Culture regained:
Situated and compound image schemas

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Abstract

The hallmark of a genuinely socio-cultural perspective on image schemas must be its ability to account for their variation both across cultures and in situated cognition. To counterbalance the prevalent research strategies which have highlighted highly generic cognitive resources that cross-cut a broad range of different contexts, I propose two complementary analytical strategies that make nuances in image schema usage more visible: The first lies in focusing more on how image schemas interact at the level of whole scenes, at which they form compound gestalts – a step allowing the analyst to get a handle on complex tropes. The second lies in evading the practice of endowing image schemas with a maximally decontextualized ontology – a step opening an avenue to augmented descriptions of image schemas and their context-bound usage. This analytical strategy produces “situated image schemas”, descriptions capturing how “primitive” image schemas are actualized with regard to the kind of embodiment they involve, as well as their intentional, emotional and motivational nature within specific settings, or their embedding within wider action scenarios and even a cultural ethos.

Keywords: augmented image schemas, gestalts, image schema ontology, situated cognition, cultural variation

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The term imagery highlights the fact that concepts originate as representations of sensory experience, even though they may subsequently undergo complex processes of formation and recombination. (Palmer 1996: 46)

… if you attend only to structure … [y]ou lose, or at least overlook, the very thing that gives image schemas their life, motivating force, and relevance to human meaning, namely their embeddedness within affect-laden experience.

(Johnson, this volume)

1. The socio-cultural situatedness of image schemas

In cognitive linguistics, the claims staked in understanding meaning are currently widening. In a recent interview Johnson defined meaning as “located in the complex, dynamic arc of interactions that includes brains, bodies, environments, and cultural artifacts and institutions” (Pires and Bittencourt, to appear). A firm recognition of the cultural side of this arc will affect the way we use image schemas as descriptive devices in several important ways that have not be discussed comprehensively yet. This chapter elaborates what is cultural about image schemas or, more precisely, how the notion of image schema can be better adapted to an analysis that takes into account cultural context. When I speak of culture here I wish to highlight the inherent situatedness of cognitive forms in the shared interaction between humans (cf. Gibbs 1999; Zlatev 1997); hence we will only become fully aware of the cultural nature of image schemas through a situated and context-sensitive analysis of their usage.

Given these brief preliminaries, this chapter will expound two major perspectives that a cultural analysis of image schemas should bring into play. In order to move beyond the classical view sketched in Section 1, I will make a case for widening the ontology of image schemas and the methodology of their study (see 1.2). Section 2 contends that we need to direct more empirical efforts to the study of “compound image schemas” and their cognitive effects, while Section 3 argues for developing more context-adaptive descriptors of “situated image schemas”. The latter argument will draw on developmental and ethnographic studies indicating that image schema acquisition may be in interesting ways cultural, and that seemingly universal image schemas may become culturally augmented or nuanced through their usage context.
1.1. From the classical to a socio-cultural view on image schemas

Ever since Johnson’s (1987) landmark publication, cognitive linguists have treated image schemas as simple topological structures of trans-modal imagery, which are acquired as the child negotiates the environment with her body. They (minimally) encompass the kinesthetic, the visual and auditory modalities. From a functional viewpoint image schemas support the topology of metaphorical mappings, categorization, and many aspects of grammar. The notion has also been used to explain how conceptual thought developmentally emerges from embodied (i.e., proprioceptive and kinesthetic) imagery, thus giving us an interface mechanism, holding one foot in either. The canonical understanding of image schemas strongly relies on a list of prototypical examples like CONTAINER, UP-DOWN, NEAR-FAR, or PATH, and two or three dozens other ones (Johnson 1987: 126; Cienki 1997: 3). All these are cognitive structures of a very basic and simple sort.

Image schemas, qua schemas, are acquired not through the specifics of individual episodes humans encounter, but through feature-overlaps between many experiential contexts. Hence, image schemas comprise primary building blocks of cognition, regardless of how these units combine in any given setting. There is also a certain concurrent tendency to focus on image schemas as structures of cognitive competence entrenched in long-term memory, although Johnson also devoted some thought to their inherently intentional nature and thus demonstrated interest in how they are enacted in situ. Not surprisingly, although image schemas are recognized by Johnson as being “relatively malleable” with varying contexts (1987: 30), descriptive techniques for contextual adaptation are largely left unspecified.

All this points to the standard account’s dominant interest in the situation-independent repertoire of imagery that members of a cultural group share or, beyond that, in cross-cultural universals. Thereby, the classical account has overlooked that image schemas are not only generalized mental entities, but also ones that are instantiated in socio-cultural contexts (cf. Gibbs 1999). Rather than rejecting what I see as the canonical view, I will furnish it with a dialectical partner here, a complementary, more context-sensitive vantage point to address matters. Thus, the socio-culturally situated perspective embraced in this chapter aims to return “qualitative flesh and

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blood to our image-schematic skeletons”, something that Johnson (this volume) recognizes as desirable, but remains skeptical about.

1.2. A cluster of biases

Self-imposed limitations hold sway over much of cognitive linguistics, which mar its potential as a full-fledged socio-cultural account of cognition, despite recent attempts to remedy this state of affairs (e.g., Jensen de López and Sinha 2000; Sinha 1999). These limitations have also left their imprint on the dominant notion of image schema. As I shall argue, the ontology and methodology of image schema research remains grounded in mutually strengthening biases which are not exactly congenial to a socio-cultural view.

