

# Toward a General Theory of Film Spectatorship

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**Abstract:** This article presents a general theory of the film spectator from a cognitive perspective. This perspective considers Thagard's (2000) notion of 'striving for coherence' as the most appropriate description of spectators' mental dispositions toward feature films; it regards Fauconnier & Turner's (2002) theory of Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending as the most comprehensive account of human meaning construction available to date; and it assumes phenomenological reduction as a necessary methodological prerequisite for theory building. These pages comprise a four part argument that lays out the cognitive dimensions of coherence, applies them to the analysis of two scenes from two classic Hollywood suspense thrillers using a mode of mental space analysis known as the "Aarhus model," and articulates a phenomenology of film spectatorship based on the same theoretical framework. When combined with Thagard's description of coherence, the Aarhus mode of analysis, and a tripartite phenomenology of cinematic engagement, Mental Spaces and Blending Theory provides a cognitively plausible answer to the perennial question: *how do spectators makes sense of feature films?*

**Keywords:** The "Aarhus model"; Attention & Awareness; Blending, Coherence; Diegesis; Dynamic Schema; Emotion; John Frankenheimer; Grounding; Alfred Hitchcock; Medium; Mental spaces; Phenomenology; Spectator.

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## 0. Introduction

The question, *How do individuals make sense of feature films?*, has elicited numerous answers over the years, many of which have determined the direction of film theory and influenced film criticism. André Bazin, Sergei Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin, Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, David Bordwell, and Noël Carroll are just a few samples of artists and scholars for whom this question has been a lifelong preoccupation. This essaysketches out a general theory of film spectatorship using Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* and John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* as case studies.

The general theory of the film spectator presented here fits broadly within the "cognitivist" paradigm of film studies and takes the following assertions as true:

- ◆ Film spectatorship—or at least the most interesting aspects of it—is a *conscious activity* (Currie 1999): making sense of film is significantly the same as making sense of the real world (Anderson 1996); the spectator uses perceptual and conceptual systems developed for interacting with a three-dimensional world to interact with and make sense of a two dimensional world; therefore, there is no specific, encapsulated,

cognitive module for experiencing the movements and gestures of fictional characters projected on a screen, nor are there specific cognitive modules for aesthetic experiences generally;

- ◆ though dependent on the same cognitive capacities as everyday experience, aesthetic experiences are qualitatively different from everyday experiences; if everyday experience depends on coherence, aesthetic experience allows considerably more room for disparity, conflict, and tension, which drives spectators' to appreciate the complexity (i.e., partial incoherency) of form and meaning;
- ◆ there is always great pressure to endow such complexities with coherence so that disparate, tense, and disintegrated elements along one cognitive dimension (e.g., conceptual incompatibility) become unified, comfortable, and integrated elements along other cognitive dimensions (e.g., deductive inferences, explanatory hypotheses, and emotional valences);
- ◆ spectators can produce psychological responses *as if* they were witnessing the events being projected before them; but spectators can respond with equal ease to the medium of representation as a medium of representation and to the world outside the representation as it relates to that representation (Allen 1995); the formal aspects of film—and the material conditions of reception—make these *as if* responses likely but only for relatively short intervals (i.e., seconds);
- ◆ these *as if* experiences, although illusory, are neither inherently irrational nor pathological but normal aspects of human aesthetic experience;
- ◆ the feature film is a derived intentional object, created by someone<sup>1</sup> with specific ordered properties; as with any work of art, we can experience them as concretized pre-aesthetic wholes and as complex layered aesthetic objects (Ingarden 1973); in each case, the spectator constructs (or reconstructs) meaning through processes of appresentation: “filling in the gaps” with presupposed knowledge to produce understanding.

This paper has four sections. Section one offers a rounded statement on coherence along seven dimensions, arguing that human cognition can be regarded as the constant striving to generate coherent representations from many perceptions and conceptions. Striving for coherence becomes most apparent to us in engagements with complex aesthetic objects, which, as suggested above, permit spectators to stretch and strain normal perceptual and conceptual boundaries. Disparity, incommensurability, conflict and tension are all triggers of wonder in aesthetic experience, whereas they are all great sources of anxiety, fear, and reaction in everyday life. The account

proceeds with reference to two scenes from Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). Section two applies Mental Spaces and Blending Theory—arguably that most promising process model of meaning construction available today—to ground coherence theory in micro-analysis of film technique and its affect on the spectator. Section three moves from microanalysis to macro-analysis, demonstrating that coherence dimensions and Mental Spaces and Blending Theory offer promising resources for phenomenological exploration of how meanings typically operate in the cinema. In this section, I argue that film spectatorship operates in three modes: *story-awareness*, *medium-awareness*, and *world-awareness*, each of which depends on slightly different cognitive processes.

### **1. Coherence theory and the seven cognitive dimensions**

If human beings make sense of film in sufficiently similar ways as they make sense of the real world, then we should ask the question: how do human beings make sense of the real world? What approach or general framework projects spectators' conscious mental states from the world to the world of film and back again?

When we try to make sense of anything— an event unfolding before our eyes, a person's facial expression, a text, a picture, and so on—we develop interpretations that best match the available information. According to Thagard,

. . . [t]he best interpretation is one that provides the most coherent account of what we want to understand, considering both pieces of information that fit with each other and pieces of information that do not fit with each other. (2000:16)

The best interpretations begin with overall assessments of coherence. Under this view, we begin with a film spectator who has specific goals and a given background of knowledge and experience, and a given perceptual situation. In accordance with Kintsch (1998), the film spectator works with associated concepts activated and reactivated from long-term memory that mesh with the current perceptual situation (i.e., images projected on a theater or television screen). This “nascent network,” as Kintsch calls it, contains both relevant and irrelevant information. As the spectator thinks, the patterns begin to stabilize, activating those elements that fit together and deactivating those that do not. Through this process we begin to construct “orderly” mental representations. In contrast to first generation cognitive science, this process is not rule-governed, serial, and rational in the sense imposed by formal logic. Rational in this second-generation context of cognitive science means satisfying a set of constraints that help integrate various kinds of information into coherent scenes. Once a spectator reconstructs a coherent scene (be it real or imaginary, past, present, future, or counterfactual), she begins to

make sense of it, drawing important implications from it with varying degrees of detail and sophistication.

Thagard proposes six different dimensions of coherence: perceptual, conceptual, analogical, deductive, explanatory, and deliberative, each of which is influenced by “metacoherence emotions,” such as contentment, anxiety, happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, pity, empathy, or disgust (2000:93).

A coherence theory of film reception follows the cognitivist enterprise by assuming the film spectator is an active participant in the reconstruction of meaning. The active spectator wields her prodigious abilities to make sense of the images unfolding before her. The theory of the film spectator outlined here begins with such models, which later can be used to justify specific interpretations. In film, like all art, coherence proceeds from the dimension of perception to other dimensions.

Using Alfred Hitchcock’s *Notorious* as an illustrative case, this paper examines two scenes depicting the villains’ attempts to poison the heroine, the second one leading up to the film’s denouement of her rescue and reunion with the hero.

Filmed in 1945 and released in 1946, *Notorious* tells the story of a young, attractive woman, Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), the daughter of a convicted German spy, who meets and falls in love with Devlin (Cary Grant), an American intelligence agent who persuades her to work for the United States. Her task is to renew her acquaintance with Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains), an old friend of her father living in Rio de Janeiro whose home is the epicenter of a German cabal preparing for a Nazi resurgence. Knowing that Sebastian is in love with her, Alicia renews the acquaintance and allows him to court her until he asks her to marry him, which she does in order spy on Sebastian's organization and report her findings to Devlin. When Sebastian and his mother discover Alicia's activities, they plot to poison her to death slowly so the others members of the organization will not find out, for that would inevitably lead to Sebastian’s death. The movie ends with Devlin rescuing the ailing Alicia from Sebastian's mansion.

The poisoning scenes in Hitchcock's *Notorious* represent, first, the moment when the viewer discovers the manner in which the villains poison Alicia, and second, the moment when Alicia discovers what the spectator already knows. The first scene is of an asymptomatic Alicia (center screen) taking her morning coffee on the porch with her husband (screen right) sitting next to her sipping his own cup of coffee. Her mother-in-law (screen left) sits calmly behind her crocheting while they make plans for the day. The final poisoning scene involves the now-symptomatic Alicia sitting (center screen) in a large, wing-backed chair in the parlor taking her evening coffee, her husband (screen left), her mother-in-law (screen right) and a friend of the

family (standing behind Alicia). The conversation focuses on whether a vacation will help Alicia. To preview my conclusion, these scenes are designed to maximize perceptual, conceptual, explanatory, and deductive coherence among viewers and the heroine; the sensation of suspense, however, depends on local emotive incoherence.

