Understanding Cinema

A Psychological Theory of Moving Imagery

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CHAPTER ONE

Understanding and Dispositions

This book is meant to be a contribution to the psychology of film. (Tan, 1996, p. ix)

The phenomenal world of humans is indeed remarkably rich and complex. It involves the understanding and the experience of the world around us, including sensation, perception, thought, and emotion. The phenomenal is the common-sense appearance of the world ("in here"), and it is the *Lebenswelt* (living world) on which we base our actions and behavior. To use the computer metaphor, the phenomenal world becomes the interface to the environment around us, structuring and directing behavior. As we receive response and feedback from the physical, social, and cultural habitat, the phenomenal transforms and adapts; thus enters a continuous loop among phenomenal–behavior–response–phenomenal. The phenomenal world is not the same thing to all individuals, but large parts of it are shared globally or locally.

The following list gives examples of the phenomenal:

- In the external world, colors exist only as light frequencies, but in the phenomenal world we see colors.
- In the phenomenal world, we perceive and categorize entities called objects that have certain properties, such as color, weight, and position. We can create new objects (artifacts), and we develop habits with objects, in addition to attaching a symbolic–emotional meaning to them.
- In the phenomenal world, things not only exist: Things *happen*. Billiard balls collide, plants grow, prices are raised, people lose their jobs, children beat up their siblings, and friends become sad once in a while. Most of us do not treat these events as random and whimsical, but rather we construct causal relations between them and other events. Causality is one of the most fundamental parameters of the phenomenal world.

- In the phenomenal world, we make clear distinctions between living and nonliving matter, between agents and things. Agents have personality and character and are driven by emotions, perceptions, and intentions. We use specialized communicatory, social, and moral codes in our interaction with agents. In the phenomenal world, we entertain social stereotypes, which we project on people based on their surface appearance (skin color, face and bodily appearance, gender, clothing).
- In the phenomenal world, we experience events and social situations that can be said to be coherent routines and habitual activities that involve a temporal chain of events, standard roles to be played as well as specialized activities often involving props or artifacts. Examples include dining at restaurants, going to bed, having breakfast, and visiting the doctor. Retelling and making sense of our day at night often invoke situations of this kind.
- In the phenomenal world, we have complex social relations with other people, for example, family relations, partners, relatives, friends, business contacts, doctors, and priests. Such relations are important experiential hubs around which the lives of many people circle.
- Cultural, religious, and personal rituals are important in the phenomenal world to give sense and meaning to the world and to provide formalized social interactions.
- Narratives and fictional worlds are key phenomenal entities that are created by others (novelists, filmmakers, game producers, porno producers) or ourselves through play, toys, and games of make-believe. We enter such fictional worlds, and they affect our experience and behavior in short- and long-term perspectives.
- Many narratives purportedly deal with actual events and characters of historic, national, and religious natures. Shared "grand narratives" occupy a key position in people's lives.
- Emotions are mechanisms by which we relate to and make meaningful the world around us. Emotions are experiences that regulate and synchronize our behavior with others.

Thus the phenomenal world is the world we perceive, experience, feel, desire, think about, talk about, and have attitudes about; it comprises the things with which we live and through which we live. The phenomenal world is multilayered and multifaceted, involving an intricate system of bodies, minds, culture, artifacts, history, social processes, and individual experiences. There is no reason to believe that natural systems of atoms, nuclear particles, molecules, cells, or macrocosmos are more complex than human systems. It is the task of the humanities and the social sciences to explain how this system emerges (from behavior, bodies, and culture)

and transforms and affects behavior, as well as to describe the mechanisms by which it operates. In academia, there are now at least four broad approaches to describe the phenomenal world of humans.

In philosophy – until recently the only systematic investigation of the phenomenal – metaphysics and epistemology are concerned with the relation between the phenomenal and the objective, observer-independent, external world "out there." Do the entities in the phenomenal world have their equivalents in this *Ding-an-sich* (object in itself) world? Do objects continue to exist even if we do not perceive them? If so, do they have the same properties as phenomenal objects? Are there actual causes in the world, and do they have the same features as phenomenal causes? Do mental states, such as intentions and emotions, exist in our *Ding-an-sich* reality? Do these phenomena exist independent of human observers, or are they abstract frameworks and conceptualizations of our constructive capacities? If we are looking for a justification for knowledge and scientific inquiry, these questions need answers.

The phenomenal is also a topic within the philosophy of consciousness (Churchland, 1988), which investigates how conscious experiences (in philosophy called *qualia*) emerge. Are such phenomenal entities products of neurons or do they arise because of the functional architecture of our minds and bodies? The philosophy of aesthetics discusses the ontological status of fictional experiences (Walton, 1990) and describes the functions of art and aesthetic experiences.

A second approach to the phenomenal is through culture. The introduction of culture – with its artifacts, tools, technology, rituals, images, and words – has been acknowledged as one of the key mechanisms by which our species started to develop a rich phenomenal world (Cole, 1996:146ff). Cultural artifacts such as knives, spears, fire, telephones, restaurants, computers, and moving imagery instigate new ways of thinking about the world, new practices, and new phenomenal worlds that did not exist before. Collectively and in interaction with those artifacts, members of a culture develop practices, conventions, norms, and codes (this is true of tangible artifacts as well as more ephemeral artifacts, such as spoken words or moving imagery). Several strands within cultural studies, history, and cultural psychology investigate how the introduction of new technology, artifacts, and instruments is appropriated by a culture and how it changes its members' (phenomenal) view of the world (the plough, writing technology, the printing press, the camera, the car, the airplane, space technology, or, more recently, gene technology). Within the humanities – for example, in cinema studies – there are research traditions that focus on how individual works of art, music, film, or literature create not only temporary phenomenal experiences, but also change the

cultural climate. A film (or a genre of films), for instance, might introduce a new theme, style, or convention that transforms the way in which critics, authors, and audience understand literature and the rest of the world.

