

Advanced Methods of Interpretation

Lecture VII

Interpretation of Images

Dr. Werner Binder

Masaryk University, Brno
Faculty of Social Studies
Department of Sociology

Advanced Methods of Interpretation
in Cultural Sociology (soc 575)
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Summary of Lecture VIII

- Materiality matters → against the linguistic and idealistic bias in sociology
- Artifacts possess agency in a network of social agents, contexts and cultural patterns (Gell, Latour)
- Artifacts document cultural meanings and ideologies (Mannheim, Žižek)
- The materiality of artifacts shapes interpretations, practices and interactions (Keane, Latour)
- The logic of practice → reconstruction of the implicit cultural logic of action



Emmison & Smith (2000): Varieties of Visual Data

- Two-dimensional visual data: images, signs and representations → pictures
- Three-dimensional visual data: settings, objects and traces → artifacts
- Lived visual data: the built environment and its uses → space and place
- Living forms of visual data: bodies, identities and interaction → practices, performances, clothes etc.



Image and Text

- Iconic difference (Boehm), autonomous logic of the image (Bohnsack, Imdahl)
- Simultaneity vs. sequentiality of semiotic elements → requires specific methods of interpretation
- Iconology (Panofsky): Images are not inaccessible to lingual interpretations
- Image and text as co-constitutive (Bartmanski 2012)



