

Cohesion in Film and the Construction of Filmic Thematic Configuration: A Functional Perspective

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General Motivation

Problems in film analysis:

1. film and linguistics, e.g. Metz, enuciation, etc.

Syntactical categories between language grammar and film elements are not parallel.

“...because a film lacks equivalents for the most basic aspects of verbal activity, I suggest that we abandon the enuciation account.”
(Bordwell, 1985)

✓ Discourse semantics (Martin, 1992; Asher and Lascarides, 2003) = codes + viewers inference/cognitive activity.

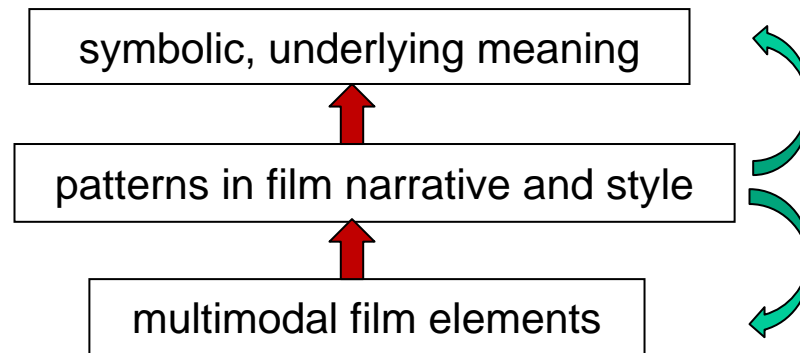
General Motivation

Problems in film analysis:

2. (neo) formalism, cognitive film theory:

Bordwell, Carroll, Thompson, etc. : film theorising should be piecemeal, problem-solving.

Bottom-up textual analysis can strengthen the empirical description of problem-solving.



General Motivation

Problems in film analysis:

3. Issues in Film genre theory:

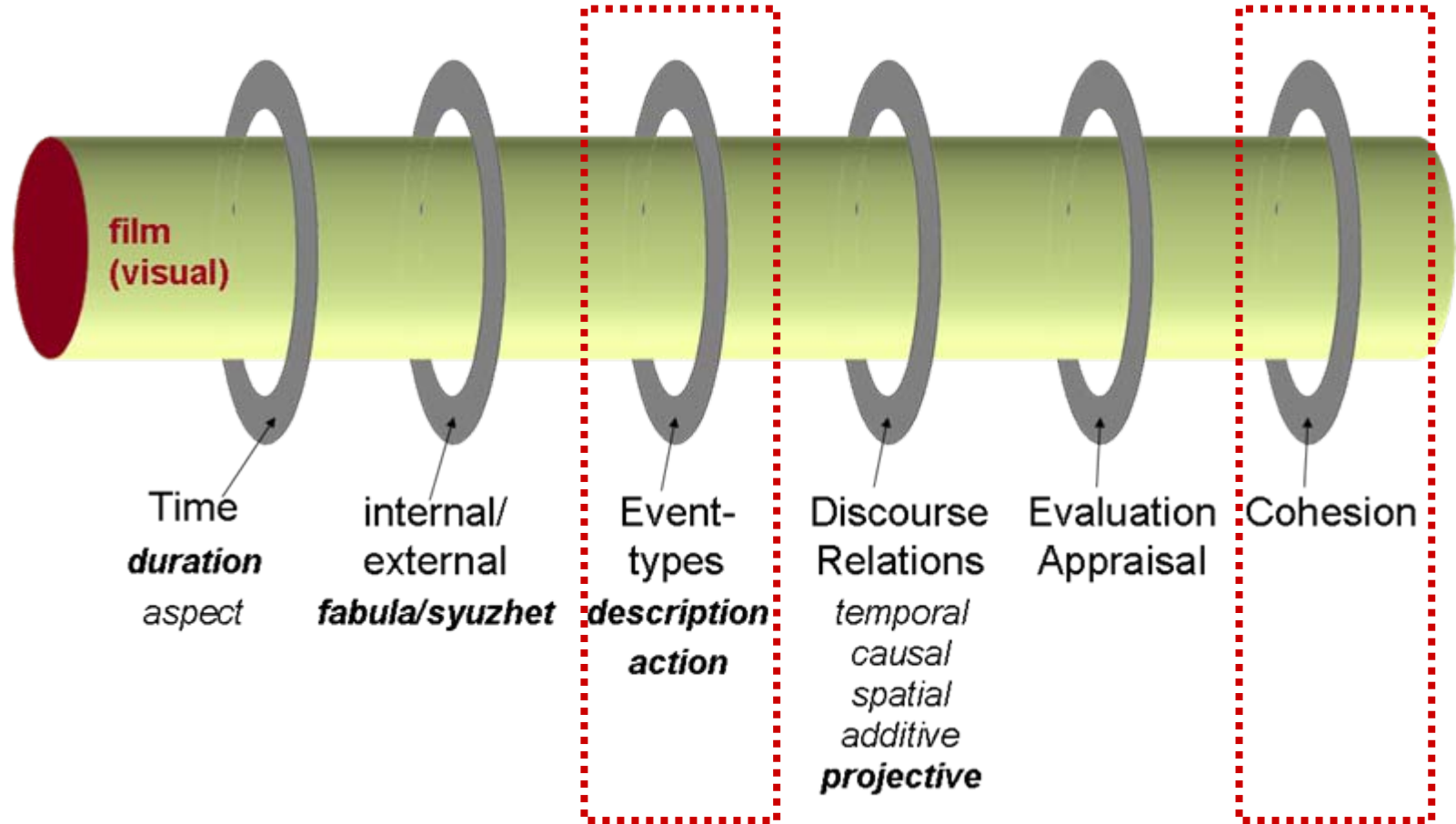
Genre reflects viewers' expectation and how narratives are interpreted.

Analytical problem: categorising genres based on single parameter (Ex: Iconography - *Western*, Mood & Emotion – *Horror Film*)

Analysis of filmic genre should be multi-dimensional (e.g. Altman, Neale).

To date no analytical methods are available

Approaching film genre through discourse dimensions



Outline

- Objectives
- Methodology
- Formulation of tools
 - Analysing filmic cohesion
 - Constructing thematic configuration
- Conclusion
 - Central contributions
 - Application and outlook

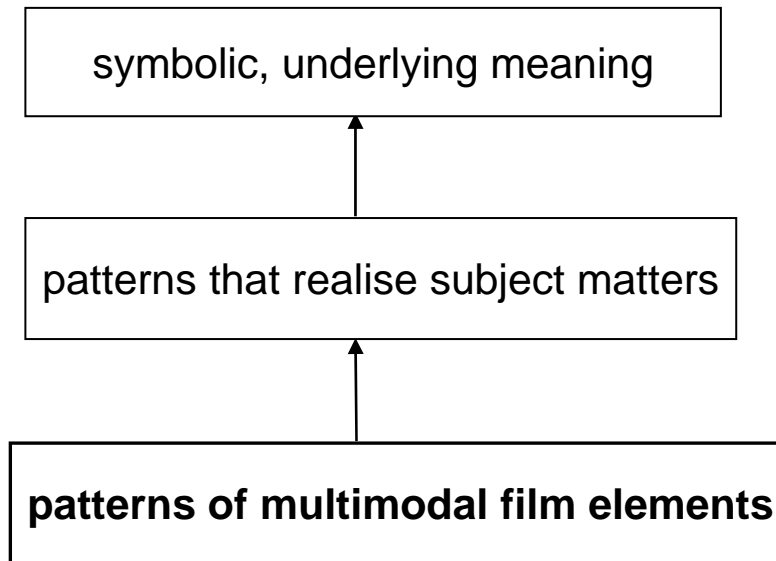
Objectives

- Proposing a theoretical framework...
 - linguistically motivated & multimodally appropriated,
 - approaching empirical questions, taking into account viewers' dynamic inferential process,
 - corpus-based studies.

Methodology

Systemic Functional Linguistics—

- a. **Cross-modal** realisation of identities of characters, objects and settings.

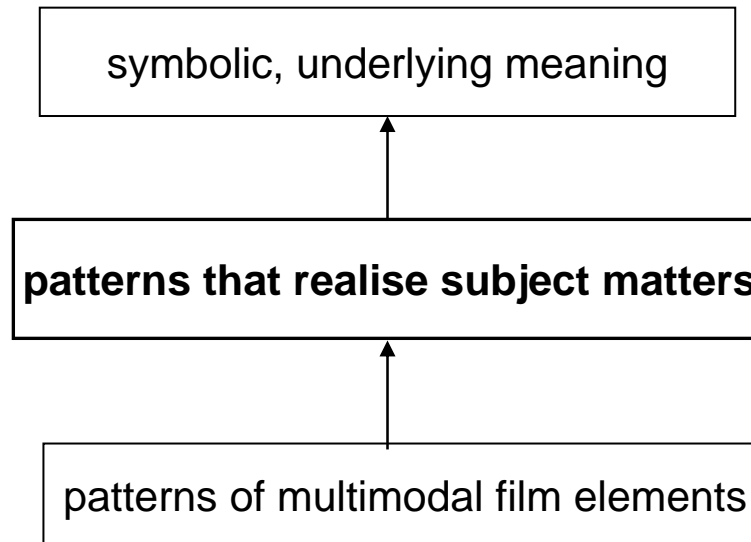


SFL: cohesive reference/ identification (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Martin, 1992)

