even Lessing discusses the reception of a picture, a painting, to be precise. He argues that first we take a look at the separate parts in the painting, then at the composition they create together, and then we form an idea of the whole. (Lessing 1766, 112.) Also Ryan found the static nature of pictures to be an advantage time-wise: the viewer has plenty of time to detect and interpret the details that create the narrative effect of the picture (Ryan 2015, 22). Predetermined narration of, for example, a movie or a play doesn't allow the spectator to control the process of perception himself. Maybe, in the spirit of Souriau, the plastic arts could be considered "arts of contemplation". Unlike Souriau, I would naturally involve photography to this category.

Mieke Bal tells about repetition as a powerful means on the character building of a narrative. A character gets more familiar to the reader through repetition; the more often the character is appeared in a story, the more the reader learns about him/her. (Bal 1999, 125.) This is something I think applies with pictures, as well. Time spent on viewing the picture plays an important role here. By spending time on spectating the picture a similar effect can be obtained as with repetition in verbal narratives; the more carefully the viewer looks at the picture the more details he/she is able to spot.



### ***3.4 The challenge of interpretations and the truth value of a pictorial narrative***

As I pointed out in previous chapter, many researchers share the same view that picture's inability to show temporal developments is the greatest problem of pictorial narrativity. I think that this kind of view underestimates spectators' ability to deduce the most logical turn of events. I propose that pictures provide visual clues that indicate what has happened, what is happening at the moment, and what is about to happen next. This is also Speidel's view: "Our everyday knowledge is quite reliable in helping us grasp temporal order in pictorial representations of stories. The clues we use may be different but they certainly are not less reliable than the clues provided by texts." (Speidel 2013.) Rather than the problem of representing time as a biggest challenge of pictorial narrativity I see the problem of interpretations; does the viewer receive such message as the author intended to convey? If a story told by a picture is partly result of the viewer's interpretation, is there any truth value in the picture?

I favor such apprehension of a narrative that emphasizes the role of the recipient as interpretator. Michael Ranta's cognitive psychological view also puts weight on the recipient. He states that the ability of the pictures to tell stories is based on the mentally stored schematas that are activated as we see pictures. These schematas are are various kinds of narrative structures that, among other things, include the causal relations of the events. Viewers have also stored mental schemas of spaces where the actions take place. This kind of structures are not only culturally influenced but also the former experiences and knowledge affect the schematas that are activated when seeing pictures or other visual representations. To make the story more coherent, the viewers fill in the "narrative gaps" when needed. (Ranta 2011.) I would take Ranta's theory of schematas even a bit further stating that pictures offer various kinds of story elements that guide what kind of schema, story-like structure, is retrieved from our minds. Visual elements of the story can be objects and phenom such as character(s) and their interaction and appearances (including clothing and facial expressions), milieu, objects of action (objects that indicate what has happened,

or is about to happen) e.g. a car refers to driving, pots and pans refer to cooking and household chores, tools to working, sport equipment to hobbies etc.

Consequently, according to Ranta's cognitive psychological approach the interpretations of the pictures are subjective. Not only are they altered by the world view, knowledge, and experiences of the viewer (Ranta 2011), I'd add that they are also socially influenced. It can be assumed that a highly educated, middle-aged Finnish woman and a Colombian teenage boy from a lower social class have somewhat different interpretations for example of the famous photograph *Burning Monk* by Malcolm Browne.

In his essay Speidel refers to Bernard Dieterle's idea that if a viewer of a landscape picture tells a story about it, the story tells more about the viewer than the picture itself (Speidel 2013). Also Michael Ranta admits that one might argue that temporal changes of events in the pictures are not conveyed by the picture but is a result of the viewer's activity (Ranta 2011). Janne Seppänen criticizes Roland Barthes for his vague and universal comprehension of a visual narrative that allows all kinds of interpretations. Seppänen states that based on Barthes' view not only photographs but also any day-to-day objects could be stimulus for construction of narratives. (Seppänen 2001, 100.)

I have to disagree with Seppänen. I think when talking about pictures, (photographs, pictures or other images) we should pay attention to authorship and the artists' intention to convey stories with pictures. I doubt, whether the "author" of these day-to-day objects can be identified or if there was any intention to evoke stories within the viewers. Mieke Bal argues that even though not everything is narrative, basically everything can be seen from a narrative angle – one can interpret anything as a narrative (Bal 1999, 220). In a way I agree and disagree with Bal; I do emphasize the viewer's role as a final constructor of a narrative. Yet again, however, I yearn for authorship: is there somebody who wants to share a story through some artefact? Though, I do understand the constructivist idea of the role of narratives as a means of comprehending the world. It might be easier to understand the existence of a forest through a series of causal events where the wind spreads pine seeds

around and the seeds root themselves in the ground, grow to saplings and eventually to full-grown pines, who release new seeds to be grown. It seems to be whole another discourse, though, pondering the narrative potential of, for example, natural objects and phenomena.

I'm also curious of questioning to what extent is the narrative work of viewer's imagination and on the other hand, the pure contents provided by the author. Speidel thinks that peoples' capability on "distinguishing stories from non-stories" is often underestimated. According to him this doesn't even mean peoples' cognizant reflection upon the matter – recognizing story is intuitive. As an example he compares Cinderella with weather forecast – the first one is narrative whereas the latter is not. (Speidel 2013.) Ranta, on the other hand, admitted that even non-pictorial or natural objects may trigger memory structures, schematas, of goal-orientated actions. For example tools may remind us of stories of work. After all, Ranta came to the same conclusion as myself noting that pictorial narrativity is author-based and intentional: "Pictorial material is frequently and intentionally produced in order to trigger stories or at least to give rise to narrative hypothesizing" (Ranta 2011). Even though I partly disagree with Alvarado's idea of including production and consumption of a picture (the choices made by the author e.g cropping and processing of a photograph) into the narrative analysis of pictures (Seppänen 2001, 102), I want to stick to the idea that *certain kind of authority and intentionality* is relevant in storytelling, even in pictorial narrativity. By talking about authorship and intentionality, I justify my choice of excluding natural objects from the discussion of pictorial narrativity.

In my opinion, when talking about pictorial narrativity, it is the recipient's role to construct the story and place its temporal actions in a logical order. Author of the picture has given the viewer the material to work with. I have to admit, though, that there are occasions, when the role of the picture might be smaller than the interpretator's. Later I shall present an illustration (Picture 2) on pictorial narrativity and state that as well as narrativity of picture can be placed on the scale by the amount of visual elements of a story, also the recipient's role can be assessed using the similar scale.

Then what should one think about the challenge of different, or perhaps incorrect, interpretations. I think different interpretations of pictures are not fatal assuming that the author of the picture is usually aware of the fact that different viewers probably give the picture different connotations. If the author wants to convey a story that is not open to interpretations, a picture is probably a wrong medium. Bal comfortably writes that neither the author nor the reader can be blamed for misinterpretations of narratives (Bal 1999, 17). Speidel reminds that incorrect deductions are not exclusively a challenge of pictorial narratives but they also occur in day-to-day communication just as well as in pictures and novels (Speidel 2013). Hence, it cannot be claimed that the challenge of interpretations would be a flaw in pictures' ability to tell stories.

When it comes to my research material, press photographs, they are supposed to give truthful information about the visualized subject. The role of the recipient here is not to produce a story relying on his/her imagination more than the picture itself gives with only slight and gentle analyzation. The situation is different with visual works of art e.g. paintings. Often they are meant to stimulate imagination and produce divergent narrative interpretations. It is possible that even documentary photographs produce many different kinds of interpretations depending on the viewer's understanding. However, I believe that stories constructed through documentary photographs by different viewers possess much more verisimilitude and resemble each other than stories evoked by (more abstract) art pictures, which, on the contrary, are more divergent depending on the viewers. Do the pictures then give truthful information, if the interpretations tend to vary? We can only note that the question of truth is complex. However, as noted in chapter 2.1.1 the role of narratives is not so much about providing facts of reality but to provide the viewer new material to construct their knowledge and world view in general. After all, Mieke Bal also states: "Who's to say that narrative serves the truth?" (Bal 1999, 220).

The stories conveyed by pictures are not necessarily "all-explanatory". We do know genres of literature that leave lots to be deduced by the readers. This applies with pictures, too. Depending on picture one can get lots of narrative

information out of it: milieu, character(s), artefacts giving clues of time and actions (decoration, jewelry, tools, machines etc.). Very often one can also deduce quite long continuum of time (even though we've noted that the question of time is controversial). As I type this, I'm watching my father who is sitting by the stove setting up a fire. He's operating in a light of an oil lamp even though I can also see electric light bulb hanging from the ceiling. If this sight was a picture, I could deduce that the electricity must be off. Also the coffeepot on the stove refers to a blackout – no electric coffeemaker can be used and the man is about to brew his coffee using the wood stove. Moreover, there's a basket of logs on the floor next to him and he's wearing boots and a hat. Hence, I can tell that before sitting down by the stove he must have been out fetching the logs.

With this example, I demonstrated a story constructed by a picture – taking a look at this "picture" (Picture 1) I could form a story where the electricity has gone off and a man living in an old log house has had to go out and fetch logs to set up a fire in the stove and brew his coffee in a pot. If thinking about reception of this kind of picture, we could also state – like probably Ranta would – that I as a viewer I already have a mentally stored schemata of this kind event that is now triggered by looking at the picture. The narrative was then based on our everyday-knowledge and our own experiences that are based on reality. Hence, the narrative – though a result of an interpretation process – gives more or less truthful information about the life in an old log house.



Picture 1: A staged photograph to demonstrate the interpretation process.

