


# Documentary method and praxeological sociology of knowledge in the interpretation of pictures

## *Método documentario y sociología praxeológica del conocimiento en la interpretación de imágenes*

Ralf Bohnsack  | ralf.bohnsack@fu-berlin.de  
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

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### Abstract

Under the name "picture science" an access to the internal logic of the picture in demarcation from verbal language and text was demanded first from side of the spiritual sciences – in broad accordance among prominent authors from this field. Social sciences and sociology as empirical sciences especially have to face the challenge of implementing these demands methodically and theoretically according to their epistemological standards. Concerning the groundbreaking Iconology developed by Panofsky a stronger consideration of the formal composition of the picture is demanded from side of the history of arts. From a mere sociological perspective the following has to be claimed in addition: the iconological access to the picture with its praxeological perspective on the modus operandi of its production by Panofsky's category of the habitus had overcome the iconographic perspective, which is bounded to the common sense with its (methodically not justifiable) ascriptions or imputations of intentions and motives to the picture producers. In the further development of the praxeological perspective on the one hand a differentiation of the category of the habitus regarding photography seems to be necessary – by distinguishing between the habitus of the picture producers behind the camera from those in front of it. On the other hand it seems important to transcend the category of the habitus in direction of incongruencies and ambiguities which are constitutive for the frames of orientation of the picture producers and thus the semantic of the picture. This will be demonstrated empirically in this work by the interpretation of advertising pictures on base of the Documentary Method with respect to the category of the pose, which appears as a de-contextualization of relevant gestures.

**Keywords:** documentary method, interpretation of pictures, praxeological sociology of knowledge, iconology, frame of orientation.

### Resumen

Bajo el nombre de "ciencia de la imagen", y en amplia consonancia entre destacados autores de este campo, un acceso a la lógica interna de la imagen en demarcación con el lenguaje verbal y el texto. Las ciencias sociales y la sociología, como ciencias empíricas, tienen que enfrentarse especialmente al reto de poner en práctica estas exigencias de forma metódica y teórica de acuerdo con sus estándares epistemológicos. En cuanto a la innovadora iconología desarrollada por Panofsky, desde el punto de vista de la historia del arte se exige una mayor consideración de la composición formal de la imagen. Desde una perspectiva meramente sociológica hay que afirmar además lo siguiente: el acceso iconológico a la imagen con su perspectiva praxeológica sobre el modus operandi de su producción mediante la categoría del habitus de Panofsky había superado la perspectiva iconográfica, que está limitada al sentido común con sus (metódicamente no justificables) adscripciones o imputaciones de intenciones y motivos a los productores de imágenes. En el desarrollo ulterior de la perspectiva praxeológica, por un lado, resulta necesaria una diferenciación de la categoría del habitus en relación con la fotografía, distinguiendo entre el habitus de los productores de imágenes detrás de la cámara y los que están delante de ella; por otro, parece relevante trascender la categoría del habitus en dirección a las incongruencias y ambigüedades que son constitutivas de los marcos de orientación de los productores de imágenes y, por lo tanto, de la semántica de la imagen. Lo anterior se demuestra empíricamente en este trabajo mediante la interpretación de imágenes publicitarias sobre la base del Método documentario con respecto a la categoría de la pose, que aparece como una descontextualización de los gestos relevantes.

**Palabras clave:** método documentario, interpretación de imágenes, sociología praxeológica del conocimiento, iconología, marco de orientación.

### Summary

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## 1. Introduction

The increasing emphasis on the picture, which has been established under the name of “picture science”, presents itself as a transdisciplinary project. Picture science – unfolding across the disciplines – thus may be called transdisciplinary or in the words of William Mitchell (1994) an “undiscipline” in a positive sense. Picture science however derives its inspirations (up to now) little from the social scientific but mostly from the spiritual scientific traditions, mainly from the history of the arts, philosophy and semiotics. Picture science is directed to “its own, only to itself dedicated logic” of the picture, as Gottfried Boehm (2007, p. 34) demanded<sup>1</sup>, summarizing in this context: “In spite of two and half thousand years of European science this Problem remains curiously marginalized”. When Boehm (2007) further is stating: “Not before the 20<sup>th</sup> century approaches concerning the scientific discourse of pictures take shape” (p. 10), this again concerns only the area of the spiritual sciences and not before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> resp. the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the social sciences. Whereas in the area of the spiritual sciences it may be right to speak about a “pictorial turn” (Mitchell, 1994), this is hardly true for the social sciences. Because a methodical basis for the analysis of pictures and photos which could satisfy the methodological requirements of empirical research is still at the beginning of its development. This is also true for the social scientific analysis of videos and films, which furthermore also has to face up the traditions of the film studies. This contribution deals with the interpretation of pictures and photos and only in the margin with the interpretation of videos and films. The documentary interpretation of films and especially videos is comprehensively dealt with in other publications.

## 2. The theoretical and methodological state of art in the interpretation of pictures in the social sciences

In the social sciences the interpretation of pictures has developed as a domain of qualitative research (see in detail among others Bohnsack, 2009, 2020). Examining the development of qualitative methods during the last twenty years, we come to an observation which, at first sight, seems to be paradox: the growing sophistication and systematization of qualitative methods has been accompanied by the marginalization of the picture. The considerable progress in qualitative methods during the last twenty years is – especially in Germany – essentially associated with the interpretation of texts. This is partly due to the so-called *linguistic turn*. The orientation towards the paradigm of the text and its formal structures has led to enormous progress in qualitative methods’ precision. One of the reasons for this can be seen in the methodological change of treating the text as a self-referential system, as we can call it in terms of modern system theory (Luhmann, among others, 1990). In the analysis of talk Harvey Sacks (1995, p. 536), the founder of Conversation Analysis, has put it in this way: “If one is doing something like a sociology of conversation, what one wants to do is to see what the system itself provides as bases, motives, or what have you, for doing something essential to the system.” This device or premise first applied in the field of Conversational Analysis was later followed by other methodologies pertaining to the area of text interpretation, among others by the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2020, Weller & Pfaff, 2013, Wagener, 2022b).