Methodology

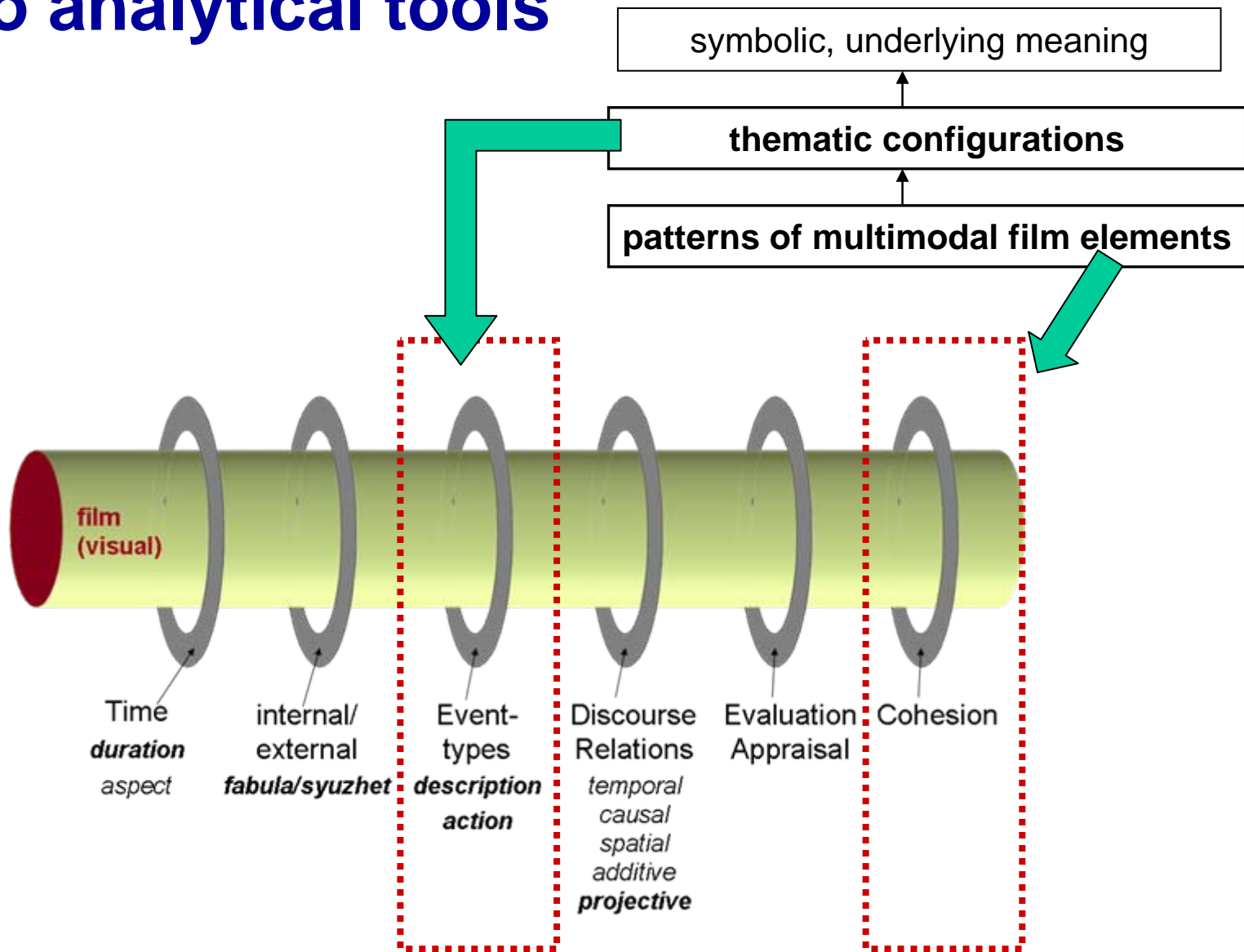
Systemic Functional Linguistics—

- b. **Action patterns** for comparison across different extracts and genres



SFL: Visual Transtivity
(Kress and van Leeuwen,
1996)

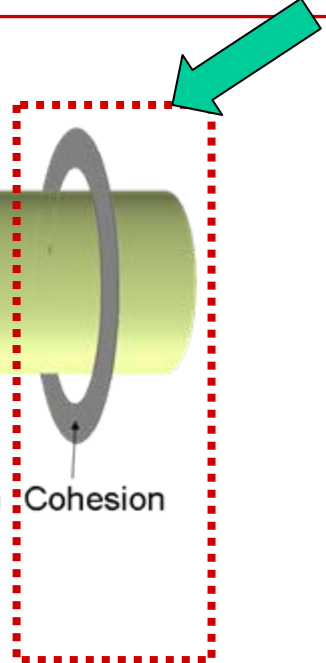
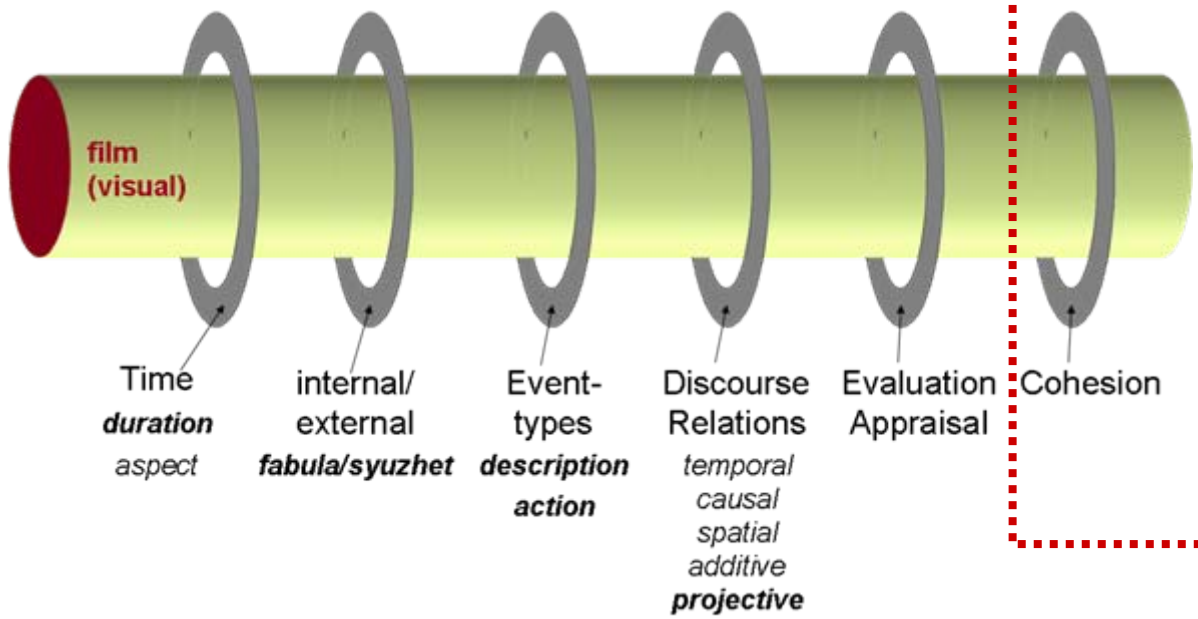
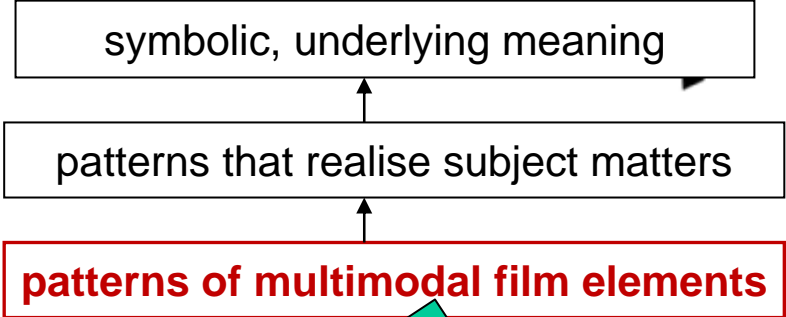
Two analytical tools



Data

- Extracts from...
- five narrative films across different epochs—*The Third Man* (1949), *North by Northwest* (1959), *The Birds* (1963), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), *Memento* (2000),
- three documentary films— *Olympia* (1938), *Comandante* (2003), *Supersize Me* (2004),
- three TV commercials

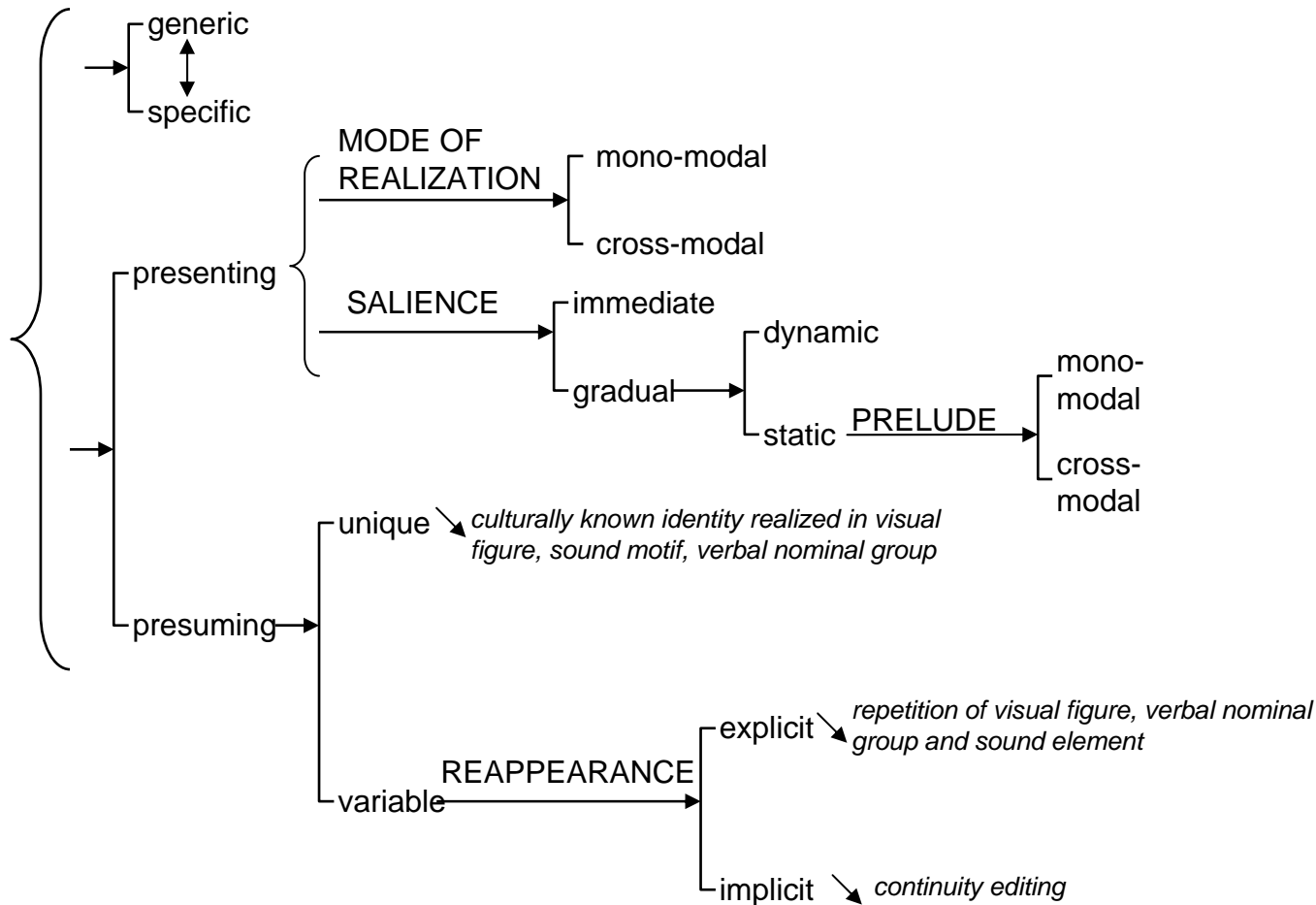
Tool 1: Cohesion in film— system of filmic identification



