

# **Learning from Hollywood? Narrating exhibitions with suspense**

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# Abstract

## Learning from Hollywood?

### Narrating exhibitions with suspense

A modern exhibition should be entertaining and suspense plays a vital role for entertainment media offerings. The lack of research on suspense in museum exhibitions is astonishing. This thesis aims to address this gap by investigating if and how cultural historical exhibitions could be narrated more attractively by adapting scriptwriting techniques used to produce suspense in popular films.

A comparative analysis of three classical Hollywood films and three cultural historical exhibitions reveals that all dramaturgic devices described in cognitive film theory (Bordwell 1985) and how-to guides (Gulino 2004) are applied in the films, whereas barely any have been used in making of the exhibitions. As this does not prove that an application is impossible, a thought experiment explores possibilities to establish dramatic tension in exhibitions. The experiment together with the analyses suggest that decisive criteria of the exhibition medium complicate a narrating of suspenseful stories by fragmenting its structure. Having thus carved out the *epic* character of exhibitions (see Hanak-Lettner 2011) – in contrast to the *dramatic* nature of popular films – this thesis suggests, based on one of the rare scriptwriting manuals to address unconventional films (Benke 2002), that suspense could be created in exhibitions by introducing techniques which support the narrative flow, balancing exhibitions' typical fragmentary structures.

Conclusively, this thesis proposes to distinguish between *mild* and *wild* suspense, as a finer tool set for identifying different kinds of suspense. Thus the ground is laid for further studies on narrative suspense in exhibitions and also for practical experiments to tell suspenseful exhibition stories. This thesis contributes to transmedial narratology by describing the narrative potential of the exhibition medium but also the limitations of its storytelling capacity.



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# Introduction

A major concern of modern museum work is the attraction of broad and diverse audience groups. Creating entertaining exhibition narratives is one way to achieve this aim (Black 2005, 22). Considering the importance suspense plays for audiences' selection and evaluation of entertaining media offerings (Vorderer et al. 1996b, vii), the lack of research about suspense and curating is remarkable. One reason might be curators' and museum scholars' fear to manipulate museum visitors by appealing to their emotions, another to oversimplify complex science-based contexts. As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill puts it: 'Museum professionals do not want to be in show business; we want to be in academia' (Hooper-Greenhill 1991, 182). But I, myself a curator, wish to reply: we *are* in show business. In my view, curating means first and foremost communicating – and this does not necessarily mean losing sight of your scholarly standards. It means communicating contents in a way the audiences can understand and process them best. Doing this by the creation of suspenseful stories seems to be a promising perspective. Suspense can keep the audience interested. Creating more suspenseful exhibition narratives holds, consequently, the potential to support museum visitors' lust for learning.

With this thesis I intend to open up possibilities to support exhibitions' educational effectiveness by integrating entertaining elements. Even though purely entertaining exhibitions may have a positive impact on visitors like promoting their well-being, my aim is a combination of entertainment and education. I hope that the findings of this research project will contribute to create, to adapt Dagmar Benke's (2002, 9) statement about films, exhibitions 'for the heart and the brain'. Therefore it is necessary to explore entertainment and the phenomenon of suspense as open and impartially as possible.

This thesis approaches the subject of curating and suspense by comparing cultural historical exhibitions with classical Hollywood films. Popular films were chosen because suspense plays a key role in their narration. Specifically, the films *All About Eve* (Script: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *The Conversation* (Script: Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and *Chinatown* (Script: Robert Towne, 1974) will be analysed in comparison to the exhibitions *Zersägt. Ein Krimi um barocke Theaterkulissen* [*Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops*], *Berge, eine unverständliche Leidenschaft* [*Mountains, a Mysterious Passion*] and *Die Leidenschaften. Ein Drama in fünf Akten* [*The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts*]. *Sawn* was curated by Michael Hütt, Anne Schaich and Grit Wendicke (Franziskanermuseum, Villingen-Schwenningen), *Mountains* by Philipp Felsch and Beat Gugger (Alpenverein-Museum, Innsbruck) and *Passions* by Catherine Nichols (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden).

In order to understand the phenomenon of suspense more deeply and to explore its potential for curating attractive exhibitions, the research addresses the following question:

*Is it possible to apply dramaturgic devices used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense in cultural historical exhibitions?*

In order to answer this question, a number of more specific questions will be pursued:

*What are the differences and similarities between exhibition narratives and film narratives?*

*Which dramaturgic techniques are used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense?*

*How are these techniques shaped, influenced or prevented by the specific characteristics of exhibitions?*

Based on the findings gained through the film and exhibition analyses, the central research question was modified during the research process into:

*Is it possible to apply dramatic devices used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense in mainly epic cultural historical exhibitions?*

Suspense is understood throughout this thesis as *narrative suspense*, i.e. the wish to see how a story unfolds, triggered by specific textual features. All four levels of narration Eric S. Rabkin identifies in *Narrative Suspense: 'When Slim Turned Sideways...'* (1973) as important for this kind of suspense, namely plot, character, theme and style, will be taken into account. The plot level will, however, be of particular interest throughout the thesis. Whereas the importance of structure has been an issue for designers and architects (Hageböling 2004a, 2004b; Psarra 2005; Greenberg 2005; Basu 2007; MacLeod et al. 2015), the consequences a precise placement of exhibits may have, have not been taken seriously enough from curatorial side while developing the contents of an exhibition (see Walklate 2012, 20). This thesis highlights and demonstrates how powerful narrative structure can be for creating specific dramaturgic effects, namely suspense.

Another reason to focus on how a story's events are selected and arranged, is that this turns our attention to a major difference between films and exhibitions and helps us, therefore, to understand the specific *narrativity*, i.e. the storytelling capacity of the exhibition medium better. For while film viewers follow the events in the order determined by script writers and directors, exhibition visitors are free to move. What does this mean in respect to suspense which demands that we *first* perceive the question and *then* the answer?

Consequently, this research can be classified as discourse analysis, comparable for instance to the film analyses conducted by Michaela Krützen (2006, 2010), and similar to Krützen's approach, with a strong emphasis on dramaturgy. An interpretation, discussion or enquiry of the events represented in the films and exhibitions is not the purpose of this study. Of course, an analysis of the plot level requires consideration of contents (Kuhn 2011, 12).

Narratologist Meir Sternberg considers suspense, curiosity and surprise, the three different types of narrative interest, as master forces affecting all other aspects of a story strongly. He argues that 'there is no narrative sequence without narrative interest to propel and channel our movement (complete with all sense-making operations) through the discourse' (Sternberg 1992, 534). For him, narrative interest is *the* crucial feature to define a text as narrative (Sternberg 1978, 1990, 1992, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. Even if you do not go as far as Sternberg in conferring such a critical role to narrative interest, examining suspense goes to the heart of storytelling because seen through this lens a narrative's structure and relevance become visible, both highly important for meaning-making. This also holds true for exhibitions viewed as narratives. Studying if and how suspense can be created in exhibitions leads to a thorough understanding of exhibitions' modes of operation and dynamics.

## **Scope of research**

This thesis resides in between various academic fields because of the examination of both films and exhibitions, and the subject, suspense. Therefore this thesis draws not only upon sources from film and museum studies but also from theatre studies, psychology,

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<sup>1</sup> A good summary of Sternberg's approach is provided by Segal (2011).

communication and media studies. As films and exhibitions are conceptualised as narratives, literature from literary studies, particularly narratology, is of special importance. This research crosses borders also in another sense: one of its most important purposes is to build a bridge between theory and practice. For this reason, dramaturgy is used as a tool for answering the concrete question how to narrate a suspenseful exhibition story.

## Suspense

This thesis is the first to explore the role suspense plays and could play for exhibitions. This topic has been a desideratum so far in museum studies. Only one work could be found among museum studies literature which addresses suspense and exhibitions at all. Perhaps not surprisingly this is Werner Hanak-Lettner's *Die Ausstellung als Drama. Wie das Museum aus dem Theater entstand* [*The Exhibition as Drama: How the Museum Grew out of the Theatre*] (2011). Not surprisingly because Hanak-Lettner understands exhibitions, as the title suggests, as dramas. Even though he addresses suspense only marginally, his reflections include important clues which are congruent with the results of this thesis.

In his opinion, it is not possible to create dramatic suspense in exhibitions, provoked by missing information, because museum visitors are used to finding information necessary for an understanding of the plot on the spot, otherwise they get frustrated. Viewers of popular films, however, have internalised certain scripts reassuring them that they will get the missing information later. Only because of this 'contract' they are able to relax and enjoy the waiting time (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 26-7). This thesis asks whether the script or scheme describing a typical exhibition visit could be changed, bringing it close to the schemes applied while watching popular films. Hanak-Lettner also discusses examples for other, more subtle types of suspense found in exhibitions (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 183-6). These examples can be classified, based on the differentiation between *mild* and *wild* suspense

proposed by this thesis, as provoking *mild* suspense. The idea behind the distinction between *mild* or *wild* respectively *epic* or *dramatic* suspense is to emphasise the range of different kinds of suspense. It takes up the differentiation between tension and suspense common in literature (Bonheim 2001; Langer 2008) and will be explained in Chapter 9.

Acknowledging the variety of suspense is of outstanding importance for comprehending how suspense can be effective in exhibitions, as this thesis reveals, but it has been considered by research only hesitantly. Empirical suspense research has addressed almost exclusively dramatic suspense. Communication scientist Dolf Zillmann for instance, who is considered the most important exponent of this field (Vorderer 1997, 243), explored why watching exciting films whose heroes and heroines are exposed to danger is experienced as pleasant (Zillmann 1991b, 291-3). His definition of suspense ‘can be regarded as common sense among researchers’ as Ed Tan and Gijsbert Diteweg state (1996, 151). Zillmann’s definition reads as follows:

the *experience of suspense* that is brought on by exposure to dramatic presentations as an affective reaction that characteristically derives from the respondents’ acute, fearful apprehension about deplorable events that threaten liked protagonists, this apprehension being mediated by high but not complete subjective certainty about the occurrence of the anticipated deplorable events. (Zillmann 1991b, 287)

It is important to note that this definition ‘reflects the typical narrative structure of the most popular suspenseful media drama’ (Tan and Diteweg 1996, 151). According to literary scholars Kathrin Ackermann (2005, 126) and Claudia Hillebrandt (2011, 118), empirical suspense research has focused too strongly on examining popular films and texts. This involves the danger of influencing theory construction through selecting similar research subjects. A danger relevant for this thesis, as by choosing classical Hollywood films as



comparatum, a perfect example for popular media was selected and explored.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this research focused at the beginning on dramaturgic techniques which help to create precisely dramatic suspense. The results of the film and exhibition analyses, however, made it necessary to question such an identification of suspense with dramatic suspense, and I had to refine the analytical tools.

Dramatic suspense is well described and explored in empirical suspense research which combines psychology and media and communication studies (Brewer and Lichtenstein 1982; Gerrig 1993; Brewer 1996; Cupchik 1996; Knobloch 2003) as well as in film studies (Borringer 1980; Branigan 1992; Wuss 1993; Tan 1996; Wulff 1996). Both fields are brought together in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Explorations* (1996a) edited by Peter Vorderer, Hans J. Wulff and Mike Friedrichsen. The volume was therefore helpful for this research project for validating the insights gained from cognitive film theory, mainly drawn from David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and Noël Carroll's concept of popular films' *erotetic* structure (1988, 1996a), and scriptwriting literature, including diverse manuals (e.g. Gulino 2004). These manuals demonstrate vividly how fundamentally film dramaturgy is based on theatre dramaturgy. Therefore Aristotle's drama theory (Aristotle 1997; Hiltunen 2002) and Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre (Brecht 1982; Esslin 1984) became important, supplemented by works addressing particularly drama and suspense (Pütz 1970; Pfister 1993; Esslin 1976).

*Suspense* (1996a) meets the 'double nature' (Langer 2008, 13) of the phenomenon by including text-oriented and reception-oriented contributions. 'Our starting point (...) is the thesis', the editors write in their preface, 'that suspense is an activity of the audience

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<sup>2</sup> For the problematic use of the terms popular – non-popular see Hollows and Jancovich (1995).

(reader, onlooker, etc.) that is related to specific features and characteristics of the text (books, films, etc.)' (Vorderer et al. 1996b, viii). This 'double nature' might be a reason why suspense had been neglected for a long time in, particularly German<sup>3</sup>, literary studies, as the editors of the volume *Zwischen Text und Leser: Studien zu Begriff, Geschichte und Funktion literarischer Spannung* [*Between Text and Reader: Studies on the Concept, History and Function of Narrative Suspense*] state (Irsigler et al. 2008a, 8). Literary studies, influenced by structuralism, were skeptical of speculations about textual 'effects' (ibid.). This deficit affects especially narratology (Langer 2008, 13). One exception is Sternberg. His study *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (1978) influenced Bordwell's explanations of film narratives' modes of operation strongly (Bordwell 1985, 37; Sternberg 2011, 43) and is thus also important for this research.

The focus on dramatic suspense in empirical suspense research and in film studies and the neglect of suspense as research subject in literary studies influenced the frame for this research project. It supported the focus, already mentioned, on dramaturgic techniques provoking *dramatic* suspense. Becoming aware of suspense's nuances during the research process, some of the comparatively few literary studies addressing suspense came into focus. Besides *Zwischen Text und Leser* (2008), these are *Spannung: Studien zur englischsprachigen Literatur* [*Suspense: Studies on Literature in English*] (Borgmeier and Wenzel 2001) and *Gespannte Erwartungen. Beiträge zur Geschichte der literarischen Spannung* [*Tense Expectations: Contributions to a History of Narrative Suspense*] (Ackermann and Moser-Kroiss 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> Baroni describes this deficit also for France (2004).

Importantly, all three volumes explore particularly non-popular texts, motivated by the insight that, put simply, even ‘high literature cannot do without suspense’ because every work wants to be read (Bonheim 2001, 1; Ackermann 2007, 7; Irsigler et al. 2008a, 8). By doing so, they show that besides the described kind of suspense typical for popular texts there are other forms of suspense, and this makes an identification of suspense with dramatic suspense obsolete. They suggest as well that many authors create suspense based on uncertainty coupled with hope and fear, typical for popular texts, *and* different forms of suspense for instance focusing more on the emotional life of the protagonists (Lenz 2001, Folliero-Metz 2007) or being produced by an *unspecific* danger (Broich 2001). This thesis contributes to the field by suggesting, based on the results of the film analyses, that classical Hollywood films similarly do not comprise of only dramatic suspense but also milder versions (see Tan and Diteweg 1996).

Especially because non-popular texts are characterised by a great variety (in contrast to popular texts which are distinguished by schematic, expectable contents and plots), it is more difficult to define these manifold and more subtle types of suspense. An early attempt was undertaken by Rabkin who distinguishes between plot-suspense and subliminal suspense, the latter characterised by aspects like style or syntax and perceived in his view by readers unconsciously (1973). Furthermore, barely anyone has tried to systematise these diverse forms of suspense so far. Daniela Langer’s contribution to *Zwischen Text und Leser* (2008) provides a first overview. This lacking systematization is one reason why drawing on literature exploring non-popular texts for this research raised more questions than it answered. Nonetheless, all this research helps to understand, to classify and to describe the observations made about suspense while watching and analysing the selected films and exhibitions; and to make an attempt to align these observations to particular features of non-popular texts, as which cultural historical exhibitions can be considered.

The fact that suspense was for a long time coupled with popular texts and consequently with commerce, might be the reason for its neglect in literary studies which, particularly in the German-speaking area, traditionally examines ‘high literature’ (Ackermann 2007, 7; Irsigler et al. 2008a, 7; Hillebrandt 2011, 104-5; Baroni 2004, 36). Possibly, it also explains the lack of research about suspense and curating. This lack can be connected to a more general neglect of emotions in the theory and practice of museums that Sheila Watson describes as a ‘mistrust of emotions’ in *Emotions in the History Museum* (2013). She writes: ‘There may well be some anxiety about being perceived to “dumb down,” to commercialize and commodify knowledge, and to reduce a carefully crafted academic discipline to a popular experience’ (Watson 2013, 289). She sees the reason for this in historians’ professional self-conception as scholars interrogating evidence in a scientific and dispassionate manner, rooted in the Enlightenment ideal of objective truth (Watson 2013, 287). Suspense understood usually as ‘thrilling excitement’ might be a particularly difficult emotion seen from this angle. Narratologist Raphaël Baroni’s statement is worth considering in this context. Baroni for whom narrative interest is a major field of study (2002, 2007, 2016) writes: ‘In itself, narrative suspense is not “commercial“ and it does not necessarily imply a diminution of the work’s quality; there exist however social applications (aesthetic, commercial, political, etc.) which can be debated and seem often debatable’ (Baroni 2004, 43).<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, there has been a paradigmatic shift in museums, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes it, towards a more emotional engagement (2000, 7-8), due to the need to be more ‘customer focused’ and ‘commercially positive’ (ibid., 2). Joachim Baur portrays

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<sup>4</sup> I have translated all foreign-language quotes.

this development for the German museum field (2012). Both highlight the role scenography has played for this move. A vivid example for the positive attitude of designers and architects towards emotions is Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley's description of one of their own museum projects, strongly inspired by filmmaking. They state: 'Storytelling that specifically addresses the visitor's emotional perception enables communication of messages at a profound level. We take the view that emotions are an integral part of spatial perception and communication with our surroundings' (Duncan and McCauley 2012, 290). This openness towards emotions from the side of designers can create conflicts while making exhibitions in cooperation with curators who, even though acknowledging the necessity to communicate contents in an entertaining way, still identify strongly with museums' educational task. Christine Bäumlér describes this conflict for the German museum landscape, based on interviews with curators, designers and museum educators (2007). Without devaluating entertainment, she pleads for relying confidently on museums' strengths, hence their educational contents and their objects with their complex stories (Bäumlér 2007, 55). Helen Wilkinson argues similarly in her study about curatorial practice in British museums (2014). She demonstrates that curators' defensive mentality exacerbated the difficult situation of museums, influenced by financial constraints. Rather than seeing 'specialist knowledge and expertise as being threatened by an increased emphasis on audiences', she recommends 'seeing how specialist knowledge can contribute to the new public face of museums' (Wilkinson 2014, 223). This thesis intends to support a resolution of this obstructive dichotomy between education and entertainment by adding to the research about museums and emotions.

In fact, research about museums and emotions points to the positive potential of using affect in exhibitions. Watson concludes, based on research (Watson 2007, 2011), that 'Thoughtful techniques used to engage the emotions of the visitor may result in a nuanced understanding of the past rather than its simplification' (Watson 2013, 289). Andrea

Witcomb argues that emotions provoked by exhibits can encourage a critical engagement with history (2013, 267). And Philipp Schorch states in his study of global visitors to the *Museum of New Zealand. Te Papa Tongarewa*: ‘It becomes clear that to “feel” invites us to be “interested” and enables us to “understand”’ (Schorch 2014, 32).<sup>5</sup> Of particular interest for this thesis’ subject is one rare empirical study about the role emotions play in free-choice learning in museums.<sup>6</sup> John H. Falk and Katie L. Gillespie examine how visitors respond to an exhibition about fear in a science centre. Importantly, their findings suggest that a particularly arousing experience ‘might result in long-term positive changes in visitors’ cognition, attitudes and behavior’ (Falk and Gillespie 2009, 128). All this together points to suspense’s potential to get and keep museum visitors interested and to support learning. This thesis adds to the field of museums and emotions by exploring and pointing out possibilities to create suspense in cultural historical exhibitions. It thus not only lays the foundation for further research about suspense and exhibitions but also for practical experiments.

## **Narrative**

Matti Hyvärinen (2010) and Martin Kreiswirth (2012) both describe the narrative turn that took place over the last decades due to complex, closely intertwined developments in diverse academic fields, with literary studies leading the way. Their explanations illustrate

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<sup>5</sup> Kramper (2017) explores storytelling as a tool for museums’ public relations. She discusses several examples for using emotions in/for exhibitions and concludes that they can be used effectively for getting audiences interested and for highlighting the relevance of contents.

<sup>6</sup> An overview of literature dealing with learning and museums can be found in Serrell (2006).

the omnipresence of the concept narrative not only in humanities but ‘in virtually all disciplinary formations, ranging from the fine arts, the social and natural sciences, to media and communication studies, to popular theory, medicine, and managerial studies’ (Kreiwirth 2012, 378). They show that the concept assumes ‘an enormous range of discursive functions’ (Kreiwirth 2012, 378). The concept narrative is also well-established in museum studies, as Witcomb’s *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (2003) or the volume *Storyline. Narrationen im Museum* [*Storyline: Narration in the Museum*] (Martinz-Turek and Sommer 2009) illustrate. Here, too, it is employed in manifold ways.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from, simply, designating the contents or messages of exhibitions, the term is often used by theoreticians and practitioners alike to express the realisation that these contents are neither objective nor fixed. Lisa C. Roberts portrays this shift ‘from knowledge to narrative’ in her book with the same title (1997). This shift was strongly influenced by discourses in history, a discipline fundamental for all museums. Hayden White, as a significant exponent of this school of thinking, goes so far as to speak of fiction in relation to historiography (White 1973, 1978; see Fulda 2005, 175). Research within the museum field supported this change. One important realisation was that the meaning of an object is dependent on its contextualisation in the museum setting (Stam 1993, 270; Saumarez Smith 1989). Peter Vergo writes in *The New Museology* about museum objects:

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<sup>7</sup> One usage was influenced by psychology, in particular by the works of Bruner (1990, 2004) (see Bedford (2001, 28-9) and Hale (2012, 194-5)) who considers storytelling as a necessary tool for defining the self. Viewing all human beings, throughout time and different cultures, as ‘storytelling animals’ (Nünning and Nünning 2002) proved to be very powerful and encouraged an understanding of stories as an effective tool for creating identities.

Through being incorporated into an exhibition, they become not merely works of art or tokens of a certain culture or society, but elements of a narrative, forming part of a thread of discourse which is itself one element in a more complex web of meanings. (Vergo 1989, 46)

Roberts underlines the important role museum educators, as visitors' advocates, played in considering meanings not as inherent in texts or objects but as constructed in a continuous process influenced by manifold factors (see Mason 2006, 21). Instead of considering visitors as 'empty vessels' to be filled with the knowledge researched and communicated by curators, visitors were now considered as active agents in the meaning-making process (Roberts 1997, 5; see Hooper-Greenhill 2007). Visitor studies supported this view significantly, showing that visitors interpret exhibits strongly influenced by prior knowledge, interests and motivations (Hooper-Greenhill 1994b; Serrell 2015; Falk and Dierking 2000; Black 2005). This constructivist position found expression in George E. Hein's concept of the Constructivist Museum. 'Acknowledging that the museum is not the repository of the "truth", but that its contents are arranged by fallible culturally influenced humans', Hein writes, 'leads to the suggestion that the messages emanating from museums are themselves stories, narratives to be read and understood by visitors' (Hein 1998, 151).

Importantly, this use of the concept narrative is shaped by the fact that scholars began to explore which narratives museums tell, assuming that they 'present a story that supports *their* particular interests and goals' (Roberts 1997, 145), understanding the museum as an authoritarian institution. One focus in this context has been since to uncover narratives 'which beyond any intention pass on apparently fixed values' (Martinz-Turek 2009, 15). Mieke Bal's analysis of three sections in the *American Museum of Natural History* was pioneering for this approach. She sees the museum as a product of colonialism in



a postcolonial era (1992, 558) and identifies the juxtaposition of ‘foreign’ cultures with animals as its central conflict (ibid., 558-9), positioning them as ‘the two others of dominant culture’ (ibid., 562). By focussing especially on contradictions between the selection, placement and presentation of particular objects and the messages of the associated text panels, she demonstrates convincingly that the exhibition reinforces this dichotomy instead of calling it into question.

Even though as a narratologist Bal is aware of story’s multifacetedness, she focuses in her writings (1992, 1996, 2006, 2007) on the perspective a story is told from and supported thus that narrative is identified in the museum field frequently with a specific point of view and one to be criticised. Although she explains in her fundamental work *Narratology* that a narrative text is characterised by first the perspective the events are presented from, second by the distinction and interplay between fabula, sujet and text, and third by the fact that ‘a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors’ is ‘presented in a specific manner’ (Bal 2009, 10-1), her main emphasis is without any question on the first aspect, termed by her (drawing on Gérard Genette) *focalisation* (ibid., 145-7). She writes: ‘This attention paid to agency and, hence, to subjectivity is, indeed, the basic tenet of the theory presented in this book’ (ibid., 12).

Bal’s writings influenced this thesis strongly, especially the consistency with which she addresses exhibitions as narratives. Her ‘close reading’ of exhibitions served as a model for my analyses and her demand for defining ‘travelling concepts’ thoroughly inspired me to explore ‘narrative’ in depth. Not least, her broad interdisciplinary approach encouraged me to combine film and museum studies. But because I want to differentiate this thesis explicitly from her understanding of narrative which prioritizes the link between storytelling and manipulation, I only rarely refer to her writings explicitly.

As useful as the concept narrative has proved in this way to serve as an analytical tool to detect implied but nonetheless powerful messages and to express that ‘museums are not neutral territory’ (Saumarez Smith 1989, 12), this usage involved a restriction and supported negative connotations. As much as this thesis was informed by this general discourse about museums and narrative, it differentiates from it in understanding telling stories rather positively. This thesis argues for acknowledging narrative’s great creative potential and for using this more effectively for exhibition making. Particularly, since stories can trigger affective and cognitive responses simultaneously, exhibition narratives have the power to get audiences interested in inspiring ways. This thesis thus ties in with a trend sparked by the conference *Creative Space* held at the University of Leicester in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Museum professionals, architects, designers, academics and artists met to reflect about developments in museum architecture and exhibition design (MacLeod 2005). A similar range of professionals gathered six years later for the conference *Narrative Space* again in Leicester.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this dialogue ‘the theme of narrative emerged as the strongest of a number of shared preoccupations’, as the editors of *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions* (2012, xx) Laura Hourston Hanks, Jonathan Hale and Suzanne MacLeod state. They consider narrative as a positive force for museum work:

If narrative is a construct, it is open to creativity. It is almost deliberately provocative and engaging, and therefore rich with creative potential. Just as we can denigrate the term “narrative”, so we can denigrate narrative itself, for imposing an artificial layer of order on the chaos of random reality. But this very artificiality is part

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<sup>8</sup> *Creative Space*, Conference, University of Leicester, Department of Museum Studies, April 5-7, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *Narrative Space*, Conference, University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies, April 20-22, 2010.

of what makes it valuable. The “lie” of the story produces a creative spark – narrative is provocative and antagonistic, engaging the “reader” in a creative dialogue both inspiring and revealing. Narrative within the museum can often be taken issue with, but that capacity for provocation is precisely where its creative potential lies. (Hourston Hanks et al. 2012, xxiii)

Like Tricia Austin’s contribution in the same volume (2012, 110), this thesis argues that narratology as the ‘theory and systematic study of narrative’ (Currie 1998, 1) can help analysing and creating narrative environments, in this case approached specifically from a curatorial perspective. This thesis seeks to contribute thus to a still small body of works which explore exhibitions from an explicitly narratological perspective. Examples are (besides Bal’s writings) Daniel Fulda’s (2005), Heike Buschmann’s (2010) and Julia Nitz’ (2012) analyses of historical exhibitions. Fulda and Nitz use a cognitive approach, Buschmann combines narratology with reader-response criticism and cultural geography.<sup>10</sup>

Both, literature from classical (Lämmert 1993; Chatman 1978; Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Genette 1998; Prince 1996, 1999) as well as from postclassical narratology (Herman 2002; Jannidis 2003; Ryan 2006) informed this thesis’ framework. In its beginnings, narratology was shaped strongly by a structuralist and semiotic approach, and therefore narrative was defined first and foremost by its formal properties; these effects are noticeable in the discipline even today. This proved beneficial for this research project as the focus is on narrative structures, important for narrating in general and creating suspenseful stories in particular, as Chapter 2 explains in detail.

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<sup>10</sup> Hartwig and Paulsen (2008) explore the potential of a narratological approach for analysing exhibitions in general.

Such a comprehension of texts and narratives however cannot cover the whole range of narrative's features; therefore drawing on postclassical approaches supported a broadening of the view. For one thing, cognitive narratology which 'emphasizes the interconnectedness between textual data, processing strategies, and interpretive choices' (Nünning 2003, 252) provided a useful framework for conceptualising films and exhibitions as *dynamic texts* (see Chapter 1). This thesis draws mainly on cognitive film theory, an approach to be explained in detail in Chapter 1 and 3. Secondly, transmedial applications offered a variety of helpful suggestions and concepts. Incorporating very different media into narratological research made a revision of the questions what a narrative is and what defines a medium's and a text's narrativity necessary (Nünning and Nünning 2002). Following the example of many other transmedial studies, Chapter 2 outlines how the concepts narrative and narrativity are understood in the scope of this research project. This is also necessary because as Mari Hatavara et al. declare in *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*: 'The various academic disciplines have conceptual traditions of their own that need to be taken seriously when doing interdisciplinary studies. When importing theoretical and methodological tools from one field to another, pitfalls abound' (Hatavara et al. 2013, 2).

Additionally, drawing on transmedial narratology, the concepts narrative and narrativity could be supplemented by the concept *narrateme*, employed originally by Gerald Prince (1996, 98; 1999, 46) and elaborated by Werner Wolf (2002, 38) and designating the features constituting or belonging to a narrative. This helped greatly to explore the exhibition medium's storytelling capacity further. Wolf's works (2002, 2003, 2004, 2011) inspired this thesis in particular because he researches media like painting or sculpture which own, compared to narrative literature, a relatively low degree of narrativity. This made it possible to narrow down exhibition's characteristics complicating telling, thrilling, stories.

Wolf's observation is important that when narratologists enter new territories and export literary narratology into non-literary media, a common problem is to overstress similarities (Wolf 2011, 157). He points to the danger 'to find an equal narrative potential in all media, for if everything becomes equally narrative, no one thing can be particularly narrative any more' (ibid.). He argues consequently for taking dissimilarities seriously, too (ibid., 158). Whereas the emphasis of museum studies was so far on similarities between exhibitions and narratives or texts (basic prerequisite for the 'linguistic turn'), this research project focuses particularly on differences.

## **Dramaturgy**

In order to broaden this analytical perspective on narrative and suspense by a practice-oriented approach, this thesis draws on dramaturgy, the art and craft of storytelling. To define dramaturgy more precisely, is the task of Chapter 1. At this point three works from this field will be introduced which inspired this thesis profoundly. There is first and foremost the above-mentioned study of Hanak-Lettner (2011). Hanak-Lettner, a curator himself, aims also to explore the specificity of the exhibition medium by comparing it with another medium in depth, in his case with theatre, historical and contemporary forms alike. His decisive argument for defining exhibitions as drama is the movement of the visitor who shapes his or her own version of the exhibition narrative (ibid., 22). 'The plot in an exhibition', Hanak-Lettner writes, 'is hence moved forward through an inner dialogue conducted by the visitor with the things' (ibid., 25). His approach to consider exhibitions consistently as narratives and his exploration of the exhibition medium's epic features were crucial stimuli for this research. The second work is Jens Eder's *Dramaturgie des populären Films. Drehbuchpraxis und Filmtheorie* [*Dramaturgy of the Popular Film: Script practice and film theory*] (2007). Eder's work not only served as valuable systematisation and extension of Bordwell's cognitive film theoretical approach but also

as a model for bringing together ‘the filmmakers’ practical theory of dramaturgy, such as is found in scriptwriting guidebooks, and the analysis-focused theory of the film scholars’ (Eder 2007, 4). Eder’s study encouraged me to draw on scriptwriting manuals, too. Last but not least, Martin Esslin’s *An Anatomy of Drama* (1976) inspired this research through the precision and passion with which the theatre scholar, dramaturg and critic explores and dissects drama. All three works are united by an understanding of theory and practice as equal, complementary sources of knowledge, an approach shared by this thesis.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The first chapter presents the methodological approach chosen for this research project. It provides the rationale for analysing cultural historical exhibitions in comparison to classical Hollywood films, exploring thus by contrast precisely their specific narrative qualities which support or hinder the creation of suspense. Conceptualising exhibitions and films as narratives, justifies the choice of semiotics as theoretical framework, complemented by cognitive film theory. Both taken together allow for understanding films and exhibitions as *dynamic texts* which are realised truly only in close interplay with the recipients. Such an approach seems especially useful for an exploration of narrative suspense which consists equally of textual features and cognitive and emotional responses triggered by them.

Chapter 2 clarifies, drawing on narratological theory, how narrative is understood in the scope of this research. This thesis shares a flexible understanding of narrativity, considering it as a bundle of formal and thematic aspects which a medium or text can each lack or possess up to a certain degree. The chapter focusses hereby on possible features important, or even necessary for the production of suspense, like temporal succession, causality, closure and teleology. The importance of structure for the creation of suspense in particular

but also for narrating exhibitions in general is highlighted, but not without stressing that suspenseful exhibition narratives may depend on telling relevant content. The chapter concludes by defining narrative in a way that helps to focus on the chainlike structure typical for popular films (providing a perfect basis for building suspense) but at the same time allows for understanding it broadly enough to cover also exhibitions with their more complex structures.

Chapter 3 turns to the kind of suspense typical for classical Hollywood films, namely dramatic suspense. With reference to Bordwell's cognitive film theory, the chapter argues that classical Hollywood films are told in such a way that their viewers are provoked to participate actively in the narration process. This is realised mainly by planting gaps in the plot which the audiences try to fill in based on the information already given and based on their previous experiences as film viewers. According to Bordwell, the reception process while watching popular films is characterised therefore strongly by hypothesising and speculating about probable outcomes. Supplementary, Chapter 3 introduces Carroll's theory who comprehends popular films as chains of questions and answers which provokes subsequent suspense from the audience. As both film scholars concentrate on the cognitive reactions of the recipients, the chapter additionally explains, based on scriptwriting manuals, how script writers try to bind the recipients emotionally to the stories. As a central dramaturgic device to create suspense, the introduction of a protagonist is described whose destiny the viewers can follow empathically. All in all, dramatic suspense is defined as the audiences' urgent wish, accompanied by feelings like hope and fear, to learn if the protagonist will succeed or fail.