### ***3.5 Is a picture narrative (adjective) or a narrative (noun)?***

In his essay Klaus Speidel wants to prove that pictures can be narratives (Speidel 2013). I want to underline that it is essential to distinguish the difference between a Narrative as a noun referring to a story and Narrative as an adjective referring to an artefact that has elements of a story, or in other words, possess narrativity. According to my view pictures are narrative – as adjective. Speidel, however, seems to be eager to point out that pictures, in fact,

can be narratives. "Doesn't the 'narrative reception' of some pictures show that they are narratives?", he asks just to show this clause false later on by arguing that story-based pictures are not necessarily narratives and that narrative reception of a picture may tell more about the viewer than the object itself. As the outcome of his essay, Speidel suggest that the even numerous counter-arguments on pictorial story-telling cannot exclude all the pictures from being narratives. According to his division pictures that have "clearly inscribed temporal program" can be seen as narratives. These are for example history paintings that were intended to tell stories. However, he admits that other kinds of pictorial presentations can posses high degree of narrativity. (Speidel 2013.) By mentioning history paintings Speidel subtly refers, probably unintentionally, to similar idea of authorship as I did in chapter 2.2.4 and intentionality of pictorial storytelling as Ranta (2011). In this context it is interesting to bring forward Mieke Bal's argument on the subject. She writes: "[...] art historical interpretation has often relied on the narratives that the image allegedly "illustrates", thus subordinating visual to literaty narratives" (Bal 1999, 161.) I can agree with Bal; one should appreciate pictorial representations as independent narratives.

It's in fact interesting to ponder whether we should talk about narrativity of pictures or about pictures as narratives. Many times I've come across the idea that in a basic structure of a story a beginning, a middle part, and an ending are to be found. One reason why a picture should rather be narrative (adjective) than a narrative (noun) could be that one can not clearly point out beginning, middle part, and ending of the story (even though some time relations can be *deduced*). As the main thing, however, I see that not all the pictures are equally narrative. In my research I want to be able to use comparatives (and superlatives) when talking about pictorial narrativity. That would not be possible if I would approach pictures as narratives (nouns). A narrative refers to a certain narrative that is more or less similar to all of the receivers. That is more easily achieved with verbal means. Pictures possess narrativity and the narratives depend on the receivers – pictures offer material to several, even different, narratives.

### ***3.6 Approaching pictorial narrativity using several levels of narrativity***

When talking about pictures and narratives there are a few questions that occupy my mind. Is the narrative of a picture constructed by the viewer subordinating the picture just a source of inspiration or is it really the picture that tells the story? Are all the pictures narrative? If one picture can be called narrative why couldn't all? Let's think about the picture of man setting up a fire, again. As I stated before, I consider this picture narrative. However, what could be said about a picture that would only show for example waves on a lake?

Mieke Bal states that it's unnecessary to question if something is, or is not, narrative. According to her view it is just as evident as noting that an image is visual. She specifies, though, that the question about objects' narrativity demands specificity. The specificity could be obtained by studying the different aspects of narrativity. (Bal 1999, 221.) Michael Ranta writes about the same phenomenon with different terms: "The question is not whether almost anything tells, or can tell, a story; the question is how much it does so and how explicit this story-telling is" (Ranta 2011). Michael Ranta's citation above summarizes the idea well. Not only Ranta but also Speidel note that at least narratologist Gerald Prince has established the existence of various degrees of narrativity (Speidel 2013). My approach to pictorial narrativity is partly based on this idea.

As the discussion upon pictorial narrativity shows, it's not easily explained whether pictures can be considered narrative or not. Therefore I aim to delineate a view that takes into consideration both the visual contents of the picture and the viewer's interpretation. I suggest that basically all pictures can be narrative – some of them more than others, though. I think it could be said that there are pictures with high level of narrativity and pictures with low level of narrativity.

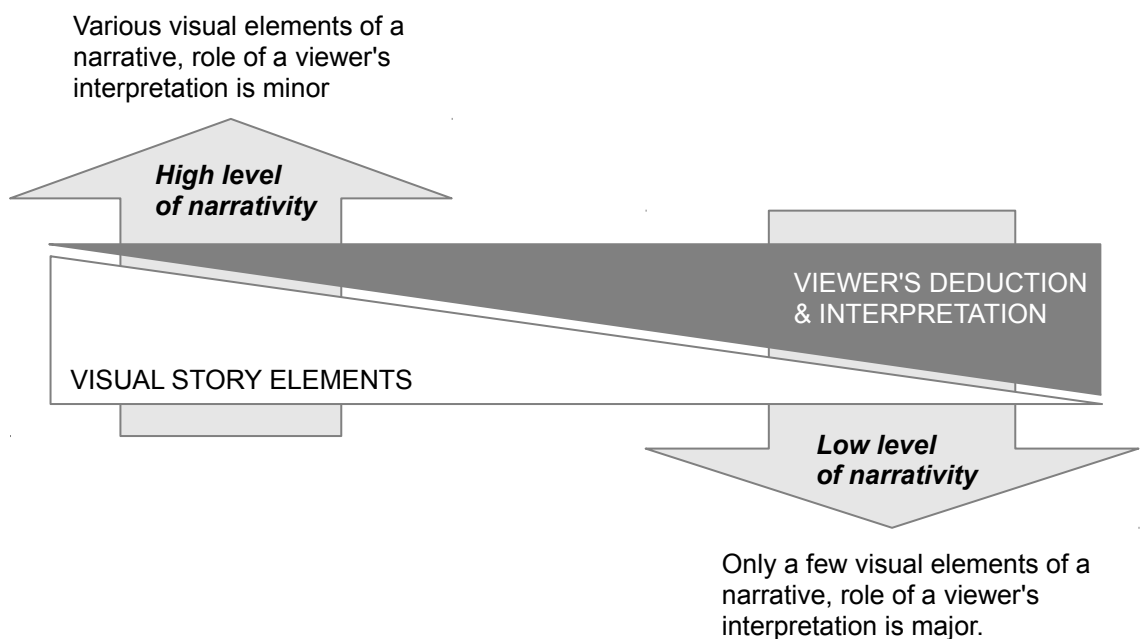
The level of narrativity determines the role of the recipient; when the spectator sees a picture with low level of narrativity, let's say a picture of waves on the



lake, his/her role in generating the narrative of the picture is major. On the contrary, when he/she spectates a picture with high level of narrativity, his/her role in generating the story is minor.

Then how could one specify if a picture has high or low level of narrativity. My approach functions through semiotic tradition. I talk about *visual clues*, when I refer to visual elements of a narrative. These visual clues could just as well be called semiotic signs. I'd say, that if a picture provides the spectator with several visual clues, the picture is of a high level of narrativity. This kind of picture would be the man setting up a fire. Extremely abstract pictures with only a few elements do not give the spectator much material to construct a story – hence, the level of narrativity is low, and the role of the spectator is emphasized. I can not claim that only the plurality of details in the picture would make it high in narrativity. It also counts how meaningful the visual story elements are. Elements that refer to action enhance pictures' narrativity because they are a great help in deducing the events before and after the pictured moment.

Often visualization of theories are needed. Below I introduce an illustration that indicates the relation between viewer's interpretation and the visual clues of story elements in the picture.



Picture 2: The visual elements of story and viewer's deduction

Probably there are theorists who state that a story should be "ready-given" and that the responsibility of forming the story should not be left for the recipient. As I think, such ready-given stories do not exist. No story is constructed before the recipient interprets the contents – conveying a story is collaboration between the author and the recipient. Interpretation determines the final form of the story – and they can be divergent depending on the recipient. This principle applies to both written and visual stories. The written stories are just successive words before someone reads, understands and interprets them.

My approach to pictorial narrativity leans strongly on the basic idea of semiotics. I aim to find "visual clues, elements of a story" from the photographs I analyze. My approach also applies some of the narratological terms in order to explore the narrative nature of the pictures. Moreover, my approach examines the degree of narrativity by classifying pictures to high or low level of narrativity. My research material is a versatile collection of both pictures with high and low level of narrativity. Some of them offer the spectator many kind of visual clues for narrative analysis some of them only a few. I introduce my material more thoroughly in chapter six.

## **4. NARRATOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND THEIR APPLICABILITY ON VISUAL MATERIAL**

Sandra Heinen has studied interdisciplinary use of narratological terms. She writes that many researchers using narrative analysis, especially among social sciences, find the narratological terminology irrelevant for their studies. Maybe the reason is that they are more interested in the content of the narratives than the form and structure. The narratological tools are not helpful for them in order to answer their research questions. (Heinen 2009, 197; 200.) Nevertheless, I will try to challenge myself thinking that some basic concepts of narratology can offer a good help in analyzing my research material. In this research they are stretched to be used as tools in narrative analysis of photographs.

My goal is not to explore the full scope of narratology – instead, I've chosen a few concepts to closer examination. These concepts have aroused interest

among researches – there have been curious questioning if these terms could be taken out of the context of verbal narratives and be applied to other kinds of narratives.

#### **4.1 Construction of narrative texts and elements of fabula**

Narratologist Mieke Bal has done convincing and noteworthy study upon narratology. In her publication *Narratology – Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* she reveals to have formerly been more orientated to literary narratives than narrativity of visual art and anthropology, for example. (Bal 1999, xiii). Consequently, in her second edition of the book she delineates a structure of a narrative that she deems to be applicable to all kind of "narrative texts" (including for example visual images). I bring this case forward since it is a good example of the complex nature of narrativity – it's not easily explained and even researchers devoted to the subject can change – or adjust – their views.