Perceptual coherence attains as we make “readings” of the sensory world. These perceptual “readings,” however, are not fictions of the individual’s mental processes. Instead, perceptual coherence refers to moment-by-moment acts of accepting information available at sensory surfaces and adjusting to that information based on previous encounters within similar environments. Thus, a scene makes sense to the extent that our interpretations cohere with low-level representations from sensory input. At the semiotic level, different signs can develop a rapport with one another. For example, recognizing an entity as a *coffee cup* can occur through visual semiosis alone. However, acquiring and using a concept flexibly depends on a converging interaction and integration of different semiotic sources. In the case of the concept *cup*, such sources range from the visual and haptic sensations (in the sense that a mug looks and feels a certain way) to the gastronomical (in the sense that mugs are associated with specific tastes and smells) to auditory sensations (in the sense that they are associated with sipping sounds) to symbolic, metonymic associations (in the sense that hot drinks may be associated with winter).

Incompatible sensory input is incoherent and can produce conflicting readings of the world. When such incompatible signs are co-activated in consciousness, the result can be humorous, startling, frightening, ironic, or a combination thereof. In the second scene, Hitchcock uses a low-angle shot of Alicia sitting in her wing-backed chair, the perceptual effect of which makes the coffee cup appear as big as Alicia’s head. Spectators likely know that cups are not that big. Such conceptual knowledge breeds sign conflict in perception. The copresence of incompatible perceptions pressures the spectator to partition interpretations, suggesting that she differentiate between the cup as a real object and the cup as a filmed object (i.e., part of the *mise-en-scène*). Perceptual disparity goads the revision of the spectator’s mental models of present reality. The overall coherence of a scene depends on the coherence of sensory information with background knowledge. In this case, the augmented presence of the coffee cup does not fit perceived reality; therefore, it can only achieve coherence through higher order cognitive dimensions.

Conceptual coherence depends on relations of concepts as positively correlated, e.g., for many Westerners, the idealized cognitive model for mothers associates positively with concepts like *nurturing*, *matronly*, *protective* and correlates positively with activities like *sewing*, *cooking*, and *babysitting*. Conceptual incoherence usually arises with the co-activation of negatively

correlated concepts, e.g., for many Westerners, the idealized cognitive model for mothers associates negatively with concepts like *aggressive*, *sexual*, *ruthless* and correlates negatively with activities like *planning a murder*. A coherence theory of film must stress the intimate, dialectical relation between perceptual and conceptual coherence, because most concepts are “given” concepts; that is, mental contact with an object in the immediate perceptual field elicits application of a concept. Hitchcock's decision to block the first scene so that Alicia's mother-in-law behaves in a manner consistent with an idealized cognitive model for an elderly mother (sitting in a chair crocheting) clashes with our knowledge that she masterminded the plan to poison Alicia.

Analogical coherence involves extracting a “template” from one situation and applying it to another situation. French (1995) argues that analogy is really a continuum phenomenon: when automatic and spontaneous, analogy-making is, in essence, categorization; when analogy-making is conscious and deliberate, when it involves accommodating of disanalogous information (a.k.a, “conceptual slippage”), analogy-making is a conscious, creative practice of “supertranslation” and “proportionality” (French 1995:8-12).

A spectator's ability to experience continuity from scene to scene depends on analogical coherence, particularly at the categorization point on the continuum. The second scene depicting Alicia drinking coffee is a “reminding incident” of the previous situation. A spectator's ability to regard the later scene as the same kind of incident depicted in an earlier scene is an example of analogical coherence, even though the exact conditions of imbibing coffee do not obtain: the victim is now symptomatic; it is now evening rather than morning; a fourth character has been added to the scene; a different topic of conversation obtains; Sebastian's mother prepares Alicia's coffee rather than Sebastian himself, and so forth. These local “slippages” do nothing to destabilize the analogous character of the two scenes, rather they help advance the narrative itself by depicting the progression of Alicia's ailment.

An example of intertextual analogical coherence, would be a spectator's ability to make a generalization like “Hitchcockian suspense” by extracting a template with variant and invariant features that count as “suspense producing devices,” then applying these to other Hitchcock films. It is then but a small inferential leap to generate analogical coherence between film makers, as when a critic asserts that such-and-such a film exhibits “Hitchcock-like tension.” In this case, the identity of the filmmaker “slips” while the filmic effect remains.

A situation attains deductive coherence when all the propositions attributed to that situation are compatible, whereas a situation fails to achieve deductive coherence when propositions attributed to it contradict one another. For instance, spectators may predict that

Devlin will rescue Alicia, thwarting Alex's attempt to conceal his incompetence from his superiors (a prediction that piggybacks on analogical coherence). Had Hitchcock decided to have Devlin appear on-scene only to find Alicia's lifeless body, he would have introduced an element of deductive incoherence, for it would have contradicted the spectator's own prediction that Devlin would succeed.

A situation attains explanatory coherence when hypotheses and evidence correlate positively with one another, whereas a situation fails to achieve explanatory coherence when hypotheses contradict one another or when an hypothesis does not account for available evidence. Why might a spectator predict Sebastian's failure and possible demise while viewing *Notorious*? Perhaps because she knows that “bad things” are not supposed to happen to the good characters, only to the evil ones. Perhaps because she reasons that Hollywood studios would not permit Ingrid Bergman to play this role if it meant the character would die in the end for fear of offending the paying movie patron. Were Hitchcock to have had Alicia die, a spectator may then wonder why he violated mainstream Hollywood conventions. The spectator's failed predictions would put psychological pressure on her to generate new hypotheses explaining why the filmmakers flouted a genre convention.

A situation achieves deliberative coherence when it matches our desired goals and outcomes. If spectators express satisfaction at seeing Devlin walk out of Sebastian's house, the situation is deliberatively coherent to the Hollywood producer because it means the film achieves a typical Hollywood outcome: that the spectator roots for the principal characters. A situation fails to achieve coherence when it contradicts or is otherwise incompatible with our desired goals and outcomes. If the spectator expresses dissatisfaction for a particular ending to a film, the situation is incoherent along a deliberative dimension for the Hollywood producer, for it may mean that the formula no longer works.

A situation attains emotional coherence when the elicited emotional valences fit with a salient coherence dimension or set of dimensions. A situation attains emotional incoherence when the elicited valence clashes with other coherence dimensions. For instance, Mrs. Sebastian's behavior in the first poisoning scene integrates perfectly with conceptual models of motherhood. In this instance, perceptual and conceptual coherence are integrated seamlessly. However, the astute spectator will recall that she is the mastermind behind the plot to poison Alicia. The largely positive emotional valences associated with a mother sitting in her chair and knitting clash with the strongly negative emotional valences attributed to someone plotting to murder someone else. There is an ambiguity here, however. If the spectator wishes to explain her motives according to the “protectionist” features of the *mother* concept, then the strong negative emotional valences

ascribed to Sebastian's mother might not materialize. That is to say, we conceptualize mothers as “protectors of their offspring” from external threats (perhaps by analogy to the situation of the lioness protecting her cubs). This justification, however, entails that we view Alicia as an external threat (which, strictly speaking, she is); however, the story gives spectators little reason to wish for Alex Sebastian's survival. The upshot here is that local emotional incoherence produced by warring percepts and concepts is a salient property of our experience of fictional representations in film accounting for ways we “resonate” with the story (*mimesis*), with the artistry behind the telling of the story (*diegesis*), and with the way the story and its medium may be relevant to the world outside the theater (*realis*).

## **2. Blending Theory and Film Analysis: Virtual Being and Virtual Coexistence <sup>2</sup>**

Coherence theory is still vague with respect to modeling online meaning construction. The present account will sketch how the mental spaces and blending framework serves as a ready-made model for examining how meanings operate in cinema at restricted (i.e., scenic) and expansive (i.e. phenomenological) dimensions of analysis. As a general theory of human cognition, blending theory is consistent with Thagard's principal notion that human thought and action depend on rendering coherent mental representations across a variety of dimensions. Achieving coherence involves a set of operations for combining dynamic cognitive models in networks of *mental spaces* (Fauconnier 1994). Fauconnier & Turner (2002) argue that a small set of partially compositional processes operate in the creative construction of meaning in analogy, metaphor, counterfactuals, concept combination, and even the comprehension of grammatical constructions. Blending processes depend centrally on projection mapping and dynamic simulation to develop emergent structure, and to promote novel conceptualizations involving the generation of inferences, emotional reactions, and rhetorical force. Although Fauconnier and Turner's theoretical framework is the principal inspiration in that it is the best theory of meaning construction around, a more recent formulation known colloquially as “the Aarhus model” (with slight modifications) will support the theoretical sketch offered here.<sup>3</sup> First, defining the term mental space before proceeding will illustrate how the model handles complex aesthetic structures.

A theory of cognitive semantics, mental space theory locates meaning in speakers' mental representations, and construes linguistic structures as cues that prompt speakers to set up and relate elements within these *ad hoc* representations. Initially devised to answer questions about presupposition, indirect reference, and referential opacity, mental space theory has proven to be useful for describing various sorts of semantic and pragmatic phenomena (see Fauconnier &



Sweetser, 1996 for a review). In fact, mental space theory does not only pertain to meaning in language, but can be seen to apply to meaning in other domains, including math, gesture, music, and discourse (e.g. Goguen, 1999; Liddell, 1998; Zbikowski, 1999; Oakley 2002), hence its ready application to the problem of film reception.