- The universalist acquisition bias: Image schemas are, by virtue of universal pre-linguistic embodiment in infancy, developmental universals.
- The feed-forward bias: Embodiment is rooted in general kinesthetic experience in space, whereby the body shapes culture, but not vice versa.
- The micro-unit bias: The simple image-schematic building-blocks of cognition are ontologically or functionally prior to higher-level gestalts.
- The maximal schematicity bias: Image schemas are what settings share at the widest schematic level; their cognitive profile does not stem from being situated in narrower kinds of settings.
- The de-contextualized methods bias: Image schemas are supported by experimental and linguistic data centering on the word and phrase level, less so by discourse-analytic and ethnographic analyses of larger units of data with a sensitivity for pragmatic usage and contextuality.

After this short preview, I will now turn to some prerequisites for a socio-culturally situated analysis of image schemas and, in the course of the argument, discuss the biases further and suggest alternatives. The two decisive steps for a socio-culturally situated analysis I see are (a) widening the focus by studying compound image schemas and (b) developing a theory of situated image schemas.
2. **Compound image schemas**

A culturalized view requires a closer look at the transformational and combinatorial capacities image schemas exhibit in usage contexts of some complexity. This section attempts to discuss and sub-classify under the heading of “compound” effects of complex image-schematic processes both in short and in temporally more extended cognitive events.

Beginning with a general division, image-schematic gestalts may occur as primitive (basal) units or as compounds: Image schemas like CONTAINER, LINK, FORCE, CENTER-PERIPHERY, or BALANCE are primitive to the extent that their topological structure cannot be meaningfully decomposed into yet simpler gestalts.\(^2\) Most image schemas discussed in the literature (cf. Oakley, to appear) are primitive ones.

Compound image schemas, by contrast, emerge when several simpler ones hook up in time or space to create more complex groupings that are reducible into simpler gestalts. I follow Cienki’s (1997: 9) view that “image schemas … usually do not occur in an isolated fashion in experience, but rather are experienced grouped as gestalts or wholes”, many of which prototypically occur together “in an experiential gestalt structure”. For example, CENTERY-PERIPHERY, NEAR-FAR, SCALE, and FORCE co-occur in the bodily experience of being a center of force which decreases with distance in a scalar fashion, like when a hand is extended (Cienki 1997: 7-9). Other compounds, I would add, though less familiar from embodied experience, may be created in the imagination.

I will subsume under “compound image schemas” those that add topological structures within a single static locus and those that dynamically construe a mental scene as one image schema following upon another. Applying a photographic metaphor, the difference between these two kinds of compound is much like that between a multiple-exposure of the same negative and a movie-clip of sequentially unfolding images.\(^3\) The former type involves static superimpositions of image schemas, while the latter, more dynamic type relies on our ability to perform what Lakoff (1987: 440-444) and Johnson (1987: 26) call image schema transformations, e.g., zooming in

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2. Image-schematic primitives constitute “irreducible gestalts” (Johnson 1987: 44, 62) whose integrity is destroyed by breaking down their internal structure.

3. As I define it here, the feature of compound-ness may also be distributed in time, even when each snapshot conforms to a primitive image schema.
and out between MULTIPLEX and MASS, or anticipating the trajectory of a moving object in a specific construal of the PATH schema.

We can often process a complex scene either as a static configuration in which all facets are conceived as coexistent and simultaneous or as a dynamic series of successively transforming states. Thus, image schemas like BALANCE, MATCHING, MERGING, CONTACT, LINK, SPLITTING and others can be understood either as a process or, when receiving “end-point focus”, as a state achieved (Cienki 1997: 7). This makes the static-dynamic distinction usage-dependent and a matter of degree.

2.1. Static compound schemas

One first type of compound image schema is (relatively) static. It results from stacking simpler image schemas on top of each other in a single imagisticative locus through image-schematic superimposition. An example is superimposing a connective CONDUIT (i.e., a FORCE moving an ENTITY through a LINK) onto the space between two CONTAINERS to create the well-known folk-model of communication.

Compound image schemas are inherently present in any complex posture which activates primitive image schemas in various body parts simultaneously. For example, the spine can be STRAIGHT, the arms in BALANCE, the shoulders up, the chest a rigid CONTAINER, etc., all at the same time and in the single integrative locus of one’s body image. Arguably, such configurations are stored and recalled as a complex image-schematic gestalts. An analysis of body-related image schemas has been indirectly suggested by Gibbs (cf. 2003: 11) who had experimental subjects rate the various meanings of the expression to stand and found that the word combines the imageschematic profiles of BALANCE, VERTICALITY, CENTER-PERIPHERY, RESISTANCE, and LINKAGE (with varying situational emphases).

Furthermore, compound image schemas of the static usage type frequently appear in philosophical or cosmological models and metaphors (Kimmel 2002). Examples are image schemas of SYSTEMS (Kövecses 2002) characterized by LINK or BALANCE relations, or hierarchic action chains.

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4. This mirrors the difference between Langacker’s (1987:144-146) construal types of “summary/sequential scanning”.

from God via the church to the layman which involve a passing of FORCE through a CONDUIT-like chain from ABOVE.\(^5\)

2.2. Dynamic compound schemas

A second type of compound image schema is more dynamic. It occurs when simple image schemas are lined up in a scenario-like sequence whose contour we imagine. This may be thought of as a multi-frame clip passing the mind’s eye, in which sizes, relations or vantage points undergo change by virtue of image schema transformations.