In a strict sense, this premise or device however has not yet become relevant in the social sciences for the interpretation of picture. The Documentary Method here is on a good way, as we claim (Bohnsack, 2020; chapt., 9 and 13.4; Bohnsack, 2017, chapt 6). Following this methodical principle it refers among others also to the history of arts and to philosophy, adapting them to the requirements of the social sciences. The historian of the arts Max Imdahl (1979) understood the picture as a “system, which is constructed according to inherent laws and its evident autonomy” (p. 190). Especially we should no longer obstruct the sight on the peculiarities of the picture by our verbal-narrative pre-knowledge. According to Imdahl the iconical interpretation can abstain from the ascription of iconographical meanings or iconographical pre-knowledge – that is from textual knowledge. Iconic interpretation can – as Imdahl has put it – “refrain from the perception of the literary or scenic content of the picture, it is particularly successful when the knowledge of the represented subject is, so to speak, methodically suppressed” (Imdahl, 1996b, p. 435). Such a “suppression” or “suspension” of textual pre-knowledge seems to be methodically necessary if we seek to comprehend a picture in Imdahl’s sense as a self-referential system.

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<sup>1</sup> All English citations of non-English publications have been translated by the author.

In relation to Imdahl's suspension of textual knowledge, we can find correspondences or analogies to semiotics in the work of both of its prominent representatives. Beyond the differences between Umberto Eco (1968) as well as Roland Barthes (1991), both agree that we must begin with the interpretation of pictures below the level of connotations in order to advance to the autonomy and inherent laws of the picture. The level of connotation, however, as Eco (1968, p. 143) emphasizes, corresponds in several respects to Panofsky's level of iconography. For Roland Barthes (1991, p. 31), when decoding the messages of the picture, we must "get rid of its connotations". At this point, some parallels with Foucault's well-known interpretation of the painting *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez become apparent. In his interpretation, Foucault (1989, p. 10) emphasized that "we must therefore pretend not to know". According to Foucault, it is not so much the knowledge about institutions and roles which should be suspended – in the example of *Las Meninas* this would mean our knowledge about the institution of the Spanish Court with its courtiers, maids of honour and gnomes. It is much more "proper names" (Foucault, 1989, p. 10) which should be suspended. This means that our knowledge about the case-specific or the milieu-specific peculiarity of what is presented, and of its concrete history, should be omitted, "if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided" (Foucault, 1989, p. 10).

Certain analytical coincidences between prominent approaches and traditions in the area of picture interpretation must be addressed. The precondition for the openness, which among others Foucault demands, is to avoid, from the outset, the subordination of the picture to the logic of language and text. Research on pictures should be in the position, to no longer "explain pictures through texts, but to differentiate them from texts," as the historian of the arts Hans Belting (2001, p. 15) has put it with reference to William Mitchell (1994). Up until now this problem has not been fully taken into account in qualitative methods. And these devices not only remain unnoticed in broad areas of empirical research in sociology and the social sciences as far as the interpretation of still pictures are concerned but also with reference to moving ones. Here it is especially remarkable that a strong development in video analysis, mainly initiated by Charles Goodwin (2001) and Christian Heath (1997) and localizing itself in the tradition of Conversation Analysis and Ethnomethodology and thus emphasizing the self-referential logic of the text, denies such a status to iconic phenomena. Thus they only have an additional significance in the interpretation of our everyday activities not an essential one as it is the case in the documentary analysis of videos and films (see among others Bohnsack, 2009; 2020; Baltruschat, 2010; Hao 2016). The development of the documentary analysis of videos and films started about ten years after the documentary interpretation of pictures, which began directly with the turn of the century.