Other cultural approaches investigate to what extent phenomenal worlds are shared among members of a group. Because cultural artifacts are mass distributed, these new phenomenal worlds become shared by many individuals, synchronizing or homogenizing thought and behavior within a group or culture. On what level and to what extent are phenomenal worlds shared universally, culturally, or socially? Is there a panhuman unity? In what ways do cultures, nations, and social groups differ in terms of the phenomenal? And how can one phenomenal world be understood by and translated to another? These are research questions within anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and cultural psychology.

From a communication point of view, shared phenomenal worlds enable personal and mass communication. On the other hand, cultural homogenization and culture's ability to synchronize individual minds threaten to lessen cultural variation. The ways in which cultural practices create a hegemony in the distribution of phenomenal worlds, promoting one phenomenal world at the expense of others, have been the focus of much recent cultural and critical theory. In these research traditions, "marginalized voices," minorities, and nonofficial cultural practices have been brought to the fore to counter the dominant phenomenal world of a culture. Critical investigations of mass media are particularly crucial in this respect, as mass-media technology boosts the cultural homogenization process in scope as well as in speed.[1]

Third, we may describe the phenomenal within a Darwinian perspective. The phenomenal world did not emerge in a day. It was developed through phylogenetic and cultural history. Evolutionary theories argue that this development was not completely ad hoc and random, but that contents of the phenomenal world adapted to features in our habitat. Our experiences of objects, space, and causes are relevant in an environment in which it is critical for us to perceive and manipulate objects, navigate in space, and understand (mechanical) causal relations between events. The highly social skills of humans must have provided a great advantage in a complex social environment (Byrne & Whiten, 1988; Whiten, 1991). The ways in which we categorize, evaluate, predict the behavior of, and morally judge other people lay the groundwork for decisions about whether to exchange greetings, converse, socialize, impress, flirt, enter partnership, trust, or even marry and have children (Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Positive emotions of empathy and social bonding seem to promote social cooperation, and thus they have a strong survival value

(Grodal, 1997:94). The ability to initiate fantasies and games of make-believe enables us to simulate events and situations in our minds before we play them out for real in the social world. Such a faculty of mind performs useful functions in the life of humans and must reasonably have had great evolutionary value.

Moreover, if we accept that biology and genetics are put to work within this evolutionary framework, we may even expect to see some of the "successful" phenomenal entities and mental capacities encoded and hard-wired into our genetic structure, making the ontogenetic development of these phenomenal abilities more or less automatic and less dependent on stimuli from the environment. Because these processes are extremely slow, we can expect that the "evolved structure of the human mind is adapted to the way of life of Pleistocene hunter–gatherers, and not to our modern circumstances" (Cosmides, Tooby & Barkow, 1992:5).

Of course, changes in the sociocultural environment affect the phenomenal world a great deal faster than do changes in the physical–perceptual environment. Thus, to use the words of cultural psychology, "[a]t some point in evolutionary history, an ability to adapt to cultural changes must have become much more critical than a genetic/biological ability to adapt to changes in the physical/natural habitat, since the former transforms so much faster than the latter" (Cole, 1996:163). In a sense, then, culture takes on a greater responsibility in the creation of the phenomenal. However, rather than creating wholly new realms of the phenomenal, cultural artifacts and cultural practices build upon existing evolutionary-developed mental capacities, "exploiting" them to generate culturally diverse realms of meaning.[2] Culture also provides a fundamental infrastructure to uphold, maintain, and stimulate phenomenal entities, for example, through cultural practices, artifacts, and written and image-based communication.

Finally, we may approach the phenomenal from the perspective of the *mental* mechanisms by which the phenomenal emerge in the mind or psyche of the individual. This is the *psychological* approach, investigating physiological, perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes involved in the creation of the phenomenal. What knowledge, assumptions, and hypotheses about the world are used, and how are these mental structures organized? What cues and stimuli from the "outside" are pertinent to the mind? How do we create a *meaningful* experience of our environment? Once created, how do phenomenal entities provide the basis for action and behavior?

Scholars and researchers need not take all of these perspectives into account in their descriptions of phenomenal entities. What they do need to acknowledge, however, is that they are all needed in an integrated and full account. They all investigate the different evolutionary, mental,

cultural, social, and historical systems that enable complex phenomenal worlds to emerge and thrive so successfully in and around humans. Whereas the natural sciences describe natural systems of particles, molecules, cells, and stars, the humanities and the social sciences investigate human–sociocultural systems. Acknowledging that philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, communication studies, anthropology, and Darwinism are all in the same boat, however, is not to say that all of them can be reduced to one. The existence of each is called for because each describes separate levels of the phenomenal. For instance, although individual mental states form the basis of the phenomenal, sociological and communication-based frameworks are needed to describe the effects of many people sharing the same phenomenal worlds and how those phenomenal worlds are propagated in a social setting. The psychological and the social are different levels of description, each with its own properties and relationships. This is not too dissimilar from the natural sciences. Although genes and cells ultimately are made up of quantum particles, a biological description cannot be reduced to physics, as the biological level has its own properties and laws.