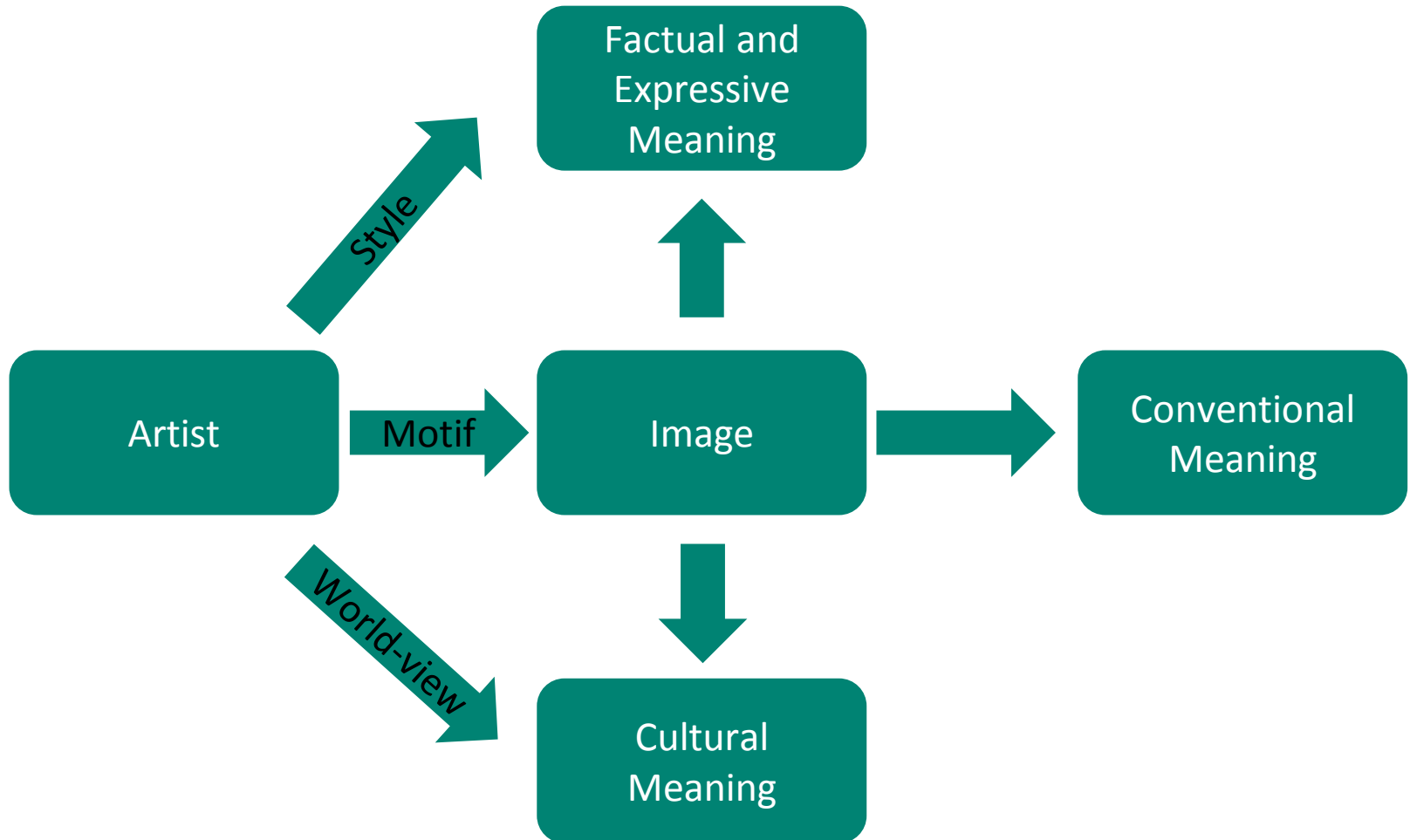
Panofsky: Iconology

The art historian Erwin Panofsky offers a method of visual interpretation analogue to the documentary method:

- Pre-iconographic description: What is depicted? → factual and expressive meaning
- Iconographic analysis: What conventional motifs are used? → embedment in narratives and sign systems
- Iconological interpretation: What cultural principle manifests itself here? → image as cultural symptom



Panofsky's Image





Steps and Principles of Iconological Interpretation

Act of Interpretation	Pre-Iconographic Description	Iconographic Analysis	Iconological Interpretation
Object of Interpretation	Primary or natural subject matter	Secondary or conventional subject matter	Intrinsic meaning or content
	factual expressional		
Precondition (familiarity)	Practical experience	Knowledge of literary sources	Synthetic intuition conditioned by culture
Corrective principle	History of styles	History of types	History of cultural symptoms or "symbols"

As long as we limit ourselves to stating that Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco shows a group of thirteen men around a dinner table, and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we deal with the work of art as such, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as its own properties or qualifications. But when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this 'something else.'