The fourth chapter outlines concrete dramaturgic techniques script writers apply in order to create suspense. Apart from establishing a main dramatic tension closely connected to the protagonist's desires and actions (as described in Chapter 3), these techniques

include telegraphing, dangling causes, dramatic irony and planting and payoff. All these dramaturgic devices are used in classical Hollywood films to support the narrative flow and to produce a strong forward movement, carrying the viewer through the story. The chapter also discusses if such a forward movement interferes with cultural historical exhibitions' characteristic to narrate past events. Finally, possibilities to create micro suspense are described.

Chapter 5 analyses the three selected films. Since establishing a central dramatic question has turned out to be the most effective means for creating suspense, informing the whole course of events, every film is analysed first under this aspect, namely based on the sequence protocols made. Subsequently, I describe by help of the viewing protocols if suspense emerged effectively while viewing. Through a contrast of both analyses, it became apparent that suspense was created to a lesser extent caused by hypothesising concretely and also to a lesser extent bound to the central dramatic question than described in the literature. Instead, the chapter suggests that suspense is produced by many diverse, convergent factors, in close interplay with the film's style. Another important observation was that the questions emerging while viewing are often of a more vague nature than described in literature. The chapter concludes by analysing the other dramaturgic devices described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 explores three cultural historical exhibitions in detail. Analogous to the film analyses, the exhibition analyses focus on a possible dramatic tension. As the protagonists appeared as the pivotal point for this tension, the exhibitions are examined for central characters. But different from popular films, no protagonists can be identified in the exhibitions, there is rather a multitude of characters. The analyses reveal in case of *Sawn* and *Passions* contradictions between intended dramaturgic effects (described in the exhibition texts) and effects provoked which shed light on the narrative constraints of the



medium. Another important result is the netlike structure of the exhibitions, especially in case of *Mountains*, because events are connected rather loosely. The analyses also show that no suspense was felt during the exhibition visits and that the other dramaturgic devices like telegraphing etc. are missing or ineffective.

As these findings do not have to mean that a creation of suspenseful exhibition narratives is impossible, Chapter 7 executes a thought experiment. It examines possibilities to develop in exhibitions protagonists typical for classical Hollywood films and enable thus continuous arcs of suspense. It seems indeed possible to construct small arcs of suspense, but impossible to build continuous ones like in popular films because of the complex and fragmentary structure typical of the exhibition medium.

This result caused the research to turn towards the question how suspense can be created in non-classical films which resemble exhibitions with their fragmentary, epic character and these ideas are set forward in Chapter 8. By means of one of the rare scriptwriting manuals addressing unconventional films and the comprised analyses of five such films, the chapter works out options to create suspense in exhibitions. Combining these results with the film and exhibition analyses, the chapter suggests that it is possible indeed to create suspense in exhibitions, even though of a milder kind, closely related to pure interest.

Chapter 9 explains that the choice of classical Hollywood films as the subject of the research and of cognitive film theory as the theoretical framework, caused, at the beginning, a narrowing of the phenomenon of suspense to dramatic suspense typical for this kind of film. It considers how curators' intention to inspire critical thinking influences how excitingly they decide to narrate. The chapter proposes to differentiate between *mild* and *wild* suspense in order to satisfy the different versions and nuances of suspense. It argues that such a refined differentiation helps to analyse and create suspense in exhibitions which can be considered as non-dramatic, epic narratives.

The final chapter specifies the findings by reflecting on the research process. It then contextualises the results within suspense research, transmedial narratology and museum studies, opening them up for future possibilities.

# 1. Methodology

## Introduction

Conceptualising exhibitions as narratives is the pivotal point for choosing the methods and theoretical framework for this thesis. Films are, despite significant differences with narrative literature (Kuhn and Schmidt 2014), widely accepted as stories. Therefore, this thesis compares exhibitions to films and analyses them based on sequence protocols, a method well-established in film studies. This chapter describes the research design and explains the criteria for selecting the case examples, an endeavour more difficult than expected and for this reason revealing. It explains why a combination of semiotics and cognitive film theory makes it possible to comprehend films and exhibitions as *dynamic texts* and thus to explore suspense as the audience's activity stimulated by the text. A rationale for consulting scriptwriting manuals and for drawing thus on dramaturgy concludes this chapter.

## Comparative analysis

### Comparison as method

Comparison as a strategy is rarely examined. Not even in comparative literary studies, even though it is predestined to investigate its central approach (Corbineau-Hoffmann 2000, 76, 80). Nonetheless, its efficiency is proved in countless examples and this research uses it as a successful method to sharpen the perception of the distinctiveness of the exhibition medium, the comparandum. Whereas films and exhibitions are the media to compare, suspense is the *tertium comparationis*, the quality to research. Indirectly, the

objective is to define the degree of cultural historical exhibitions' narrativity as compared to classical Hollywood films. Even though none of the exhibitions included any reference to Hollywood films, *Passions* was inspired explicitly by classical theatre plays, and texts in *Sawn* allude to TV crimes. Thus, the comparison oscillates between a genetic one, researching similarities caused by a direct or indirect influence, and a typologic one, focussing on similarities based on related production conditions (Zemanek and Nebrig 2012, 17).

### **Exhibition as comparandum**

While an analysis of exhibitions had been neglected for a long time in the German-speaking area, this has changed fundamentally over the last years (Baur 2010).<sup>11</sup> Due to the ground-breaking studies *Medium Ausstellung. Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin* [*Medium Exhibition: Readings of museum designs in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam and Berlin*] by Jana Scholze (2004) and *Gesten des Zeigens. Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen* [*Gestures of Showing: On Representation of Gender and Race in Exhibitions*] by Roswitha Muttenthaler and Regina Wonisch (2006)<sup>12</sup>, a number of excellent studies followed (particularly Claußen 2009; Thiemeyer 2010; Dean 2010; Schlutow 2012; Jannelli 2012; Slenczka 2013). These studies are characterised by an extensive theoretical reflection and thorough practical execution.

The methodological approach for this research project is based on an intense examination of this research and on Mieke Bal's *Telling, Showing, Showing off* (1992). Bal's analysis

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of important analyses of exhibitions in the English-speaking area see Tucker (2014, 343-8).

<sup>12</sup> Another influential work is Schärer (2003).

distinguishes between the meta-function of the museum, i.e. the display of its own status and history, and its object-function, that is, its educational vocation. Together they form what she calls the museum's 'double gesture' (ibid., 562). Her analysis influenced the trend to uncover hidden but nonetheless effective messages of exhibitions in order to reveal underlying value systems (e.g. Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006; Claußen 2009; Dean 2010). This thesis utilises these analyses in many ways, but it breaks new ground when it compares for the first time exhibitions with films through an in-depth analysis.<sup>13</sup>

### **Film as comparatum**

The main reason to choose film as comparatum is: films share with exhibitions the key feature of visuality.<sup>14</sup> This similarity is why Thomas Hammacher discusses the possibilities of applying tools and concepts (especially editing) used in film analysis for analysing exhibitions (Hammacher 2008, 33). Another rare and interesting example for using both media is Angela Jannelli's approach: she compares entrance situations in exhibitions with establishing shots in films that introduce the location and time and set the mood (Jannelli 2012, 83-5).

As concerns visuality, it is important to note that images are more descriptive than narrative.<sup>15</sup> Instead of representing a course of events, they rather depict a state (Poppe 2007, 42-3). By stringing images together however, it is possible to unfold a plot. In

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<sup>13</sup> For an overview of other interdisciplinary approaches to analysing exhibitions see Knop (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Poppe (2007, 43) defines visuality (in contrast to mere vividness) as serving the construction of meaning.

<sup>15</sup> How description and narrative differ and interrelate has been researched rarely to date; exceptions are e.g. Bal (1981) and Wolf (2007).

films, termed by Markus Kuhn an ‘art and medium of succession’ (2011, 60), one image follows another rapidly and events can be linked effectively. By contrast, exhibitions are composed of ‘space images based on objects’ as Thomas Thiemeyer (2013, 481) calls it in his instructive description of the exhibition medium’s specific narrative character and are of a more static nature. Visitors have to move from exhibit to exhibit and this, among other things, interrupts the narrative flow.

In summary, films share a decisive feature with exhibitions, the use of images, but differ from them by employing these images more effectively to create stories. This research highlights this analytical tension by choosing classical Hollywood films as specific comparative material. Classical Hollywood films have a particularly high degree of narrativity: they are organised as sequences of events closely connected to each other. And: suspense plays a major role in them.

Many questions remain unanswered regarding exhibitions as narratives, but, interestingly, defining films as narratives is also disputed (Griem and Voigts-Virchow 2002, 156, 161-3). Especially the role of the narrator, considered by some scholars as a crucial feature defining a text as narrative, is controversial (Kuhn 2011, 49-56). The problem is, as Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis (2006, 48) explain in *Film: A Critical Introduction*, that in most feature films ‘The story seems to unfold rather than to be narrated to the audience’. Seymour Chatman (1990, 113-4) tried to solve the problem by introducing the concept of the *cinematic narrator*, meaning that specific filmic devices like editing and camera perform functions fulfilled in narrative literature by anthropomorphic narrators. This argument is not relevant for the research question because it is not the role of the narrator but the fact *that* a story is narrated that is decisive for exploring suspense.

## **Transmedial narratology**

Research from a narratological point of view includes literature as a reference point at least implicitly because narratological theory was mainly developed based on literary texts. Considering three different media, this study can be classified as trans- or intermedial (Wolf 2002, 48). The risk of excluding peculiarities of single media by such a broad approach (Kuhn 2011, 27) will be avoided by focusing narrowly on the phenomenon of suspense. With such a definitive focal point, similarities and differences become apparent, as the analyses show. The analyses help understand the dramaturgic devices necessary for creating suspense – in exhibitions and in films. Insights about cinematographic narrative qualities are, however, only side-effects.<sup>16</sup> The aim of this research project is to comprehend the exhibition medium and its narrativity better and to try to reveal its presumed hidden potential for suspense.

In doing so, it is neither assumed that a medium shapes the communicated story completely (analogous to Marshall McLuhan's statement 'the medium is the message' (1964, 7)) nor that a story is transmitted through a medium totally unaffected. Discussing both these extreme views, Werner Wolf argues for comprehending media in a transmedial narratology 'in a more flexible way as influencing, but not a priori as determining, narrativity and narrative content' (Wolf 2011, 166). Referring to Marie-Laure Ryan's differentiation (2005a; 2005b) between semiotic, technical or material and ontological or cultural-historical factors of media, Wolf proposes a useful definition:

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<sup>16</sup> Typical characteristics of films which influence their narrativity are described in detail in Kuhn's *Filmnarratologie* [*Filmnarratology*] (2011).

As applicable to transmedial narratology, medium is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication; it is specified not only by technical or institutional channels (or one channel) but also and primarily by its use of one or more semiotic systems to transmit its contents, in particular within the public sphere; according to the nature and format of their constituents, *different media have different capabilities for transmitting as well as shaping narratives*. (Wolf 2011, 166; emphasis added)

Whereas it is possible to create a completely absorbing experience for the viewers of classical Hollywood films, this is probably – to anticipate a research result of this thesis – not possible to the same extent in cultural historical exhibitions. Following McLuhan's terminology, cultural historical exhibitions could be thus defined as 'cold' media, compared to classical Hollywood films being 'hot' media (see Kniescheck 1998, 20), meaning that exhibitions demand more 'participation or completion by the audience' (McLuhan 1964, 23). The crucial question of this research project is therefore: How to 'hot-up' (ibid.) the exhibition medium in order to strengthen its narrativity and to create Hollywood-like suspense?

As texts, i.e. films and exhibitions, whether fictional or non-fictional, invite readers to imagine a world (Schaeffer 2009, 33; Herman 2002, 15-6), factual and fictitious are not conceptualised as a binary opposition but as scalar properties. This reflects also the discussion about historical accounts as based on a selection and arrangement of events, strongly influenced by the author's perspective (see White 1973, 1978). Though based on evidence, cultural historical exhibitions are stories affected by manifold factors. Moreover, the focus of this research is on the discourse and not the story (fabula). The common denominator is that 'something happened', not 'something true or invented happened'.



It is important to note that a major difference between literary texts and films (see Kuhn and Schmidt 2014, 8) and exhibitions is that the latter two are plurimedial. Whereas films are audiovisual, exhibitions comprise even more different forms of media like objects, texts, images, films, music, smells, audio material like interviews and the architecture and design of the exhibition including the lighting or choice of colours. But also the room itself, the furniture like show cases or pedestals and even in some cases the room temperature convey information and take part in shaping the story (see Moser 2010). It is obvious but crucial that all these different elements do not stand alone but, using Muttenthaler's and Wonisch's words, are woven together into a 'thick texture' (2006, 37). As Kuhn states for films, this makes the analysis of exhibitions more complex than literary texts (Kuhn 2011, 9).

## **Research design**

### **Selection of the case examples**

The selection of films as well as of exhibitions to analyse was challenging, and this shed light on the research subject itself. Due to the common usage of the term narrative in respect to exhibitions and because many of them promise to 'tell a thrilling story', I expected to find case examples easily. But taking a closer look at promising expositions revealed that even though they treated highly interesting topics, sometimes even depicting dramatic historical events, they all followed a certain pattern and suspense played no important role. In fact, a tentative analysis showed that the exhibitions revealed crucial information or statements at the beginning, in most cases already in the introductory text (e.g. *Martin Scorsese* 2013<sup>17</sup>). This way, the 'answer' was given right at the beginning and

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<sup>17</sup> Curated by Kristina Jaspers and Nils Warnecke

even if this may raise interest, it does not create suspense like in popular films. This insight was a first important evidence for the possible fact that cultural historical exhibitions typically are not narrated in order to create suspense.

This intermediary result led to the decision to select *Berge, eine unverständliche Leidenschaft* [*Mountains, a Mysterious Passion*] as one of the exhibitions to analyse. Because on the one hand it treats a highly emotional and dramatic topic (alpine climbing) but on the other hand it follows the, assumed, typical pattern for cultural historical exhibitions. Moreover, the exhibits were arranged following the ascent and descent of a mountain, and this promised to teach me about the creation of a storyline and perhaps even of an arc of suspense in exhibitions. This decision was motivated also by the idea to avoid thus a view focused too narrowly on suspense created like in classical Hollywood films but to remain instead open-minded for unexpected research findings which hold the potential to explain the character of the exhibition medium better. Did there exist another kind of suspense? Which dramaturgic tools were applied by the curators and designers in order to support the momentum of the narrative and to keep the visitors' attention?

Finally, I found an example for an exhibition whose makers explicitly tried to produce suspense, as the title *Zersägt. Ein Krimi um barocke Theaterkulissen* [*Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops*] suggests. Also promising was the fact that the curators drew inspiration from the theatre world because of the central objects, the backdrops. Moreover, the information leaflet<sup>18</sup> reads:

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<sup>18</sup> Franziskanermuseum (no date) *Zersägt. Ein Krimi um barocke Theaterkulissen*. [Leaflet obtained in Franziskanermuseum], 13 December 2013.

The backdrops are full of mysteries, their investigation requiring detective skills. *The exhibition intends to let visitors assume the role of the investigator*, interrogating witnesses about the discovery of the boards, about their classification, age determination, and restoration. Some clues are misleading, requiring new hypotheses to be established. Unlike conventional television crime films, the murderer is not obvious after the first few minutes. The backdrops' precise origins and the performances for which they were created remain unclear, right until the very end. (emphasis added)

Another exhibition was especially instructive, too. But because it ended before I could analyse it in situ in depth, I only used it with reservations, to supplement the other case studies. For this reason, I wrote no sequence protocol for this exhibition. This was *Die Leidenschaften. Ein Drama in fünf Akten* [*The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts*]. As the title suggests, curator Catherine Nichols intended to shape the exhibition's structure following a typical classical theatre play, and this promised the inclusion of a dramatic arc, producing suspense. Indeed, one of the rare examples for a dramaturgic device typically used to create suspense in classical Hollywood films, planting and payoff, could be found in *Passions*.

All selected exhibitions met specific criteria established at the beginning of the search. First, they were all cultural historical exhibitions. Even though no set definition exists for this genre, such exhibitions can be characterised as including, often besides art works, objects representing history of every day life, thus taking up, as a result, an ambiguous position between art and history exhibition (Kaiser 2006, 23-4). A decisive criterion was the distinction from pure art exhibitions where aesthetics play a key role, asking for different analysis tools and (in most cases) a different definition of narratives. Second, all three exhibitions centred on objects, and this seemed especially important for exploring if and how far the use of objects hinders a narrativisation and consequently a creation of suspense.

Third, only temporary exhibitions were selected, no permanent ones, because they ought to be more experimental (Habsburg-Lothringen 2012, 10; Korff and Roth 1990, 21-2).<sup>19</sup> Last but not least, they met high quality criteria, concerning for example the design and the scientific standards applied.

The films were selected on the basis of the definition given by David Bordwell for classical Hollywood movies:

The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviors. (Bordwell 1985, 157)

Throughout this thesis, the terms *classical Hollywood film* and *popular film* are used synonymously to refer to this type of film not necessarily produced in Hollywood but written to reach broad audiences and characterised by narrative closure and other distinctive features (see Eder 2007) to be described in detail in the following chapters.

Selecting the movies was complicated because I could only identify films I did not know previously for further analysis. Having watched the films once I knew the denouement and this, thus my assumption, would hinder experiencing suspense. Working with unfamiliar films however turned out to be a time-consuming process because it was necessary to write

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<sup>19</sup> *Mountains* was shown seven years but had been created as a temporary exhibition, too.

down my thoughts and emotions while watching the film from the first second in order not to falsify the results, taking the risk that the film proved not to be adequate for the study at all. Two insights gained from studying film theory and scriptwriting manuals helped to shorten the selection process: instead of focusing on feelings it should be possible to identify suspense by focusing on plot events and dialogue lines. As described in Chapter 3, viewers feel a mixture of hope and fear when they ask themselves questions like: will something bad or good happen to the protagonist? The second insight was the ‘paradox of suspense’ (Gerrig 1997; Yanal 1996). This paradox describes the fact that texts can be experienced as exciting despite knowing the story’s outcome (see Hillebrandt 2011, 108-110). Knowing the outcome may weaken the suspense, but it does not necessarily hinder it (Brewer 1996, 125).

The final selection of films was based on a specific set of criteria which included quality standards but also simply their availability on DVD. More important were criteria concerning the research questions: the films should include examples for all dramaturgic tools typically used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense (see Chapter 4). Ideally, they should include an artefact used as a *plant*, in order to explore the potential of objects to move the narration forward. Finally, examples from the genres drama, thriller and crime were selected because for all of them suspense plays an important role, though to different degrees. Therefore I chose the drama *All About Eve* (1950), the mystery *Chinatown* (1974) and the thriller *The Conversation* (1974).

Each film was seconded by an example of the same genre in order to provide material for verifying the results: I chose *Gosford Park* (2001) as a mystery, *The Queen* (2006) as a drama and *Music Box* (1989) as a thriller. These supplementary films were not analysed in detail and are not mentioned in the following chapters (which is why the sequence

protocols are not included in the appendix); the three main cases proved sufficient to explore the suspense techniques.

### **Outline – Segmentation – Descriptive analysis**

In a first step, the selected films were outlined in writing while watching them. The objective was to note the most important events and remarkable or confusing aspects. While making notes I tried to grasp the emotional impact of the events, too. In this manner, mainly questions were written down and ‘aha moments’ were identified. At the same time, I tried to break down the narrative into sequences and scenes whereby I took decisions intuitively. In the next step, when writing the sequence protocols, the decisions were corrected if necessary. According to Syd Field a sequence is ‘a series of scenes tied together, or connected, by one single idea’ (Field 1994, 96). The sequence protocols are based on guidelines provided in literature about film analyses (Korte 1999, 38-9; Hickethier 2001, 38-9; Faulstich 2002, 63-80; Mikos 2008, 95-8).<sup>20</sup>

Given the abundance of the material (six movies and two exhibitions) the protocols were kept as simple as possible. They contain four sections: 1. Sequence, 2. Time, 3. Content and 4. Suspense Aspects. *Sequence* numbers the sequences serially and *Time* documents at which minute and second the sequence or scene starts. *Content* focuses on the action and plot, including important dialogue lines. Details regarding the camera work, lighting, costumes or the film set were only mentioned if they seemed to influence the production of suspense. *Suspense Aspects* includes mainly questions provoked by the plot and answers to

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<sup>20</sup> Even though she is not referring to film analysis, Slenczka (2013) based her analysis of a Mexican museum on a similar detailed protocol, added in her appendix.

these questions, and some observations that seemed noteworthy. I also noted feelings like hope or fear or sympathy with the characters.

The literature about suspense research and media reception in general describes extensively the difficulty to explore and measure emotional reactions (de Wied and Zillmann 1996; Fahr 2006; Früh 2006). This difficulty is not only true in case of audience studies, but becomes especially tricky in case of the chosen methodology, the analysis. How can I as the analyst measure my own physical reactions like skin conductance response or changes of facial expressions (Fahr 2006)? And how define the valence of these bodily reactions because arousal could not only be interpreted as indicator for suspense but for example for anger (Fahr 2006, 211; Herding 2004, 13)? Apart from that, another problem is the difficulty of verbalising emotions precisely. Moreover, my reactions are influenced by the analytical bearing I had to adopt, preventing a relaxed and unbiased attitude.<sup>21</sup> Instead of minimising some of these complications by complementary methods, I took Mike Friedrichsen's advice who writes in *Problems of Measuring Suspense* (1996, 332): 'A research design must above all be realistic.' Anyhow, I wrote down the emotions I experienced while watching the films and visiting the exhibitions in case they include even the tiniest hints to the occurrence of suspense.

I tried to tackle the potential problems of being the researcher and the researched at the same time by establishing and communicating the methodological approach as thoroughly as possible. One crucial point was to understand the cognitive processes, especially the importance of perceiving questions and hypothesising, which underlie emotional responses identified as suspense. Thus I regarded myself well equipped for the analysis of the

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<sup>21</sup> The problem of the researcher's agency affecting always the findings is for instance discussed in Briggs (1986, 21-3) or Spencer et al. (2014, 82-3).

films and exhibitions and did not reflect my complex position throughout the research process. In retrospect, I conclude that precisely this profound knowledge about the nature of suspense helped me to differentiate my reactions from for instance fear, uneasiness or pure pleasurable sensation. This would have been probably more difficult for other research subjects. Moreover, it was not the research objective to explore these cognitive and affective responses in detail, instead they were predominantly used as indicators for potential triggers for suspense implied in the texts and the dramaturgic techniques creating these triggers. Last but not least, maybe because I only experienced the vague feelings (later identified as ‘mild’ suspense) during the reception process myself, they could take full effect.

Equally, while walking through the exhibitions several times, I wrote down my impressions, thoughts and feelings. Unlike a ‘normal’ visitor I tried to study every single exhibit in order to perceive the whole narrative. After the visits I produced sequence protocols (or rather ‘section protocols’) for the exhibitions. They contain five columns: 1. Section, 2. Event, 3. Type, 4. Content and 5. Suspense Aspects. *Section* includes the section title and numbers the sections serially, and *Event* numbers the single information units serially in order to make them relatable when described in Chapter 6. These first two columns illustrate the spatial character of the exhibitions in contrast to the temporal one of the films. Column 3 differentiates between objects, texts, multi media, design aspects, sound etc. and stresses the specific plurimedial character of exhibitions. This differentiation was not made for the films because even though they are also plurimedial, they are perceived as an organic unity (Schmerheim 2016, 209), images and sounds merging.

By creating a segmentation of the story, it was possible to make the films’ and exhibitions’ structures visible and usable for further description and analysis. The protocols also helped identify which events exactly triggered which responses on my side as a visitor and viewer.



Last but not least, they make the material, the basis of the research results, accessible for readers of this thesis (the protocols are included in the appendix).

The next step was a descriptive analysis of the case examples, focusing on the suspense devices as described in film studies literature and scriptwriting manuals. I analysed the films first, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the techniques and the nature of suspense before looking for similar triggers in the exhibitions.

The approach for this research is *thick description*: I examined the exhibitions several times, using two different approaches: a comparison with classical films (Chapter 6) and a thought experiment (Chapter 7). By including Benke's analysis of five non-classical films, the typical structure of cultural historical exhibitions and possible applications of the suspense techniques were further explored, if only indirectly. Clifford Geertz originally applied *thick description* to anthropological fieldwork. According to him, such a close reading enables an understanding of the 'webs of significance' (1973b, 5) of any cultural text (1973a, 452-3). Muttenthaler and Wonisch used the method successfully in order to describe the interplay between visual elements and texts and space as a prerequisite for exhibition narratives (in this case judgemental perspectives on gender and race) (Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006, 51). Inspired by them, Claußen (2009), Dean (2010), Jannelli (2012), Slenczka (2013) and Ziese (2010) also analysed exhibitions by help of this approach.<sup>22</sup> Even if the main purpose of this research project is to reveal underlying narrative structures responsible for suspense, it also exposes layers of meaning. Talking about structures is impossible without talking about meanings. Eventually, the question

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<sup>22</sup> Autry used *thick description* for her analysis of histories of racial conflict and violence in 'identity-driven' museums in the US (2013). See also Tyburczy (2016) and de Oleaga (2017).

is how particular dramaturgic effects influence the construction of meanings and which function meanings fulfil for creating particular dramaturgic effects.

Whereas Muttenthaler and Wonisch analyse only parts of the exhibitions and assume that, following Geertz (1973b, 21), it is possible to draw conclusions about the complete expositions by analysing these parts thoroughly (Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006, 51, 59; see Dean 2010, 23), for this research project, instead, it was necessary to analyse the whole films and exhibitions in order to see if and how continuous storylines and arcs of suspense were constructed. It is important to note that every description, even a thin one (Geertz 1973b, 15, 20), is an interpretation in itself (Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006, 50). In this sense, selecting and including events and exhibits in the protocols is a ‘plotting of the plot’.

Unlike many German-speaking analysts cited here, I do not include the producers’ perspective. I stick to analysing the selected exhibitions and films by focussing exclusively on the works themselves. I do not for example interview curators and filmmakers about their intentions, because I understand suspense as effects caused by specific textual features. And these features can be identified by working through the text itself. Still, the ‘messiness’ of the exhibition production is not disregarded in this thesis, a criticism aimed at the textual approach by Sharon Macdonald (1996, 5). The awareness of the multilayeredness and diverse agents involved in the making process is a *sine qua non* for this research project. Exactly because fine-tuning the intended effects in an exhibition is such a serious challenge (diverse factors can influence and alter messages and contents), an awareness for possible dramaturgic tools seems particularly useful.

## **Thought experiment**

Thought experiments, these ‘devices of the imagination used to investigate the nature of things’ (Brown and Fehige 2017), are applied in diverse disciplines, especially in science and philosophy. Rachel Cooper characterises them as presenting us with a series of ‘what if’ questions. ‘In performing a thought experiment’, she writes, ‘we temporarily adjust our worldview in order to construct a model in accord with the answers to these “what if” questions’ (Cooper 2005, 336). If an internally consistent model can be constructed, the conclusion can be drawn that the situation imagined is possible (ibid., 338). The situation hypothesised is impossible, Cooper explains, when the answer to the ‘what if’ questions results in a contradiction or when – and this is the case in the thought experiment conducted during this research project – ‘different parts of the model simply will not go together’ (ibid., 339).

The decision to perform a thought experiment had not been taken at the beginning of this research project but was inspired by the findings of the exhibition analyses. The fact that the suspense devices were applied in the three case studies only in rudimentary ways could but did not mean that such an application in cultural historical exhibitions is generally impossible. Especially since provoking dramatic suspense as consequently as it is typical for popular films was not the intention in any of the examples. As such an exciting exhibition could not be found despite an extensive search, to include a further exhibition into the analyses was no option. The alternative, trying to create such an exhibition myself, was not possible because of restricted financial and time resources (see ibid., 343).

More important for the decision to conduct a thought experiment than a deficit of alternatives, was however its potential to support a reflection and review of the exhibition medium’s typical features and to carve out more precisely the narrative qualities and deficits of exhibitions which foster or prevent the creation of suspense. David Herman

uses this method in *Story Logic* in order to ‘suggest ways to mark off gradations on the scale of narrativity – the continuum stretching from sequences that are nearly impossible to process as narratives to those immediately identifiable as such’ (Herman 2002, 101). Similarly, I tried to find out by help of the experiment which components typical for classical Hollywood films and important for the creation of dramatic suspense could have been introduced or strengthened in the three exhibition narratives. Here it was crucial to differentiate between features inherent in the exhibition medium and those bound to values and preferences of curators and thus of a changeable nature.

Not least, the creative potential of thought experiments seemed to be promising: they have the power to initiate beforehand hardly predictable thoughts and ideas. ‘We are inclined to say’, James Robert Brown and Yiftach Fehige (2017) state, ‘that skeptics underestimate the importance of thought experiments for the creative mind in any field.’ In the case of this research project the experiment allowed to look into the vague feelings experienced while watching the films and visiting the exhibitions and thus to identify triggers for ‘mild’ suspense – a concept only possible to detect and enhance by combining the findings of the analyses with those of the experiment.

## **Theoretical framework**

I combine two different theories in order to explore the research subject adequately: semiotics and cognitive film theory. A comprehension of films and exhibitions not only as texts but as narratives and moreover narratives fulfilling specific (cognitive and affective) functions takes their complex and performative character into account. The methods and theories chosen to explore a specific phenomenon shape and constitute the perception strongly (Flick 2011, 11, 17). Therefore, they must be explained in more detail.

## Semiotics

Semiotics is the basis for this thesis' theoretical approach. Not only a 'spoken or written discourse' (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 3) is understood as a text but any manifested sign system, including exhibitions and films. Unlike classical analyses based on semiotics,<sup>23</sup> the objective of this analysis is no interpretation of 'codes and signs in order to understand how aspects of a text work with our own cultural knowledge to make meaning in our lives' (Brennen 2012, 197) but to detect potentialities for creating suspense. Key for such an understanding is however that a museum object is a sign or, using the term introduced by Krzysztof Pomian (1988), a semiophor, thus a bearer of meanings.<sup>24</sup> Taken out of its original context, it represents a specific idea or situation, but, as Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta explains: 'at the same time, it is a "term" in the system of values of the museum code, or signification system, which does not necessarily correspond to that given original system' (1992, 34). Like the knife of Leopold Vietoris (1891-2002) which is presented in *Mountains* with a label telling the story of Herman Schlagintweit using a knife to impress a Nepalese despot in the 1850's (see Chapter 6). A point often discussed in museum studies, and of special importance for this thesis, is that even though exactly this quality to represent a specific circumstance makes it possible to narrate by help of objects, the polysemous nature of objects complicates a fixing of this meaning (Scholze 2004, 24; Schärer 2003, 135; Korff 2002, 143; Fayet 2005, 31). The concepts *denotation* and *connotation* (besides an exhibition's *meta-function* the two other layers of meanings exhibitions are based on from a semiotic perspective) help to distinguish between the former practical values of museum

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<sup>23</sup> One example is Scholze's analysis (2004) or de Lourdes Parreiras Horta's (1992) analysis of an exhibition at the British Museum.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Pearce's analysis of the meanings of an individual object, a jacket of an infantry officer from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, adapting a semiotic approach (1990).

objects and their actual meanings in the exhibition context and the associations they trigger (Scholze 2004, 30). Interestingly enough, even though I did not aim at the beginning of this research at considering the exhibitions' meta-function at all, the intentions and attitudes of the makers prove to be very important for understanding the dramaturgy of the exhibitions (and films) fully (see Chapter 9).

Bal uses semiotic theory for her analysis, too, understanding 'the displays as a sign system working between the visual and the verbal' (Bal 1992, 561). For all German-speaking authors – Muttenthaler and Wonisch (2006, 53-8), Claußen (2009, 48), Dean (2010, 23), Thiemeyer (2010, 32), Jannelli (2012, 76) and Slenczka (2013, 77) – semiotics is also important and in most cases the basis for their theoretical underpinning.<sup>25</sup> But whereas Scholze draws exclusively on semiotics (2004, 13; 19-25; see Scholze 2010), they argue for adding other theories, mostly in order to do justice to the exhibition medium's complexity (Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006, 38; Claußen 2009, 40; Dean 2010, 19; Jannelli 2012, 68; see Macdonald 2006, 7).

Of special interest are Jannelli's and Thiemeyer's arguments. They justify such an approach specifically with the medium's sensual and spatial character: to reduce three-dimensional exhibitions to two-dimensional texts would mean to ignore some of their most characteristic features (Jannelli 2012, 75, 77-8; Thiemeyer 2010, 32). Both criticise also the relatively static comprehension of texts, typical for semiotics, a critique I share. There is the tendency to reduce the complexity of communication situations to the trinity sender – object – receiver (Hall 1980; Hooper-Greenhill 1991).

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<sup>25</sup> Mason discusses the textual approach as applied in museum studies and names a range of anglophone examples (2006), see also the overview in de Lourdes Parreiras Horta (1992, 18-21).

Jannelli and Thiemeyer argue therefore for a combination of semiotics and performative theory, referring, among others, to Erika Fischer Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen* [*The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*]<sup>26</sup> (2004). According to them, first the visitor can thus be integrated into the analysis as important agent in the meaning making process (Jannelli 2012, 78) and second the sensual dimension of an exhibition visit, the room atmosphere and the objects' aura can be apprehended (Thiemeyer 2010, 32; Jannelli 2012, 101-2). Thiemeyer who analyses in his study how museums currently present both world wars concludes:

Unlike geometrical space the performative space is not given, hence a work in the classical sense, but it is formed permanently anew, it is an event. It participates actively in the production of meaning because it helps to overcome the opposition between subject and object. Its objective is the perception with the whole body (in motion) instead only with the eyes. (Thiemeyer 2010, 123)

Such a performative approach proves especially useful for Jannelli who researches small museums run by lay people, museums she calls 'wild', and the cultural practice of 'doing museums', especially guided tours. Interestingly enough, for describing the exhibitions themselves even Jannelli goes back to semiotics (Jannelli 2012, 76). And even though both scholars also consider sensual aspects while describing the museums, these aspects remain in the background during the analyses. This illustrates the dilemma caused by the necessity to verbalise and therefore inevitably to flatten exhibitions in order to open them up for an analysis, treating them ultimately as texts, too. In my view, this dilemma is inherent in the practice, which is without any alternative to date, to describe and understand plurimedial

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<sup>26</sup> Original title of the English version.

phenomena with words. Inspiringly, Nina Tecklenburg who analyses in *Performing Stories* new narrative practices in contemporary theatre, does not consider this a deficit at all but instead understands it as a flexible, meaning-making interaction between ephemeral performance, theoretical reflection and re-narration (2014, 58-9).