Unlike the natural sciences, however, the disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences have achieved little conceptual integration (Cosmides et al., 1992:4). Whereas terminology, theories, and methodology of physics, chemistry, biology, and the engineering sciences are compatible, few researchers in the humanities and the social sciences make much effort to understand other academic approaches; they fail to adjust their theories to comply with the insights of the neighboring field. If we want to achieve the fullest description of the phenomenal and the human systems that have brought it into existence, scholars and researchers have a responsibility to integrate their – now rather disparate – frameworks. This book is an effort in this direction. Although the focus is on psychology and mental processes, historic, cultural, and communicational perspectives are integrated into the theories and descriptions. This ecumenical ambition is essential to keep in mind as we now move on to a closer description of psychology and a psychological theory of cinema.

Psychology: Understanding and Dispositions

Compared with cinema studies, the academic discipline of psychology is a giant and includes a number of subfields. Social psychology is concerned with our understanding of other people and multiparticipant situations. Personality psychology studies abstract traits of people, for example, introversion, extroversion, and agreeableness, and develops the criteria for measuring such features. Cognitive psychologists investigate perception, memory, thought, knowledge, and problem solving. Developmental

psychology investigates how mental capacities and processes are transformed during life, in particular during childhood and adolescence. Clinical psychologists study and treat pathological and deviant psychological processes and behavior. Industrial or organizational psychologists deal with the physical and the social aspects of people's work environments and how they affect work output. Evolutionary psychologists are interested in studying the evolved structure of the mind and how human mental capacities differ from or overlap those of animals. Neuropsychology looks into the relation between the mental sphere and its neurological basis. Cultural psychology investigates how behavior and thought processes are affected by cultural artifacts, technology, and language. Environmental psychology examines the interrelationship between environments and human behavior. In short, psychologists are all over the place.

Being a book about film and psychology, this study does not do justice to the whole field. Neither do I concentrate on one psychological subfield. In contrast to psychoanalytical cinema studies, which draws on one small, marginalized segment of psychology, the framework developed in this book is broad, involving traditions in the center of and on the margin of academia psychology. Psychology, according to most handbooks, is the systematic study of *behavior* and *mental processes* – and their interaction. Mental processes involve perception, comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, judgment, inference making, and emotion. From an individual perspective, these are the processes by which the phenomenal world emerges in our consciousness. Thus, preceding the phenomenal world is a complex and multilayered web of processes that take cues from the physical, social, and cultural environment, but also transform, add to, and make richer those cues. Mental processes enable the leap from the transcendental, observer-independent *Ding-an-sich* reality to the internal phenomenal world that we know and are able to handle. Mental processes ultimately are operations by which the individual mind infuses *meaningfulness* and *coherence* into a fragmented and nonmeaningful objective world, generating holistic chunks of phenomenal entities (e.g., objects, events, intentions, and causes). In the subsequent text, *understanding* is the general term for these processes, reflecting a striving for meaningfulness on all levels of process (see Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987). Understanding is an ongoing interaction between an organism and its environment:

> Understanding does not consist of merely after-the-fact reflections on prior experiences; it is, more fundamentally, the way (or means by which) we have those experiences in the first place. It is the way the world presents itself to us. And this is the result of the massive complex of culture, language, history, and bodily mechanisms that blend to make our world what it is. . . . Our subsequent propositional reflections on our experience are made possible by this more basic mode of understanding. (Johnson, 1987:104)

Understanding is the process by which we come to "have a world," forming the basis for our physical, cultural, social, and ethical behavior in the world. Although understanding connotes "cold" processes (perception, cognition), it is deeply involved in the "hot" processes of emotions and feelings.

Understanding, however, does not operate in a void. It is enabled, constrained, and guided by *mental structures*. The idea of mental structures is not new. Both Kant and Hume, for instance, postulated some mediating *schemas* or *categories* between the phenomenal and the observer-independent world (in the domains of space, time, and causality). Areas of psychology have picked up and developed the concept of mental structures to explain why mental processes and our understanding of the world have such a stability and regularity as they do and why the phenomenal world in many cases seems to be different from the "real world." Mental structures can be seen as patterns or mediators, transforming, enhancing, enriching, and generalizing the incoming stimuli to generate the phenomenal world.

Within psychology, mental structures have been described and investigated on many levels. Our system of visual perception, for instance, is able to infer a three-dimensional (3D) object in the phenomenal realm from a two-dimensional (2D) retina projection of objects at the back of the eye. Although seemingly without effort, this remarkable task is performed with the guidance of perceptual expectations held by the visual system. A straight line in two dimensions, for instance, could in 3D space be interpreted as a straight line, but also as a circle seen from the side, a wiggly curve from the side, or a square from the side. To bring 3D coherence to and untangle input such as this, it is believed that the vision system operates according to forty or so rules or perceptual assumptions, specifying how to interpret incoming stimuli and how to reach stable 3D solutions to a 2D array (Hoffman, 1998). The visual illusions generated by artists and psychologists exploit such assumptions, often leading the observer to apply oppositional rules to the same information. In establishing stable worlds of objects and space, our systems for vision, hearing, and touch rely on a number of such perceptual assumptions.[3]

More complex mental structures are often referred to as models, theories, hypotheses, common-sense knowledge, or background knowledge. These are more or less systematic conglomerates of beliefs (not necessarily conscious) that are causally, temporally, or otherwise linked with one another. These mental structures form the basis for the ways in which everyday reasoning is performed in everyday life. Some of them may be more foundational, whereas others are quite domain specific. Everyday logical reasoning, for instance, is a foundational capability that is applied

to many domains in life. The ways in which peoples' everyday deductions, inductions, syllogisms, and other forms of conclusions differ from those of formal logic have been considered in cognitive psychology (e.g., Evans, Newstead & Byrne, 1993). Johnson's (1987) *image schemas*, which are thought structures that emerge from our embodied interaction with a gravitational environment, are also foundational in this sense. They bring organization to experience in many different domains.

