Transcultural Screenwriting

Transcultural Screenwriting:

Telling Stories for a Global World

Edited by

Carmen Sofia Brenes,
Patrick Cattrysse
and Margaret McVeigh

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and its imperatives have created new scenarios where storytellers, screenwriters and filmmakers collaborate with colleagues from other countries and cultures. As a consequence, international co-productions have become increasingly common. At the 2015 Academy Awards, there were an unparalleled number of coproductions nominated in award categories. These included: *Deux Jours, une Nuit* (*Two Days, One Night*; Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne) (Belgium, France, Italy); *Matar a un Hombre* (Alejandro Fernández Almendras) (Chile, France); and *Turist* (Ruben Östlund) (Sweden, France, Denmark).

The international film co-production model provides a number of benefits. Co-productions are set up as a means to share production costs and to create stories that reach transnational audiences. They may foster long-term collaborative relationships between international creatives and allow filmmakers to draw upon a wider talent pool. International co-productions also aim to ensure the long-term viability of national film industries by developing wider distribution channels in multiple markets. However, when film crew members from different parts of the world come together to write and produce a movie, TV-series or other audiovisual product, they enter a multi-cultural environment that will condition the creative process. In addition, the stories that are aimed at wider audiences are likely to display corollary features that require screenwriters and scholars to adopt new methods of study. *Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World* aims to study those new working conditions and the multi-cultural stories that result from them. It focuses on how creatives working in a multi-cultural environment are confronted with multiple challenges: How to mesh cultural aesthetics and sensitivities? How to handle professional codes in a multicultural environment, including: how to manage authority and decision making, how to give or follow orders, or how to make things happen? And finally: How to write stories that reach wider multicultural audiences?

In order to tackle these questions, *Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World* adopts the emerging lens of transcultural studies, focusing on screenwriting in a multicultural environment.

Since an international view on film and media studies is not new, a transcultural study of screenwriting does not intend to operate a tabula rasa. Rather, it aims to continue previous approaches and strengthen the bridges between them. Hence, a transcultural lens involves multiple disciplines including screenwriting studies, film and TV production studies, narrative studies, national and transnational cinema studies, intercultural communication studies, post-colonial studies, border theory, identity, ethnicity and gender studies, studies on Eurocentrism and Orientalism, and studies on cultural imperialism including its counterhegemonic responses. A transcultural lens thus offers a different perspective to multicultural screenwriting and it provides at once a number of new categories for analysis.

Secondly, a transcultural lens offers a more flexible view on transcultural screenwriting. Whereas the screen studies notion of the transnational builds upon the national cinema concept of the nation state as a unit, the critical concept “transcultural” opens up new perspectives that complement the scope of transnational cinema studies. Even though the word “culture” has become an umbrella term, scholars generally agree that the term refers to values and beliefs that are shared by a group of people (vid. Cattrysse in this volume). The question is then: what values and beliefs are shared by which group of people? Different cultural units may share different sets of cultural values. These cultural units may be found both below and beyond the level of the nation state, or cut right through it. Examples are the Belgian Flemish and Walloons, the Basques in Spain and France, the Kurds in Irak, Iran, Turkey and Syria, and the ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia. However abstract these notions may sound, they involve very concrete and everyday assumptions about how people live and work together. Hence, depending on the purpose of the research, one may zoom in to a “microscopic” level cultural group (for example the portrayal of the family on television), or zoom out to a “macroscopic” level group (for example the common versus different features of European, Asian, American or global media). Consequently, while we acknowledge that the nation state remains a formidable factor in theories that consider screen based media texts, we understand the “transcultural” label as the category that can unite a number of fields.

Finally, as this reader will show, a transcultural lens offers a number of new categories to the study of screenwriting in a multicultural environment (for example, see below “cultural dimensions”, “habits”).

The first part of the book presents three contributions examining how a transcultural approach may help to study global and local features or values in multicultural screenwriting processes and texts, and how it can complement previous studies such as transnational cinema studies, post-colonial studies, and the like.

In “Cultural Dimensions and an Intercultural Study of Screenwriting”, Patrick Cattrysse explores if and how the concept of “cultural dimensions”, as developed in the field of intercultural communication studies, may be of use to screenwriters who work in a multicultural environment, and to a study of narratives from an intercultural perspective. “Cultural dimensions” represent mechanisms that describe and explain patterns of collective human behavior. They refer to how the members of an ingroup deal with each other, and with time and with space. To the extent that stories represent narrative behavior, this essay argues that cultural dimensions may help to design, describe and explain character and narratorial behavior as well.

Carmen Sofia Brenes’ chapter, “Aristotle’s Notion of Poetic Verisimilitude and Transcultural Screenwriting”, proposes a more philosophical approach that considers the Aristotelian notion of “poetic verisimilitude” as a tool to write transcultural screenplays. Following Paul Ricoeur and Juan José García-Noblejas’ indications, the chapter presents the notion of “habitus” as a lens to study the analogy between the logic of human action and the logic of the plot. The concept of “habitus” is understood in the classical sense of “an acquired and relatively stable way of sensing, perceiving, acting and thinking” (Ricoeur 1968, 280). Subsequently, the author analyzes the US movie *The Searchers* (1956) and the Polish movie *Ida* (2013), in order to check if and how Aristotle’s “habitus” helps to study global features in the narrative.