The problem to grasp all medium's layers sufficiently has been discussed intensely in film studies, too (see Kanzong 1992, 229) and is reflected on the methodological level. Alternative models like including visual notes in form of storyboards and production photographs or sketches (Korte 1999, 35) were not successful. Just as little as protocols and descriptions may resemble the films and exhibitions themselves as they are unable to illustrate their 'sensual total gestalt' completely (Hickethier 2001, 27), they are useful, despite these compromises, as analytical tools and exactly as such they should be understood (Faulstich 2002, 63).

There are three reasons why I include semiotics explicitly into the methodological approach even though I use almost exclusively narratological concepts throughout the research. One reason is my engagement with the historical emergence of the narrative turn in museum studies which taught me how crucial semiotics were for opening up exhibitions for analysis at all. Considering exhibitions as texts (and not longer as depictions of objective 'truth') paved the way to conceptualize them as narratives. Including semiotic theory along with narrative theory (specifically cognitive film theory) shows how closely intertwined both theories are. Second, by underlining the closeness between semiotics (which is still the predominant approach for exhibition analyses) and narratology (which so far has been used only in rare cases in museum studies despite its enormous potential), perspectives for future analyses open up. Third, I intend to make clear that an analysis of a narrative's plot – which is the core of this thesis – is not possible without a re-construction of meanings in some way. In general, analysing involves interpretation. In summary, my intention is thus to make



explicit, while describing the theoretical framework for this research project, what I use throughout the following chapters implicitly: an understanding of exhibitions as systems of signs and significations.

Even though semiotics may not cover films' or exhibitions' complex nature completely, considering these media as texts makes them comprehensible and analysable because it helps to deconstruct them and to explore single elements and relations between them precisely. But more than that: in this case, a textualisation even supports my research purpose because it contributes to an understanding of exhibitions as narratives. The idea behind this is that features complicating a narrativisation will show up while treating exhibitions as texts, demonstrating their uniqueness and resistance. The other aspect criticised, the separation between object and subject, thus a neglect of the visitor's role, is a major reason for complementing the semiotic approach by cognitive film theory.

### **Cognitive film theory**

Cognitive film theory was mainly developed by Bordwell, explained most systematically in his work *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985).<sup>27</sup> His approach (see Chapter 3) explains the modes of operation of classical Hollywood films precisely and allows for understanding (dramatic) suspense in depth. As one of the objectives of this thesis is to make the results as utilisable as possible for museum practice, to develop the concepts in close contact with the material itself, in this case classical Hollywood films, seemed to be a good idea. The blind spots caused by a focus on such a specific choice of narratives were compensated for during

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<sup>27</sup> Other important works are Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992) and Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (1985).

the research process by including non-classical films. Bordwell is mainly responsible for the fact that cognitivism is an established model in film theory and his theoretical understanding of the spectators' active role influenced, as Kuhn (2011, 34) states, other cognitive approaches strongly (see Plantinga 2002). As already mentioned, his explanations of film narratives' modes of operation are influenced by Meir Sternberg's theory (Bordwell 1985, 37; Sternberg 2011, 43). Sternberg's research is considered by David Herman as an important contribution to cognitive narratology (2013, 23), even though Sternberg himself criticises cognitive research harshly (2003).

Generally, narratology has been influenced since the 1980s by cognitive psychology<sup>28</sup> and Artificial Intelligence research. Through this combination of narratology with cognitive science, readers and their mental processes became important (Hatavara et al. 2013, 4). This fostered the shift, influenced by rhetoric and reader-response criticism (Herman 2013, 11), from a focus on narratives' formal properties to taking the recipients equally into account. In postclassical narratology, as H. Porter Abbott says, 'attention has turned increasingly to the transaction between narratives and the audiences that bring them to life' (2009, 309). Herman, one of the most influential exponents of cognitive narratology, explains why only considering the structural features of narratives does not suffice to explain the complex nature of stories. He writes: 'stories are cognitive as well as textual in nature, structures of mind as well as constellations of verbal, cinematic, pictorial, or other signs produced and interpreted within particular communicative settings' (Herman 2009, 8). Jens Eder who argues strongly for linking narratology with cognitive theory puts it in a nutshell: 'Narration

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<sup>28</sup> One example where cognitive psychology is applied to understand the meaning-making processes in exhibitions is Ham (1999).

implies communication, communication implies reception, and reception implies cognition' (Eder 2003, 282).

This focus on the relationship between artefact and reader in cognitive narratology in general and in cognitive film theory in particular is one reason to chose it as key theory for this research, complementing semiotics. The theoretical underpinning of this research is based on the assumption that texts and stories are put into effect only in close interplay with the recipients, and this holds true in particular for the phenomenon of suspense. Bordwell's theoretical framework helps to detect and verbalise cues and structural features responsible for my responses to the selected movies and exhibitions, understood as the responses of an exemplary (albeit professional) spectator and visitor (see Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006, 238).

With this a main criticism of cognitive film theory is addressed: the reactions predicted and described remain ultimately hypothetical (Kuhn 2011, 34-8). The decision to formulate the observations and conclusions in this thesis nonetheless generalising, is based on the assumption that, as Eder writes, 'there is a broad field of similarities which structure the process of film reception' (Eder 2007, 21; see Hillebrandt 2011, 16-7). Still, the analyses remain subjective, an issue they share with any hermeneutic procedure (Schreier 2004, 384-5). This makes a careful explanation of the single steps undertaken and a continuous reflection of the research process particularly important (see Walford 2001, 10). Ideally, the analyses would have been complemented by audience studies in order to verify the results. But this would have made such an extensive and profound investigation of the films and exhibitions impossible which seems necessary in order to describe the modes of operation of suspense as exactly as possible (see Ryan 2010, 481).

Besides appreciating the recipient's role in the communication situation, another reason to draw on cognitive film theory is that it explains cognitive aspects of suspense well. A

close interplay between questions and answers, enclosed in the texts and unclosed by the recipients, plays an important role for dramatic suspense. Indeed, Bordwell's approach to describe cognitive effects like hypothesising precisely, complemented by Noël Carroll's approach to detect the *erotetic* nature of popular films, proved beneficial for understanding the phenomenon of suspense.

The fact that Bordwell focuses almost exclusively on cognitive responses derives from his interest for the aspects responsible for constructing the story and its world (Bordwell 1985, 30). Bordwell assumes that it is possible to separate the way viewers comprehend the film narrative from their affective reactions (*ibid.*). He underlines indeed the importance of feelings while viewing popular films and argues for differentiating between cognition and affects only for analytical reasons, and his approach can be understood as abrasive criticism at the psychoanalytical theory dominating film studies in this period. Corinna Meyer (1996, 112-3) offers however a valid criticism of Bordwell for trivialising emotions: he does not do enough justice to how closely cognitive and emotional responses are intertwined as research in other fields clearly shows. Sheila Watson for instance argues with Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven (2012) that 'we think cognitively and emotionally at the same time and can thus experience emotion through reason, without necessarily being aware of the emotional influence on our apparently dispassionate thoughts' (Watson 2013, 283). Such an entwinement of reason and emotion holds especially true for classical Hollywood films which Ed Tan calls 'genuine emotion machines' (Tan 1996, 251; see Plantinga 2009, 7). Consequently, to consider emotions is key for exploring the suspense phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For the purpose of this research it is not necessary to define emotions more precisely and the terms emotions and feelings are used synonymously (for a differentiation between feelings like interest, pleasure and excitement and emotions like happiness or fear, provoked by entertainment offerings see Cupchik (2011)).

Cognitive theory in general faces the reproach to neglect emotions because, as Silvia Knobloch reasons, ‘cognition solely does not clarify fascination’ (Knobloch 2003, 380). Eder by contrast, argues: ‘The attribute “cognitive” does not however mean that the emotional side of reception is to be ignored. On the contrary, cognitive theories allow us to understand this area more accurately than ever before’ (Eder 2003, 284). But instead of turning to other sub fields of cognitive research focusing on emotions (see Herman 2013, 21; Hogan 2010), I decided to stay as close as possible to the comparatum, classical Hollywood films, and chose scriptwriting manuals as a source for understanding which role emotions play for creating and receiving popular films. Scriptwriting literature like Ari Hiltunen’s *Aristotle in Hollywood: The Anatomy of Successful Storytelling* (2002) and several how-to guides (e.g. Herman 1966; Gulino 2004; Cunningham 2008) helped to understand how uncertainty and hypothesising go hand in hand with experiencing fear and hope, creating thus the complex phenomenon suspense. All authors consider emotions as a key element in order to bind audiences to the story.

The core of cognitive theory is the assumption that narratives are understood by applying specific patterns, so called schemes<sup>30</sup>. In case of classical Hollywood films the *master schema* is characterised by a three-act structure and a protagonist pursuing a goal (Bordwell 1985, 34-5). This entails an exposition, an explanation, a complication and a definite conclusion. Such a master schema is an ‘abstraction of narrative structure which embodies typical expectations about how to classify events and relate parts to the whole’ (ibid., 34). Based on former reception experiences readers approach a text with this general framework and a repertoire of different mental schemes or ‘knowledge clusters’ as Bordwell calls

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<sup>30</sup> For a differentiation between the terms schemes, scripts, frames etc. see Emmott and Alexander (2009).

it (ibid., 100). Dependent on the information given at the start of the text they begin to activate the proper schemes, checking continuously if they go with the story or if it is necessary to change the mindset or to adapt the schemes. One important function of schemes is that they allow the readers to guess and substitute omitted information ‘as it is rare and often unnecessary for texts to contain all the detail required for them to be fully understood’ (Emmott and Alexander 2009, 411). A recipient familiar with popular films will know that a flaunted gap signals in most cases that the missing information is important – and excitedly the recipient will wait until it is delivered in addition (see Chapter 3). Uncertainty creates thus – potentially – suspense.

## **Dramaturgy**

Whereas the term dramaturgy is used as a matter of fact in contemporary museum practice (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 13-5), especially by designers (e.g. Hagebölling 2004b; Duncan and McCauley 2012, 293), a closer look reveals how complex the concept is (see Stapferhaus Lenzburg 2014; Turner and Behrndt 2008). This thesis benefits from this complexity because it allows for taking into account different perspectives on a work, be it a film or an exhibition. Eder explains the three different meanings of dramaturgy as follows:

“Dramaturgy” can, firstly, be understood in the sense of a formal quality or structure of the work, secondly, as the activity of the author (the δραματουργος), who structures the work and, third, as the theoretical work of an expert recipient, who analyses the structure of the work or lays down rules for structuring normatively. (Eder 2007, 11)

This thesis considers all these different but closely interrelated aspects: the ‘formal qualities’ and structures of exhibitions and films will be an issue throughout the thesis,

directly related to the analysis of concrete examples. Both, the discussion and the analysis of the works' structure, will be performed with focus on the 'activity of the author'.

'Structuring the work' means that the creator of the work produces and directs effects on the side of the audience, may they be of cognitive, emotional or sensual nature (Eder 2007, 16). And as such an effect, and a very important one indeed, suspense can be understood. Gottfried Müller goes to the heart of dramaturgy while writing in *Dramaturgie des Theaters und Films* [*Dramaturgy of Theatre and Film*]:

Dramaturgy is the art of developing a plot in such a way that its rendition leads an audience – who are waiting in a darkened room with no intention other than to be entertained – to be caught up in a constant stream of fresh excitement. (Müller 1941, 20).

As explained, this research includes scriptwriting manuals in order to describe the emotional aspects of suspense. Drawing on them, however, should also strengthen the authors' perspectives. As they are an unusual source to draw on in research, especially in museum studies, they are introduced hereafter briefly.

### **How-to manuals or scriptwriting as craft**

Scriptwriters have been a firm component of the film industry since circa 1910 (Eidsvik 1992, 177).<sup>31</sup> The introduction of the sound film in 1927 cemented their role because

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<sup>31</sup> According to Liepa (2011, 7), by 1917 script and intertitle writing had become thoroughly institutionalised elements of film production, situating writing at the centre of the creative process. Kasten (1992, 22) determines the date for the German film industry with the year 1918. About screenwriting history in Great Britain see Macdonald (2011).

writing good dialogues became a required skill (ibid., 181). The flourishing movie market attracted a lot of aspirants who hoped to make a living by writing for the screen and were more than willing to invest in the booming guidebooks. In the post-war era however, the film industry in the US as well as in Europe faced difficult times and had to cope with the decline of audience figures, as a consequence many authors were dismissed (ibid., 182). According to Dennis Eick (2006, 25) the auteur-theory was another negative influence on the status of the script writer profession. Developed by French film makers like François Truffaut in the 1950s, this theory placed the director clearly at the centre of the creative process of film making. But in the 1970s scriptwriters grew in confidence again (ibid., 17), and Field's ground breaking manual, published in 1979, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* ushered a new boom of how-to books.<sup>32</sup>

Even though all authors of such guidebooks are united by the conviction that scriptwriting is a craft and can be taught and learned, their philosophies vary significantly and can be divided into two groups. Criticised often for his 'cookbook like' advice (Eidsvik 1992, 192), Field is without any doubt the most prominent exponent of the one approach which is based on clear guidelines. His objective is to support writers in creating a commercially successful story, therefore he focusses on popular films. His approach is shared by most authors of this genre and will be used to describe dramatic suspense and dramaturgic suspense techniques in Chapter 3 and 4. Dagmar Benke, whose manual *Freistil [Freestyle]* (2002) will be crucial in Chapter 8 for describing non-classical films and for developing an understanding of epic suspense, is one of the rare cases for encouraging script writers,

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<sup>32</sup> Despite all differences, for the US as well as for Germany a boom can be ascertained for the 1920s, and another one for the 1980s for the US and a little bit later (because of the translations) for Germany (Ellermann 1995, 58, 61).



inspired by Frank Daniel<sup>33</sup>, to create more artistic scripts.<sup>34</sup> Many exponents of the first group however mention also features of non-classical films and even the authors who write about more unconventional narratives, explain the modes of operation of popular films because to explain deviations you need to understand the norm first. Christoph Vogler, whose idea to model scripts after a 'Hero's Journey' is also very influential, writes: 'Artists who operate on the principle of rejecting all form are themselves dependent on form. The freshness and excitement of their work comes from its contrast to the pervasiveness of formulas and patterns in the culture' (Vogler 2007, xviii).

Different from Ralf Junkerjürgen (2002, 14) who neglects the manuals in his study about suspense explicitly because their authors do not use scientifically precise notions, this research includes them deliberately, recognising their authors' competent experience in storytelling. Besides explicit how-to guides it considers books like Hiltunen's *Aristotle in Hollywood* (2002) and Eick's *Drehbuchtheorien. Eine vergleichende Analyse [Script Theories: A Comparative Analysis]* (2006) which take a more analytical approach. This thesis follows the lead of Eder (2007) who combines also the analyses of scriptwriting literature with film theory. He criticises the lack of exchange between film practitioners and film theorists even though both try to find answers to the question of how popular film narratives are constructed and how their dramaturgy fascinates broad audiences. His explanations and lines of arguments demonstrate how well both approaches complement each other.

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel did not write a manual but influenced for instance Howard and Mabley (1993) or Benke (2002) strongly.

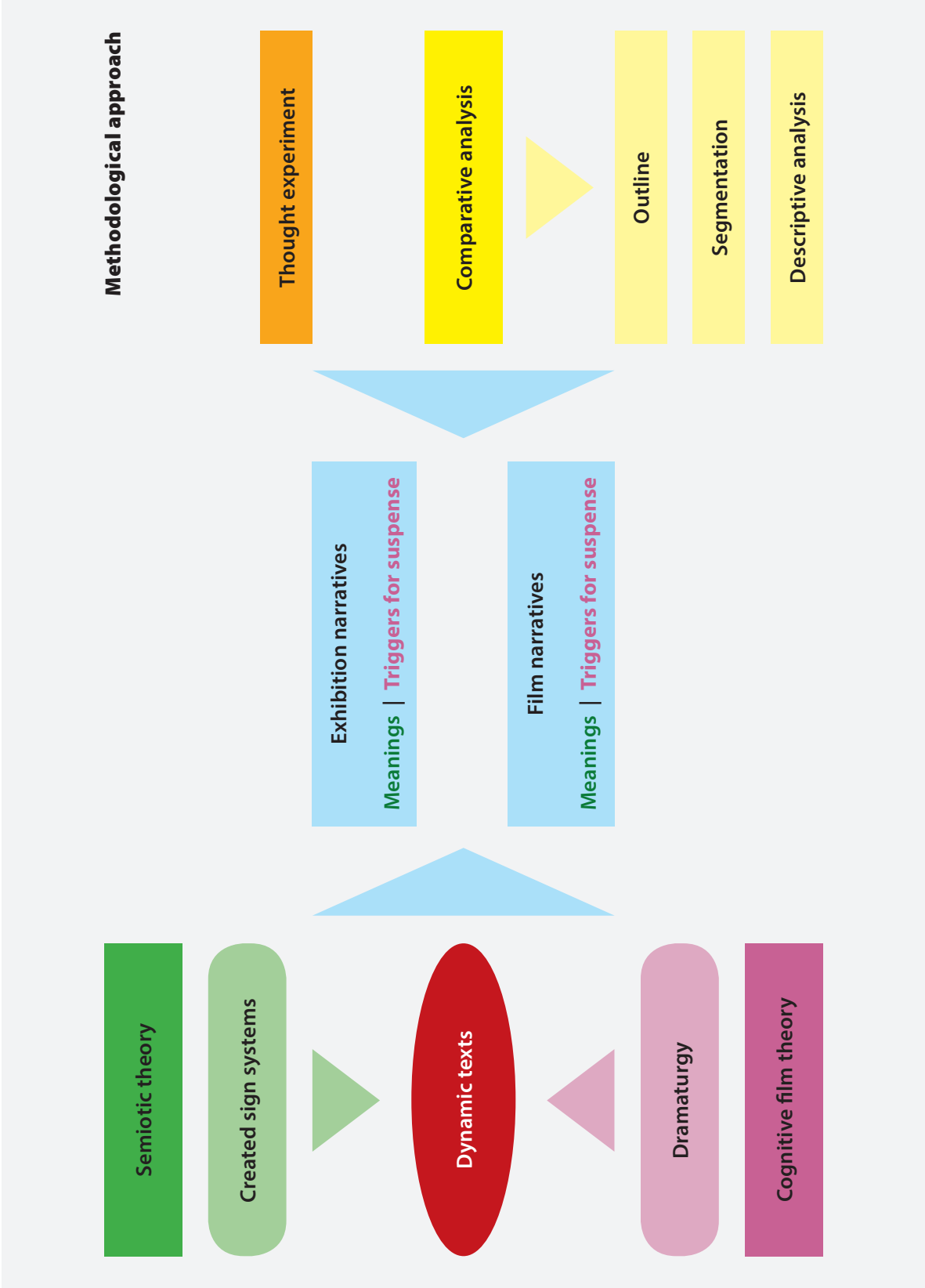
<sup>34</sup> Another example is McKee (2007).

## Dynamic texts

Exhibitions and films are understood in the scope of this research project as texts and created sign systems. This theoretical approach is combined with a second one: viewing exhibitions as narratives, with a focus on the dramaturgic effects – particularly suspense – provoked by story features. Thus integrating semiotics with cognitive film theory and dramaturgy means to understand exhibitions and films as a vivid interlacing of author, work and recipients and to see texts not as static entities but as fluent processes of meaning making, thus as *dynamic texts* (Figure 1.1). These *dynamic texts* are considered as ‘nets of information’ which unfold their effects on their recipients based on the selection, placement and presentation of (speaking with semiotics) signs and (speaking with narratology) events. Scholze’s approach to view the process of coding and decoding as a sign process and Bordwell’s definition of plot as a set of clues are thereby complementary: only if a sign is interpreted in the context of the other signs, it can unfold a dramaturgic effect. The detection of suspense is thus indissolubly linked to the interpretation of meaning and both operations taken together determine the process of decoding.

Martin Esslin describes in *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen* how useful semiotics proved to be for his theatre practice. He argues: ‘This *semiotic* approach is, basically, extremely simple and practical. It asks: how is it done? and tries to supply the most down-to-earth answers, by examining the *signs* that are used to achieve the desired communication’ (Esslin 1987, 10). What specifies his approach should serve as a rule also for this thesis: ‘And I have always made my experience as a practical director, dramaturg and critic the final arbiter in enunciating any principles or conclusions. That – the constant testing of the theory against actual results – seems to me the real use of genuinely “scientific” methodology’ (ibid., 11-2).

Figure 1.1 Methodological approach



## **Conclusion**

The chapter explained the concrete methods and theoretical background chosen for an exploration of the role suspense plays or might play for cultural historical exhibitions. It reasoned why I decided to break new ground by comparing exhibitions with films through an in-depth analysis. In doing so this thesis adds to transmedial narratology. It not only helps to understand the exhibition medium better by conceptualising and researching it as narrative but adds likewise to a further understanding of narrativity's medial specificities.

The analysis of the selected exhibitions follows the well-established practice of film analysis based on sequence protocols, describing the case studies thickly. The methodological approach was developed and refined in close examination of a body of exhibition analyses published in German, also in order to acknowledge the scholars' merits in developing the method of analysing exhibitions. Tying in with them proved useful in particular for establishing the theoretical framework for this research. Following the other studies, semiotics was chosen because understanding exhibitions and films as sign systems turned out to be very productive for a precise analysis. It showed however, too, how crucial it is to prevent a flattening of the complex and three-dimensional exhibition medium by comprehending it as texts. This thesis counteracts such a constrictive comprehension by understanding exhibitions and films as narratives and by drawing additionally on cognitive narratology. The reason for selecting this narratological approach was that it takes the recipient's role in the communication process seriously.

The thesis draws in particular on Bordwell's cognitive film theory because it is based on an exploration of classical Hollywood films and because he describes ways to create certain effects precisely. As Bordwell focuses on cognitive effects and neglects affective ones, the methodological approach is complemented by dramaturgy, in the form of scriptwriting literature and manuals. How to bind the audiences to the stories via emotions and suspense

is essential for all authors. This genre was chosen as source, too, because it is practice-oriented and sheds light on the side of the storytellers. Understanding the modes of operation of the exhibition medium and its narrativity better is no end in itself but supports the development of a more refined exhibition dramaturgy.

## 2. Narrative Suspense: Structure and Relevance

### Introduction

This chapter sets out to describe how the ‘travelling concept’ (Bal 2002) narrative is understood for the purpose of this research project. This is important because two different media, films and exhibitions, will be compared with their own specific narrative qualities. Therefore a clear point of reference is crucial (Hatavara et al. 2013, 5). Instead of trying to define narrative exhaustively however, the chapter introduces and explains aspects which are decisive for understanding how narrative suspense potentially works. Structure will be of peculiar interest throughout the research because the arrangement of the events is of outstanding importance for creating suspense. Simply put, only if *first* a question is posed and *then* the answer is given, suspense can arise. What does this mean in case of exhibitions when visitors are free to move? Since understanding narrative as a complex of structural features alone cannot explain its significance for meaning-making in general and suspense in particular, the chapter then introduces relevance as a second essential aspect closely related to narrativity. Only a recipient, thus the underlying hypothesis, who cares about the story and its outcome, will follow its unfolding eagerly. The chapter concludes by defining how *narrative* and *story*, as key terms of this study, will be used in this thesis.

### Narrativity – a flexible concept

As familiar the use of the term *story* is to us in everyday life, as complex is its nature on closer examination. But neither in narratology there is one, conclusive definition of narrative or story, but many and diverse views, depending not least on the research interest,

approach and object of study. In its beginnings, as mentioned, narratology defined narrative first and foremost by its formal properties. Typical was also a focus on literary texts. But in the 1990s narratology (labelled as ‘postclassical’)<sup>35</sup> opened up not only for different media and genres but since then narratologists, inspired among others by reader-response criticism, began also to focus on the interplay between texts and their recipients. These new fields of interest influenced likewise narrative’s definition. Werner Wolf (2002, 48), for instance, considers the capacity of a text to let its readers re-experience the narrated world as a basic quality of narrative. This quality of experientiality (Wolf 2004, 88) will become highly important when defining dramatic suspense in Chapter 3 and 4. Following Wolf (2002, 38), such features (some more, some less important) constituting or belonging to a narrative, will be designated hereafter as *narratemes* (see Prince 1999, 46).

Although narratology has broadened its scope widely, the formal characteristics of narrative are still considered as important, and the question, what a narrative is, remains crucial, too. ‘If narrative is everywhere and everything, is it anything anymore?’, Mari Hatawara et al. ask (2013, 4), and rightly so. But the research is often not any longer guided by binary oppositions like story and non-story but by a more flexible understanding. This is crucial for this thesis because such an understanding allows for including exhibitions, too, which comprises media and modes of operation hindering a narrativisation.

Narrativity (understood as the quality which defines a text as narrative)<sup>36</sup> is considered as a bundle of different formal and thematic aspects (Nünning and Nünning 2002, 6). Marie-

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<sup>35</sup> For an overview of the differences between classical and postclassical narratology and a list of diverse new approaches see Nünning (2003).

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed description and critical revision of the concept *narrativity* see Abbott (2009).

Laure Ryan for example, proposes a set of nine ‘nested conditions’ and explains:

We may in fact question the need for a watertight definition: why couldn’t narrativity be a scalar property rather than a strictly binary one, and narrative a fuzzy set allowing different degrees of membership, but centered around prototypical cases that everybody recognizes as narrative? In a scalar conception of narrative, definition becomes a series of concentric circles that spell increasingly narrow conditions, as we move from the outer to the inner circles, and from the marginal cases to the prototypes. (Ryan 2006, 193)

Ryan takes up Fotis Jannidis’ proposal (2003, 40) for a scalar approach of narration. But, as she specifies herself, whereas Jannidis creates his approach in order to measure the storytelling capacity of different media, Ryan suggests ‘that story itself can be realized to variable degrees within a given medium’ (2006, 195). An interesting example for applying such an approach to the exhibition medium, is Tricia Austin’s model for scaling a space’s degree of narrativity. At the low end of her scale she places exemplarily a motorway experienced from the seat of a car and at the high end immersive museum experience (Austin 2012, 110-2).

For this research project it is now crucial to filter out the narratemes productive or possibly necessary for the creation of suspense. As a reminder: suspense is understood in the scope of this thesis always as narrative suspense, in contrast to suspense provoked for instance by music or real life events. At this point it will be defined as open as possible as ‘the wish to learn how a story unfolds’. This definition will be enriched and refined continuously throughout the following chapters.



## Order and disorder

If you want to tell an audience the tale of a stormy night on Mount Everest in 1996, you can start by describing the climbers preparing expectantly their equipment in their respective home country, or you can hop in with the painful death of eight of the about 30 mountaineers.<sup>37</sup> This decision will have a different impact on your listeners' mood, expectations and attention. This is without having yet said anything about the genre you choose, the style of your tale or the perspective of your narration. Assuming that you begin with the death of the climbers, continue with a description of the trip and end with the participants packing happily their rucksacks in their homes, your listeners will still be able to reason from the events plotted in this specific order the underlying story i.e. the chronological order. According to Jens Eder, by this differentiation a narrative can be identified as such:

Any portrayal which presents a sequence of events and which, at the same time, exhibits a '*double temporal logic*', i.e. where a distinction can be made between *sujet* and *fabula*, *story* and *discourse* respectively, is a narrative (Eder 2007, 8)

The terms *fabula* and *sujet*<sup>38</sup> trace back to the school of Russian Formalists who created the prerequisites for modern structuralism and semiotics (Grzybek 1998, 550). Victor Shklovsky writes 'The concept of plot (*syuzhet*) is too often confused with a description of the events in the novel, with what I'd tentatively call the story line (*fabula*). As a matter of fact, though, the story line is nothing more than material for plot formation' (Shklovsky

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<sup>37</sup> See the full story in Matt Dickinson (1997) *The Death Zone – Climbing Everest through the Killer Storm*. London: Hutchinson/Random House.

<sup>38</sup> A table in Martinez and Scheffel (2002, 26) gives an overview of the differing uses of the terms.

1991, 170), and Boris Tomashevsky states: ‘In brief, the story is “the action itself,” the plot, “how the reader learns of the action”’ (Tomashevsky 1965, 67). Seymour Chatman who seeks in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* to define what a narrative is, summarises: ‘In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*’ (Chatman 1978, 19).

The difference and interplay between story and discourse is essential for comprehending all possible modes of operation of narrative suspense. In the example given, keeping to the factual chronology, simply mentioning that the mountaineers intend to climb Mount Everest will most likely signal danger to the listeners and thus evoke suspense. Viewed from cognitive narratology ‘Mount Everest’ activates a prototype schema; this will be explained in the next chapter. Another, famous, example of novelist E.M. Forster illustrates how the recipients’ wish to learn more can be evoked already on the story level. Forster defines story in the following way:

It is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence – dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on. *Qua* story, it can only have one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. (Forster 1964, 35)

It becomes clear that a mere and chronological succession of events may create a momentum which guides the reader through the story (see Brewer 1996, 113). By disarranging the events and creating a ‘double temporal logic’ the possibilities to trigger suspense can be broadened however. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan describes the ‘main types of discrepancy between story-order and text-order’ (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 46) with recourse to Gérard Genette’s terminology as *analepsis* and *prolepsis* (Genette 1998, 32-54). She explains:

An *analepsis* is a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story. Conversely, a *prolepsis* is a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. The narration, as it were, takes an excursion into the future of the story. (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 46)

Both types can be used for creating suspense. For instance, by disclosing the information that X had been in prison (*analepsis*) or by announcing that X will be in jail (*prolepsis*), he or she can be introduced as a suspect in a crime novel. The exhibition analyses from Jennifer Anne Walklate (2012, 173-183) and Heike Buschmann (2010, 156-7) show both the differences between applying these devices in a linearly organised text or in the far more complex and spatial museum environment.

Another suspense device, and a very important one indeed, related to the difference and interplay between story and plot is the implementation of gaps. This relates to the fact that however detailed a narrative may be, it can never represent all possible story events. Therefore narrating implies always a selection of events and therewith logically always omissions or *ellipses* as Genette terms it (Genette 1998, 76-8). Gapping can help the creation of suspense in different ways. Generally, ellipses support the narrative flow by skipping boring or irrelevant events and details. More specifically, they can withhold important information from the recipients, like that X had been in jail for the same kind of crime the culprit is searched for. The crucial point is that only if the reader understands that information is suppressed, suspense will arise. Last but not least, gaps can also help to create a vague mysterious atmosphere (Kirsten 2012, 108-109).

So, the narrateme temporal succession is important for creating suspense as this phenomenon can be described as uncertainty, triggered by particular narrative devices, and maintained till the question raised is answered. And merely by selecting and arranging

the events, may it be in a chronological or a non-chronological order, narrative suspense can potentially be evoked. All these techniques will be explored and described in the next chapters in detail, closely related to films and exhibitions.

However, by not only stringing the events together but by connecting them meaningfully, these effects can be intensified. In fact, most scholars consider causality as another necessary narrateme for any narrative (Jannidis 2003, 36). It is remarkable, too, that even Rimmon-Kenan who considers temporal succession as sufficient feature to identify a text as narrative, designates causality and closure as the ‘most interesting’ features of stories (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 18). Closure is closely related to teleology, meaning that all events are target-oriented, another important narrateme, and crucial also for the creation of suspense, as the film and exhibition analyses will demonstrate. Wolf underlines the outstanding importance teleology has for narrativity in general and suspenseful narratives in particular and classifies it as core narrateme, besides causality and chronology. These three basic traits of narratives belong to a group he calls ‘syntactic narratemes’ which result from selecting, arranging and presenting ‘content narratemes’, including anthropomorphic beings and actions (Wolf 2004, 87-91). The analyses will exemplify how all these factors interrelate and create, suspenseful, stories.

Finally, the interestingness of causality shall be illustrated again by help of Forster’s example. After having defined *story*, he explains *plot* like this: ‘A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. “The king died and then the queen died,” is a story. “The king died, and then the queen died of grief,” is a plot’ (Forster 1964, 94). The example demonstrates perfectly that a narrative becomes meaningful and alive in the moment events are connected. In the first case, where the events are solely added, in the form of a chronicle, we might ask: And then? But it is the grief which arouses our curiosity: did she love him so much? How was their relationship? The mere succession of events may

create a momentum, which guides the reader through the story, but this momentum can be intensified by linking the events in a meaningful way.

## **Exhibition as structure**

What Syd Field writes about popular films holds true for exhibitions, too: that structure is ‘the glue that holds the story in place’ (Field 2005, 21). This is, however, not the only reason why to focus on structure throughout the research project. The other, equally important one, is that, as mentioned before, the effectiveness of narrative structures has been underestimated for curating so far (Walklate 2012, 20). The importance of defining the sequence of an exhibition has been considered and discussed widely from the design side though. Examples are Sophia Psarra’s discussion (2005, 89-90) of consequences caused by strongly structured narratives based on sequence and causality or weakly structured ones using interconnections, Stephen Greenberg’s explanations (2005, 230) of building narrative arcs and applying the three-act scheme typical for Hollywood films to the museum space or Paul Basu’s positive assessment (2007, 54) of labyrinthine exhibitions because in his view they can disturb the visitors’ itinerary in a stimulating way. All these examples however approach museums and exhibitions from the side of architecture and design. Even though closely interconnected to the work of curators, it seems necessary to understand the importance of narrative structure explicitly from this, the content side.