Mental spaces “contain” mental models of entities, elements, and relations of any given scenario as perceived, imagined, remembered, or otherwise understood by a speaker. Elements represent each of the discourse entities, and simple frames represent the relationships that exist between them. Because the same scenario can be construed in many ways, mental spaces are useful analytic devices for partitioning incoming information about elements in the referential representation. For example, the sentence, “When I was 12, my parents took me to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious*,” prompts the addressee to construct a mental space for the speaker as a twelve-year-old child, an event space and the ensuing event relative to the present discourse base, or *Grounding* space (described below). The speaker in the grounding space identifies with the participant in the event space. Partitioning the information into two mental spaces allows the recipient to understand that while the speaker saw *Notorious* at age twelve, she need not have seen it since then, thus maintaining temporal displacement. The virtue of mental spaces is that they allow the addressee to divide information at the referential level into concepts relevant to different aspects of the scenario.

Blending theory works on the premise that the production and comprehension of signs entails the construction of a large number of simple, partial, and idealized mental models, each occurring by means of selective attention mechanisms and working memory. Complex human thought and understanding develops as we cobble together many of these simple idealized models, forming networks of mental spaces that can give rise to what has come to be known as blended mental spaces. A blended mental space combines conceptual structure to create new inferences not available in the other spaces (see Coulson and Oakley 2000 for an overview).

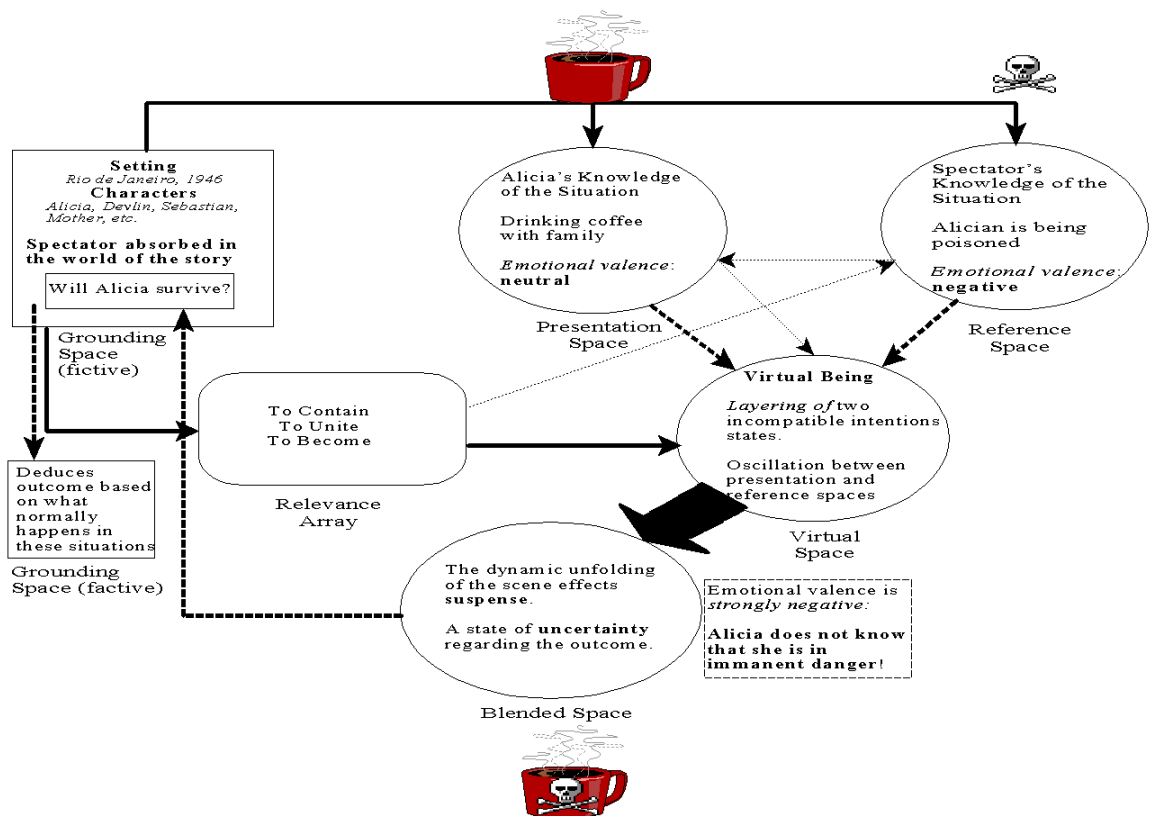
## 2.1 Virtual being in Hitchcock's *Notorious*

Consider the second poisoning scene from *Notorious* as an illustrative case of *virtual being* (L. Brandt 2002).

According to the model employed here, understanding this scene as it relates to the rest of the film requires the construction and dynamic activation of a mental space network that includes five mental spaces and a *Relevance Array*.<sup>4</sup> A standard mental space network includes a *Grounding* space, a *Presentation* space, a *Reference* space, a *Virtual* space (via composition), and a final *Blend* space (via completion and elaboration). A standard mental space analysis tries to

specify how spaces are constructed (i.e., space builders), how they relate to one another (i.e., through mappings of identity, similarity, metonymy, analogy, representation) and how they influence one another via conceptual projection, pattern completion, and elaboration). In addition, a mental space and blending analysis strives to specify the granularity of analysis. In film, the analysis of a scene and its syntagmatic relationship to other scenes corresponds typically to the level of semantic content; while the analysis of an opening scene or of transitions between scenes corresponds typically to the level of *enunciation*, and the analysis of the cultural influence of a film corresponds typically to the levels of rhetorical framing and interpretation. As argued later on, the spectators' appreciation of film at these progressively "higher" levels of analysis depends on a specific phenomenological engagement which results from a set of cognitive dispositions that can be felicitously described with the scope of coherence theory. Figure 1 depicts a mental space analysis of this scene.

Figure 1



Semantic analysis proceeds with the grounding space.<sup>5</sup> At this moment, we are assuming that the spectator is absorbed in the world of the story (see next section). She is having the *as if*

experience stipulated in the introduction. Being absorbed in the world of the story means that she is keeping track of the events presented before her; that she sees the characters on the screen and identifies with them, sorting the villains from the heroes or antagonists from protagonists; that she is witnessing events unfolding in Sebastian's house in Rio de Janeiro just after the war. In short, the grounding space is "fictive" in that the spectator is observing and responding emotionally to the events as if they were real, even though she is a non-productive participant, powerless to effect the events and actions she is witnessing. Following Langacker(2002: 318) thoughts on subjectification, the grounding space is "maximally subjective" during these *as if* experiences: the surrounding perceptual environment fades from consciousness.

According to P.A.Brandt (2002:53), the presentation space indexes the immediate "object of wonder" in that it presents something in a remarkable, surprising, or unexpected way" with the aim of referring to another state of affairs. In this case, the presentation space aligns the viewer with Alicia's knowledge of the present situation, a polite *dígestif* with her husband, mother-in-law, and a family friend. Although ailing, she enjoys a cup of coffee while conversation gravitates around which vacation spots will be most conducive to Alicia's recovery. In this space, the value "Alicia" takes on the role "Coffee Drinker," as do the other characters in the scene (i.e., Sebastian, Mrs. Sebastian, and their guest, Walter Beardsley). The initial deep focus shots focusing on the social spatial blocking and behavior of the participants acts as space builders of the presentation space, establishing the outwardly civilized nature of the event exploited in the blend.

The reference space, in contrast, indicates the spectator's knowledge of the present situation, which includes privileged knowledge of the villains' inward intentions. In this space, "Alicia Huberman" fills the role "Victim," while the values "Alex Sebastian" and "Mrs. Sebastian" fill the role for "perpetrator. " The cup is a vessel for delivering poison. This space represents the covert intentions of the two characters in contrast to the ignorance of Alicia and the guest. As the narrative unfolds, spectators learn that the intention is to make it appear as though her death resulted from a prolonged illness. Their plan takes on a distinctive character in the reference space as a slow, inconspicuous progression of an illness leading to Alicia's intensifying infirmity.

Inferences from background knowledge would likely lead spectators to deduce that the "delivery mechanism" for a slow-acting poison (e.g., arsenic or strychnine) would through drinking. Thus, when spectators see the cup from over Alicia's shoulder, they categorize it as a "delivery mechanism" for slow-acting poison. The sequence of close and medium shots focusing on the cup, Alicia's physical suffering, and demeanor of Sebastian and his mother act as space-

builders of the reference space, establishing the inward uncivilized intentions exploited in the blend.