Domain-specific everyday knowledge structures have been investigated in a number of fields. Hume (1739), Piaget (1954), and White (1995) have argued that children and adults acquire and use *theories of causality* when they establish causality in the mechanical world. Such models of causality often overlap with and are creatively expanded into common-sense or *folk theories* of physics and chemistry (Gentner & Stevens, 1983; McCloskey, 1983).

When giving causes of human behavior, on the other hand, people often ascribe these causes to intentions, emotions, sensations, perceptions, or beliefs. The methods by which such mental states are given causal status and how people reason around these are thought to rely on complex and often culturally specific models of folk psychology (FP) (Dennett, 1987, 1991b; Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987; Omdahl, 1995; Roseman, Antoniou & Jose, 1996; van den Broek, Bauer & Bourg, 1997; White, 1995; Whiten, 1991; Chapter 4 of this book).

Environmental psychology is concerned with how people acquire mental models of a given environment (a room, a building, a city, a landscape) and make use of such *mental maps* in navigation (Weatherford, 1985).

Another field of inquiry has been human interaction with mechanical and technical systems such as computers, copying machines, home heating systems (Kempton, 1986), VHS recorders, and cars. In trying to understand and interact with a system, users develop *mental models* about how the system works, often drawing on mental models from other domains (e.g., the desktop metaphor of computer interfaces). To design systems that trigger appropriate mental models and interaction patterns, system developers and designers need to know how mental models are structured and used.

In the social realm, people entertain a number of common-sense knowledge structures. In addition to making use of folk-psychology to attribute mental states to others, we ascribe personality traits to them (Andersen & Klatzky, 1987). We may, for instance, make sense of John's tendency to be late by referring to "his carelessness." People seem to have consistent and shared models about traits and how to apply them to behavior (see Chapter 4, the section on the Psychology of Recognition and Alignment, and Cantor & Mischel, 1979). Traits give us handy ways to summarize and

abstract complex chains of behaviors, as well as to create first impressions of new acquaintances. In addition, people categorize others through *social roles* and *stereotypes*. We have cultural knowledge about *occupancy roles* (e.g., police, waiters, officers, farmers, and programmers), *family roles* (e.g., mother, father, daughter, and cousin), and *situation roles* (e.g., lecturer–student, buyer–seller, waiter–restaurant guest, and master–slave). People in different cultures hold complex assumptions and theories about how such social roles should be acted out, which affects not only how other people's behavior is perceived, but also how to behave in everyday life (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995:39; Taylor & Crocker, 1981:91). In addition, *social stereotypes* are idealized and simplified assumptions of groups of people along the lines of ethnicity, religion, political convictions, gender, handicap, profession, physiognomy, and social class (Augoustinous & Walker, 1995:207; Ruble & Stangor, 1986). In Western society, for instance, women are considered to be emotional, bachelors are held to be macho and interested in sexual conquests, and the stereotypical Japanese person is industrious, polite, and clever. In cultural studies, social stereotypes are often described on a representational level, that is, how stereotypes are represented in and circulated by public discourse such as newspapers, film, literature, and computer games. However, social stereotypes are also represented in the minds of the individuals in a given culture and operate in their understanding of the world (and in their generation of discourse – see, e.g., Holland & Skinner, 1987). Like all social roles, stereotypes are often tightly linked to external marks, clearly discernible and salient: skin color, hair color, body size, man or woman, clothing, and age (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995:39ff). In first-encounter categorizations of another person, this "visuality" acts as a trigger of stereotype expectations. In contrast to traits and occupancy roles, stereotypes often involve moral judgments that may lead to acts of social injustice (Tan, 1996:168). Many social stereotypes act as objectified knowledge in collective and social life.

Event schemas are mental structures that contain (often culturally specific) expectations about social situations, such as dining at restaurants, going for a bus ride, going to a soccer game, having a birthday party, having breakfast, courting, and changing diapers (Abbott, Black & Smith, 1985; Bower, Black & Turner, 1979; Cole, 1996:187ff; den Uyl & van Oostendorp, 1980; Graesser, Gordon, and Sawyer, 1979; Mandler, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Taylor & Crocker, 1981; van den Broek et al., 1997).

Event schemas are the knowledge structures that enable people to appraise the basic nature of a situation and act in a socially appropriate manner. They hold expectations not only about social roles to be played, but also about typical locale, typical instruments and props, typical conditions

for entering the situation, a standard sequence of scenes or actions in which one action enables the next, and some standard results of successfully performing the activity. The presence and operations of implicit event schemas can be tested by text-recall experiments. Bower et al. (1979), for instance, found a strong tendency for subjects to falsely recall actions that were not part of an original text, but that were strongly implied by the event schema. For example, if the text stated that John ordered food and later left the restaurant, subjects tended to remember that John also ate the food and paid for it, although it was not explicitly mentioned in the text. The understanding and the memory of the text were constructed based not only on textual structures, but also on common-sense expectations about restaurant visits. It is believed that we appropriate approximately a hundred or so event schemas as we develop as cultural beings in the socialization process.