One reason for not considering the implications of certain structures for the dramaturgic effects and messages of an exhibition seriously enough may be the essential role objects play for this medium. Whereas the writers of fictional films can, theoretically, invent whatever they want, curators of cultural historical exhibitions have to work with specific and tangible items and their narrating is materially bound. If, for example, some Asian

vessels would be placed best in the middle of an exhibition because of their historical meaning, it may be necessary to put them instead in the beginning as the visual dramaturgy calls for an eye-catcher exactly at this place (not to speak of showcases that are too small and other trivial but crucial conditions). Another reason may be that it is today common to start early in a project to work together with designers. As many advantages such a decision may have, it holds the danger to talk too early about the visual realisation, even before the content has been worked through and storylines developed thoroughly. Last but not least, considering visitors theoretically as co-narrators strongly involved in plotting the story, might cause a certain vagueness. But in practice curators have to decide where to place this or that object exactly.

## **Relevance**

Apart from structure, a narrateme called *tellability* (see Baroni 2009) is also part of the characterisation of (suspenseful) narratives. For some narratologists it may suffice to consider only the formal properties of texts, and by definition a boring story is a story, too. But for us studying ‘places of passion and public service’ as Nina Simon (2016) calls museums beautifully, this can not be satisfying. Confronted with a boring exhibition, the visitors have the right to ask ‘So what?’. This is exactly the question linguists William Labov and Joshua Waletzky attribute to listeners when being offered an ‘empty’ or ‘pointless’ story (1967, 13; see Labov 2011, 547). Being interested in the functions of narratives, they consider tellability as utterly important for understanding narratives’ modes of operation. For keeping the audiences interested, *evaluation devices* can be employed which ‘form part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units’ (Labov and

Waletzky 1967, 37). The film analyses will reveal the substantial importance of such means for comprehending narratives.

For this thesis the term *relevance* is preferred as it turns the focus explicitly to the readers. Which literary phenomenon if not suspense can demonstrate so perfectly that a text is realised truly only in dialogue with its readers? Triggered by textual features, the other half of the phenomenon are the cognitive and emotional responses on side of the recipients. More specifically, suspense can encourage the readers to participate by filling in gaps, as Raphaël Baroni (2002, 109) explains, and activates thus the ‘lazy machines’ texts are, as he states with reference to Umberto Eco. Admittedly, also a trivial story can be narrated in a thrilling way if the author knows which buttons to press i.e. which schemes to activate. Moreover, exciting stories can pursue exclusively the objective to entertain. But by telling suspenseful stories dealing with significant topics and questions, their power to involve the readers can be used effectively ‘to make connections which unlock meaning’. This definition of relevance developed by Simon (2016) whose concern is to shape museums as participatory in a broad sense should be adapted for this research project. Suspense and relevance can support each other mutually in getting audiences interested and showing them why they should care.

## **Definition of terms**

Conclusively, this thesis works with different definitions for *narrative* and *story* which complement each other by stressing different aspects. Kristin Thompson’s definition of narrative as a ‘chain of events occurring in time and space and linked by cause and effect’ (Thompson 1999, 10) emphasises the narratemes temporal succession and causality which are considered as basic and constituent factors of narratives. The definition of Jannidis

who describes narratives as ‘meaningful structures’ (Jannidis 2003, 43) is understood here as including the narrateme relevance. Additionally, his more open definition implies that events can be connected in meaningful ways of diverse kinds, beyond causal connections.

But more than that, both definitions should not be used only in this complementary sense but also to make it possible to distinguish between the two subjects of this research project: classical Hollywood films and cultural historical exhibitions. The analyses will show that Thompson’s definition which grasps literary texts and films well, does not describe exhibitions, kaleidoscopic as they usually are, adequately. Jannidis’ definition however opens up the concept narrative beyond chains for different and more complex structures. Working with both definitions allows therefore for considering the similarities but also the differences between films and exhibitions sufficiently.

The term *story* will be used throughout this thesis as a synonym for *narrative*, unless it designates specifically the *fabula*, in contrast to *sujet* or *plot*. In these instances, *fabula* will be added in brackets.

The term *event* defines the building blocks narratives are composed of. In this thesis the term will be used, following David Herman, for states and actions (2002, 41) and, following Chatman (1978, 26), as distinct from *existents* which designates characters and settings.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Different from Chatman (1978, 32) who classifies events into *actions* (when an existent is the agent of the event) and *happenings* (when the existent is the patient), such a differentiation does not seem necessary for this thesis.



In order to create a narrative, two events have to be combined in a way that a change or transformation is implied or explicitly told. Admittedly, there is a fluent transition between events or links adumbrated and spelled out. But considering also a rock in a desert as a narrative, as Meir Sternberg does in an interview, because a passerby might wonder about its past and begin to fabulate about it (Sternberg 2011, 48), holds in my view the danger to invalidate any precise definition of narrative. Instead, the thesis will adapt Markus Kuhn's minimal definition of narrative. Kuhn (2011, 61) excludes from his definition for example a sculpture that shows a walking person because the person moves solely in our imagination. He writes: „At least one change of state must be shown in a given time interval. The initial state before the change and the final state after it must be represented explicitly, but the change itself and the conditions of the change need not be shown' (ibid.). This will become highly important in discussing the differences between classical Hollywood films and cultural historical exhibitions and for defining their specific degree of narrativity and their potential to be told with suspense.

In addition, Herman's concept of storyworlds reminds us that despite the necessity to reduce narrative's complexity in order to make stories analysable, it is precisely their richness and multidimensionality which makes them so attractive for communicating meanings. He writes:

Interpreters of narrative do not merely reconstruct a sequence of events and a set of existents but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world in which, besides happening and existing, things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief, and so on – both for narrative participants and for interpretation of the story. More than reconstructed timelines and inventories of existents, storyworlds are mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response,

encompassing sympathy, the drawing of causal inferences, identification, evaluation, suspense, and so on. (Herman 2002, 16-7)

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has defined narrative, besides suspense the second key concept of this thesis. This thesis shares the approach to understand narrativity as a bundle of different features called narratemes. Depending on which of these features a text has and to which extent, the ‘storyness’ (Austin 2012, 107) of a text or medium can be defined. Such a flexible understanding of narrative allows for considering and exploring exhibitions as narratives, too, which possess – as the analyses will show – characteristics complicating the telling of a story.

The chapter has focussed on those narratemes playing a role for creating suspense. Drawing on the difference between story (fabula) and plot, it explained that even though a certain momentum can be created by narrating events chronologically, the possibilities to provoke and intensify suspense can be broadened by disarranging the events or by gapping. When being aware of this manipulation, the recipients potentially respond with the wish to know how the story unfolds. Thus, the narrateme temporal succession seems to be of particular importance for provoking suspense. The implication for creating suspense in exhibitions which are commonly organised, unlike films, not in a strict linear order, is one of the most important questions throughout this thesis.

The chapter has illustrated, too, that narrative interest can be intensified by connecting events in a meaningful, for instance causal, way. How this affects the creation of suspense in exhibition narratives whose textures are usually more loosely woven than the ones of classical Hollywood films, was another key question during the research process. Taking all

this together, the chapter has demonstrated that even by selecting and arranging the events, certain dramaturgic effects like suspense, can be provoked.

Additionally, relevance was featured as another crucial narrateme for telling exciting stories. Understood as ‘making connections which unlock meanings’ (Simon 2016), it was assumed that relevance and suspense can go hand in hand in getting the audiences interested and involved. Conclusively, the chapter defined narrative and story in a way that both similarities and differences between film and exhibition narratives can be taken into account throughout the analyses.

As important as the answers given by this first tentative approach to the research theme, are the questions caused by them. Does a text have to be a narrative to a certain degree in order to be experienced as suspenseful? Do only narrative structures like chains allow for an unfolding of suspense? Or are there other ways to create suspense or even other kinds of suspense? So far suspense has been defined as the ‘wish to learn how a story unfolds’ – how urgent this wish has to be to be still felt as suspense? And how do relevance and suspense interact?

Before turning to exhibitions, the next chapters will explore thoroughly how suspense is created in classical Hollywood films which can be considered as ‘super stories’ because of their high degree of narrativity. Thus the ground will be laid for researching the possibilities to create likewise exciting exhibition narratives.

### 3. Dramatic Suspense: Hypotheses and Emotions

#### Introduction

In order to find out if suspense can be created in cultural historical exhibitions the same way it is produced in classical Hollywood films, it is necessary first to understand its specific nature and modes of operation in the context of this kind of media. After having outlined in the previous chapter *narrative suspense* in general, this chapter characterises therefore *dramatic suspense* typical for popular films. More specifically, this chapter explores how in popular films events are commonly selected, arranged and connected in order to provoke suspense. Moreover, the chapter will introduce empathy as a mean used mainly by script writers of popular films to let the audiences connect with the stories and experience them as relevant.

Whereas in the last chapter the textual features triggering suspense have been paramount, now the recipients' responses will be taken into account. This will be achieved by choosing with cognitive film theory and scriptwriting manuals sources which both take film audiences as their starting point, even though obviously for different reasons. Moreover, both fields complement each other since whereas David Bordwell's and Noël Carroll's theoretical approaches focus on audiences' cognitive responses, the authors of how-to guides describe dedicatedly ways to involve target groups emotionally.

## **Cognitive film theory**

Regarding film studies literature, those authors were selected, as Chapter 1 has explained, who base their reflections and explorations on cognitive theory. Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) shall be used as a main source. His explicit objective was to advance a theory that helps explain the perceptual and cognitive aspects of film viewing (Bordwell 1985, 30). Even though he does not address the topic of suspense extensively, his explanations about how narratives work provide an excellent frame for understanding this phenomenon's modes of operation better. It is important to note that Bordwell, as well as Carroll, develops his model based on popular films even though he speaks mostly of films in general. Markus Kuhn (2011, 35) is therefore right in criticising them for mixing specific with general film features. This mixing applies also to their explanations about suspense, so that the following sections can be read as a description of *dramatic suspense* as well as a description of classical Hollywood cinema.

### **Active viewers**

It is central to Bordwell's approach that he considers the viewer as active. He writes: 'A film, I shall suggest, does not "position" anybody. A film cues the spectator to execute a definable variety of *operations*' (Bordwell 1985, 29). He does not claim that all narrational phenomena can be explained by the spectator's work, but taking it as a starting point seems to make sense to him as 'the spectator's comprehension of the story is the principal aim of narration' (ibid., 30). Bordwell's concept of a spectator, as discussed in Chapter 1, does not mean a real person but 'a hypothetical entity executing the operations relevant to constructing a story out of the film's representation' (ibid.). Instead of foreseeing actual responses, his theory 'can only construct distinctions and historical contexts which suggest the most logically coherent range of conventionally permissible responses' (ibid.,

49). Nonetheless, his approach helped effectively to comprehend my actual responses, understood as the responses of an exemplary (albeit professional) spectator and visitor, to the selected films and exhibitions, as Chapter 5 and 6 demonstrate.

### **Perception as hypothesis-testing**

Bordwell understands and describes the viewing process based on Hermann von Helmholtz's constructivist theory. According to this approach, unconscious inferences the viewer draws are central for perception, based not only on the data, but also on prior knowledge and internalized rules (ibid., 31). Bordwell explains: 'Speaking roughly, the typical act of perception is the identification of a three-dimensional world on the basis of cues. Perception becomes a process of active hypothesis-testing. The organism is tuned to pick up data from the environment. Perception tends to be anticipatory, framing more or less likely expectations about what is out there' (ibid.). This understanding of visual perception can be transferred according to Bordwell to the perception of film narratives. The framing process is also based on learned patterns, the so-called schemata.

Cognitive processes help frame and fix perceptual hypotheses by reckoning in probabilities weighted to the situation and to prior knowledge. Typical cognitive activities, like sorting or remembering things, depend on inferential processes. In all these activities, whether we call them perceptual or cognitive, organized clusters of knowledge guide our hypothesis making. These are called *schemata*. (ibid.)

Bordwell values this theory not only because it fits the dynamic character of perception, but also because it helps to explain why perception is often a learned activity (ibid.): the capacity to refine one's repertoire of schemata is constantly elaborated. Bordwell's description of this dynamic process is noteworthy also because it explains that a text's

features not only invites the spectator to create hypotheses but limits at the same time his or her cognitive activities:

The artwork sets limits on what the spectator does. Salient perceptual features and the overall form of the artwork function as both triggers and constraints. The artwork is made so as to encourage the application of certain schemata, even if those must eventually be discarded in the course of the perceiver's activity. (ibid., 32)

Besides perceptual capacities, which should not be described here further, and prior knowledge and experience, which are of special interest for empirical studies, the material and structure of the film itself play according to Bordwell a major role for story comprehension. These structures of information can be divided into a *narrative* and a *stylistic* system. In *Film Art* Bordwell and Kristin Thompson explain that 'Style is the way a film uses the techniques of filmmaking' (Bordwell and Thompson 2010, 4). These techniques comprise first the arrangement of people, places, and objects to be filmed, known as *mise-en-scene*, second the use of cameras and other machines to record images and sounds, hence cinematography, third editing i.e. the piecing together of individual shots and fourth sound like voices, effects and music (ibid.).

### **Applying schemata**

One basic assumption of Bordwell's theory, taken from cognitive theory in general, is that the activity of the viewer is goal-oriented. In respect to watching narrative films the spectator's goal is to construct a more or less intelligible story (Bordwell 1985, 33) which is characterised in case of popular films by unity. Bordwell states that:

people perform operations on a story. When information is missing, perceivers infer it or make guesses about it. When events are arranged out of temporal order,

perceivers try to put those events in sequence. And people seek causal connections among events, both in anticipation and in retrospect. (ibid., 34)

(Western)<sup>40</sup> viewers expect events to take place in a specific order because they are used to such an arrangement thanks to other films and stories perceived before and experiences made in daily life. Actually the master schema of how a story usually works and which they have internalised is characterised by the two key features – chronology and linear causality (ibid.). Added to this, filmic cues normally invite the spectators to understand the chronological order of the plot as the chronological order of the story (fabula). Confronted with disarranged events spectators are activated to use certain schemata, in this case ‘template schemata’ (ibid., 34-6). Here, Bordwell follows Reid Hastie’s distinction (1981) between templates, prototypes and procedural patterns. Prototype schemata are important for recognising individual agents, actions, goals, and locales. Bordwell explains this by help of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)<sup>41</sup>, a film which narrative can be understood by applying prototypes of *lovers*, *bank robbery*, *small Southern town*, and *Depression era* (Bordwell 1985, 34). The most common template structure includes an introduction of the setting and characters, an explanation of the state of affairs, a complicating action, ensuing events, an outcome and an ending (ibid., 35). Template and prototype schemata operate by procedural schemata, meaning that information is constantly attained and organised in a dynamic process. Confronted with a film which does not work according to the described common master schema, the viewer must adjust his or her expectations and develop innovative explanations (ibid., 36).

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<sup>40</sup> This thesis considers exclusively a Western understanding of what defines as narrative and how a ‘good’ story should be structured and told.

<sup>41</sup> Script: David Newman, Robert Benton and Robert Towne



### **Plot as ‘organised set of clues’**

On the basis of all these insights and assumptions characteristic for cognitive theory, Bordwell develops his specific approach which centres around the question of why a plot is constructed as it is and how style relates to it (Bordwell 1985, 63). The key role the relationship between story (fabula) and sujet plays for narratives in general comes to the fore again. But at this point Bordwell’s cognitive theoretical perspective helps to understand – especially because viewing and perceiving is apprehended as highly dynamic – the function of manipulating the structure of the information units.

He defines *fabula* taking the viewers’ perspective as a starting point:

Presented with two narrative events, we look for causal or spatial or temporal links. The imaginary construct we create progressively and retroactively, was termed by Formalists the *fabula* (sometimes translated as “story”). More specifically, the fabula embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field. (ibid., 49)

This constructivist activity is conducted by, besides memorising, using assumptions and inferences, noting narrative cues, applying schemata and hypothesising. Bordwell underlines that a fabula is not constructed arbitrarily. He explains:

The viewer builds the fabula on the basis of prototype schemata (identifiable types of persons, actions, locales, etc.), template schemata (principally the “canonic” story), and procedural schemata (a search for appropriate motivations and relations of causality, time, and space). To the extent that these processes are intersubjective, so is the fabula that is created. In principle, viewers of a film will agree about either

what the story is or what factors obscure or render ambiguous the adequate construction of the story. (ibid.)

Bordwell's definition of the plot (he uses the term *syuzhet*), as the actual arrangement and presentation of the fabula in the film, corresponds to the definitions of other scholars specified in Chapter 2. But he puts a special emphasis on the constructivist activity of the viewers. This principle of 'narrative logic' is according to him, besides the principles 'time' and 'space', essential for the organisation of the system, i.e. the plot (ibid., 50-2). He concludes: 'The syuzhet, then, is the dramaturgy of the fiction film, the organized set of cues prompting us to infer and assemble story information' (ibid., 52). As a consequence he understands *narration* as a process guided by the effects which should be created on the audiences' side: 'In the fiction film, narration is *the process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator's construction of the fabula*' (ibid., 53).

In conclusion: Whereas the task of the viewer is to (re-)construct the fabula and thus to understand and grasp the meaning of the story, the task of the script writer is to disassemble the fabula in a way that underlines the meaning and turns the reassembling process for the viewer (in case of popular films) into an entertaining experience.

## **Suspense I: The importance of gaps**

Concerning the 'concrete narrational work of any film' (Bordwell 1985, 51) it is important to note that while watching a film, thus for the process of meaning making, the guiding question is how far the plot corresponds to the logical, temporal, and spatial nature of the story (fabula) the spectator constructs. Deviations trigger him or her to look for explanations as do featured gaps (ibid., 54). As mentioned before, it is impossible for a

plot to cover all events implied in a fabula, therefore every plot includes gaps. If the gaps pointed out the experienced spectator knows that there may be a reason worth pondering about.

A flaunted gap may warn us to pay attention: either the omitted fabula information will become important later, or the narration is misleading us by stressing something that will prove insignificant. If a gap is suppressed, however, surprise is the likely result, especially if the omitted information ranks low on a scale of probabilities. These are only general indications, but they suggest the range of effects that “gap-ping” tactics can achieve. In each case, it must be remembered, the viewer will strive to justify the very presence of the gap by appeal to principles of compositional, realistic, transtextual, and artistic motivation. (ibid., 55)

To illustrate ‘how the syuzhet manipulates fabula information over an entire narrative’ (ibid., 64) detective stories are especially helpful because: ‘In fact, specific sorts of syuzhet tactics are the *differentia specifica* of the genre’ (ibid.). The structure of the plot is determined by the progress of the investigation and gaps are indicated and stressed by questions asked like ‘Who killed X?’. Bordwell writes: ‘The genre promotes suspense with respect to the twists and turns of the investigation and plays upon curiosity about the missing causal material’ (ibid.).

The gaps invite the viewer to create hypotheses and hypothesizing is essential for experiencing suspense, as Bordwell explains drawing on Meir Sternberg’s theory (1978). Sternberg differentiates between a *curiosity* hypothesis which is activated by the perceiver in order to understand past events and a *suspense* hypothesis the viewer develops in order to foresee forthcoming events (1978, 245-6). Bordwell understands suspense as ‘anticipating and weighing the probabilities of future narrative events’ (Bordwell 1985, 37) and states that it is the primary focus of hypothesis forming.

Bordwell stresses that these hypotheses are not built out of the blue but based on the information already given, and that template schemata needs a 'firm foothold' (ibid., 38). This footing is provided by the essential character of narratives which is based on a sequence of events: the first information units equip the viewer with a grounding on which he or she can develop hypotheses. A point quite obvious but relevant to note in respect to suspense is that between the development of the hypothesis and its confirming or disconfirming, some time passes, an important feature of narratives, called 'retardation' (ibid.).

Time is anyway a factor indissolubly connected to the creation of suspense on a narrative basis. Bordwell explains:

In watching a film, the spectator submits to a programed temporal form. Under normal viewing circumstances, the film absolutely controls the order, frequency, and duration of the presentation of events. You cannot skip a dull spot or linger over a rich one, jump back to an earlier passage or start at the end of the film and work your way forward. Because of this, a narrative film works quite directly on the limits of the spectator's perceptual-cognitive abilities. *A gap will be closed only when the syuzhet wants it that way*; retarding material, however annoying, must be suffered through; a gap may be hidden so cunningly that the spectator cannot recall how the trick was pulled. It is evident that in cinema many processes of narration depend upon the manipulation of time. (ibid., 74; emphasis added)

In cinema – but exhibitions work in a different mode because the spatial dimension is so important: moving visitors reshuffle the narrative material constantly and in a very individual way.

## **Linearity – a critical remark**

One of the main characteristics of the exhibition medium is that museum visitors move through the exhibition space more or less autonomously. They select which information to pick even though this choice is influenced by proposals made by the exhibition makers. This selection process does not only concern which room to explore first or which showcase to address when but takes place also on a micro-level. The visitor determines if he or she looks first at a certain object or at the text and – an aspect not to underestimate – if he or she ignores the information (Fayet 2005, 32). Even though a classical Hollywood film includes more information and details than a spectator is able to notice and process while watching the film for the first time, script writers and directors try to ensure that the crucial story information are perceived and understood and, in respect to suspense, that this happens at a particular point of time. Putting it bluntly: a fixed linear order seems to be essential for creating narrative suspense.

But, and this is why I address the topic, linearity is anathema to current museum scholars – and for good reasons. First, as counter reaction to the traditional role of curators who transfer their knowledge to visitors with a precisely defined learning outcome, this authoritarian position of curators has been put into question (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 7; Ferguson 1996; Roberts 1997; Jones 2002, 56-7; Wilkinson 2014). Simultaneously, audiences' freedom has been underlined – they should be able to select and learn what they consider important and in ways they prefer. This includes allowing them to decide in which order they like to receive the objects and ideas deployed. Such an approach was fostered by visitor studies revealing that many visitors prefer being able to move around freely (Falk and Dierking 2013, 267). Refusing a clearly defined, restricted narrative also means refusing linearity (e.g. Witcomb 2003, 128). These value judgements are expressed in George Hein's deliberations connected to his idea of the Constructivist Museum. He states:

‘Traditional educators might still wish to guide visitors through an exhibition in a particular order; constructivist pedagogues can only welcome this release from necessarily following a predetermined sequence’ (Hein 1998, 39). Even more explicitly he writes:

But a constructivist museum education policy will also take a unique view of how the museum is to be used to teach. The model for the museum as an educational resource will be an encyclopedia or a catalogue, not a textbook. The organizing principles will inevitably permit visitors to pick and choose what subject they want to pursue, or even what branch of the subject. *The idea that a topic can be arranged linearly, like a text, will not even be considered.* (Hein 1998, 38; emphasis added)

Even though there are many examples for structuring exhibitions in a linear way, museum theory refuses linearity for another important reason: too often a chronological pattern has been (mis-)used to deploy the development from ‘primitive’ to ‘high’ cultures or ‘simple’ to ‘elaborated’ artworks. As a consequence, chronologies are often regarded as an arrangement of information units into which a valuation is directly inscribed (Bennett 1995; Meijers 1996, 12-3; Crane 2006, 107). Even though chronologies are a bone of contention in museum studies and even though they ‘are neither objective nor definite’ (Habsburg-Lothringen 2015, 329), it seems necessary to free them and linearity from these negative interpretations in order to explore the research questions, and to consider them in the scope of this research project simply as a particular pattern of events: one event follows the other. Interestingly enough, Sternberg (1990, 902) identifies for narratology also a denigration of chronological narrating, based in this case on appreciating disarranging story (fabula) events as more artistic. By contrast, he underlines the benefits of such narratives: ‘Being chronological, the sequence of events is followable, intelligible, memorable, indeed chrono-logical’ (ibid., 903). Nina Simon concludes her reflection about museums and linearity with a statement worthwhile to keep in mind: ‘Maybe we fight our own purposes

when we deliberately eschew the powerful dramatic tools available in the linear storytelling format' (Simon 2013).

In summary, this raises a central question: assuming that in a popular film, as Bordwell writes, 'A gap will be closed only when the syuzhet wants it that way' (1985, 74) and understanding that this closing point falls together on the script writer's side and the spectator's side – how can a curator equally determine the point of time when a gap is opened and when it is closed if the recipients play such an important role in arranging the sequences? How can a curator influence the visitors' movement and thus their information processing in order to narrate a suspenseful exhibition?

As a consequence of these questions, an interim result can be noted: if a curator wants to establish suspense of the kind described in this chapter, hence dramatic suspense, he or she has to arrange the exhibits linearly or to tackle the visitors' movement. Foregrounding the visitor and not the arrangement of the objects could imply to think about possibilities to change the visitor's internalised schemata developed so far in respect to the exhibition medium. Introducing new story patterns in an exhibition setting and to communicate this to the audience could support their intrinsic motivation to walk through the exhibition following this 'map'. A point to keep in mind during the film and exhibition analyses and the subsequent thought experiment.

## **Suspense II: Questions and answers**

Carroll's suspense theory helps to refine Bordwell's explanations. Carroll has been the second central figure in applying cognitive theory to film studies (Plantinga 2002, 24). His explorations of suspense are inspired explicitly by Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin's *Film Technique and Film Acting* (1960). The Russian director and scriptwriter suggested

according to Carroll that ‘the relation of earlier scenes and events in a film narrative to later scenes and events can be generally understood on the model of the relation of a question to an answer’ (Carroll 1988, 171). One scene provokes a – albeit in most cases subconscious – question on the audience’s side which is answered in one of the following scenes. According to Carroll this narrative connection is even more important i.e. more common than causal connections. Carroll calls this structure of questions and answers *erotetic* (ibid.).

Crucial for creating suspense is now that posing a question means raising ‘a structured set of possibilities’ and that the spectator expects – in case of linear movie narratives – to get these questions answered (ibid., 1972). But this does not mean that he or she waits passively for the answers but is challenged to keep track to various lines of action and their possible outcomes until one alternative is actualised (ibid., 173).

Given the erotetic model, we can say what it is that audiences expect: they expect answers to the questions that earlier events have made salient – will the shark be destroyed, will the jumbo jet crash, will Johnny Gray win Annabelle? It is a general feature of our cognitive makeup that, all things being equal, we not only want but expect answers to questions that have assertively been put before us, this explains our intense engagement with films. (ibid., 181)

But, Carroll adds, something else is necessary for building up film suspense. Whereas in life for experiencing tension it is sufficient to face an event which has some importance for the person concerned and whose outcome is uncertain, in film the range of these two elements (desirability and uncertainty) has been narrowed: ‘In film, suspense generally obtains when the question that arises from earlier scenes has two possible, opposed answers which have specific ratings in terms of morality and probability’ (Carroll 1996a, 101). The term ‘morality’ may be misleading. It does not refer to a general system of values but to the



value system set by the film story. For example, a spectator who condemns death penalty in normal life can experience the killing of a film antagonist as highly satisfying. In a word, according to Carroll, suspense is created if the outcome the spectator hopes for is less likely than the outcome he or she fears (ibid., 101-2). Literature about the suspense phenomenon discusses if the dreaded perspective has to be more probable than the sought-after perspective in order to create suspense (e.g. Gerrig 1996, 94-5; Howard and Mabley 1993, 39) but this point is irrelevant for the research question. It is important that the emotional state called suspense can be pinned down to being torn between hope and fear.

## **Hope and fear**

The emotions hope and fear are indeed the central ones ascribed to the experience of suspense in literature dealing with this phenomenon (e.g. Borringo 1980, 39; Tan 1996, 211). At a first glance, this may be of no importance for cultural historical exhibitions and therefore for this thesis but on closer examination the incredibly important role these conflicting feelings play especially for classical Hollywood films cannot be neglected. To anticipate one of the research findings of this research project: evoking them in museum visitors could be one way to create more suspenseful exhibition narratives. The difficulty, or rather challenge, is that in cultural historical exhibitions ‘dead’ objects are at the heart and not living human beings, whereas in popular films the creation of hope and fear is linked tightly to the protagonists. Interestingly enough, Wolf explains that in contemporary narratologies narratives are defined by centering around anthropomorphic characters ‘who are capable of conscious choices, plans and activities, and experience emotions and desires’ (Wolf 2011, 159; see Wolf 2004, 88).

The importance of hope and fear becomes very clear in Ari Hiltunen's *Aristotle in Hollywood* (2002). Hiltunen explains why he thinks Aristotle's concept of the *proper pleasure* is the key to successful storytelling. He refers to the Greek philosopher's *Poetics* which are up to date a central reference point for scriptwriting,<sup>42</sup> as well as to his *Rhetoric*. Following Hiltunen (ibid., 6), the proper pleasure which is evoked while receiving a good story, is for Aristotle a combination of fear and pity, followed by catharsis. The philosopher defines fear as the anticipation of evil, anxiety and unrest, caused by the notion of impending danger (ibid., 8), which nevertheless includes a pleasurable element: the hope for safety. Fear can only be felt by the spectators if danger is imminent and connected to goal-oriented action (ibid.) because only then they are able to anticipate what might happen. Pity, the other essential element, is created when a spectator fears something bad will happen to a morally good person (on stage) who does not deserve it and when that event is identified as something that could happen to the spectator him- or herself or to somebody he or she cares for in real life (ibid., 9). Pity, Hiltunen explains further, evokes compassion and identification (ibid.). Pivotal for creating proper pleasure and suspense on the side of the audience, is that pity and fear (as well as hope) are attached to future events and potential undeserved misfortune. Hiltunen writes:

The audience heed the evil forebodings, begin to anticipate the possible dangers and catastrophes that threaten the hero, and start to look for hopeful solutions. The plot provides the audience with opportunities for considering ways of avoiding the catastrophe and so become involved in the events of the drama. (ibid., 10)

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. for Benke (2002).

The proper pleasure is completed only if catharsis takes place (ibid., 12), a topic not discussed in this thesis as such a purification of passions is not the objective of cultural historical exhibitions (see Hanak-Lettner 2011, 119). Hiltunen explains that Aristotle's pity and fear or – what he believes is functionally the same – empathy, identification and suspense cause involvement. 'The more involved the audience are, the more pleasure is created', he concludes (Hiltunen 2002, 12).

David Howard, who also aims at exploring the 'recipe' for a good story in his manual *The Tools of Screenwriting: A Writer's Guide to The Craft and Elements of a Screenplay* (1993)<sup>43</sup> considers the topic of hope and fear as very important too (Howard and Mabley 1993, 38; see Eick 2006, 95-6; Schulze 2006, 25; Cohen 2006). He explains (and defines thus the essence of classical Hollywood films): 'Thus a good story could be said to be about a character with whom the audience has some measure of empathy, who strongly wants something that is very difficult, yet possible, to achieve' (Howard and Mabley 1993, 22). Howard explains further how the involvement of the audience – which is in his view so crucial for 'a good story well told' – can be reached:

So what is the trick behind keeping the audience participating in the story and creating in itself the emotional response that drama depends upon? In a word, uncertainty. Uncertainty about the near future, uncertainty about the eventual turn of events. Another way of stating this idea is hope versus fear. If the filmmaker can get the audience to hope for one turn of events and fear another, where the audience truly does not know which way the story will go, this state of uncertainty becomes a very

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<sup>43</sup> Howard used Edward Mabley's book *Dramatic Construction: An Outline of Basic Principles* (1972) as main source and mentions him therefore as co-author. As he alone wrote however *The Tools of Screenwriting* (1993), I refer only to him.

powerful tool indeed. We often find ourselves riveted to a story that has a strong component of hope versus fear. (Howard and Mabley 1993, 37-8)

At this point it becomes crystal-clear how absolutely seriously Howard and his colleagues take the involvement of the spectators. Even though the audience's (mental and emotional) participation is not the only criteria for them for judging the quality of a story, it is an obligatory one (e.g. Gulino 2004, 6). This attitude can be an inspiration for exhibition making in the sense that, following this approach, curating not only aims at creating interesting exhibition narratives but – and this means much more – that curating puts the visitors' involvement right at the top of the priority list. Probably nobody working in the museum field would deny nowadays how important the visitor experience is (e.g. Kunz-Ott 2010, 47; Falk and Dierking 2013) but a too unfiltered involvement is viewed critically. We must remember: this scepticism is linked closely to the described mistrust in academia and also in museum studies of emotions because they hold the danger to cloud the recipients' (critical) minds. This critical stance is without any doubt necessary for exponents of a field defining its place in academia and knowledge production, but even though the way to reach the audience's attention via the help of emotions and suspense (which is evaluated in scriptwriting literature as one of the most important tools to do this (Eick 2006, 96)) can be debated, defining the goal for exhibition making consequently as reaching the visitors and learning from show business, seems to be desirable.

Following this argumentation Martin Esslin's description of drama holds true also for cultural historical exhibitions:

Put in its simplest and most mundane terms, the basic task of anyone concerned with presenting any kind of drama to any audience consists in capturing their attention and holding it as long as required. Only when that fundamental objective has been achieved can the more lofty and ambitious intentions be fulfilled: the imparting of

wisdom and insight, poetry and beauty, amusement and relaxation, illumination and purging of emotion. *If you lose their attention, if you fail to make them concentrate on what is happening, on what is being said, all is lost.* (Esslin 1976, 43; emphasis added)

## Conclusion

Bringing together the explanations of this chapter with the narratemes playing apparently an important role for creating exciting narratives outlined in the previous chapter, it is possible to define classical Hollywood films in the following way: they are characterised strongly by unity and causality as well as by closure and teleology. Their temporal succession is mainly chronological but disarranged in specific cases. Therefore, popular films fit Thompson's definition of narrative as a 'chain of events occurring in time and space and linked by cause and effect' (Thompson 1999, 10)<sup>44</sup>. The next chapter will elaborate on this characterisation in order to understand these films' possibilities to evoke suspense even more precisely.

The spectators' activities going along with perceiving these kinds of 'meaningful structures' (Jannidis 2003, 43), can be summarised thus: as popular films are characterised strongly by unity and closure, the goal-oriented activity of the spectators is determined by the attempt to put all information together in order to create a coherent narrative. The experienced film-going public knows that the plot cannot cover all events included potentially in the story (fabula) but is able to interpret for example flaunted gaps as signals that important

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<sup>44</sup> Thompson belongs, like Bordwell and Carroll, to the Wisconsin project, a research group addressing filmic narration, therefore it may not come as a surprise that her general definition of narrative is congruent to popular films.

story (fabula) information is suppressed. In the attempt to close these gaps they begin to develop hypotheses and to ask themselves questions about the progress of the story and its final outcome. Empathising with the protagonist, these cognitive activities are coupled to affective responses like hope or fear. *Dramatic suspense* can be defined therefore as the urgent wish, accompanied by feelings like hope and fear, to know if the protagonist will fail or succeed.