Panofsky 2004



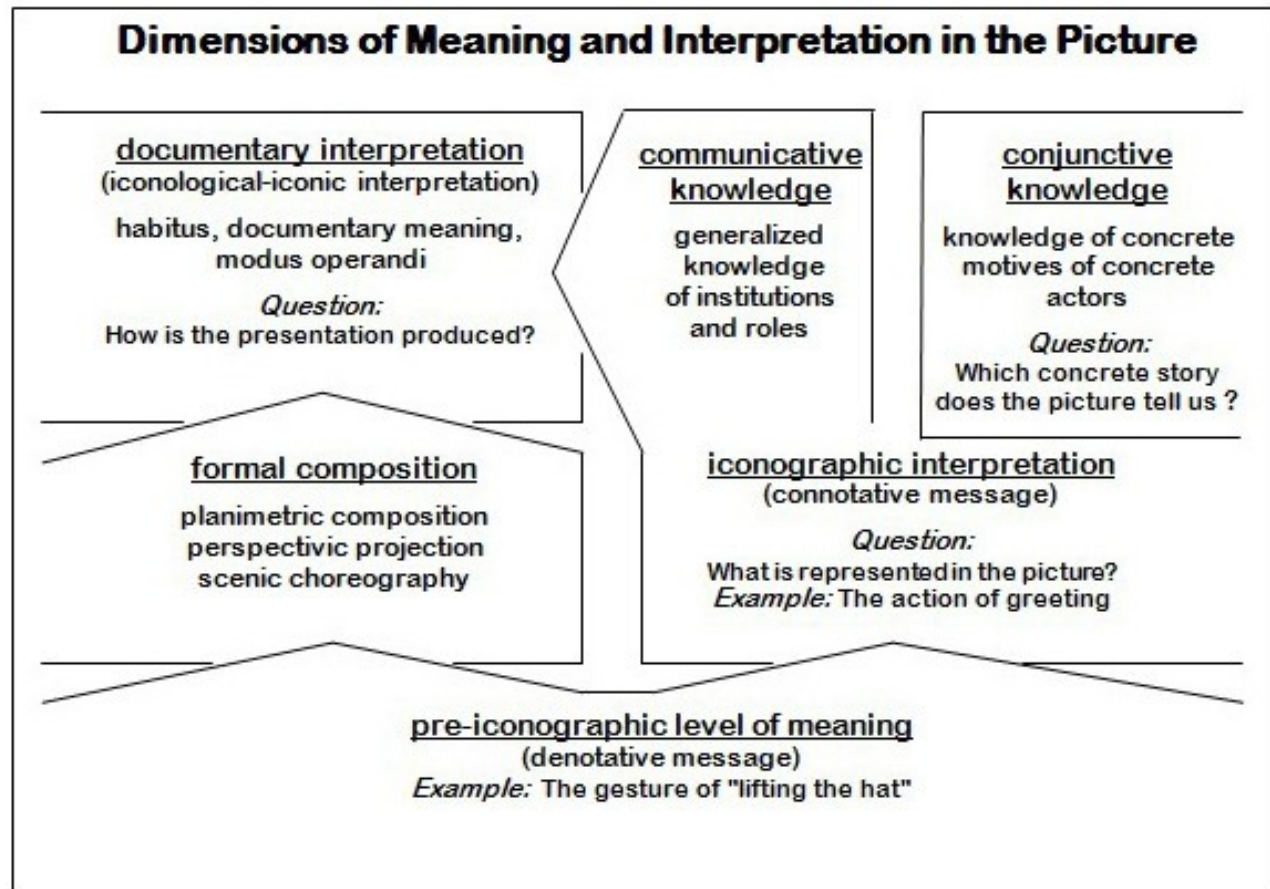
Panofsky and Bourdieu

- Bourdieu used the term “habitus” first in the postscript to his translation of “Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism” (1951)
- Bourdieu’s “habitus” follows a similar logic as the cultural structure revealed by Panofsky’s iconology
- In his study on photography (1990), Bourdieu argues that styles and motifs of photography are shaped by the habitus of the photographer



Bohnsack: Interpretation of Images

- Understanding *through* images vs. understanding *of* images
- Imagery: mental images, pictures, metaphors
- Habitus of the “representing picture producer” vs. habitus of the “represented picture producer”
- Iconic interpretation (Imdahl): Contribution of formal elements to the meaning of an image → planimetric structure, scenic choreography, perspective projection