(Cognitive) anthropology and cognitive semantics are concerned with mental structures that are manifested in language or cultural practice, so-called cultural models. The authors in the book edited by Holland and Quinn (1987), for instance, describe a number of cultural models, such as Americans' systematic view on marriage, how the cultural model of anger is expressed in American English, how illness is understood and talked about among Ecuadorians, and how Americans define the notion of a lie. Lakoff (1987) follows the same approach through more detailed linguistic evidence and sketches what he calls *idealized cognitive models* of, for example, colors, animals, plants, bachelors, mothers, going somewhere, over, and there. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) investigate the structural metaphors of time, events, causes, mind, self, and morality in the discourse of cognitive science and philosophy. Shore (1996) lists a number of Western and non-Western cultural models. All of these approaches overlap, to some extent, traditional sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies insofar as they investigate cultural understandings of various phenomena. Cognitive approaches to anthropology or semantics, however, treat culture less as the external customs, traditions, practices, or representations but rather as the knowledge people need "in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do" (Quinn & Holland, 1987:4). Of course, culture exists as artifacts, habits, and behavior in the actual world. Equally important, however, those artifacts, habits, and behaviors are represented in the minds of people in the form of mental structures (see Shore's [1996:52] distinction between *culture-in-the-world* and *culture-in-the-mind*[4]).

Many facets of the social sciences investigate similar cultural models. When sociologists, cultural researchers, television researchers, ethnographers, and opinion-poll researchers conduct interviews or ask subjects to

answer questionnaires about various cultural phenomena, they investigate shared cultural models. In our culture, people have complex theories about and attitudes toward Dallas, fan magazines, MTV, Pokemon, winners of the Nobel prize for literature, traffic congestions, modern art, consumerism, mobile telephones, smoking, Leonardo Di Caprio, Hitler, prime ministers and politicians, or any other cultural entities. People also entertain complex models of historical events, wars, conflicts, historical figures, and the causes of historical events. In most cultures, theories, myths, and narratives about history are vital to maintaining social, national, and ethnic identities and are thus powerful thought structures (White, 1990). Of course, these investigations into cultural models can also be conducted within a historical perspective, describing cultural models that used to operate but no longer circulate in our present-day culture. However, in history, the history of ideas, cultural and media history, interviews and questionnaires have to be replaced with an analysis of archival material such as written or printed material, archeological evidence, and historical artifacts. Of course, few of these approaches to cultural models treat them as mental structures in the mind of individual inhabitants of a culture of historical era. A psychological approach to culture, however, does.

It is important to note that cultural models are not exclusively concerned with facts and real entities. Cultural models may contain expectations of facts as well as of fiction and fantasy. People have sophisticated knowledge about the destiny, personality, social relations, attitudes, and physical appearance of Odysseus, Ally McBeal, Santa Claus, Macbeth, Winnie the Pooh, and Robinson Crusoe, although these characters are fictional in nature. People have fictional expectations of character types, e.g., the hero, the villain, the princess, and the Mafioso, as well as expectations of what type of fiction these characters are typically involved in. Audiences have sophisticated assumptions about genre (typical plotlines, typical character galleries, typical actions and behavior, typical moral structure, typical instruments, and locales). As children and adults, we engage in games of make-believe through play, toys, literature, film, television, and dreaming, and we come to develop complex mental structures about fictional worlds (Walton, 1990). As fictions are shared within a community or a culture, such fictional expectations often become socially shared.

Mental structures also encompass even more abstract phenomena such as people's image of politics, morals, righteousness, individual freedom, responsibility of the state, industrialization, urbanization, or modernity. In addition, religious thought structures of fate, death, life, God(s), forgiveness, and confession are central in many people's understanding of and behavior in the world. Again, these quite abstract and general apprehensions are often investigated from a culturalist–historical perspective

(within cultural studies, history of ideas, and history of politics), but they can also be treated as mental structures represented in the minds of individuals.

This sample list of mental structures is not comprehensive, but it gives a flavor of the breadth and the wealth of the various levels that shape the processes of understanding. Although academic investigations have not referred to them as individual and mental phenomena (knowledge, schemas, assumptions, expectations), these types of foreknowledge are represented in the minds of humans, socialized individuals, and members of a culture. Moreover, although they exist on widely different levels of processing, they belong together because they provide the mental tools by which individuals make sense of their physical, social, and cultural environments. In concert, they enable individuals to *understand* and to *act* within these environments. To mark this functional connection between the levels, I use one broad term to denote all of them. Although *knowledge* and *cognitive models* tend to exclude cultural aspects and *cultural models* seem to disregard noncultural mental structures, *disposition* seems to be the most neutral term to cover all levels. Dispositions are the totality of expectations, assumptions, hypotheses, theories, rules, codes, and prejudices that individuals project onto the world. Through these capacities, humans are *disposed* to understand the world in a certain preconfigured way, already prepared for some regularities of the world. Equipped with dispositions, the mind–body complex is already "halfway in the world" (cf. Heidegger's *in-der-Welt-sein* [existence in the world] or Brentano's *intentionality*). Through our acquired dispositions, we "reach out" toward reality even before we start taking things in. Together, dispositions and understanding constitute the basic building blocks of psychology.