Margaret McVeigh’s contribution, “*Screenwriting Sans Frontières*: the Writing of the Transnational film and the Key Factors Impacting on the Creation of Story in the Film Co-production Scenario”, draws upon the field of transnational film and cultural studies in order to define and clarify concepts relevant to transcultural fields. The exploration of transnational co-production practices results in the proposal of key narrative elements that can be considered to analyse co-productions as transcultural expressions including story, theme, character, genre and setting. It also includes a discussion of the role of creative, social and industrial factors present in the co-production of transnational films.

Part two presents three case studies illustrating how a transcultural study of texts may tackle issues such as influence, adaptation, translation and other forms of intertextuality.

Through the analysis of *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), Pablo Echart and María Noguera show the influence of Italian neorealism in American post 9/11 films. In their chapter "From Italian Neorealism to American Indie: Transcultural Heritage in Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* (2008)", these authors propose the notion of "family resemblances" as a way to study the presence of ethical and aesthetic similarities between Reichardt's work and the Italian neorealism. They focus on the exploration of the elements of character and theme to investigate universal values and their transcultural transference from neorealist films to *Wendy and Lucy*.

In the chapter, "Transcultural & Generic Screenwriting in the German Gangster series, *In The Face of Crime* (*Im Angesicht des Verbrechens*) (Germany, 2010)", Sarah Renger demonstrates how cultural transfer is a multi-layered and multi-faceted process in her examination of this German TV series. She investigates the series as a cross-media, cross-generic, and multi-cultural adaptation of the American gangster film genre. She proposes that this involves working on medium specificity issues (cinema vs. television), hybrid genre features (for example, gangster vs. crime vs. fairy tale), narrative patterns (for example, epic vs. serial), and multi-cultural character design (for example, German vs. Russian culture).

In "Screenwriter's Voice and National Identity in *Big Hero 6*", Rose Ferrell argues that screenwriters inscribe voice within their screenplays when writing, and that voice can be understood to carry a national inflection because the writing is informed by the writer's personal identity, including national identity. To support this argument, the author proposes a framework which represents craft decisions and choices of content via which screenplays can be interrogated for voice. She then proceeds to apply the framework to *Big Hero 6* (2014), and concludes that *Big Hero 6's* voice retains its American inflection despite paying lip service to Asian influences. This raises the question: under which conditions may a truly transcultural or transnational film be written, produced and distributed in today's globalised market?

Part Three finally focuses on the challenges screenwriters meet when either working in a multi-cultural environment and/or writing for a multi-cultural audience.

In the chapter, "Transcultural Collaboration in Screenwriting: *Jungle Pilots Case Study*", screenwriter Rafael Leal traces the journey of his screenwriting commission to create, develop and write the first three episodes of the Brazilian TV series *Jungle Pilots*. The series was produced by Giros Interativa in partnership with NBC/Universal in Brazil. Leal reflects on the changes that evolved during the writing of these scripts. *Jungle Pilots* represents a procedural drama featuring a multi-cultural cast of characters. Leal explores the way the team of Brazilian writers collaborated with the Los Angeles based American script consultant, Barry Schkolnick, in order to shape the scripts for transcultural audiences.

In "(Re)*Making Murphy*: The Development of a Transcultural Animated Feature Screenplay", Schuchi Kothari explores how, when writing the screenplay, she had to negotiate the demands of a transnational industry. The chapter offers an on-the-ground account of the research and development process of the script, including meetings with film producers, commissions, and delegates at animation festivals. Kothari reflects on how during the writing of *Making Murphy* she had to juggle storytelling traditions from five different nations (USA, UK, Japan, France, and Czech Republic), and to combine the respective cinematic styles of the Pixar and Ghibli studios.

The chapter, "Audio Description of *Juliana*: Transcultural Considerations in Retelling a Cinematic Story for Blind People" by Florencia Fascioli Alvarez, describes the process of writing visual descriptions of an audio visual text for blind people. This unique type of translation must take into account concrete descriptions of what is happening visually on the screen and translate these into audio. The translation must also incorporate cultural and social nuances that may be part of the subtext of the script and screen action. In her account of the process to make *Juliana*, the first movie made accessible for the blind in Peru, Fascioli Alvarez traces the decisions the audio translators made via a comparative analysis of a number of different drafts of the audio description. Of particular note are the factors that the multicultural team involving technicians and writers from Uruguay and Peru had to address around transcultural aspects of the text.

Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World offers new insights into screenwriting for the 21st Century to reach audiences across nations and cultures. The chapters in this book have been developed from the Screenwriting Research Network International Conference, *Transnational Screenwriting: A Dialogue Between Scholars and Industry*, which was held at the Universidad de los Andes-Santiago de Chile May, 07-09, 2015.

In conclusion, the case studies, reports on working conditions in multi-cultural environments and theoretical proposals will be relevant to screenwriters, screenwriting teachers and scholars alike. Screenwriters may learn first-hand from the experiences of other writers who have successfully worked in film, animation and television in the creation of characters and stories which draw from and speak to multiple cultural contexts. Teachers of screenwriting will gain insights into ways to think about preparing students for transcultural storytelling including writing collaboratively and thinking stories that will travel across cultural borders. Researchers are provided with relevant materials to study how screenwriters, filmmakers and producers work in multi-cultural settings, and how writers may write stories that connect to wider audiences.

