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## **PERCEIVING CINEMATIC EPISODES: A CROSS-CULTURAL REPERTORY GRID STUDY OF A NARRATIVE FILM SEGMENT \***

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Film theory has advanced concepts for explaining how it is possible for film viewers to understand what they are seeing. Many of these concepts strongly imply that the production of meaning of a film lies within the film itself – the viewer's role being reduced to that of passive spectator. This study tests that assumption using a repertory grid analysis of constructs elicited from Australian and Hong Kong Chinese subjects as they interpreted a segment of a commercial film. The results showed that the Australian sample construed more emotionally than did the Hong Kong Chinese, who responded more at the level of the film's characterisation. They were also more specific in their construals while the Australians were more diffuse. Further analysis suggested that differences between the two groups were the result of judgments about different attributes of the film, rather than because of different patterns of construing. It was concluded that since there are major differences in the two groups' interpretations of the same film, in the field of film/spectator studies where semiotics and psychology come together, the repertory grid analysis is a useful research tool.

### **Introduction**

Little enquiry has been made from within mainstream psychology about the way(s) in which audiences from different or indeed the same

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culture respond to film. Sociological studies have focussed on different socio-economic populations and communications studies generally have envisaged audiences, no matter what their make-up, as uniquely discrete individuals who respond reflexly to an input of messages operating as eliciting stimuli. As such, the methods used for their study have reflected these assumptions (see Morley (1980) for a review). Writing on popular culture (e.g. Hall et al. 1980), however, has shifted the emphasis by posing a critique of such work and offering more 'interpretative' methods for the analysis of media. Such methods have advanced the cause of *semiotics* (the science of signs) over what are seen as the naive assumptions of traditional social science paradigms in this area. However, with few exceptions (Morley 1980) such theoretical approaches have resulted in little empirical work.

This study attempts to redress the balance by taking some questions posed by semiotics and submitting them to empirical scrutiny. Specifically, it is concerned with examining the way in which certain signs in film are understood by people from different cultures given that many films are made for universal consumption. It does this by employing a repertory grid in the analysis of the reactions of two audiences, from two different cultures, to the viewing of a film segment. It is exploratory but is offered as a defence of a concept which has become undermined in communications research and in experimental social psychology: the status of the perceiving subject. It also re-introduces and defends the place of psychology in the study of film – an area largely ignored since the pioneering psychological studies of Munsterberg (1970), Arnheim (1957) and Kracauer (1968) (see Blowers (1982) for a brief review).

Recent work in 'film theory' (see, for example, Ellis 1981, 1982) has suggested that films, especially those of the dominant American cinema of Hollywood, can be understood by more or less everyone because of the way in which that institution has exposed people to its coding practices – practices which have been taken up by other countries' film industries and which collectively serve to naturalise the relationship of meaning to the production and ordering of images, sounds, colours and titles. Feature films are watched and understood because they tell stories about believable worlds inhabited by recognisable objects and because they move. The means of making each story appear credible are concealed in the process of its telling. One loses sight of the fact that one is watching a film. The techniques of suspending disbelief are

forms of code fundamental to the operation of cinema as 'entertainment' and pleasure.

The idea of the cinema as a series of codes can be traced to the work of Christian Metz (1974, 1975) and Raymond Bellour (1974) in France who have conceived of it as being synonymous with a language system and therefore amenable to structural linguistic analysis along the lines of the work first introduced in 1913 by de Saussure (1978). Metz's project in particular is concerned with the elaboration of cine-specific codes in order to identify and understand more precisely a variety of cinematic 'forms' such as genre, period, the personal stamp of the director, etc. Additionally, he has outlined a schema (*la grande syntagmatique*) for ordering different units using an analysis of the image which largely ignores the elements of sound and speech.

John Ellis (1981), a British film theorist, has extended Metz's project to include the institution which produces, distributes and exhibits the films, by proposing a textual analysis of the star system, advertising, word-of-mouth publicity and journalistic reviews. These facts are important because they collude in the marketing of a 'desire' to see a film by creating a 'mystery' about it which is only resolved by the spectator 'taking his place', 'seeing' the film. He also attempts to explain Bellour's (1974) concept of 'obviousness' (the simplicity with which almost everyone can understand feature films) by reference to the context in which they are seen: 'Obviousness is not a characteristic of texts themselves so much as an institutional mode of existence and performance of these texts' (Ellis 1981: 14). Their key concern would appear to be to create both a mystery and an 'insistence' of resolution of that mystery at one and the same time.