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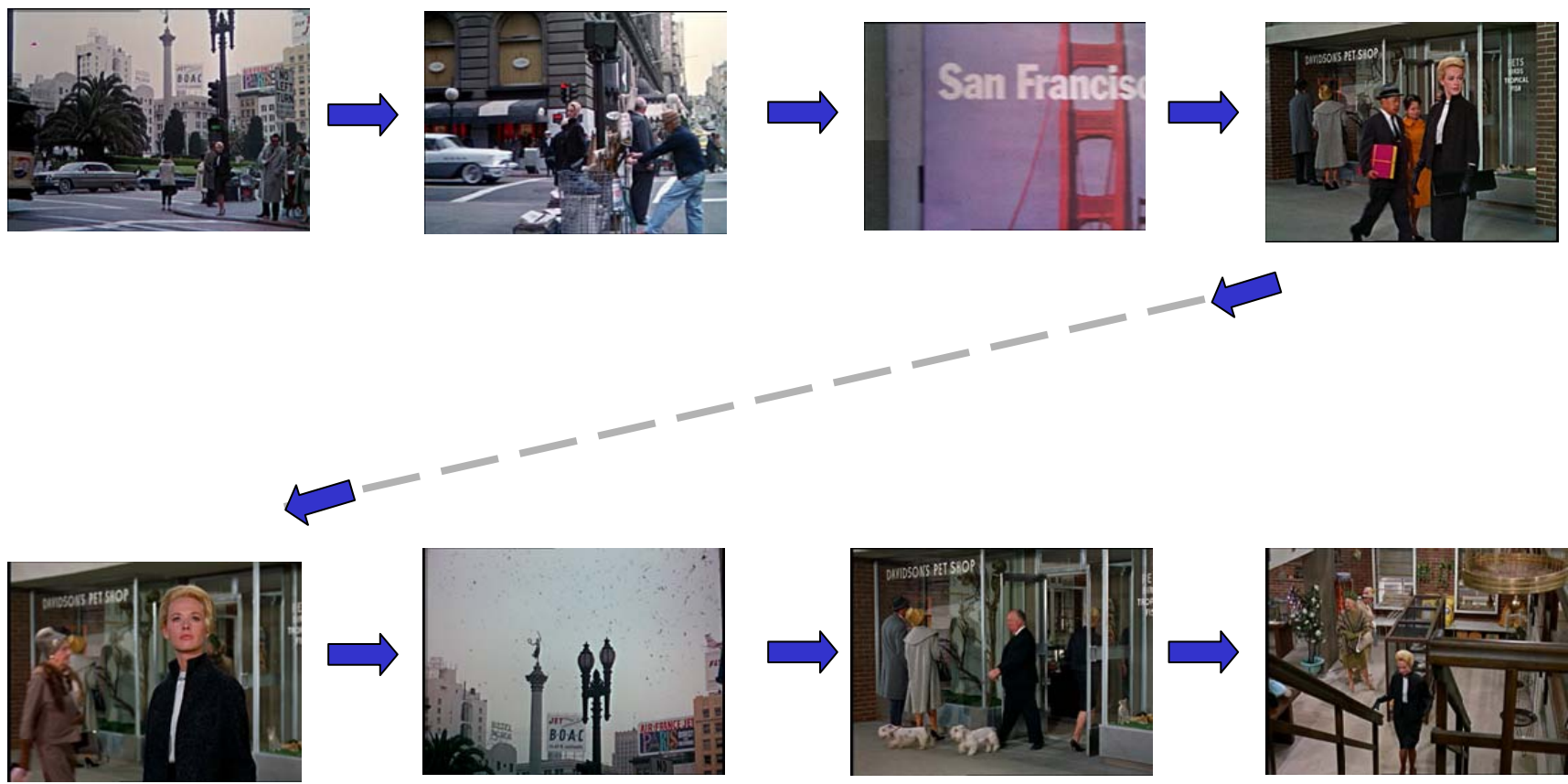
- How to examine the cross-/mono-modal realisation of identities of characters, objects and settings in a film?
- What kind of film strategies can be used to signal the retrieval of identities (of characters, objects, settings) in a film?
- How do we track an identity (realised multimodally) systematically throughout a particular film instance and establish structures based on the identity tracking?

Paradigmatic systems of filmic identification

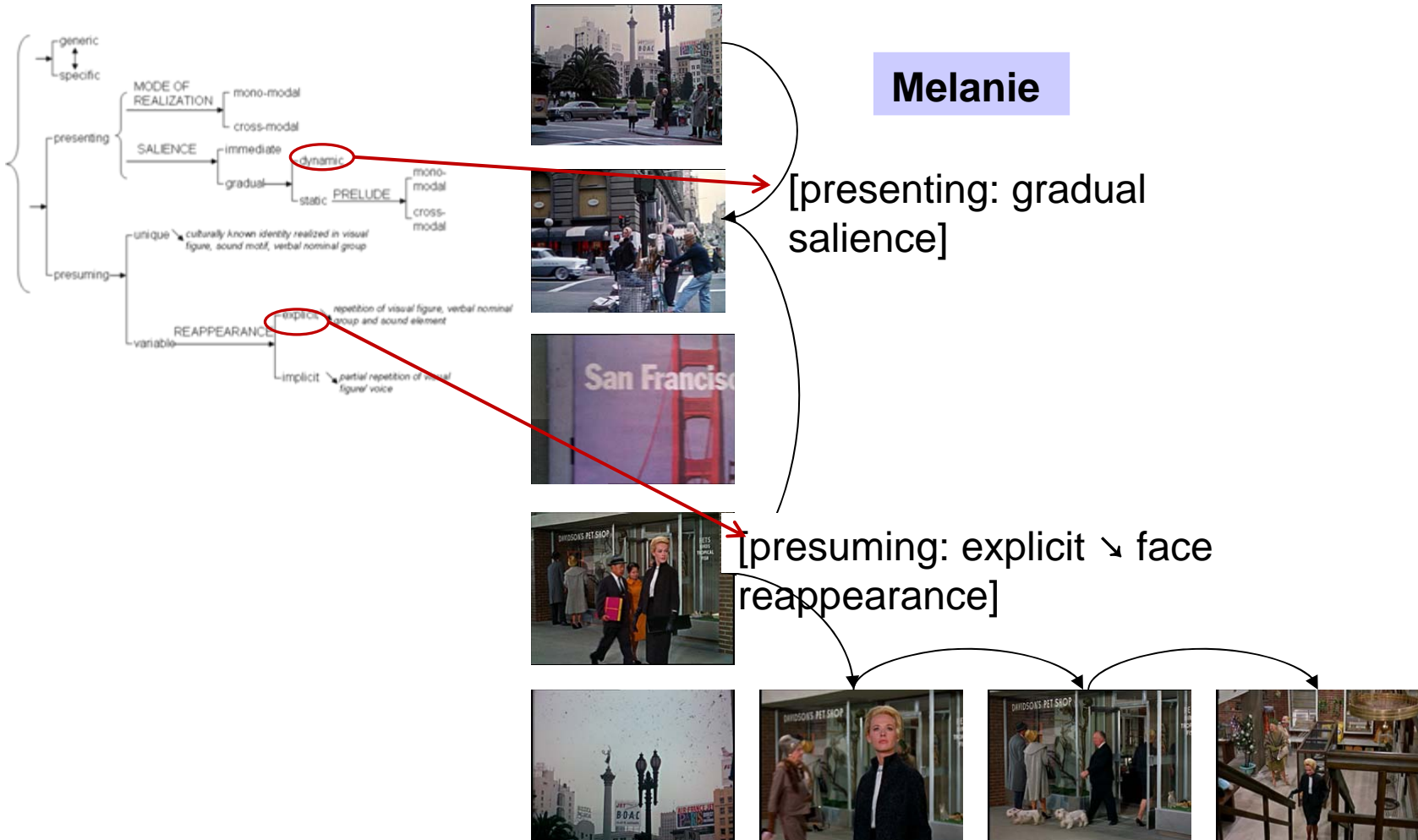


Tracking identities of characters, objects and settings

Example: the beginning of *The Birds*



The cohesive chain of *Melanie*



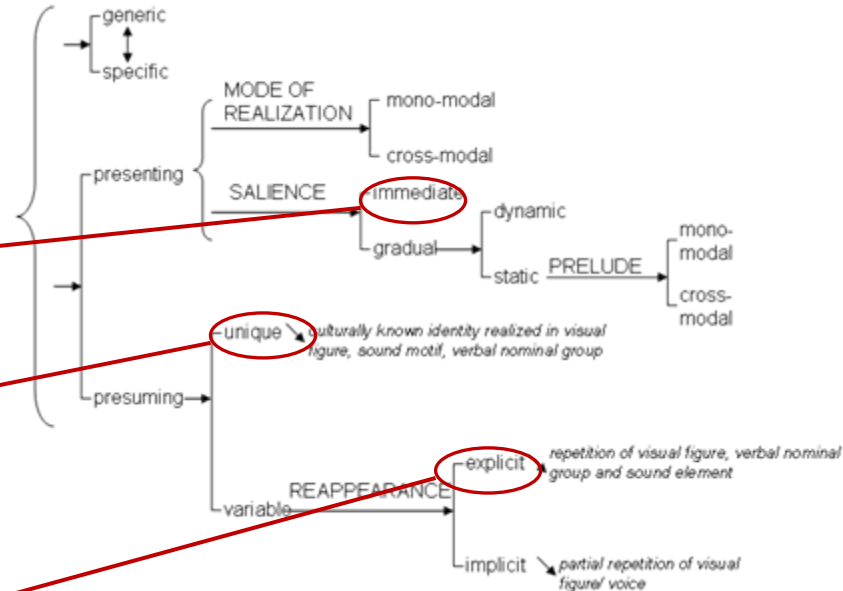
The cohesive chain of setting – San Francisco street/city view