Bohnsack 2010: 271

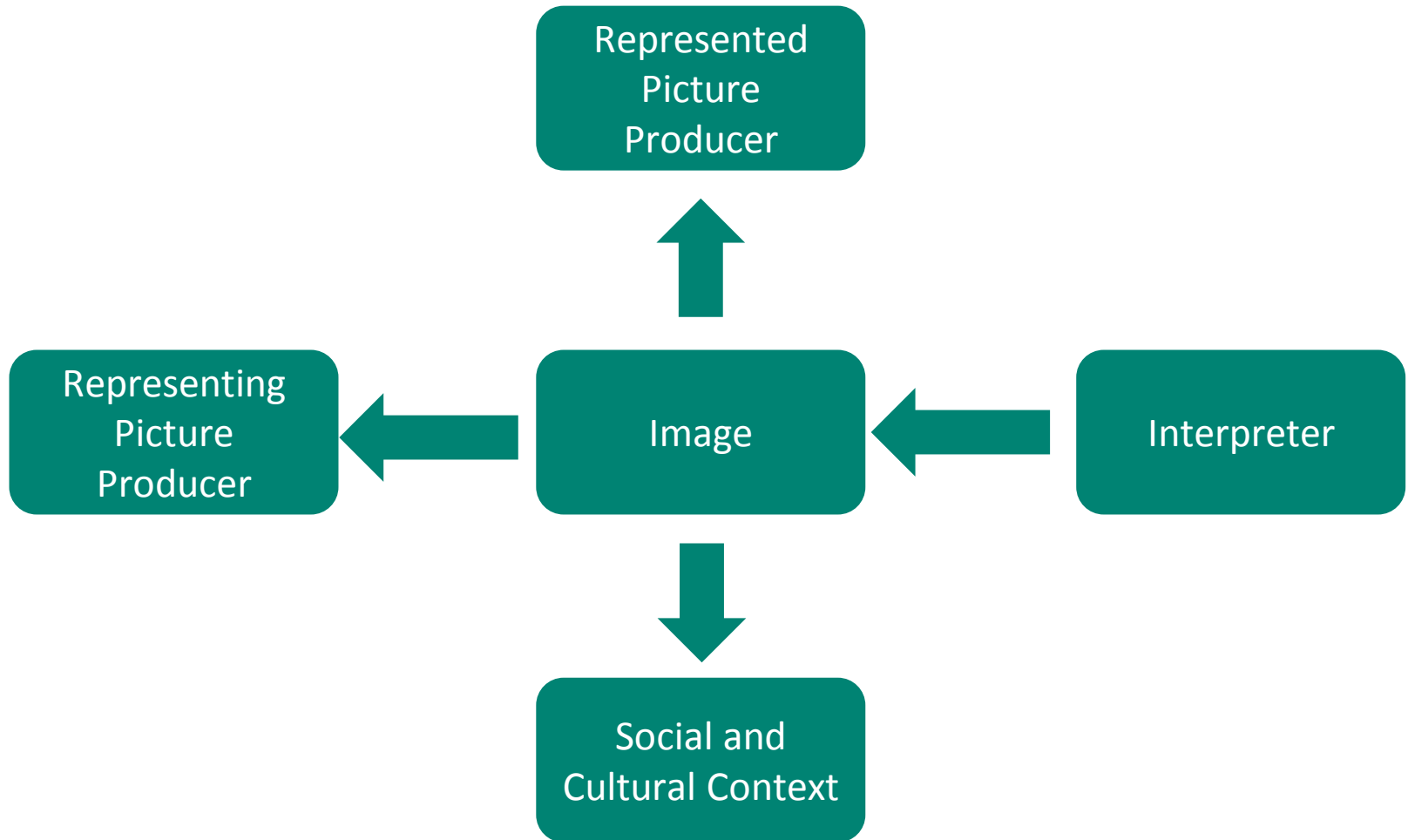








Bohnsack's Photograph





Interpretation of Images

	Iconology (Panofsky)	Documentary Method (Bohnsack)		Semiotics (Barthes, Eco)
Iconic Surface	Pre-Iconographic	Pre-	Iconic	Denotation
	factual expressional	Iconographic		
Social Meanings	Conventional subject matter	Social conventions		Connotation
Cultural Depth	Intrinsic meaning or content, habitus	Documentary meaning, habitus		“Myth”



Layers of Analysis

- Iconic analysis: formal structure (Imdahl, Bohnsack)
- Pre-iconographic description (Panofsky)
- Iconographic analysis (Panofsky)
- Iconological interpretation (Panofsky)
- Reception analysis (Michel 2006, Binder 2013)



Image and Habitus

For images (and other forms of representation), we can distinguish up to three types of documentary meaning:

- Production: Representing picture producer (Bohnsack)
 - Content: Represented picture producer (Bohnsack)
 - Reception: Interpreter of the picture (Michel 2006)
- every interpretation reveals something about the interpreter
- every bad interpretation tells us more about the interpreter than about the object of interpretation





The Abu Ghraib Icon

- Iconic analysis: triangle- or cross figure, tilted background
- Pre-iconographic description: art performance (Žižek), “stress-position”
- Iconographic analysis: motifs such as crucifixion, inquisition, electric chair, Ku-Klux-Klan
- Iconological interpretation: ideology of “white” torture and grotesque ritual of humiliation



Reception: Christomimesis

- Christomimetic reception: widespread in the American (but also German) discourse
- Explicit references to the Christ-motif in the discourse, already two days after the first broadcasting of the pictures
- Implicit references to the Christ-motif as iconic patterns in paintings and the selection of photographs
- Documents a Christian cultural background
- Effect: humiliated prisoner becomes an sacred victim

MAY 17, 2004

www.time.com AOL Keyword: TIME

IRAQ: HOW DID IT COME TO THIS?