However, in her book Bal aims to explain how narrative texts are constructed. Understanding this construction we are able to grasp the idea of "narrative system" that is concretized in narrative texts. (Bal 1999, 39.) Her study about narrative texts is premised on idea about three-layered construction of a narrative text. These separate layers – that can also be studied separately – are text, story, and fabula. Text means any kind of medium or a structure in which the narrative is being conveyed: verbal language, image (still or moving), sound etc. Story means the arrangement in which the events take place, the way the events are presented. Fabula, then, refers to the content of the story, the deep structure of a narrative text, the sequential events or, as Bal says logic of the events. For something to be called an event requires a change of state. Furthermore the events are carried out or experienced by actors, they happen somewhere, and they are processes proceeding chronologically in time. To conclude Bal's definition of fabula one can summarize that fabula consists of events, actors, time, and location. The fabula is actually the result of reader's contemplation, interpretation, after first seeing the text. (Bal 1999, 5–9; 175;

208; 214). It's easy to apply this idea with pictorial narratives; viewer first sees the picture after which he/she perceives the fabula, the deeper meaning of the pictorial representation. Picture itself is the narrative text, story being the arrangement of the picture, the (artistic) choices made by the author.

#### **4.1 Focalization**

Burkhard Niederhoff writes about the origins of the term *focalization* telling that it is a concept first coined by Gérard Genette, afterwards reconceptualized by Mieke Bal, for instance. Not only did other researchers rethink the term but also Genette himself, if not changed, at least adjusted his views several times. Originally he created the term to replace concepts of *point of view* and *perspective* (Niederhoff 2015, 1; 11.) Also Silke Hortskotte unfolds the background of focalization. She tells that Genette was especially fond of the term's abstractness. Nevertheless he later distinguished questions "who speaks?" that refers to narration from "who sees?" referring to focalization. Thus he ended up highlighting the visual angle of the concept. Yet again he then adjusted his choice of words stating that question "who perceives?" would cover other senses' perception in addition to vision. (Hortskotte 2009, 171.)

Not only were the origins of focalization confusing but also the later discussion around the concept has been controversial – debate has concerned, for instance, what is eventually the relation between focalization and vision (Hortskotte 2009, 171.) Despite that also Bal's approach has been criticized, I adopt her view in my research for the very reason that it has emphasis on vision. As noted before, Bal wants to use narratological concepts that are applicable for visual narratives, as well. Focalization is a good example of such concept. Bal is especially attached to the concept mainly because it's more precise and because the concept of focalization is very subject-orientated and Bal wants to be able to derive a subject, *focalizer*, from it. (Bal 1999, 143–144). To put it briefly, focalization means the way – or a certain vision, an angle or point of view – in which the events and elements are presented. And to be even

more precise, focalization means *the relation* between the vision and events or elements. As Bal states through focalization it is possible "for one person to express a vision of another". (Bal 1999, 142–143.)

The reason I wanted to discuss the concept of focalization is because Bal succeeds to point out how it is applicable also in pictorial narratives. This idea is contradictory to how Seppänen sees it. He states that focalization is strictly bound to the linguistic nature of verbal narratives and therefore can not be applied to photographs (Seppänen 2001, 105). To demonstrate the terms of focalization and focalizer Bal uses a pictorial example – also in order to show that narratological concepts are relevant when analysing pictorial narratives. (Bal 1999, 145.) She tells about a bas-relief located in India. In the relief there's a man in a yoga pose, a cat next to him in a similar position, and a group of laughing mice around the cat. The interpretation unravels the comical narrative of the picture; the man is immersed in his practice, the cat admires and imitates the perfect serenity of the man. The mice around the cat are amused after realizing they are out of harm because the cat is engaged in mimicking the man. The picture shows the viewer the visions of all of the characters; the man who sees nothing, the cat who sees the man, and the mice that see the man and the cat looking at the man. (Bal 1999, 144–145.) Bal's example shows, not only how the focalization functions, but also how a pictorial narrative is perceived. As many other theorists, also she regards time as an important factor – both in sense of causal events in the picture and in the way how the process of interpretation runs in time. If focalization is understood as Bal explains it, then a picture with "binocular effect", for instance, focalization should be present. I assume, we have all seen classical pictures (probably most typical in the context of comics) where a scenery is portrayed through binoculars implying that someone is looking through them. Approaching this kind of image from a narrative angle, a viewer would most likely think the scenery is seen through someone else's vision (not the viewer's himself). Thereby "a vision of another" would be expressed.

## **4.2 Diegesis and Mimesis**

There are also other narratological concepts that are interesting to try and stress to be used in narrative analysis of still pictures. In *The Living Handbook of Narratology* Stephen Halliwell introduces a pair of concepts that are presumably some of the oldest terms of narratology first studied by Plato: *diegesis* (in generalized form 'narration') and *mimesis* ('imitation', 'representation'). Halliwell not only studies the history but also the current usage of the two terms. They derive from the ancient Greece and have been through many different definitions. Socrates, for instance, used the terms in order to classify different means of conveying a story. Aristotle also studied the terms concentrating on conceptualizing *mimesis* referring to representational art-forms (Halliwell 2015, 2;10). Halliwell himself is curious of exploring the concepts "beyond the verbal" - expanding the terminology not only to be used in the context of verbal narratives but also in other media (Halliwell 2015, 1–2; 18). In the 20th century concepts of *diegesis* and *mimesis* were reconceptualized when the modern narratology was developing. According to Halliwell the terms were drastically simplified (Halliwell 2015, 15) which I find understandable as the original terms may not be easily adopted.

The concept of *diegesis* is two-dimensional. At simplest the concept is used to refine a story in general. Another, more specified, meaning of *diegesis* refers to a way of narrating, a way contradictory to *mimesis*. Socrates' distinction concentrated on oral expression and the definition of *diegesis*/ *mimesis* was neutralized by Aristotle who included both speech and action to the use of these two concepts. (Shen 2005, 107.) According to Aristotle *mimesis* means imitation. However, he did not mean that *mimesis* would be copying the reality but conceptualization and comprehension of human activity and emotions. *Mimesis* then means a way, typical to humans, of observing the world and ordering its phenomena so that the world doesn't feel overwhelming and chaotic.(Jyväskylän yliopisto 2015). I find Aristotle's definition of *mimesis* closely related to constructivist concept of cognition and therefore I can also link

narrativity and mimesis. Narrative analysis of photographs and understanding photographs narration as one form of mimesis is not far-fetched combination: they both emphasize that the receiver of the picture uses the narrative of the picture to construct his/her perception of the world.



## **5. VISUAL LITERACY: HOW TO APPROACH PHOTOGRAPHS?**

### ***5.1 Photograph as a representation – a reflection of reality?***

In my research the concept of *representation* has already emerged several times. It is a concept widely used in scientific discourse concerning (visual) culture. Seppänen calls representation "a theoretical tool" that is used to discuss, for instance, questions such as what kind of reality media constructs, and from which perspective it does so; the riddles of the pictures do not reveal themselves only by looking at them. Analytical study of pictures is often needed and using the right terminology helps to connect the meanings to the wider discussion of communication and culture. (Seppänen 2005, 77; 86.) Representation does not only mean that a certain picture is, for example, shown

to public by someone but it also means that there is someone who receives this message. Moreover, representation also covers the interpretative process which is enabled by our mental representations; the external sensory stimulus is interpreted through mentally stored knowledge about the object. People who share the same culture also share mental representations, which are a major factor in our ability to communicate. In addition to mental representations also the way the messages and meanings are shared is a crucial element of communication. That is why we have language and other notations such as photographs, paintings, non-verbal expression (facial expressions etc.). These notations consist of signs. (Seppänen 2005, 84–85.)

Seppänen introduces three different views on comprehending representation originally defined by Stuart Hall. These approaches are: 1) reflective, 2) intentional, and 3) constructivistic. In practice, understanding representation reflectively means questioning if representation reflects reality. (Seppänen 2005, 94.) I could ask if my research material, the photographs, reflect reality. Then again, Seppänen states that this approach might be questionable since we can not tell what is the reality the pictures should be compared to (Seppänen 2005, 94). Intentional approach emphasizes the author's intention; what was the impression the author wanted to make? Seppänen criticizes this approach and tells that it is not especially popular in the field of media research; finding out intentions doesn't tell anything about the meanings of the representation itself and the original intention may be very different from the outcome. (Seppänen 2005, 95). The third approach, constructivistic approach to representation, seems to be the most natural in my research, too. The core idea is asking what kind of reality does the representation produce. Equally important is to ask what kind of methods are used in producing a certain kind of message. When representation is considered as a part of reality there's no need to compare it to what is thought to be the reality (Seppänen 2005, 95.) Obviously, I am mainly concerned about the constructivistic comprehension of representation. However, as I've noted in previous chapters my approach towards narrativity is also engaged to the idea of intentionality. Unlike Seppänen, though, I'm not interested in identifying the author (Seppänen 2005, 95). My approach to

intentionality means that one needs to be aware that the representation is produced by someone. Therefore I treat photographs as constructivistic representations that also bear aspect of intentionality.

Even though the need for photography had existed since the Renaissance, photography was originally invented in the early 19th century in order to explore and portray the changing world and reality after the industrial revolution (Saraste 1980, 17). The original purpose of the photographs, then, was to capture the reality. However, the constructivistic approach to representations (that was introduced in previous chapter) is linked to linguistic turn of the last few decades. Researches among social sciences had started to comprehend the reality from a new perspective, that of a language. The role of the language was not to reflect reality but to be part of constructing it. (Seppänen 2005, 95.) This is how we may understand photographs, too – not as reflection of reality, but as a part of our comprehension of it. Janne Seppänen puts into words what many of us think about photographs nature; he states that a photograph carries a burden of representing the truth. Even though photographs may not always show the truth, photographs are commonly regarded more truthful than for example a drawing. (Seppänen 2005, 105.)