### 3. The theoretical and methodological background of the documentary interpretation of pictures

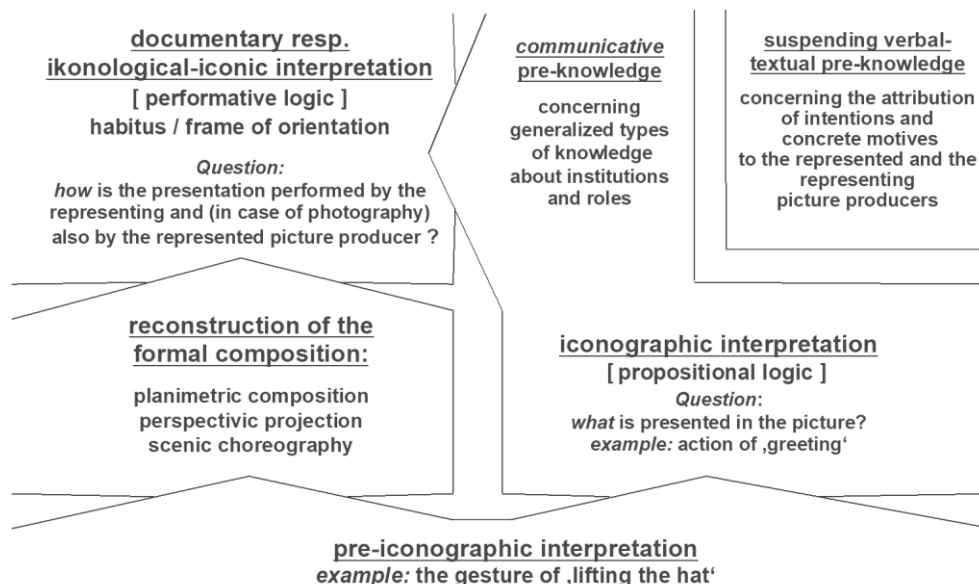
In order to find a theoretical and methodical access to the internal logic of the picture we have to distinguish between our *explicit* knowledge and our *implicit* or – as Michael Polanyi (1966), one of the founders of practice theory, has called it – *tacit* knowledge. Polanyi (1966) characterized the latter by the observation, "that we can know more than we can tell" (p. 4). And this is especially true for the knowledge mediated by pictures. But also when speaking and writing we are dealing with two different sorts of knowledge following a different logic. Already about 40 years ago Karl Mannheim (1982, p. 204) talked about the implicit knowledge as the "conjunctive" and the explicit knowledge as the "communicative" one. The former is our knowledge *within our practice* which is guiding our action, the latter is our knowledge on the level of *interpreting* our practice and communicate *about* it. Both of these levels of knowledge constitute a *structure of "duality"* in our everyday life, "a duality in which individuals bear themselves, in relation to concepts as well as realities" (Mannheim, 1982, p. 265). The duality and the relation of tension between the two dimensions is a constitutive element of the "conjunctive space of experience" ("*konjunktiver Erfahrungsraum*"; Mannheim 1982, p. 204; 1980, p. 220). Mannheim (1952a) developed the "Documentary Method" first in his essay on the Interpretation of the "*Weltanschauung*", a conception from Dilthey (1924) which in other of Mannheim's works (1982) partly was substituted by the category of the conjunctive space of experience. In developing Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge further in the direction of a Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge the two dimensions – the conjunctive and the communicative – are understood as logically different (Bohnsack, 2017). Their relation may be understood in the sense of a tension between the *performative logic*, which is constitutive for the *conjunctive* and *implicit* knowledge and the *propositional logic*, which is constitutive for the *communicative* and *explicit* knowledge. We encounter the duality between the logically different dimensions

as well in the relation of tension between common sense theory versus practical action as also between rule (or norm) versus habitus.

Erwin Panofsky (1955), the most famous historian of the arts, had referred to this duality between the explicit or propositional meaning of a picture versus its implicit or performative meaning as the relation between *iconography* and *iconology*. In a very early stage of the development of the Documentary Method, in the 1930<sup>th</sup>, Panofsky adopted it for this groundbreaking innovation in the history of arts and the interpretation of pictures in general: he understood the iconological meaning also as the “documentary meaning” (Panofsky, 1932, p. 115). He was a contemporary and (as far as his forced emigration is concerned) also a companion in fate of Karl Mannheim. The object of iconological or documentary interpretation is the “habitus” (Panofsky, 1939). As is generally known, Bourdieu (1974) adopted this concept from Panofsky. Because of these correspondences of the Documentary Method with the Iconology of Panofsky, we can transfer central elements of the Iconology to the Documentary Method and vice versa.

The change from iconography to iconology, from the communicative to the conjunctive meaning or from the immanent or literal to the documentary meaning and in general: from the propositional to the performative logic may also be characterized as the change from the question of “What” to the question of “How”. Karl Mannheim (1952a, p. 67), Niklas Luhmann (1990, p. 95) and Martin Heidegger (2010) agree that this indicates fundamental differences in the analytic attitude. Following Panofsky, the question “What” does not only include the level of iconography but also the so-called *pre-iconographic* level. The difference between iconography and pre-iconography is relevant not only for art history but also for social sciences and action theory. This becomes evident when Panofsky (1955, pp. 52-54) explains these two dimensions or steps of interpretation not only in the field of works of art but in the field of everyday life. As an example, Panofsky describes the gesture of an acquaintance. This gesture, which at the pre-iconographical level will at first be identified as the “lifting of a hat”, can only at the iconographical level be analyzed as a “greeting”. Figure 1 provides further clarification of Panofsky’s concrete example, but also goes already beyond Panofsky in a way which will be explained further in the text<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1. Dimensions of meaning in the interpretation of the picture



Source. Own elaboration.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed demonstration of the different steps in the practice of interpretation, we can refer to Bohnsack 2020, chapt. 13.4 and 2009, chapt. 4.

Elaborating Panofsky's argumentation in the framework of social sciences, the step from the pre-iconographical to the iconographical level of interpretation can be characterized as the step from mere *description* of the process of practices or gestures to the *ascription of intentions and motives*, more precisely to the ascription of "in-order-to-motives" in the understanding of Alfred Schutz (1964, p. 19ff). The acquaintance then is lifting his hat in order to greet. On the level of iconographical interpretation, we search for subjective intentions – as we always do in the realm of *common sense-theorizing*. The attribution of motives and intentions as a way of iconographical interpretation is only on a valid methodical basis as long as we are dealing with action within the framework of institutions and roles (as in Panofsky's example this is the institutionalized greeting). Otherwise, the iconographical interpretation is based on introspection and ascriptions which cannot be validated by empirical observation.