The simplest dynamic compounds are probably elicited by words. The processing of such verbs like narrow or approach requires imagining various points in time over which a trajector and a landmark move closer to each other. Other relatively simple dynamic contours occur when we manipulate a real context so that it keeps its match with an imaginative standard. Gibbs and Colston (1995) mention the example of a shepherd maneuvering his herd to keep it close enough together not to fall apart but dispersed enough to keep them moving. The shepherd continually gauges the present state of affairs against a MULTIPLEX-MASS transformation in a certain BALANCE. In a slightly more complex situation, when the whole herd has to be driven so that one escapee can be caught, the multiplex is superimposed on an imaginary TRAJECTORY anticipating where the renegade can be picked up again.

In dynamic compounds, the modality or direction of movement may change. Thus, by adding CONTRACTION to EXPANSION, we get the more complex image-schematic gestalt of PULSATION. A very similar, though slightly different image-schematic scenario is well known from the study of anger metaphors (Lakoff and Kövecses 1987). Here, the metaphor scenario of a pressurized container can be imagined as a sequence of gradual WELLING UP, rapid EXPLOSION, and the resulting DEFLATION.\(^6\) In this and similar ways, dynamic contours often underlie what D’Andrade calls “social scripts” (1995).

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5. Langacker (1987: 304-306) posits the combination of imagistic and schematic units as basic functional principle of language processing. Grammatical structure mentally sets up an elaboration-site, i.e., an analog topology that begins weakly specified but is gradually enriched as new words are processed and leave an “imprint”.

6. I introduce these new terms because they capture a specific modality of more general schemas like EXPANSION and CONTRACTION.
How we imagine emotions more generally also relates to dynamic compounds. Johnson (1999: 92) argues for the image-schematic nature of so-called “vitality affect contours” of various kinds. We experience bodily activation contours over time like “the felt quality of anger or fear – the ‘rush’ of fear, the ‘crescendo’ of anger that leads to an angry ‘outburst’, the ‘fading away’ of one’s joyful exuberance”.

Although all examples so far involve relatively short scenario-like contours, it has been hypothesized that extended events evoke imagistic clips with similar contours. This can mean enacting an entire dance choreography or ritual, perceiving a piece of music (Cook 1990), or imaging a story’s plot (cf. Turner 1996) as an extended image-schematic contour. Taking narrative as a testbed, Kimmel (2005) develops a full cognitive model of how such macro-image schemas may be created. Simple image schemas found in the text-base are compounded in the readers’ mind. One cognitive purpose of the resulting image-schematic contour is to create an extended mnemonic of the plot dynamics. Moreover, as with musical forms, esthetic meaning and emotionality may reside in this contour, e.g., through the imagistic build up of tension and its subsequent resolution. Finally, the model suggests that the build-up of image-schematic compounds serves inferential purposes, by enabling multiple readings as well as the recovery of implicit meaning. Thus compounds facilitate or constrain the creation of emergent cognitive structure.

2.3. Interacting image schemas: Irony frames and gestalt switches

Image-schematic thought allows for further complex effects, which nuance the compositionality of image schemas in interesting ways. Quite simply, it is not always the case that compounds create a perfect match between their constituents. Text cues may encourage us to integrate image-schematic elements not compatible in a straightforward way. I will exemplify two related such effects, irony frames and gestalt switches.

7. This case-study of the novel “Heart of Darkness” purports to illustrate how the joint work done by metaphors is largely based on the affinities and combinatorial fit of the image schemas inherent in them.

8. Specifically, I argue for the possibility that spatial, temporal, intentional agent-related, and emotive/mood-related features may be integrated in a single compound structure.
Turner (1996: 64-67) suggests that the perception of irony may depend on holding two inverted image schemas in focus simultaneously. Analyzing a scene of Shakespeare’s *King John* he speaks of an “ironic tension between the image schemas”. The powerful king, who senses his impeding decline, commands the messenger foreboding ill news (who is probably kneeling before him) “pour down thy weather”, thus ironically likening him, who is a mere subject, to powers beyond the king’s own, those of nature and fate. According to Turner, the scene involves a juxtaposition of two inverse UP-DOWN predications. Werth (1999) discusses a similar juxtaposition of two conflicting metaphors of the type GOOD IS UP. In one text passage of Forster’s *A Passage to India*, the topography of a city in India is predicated on power (CONTROL IS UP, POWERFUL IS UP), because the colonial Englishmen live on a hill rising above the rest of the city. This may be seen as an axiology in which one end of the scale is defined as positive, the other as negative (Krzeszowski 1993). Another axiology, antithetical to the first, presents a SCALE of vitality, ranging from the least animate Englishmen to the vegetation as most animate, with the natives situated in between. Both axiologies together create an ironical image of the powerful, but, as it were, lifeless English. This particular irony frame superimposes (or co-aligns) two axiological schemas, one of which is the inversion of the other, thus setting up a double-axiology.