Leena Saraste tells that back in the old days photography critics had been bothered by the fact that photographs were actually work of a machine, not that of human being's. It was a natural fallacy, she states, considering that the developers of photography intended to create a method for the nature to be able to portray itself. The photographer's task was just to let the light into the camera. Novelty of the invention had urged people just to get a even moderate picture of the object, their input on the composition being minimal. Today it's different when a lot of effort is put in composing the picture. The photographer carefully chooses the angle, the focal length, the lighting, the cropping etc. However, in the vocabulary of photography, the original idea of minor humane input still shows; photographs are *taken*, not *made*. Still, photographer's role is often hard to identify by looking at the picture. Saraste states that people often look at the photographs as if they were windows that show everything as if there

was nothing between the viewer and what is seen. Saraste notes also that photographing stops being easy at the moment when it's understood that it is a method of expression among other art forms and shares similar challenges such as mastering the technique and finding the right ways to deliver the message to the audience. (Saraste 1980, 138–139.)

Photographic truth is an interesting topic. As Saraste states, truth is not easily achieved. After all, according to her, it doesn't make a huge difference if the situation portrayed is staged or authentic. The idea derives from a notion that the situation is already altered by the presence of the photographer; people around him may start acting differently. Authenticity may be pursued but more important is probability and typicality of phenomena. Saraste makes a point stating that truth is not easy for a photograph since it is not a distinctive character such as a colour, for example. She continues explaining the complexity of the topic stating that the truth can not be achieved by reproducing what is seen. The truth is in the relations of phenomena and in their logical composition. (Saraste 1980, 157.)

To conclude, even though photographs are stigmatized by their "burden of representing truth" (Seppänen 2005, 105) it must be understood that photographs are – just as well as any other representations produced by people – almost always consciously constructed. Moreover, photographs are always subjective. Saraste describes them as "subjective reflections of objective reality" and refers to the various artistic, subjective choices a photographer makes (Saraste 1980, 174). What is special about photographs, though, is their undeniable impression of reality. That is something that can be taken advantage of when one wants to convey very truth-like stories (Seppänen 2005, 105).

## ***5.2 Reading photographs***

Not only is photograph field of a photographer. As we noted earlier, the concept

of representation refers also to the receiver, in photograph's context, to the viewer. Saraste argues that also the viewer needs skills. Even the core meaning (denotation) does not necessarily open up to the viewer if he/she has no previous knowledge on "reading pictures". Even the most familiar objects may not be identified from the picture, states Saraste and gives an example of group of Africans who were not familiar with photographs. Photographs of their everyday tools were shown to them but they didn't identify them without explanation. (Saraste 1980, 178). Apparently two-dimensional representation of familiar three-dimensional object is different enough that it can be unidentified if one is not used to the practice of observing pictures. Of course also size and colour can be very much different in a picture.

Even though I've ended up talking about viewers and spectators of pictures, I understand the choice many researchers have done when they talk about readers. Marcus Banks, for instance, states that using term "reading" when talking about pictures only extends the form that is generally used in literary context. His choice of using the terms doesn't derive from an idea that there would be any certain language or grammar of the pictures. He thinks, however, that "reading" implies that there are messages to be read in pictures. Reading pictures creates conversationality not only between the author and the audience but also the institutions and actors who display the images (galleries, producers etc). To me the most weighty argument was – especially due to this research method in question – that reading as a term goes naturally with the idea of narratives. (Banks 2001, 9–12.) Fiske, on the other hand, makes a very good point arguing that "reading" can be learned (Fiske 1990, 40). Nevertheless, viewer and spectator feel most natural terms to me mainly because their strict verbal relation to visuality and also due to the fact that in most of the original literary sources I've referred to, the authors have used either one of the two.

Ability to read pictures is called visual literacy. Receiving and interpreting photographs is culturally and socially influenced process. All our previous knowledge and experiences affect how we interpret photographs.

### ***5.3 Means of photographic narration***

There are various means that a photographer can use in order to create different atmospheres and tensions, to highlight something, or the other way round, to draw attention away from something. Photographer also decides what to include to the picture and what to exclude from it. All these kind of choices affect the perception of the photograph – they are means of narration.

Leena Saraste (1980) has written quite a comprehensive overview on photography in general. Among other things she writes about producing and receiving a photograph. Light is, as she states, not only a physical necessity of producing a photograph but also an important means to highlight the central elements of a photograph. In reverse, shadows can hide things that are not meant to be seen. Moreover, lighting's role in creating atmospheres is undisputed; using natural, prevailing light gives neutral and realistic feeling but altering the lighting enables emphasizing the sense of reality and it is even possible to convey a totally different atmosphere by altering the lighting conditions. Sense of space is also created by using light. For example showing distant objects light and hazy intensifies the effect. (Saraste 1980, 161; 167.)

As noted many times before in this research; still images cannot show actions directly. However, a photograph can show illusion of movement. It can be obtained through composition and – yet again – lighting. Strong contrasts of different shades and dynamic diagonal lines in a photograph can create sense of motion even if the photographed object or scenery would actually be still. On the contrary, photograph can also freeze a real movement; motion blur in the photograph creates illusion of movement when long exposure is used. (Saraste 1980 (172; 174.)

In addition to creating sense of movement, composition of a photograph is an important means of photographic narration. Photographer chooses the perspective; what is brought forward as an important element and what is drawn backwards, what is included to the picture area and what is cropped out and what is the connection between the elements in the picture? This connection is, according to Saraste, created when the photographer chooses the elements that are not cropped out of the picture. (Saraste 1980, 174.)

The elements chosen to the picture can also be people, of course. How they appear in the picture can be partly result of the photographer's activity if the people are directed. Photographer can also affect what kind of impression of the people is given. Portraying people from below makes them seem grand and noble. Vice versa; taking a picture from above "shrinks" people and makes them seem resigned. Also the moment when a picture is taken can be crucial. If an activity is portrayed in a "wrong phase" people may seem passive instead of dynamic. (Saraste 1980, 174; 175.)

Saraste gives value to details as means of narration. She states that little details can tell something about larger phenomena; shadows can tell about objects that casts them, and footprints can tell about creatures who made them. Saraste tells that this kind of indirect narration is one of the genres of photography. She also states that for example a little piece of a plant can actually refer to a whole field of flowers. (Saraste 1980, 172.) I find this especially interesting point of view when my own study is concerned. I've given the observation of details a major role in the narrative analysis of my reserach material, and my attitude towards details and their narrativity is very similar to Saraste's apporach.

Moreover, a part of photographer's means of expressions are choices concerning technique e.g. light sensitivity, different types of lenses, and focal lenght. Saraste explains that with a wide angle lens photographer can create an illusion of a wider space and emphasize distances between the elements in the picture. Teleobjective lens, on the other hand, can be used for example to

convey an atmosphere of a rush hour in the traffic – teleobjective brings the elements closer together. (Saraste 1980, 175.)

Even though my research is mainly concerned about the pictorial narrativity of a single still picture it is still good to acknowledge, that photographs affect one another. Saraste argues that the context of the photograph, texts, or other photographs or pictures close to it, affect what things are emphasized in the picture and what is their combined effect. (Saraste 1980, 179.)

#### ***5.4 Semiotic decoding of pictures***

After discussing the concept of representation it's only a natural continuum to bring semiotics into the discussion since the theory of different signs and systems they form is hard to ignore in this context. Semiotics is study on signs and on how they work (Fiske 1990, 40). Janne Seppänen tells that semiotics provide tools to understand how representation functions (Seppänen 2005, 77). The core idea of semiotics, then, is to understand the meaning of representation through signs.

It tells a lot about the importance and general prevalence of semiotics that even if media images would be analyzed without mentioning any of semiotic concepts it would be very likely that the analysis would still be based on semiotics – the semiotic terms would be found "between the lines", as Seppänen states (Seppänen 2005, 106). This can be noted also in my research: in previous subchapter I introduced some means of photographic narration by Leena Saraste. Many aspects she told about were actually semiotic functions even though she didn't mention any semiotic concept by name. She was actually talking about semiotic idea of photograph' indexicality when telling about footprints and shadows. Semiotics is wide and ambiguous field of study and it's not necessary for me to provide a profound introduction on the subject. Instead, I aim to take a look at the basic concepts of semiotics, in rather



superficial level, in order to understand the very basics of semiotics and to be able to understand the concepts in my research context.

### **5.4.1 Sign**

Sign is the basis of semiotics. John Fiske writes "A sign is something physical, perceivable by our senses; it refers to something other than itself; and it depends upon a recognition by its users that it is a sign." A sign, and the object it refers to, and the users of the sign are the three elements that construct a meaning (Fiske 1990, 41). Ferdinand de Saussure, among Charles Sanders Peirce, is one of the most-cited semiotician and its developer (Seppänen 2005, 106). Fiske explains Saussure's two-dimensional form of a sign; it consists of a "signifier" and the "signified". Signifier means the sign's physical form as we sense it, see or hear usually. Signified means the mental concepts that the signifier triggers in our minds. These mental concepts are shared with other members of a same culture and the speakers of a same language (Fiske 1990, 44.)

It is interesting how Fiske also makes a point about the importance of interpreting the signs – not only is producing a sign an active process. Instead; "Decoding is as active as encoding" (Fiske 1990, 42). In my research this kind of approach goes hand in hand with my own interpretator-orientated apprehension of photographs and their analysis.

### **5.4.2 Denotation and connotation**

Denotation and connotation, a pair of concepts originally introduced by Roland Barthes, mean the two levels that construct the meaning of a picture. Denotation is the obvious meaning that is simply what is seen. Connotation means the added meanings the viewer connects to the denotation

(Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015.) Fiske puts Barthes' words into more comprehensible form explaining that denotation is the mechanical part of the picture, performed by the camera when it transfers the replica of the object to the film. Connotation refers to photographer's choices (lighting, cropping, focal length etc.) which gives the photograph a human touch. Fiske also states that connotation connects feelings, emotions and cultural values to the sign. Regardless the culturally altered nature of connotations they are always subjective. (Fiske 1990, 86–87). In his essay *Sanoma valokuvassa* Barthes himself states that the code of connoted system consists of universal symbols or the rhetoric typical to the era. They can be stereotypes such as gestures, expressions, colours etc. (Barthes 1984 [1961], 123).

