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THE IMAGE AS A FORM OF SOCIOLOGICAL DATA:
A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO
THE ANALYSIS OF PHOTO-ELICITED
INTERVIEWS

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# THE IMAGE AS A FORM OF SOCIOCOMMUNAL DATA:
# A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF PHOTO-ELICITED INTERVIEWS

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CHAPTER I

THE IMAGE AS A FORM OF SOCIOLOGICAL DATA: PHOTO-ELICITATION
A FIRST CRITICAL LOOK

Introduction.

Why should social science be interested in photographic images?

‘There are two reasons simple to grasp. One is that images constitute an extremely rich universe of information almost pervading every space of our life. The other is that Sociology as a field of research that wants to document what people feels about its own situations can’t be excluded from the rich worlds of experience that images represent’ (Grady 1999:491).

In our society the presence of images has become overwhelming. In one institutional context or another, from the press, family snapshots, billboards and television to the Internet, images ‘permeate the environment’ (Burgin 1982: 142). For most of us it would be a most unusual experience to pass a day without seeing any kind of images. This ‘presence’ has been revolutionary both for our knowledge of our own society and for our perception of it.

Photography with its characteristic of reproducibility (whose effects were already described by Benjamin at the beginning of the last century (Benjamin 1936)) has been the necessary condition for this shift. Its ‘exhibition value’ (Sekula 1982:95), opposed to the privileged value of pictorial art, ‘has widened the field of potential readers [viewers], permitting a penetration into the ‘unprivileged’ spaces of everyday world’ (Ibid.).

The expansion of the photographic media has acted reflexively, Burgin explains, in ‘facilitating the formation/reflection/inflection of what we take for granted and what we assume and recognise as characteristic of our society (Burgin 1982: 142). The photograph and new visual media are now an inseparable part of our lives. Arnheim acknowledges this dependency and is gloomy about the possibility of a contemporary society dispossessed of its photographic representations; ‘our society is deeply dependent on visual systems of communication’ he explains, and ‘we are immediately aware that
there would be a big difference between isolating our reality from the traditional visual arts and isolating it from photography [and its by-products]. It would not be too difficult to separate the visual arts from their contexts. (…) The world would not appear much different and many people would not even recognise the loss. But try to discard photography from the world that it serves’ (Arnheim 1987:63).

If photography’s social value has always been unquestioned, the awareness however of the potential offered by images it is only now having an impact on sociological theory and practice. Sociology has been historically dominated by text, and it is only in the last decade that there have been pressures for, and efforts towards, an explicit commitment to sociological research on and with images. As Prosser (1998) and Emmison and Smith (2000) critically put it, for many decades in sociology, there has been perplexity about what to do and how to integrate these images in established theories and methodological approaches. This perplexity nevertheless did not prevent several scholars in a diverse range of social research areas from exploring the methodological potential of visuals through a series of experimental approaches, and to constitute, under an assortment of methodological and theoretical banners, what has now become a substantial corpus of theories and methods. In the last decade the impact of several epistemological traditions has changed the once sceptical attitude of social scientists to these methods and approaches. ‘It is now recognised that to become more reflexive about these new methods and theories, and to become more methodologically skilled within them, should amply enhance the quality and possibilities of our research’ (Emmison and Smith 2000:i-v-x)). However although this need for a ‘more visual’ sociology (Chaplin 1994) is now commonly acknowledged, it is still not that simple to describe and agree on what it does actually mean to do ‘Visual Sociology’. What sort of information do the images deliver and how do they differ from other founts of information? How can this information be analysed? Or better, in which classic or new sociological theories and methodologies are images going to be integrated?¹ Although in the past decade, there has been a considerable renewal of interest in the systematisation and exploration of the field (Harper 1994, Hurworth & Sweeney 1995, Prosser 1998, Banks 1995, 2001, Emmison. & Smith 2000, Rose 2001, Faccioli 2001, Faccioli & Harper 1999, Faccioli & Losacco 2003) the dispute over the role of images in sociological investigations is far from being settled.

¹ In this paper I will specifically focus on photographic images, but many of the reflections on photographs are valid for any form of visual communication, or can be considered as a starting point for further specific analysis.
1.1. The Image as a form of sociological data: a brief history of the origins.

Different scholars have attempted a reconstruction of the original roots of visual sociology, among them however three seem to present the most organised, critical and referenced accounts of the ‘history’ of the field. Harper has been one of the most prolific authors to give voice to the claims of visual sociology. He is also the author who offered the first systematisation of its inception and development (Harper 1989, 1994, 1998). Prosser, with his Image-Based Research, (Prosser 1998) has been the first to accomplish an epistemologically mature definition of the field. Emmison & Smith (Emmison & Smith 2000), in an at times controversial analysis of the evolution of visual sociology’s agenda, have the merit of having critically exposed the old unsolved challenges of the discipline as well as some new ones.

Harper, in his reconstruction of the origins of visual sociology, identifies in the efforts of two anthropologists, Bateson and Mead, the initial but only later acknowledged origins of the discipline. This now well-accepted interpretation (Harper 1998, Prosser 1998, Emmison and Smith 2000) sets the origin of visual sociology in the late 1960s when apparently few sociologists interested in the visual were at that time aware of, or involved with, the parallel movement in visual anthropology. But it is now common to associate some of their common efforts from this original stage. As Prosser also acknowledges, there have been important common milestones both for visual anthropology and visual sociology. One such milestone was the first considered and methodologically clear use of photography made by the two anthropologists in their book ‘Balinese Character’ (Bateson and Mead 1942). The book, as Prosser points out, was the first to offer a new model for integrating images and text. It was the first accomplished research to present a ‘rigorous visual ethnography that demonstrated the potential of image-based research to the wide research community by combining a carefully argued analytical framework, a credible research design, photographs and words’ (Prosser 1998:101). However, he notes, if the book inspired several other researchers at that time, it did not start a revolution for most of the anthropologists or the sociologists of that time who still considered photographs and films as largely a sort of ‘complementary’ evidence.

2 Although their merit is attenuated by what appears to be a strangely biased or misinformed account of the work of some of the key scholars of the field and their efforts. Old interpretations are incompletely reported, or the newest advancements, like in the case of Prosser’s Image-Based Research book, are not even acknowledged.
The Colliers’ classic text ‘Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method’ (Collier 1967) later re-edited and published by Collier & Collier (Collier & Collier 1986) represents the second milestone in the common course of visual anthropology and visual sociology. In this book the Colliers attempt the first survey and analytic description of the known visual techniques and methods utilised in anthropology (and later in sociology). As noted by the Spindlers in their foreword to the book, anthropologists used to take pictures to illustrate a finding that they had already decided was significant. They used ‘the camera not as a research technique, but as a highly selective means of confirmation that certain things were so’ (Collier 1967 also in Harper 1994, 1998). The Colliers instead made a case for a more ‘inductive’ use of photography, which would be used not only as a means to confirm or describe already acquired data, but integrated is a series of methods used to elicit new data. The Colliers’ book provided the first, and still unmatched, systematic and analytical investigation of image-based methodologies. However when published the book failed to convince their fellow anthropologists or to interest (at least initially) the broader audience of new visual sociologists. Perhaps this is because, as Harper suggests, they still saw photography as being at the service of, and within, traditional ethnography.

To trace the original development of visual sociology, according to Harper, we have to move away then from the first anthropological attempts and examine the early 1970s (Harper 1998) documentary photographers. The first visual sociologists, Harper claims, were ‘inspired by documentary photographers working on many of the issues which sociologists felt were missing from the sociological agenda of that time’ (Harper 1998:28). According to Harper (1989, 1998), Faccioli and Harper (1999), Grady (1999) these included most eminently the work by Jacob Riis (1970, 1980) on the poverty of urban immigrants (photographs produced during the famous research commissioned by the Farm Security Administration that inspired an all new generation of photographers), but also the photographic studies of drugs and drug culture (Clark 1971), black ghetto life (Davidson 1970), poverty and racism (Adelman 1972), institutionalisation (Lyon 1971, Jackson 1977), social and counter-cultural movements (Hansberry 1964, Simon and Mungo 1972, Kerry 1971, Copland 1969), social classes (Ovens 1973, Estrin 1979), corporativist capitalism (Smith and Smith 1975), and Robert Frank’s photographic portrait ((1959) 1969) of an alienated, materialistic American culture in the 1950s. These photographers were not trained sociologists, but ‘sociologists looking for visual methods recognised that those photographers had deep involvement with their subjects, and thus
had an insider’s knowledge, much as would a sociological fieldworker’ (Harper 1998:27).

A complementary reading of the origins of the sociological investigation of the visual is given by Emmison and Smith (2000) who consider among the initiators and inspirers of the new sociological interest in the exploration of the visual authors such as Simmel (1908) and Lofland (1973). Simmel especially, according to the authors, gave with his ‘Sociology of the Senses: Visual Interaction’ an original input to the sociological study of the visual with ‘his detailed observations of the changing character of human conduct under the changed conditions of modernity or urbanism. Indeed Simmel explicitly addressed the issue of the observability of social interaction in a famous essay first published in 1908’ (Emmison & Smith 2000:5) and gave, the authors say, an initial impetus to the study of the visible features of social life. Emmison and Smith provide a different reading of the field that tends to include the simple (non technologically-mediated) observation of certain specifically visual aspects of social interaction among the sociological visual methods. In line with their critique of the overwhelming focus of many visual sociologists on the photograph, a critique that is in part shared by Grady (1999) who sustains that not enough attention is given to the moving image for example, Emmison And Smith push for an inclusion and account of other sociologists who study vision and the visual aspects of social interaction among the contributors to the field.

When it comes to the extent of identifying who the founding father of visual sociology is however all the authors agree that Howard Becker’s lead article ‘Photography and Sociology’ in volume 1, Number 1 (1974) of Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communications was the first work to define ‘visual sociology’ and its agenda. ‘Becker noted that photography and sociology had about the same birth date and that they had both been concerned, among other things, with the exploration of social issues and society’ (Harper 1998:28). His article was intended to begin a dialogue between the two. Sociology, he suggested, should study photography because photographers have studied many of the things which sociologists routinely investigate (communities, social problems, work, social class, urban life, and more abstract themes such as social types or modal personalities). Becker’s concern was however that of making this integration methodologically more rigorous. To make photography ‘intellectually [and sociologically] denser’, he states, photographers and sociologists must become conscious of the theory that guides each one’s use of the images (Harper 1998:29) and learn from each other (Emmison and Smith 2000:25). Becker’s guidelines
for a visual sociology within the sociological discipline failed to create an upsurge of interest in the field from classic text oriented researchers, but produced, Prosser concludes, a ‘legacy’ of ideas that still underpin and challenge present research in visual sociology (Prosser 1998:101).

These constitute the original roots of visual sociology. Until the last few years however, Prosser suggests, interpreting a shared feeling among visual sociologists, image-based research played a relatively minor role in sociological research. Visual sociology has been marginalized by nearly a century of efforts that have seen sociology endeavour to establish its research credentials by adopting an ‘objective or ‘scientific’ approach (Prosser 1998:97). Sociology however has in the last decades experienced a radical shift in its interpretative paradigms developing and putting forward qualitative interpretations and methodologies that seem to be in better ‘tune’ with the potentialities of image-based research. This growing awareness of the potential of images for qualitative research, demonstrated by the increasing number of books published in the field, the birth of a new journal, Visual Studies, that addresses the field’s advancements, and the increasing number of courses in visual sociology and visual studies, are now having an impact on the academic agenda. Although this newly discovered impulse confirms, as all the authors cited do, this need for a ‘more visual’ (Chaplin 1994) sociology, these authors also still express the perplexity that exists today over how to describe and agree on what it actually means to do ‘Visual Sociology’. The (visual) academic community until now has not been able to develop a ‘clear overarching, cohesive, theoretical and methodological framework’ (Prosser 1998:103), although Harper, Grady (1996, 1999), Prosser (1998), Harper and Faccioli (1999), Emmison &

3 Although, as Becker [1998:87] notices, the very definition of visual material as unscientific is odd, since the natural sciences routinely use visual materials and many of its branches would be unthinkable without photographic evidence (see discussion in Latour and Woolgar (1986), Laboratory Life: the construction of scientific facts).

4 Prosser reconstructs the struggle for recognition of the field: ‘ the marginalization of image-based research is still strong and ‘compounded by an academic community, working within the qualitative paradigm, who have devised a methodology which places emphasis on words’ (Prosser 1998:). ‘A common theme in general sociological textbooks appears to be an enthusiasm to describe the drawbacks and limitation of using images in qualitative enquiry (…). There is little attempt to point to solutions to those issues or identify parallel problems within word-oriented research. The general message, perhaps unwittingly, is that photographs, films and videos are acceptable only as means to record data or as illustration to the central narrative of the research, images being too complex or ambiguous to be ‘constituted as evidence or to represent findings in mainstream qualitative research’ (Prosser 1998:97-99).

5 For the most inclusive discussion of the potentialities of image-based research see [Grady 1999: 491-524]
Smith (2000), Faccioli & Losacco (2003) are moving towards such cohesive overviews. Some crucial questions are still left unanswered: How do we assess/state the sociological value of images? Or more precisely, since a division between photojournalism, some kinds of photographic and video art or advertising and images for sociological analyses is nonsensical (Becker 1998), how do we make a case for a ‘sociological practice’ that functionally differentiates one from the others? What sort of sociological information can we expect to elicit from images use/analysis? What sort of sociological information are we going to explore in/through the use of images, and how? In conclusion: in which classic (or new) sociological theories and methodologies are images going to be integrated?

Three authors have systematically explored the roots and developments of visual sociology in search of a possible ‘table of contents’ for the visual sociologist. Wagner (1979) offers an investigation of the ‘modes’ of visual sociology, Harper (1989,1999) a set of categories in which photographs that can be sociologically used, and Grady (1999) an analysis of the potentialities of visual sociology for social research, with three differentiated main areas (seeing, communicating with icons, doing sociology visually) and several sub-areas of specialisation of the images use and inquiry. It is not my aim to delve into the merits and weaknesses of one or the other categorisation and therefore I shall simply refer to the above-mentioned literature. I will here instead only briefly refer to the classic scheme of Wagner (1979), who identifies five main ‘modes’ for the use of images for social research, Wagner’s main modes are:

- Photo-elicitation (use of photographs in an interview)
- Native’s image making (analyses, also but not necessarily through photo-elicitation, of images taken by the subjects of the research)
- Systematic recording (of social acts, urban or rural spaces, etc., analysis of social practices and change)
- Content analysis (analyses of the use of visual contents for institutional, personal or social purposes)
- Educational use of images.

As I said above I will not explore the details of each one of these modes or methodological areas, and I will move instead to explore only the one that directly regards this research, photo-elicitation. What I want to note here though, before introducing the subject of my research (and while referring to the original text or the systematic discussion of these themes made by Grady (1999)) is that this simple inventory, if limited in its explicative power, well synthesises the five methodological
areas in which the use of images has mostly been implemented and contributed, with original works and methods, to the sociological investigations.

1.2. **Photo-Elicitation: Introduction.**

The use of photographs in an interview process, or the so-called ‘photo-elicitation’ method, was first named in a paper published by John Collier in 1957, ‘Photography in anthropology: a report on two experiments’. It was later described in greater detail in the methodology classic *Interviewing with Photographs* by John and Malcolm Collier (Collier & Collier 1986:99-125) in their book, ‘*Visual anthropology: Photography as a research Method*’. The book was first published by John Collier in 1967 and then revised and expanded for its final edition in 1986. In the book the Colliers attempt a systematic survey of all the visual techniques utilised in anthropology up to that point. It is in this context that photo-elicitation methodology is for the first time analytically described as a simple variation on the theme of open-ended interviewing (Harper 1994:410). The open-ended interview is a non-directive method developed to favour the *ideal* collaboration between the researcher and the respondent. It emerges from the theoretical/methodological debates that have put into question the tenets of the classic structured interviews/surveys, the nature of the researcher-respondent relationship, and the knowledge that this interaction is supposed to produce (I will discuss these issues in much greater detail in Chapter III). The open-ended methodology sees the interview as an exchange that, although initiated and guided by the researcher, wants to grant to the interviewee (greater) space for personal interpretations and responses. In the photo-elicited interview, this exchange is stimulated and guided by images. ‘Typically these are photographs that the researcher has made of the subject’s world’ (Harper 2000, 1987, Gold 1991) or that have been selected because they are assumed to be meaningful to the interviewee. The pictures might also be, in certain circumstances, photographs that the interviewees have taken or selected by themselves for the specific aims of the interview.

In their description of the methodology, the Colliers described photographs as tools through which to obtain knowledge ‘above and beyond’ that obtainable through the analysis of the photographs themselves. ‘When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content,’ the Colliers explain, the photographs can become ‘communication bridges between strangers’, ‘pathways into unfamiliar, unforeseen environments and subjects. The informational and projective character of photographic imagery makes this process possible. They can function as starting and reference points for discussions of the familiar or the unknown’ (Collier & Collier 1986:99).
In their analyses, the Colliers engage with the description and analysis of several direct experiences of photo-elicited interviewing. While describing the contexts and the subjects of their researches, they develop a case for photo-elicitation as a methodology that seems to meet, almost ‘spontaneously’ (Colliers 1986:113), the aims of a qualitatively informed open-ended interview-collaboration between the researcher and the interviewee, non-directivity of the discourse, and higher engagement of the interviewee, to mention a few. The descriptions made by the Colliers of the methodology have a depth of insights that no other work on the topic has yet matched (Hall 1986, Harper 1999, Faccioli 1999). Nonetheless, many of the key methodological aspects pinpointed by the Colliers are left theoretically undeveloped and appear to be intended more as guidelines to the application of the methodology based on their practical experience in the anthropological field work. There have been no further organised theoretical developments of the concepts exposed by the Colliers and their methodological agenda still underpins any theoretical analysis that wants to investigate photo-elicited interviews. It is possibly because of this deficiency of theoretical and methodological engagement that, as recognised by Harper⁶, ‘this method has yet to catch on as a frontline sociological method’ (Harper 1994:410).

In my analysis I want to take the challenge and unfold, expand, and question at a broader theoretical level the methodological aspects of photo-elicitation left undeveloped by the Colliers. The research however should not be placed either as a development of the studies conducted by the Colliers, or as a direct challenge to their interpretations. Instead, informed from the Colliers’ experiences and interpretations in an anthropological context, the research seeks to render and explore their intuitions and guiding hypothesis in the context of a sociological inquiry. Inevitably a comparison between the two investigations of the methodology will occur, however they will not be the specific aim of my accounts and investigations.

The fair tribute to the Colliers investigation will be paid in this chapter with an initial critical analysis of their key hypotheses, and in the next chapter (Chapter II) that through a revaluation of the main theories that investigated photograph’s communicative value will be used both to give substance to my critique of the Colliers interpretations, and to create the sound basis for the development of my research questions.

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⁶ Harper is one among the few scholars that has for decades systematically studied and used the methodology, though without ever really questioning or developing the original interpretations given by the Colliers.

The first issues that I have to address are *why* and *how* to use photographs. What makes photographs a feasible instrument to pursue our aim to enrich our knowledge of other people’s lives, opinions, knowledge and behaviours? How can they achieve this aim? The Colliers’ analyses (Collier & Collier 1986:99-125) of the informational value of photographs for anthropological research have differentiated two functional elements. Photographs in their interpretation have two relevant informational values for the researcher: one, ‘encyclopaedic’, is constituted by the photograph’s ‘immediate character of realistic reconstruction’ (Collier & Collier 1986:115), that is the potential for survey offered to the researchers by the photographs’ capacity to visually record objects, persons, and physical and social circumstances. The other, ‘projective’, is based on this capacity to record objects, persons and situations. Photographs, because of their *realist* representation, offer the possibility to observe and discuss actual events and subjects with other observers. When analysed together by two (or more) observers, photographs can constitute ‘communicational bridges’ between strangers on specific (‘unfamiliar’ or familiar) subjects. They create the possibility for different observers to interpret the image’s contents according to their ‘identity of views’, ‘native knowledge’ and ‘ethos’ (Colliers 1986:103,106), and to actively discuss and exchange the personal values and meanings that these subjects might have for them.

The combination of these two informational characteristics of the image seems to sustain the whole structure of the Colliers’ arguments and to constitute the ‘intrinsic potential’ of the photo-elicited interview. The photographs with their realistic reconstruction of the subject in facts not only operates as a projective tool that constitutes a communicative path in the lives and worlds of the observers, but also creates a new communicative situation in which the report between the subjects is reshaped and refocused. The consequences of this new communicative situation are, in the Colliers’ descriptions, crucial for the interactional dynamics of the interview. Photographs, in their interpretation, ‘perform on the table as a third party in the interaction’; they shift the focus of the discourse (any question now made is functionally addressed to the photographs) and transform the respondent and the researcher into ‘each other’s assistants’ equally active in interrogating the photographs, and in discovering answers in the realities there depicted (Collier & Collier 1986:112).

The line of reasoning drawn by the Colliers throughout their analytic descriptions (although in my view affected, as we shall see in a moment, by some important
theoretical limits) suggests some interesting hypotheses for a re-evaluation of the classic verbal interview. The Colliers’ descriptions delineate a communicative interaction characterised by a different (from the verbally elicited) relationship between the interviewer, the interviewee and the stimuli (not only questions, but also photographs), and suggest (through the communicative use of images) the possibility of a different management of the dynamics of the interview. One first aspect that must in fact be acknowledged in the analysis of the photographic probe is (consistent with the descriptions made by the Colliers) that the use of visual materials in the interview breaks the uni-dimensional linguistic structure of the interview discourse with a second relevant communicative element that transcends its linguistic nature. This shift in the nature of the stimuli has two correlated macroscopic effects in the interview. First, the use of photographs undoubtedly supplements the dialogue with new informational elements and symbols that verbal communication cannot deliver (the visuals). Second, the introduction of a second non-verbal communicative element in the interaction transforms, in ways to be investigated, the structure of the verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The questions are: How are these new communicative elements used? How do they affect the interaction and discourse structure?

The Colliers offer some candid answers, by describing and interpreting the interview as a potentially problematic social interaction. This interaction, they remind us, remains always ‘a major focus of concern’ for the researcher who ‘struggles to define a genuine functional relationship’ with the respondents (Collier & Collier 1986:105). In their analyses the Colliers suggest that the use of photographs in the interview tempers many of the difficulties that arise when we want to create this relationship (ibid). Images, the Colliers explain, ‘spontaneously’ invite ‘open expression’, and ‘invite people to take the lead in the inquiry, making full use of their expertise’ (Ibid). They ‘psychologically’ perform as a third party in the interview, shifting the ‘interaction from the direct interviewer-interviewee’s confrontation’. ‘The researcher is now asking questions of the photographs, and the informants are now assistants in exploring the answers in the realities there depicted’ (ibid:105). The realistic character of the photographs, according to the Colliers, has in fact the effect of naturally inviting the respondents to take the lead in the inquiry. Photographs offers a gratifying sense of self-expression (ibid:106) to the respondents who are identifying and explaining the image’s contents, not by answering questions, but by exploring the ‘realities of the photographs’ ‘together’ with the researcher (Collier & Collier 1986:105). This effect is, in the Colliers’ interpretation, a direct outcome of the specific communicative qualities of photographs.
Photographs, the Colliers explain, ‘have, if strongly descriptive in their depicted subjects, below their surface contents that are charged with highly subjective meanings and values; meanings and values that can be ultimately opened up only by the observer’s native view’ (Collier & Collier 1986:119). Differently from a question or a verbal exchange, which bear a meaning in themselves, photographs represent a potential for meanings, but acquire a specific meaning only through their interpretation and description by an observer. The understanding of this interpretation is, according to the Colliers, that both participants, through the confrontation of their respective interpretations and points of view, define a photograph’s meaning in an interview. Both participants have to collaborate to focus their interpretative attempt, and this process transforms the interview into a ‘mutual communication in which researchers [have to] return as much as they are given’ (ibid:123). This is no small achievement for an interaction whose primary concern is to establish rapport among the interactants.

However, some issues arise. Although the Colliers offer an evocative and persuasive description of different interviews to sustain their interpretations, they limit, at a theoretical level, their arguments to few repeated hypotheses that rely solely on these ‘inner qualities of a photograph’ (in Chapter II, I will show that this interpretation is informed or underlaid by a semiotic interpretation of the communicative value of photographs, and I will describe how it can also be critiqued from the same premises of the critique of that interpretative paradigm). Throughout their analyses in fact, the Colliers explicitly or implicitly impute all the inter-relational effects (the ones described above and more) to the intrinsic realistic qualities of the photographic means, without accounting for other dynamics of the interactions that might have contributed towards that outcome. The use of photographs seems in the Colliers’ research to be the only and necessary factor that ‘spontaneously’ contributes to reshaping these interactional activities. The only responsibility of the researcher is that of choosing images that could help this natural process of identification and projection-interpretation.

If the Colliers’ descriptions intriguingly suggest the value that the communicative potential of the photographs might acquire in a research interview, they remain nevertheless handicapped by an incomplete or very basic description of the realist character of the photographic representation, leaving on the one hand unexplained the theoretical premises from which the photographs’ communicative value is drawn, and giving on the other hand a solely interpretative description of the interactions the images elicit. The Colliers do not give a clear account of what the exact dynamics of the interviews were, for example: What questions were asked exactly? How many
photographs were shown? How did the different interviewees’ responses vary? What was difference between the various interviews? Or, were all their interviews exactly identical, as the analysis seems to insinuate? We are basically left with their interpretation of the interactions, which is otherwise suggestive and convincingly argued.

It is at this stage of the discussion that I must clearly state those elements that strike me as the main limits of the interpretations made by the Colliers. The Colliers, in their analyses of the interviews conducted with photographs, describe in great detail the ‘relaxed’ and ‘collaborative’ atmosphere in which the interviews were held. They stress, for example, the careful attention paid to the construction of the interview with the Plenns family as a non-intrusive event, emphasising in general the necessity for the development of a social relationship that would not be considered by the informants as exploitative. They even describe how the Collier family, ‘John, Mary, and two-year-old Malcolm’ (Collier & Collier 1986:102) spent a day at the Plenns farm before the interviews. Nevertheless, at a methodological and theoretical level, the Colliers pay only marginal attention to the evaluation of the effects that these social dynamics might have had on the ‘collaborative’ outcomes of the interview (for example, the friendly atmosphere so carefully constructed before, during and after some of the interviews is described but not acknowledged or analysed in terms of the outcomes in the interviews). The Colliers acknowledge the importance of the rapport with their interviewees, but they attribute most of the credit for the openness and richness of the conversation only to the effect of the described ‘intrinsic’ (or ‘structural’) characteristics of the photographs. These positions, in my perspective, are vulnerable to critique from two different (interrelated) directions: one that moves from the same precinct of the interpretative analyses of the communicative characteristics of the photographs, and another that moves from an interactional analysis of the contextual aspects of the interview. I should sum up the previous key interpretative points and put forward the two main critiques that will be developed in Chapter II.

1.4. **Photo-elicitation: theoretical premises for an alternative investigation.**

In their analyses of the photographic stimuli, the Colliers pay a great deal of attention in describing the instrumental value that the photograph’s communicative characteristics represent for the interview. Photographs’ physical nature literally places them as a third element in the conversation. Their ‘immediate character of realistic reconstruction’ (the
indexical\(^7\) value of the photograph, that works also as a data record) and their communicative ‘ambiguity’ (or polysemy\(^8\)) that let the represented subjects assume values and meaning idiosyncratic to each observer (also in Harper 2002:15). These characteristics and their psychological and communicative effects on the interview discourse are, in the Colliers’ arguments, solely based and derived from the ‘inner’ attributes of the photographic medium. The photographs represent, transmit, elicit and act in the interview and on the interaction while the researcher’s only accountability or merit is that of selecting the photographs that would better serve their projective task functionally to the aims of the research (this position is also sustained for example by Harper in his study of the ‘phenomenology of farming’ (Harper 2002:20)).

What I critique in the Colliers’ description is not their interpretation of the projective potentialities of the photographs, nor the intuition of the instrumental function that their communicative use might have to re-shape the interactional in a research interview. What I critique is:

1. A reductive, methodologically unsatisfying, description of the dynamics of the interaction that is unaware or forgetful of the influences that other elements of the interaction (context, discourse, specific aims of the research, social identity of the interactants) might have on the use/interpretation of the photographs and on the interrelational outcomes.

2. A description of the projective qualities of the photographs founded on a reductive interpretation of the intrinsic (or structural) features of the photographs.

\(^7\) The potential for ‘encyclopaedic information’ of the photograph seems to directly refer to the concept of indexicality, defined in semiotics through the re-appropriation of the Piercean concept, that describes it as the necessary and physically mediated relationship that exists between and index and the subjects they represent. The Colliers do not directly use the term, but I will argue that the understanding of this concept, along with the other semiological concept of polysemy, underlay the Colliers interpretations. These arguments will be at length discussed in Chapter II.

\(^8\) Term first coined by Barthes (1964) to refer to the images’ ‘floating chain of significance’. A photographs’ ‘polysemy’ is in the semiotic interpretation constituted and caused by the presence of a heterogeneous complex of interpretative codes the number and type of which varies from one image to another. This wealth of interpretative codes motivates, for each image, a multiplicity and variety of possible meanings that are finally resolved into a clear outcome (meaning) only by the subjective interpretation of an observer (or by a caption). This ambiguity or subjectivity of meanings is described as an almost neutral or unproblematic element in the Colliers’ descriptions.
What I suggest is that there is a need for a more comprehensive theoretical and methodological investigation that might clearly account both for the potential communicative functions of the photographs, and the actual social dynamics that their use and interpretation may favour in an interview. My intention is not to argue against the (valued and insightful) interpretation of the photographs as ‘projective tools’, but rather to bring the analysis of their methodological value in an interview to a higher degree of theoretical inclusion and discussion. Moving away from the Colliers’ original description, and the introductory arguments described above, my research seeks to move the methodological investigation of photo-elicitation a step further.

1.5. Research aims.

The aim of my research is to analytically compare and investigate two sets of interviews, one set made with the sole use of ‘questions’ and the other with the use of ‘photographs and questions’ (a methodology known as photo-elicitation). This research aim is pursued through a comparative analysis that creates a methodologically and theoretically sustained juxtaposition of the characteristics of one specific design of the photo-elicited interview against a similarly designed (classic) verbal semi-structured interview. These two sets of interviews are used to investigate and analytically compare the two methodologies with the aim of providing evidence for the different performances of the interviewer and the interviewee in the two research practices.

In the analysis I suggest that the research interview can be interpreted, because of its structure and purpose, as a social encounter that favours the constitution of a peculiar social identity gap (interviewer/interviewee). This identity gap is characterised by a series of epistemological asymmetries (namely what are different are: the subject’s participation to task, know-how about the specific form of interaction, discourse structure and lexical choices, control over the topics and topic change, knowledge, rights to knowledge, social identity, and control over the data analysis and diffusion). These are asymmetries that are in part created and reinforced by specific discourse structures and features.

For this purpose my study focuses on the analysis of interview ‘discourse’ and ultimately aims at a theoretically informed evaluation of the effects that the use of photographs has on the verbal interaction developing in the research interviews and on these asymmetries.

The research, a case study of the methodology, seeks to promote and directly contribute to the investigation of the theoretical and methodological boundaries that
differentiate the two research methods. And it seeks to create a set of theoretical hypotheses against which other interview designs that use photographs can be contrasted and compared.

1.6. Description of the chapters.

The second chapter extends the critical arguments I have introduced in my introductory description of the photo-elicited interview through a revaluation of the main theories that investigated photograph’s communicative value. The chapter has two parallel methodological functions; it is used both to give substance to my critique of the Colliers interpretations, and to create the sound basis for the development of my research questions. To pursue these aims I argue for a reinterpretation of the semiotically informed concepts of ‘encyclopaedic’ and ‘projective’ information described by the Colliers (narrowly focused on the image’s physical structure and conducible, I argue, to the semiotic concepts of indexicality and polysemy) to their ‘sociological’ rendition, which expands and includes images’ usage and contextual interpretations. In this ‘pragmatic’ approach photographs’ multiplicity of meanings, and characteristics features are viewed and investigated in function of the interpretative conventions that photograph’s usage has favoured for their interpretation (in different stereotypical contexts) and the ways in which these conventions are actively elaborated in an actual communicative process.

In the third chapter I frame the analysis of the photo-elicited interview within the broader methodological and theoretical debates on interview methodology. I argue for a qualitative stance that interprets the interview (and the photo-elicited interview) as an interrelational, contextual, conversational site for the construction of knowledge. I use a perspective that holds that meaning is socially constituted, that knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it and that knowledge is itself a product of interaction. The chapter presents a critical analysis of the methodological background on which both the classic verbal interview and the photo-elicited interview rely upon, and it is used to critically focus on the analysis of the interaction between the interviewer-interviewee. In the analysis I argue for an interpretation of the interview as social encounter, an ‘interaction’ between two participants who dynamically (as in any other social exchange) construct and negotiate, through the verbal exchange, contextual narratives9 as well as individual social identities. In the development of the analysis I question this verbal

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9 Inferences on their life worlds.
exchange (and the ways it can be shaped in an interview to empower one participant or the other). I suggest that the interview can be interpreted, because of its structure and purpose, as a social encounter that favours the constitution of a peculiar social identity gap (interviewer/interviewee). This identity gap is characterised by a series of epistemological asymmetries which are, in part, created and reinforced by specific discourse structures and features. In this context the challenge is offered by the analytical investigation of how these asymmetries are addressed in conversations that relies on two different discourse structures, one characterised by the use of photographs and questions, and the other by the sole use of questions.

Given this theoretical framework, my fourth chapter begins the analytical investigation and elaboration of the comparison. In this chapter some of the methodological tenets of the two methodologies, the photo-elicited interview and the classic verbal interview, are described and theoretically compared. The analysis of some similar constitutive characteristics of the two methodologies inductively contributes to the selection of two specific interview designs. The inductive procedure also makes a case for the very possibility of comparing two different methodologies and describes the limits characteristic of any comparative attempt. It is in this context that a first definition of the aims of the comparison is given and its characteristics and limits described along with a series of basic questions that inform the comparison itself. Briefly the key questions that the comparison wants to address are: What are the noticeable differences (if any) in the social performance of the interviewer and the interviewee in the two methodologies? Which are the main (if any) differences that can be discerned between the two forms of discourse/interaction? How are the different asymmetries described earlier addressed in the two sets of interviews? It is also in this chapter that a research application is defined to constitute the terrain on which the two methodologies will be adopted and compared. The research application’s, “Studying Identity and Food: A Case Study with the Students of South-East London”, broad area of investigation is the process of consumption of food. The specific focus of the research is the investigation of food practices as markers of social identity, and the existing differentiation between

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10 Namely: subject’s participation to task, know-how about the specific form of interaction, discourse structure and lexical choices, control over the topics and topic change, knowledge, rights to knowledge, social identity, and control over the data analysis and diffusion.

11 I stressed a ‘noticeable difference’ because I think that only if these differences will be significantly evident I can evaluate the real differences between the methods themselves, and not the necessary variability of the different interviews.
genders in these practices in a specific sample. The aim of the research is to explore how students perceive their identity to be constructed in relationship to food, both as individuals and gendered subjects.

Chapter five unfolds the methodological aspects of the research. In the chapter I discuss the structure, aims, analytical methodologies and theoretical frameworks, theoretical issues, comparative analytic approaches, and limits of the study. The nature of the study, I explain, is that of a grounded theory (case) study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Any inference moves from an analytical investigation of the two forms of interviews to a general interpretation (and description) of their specific dynamics. The centrepiece of the analysis is the development of theory, generated in the context of the study, as a plausible set of relationships, concepts and hypotheses, adept at describing the peculiar characteristics of the specific design of the photo-elicited interview sample against the classic verbal semi-structured comparative sample. For the analysis (and comparison) of the interviews I have decided to use some of the methodological tools developed by Conversation and Discourse Analysis (making full use of audio-recordings and transcriptions thereof). CA and DA have been chosen because they are thought to be functional in underlining the structural organisation of talk, its sequential organisation, and the social identity construction enacted through talk practices. In marking the patterns that talk exhibits or the differences existing between interviewer and interviewee participation in talk, CA and DA helped to underline variances in the two approaches.

Chapter six systematises the analytical work conducted on the interviews, and reports on the interpretations, findings and hypotheses that were developed during these analyses. The chapter is organised in two sections: one analytical, the other methodological/theoretical. In section one, analytical, I describe the key interpretations and hypotheses that developed through the analysis and comparison of photo-elicited and the classic semi-structured interviews. I begin my analyses with a description of the general context in which the interviews were held. I then analytically approach the interviews, describing four types of discourse strategies that emerged in the sample in which the photographs are used. The description of these strategies is pursued, maintaining one characteristic discourse feature of the interviews (the distinctive Question-Answer turn pre-allocation, and its specific variation within each strategy) as the comparative-orienting point from which the analyses address and interpret the other significant discourse features. In section two, methodological/theoretical, these findings are framed within a more general theoretical and methodological evaluation of the two interviews’ designs. In this section of the analysis I focus on relevant instances of both
samples to exemplify and analyse the typical discourse dynamics that developed in the two sets of interviews. I compare these discourse dynamics and their specific discursive features.

Chapter seven concludes the research and offers an overview and elaboration of the outcomes of the analysis. The comparison of the two sets of interviews has shown that the photographs provided the occasion for the development of distinctive interactional dynamics that substantially differentiated the photo-elicited and the classic semi-structured interview samples. The analyses, which moved synchronously through different levels of the discourse, suggested that the utilisation of photographs brought about in the photo-elicited sample two kinds of distinctive discourse features and dynamics. One, structural, affected the organisation of the interaction (the exchanges between the interactants), while the other, topical, affected the elaboration of the topics developed by the interviewees in these exchanges (the content of the response/answers).

The manifestly unequal distribution of these distinctive discourse features in the interviews, however, suggests to interpret cautiously these discursive features to avoid a misconception of their methodological significance. The chapter offers an overview of the methodological areas of investigation of the analysis and indicates two concepts, discourse genre mixing and visual literacy, as two theoretical approaches that might help to describe the interaction and negotiation of contents and interpretations that particularly characterised the photo-elicited sample.
The term ‘polysemy’, ‘many signs’ (a compound of two Greek components ‘polius’ (many) and ‘sema’ (sign), deriving from the verb sao, ‘to signify’) refers to the hypothetically infinite range of meanings which results when ‘determinacy’ is replaced by ‘indeterminacy’.

This chapter extends the arguments I have introduced in my preliminary description and critique of the photo-elicited interview. It is intended as a questioning of the interpretation and value of photographs in the interview process as described in the methodology classic Interviewing with Photographs by John and Malcolm Collier (Collier & Collier 1986:99-115). In my analysis I unfold and question (to a broader and more sociological level) the theoretical positions underlying the interpretation of the photographs’ communicative value described by the Colliers. The aim of this chapter is to offer an articulate and theoretically sound basis for my analyses of the communicative functions displayed by the photographs in my empirical research case in Chapter VI. Here I present a selective/focused reconstruction of the approaches that have studied the photograph. The limits of this reconstruction derive from the necessity of a) accounting mainly for the interpretative paradigms that my research questions and challenges, and b) the necessity of limiting my discussion to the key/relevant hypothesis of each theoretical tradition. The chapter consequently does not aim at a comprehensive account of the existing debate on the image, which would by far exceed what is needed for the purposes of my study, but wants to offer a critical overview of the key approaches that can theoretically frame and sustain my specific research questions and analyses. This chapter offers an historical excursion that describes the crisis of the formal and semiotic paradigms, and the rise of new post-semiotic and post-modern theoretical perspectives, on which my interpretation of the communicative value of the photograph is based.
2.1. Introduction: Overview of the theories and authors.

For the last fifty years the debate on the nature of images has been framed by authors such as Gombrich (1962), Arnehim (1969), Sontag (1977), Berger (1972) Barthes (1964, 1967, 1980), Bourdieu (1965), Goodman (1969), Eco (1979, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1987, 1990), in questions such as: Is photography a form of evidence or a form of interpretation? Is it a form of expression or a form of reportage? If it is a form of expression, how does it communicate? Are pictures a natural (innate) form of communication or do we learn to ‘read’ pictures in the same way as we learn to read a book? Are pictures and language equivalent symbol systems built on conventions and codes?

The questioning of the communicative values of photographs pursued through the investigation of the mechanical-physical nature and characteristics of photographs in the early 1960s dominated the theoretical climate in which the semiotic approach was to analyse photographs as signs. Developing from its original intent to ‘draw analytical concepts from linguistics’ semiotics attempted to establish ‘the intrinsic and universal properties of photographs’ (Barthes 1967). Influenced by the newly discovered structures of verbal language, semiotics tried to investigate the visual characteristics of photographs in search of equivalent image-conventions.

In the last decade, sociologists and communication theorists have started to question the very intention of semiotics to establish ‘the intrinsic and universal properties of the photographs’. Theorists’ critique is not only a consequence of the semiotician’s failure to provide a distinctive solution to the concepts that semiotics recognised and differentiated, but also the result of the growing awareness that the structuralist hypothesis (developed in semiotics) did not prove useful in addressing the diverse, and often contrasting, uses and interpretations which are made of photographs.

In post-semiotic approaches¹, authors are now balancing the semiotic analyses of photographs (which are based on the logocentric paradigm and focused on the inner

¹ I should note that since there is not yet any coherent definition of the several approaches that critique the semiotic stances and move forward the analysis of the image, I decided to refer to this new range of perspectives with the generic term of post-semiotic approaches. A more popular, but also more problematic, definition of this range of approaches could be ‘post-modern’. Although many of the new theories of the image are certainly influenced by post-modern perspectives, some are not directly linked to them but rather develop within different theoretical traditions (social semiotics for example) and it is for this reason that I preferred to used a less epistemologically charged definition.
qualities of the pictures) with studies of the relationship existing between the different social uses of photography, and their influence on the interpretation and communicative value of photographs. Sekula (1982), Batchen (1997), Tagg (1988), Bolton (1989), Mitchell (1994) were among the first scholars to move in this direction. The post-semiotic perspectives, Mitchell explains, are concerned more with the real usage of images than with their ‘nature’. They search for an explanation of pictures freed from the ‘assumption that language is the only paradigm for meaning’. They also suggest that a range of recent ‘deconstructionist, post-structuralist and post-modern strategies might present models for a post-semiotic rediscovery of the photograph’ (and the photograph’s meaning) as a ‘complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, social contexts and discourse’ (Mitchell 1994:11).

While semiotics focused on the inner characteristics of the photographs, post-semiotic analyses focus on the social values and use that have been made of certain photographic features throughout photography’s history. In the interpretations developing in critical theory and art criticism (Krauss 1986, 1989, Rosler 1989, Sekula 1975, 1982, Parada, Solomon Godeau 1991, Bolton 1989, Batchen 1997), but also in – visual-sociology (Prosser 1998, Becker 1998, Cronin 1998, Harper 1998), and social semiotics (Saint-Martin 1990, Sonesson 1998, Hodge and Kress 1988, Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) and sociology (Slater, 1999, 1997a,b, 1995a,b, 1991, Lury 1998), photography is now being considered as part of a process of usage that has privileged, implemented and strengthened different interpretations of photographs’ characteristics in specific contexts and conventional practices. These new developing approaches, Bolton suggests, critically examine the ‘prevailing beliefs’ about the photographic medium by raising questions about photography’s relationship to society and culture. In reaction to the evaluation of photographs’ physical characteristics, critical theorist and post-semiotic interpretations are now arguing that a photograph’s meaning is culturally established through interpretative-conventions that exist outside of the image-conventions. These interpretative-conventions are socially and institutionally constructed2 and contextually called upon and elaborated (by the observer) in any communicative process in which images are used.

These at times competing arguments describe the tension that crosses photographic theory and practice. It suggests that a photograph’s meaning is stratified in many layers (social, cultural, contextual, physical), oppositions and unions. The

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2 In Bolton’s descriptions these conventions are thought to serve an ideological function. They are often self-effacing, helping to naturalise a system of beliefs.
ambiguity of the photograph’s meaning seems part of the photograph’s indivisible double nature in itself; is photography culture or index? From my point of view however *photography* cannot (and does not need to) be solved by oppositional logic, ‘neither simply culture or nature, yet encompassing both’ (Batchen 1997:179), but interpreted in its contextual practices that may privilege one or the other.

In this approach the photograph’s meaning and interpretations are embedded and derived from the multiplicity of contexts and subjective communicative intentions in and for which photographs are used. A photograph’s characteristics and specific features are defined as a function of the interpretative conventions that their usage has favoured in different stereotypical contexts. *Subjective meanings and interpretative conventions* are, according to this approach, both called into question and contextually elaborated in any communicative process in which images are embedded.

As I am well aware of the complexity of the history and interpretation of photography, the intention of my discussion is to selectively use some of the key arguments developing in both approaches to theoretically re-frame the analysis of the use of photographs in the specific context of the sociological interview. I will argue that in this specific application, the fact that the meaning arises contextually\(^3\) and discursively\(^4\) is particularly evident and relevant, and must allow us to reflect on the *level of information* that photographs seem to hold. The new approaches to the image’s meaning, theoretically framed in the contemporary shift towards the examination of the action-oriented nature of any communication, renders the mere identification of photograph’s ‘realist’ reconstruction offered by the Colliers somewhat trivial unless we carry the issue further by asking the empirical questions: ‘To what uses are the photograph’s indexical characteristics put in the discourse? What does the treatment of a photograph as a ‘direct reflection’ of reality achieve? Whose knowledge or set of interpretative conventions does this use of the pictures represent?

### 2.2. The social values of photographs: metaphoric signification or metonymic signification.

In the Colliers’ interpretation, photographs have two informational levels: one, ‘encyclopaedic’, is constituted by the photograph’s ability to visually record objects, persons, circumstances, places, and events. The other, ‘projective’, derives from the possibility offered by the photographs for exploring these visual contents and their

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\(^3\) Framed in specific context of an interview and guided by a specific aim.  
\(^4\) Through the interaction interviewer/interviewee.
meanings in a discussion with other observers. These distinctive informational attributes, and their effects on the interview discourse, are framed and limited in the Colliers’ description to a formal, and I would argue semiotically informed, interpretation of the characteristics of the photographs. To give substance to this interpretation, and to my critiques, I shall now describe the theoretical debates that underpin the Colliers’ methodological stances and argue for a reinterpretation of the concepts of ‘encyclopaedic’ and ‘projective’ information narrowly focused on images’ physical-inner qualities, to their sociological rendition, which expands and includes image usage, context and discursive interpretations.

I will start my analysis with a description of the debate originated when the photographic technique was first introduced. The motivations of this choice are not only historical, but mostly sociological, given the fact that almost all the communicative -and social- values historically acquired by photographic images can be reconnected to the original debates that immediately began when photography was presented.

Since its origin, photography has been characterised by contradictory interpretations: once mechanical reproduction then conventional interpretation, sometimes scientific evidence, other times interpretative assertion. As Sekula describes, ‘all photographic communication seems to take place within the conditions of a kind of binary folklore. That is, there is a ‘symbolist’ folk myth and a ‘realist’ folk myth. The misleading but popular form of this opposition is ‘art photography’ vs ‘documentary photography’” (Sekula 1982:108). The rationale of these two poles purports, according to Sekula, two different interpretations of photography: photography as ‘seer’ or photography as a ‘witness’, expression or reportage, imagination (and inner truth) or empirical truth, affective value or informative value, metaphoric signification or metonymic signification (1982:108).

If we can say that the original issue of the artfulness of photography is not problematic anymore (and I will not to detail this subject here), some of the other

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5 The ‘classic’ opposition of art and photography is nowadays surpassed or nonsensical. I agree with Claudio Marra (1992) when he says that contemporary art has institutionally accepted ‘opera’ that demonstrates how the question of artfulness is now purely formal, it regards a cultural decision more important than the ‘classic’ material, instrumental or technical aspects of art production. To make it clear, we can think of some limited cases such as Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fontana –Orinatoio’ or Piero Manzoni’s ‘Merda D’artista’; now, and we say that without any ironical intention, if our culture has been demonstrated to be able to accept as art a ‘urinal’ or some ‘shit’, does it make any sense to question whether photography can be considered a form of art and, above all, does it make any sense to argue this question starting from internal issues of ‘material specificity”? (C. Marra 1992:53). For an in depth
oppositions remained high on the agenda of photography’s theorists for more than a century. Throughout the history of photography there have been arguments to support or contrast one or the other of these two competing interpretations (the symbolist and the realist). However, all these arguments remained based on the initial prominence given to the physical characteristics of photographs and on the evaluation of their implications for the images’ meaning and communicative value. The basic question of the time was: What are the physical characteristics of this medium that can be used to support different ‘readings’ of the value of the images?

In a reconstruction of photography’s history that could account for both these competing inferences, and the rise of the new ones, we should consider the claims made by photography when it was first presented.