TIME

SPECIAL REPORT



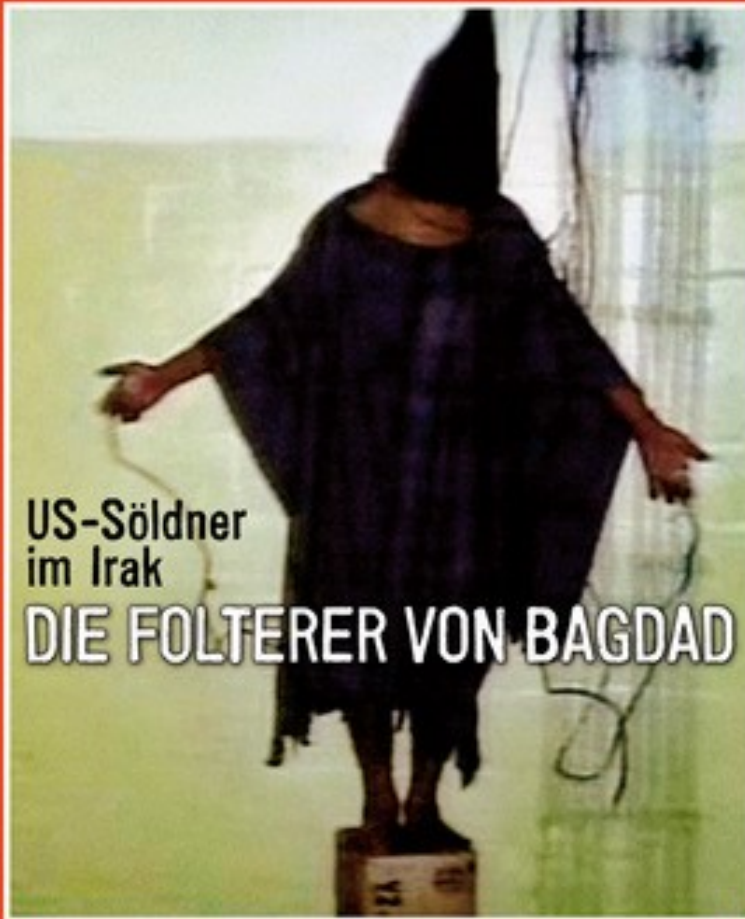
Time Magazin, May 17, 2004



The Mocking of Christ, Matthias Grünewald, 1503-1505

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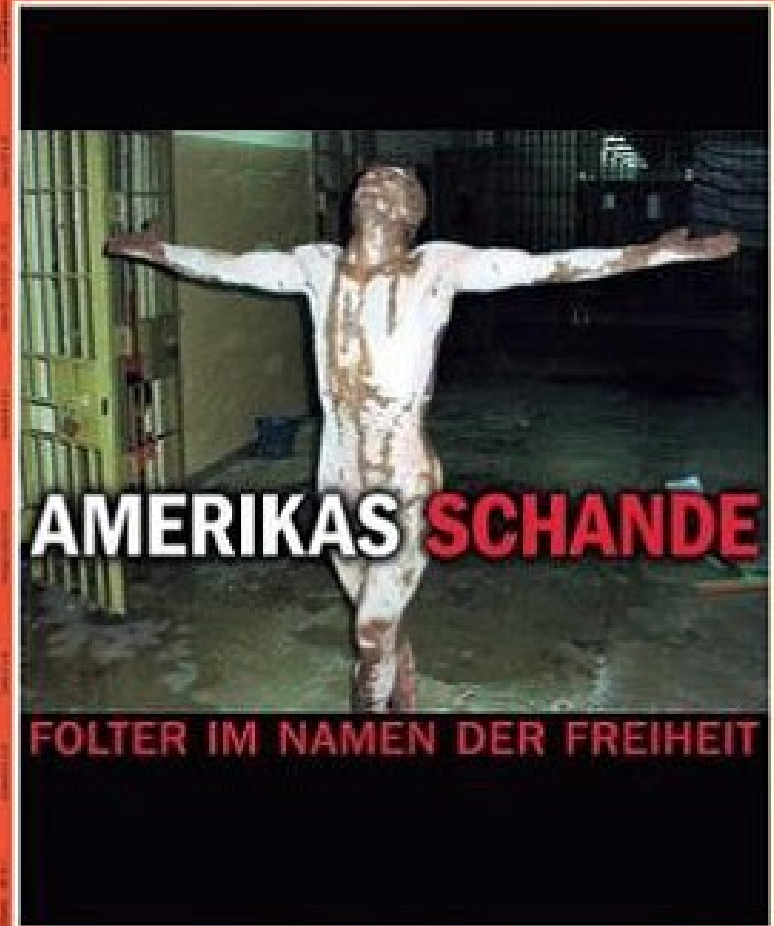
DIE FOLTERERER VON BAGDAD

www.spiegel.de

Der Spiegel, May 3, 2004

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AMERIKAS SCHANDE

FOLTER IM NAMEN DER FREIHEIT

www.spiegel.de

Der Spiegel, February 20, 2006



November 7, 2003, 23:50



The Human Pyramid

- Conjunctive space of experience (between the picture producers): posing for the camera
- Iconological interpretation: Purifying degradation ritual and heroic self- stylization („thumbs up“)
- Discrepancy between intended style and documented habitus (after all, not heroic at all)
- Reception: from pride to shame → soldiers become perpetrators and sadists, alleged terrorists turn into innocent victims



Thank you for your
attention, criticism and
further suggestions!

werner.binder@mail.muni.cz