setting (a):
SF street view

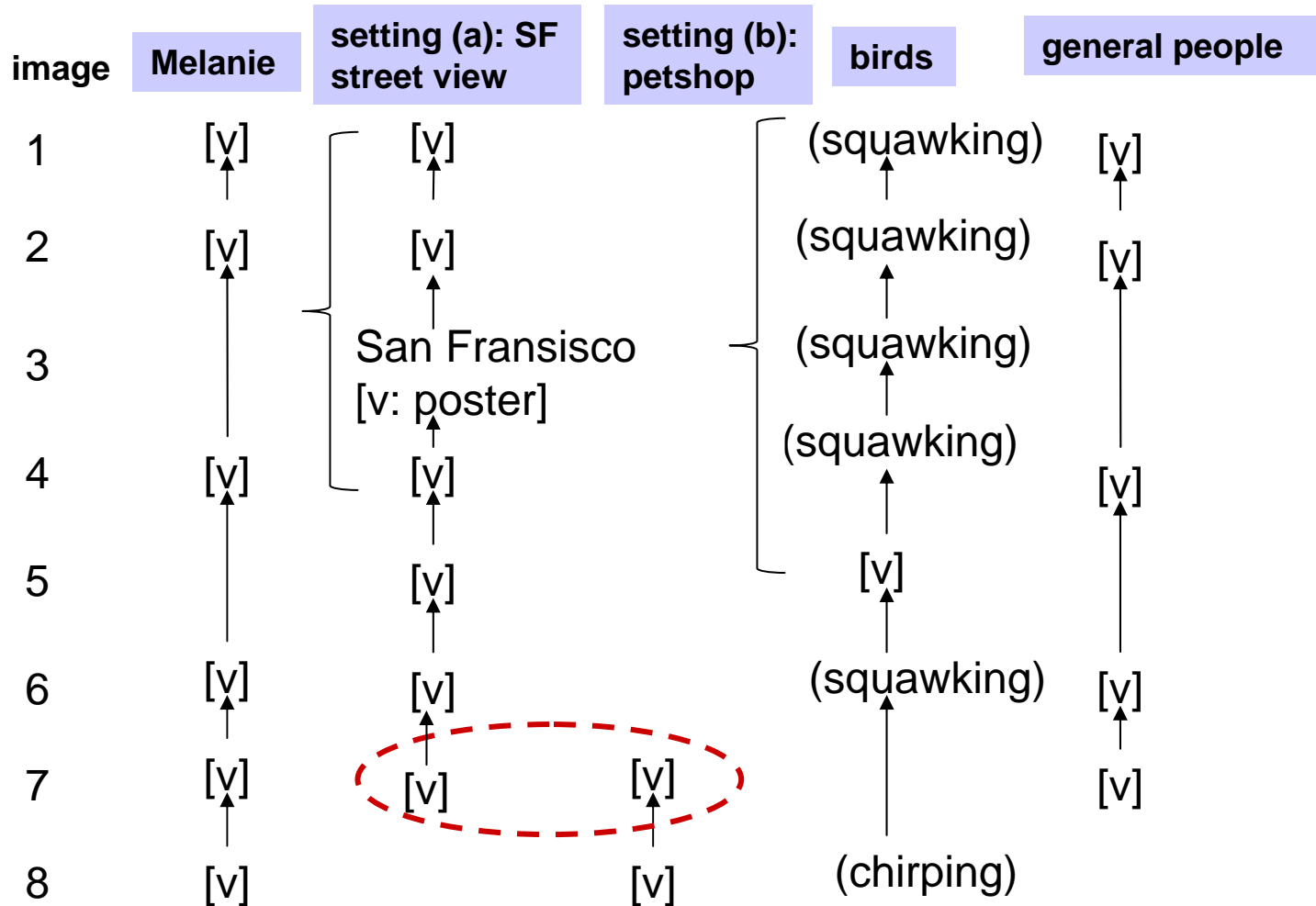
[presenting:
immediate salience]

[presuming: unique]

[presuming: explicit
reappearance]