If its aspiration to the position of art is one that we have come to know well and accept, I want now to re-consider the extremely influential claim (in popular lore and photographic theory) that photography from its inception has made on science – primarily that of being considered as evidence. As Winston points out, ‘of course, in photography’s founding moment, it was understood that photographs had artistic potential’ (Winston 1989:61). But this was not the line taken to present the new invention. Winston in fact presents evidence of the original claims made by the chemist Joseph Louise Gay-Lussac when presenting Daguerre’s invention to the French house of Peers in 1839: ‘It is certain that through M. Daguerre’s invention physics is today in possession of a reagent extraordinarily sensitive to the influence of light, a new instrument which will be to the study of the intensity of light and luminous phenomena what the microscope is to the study of minute objects’. (From the speech made by Joseph Louise Gay-Lussac in the French house of Peers, 30 July 1839 in Winston 1989:242)

From its origin, Winston explains, the claim of photography was of its nature as evidence, ‘it was positioned as science and its social importance was located in its ability to produce evidence of all kinds of phenomena’ (1989:242). This evidence included the natural world, as well as people, artefacts, objects, etc. Sekula for example in his own reconstruction of the initial steps of photography refers to Henry Fox Talbot, another of the founding fathers of photography, to describe similar evidentiary claims for the photograph. Henry Fox Talbot, in his notes on a calotype depicting several shelves bearing articles of china speculates: ‘Should a thief afterwards purloin the treasures, if

analysis of these issue however the reader might refer to the classic works of W. Benjamin 1955 (1936), Arnehim 1969, Gombrich 1982, or to Barrett 1990, Barrow 1982, Grundberg, Andy; Gauss, Kathleen 1987, Scharf 1969.
the mute testimony of the picture were to be produced against him in a court, it would
certainly be evidence of a novel kind’ (Henry Fox Talbot in Sekula 1989:355). As Sekula
reconstructs it, Talbot lays, claim to ‘a new legalistic truth, the truth of an indexical

This potential for a new realism was according to Sekula already widely
recognised in the 1840s and photography had by then already become a common tool for
documentation. In all these documentary applications the photographic process was
almost hidden, its complexity a mere matter of necessary, mechanistic manoeuvres rather
an opportunity for human intervention and manipulation. The result was, according to
Winston, that even the most acute of the nineteenth-century minds accepted photographs
as evidence. This seems however to be, he says, still the case nowadays, more then one
hundred and fifty years later: ‘the camera never lies. It seems to me that many of the
people still believe it’ (Bennet\(^6\), in Winston 1989)

The aforementioned Bennet’s assertion, whether completely true or not, openly invokes
the ‘realist folk myth’ described by Sekula as the tendency of the lay person to treat the
photograph as a ‘copy of reality’; a tendency that lasted for (almost\(^7\)) all of photography’s
history and has been long shared and recognised by many theorists. O'Connell (in 1981)
argues that ‘the image by its flatness and precision persuades us to accept the moment it
portrays as the essential one' (O'Connell in Cronin\(^8\) 1998:74). Sontag in 1977 attributes
the ‘realist’ position to the population in general when she states that ‘photographed
images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures
of reality that anyone can make or acquire’ (Sontag 1977:5). A photograph, she
continues, ‘is considered indisputable evidence that a certain thing actually happened.
Photography can deform, but we always assume that a certain thing that resembles what
we can see in the picture exists or did exist’ (Sontag 1978:51). Not much different is the
use of photos in journalism, ‘The journalistic photography, born with the aim of
documenting reality, intended to substitute the verbal description, that can alter
subjectively the events, giving an objective evidence of the events’ (Mattioli 1991:141).

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\(^6\) Andrew Bennet, Labour member for Denton and Reddish, UK, in his speech to request to the House a
code of practice to cover the principles by which pictures may be edited, altered and changed using
computer techniques.

\(^7\) The new digital era of photography is however changing the attitude of the layperson towards this
interpretation.

\(^8\) Cronin (1998:74-76) gives a clear reconstruction of the establishment of this realist myth in her article
‘Psychology and Photographic theory’.

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In conclusion Schwartz sums up the meaning of these views: ‘Both history and popular lore have encouraged us to view photographs as direct, unmediated transcriptions of the real world, rather than seeing them as coded symbolic artefacts whose form and content transmit identifiable points of view’ (Schwarz 1992:95 in Cronin 1998:74).

The last assumption openly invokes the realist myth that endured photography’s history, but also raises issues of credibility and function, i.e., what do people use photographs for? What are photography’s interpretative and communicative stances?

As for the first issue, the credibility of photographs’ representation, a certain cognitive dissonance always came into play, conceding the limitations of photography’s evidentiary power. Even as Bennett suggested that people believed the old adage, Winston notes for example, he also acknowledged that this was ‘in spite of the fact that many of them [those who view photographs] are aware that over the ages pictures have been faked, or that they could be distorted and manipulated’. This apparent contradiction, however, did not alter the common perception of the medium. On balance, Winston concludes, for more than a century, it was assumed with a justice based on the common experience of the technology, that although manipulation is possible the chances were that the camera was not lying. Cronin for example sustains this idea in reporting on Musello’s study on family albums (Musello 1980 in Cronin 1998). Musello describes in fact that ‘his sample of middle-class ‘Euro-American’ families approached photographs as ‘mechanical recordings of real events’, not as a symbolic articulation, stating that ‘meanings and interpretations are most often based on a belief in the photograph’s value as a document of natural events and on recognition of its iconic referent’ (Cronin 1998:77). This lay belief in the evidentiary power of the photograph can also be sustained with some statistical evidence. According to the 1992-3 Wolfman Report⁹, Cronin writes, ‘17.2 billion photographs were taken in the US in 1993, 8.9 billion photos were taken in 1977, and 3.9 billion in 1967’ (Cronin 1998:70). From this point of view the ‘lay’ expectation of indexical authenticity of photographs is widely justified by the common experience and practice. To think that all those photographs have been ‘not’ manipulated would be less naïve than imagine that all of them have been manipulated.

If observed in this socio-historical perspective¹⁰ the claims made by the Colliers as to the photographs’ evidentiary power seem supported by a long cultural and

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⁹ A large-scale market research survey carried out periodically on behalf of the photographic industry.

¹⁰ This admittedly does not elaborate on the effects that the diffusion of the digital images may have had on the lay user and consumer, but was accurate at the Collier’s time of writing.
theoretical tradition. What I want to note here, however, is that if we also acknowledge, as most people do, the ‘realist’ character of the photographic representation; this does not automatically clarify the communicative functions that can be explained by the photographs in a discourse. It is one thing to say that a photograph represents its subjects realistically, and another to be able to sustain that this realistic character should be thought of as the only conveyor of meanings.

My critique of the narrowly focused interpretation of the communicative function of the photographs can be better explained while moving within the premises of the semiotic tradition. Semiotics, developing among other elements also from an interpretation of this evidentiary power, explores the communicative boundaries of the image. What is questioned in this theoretical approach are the ways in which the photographic medium can be used to interpret the realities it depicts, how it can be used as a form of expression and as a means of communication.

2.3. The communicative characteristics of photographs: exploring the index.

The first theoretical attempt at investigating the communicative value of the photographs, and its characteristics, originated in the early 1960s from a small article written by Roland Barthes titled ‘Rhetoric of the image’ (Barthes 1964). In this article an analysis of a publicity picture portraying the delights of ‘Panzani Spaghetti’ is attempted using a few illustrative linguistic terms taken over from Saussure and Hjelmslev. The article signalled the origin of one of the most influential interpretative paradigms: pictorial semiotics.

Semiotics (or Semiology as it was first called) according to Ferdinand de Saussure, one of its reputed founders, was to study the ‘life of signs in society’. The second founding father, Charles Sanders Peirce, conceived of semiotics as being the doctrine of signs, the signs being the elements of mediation or meaning. The domain of semiotics was then defined as the meaning of signs, or better the interpretation of any object-sign as a conveyer of meanings. The aim of semiotics was to understand the way in which any sign is constructed and interpreted. According to these original intents, pictorial semiotics, one of the possible areas of investigation of the semiotic analyses, attempted the study of the communicative characteristics of photographs and images.

From its first tentative step towards constructing pictorial semiotics, the linguistic approach (that so brilliantly resolved the interpretations of the roles that govern linguistic
signs) was called into question. The program was clearly defined by Roland Barthes: ‘The point is to draw analytical concepts from linguistics, which we think a priori are sufficiently general to permit semiological research to be initiated’\(^\text{11}\) (Barthes 1967). In accordance with this general declaration of intent, the long-lasting attempt of pictorial semiotics might be described as the attempt to analyse the photographic images in search of those ‘signs’ and ‘combinatory roles’ that were characteristic and ‘necessary’ elements of any linguistic communication\(^\text{12}\).

It is not the purpose of my discussion here to detail the different attempts that were made by semioticians to discover these signs and combinatory roles in a photograph, but it is important here to indicate where semioticians started to look for these signs, and I shall later describe why their inability to move away from this initial agenda ultimately contributed to a crisis in the field.

Most of the attempts originally made by semioticians to investigate photographs were based on one or another form of interpretation of the physical, structural, and mechanical characteristics of the image. It is in the physical (inner) characteristics of the photographs that the formation and articulation of the photograph’s signs were searched for and investigated. In my interpretation this initial area of investigation was culturally unavoidable given the overwhelming attention paid in previous theoretical debates to the physical characteristics of the photographs. And the growing strength of the photograph’s realist myth\(^\text{13}\) (the symbolist myth was based on these characteristics as well, by opposition) made this initial choice of semioticians almost inevitable.

Among the several photographic characteristics on which the semiotic analyses focused their interpretative efforts, two have been of unanimously recognised as of pivotal importance (although they have not in any sense been unanimously interpreted) as the most peculiar of the photograph’s features. First of these was the photographs’ indexical nature, characterised by the necessary and physically mediated relationship

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\(^{11}\) The risks of this approach were already apparent when they were presented, since analytical concepts selected ‘a priori’ from a verbal model could not assure the construction of a semiology of non-verbal languages. This was soon pointed out notably by Damish (1976), Eco (1984b), Metz (1974).

\(^{12}\) The two fundamental concepts borrowed from the linguistic model of symbolic communication are that of ‘sign’ and ‘articulation’ (both elements constituting a ‘code’). In this model a sign is anything that can be assumed to be a ‘significant substitute of something else’ (Eco 1985:17). Articulation is the possibility to intentionally (and arbitrarily) transform the relation between the constitutive elements utilised to represent-signify reality (signs). Without signs and articulation, it was assumed by semioticians, there is no possibility of symbolic communication (Eco 1984a,1984b Worth 1986).

\(^{13}\) As we have seen so strongly throughout the whole history of photography.
between the referent and its photographic representation (a relationship that so profoundly differentiated photographic images from any other kind of visual representation). Secondly was photographs’ ‘polysemous value’: the ‘floating chain of signifieds, underlying their signifiers’ (Barthes 1999:37) or the ambiguity of meanings and interpretations (signifieds) that characterises any interpretation of the photograph’s subjects (signifiers).

Within the semiotic discourse, Barthes (who was influenced by the interpretation first made of the concept by Peirce) has been the most influential in setting this agenda by emphasising various aspects of the indexical14 (physical, mechanical) nature of the photograph. In his words, the photograph was interpreted as ‘an emanation of past reality’ (Barthes 1980: 88). When talking about a photograph’s subjects he suggested that ‘one could think that photography always carries its referent with itself’ (1980: 5). And conclusively when talking about the ultimate ‘intention’ of photography he says that the ‘noema15 of photography’ is its message that ‘this is the way it has been.’ (1980:77). The contiguity of the photographic ‘signifier’ with the object it depicts was grounded by Barthes in the iconic16 and the indexical nature of the photograph. Photographs, Barthes suggests, signify (become signs) through their referential value.

This interpretation proved to be extremely problematic for semiotic analysis, but it was one of the most influential and one of the most supported (Freund 1974; Gubern 1987:145; Scharf 1968, 1989; Tausk 1977, Sonesson 1989, Noth 1990).

But what does it mean ‘semiotically’ (if we are reminded that semiotics studies any object-sign as a conveyer of meanings) to define photographs as indexical signs?

Barthes is quite clear about this; photographs’ indexicality in itself is characterised by the same criteria that Pierce specified for indexicality in general, namely: ‘The index asserts nothing; it only says ‘There!’. It takes hold of your eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops’ (Pierce CP 3.361). Photographs from this point of view are considered as objects that refer to other objects, ‘pieces of the world they represent’ (Sontag 1977: 5). ‘One element amongst our visual reality’, whose

14 In addition to the correspondence by similarity, photographs also correspond to reality by their indexicality, their physical contiguity with the depicted object established at the moment of their production. ‘It is primarily because of this indexical signature that we tend to see in the photographic signifier an affirmation of the existence of the depicted object’ (Noth 1990)

15 The concept of noema refers to the more general framework of Husserl's thought on intentionality.

16 Photographs correspond to the depicted world by their iconic nature because, as Peirce (CP 2.281), puts it, ‘we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent.’
‘perception for us does not differ from any other visual perception of any other object of
the world (Gibson 1979:305).

But how do pictures communicate then? If indexicality by itself cannot be
considered a conveyor of meanings, where do photographs take their meanings?

Before answering these questions however, I should reconsider the previous
corcepts and develop the other thread of my discussion to show how the Colliers’
interpretation of the photographs ‘intrinsic’ qualities could be paralleled with the tenets
of the semiotic approach. I have written that the assumption of the evidentiary power of
photographs is based on a well-established cultural understanding of the photographic
medium. I am now analysing how this understanding was ‘translated’ in theoretical
and communicative\textsuperscript{17} terms by semioticians moving from an interpretation of the indexical
value of the photographic sign. This indexical power of the image, the ability of taking
hold of the viewer’s eyes and forcibly direct them to a particular object, is often
exemplified by the Colliers as the key characteristic on which the ‘projective’ (and
‘encyclopaedic’) qualities of the photographs are based (as we will see later, Barthes in
his definition of the semiotic approach was also extensively describing ‘the projective
power of the image’ (Barthes 1999:37 [1964]). Along the same line as the previous
arguments for example, the Colliers describe the role played by the photographs in the
interview with two different subjects. Reporting a discussion with a Native American of
some images of his territory the Colliers say: ‘Hosteen Greyhills was applying to our
photographs the same level of visual perception and fluency he would apply as he
stepped out of his hogan to look around the horizon for his grazing horse’ (Collier and
Collier 1986:110). Or in the reconstruction of some fisherman’s activities: ‘Photographs
sharpen the memory and give the interview an immediate character of realistic
reconstruction. The informant is back on his fishing vessel, working out in the woods, or
carrying through a skilled craft’ (1986:106). But if photographs set the observer in his or
her own familiar grounds, how are his/her many impressions of those representations
interpreted and communicated in a discourse? How do the photographs acquire a
communicative meaning?

\textsuperscript{17} This is because I am specifically interested in how a socially perceived quality of the photographs is
actively used in a discourse to convey meanings.
2.4. The ambiguity of the photographic message: Polysemy.

Images can always be considered as a form of message, or ‘a sign, above all, of someone’s investment in the sending of a message’ (Sekula 1982:87). ‘This message suggests meanings that can sometimes be easily comprehended, but can also suggest and deliver meanings that are sometimes not self-evident’. (J. Grady 1997:182).

The notion of photographs’ communicative ambiguity was first acknowledged and developed by Gombrich in his concept of the ‘contextual incompleteness’ of the image (Gombrich 1960: 58-59). Barthes later expanded the concept in the most famous description of the ‘polysemous’ value of photographs (the floating chain of meanings/signifieds that underlies a photograph’s subjects/signifiers). Gombrich, referring to the assertive value of pictures, stated that to acquire a ‘determined’ significance photographs must be accompanied by a caption or label. It is only in this combination of text and picture, he states, that the photographs can convey a determined statement. The image, Gombrich suggested, was not structured enough to convey a determined meaning by itself and needed some sort of definition that could clarify the meaning or the message as defined by the intention of the person who was sending that message.

Barthes took the argument of the symbolic incompleteness of the image to its logocentric extremes when he asserted the primacy of the linguistic symbolic system. The weakness of the visual symbolic system was based, according to Barthes, on the relationship existing between the photograph’s signifier (subject) and its signified (meaning); ‘As for collections of objects (photographs) enjoy the status of systems only in so far as they pass through the relay of language, which extracts their signifiers (in the form of nomenclature) and names their signified (in the forms of usage or reasons)’ (Barthes 1964:7). This in other terms meant that a photograph’s meaning could only be established by an external observer who had to define or prioritise, among the several subjects (the collection of objects) presented by a photograph, the relevant ones and reveal/interpret their meanings.

Barthes’ argument claims that photographic messages (and photographs, given their intentionality, are always a message) are so ambiguous and vague that they cannot serve to convey a determined meaning without a ‘verbal anchorage’ (Barthes 1999:37). As a matter of fact, Noth (1990) comments, in our daily experience of images, we are rarely used to experiencing images on their own. The great majority of the images we are used to looking at are ‘contextualised’ by text that helps (or forces) us to privilege one
point of view, to construct/infer a certain meaning. If ‘visual signs did not possess the characteristics of verbal language, they were thought [then] as not constituting a bona fide language but rather a sort of secondary and restricted one, interpretable only through the mediation of verbal language’ (Saint-Martin 1989:X). Barthes explains: ‘When it comes to the ‘symbolic message’, the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretations, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions (its limits, that is to say, the projective power of the image) or towards dysphoric values’ (Barthes 1999:37, italics mine).

Now, it really does not take too much speculation to realise how close the interpretative paradigms of the father of visual semiotics and the Colliers’ are. The Colliers, we have seen, acknowledge and rely, as Barthes did, both on the indexical and ‘the projective power of the image’ to construct the communicative value of photographs. They also agree that the meaning of a photograph (and of the subjects/objects it depicts) can only be determined by a verbal interpretation that anchors the floating chains of meanings that surrounds it, consistent with the concept of symbolic incompleteness (or polysemy) of the image. The Colliers describe in fact that ‘ultimately, the only way we can use the full record of the camera is through the projective interpretation by the natives’ (Collier and Collier 1986:108) in the form of nomenclature, reasons, and usage. Although, as I have stated before, the specific research aim of their anthropological research in part justifies the attention paid to this indexical and projective power of the image; does the interpretation of the Colliers explain all the potential uses and interpretation that can be made of the photographs in an interview? Do their interpretations justify their almost blind faith in the self-imposition of these indexical and projective values? In conclusion, what about the effects of these processes of interpretation on the interaction; can the polysemy and indexicality of the image solely account for all the described interactional effects?

Some answers to these questions come from the evaluation of the critiques that were and are applied to the semiotic paradigms: Notwithstanding the several approaches that attempted the discovery of the peculiar communicative structures of photographs (that

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18 The Colliers also talk at length of this process of recognition, or the way in which in their interviews the interviewees name and describe the subjects depicted in the photographs (see Collier & collier 1986: 112-113 for some typical exemplifications).
might have justified their interpretation as an independent symbolic system) semioticians did not manage to solve the challenge set by Barthes. This challenge, however, has in the last decade lost its theoretical status. The semiotic positions are now being questioned as clearly logocentric, and are critiqued from at least two perspectives.

Firstly, the very agenda of semiotics was questioned; semioticians did not ask whether a picture can convey a statement, but they asked whether it could convey the same statement as a given sentence does. This has been interpreted as a reductive interpretation of what a meaning is or what communication entails.

Secondly, semioticians focusing on the inner and universal communicative qualities of a photograph, bent in search of paradigms equivalent to the linguistic one, offered limited appreciation of the different contexts or the different uses that were and are made of photographs. The founding structuralist hypotheses, interested in the universals of the image, did not pay attention in fact to the diverse, and often contrasting, uses and interpretations that were made of photographs, therefore somehow not fulfilling the very purpose originally expressed by Saussure’s semiotics, to study the life of signs in society.

2.5. Photographs’ meanings and contexts of use: the rise of post-semiotic and post-modern interpretations.

The first critiques of the semiotic model inspired by Barthes paradoxically developed from within linguistics with the post-structuralist critique of the structuralist model. It was already in the early 1930s when Voloshinov (1986 [1929]) argued, in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, that the prime producer of the meaning of a sign is not its structural relationship to other signs, but the social context in which the sign is consumed. While structural linguistics saw meaning as being embedded within the sign structure, the post-structuralist critique of Voloshinov saw meaning as the product of the interaction of the user and the sign within a context.

From its initial development in linguistics the observation of the social dimension of signs’ meaning followed different paths to reach its application in the realm of the visual and photographic signs. Who initially influenced the contemporary study of the social practices involved in the interpretation/definition of the photograph’s meaning were authors such as Burgin (1982), Tagg (1988) and Sekula (1982), although they emphasised the role of the social context and the subject-viewer in the construction of the
meaning of images from different directions. Burgin, from the perspective of Marxism and psychoanalysis, described his intention to grasp the influence of history and the subject in the production of images’ meanings. Burgin was concerned with photography ‘as a practice of signification’ (Burgin 1982:2): that is, the process of observation of photographs in specific social (and historical) contexts, for specific purposes. Semiotics is from Burgin’s point of view one starting point for observing the process of elaboration of meaning, but he affirms that semiotics is not sufficient to account for the complex interplay of social practices (‘institution, text, distribution and consumption’ (1982:2) that characterise the image’s signification. Sekula (1975, 1982) pointed out that photograph’s meanings are conditioned by external, and contextual presuppositions. Tagg also suggested that we should not underestimate how meanings are always subject to negotiation, and emphasised the power effects of discourse practices (Tagg 1988).

These original approaches to the process of the interpretation/definition of images’ meanings have now been deployed in a range of new post-semiotic models and post-modern interpretations that argue that photographs’ meanings are socially (institutionally), contextually and discursively constructed. But what does it actually mean to argue that a photograph’s meaning is socially (institutionally), contextually and discursively constructed?

The meaning of the image, Tagg writes, is constructed by mediation between the elements represented in a photograph and the context in which they are presented. ‘A photograph can mean one thing in one context and something else entirely in another’ (Tagg 1988:63). Sekula supplements: ‘The photograph is an incomplete utterance, it is a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability’ (Sekula 1975:37) Sekula and Tagg together point to the complex interrelation of conditions and presuppositions (social, contextual, and discursive), that exist outside the image, that guide the interpretation that can be given of any one image. Let me give an example suggested by Ruby (1976) that explores these same issues from an anthropological perspective:

‘At the beginning of the last century Lewis Hine, a socially concerned photographer, took photos of children working in factories’. The National Labour Law Committee showed these pictures to advocate laws regulating child labour. ‘In this context the photographs were intended to be interpreted politically and morally’. Their meaning was created by viewers making inferences about small, pathetic children

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19 See Bolton et al. 1989 for some of the original essays on these themes, or Wells 2000 for a reconstruction of its main steps.
working in dark, dirty factories instead of playing outside or going to school. More recently, the Museum of Modern Art in New York displayed the same photographs to celebrate Hine’s unique style, use of light, and juxtaposition of textures, ‘that is aesthetic considerations’ (Ruby 1976:6). This example points out that ‘meanings’ are influenced by several elements which exist outside the image, the physical context (‘Court’ or ‘Museum’) the intention of the observer (is the observer looking for ‘evidence of states of abuse’ or making ‘aesthetic considerations’ about the photographs), and discursive practices (‘advocate laws’ or ‘analysing technical procedures’)

If brought to its theoretical implications the previous example suggests two fundamental kinds of considerations. The first is, as Cronin describes referring to her study of the meaning of family photographs, that in the ‘social consumption’ of photographs the fact that the meaning arises in a narrative context is particularly evident (Cronin 1998: 75). The second is a reflection on the level of information that photographs seem to hold, which must be treated in giving consideration to practice: that is the social contexts in which photographs are used, the purposes of the observers, and the discourses in which images are always embedded that, together, will have a decisive effect on the interpretation of the their meanings.

This interpretation of the construction of a photograph’s meaning well describes the contemporary shift toward examining the ‘action oriented’ nature of communication-discourse. Paraphrasing Cronin’s interpretations (interpretations that well sum up the theoretical critiques of the post-modern approaches, and critically addresses the dichotomy between the realist and the symbolic folk myths) we can say that: The ‘recent emphasis on ‘what talk does’ rendered the mere identification of photography’s ontological characteristics somewhat trivial unless we carry the issue further and ask the empirical questions: ‘To what uses are these characteristics put? ‘What does treating a photograph as a direct reflection of reality achieve? What does treating a photograph as a symbolic representation achieve? We need not ask ‘what is it about photograph that ‘causes’ an emotional reaction in the observer’, but rather ‘once a photograph is identified as being significant for an individual, what is it used for?’(Cronin 1998: 75)

The post-modern critique of photography eliminates the search for the unique characteristics of the photograph, exposing the discourse practices that ultimate transform images into meanings.

Becker explains these ideas very clearly: ‘if we consider, for example, researchers who want to use photographic materials for social science purposes, they often appear confused. The pictures visual sociologists make so resemble those made by
others, who claim to be doing documentary photography or photojournalism, that they wonder whether they are doing anything distinctive. They try to clear up the confusion by looking for the essential differences, the defining features of each of the genres, as if it were just a matter of getting the definitions right. Such labels do not refer to Platonic essences whose meaning can be discovered by profound thought and analysis, but rather are just what people have found it useful to make of them. We can learn what people have been able to do using documentary photography of photojournalism as a cover, but we cannot find out what the terms really mean. Their meaning arises in the organisation they are used in, out of the joint action of all the people involved in those organisations, and so varies from time to time and from place to place. Just as paintings get their meaning in a world of painters, collectors, critics, and curators, so photographs get their meaning from the way the people involved with them understand them, use them, and thereby attribute meaning to them’ (Becker 1998:84).

Becker’s (and the post-semiotic and the post-modern) perspectives question the semiotic (ontological) perspective, focused on the investigation of the photograph’s “essential features”, and claim that the interpretation (and communicative value) of the photographs’ features is the product of the practices in which the images are embedded. As Wells (2000) explains: ‘there has never, at any one time, been a single object, practice or form that is photography, rather [photography] has always consisted of different kinds of work and types of images which in turn served different material and social uses’ (Wells 2000:18). The history of photography can prove in fact that there is no univocal interpretation or definition of the photograph’s characteristics, but only a mediated (by practices of use), socially and institutionally constructed interpretation of their contextual uses (similar arguments in Bolton 1989, Becker 1986, Harper 1989, Prosser 1998). These practices are not based on conventionally over-determined features of the photograph, but are the product of the purposes for which they are employed by the people that use the images, understand them, and thereby attribute meaning to them (a process that is as a whole influenced by conventionally established practices (Floch 1984:11).

Art photography, portrait photography, news reportage, advertising and fashion illustration, erotic photography, the photography of subcultures, geographical survey photography, astronomical photography, physics/biology/documentary photography, police photography, and photographs for sociological research then acquire their meaning on the basis of specific practices of use, or institutional discourses, in which
images and their characteristics are embedded, by specific users at a specific time and place (context) for certain purposes.

These analyses describe in their epistemology a parallel line of reasoning to other approaches developed in communications, media and cultural studies, all stating the necessity, when evaluating any communicative act, of framing it in the social, dynamic, meaning-making occasion in which it is produced, in its social context. Photograph’s features are considered social elaborations, founded on certain established interpretative conventions (discourses) that are elaborated in specific circumstances (contexts) and for certain interpretative purposes.

Where does this leave us in the analysis of the Colliers, and what does it suggest?

If seen from this perspective the Colliers’ investigations might somehow be reversed, if not in their content, at least in their interpretations. If it were true that photographs have a projective potential then I would say that this potential is broader than is recognised by the Colliers. Where they impute a literal interpretation of the photographs to a structural characteristic (their indexicality or realistic reconstruction; the founding element of their analyses), One could instead invert their interpretation by hypothesising that in their interviews, it was their aim as researchers to investigate the realities depicted in the photographs (the aim of the anthropological research and the anthropological discourse, pursued by the Colliers) that influenced and favoured (in and through the interaction) the resolution of the photographs’ ambiguity in a literal interpretation. The interviewees might well have been responsive to the aims of the researchers (among other reasons because of the trustful atmosphere that they were able to create) and for this reason interpreted the photographs literally (and indexically).

The approaches developed during this discussion can be somehow summarised by trying to underline their basic assumptions. I have distinguished three approaches to image interpretation, each one characterised by the investigation of some elements of the photographic medium. These three approaches can be schematised in three epistemological models, image analysis, semiotic analysis, and post-modern and post-semiotic analysis:

Image analysis takes its point of departure from the image’s physical qualities and employs them to investigate the ontological characteristics of the image. It follows the debate between art photography and documentary photography.
Semiotic analysis turns to the communicative features of a photograph in search of a specific and unique system of signification characteristic of any photographic image. This search is still based on an investigation of the ontological characteristics of the image.

Post-modern and post-semiotic analyses critique the previous approaches and focus on the photographs’ different uses and interpretative practices. Photograph’s features, meanings and values are in this approach socially established and contextually interpreted and elaborated. This process of interpretation is also understood as subjective (or based on purpose), interrelational, contextual, and is conceptualised as somewhat less free that it might at first appear to be, influenced in an interaction by established practices and institutional discourses.

The Colliers in their analysis and descriptions of the use of photographs in an interview depart from an interpretation of pictures’ intrinsic qualities and supposedly unique form of signification. Moving away from the Colliers’ original description and the introductory arguments described above, my research seeks to move the methodological investigation of photo-elicitation a step further. In my analysis I offer a reconstruction of the photograph’s communicative value founded on social, contextual and discursive practices. This approach claims a re-consideration and re-elaboration of the interpretation of the communicative functions of photographs in an interview.
CHAPTER III
THE INTERVIEW

In the first section of the chapter I present an overview of the literature that directly or indirectly contributed to the study of the sociological interview. What I focus upon, while engaging with the arguments of the theoretical/methodological debates, are the underlying definitions of the ‘epistemological identities’ of the interviewee and the interviewer. What I argue for is an image of the interview in which the researcher and the respondent are interpreted as co-actors and co-producers of a contextual, inter-relational, linguistic form of knowledge. In the second section of the chapter I question the characteristic discourse structure of the interview. I suggest that the interview can be interpreted as a social encounter that favours the constitution of an idiosyncratic social identity gap, Interviewer-Interviewee, characterized by a series of asymmetries, in part, created and reinforced by these characteristic discourse structure and discourse features. The analysis elaborates on the key theoretical perspectives that explore these characteristic interview discourse features and their implications for the interaction.

SECTION I: The social inquiry: an introduction.
3.1. The scientific method and the interview as a pipeline for the acquisition of knowledge.
Brenner synthetically and clearly described the structure and aim of the "quantitative" approach\(^1\) which in essence can be described as aimed at the provision of evidence for particular hypotheses or theories by means of the maximally valid, reliable, and precise measurement of the phenomena covered by the research hypotheses (Brenner 1985: 9-10). In this perspective the fundamental goal of survey research/interviews is to attempt a

\(^1\) This approach is clearly informed by some of the assumptions of the scientific methodology that we have analysed previously and displays the striving of social science for scientific legitimacy (S. Aronowitz
rigorous explanation of the understandings to be achieved by the research (Nagel 1961 in Brenner 1985). This explanation is regulated by a particular structure of action, directed towards the maximal attainment of adequate measurement (Hyman 1955). The typical orientation of quantitative researchers is toward being able to produce highly reliable (adequate) measurement of social phenomena by exerting a strict control on the procedures, and clearly coding all the phases of the research. As Kvale puts it; the interview ‘becomes [then] a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge’ (Kvale 1996:5).

What Brenner describes is an approach to the social inquiry that has favoured the interpretation of a questionnaire or an interview as a pipeline for transmitting information/knowledge from an interviewee who possesses this knowledge to an interviewer who is interested in that knowledge. The interview is cast as a search and discovery mission, with the interviewer bent on finding what is already inside variably co-operative respondents. The challenge for the researcher lies in extracting the information as directly as possible from the interviewee. Interviews are recognised as social interactions, but are framed as a potential source of bias and misunderstandings. Thus the literature on interview strategy and technique is primarily concerned with maximising the flow of valid and reliable information while minimising distortions of what the respondent knows (Gordon 1987). The basic concept is simple: 'If the interviewer merely asks questions properly', the respondent will emit the desired information'. Information is supposed to be owned by the respondents (if unconsciously) and to retrieve that information is only a matter of method and technique. In attempting to borrow the rationale of scientific methodologies and approaches, "control" becomes the key term for these analyses: control over the hypotheses to be tested, control over the structure of the survey or interview, control over the form and meaning of questions, control over the interviewee’s responses, and lastly, crucially for this paradigm, control over the performance of the interviewer.

This interpretation of the interview structure as well as the nature and quality of its supposed outcomes (forms of knowledge -objectively- produced) have been systematically and articulately criticised from several different perspectives. The critiques of the very scientific

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1988:138). The social world is knowable, is objectively out there, observable through the opinions/information that respondents own, ‘uncontaminated’ by their own reality.
method, developed in the broader context of knowledge and science production, have been particularly important for the rise of alternative understandings of the interview. These critiques developed within different contexts and disciplines; some were internal to the scientific system (I refer to the well known analyses of scientific revolution made by Kuhn), and others, developing within the philosophical tradition, were soon incorporated into sociological discourse, (I refer of course to the well known sociological inferences developed by Schutz from Husserl’s phenomenological approach in philosophy).

In the next paragraphs I will analyse these critiques, describing their move towards a competing understanding and reconstruction of the dynamics of the interview, the nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, and the nature and value of the knowledge produced within the interviews. I will first analyse the different critical approaches and their specific contribution to the re-interpretation of the theoretical and methodological value of the research interview, and I will then analyse their influence and relevance for my specific interpretation of the case study.

### 3.2. The subject, and the investigation of the life world.

Developed as a philosophy by Husserl at the turn of the century and then mediated in a sociological way by Schutz, phenomenology was the first approach to question the application of the methods of natural sciences to the study of social life. Schutz’s reflections began with a re-conceptualisation of the study of human experience. For Schutz, limiting the study to observable human actions misses out on the most important part of the story. *To understand and explain any human action, he argues, we need to know the meaning attached to it by the participants themselves.* Only then we can describe the world as it is experienced by subjects. Sociology then has to study the subjects’ perspectives on their world, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be; sociology must attempt to investigate and describe the subjects’ perceptions of their life.

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2 There is a whole literature concerning the creation of questions, the study of the linguistic constructions and their influences for the interviewee perception of the subject. (Can you give a couple of references here?)

3 The structure of the following discussion is based upon the insights of Anderson's narrative of "scientific progress." (Anderson 1983), McCarl Nielsen's reconstruction of feminist theories (McCarl Nielsen's 1990), and Malhotra’s (1994) reconstruction of the positivist and relativist stances (Malhotra 1994).
worlds, grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences, and explicate their meanings. In this process of investigation Schutz and phenomenologists are specifically concerned with the importance of meaning. According to Schutz, human action is intrinsically meaningful and it is endowed with meaning (a concept that he developed from Weber). Human action is the product of a continuous, ongoing, process of experiencing, ordering, classifying and interpreting, and it is the investigation of these meaning making processes that must become the main topic of any sociological investigation. This approach to the study of human experience entailed a rehabilitation of the concept of the life world. The life world, according to Schutz’s definition, is the world as any individual encounters it in everyday life, experienced directly and immediately, independent of and prior to explanations. The program for a phenomenological science starts from this primary and subjective experience of the world. As Merleau-Ponty suggests when describing the relationship between science and knowledge: ‘All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experiences of the world of which science is the second order expression’ (Merleau-Ponty's 1962: viii).

Although extremely influential for a redefinition of the epistemological value of the sociological inquiry it is nevertheless important to note that the phenomenological approach originally challenged only the scientific method but not its tenets; the phenomenological method developed by Schutz still endorsed the subjective-objective distinction. It differed only from the positivist social science in its understanding of how we can know and understand reality when assuming that reality is objectively knowable. In his methodology Schutz argues that to study reality social scientists must suspend private judgements, ‘bracket’ their prejudgetments, and assume the attitude of objective, disinterested observers. This reduction can be pictured as an attempt to place the foreknowledge about the phenomena within parentheses in order to arrive at an unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomena. This “disinterested attitude” was

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4 The main value of which was the creation of an alternative research model to an otherwise naturalistic hegemony.
later put under scrutiny and questioned. What interests me at this stage of the discussion is that for the first time, an alternative perspective, which placed the subject at the centre of any observation, challenged the principles of the ‘scientific observation’. The observation is participatory, phenomenology states, and involves an empathetic understanding (Weber) which is necessary for the comprehension of any social action that inherently makes a distinction between social science and natural science. The only way to investigate human meanings and reality involves studying the subject’s perspectives on his/her world. Some later critiques not only reject the subject/object distinction still present in phenomenological methodology, but also question whether the traditional scientific method appropriately describes what both natural and social scientists do. I refer to the critiques of the scientific method as specifically developed by Kuhn in his ‘The Structure of Scientific Revolution’ (Kuhn 1970) and to the hypotheses developed by critical theorists such as Horkheimer, Marcuse, Adorno, and Habermas, and later by the ethnomethodologists and the feminist theorists.

3.3. The crisis of the ontological existence of reality.

Kuhn’s structure of scientific revolution (Kuhn 1970), ‘based on a historical analysis of the progress and success of western science, redefines science in a way that had the effect of demythologising it as a pure truth in a ultimate sense’ (Nielsen 1990:20). Science was thought of as the cumulative processes of discovery from increasingly correct descriptions of the physical world. Kuhn’s analysis challenged this conception of science, describing it instead as a social/historical process of paradigm transitions. Whether or not Kuhn intended it, his work challenged the very idea of a fixed, absolute reality against which we test our notions about the natural world, and gave space to an idea of reality which changes with changing paradigms-theories, a reality that is based more on competing interpretations than on a scientific ontological existence. In another sense Kuhn also showed the importance of agreement, or consensus (on the part of the scientific community). The consequences of his analysis have been fundamental for the development of new critiques and the questioning of the scientific method in many other areas of research, and among these in sociology with their development by the theorists of the ‘Frakfurter Schule’.

At about the same time of Kuhn's critique of the shifts of scientific paradigms, critiques of the scientific method were also arising in the arguments of the critical theorists (theorists
belonging to the ‘Frakfurter Schule’; a term used to refer to a philosophical movement
developed in the 1930s 40s by Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno). The development of
critical positions by Habermas and Schmidt also challenged the practice of natural science.
Habermas, in his works, wanted to develop a collective reflection on authentic social needs,
trying to free those real needs from the false ones superimposed by consumerism. For
Habermas this meant juxtaposing technological rationality ideologically ensured by groups
of power to discursive rationality, a process of symbolic communication where everyone
could express his/her opinions without coercion. The critical theory developed by Habermas
departs from, and questions, the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology is in this
case usually that of a capitalist political and economic organisation that idealises certain
things, such as the exploitation of certain results of the scientific approach or the
inevitability of the forms of economic organisation, and is used to justify the status quo (the
actual distribution of power). Through his critique of dominant ideology, Habermas
endorses a critique of positivism and the scientific method in general, rejecting the idea that
an objective knowledge and a naturally occurring social reality can exist. The critical
tradition proposes that there is no such thing as an objectively neutral perspective/social
reality, but that anyone or any group is located socially and historically and that this context
inevitably influences the knowledge and understanding of the reality they produce
(Habermas 1970). Knowledge, in short, is socially constructed.

Moving from the aforementioned developments in the hermeneutic and critical traditions,
with a systematic re-elaboration of the arguments developed by a range of philosophers,
historians of science, epistemologists, and sociologists of knowledge, ethnomethodologists
and feminist theorists have specifically challenged the research style modelled on the basis
of a disinterested researcher/observer, particularly questioning whether a researcher really
can be disinterested and whether knowledge can ever be objective. Ethnomethodologists,
developing their observations from the phenomenological tradition, have directly
contributed to this interpretation of the social interaction as a ‘locus’ where meanings are
contextually constructed, contracted, negotiated, where knowledge is part and parcel of the
same process of interaction. Focusing on linguistic interaction, ethnomethodology has
created (with Conversation Analysis that directly developed from it) the conditions for a
rising interest in the organisational structures of discourse, the study of how language is
actively used to contract and agree on newly and contextually constructed inferences of the
social world or to maintain and transmit old ones. Feminists, on the other hand, with their
own critique of the scientific method and quantitative methodologies in general, and with their studies of relationships of power to discourse, have raised the issue of equality in the interview process. These epistemological perspectives have favoured a shift in the interpretation of the interview from a supposedly objective-observatory perspective (as a producer of an objective-scientific knowledge) to an intersubjective-empowering one (producer of a contextual knowledge, where meaning resides within respondents’ relationships and interactions).

3.4. Sense – making activities and the (ongoing) construction of knowledge.

Ethnomethodology emerged as a distinctive perspective within sociology during the 1960s, as part of the tradition of phenomenological sociology (although some of its developments are associated and merged with a variety of other perspectives such as interactionism, reflexive sociology, existential sociology and most recently constructionism). As we have seen, phenomenological sociology holds that reality is an inter-subjectively shared and socially constructed phenomenon. Phenomenology focused on describing the subjective reality understood to be reality by members of a society whose acts are based on the meanings that others have for them. Phenomenology, as Keel describes it, suggested that members’ subjective experience is a shared reality, which draws upon a common stock of knowledge-typifications, recipes and formulas for accomplishing particular tasks, and common-sense understandings, and theories that are shared by members of a group (Keel 1999:1). Through the process of socialisation, these typifications and understandings are internalised. In interaction, as we try to produce meaningful accounts of the people and the world around us, we apply these understandings in an attempt to order our own experience. In doing so these understandings, and the objects to which we attach them, come to have the appearance of a reality of their own. It is this externalisation of our shared inter-subjective experience that according to Berger and Luckmann results in the 'objectification of the categories of understanding we have created' (Berger and Luckmann 1967). This approach puts into question the positivist existence of an objective reality asserted through the objective existence of a shared common stock of knowledge. Although phenomenology and ethnomethodology are both centred on describing the emergence of order out of the shared experience of members of particular societies (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970: 286-290), ethnomethodology suggests the structure of the phenomenological objective reality (stock of
knowledge) as being much more fragile and malleable than described by phenomenologists. For ethnomethodologists there is no set of understandings and meanings that members attach to the world around them. What members do share are methods for making sense of their own reality. Schutz’s ‘common stock of knowledge’ is re-conceptualised as a shared set of interpretative procedures; Sense-making activities that are invoked and employed continually in interaction to reach contextually agreed meanings/interpretations. In ethnomethodologists' view, social structure is conceptualised as a moment-to-moment accomplishment, and its symbolic meanings are analysed as emerging properties of human interaction. The process of continually negotiating these meanings by accomplishing practical accounts of common behaviours has become the focus of the ethnomethodologist. Within the ethnomethodological approach there is a focus, Keel explains, on 'how the constraints of the context, the biographies of the individual involved, and the organisational demands placed upon the actors, interact with the basic features of interpretative work in order to produce definitions of our world'. The ethnomethodologists’ aim is to elucidate how ‘seen but unnoticed [or taken for granted] roles lie at the basis of everyday social interactions’ (Keel 1999:2). There are a variety of interactional processes that ethnomethodologists analyse to support their interpretation of the work actors enact in everyday situations; the concepts of reflexivity and indexicality form the core of their interpretative paradigm.

The concept of reflexivity expresses the ethnomethodologists’ understanding of the ongoing (re)construction of meaning. Once defined, a situation becomes, in our understanding, a certain ‘type’ with some features and certain expectations. The reality of this type we have created is paradoxically understood according to Pfohl as ‘a product of the features of the situation rather than the product of our interpretative process’ (Pfohl 1994: 357). The concept of indexicality focuses attention on both the sense we make of a particular situation or activity (this being a product of our personal previous experiences and the expectations we bring to the situation), and the contingent elements of the situation. What ethnomethodologists argue is that the meaning of any action depends on the active definition of the relationship between our common sense-typifications and the contextual features of the communication/interaction5. This ongoing spiral of indexicality and reflexivity describes

5 Thus, for Garfinkel, human communication is not (only) what is said, but also (or mostly) what is not said, the unsaid being the patterns of communication that are brought to encounters by each participant. For
the production of typified understandings as practical accomplishments leading to reasonable accounts of particular behaviours-meanings within the confines of specific situations. These accounts are seen as shaping social responses towards the constructions of (agreed) understandings that generate, through new contexts, new typifications, thus continuing the process.

This approach has been critiqued on the basis that the ethnomethodologists’ perspective presents an over-ordered conception of everyday life, and also that in the ethnomethodologists’ construction there is no notion of social structure (for a more detailed development of these arguments see Cameron 1999:146-147). On the other hand, the works developed and developing from this tradition had the merit of reinforcing attention both on the linguistic (Garfinkel) and non-linguistic (Goffman) aspects of discourse as the interactional and context-bound locus of meaning production. What ethnomethodologists say is that there are no fixed meanings; there are only meanings that we actively and linguistically agree upon. Meanings are part and parcel of the process of interaction, and they cannot just be observed, because they do not exist outside the act of interaction. Feminist theorists moving from the ethnomethodological (and the critical) traditions made this issue a key point of their critique of the scientific method.

3.5. The Interactional construction of knowledge and the social inquiry.

Feminists and ethnomethodologists make a critical use of the understandings developed by the phenomenological, critical and Kuhnian arguments. Together, following their diversified agendas, they develop an alternative epistemology of knowledge that strongly opposes the positivist-scientific one. This is an alternative epistemology that Nielsen (Nielsen 1990), calls the ‘post-empirical epistemology,(…) a satisfactory alternative to empirical-analytical social science’ (Nielsen 1990:24). What does this new epistemology consist of? The challenges to the positivist approach have great implications for the theories and methods of Garfinkel, previous and present communications are at the heart of communication. The concepts we will see are key for my understanding and interpretation of the interview, but also to my elaboration of the process of interpretation of images (se Chapters VI, and VII). The interaction is what matters. For example if you meet an acquaintance in the street you know that you will engage in a series of verbal ‘formal’ polite interactions. These polite interactions say one thing, but in corrolation their actual meaning is: ‘I have made a reportable acknowledgement of our encounter’.
investigating social reality. If the experience of reality is *linguistic* and *culture/context dependent* then the social inquiry is faced with a series of methodological problems. To begin with, Cameron (Cameron 1999) argues, whether or not the researchers believe in an independent objective reality: ‘They cannot take for granted that they know or recognise exactly what a social phenomenon or event means when they see one. If meanings really are the *products* of the reality s/he is observing, the question ‘what is going on here?’ cannot be answered (it does not matter how simple or reasonable the explanation appears) without reference to the actor’s own understanding of what s/he is doing. The social scientist, then, must validate his/her understanding and interpretations with the actors being observed. This necessity makes the *interaction* [and the interview] with them *inescapable’ (Cameron 1999:148). However, what happens to those understandings if we endorse the image of the social actor described in the ethnomethodological and feminist descriptions? In the *vessel of answers* approach (positivist interpretation), the interviewee is epistemologically passive, not engaged in the production of knowledge, but a simple repository of facts and related details of experience. If the interviewing process goes ‘by the book’ (a positivist book of course) and is non-directional and unbiased, respondents will *validly* emit those subjects that they are presumed to merely *hold* (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Feminists and new ethnomethodologists argue against this possibility. Both the interviewees and the interviewers, they say, are *active* in the interaction. The actor-interviewee not only holds the facts and details of his/her experiences but also *constructively* offers them as a response to an interviewer transforming the facts and details to create *contextually* (based on the interaction) negotiated interpretations, which are ‘meaningful because of the linkages that are interactively assembled for the occasion’ (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:8-9). This inescapable *intertextuality* of knowledge is seen as the epistemological quality and real richness of the knowledge that it produces rather than the limit of the interview. For feminist theorists the very quest of the scientific method for a separation between the interviewer and the interviewee’s interaction, exchange of interpretations, and confrontation of motivations and agendas is ultimately questioned. The inescapable interaction-bound nature of our life acts and judgements are interpreted as the real richness of the inter-view.

When commenting on this inescapability of one’s own judgements or worldviews

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6 According to his/her expectations and judgement of the *situation* and according to the development of the interview-discourse
Gadamer’s contention (Gadamer 1976:9 in Nielsen 1990) is that our own cognition, values and prejudgements constitute our whole ability to experience. We should not try to bracket them, Gadamer warns, but rather use them as the building blocks for the acquisition of new knowledge. In a critique and elaboration of phenomenologists' thought, Gadamer (and Nielsen) argue that we have to become aware of our own prejudgments and test them directly against/through the exposure to, and encounter with, others’ prejudgments. Gadamer acknowledges meaning as inter-subjectively constructed and linguistically negotiated. In his notion of ‘fusion of horizons’ he argues that knowledge results from seeking knowledge while one is grounded in a perspective that cannot be bracketed or held aside. The ‘fusion’ represents the enlargement, broadening, or enrichment of one’s own horizon, deriving from the (linguistic) aperture of the discourse to different theories, paradigms, and cultures to create a new synthesis. Language constitutes the means (in the sense of ‘dimension’ and not in the sense of ‘tool’) for this encounter, Gadamer states. This inter-subjective, interactive (and linguistic) perspective to knowledge production has been endorsed both by feminists and ethnomethodologists; giving rise, according to their different agendas, to different understandings and the development of specific methodologies. In both approaches the concept of reliability (receiving the same answers independent of the occasion) and validity (‘correct’ answers) are deprived of any significance, because the interview is viewed as a dynamic, meaning-making occasion, centred on how meaning is constructed. The circumstances of construction are an inseparable part of the meanings, thus depriving the concept of reliability of any significance (or even the possibility of existence). In this context of a free and equal relationship (the feminist theorists sustain), there are no correct or incorrect answers. The concept of validity of the answers does not derive anymore from the correspondence to the ‘unbiased’ meanings held by the respondent, but from the ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible. The interest in the content of the answers persists, but it is primarily concerned with what the researcher and respondent ‘produce together under the interpretative circumstances at hand’ (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:9). Feminists develop these concepts further by focusing attention on what constitutes one of the main issue of their (and my) agenda: the latent equal/unequal distribution of

Implicit in his descriptions is the notion that this construction of knowledge is intended to enrich and involve both parts in the same way.
power in the discourse relationship in general, and in the interview in particular. To simplify matters (this subject will be in depth developed in the next section of the chapter), if knowledge formation is a dialogic process, then it is a process that requires a context of equality, as Nielsen states based on Gadamer’s concept of the fusion of horizons, and as also sustained by Habermas’ discourse rationality tenet.