The virtual space as the composition of the blend selective structure is projected from the presentation and reference spaces (depicted as two dashed arrows in figure 1). The virtual space allocates attention to the co-existence of two incompatible beliefs—what the heroine believes to be true and what the spectator knows to be true. These incompatible, incommensurate beliefs drive the dramatic structure of the scene, preparing the spectator for its climactic ending. In essence, it is a *virtual being* blend where the dramatic unfolding operates according to the organizing frame of the presentation space at the same time that it satisfies the intentional actions in the reference space. Typical of virtual being blends is the process whereby meaning arises from the continuously *unpacking of the blend* into its corresponding input spaces: the spectator “oscillates” between the presentation and reference spaces.<sup>6</sup>

Integration of these contrasting scenarios creates a strongly negative emotional valence such that the spectator empathizes with Alicia as a person who is in immanent danger but who does not know it. Once composed, this virtual space appears for the duration of the scene, producing a sense of suspense in the spectator. Suspense is a result of “running” the virtual space. As the scene unfolds the spectator creates meaning based on the uncertainty regarding the outcome. She knows what is happening to Alicia and why, but she does not know if Alicia will find out what is happening to her in time. Suspense occurs as perceptual coherence gives way to conceptual tension. The climax of this scene corresponds to the moment when Alicia realizes that she is being poisoned; thus, dynamic meaning of the scene inheres in the gradual alignment of Alicia’s knowledge of the situation with that of the spectator. The virtual and blend produces emotional tension that drives meaning construction: our contempt for the villains, sympathy and empathy for Alicia coupled with an uncertainty of outcome generates suspense.

Each mental space in this network captures a different facet of a suspense-filled situation. What holds this network together? What stabilizes it? Advocates of the Aarhus mode of analysis claim that mental space networks needs a governing dynamic of relevance. As I understand it, the notion of relevance serves as the semiotic interpretant to the network; it inferentially develops the meaning possibilities suggested by the signs used to activate the network. Specifically, relevance refers to an array of schematic structures of a most general nature that constrain both the intraspace and interspace relations among the mental spaces (see Brandt & Brandt 2002; L. Brandt 2002). As noted in figure 1, the relevance array contains three elements—TO CONTAIN, TO SEPARATE and UNITE, and TO BECOME—each denoting a dynamic schema that constrain the completion and elaboration of mental spaces as meaning unfolds. (The dotted line originating

from the relevance array in figure 1 represents a network elaboration loop.) These schemas are cognates of “image schemas” and “force dynamic relations” in cognitive semantics (Johnson 1987; Talmy 2000) and archetypal morphologies in catastrophe theory (Thom 1983).<sup>7</sup>

First is the image schema of containment made concrete in the Alicia’s coffee cup. Conceptual integration usually begins with such “material anchors,” especially in films making extensive use of props. In this instance, Hitchcock layers his presentation around Alicia’s cup, making it perceptually salient to other beings and objects in the scene. In this final poisoning scene, Hitchcock’s camera work focuses disproportionately on Alicia’s coffee cup, making it a salient perceptual element in most of the shots comprising the scene. In shot 9 (low angle), for example, the cup appears center screen next to Alicia’s head as viewed from below (at Alicia’s feet). In short 26 (high angle), for example, the cup appears screen right resting on a table, as viewed from above (over her shoulder). Each appearance of the cup activates the virtual space. In this space, the spectator develops a partial representation of the cup as a container. In order for the cup to gain relevance in the mind of the spectator, it must be used to activate other mental spaces and, ultimately, integrated into conceptual singularity. Therefore, containment is one dynamically employed schema that controls the meaning construction process. In the presentation space, containment frames the situation as a civilized, polite event. All the participants are contained in the living room, just as the coffee is contained in the cup. The spectator likely senses that Alicia herself feels contained in the present situation; she does not want to be there and intends to leave, but her commitments necessitate that she stay. In the reference space, however, containment frames the intentions of Sebastian and his mother. Not only does the coffee cup contain poison, as does Alicia’s body, but Sebastian and his mother forcibly contain (i.e., *keep*) Alicia by making her an invalid and ensure that she will never leave the house. In the blended space, these contrasting manifestations of containment—the heroine’s belief that her stay in the house is voluntary and the villains’ belief that she will die in the house—play out dramatically in the speech, behavior, and interactions of the participants. Astute observers will note that Alicia is herself contained in a high-backed chair, partially enveloped in its wings, and that the other characters “hover” over her.<sup>8</sup>

The second dynamic schema corresponds to Thom’s (1983) archetypal morphologies of TO SEPARATE, TO UNITE, and TO BECOME. The narrative trajectory here is the gradual alignment of Alicia’s and the spectator’s knowledge of the situation, so that as the blended scenario unfolds, events occur that make Alicia aware of the poisoned cup. (Her becoming aware is astutely managed by Hitchcock’s camera.) The scene evolves so that the virtual-being network established and maintained for most of the scene begins to disintegrate. The schema to separate gives way to

its antithesis, TO UNITE. Thus, the heroine comes to know that she is in immediate mortal danger. She now knows what we know, and she now knows that she is powerless to stop it. Hence, she and the spectator are uncertain about what is going to happen to her, even as the spectator might dimly deduce that Devlin is likely to save her.

The network of so-called input spaces to the blend, each of which correspond to selective structures from long-term memory, are applied to a current situation. The blended space represents the moments of conceptual integration when perceptual structure meets conceptual structure and forms a coherent enactment of the villains' plan. In the scene, Alicia is both a coffee-drinker and a victim; Alex and his mother are both “coffee drinkers” and “perpetrators” of the deadly plot; and Alicia's coffee cup and its contents are both a pleasurable beverage and a deadly potion. Framed as a leisurely, pleasurable and social activity in the presentation space acquires the emotional valences attributed to the reference space in the final blended space, so that the contours of the event (a leisurely and intimate activity) come from the presentation space but the negative emotional valences (fear, anger, disgust, contempt toward the perpetrators, and empathy for Alicia) emerge as a consequence of knowing what is in the cup.

Taken as a whole, the mental space network generates a double-scope network, with clashing organizing frames (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:179) that mark the characters' discordant intentions, even as they share the same accordant social frame: entertaining guests. Hitchcock makes the cup the most salient visual prompt throughout the scene, because it shares perceptual characteristics with conceptual structure from the presentation and reference spaces. Hitchcock could not have made a clock on the wall the most salient piece in the scene and still preserve its meaning and relevance to the story, principally because it does not advance the containment schema. Virtual being is a particularly powerful mode of conceptual integration for generating suspense in the feature film.

Another mode of conceptual integration useful in the suspense/thriller genre of film is virtual co-existence.

## 2.2 Virtual co-existence in Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate*

Another film of the suspense/thriller genre is *The Manchurian Candidate*. Directed by John Frankenheimer and based on Richard Condon's novel of the same name, the plot involves two principal characters, Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey) and Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), both veterans of the Korean war. As the story unfolds, spectators learn that Raymond Shaw—a sergeant in a reconnaissance patrol despised by his men and pitied by his commanding officer, then-Captain Marco—has been turned into a cold-blooded assassin for the communists. Capturing

the patrol during one of their tours, Dr. Yen Lo (Knigh Dhiegh) had each member drugged and brainwashed into believing they were somewhere else. Yen Lo proceeded to condition Raymond for a political assassination that would land his mother (Angela Landsbury), a communist operative and wife of Senator Eslin (James Gregory), in the White House as the next first lady.

Famous among film scholars and movie buffs for its arresting imagery and stunning compositional complexity, the scene in question is a dream sequence of now-Major Marco. This recurring nightmare calls into doubt the veracity of Marco's recollection that Raymond Shaw saved his patrol (for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor). In fact, it suggests that Shaw killed Ed Mavole and Bobby Lembeck, two members of his patrol.

A *tour-de-force* of cinematic technique, this scene dramatizes an instance of Marco's own recurring nightmares: at one moment he sees himself and his patrol settled in the hotel lobby, enduring a meeting of the Lady's Garden Club with Mrs. Whittaker as its featured speaker. At another moment, he sees himself and his patrol as docile, accepting subjects of a Pavlovian conditioning experiment conducted by Dr. Yen Lo as they sit center stage in an amphitheater somewhere in Manchuria. He wakes up in a panic just after Shaw strangles one of his patrol, Ed Mavole, to death.