### 5.4.3 Icon, Index and symbol

The physical fact that it is light that "draws" a picture of the photographed object to the film creates a causal relation between the picture and the object (Seppänen 2005, 125–126). When there is a connection like this, the sign is regarded as an index. Seppänen states that it is due to this connection that a photograph is often considered as an evidence of the existence of the photographed object. (Seppänen 2001, 93.) A well-known example of an index is that in physical reality smoke is an index of fire. Not only is a photograph an index itself but also the objects in the picture can be indexical. Smoke in a photograph, for instance, is an index for another object, for fire. (Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015.)

Icon, on the other hand, is a sign that resembles the object it refers to. Visual signs are naturally most apparently iconic. Map for example is an icon (Fiske 1990, 47.) However, Seppänen tells that semioticians are not unanimous about the iconicity of a photograph. He writes that Umberto Eco has argued that there are always more differences than similarities between a photograph and the photographed object and again according to Seppänen Stuart Hall has claimed

that a visual representation always turns the three-dimensional world into two-dimensional version. However, Seppänen himself uses a passport picture as an example of iconicity. Iconic nature of a photograph makes people think that a photograph is then also realistic – the more iconic the more realistic. Of course it is not just as simple as that since an iconic photograph could easily be fraud. The iconicity of a photograph still is a part of its ability in giving realistic impression. (Seppänen 2005, 130; 132;134.)

#### **5.4.4 Paradigm and syntagm**

Janne Seppänen states that a photograph is a syntagm which consists of signs from certain paradigms (Seppänen 2005, 129). Paradigm and syntagm are a pair of concepts which refer to connections between signs. Syntagm means a combination of signs. The meaning of the picture depends on this combination. Paradigm, on the other hand, means a group of signs that share some common feature but can also be distinguished from each other. (Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015.) We can for example think fishes as a paradigm and a pike as a unit belonging to the paradigm of fishes. A photograph of a dinner can be considered as a syntagm that shows tomatoes from the paradigm of vegetables and pike from the paradigm of fishes and wine from the paradigm of drinks. A meaning of a the picture can change if some of the paradigms is changed or replaced (Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015). If the glass of wine would be replaced with a glass of milk, viewer would think it's a dinner for a child instead for a wine-drinking adult.

#### **5.4.5 Metonymy**

Seppänen states that since a photograph shows only a part of reality, it is considered as a metonymical sign, that starts to represent that reality in general. Seppänen also argues that metonymy is an efficient means of meaning

construction and therefore it should be carefully considered what kind of press photographs are shown to the public. (Seppänen 2005, 126.) To me it seems that for example communities fighting against nuclear power can use metonymical means when striving to influence the general attitudes towards nuclear plants. Luonto-Liitto and Greenpeace have their common Facebook-page called *Ydinvoima kuuluu menneisyyteen* (Nuclear power belongs to the past) where they campaign for international run-down of nuclear power. They post material about three times a week. Sometimes they post photographs such as a picture of Alexandra, a girl suffering from hydrocephalus. In the picture there's also Alexandra's father Vitaly who has resigned from his job to take care of his ill daughter. They live in Belarus, at the fallout area of Tshernobyl. (Luontoliitto&Greenpeace 2011.) The metonymical effect pursued with this photograph is to make the disabled girl represent the effects of nuclear power in general. In work photography it is possible that the workers presented in the pictures start to represent the whole trade or profession.

#### 5.4.6 Metaphor

In short, a metaphor means that a phenomenon is expressed through another phenomenon. It is an efficient way of influencing and creating mental images. To create a metaphor one can for example change a verb from a sentence. In Seppänen's example he says "language is floating with metaphors". He wants to emphasize the plurality of verbal metaphors. Therefore using metaphor where the verb is selected from a different context, from natural phenomena. The core idea of metaphors is, then, to alter the syntagm through a paradigmatic shift. Creating a visual metaphor is not as straightforward as creating a verbal one. Also perceiving such is not self-evident. (Seppänen 2005, 134–136.) I don't find it very likely that there would be, at least, consciously built metaphors in the photographs among my research material. Seppänen also states that often metaphors in press photographs are carried out together with headlines and captions (Seppänen 2005, 136) which I have secluded from my data.

### 5.4.7 Allegory and symbol

Signs are often commonly agreed. That's when they are called symbols. Words are symbols and so are numbers, well-known red-cross, and traffic signs, too. Problematic about symbols is that they can bear different meanings to different groups of people. They are surely based on rules, agreements or conventions, but they are also bound to certain groups, cultures or societies (Fiske, 1990, 48 Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015). Through allegories one can express ideas and concepts, such as freedom, using personification, that is to say, in form of people. This way the obvious meaning of the picture can bear another meaning. (Viestintätieteiden yliopisto 2015.)

## **6. ANALYSIS – SYSTEMATIC AND ANALYTICAL READING OF THE RESEARCH MATERIAL**

### ***6.1. Jaakko Alatalo and his work photography as research material***

Jaakko Alatalo (born 1949) moved to Muonio, Western Lapland in 1978. He was born in Nivala and studied photography in Lahti Institute of Industrial Arts and graduated in 1976. A major part of his career consisted of photographing for several Finnish newspapers and magazines such as Lapin Kansa, Helsingin Sanomat, Ilta-Sanomat, Iltalehti, Kodin kuvalehti, and Suomen kuvalehti to mention a few. Besides journalistic photography his work included nature and landscape photography and portraits. Press photography, however, is

emphasized in his production. Alatalo is one of the founding members of Leuku Stock Photo Archive.

He has collected a photo exhibition "Eilisen peili" from his own archives. The photo series was first seen exhibited in Reidar Särestöniemi's art museum in Kittilä. Later it has, for instance, been part of Leuku's group exhibition in Arktikum, Rovaniemi. Alatalo's pictures have also been used in commercial purposes such as product labels and interior design.

Elina Heikka writes that Alatalo's documentary photography from the Western Lapland of 90's startlingly shows parallelism of new and old world (Heikka 2000, 13). I find this phenomenon to be present in my research material also. The photographs I've chosen as research material are all press photographs. Journalistic photographs are generally coexisting with headlines, captions, and the news text. However, I'm not examining the material in its original context as part of news stories but as independent pieces. My attention in this research, concentrates purely on photographs. I am interested in them as individual representations, not as the combination and relationship that text and photograph together form. The material consists of 20 black and white photographs taken during 1980's and 1990's. In the pictures there are people at their work – either immersed in the work itself or posing for the camera in immediate contact to their working environment. I do not know how many of the original news stories were about work, but I don't find it crucial information for my research.

## **6.2 "Research material talks"**

I have a two-dimensional approach to my research material: I examine the chosen photographs' narrative capacity and also try to find the very narratives and the information they give about work and the workers.

In my analysis of photographs' narrativity I concentrate in a few basic principles

I've set for myself. I aim to find out if the photographs meet the criteria for fabula. Can I find Bal's element of fabula: events, character(s), location, and time in the photographs? I also study the levels of narrativity mainly through the semiotic signs that I call visual clues (of story elements). I try to evaluate to what extent is the narrative of pictures constructed by my narrative reading and interpretation and to what extent are the stories constructed by the 'pure' denotations of the pictures. I try to evaluate if the pictures have high or low level of narrativity.

Last but not least: the research material consists of pictures of work. In addition to analytical study of the details in separate photographs I look at the pictures as whole series and try to grasp what kind of stories about work they are able to convey; as Saraste tells pictures also affect one another (Saraste 1980, 179). Hence, in this chapter from now on, I let the research material talk, as Töttö states. (Töttö 1999, 63.)

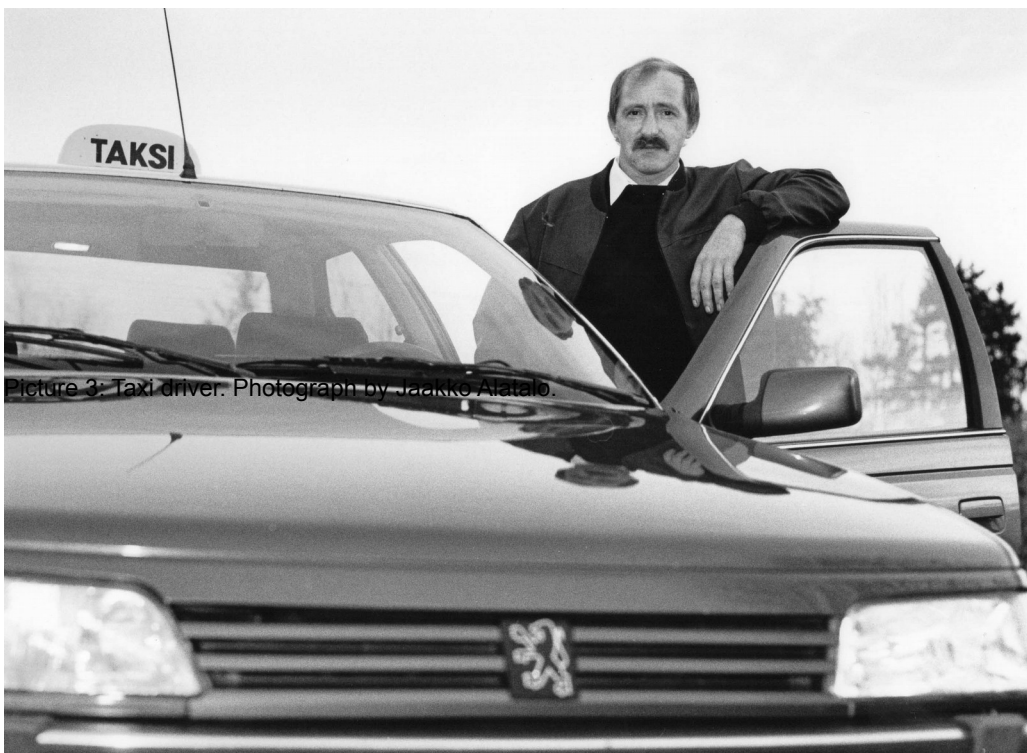
### ***6.3 Levels of narrativity***

My comprehension of pictorial narrativity is attached to the idea that not all the pictures are "equally narrative" and it depends on the visual story elements how much narrative information a photograph gives. Semiotically speaking, it depends on the paradigmatic choices how narrative the syntagm is.