3.6 Conclusion: The Interview, Interrelational, Contextual, and above all conversational.

What I have tried to delineate in the previous discussion are the theoretical debates that sustained the shift from the interpretation of the interview as a pipeline for the acquisition of knowledge, to the interpretation of the interview as a construction site of knowledge. As we have seen through the arguments of some of the authors that have sustained and reinterpreted the process of knowledge transmission and acquisition, the knowledge produced by an interview is interpreted as being: interrelational, contextual, and conversational.

In the context of an interview, Kvale (Kvale 1999:13) as sums up, knowledge is interrelational because an inter-view represents an interchange of views between two people conversing about a common theme. Knowledge is contextual because the interview takes place in an interpersonal context, and the meaning of the interview statements depends on this context. This position holds that knowledge obtained within one context is not automatically transferable to, and not commensurable with, the knowledge produced within other contexts. This knowledge is conversational in an ethnomethodological sense. Since the objective value of reality is questioned, the meanings of the world are seen as a product of the discourse-negotiation, where truth is constructed by the rationale of the discourse itself. This knowledge is also linguistic, as the medium of the interview (the object of the interview, and the transcripts of the interview) is language.
SECTION II: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE INTERVIEW.

3.7. A PURPOSEFUL DEFINITION OF DISCOURSE.

We have seen in the previous discussions that language in an interview is not only a form of representation but also a form of action, a participatory effort made by an interviewee and an interviewer in the construction and maintenance of the interaction. The previous theoretical perspectives provided insights on the communicative and epistemological value of the linguistic elements of an interview, but they also raised some specific questions about the discursive structure and features of this specific form of interaction that are worth further investigation. The issue is not merely what language says, but how language is used, what language does in an interview. In this second section of the chapter I will explore, among the existing range of approaches to discourse, those theoretical approaches that may prove helpful in shedding light on the distinctive discourse features of the interview and its specific dynamics. This move delineates a logic progression from the previous macro level of analysis (which explored the tenets of the acquisition and transmission of knowledge through language), to a micro level of analysis that explores the discourse features through which this knowledge is produced in an interview (as well as their value for the knowledge that is produced by and within the interview). The questions are: how is talk structured in an interview, and what are its peculiar features? How do these features connote and shape the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee? And what are the implications of these discourse features for the knowledge produced in an interview by the interviewee/er?

Before answering the previous question there is, however, one basic question that needs to be addressed: what is discourse? Or, what do I refer to when I talk about discourse? The definition of discourse is far from being simple. Discourse has been investigated and explored from too many sides, and to even introduce all the different perspectives on the subject by far exceeds the aim of this study. To introduce, but also to frame and focus, my rendition of the subject, I shall initially present some introductory definitions of discourse. These definitions will provide the fundamental attributes from which the analysis of the subject will be developed instrumentally to the aims of my investigation. Each of the

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8 In the last chapter, we have seen that Discourse is seen as language use relative to social, cultural and linguistic formations, it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals’ interaction with society.
following definitions of discourse, taken from some of the authors who have investigated
the subject, addresses one among the several interactional dimensions of discourse that will
be used to investigate and deconstruct the dynamics that develop between the interviewer
and the interviewee in the interview:

• Discourse is ‘language above the sentence or above the clause’ (Stubbs 1983:1)
• The study of discourse is the study of any aspect of language use. (Fasold 1990:65)
• The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it
cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purpose or
functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs. (Brown and Yule
1983:1)
• Discourse constitutes the social. Three dimensions of the social are distinguished -
knowledge, social relations, and social identity, and these correspond to three major
functions of language (Fairclough 1992:8)
• Discourse is shaped by relations of power, and invested with ideologies. (Fairclough
1992:8)

There are many elements in these definitions of discourse that have been already discussed.
In more than one way, all these definitions represent hallmarks of the qualitative shift
previously described, but they also represent glimpses of (or from) the different theoretical
traditions (and specific agendas) that have analysed discourse and social interaction. These
are traditions that can help to better organise my understanding of interview discourse and
its social dynamics.

3.8. The constitutive linguistic features of the interview.
Let me briefly detail the theoretical premises from which the analysis of interview discourse
is going to be developed. Much of the contemporary research on the interactional features of
discourse is foregrounded by the exploration of the sequential character of language
developed by Harvey Sacks (Sacks 1972). The conversation analytic perspective
(originating in Sacks’ investigation into telephone calls made to a suicide prevention centre)
developed an interest in unravelling how the participants of an interaction display their
orientation to particular dynamics of the discourse. According to the conversation analytic perspective any social interaction is organised around some specific discourse features such as: the sequential order of the individual’s contributions to discourse (turns at talk), the various kinds of basic linguistic actions and their sequences, the specific grammatical form and lexical choices, the inferences of specific discourse genres, and the control over specific linguistic structures. According to conversation analysts, these are at least some of the discursive elements that contribute to organising and unfolding any social interaction in which participants display their orientation to a specific task or social context. Conversation analysts start with the view that any social context and interaction are both the project and the product of the participant’s linguistic actions. Their assumption is that context is invoked, negotiated and agreed upon in the interaction via discourse. That is: it is through the interpretation of the context that situationally specific/typical linguistic features and/or linguistic constraints are called upon by participants, and it is through the use of specific linguistic features that contexts and social constraints are recognised, negotiated and actually defined or re-defined during the interaction. Peculiar linguistic features or (contextual) discursive constraints create, as Drew and Heritage (1992) suggest, a sort of recognisable ‘fingerprint’9 for typical/specialised forms of interactions/discourses that we learn to recognise and use in specific circumstances. For example; the medical consultation represents one of such forms of specialised discourse, regulated by a specific task, a differentiation of the social identities of the interactants, and a discourse that is organised around a typical structure and features. Coupland in his description of the different constraints and discourse features characteristic of specialised (or typical) forms of discourse describes for the medical consultation for example that the kind of answer that one can give at the beginning of the consultation to the doctor’s question ‘how are you?’ might be very different from one’s answer to the same question if it were asked by a friend at the beginning of a telephone call (Coupland 1992 in Drew and Sorjonen 1997:104). The answer, Coupland explains, will imply in both cases at least two forms of inferences about talk: one concerning the task of the interaction, which suggests to the questioned ‘what the doctor or the friend wants to find out in asking that question’ (i.e. is the question asking

9 The fingerprint is made up of the specific task of the interaction, the specialization of social identities, typical linguistic constrains and inferential procedures that the participants deploy and orientate to in the interaction (also in Drew and Heritage 1992:165, Heritage and Greatbatch 1991:95-6)
about my health and physical condition, or my general feeling about things?). The other inference concerns the linguistic constraints of the interaction; an interpretation of what would be an ‘allowable contribution’ to the specific discourse. For example the person questioned may reply with the same question to his/her friend, ‘I don’t feel too well, I have a stomach-ache, and how are you?’. This would not however be an appropriate way to answer the doctors, nor can the "patient" ask any other kinds of personal questions. If specific social tasks and contexts of interaction (that differentiate also between the social identities of the interactants: two friends versus doctor-patient) are characterised by typical forms of discourse, or specific linguistic features, what is then the characteristic linguistic fingerprint of the specialised form of interaction that the interview is? One key characteristic of the interview, as Sacks and Schegloff suggest and Drew and Heritage detail (Sacks 1992 [1972], Schegloff and Sacks 1973, in Drew and Heritage 1992), is that it overwhelmingly consists of talk that is organised into a series of questions and answers. The primary characteristic of the interview (common to all forms of institutional discourse based on a question-answer turn taking) Drew and Heritage continue, is that they generally involve a reduction, or asymmetry, in the range of interactional and discursive practices deployed by the participants (Drew and Heritage 1992:164-5). This basic discursive asymmetry between the interactants, the product of the specific task (or specialisation) of the discourse, corresponds however to other forms of asymmetry that can be defined as power asymmetries or epistemological asymmetries. I shall elaborate:

If we examine other typical kinds of interactions strongly based on question-answer exchanges such as a medical consultation (as we have discussed), a viva, a police inquiry, a court cross-examination, a job interview, a confessional talk, we find that each one of these discourse's contexts refers to different specialised tasks and forms of discourse, and to an instrumental differentiation between the social identities of the interactants. Although different between them, all these specialised forms of discourse (and tasks) share however a common power asymmetry between the interactants that is typically based on their different social identities (doctor-patient, examiner-student, judge-defendant, employer-employee, priest-believer). This social identity difference is constituted in these specific social contexts by the unequal distribution of power and control over the outcomes of the interaction (motivated by the specific tasks of each kind of interaction) and corresponds in all the previous examples to a basic linguistic asymmetry based, among other things, on the different entitlement of the interactants to ask questions. The unequal distribution of control,
which is functional to the tasks of the interactions described before, raises crucial epistemological and methodological issues for sociological inquiry, which also is typically characterised by a different distribution of question and answer turns. These epistemological and methodological issues are better understood and described when analysing in depth the implications of any discourse organised around question-answer turn types.

One initial reflection on the characteristics of Question-Answer turn types comes from the insights of the fathers of the conversation analytic perspective (Sacks 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1973). In considering the *sequence* of a question and an answer in a conversation, Sacks and Scheglof

2. Sacks and Scheglof

which is functional to the tasks of the interactions described before, raises crucial epistemological and methodological issues for sociological inquiry, which also is typically characterised by a different distribution of question and answer turns. These epistemological and methodological issues are better understood and described when analysing in depth the implications of any discourse organised around question-answer turn types.

One initial reflection on the characteristics of Question-Answer turn types comes from the insights of the fathers of the conversation analytic perspective (Sacks 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1973). In considering the *sequence* of a question and an answer in a conversation, Sacks and Schegloff note that questions and answers form an interconnected pair of utterances that display particular characteristics that are not necessarily shared by any two adjacent utterances. Answers they describe as ‘sequential objects’; they have been occasioned by a prior activity (asking a question). Their construction and intelligibility then depends upon two elements: first, their position following a question, and Second, their display of an understanding of the prior utterance. Other classes of utterances, like invitations, descriptions, comments, or even questions themselves do not necessarily have the same characteristics. What are the implications of this *sequential character* of an answer and of the *communicative function* (eliciting a response) of a question? Drew and Heritage explain that in a discourse structured around a rigid Q-A turn taking, the questioner has the resources to ‘monitor and direct’ the performance of the respondent. In contexts such as the ones indicated before, there may be little perceived opportunity for the lay person to take the initiative or have any control over the discourse, which is not the case for the professional (doctors, teachers, judges, police officers, priests and interviewers to different degrees) who can direct the change of topics or ‘sanction the validity of an answer with the next question’ (Drew and Heritage 1992:49) The professional can remake the question in a different way, picking up (as in the follow-up questions typical of an interview) the salient points in the prior answer, thereby in fact preventing different issues from becoming topics in their own right (similar arguments are found in Linnel, Gustavsson and Juvonev 1988, and Frankel 1990 in Drew and Heritage 1992). The basic acknowledgement of the implications of this unequal distribution of a specific discursive right (to ask questions), although simplified in its explicative aim (it does not account for the discursive practices that can be enacted to resist questioning and its form of control) neatly suggests that an unequal distribution of the entitlement to ask questions in any discourse favours the constitution of an asymmetry of
control over that discourse. The reflection of this basic unbalanced distribution of control to the case of a "typical" interview raises a series of questions about the distribution of power and control on the interaction which is worth further exploration. My questions are: Who has access (and on what basis) to the construction of a certain talk structure in an interview? Who decides what can be considered a relevant contribution to talk? What are the specific constraints and asymmetries of the sociological inquiry? And crucially, how do these asymmetries influence the interaction and its outcome, the knowledge that the interview is supposed to produce?

3.9. The management of power within the interview.

In an explicit critique of the scientific or positivist perspectives, I argued, through the contentions of the authors that challenged these paradigms, for a re-conceptualisation of the interview (and the knowledge there produced) as a reciprocal effort of two individuals equally but differently active in the interaction. I also argued that a methodologically aware approach to the interview must be able to account for the different interactional elements that potentially establish in the interview an epistemological gap between the interviewer and the interviewee. What I want to provide in my analysis is a description of the interview where this epistemological gap is more explicitly dealt with, and where the dynamic features of the interaction that might contribute to the constitution of this gap are systematically investigated. My hypothesis, I sustained, is that the analysis of the structural organizations of talk that characterises interview discourse can provide evidence of the formation of this gap.

It is at this stage that the work of critical discourse analysts and feminist theorists is helpful. A central notion in most critical work on discourse is that of power, specifically the social power or control that groups or institutions enact through discourse. Feminist and critical discourse analysts have gone a long way towards analysing and describing the various forms of power and ideology imposition and reproduction enacted into and through discourse. Power relations according to these approaches can be analysed by looking at the (linguistic) means deployed by the dominant systems of reference to impose and reproduce ideologies or discourses, as well as the strategies adopted to resist them. I have already described the concept that links the possibility to select (or impose) certain discourse genres to power and I shall now elaborate on this concept. The ability to enforce a certain kind of discourse genre can also be interpreted as a power-based privilege of access to resources.
that contribute, in a specific social context or for a specific task, to constructing (enforcing) and maintaining different social identities and norms of interaction. One point that must be emphasised in my discussion is that I do not retain these power resources representative of an indeterminate power (for my definition of power and the limits of the concept see 3.14. in this chapter). Power, as Fairclough (1989) suggests, in order to be spent also needs a specific context and the characterisation of the participants (their social identity in the interaction) needs to be grounded in relevant aspects of what is going on. It is not enough that the participants are characterised as a medical doctor, professor, employer or priest for them to always impose a certain form of discourse. It is also necessary that these be terms relevant, for the participants in the context of the interaction, for producing and interpreting typical conduct. Power, as Foucault well explained, can always be resisted-transformed.

Fairclough (1989:63) gives a good example of what I suggest with these forms of contextual and discursive power: let us consider for example his analysis of religious rituals such as the church service or the confession. You can only officiate at a church service (context) if you are a priest (social identity). This constraint of access is based on some conditions: you can only become a priest if you have been shown to have acquired some ‘relevant resources’; like ‘being a believer, having a vocation, having some academic ability, conforming to certain standards of honesty, sincerity, sexual morality’ (Fairclough 1989:63), and then you must have proved yourself through many years of apprenticeship to be finally institutionally recognised by the church. These resources authorise priests to impose in certain contexts, such as the church service or confession, norms of interaction and specific forms of discourse, as in the confessional where the believer confesses his/her sins to the priest but not vice versa. This linguistic structure, based on regulated forms of interaction, is based on different social identities, resources (the priest can absolve the believer from his/her sins, not vice versa) and power relations structured around a specific task. Religion, Fairclough concludes, is not much different from medicine, or education, law, a medical examination, a lesson, litigation, and I shall say the same of the interview. These practices may not be as ritualised as the religious service, but nevertheless for each of them there are strict constraints on who can do what, what social roles might be played by the participants, based on the resources they possess, and what discourse structures they can impose. All these regulated forms of interaction are called upon on the basis of a specific task that needs to be achieved. This is the case also of the research interview. The research interview is not a natural form of discourse, but rather a specialised one oriented towards a specific task.
(acquisition-exchange of knowledge of a specific area of experience) that differentiates between the interactants' roles and social identities in the interaction (interviewer-interviewee). This task potentially establishes a form of interaction characterised by a specific structural and linguistic asymmetry. This basic asymmetry is typically characterised by the uncommon (in natural discourse, but not in the institutional discourses we have seen) organisation of the interaction around a strongly unidirectional form of question-answer discourse. In the research interview, the respondent, at least in first instance, complies with this key feature of discourse that enacts a specific form of power (asking personal questions) and interactional-discursive asymmetry (based on the different entitlement of the interactants to ask those questions). The interviewee then, by accepting to be interviewed, accepts, at least initially, that they will take the social identity of the informer in an interaction with an interviewer. This has important consequences for our discussion.

3.10. Conversational Asymmetries in the Research Interview.

Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction where we, as human beings, talk with each other, interact, confront other ideas and opinions, pose questions and give answers, get to know about others’ experiences, learn about the world we live in, construct and learn about almost all of the social world that surrounds us. This process of confrontation, acquisition and interaction might be characterised by forms of ‘temporary’ (Heritage 1992) conversational asymmetries because, as Linell and Luckmann explain, ‘if there were no asymmetries at all between people, i.e. if communicatively relevant inequalities of knowledge were not existing, there would be little or no need for most kinds of communication!’ (Linell and Luckmann 1991:4 in P. Drew and J. Heritage 1992). On the other hand, it is true that in our ordinary conversations little of what we say, the actions we perform or the order in which we do and say things is determined and controlled in advance (also in Sacks et al. 1974, Nielsen 1990). In this sense, ordinary conversations are unpredictable and flow freely.

A research interview (differently by the conversation of daily life) is a professional and specialised conversation with peculiar characteristics. An interview is a conversation that has structure and purpose. It is organised in terms of setting, time, relevant social roles, aims (or tasks to be accomplished) and goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in an everyday conversation. The purpose of the interview is to obtain descriptions of the ‘life
world’ of the interviewees with respect to interpreting the meaning that a specific area of experience has for them, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining knowledge about that phenomena as perceived by the respondent. This process involves an implicit (or explicit) sharing and/or negotiation of understandings where, in comparison to the conversation of everyday life, talk is characterised by a much greater methodological awareness of the discourse structure and forms, a focus on the dynamics of the interaction, a critical attention to what is said (as the use of a tape recorder immediately testifies) and, almost consequently, a much greater definition of the social identities and roles in the interaction. The research interview is not a daily conversation between equal partners. It is characterised in its own structure and purpose by specific structural asymmetries between the role of the interviewer and the role of the interviewee. I will argue in detail for some of those asymmetries, characterising them in terms of the gap between the interactants relating to the control over the interview's topics, flow, structure and outcomes, by looking at the following features:

- Subject’s participation in the task
- Social identity and face threat
- Know-how about the specific form of interaction
- Discourse structure and lexical choices
- Control over the topics and topics change
- Knowledge
- Rights to knowledge
- Control over the data analysis and the publication of the results.


We have seen that symbolic resources are among the elements that can define the power base of a group or a subject. And we have seen that these symbolic resources are often transformed in a group or subject’s privileged access to and control over specialised discourses and communications, which means that members of these groups may decide, in certain contexts, on the possible discourse genres or speech acts of an occasion. When

10 References detailed in the next paragraphs.
analysing the discursive relationship developing between interactants in certain contexts
then, one initial definition of power was based on the argument that the ability to control the
access to specialised forms of talk is in itself a resource of power. I shall now analytically
question and critically elaborate on these arguments and their significance for the research
interview discourse. The questions to be asked are: how and in what sense do researchers
control discourse? What are the consequences of such control? How can an interviewee
discursively challenge and resist to such control? How can the researcher balance this gap,
and why would s/he want to do so?

3.11. Control over the data analysis and the publication of the results.

I wish to initially focus attention on two elements that can be placed as antecedent and
subsequent to the actual interview. One basic asymmetry that must be acknowledged in the
interview relationship is the gap between the interviewer and the interviewee’s knowledge
of the interview itself. Before starting any interview, the researcher is expected to have gone
through a series of preliminary studies of the subject, analysis of the literature, and careful
consideration of the theoretical and methodological implications of the research that in their
whole influence the research and the interview’s aims. In these conditions of interaction,
Standing (1998) notes, the asymmetry of ‘know-how’ about the interview—structure,
subjects and agenda—between the participants raises a difference of perspective, motivation
and moral threat. For the interviewer, the interview is a ‘routine case’; he/she brings to the
encounter a capitalised set of experiences and knowledge that helps him/her to constitute the
event as a non-frightening routine case. The interviewee, on the other hand, might feel
(according to his/her experience) that the interview is a ‘personal’ and ‘unique case’,
unusual or even morally frightening.

A second crucial asymmetry between the two interactants is constituted by their different
control over the outcomes of the research, Standing explains: ‘However equal the methods
of access and interviewing, we, as researchers, still hold the real power when we take the
interviewee’s private words into the public world of the academia. It is in producing the
written text, research report, journal article, book, presentation, that we have the most
power’ (Standing 1998:189). Researchers hold power over which data, which parts of the
interviews to use, how to interpret the interviewee’s words, what to use the research for, and
how to represent the interviewee’s voice. It must be acknowledged for example that a
conversation, which might be characterised by an ordinary conversation style, is transformed and somehow denatured in an academic text or presentation, in an academic style that shares very little with its original style of production.

3.12. Control over the topics and topic change, the constitution in the interview of different social identities.

I shall begin by reconsidering two elements that I already approached in my previous discussions. We have seen (see section 3.8.), although only implicitly, through the arguments of Sacks and Schegloff (Sacks 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1973) that the unbalanced ability to select or change the topics of a discussion establishes a power gap between the interactants. I shall now elaborate on these elements, and on their epistemological and methodological significance for a research interview. We know from our own experience that in certain situations and contexts, discourse's action and interaction may be controlled by prescribed or proscribed speech acts (also in Duranti 1997, and Van Dijk 1999). In many typical social situations and contexts in fact we know that discourse is defined by ‘preferred models’ characterised by typical or preferred interactive and discursive features (M. Rojo and Van Dijk 1997). I here refer to the situated, context-bound processes of interpretation by which participants in an exchange retrieve relevant background knowledge, acquired through past experience, in order to define specific encounter types and to assess others' communicative intentions as well as the most likely verbal strategies that participants might employ. As Goffman and Gumperz have argued, this process of categorisation serves to frame the interaction in such a way as to convey information on what is likely to transpire, what social relations and social identities are involved, what verbal strategies are accepted, and what potential activities and outcomes might be expected from a certain conversation. This set of pre-assumptions are in ordinary conversation associated moment to moment with the particular event or situation at hand, and act as a filter or lens by means of which we sift our general stock of knowledge and decide as a member of which group we should speak (Gumperz 1992:306-7).

In our subject of investigation, the encounter type research interview, the communicative intentions are normally clearly known from the beginning of the interaction. Also the ‘key’ verbal strategies that can be expected in this type of encounter are usually demonstrated; the interviewee can expect that an interviewer is going to pose some questions, and that s/he has
to answer them (or not) according to his/her knowledge or experience of the topics. In this specialised and socially defined situation, questions are a central part of the interaction and cannot be viewed as neutral invitations to speak, but rather must be considered and acknowledged as elements that critically shape how, and as a member of which group, the respondent should speak. Topics or questions are for the respondent the most important, sometimes unique, contextual information about the interviewer’s aims and agenda. They define and activate interactive inferential procedures that influence the arguments and the topics on which the respondent will draw upon answering.

The analyses made by Goffman (and symbolic interactionists) can throw a great deal of light upon these processes of interpretation and on the inferences that underlie question-answer behaviours. According to Goffman’s interpretation, social actors in any social situation are constantly negotiating a shared definition of the situation. Interactants take one another's viewpoints into account, and implement, through the interpretation of one another's behaviours, lines of interaction, and interactional faces (social identities) that are adapted and guided by their understanding of the situation. In a specific social situation like the interview (unequal in resources, agendas, social identities and possible-allowed patterns of interaction) it must be then acknowledged that it is almost impossible for a researcher to ask a question without activate ‘inferential procedures’ and suggest preferred ‘answers’.

The reasons can be analysed in two points:

- **The very fact that a question is asked implies that the researcher thinks that the question’s topic is of interest.**

Research questions can be observed from two perspectives: from the researcher’s point of view (why that specific research question has been asked?), and from the respondent’s point of view (what does it imply that that question has been asked?).

It is easy to infer that in the context of an interview, stated or un-stated prepositions always sustain and underlie a research question. If a question has been asked by an interviewer, we well know, it means either that that question’s topic has been carefully investigated, and

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11 *Unstated prepositions* always underline and underlie a research question, reflecting the ‘researcher's preconception’, and to some extent reactively leading (or misleading) respondents’ answers. This feature of the interview, as suggested by Van Dijk’s analyses of power, is a typical one of discourse manipulation, that is: to communicate beliefs implicitly, that is without actually asserting them, narrowing so the chance that they can be challenged. (Van Dijk 1998)
evaluated as relevant for the research’s aims by the researcher, or that during the discourse a new topic seemed useful to elaborate on this general research aim. Either way, any question asked in an interview reflects the researcher's preconceptions or interpretations of the topics. What does it imply, for a respondent, that a question has been asked? When inferring the meaning of any question there are three sources of information that can be used by a respondent to relevantly elaborate the answer. These are: a) the content of the question itself b) the narrowed set of options created by the (task) general theme/topic of the interview, and c) the context of the interaction, or the inferences and interpretations elicited by the evaluation of the interaction, the evaluation of the other interactant (questioner), and the evaluation of what the respondent thinks s/he is actually asking with that question. What does all this mean? It means, as explained by Goffman’s and my previous analysis, that a respondent in his/her response is not only addressing some questions’ topic, but is also implicitly making inferences on, and reacting to, the specific social context and the other interactant’s social identity, as we have seen in the case of the question, ‘‘how are you?’’ asked on the phone by a doctor, or by a friend. So not only is the respondent reacting to what s/he thinks the interviewer is asking him/her with that question, but s/he is also reacting to a social situation, in which s/he is developing and establishing a specific social identity. In this sense then questions and answers are not only statements about a topic, but they are part and parcel of the process of negotiation of the interactants’ social identities. As I pointed out, questions critically shape how, and as a member of which group, the respondent should speak. It is for this reason that questions are analysed, in the vast literature on the subject, as potentially frightening elements, they not only challenge the knowledge of the respondent, but they also question his-her social identity.

A second element that must be considered is that researchers rarely ask single questions about a topic; a number of questions are usually asked, and this can be viewed as constitutive of a pre-structured or superimposed ‘narrative line’, created by the researcher. We have already analysed two elements of the question-answer discourse interaction; one, as we have seen, is the peculiar structural characteristic of a discourse strongly relying on question-answer turns at talk, and the other, as we have just described, is the social value of questions in an institutional interaction. According to Goffman, social actors in any social situation are constantly negotiating a shared definition of the situation by taking one
another's viewpoints into account, and implementing, through the interpretation of one another's behaviours, ‘lines’ of possible interaction. In ordinary conversations this negotiation is balanced through an overall equal chance of access to the different forms of turn at talk, implementing through the whole interaction an equally managed ‘line’ of discourse flow. In an interview strongly structured around a Q-A turn type, the ‘topics’ of the conversation are superimposed and limited to the ones identified by the researcher, leading the overall effort of the respondent to ‘relevantly’ contribute to the social interaction. This raises another issue: As Fairclough suggests: ‘If freedom is defined as having the opportunity to think and do what one wants, then such lacking alternatives are by definition a limitation of the freedom of the recipients. And limiting the freedom of others, especially in one’s own interest, happens to be one of the definitions of power and domination’ (Van Dijk 1998 but also in Fairclough 1992 and Cameron et Al. 1992). If the research interview is influenced by these conversational elements, whose knowledge then is the interview representing?

3.13. Knowledge and Right to Knowledge.

One central issue in my analysis is knowledge, and more specifically the analysis of how and by what means the interaction defines and addresses what the relevant knowledge is in the situation at hand, and who owns it. Who owns the right to that specific knowledge? Epistemological caution must be used in the description of this multifaceted issue. If the answer at a first glance appears predictable: ‘the respondent owns the knowledge about the subject of study, that is why he/she has been called for’, a more in-depth analysis shows that things are not quite so simple.

A notable feature of many research interviews is a kind of mandatory, idiosyncratic ‘cautiousness’ in which researchers avoid committing themselves to taking firm positions about any issue during the interview (also P. Drew and J. Heritage 1992:177-8). They do so by avoiding actions that are characteristic of ordinary conversations. Specifically, by respecting the constraint that they should confine themselves to the role of the questioner, they withhold a range of responsive activities that are instead characteristically produced in ordinary conversation contexts, and they do not personally engage in the conversation. The explanation for this is canonically that researchers want to avoid biasing the response of the interviewee. At the same time that researchers are always cautious about making claims about their knowledge of the subject during the research interview, they also deploy
distinctive, functionally specialised and superior knowledge-based activities that can impart a specific ‘expert’ twist to the interview’s structure and outcomes.

Some of these issues have been already approached; for example accounting for some of the argument put forward by K. Standing (1998:198) and P. Alldred (1998:147-171) in their analysis of the academic report. We have seen that the final analysis of research data can be considered as a form of control and power enactment in itself. The starting point is the acknowledgement that academic reports seem to deprive subjects of their private and individual voice. The subjective analysis of the data, the choice of certain definitions rather then others (editing of the data), the context in which the results are presented and the same ‘lexical choices’ in representing ‘their knowledge’ in an academic jargon that does not share the original nature of the interaction and anyway ties the respondent's knowledge to certain aims, can be seen also as setting up a knowledge hierarchy. By using a language which is different from that used by the respondents to describe their experiences and knowledge in a form often inaccessible to them, a hierarchy of knowledge is established. The researcher is able to interpret the words and the worlds of the respondents. Through its complexity and difficulty, this implies that the researcher has greater, or better, knowledge/understanding than the respondents who formed the research.

This knowledge hierarchy is not limited only to the final analysis of the data. We have also seen that it is originally integrated in the same process of data collection, in what can be called the ‘hidden agenda’ of the researcher. Researchers never approach an interview without some background knowledge about the subject of investigation; rather, and most likely, after an intense study of the body of knowledge on the topic, they develop a series of hypotheses, topics and research questions to be tested in the interviews, where they look for evidence to support, refute, clarify or reformulate them. In this sense respondents have a ‘lack of knowledge’ because they are not only briefly and not (inter)actively, informed by researchers of the purposes lying behind each particular topic question, but also lack the familiarity with the ‘topics of the interview itself’ that are familiar to researchers.

A second element dominates the scene: Making questions is never a neutral activity; a question at least implies lexical choices that will always reflect the researcher’s interpretations and knowledge. As P. Drew and M. Sorjonen explain, ‘potentially, any lexical selection in institutional dialogue is investigable for its constitutive and situated relevance for the kind of discourse in which the participants are engaged, and for the tasks which they are performing through their lexical choices’ (Drew and Sorjonen 1997:101).
Thus, any lexical selection is *informative* of the participant’s orientations, expectations and interpretations. This is quite a statement for a form of discourse shaped strongly around an unequal and *verbally stimulated* form of interaction and knowledge production, and could be read in its extreme interpretation as the verbal superimposition of the researcher’s structure of understandings (knowledge) over the respondent’s world-experience-knowledge.


The ‘functional’ role played by the concept of ‘power’ in my analysis deserves a clear explanation. Discursive aspects of power relations and control are not a fixed and monolithic presence in any communication or interaction; the same definition of power is highly ambiguous and might be subject to several sometimes contradictory interpretations. For this reason I think it is fruitful (and necessary) to look at the discussed asymmetries of power in the interview discourse in dynamic and functional terms. Discursive events and discursive practices are generally negotiated (and sometimes contested) processes. In this sense, the description of any form of power can also be, and almost certainly will be, opposed by the description of some reactive forms of resistance. Foucault (1977), Apple (1982), Bates (1980), Foster (1986), Giroux (1983), Freire (1973) and Gramsci (1973) and many others explicitly critique an interpretation of any power asymmetry as a totalising element, and they assert the equal importance of the definition and value of the resistance that always accompanies any form of power. To acknowledge this constant play of ‘dominance’ and ‘resistance’ (so to say) is crucial in my analysis, which wants to react against the temptation of a theoretical monopolisation of the power asymmetries as elements immutably fixed in certain forms and terms in the social inquiry. Any form of inquiry or discourse also offers spaces of self-expression for interviewees, who are never only passive subjects of the researcher’s dominance, as I proved, but also active respondents to the tasks that an interview might create. However not all methodological perspectives pay the same attention to these issues and some theoretical approaches (more aware of these issues than others) challenge the simple concept of ‘resistance’ (as the ‘lie, hide or non-answering strategy’, only alternative of the positivist methodologies) with the concept of ‘freedom’ or ‘fusion of horizons’, enhancing the prospect of a more constructive interpretation of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is in the frame of these theories that my analysis of the interviews will be developed (in the next chapters?)
In this chapter some of the methodological tenets of the two methodologies, the photo-elicited interview and the classic verbal interview, are described and theoretically compared. The analysis of some similar constitutive characteristics of the two methodologies inductively contributes to the selection of two specific interview designs. The inductive procedure also makes a case for the very possibility of comparing two different methodologies and describes the limits characteristic of any comparative attempt. It is in this context that a first definition of the aims of the comparison is given and its characteristics and limits described along with a series of basic questions that inform the comparison itself. Briefly the key questions that the comparison wants to address are: What are the noticeable differences\(^1\) (if any) in the social performance of the interviewer and the interviewee in the two methodologies? Which are the main (if any) differences that can be discerned between the two forms of discourse/interaction? How are the different asymmetries described earlier addressed in the two sets of interviews? It is also in this chapter that a research application is defined to constitute the terrain on which the two methodologies will be adopted and compared. The research application’s, “Studying Identity and Food: A Case Study with the Students of South-East London”, broad area of investigation is the process of consumption of food. The specific focus of the research is the investigation of food practices as markers of social identity, and the existing differentiation between genders in these practices in a specific sample. The aim of the research is to explore how students perceive their identity to be constructed in relationship to food, both as individuals and gendered subjects.

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\(^1\) I stressed a ‘noticeable difference’ because I think that only if these differences will be significantly evident I can evaluate the real differences between the methods themselves, and not the necessary variability of the different interviews.
SECTION I: Methodological Comparative Approach

4.1. Definition of the Aims of the Case Study.

As simply put by Harper (2002:13) photo-elicitation is a methodology based on the simple idea of inserting photographs into a research interview. It was originally developed by the Colliers (Colliers 1957, 1967, 1986) as a new approach for their anthropological inquiries and later investigated and described as a research method that allowed the combination and instrumental use of two forms of symbolic representation, visual and verbal. Through the description of their methodology the Colliers made a case for the use of photographs as an instrument to ‘elicit’ new information and a tool to re-shape the characteristics of the interaction developing between the interviewer and the interviewee. Since its original use in anthropology, photo elicitation has undergone a number of changes and reinterpretations and we have seen its utilisation in many areas of sociological inquiry as well as in medicine, psychology, marketing research and others. However different the applications, the use of photographs in all these studies is interpreted, faithfully to the seminal intuition of the Colliers, as an instrument to profit from the combination of the representational values of the photographic imagery through their (verbal) interpretation and analysis (by a respondent). However, in sociology, if the combination of words and images might have seemed very promising it has also given rise to too many unanswered questions. That, perhaps, might explain the methodology failing to acquire explicit recognition. It is the interpretation of the relationship verbal-visual and the analysis of its implications for the sociological inquiry that still haunts the theoretical and methodological acceptance of Photo-elicitation, or perhaps of any other use of images, in sociology.

The original analyses of the Colliers, if groundbreaking, fail to convince a sociological audience by offering a limited interpretation of the communicative value of the photographs and a non-exhaustive account of the interaction developing between the interviewer and the interviewee (see Chapter I). Among the claims made by the Colliers of pivotal importance has been their interpretation of photo-elicitation as a methodology that (through and because of the use of photographs) favours an ‘equal’ or more close participation of the researcher and the respondent to the tasks of the interview. This is sustained in the Colliers argument by the combination of a specific interpretation of the

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2 Photo elicitation has been utilised in several areas of investigation that, as detailed by Harper (2002:16), included studies in Social organization/Social class, Community/Historical ethnography, Identity/Biography/Autobiography, Culture/Cultural studies.
characteristics of the photographs (photographs as *indexes*) and a specific use of the photographs in the interview (researcher and respondent *use* the photographs together to explore the *realities* they depict). These interpretations raise several methodological and theoretical problems. From a methodological point of view, the interpretation of the pre-eminence of the indexical value of the photographs (clearly functional to the specific anthropological subjects of the Colliers’ research, where this interpretation has its obvious strengths) represents a limited and limiting interpretation of the possible communicative values of the photographs. Crucially at another level, the theoretical conclusions that the Colliers draw from the interpretation of the different interaction between the respondent and the researcher lack the circumstantial evidence or detailed analysis through which the Colliers might have sustained their claims. In their descriptions we are left to guess what the real interviews were like; what questions were actually asked? What photographs were shown and how? What were the actual answers? In conclusion we are left with no evidence of the actual interactions and without any analyses of the limits of the method (What were the drawbacks of the use of the photographs?).

The Colliers left us with an inspiring set of insights, but also with an array of unanswered questions. If the use of photographs makes for a different interaction: How can we pinpoint the differences in the social performance of the interviewer and the interviewee? According to what *theoretical framework* can these differences be identified, analysed and sustained? And of what methodological and theoretical inferences can they be proof? What value might photographs acquire in various and distinct methodological applications and what are their limits?

My research moves from the Colliers’ experiences and unanswered questions. It aims at opening up to analysis the *interaction* developing in a photo-elicited interview. And through a set of clearly defined theoretical and methodological tools to evaluate, sustain and if necessary contrast, in the specific context of a *comparison* with a *classic sociological inquiry*, the claims the Colliers made for an anthropological one.

My study focuses on the analysis of the *interaction* and on the *use* and *function* that the photographs play in a sociological interview and ultimately aims at a theoretically informed evaluation of the effects that the use of photographs have on the discourse/interaction of a research interview. This research aim will be pursued through a comparative study that will create a sustained juxtaposition of the characteristics of one design of this methodology (*photo-elicitation*) against a well-
known and commonly utilised sociological method (the *semi-structured interview*). The analyses will investigate the characteristics of this specific design of photo elicitation, its limits, its theoretical strengths and weaknesses, with the aim of creating a set of theoretical and practical guide-lines that might suggest to a researcher why and how this specific design of the method might prove useful (or not) and could be preferred to others in certain research’s contexts. The primary aim of the research is that of providing a pilot study to promote the analytical investigation of the theoretical and methodological boundaries that characterise the use of this methodology. The research seeks to create a set of theoretical hypotheses against which contrast and compare the study and investigation of other interview’s designs that use photographs.

In the analyses developed in the previous chapters I have focused on an interpretation of the interview as a social encounter, an ‘inter-action’ between two participants who are dynamically (as in any other social exchange) constructing and negotiating, through the verbal interchange, contextual narratives and individual social identities. In the development of my analyses I have questioned this verbal exchange and the ways in which it can be shaped in the interview, and supported by the arguments of several theoretical traditions I have argued for a definition of the peculiar social identity gap researcher / respondent that the interview seems to favour. This identity gap has been characterised by a series of asymmetries (namely: subject’s participation to task, know-how about the specific form of interaction, discourse structure and lexical choices, control over the topics and topic change, knowledge, rights to knowledge, social identity) that are, I argued, created and reinforced by *specific discourse structures*. Given this theoretical framework, my pilot study wants to provide methodological evidence for the performance of the interviewer and the interviewee in two sets of interviews where either *questions* or *photographs and questions* will be used as stimuli for the discourse. My leading hypothesis is that the analysis of the *structural organisation of the discourse*³

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³ As we have seen in the third chapter, several elements contribute in a dialogue to display the contribution of the participants to a specific task, the sequential order of the individual’s participation to dialogue, the various kinds of basic linguistic action and their sequences, the specific grammatical form and lexical choices, the *inferences* of specific linguistic structures, the *control* over specific linguistic structures, are some of those. These elements contribute to create a sort of fingerprint for each interaction, but also to characterise the specific social identities of the participants, the constraints on their conduct and the characteristics of their relevant inferential procedures.
unravelled by the interviews can constitute an analytical ground for the investigation and comparison of the differences existing between the two methodologies. The study asks:

- What are the differences that can be noticed between the two forms of discourse?
- How, if present, these differences address the asymmetries earlier described?
- What are the theoretical implications for the methodology?


Two aspects of the methodological comparison raise immediate theoretical issues: The first concerns the choice and design of two ‘‘comparable’’ sets of interviews. The second concerns the development of methodological tools, sensitive to the definition of the discourse asymmetries, to be used for the interpretation and comparison of the interviews.

Photo-elicitation has since its original development evolved in several methodological applications each claiming specific characteristics (and posing specific issues). For example a pivotal methodological difference exists between researches that rely on photographs taken or selected by the subjects or photographs taken and selected by the respondent (the implications of this basic research choice have been already analysed in the introduction). Furthermore, once selected, the same photographs can be used in the interview in several different ways and for several different purposes. They can be shown one at a time as in the Colliers’ applications or all together as in the interviews conducted by Doughty (1995). They can be used to question the specific knowledge of the respondent about the subjects depicted in the photographs (Harper 1988) or used as evidence of subjects to be analysed for the first time (Faccioli 1997). Each one of these choices has a specific methodological bearing on the structure and meaning of the interview (and the discourse structure within it?); what application of the method should we use for the comparison? When considering the specific form of classic verbal interview that could be used for the comparison, well the options are too many to even mention. The question is: Which combination of the two methodologies will guarantee a relevant degree of comparability? In this case, as it should be, the solution relies on the identification of some clear theoretical hypothesis on which the comparison should be developed upon, depend and be defined in its limits. But, before analysing and describing these hypotheses and the actual design of the two sets of interviews let me clarify one crucial concept. What does it actually mean that the two
sets of interviews are (have to be) comparable? What does comparability mean? What does it demand and what does it imply?

The creation of a comparison demands a clear definition of its boundaries and limits, what are we going to look at? What do we exclude from the comparison? And why? Comparability implies a selection based on relevance.

There is no such thing as complete comparability, or comparability per-se, between any two interviews or social interactions of any kind. Any social interaction is characterised by an innumerable (and often unaccountable) series of elements, evaluations, specific responses based on contextual interpretations, personal decisions, feelings or mood, etc that make that interaction unrepeatable as it was. Any social interaction, from this point of view, is in the proper sense of the word unique. However, this formal uniqueness of any social interaction can be challenged when an interaction is analysed in its functional elements: not what it is, but what it does and how. From this point of view instead, a degree of similarity/comparability among different interactions can be established if we can isolate at least one key common element among the elements that characterise the interactions (a common task for example). This key common element (or elements, as it is that certain interactions might have several of them) can function as a basic criterion (criteria) for the comparison of some aspects of the interactions. A comparison, however, has always a purpose, a question or a series of issues for which the comparison is supposed to give answers or evidence. In this real context then not any common element among the interactions is relevant for specific comparative aims. In an interaction certain elements can be seen as to influence certain aspects of the interaction, but not others. Only the elements that can be hypothesised to have a bearing on the specific aspect of the interaction in which we are interested in can be regarded as relevant for the research purposes. If observed carefully, this process of selection of specific common elements (that as I said, establishes the possibility of a comparison) does also set its specific boundaries and limits, crucially delimiting the kinds of questions for which that comparison, with those elements can give answers. Thus, a comparison between two or more interactions is always a compromise between the two; the aims of the comparison and the common elements that can sustain these aims. It is with this idea clear in mind (and with the awareness of the specific aims of the analyses and the specific elements of the interviews that the analyses are going to look at) that I have selected and designed two sets of interviews that can theoretically favour this comparability.
After a long process of evaluation I have finally decided that methodologically, both interview’s samples will be constituted by semi-structured interviews where either ‘questions’ or ‘photographs selected by the researcher and questions’ will be used. These choices—methodology, kinds of photographs to be used, pattern of the inquiry—are based on several theoretical and methodological considerations.

The semi-structured interview can be interpreted as a methodology that offers several grounds for the specific comparative aims of the research. As I have comprehensively described in the previous chapters the semi-structured interview is a methodology derived from a range of qualitative approaches that thoroughly questioned the kind of knowledge that the interview produces, and the roles played by the research and the respondent in this production. The aim of the semi-structured interview is that of enabling a non-directive discourse where the interaction between the researcher and the respondent can be developed in the form of a, relatively, free conversation. For this purpose in the semi-structured interview, the main research issue is broken down into a series of key questions that become the sole guidelines for the interviewer. They establish the minimal group of thematic subjects that can be presented and explored differently in each interview. The key questions guarantee the basic focus of the sample of interviews, their flexible elaboration (according to the particular responses of each interviewee), the pursued non-directivity of the method. If observed from this perspective, the flexible organisation of a semi-structured interview around some key questions seems complementary with the arrangement of the photo-elicited interview around some selected photographs. Both forms of interview appear at a more in-depth analysis to rely on similar theoretical frameworks, and patterns of investigation.

4.3. Comparative frameworks: patterns of inquiry

The semi-structured interview is a methodology in which the relationship developing between the researcher and the respondent is put into question and the peculiar power relations that affect its development are acknowledged. Researchers explicitly recognise that they arrive to the interview with a specific agenda, and that this agenda is unavoidable. But they try to amend it by favouring an open dialogue responding to the interpretations (and agendas) of the interviewees. In a similar fashion in the photo-elicited interview, based on images taken or selected by the researcher, researchers acknowledge that their selection of specific photographs constitutes a ‘selective visual

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4 Agenda explicitly unveiled by the series of issues and questions and their process of selection/interpretation.
essay\textsuperscript{5} on the subject (of the research) (Colliers 1986: 127). They count, however, on the photograph’s polysemic value to pursue their aim of an ‘open exploration’ (with the respondents) of the subjects depicted in the photographs. These processes of selection of the questions and the photographs, and their use in the interview, seem to have then methodological and theoretical similarities. In a classic semi-structured interview, a research issue is deconstructed in a series of questions (pointing at certain subjects, issues, thematic areas) that need to be assessed by the respondent. Complementarily, in a photo-elicited interview, based on images taken or selected by the researcher, a research issue is deconstructed in a series of photographs (pointing at certain subjects, issues and thematic areas) that need to be assessed (explored) with a respondent. Both processes reveal similar intellectual patterns of selection (and limits). Both processes of selection - of specific questions or specific photographs- unveil the researchers’ subjective understanding of the research topic, as well as their personal interpretations and cultural background. These considerations informed my choice to use photographs taken or selected by the researcher. My aim of comparing the photo-elicited interview with a classic verbal interview does somehow impose this pattern of selection of the photographs. In a common research’ interview the key research questions are normally developed by the researcher/s (although this may happen after a series of pilot interviews that will help to define them). To maintain a methodological comparability with what is a common praxis in a sociological interview I decided that also the photographs should be those chosen by the researcher to reflect a similar process of selection.

The theoretical analysis of this form of photo-elicitation, however, seems to offer even more ground for the methodological comparability of the two kinds of interviews that rely also on similar patterns of investigation. The similarities between the classic semi-structured interview and the photo-elicited interview (based on images taken or selected by the researcher) in fact are not limited to the sole patterns of selection of the photographs and the question, but also to the function that key questions or selected photographs perform in the interviews. In the verbal interview, a pre-constituted set of key questions is used by the interviewer to elicit responses about specific thematic areas: a question is made to introduce a topic that will be then elaborated with/by the interviewee. In a similar fashion, in the photo-elicited interview a set of selected photographs is used by the interviewer to point at specific thematic areas to be explored with the respondent. In this case, a photograph is shown to focus on a topic that will be

\textsuperscript{5} Representative of the researcher interpretations/selection and cultural background
then explored with the respondent. Although the two communicative acts and their effects on the interaction may be different (and all of my research is bent at analytically investigating and describing these differences), the methodological function of the key questions and the selected photographs might be interpreted as to be similar: introducing a topic, a concept or a theme. I should now elaborate on this concept a little bit more.

The value of questions (or of a line of questioning) in an interview can be assessed, we have seen, from several different perspective, questions can be interpreted as an instrument of control, a symbol of social identity/difference, evidence of an individual’s agenda or personal interpretation etc. Questions however in their most common understanding can be seen simply as an instrument to focus someone else attention on a specific subject with the aim of obtaining information about that subject. This functional aim is achieved for a verbal question through its own phrasing, a question is a phrase that is structurally/grammatically organised to be recognise as ‘‘a question’’. ‘‘Photographs’’ are not ‘‘questions’’ per-se; and there is no recognisable structure that makes ‘‘a photograph’’ a request of information about the subjects of the photograph. However this otherwise uncertain communicative function can be achieved in an interview because of the specific nature of the interaction in which a respondent can easily infer (also if not informed) that if a photograph is shown, it is shown to obtain some sort of information about it. In this context, and at this functional level, photographs might be thought of, and used by the researcher in an interview to perform the same function of a question, to ask information about a subject6.