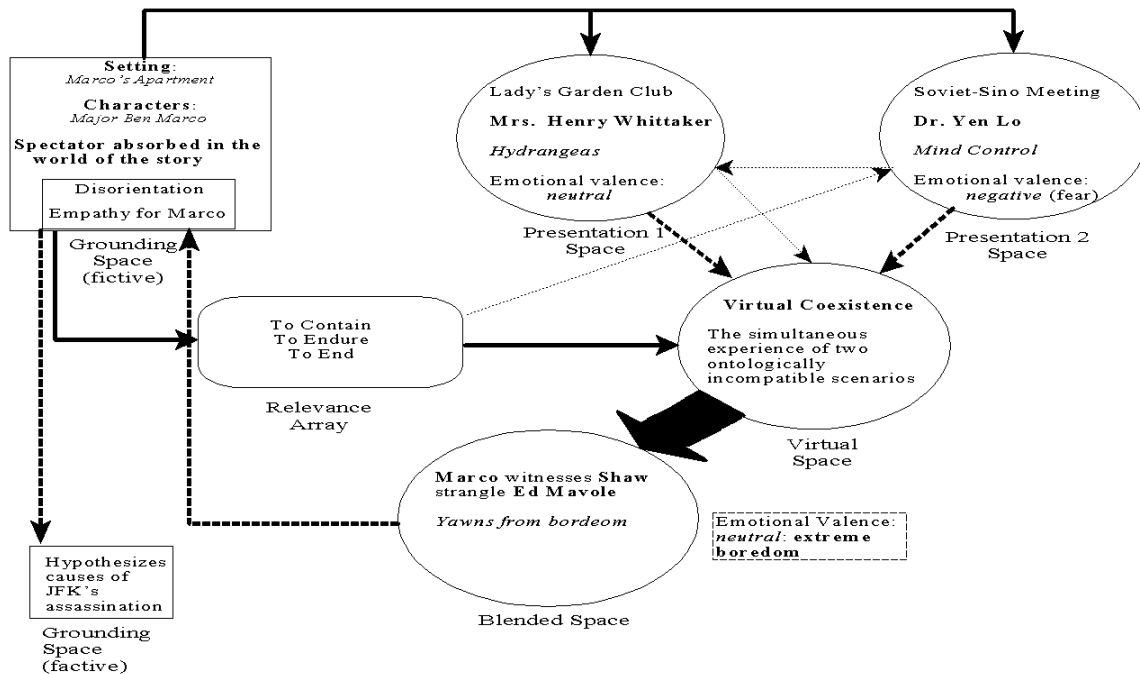
On analysis, the sequence consists of fifty-one separate shots of varying lengths and angles in which the slow panning of the camera plays a critical role in dictating the terms of the spectator's engagement in the story. The scene unfolds through a series of medium to full shots at eye-level, focusing first on Marco and the speaker, a Mrs. Whittaker, standing at a table center stage, discussing the hydrangea and "the influence of air drainage on plant climate." The camera slowly pans screen right and in a circle gradually revealing members of the patrol sitting to the right of Mrs. Whittaker in what looks like a conservatory. The shot proceeds to pan 360 degrees, revealing along the way an audience of women in bright, floral-print dresses—some eating cake, some smoking cigarettes, and talking amongst themselves as Mrs. Whittaker speaks—and coming full circle to reveal the other members of the patrol sitting to stage-left. When the camera completes its first 360 degree rotation, Mrs. Whittaker turns into Dr. Yen Lo, and the topic of conversation shifts to psychological conditioning and of "brainwashing." The camera proceeds to do another 360 degree rotation, revealing a change of setting and participants to Chinese and Soviet soldiers and high-ranking officials and the setting resembles an operating theater. Much of the developing scene consists of shot/reverse shot sequences among the principal characters and their shifting environments, culminating in two deep focus shots (33 & 40) at strategic narrative, in effect compressing two distinct moments into a single perceptual moment.

This is a virtual coexistence blend: Captain Marco is simultaneously in two places at one

time. As shots thirty-three and forty make clear, Marco is superimposing one event onto another, but the question for him and for the spectator, the ontological status of each. Is one true and the other false? Are both false?

The analysis begins as before, with a grounding space that represents the spectator’s engagement with the story. The speech setting is Major Ben Marco’s apartment. Figure 2 diagrams the mental space analysis of this scene.

Figure 2



The presentation space consists of Marco, Shaw, and the patrol sitting in a hotel lobby in the Spring Lake Hotel while Mrs. Whittaker gives a talk titled “Fun with Hydrangeas” to the Lady’s Garden Club. The members of the patrol are visibly bored as they sit onstage with Mrs. Whittaker. The second presentation space consists of Dr. Yen Lo speaking to a group of Soviet and Chinese generals and officials about reflex actions and brainwashing techniques somewhere in the Tungwa Air Base in Manchuria. The members of the patrol are likewise visibly bored as they sit onstage with Yen Lo.

Each presentation and reference space denotes two different scenes of wonder, neither of which at this moment claims a strong purchase on reality for Marco, although the spectator knows that Marco and his patrol had been captured. The first presentation space constitutes a fantastic



scenario because Fort Monmouth, New Jersey is so far from Korea. It would appear unlikely that a patrol would travel all the way to New Jersey for three days of rest and relaxation, least of all to be entertained by a group of old ladies talking about flowers. The second presentation space constitutes a fantastic scenario because it would seem unlikely that Marco and Company would be so *laissez faire* about their capture.

As previously stated, these two scenarios comprise a virtual coexistence blend by virtue of their temporal and spatial integration. Cinematically, these discordant situations achieve maximal perceptual integration during the long focus shots. In the first, Mrs. Whittaker addresses a group of Soviet and Chinese military and political officials at Tungwa Airbase; in the second, Dr. Yen Lo addresses a group of ladies outfitted in olive drab dresses at the Spring Lake Hotel. Marco sees himself in two places at one time, creating a simultaneous experience of two mental spaces integrated into a third space. This maximal perceptual integration of these two scenes creates conceptual incoherence of greater magnitude than the conceptual clash between appearance and reality in Hitchcock's film. It is precisely the sense of disorientation in Marco and the spectator, assuming sufficient empathy, that produces the emotional tension necessary to advance the plot.

The final blend in the network emerges most spectacularly at the very moment when Raymond Shaw strangles his comrade, Ed Mavole. As Shaw places a woman's scarf around Mavole's neck and squeezes, Marco and the others yawn from excessive boredom. The final blend selectively projects the action and intentions inhering in the reference space with the emotional valences inhering in the first presentation space to create a scene of extreme ethical conflict. Marco's horror is a coherent and understandable response to the nightmarish incompatibility of the two scenarios along this emotional dimension. The scene ends with Marco and the spectator making a similar deduction: the dream signifies a depraved situation; however, Marco cannot yet explain the source of its depravity, while the spectator can.

As with the previous example, this network maintains its overall integrity through a relevance array exploiting schemas. In this instance, the most salient schemas are TO CONTAIN, TO ENDURE, TO UNITE, and TO END. The CONTAINMENT schema stabilizes the blend insofar as it organizes our understanding that Marco and his men are captives. In the presentation space, they are held captive by natural forces (i.e., a severe storm); in the reference space, they are held captive by human forces. The ENDURANCE schema, likewise, stabilizes the blend insofar as each space in the network shares the common topology associated with meetings. In both scenarios, persons gathered in one place for a length of time and for a specific purpose. Hence, boredom is one cognitive-emotional entailment of endurance. The ENDING schema directs meaning

construction insofar as it makes coherent our understanding of the scene's abrupt ending with Ed Mavole's murder, a prototypical instance, according to Thom (1983:177) of this archetypal morphology. The discordant ethical responses in the blend is an emergent property, resulting from the selective projection of temporal aspects of meetings, as governed in this case by the ENDURANCE schema, and the intentional, purposeful aspects of meetings, as governed in this case by the BEGIN-END schema. Without these relevant schemas, the critical work conceptual integration needed to realize dramatic structure would not occur.

### **3. Three modes of Spectator Awareness**<sup>9</sup>

As stipulated in the introduction, film spectators draw on the same cognitive resources for making sense of film images as they do for making sense of the world at large. In phenomenological terms, a spectator's life-world (*lebenswelt*) determines the "natural attitudes" taken when allocating attention (*noesis*) to a piece of film (*noema*). Assuming this requires the articulation of a phenomenological account of film spectatorship that is not specifically tailored for filmic experience, but which nevertheless, through *eidetic* reduction, captures aspects of experience specific to film reception. This section provides a theoretical sketch of the *eidos* (essence) of spectatorship as seen through the theoretical framework developed above.<sup>10</sup> A coherence theory stipulates three modes of spectatorship specific to the feature film: story-awareness, medium-awareness, and world-awareness.<sup>11</sup> A coherence theory also stipulates that meaning construction takes place in specific times and places; therefore, any eidetic reduction must take into account specific facets of immediate context. Reference to the immediate viewing context comes through three enabling concepts: grounding, subjectification, and cinematic apparatus.

