The thesis analyses the differences in the ways key stakeholder groups are pictured in corporate photography of fifteen multinational corporations in three different sectors of economy. The data is extracted from annual reports of the corporations for the year 2005. The focus of the work is on corporate public relations, not advertising.

The thesis applies the social semiotic theory of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen to corporate photographs. It combines the Kress and van Leeuwen framework with the Peircean concepts of firstness, secondness and thirdness, first proposed in the context of photography by Merja Salo. The method of the work, a variant of quantitative content analysis, is developed from Anssi Männistö’s image analysis method.

The thesis shows that there are significant differences in the ways different corporate stakeholder groups are represented in corporate photography. The key differences are shown to be between representations of corporate management and other groups.

The study shows that the representations of international corporate management are extremely uniform, and that there seem to be tight limits for the representations of corporate management. The management is uniformly pictured as engaging the reader in the style of a traditional portrait. There are also tight limits for the expression of emotion and feeling in corporate photography. The only emotional states that are present in the data are smiles or relatively neutral facial expressions. Negative emotion is not displayed by any stakeholder groups.

The study shows that there is much more fluctuation in the ways employees and customers are represented, compared with the management. Corporate employees and customers are used as anonymous illustrations to the report, and they are given meaning through their vocational position at best, instead of their individual identities.

The thesis suggests that the pictorial representations of the various stakeholder groups constitute a metanarrative, defined in the work as a presentation by the management to the shareholders, in which employees and customers act as evidence of the efficiency of the corporation. The metanarrative is compared to John Berger’s theory of the narrative of oil painting, which describes a continuity between advertising and classical oil painting. According to Berger, the key function of oil painting was to picture the commissioner of the painting surrounded by his estate and possessions, and act in this way as evidence of the commissioner’s wealth. The thesis suggests that the corporation presented in the annual report, as well as its employees and customers as stakeholders, can be understood, adapting the narrative of oil painting, as the estate and possessions of the management. They are then used to convince the shareholders, acting as the audience, of the efficiency and value of the corporation.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord: photography, public relations, annual reports, corporations, multinational corporations, semiotics.

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Muita tietoja-Övriga uppgifter: Additional information