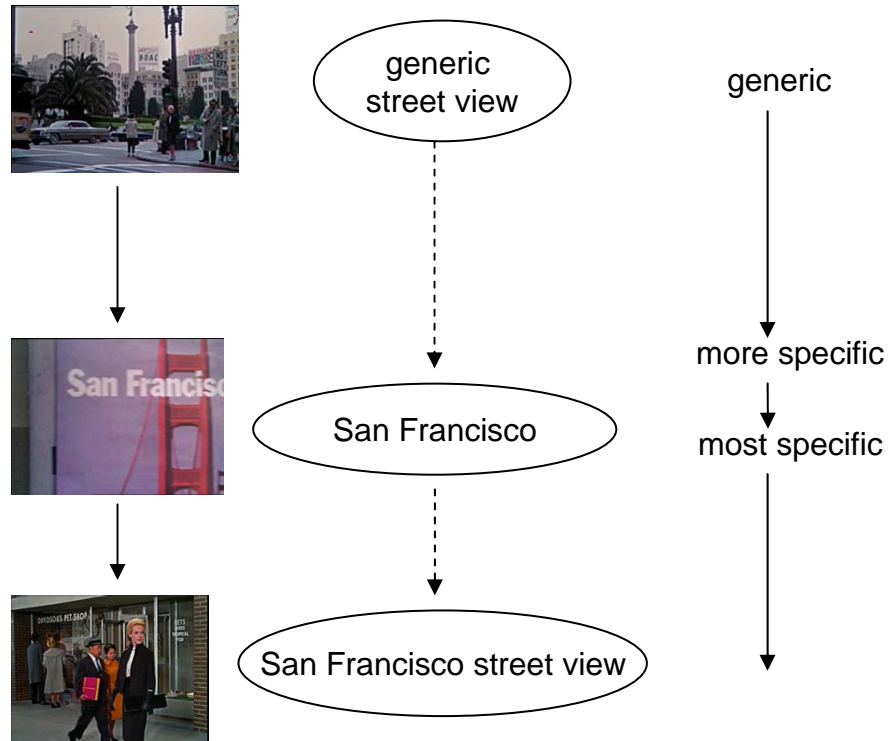


Cohesive chains of the beginning of *The Birds*

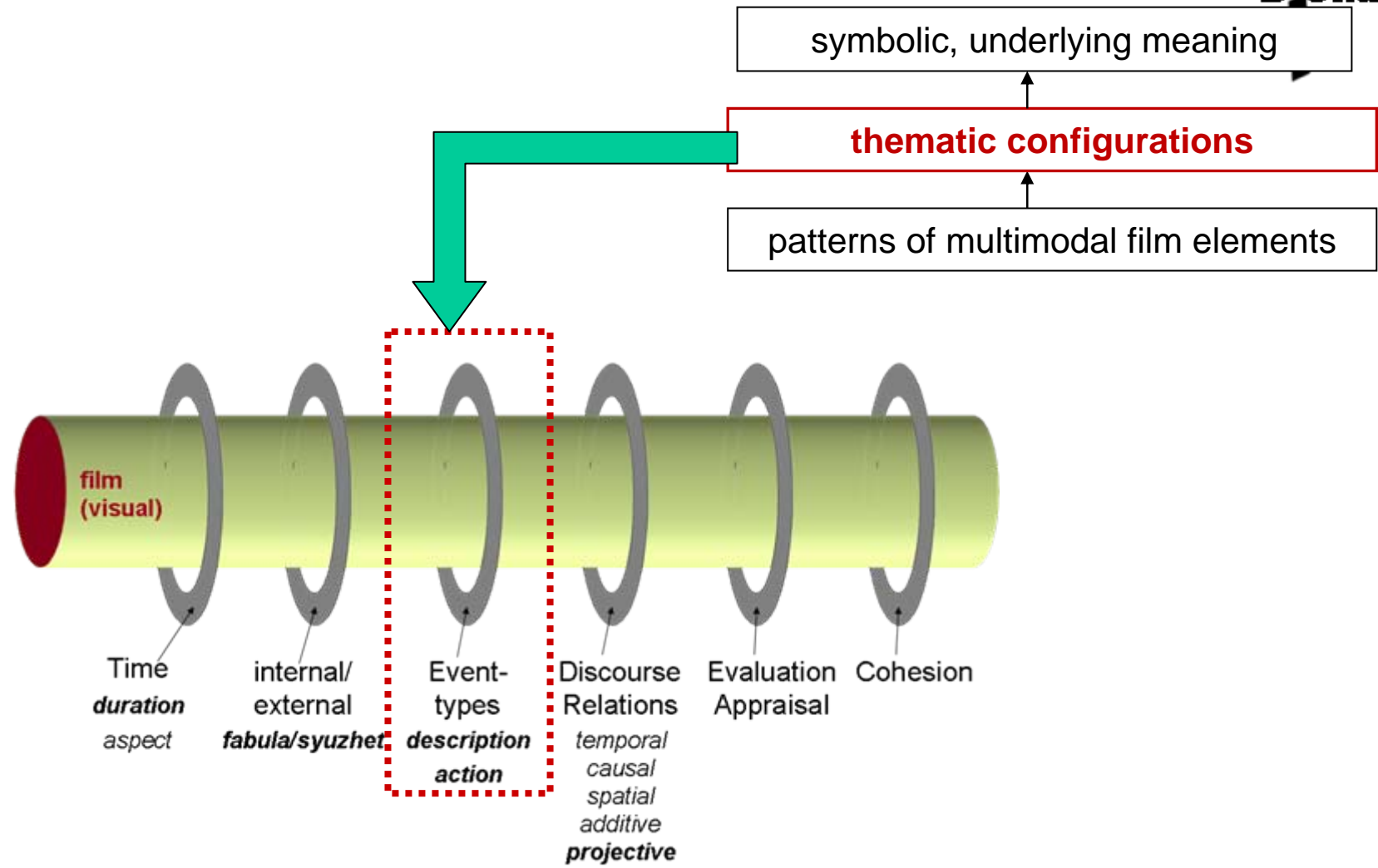


Cohesive chains show viewers' dynamic inferential process

EX:
viewers' dynamic interpretation of a setting



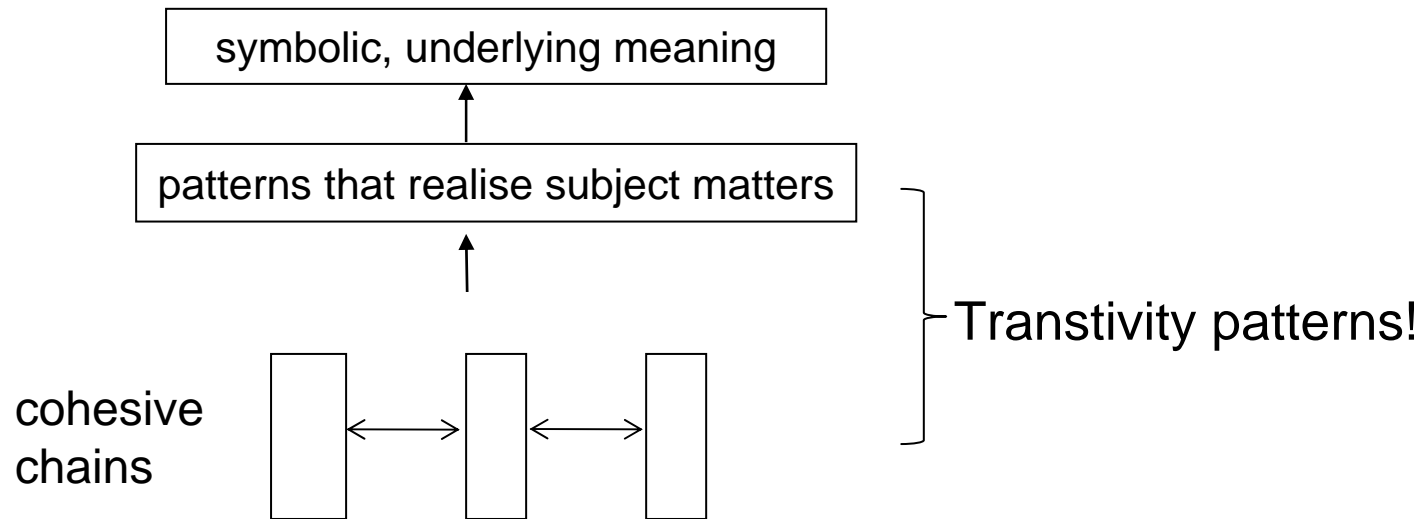
Tool 2: Filmic thematic configuration



Tool 2: Filmic thematic configuration

- How to bring cohesive chains to interact and to form patterns.
- How to compare and contrast thematic configurations within and across film extracts.
- Whether thematic configurations show potential for dynamic analysis of film genre.
- How to derive underlying meanings and interpretations drawing on thematic configurations.

Tool 2: Filmic thematic configuration



Example:

- *North by northwest*



Tracking salient characters, objects and setting

door, lamp,
etc.



location

room



RT

VD



Interaction between characters and objects

door, lamp,
etc.



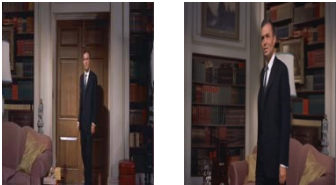
location

room



RT

VD



stare

Interaction between characters and objects

door, lamp,
etc.



location

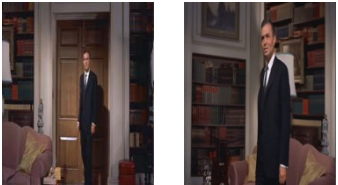
room



RT

walk/
stand

VD



stare



Interaction between characters and objects

door, lamp, etc.