PART 1:

THE TRANSCULTURAL LENS

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND AN INTERCULTURAL STUDY OF SCREENWRITING[1]

PATRICK CATTRYSSE

Introduction

A cultural study of narratives is not new. Scholars have examined all sorts of cultural aspects of creating and consuming stories. There are studies on cultural imperialism and its counterhegemonic responses, opposing for example American commercial cinema to European art cinema, or distinguishing mainstream cinema from “alternative” cinema, or “first” from “second” and “third” cinema (Guneratne and Dissanayake 2003). There are the studies on national, transnational[2] or post-national cinemas, the numerous studies on migration, diasporas, and (post-)colonialism, studies on identity, ethnicity and gender, and studies also on Eurocentrism and Orientalism. In this chapter, I examine if and how the concept of “cultural dimension”, as developed in the fields of intercultural communication studies and cross-cultural psychology, could be useful to the practice and study of intercultural screenwriting and intercultural storytelling more in general. Since the concept “culture” has become an umbrella term, section one suggests first a working definition of the word. Section two explains the concept of “cultural dimension”. Section three discusses how cultural dimensions could offer an additional conceptual and operational tool to both intercultural screenwriting and a study of intercultural narratives. Section four finally draws some conclusions and points to some caveats that could trigger further research.

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[1] This essay represents an updated version of a talk that was originally presented on September 10, 2010 at the third International Conference of the Screenwriting Research Network at the University of Copenhagen.

[2] See, e.g., Ezra and Rowden (2006). See also the journal *Transnational Cinemas*, which started at Intellect Publishing in 2010.

What is Culture?

There are many definitions of the word “culture”[3]. Hence, any discourse on culture does well to suggest a working definition first. This section proposes one that is based on a number of characteristics scholars do agree on when discussing culture. A study of culture involves first and foremost values. Values are understood as principles that guide human thought, emotion and behavior. Values may be innate (e.g. fairness, justice) or learned (e.g. speak for yourself vs. speak only when spoken to). The former are universal and part of human nature; the latter vary locally and are deemed the makeup of culture (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005a, 4; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 67-68). A clear conceptual distinction between nature and nurture does help the researcher to better understand the complex and dynamic interaction that obtains between the two. Learned values may be personal, or collective. However, scholars agree that culture deals with collectively shared values (see, e.g., Minkov and Hofstede 2014, 144). The next question is then: which group of people shares which values? Finally, culture is generally understood as both multifaceted and holistic (see, e.g., Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 67). In other words, culture consists of multiple components, but these components are interrelated and form a whole that is more than the sum of its interconnected parts. This whole constitutes the set of shared values that unites an ingroup, i.e. assists its members in identifying themselves as the members of a group that is distinct from other groups, i.e. so-called outgroups. As such, culture is ethnocentric (Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 68–69): it builds fences between cultural units and thus creates barriers for intercultural communication. Since people form ingroups on the basis of many parameters (e.g. language, age, education, profession, hobbies, sports, fashion, age, gender…), boundaries arise between ingroups and outgroups at many levels at the same time. This leads to what we call cultural diversity. Inter- or cross-cultural communication studies aims to examine both the similarities and dissimilarities between cultures, as well as the complex and dynamic interaction that obtains between them. It strives to gather knowledge about how to optimally manage human interactions in a multicultural environment. Hence, in conclusion, I hereafter understand the term “culture” to signify a set of learned values that collectively guide the thoughts, emotions and behavior of the members of an *ad hoc* ingroup.

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[3] See, e.g., Liu, Volčič, and Gallois (2015, 54).

What are Cultural Dimensions?

The concept of “cultural dimension” was developed in the field of intercultural communication studies. Textbooks generally refer to Geert Hofstede’s 1980 study *Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values* (see, e.g., Jandt 2007, 159; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 104). However, Edward T. Hall uses the term “dimension” already in his 1966 *The Hidden Dimension*, and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) borrow their cultural dimensions from Talcott Parsons’ 1951 *The Social System*. Since then, studies on cultural dimensions, value orientations (see, e.g., Kluckhohn 1967) and cultural value theory (see, e.g., Schwartz 1994) have evolved into a substantial sub-field in intercultural communication studies and cross-cultural psychology.

Generally speaking, cultural dimensions represent specific bi-polar scales of learned value orientations, which guide people’s thoughts, emotions and behavior collectively. For example they determine or explain how some people are more self-oriented or group oriented, how “open” or “closed” they are to strangers, how they assign status (or not) to each other, how they negotiate or make decisions, how they treat their superiors and their subordinates, their elder and their children, how they treat their men and women, how they reward or punish behavior. Cultural dimensions also concern the ways groups of people deal with time and interact with space.

The notion of cultural dimension presupposes that all human societies must answer a limited number of universal problems, and that even though different cultures come up with different solutions, these solutions show value patterns that are also limited in number and universally known (Kluckhohn 1967). Hence, intercultural communication researchers present surveys, often formatted as forced-answer questions, to large sets of interviewees. They then aggregate their answers statistically according to common values, and build indexes to position groups of people on the continuum of a cultural dimension.

Experts still debate about the exact number of cultural dimensions,–four (Hofstede 1980), five (Hofstede and Bond 1988), seven (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961), more or less (Maleki and De Jong 2014)?–, and they have proposed multiple names, which at times overlap (see below). Most scholars have studied cultural dimensions at the level of nation states (see, e.g., Hofstede 1980 and his followers), although other researchers have commented that the nation state may not always be the best unit to study and compare cultures (see, e.g., McSweeney 2002; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 18; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 104). However, following the working definition of "culture" mentioned above, all agree that 1. a study of cultural dimensions focuses on the dominant value dimensions of a society, and not of individuals, and 2., one should not confuse the two levels of analysis (see, e.g., Hofstede 2001, 15ff.; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 82; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 104). While individual responses may show wider variations on the cultural dimension scales, and according to some actually involve multiple dimensions (see, e.g., Bearden, Money, and Nevins 2006), aggregating large numbers of replies factors out these individual variations to reveal one-dimensional dominant features of collective behavior. Indeed, while each dimension represents a continuum of cultural responses, a culture's preference for one orientation of a given dimension means that the opposite end of the continuum is less important to that culture (see, e.g., Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 82; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 117). This has raised the question if and how aggregate-level values at the country level are suitable to describe and explain individual-level behavioral phenomena (Bearden, Money, and Nevins 2006, 195–96). I return to this question in section 4.