Thus the Social Phenomenology founded by Alfred Schutz dealing with the "constructs of common sense" (Schutz 1964, p. 3) may be overall understood as a theoretical elaboration at the iconographical level of interpretation (cf. Bohnsack, 2017). And in this sense the iconological interpretation and thus the interpretation of the habitus may be understood as "the rupture with the presuppositions of lay and scholarly common sense", as Bourdieu (1992, p. 247) has put it. The conception of habitus refers – in the understanding of Bourdieu as well as in the Praxeological Sociology – to collective phenomena like milieus, for example, to the 'proletarian' or the 'bourgeois' or to gender-specific or generational milieus. Or it may be understood – as it was the original intention of Panofsky – as the expression of a historical epoch in general, for example, of the Gothic or the Renaissance period. Different from such collective habitus the individual habitus is more complicated because any individual takes part in several milieus.

Somehow synonymous to the category *habitus* the category *frame of orientation* is used as the corresponding term in the Documentary Method and the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge. Among others these conceptual differences are due to several *differences* from Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture (see more in Bohnsack, 2017). One of them concerns the *genesis* of habitus and classes. Whereas Bourdieu refers primarily to the medium of *distinction*, the Documentary Method tries to understand the genesis of the habitus and the constitution of milieus in the medium of *conjunction*, i.e. in common or conjunctive social experiences which Mannheim (1982) called "conjunctive spaces of experiences" ("*konjunktive Erfahrungsräume*"; Bohnsack, 2017). Not only tangible groups like families, neighbourhoods or peer groups are constituted on the basis of spaces of conjunctive experience and conjunctive understanding. In the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge milieus in general are understood as conjunctive spaces of experience. As Karl Mannheim (1952b, p. 297) has shown in his essay about the formation of generations in society, they are constituted by commonalities in the "stratification of experience" ("*Erlebnisschichtung*"). Such commonalities in the stratification of experience result from existential involvement in common practices of socialization. The same may be true among others also for milieu-specific or gender-specific spaces of experience. The empirical analysis on the basis of the Documentary Method, thus differentiates among others between generation-, milieu- and gender-specific (as well as other) spaces of experience with their specific habitus. The particular case under research (for instance a peer group of young people) such is characterized by an overlaying of different spaces and habitus and may be characterized by its *multidimensionality* in a multidimensional typology (Bohnsack, 2020).

### 3.1. The difference between the habitus resp. frame of orientations of the representing and the represented picture producer

According to Panofsky, in reconstructing iconological meaning we are searching for the habitus of the picture's producer. Especially in the area of photography, however, it seems to be necessary to proceed beyond Panofsky and to differentiate between two fundamental dimensions or kinds of picture producers as it had been worked out in the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge resp. the Documentary Method. On the one hand, we have the *representing picture producers*, such as the photographer as well as all of those who are acting behind the camera and who are participating in the production of the picture. On the other hand, we have the *represented picture producers*. These are all the persons, beings and social scenes which are part of the *sujet* of the picture and are acting in front of the camera. The methodical problems which result from the complex relation between these two different kinds of picture producers can be solved easily as long as both belong to the same milieu, to the same "conjunctive space of experience".

For example, this is the case when a family member is taking a family photograph, or when (as it is with historical paintings which are meant to give us insight into a historical epoch) the painter as well as the models or pictured scenes belong to the same epoch. All this becomes methodically much more complex when the habitus of the represented picture producer is not in correspondence or in congruency with that of the representing picture producer<sup>3</sup>. It may happen then that the frame of orientation of the presenting picture producer is so dominant that we can speak of a *heteronomous framing* which is a central condition of *framing power* (Bohnsack, 2017). In advertising photos, which we will take as empirical examples in this work, the full sovereignty over the design by the advertising agencies resp. its customers is institutionalized, so that incongruencies between the presenting and the presented picture producers can reasonably not be expected.

In the area of photographs and videos the framing by the presenting picture producers in its elementary and material form is constituted as the "cadrage" (Deleuze, 1994) produced mainly by the section of the camera. It is directly interconnected with the *constitution of the formal structures* in the dimensions of planimetry and perspective, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Learning about the habitus of the presenting picture producer by the cadrage and the formal structure they may also give us insights into his or her existential social standpoint and its social bonds (the "Standort"- resp. "Seinsgebundenheit" in the understanding of Karl Mannheim (1936, p. 239). This is of methodical relevance for research where photos or videos are instruments for the collection and acquisition of data. The researchers themselves thus are the presenting picture producers (in contrast to research where data are produced by those under research themselves). The reconstruction of the planimetry and perspective thus are important for the methodical control of the empirical intervention and its analysis.