The spectators are able to perform these reflections due to schemata they have internalised while watching other classical Hollywood films and similar popular stories and which inform them about the typical material and structure of such a movie. By the help of procedural schemata the spectators are able to adjust these template and prototype schemata in case a film functions in a slightly different way. This constructivist activity is experienced as highly entertaining and satisfying (Zillmann 1996).

Understanding suspense as deciphering a net of questions and answers by applying specific mental patterns, and using the vocabulary provided by cognitive film theorists, a whole set of new questions can be formulated: is it possible to describe the master schema of typical cultural historical exhibitions? Or is this impossible because this kind of narrative is not characterised by such a strong uniformity like classical Hollywood films? Can gaps function in an exhibition narrative as triggers for suspense bearing in mind their essential if not constitutive role for this medium? What about the visitors having such a crucial role in plotting the exhibition story? Is it possible in a museum setting to make sure visitors ‘walk’ the question before they ‘walk’ the answer? And if not – is there a different kind of suspense, working independently of this linear arrangement of the events, which can be created in an exhibition narrative?

One important task of the next chapter is to define textual story features, like analepses and prolepses, which are responsible for creating suspense more specifically, by help of

the manuals, because this is necessary to answer one of the research questions – how are dramaturgic techniques used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense? The more precisely these tools are described and understood, the better the other research question – how are these techniques shaped, influenced or prevented by the specific characteristics of exhibitions? – can be approached. Relevance, as another important narrateme defined for exciting stories, will be taken into account, too, closely connected to the highly important role protagonists play for popular films.

## 4. Dramaturgic suspense techniques

### Introduction

The previous chapter has defined dramatic suspense as the recipients' urgent wish, accompanied by feelings like hope and fear, to know if the protagonist will fail or succeed. One important task of this chapter is now to define the textual features more specifically which motivate spectators to hypothesise about possible story outcomes. This is necessary in order to answer the research question how dramaturgic techniques are used in classical Hollywood movies to create suspense. The more precisely these devices are described and understood, the better the other research question – how these techniques are shaped, influenced or prevented by the specific characteristics of exhibitions – can be approached. Not least – referring to Jens Eder's definition of dramaturgy (2007, 11) described in Chapter 1 and borrowing his vocabulary – only in this way, analysing *the structure of the works*, i.e. *their formal quality* as accurately as possible, a feasible framework can be provided for *the structuring activity* of the curator who intends to produce suspense. Thus the thesis explores the creative potential of narrative for exhibition making further.

This chapter describes first the characteristics of classical Hollywood films more elaborately in order to classify the dramaturgic devices and their specific purposes. It focusses consistently on characteristics essential for the development of the plot, i.e. the selection and arrangement of the story events. It proceeds to introduce the single techniques by help of scriptwriting manuals. Some sections consider aspects which seem to be particularly relevant in respect to exhibitions, like the incorporation of past events, micro suspense and the difference between suspense and surprise.



## Definition of classical Hollywood films

The term *The classical Hollywood cinema* was coined by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson who portray the historical development of this kind of films in their book with the same title from 1985. *Classical* expresses that this dominant narrative form of feature films possesses a long-lasting and seminal history, starting around 1909/1911 and gaining its full formulation in 1917 (Bordwell et al. 1985, 157; Bordwell and Thompson 2010, 102). *Hollywood* means that this tradition was shaped in its most sophisticated form in US-American studios (Bordwell and Thompson 2010, 102). The term is used to designate films that follow a specific narrative pattern i.e. certain schemata. Scriptwriting teacher Frank Daniels describes this pattern concisely with his famous axiom: ‘Somebody wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it’ (cited in Howard and Mabley 1993, 22). And indeed, all crucial features of such movies are already comprised in Bordwell’s characterisation, cited in Chapter 1: they center around individuals who have to overcome obstacles in order to attain a certain goal and the story ends with a clear achievement or nonachievement of this goal. Bordwell explains: ‘The most “specified” character is usually the protagonist, who becomes the principal causal agent, the target of any narrational restriction, and the chief object of audience identification’ (Bordwell 1985, 157). Establishing the protagonist as the ‘principal causal agent’ is *the* decisive activity of authors writing a classical Hollywood film. Non-classical films present psychologically ambivalent or confused characters without distinct goals. ‘Hence’, Bordwell states elsewhere, ‘a certain drifting, episodic quality to the art film’s narrative’ (2002, 96). This difference becomes important in Chapter 8.

In classical Hollywood cinema the action is indissolubly linked to the protagonist’s attempts to achieve his or her goal (Benke 2002, 30). These wishes, called *wants* in scriptwriting language, may vary greatly, ranging from gaining money in order to be able

to pay alimony for a son (*The Full Monty*, Great Britain 1997)<sup>45</sup> to killing a shark (*Jaws*, USA 1975)<sup>46</sup>. Anyway, for some reason the protagonists want to change the status quo and begin to take action. This action provokes a reaction which influences the strategy of the hero or heroine and the decision which step to take next (Bordwell et al. 1985, 17). In this way, a tight cause-effect chain is established. Key is now that this ‘system of narrative logic’ dominates the ‘systems of cinematic time and cinematic space’ which any fictional narrative film consists of (ibid., 6). This means for example, that the plot will omit significant durations in order to focus on important causes (Genette’s *elipses*) or that it will arrange story chronology so as to present the cause-effect chain most distinctly (Bordwell and Thompson 2010, 103).

Another essential characteristic of classical Hollywood films is a motivation that is as clear and complete as possible (ibid.). Bordwell explains:

Understanding classical story causality takes us toward grasping how a classical film unifies itself. Generally speaking, this unity is a matter of *motivation*. Motivation is the process by which a narrative justifies its story material and the plot’s presentation of that story material. If the film depicts a flashback, the jump back in time can be attributed to a character’s memory; the act of remembering this motivates the flashback. (Bordwell et al. 1985, 19)

Coming back to the cognitive activity of spectators watching such a feature film described in Chapter 3, these two principles of causality and motivation are, according to Bordwell, the decisive guidelines for constructing the story based on the plot (ibid., 24). At this

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<sup>45</sup> Script: Simon Beaufoy

<sup>46</sup> Script: Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb

point it should be underlined that the objective of Hollywood authors and film makers is to present a work as seamlessly as possible. Jens Eder exemplifies analogies and contrasts which are avoided in popular films because using them frequently and consciously attracts the recipients' attention not to *what* is told but to *how* it is told. He states:

In such a case the film becomes self-referential, referring both to the narrative process and to the fact that it is an art product. Popular film tries to avoid both the viewer analysing comparatively the *content* depicted, and adopting a *formal* analytical attitude that focuses on the nature of the film as artefact. Through the primacy of the causality and the restrained use of analogies, the dramaturgy contributes to the inconspicuousness of the telling. (Eder 2007, 70-1)

This implies that the narrator is only seldom present in classical Hollywood movies, thus enabling the viewer to focus on one action and one protagonist without being distracted by another agency and to witness the plot directly and not mediated (ibid., 72). Eder concludes: 'Viewers forget that they are being told a story. Instead, they feel they are invisible observers of the scenes shown' (ibid., 75). Or, as Dennis Eick (2006, 59) puts it, referring to the importance of popular films' typical three-act structure: the events should unfold naturally as if the viewers would be absent and the story would take place also without them.

Although the character is 'the heart and soul and nervous system' (Field 2005, 46) of a classical Hollywood film, new developments in scriptwriting and dramaturgy show that movies that tell the stories of groups instead of single persons can be successful and convincing, too. How exactly these feature films function however has still to be

researched, and they are still exceptions.<sup>47</sup> To write ensemble films is considered a challenge for every writer because it is more difficult for the viewer to empathise with a crowd than with one single person he or she can identify with (Cowgill 2003). And empathy, as described in Chapter 3, seems crucial for a proper involvement of the audience. A point to return to in Chapter 8.

It is important to note that the classical Hollywood film follows a formula which is realised in manifold modifications. Even though, for instance, spectators of *All About Eve* (1950) may fear for actress Margo's happiness, actress Eve plays on the first sight an even more dominant role because her want is the action's engine. To decide who is the protagonist is therefore complicated. It is also important to note that the boundaries between classical Hollywood and non-classical films are fluid, an aspect which will be relevant in Chapter 8. With *The Conversation* (1974) a film was selected in which classical Hollywood patterns mingle with techniques typical for unconventional and art films, like for instance the use of dreams for describing the psychological state of the protagonist's mind.<sup>48</sup> The paradigm may sound relatively simple, but its implementation is challenging: writing such a (well-made) script is complex and can resemble taming a monster. Analysing such a film, on the other hand, is also not so clear-cut as it seems; there may be different viewpoints even on defining a protagonist's want, or scenes, sequences or acts can be identified diversely.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This tendency was discussed at the conference *FilmStoffEntwicklung – Tag der Dramaturgie* [*FilmSubjectDevelopment – Day of Dramaturgy*](10 November 2012), hosted by VeDRA – Verband für Film- und Fernsehdramaturgie e.V. (my notes).

<sup>48</sup> See Bordwell's analysis of this film in Bordwell et al. (1985), 375-7.

<sup>49</sup> Eder (2007, 54-5, 79-80) for instance describes the difficulties to identify clearly the central dramatic question and to isolate sequences. Field (1994) for example comes up with a different definition of the acts in *Chinatown* than this thesis, see Chapter 5.

Even though film scholars and authors of guidebooks choose different starting points for defining popular films, like for example Eder (2007) who begins his description by explaining three-act structure as typical or like Craig Batty and Zara Waldeback (2008) who focus on the role conflict plays, and even though their emphases vary, all of their descriptions are congruent. One important aspect Eder adds to Bordwell's explanations is that story events are arranged in a way to increase the cognitive, emotional and sensual effects steadily. At the end a most intensive climax event answers the central question and solves the central problem (see Eder (2007, 78; Chion 2001, 178). This refinement seems pivotal in respect to exhibitions which are often described as including an arc of suspense – an aspect to scrutinise in Chapter 6. The next sections introduce concrete means how to create suspense in popular films.

## **Techniques to create suspense**

Syd Field declares that there is nothing more important in a film than its underlying storyline, its forward movement and compares it hence to a roller coaster ride (Field 2001, 117). Keith Cunningham describes the relation between suspense and a storyline clearly in his guidebook *The Soul of Screenwriting: On Writing, Dramatic Truth, and Knowing Yourself*:

So you raise a question that engages the audience. And then you deliberately *do not* answer the question. You *suspend* the answer. You leave it hanging. Suspending the answer creates *suspense*. Suspense means you create *tension* in the audience, because they want the answer but are not getting it. The longer the answer remains suspended, the higher the tension rises. (...) Whether in comedy or serious drama,

thriller or melodrama, this question → suspense → answer → question unit is the basic mechanism of rising dramatic intensity. (Cunningham 2008, 274)

Carroll's analysis of popular films' *erotetic* nature is explored here from the script writer's perspective. Typically at the end of a scene a question is raised or left open which is answered in one of the next scenes. Cunningham writes that every answer poses a new question and thus a chain or better 'the spiraling double helix of a DNA strand' (ibid., 275) is constructed. To raise questions is therefore the connective motif of the specific suspense techniques described in the manuals.

Surprisingly enough – considering the importance suspense plays for classical Hollywood films – no detailed description of the means to create suspense can be found in most manuals, nor does a consistent labelling exist. Paul Joseph Gulino's list of basic tools which are successfully employed to keep the audience's attention directed toward the future is a rare exception. He describes what he calls the 'Big Four':

### **1. Telegraphing<sup>50</sup>:**

Something – a dialogue or an action – tells the audience explicitly what will happen in the future (Gulino 2004, 7; see Howard and Mabley 1993, 74). *False* telegraphing is when something is announced which won't happen. According to Gulino this tool is in most cases used as part of the support system of the narrative flow but it can also create suspense. He points as an example to the hero in *American Beauty* (1999)<sup>51</sup> who says right in the beginning of the film 'In a year I'll be dead' which immediately evokes the question in the viewer's mind: What does he die of? A deadline putting the protagonist

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<sup>50</sup> This techniques is also called pointing or advertising.

<sup>51</sup> Script: Alan Ball

under time pressure can strengthen the viewers' emotional involvement (Gulino 2004, 7-8).

## **2. Dangling cause:**

Whereas telegraphing is according to Gulino neutral information, a dangling cause carries more emotional freight. The cause 'dangles' in the mind of the viewer until its effect is shown. It can be opened up by a person saying something, Gulino calls it a *dialogue hook*. A dangling cause can be embodied as an expression of intent, a warning, a threat, an expression of hope or fear or a prediction (Gulino 2004, 8). David Howard calls this technique after Frank Daniel 'elements of the future'. He adds to Gulino's list omens, daydreams, assurances, expectations, promises, doubts, plans, forebodings, faith and aspirations (Howard and Mabley 1993, 75; see Driest 2001, 115-6.; Eick 2006, 44).

## **3. Dramatic irony:**

The audience knows more than one or more characters and is excited to find out what will happen the moment the truth is revealed. This 'ironic tension' is set up by a scene of 'revelation' in which the viewers get to know an information the character does not know and a scene of 'recognition' in which the character learns the information as well (Gulino 2004, 9). According to Gulino, this device plays a more important role than telegraphing und dangling causes and even has the power to sustain a whole feature film (ibid., 10).

## **4. Dramatic tension:**

Gulino calls this tool the most powerful of the four. It turns the attention to the answering of the dramatic question. As it concerns the central question of the film (will the protagonist satisfy his/her want?), the tension created is called *main tension*. Gulino explains that – unlike dangling causes – it requires an emotional connection between

the audience and a character (ibid., 12). Both, Gulino and Howard, say that this main tension is deployed in the second act. In the first act the protagonist's want is established and the dramatic question raised. In the second act the protagonist has to overcome several obstacles in order to gain his or her aim, and at the end of this act it shows if he or she has failed or won. The third act deals in most cases with a new dramatic tension and a new question (Gulino 2004, 10-2; Howard and Mabley 1993, 52-3; see Driest 2001, 115-6). Ideally, each sequence and each scene has a dramatic tension, too (Gulino 2004, 11) – an aspect I will come back to later. Besides the main tension (located in the second act) and the tension of the third act, there is therefore a so-called micro suspense which concerns a short plot line.

Summarising, Gulino underlines these devices' fundamental significance:

These, then, are the four basic tools of the storyteller. Other tools exist that can help enrich the experience of a script or movie (...). These four are presented here because they are the ones crucial in achieving the most basic task of the screenwriter – keeping the audience wondering what is going to happen next – and thus play the most basic role in how a screenplay “works”. (ibid., 12)

Still, these are not the only suspense techniques, as Eugene Vale points out in *The Technique of Screenplay Writing: An Analysis of the Dramatic Structure of Motion Pictures*: ‘Because the definition of suspense means simply that it is the doubt as to the outcome of an intention, suspense can be achieved in thousands of different ways’ (Vale 1972, 186). Lewis Herman lists some of these ‘innumerable little tricks’ like a person different from the one expected entering through a door, a tire blowout or a machine breakdown, or an important letter being ignored by characters who could profit from opening it. The common denominator is that every single device ‘interrupts what appears to be the inevitable’ (Herman 1966, 43) and thus, again, creates questions. It is important to know



that the techniques, as Chapter 8 will show, can be employed in some cases to support the momentum and possibly even the creation of suspense in non-classical films. But here and in the next chapter their application to classical Hollywood drama is explored.

### **Moving forward, moving backwards**

Classical Hollywood films are characterised by a strong and consequent forward movement. Vale stresses the importance of this forward movement for film in general by its composition of blocks, meaning shots and scenes, which have the tendency to fall apart and to interrupt thus the continuity of the story. This would call for supporting continuity by suspense means (Vale 1972, 193-4). Germanist Peter Pütz states that in drama in general, including theatre plays, all single moments are ‘tensioned’ towards the end (Pütz 1970, 13). He writes:

At every moment of the drama something has *already* happened, and something, which is derived from and prepared for by the preceding moment, is *still* due. Every moment references the past and anticipates the future. The dramatic action consists of the *successive* visualization of anticipated *future* and retrieved *past*.

(Pütz 1970, 11)

The challenge is, as pointed out by Eick (2006, 44-5), to incorporate background story which is by nature backward and which hinders potentially the course of the present development into exactly this present development. A very good example to illustrate this conflict – conflict judged by Hollywood standards – are flashbacks. This becomes especially evident by the statements of Herman who describes how flashbacks ‘fritter’ suspense.

Flash backs impede movement. For one thing, the flash back definitely impedes the forward flow of a picture's action. Because it is retrogressive, it halts progression. That in itself defeats the primary rule of motion-picture making – the picture must *move*. (Herman 1966, 67)

Even though Herman admits that sometimes it can make sense to use flashbacks, for instance if it is necessary to withhold particular background information in order to provoke suspense (ibid., 69-70), his scepticism is obvious. Impressively enough, he argues that flashbacks do not happen in real life (ibid., 67). Again, the intention to create the illusion of a reality comes to the fore.

This relationship of tension between past and future has also an impact on the creation of suspense based on the placement of information.<sup>52</sup> The spectators' desire to find out more is directed not only towards the future but also towards the past, for instance in respect to the motives of the characters. The suspense form characterised by the omission of an information which creates the question 'What happened?' is called mystery (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 125; see Zillmann 1991b).<sup>53</sup>

While I assumed at the beginning of the research project that mystery could be of special interest for creating suspense in cultural historical exhibitions because it deals by definition with the past, it became clear during research that for mystery, too, the forward movement of the story is key. The recipient wants to know 'who's done it' and waits excitedly for the moment when this information will be revealed (see Langer 2008, 14).

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<sup>52</sup> About the complicated relationship between different times in film see Vale 1972, 121-4.

<sup>53</sup> In German: Rätselspannung

## Micro suspense

Suspense arcs can (in classical Hollywood films: should) span relatively large parts or subunits. Cunningham defines these subunits as sequences, scenes and beats<sup>54</sup>. ‘Sequences can be thought of as the major episodes, or chapters, in the story. A sequence is a block of action that tells one part of the story’ (Cunningham 2008, 340). Sequences are composed of scenes, and a scene can be determined as ‘the action happening in one place over one continuous period of time’ (ibid., 343). On each level the construction of dramatic suspense follows the same pattern: the goals of scenes and sequences are interconnected with the protagonist’s main goal. As Cunningham puts it, ‘the entire dramatic curve is present in each of the dramatic subunits’ (ibid., 338; see Eick 2006, 65; Gulino 2004, 11; Brewer 1996, 116). This close interlacing gives structure such an importance for popular films. Syd Field sums up:

Structure is like gravity: It is the glue that holds the story in place; it is the base, the foundation, the spine, the skeleton of the story. And it is this relationship between the parts and the whole that holds the screenplay together. It’s what makes it what it is. It is the *paradigm* of dramatic structure. (Field 2005, 21)

The relevant question for curating is if such micro suspense can be created in single scenes and sequences independently from the described main tension, i.e. without a suspense arc spanning the whole exhibition narrative.

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<sup>54</sup> The role *beats* as the ‘smallest, atomic unit of dramatic action’ (Cunningham 2008, 346) play, shall be neglected here.

## Suspense and surprise

François Truffaut asked Alfred Hitchcock in his famous interview for the distinction between suspense and surprise, and the 'Master of Suspense' answered with an oft-cited example: When neither the characters nor the viewers know there is a bomb under the table the characters sit and talk at, the explosion of the bomb will come as a surprise. When the spectators are informed about the ticking bomb but the characters are not, they will follow the course of events full of suspense, wishing they could warn the characters. Since the surprise effect only lasts for some moments, the state of suspense however can be prolonged for several minutes, Hitchcock clearly favoured creating suspense and declared that the audience should get informed whenever possible (Truffaut 1973, 64). Christina Stiegler verifies in her study *Die Bombe unter dem Tisch* [*The Bomb Under The Table*] Hitchcock's theories and explains, based on the analysis of five of his films, that in fact suspense as well as surprise are created in his works in most cases when spectators share the same knowledge with the characters (Stiegler 2011, 337). The crucial point is therefore not an information imbalance but the fact that, in case of surprise, the audience gets to know information totally unprepared, and in case of suspense, they have so much information as to expect something exciting to happen (see Eick 2006, 43). As these expectations can take place both on a conscious and on an unconscious level, it is sometimes not easy to draw a line between suspense and surprise.

Yet again, information is of pre-eminent significance for the creation of suspense. Vale's definition of a story puts it straight: 'It is necessary to understand that a story is a series of items of information' (Vale 1972, 76). Consequently he asks: 'At what moment in the story should certain information be given?' (ibid., 81). Writing a script can be therefore narrowed down to the selection and management of information (Eick 2006, 90). The technique of planting and payoff, as explained in the following section, demonstrates clearly that

creating suspense does not only depend on the placement of information but on the *precise* placement of information. And the precise placement of information seems of outstanding importance for exhibitions which are characterised by the moving and thus plotting visitors.

## **Planting and payoff**

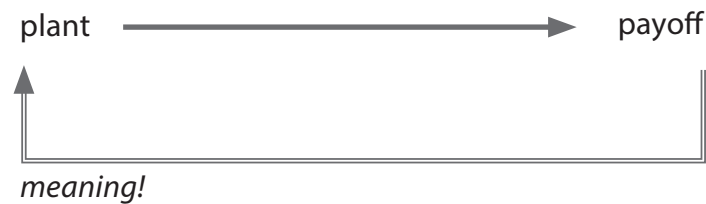
This technique is especially important for understanding how the net of information is woven together in the medium film. Not every plant and its payoff serves however the purpose to create suspense, thus differentiation is required.

Michel Chion defines a *plant* as ‘the introduction of a person, a detail, or a fact which, although it will be useful for the plot later, is of no particular interest at the point where it is “planted”’ (Chion 2001, 218). He advises not to announce the plant i.e. not to clarify that it is a plant at all (ibid.). As an explanation for his advice he points to Herman who states:

The audience must never be permitted to realize that later on the plant will be developed and paid off. Otherwise they will wait expectantly for it to appear, pounce on it when it does, and thus destroy the effect of explosive suddenness which the denouement or payoff of each plant must possess to justify its use. (Herman 1966, 58-9)

In this way the device is used to create surprise. The meaning of the plant is only revealed in retrospect. This is classified here as Type I (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1** Planting and payoff: Type I



But this is just one way this technique can be applied. There are many examples for plants which are introduced in a way they potentially provoke questions in the mind of the viewer immediately. The plant ‘rosebud’ in *Citizen Kane* (1941)<sup>55</sup> is one of the most famous plants in film history. Kane, the newspaper tycoon is dying, lonely and embittered, and his last word is ‘rosebud’ which nobody can decipher. So his life-story is told, beginning in his childhood, showing him happily riding a sledge. His rise and decay follow. After his death his house is cleared and his old sledge is thrown into the fire: carrying the inscription ‘rosebud’. The power of this payoff is so strong because the planting is so obvious and seeds so effectively a question in the viewer’s mind. All in all, the question what ‘rosebud’ stands for is posed about ten times. A riddle is set right at the beginning of the film, which the viewer, even though he or she is distracted from the multiple events of the plot, wants definitely to know the solution for.

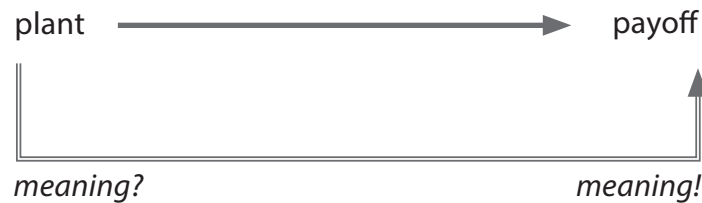
Applied in this way, the technique potentially creates suspense (Type II) (Figure 4.2). The plant triggers a question: what is the meaning of ‘rosebud’? We know a man’s dying words are important and guess that the answer will be the key to the character of this impressive

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<sup>55</sup> Script: Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles

man. And having a question we really want to know the answer for – this is the essence of suspense.

**Figure 4.2** Planting and payoff: Type II



Suspense is also created and supported in a more subtle way by a third type of this technique which can be considered as a mixture of Type I and II: information is introduced randomly and does not evoke a question in the viewer's mind explicitly like in *Citizen Kane* (1941) but something is confusing, and unconsciously the viewers ask themselves what is wrong and even try out different hypotheses.

For example, in *The Prestige* (2006)<sup>56</sup> the fact that a very successful magician has an identical twin brother which enables both to perform on stage the most stunnings tricks is revealed to the film audience only at the end. While viewing the film, spectators marvel probably about how the magician is able to do these amazing conjuring tricks but they have not enough information to understand that the assistant introduced at one point of the

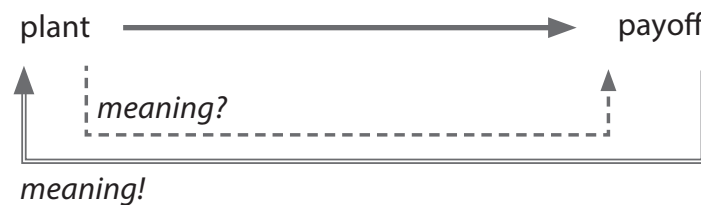
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<sup>56</sup> Script: Jonathan and Christopher Nolan

story is his twin. Only in retrospect many small clues can be understood as preparing this revelation. With the payoff, suddenly everything falls into place (Figure 4.3).

This third type can create an especially rewarding and pleasurable emotion on the side of the audience. It can be felt like a relief, a reward and gratification: ‘There you are!’

**Figure 4.3** Planting and payoff: Type III



It is important to note that not every plant and its payoff is so meaningful like the example of ‘rosebud’. It can be of a simpler character and serve other purposes like to reveal character or to move the story forward. Another, important, purpose is to unify the narrative (Howard and Mabley 1993, 73). In *The Conversation* (1974), protagonist Harry Caul, a surveillance expert, works together with his colleague Stan in their office in an empty factory. In the beginning of the movie Stan jumps on his moped (plant) he has parked in the loft to go home. Later, in a key scene of the movie, Harry reveals his most secret fears to a woman, standing in the middle of the loft – and is interrupted by Stan who drives the moped (payoff), circuits Harry and abducts finally the woman. The second use of the moped unifies the narrative; the viewer gets the impression to know the characters – ah! Stan again with his moped! ‘But all plants and payoffs – if done properly – do involve the audience, connecting with them and making them active participants and not just passive observers’ (The Script Lab 2010).



Plants of Type I and III have to be seeded carefully so that the audience does not identify them as plants too soon, at the same time they should not be too subtle because in this case the spectators won't remember the plant in the moment it is paid off (McKee 2007, 260-1). One solution is to repeat the plants over the course of events (Herman 1966, 59). In any case, plants should be paid off so as not to frustrate the recipients (ibid.). Interestingly enough, Robert McKee advises to adjust the intensity of plants to the target audience: for young people, for instance, less subtle setups are recommended because they are not as experienced as adult filmgoers (McKee 2007, 261). This underlines the fact that viewing films is a learned activity and that the devices described here interact closely with the schemata the audience deciphers a movie's story with. Can exhibition visitors be trained likewise in order to understand the technique of planting and paying-off or does the exhibition medium prevent, because of its inherent nature, the application of this suspense means? In this respect, it is important to note that props can be used as plants, too (Howard and Mabley 1993, 72; Herman 1966, 246-7). Examples will be given in the film analyses in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter described the narratemes important for narrative suspense and their specific shapes in case of classical Hollywood narratives, introduced in Chapter 2 and 3, more precisely. It showed how strongly popular films are characterised by a strong forward movement, decisive for directing the spectators' attention toward the end and toward the answer if the protagonist will have obtained his or her goal. This also explains why the question if a missing information could be found in the past or which event of the story (fabula) has been suppressed, typical for mystery, is not relevant for the research topic because it will be revealed to the audience anyway at a later point of the plot, in the future.

The chapter also showed that teleology and closure are important for the concrete dramaturgic suspense techniques, the 'Big Four' and planting and paying-off: they all are employed in order to support the momentum. The spectators are forwarded through the story, may it be to an event happening soon after it has been telegraphed or to a payoff happening at the end of the film, long after it has been planted. It can be also noted, that gapping is used in popular films in order to create suspense or to skip boring and superfluous passages.

It has become obvious again, how highly important the existent protagonist is for popular films: his or her actions define the plot. The goal set in the manuals for writing a successful film is to get the audiences focused on the events as intensely as possible; they should become deeply involved in the hero's or heroine's life, suffer with them and be happy about their happiness. The chapter underlined how decisive coherence is for this purpose, meaning that every event is motivated: neither unnecessary nor unanswered questions should disturb the viewers and distract them nor the presence of a narrator. At this point is shows clearly how closely the single narratemes are interconnected.

Taking all this together, it can be concluded that a successful *transportation* of the film viewers, meaning carrying them off to the story world and letting them forget the real world (Gerrig 1993), is highly appreciated. Immersion is key. This is where narratives' function comes in again. To use William F. Brewer's and Edward H. Lichtenstein's (1982) axiom: Stories are to entertain, and this applies particularly to classical Hollywood films. Amusing oneself depends in this case on taking one's mind off things. Suspense typical for this kind of Hollywood drama, as an exciting game with knowing and not-knowing, exactly managed by allocating information by the author, is a very effective tool for binding the recipients' attention constantly to the story narrated on screen. It is important to keep in mind throughout the following analyses how important narratives' function is. Since,

if the purpose of popular films is to entertain – what is the purpose of cultural historical exhibitions?

The next chapter verifies if the theoretical characterisation holds true in practice. After having thus refined our understanding of dramatic suspense, its (possible) use for cultural historical exhibitions will be explored.

## 5. Film Analyses

### Introduction

This chapter examines if and how suspense is created in the classical Hollywood films *Chinatown* (1974), *All About Eve* (1950) and *The Conversation* (1974) by means of the dramaturgic techniques described in the previous chapter. As the dramaturgic device to create a central dramatic question was considered as the most important one (Gulino 2004, 12; Bordwell 1985, 157), the chapter first analyses the protagonists' wants and how and if they reach their goals, based on the sequence protocols and watching the films repeatedly. In a second step, the chapter describes when suspense was felt while viewing and analyses which textual features triggered this response. The analyses reveal that suspense was not supported mainly by the desire to learn the answer to the central dramatic question but triggered by a multitude of different, closely interconnected minor questions, nonetheless finally all linked to the protagonists' journey. The chapter's second part explores if and how the other dramaturgic techniques dramatic irony, telegraphing, dangling causes and planting and payoff were used in the selected films. The analyses focus on detecting triggers for dramatic suspense, hence on means which provoke questions and consequently hypothesises about the stories' progress and outcomes and evoke hope and fear. Simultaneously, the chapter explores which other features of the narratives help to follow the films with interest.

## **Chinatown (script: Robert Towne, 1974)**

### **Synopsis**

Private detective Jake Gittes is engaged by a woman to find out if her husband betrays her. The woman pretends to be Evelyn Mulwray, the wife of the chief engineer of Los Angeles' Department of Water and Power (Figure 5.1). And indeed, Gittes takes pictures of Mulwray and a young woman at, what seems, a date. Without Gittes having a hand in it, one of the pictures is published in a newspaper and causes scandal (Figure 5.2). Now, the real Evelyn Mulwray appears in Gittes' office and accuses him of having sold the picture and threatens to bring him before court (Figure 5.3). As Gittes wants to protect his reputation, he tries to find the persons who are responsible for the publication of the picture and obviously intended to damage Mulwray. During his investigations, he gets onto a complot around the water distribution in Los Angeles. Then Mulwray is killed and Mrs Mulwray, Evelyn (the real one), hires Gittes to find the murderer. Step by step, he discovers how both, the complot and the murder, interrelate. Even though Los Angeles is hit by a drought, water is dumped on a huge scale. Thus, certain properties dry up and can be sold for a very low price. After a dam will have been built, the properties will be worth millions. Gittes finds out that Noah Cross (who happens to be Evelyn's father) will benefit from the land sale and therefore killed Mulwray who was against the dam project. But Gittes detects another secret, too. Evelyn had been sexually abused by her father. She now tries at any cost to protect her daughter (the girl on the newspaper photo) conceived by the incest from her father but fails. In the showdown in *Chinatown* (1974), Evelyn is shot by the police. Cross walks away with his daughter and Gittes has to watch helplessly.

## **Dramatic tension**

Will Gittes find out what is behind the confusing story around the water distribution in Los Angeles? This is the dramatic question set up in the first act. Initially, he wants to locate the person who sold the compromising photo to the newspaper. So he has to comprehend the interests of the agents involved. His motivation is to maintain his reputation. This becomes clear in the scene where another customer in a barbershop accuses him of being greedy because he suspects Gittes of having sold the pictures. Furiously Gittes shouts: 'I make an honest living. People only come to me when they are in a desperate situation and I help'em out of a bad situation' (16:00). The fact that he (otherwise always composed) reacts highly emotionally, shows that he feels his honour is truly affected. The desire to help others is the engine of his actions. When Evelyn threatens to inform the press that she had never asked him to spy on her husband and tells him that she had already hired a lawyer, Gittes' want is intensified (19:02). In his investigations, he comes across more mysterious hints: on the one hand, water seems to be wasted deliberately (21:24), on the other hand, farmers in a valley with orange groves are furious about not getting enough water to sustain their land (07:14; 22:49). Gittes convinces Evelyn that he urgently needs to talk to her husband, also in order to help him. Again, he declares his motivation: 'I don't want to become a local joke' (27:00). But when the corpse of Mulwray is retrieved in one reservoir (31:49), the intention of Gittes to understand the mystery around the water distribution gets a twist and is no longer merely a personal one: his sense of justice is triggered and he wants to find the culprits and sue them (41:33). The killing of Mulwray illustrates that something is at stake and marks the beginning of the second act. To find the killer seems to be the key to solve the mystery. Later, Gittes is officially assigned to do so by Evelyn (54:28).