Cultural Dimensions and (the Study of) Intercultural Screenwriting

Following the above, this section discusses two assumptions:

1. Since cultural dimensions apply to real life and work in a multinational and multicultural environment, they can help to study and improve the collaborative pre-production process of screenwriters and other crew members involved in international co-productions.

2. Since cultural dimensions describe patterns of social behavior, narrative texts that represent social behavior may be studied in terms of cultural dimensions as well.

To illustrate this, I hereafter discuss briefly three cultural dimensions (sections 3.1.-3.3), and suggest that there is more (section 3.4).

Universalism vs. Particularism

The universalism-particularism divide can be summed up with two key terms: rule-oriented vs. person-oriented. Whereas the universalist stipulates that society must be ordered by laws that apply equally to everyone always, the particularist will say that interpersonal relationships prevail. Since all people are different and lead different lives, it is unfair to apply one law equally to all. Laws must adapt to people, and not the other way around. To illustrate this dilemma, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, 29ff.) describe a number of situations presented as tests to some 50.000 respondents from over 100 countries (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998, 252). Here is one such exercise. Imagine the following scene, which could actually figure in a screenplay or story (see below):

> You are riding in a car driven by a close friend. He hits a pedestrian. You know he was going at least 35 miles per hour in an area of the city where the maximum speed is 20 miles per hour. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says that if you testify under oath that he was only driving 20 miles per hour it may save him from serious consequences (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998, 34)[4].

What do you do? Help your friend or stick to the law? Whoever decides to tell the truth in Court displays universalist behavior; s/he who decides to help the friend shows particularist behavior.

In the perfect universalist society, relations between people are abstract, generic and task-oriented. One does not need to know the people one is going to work with personally. A CV and a portfolio will do. Business trips may be kept to a minimum, and small talk is redundant and to be avoided. Working agreements are cemented in a contract that stipulates all the foreseeable and unforeseeable contingencies; detailed penalty clauses follow in case one party decides not to follow up on the written agreement. In the universalist society, a reliable (read: professional) person is a person who sticks to the rules no matter what.

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[4] The test was designed by the Americans Stouffer, S.A. and Toby, J. (1951) 'Role Conflict and Personality', in *American Journal of Sociology*, LVI(5):395-406. This may explain the universalist bias in the very construction of the anecdote. Unfortunately, space limitations force me to leave aside the multiple side issues that make this example more complicated than it appears in this essay.

Conversely, in the particularist society, working relations are only part of, and therefore dependent on a wider set of interpersonal relationships, which need to be established first. Particularist relationships are concrete, unique, and focus on who people are rather than on what they do. That is why they require time to develop. The time needed to invest in an interpersonal relationship builds trust and loyalty. Trust and loyalty replace the need for contracts,–oftentimes a handshake will do–, and make lawyers and judges redundant. If conflicts arise, they are settled amicably between the parties involved. If a contract is signed, it serves merely as a token of confidence. Whatever is printed on the paper remains subjected to the maintenance and improvement of the good relationship. If all is well, relationships last much longer than contracts.

In practice, both kinds of judgment may overlap or reinforce each other. In a universalist society, the rule may be not to steal or not to lie, while in the particularist society, John would never steal from Peter, or lie to him, because that would endanger their friendship. However, in other circumstances, as in the car and the pedestrian scene, decisions may go separate or even opposite ways. Interestingly, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, 34) point out that, as the seriousness of the accident increases, the moral viewpoints grow further apart: the more serious the pedestrian’s injuries, the more likely the universalist is going to tell the truth in Court, while conversely, the particularist is more likely to help the friend. Particularists and universalists may thus still understand each other when the problem is not too serious, but when the stakes are high, both sides are likely to fall short of understanding, and to accuse each other of being corrupt, not to be trusted.

Now how could the universalist-particularist divide be of use to intercultural screenwriting? As with all cultural dimensions, intercultural communication scholars have examined the universalist-particularist divide at the country level. Confronting some fifteen thousand interviewees from about fifty different countries with similar and more refined questionnaires, researchers have drawn a map of more particularist and more universalist regions. For example, with respect to “the car and the pedestrian anecdote”, Trompenaars-Hampden-Turner’s (1998, 35) graph shows that the Swiss respondents score the highest on the universalist scale, with 97% of the interviewees choosing to abide by the law and not help the friend. As a close second comes the US with 93% of the respondents betraying their friend and favoring the law. At the other end of the scale come the Venezuelan respondents: 68% preferred to protect the friend and ignore the law in Court. Consequently, screenwriters who plan to work abroad might do well to ask themselves in what camp–universalist or particularist–, they see themselves rather than not, and in what camp they esteem their working partners are going to fit. As stated above, the statistics do not imply that every single individual behaves either in a universalist or in a particularist way, but given the fact that these statistics suggest dominant values in certain regions, a (probably more universalist oriented) Swiss screenwriter who intends to work with (probably more particularist oriented) colleagues in Venezuela or Serbia, should not be surprised to meet with some universalist-particularist related issues.