Any form of comparison however has certain limitations, and in this case to a basic comparability between the processes of selection and the methodological functions of photographs and questions correspond significant limitations in the comparability of the different uses that of photographs and questions can be done in a discourse/interview. An analysis of these differences and the limits that they impose on their comparability will help to inform the selection of two interview designs that can guarantee a reasonable degree of comparability of the uses of the photographs and the questions in an interview.

4.4. Comparative frameworks: the choice of a research design.

6 There is a problem here; if the communicative function of a photograph in an interview might be clear, not necessarily clear is the specific definition of its ‘‘subject’’. Photographs might or might not clearly identify ‘‘that subject’’, if this might well be the strength of the use of photographs it might well become its limit.
We have seen that certain photographs and certain questions might be considered the product of similar intellectual processes of selection. I have also given a basic interpretation of why, in the context of an interview, photographs and questions might be thought to perform a similar communicative function\(^7\). These conceptualisations however do not change a fact, “photographs” are not “questions” (and vice versa). Their physical differences make for very different practices of use (and communicative values) that (de)limit the specific uses of photographs and questions that are directly comparable. For example, if the researcher decides to show all the images together to let the respondent decide which ones to discuss (Doughty 1995), s/he will achieve a different communicative effect\(^8\) then if s/he shows one photograph at a time during the interview. If the latter practice, as we have seen, has a degree of similarity with the communicative use of a series of questions asked to a respondent; the former describes a communicative scenario that is not only physically unattainable through verbal questioning (photographs can be shown all together and at the same time, questions cannot) but also uncommon in its practice. It is in fact not common for an interviewer to ask all the questions at the beginning of an interview, or to show the questions to a respondent who will then choose from which one to start (although as noted by Van Dijk (1997) there is a relevant exception to this norm\(^9\)). There might be different research reasons for which a researcher might opt for one or another use of the photographs; in my case the choice has been dictated by the evaluation of the methodological limits that the comparison imposes and by the acknowledgement of the common practices of the sociological inquiry. Thus I decided to keep the design of the two sets of interviews as close as possible to the well known classic semi-structured interview model: In one set of interviews some key research’ questions will be used as guide-lines for the interview, in the second set of interviews the same key questions will be used along with some relevant photographs (for each question one photograph or one related group of photographs).

What happens if a photograph is combined with a question referring to the subject/s it depicts? We know that the combination of photographs and words –

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\(^7\) This will be analysed in much greater detail in the analysis of the interviews in Chapter VI.

\(^8\) There is much more about this choice then the sole communicative effect but I am not going to expand on this subject matter now.

\(^9\) This is the case of some interviews to persons in positions of power for whom the role apply that they would agree to be interviewed only if previously informed on the subjects and questions of the interview. The very exception is a confirmation of the power position associated with the ability to ask questions. The knowledge of the questions in fact wants to re-establish in the interaction the social identities and the power position by them normally established.
specifically in this case a question- could be analysed from several different perspectives (see Barthes’ discussion of photographs ‘verbal anchorage’), but what we are interested in now is its ‘contextual’ (within the context of the interview) communicative value. How is this combination going to be interpreted communicatively in an interview? What we know is that a question about (or along with) a photograph is still a communicative act that intends to focus someone else attention on a specific subject (the one that the questioner thinks the combination of the words and the photograph/s should suggest), and that it is aimed at obtaining information about that subject/s. What we do not know is how this combination is going to be interpreted/used by a respondent to answer to our question. This brings us back to the comparative study and my decision to use in one set of interviews a group of defined questions (subjects) and in the second set the same questions along with a photograph (or group of photographs) related to each question (subject). My hypothesis is that in using a fixed set of questions along with photographs I will be able to observe how the presence of the images effects the conversation (the interpretations and the answers) in comparison to the first group of interviews where the sole questions were used. At an analytical level the questions are: Does the discourse change when photographs are used, and how? How do the respondents use the photographs? And at a theoretical level: Does the use of photographs affect the relationship interviewer/ interviewee? Or more specifically; does the use of photographs alter the underlying power relations and discourse asymmetries that characterise the two groups of interviews?

4.5. Methodological limits, and aims of the comparison

If I have argued for the motivations that sustained my selection of one form of research design, let me now comment on its limits. It appears from my previous discussion that, of the several peculiar uses that of the photographs could be done, my interview structure seems to utilise the plainest. Different and more distinctive utilisation of the photographs in fact seem to offer, also if at a very superficial observation, a stronger challenge of the power relations developing in a research interview (key subjects of this analysis). It also appears that for the sake of comparability the structure of the photo-elicited interview has been sacrificed in favour of the more conservative design of the verbal semi-structured interview. The truth is that I think this to be the best compromise given the key aim of my research. The semi-structured interview is a well-established and known methodological practice. To bend the form of its common use would have meant in my
opinion to weaken the primary aim of my research, that of presenting a pivotal, methodologically articulate, analysis of what this new methodology might offer to those researchers that are already familiar and use the classic semi-structured interview. If a comparison has necessarily to be focused and limited, I argued, then I judged that this target would have set the boundaries (and limits) of my study: The nature of the research is that of a pilot study, an initial analytical approach to the investigation of the methodology. The centrepiece of the research is then the development of theory generated in the context and limits of the study. This approach to the research follows the ideas described by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin 1990) for a ‘Grounded Theory Study’ (this methodological approach will be at length discussed in the next Chapter V) that held that theories and inferences made through the analysis of these two specific sets of interviews and specific research design want to offer a theoretical sound basis for the investigation of the methodology against which other research questions or different research’s designs can be confronted to, or developed from.

In conclusion the aims and structure of the comparison can be finally schematically summarised:

• The two sets of interviews will be cast on the model of the classic semi-structured interview.
• The two sets of interviews will rely either on the use of key questions or on the use of the same questions along with complementary photographs (one or a group of photographs for each question).
• The photographs will be selected or taken by the researcher.
• The aim of the case study is that of providing analytically sustained evidence of the differences that characterise the discourse structures/dynamics in the two sets of interviews
• The analysis of the interviews will specifically focus on the interaction between the researcher and the respondent in the frame of an analysis of the ‘power relations’ or ‘epistemological asymmetries’ that are constructed in/through discourse.
• The aim of the research, a pilot study of the methodology, is that of developing theoretical hypotheses for the investigation of this design of the methodology. Theoretical hypotheses against which new hypotheses, new perspectives of analysis or other forms and designs of the methodology can be juxtaposed/confronted.

4.6. Methodological instruments for the comparison

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The second problematic aspect of the research is how to approach the analytical comparison of the two sets of interviews. If I know what I want to look at, the problem is now, how? For the analysis and comparison of the interviews I have decided to use some of the methodological tools developed by Conversation and Discourse analyses (making full use of video-recordings and transcriptions thereof). CA and DA have been chosen because they are thought to be functional in underlining the structural organisation of talk, its sequential organisation, and the social identity construction enacted through talk practices. In marking the patterns that talk exhibits or the differences existing between interviewer and interviewee participation to talk, CA and DA could help to underline variances in the two approaches. Discourse analysts use several different approaches in developing their analyses. Some rely on common practices and general analytic tools, others often use ‘crafted’ ones (Van Dijk 1997) designed for the specific needs of the research; choosing among them is often problematic. For my investigations I have been convinced by the incisiveness of five tools described in the analyses of Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) Van Dijk (1997) and Fowler (1979) and others that seem to be specifically useful to underpin the elements of the interaction that are relevant for my research questions. The tools consist of questions to ask and areas to think about when analysing the recordings and transcripts. However, before moving to the description of the tools, I want to detail a little more about the recordings and transcripts and their use.

Conversation analysts generally transcribe their tapes using transcript conventions developed and elaborated by Gail Jefferson. However these conventions cannot reproduce what is on the video/audio tape but remind the reader of the details of the conduct that can be heard or seen on the tape. The best way to develop the analyses is to use both videotape and the transcript [Pomerantz and Fehr 1997]. I will use transcripts to isolate and study specific phenomena in parallel with the videotapes without whose help much information would be lost in the transcripts (the transcripts cannot account for many of the dynamics of the interaction). The parallel use of transcripts and video will help to provide an overview on the different aspects of the interaction; example was the subject looking at the photographs or at the researcher when s/he said something?)

4.7. Tools for analysis: questions to ask and areas to consider.

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10 I am going to use a simplified version that is very straightforward to use (in Van Dijk 1999).
In this section I develop the specific details of the approach to the analyses and its rationale for the investigation of the dynamics of the relationship interviewer/interviewee. The selection of these tools is based both on ‘opportunistic reasons’ (dictated by the aims of my research) and ‘common practice’ among the analysts of discourse. At the end of the description of each tool I concisely indicate for which of the asymmetries the tool could provide useful evidence. The asymmetries are not meant as separate variables and obviously there is often no clear separation among some of them. The indications at the end of each tool are then supposed only to suggest which areas of the interaction the tool is looking at.

1. **Select a sequence.** The first step in the analyses of each interview is the identification of sequences of interest. A sequence is characterised by identifiable boundaries (openings and closings) within the talk that limits the discussion of a specific topic. Sequences openings and closings are treated as the products of negotiation. While one party may offer a possible start or finish (introducing a topic or shifting from a topic), the start or finish is not fully accomplished without the ratification of both the participants. A sequence contains a variety of phenomena that can be investigated. It is also common that different patterns for the identification of sequences can be utilised as one works on the material.

2. **Characterise the Actions in the Sequence.** A basic analytic concept for conversation analysts is action. Actions are central to the way that participants themselves produce and understand conduct. They are a fundamental part of the meaningfulness of the talk. One identifies action by answering the question ‘What is this participant doing in this turn?’ For example when the researcher says ‘I am not sure that I understood this right’? The researcher intends (and is understood as intending) that s/he is inviting the other person to repeat, expand or rephrase what the interviewee has just said. In the same way a question or a comment made in the interview might actually indicate the will to accomplish a certain action. In the sequence chosen we can characterise an individual’s turn in terms of the action that the speaker performs. When characterising the action or actions performed in the turns, you will end up with characterisations of the actions that comprise the sequence. The relationships between the actions can also be considered. Actions are not isolated performances. Most are offered with the expectation of a response or as a response to prior action.
Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about the subject’s participation in tasks and social identity differentiation.

3. Consider how the ‘packaging’ of actions provides for a certain understanding of the actions performed. The ways actions are performed (lexical choices, form, attitude, selection among alternative ways to achieve the same action) are informative of the understandings that the interactant associates with the action. For example if we say ‘do you want to go for lunch?’ or ‘come on, let’s grab a bite’ we are performing the same action, to invite someone to have food together. But we are implying a different time constraint that might invite different reactions. I might be willing to have a quick snack but not have time for a full lunch sitting in a restaurant. The question is: what understandings do the interactants display in the action? What aspects of the way in which the action was formed and delivered may help provide for those understandings? What are the interactional consequences of using this packaging over an alternative?

Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about the discourse structure and lexical choices, knowledge and right to knowledge.

4. Consider how the turn taking provides for certain understandings of the actions (of obtaining the turn, timing the start of the turn, and terminating the turn).

How did the interactant obtain the turn? Did the speaker select them to speak or did the other speaker address them? Relative to the prior turn, where did the current speaker start to speak? Did they wait for a possible completion, or start prior to a possible completion point of the other speaker? Did a gap emerge?

Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about the control over the topic and topic change, social identity differentiation.

5 Consider how the Question-Answer (Q-A) activities provide for a certain understanding of the relationship.

Who makes the questions and gives the answers in a certain sequence? Consider the function of a certain question: Is it used to introduce a new subject? Is it used to develop on certain aspects of a current one? Is it a tool to close the current subject and move away from it? In the sequence chosen, we can characterise individual’s participation to task in terms of the question-answer activities that the speakers perform. When characterising the activities performed in the sequence, one will end up with a characterisation of the speakers.
Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about social identity differentiation, right to knowledge, subject’s participation to task, control over the topics and topic change.

6 Consider how new topics are introduced or current ones terminated.
Who introduced the new topic or terminated the previous one? Was it at the end of a series, in a moment in which the discussion was open to different options, or during the discussion? When characterising the activities performed by the interactants it will be possible to underline the constitution of peculiar differences in their participation to the discussion.

Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about the knowledge and right to knowledge, obviously also about the topic and topic change and subject’s participation to task.

7 Consider the ways in which actions are accomplished and the social identities, roles and/or relationships they implicate.
What rights, obligations, and expectations between the parties may be gleaned from the discourse? Are the ways that the interactant talked and acted common across a wide range of relationships, roles, statuses, or do they implicate particular relationships, roles, and statuses? Do the ways the interactant refer to the subjects (people, objects, places, activities etc) implicate particular identities and relationship with those subjects? Do the ways they package their actions implicate particular identities and relationship with those subjects? Do the ways the interactants take their turns (or decline to) implicate particular identities, roles and relationships?

Asymmetries: This tool can be used to elicit information about the Social Identity and Face Threat, Know-how about the specific form of interaction and Lexical choices.

4.8 Considerations on the selection of the photographs for the interviews.
I have already discussed in the previous paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 how the specific comparative aim of the research imposed certain limits on the kinds of images that could be utilised for the case study. As suggested in other parts of the discussion, there are at least two basic kinds of images that could be used in a photo-elicited interview. These two main groups can be divided in a) photographs that have been selected or taken by the interviewee, and b) photographs that have been taken or selected by the interviewer.
These two kinds of photographs, or better their processes of selection, offer from an epistemological point of view two very diverse, possibly competing, accounts of what those images communicatively represent. One representing a process of interpretation and selection informed by the interviewees’ motivation and interpretations of what could be shown as representative of his or her own histories, opinions, experiences, interpretations etc (within the context of a specific interview theme). The other constituting the ‘opposite’ (or complementary) interpretation of what an interviewer may think that those histories, experiences and interpretations might be and what images could, representing them, give him/her access to those histories, experiences, and interpretations. Two main considerations informed my decision to rely on images that I had taken and selected. The consideration that the great majority of the researches conducted using photo-elicitation relies on pictures selected or taken by the researcher (Harper 2000, 1987, Gold 1991). The common practice then justifies my intention to move my interpretative attempt in this direction; and the acknowledgement of the fact that, as I described earlier, this process of selection of the images better adapts to the process of selection of the questions and themes characteristic of the comparative sample.

I shall here briefly describe also how I finally selected the actual images used for the interviews. Two main kinds of images were used. Some are pictures that I have taken for the precise tasks of the interview. Others are pictures that have been selected from different sources to represent the issues and themes of the research. The pictures have been selected to represent, at least broadly, three main images practices or common uses, synthetically they can be defined as, media produced images, family photographs, artistic. This group was chosen for two main purposes, one, I wanted to offer images that ‘belonged’ to discourses that could describe general food practices from different cultural perspectives, the other was again methodological. I was interested to observe how the different degrees of abstraction of the photographs would have affected the interpretations of the interviewees. Different photographs were grouped together according to my interpretation of a theme. And the images were presented in their original (and common for their context of use) appearance, which means that photographs containing captions, or texts, were preserved both if applied to the photographs (as in the case of the fashion magazines) or if part of the subjects’ actual appearance (as in the case of the name of the brands on certain food products, restaurants’ names, etc).
SECTION II: Research Application


Now that the nature of the study and its exact methodological aims have been defined, I should describe the research topic that I have chosen for the applied case study. What will be the subject of the interviews? For the selection of the research topic I have initially set some simple guidelines that the topic had to comply with:

- Compatibility with the main research structure and aims.
- Sociological interest.
- Fairly easy access to interviewees’ sample.
- Fairly easy access to a set of representative images.

Five different areas/topics have been identified and evaluated. For each one of them a tentative line of investigation has been developed and assessed, and its pros and cons have been evaluated. Among the five, the topic finally selected has been the one that seemed to have most elements that could favour the constitution of a feasible research topic, within the boundaries of the comparative case study.

The empirical research finally selected has been designed to investigate the sociological significance of food practices as markers of social identity among the British students of South-East London. Although the nature of the research is instrumental and its development is ultimately aimed only at the creation of the two sets of interviews for the methodological comparison, the research has nevertheless been thought, developed and conducted as a self-standing research case. However given the instrumental function of the research case in the next paragraphs I will only —synthetically and analytically— describe the processes that started with the selection of a generic area of interest and ended with the definition of the research topic, the creation of a specific set of interview’s questions, and the selection of a certain number of relevant photographs.

4.10. Using theory to generate a research problem

There is a long tradition of anthropological and sociological work that has established that food marks cultural identities. Simple equations such as: ‘we eat meat and they don’t’, ‘we eat horses and they don’t’, ‘they eat insects and we don’t’ (Levi-Strauss
describe these differences among cultures, as well as underlying shared notions of edibility. In contemporary sociological work, this concept of food as a marker of cultural boundaries and social identities has come to include many classic sociological variables (Caplan 1997:9). In the existing literature the investigation of different patterns of food consumption has been developed to describe and include multifaceted cross cultural variables such as Gender, Social Class and Status, Ethnicity. Thus, we have now a fair amount of information available on food practices and Gender differentiation (Murcott 1982, 1983, 1995, Charles and Kerr 1988, Fiddes 1991). Class and Status, that has been one of the first variables to be investigated and is now one of the most developed in the literature (Veblen 1953, Bourdieu 1986, Mintz 1985, Warde 1997, Warde and Martens 2000). Ethnicity (McIntosh 1996, Alba 1990, Bell and Valentine 1997, Caplan 1997). It is through the selective reading of these authors that I have developed an interest into the process of identity definition and individuals’ food practices. And particularly inspired by the works of Caplan (Caplan 1997) and Warde and Martens (Warde and Martens 2000), I finally decided that my research application should focus on the investigation of food as a marker of social identity and gender differentiation.

This topic has been chosen because seemed to have various methodological and practical advantages. One primary methodological strength of the topic is that it deals with a mundane, substantially (but not completely) unproblematic definition of ‘social identity’ that is still able nonetheless to challenge and address main sociological categories, like gender. The specific focus on this interpretation of social identity seems to avoid the pitfalls of other more problematic areas of social identity definition-investigation, while still offering a decisive advantage for a research that directly looks at processes of identity constitution and definition in/through a discourse. The topic also has two add benefits; on one hand it focuses on subjects, food and associated practices, whose visual representation are not particularly problematic. And on the other hand, given the fact that food consumption is one among the literally universal human practices, it basically allows a very unproblematic selection and recruitment of the interviewees for the sample. The sample selected for the interviews then has been constituted by a group of students of the Goldsmiths College, in the South-East of London. For obvious reasons this selection of the sample had the advantage of providing an ample and easily recruitable local community that also shared (to a level) similar social status and conditions. I shall now describe the different phases through which the research case was approached and developed:
To approach the chosen area of investigation, food and identity, I followed a five-steps analysis of the subject that brought me to the final definition of a specific research topic and a set of questions/subjects to be utilised in the interviews. The five steps were:

- Focused literature review.
- Selection of an initial set of general themes and issues.
- Pilot interviews: Informal interviews, open discussions, with six students used to focus the general interpretations developed through the literature review on a more local and contextualised interpretation (within the community object of investigation) of the themes and issues. The pilots have been used also as a source for a livelier and less formal definition of the lexicon.
- Content analyses of the pilot interviews used to identify main themes and subjects.
- Final selection and definition of research main topic and themes and key guidelines questions.

4.11. **Focused literature review.**

The question of identity, gender and food is a multifaceted one. It includes practices of food selection and consumption, the preparation of meals, the individual and social significance of different food selections, etc. The first stage of my research has been that of gathering literature covering a broad range of themes developing within the subjects’ area. The aim of the literature review was to develop a sense of the relationships existing between food and identity in general, the symbolic and social uses/values of food, and the connected aspects which differentiate between genders’ practices. The literature focused on two main approaches or areas of investigation: the anthropological and the sociological. The classic anthropological literature on the subject offered insights on different hierarchical, gender differentiated, forms of food production, preparation and consumption, but also on the social and symbolic uses and values of food prevalently in non-industrialised countries. Among the others Mary Douglas’ work (1999, 1996) on the subjects has been very useful to ‘tune’ with ways in which the issues of identity and gender, focus of my research, were explored in different cultures and contexts. The sociological literature analysed focused mainly on the symbolic values of the practices of food ‘selection’ and ‘consumption’, and the variation of these practices according to different -mainly Western-European- social communities. In this case the studies conducted by Sen (1981) Bordieu (1981), Fiddes (1991) on the entitlement, or the possibility of gender-based differences in the entitlement to specific kinds of food or practices of food preparation, have been particularly informative and valuable for the
research. As well as the work of Constin (1997) that specifically deals with the concepts of perception of health and food and with the study of eating disorders and dieting as gender differentiated practices.


The literature review helped me to establish an initial agenda for the investigations. The general issues that I wanted to address were:

- Identity and food –Gender differentiation (?)
- Does food symbolically connote maleness and femaleness? (If yes, How? in what sense?)
- Do patterns of food selection, preparation, and consumption contribute to define different (social) practices for the two genders? (If yes, which ones?)

The specific issues associated with the peculiar lifestyle and social condition of my sample (BA-MA university students) were:

- (Gender and food) Symbolic values of food work.
  Self or shared responsibilities?
  Acquisition: who buys the food?
  Selection: Kinds of food. Is there any rationale in this selection? Economy, health, taste, family, social pressures etc.
  Preparation: who prepares the food? Different practices / responsibilities / places
- Preparation ‘patterns’: specific patterns linked to common/specific occasions, contexts?
- Consumption ‘patterns’ (different patterns according to gender?, contexts? etc?)
- Legitimacy
- Attitude to their bodies and food practices.

This set of indicative issues and themes has been used as a guideline to conduct a group of informal pilot interviews. Informal interviews are a simple and effective instrument that can be used by a researcher to contextualise general issues and ideas that have been developed through a literature review. They are a tool through which the general perception of the issues can be focused on a specific sample, and an instrument that can help a researcher to develop his/her own specific, contextual theories and hypotheses. For this reason I have chosen to conduct a series of pilot interviews to actively and
flexibly speculate on the general topics that I had identified, to get them adjusted, modified, if necessary expanded, and finally tuned in the context of my research purposes. The pilot interviews have been conducted with six students (three guys and three girls\textsuperscript{11}, aged 19 to 22) of the Goldsmiths College, University of London (consistently with the sample of interviewees that will be selected for the final interviews). Four students interviewed in a face-to-face format constituted the original sample. Two more students completed the pilot. The four initial interviews proved exhaustive in highlighting many aspects of the food practices and choices among students. However, I decided to conduct one final interview with two more students (the fifth interview was conducted in a different format with two respondents together) to expand on some specific topics that were identified in the first interviews, but I felt were not adequately developed and clear to me.

The interviews were conducted in this manner. I first introduced the broad aim of the interviews explaining that they were intended as an informal discussion to elicit ideas about the subject: identity, food and gender, students’ food practices. I encouraged the respondents to say whatever they wanted, however irrelevant they thought it might be, and I explicitly told them they were free to ask me any questions about the research or any other subject if they wanted. Finally, I asked permission to tape-record. Once the conversation got started (all interviews with a general question about food and identity) I then continued the discussion with follow up questions balancing my initial agenda with the specific subjects that were developing in each interview\textsuperscript{12}.

The outcome of the pilots proved interesting. The interviews suggested issues that I did not think of before, confirmed some, and developed others in ways often unexpected. For example, one theme that I did not considered properly was that of ‘change’; a concept that could be traced and followed in several lines of the discussions; ‘change in the kinds of food eaten, in the economy, in the preparation of food or in the food practices in general. Almost all the students when initially asked about food and identity described the link food - identity as ‘what you are brought up with’ both referring to the specific family diet or more generally to the national cuisine. Four out of six students referred to their new acquired status of college students as an occasion of confrontation of ‘this

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Girls’ and ‘guys’ will be used as common terms to indicate ‘men’ and ‘women’, this is done to reflect common use made of the terms by the interviewees.

\textsuperscript{12} One note, although explicitly encouraged to do so, and also if the atmosphere of all the interviews (but the last) was very relaxed and ‘chatty’, only once in all the interviews a student has asked me one direct question.
identity’ with other national ‘identities/ cuisines/ cultures’. This confrontation was occasioned by their accommodation in halls, or shared flats, and the contact with students of different nationalities that this new lodgings and their new social status favoured13. Something worth noting in this context is that throughout the interviews the students displayed frequently a certain cautiousness in the interpretation of certain aspects of food consumption, often referring to the possibility of different habits and/or interpretations in different cultures. This element was quite strong, and the conversations seemed invariably to suggest that it might have been caused from the fact that I am clearly not British. They expressed their opinion, but often cautioned against alternative possibilities, but at times they explicitly referred to me as an ‘Italian’, thus possibly having because of my cultural background different views on the subjects. Although this was somehow expected, it was interesting to observe how this cultural ‘confrontation’ was entwined to many of the subjects in the discussion. Another, easily predictable, aspect of change that came out in the discussions was the one connected to the new ‘economy’ and the necessity of preparing and buying food by themselves. This subject could be easily simplified in three main themes: ‘Economy’, less careful vs. more careful use of the budget. ‘Preparation’: (generally the mother, six out of six) vs. self-catering or professional catering (canteen, student’s union, frozen food, pre-cooked, snacks). ‘Time-schedule, selection’, meals usually decided by the parent(s) at scheduled times (usually dependent from the father time-schedule, 4 out of six) vs. independent, variable. These changes were also described in terms of new adjustments; some were now eating some meals with their flatmates/friends at home (two girls, one guy) somehow reproducing a form of family structure, some shared parts of the food budget (1 girl), others were eating together but cooking separately and not sharing the food/budget (two guys). Girls seemed to enjoy more to eat and prepare food together then guys. When the discussion moved to gender differences and food choices, most of the stereotypes came out. The generally expressed feeling of the interviewees was, predictably, that a conscious diet has often a direct link with the consciousness of one’s look, and that although guys do think about their weight/health and appearance, for girls it is ‘more of a point’. This, if with a bit of generalisation, was taken as one of the main reasons that created a difference in the food choices between girls and guys. For example the students were saying: One guy, ‘girls are more fussy about food’, one girl, ‘girls always care about what they eat, also if they pretend not so’. Another girl, girls usually

13 This aspect was particularly interesting in terms of status change and adaptation to new forms of social interaction.
choose ‘something they are not going to regret later’ guys choose ‘what tastes the best’. Guys choose ‘meat, kebab, chips’, girls usually ‘vegetables, salad, yoghurt’ (I could not believe my ears!). The three girls, none of them vegetarian at the moment, said that there are ‘definitely’ more vegetarian girls then guys. Two guys, didn’t know, but thought that was possible that there were more vegetarian girls. And continuing: Girls care more about their health, but often ‘mask behind their concern for health the concern with their appearances’. Something interesting, all the three girls (!) when talking about food choices and the reasons laying behind these choices said that girls are always careful about what they eat because of their appearances. Then at different stages of the discussion (two of them) justified that although they were careful too in their food choices it was really for their own health and not for any concern about their looks (‘I never put weight anyway’ or ‘I know I am not fat’ – repeated twice,- or ‘I have never been fat’, were comments that came out at this stage of the discussion. Among the guys instead, two gave no explicit self-evaluation of their weight or appearance at any time. The other (vegetarian) mentioned his concern for his ‘health’, but also that he would not like to be ‘fat’). When asked why they think overweight people are so, the students answered: genes (3 girls, 1 guy), too much food (6), become obsessive about food (1 girl), unhappy (1 girl), wrong food (2 girls, 2 guys). When asked why normal/slim people are so the answers were: constitution (3 guys, 1 girl), careful about the food they eat (2 girls, 2 guys), physical activity (2 guys, 1 girl), and healthy diet (1 guy, 2 girls). When asked if being overweight or normal/slim was differently judged ‘socially’ according to gender, the answers were strongly positive. Being overweight is perceived to be not as much of a problem for guys as it is for girls. For one girl to put weight ‘is always a problem for a girl, …a guy if (he) puts weight is not too bad, …it is like…muscles’. When asked if ‘they’ had a personal judgement of overweight people the answers varied: two girls did not care, they don’t judge people ‘in this way’ (but would not like to be ‘fat’). One girl explicitly says that she does care about people looks either male or female, and explains that overweight people ‘should take more care of their health’. Two guys say that also if they suppose they should not, they care about the physical appearance especially of girls, it is not that they ‘have to be anorexic (!)’, but should show that ‘they take care of themselves’.

In different moments of the first four interviews there have been references to the social pressures for ‘thinness’, and the role played by the media in the perception of what a ‘healthy’ or ‘beautiful’ body is (although media were referenced to a degree much lower then expected). They also referred to the phenomena of eating disorders as a gender
differentiated problem. All the students agreed that it’s a ‘girls thing’, two guys explained that for a girl to be anorexic is not a problem, while it would be a problem for a guy (cautiousness by both). While the students seemed to agree that ‘anorexia is definitely a girl’s thing’, they were instead not sure what to think about ‘bulimia’. What was interesting in their accounts however was the perception of the social pressures for ‘thinness’ to be connected not only to the (stereotypical) influences of the media, but more influently to the local, day-to-day, pressures coming from the group of peers (friends and acquaintances of both sex).

More elements came out when talking about connected food practices and behaviours. When talking about the preparation of food, none of the students claimed to be able to cook, neither the girls nor the guys. The girls expected though that girls would be ‘generally’ more able to get a meal done than guys, and although it is was not always like that they would be at least the ones expected to be able to do so. Two of the guys said that they were not sure, but thought that there would be not much difference between the two. Other elements in the discussion suggested that guys tended to rely more on pre-cooked food and catering then girls that expressed instead their preference for light meals or snacks when out.

When talking about other eating behaviours in general, the shared feeling of the students was that girls had to be more ‘attentive’ in many food related practices. The array of examples used to describe this higher degree of ‘attentiveness’ required from girls, ranged in a wide variety of eating and drinking behaviours. ‘Guys get away with a lot more’ while girls ‘have to be more controlled’ was the synthesis of one girl. For example when talking about eating together with other people one girl said that she would not ‘eat too much when out on a date’, because she thought a girl is not expected to show that she eats ‘too much’. Or two girls who sometimes get drunk, thought that people judge ‘getting drunk’ differently if it is a guy to be drunk or a girl, (especially in public places like clubs or pubs). The other girl who does not usually get drunk, said that she would not like to be drunk in a social situation because of the judgment of the other people and because ‘a girl must be careful’. One guy, who also would not get drunk when in a social situation, gave though a completely different reason; he would not like to show that he is not able to hold alcohol (‘it is about showing how much you can drink without getting drunk’). The other two guys said that they usually get drunk and think that is ‘fun’, but they think that for a girl to get drunk is ‘different’, and ‘more dangerous’, ‘she is looking for troubles’, was the ‘moral (?)’ judgement. In conclusion what is interesting in this variety of exemplifications is that they are describing for the two sexes, two significantly
different kinds of food practices as well as diversified social pressures for, and social judgement of a variety of eating and drinking behaviours.

The purpose of this rather scattered description of the interviews was to give a broad idea of the kind of discussions and subjects that were developed and discussed in the discussions with the students. The interviews proved remarkably useful for me to develop a contextually informed perspective on the subjects, but also to constitute a specific set of themes that contextually elaborated the issues and themes initially suggested by the literature’s review.

4.13. **Content analyses of the pilot interviews used to identify the main themes and topics of the interviews.**

The main analytical task of the pilot interviews has been that of providing data for the creation of a list of the specific themes and subjects discussed by the students. This list was obtained through a basic analysis of the content of the interviews. The basic codification of the content of the interviews helped me to construct a list of all the categories and themes elaborated by the students, I tried to keep the definition of these categories and themes as close as possible to the definitions of the students\(^{14}\). The list I obtained, and the coding procedure used to develop it, however are in this case not particularly problematic given the fact that the purpose of these categories and themes was to provide a ‘glance’ on the subjects developed in the interviews, and to work as a tool for the identification and selection of a narrowed set of topics and themes to be investigated in the interviews. The main topics and sub-themes identified in the interviews are the following:

**Topics and Themes:**

9 Topics 32 Themes

1 PREPARATION

- 1 Buying
- 2 Serving
- 3 Washing/Cleaning
- 4 Cooking

\(^{14}\) It is for this reason that some definitions and themes are repeated in different sections according to specific point of view in which they were developed and discussed.
• 5 Eating

2 ECONOMY
• 6 Buying
• 7 Amount spent on food
• 8 Planning

3 EATING HABITS
• 9 Kinds of food eaten in a week
• 10 Kinds of food eaten in a day
• 11 Eating at Home
• 12 Eating in Restaurants /Catering / Various

4 DIET(ING)
• 13 Kinds of food
• 14 Health
• 15 Body
• 16 Cultural Capital (Family/ Ethnicity)
• 17 Personal choices, social identity

5 HEALTH
• 18 Body
• 19 Eating disorders
• 20 Diet

6 EATING DISORDERS
• 21 Anorexia Nervosa
• 22 Bulimia

7 CONSUMPTION
• 23 Quantity
• 24 Quantity/ contexts
• 25 Social pressures and food selection
• 26 Social pressures /Gender differences / others (?)
8 SOCIALITY
- 27 Home vs. Restaurant/Catering/Various
- 28 Gender Differentiation
- 29 Social pressures

9 ETHNICITY
- 30 Cultural capital
- 31 Family
- 32 Nationality

4.14. Selection and definition of the research main topics—themes and key interview’s questions.
This initial list of topics and themes has been then used to narrow down the research’s focus to three of the main topics-themes. This selection of topics was made necessary by the need to narrow down the aims and the complexity of the investigation to a feasible research’s aim. For this purpose some of the main representative topics were selected and others excluded, on the basis of their relevance for the general research’s aims, identity and gender, and according to an evaluation of the complexity of these themes to be photographically represented. The topics (three) finally selected for the research were in part hybridisations of the previously identified categories. Each topic has been divided into a number of themes, each corresponding to one question to be asked in the interview and one photograph or group of photographs, for a total of 10 questions and 10 photographs/groups of photographs. The research’s topic and the themes were finally so defined:

Topics and Themes:

FOOD CHOICES
- Kinds of food
- Social pressures (for certain kinds of food)
- Motivation(s)
- Individuals choices- Cultural Background

The research broad area of investigation is the process of consumption of food in general, the specific focus of the research is the investigation of food practices as markers of social identity, and the existing differentiation between genders in these practices. The research’s target group is constituted by the students of the Goldsmiths College, University of (South-east) London. The aim of the research is to explore how students perceive their identity to be constructed in relationship to food, both as individuals and gendered subjects. What are their motivations for choosing the food they eat? How do they perceive their identity to be created and/or linked to the food they eat? What are their food practices and eating habits and how do they perceive the relationship between their health-body and food? Specifically, when it comes to their gender, do they feel that the symbolic worlds of food are differently defined for and perceived by the two genders? What are these differences, if any? This general research aim and set of questions were actually transformed in a selected group of topics and themes, Food Choices, Health-Body-Dieting, Food Practices, and developed in a certain number of key questions. The introduction to the research’s aims and to the themes of the interview was common to all the interviewee in both samples. Also the questions, as several times specified, were the same in both samples of interviews. Associated to each question in the photo-elicited sample there were a set of photographs (show below). The only difference in the presentation of the research to the interviewees of the photo-elicited group was constituted by a brief explanation of the use that would be done of the photographs in the interview. They were then explained that they could use the photographs as they wished, or not at all if they did not want to.
4.14.2. Introduction to the interview’s themes and questions:

In the following paragraphs I will shortly describe the three main topics of the research. They are not intended as separate areas of investigation of course, but they have been instrumentally divided at this stage for a clear identification of the points of view from which food practices will be observed and the key guiding questions developed. In the last paragraph the general introduction and presentation of the themes that was given to each interviewees is presented with an excerpt taken from one of the interviews.

Food Choices: In the broadest sense this topic is oriented towards the investigation of the reasons/influences that guide one individual in his/her food choices. Moving from the kinds of food that are normally eaten by the subject, I want to question the reasons that guide these choices: a matter of taste, or motivated by reason of health, diet, social pressures, ethnicity, cultural background, personal choices, economy? Is there any difference between the selection of food of the two genders according to the interviewee?

QUESTIONS: (in no particular order)

- Do you think that girls and guys tend to prefer different kinds of food? PIC 1
  (and what about your personal choices, how do you choose the food you eat?)

- How much influence do you think that your cultural background has on your food choices? PIC 2

Health Body Dieting: I want to investigate the interviewees’ opinions and assumptions on the relationship existing between food, body, and health. In this context the focus will be the investigation of the interviewee’s opinion on dieting, and the reasons that he/she thinks can lead a girl/guy to follow a ‘diet’ (again, health, body (aesthetics). I will focus also on two, socially stigmatised, ‘Eating disorders’, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, to question how they are perceived by the interviewee and if they feel that the chances of being affected by one or the other is gender related?

QUESTIONS: (in no particular order)

- What kinds of relationships do you think exist between the food that you eat and your health and body? PIC 3
  (Do you think that girls and guys have the same ideas? (Or) perceive these relationships in the same way?)

- What are the motivations that you think can lead a girl or a guy to decide to follow a diet? PIC 4
(Do you think that these reasons might usually be different for a girl or for a guy?)

- What do you think causes eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia? PIC 5
- What role do you think the media play in your perception of food, body and health? PIC 6

**Food Practices:** The focus is initially the ‘labour division’ between genders in the process of preparation and consumption of food. The questions want then to focus the investigation on the social pressures, if any, exercised on the individuals in their food choices. There are kinds of food (or attitudes and eating behaviours) that are seen as more masculine or more feminine? The investigation specifically wants to elicit accounts of personal experiences in which the individuals feel/felt pressured to abide to certain ‘non-written social roles’ that sanction the choice and the ‘attitude’ towards certain kinds of food and their consumption. There are eating habits that are expected by one gender and not by the other? And eating behaviours that are differently reprehended or accepted?

**QUESTIONS:** (in no particular order)

- Do you think that there are different informal ‘social rules’ or ‘social expectations’ regulating the eating behaviours or table manners of a girl or a guy? PIC 7
- Do you think there are differences between genders in the practices of cooking, serving, and cleaning/washing up? PIC 8
- Do you think that there are different norms for girls and guys when drinking alcohol in general and in public places in particular? PIC 9
- Do you think that these differences (whatever the differences identified by the interviewee), if any are typical across all cultures or are they only related to your own culture? PIC 10

**Introduction to the interviews.**

This an excerpt from one of the interviews of the classic semi-structured interview sample where I introduce the themes of the interview, and I explain its basic organisation.

**Excerpt 1, Classic semi-structured sample, Subject 2**
So I’ll tell you a little bit more about the interview how the interview is structured and I will tell you a little bit more about the content of the interview and the aim of the research. This interview is part of a study that explores perceptions of food identity and gender through two kinds of interviews. Some use images, others like this one, a normal verbal interview. I am studying how the two methods and perceptions differ from each other. But that said, This interview wants to be very informal, there is no specific structure, so if you want to ask any questions, or if there is anything you want to say about the research itself or the themes of the research it would just help, so, you are not just welcome but it would be actually very useful to me ok... now a little bit more about the research. Well...a brief introduction to what the aims of the research are, what I’m interested in and what I would like you to discuss.... What I am looking at is the process of consumption of food in general and the ways in which food can be seen as a marker of social identity, so I am looking at all the ways in which you select, prepare, consume food and the ways in which you suppose these practices might relate to your identity. What I am also specifically interested in is food as a marker of gender differences or how certain food practices can be associated to or differentiate between genders. To try to give a minimal structure to the interview I have identified three areas that I would like to explore, they are meant only as a guideline to get the discussion started really and you can change them at any time if you want to ok. so the first area I called ‘food choices’, and with this I refer to your personal choices and to your motivations when you chose the food that you eat, again I’m also interested to know if you think that these motivations might be different for a person of the opposite sex. The second area is what I called ‘health body and dieting’, and refers to the ways in which you perceive food to be related to your health and body, and dieting in the broad sense, you know taking care of what you eat. So what I would like to explore is how you think food relates to health and body and also if you think that there are differences between the two genders in the ways they perceive those relationships. The third area is what I broadly called ‘food practices’, food practices are what ever relates to, you know the actual cooking, serving, cleaning or any other activities that food consumption involves, and finally I I am also interested in how all these food related activities relate, if you think they do to the consumption of alcohol, you know drinking, drinking beer or spirits.

And this is the short description that I added to the presentation to the interviewees of the photo-elicited sample:
Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 3.

1 ER (...) so what I am going to do is along the discussion I am going to show you some photographs, I would like you to look at these photographs and then use them really as you want if you think they help well you can used them otherwise you can just … do what ever you like [ok] (...)
CHAPTER V
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

In the chapter I discuss the structure, aims, analytical methodologies and theoretical frameworks, theoretical issues, comparative analytic approaches, and limits of the study. The nature of the study, I explain, is that of a grounded theory (case) study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Any inference moves from an analytical investigation of the two forms of interviews to a general interpretation (and description) of their specific dynamics. The centrepiece of the analysis is the development of theory, generated in the context of the study, as a plausible set of relationships, concepts and hypotheses of the specific design of the photo-elicited interview sample against the classic verbal semi-structured comparative sample. For the analysis (and comparison) of the interviews I have decided to use some of the methodological tools developed by Conversation and Discourse Analysis (making full use of audio-recordings and transcriptions thereof). CA and DA have been chosen because they are thought to be functional in underlining the structural organisation of talk, its sequential organisation, and the social identity construction enacted through talk practices. In marking the patterns that talk exhibits or the differences existing between interviewer and interviewee participation in talk, CA and DA helped to underline variances in the two approaches.


Before I embark on the critical and analytical comparison of the interviews it is necessary for me to systematically detail the approach (or it would be better to say approaches) and methods that will be utilised for the actual analysis and interpretation of the interviews. In chapters III and IV I have given an account of some of the most relevant epistemological interpretations of the Sociological Interview and the knowledge that it produces. I positioned myself critically against some of the limiting quantitative stances, and I endorsed the arguments of more sensitive qualitative approaches that account for and include in their interpretations more subtle and comprehensive
evaluations of the interaction in which this specific form of knowledge is produced. Moving to the analytical investigation of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the peculiar social dynamics that govern this kind of social encounter, I then argued for a series of conversational and discursive approaches that account for these discourse dynamics. This analysis was meant to critically address the issues arising in Colliers’ interpretation of the use and value of photographs in a research interview, their specific social dynamics and the supposed outcome for the interaction. I therefore argued that the application of certain forms of discourse and conversation analytic perspectives would give theoretical substance to these critiques, and could constitute the sound basis for a more critical, analytical and theoretically grounded evaluation of the specific characteristics of this methodology. In the previous chapter I set the conditions for a comparison between two possible interviewing methods, the classic semi-structured interview and one specific design of the photo-elicited interview. The aim of the comparative approach is that of creating an empirical ground for the analysis in which new hypotheses and interpretations of the specific characteristics of the method could be developed, challenged and compared. It is now time to address the specifics of the analytical approaches that will be utilised to analyse and interpret the dynamics of the interviews and to compare their epistemological outcomes.

The range of procedures in text and discourse analysis is enormous both in terms of analytical goals and the means or processes that have been developed to pursue them. The selection of one or another theoretical approach and method is problematic, and should arise in any research from the careful evaluation of three equally influential elements: the researcher’s issues and agenda, the data, and an evaluation of the methodological approaches tradition whose declared general principles can sustain its use for these issues and specific agenda. The research issues and my agenda have been carefully laid down in the last chapter(s) of the study and are, by now, hopefully clear,. It is now time to detail the methodological approaches that will actually be used in the analysis of the interviews.

As briefly suggested in Chapter IV my approach to the analysis of the interviews is broadly informed from the Grounded Theory methodologies developed notably by Strauss (1987) and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Among the key hypotheses that delimit this approach is the concept of the analysis of text and discourse as an open task. The aim of the investigation is that of developing through the reciprocal interaction of data analysis and theoretical hypotheses ‘grounded’ theories that can account for the specific interactions at hand. This process of theory development is seen as open not only
within the research data and provisional hypothesis, but also in its own aims and subjects, in a process where new data could shed a different light on the theories developed so far or a new hypothesis might suggest the need for gathering different/new data. This epistemological approach shares with this study two key understandings. These are first, its openness towards the subject of analysis, and second, its methodological approach. It is clear by now that the comparison between the two kinds of interviews (semi-structured and photo-elicited) is one among the different possible ways in which the photo-elicited interview could be analysed. The aim of this pilot investigation, that of developing theoretical hypotheses that can constitute a sustained theoretical basis against which other methodological designs or approaches can be confronted and developed, is also clear. This openness, or explicit acknowledgement of the ongoing nature of this research (approach) proves to be consistent with the methodological inferential procedures developing within Grounded Theory. In this procedure the development of theory is seen as always raising new questions that can only be dealt with if new data are collected and/or earlier data are re-examined (Titscher et al 2000:77).

I should now spell out my interpretation of the Grounded Theory framework and the key analytical concepts that will inform my analysis. The methodological outline of Grounded Theory relies on two operational definitions (Strauss and Corbin 1990 vs. Glaser 1992) that although consistent in their core theoretical framework suggest two different analytical procedures (and understanding of the method). As summarised in Kelle (1994:333) there are a number of fundamental differences between the procedures developed and sustained by Strauss and Corbin and those of Glaser. These differences have a direct bearing on my analysis, and should be addressed and clarified within the aims of my specific analytical framework. Grounded Theory can be considered as a methodological modus operandi more than a specific textual and discourse analytic tool. In its different forms and interpretations this approach suggests a series of strategies that can be adopted to ‘code’ —break down, examine, compare conceptualise and categorise (Strauss & Corbin 1990:62)— texts and discourses, with the aim of developing a theory and hypothesis on the basis of the interactions at hand. While the conversational analytic tools used to achieve this may vary according to the specific subject of analysis and the interpretation of the researcher; Grounded Theory suggests a number of overarching strategies that help to provide sound, intelligible criteria to this process of theory development.
At the core of the Grounded Theory approach to the analysis of text and discourse is the definition of the so-called Concepts and Indicators (Strauss 1987:25):

- **Concepts** are the theoretical and analytical interpretations of the characteristic conversational features of a discourse. They describe and interpret these features and their relationships in order to account for the conversational value and reciprocal influence that they display in a discourse. Concepts are the product of a reflexive use of initial *sensitising concepts* (the provisional hypothesis and research questions through which the data are observed), which are developed, adjusted and matured in a process of continuous confrontation with the analysis of the data. The goal of Grounded Theory is that of hierarchically developing these concepts (through a process where theory, data collection and analysis stand in reciprocal relationship with each other (Strauss and Corbin 1990:23)) to account for the specific characteristics of a discourse.

- **Indicators** are modes of interaction, discourse strategies, lexical and linguistic forms, patterns, latent interpretative strategies, and conversational features that can be identified in the interaction/text/discourse and that constitute the actual instances of discourse on which the development of the Concepts is based.

Central to the Grounded Theory approach is the procedure of **Coding**, based on the definition of these Concepts and Indicators. Grounded Theory understands the process of ‘coding’ as a series of steps in the procedure of *text interpretation*. The coding stages are diversified to an increasing degree of complexity and theoretical representationality. These stages can be described as follows: The first step in the coding process is the ‘Open coding’, during which process comparisons must be made between the researcher’s contextual knowledge (Strauss 1987: 28 in Titscher 2000:79) (I would say these are *provisional theories / hypotheses*, but the importance of this postulation will be described later) and the data. The open coding starts with the analysis of *single passages of text and phrases* that seem to have some interesting interactional features. A single passage is selected, its peculiar features are questioned and described, the original data are re-observed and passages with similar properties are pointed out and grouped together. These textual examples (Indicators) will be grouped together to build on each provisional Concept. Each set -Concept and Indicators- so developed will then be **Categorised** and ordered into a (temporary) hierarchy. The question to ask is: which Concepts seem to have a more direct relevance for the analysis of the topic at hand?
During this delicate level of analysis Strauss recommends that the researcher in the open coding process should analyse the text *very carefully* in order to minimize the risk of overlooking important categories (Strauss 1987:30 and Titscher 2000), he however *avoids making any recommendations about possible procedures of analysis* (Titscher 2000:79, my emphasis). The second level of coding is what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call ‘Axial coding’. This process involves the extraction and comparison of the individual Indicators (texts) in an attempt to elaborate on the properties of the individual Categories, and the relations existing among them. Finally the last coding process is so-called ‘Selective Coding’. This term refers to the process of identifying the *Core Category* (or categories) and analytically linking it/them to the others. ‘In this way, step by step, a grounded theory will emerge’ (Titscher 2000:80).