It was basically easy to say if the photographs have high or low level of narrativity: I noticed, however, that it's not only the matter of quantity of details in the picture, or the visual elements of the story that determine the level of narrativity. Maybe even more than the quantity, weights the significance of these elements. For example the objects that refer to action add the narrative potential of a photograph. Let's think of a hypothetical photograph of a little girl with significantly red cheeks, holding a mug in her hand. This picture leaves us wondering why the cheeks are red, possibly also, what is she drinking. With a



little paradigmatic shift, changing the mug to ice skates that the girl is hanging in her hands sets the photograph to higher level of narrativity. Now the skates tell us that the girl has been outdoors, skating, which has caused the healthy glow to her cheeks. The ice skates, as objects of action, bear more significant narrativity than the mug. I noted this kind of difference in signification of story elements also in my research material. There were for example two pictures of professional chauffeurs: a taxi driver (Picture 3) and a truck driver (Picture 4). The pictures seemed to have pretty much the same amount of different kind of details, visual elements of a story. They were both quite low in narrativity. The picture of the taxi driver, however, gave more detailed information about work, since I as a viewer could instantly tell that the man in the picture is a taxi driver. The other picture, the photograph of the truck driver, didn't give specific information on the drivers' work; what kind of assignments does he perform? The taxi as a sign was richer in significance than the truck; I could quite easily deduce the events that were very likely to take place before and after the picture. The taxi driver is about to get into his car and fetch a customer whereas it's harder to tell what's the aim of the truck driver's actions.



Picture 3: Taxi driver. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

Picture 3: Taxi driver. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.



Picture 4: Truck driver. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

Next I'll introduce two pictures in order to demonstrate a photograph that I find to be somewhat low in narrativity and on the contrary a photograph that is high in narrativity. The recent photograph of the taxi driver (Picture 3) is quite plain when it comes to visual elements of a story. In order to construct a narrative, viewer needs to be an active interpretator. On the contrast, a picture of a couple working at a gas station (Picture 5) is high on the level of narrativity. The role of the visual elements in the picture is bigger than the interpretator's. The photograph itself largely determines what kind of narrative it tells. Not much viewers deduction is needed. The picture tells a straight-forward story of working at a gas station. Due to the familiarity of the situation, the picture almost conveys their conversation: "Twenty marks in return" and "Have a nice afternoon!" The picture is rich in visual elements of story. There are three characters: two workers and one customer, we see the most traditional instrument of trade: money. Hair, clothing and accessories of the people and the products in the shelves tell about the era, strong light coming through the window refers to spring time's flood of light due to the combination of sun and snow.



Picture 5: Gas station staff. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

## **6.4 Narratology and photography**

### **6.4.1 Presence of fabula**

Elements of fabula can quite easily be named from each picture. Naturally events and their sequentality in time had to be deduced but with most of the pictures this interpretation came naturally – it was often easy to deduce the logic of what had happened before the picture was taken and what probably happened afterwards. However, if there was a problem or uncertainty in pointing out the events, there was also difficulty in ordering events in time since they are dependent on each other.

Characters, on the other hand, were easy to point out in all of the pictures. It was easy because the photographs tell about work, human activity, and each photograph had people in the focus. Also locations were somewhat clear to see. There were interiors such as homes, offices, and other work-related spaces.

Some locations were open spaces outdoors, and in two pictures events took place inside a car.

Even though not understood this way in Bal's theory of fabula, time in the pictures can also be discussed referring to the time when the picture was taken. Mitchell and Allnutt (2008) have studied how a photograph can be used as a research material in social studies. In their research article they note that pictures from the same era look very much alike and that seems to be much because of clothing, hair, photo-finishing, poses etc. (Mitchell & Allnutt 2008, 254). I also paid attention the same phenomenon – I argue that even without the pre-existence information I would have estimated the era quite well mainly by the clothing and milieu. Picture of the gas station staff (picture 5) is a good example of this.

#### **6.4.2 Focalized pictures**

As Seppänen assumed, focalization seems to be rather complex concept within narrative analysis of photographs. "To express vision on another" was one of the functions of focalization according to Bal. If so, I could then state, that in a picture where a revenue officer with a dog is sitting by a window at the customs between Finland and Norway (Picture 6), the photographer has succeeded in focalization. The man looks at the dog, amused, because he sees that the dog is desiring looking at the bag of buns on the table. I see this case very similar to the example Bal described in her book. Even the comical effect is conveyed to the viewer through focalization and interpretation of the picture.

Similar type of focalization is present in a photograph where a customer is buying cigarettes from a gas station (Picture 5). The viewer first sees this transaction and then notices that the man standing next to the seller is attentively watching this event. There were a couple of more pictures where I would say that the focalization is partly present. For example there is a picture

of librarians and a little boy (Picture 7) where one could think that the vision of the little boy is expressed. Maybe due to focalization's challenging nature as a concept it was not all that easy to find it from my reasearch material. Focalization and pictures is, however, an interesting point of view and merely the search for focalization directs the vision and gives the analysis a new enriching angle.



Picture 6: Revenue officer and a working dog. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.



Picture 7: Library bus staff. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

### 6.4.3 Appearance of Diegesis/Mimesis

Diegesis/mimesis is undeniably a challenging pair of concepts as a tool for analyzing photographs. In pictorial representations, if ever, these concepts are not unambiguous. However, if these two terms are understood as two opposite ways of narrating and mimesis means imitation yet not strict copying and diegesis is more descriptive way of narrating, I can find both types of narration in my research material. The photographs I analyze tell something about work. The other actually *show and demonstrate* how the work is done; the people are immersed in their work. This kind of pictures are mimetic. The diegetic pictures, on the contrary, use other methods of narration. They for example show people posing at their working environment *describing* the work through equipment, tools etc. A good pair of photographs of diegesis and mimesis are pictures from bakery (Picture 8) and from reindeer round-up (Picture 9). The first one is diegetic; the picture tells about work showing the bakers and bakery themselves, a dough trough, and some bakings. The latter is mimetic; the photograph as a representation imitates the actual situation of round-up.



Picture 8: Bakers. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.



Picture 9: Reindeer round-up. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

### **6.5 Semiotics meet narrativity**

Keeping mind open to semiotic tools enriched the narrative interpretation of photographs. For example the picture of the director of the biological research institute (Picture 10) got deeper symbolic meanings when analyzed with the principles of semiotic tradition. As well-known, in Finnish culture, birch trees symbolize young women (Viestintätieteiden yliopistoverkosto 2015). In this picture in question the director is apparently having "a field work day" and is examining a bird house in a forest. The man is surrounded by leafless birches and he has one arm around a tree trunk and another is grasping the bird house. This gentle hold of the tree and the fact that the birches are leafless, or naked, brings sexual tension into the picture. The silent nature around him and his facial expression create a sense of longiness, even loneliness. Does working in a small work community in a little village make him feel lonely? Does he yearn for affection? Closer examination, however, reveals that he has a ring in his ring finger which is a symbol known world-wide; the man is married or at least engaged to be married. Maybe he is – like the birds in the vernal forest –

"nesting", that is to say, in the stage of life when he is starting a family. Maybe the bird house and the soon-to-be-blooming nature reminds him of his own life; he identifies with the cycle of nature and longingly thinks of his own family. But what kind of narrative does this kind of interpretation tell about work? Perhaps the bird house checking is such a straight-forward routine that it enables daydreaming while working. Or maybe he takes care of environment and birds with similar love and tenderness as if he was with his beloved one.

Another, more simple example, of semiotic reading of my research material can be studied through the bakery photograph (Picture 8). The photograph is a syntagm and from the paradigm of people (or professions) two bakers are shown. If one of the bakers would be removed, the whole narrative of partnership would be changed.



Picture 10: Director of a biological research institute. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.



## ***6.6 From photographs of work to stories of work***

After analyzing the research material I noticed that narrative approach does not merely provide information on the photographed object or phenomenon. I think emotional aspects of the photographs are emphasized with narrative touch. Setting myself on "narrative mood" made me responsive to sense atmospheres and ambiances of the photographs. I think visualizing oneself to the photographed situations, in the roles of different characters, helps to identify with them.