Secondly, complex thought processes may also rely on “gestalt-switches” (cf. Wittgenstein 1953). Although previous uses of the notion choose other foci, I will define a gestalt-switch as the imaginary oscillation between two incompatible image-schematic configurations that are nonetheless understood as integral. The skill of performing gestalt-switches is notably involved in certain mental operations in philosophy, theology, and mathematics. An example discussed by Arnheim (1969: 287) and Blumenberg ([1979] 1996: 445) is Nicolas Cusanus’ “Sprengmetapher” (‘explosive metaphor’) of God as a sphere with an infinite radius and its center everywhere. This idea makes the circumference converge with a perfect line, yet, so we are told, it belongs to a circle. As I interpret this, what our mind’s eye is encouraged to do is to move away from this line to make the curvature become visible. Whenever we think that the curvature should be visible, we remember the paradoxical instruction that it cannot be so and correct our image by superimposing a line to make it conform. Thus we try moving even further outwards, ad infinitum. Of course our imaginative act will not continue endlessly, but its effect will be to suggest infinite distance through the corrective gestalt switch from curve to line.
Olds (1991: 18) discusses a comparable example from the Chinese Buddhist philosopher Fa-Tsang (A.D. 643-712). For teaching the notion of infinite progression the sage used the image of the Golden Lion “each of whose hairs contains another golden lion, such that all lions and all the hairs together enter into each other in infinite progression”. In addition, all the lions embraced by all the hairs simultaneously enter each single hair, filling it with an infinite numbers of lions. This complex image elicits what we may call a recurring NESTING relation within a multi-level PART-WHOLE image schema and simultaneously an IDENTITY image schema (as a shorthand for the involved structure matching). Simultaneously with nesting there is structural replication, a kind of micro-macro iconicity between PARTS and WHOLEs. Fa-Tsang’s goal is to intimate the idea of unending mutual inclusion and a radically non-hierarchic view of reality. We can start out on every conceivable level of reality and all other levels will always be contained within it. Fa-Tsang’s ontological statement is, of course, paradoxical. According to our everyday knowledge, something can either include something else or be identical with it, never both. The paradox is realized through jumping between an image schema of PART-WHOLE/NESTING on the one hand and one of structural IDENTITY on the other, while understanding both as integral. This gestalt-switch occurs as soon as we direct our attention from the inclusion hierarchy to the isomorphism between the different levels. As an emergent effect, the nested levels appear interchangeable because they can be topologically matched.

In concluding this brief sampling of more complex effects of image-schematic compounding, we may compare irony frames and gestalt switches. The two are apparently sibling phenomena in that both match what appears incoherent, with irony frames representing more static images of tension, whereas gestalt switches tend towards the opposite pole of dynamically oscillating images. Studying these and similar cognitive effects is highly instructive: First, they point towards a usage-based analysis rooted in the insight that, rather than being topological givens with narrow combinatory constraints, image schemas are often used in fluid ways and undergo complex reshapings. Secondly, we can glean from the examples how image schema analysis might be applied at the higher level of dynamic thought models (cf. Kimmel 2002). While characterizing complex thought as mere collections of image schemas may often prove inadequate, the perspective remains eminently useful when it instead chooses as a descriptive topic the interaction of several image schemas and their effects.
2.4. Compounds and theory

After this typological survey we may return to the wider issue of how we define the ontology of image schemas. Without question, compound image schemas move back to center stage the notion of “gestalt,” which has been somewhat neglected since Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987) introduced it to cognitive linguistics. It thus seems timely, even though prosaic, to remind readers of the fact that not only primitive configurations such as the CONTAINER schema have gestalt features like the in-out relation and a boundary. Many interesting gestalts in perception, thought, and action are higher-level gestalts like the ones just discussed.

I will examine further along how, by dint of cultural learning, complex image-schematic gestalts – though structurally more complex than highly intuitive pet examples like the CONTAINER – may gradually become “psychologically simple” – one of Lakoff’s (1987: 489, 525) criteria for a successful image-schematic gestalt. While it may be an overgeneralization that image schemas need to be “cognitively simple, easy to learn”, they will probably remain “easy to remember, and easy to use” once they are acquired (Lakoff 1987: 538). An alternative hypothesis would be that image schemas are encoded at multiple mental hierarchies, out of which combinatory high-level gestalts can be just as easily generated as simpler ones.

One research bias that seems to be characteristic of cognitive linguistics is that the canonically listed CONTAINER, CENTER-PERIPHERY, UP-DOWN, LINK, PATH, or BALANCE schemas remain the primary object of attention. A focus on these primitive schemas is a logical consequence of looking for situation-independent patterns in grammar or the non-situated meanings of words. While reducing the scope of an image-schema analysis that might be potentially interesting to the humanities and social sciences or, for that matter, to linguists concerned with larger chunks of discourse, the practice in itself is, of course, perfectly legitimate. However, behind this may stand an implicit ontological bias that is untenable. The sole focus on primary image-schematic building-blocks makes these primary image schemas seem either functionally or ontologically more basic than complex, culture-specific packages. Implicitly, an analytic ontology is preferred to a more holistic one. Overall, I can see no ontological grounds for excluding compound gestalts from the image schema notion. Their psychological reality in a given context, however, is an empirical issue.
Socio-cultural situatedness becomes manifest in studying the interdependence of individual cognitive dispositions and specific cultural contexts. Current cognitive-science approaches emphasize “structural coupling” of the cognitive system with the environment as a general property of cognition (cf. Gibbs 1999). As I see it, two avenues are open to scholars who accept the importance of a situated perspective on image schemas: We can leave image schemas narrowly defined by proposing other theoretical descriptors for capturing their dynamic interaction with situated themes in discourse (e.g., Quinn 1991). Alternatively, we can frame the image schema notion itself more widely by describing situation-adaptive subvariants of generic schemas. Taking this second route here, I will argue for fleshing image schemas out by specifying situated aspects of their acquisition and usage. In other words, I will discuss ways of descriptively specifying how image schemas structurally couple with cultural (or natural) environments and thus take on a situated ontology.