It has to be noted in a final comment on this brief description of the Grounded Theory approach that this reading of Strauss and Corbin’s analytical approach explicitly dismisses a great aspect of their methodological ‘paradigms’ (Strauss 1987:32) in favour of a *modal* interpretation of their approach (referring to its distinctive mode of operation). This is done in a way faithful to their pivotal axiom that text analysis should not be approached using ready-made concepts, but rather that these should be developed ‘creatively’ and with a ‘theoretical sensibility’ for the material at hand (Strauss and Corbin 1990:75). They should also be developed with the awareness that although statistical analyses (See Coffey et al 1996, Lee & Fielding 1996, and Titscher et al 2000) ‘would suggest that Grounded Theory is the most prominent among the so-called ‘qualitative’ approaches to data analysis’ (Titscher 2000:74) the complex methodological *practicalities* described by Strauss and Corbin have raised not a few debates whose issues are not necessary for me to tackle. Grounded Theory then offers in my interpretation the platform on which specific analytical tools and methods will be framed, schematically organised and operationalised.

If my interpretation of Grounded Theory (methodological procedures) offers this overarching grand frame for the analysis, it leaves undeveloped the analytical ‘tools’ that should be used for the analysis of the interviews (*discourse*), however. The development of these tools requires: on the one hand engagement with a definition of discourse that may account for the *agenda* that I have set for this comparative study, and on the other hand identification of a series of theoretical resources (Strauss would say *Sensitising*...)

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1 For example, Strauss offers in his descriptions a series of theoretical concepts or ‘coding families’ that are meant to constitute a complementary device for the researcher in the coding processes, or specific coding paradigms that should help the researcher in the axial coding of the texts and more.
Concepts) and analytical devices that may help in ‘reading’ (coding) the texts in search of relevant Indicators and Concepts and Theories that might explain them. In Chapter IV a methodologically informed analysis of discourse in an interview setting has already been laid out and some pivotal concepts have been described (among others of key importance for my analysis is the definition of the asymmetries between the participants, for example). The analysis of the interview discourse relied on the analyses of the topic made by conversation analysts, linguists, ethnomethodologists, symbolic interactionists, feminist theorists and critical discourse analysts, among others, in an attempt to describe the specific dynamics developing within an interview. The analysis critically addressed the differences in social identity and (contextual) empowerment that this form of discourse favours. It is in this context and with this agenda in mind that I decided to observe how and in what sense the use of photographs may re-shape this interaction. It is with this aim that I turn my attention to some of these discursive analytical approaches that seem to be closer and more consistent with the specific agenda that is set by the peculiar form of interview topic of my study, and the methodological approach described above. In the discourse analytical perspective, the agenda of Critical Discourse Analysts seems the one closest to the subject of my analysis. Although all forms of conversation analysis in one way or another have challenged discourse in terms of the power relations that it may establish, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has distinguished itself by an explicit commitment to the investigation of the dynamics of power, the ‘hidden agenda’ of discourse, developing a specific interest in institutional rather than ordinary talk. This ‘political’ agenda has developed a series of strategies within this approach in the analysis of discourse –inter-disciplinary in method, but systematic in their focus of analysis—that could prove interesting for the topic at hand.

As explained by two of its most representative authors: ‘Critical discourse analysis sees discourse –language use in speech and writing- as a form of ‘social practice’’, where a particular discursive event has to be embedded within the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it, in a two-way relationship where one influences the others dynamically (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 55). For the analysis of discourse Fairclough has developed a method based on three levels of observation: description (textual level), interpretation (discursive practice) and explanation (socio-cultural practice). ‘Linguistic properties are described, the relationship, the productive and interpretative process of discursive practice and the text is interpreted, and the relationship between discursive and social practice is explained’ (Fairclough 1995:97 in Titscher 2000:153). These interpretative approaches can be accounted for also in terms
of the discourse traditions upon which they rely. Conversation analysis would look at the specific linguistic structures/functions that characterise the discursive event. Discourse analysis, which is interpretative and explanatory, would account for the interpretation of the contextual discourse dynamics, and the general discourse ‘genre’ in which the discourse can be framed. Critical Discourse Analysis using both approaches would look at the social conditions of the discursive event, displaying the working of power (the ideologies) that the discursive event implies. It should however be understood that this process is not seen as a sequence of separate operational steps but as a cycle in which the three analytical dimensions are systematically and recursively related to each other. It is this multi-dimensional, intertextual, approach to discourse analysis that proves fundamental for my research study. The specific use of the notion of intersexuality made by critical discourse analysts, Cameron explains, is borrowed from the study of literature (Kristeva 1986) and other forms of artistic production. Most works of art are not ‘original’ in the sense of being totally unlike and unrelated to any other works; rather they are full of allusions to and echoes of that which preceded them. These allusions create ‘intertextual’ (between texts) relationships: in alluding to other texts, an author can transfer something of those texts’ qualities and their cultural significance into his or her own text’ (Cameron 2001:130). It is this intertextual approach to text and discourse that means Critical Discourse Analysis is the only one among the discourse analysis perspectives to include visual images among the constitutive elements of ‘text’. In his definition of text Fairclough in fact emphasises the multi-semiotic character of text, and adds visual images (and sound) as other semiotic forms that may be simultaneously present in ‘texts’ (Fairclough 1995: 4, but also Kress & van Leeuwen 1990). Images, in his interpretations, which specifically refer to the media, are often (if not always) used politically as conversational tools that in conjunction with words can constitute and reinforce power and ideology. This interpretation is well established in visual and media analysis, but opens up an all-new range of hypotheses in discourse analysis.

Now before moving to the specific analytical methods and interpretative devices to be adopted in the investigation of text and discourse, there are two final points about this theoretical framework—Grounded Theory and CDA— that have to be spelled out. A careful reader cannot have missed the uncannily similar approaches that the two methodologies have. These similarities may be summarised by can be also considered a final declaration of intent for this research: Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded

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2 It must be noted here however that one of the critiques that has been addressed to CDA is that of not dealing profoundly with its materials (Schegloff 1998)
Theory want to create a methodologically intelligible approach to their interpretations and explanations. The way in which investigators have arrived at their results must be recognisable. In addition, these approaches appreciate that the validity of their results is not absolute and immutable but always open to new contexts and information that might cause the results to change. The interplay of open-endedness and intelligibility, and of the interpretative and explanatory nature of their analyses, are fundamental criteria for CDA (Titscher 2000:164) and Grounded Theory. As it is clear, like these approaches, this study treasures these principles.

The second issue that I should discuss is in reply to two again very similar critiques that have been addressed to CDA in general, and to Strauss and Corbin’s Grounded Theory approach specifically, and whose arguments have a direct bearing on the interpretations (of GT and CDA) and the methodological choices that I have made so far. I will use the clear synthesis made by Kelle (1994) of these two divergent arguments to address the issues: ‘While Strauss and Corbin insist on tackling an object of study with open questions, Glaser (1992) prefers that investigators approach their field without either research problems or questions’. ‘Glaser requires that an empirical field should be addressed with no prior contact with any scientific literature. All background knowledge is viewed as harmful’, with a clear understatement that such contacts or knowledge will bias the researcher’s analysis, ‘Strauss and Corbin on the other hand, permit –even recommend-- intensive study of the relevant literature before the empirical work begins’ (Kelle 1994:333). Of a similar type are the critiques faced by CDA. Its detractors accuse CDA of being biased in a dual sense, on the basis of its ideological commitment, and because of a ‘selective’ (informed by a prior judgment) collection of discourse material. Fairclough’s reply to these critiques draws attention to the open-endedness required in the principle of CDA, but he also points out that CDA, unlike most other approaches, is simply explicit about its own positions and commitments. Similarly in reply to Glaser’s critique and suggestions I would respond, in line with Fairclough’s contention, that it is fairly naïve to suggest that a researcher should (or ‘could’ for that matter) approach a research subject without prior knowledge. This is sometimes constitutively impossible because of the very nature of the research subject that might stem, as in my case, from a discourse developing in such literature, but also because as described in detail in Chapter IV, the agency of the researcher is not simply something that can be ‘bracketed’, but that can, and must, be made explicit and clearly available to critique.
5.2. Analytical Concepts and Methods

That said, I shall now engage in the discussion of some analytical and interpretative approaches to constitute the so often discussed provisional Sensitising Concepts for the initial stages of the analysis. These concepts consist of areas to think about and questions to ask when analysing text and discourse. Discourse analysts have developed a vast assortment of analytical devices to conduct their analyses, some rely on well-established analytic approaches and practices; many others are individually ‘crafted’ (Van Dijk 1997), designed for the specific needs and challenges of the research.

Among the several features that might characterise any conversation, there are some fundamental ones that can be expected to be relevant for any kind of analysis of discourse. We can in fact pragmatically expect that any analysis of discourse will have to offer some form of account of the Context in which a social action occurs, a definition of the Social Identities of the participants and a description of their peculiar Discourse Strategies. Although an analysis of these subjects can be taken almost for granted in any analysis of discourse, the way in which these subjects are approached and dealt with in the different discourse analytic perspectives varies a great deal. I will start, then, with my definition of these fundamental concepts, framed within the specific issues of my study, and the analytical tools for their analysis.

5.3. Strategies

I shall start with an example:

Ok so I’ll tell you a little bit more about the interview, the first thing that I would like to say is that the interview wants to be very informal, so you can tell me whatever you want, you can ask me questions, you can ask me questions about the research or whatever, actually if you have any comments it would really help [yahhh] so.... What the research is about, what I am interested in is [...] To make the interview a little bit more structured I kind of identified three areas of interest, they are just working tools really, they can be changed and adjusted however you want. These three areas...[...] What I am going to do now I have a group of photographs that I am going to show you, so you will look at the photographs and then you might use them if you want or not if you don’t think them to be useful ok? [yahhh] ... so talking about the food choices [...]
This opening excerpt is a passage of the typical opening description in which I broadly describe the interview to each of the interviewees; it is similarly phrased in all the interviews, with the exception of the description of the use of photographs, which is described only in the second set of interviews. This selected text can be analysed from several different perspectives; from the point of view of a simple content analysis it is a list of information used to orient the interviewee to the subject of the interview, and to explain that photographs will be used alongside the conversation. This could be interpreted as a fairly necessary passage in any kind of interview. Wodak (Wodak et al. 1998) and Heinemann & Viehweger’s (1991) definition of strategies will help me to look at this passage from a different point of view, and show its implicit (and not common) agenda.

A ‘strategy’, as the common ‘epistemological’ meaning of the word suggests, is a line of action carried out by a subject to achieve certain goals (which can be conscious or unconscious). It is based on an interpretation (which can be rational or not) of the situation at hand, and the reaction to this situation/interpretation is tied to the achievement of contextually defined goals (which might be consciously set or not). It is important to understand this interpretation of strategy(or strategies) within the context of discourse as an on-going plan of action that operates at different levels of the communication. ‘Strategies in a discourse mediate between the goals of different communicators and their realization’ (Heinemann & Viehweger 1991:215); which means that they might vary during discourse, and also that they can prove effective or not. Strategies in discourse can often be identified, interpreted and explained, and so can their effects on the interaction. For example going back to the preview excerpt and following

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3 It is important to clarify these concepts within the specific context to which they refer. It is common in the literature to caution against the interpretation of a strategy as an always conscious and voluntary discourse activity of the participants. Wodak et al. (1998) for example warns us not to define a strategy as something that is ultimately and rationally intelligible to the participants in terms of aims and patterns. Rather they suggest it can be interpreted also as a process that works in an unconscious, irrational or emotional way. Thus the interpretation of these strategies is something that can at times only be hypothesised by the researcher and depend on his/her subjective assessment of the respondent. The strategy of one of the participants in the interaction is in this specific case always available, and in fact the researcher can and must assess his/her own strategies within the interaction. In this case his or her inferences can be based on the reaction of the respondent to his/her conversation. Did the respondent agree or resist these strategies? Did a new line of action emerged for the interviewer on the basis of the interviewee’s responses? The interview is not, we have often cited, a usual form of interaction, and it commonly elicits a higher degree of attention to discourse, both from the point of view of the respondent and that of the interviewer. Clearer evidence of the participants’ strategies is then very common.
this interpretative line (and the three levels of analysis suggested by Fairclough) the
selected text can be de-structured and analysed to prove that the speaker (me) is adopting
a specific strategy.

At a Textual level what can be immediately singled out in the extract is the
openness and relaxed attitude in which the interviewer is trying to set the interaction.
This is pursued in the text through a repeated use of terms and phrases that seek to
clearly suggest this informality, ‘the interview wants to be very informal’, ‘tell me
whatever you want’, ‘ask me questions’, ‘the areas of interest …can be changed and
adjusted however you want’ etc. Also the style of the text, the specific way of wording,
keeps suggesting this openness: ‘you can ask me questions about the research or
whatever, actually if you have any comments it would really help’, or ‘to make the
interview a little bit more structured I kind of identified three areas of interest, they are
just working tools really’. And when talking about the photographs: ‘then you might use
them if you want or not’.

At the level of Discursive Practice two different discourses can be uncovered in
the extract. One quite obviously refers to a traditional ‘research interview’ discourse,
where the text clearly expounds two well-defined social identities, and against the
unconcealed effort of the speaker, suggests an initial institutional difference between the
two speakers. On the other hand, somehow working against this institutional form of
discourse, the text displays an unusual approach to the research interview, in which a
detailed description of the agenda (through the fairly extensive description of the areas
of interest –omitted in the excerpt) rather then a simple description of the subject(s) of
the interview, is given to the interviewee. Along with the clear indication and suggestion
of verbal practices (the possibility for the interviewee of asking questions or giving
comments both generally and specifically about the research) which are unusual in a
large part of this discourse genre.

At the Socio-Cultural level it might be explained that the text seems to belong to
a general movement of contemporary orders of discourse, which Fairclough calls
‘conversationalization of discourse’, or the tendency in all forms of institutional
discourse (including and foremost in the sociological research interviews we know) to
reduce the conversational asymmetries that take place in discourse between subjects with
different roles or statuses. This conversational strategy is well evident in the text extract
and its analysis could be expanded to other elements of the text, as I shall later show.
Crucial for the study is for example how photograph use is verbally dealt with by the
interviewer. However, what I care to stress at this stage is that to look at discourse in
terms of the developing strategies adopted by the speakers in the conversation will help us to reveal how the speakers position themselves in the conversation, what agenda(s) they try to develop, and what their reactions are to each other’s strategies throughout the conversation (For example, does the interviewer succeed in his effort to establish an open discourse? How is this strategy further sustained? How does the respondent interpret it?).

5.4. Context

It has become commonplace to emphasise that social action does not occur in a vacuum and that we thus need to consider the Context in which it occurs in order to analyse and understand it (Wood and Kroger 2000:127). This seemingly unproblematic and commonly agreed upon concept however proves to be more complex than expected when it comes to its operational definition. What is Context in an interaction? How do we account for it in our interpretations? Context is generally described as the kind of information that lies outside the text and that describes the circumstances, the settings, the physical context in which the discourse takes place, or the other features of the interaction which are not easily deducible from the text (age, gender, race for example are among the most common). This sort of information is sometimes referred to as extrinsic context (Schegloff 1992) in contrast to intrinsic context. By intrinsic context we refer to the conversation as the ‘space’ where context is ultimately constructed, both in the sense of being interactively shaped and negotiated by the participants, but also in the sense of being made of a chain of previous and following utterances (and meanings) in which each utterance has to be imbedded to be comprehended. This interpretation of course does not deny that the social context of interaction may have specific relevance for the participants, but acknowledges that ultimately it is the acknowledgment of this social context and its intra-textual negotiation (through and into discourse) that makes it operational. Although in the literature it is the former definition of context that raises the most active discussions, I retain that both deserve careful consideration.

For example starting from the latter definition of extrinsic context we might look in the previous extract at one specific sentence of the interviewer:

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4 The context both as space constituted by the conversation, and space within which the conversation develops and takes shape
‘I have a group of photographs that I am going to show you, so you will look at the photographs and then you might use them if you want or not if you don’t think them to be useful’.

We realise that the sentence constitutes a key conversational clue that creates a specific space for the use and interpretation of the photographs. This conversational clue can be treated as indispensable contextual information for the analysis and interpretation of the actual use made of the photographs by the interactants. It can be assumed to foreground the strategy that will be adopted by the interviewer in his/her use of the photographs, and can be assumed to exert a certain degree of influence on the interviewee’s own use of the photographs. It might in fact be reasonably hypothesised that a different text, such as, for example:

‘I have a group of photographs that I am going to show you, I would like you to look at them and comment on each one of them with any ideas or thoughts that the pictures might suggest to you’

would have given a completely different guidance to the interviewee, and very likely elicited a very different use/interpretation of the photographs (reasonably suggesting also a different use of the photographs by the interviewer). It is important to reaffirm that the definition of context (intrinsic or extrinsic) is always shifting. For example in regard to the use of the photographs (depending on what one defines as ‘text’, for example we remember Fairclough’s definition that also includes images and sounds) the interpretation could be shifted from the previous causal inference to an interpretation of the photograph(s) as the necessary contextual information on which the interpretation of an utterance meaning can be based (as we will see later in the analysis of the interviews this has often been the case. Phrases and comments could not be possibly interpreted without a reference to the photographs). Context is then considered a grounding process or activity whose evolution in the conversation has to be followed, and not as an element that can be taken for granted once defined.

This discussion of the so-called intrinsic context of the conversation was not meant to undermine the value given to certain “extrinsic” contextual features of the discourse. On the contrary my contention is that both notions are of fundamental importance. Although this is not the place to extensively engage in the debate over the definition of the so-called intrinsic context (extensive treatment are available in several
collections, e.g. Duranti & Goodwin 1992, Tracy 1998, Watson & Seiler 1992, in Wood & Kroger 2000). I should however describe what my position is in relation to some key ideas and authors that have discussed it, and clarify their specific significance for this analysis. As Schegloff points out, there is a tendency to treat context as understood, ‘it is not so much subject to analysis … as it is invoked’ (my emphasis, Schegloff 1992:193 in Wood & Kroger 2000:129). Categories like sex-gender, race, age, institutional social positions, institutional orders, such as legal or medical order, and settings, such as ecological and cultural settings (also in Schegloff 1992:195) are often cited as general contextual features identifiable for any discourse. Schegloff’s argument however is that the problem is not that it would be false, for example, to say that a person is a man, a professor, and a father. The problem is that all of these categorizations are true. How do we select the ones that are relevant among the many that could be true about a person, a situation or a setting? Schegloff (along with others) suggests that we should account only for the categories that can, in some way or another, be seen in the discourse (seen to be relevant to the participants in their discourse). This position is limited and problematic. I do agree in part with Wood & Kroger (2000:129) and Edwards (1997:95) when they say that this requirement to identify (ground and demonstrate) context features in the discourse has a practical virtue: it gives us a principled way to stop identifying more and more categories (in fact, Edwards admits, for any one instance of talk we could go on forever). At the same time I object that analysis should do more then identify what is ‘visible’ in the text, and it should also identify (coherently and plausibly) what does not appear, but is nonetheless implicated in some way in the discourse (see also Wetherell 1998 and Wood & Kroger 2000). With two examples taken from the analysis of the interviews I shall describe these two points more clearly.

In the interviews, both the classic semi-structured and the photo elicited ones, a relevant subject of discourse has been that of the different national identity of the participants. At times this notion of identity has elicited a direct comparison between my national identity, Italian, and the respondent’s national identity. This confrontation, rather then being problematic, has elicited interesting perspectives and interpretations from the respondents. If we look at the text however we would notice that in not one of the interviews where these discussions occurred is there a sentence were I communicate what my nationality is. It could be inferred that my accent could have given out the information, but more simply I could tell you that before the interview, in different circumstances, this information, my being Italian, was discussed with some of the interviewees. Such simple information has become a subject often referred to (explicitly
or latently) in the discussion in some of the interviews. This very simple example offers an almost classic case of contextual information that is discussed outside of the interview and that is later recalled into it, becoming relevant for the interview discourse (and its analysis).

The second example is more complex and refers to a kind of contextual information that in part is (re)produced within the discourse, and in part remains unavailable to text, but continues nevertheless to be fundamental for an accurate account and interpretation of the specific interview discourse. Interviews, as has been shown extensively, are a form of interaction ordered by specific discourse features. Among the features of pivotal importance is that the participants arrive at the conversation with a specific agenda: the researcher at very least always engages in the conversation with a specific agenda. This agenda can vary enormously; but however it is constituted it will always imply a form of discourse strategy: a ‘disciplined’ (aware) approach to the conversation performed by the researcher to sustain (and/or) develop (and/or) examine (and/or) challenge a certain number of subjects and hypotheses. This agenda constitutes, intuitively, one form of contextual information fundamental to coherent interpretation of the discourse, and to characterise at least the specific contributions of one of the participants (the interviewer). As explained earlier the respondent always presumes that a researcher has an agenda, and s/he will implicitly or explicitly react to what s/he infers (or knows) this agenda to be. This process will generate a negotiation, an interplay of identities, agendas, discourse strategies and inferences that will be (in part) reflected by and represented in discourse. The task of a discourse analyst is to critically account for those dynamics, and to describe how this process of negotiation has been specifically managed by the participants and what the outcomes of this form are for the interaction. Such a critical account is not only interested in what has been said, but in how it has been said, why it has been said, and with what effects. In this specific case, if it might be not possible to account for all these elements for the interviewee in any other way than through the investigation of what appears in the texts, it is however possible to account for what the agenda, the strategies, the lexical choices and the goals were for the

5 Together these activities will contribute to shape the interaction, and they will inform the ongoing contextual (local) interpretations on the basis of which the interaction will be developed and understood by the participants.

6 Common questions are: What have been the specific conversational features deployed by the participants? Can the discourse be framed within a broader discourse genre that relies on similar discourse features and do these features contribute to the definition of typical social identities?
interviewer. This information, as the detailed account of each choice made in my specific case study exemplifies, can be sustained and proved through the text but they reside in some forms of contextual information that are located outside the discourse\(^7\), and that help enormously to frame and interpret the interaction at hand.

We are by now well aware of the complex interplay that exists in this research between theory, method and design of the comparative case study. We are well aware that the interviews and the discursive strategies adopted to pursue them are deeply influenced by the limits imposed by the comparison. We also know that these limits have been transformed in the actual interviews by a “focused attitude” to the discourse in a conscious attempt to balance between the specific development of each interview and the needs of the comparative research. If an analysis of the individual interviews would certainly be able to describe what the interaction between the participants was like, and would certainly be able to tell us a great deal about the dynamics of the interaction, it would be not able to account and describe with the same accuracy the over-arching governing patterns of the interactions without the contextual information deriving for example from the description of the comparative discourse strategies that we have set for the interviewer, that so fundamentally influence his (my) performance.

As we know the comparison has set a very clear agenda for the researcher, and to be unable to critically account for the influence that this agenda has on those interactions would mean missing out on the key aspect of the interview that this feature so strongly focuses upon. What is relevant for the present discussion however is that none of this information was and are in any form present (or inferable for that matter) in the text alone (although it can be hypothesised that they become to a certain degree available through the comparison of the whole sample of interviews). Without the acknowledgment and account of this contextual information the interviews and their discourse structures could not be comprehended (interpreted) or described with equivalent accuracy.

Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the importance in certain discourses of what does not appear in the discourse also has evident implications for my fundamental subject matter. It has to be remarked in fact that an open and inclusive (based on relevance for the discourse) methodological definition of the contextual features of a discourse is a necessary condition for my analyses in which a non-verbal form of

\(^7\) Proof that the interaction developing within a discourse can be sometimes comprehended only when framed within the context of what does not appear in the discussion (on this subject see also Wood and Rennie 1994, Wood and Kroger 2000).
communication is being used and has to be accounted for in the investigation of the dynamics of the discourse.

In conclusion my interpretation of what constitutes context in an interaction is based on the relevance of the information available when interpreting the discourse. This might include any form of information which might be reasonably inferred from the text to be of interest to frame, even to only make more available to the reader, the contexts within which the interview took place. In the analysis, then, contextual information to be accounted for will also include the ethnographic knowledge that the researcher might have about the subject at hand, in an explicit acknowledgement of the position from which s/he is coming to the analysis of the text. The text on the other hand will create a hierarchy among the contextual features of discourse, which will move from those features that the discourse clearly proves are relevant to the participants, to those which are inferred to be relevant by the researcher and should be argued for.

5.5. Social Identity
Another topic that receives a great deal of attention in any analysis of discourse is that of the investigation of the Social Identities that are developed/displayed by the participants in and through discourse. The concept of identity definition or identity display in discourse is a multifaceted one and its analysis might well be counted as one of, if not the, pivotal aspect(s) of any analysis of discourse in interaction. I have discussed at length in Chapters III and IV how language can be seen as one of the most common instruments through which social distinction and identity definition are produced and reproduced. The analysis of discourse (language in use), then, is a resource for understanding how these identities are constructed, accomplished, and performed. To track this process of identity definition and negotiation means to move in a discourse from the observation of the lexical forms of the text, to the analysis of the relational functions that it displays. This process in many ways can be also counterintuitive: We have analysed that in institutional talks participants can display a specific orientation to the conversational exchange. For example in certain kinds of interactions, I argued, the asymmetrical distribution of questions and answers between the two participants is a clear indication of two very different social identities. If we aggregate the number of questions asked by professionals and by respondents in certain kinds of institutional settings, we find that professionals far more, and often respondents ask virtually no

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8 Photographs might be part of ‘a discourse’, but are de facto always external to ‘Discourse’
questions. This might misleadingly induce to think that in a conversation the simple count of the number of questions asked by the participants will give us an idea as to their social identities and the power relations that are established between them. Things are more subtle (and complex) than that. An approach focused solely on the lexical forms of the conversation could lead us to a very misleading assessment of these social identities. For example, a speaker who asks another speaker’s advice on some matter places himself or herself in a position of asymmetry in relation to the recipient. Asking for advice situates the recipient in a position of ‘holder of knowledge’; a position of authority rather then reliance. A conversation based on a series of questions and answers which displays questions with this conversational function would define at a relational level two social identities, Enquirer and Advisor, characterised by a relation of ‘power’ overtly in contrast with the one that might be inferred by a simple count of the distribution of the questions and answers in the discourse.

As Schegloff suggested, then, it is fundamental for analysts to take care to understand the basic conversational functions of utterance types before drawing conclusions about relations of authority and power in discourse (Schegloff 1991). In other words, it is not enough to simply codify individual utterances on the basis of an assumption about the (power) relations that that lexical form (question-answer, for example.) seems to establish. ‘We need to remain sensitive to the local interactional relevancies that the participants are demonstrably oriented to’ (Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998:165). This will also involve a careful analysis of the intrinsic and extrinsic contextual features on which the participants rely. In certain institutional talk the contextual definition of the social identities might be more restrictive than in others (a police interview, or a job interview for example). In these contexts we might reasonably expect the participants to deploy more defined conversational conventions; in others, like a sociological interview, these conventions might be more blunt and subject to a greater degree of negotiation. The interview’s interactional characteristics then will be shaped by what the participants take/display their role to be when interpreting and producing the discourse. If we look back at the previous extract of the interview from this perspective, we can see how the interviewer is trying in this initial passage to deal with this identity definition by counterbalancing his institutional role (the person doing the interview) with a different social position (the person asking for advice on the research issues and themes) in a process of empowerment of the respondent. How this negotiation will develop through the conversation will depend on the respondent’s interpretation of the discourse/context and his/her actual responses to it, and from the successive
interviewer’s responses. It is also this frame of analysis, the analysis of the interaction and negotiation of meanings and identities, that we should be able to investigate in terms of the role that photographs might play into this negotiation process, but I shall focus on this subject in greater detail in the next chapter.

In conclusion there is one final remark on this analysis of the social identities in the interview. When investigating a conversation with the aim of analysing the Social Identities of the participants the key questions to ask are: *Who is the holder of knowledge in the interaction? What are the implications of this knowledge holding for the conversation?*

### 5.6. Comparative analytic approach.

We have discussed and exemplified above some of the basic approaches to discourse that will be adopted for the analysis of the interviews. I should now further detail the analytical approaches that are used to sustain the comparison between the two sets of interviews. Discourse analysis is primarily an analysis carried out utilising qualitative inferential procedures; thus more than in the *frequency* of a conversational event (how many questions were asked for example) we are interested in how this event has been constructed and interpreted by the participants and how it could be connected to other events ultimately occurring in the conversation. In this theoretical framework there might seem then to be little space for approaches aimed at establishing any kind of statistical significance for those events. As Wood and Kroger put it, ‘Discourse analysts are concerned with what people are doing or not doing, how they are doing it, and how it is connected to other things they are doing, rather than with how often they are doing it, how much they are doing it, and so on’ (Wood & Kroger 2000:136-137). The use of *quantities* seems conceptually inappropriate to describe *qualities*, which refer to *meanings* that cannot be synthesised by a frequency, given that *meaning* shifts with the *context* and that context cannot be quantitatively represented (Schegloff 1993). These arguments however do not mean that discourse analysts do not, or might not use quantifications; but they suggest that when used *quantification* will play an entirely different role in the analysis of discourse.

The fundamental issue of the use of quantification in discourse analysis is that quantification according to a certain scientistic assumption is an activity (if not *the* activity) that produces ‘evidence’ and ‘meaning’. Frequencies and counts characterize the event, and their analysis establishes ‘hierarchies and influences’: the form and the strength of the relationships between certain features or variables. In most quantitative
analyses then the analysis of the frequencies represents the final stage of the investigation. In discourse analysis this is not the case. We are not interested in knowing that in a discourse ‘10’ questions were asked by ‘Mr A- the interviewer’, and ‘3’ by ‘Miss B- the respondent’ (clear proof, consistent with the discourse genre, that interviewers ask more questions than respondents!?), rather we are interested in knowing what roles those questions played in the discourse, how they were interpreted by the participants, what relationships they established between them, what kind of discourse genre they reproduced— of course—, but also with what peculiarities; all issues that without the contextualisation of the ‘questions’ cannot be resolved in favour of any plausible interpretation. That said it must be explained however that the observation of these conversational frequencies are not useless for a discourse analyst, on the contrary they might function as a valuable pre-analytic tool, an instrument that might help the researcher to select (rather than to interpret) relevant data. In Wood and Kroger’s words, ‘for example, a researcher may wish to quantify various features of discourse in order to select for analysis a particular feature that occurs frequently or rarely’ or which has a distribution that is unusual. ‘Quantification may also be helpful in the detection of patterns [...]' (Wood and Kroger 2000:139) that could have been otherwise more difficult to pinpoint. It could also be useful in the detection of ‘the co-occurrence of particular features of discourse (that) can suggest that there may be particular functions of those features’ (ibid.). This strategy then does not treat the quantitative assessment of these conversational features as complementary to analysis, nor as evidence for claims about these features, but simply as a preanalytic activity that might help the researcher to detect certain features/patterns of discourse and to select instances of the text that will be used for analysis. In this case the problem of the categorisation or coding of the text is unsubstantiated because no claims are made about those patterns. The patterns are merely a starting point for the selection of material for analysis. The analysis will have then to prove whether those features displayed any peculiar function. In this process then new categories and codes can be added at any time, and old ones can be changed, in a process whereby new hypotheses (either entirely new or based on the results of previous analyses) might suggest new (categories) and ways of coding the data.

What is fundamental to note about this procedure is that it does not only help to seek patterns in a discourse, but also, crucially for our study, makes it possible to compare those patterns in two (or more) similar interactions at a glance. In an inferential procedure very similar to the one previously described, if a pattern or specific feature of discourse has been identified and proved interesting in one interaction, its presence can
be cross-examined in other similar interactions. Similarities or differences can be noted (in the patterns’ frequencies for example, and/or in connection with other features) and instances of the texts can be selected for an in-depth analysis and comparison of the discursive features of the texts. An important strength of this procedure is that the analysis can be started at any point of the discourse or at any stage of the analysis in general, and in any interaction, to then be extended to the others in search of evidence of the consistency or inconsistency of the pattern across the interactions. This approach is also consistent and easy to integrate within a more conventional approach to the analysis of discourse that will traditionally move from the analysis of single instances of the discourse to the whole discourse’s/texts’ sample.

This methodological (theoretical) grand frame is crucial to understand and sustain the application of a certain form of content analysis that has been used to initiate the comparison of the two interview sets. The main challenge of any such approach to the analysis of text is constituted by the definition of the categories that will be used for the coding of the text. I will not expand on this subject at length in this context (see Schegloff 1993 and Wood & Kroger 2000 for a much more detailed discussion of these issues), but what I need to remark upon is that the strongest critiques, which I endorse, of any quantitative approach to the analysis of texts has always in the literature been based on a critique of the value of these categories. Such critiques point out that the fundamental issue is that quantification requires coding, and that coding cannot be done without being seen at best as imposing the analyst’s interpretation. However in the interpretation that I sustained of the coding system for the analysis/comparison, it is reasonable to claim that those categories (or ‘sensitising concepts’ used in the ‘open coding’ stage of the analyses) are not contentious if they are seen, as I explained they must be, only as a path to the actual analysis, a working tool for the selection of discourse instances and the development of hypotheses that will be then assessed, sustained and opened to critique through the analysis of the text.

It is within this framework and with the awareness of the intermediary and instrumental (to the development of hypotheses) use of these categories that I am going to acknowledge only the investigative approaches that have been used to initiate the analysis and the comparison of the interviews. The initial use of certain categories, or forms of codification of the text, was only functional in the research for the initial approach to the texts and to their comparison. It is for this reason then that in the final report of the analyses (see Chapter VI) these intermediary analyses are not actually accounted for, but are only described in this methodological context. This decision has
been taken for theoretical and practical reasons. The first, theoretical, reason is that the analyses of the interviews, and any hypothesis developed about them, has been developed and sustained with close reference to the actual texts of the interviews. The analyses look at the texts of the samples and only on these texts base their interpretations. The analyses then offer an account and interpretation of the actual texts available at the moment of analysis and do not claim to be necessarily representative for other similar interactions that should be contextually evaluated and analysed. They instead want to offer a methodological approach that could be critically evaluated and applied to the analyses of other interactions. Consequently only in the conclusion (Chapter VII) are more general interpretative hypotheses developed. It is then my opinion that the description of these initial categories and analyses might give the false impression that the analyses and description of the interaction/discourse were based on an approach different from the conversational and discourse analytical approaches chosen and sustained for the investigation. The second reason, a practical one, is not only that the report of the intermediary processes is substantially useless for the reorganisation and description of the analysis, but also that it would significantly detract from the space that should be (and will be) given instead to the actual analyses conducted on the texts. It is for these reasons, and with the purpose of methodological clarity and accountability, but also to offer a description of a method that proved useful in the initial stages of the analyses, that I will briefly acknowledge the interpretative strategies that have been initially adopted and contextually to the aims of the research changed and developed.

5.7. Notes on the initial analytical approaches and the use of the N*VIVO software package.

The initial interpretative approach that I used to start the analysis, and later the comparisons, of the interviews was based on the observational categories developed by Banaka (1971) for his in-depth analysis of interview discourse. Although I am critical of some aspects of the theoretical framework within which these categories and their use are framed by the author, these categories were—selectively—chosen as a starting point because they offered an analytically elaborated, and methodologically well-structured, approach to the investigation of the dynamics and the discourse features of an interview. While Banaka’s methodological approach to the text was maintained, Banaka’s categories (see note⁹) were instead used only as initial guidelines to approach the text.

⁹ The basic categories developed by Banaka are based on the qualitative features and orientation of the questioning and answering procedures. Basically Banaka distinguished among the different informational
The specific aim of the research and the in-depth analysis of the interviews soon suggested new observational categories that were developed consistently with the aims of the research and these general categories were substituted as soon as an understanding and interpretation of the underlying dynamics of the interviews started to take shape.

For the analysis of the text the use of the N*VIVO software package was of great help and was utilised in the initial stages of the analysis when hypotheses had to be developed and discourse features identified and compared. N*VIVO is computer software for the qualitative analysis of texts and transcripts that allows one to code a text into as many categories as one wants. Data can then be searched by these categories or codes, and similar excerpts, frequencies, overlaps and connections can be discovered. The software makes possible simply what has been described earlier in the discussion, working with ideas and hypotheses and moving back and forth between the data and the developing hypotheses. The use of N*VIVO is described in Silverman 1993, Warde and

levels pursued through the questioning and the different informational levels of the answers offered by the respondent. Questions, Banaka describes, can aim at different levels of knowledge of the interviewee. So we can have: **Factual questions** that ask for factual information. **Opinion questions** that ask for the interviewee’s beliefs, attitudes, or values (all the questions of the interviews were of this kind). **Feeling questions** that ask for the inner emotional state of the interviewee. **Descriptive questions** that ask for a narrative account of an experience or situation. **Knowledge questions** that ask about the knowledge of the interviewee in a specific area/subject. **Probe questions** are questions that follow up a previous question with the aim of obtaining further information about the topic at hand. **Leading question** asks a question whose answer is already known or asks the question in a form that implies or suggests the interviewer’s opinion or answer. And **Clarification questions** that restate previous questions that the interviewee did not understand. Conversely we have also different kinds of responses that provide: **Facts** or specific bit of information. **Knowledge**, a statement of specialised knowledge or skill. **Opinions**; either a belief, value, or attitude focused on a certain subject. **Descriptions**, a narrative account of an experience or situation. **Feelings**, a description of the affective, inner state of the respondent. Banaka also offers a scale of these responses describing that facts, knowledge and opinions are usually easier to be obtained then descriptions and feelings. The juxtaposition of the informational levels of the questions and the answers offers an additional level of analyses that helps to investigate the interaction and the dynamics of the discourse at a different level that is not necessarily revealed by other, formal elements of the discourse. The approach developed by Banaka was initially used to observe the interactions, but was also soon abandoned given the fact that the observational perspectives offered by Banaka’s categories did not prove to address the epistemological levels of the interaction focus of the research (the epistemological asymmetries which are based on other elements of the discourse as we will see in the next chapter). Banaka’s approach however has been here described because it I my opinion that in a further development of the analyses the investigation of these discourse levels could offer new insights on the interaction and the function of the photographs. This is here left then as an open suggestion for the development of this and possibly other analyses of the methodology.
Martens 2000 and by several other qualitative researchers to whom I invite the reader to refer for an in-depth description of the software. What must be noted here is that the function of the software in this research was only that of an advanced word processing programme, used with the aim of facilitating the observation of patterns. According to the methodological guidelines described previously, the software was used to work on these patterns and to select instances of the text which will be analysed in depth in the next chapter.
In the previous chapter (Chapter 5) I have laid down the theoretical/methodological approaches that informed the observation and interpretation of the interviews. As explained in the chapter the actual analysis of the interviews developed in a process of constant interaction between the theoretical and the analytical work. This approach contributed to the development of a multifaceted theoretical, methodological and analytical interpretation of the interviews.

The function of this chapter is to systematise this analytical, theoretical and methodological work and report on the interpretations, findings and hypothesis that were developed there. The chapter is organised in two sections: one analytical, the other methodological/theoretical.

In section one, analytical, I describe the key interpretations and hypotheses that developed through the analyses and comparison of the photo-elicited and the classic semi-structured interviews. I start my analyses with a description of the general context in which the interviews were held. I then analytically approach the interviews, describing four types of discourse strategies that emerged in the sample in which the photographs are used. The description of these strategies is pursued, maintaining one characteristic discourse feature of the interviews (the distinctive Question-Answer turn pre-allocation, and its specific variation within each strategy) as the comparative-orienting point from which the analyses address and interpret the other significant discourse features.

In section two, methodological/theoretical, these findings are framed within a more general theoretical and methodological evaluation of the two interviews’ designs. In this section of the analysis I focus on relevant instances of both samples to exemplify and analyse the typical discourse dynamics that developed in the two sets of interviews. Finally, I compare these discourse dynamics and their specific discursive features.

6.1. Introduction: Overview of the key hypotheses.
In the previous chapter I have described that one of the consequences of genre mixing, when it occurs, is that within the discourse we will witness one or more forms of
negotiation. Negotiation between different rhetorics, between the social relations that the discourse generates and the discourse genres entail, and negotiations among lexicons, thematic subjects, discourse styles and discourse organisational structures. The outcome of these negotiations, as I described along with Fairclough (2003), will constitute within the discourse a hierarchy of genres. This, I explained, means that within the discourse we will observe the emergence of a ‘main genre’ and a series of what Fairclough calls ‘sub-genres’ that might differently contribute to and/or challenge the development of the main discourse genre. The analysis of the interviews that will follow will show through the in-depth analysis of the text the emergence of (four) different discourse strategies (sub-genre hierarchies) that establish different degrees and forms of interdiscursive hybridisation between the visual and verbal forms of signification, and their rhetorics.

In this specific form of (photo-elicited) discourse a basal hierarchy between the two genres is established by the particular communicative functions of the photographs which in a discourse necessarily rely on their verbal (re)articulation. In fact, as I explained referring to Bryson (Bryson 1984: 66), although others may also see what we see in the photographs, the (interpersonal) communicative definition of what is seen can be reached only through language. So in this particular form of (discourse) genre mixing, when I talk of genre chains and genre hierarchies I essentially refer to the communicative use of the photographs made by the interactants within the frame of the discourse, I refer to the hierarchy of content-themes, interpretations, and communicative organisational structures that the uses of the photographs create in the discourse.

The four discursive strategies I identified in my sample of interviews are here described following the different degrees of communicative status that the visual information acquired within the interviews. This is a communicative status that in the interviews of the sample moves from an equal use and value of the two forms of signification, to a complementary, subordinate and ultimately ancillary use of the photographs within discourse. The definition of these four typical strategies emerges from the analysis of the patterns of use-interpretation-reference to the photographs made by the interviewees, the scrutiny of their communicative functions within the discourse dynamics, and the investigation of their effects on the organisational structure of the interaction. Schematically these key strategies observed in the sample can be so summarised:

*Equal:* In the first type of response strategy the interviewee engages extensively with the interpretation and use of the photographs. Not only does the interviewee at times interpret the photographs as a form of completely formulated question (turn), but she
also interprets and communicatively uses the photographs within the discourse to challenge and renegotiate many of the conventional organisational structures of the interview discourse genre (notably, among others, the conventional Q-A turns pre-allocation).

Complementary: In this second kind of response strategy the interviewee also extensively engages with the photographs. The interviewee however in this case limits his/her engagement to the interpretation of the photographs’ subject-meanings within the frame of a more conventional organisational structure of the interview. Although questions and answers turn pre-allocation is maintained, other conventional discourse features of the interview are challenged: the interviewees for example use the photographs to re-formulate, or re-direct the topics of the discussion, or to challenge the interpretations suggested by the interviewer.

Subordinate: In the third kind of response strategy the interviewee responds only once the interviewer has both shown the photographs and elaborated the question (Photograph + Question = Answer). In this case, the interviewees’ response strategy displays different forms of negotiation and mediation between the visual and verbal information provided by the interviewer. This response strategy was the most common within the photo-elicited sample.

Ancillary: In the last type of response the interviewees’ strategy is similar to the one adopted in the previous case (P+Q=A). The interviewee waits for both the photographs to be shown and the question to be formulated before replying. However in this type of response the use of the visual information cannot be unambiguously ascertained or accounted for in the answer given by the interviewee.


Before engaging with the in-depth analysis of the interviews I should describe the general conditions in which the interviews were held, the process through which the interviewees were recruited, and the strategic, organisational features that characterised my line of questioning throughout the sample. The characteristics of the interview sample have been already described in detail in Chapter III. In this context I shall instead describe the common practices that have characterised the organisation of the interviews and the way in which they were held. Most of the interviewees (ten out of fourteen) have been directly contacted on the college premises. The remaining four were instead contacted directly or through the mediation of other interviewees who introduced me to
some of their friends, or through personal acquaintances. The relaxed and friendly environment of the university made the motivations of my query immediately available to the students. It is very common for the students of the college to be engaged in the course of their studies in research activities that involve interviewing or other forms of direct surveying. This common practice and the non-threatening atmosphere offered by the college facilitated enormously the recruitment of the interviewees, who most of the time were very willing to participate in the interviews. Once the students agreed to participate in the interview they were normally invited at a certain pre-agreed time to my college office where all the interviews were held. Very little information about the actual content of the interviews given or asked was at this initial stage. I usually explained to the interviewee that the interviews were part of my PhD research, that the interview would be completely informal and was expected to last no more then 30 minutes, and that the interview was broadly concerned with the study of food practices. This initial interaction with the interviewees was normally characterised by some forms of informal conversation. I often asked the interviewees about their nationality and the course that they were attending at the college, and I often answered to similar questions. This short exchange of information (about nationality, or course attended at the college), as I described in my previous discussion, became sometimes origin or subject of discussions in some of the interviews (Excerpt 2 is one that exemplifies such instances).

Once in my office, the students were greeted very informally, I usually offered them something to drink, water or tea, and I tried to ‘break the ice’ and make them feel comfortable with some very informal exchanges. The interviewees were then guided to their seat next to the table, on the close side of my seat. It is at this stage that I informed the interviewees that the interview would be absolutely confidential and used for the sole purposes of my PhD research. I also suggested that their names would be changed, and I then finally asked for their permission to record the interview. Once I had obtained their permission I turned on the recorder and positioned it on a corner of the table.

Although these elements will be re-examined in much greater detail in my following analyses, it is worthwhile, in this broadly descriptive context, to also account for the general strategic and organisational features that characterised my line of investigation. These discursive practices have been similarly adopted in both the semi-structured and the photo-elicited interviews and might be simply synthesised in few key points. In all the interviews I asked two kinds of questions. The first kind of questions were constituted by key research questions; this type of questioning closely reproduced in each interview all ten of the specific research questions designed to guide and sustain
the interviews. No specific order was intentionally imposed on their sequence, in an attempt to develop a line of reasoning that could be based on the specific response of each interviewee. However, some patterns emerged throughout the full sample of the interviews. The second type of questions were a kind of alternate ‘follow up’ question. Their phrasing was contingently formulated on the basis of the answers given by each interviewee, but they tended nonetheless to establish two recognisable patterns of investigation. If the interviewee described, in his/her previous answer to the theme/key question, elements that accounted for his/her own choices or motives about the subject of the question, I would normally follow up by asking if s/he thought that whatever s/he described could be applied to/for both genders. Conversely if the answer addressed the issue of gender or differences among genders I would normally follow up by asking a question to clarify his/her personal choices or motives. If the answer of the interviewee addressed both issues, no follow up questions would be asked. These kinds of strategic contributions to the interaction have been consistently, but flexibly, adopted in each interview. There were however in some of the interviews other kinds of discursive exchanges. These exchanges constitute a crucial theme of the analyses, and to their interpretation much greater detail and attention will be paid. In general terms however I can say that with this kind of exchange I refer to the ones that were elicited by the interviewee through any form of direct or indirect probing (questioning or any other form of utterance that would normally require a reply in a conversation). In this case the strategy was simple, I replied to any of such utterances as I would have normally done in any informal conversation.

One last element that I should account for regards the use of the photographs in the photo-elicited interview sample. In this case, as hypothesised before in my methodology chapter, the pictures were shown one at a time. The photographs were shown to the interviewee, but no direct reference to them was mentioned, abiding by the principle that the photographs should be called into the discourse only on the base of the interviewee’s response to them. If the interviewee did not mention or directly refer to the photographs I did not question him/her about his/her interpretation of the photographs. The normal procedure was for me to choose one of the photographs from the whole set of pictures that I kept in my hands, and to present it to the interviewee by placing it on the table. I would normally wait a couple of seconds, time enough for the interviewee to ‘see’ the picture, to visually get hold of the picture, and then follow up with my question. Once more, I will pay much greater attention to this aspect of the photo-elicited interviews in my analyses, but what I should note here is that it has not been uncommon
in the photo-elicited interviews for the interviewees to directly ‘respond’ to the presentation of some of the pictures. The very act of presenting the pictures was at times interpreted as a form of ‘questioning’ to which the interviewee directly ‘answered’. When this kind of event occurred my practice was to always let the interviewee ‘answer’, explain undisturbed his/her views and interpretations of the photographs, and then follow up on the basis of their answers. The interviewees’ answers have been mostly consistent with my hypothetical verbal question (and suggested meanings), in these cases (most of them) then I normally proceed with my typical follow up strategy (which at times included also reference to the pictures, if any was given by the interviewee). If the interviewee’s answer did not address the hypothetical question I associated with the picture, I would normally explain to the interviewee what my suggested meanings were and then state my communicative intention (my thematic question). In a process which is very similar to a classic verbal questioning, when the respondent misinterprets or does not understand the question, and the interviewer re-phrases it. The description and interpretation of this and other particular forms of interaction will be described in detail later in my analyses.

Once the interview was finished, I normally thanked the interviewee for his/her collaboration and I somehow disengaged from the interview form of interaction, both discursively and dynamically, by putting the photographs that were usually spread on the table back together, changing my position, etc. In these last stages of the interview I then asked ‘off the record’ what the interviewee’s impressions were, and how they actually used the pictures, if they found them useful and in what sense. Finally, I would thank the interviewee again for his/her time and collaboration and accompany him/her to the door of the office.

SECTION I: ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

6.2. Photo-elicited Interviews. Challenges to the conventional Question-Answer turns type pre-allocation.

In the third chapter of this research, I have portrayed the sociological interview in terms of the epistemological asymmetries discursively established in this form of interaction.