location

room

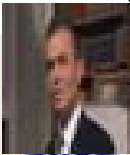


RT

talk

walk/
stand

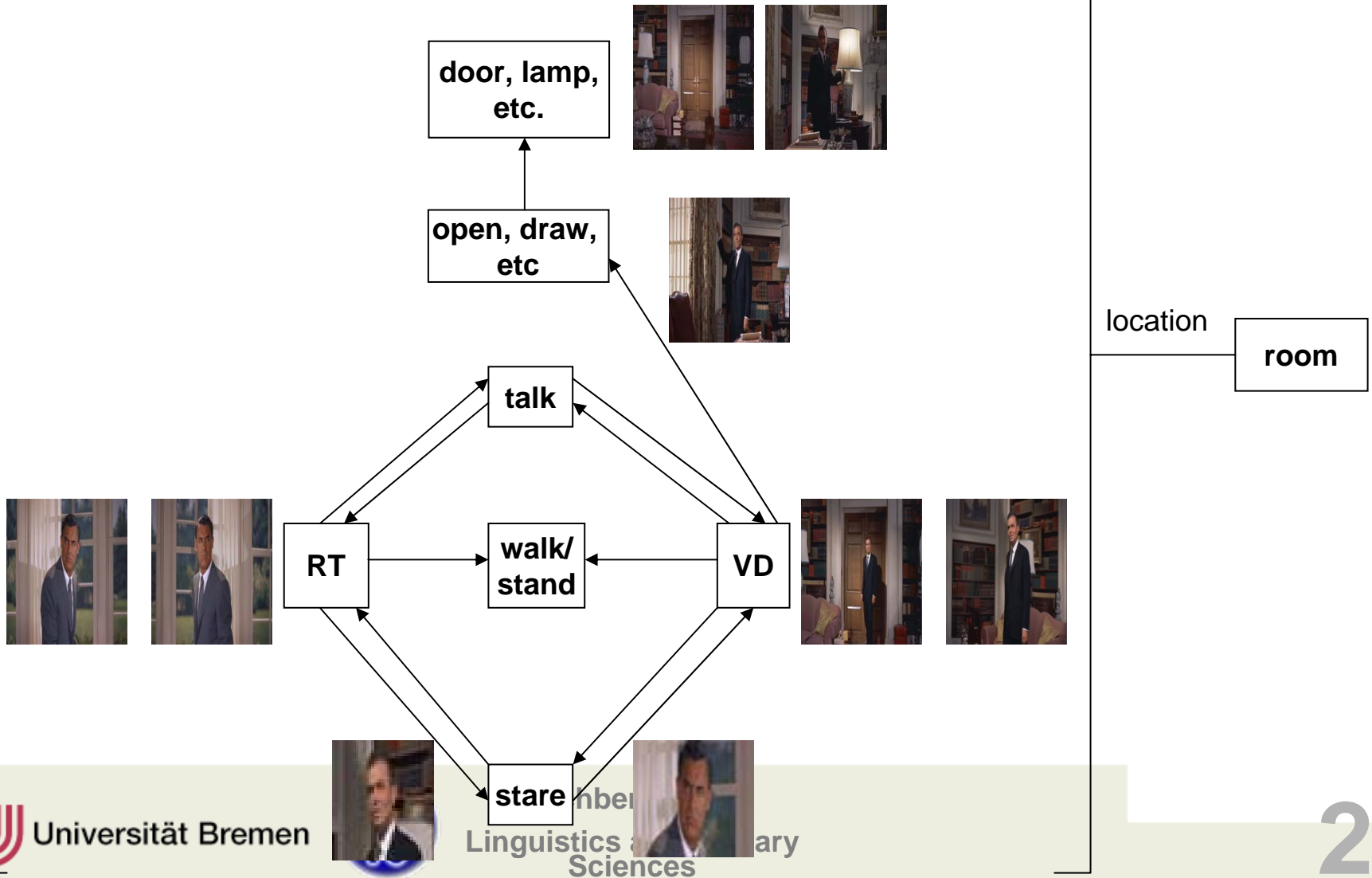
VD



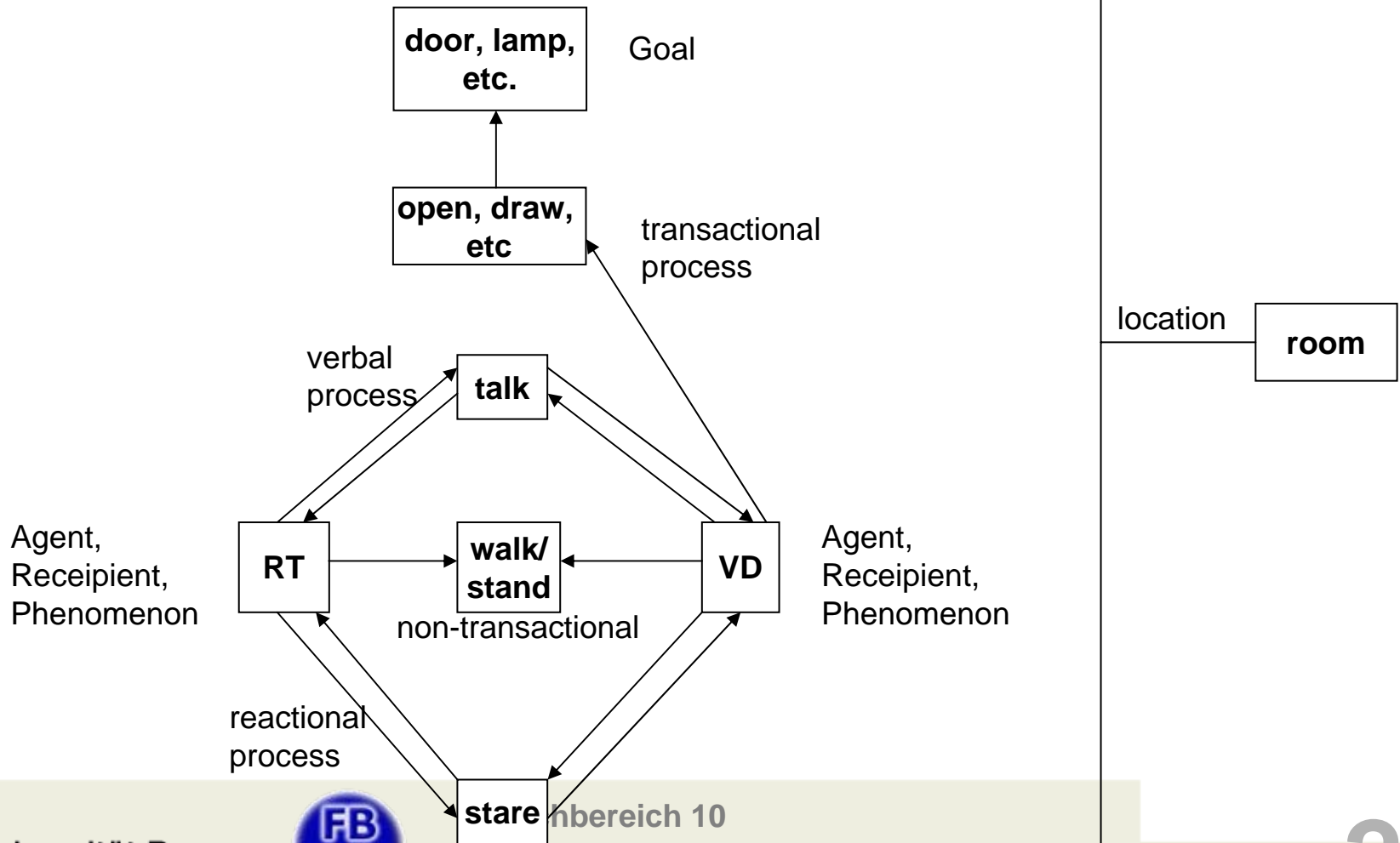
stare



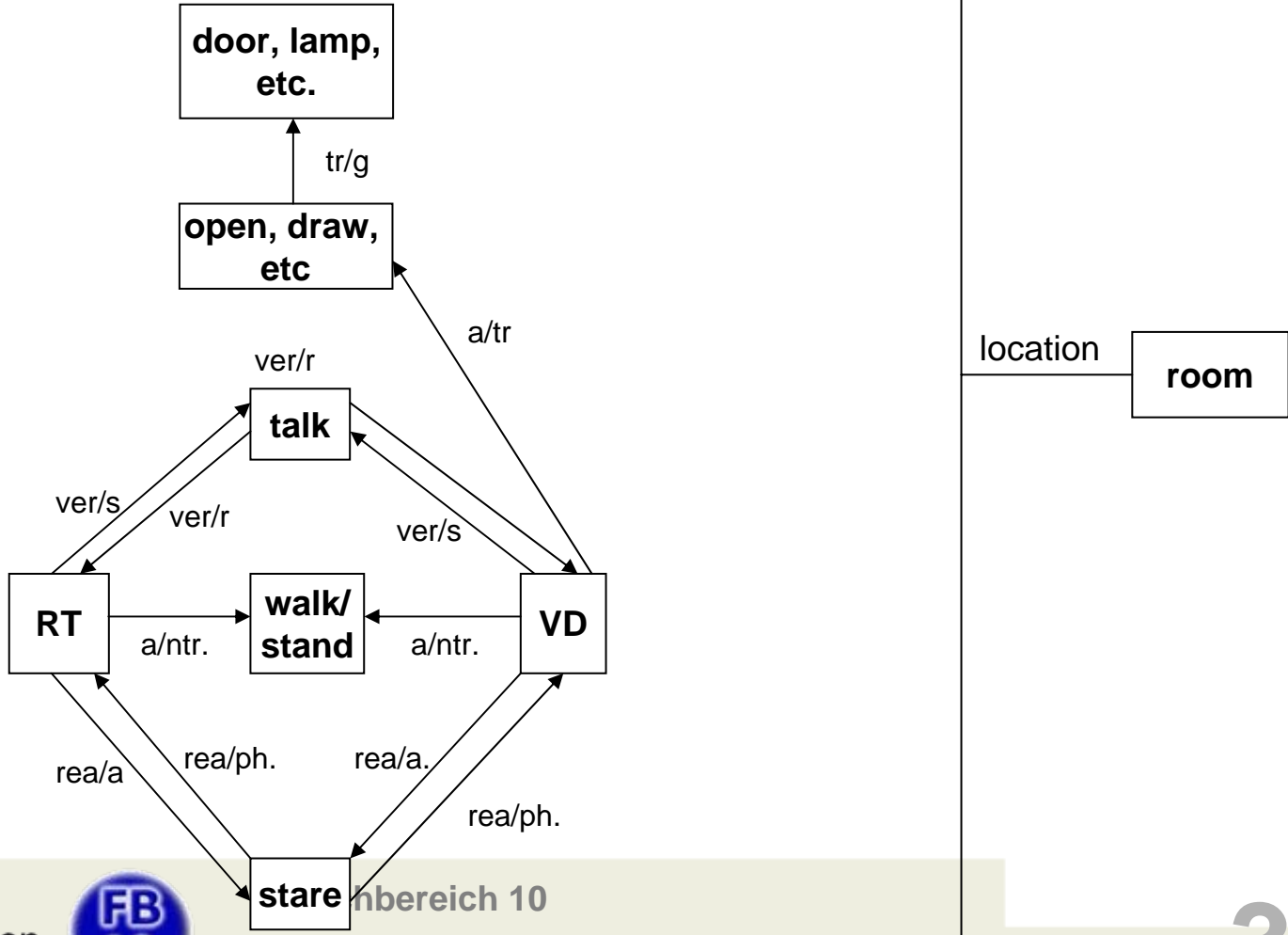
Interaction between characters and objects



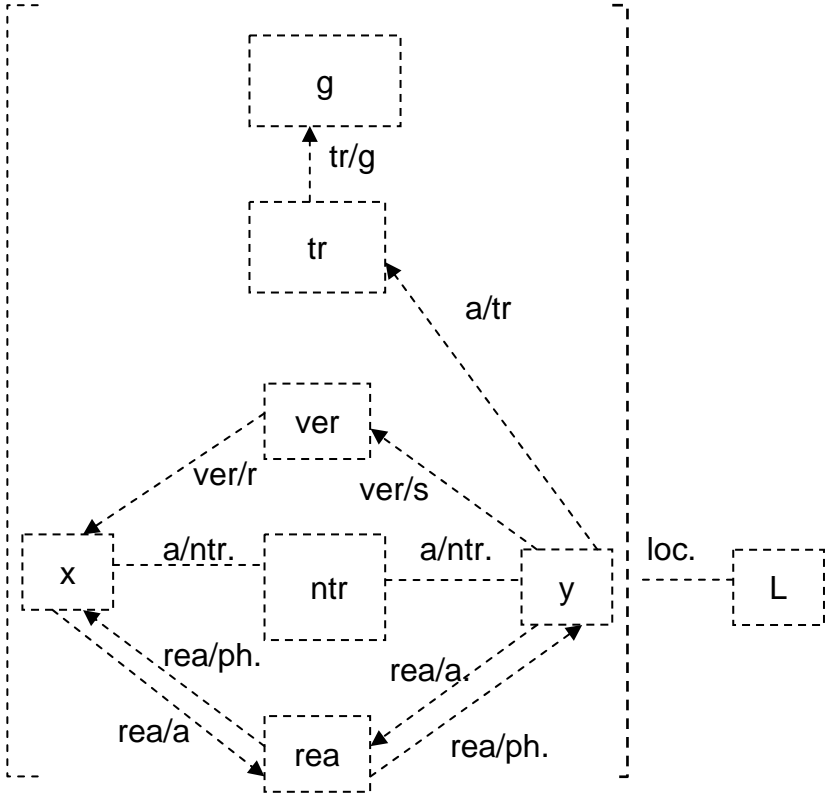
Discourse patterns of functional semantic relations