#### 3.1. Grounding, subjectification, and the cinematic apparatus

With the mode of mental spaces analysis adopted here, pragmatic issues that define the nature of the ongoing activity always start with a grounding space. In linguistics, the ground refers to the speech event, its participants and immediate circumstances of which the speaker and hearers are always at least dimly aware (Langacker 2002: 318). In mental spaces theory, a grounding space is an analytic device for noting the influence that immediate discourse context has on the development of the network itself. As meaning construction proceeds, participants create factive or fictive versions of this grounding space. In each instance, however, the grounding space stipulates the actual discourse participant's engagement with or disengagement from the immediate situation. The filmic version of grounding space consists of a spectator, a screening room, and a film. For the sake of exposition, let us bracket the specific identity of the spectator,

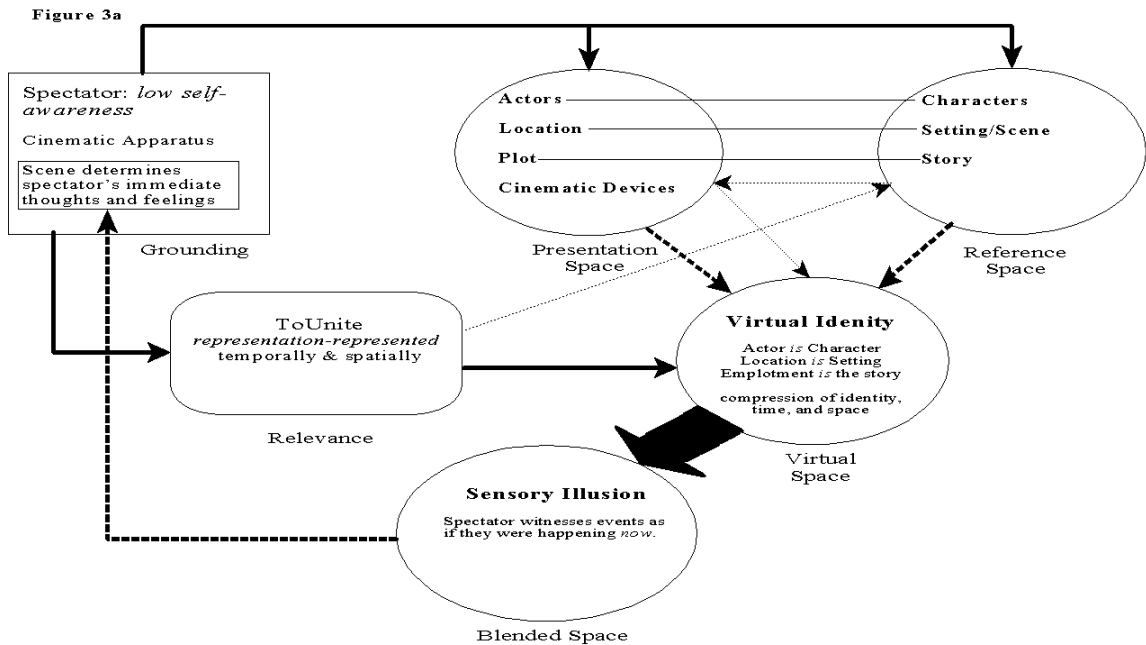
and the specific venue and medium (35mm film, video, commercial theater, private living room, etc.).

As will be made clear in the next sections, each mode of spectatorship operates along a range of viewing arrangements, each of which I imputed with a specific degree of subjective and objective experience. As Langacker (2002:315-344) points out, objects of perception can be strongly subjectivized or objectivized in relation to the ground. The ground can be defined subjectively to include only the onstage elements evoked by the speakers and not the complete perceptual field of the discourse. In this viewing arrangement, the spectator is maximally aware of the objective scene and maximally unaware of herself and of her engagement with the objects of perception. Alternatively, the ground can be maximally objective to include the entire perceptual field, including the conceptualizer who is maximally aware of her surroundings and engagement or disengagement with the object(s) of perception. Story-awareness mode has a maximally subjective viewing arrangement, whereas medium- and world-awareness modes exploit range of viewing arrangements along subjective-to-objective scale. (These viewing arrangements appear in Figures 3b-5b and loosely follow Langacker's diagramming conventions.)

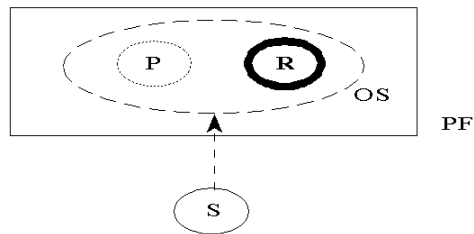
A point of clarification needs to be inserted in order to make use of Langacker's cognitive grammar for film theory purposes. I will, therefore, substitute hearer with *spectator* (marked by an S in a circle in the "b" diagrams) and speaker will be substituted with the *cinematic apparatus*, a term considerable critical currency within film studies (especially in reference to the writings of Baudry, Lacan, and Metz) that refers to the forces integrating the raw material, conventional, and ideological elements of filmed objects. The cinematic apparatus, then, operates on several layers. Most immediately, it specifies the material productive and reproductive technologies of film. On the productive side, the cinematic apparatus can refer to the object and persons filmed, the director's and cinematographer's selection of shots, the editing of shot sequences and synching up of sound, and so on. On the reproductive side, the cinematic apparatus can refer to the projector, the sound system, the position of the seat in relation to the screen, and so on. Cinematic apparatus also refers to the cognitive context of beliefs and presuppositions influencing the production and consumption of films at specific historical moments. In its widest scope, the cinematic apparatus refers to the socio-historical development of norms and behaviors of specific socialized others, filmmakers and spectators alike, and the political economy of filmmaking and film-going. I will restrict my use to the immediate productive and reproductive contexts.

### 3.2 Story-awareness, Medium-Awareness, and World-Awareness

When viewers experience a film as a fully realized world, what Allen (1995) calls a “sensory illusion,” they become story-aware spectators. The classic Hollywood film strives to place viewers in the mental condition of becoming story-aware spectators more than any other modality. The above blending analyses take the interpretive stand of the story-aware spectator. Thus, spectators achieve story-awareness when they experience the film as a set of events unfolding before them, as if they were present at those events. For instance, when spectators watching *Notorious* respond to Cary Grant as if he were really working as a spy for the United States Government and respond to Ingrid Bergman as if she were really the troubled daughter of a convicted German spy, they are operating in story-awareness mode. The same holds true when they respond to Frank Sinatra as if he were really the subject of a clandestine mind-control experiment. Figure 3a presents a diagram of the story-awareness mode of a spectator. The network presented here determines the set of blending operations diagrammed in Figures 1 and 2.



**Figure 3b**  
Viewing Arrangement



The grounding space stipulates the real counterpart to the fictive grounding space in Figures 1 and 2; it marks the immediate perceptual situation of the spectator as a non-productive

participant in the onscreen events. The presence of filmed objects builds a presentation space, which like the grounding space, lurks in the background. As the name suggest, this mental space accounts for the means of representation in film—the actors, locale, plot, cinematic devices, acting techniques, editing, cinematography, and so on. Covert activation of the presentation space builds the corresponding reference space, which unlike both presentation and grounding, foregrounds its salient elements—character, setting and scene, and story—through a series of representation-represented mappings from the covert presentation space. These cross-space mappings operate according to the relevance array, UNITING representation and represented in a temporal and spatial singularity so that the ontological disparities between these spaces remain below the threshold of conscious introspection.

The virtual and blended spaces represent spectators' conscious experience. It is a virtual identity blend where perceived actors are characters, where a perceived locale is the setting, and where a perceived plot device is experienced as a real event in time and space, not a contrived staging. This virtual identity of character and person, setting and locale, and story and plot produces a sensory illusion whereby the spectator witnesses the events and actions *as if* they were happening in the here-and-now as opposed to the there-and-then.<sup>12</sup> This *as if* experience in the blend projects back to the grounding space (as noted by the dashed arrow in Figure 3a), creating a fictional counterpart that influences the spectator's present thoughts and feelings.

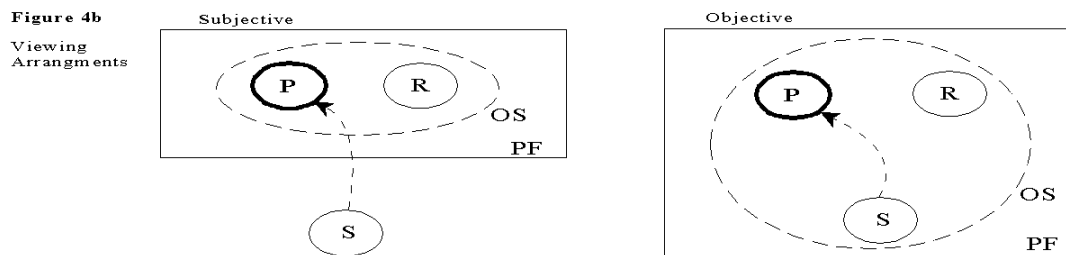
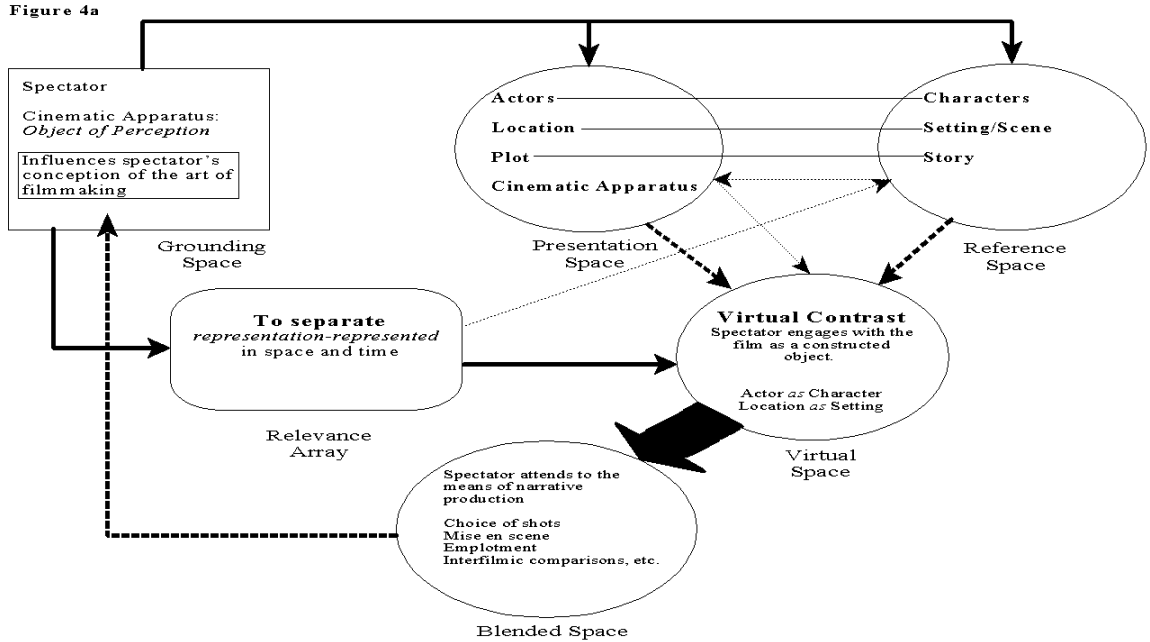
Story-awareness mode constitutes the optimal viewing arrangement, at least from the perspective of the filmmakers trying to align the spectators' experiences with those of the story's protagonists. As Figure 3b suggests, this optimal viewing arrangement is maximally subjective insofar as spectators have minimal self-awareness and maximal awareness of the onstage events and actions. The perceptual field ends at the filmed environment with attention allocated to the referent scene (the thick circle marked "R"), even though the spectators remain dimly aware of the representational devices that define the presentation space (the dotted circle marked "P"). The spectators are virtual-selves interacting with an ontologically distinct world *as if* they were in it but unable to influence it. Spectacular instances of complete story awareness and subjectivization are evidenced in spontaneous reactions from audiences to the events unfolding before them, as when a spectator might try to tell Alicia that she is being poisoned or might try to warn Marco that he has indeed been brainwashed. Less spectacular but more common would be spontaneous emotional reactions to depicted events, such as flinching at a loud noise.