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1 This you might recall was already hypothesised in my methodological interpretation of the communicative value of the photographs in the context of an interview process.
between the interviewer and the interviewee. Using Atkinson and Drew (1979) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) I described the interview as a form of interaction characterised, among the other things, by a ‘turn taking system which departs substantially from the way in which turn taking is managed in conversation’ (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991:95). This according to Atkinson and Drew’s coined notion of ‘turn type pre-allocation’ was identified as a consequence of the fact that participants in an interview are normatively constrained in the types of turns they may take. The interview, as I described, commonly involves chains of Question-Answer sequences that are commonly unidirectionally developing from the interviewer to the interviewee. This form of turn type pre-allocation, I explained, is not only representative of the particular institutional roles of the interactants, but it also represents and discursively establishes an epistemological power hierarchy between them. This power hierarchy, I cautioned in my previous analyses, cannot be based on the simple count of the types of turns (Question-Answer) of the interactants, but has to be analytically accounted for through the contextual interpretation of the communicative value of the utterances (their being questions or answers) in the discourse. The analysis and comparison of the two sets of interviews, the classic semi-structured and the photo-elicited ones, revealed significant differences in the management of these types of utterances by the two participants. The variability, the form, and the communicative value of the different organisation of the question-answer turn types delineate degrees of variability between the two sets of interviews, and among the interviews within the photo-elicited interview sample. The photographs displayed, in the interviews where this pattern emerged more strongly, a fundamental discursive role in the re-organisation of the turn type allocation, which to different degrees among the sample significantly characterised and differentiated the style and mode of the whole interview interaction. As suggested, the degree of this re-organisation of the allocation and communicative value of the turn types significantly varied within the photo-elicited sample, while no comparable occurrences or variations could be found in the classic semi-structure interview sample. In this section of my analysis, I shall then describe in detail the typical forms, the patterns and the communicative value of the Question-Answer turn taking in the photo-elicited interviews sample, and when necessary compare them with the ones occurring in the classic semi-structured sample.

I should start with an example: consider these two forms of Question-Answer interaction selected from the two samples:
While talking about the media influences.

23 ER and what about you?

24 EE as . does the media affect me? [humm] in what I eat?

25 ER yeah, and also your perception of you know health, body..

26 EE hummm I’m sure it does subconsciously but I just can’t really think of how it does (…)

Excerpt 2. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 1.

While discussing cultural differences.

84 EE (...) people here in general if it’s not that perfect they can still eat it, come on you know I mean it’s ok, may be in this (indicating the picture) I mean the spices and the sauces like, I noticed that Asian food depends from sauces very much, in our culture is the spices for example and in Italy you say, what is it? The parmigian cheese?

85 ER Humm what?

86 EE The most important thing about the food, you don’t eat anything without cheese right, no?

87 ER Well also this thing that has to be warm, cold food just goes to the bin, well. (in a previous line she was describing that her father would refuse to eat the food if it was not hot, and she was explaining that this is a common characteristic for Palestinians)

88 EE So you are like us then?
There are some kinds of food that you’ll eat also if they are cold but not pasta for example

Hummm, It’s fine by me, I mean it’s really fine by me, I can still eat something if it’s not really warm. Is it because you are a man or because Italians…?

No I think it’s general, like pasta can’t be… it gets too .. soft

Ohh right right, for example we can’t eat food without salad, salad is a very important thing on the table, (…)

These are two significant examples of Question-Answer turn type shift that describe two completely different communicative functions displayed by the questions (or line of questioning). In Excerpt 1, we have a classic query for clarification. The interviewee has been asked a question whose meaning he finds unclear, and he consequently asks for clarification. The interviewer attempts a reformulation and the meaning of the question is finally negotiated between the interactants and then answered by the interviewee. In this example, although a degree of negotiation is recognisble in the excerpt, no real shift or negotiation between the institutional roles of the interactants can be identified (the meaning of the question ultimately relies in the interpretation of the interviewee).

Excerpt 2 presents a completely different scenario. The interviewee in this context is not asking for clarification about a previous question, she is instead developing her own line of inquiry for the interviewer through a series of different steps. The institutional positions are completely reversed: in the second line of the excerpt we can see that this time it is the interviewer who does not acknowledge or understand the question at first. He asks for clarification, which is given by the interviewee, reformulated in a different question. This line of inquiry is kept for a series of turns in which the role of the interviewer is now transformed into the role of the respondent. Although Excerpt 2 represents a particularly strong instance of identity negotiation and institutional role shift, the excerpt well represents the style and mood of the whole interview, in which different forms of negotiation of meanings and various forms of challenge to the institutional role of the interviewer have been enacted. It might be noticed also that in Excerpt 2 there is only an indirect reference to the photographs (line 84). This example then does not clearly represent the influence that the images have had in the development of this interaction, of which Excerpt 2 represents only the final and most demonstrative passage. Their role will be analysed in greater detail in a moment.
These two excerpts have been selected here for two fundamental reasons; the first is to give an idea of the degree of variation to which the Q-A turn types have been subjected in the interviews, and to suggest in part what their implications may have been for the interaction. The second reason is that these examples are also fundamental to describe the difference between the two sets of interviews in this specific observation of the Q-A turn type variation. It has to be remarked that within the first set of classic semi-structured interviews the first form/type of question (clarification questions) represent almost the entirety of the interviewees’ questioning stances\(^2\). The second set of photo-elicited interviews was characterised by a much greater variability, both in terms of the forms, and the communicative value of the Q-A turn types re-allocation. This variability ranged from a series of questions whose nature was similar to the clarification questions previously described (with the subject this time being constituted by the photographs) to a more complex organisation of one or more questions around one or more of the photographs. Typical for the first kind of questions are these two examples:

**Excerpt 3. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 5.**

![Image of food choices]

*While talking about food choices*

4 **EE** Where are these images from?

5 **ER** Hummm most of them have been taken in Sainsbury’s

6 **EE** Haa so you took digital photos [yeah] and then you arranged them and you printed them off, ok!

7 **ER** So… do you think that girls and guys tend to prefer different kinds of food?

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\(^2\) 20 questions out of 22 in seven interviews were questions used to clarify the previous interviewer’s question. In the sole interview with the subject 1 of the photo-elicited sample, 16 questions were asked (the highest number in the sample) representative of at least five different kinds of communicative interactions.
Excerpt 4. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 5.

*While talking about eating disorders*

21 **EE** (…) hum what’s going on here … I mean this relatively young women is, looks like if she is refusing her food which is not exactly very appealing neither (laugh) humm, what kind of connection do you feel there is here? I mean bulimia or anorexia?

22 **ER** Food refusal

23 **EE** Food refusal

24 **ER** In a metaphorical way

25 **EE** Hha that’s true, well I find it very scary I mean anorexia and bulimia obviously are topics for themselves but I know one person was having eating disorders and she is the ex girlfriend of the brother of .. my girlfriend (...)

These two examples are representative of similar forms of clarification questions that focus on two different aspects of the photographs, one its production and origin (*Excerpt 3*), the other its meaning and communicative function (*Excerpt 4*). Although none of the two examples are representative of any role shift between the interactants, this kind of interaction and negotiation of the photographic meanings and forms has a discursive style that proved effective in setting the mode for other forms of negotiation of meanings that occurred in the conversation. Another example from a different interview (Subject 1 of the photo-elicited interview sample) will help me to show how this informal negotiation of the photographs’ contents build up in the discourse, creating the opportunity for a negotiation and re-organisation of the photographs and questions.

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3 As described earlier for the verbal questions also in this interaction the beholder of the photograph’s meaning is still the interviewer. The interviewee does in fact ultimately refer to his interpretation of the photograph.
meanings, but also for the establishment of a different style of interaction, which will be maintained in the rest of the interview (as it has been indicated for Excerpt 2). In the following example another key element emerges in the very first line. In this case, as suggested elsewhere, the presentation of the photograph to the interviewee elicited a direct response (no question could be asked), and the following negotiation of its meaning. The value of this form of response to the photographs will be described in the next section of the analysis (paragraph 6.7). I shall now focus on the negotiation of the subjects and photographs’ meanings that originates from this response, and describe how this negotiation establishes a certain style of interaction within the interview. The excerpt is lengthy but worth quoting in full given the dynamics that it describes.

Excerpt 5. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 1

While talking about food choices.

2 EE (could not articulate the question, the interviewee responds promptly to the presentation of the photographs) I use this one, I drink Alpa Soya [ahhh ok] it’s my favourite and cereal, fat free but not ‘Weight Watchers’, I use don’t know… I think it’s ‘Be Good to Yourself’ may be, I don’t like meat at all I can’t buy this meat, I know that may, I mean guys in general they like meat very much [yeah], but I don’t like meat, I mean they say it’s all yammy yammy, I just go like heee, I just go away. I love cheese, but I always keep in mind how, I mean the percentage of the fat present in this cheese so, I just feel bad if I go there and haaa it’s very nice but then I just go away, I don’t want extra fat in my body…(laugh).. hummm what is that yoghurt?

3 ER yeah that’s organic.. it’s..

4 EE I know

5 ER It’s like high market quality and it’s in a glass instead of being you know in aaaa

6 EE But for me if the yoghurt is not in a plastic.. then I don’t feel, I don’t think it’s yoghurt, it’s like you know something for the pasta [aaaahh] you never, I never saw
yoghurt in a glass, like I have never seen that, I always see yoghurt in plastic stuff.. soo this is organic yoghurt … ohhhhk hummm what is that?

7 ER Aubergines

8 EE Is that aubergines? Hummm there is this very famous Palestinian dish which is called mtabel we do it with aubergines, this is my favourite with aubergines but I cannot eat aubergines like that…

9 ER Like?

10 EE There is something that we do with aubergines in Palestine, we do it, we call it mtabel ok? But for me aubergines is only in mtabel, we don’t eat aubergines if not in this specific version…[ahhh ok] …what is that?

11 ER Fish

12 EE It’s not really my.. actually I had a problem with fish and when I went to Scotland I find out like that I liked smoked fish and I wouldn’t know that in my life, I was talking to my dad today and I was like, he loves fish, it was like ohhh dad your dream came true I was able to eat fish and be happy at the same time, and he was like what? And well I had fish in Scotland and I thought that I really liked it, but yeah I want really buy it, if it served for me then I can eat it but I am not really enjoying cooking fish yeah .. humm this is? What is it? is it like ..?

13 ER It’s humm

14 EE A ready meal?

15 ER Yah it might well be, but I was focusing only on the label you know to say that yeah it is suitable for vegetarians [huu huu]

16 EE Tomatoes, that’s my favourite, I can’t eat anything without tomatoes, everything that I think I eat has tomatoes, but the problem that I have here is that I have to buy the tomatoes one by one while back home it would be boxes and boxes, this kind of …, because they expire [yahaa] (laugh) yahaa I mean that’s all about it, food, but it’s healthy in general, except for the fact that there is meat yahaa but it’s healthy [yeah]
17 ER What differences do you think there is between girls and guys in their food choices?

18 EE I mean I don’t think that a guy would choose this, because they don’t actually, I mean, the food that it’s fat free brand thing that is there on the yoghurt or whatever is there for girls, you know they would say I would love to purchase that, because I know that if I’ll buy it I won’t gain weight and at the same time I would eat something healthy, so I think that girls are more like they take care of these things and more than guys because you know they have a figure that they should take care of, but really guys they don’t, not all of them care because they go to gym and burn the extra calories (… continues in the footnote⁴)

This sequence (Excerpt 5) is worth quoting in full for several reasons. As suggested at the very beginning, the first is that the excerpt shows how the initial dialogue, and negotiation of the photographs content, builds up in the interaction, becoming more and more articulated. The prompt reply given to the photographs by the interviewee originates a series of negotiations about the subjects of the photograph, which are explored indexically by the interviewee. The interviewee during this process of ‘exploration’ and ‘recognition’ accounts with several personal views, ideas, and descriptions for the value that these different subjects (kinds of food) have for her. She very quickly builds up pieces of her social identity as: her cultural background, Palestinian; her taste, for ‘Alpa Soya’ milk; aubergines in a typical national recipe; her

⁴ Because what they burn is much higher then girls, so yeah this would be very like for a girl or for a woman really but men they would like humm may be they would like the taste if they tried but they wouldn’t purchase for the first time by their own [yeah] the same, I don’t know about the ‘Alpa’ Soya because the Alpa Soya is a high protein milk and it’s really really healthy apart from the fact that I use it because it’s low fat I buy it because it has more calcium in it and I thought for a while that I needed extra calcium humm meats, it’s …I don’t feel for me as a student, I mean either a female or male, I couldn’t be bother to deal with meat really, but back home I would eat meat because it’s already there for me, it’s cooked for me, but I don’t know how to deal with it, how to clean it how to cook so it’s either ready meat or minced meat … yeah cheese is my favourite it’s like I think it is nice for both males and females, the same goes for the fish, this one applies for so many people I mean the organic yoghurt may be some people like organic stuff because you know ‘I’m having organic stuff’ it’s not because you actually wanna have that … but yeah actually some of the products taste better and that’s why sometimes you purchase that but I wouldn’t purchase that I would purchase something organic like pasta, bla bla something that I eat so much humm in general humm let’s see you said female and male [yeah] what… you said something else identity right?
usual dislike for fish; her food practices; carefulness in the selection of healthy food; and personal relationships when she gives an account of a personal, familiar subject of discussion with her father. This process of recognition, negotiation, and personal interpretation of the photographs’ subjects in these passages of the interview are consistent with the account given by the Colliers (1986). The photographs are explored in their indexical value, and this exploration not only opens up the life worlds of the subject, but also creates the condition for the emergence of a narrative that is articulated by the interviewee and her interpretative intentions. It is only after a long sequence of turns that the interviewer’s suggested meaning is reached in line 17, where he finally sets his communicative interpretation of the photographs in the discourse. The answer that the interviewee gives to the interviewer’s question is very detailed and continues to alternate the observation and recognition of the photographs’ subjects with a personal account of their value within the context of the interview. Other interesting elements emerge in the excerpt. Between lines 12 to 16 for example, one picture is the subject matter of interpretation between the interactants. The interviewee reads the photographs as representing a ready meal box, the interviewer instead offers a different interpretation that focuses on the icon of the food which indicates that the food is ‘suitable for vegetarians’. In the following turn the interviewee challenges this interpretation by disregarding it, and in her subsequent turn she focuses on a different subject, shifting the topic offered by the interviewer (vegetarian food) with a different one (tomatoes). This articulation of topic definition and change, as we have seen in chapter III, is a relevant element for the investigation of the power relationships (and their negotiation) that are established within discourse. In this context for example they represent a challenge to the definition of the institutional roles developing in the interaction, being in their pattern characteristic of a more informal form of interaction.

Similarly in line 8 to 10 we witness another form of role shift. In line 8 the interviewee acknowledges, but not without some hesitation –‘humm is that aubergines?’- the interpretation of the subject depicted in the photograph, and then she offers an account on the typical use of that kind of vegetable in Palestinian cuisine. The interviewer in line 9 expresses his partial understanding of the previous account in the form of a question. In the successive line, with a practice that Fairclough recognises as typically characteristic of the interviewer\(^5\), she re-phrases her previous account (to offer a

\(^5\) In an interview it is commonly prerogative of the interviewer to re-phrase or synthesises a previous sentence or subject before moving to a re-questioning or exploration of the subject or movement to the next topic.
different interpretation of the subject that was not understood by the interviewer) before elaborating on the subject, and answering the request for clarification by the interviewer.

A different scenario is offered by the following excerpts in which the photographs still constitute the subject of a negotiation, but display a radically different function and communicative value.


While talking about the relationships existing between food and health.

7 ER and still talking about the perception of food and the motivations and these kinds of things...what kinds of relationship do you think exists between the food that you eat and your health and your body?

8 EE I think very important and not just from the things that I have read or whatever, but I generally, generally think you know the classic saying you are what you eat but it does have a big connection between how you feel. Maybe sometimes I don’t know if you drink a lot of water and you feel hydrated you feel fresh and if you eat like a lot of pasta or if you’re not doing a lot of exercise you sometimes feel like a little bit heavy, the carbohydrates this sort of things (pointing at the picture), and yeah towards your health obviously too much fat this sort of thing, and yeah so I think this is very important...but I may just ask ..do you want me to make comments on the pictures I’m looking at or they are just there to …

9 ER noo..I mean if you think that you recognise anything or there is anything that it’s interesting to you [yeah] yeah actually you are very welcome to [ok]

10 EE ok, ohhh yeah as I was saying, as well as saying that health and that is important humm this sort of pictures (pointing at the photographs) where it is important but these sort of things it is, it is marketed, and it is marketed a lot towards women isn’t it? [humm] like slimming things like Weight Watchers and all that sort of thing and from the sociological point of view I told you before about the ideal body and that sort of thing, (…)

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We have seen in the previous examples different kinds of problematisation of the photograph’s origin/selection, and meaning, the latter excerpt exemplifies instead a form of questioning that puts into question the _use_ of the pictures. The interviewee displayed in the turns antecedent to the excerpt a form of insecurity in his answers. The origin of this insecurity has been finally manifested at the end of line 8. Although at the beginning of the interview I described to the interviewee that:

**Excerpt 7. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 3.**

1 ER (…) so what I am going to do is along the discussion I am going to show you some photographs, I would like you to look at these photographs and then use them really as you want if you think they help well you can used them otherwise you can just …do what ever you like [ok] (…)

The interviewee (**Excerpt 6**) has been for the first 8 turns of the interaction insecure about the expected (or allowed) use of the photographs. Methodologically this implies that the use of the photographs in this interview initially produced an additional level of insecurity (the interviewee was trying to judge what the agenda of the interviewer was) in the interaction that required resolution by the interviewee at a certain point. Other times in the photo-elicited sample the photographs were interpreted by the interviewee as communicatively problematic (at different levels). Most of the time, with only a few exceptions of the previous type, these issues were resolved through other discursive features (see section 6.8). If these occurrences originated in some of the interviews they must however be correctly framed within the overall interview discourse in which they emerged. The photographs became subjects of explicit negotiation or problematisation specifically in those interviews (three in particular) in which the interviewees adopted them as key subjects of their discourses. In the case of this excerpt for example (which is taken from one of these three), the interviewee keenly relied on the pictures for his interpretations once the issue of the allowed or required use of them had been resolved. As a matter of fact this same interview constitutes the case with the greatest number of photographs directly interpreted by the interviewee (as I suggested earlier there were several cases in which the interviewee promptly responded to the presentation of the photographs, before any kind of question could be articulated by the interviewer). In light of the overall structure of the interview then, the initial uncertainty of the interviewee has to be read more as a consequence of the subject’s drive to use the photographs than as a struggle to interpret them.
In conclusion, how can the sample be characterised in terms of the distribution of the pre-allocated Question-Answer turns? In the above-described excerpts, I have attempted a systematisation of some of the significant types of variation that emerged within the photo-elicited sample. These variations acquire even greater methodological significance when compared to the uniformity displayed by the classic semi-structured interview sample in which no kind of significant variation to the conventional Q-A pre-allocated turns type was detected. It has to be remarked that the analyses developed so far do not sustain a conclusive interpretation of this conversational feature whose (epistemological) value can be established only when considered within a more complete investigation of the interactions (see the conclusive analyses in section 6.11). The analyses however already soundly illustrate the emergence of a range of interactional dynamics within the photo-elicited sample that do not find an equivalent counterpart in the classic semi-structured interviews sample. Some of these dynamics clearly prove interesting for my investigation and comparison of the interactional dynamics (and epistemological asymmetries) characteristic of the two research designs. Does this mean that this specific feature of the discourse strongly characterised the whole photo-elicited interviews' sample? Far from it. An overall analysis of the interview sample not only reveals that in some of the interviews none of these kinds of unusual discourse exchanges were present, but also reveals that in most interviews the questioning turns mostly remained in the hands, so to say, of the interviewer. The importance of such discourse features however resides in other interconnected elements of the discourse. It should be noted in fact that the analysis of the discourse revealed that the occurrence of these forms of turn’s types re-negotiations tended to correspond in the interviews with other methodologically significant discourse features. Among these, two are particularly relevant in this section of the analysis: one is the often cited occurrence of a prompt response to the presentation of the photographs; an occurrence that from a communicative perspective might constitute the photograph as a particular form of question. Moreover, these initial analyses have shown that these unusual (in comparison with the semi structured interviews sample) discourse formations regarded not only different dynamics of Q-A turns allocation, but also parallel forms of negotiation or challenge to the questions asked by the interviewer. In the next section, (6.7), I shall

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6 The clarification questions present in the sample do not constitute in my interpretation an exception to this pattern.

7 With one exception, the interview with the Subject 1 who asked as many questions as the interviewer!
analyse the first of these discourse occurrences, and then follow with the analysis of the other instances.

6.3. **Photographs as a form of questioning. A case of visual–verbal hybridisation.**

I should now briefly recall the hypotheses that have been advanced in chapter IV, in which I suggested the comparability within an interview context of the communicative function of a ‘question’ and a ‘photograph’. Questions in their most common understanding, I explained, can be seen as an instrument to focus someone else’s attention on a specific subject with the aim of obtaining information about that subject. This functional aim is achieved for a verbal question through its own phrasing. A question is a phrase that we recognise to be “a question”. “Photographs” are not “questions” *per se*. There is no recognisable structure that makes “a photograph” a request for information about the subjects of the photograph. However this otherwise uncertain communicative function can be hypothesised within an interview because of the specific nature of the interaction. In an interview, I explained, a respondent can infer that if a photograph is shown, it is shown to obtain some sort of information about it. In this context, and at this functional level, I hypothesised photographs might be thought of, and used by the researcher in an interview to perform the same function as a question, to ask information about a topic. There is however a difference between the two forms of questioning. A question not only addresses a subject (or subjects), but it also addresses the subject (or subjects) from a specific point of view, the one expressed in the question. This specific take on the subject is always implied in the phrasing of the question. Conversely, photographs might or might not clearly identify “the subject” (as opposed to “a subject”, as the range of possible interpretations of the depicted subject/s), and the context of the interaction might or might not sustain an educated guess as to what that subject might be (the subject according to the intention of the interviewer). This, I

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8 It might be clear or not to the questioned, and in this case renegotiated, but it is anyway implied in the question.

9 To make it clear, I am not saying here that verbal questioning is unambiguous and its meanings are fixed in the vacuum of a shared system of signification (*langue*). Verbal questioning, as any other feature of discourse, establishes its meaning within the context of the interaction as the photographs do. This means that both communicative forms can be subject to alternative (to the intended) interpretations, and consequently require negotiation. The hypothesis here is that verbal and visual systems of signification have two different degrees of communicative ambiguity, and base their communicative value on two separate forms of representation that account for their communicative diversity.
sustained in chapter II, is due to the polysemic value of the photographs, or the fact that along with the suggested meaning, a photograph may carry a rich array of information on the subject (or on different subjects altogether if more subjects are depicted in the photograph, or several photographs are used) that may establish within the same communicative context alternative paths (contents and meanings) for the interpretation of the observer. As we know, in my interviews the photographs were used simultaneously with the questions. Within this frame these questions could be interpreted as discursive features that limit (or delimit) the range of interpretations of the subjects depicted in the photographs. I however hypothesised a more open interpretation, that the analyses of the interviews shall confirm, in which the combination of photographs and questions was interpreted less as an unidirectional closure (the verbal delimiting the meaning of the visual) and more as a process that opens the possibility of negotiation between the two forms of signification, where one works and influences the other in ways to be established.

I shall in the first part of these analyses focus on the particular (contextual) communicative function explicated by the photographs. As suggested several times so far in the photo-elicited interviews, there have been more than a few instances of prompt responses to the presentation of photographs. This means that at times the photographs were shown to an interviewee who promptly started to interpret them before any form of question could be formulated. One instance of such occurrences has been already analysed with a different purpose in Excerpt 5, which presents a significant and articulated example of such an occurrence. These are some other excerpts taken from different interviews:

**Excerpt 8. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 3**

While talking about media influences.

13 ER can you… (I have just shown the picture –media influences- when he starts talking before I could ask any question)
that it is, says again like what I have just said, how it is more than ever that men’s health.. shows that in a (:::) like these are, ’cos this is the way has been for years now and the media targeting women they have started it for men as well with that one but that’s generally as widespread and these are really widespread and you can see, I think you can see in lots of women they try to aspire to these things, and they go into these diets that they are sort of commercialised. The media have a serious influence on the construction of certain ideal types, you know, the people you compare to and aspire to… And if before they were targeting mostly women now they are starting more and more to target men as well…

Excerpt 9. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 3

While talking about drinking behaviours.

ok and ..(I am showing the picture and without letting me complete the question he answers)

humm I’ll say generally even though the turns have been turn again recently, a lot more girls drink a lot more alcohol these days generally, like in you know, social circles, and boys drink a lot more alcohol, more quantity right, although do drink pints as seen here, a lot like the alcohol pops these drinks are certainly more associated with girls, whereas all these pictures remind me of like lots of blokes when they just sit and drink in the pub. It’s rather work girls would rather catch in a café or a restaurant have some wine with their meals or something, whereas boys would just drink all day standing at the bar. And I mean that’s got to do also with class as well, not just gender, again humm and this is like … usually I have been talking about a more Western yeah and probably more from a British perspective, but yeah I’d say boys drink more alcohol generally although it’s changing a bit …

These and the other similar episodes that occurred in the interviews can be analysed at different levels. From the point of view of the analysis of their basic communicative value these excerpts sustain and confirm the hypothesis previously formulated about the communicative function that might be explicated by photographs within the context of an interview. In all these excerpts (Excerpts 8, 9 and 5) the interviewees interpreted the
photographs as a complete communicative turn (of the interviewer) and they are replied to them as if the interviewer was formulating a question. These excerpts however, at a more in-depth analysis, also reveal significant differences, which contribute to varying interpretations of the roles of the interactants, the communicative functions of the photographs, and their contribution to the tone and style that characterised each interaction. The interpretation of these more contextual communicative functions of the photographs and the discourse sequences that they might have generated in the interaction have significant methodological and theoretical implications for our analysis (in this part of the analyses I shall focus on the interactional dynamics elicited by the different communicative uses of the photographs, these same instances will be furthermore addressed in their methodological implications in my analysis in section 6.11).

If we analyse the excerpts, carefully and within the context of the interaction where they take place, we can notice that several differences emerge among them. These differences describe four different levels of engagement of the interviewees with the photographs (with the fourth being the interactions in which no direct reference to the photographs is made by the interviewee).

CASE I. The equal communicative value of the photographs.

In Excerpt 5 (as quoted above) the interviewee engages promptly with the photographs from her very first turn. Following the general description of the research and the aims of the interview, the interviewer suggests to the interviewee that photographs will be used in the interview and that she might use them in ‘any way she wants’. The interviewer then presents the first picture, but before being able to follow it up with the opening question the interviewee immediately starts to discuss it. The patterns of interpretation of this first picture (described in my previous analysis of Excerpt 1), and the position of these interpretative patterns in the initial stages of the interview profoundly influenced the development of the whole interview. From the first stages of her reply, the interviewee constructs her answer in terms and contents which are directly relevant to the interviewee’s suggested meanings. She addresses concepts of gender difference, personal choices and motivations. What is more interesting however is that to achieve these descriptions she follows an unusually complex pattern of interaction, working her interpretations back and forth between the subjects of the photographs (which are interpreted at a very indexical level), the guiding lines established by the presentation of the research aims, and forms of probe questions addressed to the interviewer.
Several elements are of interest in the development of this process. The first is the way in which her accounts are structured. Her first turn is rather lengthy. She recognises and describes several subjects of the photographs and she gives brief (relevant) comments about them (displaying an understanding of the research frame and the links with the depicted subjects). She then opens an interpretative negotiation. The face value of her indirect questioning might be misleading at first but becomes clearer in the other sequences. Her questioning (which apparently focuses on the recognition of the photograph’s subjects) can be interpreted from a different point of view if analysed in its communicative function, which goes along with and beyond the reference to the declared content. Her questions can be interpreted not only as a process of negotiation of the contents of the photographs, but also as a formal action of passing the table (of the conversation) to the interviewer for feedback. With her questions the interviewee does not only ask for clarification about the depicted subjects, but she also gives to the interviewer the opportunity to comment on the adequacy of her previous accounts. This is confirmed in the lines 17 and 18 where the interviewer finally formulates a question and the interviewee responds with a much lengthier and more articulated (and confident) reply in which she re-organises and elaborates on the previous accounts (line 18). This pattern of ‘free’ interpretation of the photographs, request for feedback, and re-elaboration will be followed with increased confidence and flexibility throughout the whole interview. For example in another passage extracted from the same interview:

Excerpt 10. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 1

While talking about the relationship existing between food and health.

21 ER What about [yeah] yeah the relationship (interrupted while presenting the photograph)

22 EE Humm you are talking with someone who was trying to loose weight for a long time, hummm... I mean look it’s a woman (indicating one picture), it’s a woman (indicating another picture) (laugh) haaa this looks like a woman as well, I mean, I mean guys’ way of loosing weight from the people I know is more practising or
exercising more but not actually to look to eat food less or dieting, they don’t, I mean most of the people that I know, but for girls most of the girls that I know they are always on a diet and I am one of them, like I always try like if I feel like that I need to diet know I would diet for like … twice a month, so this would be, if I see this in a … hum is this a book?

23 ER Yeah

24 EE Yeah, I’ll buy that, like I saw this book the other day at Goldsmiths the ‘…’ and I was noo I won’t buy that, I’ll do my diet, huum….

25 ER What, what kinds of relationship do you think exists between food and health?

26 EE Health? [yeah]….mainly, you are not supposed to eat high fat food right, it’s not good for your health, but… like.. how do I say it, before I used to love food, I used to love food, I used to enjoy eating food and I was 80 kilos or so I used to love food and most of the food that I used to eat was really not healthy at all (…continued in the footnote\textsuperscript{10})

\textsuperscript{10} I used to eat fruits for example, vegetables, but not in the same way I used to eat rice and macaronis and bread (indicating the single items on the picture) so this was my favourite area (indicating the picture) with of course with proteins like cheese and eggs and stuff like that but this was this was like most of the times it was out of my programme and I think when you see that triangle and you should base your meal and what kind of food you should include and be balanced and stuff like that depends on your life style and I mean as a student I can’t have this balanced food especially when I am living by my own, I don’t have time to cook, I mean here fruit expires and sometimes I forget and I have to put them in the garbage and I regret that I did purchase them so it’s partly my fault also because I don’t remember, but in general to be healthy is to eat healthy and to be balanced, it doesn’t have to do with the fat, you can still be fat, but look some people they are fat but they eat healthy, it doesn’t have to do with it. Gender? I mean women only eat healthy meal because they think they are going to lose weight not the idea that they enjoy to eat healthy so you will find people that will diet for their looks but they don’t diet for their health, you know what I mean [yehhh yeahh] huum (reading from one of the pictures) fat and a scale bla bla bla … huumm what is it? Fat prejudice, female body image and eating, nutrition and weight loss, surgery … huum I mean most of the diet products are related to the fact that you eat healthy, but the fact to be healthy is not to take a pill diet or any kind of other diet products, the fact that you should eat healthy is like to have a balanced meal and lose weight but to be healthy, but I just feel sometimes like this one weight loss surgery why, why you know it’s titled fat and than it says what experts say, reading on the beauty and then it links weight loss surgery so it’s kind of I don’t know, but I just would look at this (food pyramid), I love the colours of the food just you know, food is nice
This excerpt (Excerpt 10) presents a similar case, where the photograph is interpreted, a question is asked, the interviewee replies and waits for the elaboration of the interviewer who asks her a question, and finally she replies with a lengthier answer in which she often refers to and elaborates on the photographs. This excerpt is significant not only to sustain the interpretation of this recurring pattern but crucial also to exemplify a different underlying discourse dynamic which will introduce us to another set of considerations. It should be noted that the interpretation of the photographs in turn 22 (direct response to the photographs’ subject/s) is this time not consistent with the suggested meaning (the meaning that was in the intention of the interviewer associated with that subject/s). The interviewee focuses on a very personal account of her long-standing problem with her weight and the diet practices in which she has been involved ‘for a long time’. This topic (and opportunity) is however not acknowledged by the interviewer who in line 25 imposes his own original interpretation of the photographs (and his own topic). The interviewee replies lengthily to these questions, but resists the suggested interpretation using the photographs to re-focus on her previous line of reasoning (or anyway on a negotiation between the two topics). The dynamics involved in this excerpt are interesting because they exemplify similar dynamics that occurred several times in other parts of the interaction (and similarly in other interviews). The interviewee (in the comparable instances) uses a similar strategy employing the pictures as discursive tools to re-negotiate or to completely shift the topic of the discussion (the one imposed by the verbal question of the interviewer), or to interrupt the interviewer’s questioning and continue with his/her elaboration, or even to ‘impose’ her own topics. For example:

Excerpt 11. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 1

While talking about anorexia

42 EE (…) humm but yeah girls can do that, they can be that extreme from the girls that I know not all of them of course but in general I don’t know too many people
whether they are girls or men that do that, I swear, only two or three people and they were girls …

43 ER Humm talking about..(trying to present another photograph. Interrupted)

44 EE And she is very sad right, is it burnt, the food is burned no?

45 ER I don’t know.

46 EE It looks like it’s burned ..humm you have to go to school you have to eat, I mean why. there is a spoon for an egg (laugh) it’s only a knife and a fork and there is no bread you can eat an egg plain without anything ..look it looks like it’s burned for me

47 ER yeah it looks burned

48 EE and it’s not really yummy yummy you know so I sort of think it’s a natural reaction all right ..

49 ER humm . true ..(present another photo... she removes it)

50 EE plus she is a kid and she is putting lipstick … what is that for? and an eye shadow as well she is no more then twelve right and from her hair she looks like she is a school .., she is just going to school ..hummm I don’t like this picture …. all right .. (she picks up the new photo) humm are you going to ask me to which restaurant I would go to? Humm hummm …. 

(Excerpt 11) By way of giving to the photographs equal communicative status (to the verbal) the interviewee manages to develop in this exchange her own line of reasoning. She resists (twice) the interviewer’s indications of wanting to open a new topic of discussion. She conversely puts forward her own topic, and she thrusts the interviewer into two response turns which address her topics. What is important to stress in this specific interaction, aside from the instrumental use of the photographs, is that this challenge (or negotiation of intents) is overtly elaborated through a series of exchanges with the interviewer. This is a pattern that, I have suggested, is common throughout the interview. In other occasions, and in different interviews, similar challenges to the interviewer’s verbally (or photographically!) suggested topics/meanings were raised but were, in these circumstances, resolved within the same turn by the interviewee. These
occurrences exemplify a different strategic use of the photographs employed by the interviewees to challenge the interviewer’s interpretations and offer alternative readings of the subjects\textsuperscript{11}.

\textbf{CASE II. The complementary communicative value of the photographs.}

I shall now move back to \textit{Excerpts 8 and 9}. As explained before, in these cases the photographs were also presented to the interviewee, who promptly replied to them, not allowing the interviewer to complete the question\textsuperscript{12}. In these cases however, the response to the photographs, and the general form of the interaction in which they were used, are very different from the previous example (Subject 1). For a series of turns the interviewer engages in what can be basically counted as a normal Q-A pre-allocated turn format. This format is somehow challenged, as we have see in the discussion of Excerpt 6, when the interviewer asks about the ‘allowed’ use of the photographs. Once the allowed use of the photographs is negotiated the interviewee changes his response strategy and starts to significantly rely on the photographs.

This variation of strategy is ambivalent; on one side the interviewee’s momentous shift brings him to heavily rely on the photographs’ communicative value. At four different times the interviewee promptly engages with the photographs that are presented to him before the interviewer could formulate any verbal question\textsuperscript{13}. These occurrences, it has to be acknowledged, constitute a significant form of variation/challenge from/to the previously established form of interaction. On the other side, however, aside from the newly-acquired communicative value of the photographs, the interviewee does not challenge the established form of the interaction (interviewer questioning - interviewee responding) as it occurred extensively in the previous example. The interviewee interpretatively substitutes the photographs with the questions at times, but he interprets rather “conventionally” the communicative turns that they establish. No clarification questions or direct questions (challenging the pre-allocated turn structure) are this time asked of the interviewer\textsuperscript{14}, but the photographs are interpreted, used and flexibly

\textsuperscript{11} I shall return on these in a moment in the analyses of Excerpts 14 and 15.

\textsuperscript{12} And also in these cases, at a basic level the interviewee’s prompt interpretation of the photographs justifies the comparison of the communicative function of the photographs with that of a question, as we have described earlier.

\textsuperscript{13} Four pictures out of eight -two represented in Excerpts. It is correct to say eight, since he started to use them only once he made sure how and in what sense he was ‘allowed’ to use them.

\textsuperscript{14} Neither re-formulation of the key questions were necessary given the fact that the interpretations of the four photographs were in all cases somehow consistent with their intended meaning (the meaning
referred to, to articulate the answers. In this case, the variability, within the established answer turn, of the communicative use of the photographs is particularly interesting for my analysis.

One hypothesis that might explain this use of the pictures, notwithstanding the clear interest displayed by the interviewer in the photographs, relies on the acknowledgment of the negotiation of identities and discourse roles that already took place in the interaction. As described before the use of the photographs shifted after that a certain number of exchanges had already taken place (a series of Question-Answer turns in which no reference to the photographs was made by the interviewee). This previous sequence of exchanges might be interpreted as having already given a certain shape to the interaction (establishing in part identities and discursive roles). It could be hypothesised then that the interviewee did not have the will to change this already ‘negotiated’ style of the interaction, and decided instead to rely only on the interpretative opportunities offered by the photographs’ subjects to articulate his responses. This interpretation also seems sustained also by the analyses of two other interviews for which a similar hypothesis could be made (Subject 5 and 7 on whose analyses I will turn in a moment).

In the previous excerpts we have analysed instances of the interviews in which the photographs were given the communicative status of a verbal question by the interviewee. This particular interpretation of the communicative function of the photographs, we have seen, originated two kinds of scenarios. In one the extensive and multifaceted interpretation and use of the photographs gave origin to a form of interaction within the interview that significantly challenged many of the pre-constituted discursive features characteristic of this specific form of discourse. Among the others, I specifically described the conventional Question-Answer pre-allocation characteristic of the interview. In the second scenario the photographs were again given the communicative status of a verbal question (photographs communicatively substituted the verbal questions). They were however interpreted and used in a more conventional discourse structure, which maintained the characteristic (Q-A) turns pre-allocation this time.. Photographs were interpreted and responded to directly, and used and referred to in different ways within the limits of the given turn (Answer).

hypothesised by the interviewer for the photographs). Consequently only the usual follow up procedure was followed elaborating on the interviewee’s interpretations.
I shall now analyse the third and most common strategy adopted by the interviewees, which shows the interviewee responding to the combination of the photographs with the question\textsuperscript{15} (Photograph + Question $\rightarrow$ Answer).

6.4. Communicative functions of the photograph (within the turn): The case of the negotiation of visual and verbal information.

CASE III. The subordinate communicative value of the photographs.

Before moving into the in-depth analysis of some exemplary excerpts which account for some of these typical forms of response, there is however a brief, but fundamental forward to these analyses. I described in my preliminary description of the interviews that at the end of each interview I asked the interviewees how they thought they used the photographs during the interview. Although differences emerged among the interviewees, it should be noted that as a whole they gave a very coherent description of the process, in which common elements were differently accounted for. I shall quote two of them to synthesise and elaborate on their arguments:

Excerpt 12. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 4\textsuperscript{16}

Pictures they kind of made easier to understand what kind of direction I was trying …and you were trying … to follow, so I would just look at the pictures and then I just could say something according to what you were saying and what the pictures are showing … I used them, I didn’t necessarily refer to them, but with the questions I would just look at the pictures and that would start what I had to say what ever it was, not all of them but some of them.

Excerpt 13. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 7

I think, I think visually so I liked to have pictures, I mean I am not sure whether I discussed always what’s in them but .. they make you think, they give you associations at least… so yeah… I found them very very useful to think, you know about the

\textsuperscript{15} Considering the photographs and the question as a single unit, in almost the 80% of the cases the interviewee waited for the complete combination of the two to be articulated before interpreting the photographs and/or answering. This does not account for the different uses of the photographs that was done once the question was formulated or for the sequence of exchanges that the ‘question + photographs’ might have originated.

\textsuperscript{16} Subject 4 was among the interviewees who made the smallest and most indirect use of the photographs in his answers.
different aspects yeah you know the research and the things that you said…and my views about them… yeah very very helpful

Several elements emerge from these excerpts, but in this context I shall particularly focus only on some of them. What these excerpts describe with their different emphasis on the verbal and the visual, is a process of meaning negotiation between the photographs and the verbal information provided by the interviewer. The photographs in combination with the verbal information (or vice-versa) elicit associations and ideas, the interviewees state. However, through their combination they also suggested preferred meanings, the meanings supposedly associated with the photographs (and the questions) by the interviewer. The subjective interpretation and negotiation of these two elements finally generates the interviewee’s response. This process of negotiation between the verbal information, the photographs’ subjects and the interviewee’s interpretation of them, is particularly evident in those interactions in which the merger of these two separate meanings (visual-verbal) becomes problematic for the interviewee. The analysis of this problematic process of negotiation in two different excerpts will not only show the workings of this negotiation of meanings within the turn/answer, but it will also help me to describe two different cases: one in which the photographs are used functionally by the interviewee to overcome this interpretative difficulty and to impose his own meaning and interpretation of the subject/s, and the other in which the inability to solve this interpretative difficulty results in a confused answer of the interviewee and in the rejection of the association (question-photographs). It should be noted that both cases occurred with two interviewees who clearly pay considerable attention to both types of information:

Excerpt 14. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 5

While talking about gendered food preferences.

17 The interviewees described also their variable interest for the different photographs. The common mood in their accounts is that although all of the photographs in different ways helped to elicit some ideas, some of them captured their attention and interest more then others (quite predictably). This element will be described more fully in the continuation of the analysis.
Positive negotiation of problematic meanings.

5 ER So… do you think that girls and guys tend to prefer different kinds of food?

6 EE (…) humm it’s funny I’m looking at this because it’s there to look out for me and trying to think of the question that you have put to me and I don’t really see a relationship. I wanted to start thinking about what I see here, but the question that you asked me I can’t really bring it to bear on this, because in an interesting way I think what you have provided is not gendered to me, but it’s classed to me. Apart from the fact may be that you know the kind of aesthetic language that I see here the ‘Weight Watchers’ fat free yoghurt, the visual language here the type face of ‘Weight Watchers’ having a thinner stroke the kind of free hand almost xx of writing fat free, the colours, this sort of gentle swing of heee of the lines that separates this vanilla colour from the fruit colour that to me is a kind of set of signifiers that I associate with a gendered visual language, and may be also in the case of the this Soya dairy free milk, that has a kind of visual signifiers to me, apart from that the rest looks like up market, not gender but class, very much sort of .. fresh cut meat for instance, with some parsley to decorate it that to me speaks much more of a kind of consumption not for men or women, but for people who want, expect you know a certain quality of food, a certain quality of life, there is that kind of dimension to it. The same with the cheese, I think particularly in Britain that is so classed you know when you look at the …hum the fridge in which you have the pre packaged cheddar, you know the economy brick of cheddar, proper brick of cheese it’s just like it’s almost the no frills back to basics brick of cheese whereas here you see the cheese is cut in different ways depending on the texture of the whether its soft or hard, so you know you have the triangles, squares and little bricks and slices and certain, I think again there is a certain class dimension here and to get back to your question about gender I feel that there are differences as I said, I don’t have anything substantial to base it on, this picture with the visual elements speak to me in a gendered way I think this is as close as I can come to answering to your question huum

Excerpt 15. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 3

While talking about diet.

Negative negotiation of problematic meanings
17 ER still talking about these differences in perception, what are the motivations that you think might lead a girl or a guy to go on a diet?

18 EE Huum with a girl, because of this ideal image. I was saying as it’s always portrayed in the media and the concept of dieting as you always hear it hummm For the same reasons really for a boy. As I was saying more than ever before hummmm beside generally, historically for women has always been to attract the opposite sex or historically perhaps men don’t haven’t felt the need to shape their body, to do that, whereas perhaps now they do a lot more, and that has to do with the consumer culture, which again relates back all to the different types of food you can get now [huum] but I don’t, I could see with all the other pictures perhaps what sort of reaction you were trying to get from me, but with these I don’t see, I don’t quite, I don’t see anything there really. I don’t have anything to say about these two.

These two excerpts (Excerpts 14 and 15) offer a great number of significant elements worth analysis in their own right (I shall refer to Excerpt 14 in two different sets of analyses). In this context however I shall limit my observation to those that are useful to describe the two different dynamics and forms of negotiation (between the visual and verbal information) that the interviewees enact, within one single turn/answer and from this move finally to an assessment of the typical form of response that they, in their apparent diversity, represent.

As suggested briefly at the beginning, the two excerpts although profoundly different in their development and resolution have at least three key elements in common. First, they both present the interviewees as agents in the interaction. In both interviews the interviewees could have chosen not to use the photographs and focus on the purely verbal questions\(^\text{18}\) that in these particular circumstance were both very lucid and comprehensible. Second both sequences present a case in which the visual information (although problematic) was communicatively privileged over the verbal information (with two very different strategies and outcomes). The third, and most significant in the frame of my actual presentation of patterns of response, is that both excerpts represent cases of the most common strategy adopted by the interviewees in their answers (Photograph + Question \(\rightarrow\) Answer), which I shall describe after an exploration/comparison of excerpts.

The first excerpt (Excerpt 14) shows the interviewee questioning the association hypothesised by the interviewer between the question and the photograph from very

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\(^{18}\) Both interviewees on a different occasion have chosen this second strategy.
early on in the discussion. He then suggests an alternative interpretation of the photograph’s meaning. Consequently the interviewee attempts what proves to be a very sophisticated interpretation of the photographs according to the suggested meaning (suggested by the question). This interpretation is finally developed through the re-interpretation of the photograph’s subjects as a sophisticated elaboration of his own initial argument and reading of the images. The dynamics of this response are remarkably interesting. They reveal openly in a text the different influences exercised by the two symbolic systems; and the negotiation of rhetoric and meanings that might originate in a discourse as a consequence of their juxtaposition. Conversely the dynamics of the second excerpt (Excerpt 15) illustrate a similar case in which this negotiation of different rhetorics and meanings has a completely opposite outcome. In the second excerpt the interviewee attempts an interpretative mediation between the two rhetoric systems, and tries to engage with both the question and the photographs. However the problematic interpretation of their conjunct representations/meanings is soon evident in his hesitant, almost confused initial response. It is finally explicitly expressed by the interviewee, who renounces any further interpretative attempts. In contrast the dynamics of this second excerpt reveal the kind of interpretative problems that might arise when photographs are used, and the two rhetorics are put together.