The events of the second act are determined by Gittes' objective to solve the mystery around the water distribution. He suspects that water is dumped and finds it confirmed

(37:15; 39:31; 47:31). First, he believes that Mulwray was killed because he had discovered this (47:31). But investigating the farmers' situation in the valley (01:08:02), he reveals the true reason for his death. Wasting water and denying the farmers access to water, served the goal to sell their land for an extremely low price. After a dam will have been built which will provide the valley with a steady water supply, the land will be worth millions (01:10:30). Mulwray had to die because he knew about this and spoke against building the dam. The dramatic question is therefore answered at the end of act two: Gittes has indeed understood the backgrounds and therefore why somebody was interested in destroying Mulwray's reputation with the photo in the newspaper and in finally killing him.

Two important questions are raised, i.e. intensified, during the second act which converge at its end on the dramatic question responsible for the tension of the third act. The questions are: which role does Noah Cross play and what does Evelyn hide? During his investigations, Gittes comes across Cross (48:37) and learns that he once owned the water department together with Mulwray but that both were real adversaries and fell out finally. He realises that Cross is the man on the photos taken during his observations, with whom Mulwray quarrelled severely (12:50). But only at the end of act two Gittes understands that Cross, as the owner of the Albacore Club (01:23:12), is involved in the complot around the land acquisition and water distribution (01:14:58). The fact that Cross is Evelyn's father (47:06) is immaterial for him for a long time.

More important, crucial indeed, for the creation of suspense, is the question what Evelyn hides. When Gittes visits her the first time in her villa, eager to talk with her husband, she tries to prompt him to 'drop the whole thing' (27:42). She gets angry when he mentions that the young girl (Mulwray's lover, he still assumes) has disappeared, probably together with her husband. Trying to calm her he says: 'It's nothing personal...' but passionately she replies: 'It's very personal. It couldn't be more personal' (28:38). At this point, Gittes

(and we, the viewers) cannot conceive the true meaning of her words. At any cost, she tries to prevent that Gittes discloses her darkest secret, the incest with her father, Cross. Rather innocently Gittes comes closer and closer to her secret, but his intention is merely to disclose the murder and the conspiracy. He understands that she conceals something but assumes this is connected to the murder (32:21; 44:34; 01:29:25). The action is getting to the point where he is convinced that she herself has killed Mulwray and even calls the police (01:43:48). Under this pressure, she finally shares with him that the girl is the offspring of the forced incest with her father (Figure 5.4). She shouts: ‘She is my sister *and* my daughter!’ (01:46:13). This marks the beginning of the third act. The dramatic tension is now determined by Gittes’ new want: will he be able to protect Evelyn and her daughter from Cross?

In the third act, Gittes understands that Cross has killed Mulwray and confronts him with the truth (01:55:19). Cross reveals the last missing pieces of the puzzle concerning the water; it becomes clear that he is the main force behind the complot. Finally, the new dramatic question, if Gittes can protect Evelyn and her daughter, is answered in the negative: Evelyn is shot and Gittes has to observe helplessly how Cross walks away with the girl (02:02:07). Gittes was *not* able to protect both.

In fact, as described in the manuals (see Chapter 4), a main dramatic question is established in the first act, closely connected to the protagonist’s want. This question is answered step by step in the second act. The tension of the third act is created by a new dramatic question, answered at the end of the film. The analysis shows that the second dramatic question has been established as well from the beginning of the whole story and that both questions are closely connected. Another result is that many explicit hints point to the answers of the questions and that the protagonist’s want is expressed explicitly several times. And, finally, that only in retrospect all events can be fully understood and integrated.



### **Suspense while watching the film**

But what seems, based on the close analysis of the sequence protocol, supported by watching the film repeatedly, to be absolutely coherent, is different while viewing *Chinatown* (1974) for the first time. Understanding the complot around the water distribution remains complicated until the end (see Field 1994, 73-94). One main reason might be that it is difficult to understand the connection between the dam building, the farmers' situation, and the water dumping. Only in one of the last scenes, Cross explains the whole plan. Likewise, in one of the first scenes, the connections between the dam and the farmers' plight are implied and even Mulwray's position which leads to his killing is deployed. This is the scene in the city hall when the dam building is discussed, interrupted by a protesting farmer and his sheep. As viewers, we cannot appreciate the meaning of the situation because we only just have begun to orientate ourselves in the story world and to gather information, building a 'firm foothold' (Bordwell 1985, 38) we can develop our understanding and hypotheses on. Another important reason which hinders us from connecting the information given at this point in a meaningful way is that we observe the scene and Mulwray's speech through Gittes' eyes, determined by the question if Mulwray commits adultery. Gittes reactions filter our understanding: he attends the public meeting and is obviously bored (05:32) (Figure 5.5 and 5.6) and reacts to the farmer's performance only slightly amused, welcoming it as an interruption (07:14). The importance of the scene for the storyline is thus de-emphasized. Thus, viewing the film for the first time, we cannot understand that the solution of the mystery is here fully implied.

All in all, the complexity of the solution makes it difficult to understand the causal connections between the single information units and to create suspense on the side of the audience. One reason for the willingness to follow the story regardless is that we as viewers trust the filmmakers that our patience will be rewarded. Believing in the quality

of the film, we accept such scenes like the one in the city hall because we expect them to be selected and presented carefully, and in every case to be motivated. Being familiar with the schemata typical for classical Hollywood films, we expect that our comprehension will grow in the course of events. This trust can sustain our attention however only over the first scenes, if the apparently trivial remains trivial or if the story becomes too confusing our trust lapses. But step by step we begin to understand, as Gittes begins to understand, that all these stories around water play a crucial role, even though he and we do not yet comprehend which one. Our attention is also kept alive by other factors. One is the sympathy we feel for Gittes. Right at the beginning, in the first scene, he is introduced as a decent man. He treats his client, Curly, with compassion and fairness (03:10). He even wants to reject the assignment of another client, the fake Mrs. Mulwray, to spy on her husband foreseeing her sorrow as a cheated wife (04:26). We as viewers trust him and as we want his best, we are willing to accompany him during his investigations.

Another factor which keeps us curious, is that the dramatic question activated in the third act is prepared already from the end of the first act on. During the first real encounter of Gittes and Evelyn at her villa, their reciprocal attraction is noticeable. More importantly, it is obvious that something concerning finding the person who had commissioned Gittes to spy on her husband makes Evelyn extremely nervous (27:42). We as viewers sense that there is something wrong with her. This feeling is intensified by the following scenes in which her nervousness becomes more and more evident, connected to a great vulnerability (32:21; 45:23). The answer to the first dramatic question (will Gittes find out what is behind the confusing story around the water distribution in Los Angeles?) is discovered by Gittes routinely and even though the necessity to find the culprits becomes more and more urgent (first, Gittes only wants to maintain his reputation, but then he has to prevent to be accused of extortion and evasion of proofs (01:37:29)), we follow this storyline rather serenely and more interested than excited. More intense suspense is created by the fact that this

storyline and our calmness is disturbed first barely noticeable, by the enigmatic behaviour of Evelyn. On the surface, the storyline is about the complot around the water distribution, but underneath the horror of the incest is continually at work. The question which creates the strongest suspense on our side, even though partially unconsciously, is therefore: ‘What is wrong with Evelyn?’ The urge to find an answer to this question is supported by being aware of the affection Gittes develops for her. In other words, this is the gap we most strongly want to close.

To sum up: in this case, the most powerful suspense is not created by the central dramatic question which shapes the course of events till the end of the second act. The most efficient source of suspense is the preparation of the dramatic question which is set up finally at the beginning of act three. The coalescence of both storylines (the complot and the incest) culminates in the confession and emotional outburst of Evelyn. His compassion for her moves Gittes to change his want: to maintain his reputation and to prove his innocence is not any longer his focus, instead his objective is now to protect the woman he cares for.

Suspense is fostered only sparsely on an emotional level in this film. Even though we sympathise with Gittes and – after having learned about her destiny – also with Evelyn, we, as viewers, keep mostly a cool distance. Even though we are curious what Gittes will find out, we are not torn between hope and fear. This seems to be mainly due to the genre *Chinatown* (1974) is an example for. Genres function as ‘super-schemata’ (Hettich 2014, 58) we check our understanding of the story against. *Chinatown* (1974) is a ‘neo-noir’. The performance of actors in this kind of films can be described as frozen and understated (Peberdy 2013, 319). But being familiar with such hardboiled heroes, typical for films noir, we are able to judge and relativize their reactions: the protagonists’ almost motionless behaviour does not mean that they do not possess feelings, they just do not show them. In this context, the rare situations in which Gittes and Evelyn behave emotionally (the scene

in the barbershop, Evelyn's outburst) serve as markers for the importance of these points. In this regard, it should be noted that signals of diverse nature are used to mark relevant events, like music or zooming in on the faces. They help us to understand which story event is of special importance.

## **All About Eve (script: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950)**

### **Synopsis**

The film starts with an award ceremony: Eve Harrington gets a prize for 'Distinguished Achievement' as an actress (Figure 5.7). Theatre critic Addison DeWitt, sitting in the audience, comments the events via voice-over. He introduces some of the guests to the film audience, among them the 'Star of the Theatre' Margo Channing. But she is not applauding (Figure 5.8).

A flashback follows: Eve introduces herself with the help of Karen, Margo's best friend, to Margo as an ardent admirer of her acting (Figure 5.9). Eve succeeds in becoming Margo's personal assistant and pretends to care solely for her well-being. Step by step, however, it becomes obvious that she is obsessed only by one goal: to become a famous actress as well. Scheming, she finally succeeds in playing the chief part in a new play which was meant for Margo. Her plan to seduce Karen's husband Lloyd away from her, the very successful writer of the new play, fails. Instead, she is forced by DeWitt to become his lover.

Back in the present time, Eve gets the award and intends to go to Hollywood, but could find neither friendship nor love. Margo instead, is still a star and on top of that happily married with director Bill.

## **Dramatic tension**

The dramatic question raised in the first act is: will Eve succeed in getting the leading part in Lloyd's new play instead of Margo? Again, this is implied in one of the first scenes, at Eve's first encounter with Margo, Margo's friends Karen and Lloyd and her lover Bill. Eve mentions that she read about Lloyd's new play in the newspaper and praises Margo for her ability to pick the best plays (11:36). But only at the end of the first act when Margo is angry that Eve has placed a birthday call to Bill without informing her (Figure 5.10) and, even bolder, has written Bill that a party will be given for him after his return without having talked about this idea with Margo, it becomes clear that Eve is up to mischief (30:23). At the end of act two, Eve has obtained her objective: Margo declares that she is not interested any longer in playing the central character in Lloyd's new play – and clears thus the way for Eve (01:43:46). At the beginning of the third act the new dramatic question is raised: will Eve begin an affair with Lloyd? First, it seems as if she succeeds as well in this field but at the end of the third act, this question is answered in the negative. Critic DeWitt forbids her to marry Lloyd and forces her instead to become his lover and partner (01:55:25). Eve accepts that this is the price she has to pay for her career. The frame story – the award show – does not influence or change this question-answer structure of the three acts. The story would have worked without this frame, too. But it turns the story into a parable of the mechanisms of the theatre world where only an iron will leads to success and where illusion and reality are often confounded. This becomes obvious when in the last scenes of the film a young girl, beautiful and ambitious, intends to follow in Eve's steps, eager to cut her out one day.

## Suspense while watching the film

Like in the case of *Chinatown* (1974), the suspense mechanisms do not unfold one-on-one while watching the film for the first time. The first dramatic question is set up in the first act and answered in the second one, followed by another question being answered in the third act, as explained in the manuals. But while thus a clear structure is built the plot is based on, Eve's actions cannot be understood so distinctly, and only in retrospect, all signs can be interpreted clearly. This is due to the fact that Eve – as opposed to Gittes in *Chinatown* (1974) – does not express her want explicitly. We as viewers are only aware that Eve schemes something the moment Margo feels deceived because of the call and party, and soon after that Eve intends *somehow* to take over Margo's role. Our suspicion grows when Birdie, Margo's assistant and friend, tells her she doesn't like Eve because she studies Margo like a book or a play (33:25) and when we see Eve wear one of Margo's old dresses (34:30). But until then we are not aware of Eve's talent as an actress; she could be only an obsessed devotee trying to copy and infiltrate Margo's life. Only when Eve asks Karen to help her become Margo's understudy in the recent play, we understand that she really tries to take over Margo's professional role (51:19). Suspense is not created by the dramatic question if Eve will be able to play the chief part in Lloyd's new play but by a vague suspicion, sustained by the more general question what Eve's intentions are.

As spectators we are remarkably willing to suppress the information given in the frame story, the award ceremony. Right at the film's beginning, Eve is presented to us as a very successful actress, in fact, the most important award for acting is given to her (01:04). Moreover, her goal is explicitly named by the eulogist as a representative of the theatre world: 'She has had one wish, one prayer, one dream: to belong to us' (05:37). And seemingly she succeeded to gain this objective. Nevertheless, we enter the main plot innocently, following the course of events with suspense. This touches upon the 'paradox

of suspense', briefly explained in Chapter 1: the possibility to feel suspense while watching a film even though we view it for the second time. This discussion is important because it challenges the thesis that suspense is mainly dependent on uncertainty. So far, no completely convincing explication has been provided in the literature. But Claudia Hillebrandt's assumption (2011, 110) that recipients still identify with the characters' emotions while reading a text repeatedly and that this is a sufficient reason for experiencing suspense, seems plausible. It seems also reasonable that we are willing to suppress knowledge in order to sustain suspense while watching a film the same way we are willing to ignore the knowledge that we enter a fictional work in order to enjoy the story world intensely (see Carroll 1996b; Gerrig 1993, 14-6).

Suspense is also produced by our sympathy for Margo: she is the one, we fear and hope for. Eve can be identified as the main character of the film because her want drives the action. But her artificial behaviour makes it difficult for us as viewers to connect with her. Margo instead is a human being with a lot of charm and a lot of flaws she does not deny. We can empathise with her fear that she will not be attractive any more after her career has ended, and we can bond with her desire to be loved for herself and not her professional achievements (01:18:24). She treats her friends with respect and herself with dignity. Therefore, suspense is created by questions like: Which disaster will happen at the party? (36:12) Will Margo lose Bill? (01:03:43) or Is DeWitt's critique about Eve destructive for Margo? (01:27:49) This illustrates another result of the analysis which is congruent with the explanations in the manuals: suspense is created on a micro level, too. The protagonist tries to obtain his or her objective step by step. After having gained Margo's trust and having proved as efficient as her assistant (26:37), Eve bonds with Margo's lover Bill (35:43) (does Eve want to seduce him?), asks Karen for help in becoming Margo's understudy (51:19) (will she succeed in taking over Margo's part?), makes sure that she steals her show as her understudy during a rehearsal (01:00:18) (again: will she succeed in taking over Margo's

part?) and plots against Margo so that Karen prevents Margo from arriving in time for playing her role (01:15:28) (will Margo find out that Karen and Eve betrayed her?).

## **The Conversation (script: Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)**

### **Synopsis**

Harry Caul is a surveillance expert and first in the field. Unable to share intimacy, he is completely focussed on his work. His new job is to eavesdrop on a young couple without knowing his employer and his motif. Harry's intention is to not let the information collected by him serve as the reason for a murder – something he had to endure in his past. When he discovers that his recordings are dangerous and actually a murder is planned, he fears that his employer intends to kill the young couple. He wants to protect them but when he witness the murder from an adjoining room, he is unable to intervene. But finally, he has to learn that not his employer killed the young couple, but the young couple his employer, the woman's husband. Moreover, he (pre-eminent in his field!) is surveilled by the young couple in order to prevent him from reporting them to the police.

### **Dramatic tension**

The dramatic question established in the first act is: will Harry be able to prevent that somebody is hurt again because of his work as a surveillance expert? He says to his colleague Stan while listening the young couple's conversation 'I don't care what they're talking about. All I want is a nice fat recording' (08:22), but this is not true. The moment he learns that the recordings are dangerous sets his antennae quivering. Confessing to a priest, Harry describes his fear and admits that 'People were hurt because of my work' (39:32).



His desire to prevent that this happens again fuels his motivation to work on his recordings until he can understand the conversation between the young woman and the young man as clearly as possible. He listens to the man saying: 'He'd kill us if he got the chance' (37:29). 'He' – Harry is convinced of – is his employer. Harry's plan to destroy the dangerous tapes fails (01:12:46; 01:17:15), and when he checks in at the hotel where a meeting between the young couple and his employer is due to take place, he is finally unable to intervene when the murder really happens (01:32:19). At the end of act two, the dramatic question is therefore answered in the negative. But instead of pursuing a new dramatic question, the third act is determined by Harry's comprehension of what really happened: somebody was indeed killed, but not, as he had suspected, the young couple by his employer, but his employer by the young couple (01:40:21). Harry thus failed in diverse aspects: he not only supported a crime with his work and witnessed a murder passively, but moreover he trusted the wrong people and was not able to interpret the recordings accurately. The last scenes carry his failure to extremes: the assistant of the murder victim who is in cahoots with the young couple calls Harry, threatens him, tells him not to go to the police and says 'We'll be listening to you' (01:42:39). Even though Harry rips apart his apartment, he cannot find the bugs (01:45:35). He has not only lost his position as the best surveillance expert in the USA but, more important, his privacy which is vital to him.

### **Suspense while watching the film**

Like in the case of *Chinatown* (1974), it is difficult for us viewers to understand the plot around the murder. But unlike *Chinatown* (1974), this is not due to a very complicated story. On the contrary, superficially the story is simple: a young couple plans to kill the husband of the young woman. But the motives and the relationships among the three are only hinted at. Additionally, it is as difficult for us as it is for the protagonist Harry to decipher the story based on the – poor – recordings (Figures 5.11-5.13). Thus, at the

beginning many gaps are left open and we need to be patient to fill them in. The same way the missing context makes it difficult for Harry to interpret the meaning (and potential consequences) of his job, we as viewers have to construct the context of Harry's work and situation piece by piece. His want is, for example, explained by himself to the priest only *after* having fought (and won) for keeping the recordings to himself instead of giving them to his employer's assistant. This makes it more difficult for us to establish a cause-effect-logic. Another example is the scene where Harry sits in the bus after his girlfriend broke up with him. Suddenly, the bus stops and the light goes down. At this moment Harry remembers how the young woman kissed her lover on the city square (26:45). Viewing the film for the first time, we might assume that he is just obsessed with his work. After knowing the whole story, his association illustrates how deeply he longs for companionship and how much he suffers from his isolated life situation. He seems to project his longing on the young woman.

Still, questions connected to the plot create suspense and we as viewers are interested in unravelling the mystery around the young couple. But instead of following the main dramatic question step by step, attention and suspense are sustained by smaller questions like, who had put the birthday gift in Harry's apartment? (his landlady) (09:42) or what awaits him in the basement? (his lover) (19:24). Another strong means to keep us interested is again our sympathy for the protagonist. Harry is introduced as a humourless man, focussed on his job, unable to maintain relationships. But we understand that he suffers from his isolation and his inability to change his life. We see, for example, that he really cares for Amy, his (former) lover: He not only tries to approach her again after she has broken up with him (48:11) but asks another woman if she would go back to a man who finds it difficult to talk about personal things (57:29). This illustrates that he still cares about Amy and regrets their breakup.

But there is another important aspect that keeps us in suspense while watching *The Conversation* (1974): the film's atmosphere. It is difficult to comprehend the plot and thus to develop distinct questions, but the impenetrability of Harry's opponents (his employer, the assistant, the young couple) and Harry's own impenetrability create a mysterious atmosphere that attracts us.

## **Further suspense techniques**

### **Dramatic irony**

Examples of dramatic irony can be found in *All about Eve* (1950) and in *Chinatown* (1974). Suspense is created in this way at some rare points but the device is not used to sustain the whole films.<sup>57</sup> When Eve enters her hotel room after the award ceremony she is not aware of the young fan waiting for her, but we as viewers spot the girl in a mirror before Eve does (02:06:20) and wait expectantly for Eve's reaction: her surprise is our delight (Figures 5.14 and 5.15). In *Chinatown* (1974) dramatic irony is applied when Gittes tells his colleagues a coarse joke unaware of Evelyn Mulwray behind him listening (19:02). A similar situation appears in *The Conversation* (1974) when Harry finally meets his employer in person. He enters the office where his employer and his assistant listen to the recordings, but his employer notices Harry only after some moments (01:22:36). Even though we wait expectantly how the encounter will develop in general (knowing that Harry is potentially in danger), in this case, no dramatic irony unfolds because Harry seems in control of

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<sup>57</sup> An example for a film where dramatic irony plays a central role is *The Shop around the Corner* (1940, script: Samson Raphaelson and Ben Hecht)

this precise situation. We do not wait in suspense for the director becoming aware of his presence – we just wait.

### **Telegraphing**

Telegraphing is used in all three films in many cases in order to support the narrative flow. When Gittes' assistant informs him that Mulwray is in a rowboat in a park with his 'girlfriend' (13:52), we are prepared for the next scene when Gittes and his assistant take pictures of them in a rowboat (14:18). The moment the information is given to us, we do not doubt this information and do not expect otherwise and indeed it is congruent with the information given in the next scene. Another simple example is Mulwray's deputy asking Gittes to accompany him into his office (21:38). We expect both to go there: and right, the next scene shows both talking there (22:04). This device is used for this purpose as well in *All about Eve* (1950). For example, when Margo invites Eve to accompany Bill and herself to the airport (19:34) or when she talks to producer Max about the audition in a couple of weeks (46:26). In *The Conversation* (1974), it is applied when Harry's colleagues talk about the convention for surveillance experts they want to visit the next day (07:34) and, second instance, at the convention when Harry's colleague announces: 'Hey, come on, there's somebody over here I want you to meet, a competitor of yours' (43:06).<sup>58</sup>

But in some cases, the pointing device is indeed applied in the films in order to create suspense. In this instance, the information given raises more than one possible outcome and invites us to hypothesise. One example is Eve talking during the party with Bill and DeWitt

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<sup>58</sup> Sounds can serve as announcements as well, when for example the rattling of scissors points to Evelyn Mulwray's gardener clipping a hedge before Gittes (and we) spots him (25:17).

about theatre. For one moment, she forgets the role she plays and reveals her burning ambition to become a famous actress. But then she suddenly hesitates because somebody is approaching and she changes her facial expression from animated to innocent and a little bit dull (54:14) (Figure 5.16 and 5.17). We ask ourselves (sensing conflict): who approaches and from whom does Eve hide her true self? Right: it is Margo. Another example is Eve's announcement at the end of the film to DeWitt: 'I have something to tell you!' (01:51:26). This arouses our curiosity and we wonder what she will reveal to him. Now, what is it?

Often, we are not aware of the questions raised by telegraphing, mainly because we have to receive, comprehend and organise a multitude of information and also because in many cases there is just a short moment between question and answer. But even if we do not feel suspense explicitly, our attention is attracted.

The example illustrates that the difference between telegraphing and dangling causes is subtle, as the following example also shows. When Gittes noses around in the nursing home owned by Noah Cross and interrogates the inhabitants, a staff member interrupts him and tells him that somebody wants to talk to him (01:15:16). This not only points to the next scene where Gittes discovers that the two men who had attacked him want to talk to him and thus carries neutral information. It can be read as a threat, too, because we have just learned that the inhabitants are (innocently) involved in the conspiracy and therefore we can assume that the staff member is informed about Cross' criminal plan and an accomplice eager to harm Gittes. We expect thus in suspense whom Gittes has to meet.

### **Dangling causes**

In *Chinatown* (1974) this device is applied only rarely. One example can be found in the scene when Gittes is attacked and his nose is cut. His offender says: 'Next time you lose the

whole thing!’ (40:28). This threat is never realised but we ask ourselves (even if, again, not consciously) if Gittes will indeed be hurt more severely and this supports the fear we have for his wellbeing, and thus suspense. Another example is Evelyn Mulwray’s plan to escape together with her sister/daughter to Mexico which she reveals to Gittes (01:47:51). This directs our attention to the future (will she go to Mexico?) and supports the hope we feel for her (01:47:51).

More dangling causes can be detected in *All about Eve* (1950). For instance, when Margo says goodbye to Bill at the airport, asking him: ‘Am I going to lose you? Am I?’ (24:51) We ask ourselves the same question and hope for a negative answer. Or when Margo expresses her sense of foreboding regarding the party: ‘Even before the party started I could smell disaster in the air’ (36:12). Again, we ask ourselves what will happen and feel with Margo whom we wish a happy reunion with Bill. A promise serves as a dangling cause when Karen reassures Eve and makes her talk to producer Max about her wish to become Margo’s understudy (‘I won’t forget!’ (59:25)). We ask ourselves if Eve will succeed in obtaining her goal. Very effectively the device is applied when Karen regrets she manipulated the car in order to prevent Margo from arriving in time to the theatre and allowing Eve thus to act as her understudy. Sitting in the car, waiting for help, Karen excuses herself, but Margo answers: ‘After all, you didn’t personally drain the gasoline tank yourself’ (01:18:24). Karen’s sense of guilt is obvious but she remains silent. The question raised here is: What will happen if Margo finds out about Karen’s betrayal? Here the distinction to dramatic irony is fine as we as viewers share the same knowledge with Karen, but Margo is clueless.

Another powerful example of this technique can be found in *The Conversation* (1974). Harry is able to decipher the recordings better and better and finally hears and understands the crucial words, spoken by the young man, for the first time: ‘He’d kill us if he got the

chance' (37:29). This not only points neutrally to a possible future event but implies real danger. At this point, these words show only how much is at stake for the young couple, but in the next scene, Harry expresses his greatest fear to a priest: the worst thing that can happen to him is that people he observes get hurt. This turns the line into a powerful dangling cause. Indeed, it is used, slightly modified, a second time as a dangling cause. Having developed a particular concern for the young woman's wellbeing and life, Harry tries to warn her in a dream and shouts: 'He'll kill you if he gets a chance' (01:16:20). More urgently we, therefore, ask ourselves: will Harry be able to protect the young couple and thus himself? At another point, a wish serves as a dangling cause. The woman who is to spy on Harry and steal the recordings tells him: 'Something is on your mind. I wish you'd tell me' (53:34). In retrospect, we know the young couple hired the woman to find out what Harry knows about their planned murder, but viewing the film for the first time this sounds like a rather private conversation. Will he share his sorrows?

### **Planting and payoff**

This technique has a different weight in the three selected films. It is used in *All about Eve* (1950) and in *The Conversation* (1974) mainly in order to reveal character, to move the story forward or to unify the narrative. In *The Conversation* (1974), an example for Type I can be found: when Harry realises that the pen his main competitor Moran gave him (46:10) turns out to be a bugging device and was misused to spy on him in a most intimate moment (01:06:28), this comes as a surprise, not only for him but probably also for us as viewers (Figures 5.18-20). *All about Eve* (1950) comprises an example difficult to classify. After Eve has succeeded in becoming Margo's highly esteemed assistant but before we as spectators suspect that she intends to bump her idol, Margo finds Eve after a performance on stage, holding one of Margo's costumes close to her body, looking dreamily at a mirror. Margo smiles benignly but Eve looks shocked realising that Margo has observed

her (29:55) (Figures 5.21-23). Watching this scene, we interpret Eve's reaction as fear that Margo caught her unawares, but in retrospect, knowing about Eve's intention to take Margo's place, we understand that Eve was afraid Margo had read her mind. Only then we can read the scene as a powerful metaphor of Eve's true intention. The plant therefore does not provoke suspense explicitly, but adds to the increasing mistrust of Eve.<sup>59</sup>

In *Chinatown* (1974), the technique is used clearly to create suspense. In fact, different plants work closely together to produce unsettling questions which are answered step by step in the course of events. The first plant is the word 'apple core' that Gittes' assistant says he heard during a quarrel Mulwray had with Cross (13:27). Gittes does not know what the word means and classifies the information as irrelevant. Only after having solved the crime about the water supply, he understands that they quarrelled about the 'Albacore Club' Cross owns and that plays a key role in the crime, not about an 'apple core' (01:14:58). The moment this plant is paid off, Gittes' first want is fulfilled and the mystery around the water distribution solved.

But still Gittes has to find out who killed Mulwray, and where. These questions are again answered by using the technique of planting and payoff. When Gittes visits Evelyn the first time at her villa, he has to wait in the garden for a while. He observes her Japanese gardener extracting angrily some tussocks from around a pond, saying something like 'Bad for glass'. Clueless and bored, Gittes imitates the gardener: 'Yes, sure. Bad for the glass' (26:14). We as viewers do not yet understand that the gardener talks about the grass (pronounced with his Asian accent as 'glass') and ask ourselves what these words might

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<sup>59</sup> This could be also classified as an example for the technique foreshadowing (see Chapter 8).



mean. But because of Gittes impassible behaviour we do not ascribe too much importance to them.

Just after this small conversation another information is planted: Gittes spots an object in the pond and wants to take it out of the water but is interrupted by the appearance of Evelyn (26:30) (Figures 5.24 and 5.25). For the moment, the question: What lies in the pond? stays unacknowledged. Part of the answer is revealed when Gittes' first meets Cross: they eat fish that is served with the head. Cross puts on his glasses to have a closer look (58:46) and is thus presented to us as an occasional wearer of glasses – an information becoming important later.

The question *Why does the gardener rail against the grass?* is answered partly by the information that Mulwray had salt water in his lungs (01:38:19). Now Gittes knows Mulwray wasn't killed in the fresh water reservoir where the body was found. Soon after he talks again to the gardener, repeating his words 'Bad for glass'. The gardener confirms his words, adding: 'Salt water velly bad for glass' (01:41:31). The gardener, remarking 'Bad for glass', was angry that the salt water in the pond did damage to the vegetation. Thus, the plant is paid-off: Gittes realises that Mulwray could have drowned in the pond (Figure 5.28). So he fishes the object out of the pond: it's a pair of glasses (01:42:08) (Figure 5.27). This payoff serves as a new plant because it raises new questions: Whose glasses are they? And how is the owner connected to the killing? Gittes shows the glasses to Evelyn. He assumes they belonged to her husband and that she killed him, but she denies (01:44:37). Later she tells Gittes they were not her husband's since he did not wear bifocals (01:48:17). While Gittes talks to Cross on the phone, asking him to meet him at the villa, the camera zooms on the glasses lying on a table and we as viewers understand what Gittes has realised as well: the glasses belong to Cross (01:54:59) (Figure 5.28). And right: when Cross arrives, Gittes asks him to read the obituary column in the newspaper and watches Cross

putting on glasses, indeed bifocals. Gittes shows Cross the broken bifocals he had found in the pond and accuses him of having killed Mulwray (01:55:19) (Figure 5.29). Cross does not confess the murder, instead he asks his accomplice to take the glasses, i.e. the main *corpus delicti*, from Gittes.

The payoff with the greatest power is beyond doubt when Evelyn confesses the incest with her father and that the young girl is her daughter *and* her sister (01:46:13). Even though this payoff is carefully prepared as the analysis shows (27:42; 28:38; 32:21; 44:34; 48:12; 01:23:12; 01:29:25), it comes as a surprise. The reason is our assumption Evelyn should be interested in finding out about the conspiracy against her husband and then his killing and linking her mysterious behaviour and her secrecy to the crime. Only when she reveals her secret to Gittes it becomes clear that her want is not to solve the mystery but to protect her daughter. The frame of interpretation has changed from *murder* to *incest*.

Comparing all the examples given, it becomes clear how essential it is – in order to implant this dramatic device successfully – to ascribe exactly the right importance to the information which serves as a plant. As mentioned before, we as viewers watching a classical Hollywood film expect all information given to us to be of some importance and if a minor detail gets too much attention we suspect it to be a plant. The plant ‘apple core’, the gardener’s comment ‘Bad for glass’, and the object in the pond in *Chinatown* (1974) confuse us for a moment but because protagonist Gittes pays no further attention to them, we are willing to ignore them as well, also because we have to pay attention to the following events. We therefore neglect exactly the information that is crucial for solving the mystery and answering the central questions about the site of the crime, the offender, and the motive. By contrast, the fact that Evelyn protects a secret is highlighted to us several times by Gittes who says angrily that his questions are not personal (28:38), accuses her of hiding something (44:34; 48:12) and extorts her to tell him the truth (01:29:25). But these

obvious hints and explicit questions do not involve the danger of spoiling suspense as the information behind them does not help to solve the mystery at all but misleads us and gains rather the quality of ‘red herrings’ i.e. wrong tracks. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that if an information is mentioned or shown too randomly there is the danger that we miss it at all. The fact that Cross is the owner of the Albacore Club, for instance, is suggested too subtly in the scene where Gittes meets him for the first time.

Another result which confirms the description of this dramatic device found in the manuals is the subtle distinction between the three different types of this technique. In none of the three films, a plant is introduced in the same marked and central way as in *Citizen Kane* where the question what or who ‘rosebud’ is, functions as an engine for the whole plot. Questions are provoked by information serving as plants but in most cases they operate at the boundary between consciousness and subconsciousness. They are not strong enough to motivate us to pursue continually answers but strong enough to unsettle us slightly and to keep us interested in the story. The examples illustrate as well how closely the single plants and payoffs can work together. This is also true in case a payoff becomes another plant creating a new question, as explained. Last but not least an information can fulfil a function in different planting and payoff threads: in *Chinatown* (1974) the information that Cross is Evelyn’s father not only reveals that Cross was Mulwray’s father-in-law and is thus a piece of the crime puzzle but casts a first light on the incest (47:06).

Another important insight is that the protagonists’ reactions to the information seeded are significant for our reactions as recipients. In *All About Eve* (1950), Margo reacts serenely and slightly amused to Eve dreaming about her costume – why should we be concerned? Harry accepts Moran’s giveaway at the fair, eager to get rid of his annoying colleague – why should we suspect that Moran uses the pen as a bugging device? Gittes does not care about the ‘apple core’ or the pond – there is no reason for us to ponder over them.

Instead, Gittes trying again and again to draw the secret from Evelyn keeps us interested in scrutinising her mysterious behaviour. It becomes clear again how utterly important the role of the protagonists is for guiding us through the story and for influencing the effects the story has on us.