### 3.2. Relying on the reconstruction of the formal composition and on the pre-iconographic knowledge

Panofsky has worked out the concept of the habitus or the documentary meaning (for instance of an epoch like the Renaissance) by ways of *homologies* (structural identities) between quite different media or quite different genres (painting, architecture, literature and music) from the same epoch. This extraordinary achievement however also has become the point of reference for the art historian Max Imdahl to ask what then is *singular* to the picture medium or to iconicity in Panofsky's interpretations. In this context Imdahl (1996a, p. 89) especially criticized the reduced significance of the reconstruction of "forms" and "formal compositions" in the work of Panofsky. Their interpretation would be reduced to their function of arranging pictured objects in their concreteness and of arranging iconographical narrations (for example a text from the Bible) in a recognizable manner. Imdahl (1996a, p. 89) contrasts this so-called "recognizing view" ("*wiedererkennendes Sehen*") with the "seeing view" ("*sehendes Sehen*"), which has its focus of reference not in the pictured objects in their concreteness, but in the entire composition of the picture. This differentiation is the basis of Imdahl's method, which he has called "iconic" ("*Ikonik*"; Imdahl, 1996a). The iconic resp. iconological interpretation is based primarily on reconstructing the formal composition and on the pre-iconographical description by suspending or "suppressing" ("*verdrängen*"; Imdahl, 1996b, p. 435) methodically most of the textual-narrative knowledge constituting the iconographical level. And in the sense of Foucault (1989, p. 10) this means, as already mentioned, to suspend "proper names" (Foucault, 1989, p. 10), i.e. pretending not to know about the case-specific situation, but including our knowledge about the formal institution and roles of the depicted situation. In terms of the Documentary Method it means that we should erase all our verbal-textual knowledge on the *conjunctive*, but not on the *communicative* level. Taking a family photo as an example, we should, or must, proceed on the assumption (or on the basis of secured information) that the pictured persons are a family, i.e. on the basis of our communicative knowledge (see for an empirical example Bohnsack, 2009). Thus we have to introduce until further notice our knowledge about the institution of the family and its role relations. If we know that it is the 'Johnson' family, we should, however, suspend or ignore as completely as possible all of the verbal-textual knowledge we have for instance about the concrete biography and history of this family. In this respect, we should only depend on the knowledge we can gain from the interpretation of the picture itself, even if we are endowed with valid *conjunctive* knowledge (maybe

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<sup>3</sup> We have demonstrated this among others with the example of a photo from a family of farm workers in Brazil, which was taken by the well-known photographer Sebastião Salgado (see Bohnsack 2017, 2020), but also with examples from photographs of politicians edited and published in the print media (see Bohnsack 2017, & Kanter, 2016).

on the basis of interviews or the analysis of family conversations). Suspending or ignoring this, we thus should begin as far as possible on the *pre-iconographical level* and on the level of the *formal structure* (see Figure 1).

The methodical importance of reconstructing the formal structure of the picture had been explained by Imdahl (1996a) among others with the example of Giotto's famous fresco "The Capture of Christ".

Figure 2. Giotto, The capture of Christ– planimetric composition



Source. Lines drawn by the author according to Imdahl (1996a), *Abbildungsverzeichnis*, p. 45.

Imdahl tried to demonstrate that, "due to a specific pictorial composition, Christ appears in a position of being inferior and superior at the same time". This semantic content, which in the understanding of Imdahl (1996a, p.107) is characterized by a "complexity of meaning in transcontrariness" (in German: "*Sinnkomplexität des Übergegensätzlichen*"), here is essentially based upon the so-called "*planimetric composition*", i.e. upon the understanding of the picture as a plane. In the case of Giotto's "*The Capture of Christ*" it is only one slanting line, which – according to Imdahl – is decisive for the formal composition of the picture. According to Roland Barthes (1991, p. 53) the deeper structure of the picture, the "obtuse meaning" can only be transmitted by the medium of text or language in the form of ambiguity. In a similar way, Umberto Eco (1968) speaks of the "productive ambiguity" in the deeper semantic structure of the picture. Whereas for Imdahl it is not completely futile to attempt to verbalize this complexity of meaning, Roland Barthes (1991, p. 59) insists that "we can locate theoretically but not describe" that deeper semantic structure of the picture which he calls the "obtuse meaning". "The obtuse meaning is not in the language system" (Barthes, 1991, p. 51).

All newer qualitative methods of the interpretation of *texts* are following a strict *sequence analysis* (Bohnsack, 2020). The pictures however are inherent a "everything to everything and everything to the hole simultaneous structure" (Imdahl, 1996a, p. 23). And with Imdahl we can distinguish three dimensions in the formal compositional structure of the picture: Besides the "*planimetric composition*" these are the "*scenic choreography*" and the "*perspective projection*" (see also Figure 5). Perspectivity has its function primarily in the identification of concrete objects depicted in their spatiality and corporality and is thus orientated to the regularity of the

world outside of the picture (re)presented in it. With reference to the scenic choreography, the same is true for the social scenes represented in or by the picture. In contrast, the reconstruction of the planimetric composition, the picture's formal structure as a plane, leads us preferably to the picture as a "system, which is designed according to its inherent laws and is evident in its autonomy" (Imdahl, 1979, p. 190). If we thus succeed in gaining access to the picture as a self-referential system, then we will also attain systematic access to inherent laws of the picture producer's conjunctive space of experience – for example to that of a family with its specific collective habitus.

### 3.3. The dual structure of habitus and norm, the performative versus the propositional logic

The dual structure and the relation of tension between the conjunctive and the communicative knowledge or the performative and the propositional logic is – as already mentioned – one of the theoretical principles of the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge (see Bohnsack 2017). Going beyond Bourdieu's conception of the habitus this means that it is required to enforce the manifestation of this duality and its relation of tension in the notorious discrepancy of *habitus versus rule (or norm)*. Bourdieu's shrewd reflections on the "illusion of the rule" (1976, p. 203ff.) are focused on the demarcation of the rule from the habitus without a complexer positive determination of the concept and the function of rules, so that rules seem to be reduced more or less by being incorporated into the habitus (Bohnsack, 2017). Including the relation of tension between habitus and norm in the terminology of the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge we distinguish the *frame of orientation* (in a narrower sense), which is mostly synonymous to the category of habitus, from the *frame of orientation in the broader sense* which deals with the relation of habitus and norm. This relation of tension is among others of special relevance for the organization theory and the professionalization theory of the Praxeological Theory of Knowledge, especially in the areas of school, early education and social work, which, as already mentioned, are methodically based on the documentary analysis of videos (see for example Fritzsche & Wagner-Willi, 2015; Sturm, 2015; Wagener, 2022a; Treß, 2024). As far as the interpretation of pictures is concerned one of the ways of managing the discrepancy or tension between norm and habitus can be observed as the practice of *posing*. As empirical examples for the documentary interpretation of pictures I have chosen three cases of research to the area of advertising photos dealing with this topic.