These two significantly different excerpts however have a third significant unifying element; the corresponding communicative juxtaposition of the photographs with the verbal question. This brings me back to my initial description of the typical forms of response that developed in the sample. These excerpts are representative of, among other things as I suggested at the very beginning of my investigation, the most common strategy adopted by the interviewees for their responses. This strategy was normally to wait for both the photographs and the questions to be presented by the interviewer before answering. The previous excerpts and analyses suggest that this strategy was informed by the preference of the interviewees to receive the interpretative frame that the question suggested before answering and engaging (or not) with the interpretation of the photographs. In all the instances in which the interviewees made use of the photographs in their answers the two rhetorical arguments (visual-verbal) were treated as an interconnected unit, their suggested subjects/meanings were confronted and negotiated and flexibly used/interpreted/referred to in their answers. The previous excerpts, which were instrumentally useful to make a point about the issues that the combination of the two rhetorics may raise, presented us also with two cases in which this process of negotiation was clearly evident. Most of the instances in which the
photographs were used, however, were not in fact, did not appear, and were not described by the interviewees, as problematic. On the contrary they basically presented a flexible, variable (from minimal to very extensively-detailed), combination of these two rhetorics as in the next two examples19 (Excerpts 16, 17):

**Excerpt 16. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 5**

*While talking about the relationship between health, food and body and the pressures of the media*

14 ER And what about the pressures of the media?

15 EE Yeah I mean .. enormous, enormous, enormous .. huumm yeah you see it’s interesting.. you see it’s interesting, I mean here …huuum the pressure of the media., the way that body and nutrition and a sort of a fit body is constructed in this sort of almost like mag, triggered the female market magazines that are possibly about television programmes, soap operas something like that it’s always about weight loss, weight loss, you know special diet, this kind of thing and weight loss, weight loss, whereas I think in the sort of more up-market female magazines, women’s magazines I think it’s more about a kind of wholesome identity more, ‘you are the modern women’ so you exercise, you eat right, you know, you are aware of certain social issues, but you are also interested in fashion; so it becomes a more sort of complete identity, to bring it back to the question of identity which you have raised not necessarily a traditional cultural identity in the sense of being British in a certain way of being, German in a different, forget all that being cosmopolitan in a certain way as a modern woman, it means of course you want your body in a certain fit shape, it’s not just about weight loss, purely now you know this is the way to lose weight, whatever that’s only one dimension to a completely complex way of being of the modern women, and so you can see that in the media discourses here I think depending on the publications, as for men, I think you know, let’s look at these pictures ok, so I mean ‘Men’s Health’ it’s a very interesting magazine because it basically says the same thing in every issue, it’s really

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19 The two examples represent two different interpretations of the same photographs which originated three different kinds of discourses -which I shall analyse later for a different purpose.
the same thing in every issue and you know six weeks to a perfect body, four week five
weeks to a perfect body whatever and that it’s obviously linked to you know a fulfilling
sex life, and also dreams or myths of a kind of masculinity which is realised on every
level you know, successful, affluent, confident, sexually fulfilled, physically fit and
impressively built and bla bla bla, and and of course ‘Men’s Health’ goes over the top a
little bit and kind of ironies these discourses I mean at the same time I mean, I can talk
only for myself hee, but I do find that these discourses have .. a certain influence on me
in a sense well yeah you know yeah can I really?, can I lose bits of body fat that I don’t
really want?, get rid of it in six weeks really?, let me take a look at how you did it again
you know, how they do it again, soo and also it sets normative criteria, it sets ideals,
this is ‘good’, this is ‘healthy’, this is fit, this is fulfilled, this is successful, this is
modern as opposed to ‘retarded and traditional’, this is hummm even international
cause it’s an international magazine, [humm huum] you know you can get it here, you
can get it in America, you can get it in Germany [yeah] and I’m sure you can get it in
other countries as opposed to ‘completely provincial’, so it does set premises. And this
one here is FHM, pictures of I think two band members, may be ‘Atomic Kitten’ or ‘S
Club Seven’ something like that, I mean FHM is in the business of completely
normalising the female desirable and… humm female body in a particularly
problematic ways of sexual availability somehow suggesting I mean why on earth do
these women have to sort of standing in the African desert or or grassy planes dressed
in sort of bikinis, posing in a sort of sultry sexy mode, I mean that’s bizarre really, so it
does construct desires and norms of physical appearance … … interesting about the
other magazines that I talked about first hueee the more quote quote housewife oriented
ones they don’t seem to do that, they don’t seem to represent the female body in this
way, and therefore weight loss is never visualised, whereas the modern woman is
represented, there are photo editorials where sort of models parade bikinis or other
forms of dress, we can see this is the kind of the desirable female shape, where the more
housewife quote quote oriented ones they sort of, they don’t do that, they just like here
it is weight loss in general if you need it …Hummhummm, great photographs by the
way

Many elements are of interest here (Excerpt 16), what I shall observe however in this
context is how the obviously very knowledgeable and well informed interpretation and
account of the photographs’ subjects is articulated (within one turn) by the interviewee,
consistent with the frame suggested by the interviewer’s question. Some elements
emerge: Both the general aspects about the gender differences, and the subjective
position of the interviewee are clearly accounted for in his descriptions. The photographs
elicited a great deal of information on a number of different subject and levels, and display the interviewee’s in-depth knowledge and interest for the subject. Although the dynamics within the answer are very complex, they are ‘packaged’ in a very conventional interpretation of the interactants turns (Q-A) which is maintained throughout the whole interview. In this case (Excerpt 16), and in Excerpt 14 (which is taken from this same interview), and in all his other responses, the interviewee extensively and critically engaged with the photographs’ subjects. He also always organised his interpretations and critiques within the conventional Q-A turns pre-allocation structure of the interview. The interviewee in almost all of the cases (with one exception, prompt interpretation) waited for the question of the interviewer before answering.

Excerpt 17. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 4

While talking about the relationship between health, food and body and the pressures of the media

11 ER hum …so you were saying about the influence of the media [yeah] or this kind of stuff, hummm so what influence do you think the media play in your perception of food health body?

12 EE hooo I think it plays like ..a big influence ‘cause they tell you what is, they ultimately tell you what is beautiful what is good looking and what is healthy, and to be healthy you need to have a kind of physique and you need to be like looking a certain way so I think it’s influential when girls that, it’s known that girls are inspired to look that certain way and even men buy these like men’s magazines now, men buy men’s magazines and they are inspired to look like the men on the front cover, so they, they are very influential, they kind of make people wanna be healthy when they see all these beautiful images of people on the front covers …

13 ER and what about you?

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20 The interviewee’s interpretations have been at times (twice) critical of the suggested interpretations of the interviewer (as we have seen in Excerpt 14 from the same interview) and in both cases were re-elaborated by the interviewee.
14 EE no not really, I if ..like looking at men’s magazines and seeing a men who has
 got a muscular body that’s all good for him but if I ain’t got the time nor the money to
 be spending hours and hours and cash in a gym, you know I can’t really do it, what I
can do is what I can do I ain’t really bothered for how I look for now, when I’ll get,
when I’m working then I can spend time in a gym if I want to, but other then that reason
I ain’t really bothered about how I look …

This excerpt (Excerpt 17) shows a much more moderated or indirect use of and
reference to the photographs which are used only indirectly to sustain the line of
reasoning adopted in the response. This excerpt is one among the few (three) in which
the interviewee made any direct reference to the photographs. The interviewee in this
interview always waited for the completion of the questions by the interviewer before
answering. The interviewee in this case used the photographs, or ‘some of them’, more
as ‘aide memoire’ and supplementary information to understand the interviewer’s
question and develop his position on the subject(s)\(^{21}\) rather than as actual subjects of his
interpretations (this interpretation is sustained by Excerpt 12 that is taken from this same
interview). Also in this case the interviewee adopted a very conventional interpretation
of the interactants pre-allocated turns Q-A, which are maintained through out the
interview.

The previous excerpts presented us with three different examples of
negotiation/use of the two rhetorics/subjects/meanings introduced through the question
and the photographs by the interviewer. The photographs in these excerpts were used to a
different degree, within different communicative structures, and to achieve different
communicative aims.

The first kind of examples (Excerpts 9, 14, 16) showed us an extensive use of the
photographs within the turn. The photographs helped to articulate a complex answer in
which many elements were knowledgably referred to in a formal style (form, lexicon,
subjects). The photographs were not however used to alter the established discursive
turns and patterns of interaction, in this way maintaining a clear distinction between the
institutional roles of the interactants. In the second case (Excerpts 5, 8, 10, 11) the
photographs were instead used extensively but more informally. The unusual
interpretation of their communicative functions (in the development of the question) was
used by the interviewee to alter these conventional discursive turns, and to create (and

\(^{21}\) As it has been described in the analyses of Excerpt 12 which is taken from this same interview.
build up in the interview) a very distinctive discursive style that in many ways challenged the conventional institutional roles of the interactants. The third and fourth kinds of response strategy require further investigation and are discussed in the next section (6.5).

6.5. Privileging the verbal: the cases of minimal or undetectable use of the photographs.

CASE IV. The ancillary communicative value of the photographs.

The third kind of response (Excerpt 17) shows the least influential use of the photographs in the discourse. The photographs were minimally or indirectly referred to, and the interaction developed mostly (almost completely) through the negotiation of verbal meanings. The Pattern of the interaction was in this case strongly influenced by the conventional turns pre-allocation and associated institutional roles. This excerpt also introduces us to another typical form of response present in the sample: In the previous analyses it has been hinted that the typical strategy of the interviewee to wait for both the photographs and the questions to be presented by the interviewer, which could be followed by two forms of responses in which the interviewee decided to engage, ‘or not’\textsuperscript{22}, with the interpretation of the photographs presented by the interviewer. In all the instances analysed so far the interviewees made a direct use of the photographs in their answer. I shall now account for the last typical form of response, in which the photographs were used minimally, indirectly, or not used at all. The boundaries that delimit these types of uses (or non-use) of the photographs are blurred and difficult to establish. This is specifically the case for the identification of the answers that apparently have no direct or only indirect reference to the photographs. To account for the minimal use of the photographs I relied on the threshold defined by the minimal unambiguous verbal reference to one of the photographs by the interviewee. The category of the indirect or non-existent use of the photographs remains difficult, if not at times impossible, to define. It is in fact very difficult to establish, in a text where no direct reference is made to the photographs, if the interviewee is not somehow referring to some of their subjects, given the fact that the question anyway addresses corresponding themes. It might however be the case that the clear categorisation of these (three

\textsuperscript{22} It should be remembered that in my initial description of the interview to the interviewees I specifically suggested that the photographs could be used or not according to their wishes. Also during the interview no attempt was made to force or suggest to the interviewee that they turn their attention to the photographs. The interviewee were left free to use them or not, and to use them as they wanted.
different) instances is ultimately not so important for our discussion. What is more important to reveal is that these kinds of responses (with a minimal/indirect or non-existent reference to the photographs) constituted around one third of the answers of the whole sample, and that they were mostly concentrated in two or three of the interviews. So while in none of the interviews of the sample was there a case of a complete non-use or reference to any of the photographs; it is fair to say that the (explicit) engagement of the interviewees with the photographs in two interviews was minimal or mostly indirect.

I shall now synthesise the four types of strategies that characterised the use of the photographs in the interviews. In this part of the analysis I have explained that the use of the photographs in the photo-elicited interviews sample originated several forms of discourse negotiation. These negotiations between the two different (verbal and visual) rhetorics took the form of different kinds of mediations between the thematic subjects and the communicative functions suggested/displayed by the two forms of signification. These negotiations originated variations in the discourse style and organisational structure of the interviews (notably we have seen for example in the Q-A turn pre-allocation). As I described in the analysis, the proceedings of these negotiations originated within the discourse characteristic discourse strategies (and forms of visual-verbal genre mixing) which established in the photo-elicited interviews’ sample different degrees and forms of interdiscursive hybridisation between the two systems of signification. These strategies, as I described, delineated in the discourse different hierarchies between the two rhetorics (the verbal and the visual). Four strategies emerged which described within the discourses a decreasing degree of communicative status of the visual information a communicative status which moved from an equal communicative value of the two forms of signification/information, to a complementary, subordinate and ultimately ancillary use of the photographs within the discourse.

My analysis of these four typical strategies relied on the investigation and interpretation of the patterns of use/interpretation/discussion of the photographs enacted by the interviewees, the communicative functions explicated by the photographs and the methodological implications of their different usage which I shall now schematically summarise:

*Equal* communicative status: In the first type of response investigated in the analysis the interviewee extensively and openly engages in the interpretation/use of the
photographs in the discourse. Not only does s/he address the photographs as complete questions/turns to which s/he replies as s/he would do with a question, but s/he also interprets and uses the photographs presented (by the interviewer) in the discourse with a communicative status equivalent to the interviewer’s utterances. This complex form of discursive engagement (subjects and meanings negotiation) has significant effects not only on the normal pre-allocation of the Question-Answer turns characteristic of the interview (in general we have seen that this is characteristic of an interview, but in this case also specifically characteristic of the comparative classic semi-structured interview sample in which none of these forms of interaction took place), but it does also significantly influence the dynamics and style characteristic of the whole interaction. Questions are posed to the interviewer, meanings and interpretations are directly challenged and negotiated, and institutional roles are reversed.

**Complementary** communicative status: In the second case the interviewee also engages directly with the photographs, giving them at times the communicative status of a question (complete turn). The interviewee however in this case limits his/her engagement to the interpretation of the photographs’ subjects-meanings (guided by contextual information – previous discussions, descriptions, interpretations, etc – and by the specific research agenda as described). The photographs are treated as questions, interpreted, and ‘answered’ to accordingly. This process of interpretation generates thematic variations within the answers, in which the photograph’s subjects and the general guiding research issues are with variable degrees (re)interpreted and referred to. Although the conventional Q-A pre-allocated turns are maintained, the interviewees use the photographs at times to re-formulate, challenge or re-direct the topics of the discussion.

**Subordinate** communicative status: In the third case the interviewee responds to the photographs only once the interviewer delimits or frames the subjects and meanings through the elaboration of a question. In this case the function of the photographs is negotiated and mediated between the two kinds of information given by the interviewer, visual and verbal. The communicative functions in which the photographs are used vary among cases and are complex and articulated with effects on the topic, topic shifts, challenges to suggested interpretations and subjects (both verbal and visual), and on the sequence developing following the initial Q-A turns. These forms of response to the combined effect of the photographs and the question, represent (numerically) the most common type of response within the sample.
Ancillary communicative status: In the last type of response the strategy of the interviewees, as we have seen, is similar to the previous type (the interviewee responds only once the interviewer has both, shown the photographs, and elaborated the question). However in this case the use of the visual information cannot be ascertained or accounted for in the text/discourse, which seems to rely entirely on the verbal interaction. The use of the photographs cannot be excluded (on the contrary, the interviewees’ descriptions –see Excerpts 12 13- clearly also illustrate in these cases a form of use of the photographs), but are certainly secondary in the interviewee’s descriptions. In these interactions the interviews follow a very classic Q-A form of response-interaction.
SECTION II: THE COMPARISON OF THE PHOTO-ELICITED AND THE CLASSIC SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS’ SAMPLE.

6.7. Discourse strategies: comparison between the two samples.

How do the two samples compare within the guidelines constituted by the subjects of my previous assessments? As is implicit in the nature of the interactions described before, some (at least two) of the discourse strategies adopted by the interviewees in the photo-elicited sample did not have equivalent or comparable functions in the classic semi-structured interviews. The use of the photographs, we have seen, originated in certain cases two peculiar forms of response from the interviewees. These responses developed as two interpretative strategies that were directly based on this initial interpretation (prompt response to the photographs and negotiation of the visual and verbal information). Obviously, in the semi-structured interviews, no comparable occurrences could be encountered given the fact that no alternative to the verbal communicative functions and information were available for the interviewees. Although also in this case alternative responses to the conventional Q-A turn pre-allocation could be hypothesised, or were anyway conversationally possible, this did not prove to be the case in the sample, where almost the entirety of the responses could be narrowed down to two alternative forms:

(Response Type 1) Excerpt 18. Classic Semi-Structured Interview. Subject 7.

While talking about the relationship between health, food and body and the pressures of the media

19 ER hummm and what about this thing, you were saying about the media, what role do you think the media play in your perception of food, body, health?

20 EE haaa I think in a large way they dictate they set the agenda of what to think, how to view food, how to view health. And as I said there’s been this buzz in the last fifteen years of living healthy, with like organic food, you’ve got ‘Holland and Barrett’, natural vitamins and stuff like that. In a way it has been proved that organic food isn’t very much different, but is a vast market a lot of profit has been made from it. So in a way I see the media in a way generally in society tend to choose what we discuss, choose how we see things so I don’t see it being different in the world of food and health…

21 ER and what about yourself?
22 EE myself, at the moment being a student I can’t really afford to eat well, but I tend, I try to eat as well as I can … …

(Response Type 2) Excerpt 19. Classic Semi-Structured Interview. Subject 2.
While talking about the relationship between health, food and body and the pressures of the media

21 ER ok, you were saying about the media, so what role do you think the media play in the perception of you know food, body, health?

22 EE well, I just think all depends on the individual person, I think the media can play, I mean I was saying that anorexia I don’t think is caused, I do think it can influence someone who is prone who has a sort of personal tendency to have the sort of, like an eating disorder, but I don’t think it’s because, the way they are, is not because of the media. Because not everyone is affected by it, but I do think that media have certain responsibilities and I do think that it is wrong for them to, I mean I don’t, they’ll promote junk food and that sort of things. They’ll just do anything to make money, really. They are not really thinking of the consequences. But then they’ll promote skinny images of women and models and stuff, I think they are trying more to change that now … but it just depends, it just depends on different factors…..[humm]

23 ER and what about you?

24 EE as does the media affect me? [humm] in what I eat?

25 ER yahh, and also your perception of you know health, body

27 EE hummm I’m sure it does subconsciously, but I just can’t really think of how it does, I am sure it must, I mean I don’t know, I don’t know …

(Excerpt 19) I have described beforehand that one typical instance of reversal of the Q-A turn types is constituted by the clarification questions. These kinds of questions, which in different forms were present in both samples, do not however represent a significant variation from the institutional Q-A turns pre-allocation (of which Excerpt 18 represents a typical form).
One important methodological observation derived from the analysis of the semi-structured interview sample is that ‘all’ the interviews in the semi-structured interview sample proved to be strongly organised around these two typical response strategies that organisationally conformed to the typical Q-A discourse structure of the interview. The interviewees listened to the question, answered focusing on the question’s subject, and then waited for the next question to be formulated by the interviewer. Although the atmosphere of the all the interviews was very courteous and informal the interviewees never engaged in any communication activity that moved from a simple question, answer organisational structure. They did not ask personal questions or opinions, neither challenged the suggested topics of the questions. Perhaps one interpretation that might explain this consistency within the sample (and its difference from the photo-elicited sample) is that the phrasing and the themes of the questions did not offer, because of their intentionally minimal, open-ended, indication of the subjects, enough elements to account for the interviewer’s position on these subjects. This minimal indication of the subjects (basically to a degree elaborated only in the introduction) either did not create the necessity (with the exception of the clarification questions) or did not offer the subject matter for a challenge, or critical rebuttal, by the interviewees. This is an opportunity that, we have seen, was presented instead to the interviewees by the photographs’ themes-subjects that juxtaposed to the questions added and (suggested) new meanings-interpretations representative of the interviewer’s point of view.

The analysis of the photo-elicited interview sample has shown that the photographs provided the occasion for the development of distinctive interactional dynamics. In the previous analyses I have described some of these dynamics through the scrutiny of the organisational and structural elements of the discourse, and the breakdown of its formal and semantic relations. In that context I have purposely analysed important methodological elements such as the unconventional Q-A turn types pre-allocations, the several discourse strategies (based on the use of the photographs) that were adopted in the (re)organisation of the interviewer and the interviewees’ turn types, and the various forms of interaction that these strategies established between the two interactants. The manifestly unequal distribution of these distinctive discourse features between the two samples, and their methodological significance, sustained my choice to give to their description, juxtaposition and comparisons a primary position in my investigations and report. I should however now caution against a misinterpretation of the significance of these discourse features which to be equitably comprehended have to be framed in their contexts, that is the individual interviews from which they were
extracted. And in their frequency and distribution, that is their representativeness for the
general discourse structure of the interviews from which they were taken.

Undoubtedly the unconventional forms of response, and the unusual
interdiscursive dynamics that characterised some of the photo-elicited interviews,
constitute a focal point for the assessment of the distinctive methodological
characteristics of this design of the photo-elicited interview. It is important to stress
however that these unconventional forms of response/interaction were not equally
distributed in the whole photo-elicited interview sample. The interviews, I suggested,
proved to be very different both in terms of the degree of communicative use of the
photographs, and in terms of the privileged strategies adopted in their interpretation. This
meant, as I have already described in the previous analysis, that some of the interviews
were characterised by a very extensive use of the photographs, while in others the images
had a subsidiary discourse function.

Also among the interviews in which the images displayed a more central
communicative role, however, significant differences emerged. These differences can be
explored in terms of the different distribution of the aforementioned characteristic
discourse features, and the particular discourse styles that developed from these
interactions. Schematically, of the seven interviews analysed in the photo-elicited
sample, three presented a very extensive use of the photographs. One presented an
intermediate use of the images, and the remaining three displayed a marginal
use/reference to the images. The interviews characterised by an extensive reference/use
of the photographs presented diverse degrees and forms of engagement with the visual
material, which had a different effect on the organisational structure of the interviews.
Of the four interviews that showed a significant discursive use of the photographs, only
one presented a case in which all the unusual discourse features described above were
present (Subject 1). In this interview the images acquired a pivotal function and
originated a discourse structure that profoundly differs from the typical classic research
interview structure characteristic of any of the interviews of the comparative sample. In
the remaining three interviews in which the photographs played a significant
communicative role, the interviewees made a diverse use of the photographs. No
common patterns emerged among these interviews, but interestingly, significant patterns
emerged within them. The photographs were subjects of several forms of negotiation
within the interviews. One of these forms of negotiation regarded the establishment of
the allowed communicative uses of the photographs, although it was clearly suggested to
the interviewees that any (communicative) use of the photographs was permitted (‘you

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can use them as you want). All the interviews displayed, however, some forms of negotiation that tended to establish what the boundaries of these permitted uses were. These negotiations usually developed in the initial stages of the interview and were at times 'explicit' (see Excerpt 6, Subject 3) and other times 'implicit' and achieved through other forms of discourse interaction (Excerpt 5, Subject 1). Interestingly, these negotiations seemed to establish different allowed uses of the photographs within each interview, as the different typical uses of the photographs in the different interviews seems to confirm. For example the cases of prompt response to the photographs were mostly concentrated in the interview with Subject 3. Noticeably, these kinds of responses developed in the turns that immediately followed the negotiation/agreement of the allowed use of the photographs (see Excerpt 6). Similarly in the other interviews specific patterns of interpretation seemed to be privileged over others (Subject 1 and 5). It should be made clear however that these typical patterns did not exclude different uses of the photographs within the interview. The hypothesis that these patterns were the outcome of these initial negotiations, then, although plausible, has to be considered cautiously and needs further elaboration in an analysis of a bigger sample. Anyway a more comfortable hypothesis would suggest that the interviewees used these initial negotiations, whatever the form, as a way to establish the ‘actual’ possibilities of using the photographs. Beyond the validity of these hypotheses however there are two elements common to all these kinds of interaction that I should conclusively note here: One is that the interviewee always established the initial input on the specific form of use of the photographs. The second is that these patterns emerged, as already stated, specifically in those interviews in which the photographs acquired a significant communicative role.

If the previous descriptions illustrate the uneven distribution of these peculiar discourse features among the interviews, can any conclusions be drawn from the observation of the typical discourse structures of the interviews of the photo-elicited sample? It is difficult to make an overall evaluation of the typical discourse structure for the photo-elicited sample. Unlike the classic semi-structured interview sample, in which a clear common structure emerged, the photo-elicited sample presented a range of discourse organisational structures, which are difficult to put together or generalise. This does not mean however that there are no common characteristics in the sample that are worth notice, quite the opposite. With the significant exception of one of the interviews, the analysis of the overarching discourse organisation of the interviews strongly suggests that also in the photo-elicited sample the ‘main discourse structure’ remained the one established by the conventional interview discourse. If we consider, as I did throughout
the analyses, one characteristic discourse feature of the interview (the now well-known Q-A turns type pre-allocation) as our orienting point of view for example, some important preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Although with significant differences (we have analysed the specific forms of challenge that the use of the photographs raised in some of the interviews), both the interviews in which the photographs were used extensively (3), and the ones where the photographs were used marginally (3), revealed an overarching organisation of the discourse consistent with the typical Q-A turns pre-allocation characteristic of the interview discourse. The (statistical\(^1\)) majority of the responses in each interview (with the significant exception of the interview with Subject 1 who asked as many questions as the interviewer) were regulated by a conventional development of the turn taking (Interviewer asks the questions = the interviewee answers) and discourse-sequencing characteristic of the institutional interview discourse genre. This does not alter the fact that the unusual responses characteristic of some of the interviews had interactional outcomes that significantly differentiated those interviews from the others (and most notably from the semi-structured interview sample), but also suggests the meaning of those discursive differences could be sought elsewhere in the discourse.

The unconventional response strategies typical of some of the photo-elicited interviews acquire their full methodological meaning in fact only in an analysis that includes and accounts for the entire discourse dynamic that characterised the interviews. In the analyses conducted so far I have focused predominantly on the unusual discourse strategies that raised a challenge to the conventional organisational structure of the interview. The unconventional response strategies that significantly moved away from the typical Q-A discourse structure however were neither the most common, nor the only noteworthy discourse features within the photo-elicited sample. The evaluation of the interpretational dynamics which characterised the communicative uses and function of the photographs within the clause (within the answer/ response) in fact further characterise and crucially differentiate among the discourse dynamics of the two samples.

The subjective communicative uses of the photographs, and the different interpretational dynamics enacted by each interviewee are two elements that together

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\(^1\) This evaluation refers to the numerical count of the types of interchanges, which are in this case considered independently from the context and the specific interviews in which they developed. It has been stated already that the distribution of these responses was not uniform throughout the photo-elicited sample, but was instead unequally distributed among the interviews.
raise great methodological interest, and they are together the subjects of the next section of the analysis.

6.8. Interpretational dynamics, lexical choices, selection of themes and subjects, discourse style; differences between the samples.

The unconventional response strategies typical of some of the photo-elicited interviews were neither the most common discourse features within the sample, nor the only ones noteworthy for the comparison and differentiation of the two methodologies (and research designs).

In the previous analyses, I have already examined, within the frame of the investigation of the diverse response strategies of the interviewees, representative instances of the interviews that were developed within a more conventional interview structure (see Excerpts 14, 16, 17 for different examples). In these instances, we saw, the interviewees answered to the combined use of the photographs and the questions, or solely to the questions (Excerpts 18, 19), within the guidelines of a conventional Q-A turns structure. What is critical to notice here is that these responses, which proved to be the most common in both interview samples, were indeed framed within similar discourse structures, but were nevertheless characterised, when compared at other levels of the discourse, by profoundly different response dynamics. These (intra) discursive differences differentiate remarkably between the two samples in terms of the typical degree of elaboration of the answers, the lexicon, and the subjects that these answers elaborated and explored. In this section of the analysis I shall then move my investigation of the interviews from the examination of the organisational structures of the discourse, to the investigation of the characteristic discourse features of the interviewees' responses, such as the specific lexical choices, the themes and subjects, and the conversational styles that have been used by the interviewees in the elaboration of their answers. These analyses will delineate, through the observation of some typical instances, a number of discursive differences that distinguish between the typical responses of the two interview samples.

The careful reader might have already noticed that Excerpts 16, 17, and Excerpts 18 and 19 (which were taken from the photo-elicited sample, and the classic semi-structured interview sample respectively) are all different instances of a response to the same key thematic subject (same question). This question aimed at the investigation of the role the interviewees thought that the media played in their perception of food, body
and health. These already familiar excerpts will be used to lay down my initial hypotheses, which will be elaborated with other excerpts from both samples. The excerpts are useful for different purposes. I shall first refer to them to analyse the specific processes of subject and meaning negotiation, or communicative hybridisation of the visual and verbal information, that the excerpts exemplify. The excerpts will be used as initial examples to compare the different, and the typical, interpretational dynamics of the two interview samples. These differences notably originated, I will show in the analyses, from the (explicit or implicit) interpretation/negotiation of the verbal and visual information in the interviewee's responses.

Before moving to the analysis and the comparison of the excerpts, there are few methodological choices that it is necessary to explain. As I said, the selected excerpts present different responses to the same key thematic question. I should clarify that the selection of this particular question among others was not for any particular reason. Many excerpts/questions could have been used with the same purpose, and to account for the same discourse dynamics. The use of different responses to the same question is however intentional, and motivated by the obvious advantages that come from the possibility to juxtapose the different interviewees' elaboration of the same photographs/subjects. Finally I described that the majority of the responses within both samples were characterised by a rather conventional form of turn taking. It is for this reason that I have decided that in reporting the outcomes of my analysis it was a plausible methodological choice to select and start with a number of excerpts from both samples characterised by a similar conventional organisational structure that could favour a certain degree of comparability between the excerpts (Excerpts 16, 17 [and 20, 21, presented below] from the photo-elicited sample, and Excerpts 18, 19, from the classic semi-structured sample). Furthermore in the photo-elicited sample I have chosen two groups of excerpts which present in juxtaposition examples from an extensive (Excerpts 16, 21, Subjects 5 and 1), and very moderate (Excerpts 17, 20, Subjects 4 and 6) use of the photographs in the answer.

Excerpt 16, it should be remembered, was initially used in the context of the investigation of the different response' strategies adopted by the interviewees in the

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2 It has been noted already that also in the interviews in which there seemed to be the least reference or articulation of the photographs subjects the interviewee used both forms of information to develop his/her answer, see Excerpt 12 and its discussion for the initial approach to this interpretation. In the analyses however only the instances were these forms of use and interpretation of the photographs are explicit will be analysed.
photo-elicited interviews. It was used to exemplify what I suggested was a conventional
interpretation of the Q-A turns pre-allocation and an elaboration of the subjects of the
questions and the photographs within the conventional pre-allocated turn. This excerpt is
however dense with many other discourse dynamics, which are pregnant with theoretical
and methodological implications.

Several elements immediately stand out from the analysis of the distinctive lexicon
and style of the response characteristic of this and other responses of the same interview.
The interviewee displays in his answer a very informed and sophisticated knowledge and
understanding of the visual information presented by the photographs (please refer to the
full text of the Excerpt 16)

These included information about:

a) (Indexical Referents) The actual subjects on the front covers of the magazines;
the interviewee tries to recognise the girls’ band unnamed on the front cover, 'Atomic
Kitten or S Club Seven' (they are the 'S Club Seven').

b) (Systems of Representation) The printed media politics specific for different
magazine: the interviewee knowledgeably elaborates on the different strategies pursued
by different magazines through the description of the typical use of certain (visual)
contents aimed at a specific target audience: certain magazines are all about, he explains:

'weight loss, weight loss, whereas I think in the sort of more up-market female
magazines, women’s magazines I think it’s more about a kind of wholesome identity
more, ‘you are the modern women' so you exercise, you eat right, you know, you are
aware of certain social issues, but you are also interested in fashion; so it becomes a
more sort of complete identity (...').

c) (Representation and Ideologies) The interviewee critically evaluates the power of
stereotypical forms of representation, or lack thereof, and the ideals that they attempt to
establish:

'so it does construct desires and norms of physical appearance … …interesting about
the other magazines that I talked about first hueee the more quote unquote housewife
oriented ones, they don’t seem to do that, they don’t seem to represent the female body in this way, and therefore weight loss is never visualised, whereas the modern woman is represented, (...) we can see this is the kind of the desirable female shape'.

These elaborations on the photographs' subjects can be interpreted from several different points of view in our context of analysis. The degree of sophistication displayed in the interpretation and description of the subjects is certainly revealing (formal education, interests, etc.) if not of the social identity of the interviewee, certainly of his knowledge of the subjects to which I shall return). There are several elements that are particularly significant (and revealing) for our analysis. First of these is the linguistic style of the response; the style adopted by the interviewee is very formal, with little or no use of conversational forms. The lexicon is erudite, he uses an appropriate vocabulary and constructs an elaborate response which displays a specialised knowledge of the subjects. Remarkable, within the frame of my observation, are the interpretative dynamics, and the communicative uses of the photographs developed by the interviewee in his descriptions. Excerpt (16), we have seen, shows a very highly crafted use of visual information in the articulation of the answer.

The interviewee starts by acknowledging a basic implication of the question, the supposed pressures exercised by the media on the individuals' perception of the relationship existing between food, body and health:

'Yeah I mean .. enormous, enormous, enormous'.

He then establishes a contextually informed agenda for his answer:

'huum yeah you see it’s interesting.. humm it's interesting you see ...huuum  the pressure of the media., the way that body and nutrition and a sort of a fit body is constructed in this sort of almost like.. magazine'.

He finally elaborates on these subjects in his long answer, consistently referring and inferring from the photographs. The interviewee also displays during the answer his intention to stick to the agenda set by the interview:

'to bring it back to the question of identity which you have raised'.
It should be noted that the 'question of identity' was not directly suggested by the question, but was stated as one of the main themes of the interview in the introduction and was brought into the discourse several times by the interviewee. In conclusion the interviewee's response can be described as an elaborate process of interpretation in which all the contextually available information is used. The subjects previously elaborated in the discourse and the question—which orient his descriptions— the subjects portrayed in the photographs—to which he consistently refers—and the general agenda of the interview—that he keeps in focus while answering.

The analysis of another excerpt, answering the same photographs/question, will show a different kind of interpretation of the same images, a different communicative priority granted to the visual information, and the use of a completely different style and lexicon. It should be noted also that this excerpt presents an answer which developed within the same discourse organisational structure of the Excerpt 16 (the typical Photo+Question=Answer):

Excerpt 20. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 6

While talking about the relationship between health, food and body and the pressures of the media

9 ER so what about, you were saying, the pressure of the media? [hum]

10 EE yehhh the pressure of the media is constantly everywhere and is just really harming society in a way because people is taking it so seriously and to an extreme, you know that just get obsessed, you need a sort of wall, although a mature woman … you have this sort of yehh that tells you that in order to fit you have to be like that, and men are just like, and men I told you the number of men that have started to care about their bodies and the way they look is just increasing more and more, if you go to the gym you know there’s many woman but there are many man as well, doing exercises, taking care of their bodies. And shopping … you see my flatmates for instance from last year they shop for all this fruit and stuff, they do exercise everyday and they do buy these magazines as well and yahh I don’t know what you think about the media? It's just like … you know..I just think that the way they treat this .. is inconsiderate
and what about yourself? do you feel pressured by the media?

hummm not from those magazines because I have never read them, but of course it is just something that you can’t avoid like, sometimes you just flick through them, or just watch … you know and you see woman with you know nice bodies and stuff and you think ohh that’s nice she’ll probably looks like I don’t know in her 20’s early 30’s and you go hummm she keeps really like fit, and nice and stuff and hummm unconsciously, it is an unconscious process I am sure about that, you just like ok today I am going to buy healthy things, you get encouraged by that, and then probably if you don’t have self esteem or confidence in yourself you just get attracted by that and becomes an obsession, instead of just being something which is nice to take into consideration, you know be aware of, you know it is always nice to take care of and look nice and stuff but might be that people get just in that obsession for this stuff and that’s were all those illnesses like anorexia bulimia or yahh eating disorders just start because you just stop eating all the sudden, ohhh yahh I’ll be fine and then one day you just grab all that food inside and then just becomes … into bulimia yahh it is really bad. I think media is one of the main main pressures, the big one, because you can have family problems, anxieties, social problems but they don’t influence to the same extent.

This excerpt (Excerpt 20) shows a much more informal style, lexicon, and use of the photographs within the answer. The reference to the photographs is blended within a discourse in which the interviewee wants to state her opinion about the negative influence of the media. The photographs in this excerpt seem to be used as an example in the development of an argument that has a much more personal (when compared to the previous answer to the same question), 'experience-felt' interpretation of the life world of an individual (a woman, or an 'increasing number of men') and the problems that s/he may encounter in her/his definition of the idea of an 'healthy and fit' body. These are problems mostly provoked, the interviewee explains, by the stereotypical (idealised) images that the media offer of 'that' healthy and fit body. In her answer the interviewee touches on subjects like age —when she refers to the pressures on ageing woman and man to be fit— social change and gender difference —when she suggests that both sexes are now interested in their own physical appearance— anorexia and bulimia —as kinds of illness that the pressures of the media might favour more then the pressures coming from the family or the group of peers. The answer also provides a series of insights into her personal life, and her feelings about the pressures that she receives from the media and the ways in which she resists reacting to them. The lexical choices and the style of the
discourse are in this excerpt more informal and definitely less specialised than the ones used by the interviewee in the Excerpt 16. Also, the photographs are in this case not the direct subjects of the answer/discourse, but they provide a resource that is mostly referred to indirectly. The subjects of the photographs are directly referenced only twice in the answer. Although these two references have apparently a minimal, descriptive, function in the interviewee's elaboration, they play a simple, but crucial, communicative function in the answer that is worth exploring. The interviewee basically works with her two references to the photographs to construct a social identity counterpoised between her 'male' friends, who are active viewers and readers of the magazines depicted in the photographs ('they do buy these magazines'), and herself who never 'reads' them (the following line explains that here she means that she does not 'buy' them, which would construct her as an actively interested reader). In fact she immediately continues by saying that 'you' (she) cannot avoid sometimes to 'flick through them' (again she uses a verb that distances her or characterises her as a non-attentive, as opposed to active, reader/viewer of these magazines). The second answer to the question continues in this line of contraposition (and social identity construction) when she describes people who do not have 'self esteem or confidence' as victims of these representations (of ideal typical bodies from which they become obsessed) instead of just looking at them as something to take critically into consideration (as she does).

There are several elements worth noting here. This excerpt has been taken from one of the interviews in which the interviewee made the most indirect reference to the photographs. It is significant then for me to note that also in this case of indirect/minimal reference to the photographs, the images played a significant communicative function in the elaboration of the answers. The photographs, we have seen for example, have a central communicative function in the way the interviewee constructs, by contraposition, her social identity. Furthermore at a different level of the discourse the images seem also to establish a 'set of orienting themes' to which, also if indirectly, the interviewee refers (as when she talks about men doing exercises, or models with nice bodies in their 20s 30s, that can plausibly be hypothesised to be references to the photographs' subjects).

We shall now look at another excerpt from the interview with Subject 1, which refers this time to a different theme/question. As suggested many times in the previous analyses the interview with Subject 1 proved to be the most complex and methodologically challenging of the photo-elicited interview sample. This excerpt

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3 This set of themes that the photographs may establishes have a methodological bearing on the interpretation of the photo-elicited methodology that I shall analyse in detail in paragraph 6.13.
however is taken from one passage of the interview in which no specific discourse challenges were raised, and where the interviewee simply answered to a (photograph +) question of the interviewer (conventional P+Q=A). As is common to almost all the responses of this interview, in this case the interviewee also often directly refers to the photographs in her answer. It is this use and interpretation of the photographs (and what they imply) that is of interest now:

Excerpt 21. Photo-Elicited Interview. Subject 1

While talking about the relationship between health, food and body.

25 ER What, what kinds of relationship do you think exists between food and health?

26 EE Health? [yahh]….mainly, you are not supposed to eat high fat food right, it’s not good for your health, but… like it's not that simple.. how do I say it, before, I used to love food, I used to love food, I used to enjoy eating food and I was 80 kilos or so I used to love food and most of the food that I used to eat was really not healthy at all. I used to eat fruits for example, vegetables, but not in the same way I used to eat rice and macaronis and bread (indicating the single items on the picture) so this was my favourite area (indicating the picture), with far too many carbohydrates, and with of course too many proteins like cheese and eggs, and oil and fat stuff like that. But this (indicating the pyramid) was, this was like most of the times it was out of my programme (laugh) and I think when you see that triangle and you should base your meal, and what kind of food you should include and be balanced and stuff like that ahhh....but I mean it depends also on your life style, and I mean as a student I can’t have this perfectly balanced food especially when I am living on my own. I don’t have time to cook, I mean here fruit expires and sometimes I forget and I have to put them in the garbage and I regret that I did purchase them so it’s partly my fault also because I don’t remember. But in general the sad thing is to be healthy, is to eat healthy and to be balanced, but it doesn’t have directly to do with you being fat. You can still be fat, but look, some people they are fat, but they eat healthy, it really doesn’t have to do with it, with your balance. Gender? I mean women only eat healthy meals because they think they are going to lose weight, not the idea .. because they enjoy to eat healthy. So you will find people that will diet for their looks, but they don’t diet for their health. You
know what I mean [yehhh yeeahhh] humm (looking at the pictures) fat and a scale bla bla blaa … humm what is it? Fat prejudice, female body image and eating, nutrition and weight loss, surgery … humm I mean most of the diet products are related to the fact that you have to eat healthy, but the fact is that to be healthy is not to take a diet pill or any kind of other diet products. The fact that you should eat healthy is like to have a balanced meal like here (indicating the photograph) and lose weight but to be healthy. But I just feel sometimes, like this one, weight loss surgery.. why? why you know it’s titled fat and than it says what experts say, talking about beauty and then it links it to weight loss, surgery, so it’s kind of I don’t know, but I just would look at this (food pyramid), I love the colours of the food just you know, food is nice..

This excerpt (Excerpt 21) follows up on a subject that has been many times directly or indirectly the centre of attention of the interviewee. In several other moments of the interview, the interviewee has very plainly and openly discussed her problems with her (extra) weight and the many (not completely successful, in her judgement) diets that she had to follow to correct it. What is important for me to stress here however are other elements of the answer. The interviewee not only repeatedly refers to the photographs, but also articulately uses their subjects to construct her argument. She displays in her answer a deep knowledge of the meaning of the food pyramid, and the characteristics of its elements and sections. She also gives a personal and detailed account of her relationship with the 'pyramid' as a symbol of healthy eating, but also as an unfulfilled promise (the one coming from the association of healthy eating and a fit body that the pyramid seems to give, but that is revealed to be not necessarily true for every person). Throughout the answer the interviewee elaborates on a long list of associated subjects, consistently moving in this process of elaboration between the subjects represented in the image, and an account of her personal experiences and interpretations (subjects like the pyramid, the kinds of food and their properties, the economic factor, the different life styles of different individuals, the interpretation of what 'healthy' means, and of what healthy food represents for the two genders. She also looks critically at the association between healthy eating and a fit body, and the concept of health mischievously associated with diet products like diet pills or even surgery). In conclusion the interviewee actively uses many of the subjects of the pictures both to sustain her
interpretations of the question and photographs' themes, but also to directly critique some of the concepts that certain images seem to suggest.

6.9. The subjective processes of negotiation between the visual and verbal information.

I the first part of the analysis I developed a detailed argument that described how the use of the photographs in the photo-elicited interview sample originated several forms of discourse negotiation. These negotiations, I described in the analysis, took the form of different kinds of discursive mediations between the subjects and the communicative functions suggested or displayed by the visual and verbal information, or what I described as the inter-discursive hybridisation of the visual and verbal information (systems of signification) among the different interviews of the sample. The excerpts presented above, and many of the others investigated for a different purpose in the previous analysis, present clear examples of these forms of negotiation/hybridisation. In these excerpts the visual contents of the photographs are actively used and referred to by the interviewees to construct their arguments and to elaborate on their ideas. This negotiation of contents and meanings, similarly to what was argued before when analysing the organisational elements of the discourse, established in the responses of the interviewees different degrees of use and integration of the two kinds of information. In some instances the photograph subjects acquired a central function in the elaboration of the interviewees’ answers (see Excerpts 16, 21), other times they were less central in their elaboration, but nevertheless communicatively significant (see excerpts 17, 20). At times, I have explained, the use or reference to the photographs was instead not detectable at all in the interviewee’s elaboration. I have already explored in my previous analyses the different communicative status that the photographs might acquire in the elaboration of the discourse and their effects on the organisational structure of the interview (see paragraph 6.10). What I will analyse now is the value these different communicative uses and negotiations have for the elaboration of

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4 This element is in itself of interest, first because the captions provide extra verbal information, second because they suggested a certain interpretation of the pictures they are associated with, and thirdly, and most relevantly for my analysis, because these pictures, and the meanings to these associated by the captions, are subjects of a direct critique by the interviewee. From the methodological point of view however this is nothing new and was already hypothesised when the photographs were selected, as we have seen in the discussion of the subject in chapter XX.
the contents of the answers. How does the use of the photographs characterise the elaboration of the answers? What are the epistemological implications of the use of the photographs? What are their methodological implications?

The excerpts 16 and 21 are useful to account for the extensive interpretation, negotiation, and use of the visual information from two different points of view which I could call, remindful of the semiotic definitions of the concepts, ‘symbolic’ and ‘indexical’. Although different, they also offer a simple overarching interpretation with which I should begin. At a general level we can say, almost banally, that the extensive use of the photographs in the interviews is a certain proof of the interviewee’s interest in the images, and of his/her capacity to use them communicatively. The images attracted the attention of the interviewees, who independently decided to use them in their interpretations (it is worth remembering that in my specific design of the interviews the interviewees were not ‘forced’ to interpret the images presented, but they were given the chance to use, or not use, the photographs. We have seen that the interviewees used this opportunity very differently). From one point of view this common decision to use the photographs unifies the two excerpts, proving in both excerpts the interviewees’ confidence in interpreting and communicatively using the photographs.

The two examples however are characterised also by a significantly different level of interpretation/use of the photographs. These different levels of interpretation of the photographs are specifically important because they may critically be used to counterpoise one key tenet of the analysis of the Colliers (1986) who based their interpretations of the ‘function’ of the images on the indexical value of the photographs. Excerpt 21 (and many others in the sample) confirms an interpretation that suggests that the indexical value of the photographs (or the ability of the photographs to re-present subjects and objects that can be recognised, explored, described, and discussed by the interviewees and the interviewer) represents a key epistemological value of the photographs in the interview. Excerpt 16 (and many others in the sample) however proves that photographs can also be used to explore more symbolic forms of knowledge, associated not with the actual photographs’ subjects, but in this case for example with the images as forms of representation in themselves. These interpretations of the symbolic values of images are in fact indicative of a kind of knowledge that, as we have seen, is not only knowledge of the subjects indexically represented by the photographs, but also knowledge of the different symbolic practices of use (institutional and non) in which images are always embedded. In this case the same forms of symbolic representation become subjects, representative of communicative and social practices of use that can be
discussed and explored. The primacy given to one or the other characteristic of the images (symbolic value or indexical value) is then completely dependent from the subjective interpretations of the interviewees.

In conclusion what I want to suggest is that in both forms the communicative uses of the photographs elicited in the discourse complex forms of negotiation. There was negotiation between the visual and the verbal information, which means negotiation between the interpretations/knowledge of the interviewer (suggested by the association of the question and the photographs) and the knowledge of the interviewee (elicited by the photographs and the question, informed by his/her interpretations/knowledge of the subjects) contextually and discursively negotiated in the interaction. My analysis of some typical responses of the photo-elicited interview sample have shown different significant instances of negotiation/integration of the visual and the verbal information in the elaborations of the interviewees. They have also shown how at the two extremes of the communicative spectrum (characterised by an extensive—Excerpts 16, 21— or by a minimal—Excerpts 17, 19— use of the photographs) degrees of communicative integration of the two symbolic systems of representation were present and functional for the elaboration of the answers.

6.10. **Comparison of the typical elaboration of the answers in the two samples.**

In reporting the outcomes of my analyses I have decided initially to focus on some specific instances of the interviews (the ones developed within the conventional turn taking structure represented in the excerpts 16, 17, 20) to maintain a certain degree of comparability with the equivalent instances of the classic semi-structured interviews (which overwhelmingly followed this form of response strategy). I have also chosen two excerpts (Excerpts 17, 20) which represent instances of the most extensive, and most moderated, uses of the photographs within the sample (in juxtaposition with the case presented by excerpts 16, 21). This was done to prove that also in the cases of minimal communicative use of the photographs, certain interpretative dynamics (and negotiations) were identifiable and analysable. How then do these rather representative responses compare with the ones characteristic of the classic semi-structured interview sample?

The Excerpt 18 (please refer to the excerpt for the full text) was previously used to characterise a typical response strategy in the classic semi-structured interview sample. In that context the excerpt was juxtaposed to the Excerpt 19 (that I shall re-
analyse) to exemplify the two unique response strategies that characterised the whole classic semi-structured interview sample. In this part of the analysis I will look at these same excerpts to describe the style of the discourse, the interviewee's lexical choices, and above all the processes of elaboration that characterised these answers.

From the point of view of the linguistic style, Excerpt 19, like the rest of the interview from which it is taken, is characterised by a relatively formal lexicon that although not particularly specialised (unlike the one in Excerpt 16 or in part Excerpt 21) is anyway rather official. The lexicon used by the interviewee proves consistent also with the organisational structure of the interview, which was also very formal and conventionally organised. It is however the analysis of the contents developed in the elaboration of the answer that are particularly relevant in this analytic context. The answer given by the interviewee to the same question posed to the other interviewees in the excerpts 16, 19, 20 addresses two subjects, one general and one exemplificative. The interviewee’s general opinion about the subject of the question (which problematised the pressures exercised by the media on individuals’ perceptions of food) is expressed at the beginning of the sentence, and reaffirmed in its closure:

I think in a large way they [the media] dictate, they set the agenda of what to think (...) So in a way I see the media in a way generally in society tend to choose what we discuss, choose how we see things so I don’t see it being different in the world of food and health…

In the intermediate part of the answer the interviewee uses the example of organic food to exemplify one kind of food whose healthy qualities have been emphasised by the media (unreasonably so, the interviewee seems to suggest), thereby influencing the general perception of organic food and increasing the products' marketability. When asked about the influence the media have on his perceptions, the interviewee gives very little information, and no personal details which might help to understand if he feels that the media have an influence on his opinions and choices. This can be only partially deducted from the tone of the previous answer. What is important for me to notice here is the rather focused aim of the response developed by the interviewee. He replies with one key interpretation of the question, suggests one exemplificative case, and concludes with a re-elaboration of the initial argument (a classic response strategy). This rather narrowly aimed composition of the answer is particularly interesting because it is representative of the majority of the responses developed in the classic semi-structured interview sample.
The interviewees' answers, in this interview design, tended to address—rather concisely—one key interpretation of the subject of the questions. Although some questions triggered more elaborated responses (no specific pattern emerged in terms of the questions that triggered these responses), the great majority of the answers displayed in fact very little or no development of complementary subjects. We shall look at a few more examples from the classic semi-structured interview sample to explore this and some other relevant elements.

In Excerpt 19 (please refer to the excerpt for the full text) we can observe, as in several other answers to the same question in both samples, the juxtaposition of media representations of the body, and eating disorders. It should be remembered that in the introduction to the interview, for all the interviewees and prior to this specific question in some of the interviews, the subject of 'eating disorders' had been already matter of discussion. This can very plausibly be interpreted as a form of contextual information that has influenced the preferred reading of these photographs/questions. Also in answer (19) then among the several subjects that might have been explored to account for the various media representations of food, body and health, the interviewee privileged the one that associates certain stereotypical representations of the body ('skinny images of women and models') and the (negative) pressures that these representations might exercise on an individual 'who is prone, who has a sort of personal tendency, to have the sort of like an eating disorder'. What is important to observe here, aside from the contextual information that might have influenced the interpretation of the question, is that also in this case (like in the previously analysed Excerpt 18 classic interview) the interviewee focuses his answer on only one general interpretation of the subjects. He elaborates to a degree on his 'general opinion' about that subject, but when asked about how he thinks the media affect his perceptions and choices he replies very briefly, and ambiguously, only suggesting that they might, subconsciously. In this answer then, no information and no personal details are given to support an interpretation of his ambivalent impressions.