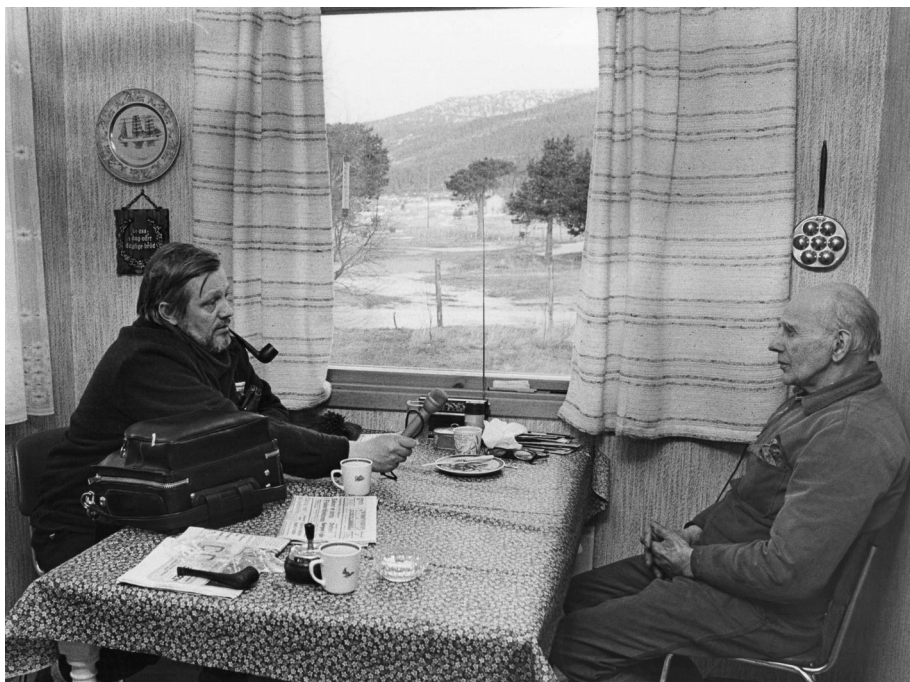
My categorization to the different themes of stories was largely based on the intuitive feelings evoked by the photographs. However, I think the themes I've chosen describe the work culture of the era and area in question quite well. I also noticed that categorizing pictures thematically opened the pictures to deeper analysis beyond the original themes. I mean for example that as I started analyzing a photograph from one theme's point of view I ended up discussing a whole another theme – one theme worked as a starting point for another one. As individual photographs the research material tell personal stories of the people in the pictures. When seen all the pictures as a whole series they communicate with each other, "filling narrative gaps" and creating a wider narrative telling more generally about the era, area and the work culture of this specific time-space framework.

All 20 photographs were classified into five different narrative themes and some pictures can be found from several categories. In the following subchapters I introduce the narrative categories and give some examples of each theme. I've chosen photographs that seem to describe the chosen themes especially well. Even though not all the photographs are introduced here, they are went through the similar kind of systematic analysis which I introduced in chapter 6.2.

### 6.6.1 Stories of solitary scenery

The pictures that showed a wider range of the landscape indicated that the photographs were taken, thus the work was done, in remote areas. I classified five pictures in the category of solitary scenery.

The picture of a reporter (Picture 11) tells that a journalist in Lapland has to be willing to travel to remote areas to meet interesting people. People, who live in their own wide territory and who are aware of their personal space. In the picture the man who's being interviewed is leaning back to keep a certain distance from the microphone and the reporter and the reporter determinedly stretches his arm to get the microphone closer to the man. Often people who are not used to technical gear are uneasy around them but it is also typical to avoid getting physically close to new people. Going to remote places like the one in question requires not only time and patience to be able to travel in varying weather conditions and often questionable road maintenance, it also requires good social skills, accessible and pleasant personality to come along with different people.



Picture 11: Reporter. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

The other photograph I bring up from this category is again the librarians and the boy (Picture 7). The scenery from the bus window tells that these librarians serve the cultural democracy by providing public services to remote rural areas of Lapland. They have to drive hundreds of kilometres and accept the fact that there will probably be only a few customers where they go. Or maybe sometimes in some villages there's nobody coming to their bus. They know, however, that their job is valuable.

Long distances in Lapland are also emphasized in the work of a taxi driver (Picture 3). Even though one might easily think that there couldn't be more social job than a job of a taxi driver's who always has company. With distances as long as in Lapland a taxi driver has to drive long distances alone to fetch people. In the picture there's a nice detail; reflections of the driver are cast on the windscreen and on the hood of the car. This gives an impression that the driver himself is often his only companion. On the other hand it refers to the different roles he has to take when dealing with so many different groups of people. He's taking children to school, tourists to the airports and stations, elderly to grocery shops etc. As well as in the job of a reporter social skills and patience to cope with the distances is emphasized.

### **6.6.2 Stories of tranquility**

Tranquility in the work photography was often associated to the impression that people were in charge of their own tasks and schedules and no external forces determined their routines. In the photographs categorized as stories of tranquility an unhurried feeling was strongly present and the facial expressions and body language reflected certain kind of serenity. Tranquility in work pictures tells that the work culture hasn't yet reached the hectic pace of business life of today. Soft values come before now highly valued aspects of profitability and efficiency. Employers want to take care of their employees' wellbeing. I classified nine pictures to the category of tranquility.

One of them is a picture of a horse farmer with a mare and a colt (Picture 12). Merely the harmonic composition in the picture is enough to convey the peaceful atmosphere; the man's serene face is the center of the picture and the chubs and heads of the horses follow the lines of golden section. The milieu seems so peaceful, too, that I can almost hear the total silence. Running a horse farm on the countryside is more of a life style than a job. It requires a lot of work – especially if there are a lot of animal at the farm. It seems, though, that this farmer has found a balance in the amount of work. He's not pursuing for great income – providing for himself is enough. The serenity of the man can also be due to the fact that presence of animal is calming and produces pleasure. In a way this photograph is also very symbolic; horse symbolizes work and but also freedom which in this picture of work refers to the mythical concept of freedom of an entrepreneur. Myth indeed, as it is obvious that running a horse farm is more likely to be binding than liberating. Moreover, the symbolic of freedom is also emphasized through the connotation triggered by the combination of horses and the wide landscape; riding wild and free towards the sunset is commonly known metaphor from western movies. It is often used as a slightly melancholic finale of a film. In this picture it leaves the viewer with contradictory feelings as the newborn colt refers to continuity.



Picture 12: Horse farmer. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

The photograph of the truck driver (Picture 4) tells the story of tranquility. He seems calm and relaxed. He's aware of the camera, looking down from the big truck (the magnificence of the truck is emphasized with the chosen angle), smiling serenely as if to say "Take your time, I'm not in a hurry". This picture leaves the viewer with an impression that efficiency is not everything. A little chit-chat during the working hours is fine. The truck driver's boss and the receivers of the goods he's hauling are not pressuring him, following his each step. Stress-free worker is a good worker.

### **6.6.3 Stories of pride and satisfaction**

In several pictures I could tell mainly by the facial expressions and body language that people seemed really content at their work. There was no tension or anxiety to be seen. Instead, these people seemed calm and happy. When thinking of what kind of satisfaction work can offer I can name a few things; to be able to help someone is pleasing, the sense of self-realization and implementation of one's dreams gives a great pleasure, to face challenges yet being able to experience success is also a factor for meaningful work. I ended up classifying 12 photographs to this category. Maybe the plurality is partly explained by the fact that people tend to show their happiest side to the camera or maybe it's genuinely true that people are contented with their work.

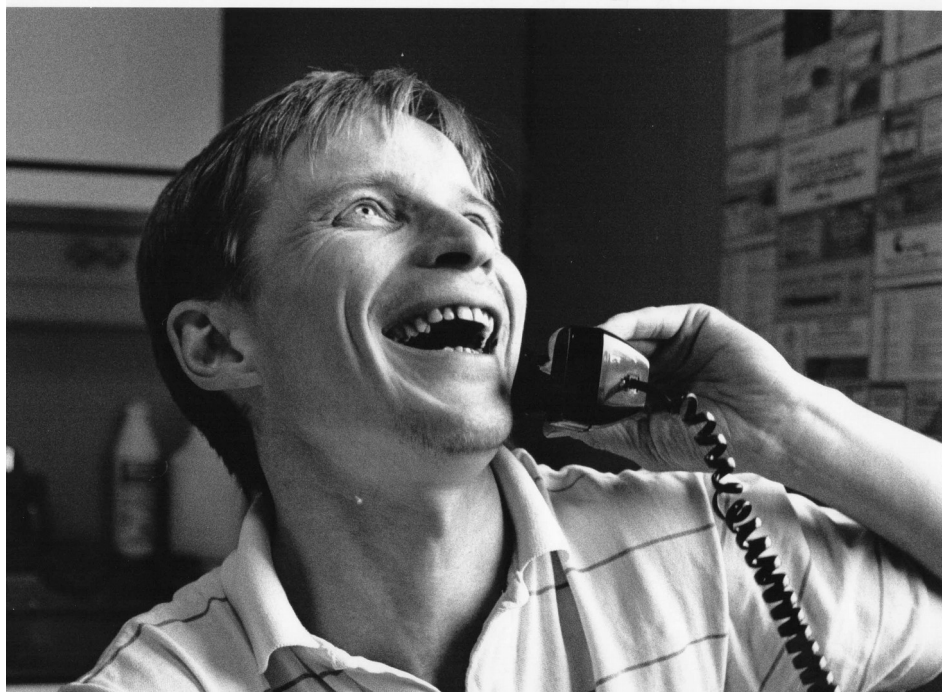
In the photographs in my research material I can find all of these factors of satisfying and meaningful work. There's for example a picture of a doctor examining a patient's ear (Picture 13). There's a causally proceeding circulation of nonverbal interaction to be detected between them; the other one's gestures causes reactions in the other one. The doctor looks concentrated and interested about his patient. He's leaning towards the patient. His touch is firm and determined, not fumble. The patient is photographed from behind. Her posture, shoulders relaxed, indicates, that she's not anxious or preserved. Instead, she

seems confident. The patient is able to sense that the doctor is self-confident and good at his job and there's no need to be nervous. The absolute trust of the patient gives the doctor a sense of satisfaction.



Picture 13: Doctor. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

It was obvious to me to include the joyful laundry man (Picture 14) to the stories of pride and satisfaction. He's sitting in his office, talking in the phone, and laughing open-mouthed. He seems to be fully concentrated on the conversation as his gaze doesn't seem to be fixed on anything. His laughter is not only a polite little smirk but a genuine laughter which tells that he enjoys communicating with his customers and not only business is discussed. This picture is not especially narrative as it has very few visual elements of a story. I have to admit that without pre-existing information about his profession it would have been hard to say a thing about his work – in addition to the obvious fact that it's enjoyable. However, the location doesn't seem homelike and the noteboard refers to an office so the deduction would have guided the interpretation towards themes of work.