### Criticisms

Of relevance to psychological theory there are two criticisms of Metz's and Ellis' approaches which can be made:

(1) They both offer an extreme form of environmentalism which displaces individuals in audiences from playing any central role in the production of meaning. It would appear that the structures of the film set the limits for meaning by minimising the options available for understanding so that the spectator's role is reduced to one of passivity. However, the semiotician, by his own activity, is the very antithesis of

this passivity which would otherwise prevent him from reading the text à la Metz. If the semiotician is able to do this, then others are also able to break free from the 'constraints' of the codes. How this is possible is made clear by the second criticism:

(2) Semiotics, as an activity, conceals a tautology: the semiotician's phenomenal experience of watching films, his 'pre-semiotic' analysis, is being used to justify the imparting of significance to certain technical filmic conventions which in their turn are then used to justify certain phenomenal effects presumed to apply universally to all who watch film.

Acknowledging this second criticism Carroll, however, offers a way out of the dilemma:

'all he needs to do is to establish his terms operationally in subjective experience. The validity of the sequence as a unit of cinema structure or of the event as a unit of narrative, rests on the empirical consequences of taking them to be units (evidenced in viewer intuitions, perceptual and cognitive measurements, etc)' (Carroll 1980: 38).

In other words while it is quite legitimate to formulate a classificatory scheme, it must lead to measurable consequences. In the context of the present study, the problem is one of defining 'audience response' to a segment of film and this raises several questions: will different audiences respond to a film in the same manner? Does the structure of the film limit the availability of responses to it? Given a story-to-be-told, do different members of the same or different audiences 'receive' the same event(s)? Do audiences from different cultures have a common reaction to the same film? A semiotician assumes an affirmative answer to these questions without enquiring further into their psychological consequences. A psychologist would not readily make the assumption.

However the question here for psychology is whether meaning(s) can be shown to have been conveyed? What constitutes an accurate assessment of whether the film has been 'read correctly'? Clearly a questionnaire, rating scale or laboratory study won't do since each formulates questions in terms of the experimenter's theoretical assumptions, compounding the subject's responses into categories and scale positions. As Fransella and Bannister say:

'... the subject cannot do what we allow him to do in conversation, *propose his own terms*' (1977: 111).

and later:

'... nothing except our own ideology prevents us from acknowledging that the "subject" is a theoriser, an experimenter, a constructor of meanings exactly as "we" are' (1977: 112).

### **Researching the audience**

Previous audience research (ably summarised by Morley (1980)) has not come to terms with this formulation, although the study by Morley himself, has some points of contact with the present one. Morley's study involved taking 22 groups of subjects drawn from different levels of the educational system in England as well as some others from Trades Union groups and managers from banking institutions who between them watched one of two different episodes of a BBC television daily news programme (*Nationwide*). A detailed analysis of its coding practices was drawn up by Brunsdon and Morley (1980) prior to Morley's empirical study of its influence upon different strata of the viewing population.

Although we would argue that Morley's framework is suitable for the interpretation of media effects upon an audience, it is not a test of the universality of code interpretations for a number of reasons. To begin with it uses a national television programme which was not made for export. Secondly, in its data analysis it sacrifices the individual response to that of the group, and thirdly, its view of the group is constructed on the basis of discussion by its members who might be subject to conformity effects (Deutsch and Gerard 1955). Morley's study fails therefore to meet Fransella and Bannister's dictum that experimental subjects be accepted on their own terms.

### **Personal construct psychology**

The Repertory Grid, first described by George Kelly (1955) in his *Psychology of Personal Constructs* is an instrument designed to display the person in his or her own terms. It is a record of a set of personal judgments (constructs) amongst a sample set of elements. These elements (e.g., people, situations or experiences) constitute a context and constructs are the basis upon which the elements are understood. A

construct is a category of thought by which an individual construes or interprets his or her world of personal experience. It represents a consistent way for the person to make sense of some aspects of reality. In a sense, each construct represents a pair of rival hypotheses, either of which may be applied to a new element which the person seeks to construe. A construct is therefore a discrimination in which some things are construed as being alike and yet different from others.