I shall now discuss one last excerpt taken from a different interview, which also addresses the same question:


5 It is also interesting to note however that conversely some answers, like the one discussed in Excerpts 16 (photo-elicited) and 18 (classic), do not actually focus on this interpretation of the question.
16 ER huum yeahhh, you were also saying about the media… what role do you think the media play in the perception of food body and health?

17 EE well … …. I think, well of course it plays, for anybody when they see the photographs of really really skinny models, ... but there is also a conscious reaction to it, you are saying no! I don’t want to. So it makes me think about what I am doing and am I doing just to be like this hemm bla bla but more food wise I suppose, … I wouldn’t say it is the media that influences my food experiences [huum]

18 ER what does?

19 EE well my friends, and what I have got access to as well of course; if I lived next door to a nice market for example I could go there all the time, but I don’t live there so I don’t go there so it is also how close I am to the food that you want to have [hum] and time and knowledge of what it is good for you as well I suppose …

In this excerpt (Excerpt 22) we have a kind of dynamics similar to those presented by the Excerpt 20, the interviewees uses a very simple counterpoising to construct a certain social identity for herself. She acknowledges that a certain form of pressure is exercised on others and also on herself, by the typical representations of the media of 'really really skinny models', but she also immediately notes that she resists those pressures, privileging in her food choices other patterns of selection (friends’ influence, access to different foods, time, and 'knowledge of what is good'). As in all the other excerpts presented, the interviewee focuses on a basic interpretation of one aspect of the question's themes. The elaboration however is mostly used only as a device to define a certain social identity, independent, active, critical, practical. This is a process of identity definition that is initiated in the first answer, and further reinforced in the second. Again also in this case very few subjects are simply indicated, but not explored.

In the Excerpts 18, 19 and 22 we have three typical examples of answers taken from the classic semi-structured interview sample. They address the same question as the previous responses and they elaborate to a degree on similar topics. In Excerpts 18 the interviewee focuses on the ways in which the media establish in the collective imaginary what is healthy food and what is not. He specifically exemplifies this with the case of organic food. Very little information is given about himself and his personal perceptions or choices. In Excerpt 19 the interviewee critically focuses on the responsibility that the media may have in pushing individuals who already are vulnerable (who have a 'personal
tendency) towards the development of eating disorders. Again, very little information is
given about his personal experiences or choices. Similarly in Excerpt 22 the interviewee
critically acknowledges the pressures exercised by the media on individuals’ perception
of food’s qualities. She however distances herself by offering a brief list of other
elements that influence her personal choices. These patterns of response, the tendency to
address one aspect, and at times a few marginally related themes, are typical of the semi-
structured interview sample, and are sharply in contrast with some of the responses of the
photo-elicited sample (as we have seen in the atypically complex, but typically
elaborated, development of the subjects in Excerpt 16). While in Excerpt 16, taken from
the photo-elicited interview sample, the interviewee critically explores subjects such as
media subjects and rhetorics, the diversified media’s target audiences and national
identity differences, an exemplification of media tactics through the observation of
‘Men’s Health’ magazine, and different interpretation of FHM magazine. All these
subjects are explored in depth and with frequent references to his own habits, ideas,
choices and feelings. Similarly in Excerpt 21, the interviewee explores in depth subjects
such as the different qualities of food groups, the economic restraints that govern her
food choices, diet and gender differences, the relationship between food choices and a fit
and healthy body, and the misleading representations of diets and foods. All of the
subjects again are developed with frequent and diverse references to her own personal
choices, feelings, problems and experiences.

Also in comparison with Excerpts (17, 20) in which the interviewees made a less
elaborate response to the question, the interviewees addressed and developed the subject
from more than one perspective, and in these cases also offered a revealing description of
their own perceptions and choices.

Independently from the specific themes developed in these excerpts what I shall notice is
that the responses developed in the semi-structured interview seem to be much more
focused (concisely addressed to the specific question) then the ones that developed in the
photo-elicited sample, which, while answering to the same question, seem to be
addressing a greater number of subjects and issues in greater depth. This interpretation
requires more elaboration. Two things immediately caught my attention when analysing
and comparing the typical responses of the two samples.

• The significantly different degree of elaboration of the subjects of the interviews in
  the two samples.

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The patterns of selection and organisation of themes/contents that characterised the typical answers of the photo-elicited interviews in which the photographs were extensively used.

The first remarkable aspect that I noticed when I started the analysis of the interviews was the typically different degrees of elaboration of the responses of the two samples (the simple examination of the transcripts made this observation unavoidable). This is, and was, an element difficult to tackle theoretically and methodologically for a number of reasons. Without any doubt the two interview samples presented a very different degree of elaboration of the subjects of the interview. This took place in the whole sample (but to a different extent in the two groups of interviews characterised by either an extensive or moderate use of the photographs), and can be exemplified by the comparison of the excerpts here presented (Excerpt 16, 17, 20 vs. 18, 19). The interviews of the photo-elicited sample were at times twice as long as the ones of the classic semi-structured interview sample (5-6000 words for Subjects 1,5 and 6 against 3000 words on average for the classic semi-structured sample). This at first, although remarkable, seemed to be of ambiguous value and difficult to interpret given the statistically non-representative number of interviews constituting the samples. The odds could be that different interviewees with different motivations could respond differently to the interviews and the interview subjects (independently from the methodology of the interview) or just be more open to the interaction. Soon however the more in-depth investigation of the interviews seemed to suggest a different hypothesis. The most elaborate interviews in the photo-elicited sample proved to be the ones conducted with the interviewees who made the most extensive use of the photographs. I have already analysed in some of the excerpts taken from these two interviews (Excerpts 2, 5, 11, 14, 16) the communicatively significant uses that the interviewees made of the photographs in their responses. And I have also analysed other excerpts (see the previous analyses of the Excerpts 16, 20, 21) to describe the degree of elaboration characteristic of many of these answers. The actual length of the average answer (or interview) however does not justify any possible evaluation of the ‘value’ of the response (if it is possible to say so, for example referring to how relevant an answer might be, or not, to the elaboration of the subjects of the research), or of the methodology for that matter. A different hypothesis might instead account for these differences and explain their high degree of elaboration. I have analysed in detail in the typical responses of the photo-elicited sample (even in the kinds of response that made a more moderate use of the photographs) the
emergence of negotiations between the verbal and the visual information. In the above-mentioned interviews with the Subjects 1, 3 and 5 it can be observed that the interviewees who most extensively used the photographs were also the ones who developed more themes or subjects in their answers. This is true both in comparison to the interviewees who either did not use the photographs as much, or did not have any photographs. Although this information does not tell us anything about the reasons why certain answers were more concise, or about the motivations that made the interviewees answer in a certain way, it does however suggest other plausible interpretations. For example in terms of the specific interest in the photographs or knowledge of the photograph's subjects of the interviewees, the specific interest and knowledge of the visual rhetorics of Subject 5 can definitely be interpreted as a factor that influenced the motivation and the ability of the interviewee to elaborate, as he did, on the photographs and interview's subjects. Similar interpretations could be advanced for the Subjects 1 and 3, which so extensively, even enthusiastically, used the photographs in their responses.

What I am suggesting is that the analyses of the interviews proved consistently that the photographs added an entirely new range of information, and consequently possible paths of interpretation, for the interviewees who were willing and able to use and interpret them. The interpretation and negotiation of the two forms of information (as we have seen detectable in the great majority of the responses) offered the basis, to the motivated interviewees, for the elaboration of various themes within the response. The richness and degree of elaboration of the responses then seem to rely on the photograph’s ability to offer new kinds of information, and the ability and interest of the respondent to elaborate on this information. This ability of the interviewees to communicatively use the photographs in their responses is linked in my interpretation to the ability, and motivation, of the interviewees to draw on their (specialised or not) visual interpretative repertoires, which might also be called specific forms of visual literacy. The concept of visual literacy offers grounding in a theoretical perspective which also helps the interpretation of similar and different responses of various interviewees to the same photographs and questions. It is this difference (or at times similarity) in individuals’ visual literacy that adds a new ‘social’ dimension to the concept of photographs’ polysemy which is also based in this interpretation on the individual’s different socialisation to certain visual rhetorics and visual genres. The specific forms of socialisation to certain visual genres may narrow and diversify the ‘degrees’ of polysemy of certain images for specialised viewers, or specific visual
communities\textsuperscript{6}, so it can of course the direct or indirect knowledge of the subjects depicted in the photographs. The concept of ‘visual literacy’ is also particularly useful in the context of my analysis because it is epistemologically linked to the concept of ‘language literacy’. It does suggest and help with the observation of the discourse ‘social’ dynamics, typical of the interviews, and the dynamics of interpretation of the images embedded in this discursive process, as a process of negotiation, among different forms of communication (and different literacies-literacies-visual and verbal-), that ultimately construct and define the interaction.

In conclusion, to bring it back to the comparison of the two interview samples; the hypothesis that the negotiation of the visual and verbal information (photograph/question) provides the basis for the broader elaboration of the subjects and themes seems to be confirmed also by those interviews in which the photographs did not receive the same degree of interest/use. These interviews proved to be closer to the interviews of the classic semi-structured sample, both in terms of their discourse structure, and in terms of the discursive strategies adopted in the elaboration of the interview subjects.

\textbf{Excerpt 23. Photo Elicited Interview. Subject 2.}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.2\textwidth]{image}
\caption{While talking about the relationship between health, food and body.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{6} The hypothesis is that on one hand similar processes of socialisation to specific visual forms of representations narrow down the degrees of polysemy of certain typical images for a specific visual community. On the other hand these same processes of socialisation might be different for different individuals, with different experiences and interests, or belonging to a different visual community, creating different understandings or interpretations of the same specific forms of visual representation. For example, consider the shared experience of certain well known advertisements made a few decades ago and the meanings, values and experiences that are associated with these same advertisements by viewers of two distant generations.

Furthermore this interpretation does also insinuate the idea that the use of other forms of visual information (see the use of drawings in therapeutic interviews with children (Prosser 1999)) might have similar, but different (based on the different symbolic, and social, values of drawings) communicative functions within the interview, which could be also interpreted in terms of different interpretative repertoires and visual literacy/s.
so still talking about the food choices, what kind of relationship do you think exists between the food that you eat and your health and your body?

ohh I think is like a close relationship because that’s the stuff that you are fuelling your body with and you need to take good food to fuel your body to keep yourself healthy, so I think there is a very close relation between food and health so if you don’t do the exercises then your food is possibly the only influence that would keep you healthy, unless you don’t do exercises I think that’s very influential. But ..I’m not concerned with .. to be honest I’m not really concerned with all this balance, I just eat what ever is there, what tastes good and I’ll probably deal with that later in my life….

humm do you think that girls and guys you know tend to perceive this relationship in the same way or differently?

no I think that girls and boys they know, they know the same amount of information about food and health, but in my opinion I think girls are more willing to live by what they know then boys, whereas like I said they don’t really, most boys anyway unless they aspire to be an athlete or just wanna be healthy, they are not really concerned about . if they have too much red meat or whatever, whereas girls they are always looking for the low calories bars or any of these foods that would keep them healthy, get rid of spots or all this kind of madness…

In this passage the response strategy of the interviewee is also based on the elaboration of one interpretation of the question. In the first response the interviewee acknowledges that there is a relationship between food and health, but also between health and physical exercise he suggests. He concludes however saying that personally he is not interested, yet, in any of these issues. The answer is constructed around a single topic/subject used to agree with the interpretation suggested by the question, and at the same time used to distance himself from that interpretation. Very similarly in the second response the interviewee constructs his answer in two related sections. This time he first denies part of the implicit suggestion of the question, that girls and guys may have different views about the issues, saying that they have the same amount of knowledge about the issues. But he then elaborates saying, that again with the exception of guys who are involved in
physical or athletic practices, girls are much more active, at times obsessive he suggests, in the actual practices of food control. In both answers the interviewee makes no direct references to the photographs, but could be argued twice indirectly refers to some of the photographs subjects (more specifically to the pyramid, both when he talks about food balance and red meat).

Although this excerpt is only one among several instances that could be analysed and used to describe the response dynamics characteristic of these (three) photo-elicited interviews, it is used here to make a point, and to give an example that can be juxtaposed to the discourse dynamics of the interviews in which the photographs were used more extensively, or to the interviews of the classic semi-structured sample. The interviews in which the photographs were more extensively used are characterised by recognisable ‘structural’ and ‘interpretative’ patterns, as we have seen, which clearly differentiate them from the other interviews (of the comparative sample – or - from the interviews in which the photographs were not noticeably used). One of these patterns, rendered by a similar process of selection of certain themes and subjects in the elaboration of the answers, deserves a more in-depth analysis and a paragraph of its own.

6.11. Patterns of selection of themes and subjects.

As suggested before there was a second pattern that strongly emerged from the analyses of the interviews. This pattern can be synthetically reduced to the emergence, within the group of interviews in which the photographs were extensively used, of similar processes of selection of specific themes and subjects. In the previous analysis I have shown that one of the significant characteristics of the responses of this group of interviewees was that their answers often showed processes of dialectic negotiation of the verbal and visual information. Within that context of analysis I argued that these processes of negotiation favoured the elaboration of articulated responses in which various topics would be indicated and explored. This comparatively was juxtaposed to the classic semi-structured interview sample, and to some of the interviews of the photo-elicited sample in which the photographs did not play a key conversational role. The responses of these two other groups of interviews, I argued, presented a much more focused and synthetic interpretation of the question and elaboration of the answer. Commonly in these responses only one key topic was selected and to different degrees elaborated. In the previous context of analysis then the focus of the investigation was on the discursive dynamics through which the responses were constructed, and the specific function that the photographs played in these responses/discursive dynamics.
The processes of negotiation that characterised these discursive dynamics however can also be observed from a different perspective and can be interpreted within a different framework. One of the key tasks of the analysis so far developed has been that of tracing the impact of different discourse dynamics on the epistemological asymmetries characteristic of the research interview. I argued in my interpretation of the research interview discourse/interaction that one of the epistemological asymmetries that characterise the research interview is constituted by the different degree of control that is exercised by the interactants on the selection of the topics and on the priority that may be given to one or some of those topics in the discourse. The basic hypothesis was that the interview is a form of discourse that is amply regulated by a pre-organised selection of specific topics mostly selected and presented by the interviewer. In the context of the analysis I questioned then whose knowledge the interview was actually representing if the interaction is mainly sequenced and organised only by one of the two interactants’ agendas. In a different context, while describing the specific design of the photo-elicited interviews, I have also argued for the specific epistemological value of images selected by the researcher, images, I argued, that again would represent the researcher’s subjective views, or visualisations, of specific subjects and topics. It was then acknowledged that, consistent with the interpretation of the Colliers (Collier & Collier 1986), the selection of specific photographs by the researcher constitutes a ‘visual essay’ (also in Losacco 1999), an elaboration and interpretation of the subjects operated by the researcher according to his/her subjective interpretations, views and agenda.

This theoretical framework proves interesting when considering the second pattern characteristic of the interviews in which the photographs were extensively used. This pattern can be again observed and discussed through the investigation of the same excerpts presented above. Almost implicit in my analyses of the processes of negotiation of the visual and verbal information that characterised the answers of some of the interviews is the link between the photograph’s subjects and the topics of the response. Looking at the previously analysed Excerpts 16 and 21, it can be noticed that although the responses were differently arguing for the subject/theme of the question they were both referring to a similar set of topics and themes. Both the interviewees referred to the magazines’ front covers, both the interviewees differentiated between the magazines for men and for women, for example, as key starting elements of their answers. Similarly to other cases, as for example with the answers that dealt with the selection of specific
kinds of food (see Excerpts 5, 14\textsuperscript{7} for example), common practice of the interviewees was to directly select and refer to the kinds of food depicted in the photographs. These topics, and many others in other parts and answers of the interviews, were directly connected to the photograph’s subjects to which the interviewees consistently referred throughout their answer (to sustain and elaborate them, but also to refuse and transform them). This process of direct reference and interpretation created a pattern among the answers that extensively referred to the photographs; the pattern being constituted by a similar process of selection of topics and themes. The responses did address and explore these themes from very different points of view, giving substance to the concept of polysemy of the image, but they also displayed at a general level a consistency in the selection of these general themes that is in contrast to or differs from the pattern of theme selection of the classic semi-structured interview sample.

It should be noted that because of the focus of some of the question on subjects which are associated to widely recognised discourses (such as for example the link between anorexia and the representation of ideal-typical skinny bodies in the media that was almost unanimously mentioned by all the interviewees) many questions elicited answers which proved similar in their selection of exemplificative subjects and themes. What differentiate the two samples then are not the selection of these otherwise common shared discourses, but the sequencing of a number of similar topics and subjects. This sequencing and selection of similar topics can then be directly linked to the initial selection of the photograph’s subjects by the interviewer. If analysed within the framework of the discourse dynamics and the influences of the two interactants on the development of the interaction, the selected photographs can be interpreted, as Drew and Heritage (Drew and Heritage 1992:165, Heritage and Greatbatch 1991) do with the questions, as a discursive element that contributes to the establishment of two opposing social identities characterised by different degrees of control on the interaction, in this case control over the topics and themes of the discussion.

The juxtaposition of these two levels of interpretation, one looking at the discourse dynamics elicited by the photographs, the other looking at the epistemological asymmetries created by the specific design of the interview which uses photographs

\textsuperscript{7} The strength of this “imposition” of subjects has been for example already described in the analyses of the Excerpt 14, also used to demonstrate however how the photographs allowed the initial rejection and transformation of these very topics by the interviewee.
selected by the researcher\(^8\), are not in contrast with one another, but complementary. On one hand the photographs can be interpreted as elements of the interaction that favoured, as we have seen in some of the excerpts, the elaboration of a certain number of topics presented by the photographs and the emergence of others than these associated by the interviewee. On the other hand the photographs can be valued in the same interaction as elements that suggested to the interviewees\(^9\) the interviewer’s interpretation of these general themes, that were then evaluated and elaborated in the answer.

My interpretation of these discourse dynamics then focuses, consistently with other parts of the analysis, on the different processes of negotiation that bring the images and/or the questions to acquire certain communicative functions/meanings\(^10\) in the specific responses of the different interviewees. Although many themes and subjects can be recognised within the different answers, the ways in which, and the interpretations through which, these themes were embedded proved to be significantly different for the various interviewees, and so proved the offspring themes that were developed from these more general themes. My interpretation then looks at these suggested themes of the photographs both as a constraint and as a communicative aid that favoured the interaction, *negotiation* and interpretations of the interviewer and the interviewees. The conclusive chapter of these analyses will reorganise and critically re-evaluate these processes of negotiation of the visual and verbal information in the discourse and their outcome for the interaction.

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\(^8\) It is worth noting that alternative methods of selection, as for example the use of photographs selected by the interviewee, create new discourse dynamics that although not matter of investigation in this analysis would be definitely constitute a further development in the interpretation and study of the methodology.

\(^9\) This is we have already seen confirmed in all the interviews by the interviewees when asked at the end of the interview about the use they did of the photographs. Please refer to the extracts 12, 13.

\(^10\) This interpretation is also informed and sustained by the critical analysis developed in Althusser’s model of interpretation. In his discussion of the concept of viewership, or the process through which we come to recognise and interpret certain forms of visual representation, Althusser explains the different interpretation of the images as a form of negotiation based on the interpretative repertoires of the viewers and the interpellation of the images. This process is very similar, in content and theoretical implications, to the one described by Bakthin (1986), Fairclough (2003), and Swales (1999) for the interpretation and negotiation of the verbal information contextually interpreted within the specific context of the interaction.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

7.1. The Image and the Interviewer–Interviewee Interactional dynamics

The comparison of the two sets of interviews has shown that the photographs provided the occasion for the development of distinctive interactional dynamics that substantially differentiated the photo-elicited and the classic semi-structured interview samples. These different interactional dynamics have been explored and interpreted through the scrutiny of the organisational, structural and semantic relations developing within the discourses of the two interview samples. The analyses, which moved synchronously through different levels of the discourse, suggested that the utilisation of photographs brought about in the photo-elicited sample two kinds of distinctive discourse features and dynamics. One, structural, affected the organisation of the interaction (the exchanges between the interactants), while the other, topical, affected the elaboration of the topics developed by the interviewees in these exchanges (the content of the response/answers).

The manifestly unequal distribution of these distinctive discourse features, however, must be cautiously interpreted to avoid a misconception of their methodological significance, which, to be fully comprehended, must be framed against three key areas of investigation:

- The general theoretical/methodological hypotheses developed in my analysis of the sociological research interview. In this case the analysis of certain communicative uses of the photographs, and the challenges that derived from these uses for the typical structural (and epistemologically asymmetric) organisation of the classic verbal interview sample, prove interesting for elaborating on the methodological value of the photographs.

- The specific analytical/methodological comparison of the two interview samples. The unconventional forms of response/interaction characteristic of the photo-elicited sample were not equally distributed in the different interviews of the sample, but were significantly and differently developed in each one of them. The analyses have shown that in some of the interviews the communicative use and interpretation of the photographs offered the opportunity for the development of unusual interactional
dynamics. The analyses also revealed however that most of the interviews (with one significant exception) followed in their overall organisation a discourse structure consistent with the classic semi-structured interviews of the comparative sample.

- The interpretational dynamics. The unconventional response strategies typical of some of the photo-elicited interviews acquire their full methodological meaning only in an analysis that includes and accounts for the entire discourse dynamic that characterised the interviews. The analysis then must include and carefully account for the interpretational dynamics, which characterised the communicative uses and function of the photographs within the clause (or the elaboration of the topics within the response/answer). These interpretational dynamics further and appreciably differentiate the discourse dynamics of the two samples.

I shall conclude the analysis of the interviews and my research with a critical re-elaboration of these key points.

Undoubtedly the unconventional forms of response, and the unusual interdiscursive dynamics that characterised some of the photo-elicited interviews, constitute a focal point for the assessment of the distinctive characteristics of this design of the photo-elicited methodology. These distinctive characteristics can be better evaluated if framed against the theoretical assessment of the research interview discourse previously developed. In my discussion of the research interview in Chapter III, I have gone a long way towards the formation of a theory that approaches the interview as an interactive endeavour subject to formal and discursive constraints. In my analysis I argued for a re-conceptualisation of the interview, and the knowledge there elaborated, as the product of a reciprocal effort of two individuals equally but differently active in this process of knowledge confrontation, elaboration, and production. I also maintained (consistent with a vast literature on the subject) that a methodologically aware approach to the interview should be considerate of and account for these differences between speakers. I sustained that a researcher must be able to describe, for example, what elements contribute to guiding (or imposing) certain interpretations in the interview, and why and how a specific interpretation prevailed in situations of ambiguity or competing inferences. These considerations moved from the basic understanding that the research interview is an interaction characterised, because of its organisation and purpose, by specific 'discourse asymmetries' (between the interviewer and the interviewee) that might intervene to create 'epistemological asymmetries' (a hierarchy) between the interviewer's and the interviewee's knowledge(s), and in the knowledge discursively produced in the
interview. These asymmetries have been illustrated with reference to the peculiar 'structural' organisation of the interview exchange, notably characterised by a typically unbalanced participation by subjects in the tasks of the interview. These asymmetries, I explained, are reflected, among other things, in the different level of control of the interactants over the topics and themes of the interview/discourse, the sequencing of the discourse, or the often-mentioned unbalanced entitlement to pose questions. Within this framework of analysis the investigation of the two interview samples produced remarkably interesting results. The analysis of the photo-elicited interviews, we have seen, revealed that some of the interviewees’ uses of the photographs raised various challenges to these conventional discourse structures which are characteristic not only of the general research interview discourse, but crucially also of the comparative classic semi-structured interview sample, in which none of these occurrences was detected. Notably, the interviewees used the photographs to:

To challenge the interpretations suggested by the interviewer. The communicative use of the photographs originated in the interaction’s multifarious forms of meaning negotiation. This negotiation of the images' meanings at times took the form of a direct challenge of the interpretations suggested by the interviewer, which was followed by the interviewee's elaboration of an alternative interpretation (See for example the discussion of Excerpts 4-5-14-15 in Chapter VI).

To reverse the conventional Question-Answer turns pre-allocation. Other times, we have seen, this negotiation was constituted by exchanges in which the interviewee would ask questions to the interviewer to finally reach a shared interpretation of the photographs' meanings (See for example the discussion of Excerpts 2-5-6-11 in Chapter VI).

As references to introduce new topics, or to oppose a suggested topic change. The photographs were used several times in the interviews to introduce new topics, to challenge the topic shift suggested by the interviewer, or to move back to a previous topic of the discussion against the indication of the interviewer (see for example the discussion of Excerpts 11-16 in Chapter VI).

These different instances of communicative use of photographs, and the identification of the discourse strategies in which they were embedded, have limited explicative value

1 And to the corresponding institutional identities and roles that they establish.
if considered individually, but acquire methodological substance when analysed together as elements that contribute to the definition of a different interactional style for the two interview methodologies.

**Question-Answer turn types:** In the third chapter of this research, using Atkinson and Drew (1979) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1991), I have described the interview as a form of interaction characterised, among other things, by a ‘turn taking system which departs substantially from the way in which turn taking is managed in conversation’ (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991:95). This, according to the notion coined by Atkinson and Drew of ‘turn type pre-allocation’ was identified as a consequence of the fact that participants in an interview are normatively constrained in the types of turns they may take (in the analyses, strong emphasis was given for example to the characteristic question-answer turn types). The analysis and comparison of the two sets of interviews revealed significant differences in the management of specific types of utterances by the two participants. The photographs displayed, in the interviews where this re-articulation of the typically pre-allocated turn types emerged, a fundamental discursive role in their re-distribution in the interaction. Among the types of utterances that characterised the photo-elicited set of interviews, of particular significance are the question-answer exchanges, and the question-answer turn type variations (as we have seen in Chapter VI Section I).

The photo-elicited set of interviews was characterised by a significant variability in the allocation of the question and answer turn types. In these interviews the interviewees often asked questions of the interviewers. The types of questions asked are particularly significant, and fundamentally differentiate the two interview samples. It has to be remarked that within the set of classic semi-structured interviews, clarification questions represented almost the entirety of the interviewees’ questioning stances. Clarification questions are normally simple questions aimed at obtaining either the repetition of a previous question or its reformulation. The photo-elicited sample showed greater variability among the types of questions asked, with questions of the same type as the clarification questions, but also with exchanges in which the interviewee would ask more personal or complex questions of the interviewer either to negotiate a shared interpretation of the photographs' meanings, or simply to elaborate on a topic of discussion. In a few instances questions were asked to directly challenge a previous question or interpretation by the interviewer\(^2\). While the analysis has shown greater

\(^2\) 20 of 22 questions asked in the in seven classic semi-structured interviews were questions used to clarify the previous question by the interviewer. In the sole interview with the subject 1 of the photo-elicited
variability in the number and kind of questions asked in the photo-elicited sample, they also described a variation in the frequency and type of questions asked within the sample. Significantly the number and type of questions varied between interviews, and in their more complex forms were mostly gathered in three of the seven interviews constituting the sample.

*Visual-verbal meanings negotiation*: The most common strategy adopted by the interviewees for their responses was to wait for both the photographs and the questions to be presented by the interviewer before answering (we have also analysed some exceptions such as the ones in which the interviewee promptly answered to the presentation of the photographs before any question could be formulated). The analyses suggested that the most common strategy (to wait for both the photographs and the question to be asked/shown) was informed by the preference of the interviewees for receiving the interpretative frame that the question provided, before answering and engaging (or not) with the interpretation of the photographs. In all the instances in which the interviewees *made use of the photographs in their answers* the two rhetorical arguments (visual-verbal) were treated as an interconnected unit, and to different degrees elaborated in their suggested subjects/meanings that were either negotiated and developed and flexibly used/interpreted/referred to in their answers, or sometimes confronted or challenged.

Several elements emerged from the analysis of these processes of meaning negotiation, development or confrontation. The photographs in combination with the verbal information (questions) provided a space for mediation or negotiation of contents and interpretations to which the interviewees reacted differently with different interpretations and associations. However, through their initial combination photographs and questions also suggested *preferred* meanings or interpretations. These meanings were mostly negotiated or discussed, shared or reinterpreted, by the interviewees who communicatively used the photographs, but they were also at times questioned as problematic, or even completely rejected. The interviewees who made significant communicative use of the photographs did not show clearly perceivable interpretative patterns among the photographs presented, the questions asked, and their answers.

In conclusion, these complex forms of discursive engagement (subject and meaning negotiation) elicited by the photographs had significant effects not only on the sample, 16 questions were asked (the highest number in the sample) representative of all three types of questions.
typical pre-allocation of the question-answer, but also on a range of significant discourse practices that influenced the dynamics and style characteristic of the whole interaction. Questions were posed to the interviewer, meanings and interpretations were directly negotiated or challenged, and institutional roles at times reversed.

**Topics and topics change:** Among the different specific negotiations that emerged in the photo-elicited sample, also interesting was the communicative use made of the photographs to either re-negotiate a turn -to further explore and account for a specific topic of interest-, or to shift from a new topic presented by the interviewer –moving to an old one or to a different one-. Photographs in this case were communicatively called into question and referred to as actual themes of the discussion. Although most of the topics shifts and topics selection, consistently with the semi-structured interview sample, were put forward and presented by the interviewer, the photographs, at least in the interviews in which the interviewees made an extensive use of the photographs, have been often used to negotiate the themes at hand. A typical exchange would see the interviewer presenting the photographs and introducing the theme and the interviewer negotiating and interpreting this theme developing his or her own line of topics. The fact that the photographs’ subjects were often interpreted as first points of departure for the response or the negotiation of new topics and meanings has important methodological implications and will be reconsidered in a moment.

Although remarkable in their dynamics (as described at the beginning none of these discursive occurrences were present in the classic verbal semi-structured sample) the sole interpretation of some of the discourse dynamics developed in the photo-elicited sample does not offer an exhaustive account and interpretation of the diversified distribution of these discourse features within the photo-elicited sample, and within each of the interviews of the sample.

In the initial stages of the analysis I focused on a systematic account of the distinctive discourse features that emerged in the photo-elicited sample and I developed a detailed line of investigation that described how the use of photographs in the photo-elicited interview sample originated several forms of discourse negotiation. These negotiations, as I described in the analysis, took the form of different kinds of discursive mediations between the subjects and the communicative functions suggested or displayed by the visual and verbal information.

These unconventional forms of communicative negotiation, however, have proved to be very differently distributed among the different interviews of the sample both in terms of the degree of communicative use of the photographs, and in terms of the
privileged discourse features in which they were adopted. This meant, as we have already seen in the analysis, that some of the interviews were characterised by a very extensive use of the photographs, while in others (almost half of the interviews of the sample) the images had a subsidiary discourse function\(^3\). Although with significant differences (I have analysed the interviewees’ diverse forms of engagements with the visual material, and the specific forms of challenge that the use of the photographs raised in different interviews, particularly in one of them), both the interviews in which the photographs were used extensively, and the ones where the photographs were used marginally, revealed an overarching organisation of the discourse consistent with the typical turns pre-allocation, discourse-sequencing, and topic selection and change characteristic of the institutional interview discourse. That means that although the interviews displayed significant differences in the negotiation of the contents and interpretations, they still relied upon and were organised in their unity around a discourse characterised by a classic discursive structure very similar to the typical discourse structure of the classics semi-structured interview sample.

The uneven distribution and the variety of discourse features developing in each interview made an overall evaluation of the communicative function of the photographs and the discourse structure of the sample a difficult task to accomplish. Unlike the classic semi-structured interview sample, in which a clear common structure emerged, the photo-elicited sample presented a more diverse range of discourse organisational structures, which are difficult to put together or generalise. This does not mean however that there are no overarching theoretical interpretations that can account for this diversity of features and responses.

The significance of the peculiar discourse strategies characteristic of the photo-elicited sample can be elaborated and reorganised with reference to the interpretation of discourse ‘genre mixing’ described by Fairclough (2003:35). Fairclough moves towards a definition of ‘discourse genre’ based on social and linguistic practices (institutional and non-) that are characterised by specific forms of discourse organisation. He however cautions that the concept of discourse genre should be interpreted warily, and that what he suggests is not that discursive events, texts and interactions, might be univocally

\(^3\) Schematically:

1+2 presentations presented a **very extensive (1) or extensive (2) use** of the photographs
1 presented and **intermediate use** of the photographs
3 displayed a **marginal use** or reference to the images

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“associated” with a certain discourse genre, but that discursive and interactional events might ‘draw upon socially available resources of genre’ (Fairclough 2003:69). Genres, in his definition, are associated with particular kinds of social practices that constitute a ‘potential’ which individuals may ‘variably drawn upon in actual texts and interactions’. According to Fairclough, a discourse is generally not ‘in’ a single genre, but it is usually a ‘mix’ or a ‘hybrid’ of discourse genres and social practices (Fairclough 2003:34). This means that individuals may rely in a discourse on several conventional/typical forms of discourse (genres). What we observe in a discourse then, Fairclough explains, is the development, emergence or imposition of a ‘main genre’ and the constitution of a hierarchy of ‘sub-genres’, based on the different contribution, or challenge, of the different sub-genres to the development of the main discourse genre.

Consistent with this interpretation, the interview can be described as a discourse genre—a specific social/discursive practice governed by a purpose, and some common social and discursive expectations. In this perspective for example an ‘interview’ can be described as an interaction characterised by specific practices and discursive expectations. The interviewee, for example, expects the interviewer to ask some questions about a topic of interest, and s/he expects to be the one who has to answer and elaborate on these questions. These basic expectations however are differently realised and contextually elaborated in any given interview according to the personal interpretations brought to the interaction/discourse by the interactants.

If interpreted within this orienting theoretical framework then I can say that the analysis showed that the use of the photographs favoured the emergence of different kinds of discourse dynamics, mixes and hybridisations in the interviews elicited by the communicative use and interpretation of the photographs. These different forms of communicative hybridisation (use and interpretation of the verbal and visual information), although at times challenging for the ‘main’ discourse genre, did not however transfigure the purpose and the overarching discourse organisational structures which remained, consistently for both interview samples, those characteristic of the research interview discourse genre. These communicative hybridisations and mixes of the verbal and visual information instead had, as we have seen in the second part of the analysis, a much more deep and spread out effect on other discourse features of the interview.
7.2. Photo-elicitation and the negotiation of the visual and verbal information: methodological implications.

The first remarkable aspect immediately apparent during the interviews and also in the initial stages of the analysis was the peculiarly different degree of elaboration of the responses of the two samples (the simple examination of the transcripts made this observation unavoidable). This, I explained, was an element difficult to tackle theoretically and methodologically for a number of reasons. Without any doubt the two interview samples presented a very different kind of elaboration of the subjects of the interview. Even if only indicative of a greater degree of elaboration, it should be noted that the interviews of the photo-elicited sample were at times twice as long as the ones of the classic semi-structured interview sample.

Although remarkable, this at first seemed to be of ambiguous value and difficult to interpret given the statistically non-representative number of interviews constituting the samples. Soon however the more analytical investigation of the interviews suggested significant interpretative hypotheses, one raising important methodological issues, the other pushing the theoretical interpretations into new, and therefore more audacious and problematic, grounds. The most elaborate interviews in the photo-elicited sample proved to be the ones conducted with the interviewees who made the most extensive use of the photographs. Although this information by itself does not tell us anything about the reasons why certain answers were lengthier and others more concise, or about what motivated the interviewees to answer in a certain way, it does however offer space for some interpretation.

One basic hypothesis privileged in the analyses of the interviews was the capacity of the photographs to add an entirely new range of information, and consequently possible paths of interpretation, for the interviewees who were willing and able to use and interpret them. The interpretation and negotiation of the two forms of information (the photographs and the questions) offered the basis, to the motivated and interested interviewees, for the elaboration of various themes and subjects. The richness, and the degree of elaboration of the responses, then seem to rely on the photograph’s ability to offer new kinds of information, and the ability and interest of the respondent to elaborate on this information. This enriched informational environment, and its communicative value for the interviewees, may be interpreted from two different perspectives. On the one hand, a simple interpretation of the communicative value of the photographs can be based on the evaluation of the very ability of images to show more and different subjects than would a simple question.
We have seen in the analysis that the classic semi-structured interviews presented a typical pattern of response that was based on a direct answer to the question, and at times, on a simple elaboration of a few complementary topics. The photo-elicited interviews, although with significant variations among them, instead displayed a significantly lengthier elaboration of the responses and a greater variety in the number of subjects explored. The elaboration of the responses, and the increased number of subjects developed within them, might in one interpretation simply be connected to the greater interpretative opportunities offered by the subjects of the pictures. The addition of the photographs’ subjects to the question’s theme might be interpreted as the cause of the lengthier and more elaborated responses of the interviewees, who then had more information to observe and elaborate upon. This basic interpretation is to some extent also confirmed by the analysis developed in Chapter VI (Section II), where I observed a typical pattern within some of the responses of the interviewees. This pattern can be synthetically reduced to the emergence, within the group of interviews in which the photographs were extensively used, of a similar selection of themes and topics; topics that could all be directly linked to the photographs’ subjects.

This recognition revealed a basic methodological issue connected to the selection and use of photographs selected by the researcher in an interview. In my analysis of the sociological inquiry in Chapter III, I discussed how the imposition of certain topics in an interview can be criticised for establishing certain epistemological asymmetries between the interactants. It is worth remembering here that the photographs were taken and selected by the interviewer, and consequently the adherence to the interviewer’s selection of themes and topics might be interpreted, if not as an imposition (some interviewees did not directly refer to or use the photographs), as a direct form of control over the development of the interaction. If this cognition remains problematic in the methodological assessment of this interview design, there are however other aspects of these same responses which are worth exploration.

The analysis revealed that various responses to the same questions and photographs presented a similar selection of themes and topics. However, it also showed that these responses differed significantly in the elaboration of these same themes and topics. If observed from this crucial perspective the investigation of the patterns of selection of the themes and topics tells us a great deal about the similar processes of selection adopted by the interviewees, but very little about the differences existing between their interpretations. It says even less about the responses (and the interviewees) that did not select those themes at all. Furthermore, although the main themes may have
been similar for some responses, the development of new topics and their correlation were many times very different. An inclusive approach must be able then to account both for these similarities, and the differences.

As I suggested in the analysis, the juxtaposition of these two levels of interpretation, one looking at the discourse dynamics elicited by the photographs, the other looking at the epistemological asymmetries created by the specific design of the interview, are in my interpretation not in contrast to one another, but are complementary. On one hand, as we have seen in some of the excerpts, the photographs can be interpreted as elements of the interaction that favoured the elaboration of a certain number of topics presented by the photographs and the emergence of others than the ones associated by the interviewee. On the other hand the photographs can be valued in the same interaction as elements that suggested these general themes to the interviewees, who then evaluated them and subjectively elaborated upon them in their answers. In the first part of the analysis I developed a detailed argument that described how the use of the photographs in the photo-elicited interview sample originated several forms of discourse negotiation. These negotiations, as I described in the analysis, took the form of different kinds of discursive mediations between the subjects and the communicative functions suggested or displayed by the visual and verbal information. In this new analytical framework (which investigates the dynamics through which the answers were elaborated) my key interpretative hypotheses are based on an interpretation of the varying ability, and motivation, of the interviewees to draw on their (specialised or not) visual interpretative repertoires; that is, as I briefly suggested in the analysis, their specific visual literacy(ies).

The concept of visual literacy has currency in many discourses about visual languages and visual forms of representation. It is however also a subject of great confusion and competing interpretations. My use and interpretation of the term can be conceptually linked to the seminal interpretation of Moholy-Nagy who in his discussion of photographic communicative practices juxtaposed the photograph and the alphabet, visual literacy and verbal literacy, as two products of different, but similar, learning processes. This seminal concept has been admired by many scholars, among them for example Kress and Van Leeuven (1996) who elaborated on this relation between linguistic and visual elements as socially mediated, contextually acquired, practices (Kress and van Leeuven 1996:2-4). These various processes of acquisition to which the authors refer describe for the image practices (interpretation, acquisition, naturalisation and re-presentation) a process of socialisation to the images which brings into question certain contemporary interpretations of the photograph that focus on experience, and treat
‘photography as a set of practices that take place in particular contexts’ (Wells 2001:11) which are both socially and individually experienced and elaborated (see my discussion of the rise of post-semiotic and post-modern interpretations in the investigation of the image, which I developed in chapter II).

It is from this perspective that the concept of visual literacy offers a theoretical investigative tool that allows us to add a new ‘social’ dimension to the concept of photographs’ polysemic, which I interpret as based on the individual’s different socialisation with regard to certain visual rhetorics and visual genres.

Photographs’ meaning is seen in this perspective as overtly dialectical (at the level of the viewer: among the visual representations, contexts, previous experiences, knowledge, and viewer’s motivation), and open to negotiation (at the level of the interaction: according to the contexts in which images’ meanings have to be discursively negotiated and achieved among viewers). Different visual representations, practices of use, the individual’s socialisation and knowledge, motivations, contexts, and discursive negotiations interact with each other, and influence and transform each other, creating a network of (visual) experiences and interpretations that sustain and influence any actual interpretation of the images. This network of experiences brings into consideration both what Bourdieu calls the habitus (1977) of the person, i.e. the embodied dispositions which enable them to see and act in certain ways based upon socialisation and experience, and my interpretation of the concept of individual’s visual literacy(ies), which is based on this network of individual experiences, social representations and contextual negotiations of visual representations and meanings. It is this difference (and at times similarity) in individuals’ visual literacy, that is, the specific different forms of socialisation to, and knowledge of, certain forms of visual representations and subjects, that may account for (but also diversify) the communicative uses and interpretation of images’ meaning by certain viewers.

An example might help to clarify these concepts: a medical doctor is trained in the interpretation of an echo-scan photographic representation, and the amount and type of information that s/he will be able to retrieve from its observation is significantly different from the information that would be available to the lay observer. Similarly, to the experienced photographer or the astrophysicist respectively, the picture of a scene whose focus is extended from the closest objects depicted in the picture to the furthest ones, or the picture of a red nebula, will communicate different technical-scientific information about the aperture that was used to take the picture, or the direction in which the nebula was moving relative to the point of observation from which the photograph
was taken. These examples are representative of three different systems of visual representation (and systems of knowledge) that signify something specific to each observer’s specialised visual literacy (representative of the visual knowledge(s) of the communities of medical doctors, photographers and astrophysicists and the property of the individuals who master them).

How can these examples help us to understand the dynamics of interpretation and the use of the pictures in the specific context of our photo-elicited interviews? If we continue with the previous cases and we include the context of interpretation of the images as one of the fundamental aspects that contribute to the actual interpretation of an image (see the discussion in Chapter III), we can say that communicatively these same pictures (echo-scan, a still photo, or the photograph of a nebula) can be hypothesised to acquire a completely different meaning for most observers who would look at the same photographs if exposed in their “original” contexts of production (the hospital, the lab, the observatory) or in a different one, such as an art gallery. Conversely however, it can be hypothesised that if exhibited in an art gallery these pictures would also retain some of their ‘original’ meanings for a medical doctor, an experienced photographer or an astrophysicist who observed them in that context. Similarly it could be hypothesised that in the same art gallery in a discussion over the meaning of any of these pictures between a lay observer and one of the three specialised viewers, part of the specialised knowledge (or specific visual literacy) of the ‘specialised’ viewer would emerge in his/her interpretations, although discursively negotiated within the context, and with the meanings (visual knowledge/literacy-interpretation-motivations) brought to the discussion of the images by the other observer.

This interpretation proves interesting in the context of my previous hypothesis regarding the interview discourse because it also allows us to overcome any reductive interpretation of the polysemous communicative value of the photographs based solely on the image’s communicative qualities. It allows us to elaborate on and account for competing inferences about the same photographs, such as the ones for example observed in the interviews where pictures were either interpreted with reference to the subjects of the photographs themselves, or to the symbolic communicative practices in which these images might have been usually embedded (see the discussion of the excerpts 16 and 17 of the representation of the media in Chapter VI for example).

The concept of visual literacy is useful for my interpretation as a fringe model that helps to allow us to speculate on and observe the social dynamics of discourse, typical of any process of interpretation of an image, and to include them within the
dynamics of the interpretation of the images embedded in the discursive process of an interview, where meanings become and are discursively achieved through the confrontation and negotiation of different forms of knowledge that ultimately, through the discourse, construct and define the interaction.

The concept of visual literacy, or better still the possibility to talk about different, personal, and more or less specialised, forms of (visual) knowledge, proves interesting for reframing many of the interactions that have been analysed in the course of the research. The usefulness of the concept is particularly evident when reconsidering some of the excerpts taken from interviews in which the interviewees made an extensive use of the photographs, and on a more general level in most of the interactions in which the photographs were actively used by the interviewees. In some of the interviews, and for some combinations of photographs and questions, I analysed cases of an extensive use of the photographs in the elaboration of the interviewee’s answers. Already in the initial analysis of those excerpts I noticed that the style, the lexical choices, and the elaboration of the subjects proved the interviewee’s strong interest in the photographs. They also however proved the interviewee’s knowledge of the themes/subjects to which those photographs referred. This specific knowledge, either of the subjects or of the systems of representation, in which the images are typically used, or of both was elaborated, negotiated, and exchanged in all the responses in which the photographs were significantly used by the interviewees.

What is important for me to stress here then is the epistemological value that the combination of the two systems of signification represents for the sociological interview. It is important to stress that although if characterised by several differences and a diverse distribution of the interactional dynamics, the interviews with the photographs offered, in comparison with the classic verbal interviews, only further opportunities for the dialogue between the two interactants, without otherwise detracting from the interactions in which the images were not communicatively used. It has to be noticed in fact that although the images did not seem to directly affect or interest some of the interviewees of the sample, they did not constitute within those same interviews any obstacle to the normal development of the interaction. The photographs instead did however in a significant number of cases substantially helped the interviewee to reshape, transform and enhance the interactional dynamics of the interviews and the degree of elaboration of those topics and themes that they recognised as familiar, or interesting. The images then from this point of view can be interpreted as communicative elements that open up possible
alternative pattern of interaction, open to diverse, but still complementary areas of experience and knowledge

My research offered an in-depth analysis of these possible interpretative dynamics, as well as a methodologically informed analysis of the implications that these interactions might have for the interaction and the outcomes of the interview. In a re-appropriation of the Gadamer’s concept of fusion of horizons (Chapter III), the use of the photographs, even the once selected by the interviewer, may become communicative elements that can favour the mediation, confrontation and exchange of different forms of knowledge, interpretations, and experiences.

7.2. Conclusions and key theoretical findings

The joint use of verbal and visual forms of representation within the context of a research interview creates the conditions for certain forms of hybridisation (or peculiar form of genre mixing) between the two symbolic systems of representation which are confronted and negotiated for the creation of meanings. This line of reasoning supports the definition of a more general interpretative hypothesis, and sustains the conclusive interpretation of my case study,

**The photo-elicited interview**: The images in the interview did not consistently re-shape the interview structure or the power relations existing in the interaction, they however created the opportunity for a particular Genre Mixing and Verbal-Visual Communicative Hybridism from which different forms of interaction developed and specific challenges to the institutional identities, and epistemological asymmetries, emerged (specific for each interview/ee, but characterised by some overlapping characteristics).

**The comparison of the two interview methodologies.** The two sets of interviews proved strongly similar in terms of their discourse organisational structures, which reflected a consistent separation between the institutional identities of the interactants. Significant differences however emerged at different levels within the interviews in which the interviewees used the photographs more extensively. These different uses had methodologically significant effects on the interview structure at different levels. The most significant differences between the two samples however emerged in other areas of the discourse. Noticeably at the level of the content of the answers which displayed consistently within the sample an higher degree of elaboration both at the level of the number of themes discussed that at the level of their elaboration within the answers.

**A general Hypothesis**: Genre mixing, when present, always represents a challenge to the established power relations associated with the *dominant discourse genre* (in this case the
sociological interview genre). The nature of this challenge is a function of the hybrid discourse genre that emerges (if it does emerge) in each contextualised interaction, and it is specific to the particular communicative use that is made of the photographs by the interactants involved in that exchange. The photographs can be hypothesised to be communicative elements that create a discursive environment that favours these forms of genre mixing and consequently the redefinition of the relationship between the interactants.

Limits of the research: The methodological comparison of the two interview designs significantly limited the interactional responses available to the interviewer, who could not follow up the interviewee is some of his/her invitations. An analysis of the method freed from these comparative constraints should offer the chance for new analyses of the interactional dynamics which might develop in this case. The selection of the photographs made by the researcher has strong methodological implications. It would be definitely worth exploring the different methodological aspects which might characterise a photo-elicited interview based on photographs selected by the interviewees. The limited number of interviewees in the two samples did not allow further generalisation or the analysis of statistical patterns.
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