Discourse patterns of functional semantic relations



Discourse patterns of events for comparison

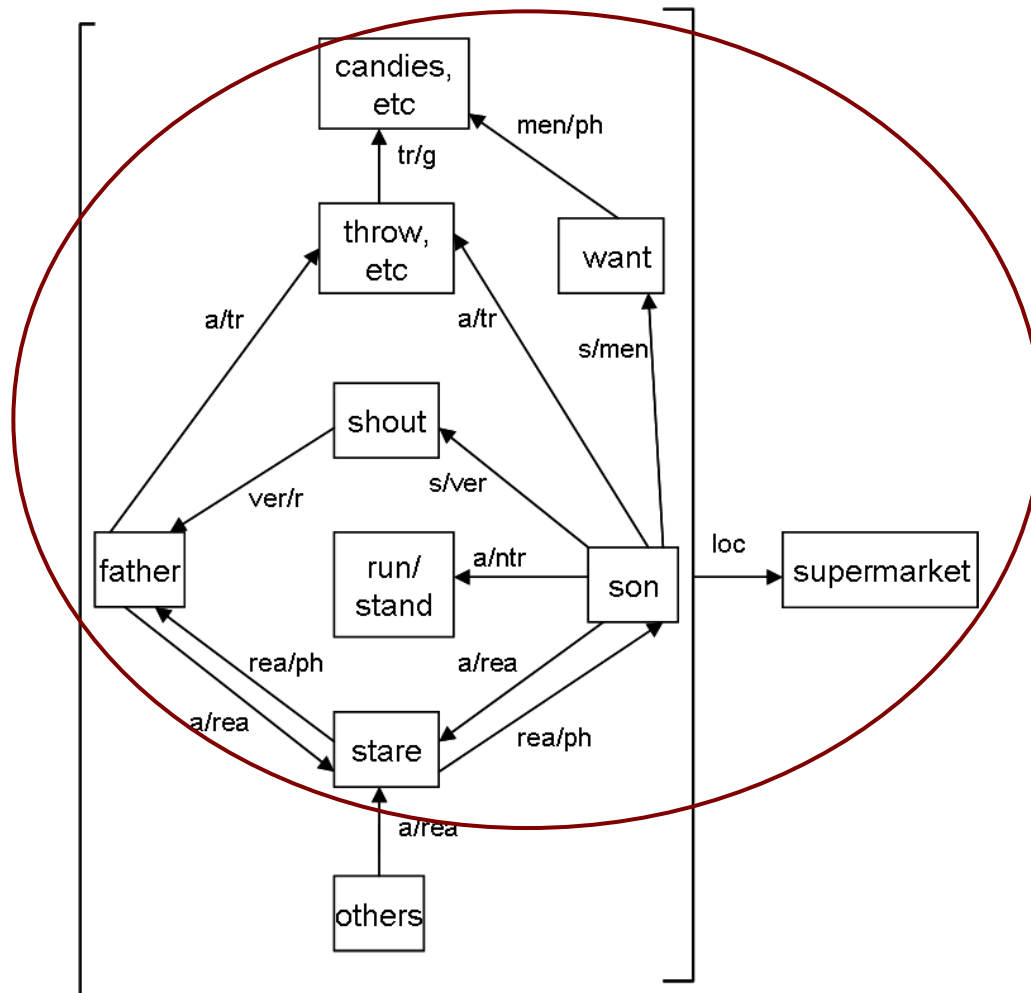


Comparison across genre

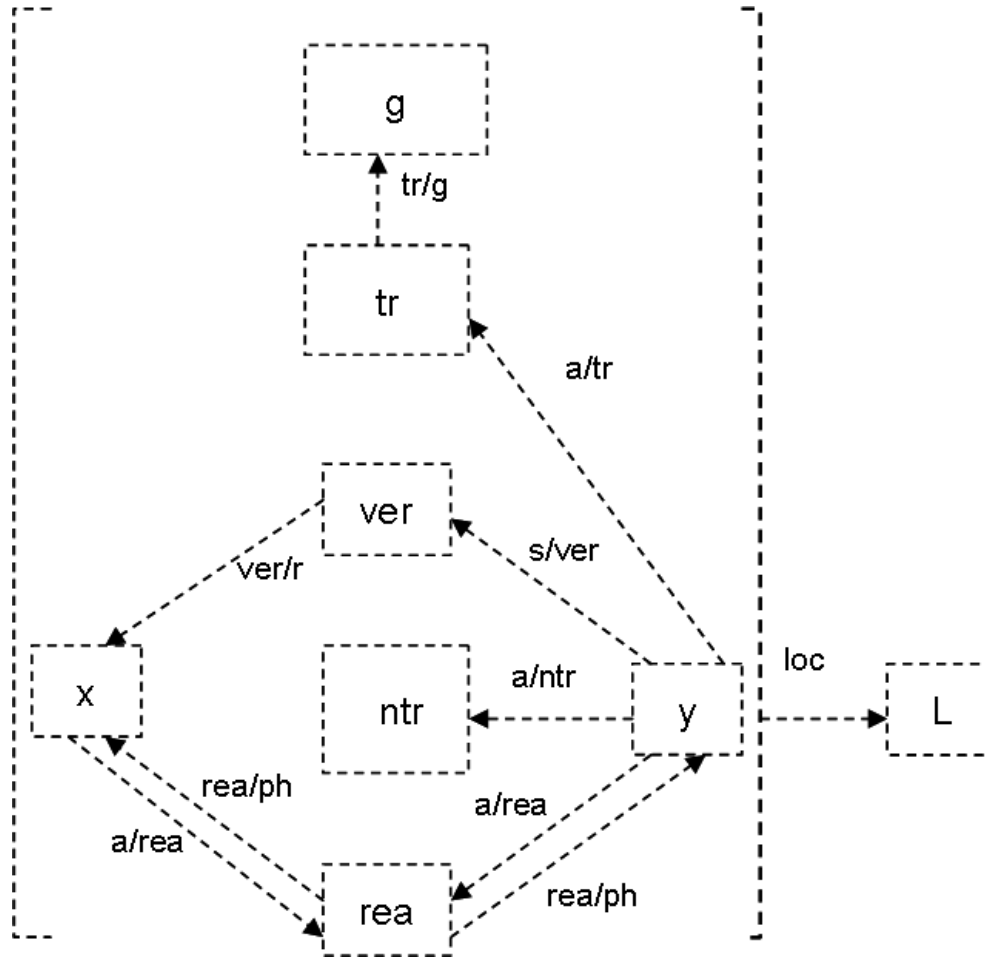
- Ex: TV commercial



Thematic configurations of the TV commercial



Pattern found in *North by Northwest* and TV commercial

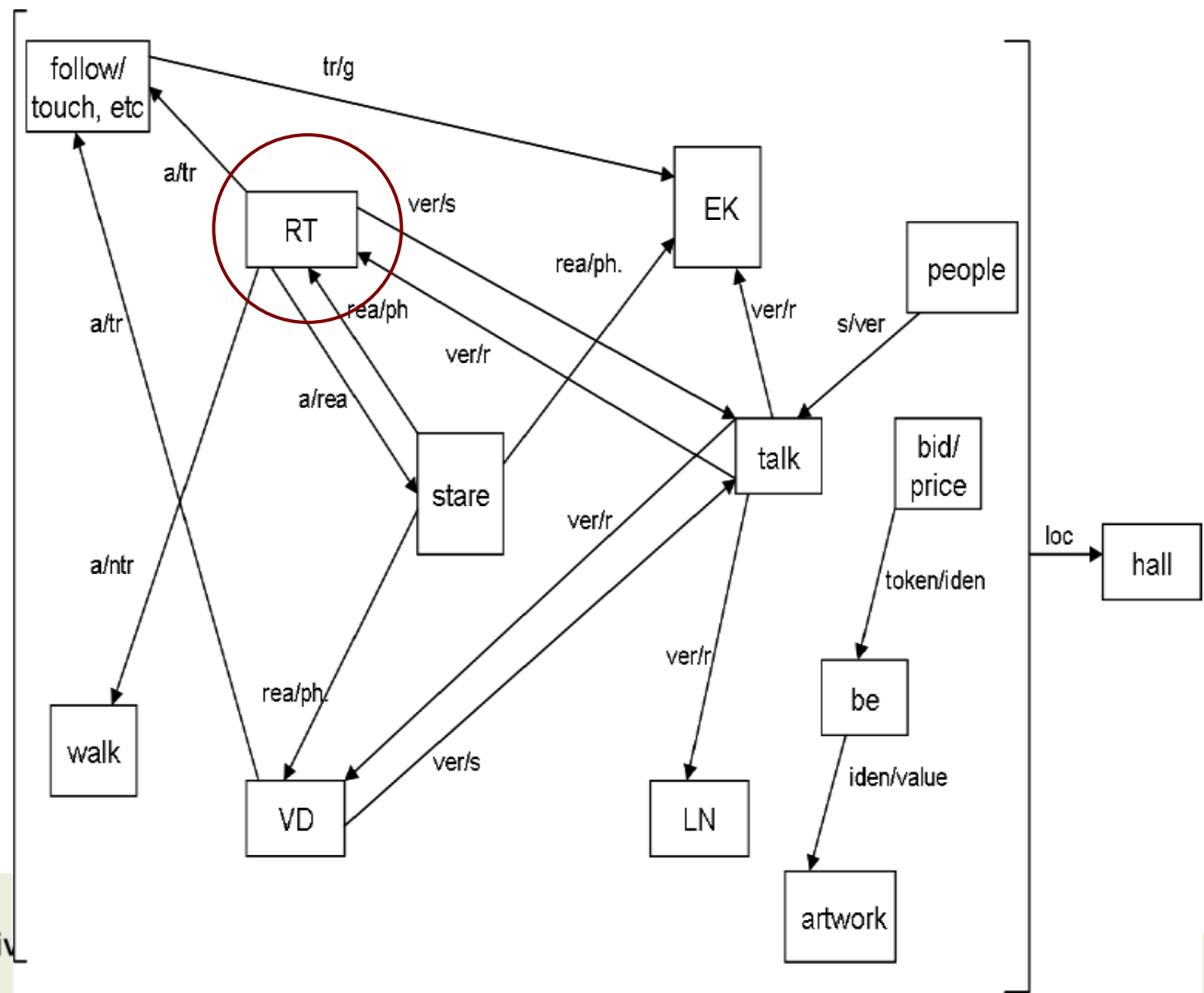


metaphorical structure
certain direction of
viewers' narrative
interpretation?