Constructs can be elicited in a variety of ways, commonly by a triadic sorting procedure which involves asking subjects 'in what way are two of these elements similar to each other and different from a third?' This question yields statements of comparative similarity and difference (construct/contrast) and can be repeated for any group of three elements. Numerical values then assigned to positions along the construct/contrast dimension enable all of the elements to be rated on all of the constructs. These ratings can then be transformed by statistical procedures such as Principal Components Analysis, Multidimensional Scaling or Cluster Analysis (Rathod 1981) which identify components or groups of similarly used constructs central to teach subject's construing system.

The value of the repertory grid is that:

- (a) it makes no a priori assumptions about what is significant for individuals;
- (b) it does not seek to elicit a particular response from subjects regardless of its pertinence, as more traditional psychological methods such as questionnaires and reaction time studies have done;
- (c) it situates the subject at the centre of a construing system;
- (d) it enables group patterns of responding to be discerned from individual patterns.

An earlier unpublished study by Carver (1967) is of relevance here as it examines film/viewer relations by means of a repertory grid. The study sought to compare critics' with laymen's evaluations of films as a way of addressing the questions of whether (1) the 'mass public' and the critics were in possession of different value systems, or (2) critics and the mass public shared similar values but evaluated films differently because of differences in the extent to which particular films were perceived as possessing those values. The results confirmed the second assumption rather than the first. The films were evaluated differently

by the different groups because of judgments made about different attributes of films rather than because different patterns of construing were at work. However, O'Hare (1981) has made two criticisms of the study. Firstly, nearly all of the constructs were supplied by the experimenter rather than elicited from the subjects. This means that the results may have been more a reflection of the experimenter's mode of construing than those of his subjects who were not given the chance to supply their own constructs. Thus, differences between the construing by the public and the critics were limited to judgments of 'significant' filmic perceptions imposed upon rather than elicited from subjects. Secondly, no films were viewed in the study per se (O'Hare, personal communication). Instead, subjects were each asked to nominate ten films to include the most recently seen, ones liked and disliked, and the earliest seen. This meant that not only was each subject recalling different films but that differences in recall of relevant material between the two groups might have confounded an answer to the questions posed.

### The present study

Here the Repertory Grid was used to assess the responses of two groups of subjects from two different cultures, Australian and Hong Kong Chinese, to part of an American feature film to gauge the similarity of their response patterns. These two cultures bear different relationships to the socio-historical practices of the (North American) culture which produced the film for 'universal' consumption. Using the grid it becomes possible to test the assertion that if cultural groups differ with respect to the meaning they give to a film segment, a 'universal semiotic meaning' cannot be taken for the psychological meaning people impart. This was achieved in this study by examining the psychological implications of the *sequence*, defined by Metz as a discontinuous episode having a spatial-temporal unity. It was hypothesised that if the arrangement of sequences acts as a universal code, then each group should make essentially similar construals from the segment.

The study therefore aimed to discover:

- (i) How the subjects construed relations between the different sequences in the segment;
- (ii) whether there were any group differences in construal of the segment and what form they would take.

### Methodology

Two groups of subjects, nine Australian (eight female, one male) and ten Hong Kong Chinese (eight female, two male) students all registered in postgraduate courses



of psychology, (the former at Macquarie University, the latter at the University of Hong Kong) watched a ten-minute segment of a videotaped American feature film screened on a television monitor. Groups were matched in terms of age and psychological sophistication. The Hong Kong Chinese subjects were competent English speakers and both groups regularly watched films.

### *The film*

The film, a representative example of the American 'classical' narrative cinema, was called *Union Station*. It was regarded as old enough not to have been seen by any of the participants in any recent exhibition and after viewing the film all subjects confirmed that it was previously unknown to them. However, they were assumed to be familiar enough with the *genre*, i.e., a black and white film, late 40's/early 50's 'thriller', recognisable star (William Holden), common storyline (police investigation of a kidnapping).