3.1. Image schemas in memory and in on-line use

Situating image schemas requires looking at on-line cognition. In the past, there was a certain tendency to understand image schemas exclusively as permanent structures in long-term memory. While entrenched image-schematic dispositions are a valid hypothesis to consider (cf. Gibbs and Berg 2002), we may also stress the fluidity of image schemas or even argue against viewing them as stable representations and for seeing them as assembled “on the fly” in on-line use, as Gibbs (this volume) does. The least we can say is that to exclusively consider image schemas as transcontextual constructs which reflect general properties of the human cognitive inventory is reductionist. Applied ethnographic contexts like symbolic healing underscore this possible double perspective:

… [d]emonic possession … begins with an inchoate (pre-objectified) feeling of loss of control over the body … This is then objectified by a healer in terms of what Johnson calls the “container schema” and is diagnosed as an intrusion across a boundary, to be corrected by a suitable form of embodied action in response. What emerges, then, is something quite particular and also something comparable to other contexts in which the container schema is similarly activated. (Strathern 1996: 188-89 [emphasis added])
Thus, I would not yet go so far as to say that image schemas are only and always fluid structures without fixed memory traces of any sort. Instead, what we need to cultivate more is a stereoscopic view on context-bound and transcontextual functions that image schemas fulfill (Kimmel 2002: 165-68), a double ontology.

3.2. Situated image-schema acquisition

For fleshing out the context-adaptive aspects of the ontology of image schemas, it is useful to look first at the mechanisms whereby their acquisition reveals cultural and contextual facets.

The cognitive linguistic mainstream to date retains a relatively a-cultural take on how basic cognitive forms emerge from embodiment (Sinha 1999). What looms large are universal patterns of bodily experience that developmentally prefigure conceptual discourse. This is conceived either as grounding of simple images in transcontextual kinesthetic experiences like the FORCE schema (Johnson 1987) or as the grounding of metaphoric mappings in primary scenes – co-occurrences of source and target – like RELATIONSHIPS ARE ENClosures, DIFFicult IS HEAVy, PLEASING IS TASTy, or IMPORTANT IS BIG (Grady 1997, this volume). Image schemas are thus thought of as acquired through kinesthetic, spatial, and sensory experiences of a general nature. A universalist acquisition bias inheres in this, assuming that image schemas are, by virtue of pre-linguistic embodied experience in infancy, developmental universals. Yet, image schemas are also acquired or refined in more specific interactions with other bodies, social space, social interaction or rituals, and culture-specific artifacts. Studies with a developmental or acquisition focus document at least four kinds of culture-specific concept formation that involve the body.

First, learning particular and complex image schemas is often mediated by formative special practices or settings. Shore (1991) describes ritualized postural techniques that are instrumental in acquiring the twin concepts mana (‘generative potency’, ‘luck’) and tapu (‘sacred’, ‘bound’, ‘set-aside’). When tapu is imposed on people or objects “in the interest of rendering these people or objects intelligible and redirecting personal potency for general or cosmic ends” (Shore 1991: 17), body techniques are involved that can be connected with BINDING, CONTAINMENT, CENTEREDNESS, RIGIDITY and STASIS schemas, which must be co-activated in body awareness. Clearly, this is a compound or superimposition of several simpler image schemas, which
is difficult to master and in which each aspect further nuances body awareness. Learning this contained body style begins in infancy with the encouragement of stress impulse control and a technique of sitting in the fataʿi position (legs crossed and arms resting on the thighs). The same embodied style later informs postural attributes of chiefs, dance, ritual and gender styles.  

Elsewhere, Shore (1996: 207-261) discusses complex learning through specialized cultural practices in great detail. He argues that aboriginal novices, over several years, distill a complex “walkabout” schema (arguably to do with CYCLE, ITERATION and INSIDE-OUTSIDE) of geographical and epistemic relevance, from a multitude of overlapping episodic memories. In a parallel process, ritual experiences are gradually transformed into procedural schemas, while mythological narratives are transformed into semantic schemas.

Second, image schema acquisition is mediated through a mix of overt and covert body practices that are ubiquitous in everyday life. Geurts (2003) studies the image schema of BALANCE across contexts in the Anlo-Ewe culture of Ghana (see below). Bourdieu’s (1977: 90-92), ethnography of the Algerian Kabyles, while not introducing the notion of image schema itself yet, describes a complex system of gendered homologies in which postures, practices, and social space together define OUTWARD and UP schemas as male and INWARD and DOWN schemas as female. Bourdieu’s theory of embodied cultural knowledge – couched in terms of generative principles called “habitus” and concretely manifested in bodily “hexis”, i.e., posture and movement patterns – sees ritual and everyday activities as continuous “structural exercises” for particular schemas.

Third, image schema acquisition is mediated through the cultural environment of artifacts or spatial arraying (cf. Toren 1993). According to Sinha and Jensen de López (2000: 31), children employ social knowledge of the canonical use of objects in conjunction with their innate capacity for schematizing spatial relations. The image-schematic nature of cultural objects may be a prototypical ecological affordance that influences language (Sinha and Jensen de López 2000: 22). Thus, Zapotec children are not as quick as Danish or English children to notice linguistic differences between

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9. Shore (1991: 17) calls this learning by “sensory metonymy”. It is triggered, as with Grady’s (1997) account of “primary scenes”, by feature co-occurrence in a setting. But whereas Grady emphasizes co-occurring attributes in infancy in basic nurturing or kinesthetic experience, Shore’s formative co-occurrences continue throughout adolescence and are culturally orchestrated.
senses of under and in because they are not encouraged to play with upright cups, and more generally because Zapotecs use a smaller variety of containers they tend to use more multi-functionally.