## 4. Examples of empirical research and results: posing in advertising photos

The following example for the documentary interpretation also may empirically illustrate, that pictures, mental as well as material ones, are not only *representations* of our everyday practice, but that practice also is *constituted* and *produced* by pictures (see also Mitchell, 1994) as media of *understanding* and communication totally independent from words and texts. Aglaja Przyborski (2018) has called this "picture communication" ("*Bildkommunikation*"). She had developed a survey design for its empirical reconstruction. The probands (groups of friends) were asked to choose a commercial and a private photo both of which should be of (whatsoever) special importance for themselves. Thus, the probands should use the medium of private pictures to express their reaction to commercial ones. In this context we (see Przyborski, 2018, and Bohnsack, 2017) have reconstructed the empirical relation between habitus, pose and lifestyle. The following photo was selected by a group of three girlfriends (the group *Pool*) in the age of 13 years (Figure 3) and further the girls were asked for a private photo (Figure 4).

The girls were so to speak reacting or answering with her private photo, a self-portrait, to the advertising photo, which also had been selected by themselves. The sujet of the former is a bath scene of five young women at the beach. Concerning the private photo the girls had photographed themselves (with the help of one father) also in a bath scene, here in a private swimming pool. Thereby they picked up a specific gesture or pose of one of the protagonists in the advertising photo putting this into the new context of their self-portrait (more precisely: Bohnsack, 2017 chapt. 6 and Przyborski, 2018, chapt. 8). This gesture of the right hand and arm is touching and arranging the hair above the left ear. It is positioned right in the middle of the advertising photo, i.e. on the mid perpendicular (dashed line) and the arm is positioned between the mid perpendicular and the golden section (dotted line) and thus is focused. This arranging gesture as such may indicate a sort of embarrassment. By making this gesture of arranging the hair not with the left but with the



right hand it contains further components. Covering the upper body and especially part of the breast it may indicate a protection. By not only arranging but also covering and protecting the character of embarrassment this may be extended to a sort of *bashfulness*. However this seems not really significant, because the allover context of the photo does not really fit into this frame: the presentation of the body of all five young women apart from the focused gesture is somehow unobtrusive, but offensive, self-assured and not bashful. Their habitus thus may be merely characterized by the *women's self-confidence of their bodily-sexual attractiveness*. Thus with the "arranging gesture" we have a relation of tension which draws attention but initially remains somehow an empty space in the advertising photo.

Figure 3. Advertising photo from *H&M* – planimetric composition



Source. Lines drawn by the author.

Figure 4. Private photo from the group "pool"



Source. Private.

Fully adequate to the allover context this gesture however proves in the girls private photo, and thus its bashful character is confirmed or maybe only then it takes on its significance for us for the first time: First of all it fits homologous into the overall performance of the girls' bodily expressions: In contrast to the advertising

photo there is an averted presentation of the whole body especially of the girl in the middle but also as regards the others: their bodies are more or less slanted to the image plane and the observers. Second this is accompanied by hiding the body with the doubling of the clothing (as the bikinis are covered once again) and by hiding behind the wall of the pool resp. being somehow partly protected by it. These *hiding walls* like *barriers* or *frontiers* are dominating the *planimetric composition*, i.e. the formal structure of the whole picture in an unmissable way (so that it is not necessary to mark them with lines). As the double clothing fits close it emphasizes the body more than concealing it. In this clumsy attempt we may also find elements of (girlish) innocence. The adequate contextualization of the focused gesture confirms its interpretation of bashfulness and somehow innocence or helps us to identify this for the first time.

The case thus has an exemplary character also for demonstrating the importance which (in accordance with the Grounded Theory) the *comparative analysis* comes up to in the research with the Documentary Method (among others, Bohnsack 2020). It is in comparison against the counter horizon of the private photo that the gesture of bashfulness in the advertising photo definitively appears to be de-contextualized. At the same time – when fitting adequately and homologous into the performance of the girls, i.e. into their overall habitus – the validity of the interpretation of the gesture as girlish and more as a *girlish bashfulness* appears to be confirmed or proven. In a praxeological perspective this bashfulness as a practice or *habitus* with its performative logic is so dominant that the normative expectation of the *women's self-confidence of her bodily-sexual attractiveness* as a *mere imagination* with its propositional logic has no (resp. no short-term) consequences for the practice which is documented in the photo.

Both sides – the girls and the young women – however also have a frame of orientation (in the broader sense) and thus a (gender-specific) conjunctive space of orientation in common. It reveals an ambigüe or hybrid construction, a “complexity of meaning which is characterized by transcontrariness” in the understanding of Imdahl (1996a, p. 107). And it demonstrates, as Imdahl has argued, that pictures are predestined for this way of complexity in meaning. By its pictorial design the advertising photo is representing and at the same time promising to accomplish a problem with identity which seems of relevance for girls and younger women in general: this is the *mediation or integration of a “girlish innocence with the bodily-sexual attractiveness of the self-confident women”*. The latter is seamlessly *incorporated* by the young women on the advertising photo. It belongs to their *habitus* resp. are they able to perfectly present themselves according to it, whereas the girly innocence is represented in the advertising photo as an *expectation or imagination*, as a *norm*, which is – as it is the character of norms in general – “counterfactual”.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the girls we have a frame of orientation with the same structure, i.e. a tension between habitus and norm, but the other way round: the ‘girly innocence’ seems to be incorporated and habitualized, i.e. as a component of their *habitus*, whereas the presentation of self-confidence concerning their bodily-sexual attractiveness is the expectation and imagination, i.e. the *norm* which makes the advertising photo attractive for the girls. This frame of orientation with its particular relation of *tension between norm and habitus can be understood as an “identity norm”*.