## **Conclusion**

The analyses suggest that even though the central dramatic questions are an important device for the scriptwriters to structure the narratives and even though this structure is the ‘skeleton’ (Field 2005, 21) of the story, holding together all minor questions, from the viewers’ perspective these central questions do not dominate the reception process in the sense that an answer is continually pursued. Rather, while viewing we react to the *erotetic* nature (Carroll 1988) of the films and wait for answers to the small questions raised one after the other; micro suspense plays an important role. Dolf Zillmann underlines the importance of such episodic suspense and writes: ‘Suspense thus tends to be created in chains of potentially independent episodes in which endangerments are indicated, dwelled on, and resolved. The overall plot is unlikely to meet these conditions because of the necessary frequent interpolation of information that connects the element of a story’ (Zillmann 1996, 207). This micro suspense is supported, as the examples show, by the use of telegraphing, dangling causes, dramatic irony and planting and payoff. The analyses demonstrate, too, that these techniques are also used to support the narrative flow and the story’s unity, as described in the manuals. This point will become important again in Chapter 8 when devices will be discussed to maintain suspense in unconventional films.

Another important observation is that in many cases these questions do not motivate us to develop consciously concrete hypotheses but to follow the events with interest anyway,

puzzling about the information given and withheld. *Somehow* we suspect that Evelyn keeps a secret and *slowly* we realise that Eve is up for mischief. The results of the analyses modify therefore how Bordwell (1985) describes the reception process, focusing thereby on the cognitive responses, particularly on making assumptions. Gaps are not only used in the films to provoke concrete questions, but as described in Chapter 2, also to add to a vague, mysterious atmosphere. Obviously, gapping is also applied in order to skip boring or irrelevant events, like the characters going from one place to the other or like the weekend Margo spends with her friends on the countryside.

The analyses show, too, that the three films demand a lot of patience on the viewers' side concerning getting the central questions answered, especially in case of *Chinatown* (1974) with its complicated plot. The plot of *The Conversation* (1974) is also difficult to understand as the decoding process depends on deciphering the recordings of poor quality. This shows not only how decisive the scriptwriters' balance between giving too much and too little information is in order not to frustrate or bore the audiences but also how important other devices are which can maintain the viewers' interest. Our willingness and, even more, our joy to follow the stories until the end is due to a variety of aspects and draws not exclusively on the techniques described.

First, being familiar with the schemes of popular films, knowing that they are characterised by unity, viewers are confident that at the end all pieces will fall into place and that their goal-oriented activity, namely understanding the plot, will be rewarded by getting answers to all questions. This kind of expectation is typical especially for recipients of fictional stories, as Werner Wolf explains:

Narrative worlds can basically be fictional or non-fictional. Yet for obvious reasons the freedom to devise and shape narrative material which fictionality permits enhances the possibility of creating meaningful coherence. (...) Conversely, once a

recipient has applied the frame of fictionality (...) he or she will develop “specific expectations” towards a narrative, in particular the expectation of a high degree of “integrativity” (coherence and meaningfulness) of the substance and its presentation. Central among the concepts that answer this expectation of integrativity are chronology, repetition, unity, causality and above all teleology. (Wolf 2003, 187)

This point will become of interest in the next chapter while analysing the exhibitions: how can the visitors’ goal be described in case of receiving non-fictional narratives?

Second, even if the narrative system was separated from the stylistic one for analytical reasons, the analyses show impressively how closely both levels interact in keeping the audiences interested. Interestingly enough, according to scriptwriter Robert Towne the preview of *Chinatown* (1974) was no success at all and the background music was changed. ‘And suddenly the film awoke to new life’, he tells (cited in Goldman 2001, 271). The narrative suspense techniques are supported by stylistic means like for instance music or camera zooms, but a film’s style can be attractive in its own right, motivating the viewers to continue watching. Last but not least, other aspects like for instance the witty dialogues in *All about Eve* (1950) or Bette Davis’ brilliant achievement can amuse recipients and keep them interested.

Third, the analyses show that empathy is, as described in the manuals and explained by Ari Hiltunen (2002) and Noël Carroll (1988), a very powerful tool indeed ‘which permits the recipient to re-experience the narrative world and become emotionally and imaginatively involved in it’ (Wolf 2004, 88). But again, our interest is not only or mainly guided by the question if the protagonists will obtain their goals, as described in the previous chapters based on the manuals and scriptwriting literature. Our interest can be described more generally as the willingness and wish to accompany the characters on their journeys. In

case of *All about Eve* (1950) for instance, our interest in the story draws mainly on the relationships among all characters and their emotional up and downs.

One important point in this context is that the protagonists' wants are as important as their *needs*: this term denotes what they really require for their well-being and happiness (Krützen 2006, 143; Cattrysse 2010). Gittes' want is to keep his reputation – his need is being able to protect the people he cares for in a corrupt world. Eve's want is to play the chief part in Lloyd's new play – her need is to be loved and to find friendship. Harry's want is to prevent another irreparable damage caused by his work – his need is to break free from his isolation and to open up. The questions connected with the needs of the characters sustain suspense very effectively – will they fail or will they succeed? The introduction of needs is a strong device for connecting audiences emotionally to the story and will become important again in Chapter 8 when an 'emotional leitmotif' will be discussed as a possible means to create suspense particularly in cultural historical exhibitions.

Our empathy for the protagonists plays a role, too, in unfolding dangling causes' effects as the analyses revealed. As opposed to Gulino (2004) who explains that dangling causes (even though they carry more emotional freight than telegraphing) require no emotional connection between the audience and a character, the analyses suggest that suspense created by dangling causes does depend on such a link.

The protagonists are highly important also for the viewers to comprehend the relevance of the story and single events. Their understanding of the importance and meanings of events is predominantly guided by the protagonists' reactions. This demonstrates vividly how important 'evaluation devices' (Labov and Waletzky 1967) are as explained in Chapter 2, for storytelling. A point to return to in the next chapter.

The analyses of the films demonstrated that every film shows a different combination and occurrence of the techniques. Whereas dramatic irony is applied only rarely, telegraphing and dangling causes are often used, even though to a different degree and even though the effects provoked have a different intensity. The technique of planting and payoff plays a different role for the three films. The varying mixture and application of the dramaturgic devices are probably also due to the different genres of the films. Even though the sample of only three films does not allow to draw valid conclusions about the connection between the use of suspense techniques and genre, it is plausible that they are used in dramas like *All About Eve* (1950) in a more subtle way, whereas they are rather important for crimes like *Chinatown* (1974).

Finally, even though the variety in the three films is greater than the somewhat rough descriptions in the manuals that provide clear guidelines and also in cognitive film theories that try to describe schemes, the films' structures are nonetheless congruent with the master schema of popular films, outlined in the last chapters. They all follow a three-act structure, they all focus on a main storyline and they all centre around dramatic questions, closely connected to the protagonist's want, which are answered in the end.

Against this backdrop, the next chapter examines three cultural historical exhibitions with regard to suspense, focusing on possible protagonists and central questions and also trying to detect examples for the other dramaturgic suspense techniques described so far.

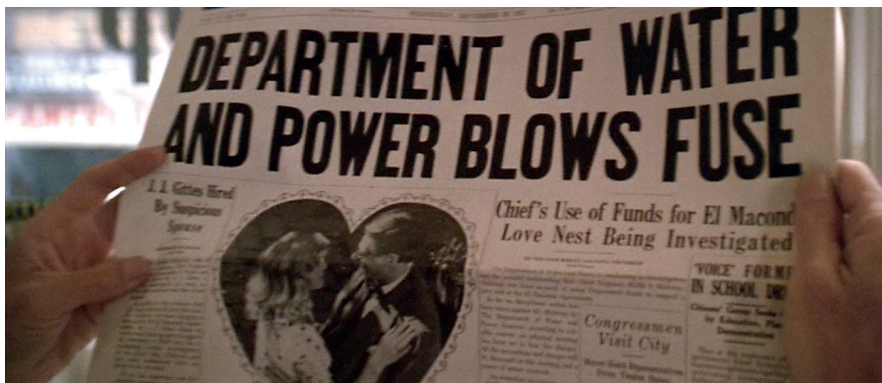


## Films

**Figure 5.1** *Chinatown*. The ‘wrong’ Mrs Mulwray hires Gittes.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.2** *Chinatown*. The picture taken by Gittes causes scandal.  
Screenshot by author.



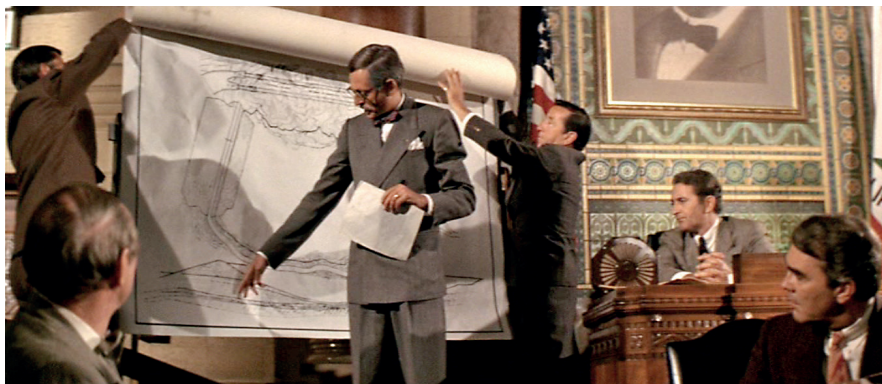
**Figure 5.3** *Chinatown*. The ‘real’ Mrs Mulwray threatens to bring Gittes before court.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.4** *Chinatown*. Evelyn admits the incest with her father (second turning point). Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.5** *Chinatown*. Mulwray speaks against the dam project. Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.6** *Chinatown*. Not yet understanding the brisance of the project, Gittes listens bored. Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.7** *All about Eve*. Eve gets the prize as best actress. Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.8** *All about Eve*. Why does Margo not applaud? Screenshot by author.





**Figure 5.9** *All about Eve*. Still innocently, Karen introduces Eve to Margo and her friends. Screenshot by author.

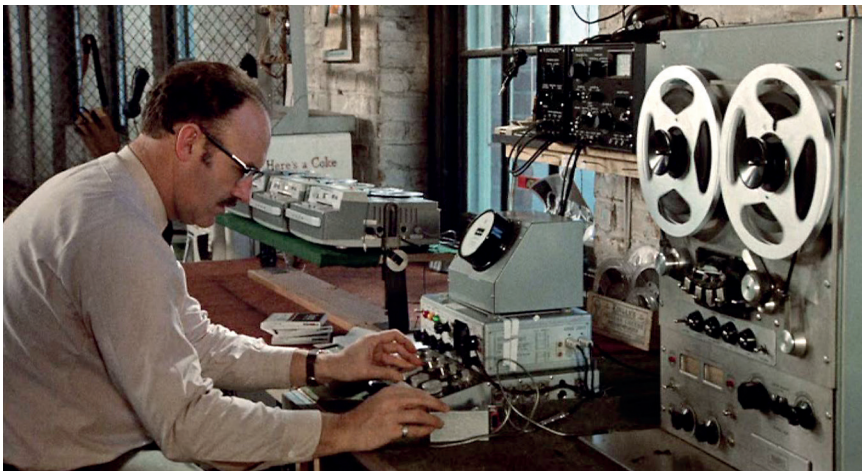


**Figure 5.10** *All about Eve*. Margo is angry about Eve having placed Bill's birthday call and begins to realise that Eve is up to mischief. Screenshot by author.





**Figure 5.11**  
*The Conversation.*  
First, Harry is not  
able to decipher the  
couple's dialogue.  
Screenshot by  
author.



**Figure 5.12**  
*The Conversation.*  
But using special  
equipment ...  
Screenshot by  
author.



**Figure 5.13**  
*The Conversation.*  
...he finally  
understands that  
the man said:  
'He'd kill us if he  
got the chance.'  
Screenshot by  
author.

**Figure 5.14** *All about Eve*. We spot the young girl in the mirror before Eve does. Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.15** *All about Eve*. Eve discovers the young girl and is startled. Screenshot by author.





**Figure 5.16** *All about Eve*. Eve raves self-forgotten about being a famous actress. Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.17** *All about Eve*. Who does she see coming? Screenshot by author.

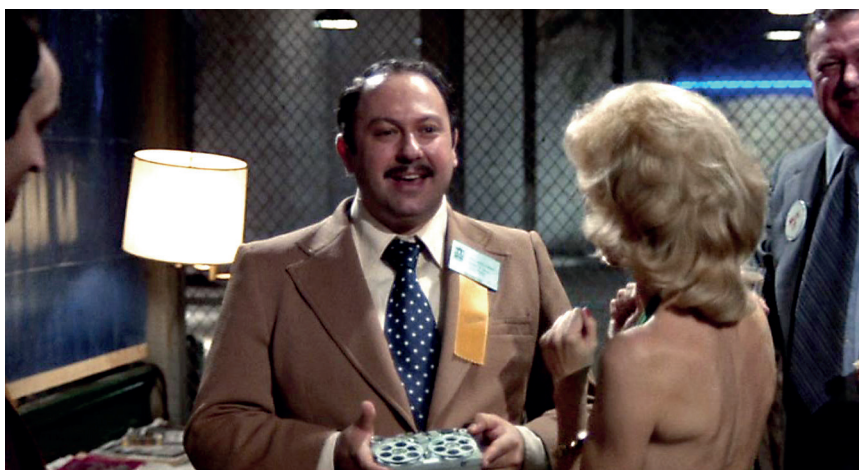




**Figure 5.18**  
*The Conversation.*  
Harry's rival Moran  
puts a pen in his  
pocket (plant).  
Screenshot by  
author.



**Figure 5.19**  
*The Conversation.*  
By help of the pen,  
he spies on Harry  
in a most intimate  
moment. Screenshot  
by author.



**Figure 5.20**  
*The Conversation.*  
Moran has proved  
his expertise as  
surveillance expert  
(payoff).  
Screenshot by  
author.





**Figure 5.21**

*All about Eve.* Eve with one of Margo's costumes.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.22**

*All about Eve.* Margo is amused.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.23**

*All about Eve.* So, why is Eve shocked?  
Screenshot by author.

**Figure 5.24** *Chinatown*. Gittes spots an object in the pond.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.25** *Chinatown*. He wants to take it out of the pond but is interrupted by Evelyn.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.26** *Chinatown*. Later, Gittes realises that the pond is filled with salt water – and thus the murder scene (payoff). Screenshot by author.





**Figure 5.27** *Chinatown*. The object in the pond is a pair of glasses.  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.28** *Chinatown*. Gittes understands that the glasses belong to Cross...  
Screenshot by author.



**Figure 5.29** *Chinatown*. ...who is thus convicted as Mulwray's killer.  
Screenshot by author.



## 6. Exhibition Analyses

### Introduction

This chapter analyses the three exhibitions *Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops*, *Mountains, a Mysterious Passion* and *The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts*. The focus is on the search for the protagonists because of their outstanding role for creating dramatic suspense. The previous chapters have shown that the central dramatic question in a classical Hollywood film is indissolubly linked to a main character and that his or her actions serve as an engine for the whole, enthralling, plot. It has nevertheless proved useful to approach each of the exhibitions from a different angle, taking into account their different characters. The creators of *Passions* labelled their exhibition as ‘drama’, so it was productive to examine if their aspiration were manifest in the actual exhibition. For *Sawn*, it proved essential to find out if the ‘crime’ can be solved and if it can be considered as mystery after all. By applying this methodological strategy, the question could be answered if and to what extent suspense actually unfolds. For the exhibition *Mountains*, it turned out fertile to scrutinise the stories connected to its manifold characters and to uncover thus its netlike structure. This netlike or fragmentary structure can be classified, based on museum studies literature (Scholze 2004; Hanak-Lettner 2011), as typical for cultural historical exhibitions. It also characterises the narratives of *Passions* and *Sawn*. It is also one of the most striking differences to classical Hollywood films and has to be examined therefore with care. The chapter then addresses the question if the dramaturgic techniques dramatic irony, telegraphing, dangling causes and planting and payoff were applied to the exhibition narratives in order to create suspense or similar dramatic effects. As explained in Chapter 1, *Sawn* and *Mountains* were analysed completely in order to understand the dramaturgy of the whole narratives; but for the purpose of this thesis, a summary of the analyses will

suffice. The tables included in this chapter as well as the protocols in the appendix make up for the complete analyses. Before analysing the exhibitions, each will be described briefly for a general orientation.

## **Dramatic tension in the exhibitions?**

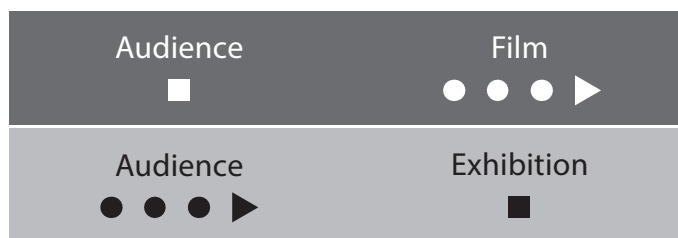
### *Identifying dramatic questions*

Identifying the dramatic questions of the three exhibitions is not as obvious as it was for the films, and for good reasons. Based on the sequence protocols, the central questions of the exhibitions could be defined as following: What were the painted boards used for? (*Sawn*) What is passions' nature? (*Passions*) and Why do people take the risk to climb mountains? (*Mountains*). The answers would read as follows: The painted boards were backdrops used in theatre performances during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, eventually at monastery schools. As opposed to other emotions passions have the power to overwhelm us. People climb mountains for diverse motives which are stronger than fear and caution. But these questions differ fundamentally from the dramatic questions typical for classical Hollywood movies. For comparison, the analyses of the three selected films revealed questions like: Will Jake Gittes find out what is behind the confusing story around the water distribution in Los Angeles? Will Eve succeed in getting the leading part in Lloyd's new play instead of Margo? Will Harry Caul be able to prevent that somebody is hurt again because of his work as a surveillance expert?

One difference is striking: whereas the answer to all central dramatic questions analysed in the films is either yes or no, all central questions found in the exhibitions demand a more elaborate answer. Still more, even though the questions and answers implied in the exhibitions are connected implicitly with actions like painting or climbing, they have a

distinct descriptive character. The questions and answers identified in the films however clearly relate to actions. In contrast to dramatic questions typical for classical Hollywood films, the questions typical for cultural historical exhibitions are of a *thematic* nature. It is enlightening that the Greek word origin of drama is ‘to do’ and the one of theme ‘something laid down’, from ‘tithenai’ – to place.<sup>60</sup> And in fact: whereas film viewers follow the unfolding course of events on the screen, museum visitors view events ‘laid down’ statically in the exhibition spaces (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1** Audiences – film and exhibition



### *Identifying protagonists*

This does not mean it is impossible to identify potentially dramatic questions for the three exhibitions. Trying to identify dramatic questions, the typical traits of these questions (they can be formulated as ‘Will he/she fail or succeed?’ and answered in the affirmative or negative) should be used as a guidance. Another guiding principle should be the search for the exhibition stories’ protagonists because they are indissolubly linked to the dramatic

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theme>,

tension developed in the Hollywood narratives. On the surface, it may seem easy to identify the protagonists of these three specific exhibitions. But taking a closer look, there are certain and highly important inconsistencies, not least in respect to the visitors' roles.

## **The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts**

### **Description**

The Deutsche Hygiene-Museum Dresden is well known for its exhibition style characterised by combining artworks with historico-cultural artefacts and by creating strong narrative environments. The special exhibition *The Passions* fits in with this profile. It was shown from 25<sup>th</sup> February to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and was curated by Catherine Nichols and designed by opera director Mariame Clément and set designer Julia Hansen.

*Passions* deals with the nature of these powerful emotions in all its facets. It is communicated to the audience as a drama in which the passions as well as the visitors are the main characters who encounter each other on stage, the exhibition space.

Following a classic five-act-play it is divided into five sections plus a section at the beginning, called *Foyer* (Figure 6.3). Here the introduction text is situated which describes passions as stormy emotions, having the power to overwhelm us. This characterisation of passions serves as leitmotif throughout the exposition.

The four following sections are designed like living rooms picking up the idea of an emotional household. The first section, i.e. the first act, S01 *Exposition* describes passions by naming verbal images, explaining historical understandings and concepts or by

discussing theories about passions' base in the brain and other organs. The rooms in this section look welcoming and peaceful (Figure 6.4).

In the next section S02 *Conflict*, ergo the second act, different philosophical beliefs concerning passions from antiquity to the present are contraposed. Whereas some philosophers and scholars considered passions as important forces moving us to get active, other viewed them as disruptive forces that need to be tamed. The floor of the living room where the second view is deployed is tilted and the furniture disarranged.

The third section S03 *Climax* presents diverse passions like fear, joy or hate. Every passion is depicted by objects compiled on an island constructed by broken furniture. Fear, for example, is represented by an artwork that shows a spider made of scissors and an anatomic model of skin with goose bumps. The message is: passions may be dangerous, but not because of their essence but because of their intensity. Even a positive feeling like love can turn into an emotion difficult to handle.

The next section S04 *Turning point* introduces institutions that may serve to tame the passions, like education, religion or medicine. The texts say that the methods these institutions apply base on love, fear or shame and even though these institutions can be criticised they still help living together. The objects are presented here again in well-ordered furniture, like for instance in a kind of classroom.

In the last section S05 *Resolution* the visitors can look into a living room from outside, like standing in a garden peeping through a window. Inside, they see a table with a cake and disarranged crockery, as if the inhabitants have made a hasty departure. Slides are screened on the back wall of the room, showing pictures from a ceasefire Christmas 1914 at the German-French frontline. A text explains that this is the home of the passions.



The sections are arranged one behind the other so that the visitors have to move through them in a linear order (Figure 6.4).

## **Defining the protagonists**

### *Texts*

In case of *Passions* there is a contradiction between the statements made in the texts and the meanings unfolded through the selection and presentation of the objects and through the exhibition design. The texts explicitly designate passions as well as the exhibition visitors as protagonists. The introduction text in S00 *Foyer* reads: ‘In this exhibition you meet the passions unmediated because the exhibition is told as a drama in five acts, in which you and the passions are the protagonists.’ It continues: ‘You move spatially through the play: from act to act, from scene to scene. The performance starts the moment you enter the stage. Good luck!’ In S01 *Exposition*, the main text explains that the passions are described to some extent, but they are present only implicitly: ‘... who knows when the passions might return?’ The objects presented are described as things in which the passions have left their marks. In S03 *Climax* the main text states that the passions have finally arrived ‘on stage’: ‘Here they are: Love! Desire! Envy! Anger! Fear! Shame! Disgust! Hate! Grief! Joy! Wonder! The passions we all know...’. The space, as explained in the exhibition’s description, looks like a scene of destruction. ‘You try hard to retain an objective point of view’, the text continues, ‘But your body language betrays your alternating attraction and revulsion as you oscillate between pleasure and pain. You are no longer sure whether you are a guest here, or whether you may in fact be at home’. In the following section S04 *Turning point* where diverse methods are discussed that can be applied to tame passions, the main text reads: ‘The morning after. In the emotional household, the storm has passed; the passions have departed.’

Even though (for reasons explained in Chapter 1) it was not possible to make a sequence protocol of *Passions*, the information documented in the inspection record, complemented by photographs provided by the museum, are sufficient to put these textual statements into question, by analysing the role of the exhibits and interpreting the design.

### *Design*

In the exhibition, S00 *Foyer* is described as the space where the visitors enter the stage. But starting from a classical play and noting only the design of the space, the foyer could be understood as the place where the spectators reach the auditorium, in order not to act but to observe. But leaving this for a moment aside, the visitors would then enter in S01 *Exposition* the stage which is created, also in S02, S03 and S04, based on the idea of an emotional household. Taking this central metaphor seriously, this would mean that the visitors move through the emotional household, the place where common feelings are constantly at home, waiting for the moment the passions will make their appearance. The most important question is therefore: what happens in that moment? How will the visitors react? And, considering the knowledge communicated through the whole exhibition: Will the visitors be overwhelmed and defeated by these extreme feelings or will they be able to handle the passions in a positive and constructive way?

In regard to the appearance of the passions there is a contradiction between the texts and the design of the sections. According to the text the passions are present in S03 *Climax*. But the furniture is broken and disarranged, it is not breaking while the visitors are present. No action takes place, instead the consequence of the action is visualised (Figure 6.5). Thus the scenery can be viewed as showing the traces of the passions' appearance, but not as a setting framing the passions entering the stage firsthand. At this point the static nature of the exhibition medium becomes evident and the difficulty to visualise a temporal sequence of

events with the help of the means typical for exhibitions – things and images –, and thus the difficulty to tell a narrative.

### *Objects*

Considering the objects, I wonder if the passions are truly present in this section or if they are more present than in the other four sections. In order to be able to answer this question one has to consider the use of the objects in the whole exhibition. The main text in S01 *Exposition* states that the passions have left their marks in the objects – but can visitors understand that only by looking at the objects? Among these items is for example a plate from circa 1880 depicting Venus, Mars and Cupid. The label says that in antiquity people believed that gods have assumed power for a while when someone was overwhelmed by a passion. The crucial point is that passions cannot be depicted directly because they are immaterial feelings. They can only be visualised by showing their effects on human beings or in form of symbols or allegories, like in the case of the plate. Thus they are neither present directly in this section nor in S03 *Climax*.

### *No passionate feelings*

The only possible way to let passions enter the exhibition's stage would be to provoke passionate feelings in the visitors themselves. But the (selected) objects do not have this power. Even though some subtle feelings may arise while walking through the exhibition, neither do they resemble passions in their characteristic intensity nor are they congruent with the nature of specific passions. Walking over the tilted floor in S02 *Conflict* may provoke unease on side of the audience, but this is caused physically and not because of fearing the appearance of potentially dangerous passions (Figure 6.6). And viewing the mentioned art work by Christopher Locke made from scissors and placed in the exhibit unit *Fear*, may evoke discomfort but much hardly fear (Figure 6.7).

To put it straight: despite all textual assertions the passions are not present unmediated in this ‘drama’ and do not enter the stage even in S03 *Climax*. The important question how the visitors will react the moment they are confronted with passions, has to remain therefore unanswered. But is it still adequate to designate passions and visitors as protagonists? More precisely: do they share features with protagonists typical for classical Hollywood films? Presuming that these protagonists are defined mainly by moving the plot forward, the question is how active passions and visitors are in the context of the exhibition.

### *Visitors as observers*

The role of the visitors can be described as passive, in the sense that they do not move the plot forward. This is no contradiction to the approach described in Chapter 1 understanding museums as performative spaces (Thiemeyer 2010; Jannelli 2012), meaning that the visitors enter into a dialogue with the exhibits (Hanak-Lettner 2011) which is reflected in this thesis’ approach to consider films and exhibitions as dynamic texts. The crucial point here is, however, that with or without visitors, the scenery remains essentially unchanged. The visitors are placed in *Passions* in the position of observers and learners who draw conclusions based on the things viewed. S00 *Foyer* can therefore actually be interpreted as an entrance to an auditorium and not the stage. Presuming, that education [Bildung] is the major goal of cultural historical exhibitions (Kaiser 2006, 34; 61-2), this works well: the nature of passions is characterised from manifold different angles and throughout history, thus the central thematic question is definitely answered. But whereas the visitors perform cognitive and probably also emotional activities and even though they move through the exhibition, they cannot be designated as protagonists in a dramatic sense like in classical Hollywood films. As protagonists they should have become truly active at least in S03 *Climax* and should be overwhelmed by passions, fighting or enjoying this state and adjust their consequent activities to their reactions. Their want specified in S01 *Exposition*

and S02 *Conflict* would have been therefore to control and fight successfully the ‘beast’ passions in S03 *Climax*. I assume that no visitor was overwhelmed by stormy emotions difficult to handle for him or her while viewing the exhibition objects. But even if this had happened, passions could not fulfil their ascribed role as protagonists because they cannot pursue a concrete goal. Passions themselves are unintentional emotions which serve as motives and engines for human beings to pursue goals.

**Figure 6.8** Presence / absence of passions

	<b>I Exposition</b>	<b>II Conflict</b>	<b>III Climax</b>
<b>TEXTS state:</b>			
<b>Presence of passions</b>	Passions: absent	Passions: absent	Passions: present
<b>Effects on the visitors, caused by objects and design</b>	Visitors get familiar with the emotional household and ask themselves what the nature of the passions is and when they will arrive.	Visitors learn about the positive and negative effects of passions; they ask themselves how they value passions. Confronted with the potentially dangerous nature of passions they feel uneasy.	Visitors are astonished about the power passions have. They would like to keep a distance but realise that they react with either dislike or affection confronted with single passions.
<b>Conclusion based on the texts</b>	Passions were present and will be present again.	Value judgements about passions but passions themselves not present	Passions are present unmediated.
<b>Visitors as protagonists?</b>	Visitors expect the appearance of passions.	Visitors await/fear the appearance of passions.	Visitors are directly confronted with passions and feel dislike or affection.
<b>OBJECTS/DESIGN show:</b>			
<b>Design: Emotional Household</b>	Everyday, peaceful	Tilted floor on the side where negative judgements are introduced.	Broken and disarranged furniture
<b>Conclusion based on the design</b>	Passions: absent	Are passions present in a very moderate form?	Passions: absent
<b>Use of the objects</b>	The main characteristics of passions are visualised and explained by objects.	Concepts and value judgements about passions are visualised and explained by objects.	The single passions are characterised and illustrated by objects.
<b>Conclusion based on the objects</b>	Passions indirectly present	Passions indirectly present	Passions indirectly present
<b>Effects on the visitors, caused by objects and design</b>	Visitors learn about the nature of passions. They do not feel any emotions.	Visitors learn about diverse concepts about passions. They feel unwell because of the tilted floor, this evokes unease. But this uneasiness is not provoked by the intensity of any feelings or their nature, therefore not provoked by passions.	Visitors learn about the single passions. They do not feel any emotions.
<b>Visitors as protagonists?</b>	Visitors learn	Visitors learn	Visitors learn
<b>Presence of passions</b>	Passions: absent	Passions: absent	Passions: absent

**Figure 6.8** Presence / absence of passions

	<b>IV Turning point</b>	<b>V Resolution</b>
<b>TEXTS state:</b>		
<b>Presence of passions</b>	Passions: absent	Passions: absent
<b>Effects on the visitors, caused by objects and design</b>	Visitors reflect their experience. They distrust the peace and are still not sure what to think about passions. They reflect about the methods described to tame passions.	Visitors have left the emotional household and ponder if compassion could be a good way to deal with passions.
<b>Conclusion based on the texts</b>	Passions were present and will be present again.	Passions were present and will be present again.
<b>Visitors as protagonists?</b>	Visitors reflect their experience, still a little bit shaken.	Visitors reflect about compassion but do not feel compassion or any other passion.
<b>OBJECTS/DESIGN show:</b>		
<b>Design: Emotional Household</b>	Partly disarranged but repaired furniture	Everyday, but slightly disarranged
<b>Conclusion based on the design</b>	Passions: absent	Passions: absent
<b>Use of the objects</b>	Diverse methods to tame passions are discussed and explained and illustrated by objects.	Compassion is visualised by objects.
<b>Conclusion based on the objects</b>	Passions indirectly present	Passions: absent (but compassion is, indirectly, present)
<b>Effects on the visitors, caused by objects and design</b>	Visitors learn about diverse methods to tame passions. They do not feel any emotions.	Visitors learn about compassion as an alternative to deal in a constructive way with passions. They do not feel any emotions.
<b>Visitors as protagonists?</b>	Visitors learn	Visitors learn
<b>Presence of passions</b>	Passions: absent	Passions: absent

## **Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops**

### **Description**

In 1993, mysterious painted boards were discovered during a renovation of a private home at Villingen, not far away from Stuttgart. The 170 boards had been used as building material in the attic. The first hypothesis read that the boards were sawn backdrops created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the performances of the monastery schools in Villingen, but this could not be proved for good. The Franciscan Museum in Villingen presented the restored and assembled boards in the exhibition *Sawn* for the first time to the public from 30 November 2013 to 23 February 2014. Because of its success the exposition, curated by Michael Hütt, Anne Schaich and Grit Wendicke, was prolonged, after a short break, until 27 April 2014.

The exhibition's storyline is guided by the still open question of the use and meaning of the boards. The objects and information are presented as 'clues' and the visitors are explicitly invited to join in answering this question. The idea of solving a crime while walking through the exhibition is also reflected in the object labels. They are designed like 'evidence sheets' used by the police to document a crime scene.

The museum is situated in the former monastery of the Franciscans; arched ceilings characterise the exhibition rooms that nevertheless look rather modern. One part of the exhibition is presented in the former cloister still recognizable as such with its frescos and historical windows; section S11 *Sepulchre* is situated in the chapel.

*Sawn* is presented in five spaces in which not every section is labelled distinctly, only some sections are marked by red banners with titles. For the purpose of the analysis, the exhibition is divided into 12 sections (plus the *Foyer*):



*S00 Foyer – S01 Introduction – S02 Theatre – S03 Laboratory – S04 Jesuits – S05 Passion play – S06 Franciscans – S07 Benedictines – S08 Boards – S09 Baroque Performance Practice – S10 Turks – S11 Sepulchre – S12 Evaluation*

Whereas all visitors first have to pass the sections *S00 Foyer* and *S01 Introduction*<sup>61</sup>, they are free to choose how to continue their tour (Figure 6.9).

Apart from the banners, titles of sections as well as texts are printed on simple paper sheets fixed to pinboards, evoking the impression of workstations. Many illustrations are displayed at the pinboards, supplemented by photographs showing the research situation. The pinboards occupy an outstanding position in the exhibition and could themselves be classified as objects, the pinboards in *S02 Theatre* are even presented in showcases (Figure 6.10). Apart from the painted boards which are centre stage of the exhibition, only a few 3D objects are displayed. Most exhibits are pictures like drawings, etchings or copper engravings or documents and books.

Interviews with experts are an integral part of the exhibition. Interactive stations aim at involving the visitors into the research work of the experts like a jigsaw depicting the sawn boards with their diverse motifs.

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<sup>61</sup> In theory it is possible to walk directly through the cloister to *S11 Sepulchre* after having entered the exhibition space through *S00 Foyer*, but this is rather improbable as no one suspects, at this point, an exhibition section in the chapel.