Finally, acquisition is mediated through language itself (Bowerman 1996; Zlatev 1997). For example, probably due to linguistic marking, Yucatec Maya pay more attention to what something is made of in categorizing, while English speakers pay attention to shape (Lucy 1996: 49-52).

All this suggests that image schema acquisition inherently involves a dialectical relationship between bodily and socio-cultural dispositions. For a balanced view, cognitive linguistics must overcome a tendency to unidirectionally theorize how image schemas shape discourse, while neglecting how discourse, ritual, and material culture shape image schemas. To remedy this “feed-forward bias” – perhaps deriving from the “universalist bias” previously discussed – we need to develop frameworks (cf. Kövecses 2000: 160-163) that capture how image-schematic metaphors, for example, are doubly constrained by embodied experiences and by cultural ideology. Finally, a strong connection between compoundness and situatedness suggests itself for further exploration: Compound image schemas may often be acquired through exposure to culture-specific scenes that create situation-bound knowledge packages, that is, quite specific experiential gestalts.

3.3. Image schemas with context-selective origin and context-adaptive use

For opening the notion of image schema to a socio-culturally situated ontology, we had best begin with a caveat: If we want to study recurrent and schematic aspects of cognition, we cannot throw out the baby with the bathwater and focus exclusively on the finest ethnographic details of how people act in a single context or say that this context is so unique it has nothing noteworthy in common with other contexts. However, the issue hinges on the question just how transcontextual the origin of an image has to be in order to make it an image schema. The simple image schemas usually enumerated only capture schematic commonalities across the widest possible scope of differing situations. Every CONTAINER schema is described quite like any other, even though a container like our body’s trunk, a thermos flask, and the religious model of an all-encompassing entity have notable differences, and these perhaps even extend to the schematic level: one we can feel inside, the other touch with our hands and see, and the third only imagine with reference to a complex cosmological model. Still image schemas are usually discussed
as schematically as our own abstractive imagination allows, without a trace of contextuality and without specifying situation-specific subvariants or the loci of the image schemas.

But do image schemas qua schemas need to be described as maximally schematic entities? Clearly, the notion of schema per se does not force a commitment to maximal schematicity. Schemas are spoken of at various levels of embeddedness. Hence, calling something an “image schema” may be perfectly legitimate, even if it captures commonalities of a limited set of (typically culture-specific) experiential settings like some kinds of healing, a class of religious rituals, or a type of body posture.

3.4. Cultural augmentations of “primitive” image schemas

How may we then capture in which way a relatively limited set of experiences produces a corresponding set-specific, and thus “situated” image schema? I propose that the descriptive adaptation of primitive image schemas to specific types of action should involve several aspects, notably their intentionality, motivation/emotion, and embodied quality.

3.4.1. Fully intentional image schemas

The ontological status of image schemas is, despite the possibility that they create transcontextually entrenched structures of cognition, inherently also that of contextual significance-bestowing devices. As Alverson’s (1991: 117, 1994) cognitive-phenomenological work points out, image schemas are never actualized as pure idealizations or Euclidean abstractions. Rather than actualistic shapes they are intentional tools through which we make sense. Take the simple example of intending one’s glass half full and intending it half empty. Clearly, our viewpoint lends a different intentionality to the same scene. What I am getting at is that any simple image schema will appear in a more situated way once we specify the intentionally of its usage. Although an Euclidean bias may still prevail (due to the interest in situation-independent cognition), descriptions of image schemas should, for several reasons, not remain entirely devoid of the intentionality they are enacted with:

First of all, culture may determine fairly stable general modes of bestowing intentionality. Linguistic worldviews may produce a strong bias to con-
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strue a scene as moving, as Palmer (1996: 148) notes for the Yaqui speakers of northern Mexico and Arizona, whereas English speakers tend to construe the very same spatial scene as static. The same drawing is seen as representing a static or a moving person depending on culture. Similarly, Alverson (1994: 22-23) shows that Bantu-speaking cultures see anchor points based on object size ‘into’ the spatial line-up of three objects, while Europeans treat them ‘on a par’, independent of size. Furthermore, Bantu speakers may scan the scene beginning with the remotest object, Europeans must do so from ego’s viewpoint.

Second, intentionality means that image schemas are always embedded in a concrete type of usage context. Recurrent context-types always add something to the decontextualized ontology of basic image schemas, as Gibbs (1999: 154) expresses it:

… containment is not just a sensori-motor act, but an event full of anticipation, sometimes surprise, sometimes fear, sometimes joy, each of which is shaped by the presence of other objects and people that we interact with. Image schemas are therefore not simply given by the body, but constructed out of culturally governed interactions.

While Johnson (1987: 181-190), when he first developed the notion, was at pains to describe image schemas as inherently intentional, he may have understood intentionality in a more transcontextual sense than Gibbs or I would understand it. What Johnson seemed to be emphasizing then is the fact that we cannot conceive of a schema like CONTAINER devoid of a usage-context or aim of some sort. Through this valuable insight alone we do not yet achieve a particularly thick description of any actual intentionality, or one that is fully context-adaptive. By conceiving of intentionality as pertaining to the general class of events where a CONTAINER occurs, its description will include in-out and boundary dimensions, but nothing beyond. This still relatively unspecified intentionality remains open to further specification according to a particular usage-type.