For practical purposes the selected segment was taken from the opening ten minutes of the film and was comprised of five sequences -- each a set of coherent actions related to a particular location. In the first, a car is seen pulling up at a station and a girl gets out. Dialogue on the soundtrack identifies her as Miss Willecombe. She says goodbye to a second girl (Lorna) who is blind, and their driver. The second locates a railway carriage in which the first girl witnesses a speeding car running parallel to the train and from which, at a nearby halt, two men leave, board the train and enter the compartment from opposite ends. A gun hanging on the inside coat pocket of one of the men is revealed -- an event which causes concern to the girl who informs the ticket collector. He complies with her request for action by agreeing to notify the police at the terminal station. The third sequence reveals the busy inside of a terminus and a police inspector reading a telegram informing him of the presence of two suspicious men on one of the incoming trains. He is then shown going about his daily business on the station. The fourth sequence also takes place in the station and shows the inspector meeting the girl from the train. Together they follow and observe the two suspicious men who put a suitcase that one of them is carrying into a locker and its key in an envelope which is dropped into a postbox. The fifth sequence shows the inspector and the girl in his office examining the contents of the retrieved suitcase. A scarf with the word 'Lorna' embroidered on it reveals that the owner is the blind girl who appeared briefly at the beginning and from which the inspector deduces that she has been kidnapped.<sup>1</sup>

### *Procedure*

Following the screening, the subjects were reminded of what they had seen by the experimenter making brief reference to the five sequences with a limited description of each ('In the first episode we saw a girl preparing to board a train; in the second episode we saw the same girl on the train; in the third we saw the inspector; in the fourth the girl and the inspector meet and in the fifth we have the realisation of the kidnap'). Using these five episodes as elements, the elicitation of constructs (and contrasts) by Kelly's method of triadic sorting was demonstrated by presenting each

<sup>1</sup> A detailed shot-by-shot analysis of the segment is available from the first author.

group of subjects with three of the elements and asking: 'in what way are two of these elements similar to each other and different from the third?'

Following this, subjects were given a blank repertory grid sheet in which all the possible combinations of three elements from the list of five (equivalent to 10 sorts) were written and they were then asked to write down under a 'construct' column their description of how two of the elements in each triad were similar. Under a 'contrast' column, they were asked to write how the third element was different. Treating each construct and contrast as the poles of a continuum scaled from 6 to 1, subjects then graded all of the elements on all of the construct/contrast dimensions. This resulted in a five by ten matrix of numbers for each subject from whom a set of individual constructs had been elicited. The matrices were then analysed individually using a Principal Components Analysis programme developed by Slater (1972).

#### *Data analysis and Results*

For all subjects the first principal component accounted for 45% to 81% of the total variance and the first three components accounted for 92% to 100% of the variance amongst all subjects so no further components were investigated. The naming of components was carried out by two judges acting independently who reached agreement on approximately 85% of all items and negotiated the names of the remainder. Later they conferred with author G.H.B. for the purpose of reaching agreement on a name for each category. Naming was achieved by examining those constructs which loaded most heavily on each component and conferring a category name which best fitted or encompassed their meanings. This produced 57 (3 × 19) named components. Naming components for later objective uses such as sorting into categories is preferable to dealing with raw constructs at one level because of the sheer number of constructs that can be generated using a group of subjects as opposed to a single individual, and at another and more importantly, because one is looking for degrees of commonality amongst the data. And while some constructs have idiosyncratic meanings which are specific to the person from whom they are elicited, these meanings can be grasped by examining the relations they bear to other constructs with which they load on components or through deduction from noting correlations in construct application patterns based on the concept of 'functional similarity'. In this inter-related interpretation a construct becomes 'shaded', but this method still gives prominence to constructs as used by each individual, that is, it still respects the way s/he uses them idiosyncratically. This method of examining a set of constructs for a component name, validated as meaningful to the subject by McCoy (1977), gets away from dependence on an assumed shared meaning and affirms the repertory grid's fitness for assessing idiosyncratic uses of language.