Picture 14: Laundry service. Photograph by Jaakko Alatalo.

#### 6.6.4 Stories of partnership

In some of the pictures social interaction with colleagues – humans or even with animals – was emphasized. Once again I use the picture of the two librarians (Picture 7) as an example. The presence of a colleague is important even though there's no need to keep up constant conversation. When people know each other the silence is not awkward. When people have worked together for long enough they know their tasks and roles and co-operation goes smoothly.

The photograph of the pair of bakers (Picture 8) both strenghtens and unravels my pre-existing apprehension of entrepreneurship as a baker. The couple looks tired – just as I would have expected. To be able to have freshly-baked goods for sale early in the morning, they've had to start baking when the rest of the people have been still in bed, fast asleep. That is the day-to-day life of a baker as we know it. Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is something I'd associate with coming alone on one's own. This pictorial narrative tells, that the couple

have decided to make it together. They are partners both at work and in life. Need for a companion is emphasized when a new business is set up in a small community in a remote area. It is mentally and financially safer to have someone to share the the risks and the responsibilities. Also their personal life as a couple is smoother when they share the same daily schedule; they both wake up extremely early and probably need to get to bed early. In the photograph the partnership is also emphasized by the composition of the picture; the sales counter divides "them" (a couple) from "us" (viewers). They look at us from behind the counter and the empowerment that the sense partnership gives them is strongly present in the photograph.

The picture of a revenue officer and a dog (Picture 6) introduced already when talking about focalization tells also a story of partnership. The warm interaction between the man and the dog is almost tangible. The man seems to be very fond of the dog and appreciates it as a work partner as if it was another human being. They work together, they have a break together and, very likely, they live together. The picture is taken in the break room where the officer is having coffee with a bun and a cigarette. The dog seems to be eager to have his own bun but doesn't get a bite. Even though this partnership between the man and the dog is strong and warm it seems that a dog is always a dog. Even when the dog is working long days like his human colleagues he doesn't get a bun. Moreover, he doesn't get salary. This all tells about the traditional set-up between a man and a dog – man is the master and dog is the servant. However, the master always rewards the loyalty of his servants and responds to goodness with goodness. This caring shows in the photograph.

### **6.6.5 Stories of stability**

Stories of stability tell that even though the work culture is constantly facing different kind of changes there are some things that still remain the same. There are professions that are always needed and their core tasks are the same



decade after decade. Doctors, for example, have been – and they still are – highly valued and needed. People nowadays are more and more aware of healthy lifestyle and wellbeing but it doesn't change the fact that people still get ill and also need preventive consultation. Maybe decades ago doctors treated different kind of diseases and patients and maybe future generations have yet their own medical concerns. Doctors will still have their important role in the society.

Reindeer herding, then, is an old profession that is appreciated due to its long traditions. Time and technology have brought new resources, like snowmobiles, to cope in the challenging conditions. The very special, even unique, profession of herding semi-wild animal has still sustained its distinctive characteristics; certain primitive touch, and there are no signs that this source of livelihood would be past and forgotten in the near future. However, the change of society and international regulations guarantee that the existence and the stability of the profession is not self-evident. Despite the development and more efficient working methods, there are still physically challenging operations involved in reindeer herding. One of them is a reindeer round-up which is also shown in the photograph (Picture 9).

The reindeer are running and the reindeer herders are using their lassos in order to catch the reindeer. Motion blur creates movement in the picture but for some reason the atmosphere conveyed by the picture is "sticky". I as a viewer feel uneasy as the men in the picture doesn't seem to be succeeding in their quest. The frustration caused by the picture is due to the direction of the action which is from right to left, not from left to right as the western reading direction would naturally guide our vision. Saraste tells about this issue, the reading direction, stating that action that adapts the traditional reading direction is easy (Saraste 1980, 174). In this picture the opposite direction of action efficiently highlights the physical struggle in the round-up. The work of a reindeer herder involves activity with semi-wild stubborn reindeer – that it how it has always been and will be in the future. I also question why the composition of the photograph doesn't take advantage of diagonal lines that would enhance the

dynamic feeling of the picture (Saraste 1980, 172). The reindeer in the photograph are portrayed running horizontally. They seem to merge into the landscape which gives an impression of their connection and belongingness to the surrounding nature. Reindeer are herded by people but they are meant to run free. It's an order of nature that people need to obey and appreciate.

## **7. CONTEMPLATION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### ***7.1 Observations about narrative reaserch process***

Narrative reading of photographs was rewarding. Personally I now appreciate photographs and their power of expression and ability to tell stories more than before. I also give higher value to receivers, readers, or viewers of the pictures; they (we!) have a crucial role in the process of constructing the narrative. In narrative analysis of pictures it is not relevant to produce entire, narratologically complete stories. It is more important to find their deeper meanings or messages. Or their fabula, meaning a more general theme that they tell about, even though they do so in a personal level, from subjective point of view.

I learned that semiotics are also present in photography analysis even if the

method chosen would be narrative analysis. There's no need to use semiotics and narrativity separately only. Instead, they can be used alongside each other. New angles of narrativity can be found by observing pictures with semiotic and narratological concepts.

After the research process I feel as if I'd experienced some sort of "narrative awakening" in a very comprehensive level. Narrativity as an approach was so mind-opening and that I now find myself thinking and talking from narrative point of view in my day-to-day life, I see my past, my future, and different stages of my life as narratives through which I find meanings for the choices I've made in my life. It feels very comforting.

## ***7.2 Evaluation of the research results***

Many times during the research process I've found myself wondering if I can produce "truthful" or even truth-like narratives out of my research material. Obviously Christine Bold (2012) has faced similar challenges. She thinks that concepts of validity, reliability, and replicability, that are widely used in research contexts to evaluate the results, should be reconceptualized within narrative framework. She explains that, for instance, replicability in narrative research does not mean that the repetition of research would end up presenting the same results. Instead, it means that readers can compare and identify the results to their own knowledge. She suggests that instead of describing the narratives born in research contexts as fiction we should call them "representative constructions". According to Bold's view fiction refers to something that doesn't exist and/or something that is not true. These kind of suppositions do not provide credible basis for scientific research. The narratives, or the representative constructions, that are born in the research process are not fiction as they are based on real events. Hence, they have reconstructed information in a new form that serves the reality. Bold writes: "Using the the words 'representative' and 'construction' together in

representative constructions suggests that the story is constructed to represent a particular type of person or set of events". (Bold 2012, 145.)

I consider Bold's findings as a confirmation for my choices of research method and as a justification to be open for interpretations and trust the power of expression of the research material. Regardless my constant doubting, I think I managed to form a general understanding of the work culture of Western Lapland in 1980's and 1990's. Of course I'm not able to provide detailed information about the subject, but if one want's to get "a little taste", to sense the atmospheres, then my research has fulfilled its purpose; the general image of the era and the area brought up by the narrative categorization of the pictures seems credible.

I was even surprised by some observations I made by the photographs; this might actually be true! For example the interaction between the doctor and the patient was something I had never consciously thought of before, but I think this observation actually tells about doctor's work and about the reassuring effect of nonverbal interaction. The patient comes to see the doctor and is very likely nervous. Being nervous or afraid is not usually admitted to the doctor but the doctor is aware of it. If he is socially talented doctor he can use this skill to release the tension with nonverbal communication. He gets reassurance from the patients behaviour and knows how to proceed. If I see a doctor and afterwards someone asks me how it was I could answer: "It was not so bad, after all. The doctor seemed really competent". My evaluation of the visit would be largely based on the unspoken impressions of the doctor's behaviour.

I was also satisfied with the findings answering to my first research question "how can narrativity of a picture be defined?" My comprehension of pictorial narrativity can be summarized in three clauses:

- 1) In principle, all the pictures can be considered to possess narrativity of some level, though it should be acknowledged that not all the pictures are equally narrative.

- 2) The level of narrativity depends on the amount and significance of visual story elements in the picture. The more they tell, the less needs to be deduced.
- 3) Conveying a narrative through a pictorial representation requires both author's intention in delivering a message and receiver's activity in narrative perception of the picture.

As well as most other researches I find events as a crucial element of a narrative. However, what is noteworthy in my comprehension on pictorial narrativity is that picture's "inability" of expressing time-relations directly is not a remarkable obstacle in story-telling. It was satisfactory to notice that as I expected there are pictures that are more narrative than others. The narrative analysis of the pictures with low level of narrativity were left at more superficial level.

### ***7.3 Further study***

Like probably many pro gradu -scholars, I was also struggling to keep my thesis concise. When exploring several articles and studies concerning narrativity, narratology, visual culture, photography and etc, I kept finding more and more interesting topics for further research. It seems that the usability of narratological terms to multidisciplinary fields has not been widely studied nor has there been much guidance on how to perform a narrative research of visual data. On the other hand, the fact that narrative analysis is merely an approach, not a strictly guided research method gives the researchers freedom to create their own tools and take use of those narratological concepts they find suitable for their own study.

My research material would also offer an interesting topic to study narrativity of pictures from a perspective of receiving and interpreting the pictures. By showing the same photographs for various people would offer a great opportunity to study what kind of narratives different people construct from the

same pictures and in the main findings would be similar.

Also an idea for an artistic project was formed during the research process. It would be extremely interesting to reshoot this photo series following the same style and form as the original pictures. It would not only visualize but also concretize the changes these people and their living or working environment have faced. Not all of the photographed people are alive today but photographing the scenery without them would tell a story of continuity and eternity; what happened after they were gone?

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