It is often the case that perceptual disparity gives way to conceptual coherence when the spectator experiences the film in this mode. Instead of noting that Alicia's head and her coffee cup appear to be the same size in shot nine of the second poisoning scene, the spectator interprets

this scene as juxtaposition of cause and effect. Alicia's growing ailment is caused by the poison in her coffee. Instead of noting Frankenheimer's editing skills, the spectator interprets this scene as an instance of repressed memories coming into conscious introspection. Story-awareness mode requires a set of conceptual integration processes that foreground reference space and background both the conditions of spectator engagement and the means of representation in favor of virtual simulation.

While story-awareness is a common occurrence and relatively easy to achieve, it is difficult to sustain for long periods. Empirical studies tracking the shifting attention of spectators (children and adults alike) suggests that even the most story-aware spectator can only sustain that mode for not more than 60 seconds at a time (15 seconds being the typical engrossment time before subjects have to look away) before some distracting phenomenon takes over (Prince 1996). Medium-awareness and world-awareness modes constantly intrude and interrupt story-awareness mode. It is to these two modes that the discussion now turns.

When spectators notice that Alicia's head and her coffee cup appear to be the same size, an effect produced by a low-angle shot, they are focusing attention on the manner of presentation. When spectators begin to appreciate how Frankenheimer and his associates composed the sequence of camera panning, shot-reverse-shot, and deep focus shots comprising the scene of Marco's nightmare, they are focusing attention on film technique as an object of wonder. At the same time, they are likely to remain dimly aware of the meaning of these scenes (described in Figure 2) as they relate to the larger narrative. Allocating attention to the means of production is a sure example of medium-awareness mode, a mental spaces description of which appears in Figure 4a.



The principal difference between the cognitive underpinnings of medium-awareness and story-awareness modes is the relative status of the presentation space. In Figure 4a, the presentation space is the primary influencing space to the virtual and blended spaces. While links between representation and represented remain among the two spaces, it is this sense of virtual contrast developed in the blended spaces that defines the spectators' cognitive disposition at that moment. In the blend, the spectators regard the film as a multi-layered aesthetic object. The actors are regarded as characters and the setting is regarded as the locale: their identity is not presupposed. Medium-awareness mode can therefore be defined typically as a virtual contrast blend that exploits the unpacking principle as defined by Fauconnier & Turner (2002: 332). To view a film as a mediated event, focusing attention on the conditions of its construction and the terms of aesthetic involvement, depends on the dynamic schema TO SEPARATE. Specifically, the network operates over time to separate the strong links between representation and represented, disposing the spectator to think about such issues as choice of shots, staging, plot, acting technique, and so forth.

Sophisticated development of medium-awareness mode entails the achievement of

analogical coherence through intertextual comparisons (e.g., comparing camera work in *Notorious* to camera work in *Psycho*). The viewing arrangement for this brand of medium-awareness is still subjective in that it keeps the spectator's terms of engagement off stage. This *effective* mode contrasts with an *affective* mode. In this mode, the spectators reflect on the affective style of the film, as, for example, noting a causal connection (i.e., explanatory coherence) between the slow panning shots of the opening sequence and their own feelings of anxious anticipation, or their reflecting on the causal connection between the high angle shots over Alicia's shoulder and their own subsequent sense of helplessness. Figure 4b shows this contrasting viewing arrangement. In the subjective arrangement, the spectators remain unaware of their involvement and thus are outside the objective scene, whereas in the objective arrangement, they place themselves inside the objective scene. In both instances, however, they construct a virtual contrast blend for purposes of interrogating the representation-represented mappings that nevertheless remain accessible.<sup>13</sup>

When spectators begin to imagine themselves in poor Alicia's situation as they watch the scene unfold before them, or when they wonder as they watch *The Manchurian Candidate*, if Lee Harvey Oswald were actually brainwashed by the Communists as was Raymond Shaw, those spectators are operating in world-awareness mode. In its broadest sense, world-aware spectators (and there are innumerable varieties of them) use the diegetic world of the film (or some relevant portion of it) as a reference point for reasoning about the non-diegetic world, either past, present, future, real or imagined.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 5a

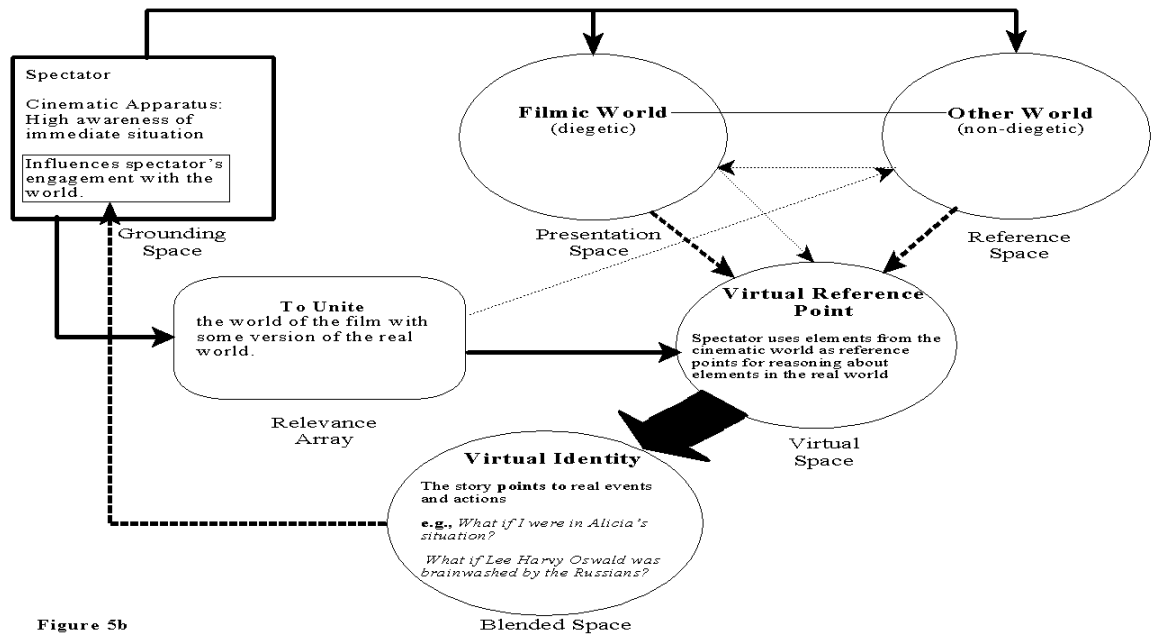
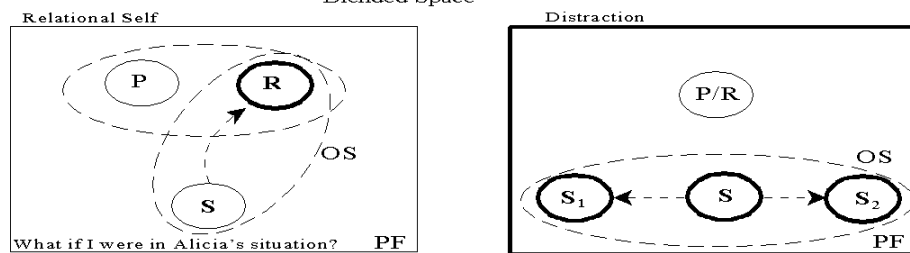


Figure 5b

Viewing Arrangements



The cognitive network of mental spaces for world-awareness mode (Figure 5 above) consists of a presentation space for the filmic world and a reference space specifying some facet of another world, real or possible. The spectator then integrates these two spaces into a blend I call the *virtual reference point* space. This space blends the filmic world and the other world by using focal elements from the presentation space as reference points and structuring principles for reasoning about focal elements in the reference space. The effect is a compression of vital relations like identity, space, and cause-effect into a single dynamically unfolding scene in the virtual and blended spaces. On elaboration, the blend develops full-fledged blended scenarios that project back to the grounding space. In the grounding space, the immediate engagement with the film influences the spectators' engagement with other worlds, as described above. Reference point blends establish analogical links to other real or possible worlds for purposes of generating coherent deductions or hypotheses about them, or for deliberating on some facet of the scenario. In fact, movie lore has it that Frank Sinatra had the *Manchurian Candidate* shelved shortly after John F. Kennedy's assassination out of fear that the film would inspire too many conspiracy stories involving brain-washed assassins.