Parameters of Dispositions

In the mental architecture, dispositions perform a number of essential functions. Dispositions guide the encoding of information, bring coherence to the incoming stimuli, and lend structure to experience. Because dispositions often contain internal coherence, placing stimuli into those frames of mind usually means that the phenomenal world becomes stable and reliable. Even though stimuli are scarce and poor, dispositions provide the background and the "carpet of assumptions" that enable the mind–body complex to make sense of the data presented, filling in where information is missing. This occurs in "here-and-now" situations, as well as in recalling, fantasizing, dreaming, and other reconstructive enterprises. For instance, a great number of studies within cognitive psychology have shown how mental schemas supplement in situations in which memory fails (e.g., Bower et al., 1979).

Dispositions also enable reasoning, explanations, and predictions. Dispositions come in different forms of sophistication, but all have structures that enable inferences. For instance, if I categorize a man as an introvert, I can draw the conclusion that he is also quiet and shy (according to the trait model). If a man has finished eating at a restaurant, he has probably already ordered (according to the going-to-a-restaurant event schema). Because dispositions often specify probable temporal, spatial, and causal relations among objects, events, and behavior, such everyday reasoning becomes possible. Because dispositions are shared across individuals in a given culture, there is often a general social consensus about the (non)validity of such explanations and predictions, at least in common-sense reasoning. Predictive inferences allow people to make qualified predictions of how physical and social reality will behave in the future. For sure, such folk-theoretical predictions are primitive and simplified, but they are almost certainly more valuable to the organism than no predictive ability at all (in terms of Folk Psychology, see the discussion in Chapter 4, the subsection on the Instrumental Value of Folk Psychology).

Because dispositions are general, simplified, and idealized models of the world, they save cognitive energy. Hoffman's perceptual rules, a restaurant schema, social stereotypes, or the diverse heuristics in attributing cause and effects are simplified conceptions of the world, by which we "uncomplicate" reality and thereby "make sense" of it. Event schemas, for instance, are not fleshed-out memories of particular restaurant visits or bus rides, but abstract models of what restaurant visits *generally* include, in what order events in those situations *prototypically* happen, and what props and roles are most *typically* involved. Using such idealized models in understanding or recalling a situation, event, or object liberates the mind from the impossible task of making sense of and recalling every nitty-gritty detail. Instead, unique phenomena are placed within abstract frameworks. All behavior and events taking place at Mickey's last night are placed in "a restaurant visit." Many actions of John are simply subsumed under the trait "careless." In gaining our first impressions of people, we often tend to ignore complexities in behavior and appearance and to categorize them along social, ethnic, religious, and other stereotypical lines.

Even though such "top-down" processes are fast, do not require us to model reality from scratch, and may work well in some situations, the simplified nature of dispositions may make them contraproductive. Consider the following riddle:

> A FATHER AND HIS SON ARE DRIVING ALONG A MOTORWAY WHEN AN ACCIDENT OCCURS. THE FATHER IS KILLED. THE SON IS SEVERELY INJURED AND TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL. IN THE OPERATING ROOM, THE SURGEON LOOKS AT THE CHILD AND EXCLAIMS, 'MY GOD, IT'S MY SON!' HOW COULD THIS BE?[5]

The failure (?) to identify the answer to the seeming contradiction is attributed to the fact that our society maintains a social stereotype that associates surgeons with men. When our tacit assumptions fail to distinguish between male and female surgeons, we also fall short in solving the riddle. As more and more surgeons of today are women, a person operating with such a stereotype will surely run into more serious social dilemmas than failing to solve riddles. Although disposition-driven processes ("simplification") help to make a fragmented world appear meaningful without much cognitive strain, stimuli-driven processes enable us to detect new distinctions and hierarchies in the world, as well as to modify and transform the structure of the dispositions that we already have. Learning, science, scholarship, criticism, and art, for instance, seem to require that we (make an effort to) put some of our dispositions and foreknowledge aside and attend to things with "a fresh mind," taking things at "face value" or "from another, unusual perspective." To deal with a constantly changing physical and social habitat, balancing between these two cognitive modes seems to be crucial to any animal.

Dispositions are not singular and isolated structures of knowledge, but the mind maintains sophisticated mechanisms by which to combine dispositions. Metaphors and analogies are forceful tools by which the mind extends dispositions in one domain to another (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). Such conceptual mappings may be deliberate acts of speakers, but they also seem to be built into the language use and the cultural models we evoke when we talk.

Many dispositions emerge in or habitual interaction with reality. Their operations become habitual thinking, and we seldom reflect on the fact that we use dispositions in our understanding of reality. To use Hutchins's (1980:12) words, once dispositions are learned they become "what one *sees with*, but seldom what one *sees*." Because many dispositions are transparent in this way, phenomenal reality appears as if it existed objectively, independent of our perception of it. To Feldman (1987), this tendency to endow the phenomenal world with a special, external ontological status may be a human universal. She calls this "ontic dumping."[6] Of course, the fact that humans in their everyday business many times fail to reflect on their active dispositions does not mean that they are doomed to ignorance. Science, social science, the humanities, art, and public discourse often investigate and remind us about the foreknowledge by which our minds operate, making us aware of the ways in which we understand the physical, social, and cultural world. Dispositions do not reside in the Freudian unconscious, but rather in the *cognitive unconscious* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999:9) or *preconscious*. Such mechanisms of awareness making are important for individuals as well as for cultures. Making explicit tacitly held and taking for granted dispositions and knowledge and putting

them up for intimate scrutiny are essential for a culture to avoid stagnate consensus and intellectual decline. The possibility for awareness making also means that humans' destinies are not determined by dispositions, cultural or otherwise. Even though dispositions govern and constrain understanding and behavior, they also enable creativity and awareness-making processes. Humans and human cultures are able to break free from traditional thinking and to understand the world in novel ways. The cultural–psychological theory presented here is compliant with the fundamentals of Modernity and Enlightenment on individual and cultural levels.