This is a term from Erving Goffman (1963, p. 130). He also speaks of identity norms as the “phantom normalcy” (Goffman 1963, p. 130). Because of their imaginative and thus phantom-like character nobody can do justice to these norms in praxis, i.e. in the habitualized practical action. And because being propagated by the media the identity norm may be understood as a *life style*: the mediation or integration of the ‘girly innocence’ with the ‘women's self-confidence of her bodily-sexual attractiveness’. This imagination which is implicated in the advertising photo seems to be a promise to the girls that they are no longer far from the norm of the self-confident and offensive woman: together with the bikini-fashion from H&M they potentially can buy the propagated life-style.

Besides these references to the category of the identity norm which the girls' and the young women's photo have in common, there is an important difference between both photographs. The girls' identification with the image of the ‘women's self-confidence of her bodily-sexual attractiveness’ remains an *imagination*. It has *no consequences for their practice* which is represented in the picture itself, in the self-portrait, which all over is constituted by the ‘bashful-girlish’ gesture and fully contextualized. Thus the latter proves as their authentic habitus. Their practice which is captured in the picture may thus also be called a *re-appropriation* (of the gesture which has been appropriated by the advertising photo). There is no de-contextualization in

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<sup>4</sup> “Normative expectations are counterfactual expectations, which become not adapted when disappointed, but are maintained” (Luhmann 1997, p. 638). The counterfactual and imaginative construction of the norm as an expectation of a practice is categorically different from the habitus, which stands for the performative structure of the incorporated and/or verbal practice itself, thus representing the facticity (in difference from the counterfactuality of the norm) (Bohnsack 2017).

the photos of the girls as we can find this in the advertising photo, where this de-contextualization may be categorized as a *pose*.

However not any de-contextualization achieves the quality of a pose. Precondition for a pose is that the relevant gesture not only turns out to be de-contextualized but also functions as a reference or an indicator for *another* norm or imagined habitus and thus constitutes a complex identity norm. Here is another demonstration of posing by a very early research example with the interpretation of another advertising photo:

Figure 5. Advertising Photo West: "Heidi" – planimetric composition



Source. Lines drawn by the author.

The young woman in the middle belongs to two different worlds, represented by two different identity norms. She succeeds in their hybridization in a charming way. On one side, which has a reference to institutionalized roles, she is a dairy maid. By her milking accessories and tools and partly also by her clothes (the dirndl dress) she is integrated in the world of work of the alpin pasture. The shoes however do not fit to it. The stiletto pumps don't belong to the alpin pasture at all and also this sort of earrings would obstruct the work and do not belong to the traditional dress. But it is still more the special styling of the outfit of the dressing than the dress itself which is responsible for the de-contextualization: it is its obtrusiveness and faultlessness, especially of the hairstyling and the jewelry. This corresponds with the special sitting position. Exposed by the planimetric composition and the scenic choreography which have the character of a throne.

Homologous to this is the structure of the corporated form of expression: The expression of the mimicry and the look seems unapproachable – although charming – and the upright frontal seating position which is not addressed to the interaction partner, although he is admiring and rendering homage to her, may increase this enthronement. Remarkable is the position of the legs spread wide. This 'improper' seating position for women and especially for women in skirt may be owed to the working position of milking. The decisive component however is the styling of this widened position by supporting herself on the tiptoes (which is not only owed to the stiletto pumps). This somehow indicates a distance to the claims of female decency. In total the dissonances or discrepancies with the habitus or the identity norm of a dairy maid appear as de-contextualization within the situation of the alpin pasture and the practice of the dairy maid. Firstly this may be interpreted as an ironic take of the cliché of the beautiful ideal world of the alpin pasture. But going further a hybridization of two identity norms or life styles and worlds is constructed here. The young woman is partly freeing herself from the traditional world of the alps and the alpin pasture to which she is assigned to by the superficial context and is presenting herself in a shrill and oblique way somehow in a manner of a discotheque visitor. Allover she appears as charming, very controlled, dominant and attractive. Actually it is this hybridization which accounts for her attractiveness. People like that – this obviously seems to be a central component of the lifestyle conveyed by the advertising message – are smoking West. Those people are not

tied to the ideal world of an intact milieu, but rather are border cross between pluralistic styles without fear of dissonances. Much more they know how to utilize them in a productive, controlled and in this sense attractive way of self-presentation and dominance.

Up to now, the examples for hybrid frames of orientations were based on de-contextualizations relating to inconsistencies within different gestures (*H&M*-advertising) or to inconsistencies between the gestures and the styling of the dressing on one side and the context of the institutionalized role on the other side. Now, we briefly want to demonstrate a de-contextualizing relating the *process flow* of gestures, i.e. their sequential series. The photo stems from the *Burberry*-advertising:

Figure 6. Advertising photo *Burberry* – planimetric composition



Source. Lines drawn by the author.