The component classes identified three distinct aspects of subjects' construals:

(1) a category of *characterisation* made up of components pertaining to general descriptions of interpersonal interactions of characters in the film such as 'independent vs involved', 'sexually interactive vs solitary', 'close vs superficial', 'authoritative vs powerless', 'professional, business-like, vs social', etc.;

(2) a category of *plot realisation and film structure* with components derived from descriptions of the plot and what the film was attempting to do such as 'routine vs exciting', 'impartial vs probing', 'novel vs expected', 'build-up vs climax', etc.;

(3) a category of *emotion* derived from descriptions of emotions felt by the subjects as they recalled their viewing experience and which defined for them the 'mood' of the film. Such examples included 'attractive vs aggressive', 'calm vs tense', 'peaceful vs anxious', 'anxious vs secure', 'uncertain vs confident', etc.;

Having established this schema, a number of characteristics of the two groups were identified based upon the percentage of variance accounted for by each component occupying a particular category. To begin with, the percentage of subjects in each group using a category as the principal dimension of judgment was calculated by adding up the number of first principal components in a category and dividing by the total number of subjects in the group. Thus for the three categories 'characterisation', 'film/plot structure', and 'emotion', this produced figures of 22%, 33%, and 44%<sup>2</sup> respectively for the Australian sample, and 40%, 30% and 30% for the Hong Kong Chinese.

Secondly, percentages of the number of subjects using one, as opposed to two or all three categories were calculated by looking at the spread of components across categories and placing each subject in a one-, two-, or three-category class. The number of subjects per class was then divided by the total number of subjects. For the Hong Kong Chinese group, 40% used just one category of construing, 50% used two, and 10% used all three categories in forming judgments. For the Australian sample the figures were 11%, 67% and 22%, respectively.

The assigning of components to categories provided estimates of the percentage of variance for which they accounted to be examined across categories and groups. Obviously, for any one subject, the percentage of variance for which components account in any category will, of necessity, constrain the values of the percentage in the remaining categories since the three components between them account for nearly 100% of the variance. This means that for each group, the different categories are effectively related samples which should not be tested for significant differences in a post hoc fashion. However, no such limitations apply to the testing of differences between the two groups and a Mann-Whitney *U*-test (Siegel 1956) was carried out to determine whether there were any group differences with respect to the percentage of variance accounted for by one of the three categories of construing. No significant differences emerged – a finding which supports the idea that the categories have equal value for the two groups and thereby affirms the initial categorisation by the judges.

The above analyses apply to the components. At this juncture we can focus analysis on the elements, that is, the film sequences, and how they were construed by the subjects. Part of the INGRID analysis produces an estimate of the percentage variance due to each element. This variance measure is calculated for each subject as the sum across the constructs of all the differences between the mean rating and the rating for particular elements considered. The *greater* the difference between the element and the mean in terms of rating (summed across constructs), the more 'meaningful' is that

<sup>2</sup> All percentages are rounded off for ease of reading.

Table 1  
Mean percentage variance due to each element (film sequence).

Group	Element (sequence) number				
	1 <sup>a</sup>	2	3	4	5 <sup>a</sup>
Australian	19	15	18	13	35
Hong Kong Chinese	30	18	18	10	23

<sup>a</sup> indicates sig. difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the two groups for elements so marked.

Table 2  
Percentage of subjects in each category of construing in each group with element number loading extremely on first component (A = Australian, HKC = Hong Kong Chinese).

Category	Group	Element (sequence) number				
		1	2	3	4	5
Characterisation	A	25	75	0	0	100
	HKC	75	25	25	0	75
Plot realisation and structure	A	33	33	33	0	100
	HKC	33	33	33	0	100
Emotion	A	0	50	75	25	50
	HKC	100	33	0	33	33

element. Slater (1972) employs the German term *maßgebend*, to identify an element which is a trend setter. This element sets the scale or standard by which all the others are judged. Looking at the percentage variance for each element of each subject enables group comparisons to be made. The mean percent variance calculated for each of the five elements for each group is shown in table 1.

Mann-Whitney *U*-tests carried out between the two groups at each element level revealed significant differences at the 0.05 level of probability in the case of elements one and five. As can be seen, element one (the first sequence) for the Hong Kong Chinese and element five for the Australians were the 'trendsetters' against which all the other elements were judged. A visual inspection of the spread of elements as they load on components revealed that elements one and five loaded more extremely on the first principal component for the majority of subjects than did any other of the elements. Breaking the figures down by groups and categories, the percentage of subjects for whom an element loaded extremely on the first component (that is, when used as one part of the basis for which a discrimination is made) is shown in table 2.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The percentages for each group add up to 200%. Since for each subject there are always two elements which form an extreme loading on any component, each subject counts twice in the computation.