Although we take an individual perspective of dispositions, we find that it is important to acknowledge the extent to which many of them are shared locally or even globally. To be sure, dispositions can be idiosyncratic and restricted to an individual. I may, for instance, have a mental map of the route to my work, or I may have memories from last year's Midsummer's Eve festivity that differ radically from those of my party friends. Many dispositions, however, are spread within a group, a community, a culture, or a species. We share dispositions and methods by which we understand the world. In this way, a great many people come to have overlapping phenomenal worlds. This fact, that individuals are not islands of solitary and idiosyncratic phenomenal worlds, is not a happy coincidence. Considering its communicatory, cultural, and evolutionary advantages, synchronizing minds and understandings of the world is invaluable. It enables smooth cooperation in activities, work, tasks, and communication. The fact that group members share dispositions about the environment – and are aware that they all share dispositions about the environment – enables members to predict the behavior of other group members in ways that profoundly improve cooperative activities. In this way, sharing habitual thinking and behavior makes altruistic tendencies more effective and thus more advantageous from a Darwinian point of view. Shared assumptions about the world also make oral, written, or image-based communication more efficient, easier, and less ambiguous. Sharing dispositions enables communication to leave out a great number of details and "context" that otherwise would have been required for making sense of the discourse. The more shared dispositions, the less information needs to be explicitly communicated. The ways in which (visual) communication relies on tacitly shared dispositions and the ways in which the dispositions of the spectator–reader guide the decoding of the discourse are the most central themes of this book.[7]

Shared dispositions also seem to provide a sense of group belonging and social identity that are crucial to the perseverance of any given culture or nation.

The extent to which people share dispositions and phenomenal worlds is, of course, not a settled question. Anthropologists, sociologists, communication researchers, psychologists, and others do not agree on panhuman universals, cultural homogeneity, and group consensus, nor the levels at which such shared phenomenal worlds should be best described. Moreover, as globalization gains speed, the objects of study seem to change faster than empirical studies can cope with, literally making anthropological results obsolete (or rather, historical) within months. In cinema studies, however, one thing seems to be clear. In describing the reception of visual media, *differences* in dispositions along lines of gender, ethnicity, and class have been prioritized at the expense of investigating the degree to which spectator groups *share* dispositions and understanding of a film. In this respect, in this book I hope to make a difference. In the following chapters I make the case for (semi)universal dispositions and describe the ways in which these contribute to a shared understanding of certain layers of cinematic meaning.

The issue of shared dispositions and phenomenal worlds is often confused with the question of their origin. Finding out whether a disposition is shared universally or locally restricted is a straightforward empirical endeavor. Explaining the causes of those results, however, is trickier. How and why do dispositions end up in the minds of people? Whereas Kant and Hume assumed that their categories were implanted there by a benevolent God, modern academia discusses other origins. Evolutionary approaches assume that some dispositions, proven to be valuable in the everyday lives of humans, over time become genetically encoded. This would ensure disposition continuity across generations. For instance, a basic ability to visually perceive 3D objects and determine their position in space in order to manipulate them and navigate among them is probably valuable to any creature of our size living on a planet such as ours. Another example would be the basic social skills required for coping with a social environment like that of humans. For instance, paying attention to the eyes of other people – their movements and directions – seems like such an old and basic social strategy that it may have been "hard–wired." Although this seems straightforward enough, it still needs to be determined how influential such genetic predispositions are and the extent to which environmental features spark, inform, enable, and change those emerging dispositions. This is the old nature–nurture issue. How much of our ability to perceive and categorize 3D objects is because we were born with an ability or a predisposition to develop an ability, and how much is caused by the fact that we inhabit and develop in a rich object environment that structures and shapes our visual system? Are the sensory–motor, cognitive, and emotional stages of Piaget's developmental psychology mainly

caused by a genetic predisposition to develop those skills at a various point in time, or does a child actively have to learn, construct theories, and form dispositions from the embodied interaction with the environment?[8] These are difficult questions. Perhaps dispositions that are basic and critical for higher-level dispositions are genetically pushed into the mind of the child. If the child, for instance, fails to pay attention to another's eyes and has trouble establishing a mutual gaze with his or her caretaker, he or she will have problems developing basic empathic, social, and emotional skills in later developmental stages. Giving eye fixation a reflexological status in the newborn would impede such malfunctions.