The universalist-particularist dimension may also function as a hermeneutic tool to perform an intercultural text analysis. For example, audience empathy represents a particularist type of relationship between a viewer and a character. To develop such a relationship, whether with a real person or a fictional character, requires time. Indeed, it takes time for a (real or fictional) stranger to become a friend. This fact has an immediate relevance for the storyteller who wants to develop audience empathy for the main character. With the exception of long-running TV-series and franchises, characters who appear for the first time in a story are strangers until the audience gets to know them better. A narrative may try to facilitate the development of viewer-character relationships or not, and be more or less successful vis-à-vis a real audience. This issue is related with the classic topic of writing exposition or backstory, and the low versus high context distinction, developed by Edward T. Hall (1976) (see below).

In addition, the universalist-particularist divide may assist the analyst in recognizing specific generic features in particular scenes, sequences or stories. For example, in episode 4 from season 4 of the US sitcom *Seinfeld*, called *The Ticket*, Newman (Wayne Knight) urges his friend Kramer (Michael Richards) to help him beat a speeding ticket. The episode recalls Trompenaars' and Hampden-Turner's "the car and the pedestrian" anecdote: Newman argues that Kramer is his best friend, and that therefore Kramer must put their friendship before any consideration for the law. That is why Newman presses Kramer to lie in Court and provide Newman with an alibi. The narrative presents the whole situation as utterly ridiculous, –after all, it is a sitcom–, and it uses the universalist-particularist divide for comical relief. Since according to statistics, the US is a predominantly universalist country, it should not surprise that the joke is on the particularist.

One finds a reversed perspective in the US-Mexican co-production *Bella* (2006), where this time, the narrative adopts a particularist bias. At some point, we see Nina (Tammy Blanchard) who, for the second time, arrives late at the restaurant, where she works. Thereupon, her employer, Manny (Manny Perez) fires her. Manny lectures her on the classical universalist values–if everyone acted like you do, he might just as well close the restaurant–. Manny is not interested in "personal excuses", which make up Nina's particular background situation: Nina has been late for work twice because she has been sick, and unlike what Manny suggests, she has not been sick because she was drunk but because she is pregnant. However, the father of the baby has left her, and Nina remains undecided whether to keep the baby or not. The rest of the movie is about how good interpersonal relationships solve all existential problems. Manny's brother, Jose, who is the cook in the restaurant, leaves his work because he worries about Nina, and wants to help her. Since life comes before work, Jose and Nina spend the afternoon together. Jose looks up a friend who offers Nina a new job "for old times' sake", i.e. the friend hires Nina on account of her friendship with Jose, not because of some unknown's impressive cv. In other words, she hires Nina for particularist reasons, not for universalist ones. Subsequently, Jose invites Nina at a warm and hearty Mexican lunch with his family at his parents' house. They talk about their past and their future–is she going to keep the baby?–, and end the day at the beach. Finally, we learn that Jose will adopt Nina's baby, and that after some years, Nina shall come to terms with her being a mom, and be able to take care of her daughter, Bella, too. To the extent that the script is biased in favor of particularism, it is also biased against universalism. Manny, who is a Mexican expat working in New York, is presented as a particularist who has a hard time struggling with his newly adopted universalist way of life. At one point, when Jose leaves the kitchen to help Nina, Manny fires his brother too. To the particularist viewer, this act is as laughable as Newman's is when he forces Kramer to lie in court and provide him with an alibi. As Hofstede and Hofstede (2005a, 100) put it, in a particularist society, the workplace is like a family: "poor performance of an employee in this relationship is no reason for dismissal: one does not dismiss one's child", or brother in this case.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The individualist-collectivist dimension refers to the tension between a prime orientation to the self and a prime orientation to goals and objectives of the group one belongs to (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998, 51). In other words, it refers to the idea that generally speaking, individual interests prevail over collective interests, or the opposite is true. In an individualist society, people consider themselves primarily as independent individuals while in a collectivist society, they consider themselves primarily as the interdependent part of a group. In an individualist culture, personal goals are the end and group goals may be a means, while in a collectivist culture, the opposite is true. Since people form groups on the basis of many parameters (family, language, friends, education, profession, hobbies, region, nation, religion, politics, ideas…), there are many self-ingroup relations to consider.

Like all cultural dimensions, the individualism-collectivism divide plays at once at the personal, the collective and the universal levels. Selfish and altruistic behaviors represent innate talents which are part of human nature. Imagine two kids are drowning in a pond. One is yours, the other is from another town. Who do you save first? Unlike the “car and the pedestrian”-question, this question is easy to answer, and the answer will be universally the same: humans will always favor their kin. However, while we all have family and friends, what friendship and family actually mean varies across cultures; it varies both at the collective and the personal level. Once again, the purpose of an intercultural study in terms of cultural dimensions consists in carving out the intermediate level between the idiosyncratic and the universal. Hence, while individuals may display both individualist and collectivist attitudes, intercultural communication scholars argue that bi-polar patterns appear at the societal level. Here too, most individualism-collectivism research has been done at the level of national culture. However, various scholars have suggested one study the individualism-collectivism dimension also at other group levels such as family, occupation, workplace, etc. For example, while individuals behave in a collectivist way at home with their family, they may be expected to behave in an individualist way at work, or not.