Here it is apparent that for the Australian group element five, the final sequence, played a vital role in all three modes of construal. Additionally, element two proved popular in eliciting construals of characterisation; elements two and three in eliciting construals of emotion. For the Hong Kong Chinese, apart from the fifth element, element one proved a popular sequence for construals of characterisation and emotion, the pattern for construal of plot across all sequences being identical to that of the Australian group.

Further analyses of elements involved looking at the distances between them produced by INGRID as a way of identifying those which form the basis of the most extreme construing, and then examining the constructs which load most heavily upon them, comparing the two groups. With five elements there are ten combinations of pairs of elements for each subject. Mann-Whitney *U*-tests of differences between groups for each element pair produced statistically significant results in respect of pairs 1-2, 1-4, and 3-5, only. Closer inspection revealed that the distance between the first two of these pairs was greater for the Hong Kong Chinese group and for the third pair was greater for the Australians. These results essentially confirm the findings in table 2, in respect of those elements contributing most to the different modes of construal and provide a point of comparison between the two groups' specific constructs. What emerges is that while both groups employed very much the same constructs overall, they were utilised differently across particular elements. The findings suggest that the Hong Kong Chinese were able to make greater discriminations between the first and second and first and fourth sequences than were the Australians. The latter group, on the other hand, made greater discriminations between the third and fifth sequences than did the Hong Kong Chinese. In all other discriminations there were no significant differences, suggesting they performed more or less equally. The differences are worth looking at in more detail.

In the case of the first two sequences the Australian group's significant construals drew attention to the rather concrete 'facts', that the first sequence has three characters in it who know one another while the second has only one for much of its length and then several who are unknown to each other. This was reflected in the construals employed: 'interaction', 'introduction of characters', 'beginnings of a relationship' and so on, while construals of the second sequence implied a concrete opposite: 'no interaction', 'alone', etc. The Chinese group, on the other hand, construed the opening sequence much more in emotional terms, being seen as 'calm', 'friendly', 'relaxed', 'regular', 'loose' and so on, and the second by contrast as one of 'anxiety', 'suspense', 'surprise', 'excitement', 'irregular', etc. Much the same pattern emerges with the first and fourth sequence pair, the Chinese group using contrasts of emotional tone when construing the fourth sequence in relation to the first; the Australians maintaining a discrimination in terms of the interaction of the characters, although some construals of emotion are present as well as references to the plot as the fourth sequence is seen as 'male-female relationship overtones', 'strange', 'sense of expectation', 'cold, unfriendly', 'anger', 'bringing characters together'.

With the third and fifth sequences more emotional construing is evident for the Australian group, particularly in respect of the final sequence, but both groups very evidently saw the sequence as motivating the plot. For the Australians the difference between three and five was one of: 'mundane as opposed to special', 'brash vs

suspicion of romance', 'uncaring vs concerned', 'interaction vs plot development', 'peripheral concerns vs central events', 'movement vs realisation' and so on, while for the Hong Kong Chinese it was the difference between 'not very explicit vs making explicit', 'build-up vs climax', 'calm vs fear', 'concern for self vs concern for others' and so on. These results are discussed further below.

## **Discussion**

Most current film theory predicts that the reception of a film is predetermined and implies that the spectator, lacking autonomy, is caught in a universal receptive field with other members of the audience. This study has indicated that this does not appear to be the case. The application of a methodology which avoids building into it many of the assumptions that an experimenter wants to test, has revealed a variety of individual responses to a small segment of a narrative film whose story hardly begins to unfold. In the space between the opening shot and the series of shots which reveal the underlying rationale of the narrative – its point – a linear array of coded images and sounds elicited a set of responses which ranged from an attention to the actions of the characters, through a 'felt' experience of the film's 'mood', to a reflection on the way in which the first two types of response become possible.

These response styles were common to the two cultural groups studied here. While both groups can be considered as representative of larger cultural sub-groups of sophisticated film viewers, it is interesting to note that the Chinese group took a more single-minded approach in their construals, limiting themselves to one or two categories, while for the Australians, a more 'diffuse' pattern emerged involving either two (for the majority), or three categories. This suggests one of two things: either the Chinese group were not sensitive to some of the possibilities coded in the film or they were sensitive to the array of codes favouring those which made one mode of construing preferable. The latter hypothesis is the more plausible one, given that statistical analysis has shown no significant differences between the two groups in terms of the variance from all three components attributable to each of the categories of construal. This would suggest the three categories were equally valued by the two groups.