Although interesting and important, the nature versus environment debate is centered on the individual. Culturalist approaches take this to another level, claiming that the so-called environment with which we interact is not something naturally given (consisting only of natural objects), but is something that we "artificially" create. I can design artifacts that structure my thoughts and incite new and innovative thinking (e.g., a sketch or a drawing). Most cultural artifacts and practices, however, exist before and beside my own intervention. Looking around my apartment, for example, I find very few objects that are either "natural" or manufactured by myself. Instead, culture, history, and economy have "created" tools, instruments, utensils, pottery, technology, props, buildings, clothes, computers, knives, and vehicles. In addition, each such artifact mediates and supports some form of habitual or routine activity that not only structures my behavior, but also allows me to "see" and imitate the practices of others. This also includes cultural practices in which no "physical" artifacts are involved, for example, rituals, dances, ceremonies, greetings, singing, customs, and body language. Cultural environment includes social and cultural rules, laws, and conventions, as well as the institutions for reprimanding those people who do not follow these rules. Finally, discourse and imagery forcefully influence the ways in which people acquire dispositions.[9] Although some species may be thought of as "artifact species" (think, for instance, of nesting activities among birds), none produce cultural environments with such complexity, range, and quantity as humans do (Cole, 1996).

As far as the origin of dispositions is concerned, the culturalist asks two questions. How and to what extent does the cultural environment (locally or globally distributed) determine individuals' dispositions? This may be seen as the traditional nature–nurture question, although the notion of *environment* probably differs between psychologists and cultural researchers. Second, cultural studies are not so much concerned with how dispositions end up in the minds of a cultural inhabitant (culture-in-the-mind), but rather to explain how cultural environments emerge and exist

(culture-in-the-world). Describing the mechanisms by which dominant, semidominant, and subversive cultures struggle to design the cultural environment and to define the practices and codes in those environments constitutes a sociological level of description. This includes critical analysis of institutions, commercial forces, political lobbying, and the message of mass-communication channels. The sociological perspective extends the classical nature–nurture question and encompasses a much broader view of the origin of dispositions.

According to the stance I take in this book, dispositions originate from all of these sources. Genetics may be responsible for some dispositions, phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically. Our embodied interaction with and manipulation of physical reality are critical for many dispositions (Johnson, 1987). Cultural practices, conventions, and artifacts provide a rich habitat out of which many dispositions arise in the minds of people. Finally, to explain how and why people acquire a given set of cultural dispositions, history, cultural studies, media studies, cultural psychology, and anthropology need to describe how cultural environments exist and are transformed. This broad and integrative stance, of course, does not give answers to the origin of individual dispositions; it only acknowledges that causes of dispositions must be sought on many levels in an ecumenical spirit. To paraphrase Johnson (1987:xix), humans are *cultural* animals, but also cultural *animals*.

We now need to specify how dispositions and understanding operate in the reception of cinema and the ways in which spectators create meaning out of moving imagery.

A Psychological Model of Reception

The image is not an end in itself; it is a start. (Mitry, 1997:51)

Reception theories seek to explain the production and the emergence of meaning in the broadest sense of the term. The basic assumption is that spectators, or some aspect of the spectator, use or do things with the film object and that these activities decidedly influence the meaning of it. The film is not seen as an autonomous object that contains its own meaning, but rather as a structure that acquires its meaning in the confrontation or interaction with spectators' knowledge, world views, morals or, in my terms, dispositions: "[I]t is in the reader that the text comes to life" (Iser, 1978:19).

Over the years, film theory has produced or recruited models of reception (for overview and criticism, see Mayne, 1993; Persson, 2000). Soviet film theorists embraced reflexologic and behaviorist models of the spectator, in which meaning was thought of as (shock) effects of the

film text. Eisenstein's (1988) spectator, for instance, is not a mind negotiating the text or evaluating alternative understandings, but is one who simply reacts involuntarily. In spite of Eisenstein's revolutionary ambitions for the film medium, he does not seem to recognize that different background assumptions (cognitively, culturally, social class, or gender) might be the source for different understandings of the film. Münsterberg's (1916/1970) purportedly psychological approach seems to promise a somewhat more complex theory of the spectator and meaning production. However, instead of explaining how close-ups, flashbacks, and point-of-view (POV) shots are understood and processed by the spectator, he suggests that these conventions imitate and materialize the mental processes of the spectator. The close-up, for instance, is said to "objectify" the mental process of attention (Münsterberg, 1916/1970:38). The screen almost seems to acquire a mind of its own, making it the site of meaning production – not the spectator. In the 1970s, the spectator was widely considered as a *subject*, driven by psychoanalytical or capitalist mechanisms. Often decontextualized from his or her psychological, cultural, and historical situation, the spectator assumed the role of a "position" rather than an embodied recipient. The implied reader–spectator, for instance, was "not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself" (Chatman, 1978:149ff). This rather odd conception of the spectator was in fact less a theory of reception and more a theory of texts: "[I]t can be argued that contemporary psychoanalytic criticism, despite its claim to offer a theory of 'spectatorship,' is in fact not particularly concerned with the viewer" (Thompson, 1988:28).

Growing out of dissatisfaction with the abstract notion of spectator, cultural studies differentiated the audience in terms of ethnicity, culture, subculture, class, and gender, and claimed that these parameters of social identity decidedly influenced the reception process. The influential distinction of Hall et al. (1980) among *dominant*, *negotiated*, and *oppositional* readings of media took into consideration not only the socioeconomical background of the spectator, but also assumed that the spectator could (in theory) resist any dominant position offered by the text. Many researchers of cinema studies took this as yet another framework within which they could pursue introspectionist textual–critical analysis (for criticism, see Bordwell, 1989b); others started to turn to empirical methods by which they could validate different forms of reception. The ethnographic approach developed by the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (of which Stuart Hall was a member), included *qualitative* methods (e.g., group interviews, individual interviews, participatory observation) and *quantitative* (e.g., questionnaires