Let’s see now how the individualism-collectivism dimension may be of use to intercultural screenwriting. Based on the country level individualism index, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005b, 78-79) produce a list of 74 countries and regions, where the US, Australia, Great Britain and Canada score as the four highest ranked countries on the individualism index, and therefore represent the four lowest ranked countries on collectivism. At the other end of the continuum, Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela occupy the four highest ranked positions on collectivism, and therefore represent the four lowest ranked countries on individualism. Consequently, one could expect that a US screenwriter who plans to work in Guatemala or Ecuador is likely to meet with some individualism-collectivism challenges, and the same applies probably to the Venezuelan screenwriter who plans to work in say Canada. In addition, screenwriting represents a rather peculiar profession when considered in terms of individualism and collectivism, for on the one hand, (screen)writers are often seen as loners, and on the other hand, screenwriting remains part and parcel of a larger collective endeavor. Consequently, besides looking into the individualism-collectivism divide from a country level perspective, future research could also investigate the individualism-collectivism dimension from other group level perspectives. For example: Can one distinguish professional cultures (e.g. accepted notions of "good practice" in filmmaking or media production more in general, directing, screenwriting for feature film, TV or gaming, acting…) from national and other societal cultures? Can one distinguish a "screenwriter culture" (e.g. making art) from a "producer culture" (e.g. making money)? How are screenwriters in the US, Norway, Nigeria or South-Korea trained to work with the other members of the crew? How does the professional mental programming interact with other personal, collective (e.g. national) and universal value types? Can one distinguish various types of group dynamics with respect to screenwriting in a multi-cultural environment? Moreover, many of the questions I discuss hereafter, with respect to an intercultural study of narrative, may be instructive to the expat screenwriter as well.

The individualism-collectivism dimension offers also various specific research questions that can launch an intercultural study of narratives. Here are some examples:

- Which groups are represented in this script and how much narration time is spent on them respectively? Groups to be considered are: family, friends, work, social life, men, women, ethnic groups, races, the "gang", social classes[5], generations, regions, religion, politics, ideology, ideas, etc.

- How are self-ingroup relations represented? Is there one hero-protagonist who strives to distinguish her/himself from the group, and does the group accept this type of behavior? For example, is there one (anti)-hero protagonist who actively pursues her/his dramatic goal and takes all the credit or the blame, or are success and failure represented as a collective responsibility (cf. the ensemble or multiple protagonist film)? Social acceptance, other's opinions, group conformity, and loyalty to the group are more important in collectivist societies than in individualist societies. In an individualist society, children are raised to speak up for themselves and to stand on their own feet in the world. In a collectivist society, they are educated to avoid venting personal opinions that deviate from the group opinion. Individuals think of themselves rather as part of an ingroup that will provide them an identity and offer them protection against the hardships of life.

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[5] See, e.g., Green, Deschamps, and Páez (2005, 323), who report that people from higher classes tend to be more individualist than people from lower classes.

- Individualist cultures encourage the showing of happiness and discourage the sharing of sadness, while collectivist cultures do the opposite (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 94). Freedom in our (Western) perspective is an individual value, equality a social one (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 106); shame and honor cultures are collectivist, guilt culture is individualist (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 89–90). The individualism-collectivism divide is also commonly associated with direct or indirect ways of communicating (see, e.g., Jandt 2007, 162; Liu, Volčič, and Gallois 2015, 106; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 86). For example, to say "no" to the request of a friend is confrontational. It may be acceptable in an individualist society, but in a collectivist environment it is embarrassing. Here, people will avoid this kind of confrontation and prefer a more roundabout reply like: "yes" as in "yes, I heard your request".

Identifying narratorial or character behavior in terms of individualism-collectivism may be more obvious in some narratives than in others. Take for example the movie *Outsourced* (2006), whose main topic is intercultural communication. The film tells the story of an American salesman, Todd Anderson (Josh Hamilton), whose department has been outsourced. Consequently, Todd travels to India to train the people who are going to replace him. Since the movie's first aim is to entertain a US (or Western) audience, it hardly scratches the surface of Indian culture. Overall, the narrative maintains a light tone and uses a few common clichés for comical relief: the "funny" English these Indian people speak as opposed to the "standard" "American" accent, the Holi festival of colors as the cultural counterpart for Halloween, etc. Occasionally, the American ways are mildly smiled at, but the "normal", "default" world view is the Western (US) way, especially when following the obligatory love interest, in a rather uncharacteristic way, the tone becomes more serious and the topic of marriage is dealt with. In the American/Western view, marriage is a romantic agreement based on love between individuals. In a collectivist society, marriage represents rather a contract between families, and the role of love in it is significantly different. As a matter of fact, in collectivist societies, considerations other than love weigh heavily in marriage (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005b, 91). Yet in spite of the fact that research shows more marital satisfaction in arranged marriage than in love marriages in India, and more in Indian love marriage than in American marriages, the character Asha (Ayesha Dharker) is shown as victimized by the arranged marriage system - “my only holiday in Goa” -, and no understanding is shown for this “other” marriage system; not by the main character Todd, nor by the narrative as a whole. When the two characters walk together in public, they are not supposed to have an intimate conversation, or to hold hands, except if Asha is taking Todd’s hand to help him step down some stairs. Social control is omnipresent and presented in a threatening way. The narrative presents only negative aspects of collectivism; positive aspects such as protection, care, support, and solidarity are completely ignored in this picture. It would therefore be interesting to see an Indian screenwriter turn the (indigenous and foreign) tables, and write an acculturated adaptation of the US script.