In a situation which iconographically can be identified as a picnic, the interactive relation, i.e. the *scenic choreography*, of the five young people on the photo as well as the context of the forest floor indicate a relation of closeness and intimacy between them. The scenic choreography here is strongly supported by or is identical with the *planimetric composition* (see the marked lines). However, in contrast, this impression of belonging or togetherness becomes undermined or queried by avoiding strictly the visual contact. In addition the upper bodies are not facing each other, though in case of the couple on the right the bodies are in close contact. Having a closer look at this situation it becomes evident that for instance the gesture of the woman on the right when putting both hands on breast and shoulder of the young man cannot be integrated in a clear affiliation to a meaningful gestures. Here we have a gap affirmed by homologies in the absent of visual contact and by the expressionless mimicry. The gestures are de-contextualized from their process flow and thus also from their interactive or social relation. Imdahl (1995, p. 578) had defined the category of the *pose* (in his research about the visual arts of the German National Socialism) by the character of *solidification*, i.e. not "being organically compatible with the possibilities of the motoric skills of the body, with performances of motions before and after".

Here we meet a paradox or "transcontrariness" (Imdahl 1996a, p. 107): by the planimetric composition and the sheer proximity of the bodies an impression of belonging or togetherness is produced which among others is occurred by the absent of visual contact and by the expressionless of gestures and mimicry. The persons are at the same time individually isolated and close together. In search of a plausible interpretation of the message which seems to be communicated with this advertising photo we may follow Erving Goffman and Jürgen Habermas. The latter is characterizing the fundamental problem of the contemporary construction of identity "as the paradoxical relation being equal to the other and nevertheless absolutely different", i.e., that the individual "preserves as well his social and his personal identity". Habermas (1973, p. 230) is referring here to Erving Goffman's (1963) categorical definition of the relation between social and personal identity

which can be understood owing a character of transcontrariness. Individuality, which is of central importance in the marketing of textile and clothing, in the advertising photo however is constructed ex negativo, namely by a lack of social relatedness.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: the fields of research of the documentary interpretation of pictures and central components of its attitude of analysis

The interpretation of *advertising pictures*, the field which is chosen for exemplifying the attitude of analysis which is characteristic for the Documentary Method, is only one of its many fields of research. In the interpretation of pictures as well as video analysis we can distinguish mainly the fields of public media and politics, processes of socialization and individuation, friendships and couple relationships, and professional practice in education and social work. Part of the research has been done on the basis of a triangulation of picture interpretation as well as video analysis with other methodical approaches (for example, group discussions and interviews) on basis of the Documentary Method.

During the last years the documentary video analysis, which started at the turn of the century, has (together with the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge) received a broad application especially in the fields of research on interaction in school and teaching, in early education and in social work with a particular regard to the professionalization of the teachers, nurses and social workers (see for example Fritzsche & Wagner-Willi, 2015; Sturm, 2015; Wagener, 2022a; Treß, 2024; with some differences in the application of the method see also: Asbrand & Martens 2018). Besides photos, videos and films the Documentary Method has also been applied in the interpretation of drawings and paintings, for instance by children and young people (Wopfner, 2012; Bohnsack, 2017), and in political propaganda and self-presentations (Liebel, 2011; Kumkar, 2018).

The following *central components of the attitude of analysis* in the documentary interpretation of pictures, i.e. its central methodological and theoretical principles, shall be emphasized once again:

- To gain access to the picture in its internal logic we should refrain from an understanding of pictures through texts, much more we should differentiate them from texts. More concrete this means among others to start by suspending or ignoring as completely as possible all our case-specific (conjunctive) verbal-textual pre-knowledge during the process of interpretation.
- Taking an attitude of analysis which allows an access to the picture as a self-referential system requires the rupture with the presuppositions of common sense, what especially means to refrain from the ascription or imputation of motives and intentions to the picture producers (by following the propositional logic).
- Instead we strive to understand on the level of the structure of practice of the performative logic, i.e. on the level of How, of the *modus operandi*, of the habitus and the frame of orientation. The central category of the habitus has to be elaborated still further in two respects:
  - Firstly: for a deeper understanding of the frame of orientations or space of experiences of the picture producers, we have to include and to integrate still another central category of sociology besides the habitus. The category of the norm as the representation of the propositional logic of orientation has not simply to be excluded from praxeological theory but to be understood in its relation of tension with the performative logic of the habitus. Pictures are predestined to represent those relations of tension.
  - Secondly: the pioneering category of the habitus developed by Panofsky and Bourdieu needs to be differentiated when interpreting photographs: A closer view on the formal composition of the picture may enable us to differentiate between the presenting picture producer (behind the camera) and the presented one (before the camera). This could not have been demonstrated by the empirical examples in this article because in the field of advertising pictures the presenting producers are expected to have the full sovereignty also over the gestures of the presented picture producers, the models.
- In the understanding of Imdahl the iconological interpretation according to Panofsky has somehow neglected the picture's formal composition which is leading us to its entirety. This is due to Panofsky's concentration on the depicted objects and gestures which are presented in the picture. The reconstruction

<sup>5</sup> See for a more embracing discussion of these interpretations with relation to other advertising photos of the Burberry-Company Bohnsack 2009, chapt. 4.2.

of the formal composition (of the picture as a plane) is one of the conditions to understand the picture in its internal logic, i.e. as a self-referential system.

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### Brief CV of the author

Ralf Bohnsack is Professor Emeritus for Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences in the Social Sciences at the Free University of Berlin. Diploma in Sociology at the University of Bielefeld. Doctoral degree at the University of Bielefeld. Second doctoral degree at the University of Erlangen Nürnberg. His main lines of research are the following: qualitative methods, documentary method, praxeological sociology of knowledge, analysis of talk, interaction, pictures and videos; research on milieus, professionalization, evaluation and organization.

### Conflict of interest

The author declares that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.