Thus the differences that do emerge between these two groups would appear to be due to attributing significance to different features of the

film rather than because fundamentally different patterns of construing were at work. That is to say, the differences probably arose because although the sequences as a whole were perceived in much the *same* way by each group, there were differences of emphasis within particular sequences. This finding supports that from an earlier study by Carver (1967). Some points for consideration in any future study can be gleaned from an examination of those elements which produced the most significant discriminations for each group. While the fifth and final sequence in the film segment figured as a significant element for both groups in discriminations of character and plot, it was less significant as a generator of construals of emotion, particularly for the Hong Kong Chinese.

For the Australian group, it was the second sequence (element 2) which was the most significant, after element five, in eliciting construals, primarily of character and emotion. With the exception of the first sequence, this group overall responded more at the emotional level to the film. It is also interesting to note that sequences two and five both contain scenes in which the female protagonist is portrayed as being highly anxious and both sequences contain what Metz calls an *autonomous shot* (a single shot containing a basic unit of meaning) for attention to specific significant details in the storyline. Thus, two further types of code, that of the actions of the actors (particularly the use of the eyes in facial close-ups) plus the formal device of interlocking shots of detail jointly set up the possibility of being construed as 'emotional', although, as the differential response from each group has shown, do not guarantee its realisation in the viewer.

One possible explanation for the Chinese group using less emotional construing than the Australians is that there may be fewer display rules for the facial expression (and identification) of emotion in Chinese culture. Eckman and Friesen (1975) have uncovered a wide variety of display gestures used by Westerners in the facial expression of emotion but an examination of the art of performing rules for actors in the classical Chinese theatre (Brusak 1976; Zung 1980) suggests that the expression of emotions is conveyed more by sleeve, hand, arm and foot gestures than by eye, brow and lip movements. This implies that many of the potential cues for emotional display used in the West may not be culturally relevant for the Chinese and that film codes derived from Western theatrical experience may miss their mark in cultures with disparate traditions. Supplementary evidence for this view can be

found in an empirical study by Fan (1977) which showed that while Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates could easily identify the emotions of anger, despair and happiness depicted in photographed Chinese actors following Eckman's rules, the Chinese experimenter found it much more difficult to communicate emotion via facial expression exclusively. Hong Kong has a long history of importing foreign (non-Chinese) films and it is unlikely that emotional construal presents any major problem for its mainly Chinese film audience. However, Chinese culture might lessen sensitivity to expressions of emotion which are purely facial.

Clearly, these are points which require further investigation. It is to be hoped that this study has shown that the rudimentary framework of an analysis of a film segment is not, of itself, sufficient to predict the response, nor even specify the range of responses possible from an identification of some of its codes. What is required is an investigation of coding practices undertaken in conjunction with studies of audience responses. The latter can then be used to supplement the work of the semiotician. In this way, film theory and the psychology of perception of 'meaningful stimuli' will be mutually enhanced.

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Comment le spectateur comprend-il le film qui se déroule devant l'écran? Selon les postulats sémiotiques, le sens du film émerge de la séquence cinématographique elle-même, le rôle du spectateur étant réduit à celui de récepteur passif. La présente étude se propose d'évaluer le bien-fondé de ce postulat en étudiant la façon dont deux groupes de culture différente, l'un australien, l'autre chinois de Hong Kong, ont compris une courte séquence tirée d'un film de grande production. La technique du *Repertory Grid Analysis* a été utilisée pour établir pour chaque sujet une série de *constructs*. Les résultats montrent que les constructions du groupe chinois étaient plus restreintes, se limitant à une ou deux des trois catégories, tandis que ceux du groupe australien s'étendaient aux trois. Il se peut que, cette divergence s'explique par le fait que les deux groupes aient évalué certains attributs du film de manière différente, et ne résulte pas d'une différence dans leur façon de comprendre celui-ci. Cette étude semble indiquer que comme il y a des différences majeures dans les interprétations d'un même film par les deux groupes, le *Repertory Grid Analysis* constitue un outil de recherche valable dans l'étude de rapports spectateur/film où la sémiotique et la psychologie se rencontrent.