The Specific-diffuse Dimension

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, 83ff.) explain the specific-diffuse divide using Kurt Lewin’s (1936) distinction between a G-type (e.g. Germany) and a U-type culture (e.g. the US). The G-type/U-type dimension refers to what cultures consider to be public or private, whether life spheres are cut up into neatly separated sub-sections (e.g. work, leisure time, family…) or not, and how accessible (or not) certain life spheres are to specific groups of people. G-type persons represent a life space that is predominantly private, diffuse, i.e. not divided into separate sections, and well closed off from outsiders. Conversely, U-type people represent a smaller private life sphere, and a larger public life space, which is cut up into various neatly separated sub-sections. Whereas each sub-section (e.g. family, leisure, work…) is easily accessible from the outside, the passage from one sub-section (say work) to another (say sports) is more difficult. A stereotypical example of a G-type person would be Herr Doktor Müller, who is not only called Doktor Müller at the university, but also at the butcher or at the local school. In a G-type society, his doctoral authority leaks over into all the sections of both his public and his private life spaces. Even his wife may be called Frau Doktor Müller. Conversely, the U-type CEO of a company may have authority at work, but when (s)he leaves the company, (s)he leaves her/his authority with it. At the tennis court, (s)he is just another player, and at the bakery just another client. Whereas it is much harder to enter both the public and private life spaces of the G-type, once in, you have access to all the life spaces pertaining to work, leisure, family, etc. The belief that you can separate work from pleasure, or politics from religion is thus a very "Western", i.e. specific (as opposed to diffuse), idea.

Once again, this cultural dimension may be helpful to both the traveling screenwriter and the intercultural scholar of narratives. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, 90) present a graph based on a survey of respondents from fifty two countries reacting to the following situation: Your boss asks you as a subordinate to help him paint his house in the week-end. What do you do? Answers depend on whether the respondents consider their boss to remain their boss outside work or not. Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland score the highest on the specific end of the scale, while China, Nepal and Burkina Faso score the highest on the diffuse end of the scale.

However schematical, the G-type/U-type dimension allows users to describe and explain various types of intercultural misunderstandings, which I am sure, many a reader will recognize. Here are some examples. When a G-type person meets a U-type person for the first time, the latter may appear very open and accessible to the former. This is likely to happen because the U-type person gives easy access to an albeit limited portion of its larger public life space. U-types who just met someone are likely to start talking about subjects G-types would only talk about after knowing their interlocutor for a longer period of time. In addition, this openness may produce the wrong effect on the G-type person, who is not aware that this openness only applies to a limited portion of the public life space. After all, a G-type person is not used to the segregation of life spaces and may thus mistakenly conclude that now s/he has access to all sorts of mental or physical spaces, which would otherwise be closed off by privacy conventions. This is how a G-type person may become "intrusive" to the U-type beholder and find herself suddenly blocked off, because in fact, s/he was attempting to trespass on a different segregated sub-section. Conversely, the G-type is likely to appear cagey and mysterious in the eye of the U-type because of the larger sized private space and the protected access to that space. The point is that in a G-type society, initial entrance into the life spheres requires more time, but once accepted inside, the other person has access to (practically) all life spaces. There are no segregations separating one sub-section from the other. Another commonly known case of misunderstanding or miscommunication related to this cultural dimension is called “losing face”[6]. Again, a number of mishaps occur at the same time. Firstly, because the private space is larger in the G-type world than in the U-type world, it is easier for the U-type to offend the G-type than vice versa. In other words, there are more chances that the U-type deals publicly with content the G-type considers to be private, and embarrassment follows. Moreover, because of the diffuse nature of the G-type, as opposed to the more specific nature of the U-type, G-types consider persons, their actions and thoughts as one whole, while U-types separate people’s identity from their actions, or their specific ideas. Imagine the following situation: a U-type person Hans, from the Netherlands, discusses the concept of a bridge designed by a G-type person Giovanni, from Italy, and at some point, Hans calls one of Giovanni’s ideas “crazy”, whereupon Giovanni promptly leaves the room. What happened is that Giovanni did not interpret Hans’s remark as intended. Whereas Hans only referred to Giovanni’s idea about the bridge, Giovanni took the criticism personally and understood it to refer to his whole person. He interpreted Hans’s criticism as: “*You* are crazy”, and thereupon left the room. The expression “losing face” offers an appropriate metonymical denomination for actually pointing to the part as a whole. The person does not only lose her face, she loses the dignity of her whole person. As such, the G-type/U-type divide ties in with the particularist-universalist dimension: reference is made to the whole person as opposed to isolated tasks, rules or functions.

The G-type/U-type distinction may also inspire writers to design character behavior. For example, the writers of the sitcom *Seinfeld* have made frequent use of this cultural dimension divide for comical relief[7]. In episode 10 from season 7, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Loretta’s doctor takes a lemonade out of Larry’s fridge without asking, and Larry calls him on it. The refrigerator figures literally in Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s (1998, 85) description of Lewin’s G-type/U-type divide. Another G-type/U-type related scene occurs in season 7, episode 3, called *The Maestro*, where Elaine dates the conductor of an orchestra who insists everyone call him “Maestro”, also at the restaurant… The Maestro recalls

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[6] Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 89) connect this feature with the collectivist-individualist divide: the social shame-culture as opposed to the individualist guilt-culture.

[7] I thank my Intercultural communication students at Emerson College for pointing me to these scenes.

Herr Doktor Müller mentioned above. In episode 16 from season 6, called *The Kiss Hello*, Jerry and George are walking down the street when they meet Elaine and her friend Wendy (Wendie Malick), who is a physical therapist. George asks Wendy for treatment for a sore arm. Later, Elaine scolds him for asking Wendy questions about her work outside her office. Finally, I mention episode 18 from season 3, called “The Boyfriend (2)”. After having been out one time with Jerry, Keith Hernandez calls Jerry and asks him to help him move some furniture. Jerry does not feel right about this since “he hardly knows the guy”. His face reads “Indecent Proposal” all over as he explains to Elaine that “this is a big step in a male relationship,… the biggest”. The sequence illustrates at once the specific nature of Jerry’s relationships: Keith Hernandez,–the Hispanic name suggests a G-type person?–, tried to cross a sub-section in Jerry’s specifically arranged life spaces: from going out in a public place into Keith’s apartment. All these scenes have in common that they not only poke fun using the specific-diffuse dimension, but that they ridicule behavior that sits at the diffuse end of the scale. Since the US scores high on the specific scale, that is probably the safest choice to make.