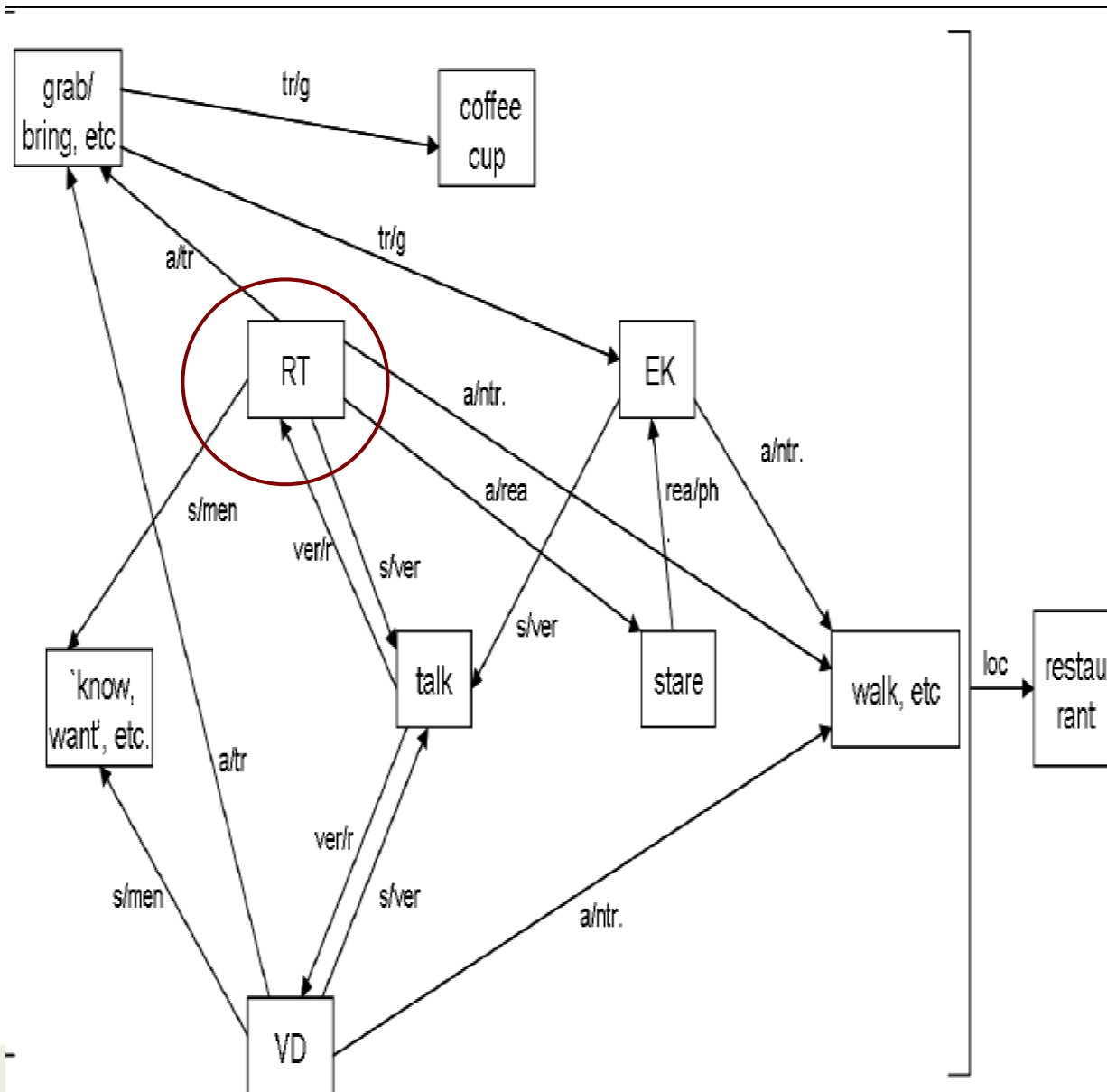
Patterns as basis for further interpretation

- EX: thematic patterns as robust ground for interpreting figures/characters
- Comparing patterns in confrontations between RT and VD across the film.

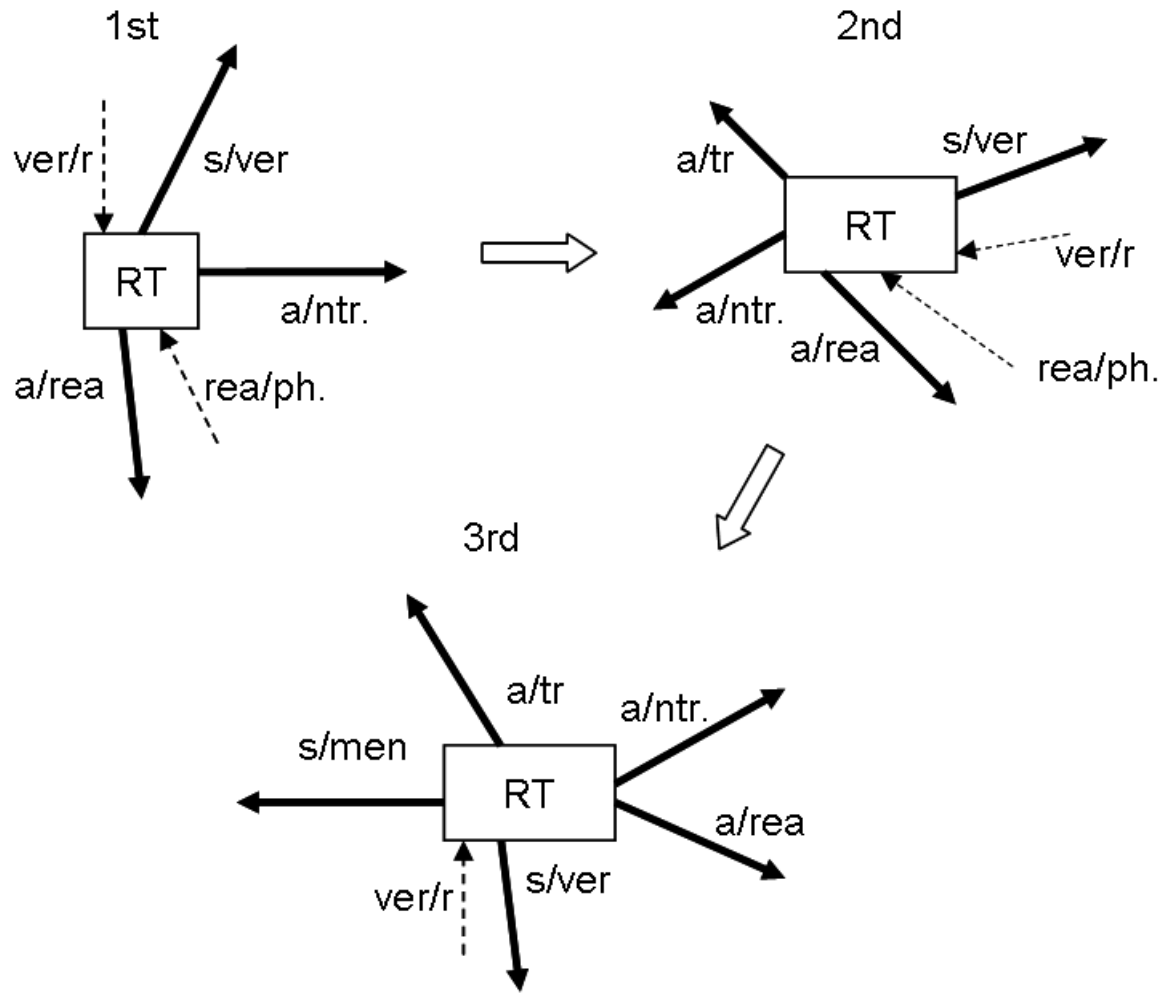
Pattern of the second confrontation between RT & VD



Pattern of the third confrontation between RT & VD



Patterns as basis for further interpretation

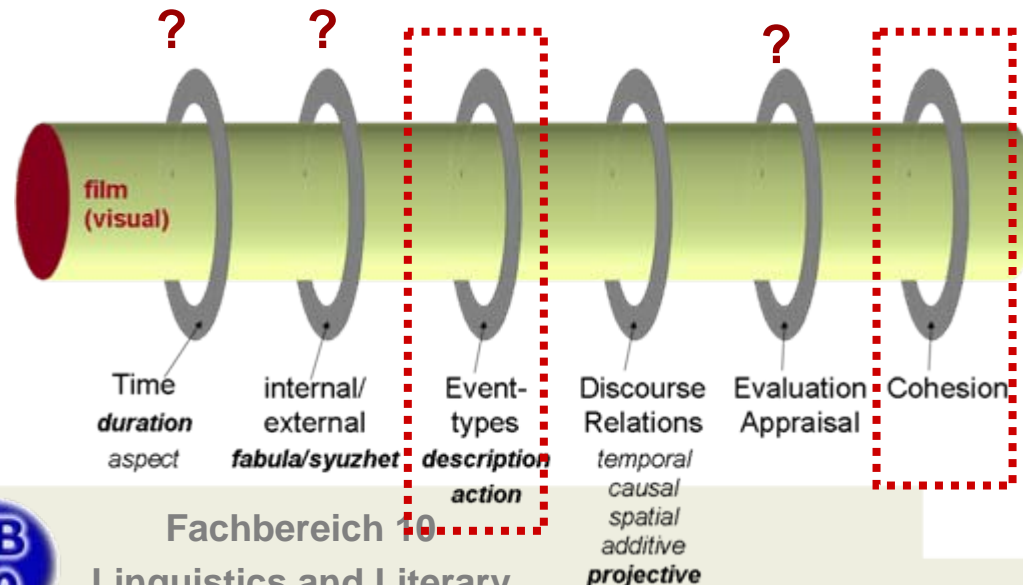


Conclusion: scientific contribution

- Bottom-up framework → a more systematic account of cinema poetics
- Reflecting dynamics of viewers' interpretation and constraining hypothesis of mechanisms of viewers' narrative comprehension → cognitive film theories
- Multi-ness of multimodality during the meaning making process.

Further application and outlook

- Film literacy
- Corpus-based studies
- More empirical analysis
- Other discourse dimensions



Thanks for your attention!

Discussion~

Questions~