Any image schema’s intentionality depends on its locus with relation to the individual, i.e., on whether it is perceived/imagined in one’s own body or perceived/imagined in the external world. Usually, our actions directed at the body-container feel noticeably different from such directed at a balloon, and definitely different from mental operations undertaken with a category-container.10 Similarly, image schemas, though ensuring transmodal map-

10. There is perhaps some truth to the claim that, say, the imaginative and metaphorical FORCE of reason (e.g., acting on an idea-object) and an external
Specificity also arises from the fact that intentionality may primarily be bound to holistic image-schematic scenes, in which other image schemas are co-present, not to an image-schematic primitive per se (cf. Alverson 1991: 112). A STRAIGHT FORCE feels intentionally different from a FORCE CYCLE. Whenever experiential co-occurrence results in an “integral relation” between image schemas, the intentionality should be tied up with the entire scene, like MASS, NEAR-FAR, and MERGING related in seeing something recede in the distance (Cienki 1997: 8). As Alverson’s Bantu example showed, further specificity arises from different construals of such a complex spatial setting. In discourse, a quite different kind of holistic determination may obtain. Quinn (1991), in a study of marriage discourse, observed that distinct image-schematic metaphors may occur in a tightly packed fashion within a single passage. One interviewee, for example, smoothly switches between ontological construals of marital lastingness as unbreakable bond (LINK), well-made product (ENTITY), permanent location (CONTAINER), and ongoing journey (PATH). To capture how themes like marriage and sub-themes like lastingness are organized, Quinn posits higher-level “cultural models”. If image-schema selection and grouping is indeed governed by these, then image schemas may inherit from them part of their complex intentionality. Finally, cultural styles of relating to an image schema, i.e., its embedding in a holistic ethos, may also shape its intentionally (see 3.4.4).

In sum, we should recognize that the generic fact of intentionality can be fleshed out through the situated intentionalities real people act on. This notwithstanding, we also need to retain Johnson’s insight that something connects all ontological sub-variants of an image schema. Recognizing this more decontextualized level of ontology remains indispensable for explaining what provides the cognitive basis for transmodal mappings and the (re-) combination of gestalts.
3.4.2. Fully emotional and motivational image schemas

The affinity of image schemas to emotion and evaluation has been discussed by Krzeszowski (1993), Palmer (1996), and Johnson (1999). First of all, image schemas may be said to become imbued with emotion to the degree that they also constitute motivations (cf. D’Andrade and Strauss 1992). Palmer (1996: 107, 109) argues that “[all] concepts are imbued, to varying degrees, with emotional values that constitute part of their imagery” and that, conversely, “emotions are complex configurations of goal driven imagery that govern feeling states and scenarios, including discourse scenarios.” This two-way connection sits well with Paul’s (1990: 439) definition of drives as “cognitive mental images already endowed with an affective tone that renders them motivational.” Hence, to become emotion-imbued, an image schema must be motivational and intentionally linked to a specific action-goal. While a decontextualized, stripped down image schema will hardly become emotion-imbued, putting it to a human task in some context can produce this surplus quality. Emotion and motivation thus tend to occur as emergent properties of image-schematic compounds, because these are typically the outcome when an emotion-triggering social setting is construed as a complex scene.

3.4.3. Fully embodied image schemas

Image schemas have always been claimed to be of an inherently embodied nature (for limitations, cf. Kimmel, to appear). Therefore, a final layer of endowing an image schema with situatedness relates to how we describe its embodied quality. In my view, richer phenomenological and qualitative descriptions of bodily experience can be part of understanding image schemas. This should involve looking at how an image schema is embedded into a particular way of the body’s “engagement with the world”. Here, we can look to Csordas’ (1994) cultural phenomenology, a recent trend in the anthropology of the body that is intensely concerned with imagery in embodied experience. Csordas’ strategic focus is the enactive “lived body” and notably involves the study of “somatic modes of attention”. These are culture-specific modes of attending to one’s own body, the others’ bodies, and of reacting to the others’ attention to one’s own body.

The approach is context-adaptive in that it describes embodiment in a richer and more qualitative fashion than image schemas alone would allow.
However, it does so in a way that can accommodate these, as Csordas’ ethnography of symbolic healing in a Pentecostal community illustrates: By way of causal-explanatory objectification, the expert-healer interprets the lay-client’s diffuse state of embodied discomfort or guilt as “demon” (of masturbation, etc.). This means that an external agent who has taken possession of the body container through penetration is predicated onto the client’s subjective feeling, thus enabling the expert to expel it by applying spiritual force. Apparently, important aspects of Csordas’ account may be reframed as an image-schematic social script functioning as a medium of the symbolic act. More generally, infusing the analysis of image-schematic practices with phenomenological context sensitivity often requires a holistic analysis of embodied social scripts as well as a discussion of the styles of embodied awareness and beliefs surrounding them.11

3.4.4. A case study of a situated image schema

Image schemas can become culturally situated, because the goals they are directed at are embedded in holistic cultural meanings. Their intentionality forms part of an ethos or worldview. Within the ethnographic literature on cultural sensoria, Geurts’ (2003) study of the Anlo-Ewe of South Ghana breaks new ground by giving a careful culture-sensitive description of modes of embodied engagement. Combing ethnographic, linguistic and developmental aspects, her goal is to illustrate the role of kinesthetic and proprioceptive schemas related to the Anlo-Ewe theory of seselelame (‘attending to feeling-within-the-body’). Within this general cultural mode of being, balance is a powerful generative principle. Cultivating proper balance is ubiquitous in Anlo-Ewe life: To begin with, balance is quite simply required to carry heavy loads on the head, so as to be able to move freely and naturally. But achieving balance is not only a goal of explicit learning as a transportation technique; someone’s posture and gait also index a person’s moral fortitude and psychological disposition. Metaphors expressing this are linguistically more varied and performatively more elaborated than similar Euro-American

11. What kind of embodiment one may discover inherently depends on the situatedness of the analysis: Clues about “strong” embodiment (in the sense of a full “engagement with the world”) emerge from looking at ongoing acts of experiencing in toto. Experiments on the co-activation of embodied imagery with words, however, generate a “weaker” sense of embodiment, at least as long as phenomenological specifications are not attempted.
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counterparts such as “having backbone”. Not surprisingly, the head-balancing of objects is also elaborated in ritual. Moreover, special social practices ensure that children develop a proper sense of BALANCE: Infants often get their joints flexed to develop an awareness of graceful movement; and toddlers are continually exhorted to balance.