Other Cultural Dimensions

As stated above, intercultural communication scholars have suggested several more cultural dimensions, some of which I can only briefly mention here. All refer to patterns of collective human behavior that have been studied at a societal (mostly country) level. It follows that they all suggest useful applications both at the level of screenwriters working in a multi-cultural environment, and at the level of an intercultural study of narrative. For example, Edward T. Hall’s (1976) distinction between high and low context cultures points to societies where a lot of previous knowledge is necessary before one can function in that society, as opposed to societies where little or no previous knowledge is needed. Besides the obvious relevance for people working abroad, the dimension suggests narrative-related questions with respect to the treatment of exposition or backstory: how much backstory is needed before the viewer can follow the narrative, and how does the narrator deal with it? Another cultural dimension is called the “Power Distance Index” (Hofstede 2001, 79). It measures to what degree a society tolerates unequally distributed power. The power distance index deals with questions such as how authority is coded in a production team, how a boss deals with her/his employees, how parents deal with their children, etc. The achievement versus ascription based status draws from the work of the American anthropologist Ralph

Linton (see, e.g., Parsons 1951, 42) and refers to societies where people are valued for what they do versus for who they are. For example, the classical screenwriter's rule that a protagonist must actively pursue her or his dramatic goal suggests achievement based status. The masculinity vs. femininity divide concerns what the concepts mean in a society and the division of roles between men and women in a society (see, e.g., Hofstede 2001, 279ff.). An obvious link emerges here with the existing gender studies. Cultural dimensions also deal with how people manage time and space. For example Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998, 123ff.) discuss past, present and future oriented societies, what it means "to be on time" in one culture as opposed to another, and how this relates to the organization of work and life in general. Once again, applications for expat screenwriters as well as an intercultural study of narrative are obvious. Finally, with respect to the human interaction with space, I mention the distinction between inner and outer directed societies, which is based on Rotter's (1966) distinction between the internal and external locus of control. This dimension points to societies where people are convinced that they control their environment as opposed to those societies where people are convinced that whatever happens in the world is beyond their control and that therefore, they must adapt to the world to the best of their abilities. Once more, the active or re-active protagonist springs to mind.

Conclusions

It is impossible to fully discuss the possibilities and ramifications of cross-cultural screenwriting in terms of cultural dimensions within one essay. Yet even a succinct presentation of the subject suggests that the cultural dimensions as studied in intercultural communication studies open up some promising new avenues for research. As indicated above, cultural dimensions could assist research into cross-cultural screenwriting as a professional practice: how standardized are professional procedures within and across countries and cultures? For example, (how) are screenwriters trained to work with the other members of the crew? The director, the producer, the DOP, the actors, colleague writers…? How do the aforementioned cultural dimensions observed at the country level intervene with various professional and other societal motivational value types when screenwriters work in a multi-national or multi-cultural environment? Needless to say, to understand the cultural features that enhance or inhibit cross-cultural screenwriting represents only half of the solution. The next step will consist in learning how to manage the observed cultural boundaries.

New lines of research appear also regarding an intercultural study of narratives, even though some prior caveats are in order (see above). Since cultural dimensions refer to societal (mostly national) patterns, critics have pointed to potential problems when applying them to the study of individual behavior. These problems concern both the explanatory and predictive power of cultural dimensions at the level of individual behavior. Indeed, whereas cultural dimensions may emerge as one-dimensional, bi-polar scales when applied to large numbers, i.e. at the societal level, individuals may display unpredictable behavior that combines the extremes of multiple cultural dimensions. Consequently, one should not *a priori* assume that the cultural dimensions expressed in one particular narrative would automatically coincide with the dominant values of its country of production or the region that it represents. Narratives that have involved a multi-national or multi-cultural production could be particularly interesting in this line of research. Screenwriters and storytellers more in general with an eye for marketing have been known to adapt their narratives to more dominant cultural models and Western market conditions, irrespective of their own cultural background. However cultural dimensions do allow researchers to recognize individual behavior or specific situations as tokens pertaining to or actualizing one or more types of value orientation. The film and TV examples discussed above suggest that, at times, one can *ex post facto* interpret a singular occurrence of narratorial and character behavior as the specific *ad hoc* actualization of an intermediate position on one or more bi-polar cultural dimensions. For example, when watching *Bella* (2006), the universalism-particularism divide allows one to recognize Manny's behavior as universalist, Jose's as particularist, and Nina's life as being threatened first by universalism and then being saved by particularism.

Another difference between a study of cultural dimensions at country level and a study of narratives in terms of cultural dimensions concerns the object of study: whereas the intercultural communication scholars study the interpretation (by thousands of subjects) of behavior represented in problem-scenarios, the (one!) narrative analyst studies the behavior represented in one narrative. A more equivalent analytical situation would require a study of the interpretation of thousands of real viewers interpreting behavior represented in (a sequence in) a narrative. This raises the question if and how one can compare research results across narrative analysts, or even replicate analyses. Even though this problem is not proper to a study of narratives in terms of cultural dimensions,–it