World-awareness mode covers a range of phenomena from total momentary distractions common to filmgoing experiences (Figure 5b, right) to full reference point simulations discussed above (Figure 5b, left). Generally, distraction is the cognitive result of allocating attention to the factive grounding space, focusing consciousness on the viewing conditions themselves. In this scenario, the grounding space remains and the rest of the mental space network fades into the background. In this viewing arrangement, spectators are maximally aware of themselves and the immediate perceptual field (the thick lines around the grounding space in Figure 5a and around PF in Figure 5b). On the other hand, if spectators were to imagine themselves in Alicia's situation, they would be projecting versions of themselves into a blended scenario "plotted" by event contours inhering in the presentation space and acted out by antagonists from in reference space and protagonists from the grounding space. In this viewing arrangement, the spectators blend facets of the fictive and factive worlds.

The cognitive disposition of the world-awareness mode depends on a relevance array governed by the impulse TO UNITE facets of perceptually given in the immediate situation to facets of another situation displaced in time and space.

In summary, the three modes of film spectatorship provide a broad and consistent scheme for describing the perceptual, conceptual, emotional, deductive, and deliberative dispositions of the spectators as they try to make sense of what is going on around them. This present tripartite scheme defines the "macro-strategies" available to Western viewers for integrating diverse arrays of information into coherent representational scenes, whether it relates to the world of the story being told, to the medium for telling the story, or the world outside both teller and told.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have tried to answer the question: *how do spectators make sense of feature films?* The principal assumption is that they do so by applying the same cognitive processes for perceiving, conceiving, analogizing, deducing, explaining, and deliberating about the real world; a theory of spectatorship need not impute specialized cognitive devices in the brain nor irrational mental states of the mind as necessary conditions for aesthetic experience in general nor filmic engagement in particular. Such a theory does require a dynamic model that is both compatible with the coherence heuristic outlined earlier and that is simple enough for investigating meaning making at the many levels of formal analysis—i.e., shots and shot sequences, intrascenic and interscenic analysis, and so on. In addition, such a theory must provide a principled means of producing a phenomenological analysis of film spectatorship. In summary, the different cognitive dispositions evidenced in the three modes of spectatorship influence greatly the kind of meanings

produced at the formal levels of film engagement as well as characterize different motives of interpretation.

The case presented here is that a modified “Aarhusian” incarnation of mental spaces and blending offers a dynamic model of meaning construction that may point to a new development in film theory, one that gathers with a common framework the semiotic, affective, and phenomenological approaches to film that have heretofore constituted separate schools of thought.

Such an enterprise is certainly ambitious, and I lay claim to nothing more than providing the most general theoretical framework that coordinates recent developments in cognitive science to long-standing issues and problems in the arts and humanities. It is my hope that a new generation of film theorists will fill in this wire-frame-theory with deeper analyses of filmic texts and the terms of their engagement, with ethnographic studies of real film-going populations, with histories of the film spectator from social, political, and economic perspectives. Finally, it is my hope that a coherence theory of the film spectator will have a reciprocal effect of deepening and advancing descriptive and explanatory rigor of Mental Spaces and Blending Theory.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> With few exceptions, the feature film is largely a collaborative effort. While it is convenient to talk of feature films as the intentional objects of directors, it is important to note that they bear intentional properties of many constituents (executive producers, sponsors, ratings boards, writers, actors, editors, cinematographers, critics, preview audiences, etc.). That said, the two films discussed here represent work of directors with easily recognizable styles; hence, I will stick to the convention of identifying the film by linking its title to the director's name.

<sup>2</sup> The terms "virtual being" and "virtual coexistence" originate with Line Brandt (unpublished handouts), who presented them at the International Graduate School in Linguistics, August 12-18, 2002. The terms "virtual identity" and "virtual contrast," appearing later in the essay, also originate from the same source. To the best of my knowledge, the term "virtual reference point," also appearing later, originates with me but is clearly inspired by Line Brandt's work.

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<sup>3</sup> I hesitate to call it a different model, because there is substantial agreement between Fauconnier & Turner and the Aarhusians on the central insights of conceptual blending, and its basic processes and cognitive effects (i.e., that blends compress vital relations of time, space, identity, cause-effect, etc., to produce emergent structures not available in the other spaces, and that conceptual blends influence thought, feeling and action). It is more accurate to call it a *mode of analysis* that stresses slightly different facets of meaning construction. Fauconnier and Turner seem more interested at the moment in establishing the principles of blending itself. Per Aage Brandt, Line Brandt and others seem more interested in providing more detailed analyses of specific semiotic phenomena and in providing blending theory with a firm phenomenological grounding. At the moment, I regard the Aarhus mode of analysis as more congenial for my purposes, even though I consider myself an acolyte of Fauconnier & Turner.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term *array* rather than space, for I do not think it constitutes a separate mental space with concrete representations. The relevance space comprises a matrix of related dynamic schemas that serve as sign interpretants to the entire mental space network (Brandt & Brandt 2002). In order for conceptual blending to occur, all elements in a mental space network must be coherent along one or more cognitive dimensions. The relevance array specifies one or more of the controlling schemas that maintain specific coherence relations as conceptualization proceeds.

<sup>5</sup> The term “grounding” originates with Langacker (1987). A component of his theory of Cognitive Grammar, Langacker uses this term to refer to the speech event, its participants, and setting. In the mode of analysis proposed here, grounding is a greatly expanded version of Fauconnier’s (1997:49) narrower concept “base space,” which notes the starting point of a piece of discourse. The grounding space has essentially the same meaning as Brandt & Brandt’s (2002) “Semiotic space,” a space marking the intersection of participants and the codes they use and exploit.

<sup>6</sup> The differences among blends offered in the Aarhus mode of analysis may need to recruit Fauconnier & Turner’s optimality principles (2002:325-336) to explain these differences. To the best of my knowledge, no explicit work has been done to integrate space optimization and this new mode of analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Although image schemas and archetypal morphologies specify the kind of dynamic schemas imputed in the Aarhus mode of analysis, they are anything but cognates to one another. Image schemas specifically invoke fundamental relations between body, mind, and symbolization; archetypal morphologies invoke laws of dynamic creation and destruction of all life systems. Though philosophically distinct, it appears as though they can serve similar analytic purposes.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Larry Zbikowski for this insight.

<sup>9</sup> The general scheme presented here has much in common with Roger Odin’s (1994) pragmatic theory of film, which seeks to describe the different modes of attention involved in viewing different types of film. Odin’s classification emerges from specific types of film (e.g., feature films, documentaries, and home movies), whereas mine emerges from the study of generalized cognitive dispositions. As a result, many of Odin’s classifications have sufficiently similar cognitive features better treated under a single type. For instance, his “documentary” and “home movie” modes are comprehended by my “world-awareness mode,” while his “dynamic mode” is comprehended by my “medium-awareness mode.” In summary, my typology is phenomenologically reduced; Odin’s is not.

<sup>10</sup> An exemplary model of phenomenological investigation originates with the work of Ingarden (1973), i.e., *What gives literature its literary characteristics?*

<sup>11</sup> Inspiration for this tripartite terminology derives from McNeill’s (1992) study of spontaneous gesture during narrative discourse, in which he distinguishes the *narrative* from the *metanarrative* and the *paranarrative*.

<sup>12</sup> Story-awareness mode seems to require imperfective narrative aspect with the spectator’s viewpoint operating from inside the boundaries of an event space as it unfolds, even if her vantage point is outside it.

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<sup>13</sup> The difference is in the specific pattern of integration in the blend. It may in fact be that effective and affective medium-awareness modes identify the distinctive cognitive dispositions of competing schools of film criticism.

<sup>14</sup> *Diegetic* refers to the storyline represented through the formal narrative devices of movie making; *non-diegetic* refers to events, actions, and characterizations made relevant through spectator appresentation.