The Anlo-Ewe also perceive balance as a diachronic relation and therefore as something that can obtain between different events: Balance schemas inform a specific ritual dramaturgy where dancing alternates between a heated and a cool mode. Another schema encourages each Anlo-Ewe person to achieve balance between extra- and introverted modes of being across time. Finally, balance is not strictly intra-individual; it also refers to the necessary balance of the social and cosmic bodies (= systemic relations). Living in balance therefore requires a sensitivity to family relations and extends, as it were, beyond the individual’s skin.

Geurts’ account underscores that Anlo-Ewe BALANCE is at all times situated in contexts ranging from mundane ones such as the fetching of water to highly elaborate ones such as ritual. The view from a detailed ethnography ipso facto turns out to be different from the early Johnsonian image schema of BALANCE that children all over the world acquire in a roughly similar way. The balance ethos of the Anlo-Ewe brings to the fore how an image schema like BALANCE may be culturally refined. Especially because it partakes of a cultural disposition for cultivating the proprioceptive sense, it is a perfect example for my proposed descriptive strategy of specifying how the intentionality of general image schemas is fine-tuned. Even though Anlo-Ewe BALANCE has in itself obvious image-schematic sub-variants (e.g., various loci), these different instantiations hang together via the cultural ethos that makes balance so salient and produces a strong resonance in body awareness.12 Thus, the generic BALANCE schema is refined with regard to a cultural ethos, which constitutes a wider intentional field.

3.5. Situated image schemas and situated analysis

Image schemas, as I propose to understand them, are tools of situated cognition and action (Zlatev 1997; Gibbs 1999). Together intentionality, emotion,

12. This partly mirrors Strauss and Quinn’s (1997) theory of discursive metaphor use, which spells out how, against the backdrop of a shared cultural ethos, subvariants in conceptualization emerge.
motivation and full phenomenological embodiment define what I call situatedness in usage. From an acquisition perspective we may additionally direct our focus onto how specific image schemas are learned or refined in culturally recurrent settings.

For all practical purposes, speaking of situated schemas means striking a healthy balance between isolating unique cultural occurrences too rich for a schema and positing maximally schematic, general image schemas devoid of anything context-bound. To make this work, I propose to fine-grain the ontology of the more basic image schemas by moving center stage their situated sub-variants and their connection to particular context types. While neither subvariants nor context types need to be universal, they do form parts of the recurrent experience of a group of people. Thus, for a situated analysis, image schemas must be specified at least at the level of some scenario-type, i.e., a kind of recurrent action goal, with regard to some or all of the above criteria: their meshing with other image schemas, their sensory modality, their locus in the body, their intentional, motivational and emotional role. This specification may be put into practice either by sub-indexing familiar image schemas to create terms like FORCE-CYCLE, or by describing them in their qualitative context.

3.6. Situated methods

Finally, to understand how people do things with image schemas in contexts (like framing a discursive topic in a processual or, alternatively, in an entified ontology) we will have to open up to situated methods of data collection. Presently, linguistic and experimental methods which tend to generate rather de-contextualized data dominate. Much of the ontology of how linguists understand image schemas has emerged from looking at such data. This may have created a bias towards overemphasizing the situation-independent cognitive inventory or even cultural universals. The danger is that, without applying context-sensitive methods as a countercheck against research artifacts, it remains difficult to gauge to what extent assumptions of universality are influenced by the scholar’s own abstractions from situated data and how much subtle variation in image schema usage escapes the analysis. Here, the rise of ethnographic (Geurts 2003) and discourse-analytic approaches (Quinn 1991; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Liebert et al. 1997) points in the right direction.
4. Conclusion

Picking up the various loose ends, a larger picture of the perhaps dominant view of image schemas in Cognitive Linguistics emerges. The logic of the ontological biases enumerated above – universal acquisition, feed-forward, micro-unit, maximal schematicity – is mirrored in the methodological preference for situation-independent data. These biases hamper a socio-cultural view, probably because they tend to mutually support one another: First, studying micro-units like CONTAINER pure and simple, especially when conceived as maximally schematic, is congenial to the search for situation-independent cognitive structure precisely because primitives devoid of situated characteristics are what different contexts are likely to share. Second, experimental and linguistic methods which invite the elimination of situated nuances of intentionality mirror this predominant aim. Third, a rather universalist view of image schemas is itself partly due to this abstraction from cultural context. Fourth, screening out ethnographic methods for studying image schema acquisition and usage means neglecting how cultural environments and practices feed back into image schemas, a fact which further reinforces universalism.

All of the biases discussed are thus part of an academic gestalt in its own right, which cognitive linguistics seems to have lived by for some time. While this gestalt does not need to be replaced completely, it needs to be given a dialectical partner, perhaps through honing our own capacity for performing a gestalt-switch between seeing image schemas as situated and as maximally transcontextual entities.

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