## **Defining the protagonists**

Unlike *Passions*, *Sawn* does not name protagonists explicitly throughout the exhibition. But implicitly the visitors and the experts exploring the painted boards can be considered, following the official storyline, as protagonists of this ‘crime’, both in their role as members of the Special Commission ‘SCOM Sawn’. As mentioned, this storyline is guided by the still open question of the use and meaning of the boards. Or so the texts claim and the selection and presentation of the objects and the design suggests. The crucial point, in order to identify the protagonists and therewith the central dramatic questions, is if this question is indeed still open. In other words, the problem is not a discrepancy between the texts on the one hand and the objects and the design on the other hand as in the case of *Passions*, the problem is the doubt if this central question is a question at all. This point is so important because only the involvement of the visitors into the ‘investigation’ justifies to consider them as protagonists in this particular exhibition narrative.

First, the exhibition will be described, based on the sequence protocol and the photographs. The focus will be on the rationale given throughout the exhibition for the use of the boards. The importance of the specific questions asked and specific answers given throughout the narrative will become evident when subsequently the exhibition will be described from the visitors’ perspective. In this case, the analysis follows the structure chosen for the film analyses: first the dramatic questions were defined by studying the films based on the sequence protocols, followed by a description of how the film narratives unfold their suspense effects while actually watching the movie.

## Line of argumentation

### *Backdrops*

The line of argumentation in *Sawn* reads as follows: the first hypothesis was that the boards were sawn backdrops created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most likely for the performances of a monastery school in Villingen. This is communicated via texts presented on the pinboard in S01 *Introduction* (S-01-07; S-01-10). Dendrochronologist analysis confirmed the assumed time of creation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (S-03-11). But because many questions are still open around the boards, a text printed on a huge banner invites the visitors at the beginning of the exhibition to join the ‘SCOM Sawn’ and to participate as investigators in clarifying the real facts (S-01-15). By offering different options, contributed by passers-by of the museum and named via texts (S-01-02) and film interviews (S-01-12), as for example ‘coffin lids’ or ‘painted doors’, the fact that the boards were used as backdrops is however put fundamentally into question. Despite that, the boards are designated throughout the exhibition explicitly as ‘backdrops’ (S-01-10; S-03-14; S-03-19) and presented in a theatre setting (for instance with the red curtain in S00 *Foyer*: S-00-01). The theatre context is also expressed for example by dedicating a whole section to different theatre types, the section S02 *Theatre* (S-02-01 - S-02-05) or by arranging some of the boards like wings on a stage in S08 *Boards* (Figure 6.11). In several texts the boards are called simply ‘panels’ (S-03-08; S-03-25) or ‘boards’ (S-03-27) which however does not contradict the use of the boards as backdrops.

And there are some serious indications for the use of the boards as backdrops, indeed. First, as explained in S03 *Laboratory*, some of them were repainted several times with different motifs which hints to their use in different plays (S-03-28). Second, some of the boards were painted with the corresponding motifs for the play *Irene* performed in the Franciscan monastery school in Villingen, as a conservator reports in a film interview (S-03-38).

According to the conservator, third, the space-depth-relationship of the paintings of some boards indicates that the boards are backdrops (S-03-38).

### *Monastery school theatre*

Even though some details could not be clarified to date, it seems proven at this point that the boards were really used as backdrops in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But in which kind of theatre exactly? This is discussed in S02 *Theatre*. There are several arguments against the use of the boards in a court theatre (S-02-22) or in a travelling theatre (S-02-27). Neither is the use of the boards in a civic theatre plausible since no such theatre existed in this time period in Villingen (S-02-25). Thus, it is assumed implicitly that the boards found in an attic in Villingen must have been created and used in or near this town. The fact that several monastery schools in and around Villingen had a theatre (S-02-13; S-02-14) suggests the use of the backdrops at these places.

Three of these monastery schools with their particular theatre traditions are described in detail in the sections S04 *Jesuits*, S06 *Franciscans* and S07 *Benedictines*. The first section mainly clarifies that Jesuits had founded a rich theatre tradition which served as example for other congregations (S-04-03). No hypothesis however is developed that the exhibited backdrops were created by the Jesuits for their school theatre.

### *Benedictines or Franciscans*

In the partially overlapping sections S06 *Franciscans* and S05 *Passion play* a document proves that a theatre existed in the ‘comedy garden’ of the Franciscan monastery (now the museum) (S-05-07). This was probably used for passion plays and for school performances likewise, as a text and a film interview with a historian explain (S-05-12 / S-06-02; S-06-13). The evidence sheet asks: ‘Were the same backdrops used for both genres?’ (S-05-16 /

S-06-06; S-06-09). Hence, even though there is some evidence for the use of the backdrops in passion plays and in school theatre performances, this cannot be regarded as proven.

The exhibits and texts in S06 *Franciscans* deal with the monastery school in Villingen and its rich theatre practice since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (S-05-12; S-06-02). In 1710 the play *Irene* was performed there (S-06-10; S-06-11). The evidence sheet concludes: ‘the venues mentioned in the play demand backdrops for a palace, a garden and a public place, like the ones among the Villingen backdrop fragments’ (S-06-11; see S-03-38).

In a film interview the historian states that she is not sure if the backdrops stem from the Franciscan or the Benedictine monastery in Villingen (S-06-13). A text mentions that the Franciscans and Benedictines in Villingen were competitors and that the Franciscan pupils had to go to the Benedictine monastery school after their grammar school had been closed in 1774 (S-05-12 / S-06-02). Learning about the competition between the Franciscans and the Benedictines in Villingen makes the question to which monastery school the backdrops belonged to even more relevant.

The section S07 *Benedictines* explores exactly the alternative that the backdrops had been created for their monastery school theatre. A film shows an interview with an engineer who seeks to clarify if a theatre hall had been situated in the former Benedictine monastery. He summarises his exploration of the building as follows: ‘Therefore it is highly possible that the stage was situated at this end’ (S-07-01). But a known fact, as a text explains, is only that ‘A two-storey unsupported hall of the building from 1749 is provable’ (S-07-03), not necessarily used for school performances. But two drawings (from 1837 though) show the interior of the theatre hall in the Benedictine grammar school (S-07-07), they are ‘the most explicit indication of a theatre practice among the Benedictines, which are consistent with the findings.’ Interestingly, a text concludes that theatre shows of the Benedictine grammar school (documented since 1664) had taken place since 1749 in the big theatre hall of the

new school building (S-07-11). Thus the probable existence of a theatre hall in this early time period researched by the engineer is communicated as a fact by the exhibition makers, supported by documents from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (S-07-07; S-07-10). So far, the exhibition had only explained that the Benedictines in Villingen indeed performed school theatre in the defined time period. But some hints (S-07-09; S-07-15; S-07-10; S-07-11) suggest the exhibited backdrops were used in this monastery. Strictly speaking, however, these are all indications but no proofs.

### *Motifs, style and function*

In the next section S08 *Boards* the use of the painted boards as backdrops is consolidated by analysing motifs, style, their specific function, the painting technique and its quality (Figure 6.12 and 6.13). One intention is to narrow down their time of creation, beyond dendrochronologist analyses. Moreover, the boards and their possible relationship with monastery school theatre are examined. To summarise: All hints suggest a use of the boards as backdrops (in one case as a proscenium, whereas the use of a board with skulls and of the ones with a drop curtain are still unclear (Figure 6.14 and 6.15)). Many hints indicate that the backdrops were created and used during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that they are typical for the Baroque period. And a few hints point to their application in monastery school theatres in Villingen.

### *Baroque theatre*

It should be noted that Baroque theatre in general is described not in this section where the boards are deployed but in the adjacent room. Here, in S09 *Baroque Performance Practice*, a text explains that first ‘The baroque chariot-wing-system gained acceptance in the 17<sup>th</sup> century’, that second ‘The application of the central perspective created a perfect illusion of space...’ and that third ‘Instead of the three antique stage types according to Serlio, a

series of new types of scenery emerged like palace, garden and ocean' (S-09-03).<sup>62</sup> The text concludes 'Theatre had become a total artwork' (S-09-03). The importance of these general explanations will be discussed in the next section while describing the exhibition narrative from a visitor's perspective.

### *Sepulchre panels*

An alternative use of the painted boards is presented in S11 *Sepulchre*. In this section, painted wooden panels from mid 18<sup>th</sup> century with biblical persons and sceneries are staged in the sanctuary of the monastery chapel (S-11-02). The central panel shows Jesus in his grave. A text, fixed to a pinboard, explains that since the early Middle Ages during Easter Time performances took place inside the church. While passion plays became gradually outdoor theatre performances, the church interior was decorated with painted panels, too. It is important to note that no outdoor use of Sepulchre panels is mentioned here. The crucial point is that, as the evidence sheet explains: 'make and use of the panels show strong parallels with the monastery theatre. For the backgrounds of sepulchres, panels with garden, palace and city scenes were needed – exactly how they can be seen on the Villingen backdrop panels' (S-11-12). But despite these parallels (see S-11-03; S-11-04), the hypothesis that the painted boards exhibited in the other sections of the exhibition were used in this religious context as well, is not mentioned directly or pursued. A possible explanation for this is given in the remaining section S10 *Turks*. Here, the film interviews summarise the decisive arguments and give answers to the central question what the boards were used for.

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<sup>62</sup> Sebastiano Serlio was an Italian architect.

## *Résumé*

The text belonging to the film interviews states that ‘The mystery around the Villingen boards is not revealed’ (S-10-08). It summarises the arguments against the use of the boards as backdrops: the weight of the massive wooden plates and that no comparative examples exist all over Europe. Moreover, the point of origin is still not clear. Two arguments are mentioned that speak against the use of the boards as decorations of a sepulchre: no persons are depicted on the boards and water-soluble colour was used (S-10-08) – since sepulchres were also used outside, so water-soluble colour would have caused a problem in case of rain (S-12-18).

But first the couple who had discovered the boards in their attic are interviewed. The man says: ‘I could not imagine that these are backdrops. By now I am convinced they are.’ As reason he mentions the similarity of all backdrops in the defined time period (S-12-13). A conservator involved in the research concludes that it remains undecided in which theatre the boards were used but that they were used as backdrops, this seems to her very obvious (S-12-14). Another conservator highlights the fact that the backdrops are painted on massive wooden panels because usually backdrops in this period were painted on canvas. According to her, descriptions of the style of the Villingen backdrops can be found however in literature and furthermore, the sepulchre panels are made in a similar way (S-12-17). The historian is interviewed, too, and says: ‘It is obvious that the boards are backdrops, but because there were two competing theatres in Villingen, they can stem from the Franciscan as well as from the Benedictine grammar school’ (S-12-15). The engineer explains again that he cannot say for sure if the backdrops were used in the school of the Benedictines (S-12-16).

Finally, museum director Michael Hütt shares his opinion. He points to the fact that the trove is not consistent: the boards with for example the city scene or the palace are



obviously backdrops, but some other boards were more likely used as proscenium. The boards showing the drop curtain were perhaps used as wall covering (according to the paintings on the backsides), but the curtain points clearly to a use in a theatre context. Coming back to a possible use of the boards as elements of a sepulchre, Hütt mentions aspects that speak for such a use: the fact that similarly massive boards were used for sepulchres and their similar backdrop-like architecture. He concludes: ‘The thrilling thing is just that we still have all possibilities’ (S-12-18). Thus, whereas not one of the experts involved in the research process doubts that the boards were used as backdrops, and more specifically as backdrops in the Baroque period, it was not possible until today to specify their origin.

### *Final evaluation*

Some of these arguments are taken up on two red text panels hanging in the cloister which are captioned ‘Final Evaluation’ (S-12-02) (Figure 6.16 and 6.17). On the left it says: ‘Which clue do you consider as convincing? Vote by sticking a red point in the relevant field’ (S-12-03). The twelve fields mention all options discussed from Sepulchre to Passion play to School theatre to Benedictines etc. (S-12-03), two are captioned only with a question mark. It is important to note that the options proposed by the passers-by are not mentioned here. The text on the right panel begins with the statement: ‘Till this day many questions around the painted, sawn boards are still open’ (S-12-06). A couple of questions follow, taking up some of the options mentioned on the left panel and listing some of the still open details like ‘How do the single parts belong together?’ or ‘How were they erected concretely?’. Remarkably enough, the general question is asked: ‘Were they really once theatre backdrops?’ (S-12-06) And the last question, also important to note, reads: ‘Or is it necessary to think everything anew again?’ (S-12-06) Finally the visitors are invited to

write down their answers and further relevant information on notepads and to clamp the notes on the panel (S-12-06).

**Figure 6.18** *Sawn*: Line of argumentation

**Hypotheses Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops**

<b>Backdrops?</b>	
<b>Pro</b>	Some boards were painted with the corresponding motifs for a play performed in the Franciscan monastery school in Villingen in 1710.
	Some boards had been repainted several times with different motifs which hints to their use in different plays.
	Different motifs are painted on the backsides of some boards. Probably, former backdrops were used newly on the backside for another play.
	Boards with a landscape scenery could have been used to change a forest landscape with little replacement into a rocky canyon. It was common at great theatres to create variation possibilities by combining different scenes.
	A backdrop from the palace theatre in Ludwigsburg can be dated to the second half of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century. Its resemblance with the painted boards concerning the motif and the long-distance effect of the painting hints to the use of the boards as backdrops.
	Fragmented boards with the façade of a palace could have been rear shutters.
	The space-depth-relationship of the paintings of some boards indicates that the boards are backdrops.
	One ensemble of columns on some boards is painted on a smaller scale. Stages had in most cases a floor that increases towards the back and the wings in the back were smaller than the ones in the front.
	The low height of boards with a garden motif could be an evidence for their position on the back part of the stage. The decrease in scale provoked an optical enlargement of the real room depth.
	Some boards, with painted wall decoration, could have been used as proscenium, another evidence for the use of the boards in a theatre context.
	Fragmented boards with a painted drop curtain are interpreted as an evidence for their use in a theatre context, too.
<b>Contra</b>	No comparative examples exist all over Europe.
	The point of origin is still not clear.
	The massive wooden plates are heavy. Usually, backdrops in this period were painted on canvas. However, descriptions of the style of these backdrops can be found in literature, and the sepulchre panels are made in a similar way.
<b>Uncertainties</b>	No complete scene can be reconstructed by help of the backdrops.
	The question how the backdrops were erected on stage is still open.
	The question if they were installed permanently or made for scene changes is still open.

Baroque?	
<b>Pro</b>	Dendrochronologist analysis confirmed the assumed time of creation in the 18 <sup>th</sup> century, and more specifically, the analysis of ten boards showed that these were first used between 1671 and 1734.
	Some of the boards were painted with the corresponding motifs for a play performed in the Franciscan monastery school in Villingen, in 1710.
	Connections are drawn between the style of the painted motifs and the style of garden and house architecture of this period.
	Depicting a forest as 'exotic wilderness' makes some of the boards an ideal setting for a satyr play.
	Stages in many theatre halls of baroque cloisters were separated only by a painted proscenium from the auditorium.
	Boards with architecture motifs could have been wings for a glorious hall. Such 'splendid halls' extended the fixed drama settings on the courtly opera stages in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century.
	The city scenes on some boards are classified as a motif belonging to the three basic configurations for the Italian theatre stage of the Renaissance, still relevant in the Baroque.

Monastery school theatre?	
<b>Pro</b>	Several monastery schools in and around Villingen owned a theatre
	The theatre practice of the Jesuits school shows many similarities with the one of the monastery schools in Villingen. And the Jesuits in Rottweil, near Villingen, knew how to construct stages.
	Stages in many theatre halls of baroque cloisters were separated only by a painted proscenium from the auditorium; and some of the boards can be interpreted as parts of such a proscenium.
	Because of the same basic structure city scenes could be adapted easily to the conditions of every stage, and also for the school stage.
	The clumsiness in logic and perspective and the diverse painting techniques of some boards with garden scenes suggests that pupils painted them.

Franciscans?	
<b>Pro</b>	Some of the boards were painted with the corresponding motifs for a play performed in the Franciscan monastery school in Villingen, in 1710.
	Pupils of the grammar school of the Franciscans had performed plays since the end of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century.
	A Franciscan theatre in Villingen existed provably in 1717 and 1750; it was demolished in 1789. In 1774 the last play was performed.
	The wooden theatre sat in the 'comedy garden' of the Franciscan monastery: perhaps used not only for passion plays but also for school performances.
	The stage in the 'comedy garden' consisted of two parts. A similar stage existed in Schwäbisch Gmünd on which backdrops were used for sure.
	A theatre bill usually printed for school performances exists for a passion play performed in the 'comedy garden'. Thus the closeness between school theatre and passion plays is shown. Perhaps the stage was used for both.

Benedictines?	
<b>Pro</b>	The boards were found not far away from the Benedictine monastery and its school.
	Dendrochronologist results show that the boards stem from the same time period as the building,
	It is highly possible that school performances had taken place since 1749 in the big theatre hall of the new school building.
	An inventory of the school theatre includes 'paintings and panels'.
	Three graphics show different scenes from a play performed at the university theatre in Salzburg which belonged to the Benedictines. The scenery depicts a city, a forest and a palace and this resemble the paintings on the boards.
	A volume with bills belonged originally to the Benedictine monastery. The single bills had been taken probably also to other school performances because they show signs of usage. In this way knowledge about theatre decoration had been exchanged.
<b>Uncertainties</b>	A two-storey unsupported hall of the school building from 1749 is provable; a stage in this hall is probable but not sure.

Passion Plays?	
<b>Pro</b>	A wooden theatre existed in the 'comedy garden' of the Franciscan monastery, used for passion plays.
	The stage in the 'comedy garden' consisted of two parts. A similar stage existed in Schwäbisch Gmünd on which backdrops were used for sure.
	A theatre bill usually printed for school performances exists for a passion play performed in the 'comedy garden'. Thus the closeness between school theatre and passion plays is shown. Perhaps the stage was used for both.

Sepulchre?	
<b>Pro</b>	Make and use of the panels show strong parallels with the monastery theatre. For the backgrounds of sepulchres, panels with garden, palace and city scenes were needed – exactly as they can be seen on the Villingen backdrop panels.
	An ambivalent interpretation of one figure, belonging to a Lent crip, points to the possibility of a multiple use of the panels. Backdrops could be used for profane as well as for sacral purposes.
	Similarly massive boards were used for other sepulchres.
<b>Contra</b>	No people are depicted on the boards. But for sepulchres pictures of people are typical.
	Water-soluble colour was used on the painted boards, this would have caused a problem in case of rain because sepulchres were also used outdoors.

## **Suspense while walking through the exhibition**

### *Contradiction*

Summarising and organising the arguments in this way shows that all evidence presented argues convincingly for a use of the boards as backdrops during the Baroque. No serious counter-argument is discussed: neither the fact that no comparative examples exist over Europe nor the uncertainty regarding the boards' point of origin refute this application and age determination. Neither does the possible use of the panels in passion plays contradict their appropriation in theatre performances. This is expressed explicitly in the exhibition's title 'Sawn. A Crime around Baroque backdrops' and by designating them in many texts as 'backdrops', and implicitly through presenting the boards in a theatre context.

But there is a contradiction in the exhibition narrative because on the other hand the questions directed to us as visitors refer to 'painted, sawn boards', suggesting in this way a greater openness. Moreover, these questions are formulated at central points of the exhibition, in S01 *Introduction* and S12 *Evaluation*, and it is explicitly stated that 'To this day many questions are open around the painted, sawn boards' (S-01-15; see S-12-06). Assuming that we are willing to ignore the answer already given in the title, as we are willing to ignore knowing the killer while watching a crime for the second time in order to enjoy suspense, we might accept the openness of these formulations and start our tour and accept the invitation to join the 'SCOM Sawn'. Indeed, the inspection protocol reveals that I felt suspense at the beginning of the tour, looking forward to discover the meaning of the central objects. Yet, when asked in S12 *Evaluation* for my opinion about the boards' origin, I was reluctant to answer: the film interviews with all experts involved in the research process left no room for interpretation.

### *Visitors as observers*

In addition, whereas the ideas of the passers-by for alternative explanations offered in S01 *Introduction* via the text signs and film interviews, seem actually to broaden the range of interpretations, at the end of the tour it has become clear that these ideas are not verified or taken up at other points of the exhibition narrative. On the two text panels in S12 *Evaluation* these ideas are not mentioned again, instead only the possibilities discussed by the experts are listed. This is not to say that the exhibition does not have the power to keep us interested, on the contrary, it is fascinating to learn about the findings and to examine the painted boards from every angle. But the crucial point is that we as visitors do not play the role of protagonists in this ‘crime’ as suggested. Generally speaking, we do not have the expertise to contribute different proposals and we do not have the possibility to verify the ideas offered.

In S03 *Laboratory* for instance, we learn about the dendrochronologist analysis of the sawn boards but we have neither the equipment nor the knowledge to repeat the analysis in order to check the results (see Figure 7.3). We have to rely on the information provided by the experts. Admittedly, we are able to question and scrutinise the presented clues, as we are challenged to do via the text banner hanging at the beginning (S-01-15). For example, unlike the experts who obviously think the boards were produced and used in Villingen because they were discovered in an attic in Villingen, we may interpret this as a probability but no necessity. But our thinking does not influence or change the course of the events unfolded in the exhibition narrative, we are no protagonists moving the plot forward, and this is neither changed by the offer to note down our opinion and ideas at the end of the exhibition. We as visitors are placed in the position of observers, studying the actions of the experts: we follow their line of argumentation, discovering step by step their research results and learn about the boards’ use and meaning from their point of view.

In summary, this ambivalence regarding the information exhibited and regarding our role in the investigation process complicates the creation of dramatic suspense because it is not clear enough which question we are challenged to hypothesise about.

### *Little evaluation devices*

This difficulty is supported by another characteristic of this specific exhibition narrative. As David Bordwell states, it is necessary to establish a ‘firm foothold’ (Bordwell 1985, 38) in order to produce suspense, in other words: in order to being able to close a gap we have to be aware of its brinks. But similar to the confusing story around the water distribution in *Chinatown* (1974), there are several points which makes our penetration of the mystery difficult in *Sawn*.

First, most of the information is weighted equally. Probably this is due to the exhibition makers’ understanding, expressed on a small text label shown in one of the showcases in S02 *Theatre*, that history and museum work is always like detective work and a puzzle (S-02-06). This includes that part of the process is to learn step by step which piece of information is relevant. The difference is that the experts delved deeply for years, whereas we as visitors spend averagely perhaps one hour in the exhibition. It can be assumed for example that most of us are not familiar with Baroque theatre. Since the theatre practice from this period is explained in general only in S09 *Baroque Performance Practice*, in a room set aside, and not in the room where the boards are presented, it is difficult to decipher the boards as flats. The information, for instance, that the wing-and-drop-system, refined as the chariot-wing-system, was typical for the Baroque (S-09-03) is very helpful in order to understand the staggered arrangement of some boards (Figure 6.11 and 7.6). Equally, the itemisation of the different motifs is highly important for being able to comprehend the age determination and the use of the boards as backdrops. But the formative influence of architect Sebastiano Serlio’s illustrations of the tragic, comic and



satyric stages (depicting two different city places and a forest) and the extension during the Baroque period by the stage settings palace, garden and ocean, is communicated by pieces of information spread over the sections S08 *Boards* and S09 *Baroque Performance Practice*. In this context it is important to note that highlighting such historical developments and changes, interpreted as turning points, holds the potential to create suspense, too – a point to return in the next chapter.

### *Weak causal connections*

More important, the distribution of the information touches, second, upon another problem: in many cases the causal connections are difficult to detect even though they are implied. For the exhibition makers it is probably more than obvious that a Franciscan and Benedictine monastery existed in Villingen during the 18th century (also because the museum is situated in the former Franciscan monastery) so that they did not consider it necessary to highlight or even include this fact on the map in the showcase ‘Monastery schools in the South West’ (S-02-13). Learning this information here, right at the beginning of the tour, would have been however extremely helpful in order to classify the following assumptions about the boards’ origin.

Analysing the inspection protocol, focussing on the ‘aha-moments’ shows that the process of reception was indeed not accompanied by developing own hypotheses but by trying to comprehend the experts’ hypotheses. Doing the jigsaw in S03 *Laboratory* allowed to understand the importance that some of the boards were painted on both sides; viewing some of the boards in the same section through the transparent sheets helped to discover their different layers of paint. Both were understood as crucial hints for the boards’ use as backdrops. Learning about the play *Irene* and the stage sceneries included and that these fit to the motifs on the exhibited boards and coming to know that a ‘comedy garden’ existed in

the Franciscan monastery, supported the thesis that the boards had been used as backdrops in the monastery school theatre of the Franciscans in Villingen convincingly.

### *Curiosity instead of suspense*

All in all, it shows that the visitors' urge to know more is not directed towards the future but towards the past: instead of a forward movement, typical for suspense oriented stories, the exhibition narrative is characterised by a backward movement. Curiosity, defined as the wish to learn what happened and not, as in case of suspense, what will happen (Sternberg 1978), is the primary sensation while walking through *Sawn*. The question remains if this could have been changed by setting the course differently at some crucial points. Would it have been possible to use the implied central dramatic question which is effective only subliminally in the actual exhibition, as a source for suspense in the sense of classical Hollywood films and turning thus the exhibition into a true crime? This shall be discussed in the next chapter after having analysed the third exhibition, *Mountains*.

## **Mountains, a Mysterious Passion**

### **Description**

The exhibition *Mountains, a Mysterious Passion* was initially planned as a temporary exhibition but was prolonged because of its success for seven years. It was shown from 30 November 2007 through 31 October 2014 at the Hofburg [Imperial Palace] Innsbruck. The exhibition, curated by Philipp Felsch and Beat Gugger, was organised by the Alpenverein Museum of the Austrian Alpine Association which has been without an own exhibition space for some years.

As the title suggests, the exhibition deals with the fascination for the mountain world and tries to give answers to the question why people take the risk to climb mountains. Mountaineering is described as a relatively young phenomenon, influenced strongly by diverse cultural historical developments.

The exhibition is divided into 12 different sections, equivalent to 12 rooms (Figure 6.19). The storyline follows a mountain tour, with its ascent and descent, and every section corresponds to one station. The sections/stations are:

S01 *Imagining* - S02 *Packing* - S03 *Looking* - S04 *Walking* - S05 *Vertigo* - S06 *Resting* - S07 *Recording* - S08 *Hanging on* - S09 *At the top* - S10 *Exhausted* - S11 *Getting down* - S12 *Remembering*

Except from S05 *Vertigo* and S06 *Resting* which are attached laterally to S04 *Walking*, the rooms are arranged one after the other so that the visitors move through the exhibition linearly.

It is noteworthy that neither a general introduction text nor section texts are presented in the exhibition. Instead, all information are given via object labels; in many cases these exceed usual labels and contextualise the objects. Additionally, quotations are written on the walls which match the topic discussed in the respective room.

The exhibition features mainly objects from the Alpenverein Museum's own collection, supplemented by loans. Pictures like oil paintings, lithographs and photographs play an important part besides the 3D objects. The exhibits are completed by multimedia stations presenting films or audio material. All in all, it can be stated that the exhibition follows an object-centered approach.

Some playful, interactive, elements supplement the exhibition, like a mountain model where you can start a pop song praising the mountain world, a red lighting (the ‘Alpenglow’!) and the scent of mountain pine oil by pushing a button. Humour and irony are integrated as an element into the exhibition, like in S06 *Resting* where the sound of snoring evokes the image of a cramped Alpine hut with unbeloved bedfellows.

### **Defining the protagonists**

Remember: this exhibition was chosen for the analysis exactly because it did not announce to narrate a story or to adapt any kind of drama but seemed to be a good example for a typical cultural historical exhibition. Thus the basis of comparison for the two other selected exhibitions should be expanded. Nonetheless, the topic of the exhibition, mountain climbing, promised a thrilling exhibition narrative and the arrangement of the sections following the ascent and descent of a mountain pointed to a possible arc of suspense.

### **Visitors as protagonists?**

The chronological structure, based on the typical sequence of a mountain tour, might suggest that one objective of the exhibition makers was to put the visitors in the position of mountain alpinists, and thus to consider them as protagonists of the exhibition narrative. But taking a closer look reveals that the audience is neither explicitly nor implicitly understood as main characters. The exhibition texts do not mention the visitors or address them directly as in the case of *Sawn* or *Passions*. Additionally, even though two of the sections, S06 *Resting* and S09 *At the top*, may evoke connotations like tightness and transcendence, these feelings are not in the least similar to the feelings of mountaineers spending the night in a cramped Alpine hut or having finally arrived on the eagerly awaited

peak. The audience neither has to care about what things to carry during the exhibition tour, like the mountaineers described in *S02 Packing*.

This is neither changed by the hiking map which is delivered to the visitors at the start of their tour at the ticket desk. This map resembles at first glance a map of a specific mountain area in Austria but at second glance you realise that some spots of the drawn-in tour are renamed according to the exhibition theme. The map is accompanied by diary entries of a fictitious, obviously male, person reporting his experiences during a mountain hike, writing emotionally about the single stages correspondent to the 12 exhibition sections. The language sounds antiquated and based on the information given the entries can be dated to around 1900. But the exhibition works well also without the map and the fictitious person does not appear again in the exhibition itself. Most importantly, the map is not meant to guide the visitors through the exhibition seen as a mountain hike itself, but can be considered as a help for them to comprehend the (emotional) sequence of a typical mountain tour. To conclude: as opposed to *Passions* where, based on the texts, the linear order is intended as an emotional dramaturgy for the visitors, in this case the structure is rather a 'reading aid' for the audience to understand the nature of mountain climbing; it helps to answer the central thematic question *Why do people take the risk to climb mountains?*

#### *Visitors as observers*

In *Mountains* the visitors are placed in the position of observers and 'knowledge gainers', as the texts told by an authorial narrator express. The texts include facts which are set into a broader context, as well as interpretations and, substantiated, assertions. The text accompanying the 'Alpenglow visual intensity scale' (M-03-18) and the 'Alpenglow in diagrammatic form' (M-03-17) may serve as an example:

How beautiful is the alpenglow? In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Swiss scientists Albert Heim and Paul Gruner tried to analyse – and even quantify – the phenomenon of the twilight colours with scientific precision. But in spite of all their data and optical reasoning, people today still gaze in awe when the rays of the raising or setting sun bring a glow to the mountain peaks.

The exhibited objects serve as documents for hikes and expeditions undertaken in former and recent times, like for instance a pair of hiking boots worn by Hermann Buhl for the first ascent of the Nanga Parbat in 1953 (M-09-15). Many objects illustrate the motives for exploring the mountain world like the beautiful oil paintings of mountains in S01 *Imagining* (M-01-01) or the ‘Fatigue curves from Italian mountain infantry’ (M-04-08), a result of physiologist Angelo Mosso’s studies. Others exemplify the dangers of mountain climbing like a broken rope a climber used before he fell to his death during the descent from the Matterhorn in 1993 (M-08-09).

This specific combination of texts, objects and design serve the purpose to visualise the central topic, to communicate facts and to inform about cultural historical developments. It also alludes to emotions connected to mountain climbing and triggers associations. The information units are linked by the question for the motives of people visiting the mountains. But can they be considered as protagonists in the sense of classical Hollywood films? By taking the section S02 *Packing* as starting point, it shall be clarified how many different characters and how many different stories are included and how the events are arranged into narratives.

## **A multitude of characters**

When you enter the section S02 *Packing*, you go straight up to a mountain model placed on a head-high pedestal and illuminated from above (M-02-01). A text explains that the relief was made in 1921 by Leo Aegerter and shows the Dachstein mountain in Austria, another text says that three-dimensional models of the Alps were very popular at the turn of the century and ‘were used for topographic and military purposes, as well as for entertaining the general public and attracting tourists’ (M-02-04). The text also mentions that Aegerter’s colleague, the cartographer Fridolin Becker created the disparaging term *reliefomania* for their outstanding popularity in this period.

Taking only this single object combined with the texts, this information unit mentions two characters explicitly and by name, Aegerter and Becker, and explicitly but in general ‘many model makers’. The text also refers implicitly to military personnel, to tourists and to the general public. Next to the text a quotation by Nathan Zuntz from 1905 is printed on the wall by which we understand that Zuntz must have been an experienced mountaineer, too (M-02-02). On a wall a list is printed which is taken from a guidebook for hikers in the Eastern Alps from 1928, thus another group of characters (M-02-17).

The list, quote and section title ‘packing’ frame the objects presented in an elongate showcase. In this showcase around 30 different objects are displayed, all pieces of equipment for mountain tours. On every label the object’s weight is noted. In some cases similar objects from different times are placed side by side, and their different weight illustrates the section’s main message that mountaineers were eager to reduce their luggage over time.

To sum up, besides two non-mountaineers, four or five mountain climbers are introduced by name (Smith, Vietoris, Hall and Schlagintweit). Besides mountaineers in general, the

porters and members of the German expedition to the Nanga Parbat in 1937 and the Hitler Youth Mountaineering Groups in the German Alpine Club are mentioned as more specific groups. Adding the ‘hikers in the Eastern Alps’, and tourists, military personnel and the general public, and in addition cartographers (among them Becker) and model makers (among them Aegerter) and finally Zuntz, it becomes clear how many mountaineers are gathered only in this section of the exhibition.

Obviously, so many diverse characters would push the boundaries of any ensemble film. A possible solution to handle this challenge and to create nonetheless suspense will be discussed in the next two chapters. At this point it should be noted that no matter how diverse the motives of all these persons may be, their objectives can be summarised indeed as ‘climbing mountains’. How this could be used as a precise want, as an essential element to guide specific hypothesising on the side of the audience following the example of popular films, will be discussed in Chapter 7. Here the focus is still on how the exhibition narrative is actually unfolded.

### **Moving the plot forward?**

#### *Manifold plots*

The crucial question in order to evaluate the characters’ role as protagonists is if they move the plot forward. Two findings are important in this respect. First, the plots introduced are manifold. Second, the plots are touched upon but not amplified. Actually, the question arouses if it is possible to talk about ‘narratives’ at all. These aspects will be addressed by taking Bavarian geographer Herman Schlagintweit and Robert Hall, the leader of a commercial expedition to the Himalayas, as examples, also because the objects exhibited in the described showcase in S02 *Packing* promise especially thrilling stories. A knife is displayed next to a text telling the story of Schlagintweit ‘who travelled in the Himalayas



in the 1850s' and 'kept a clasp knife in his pocket with forty different blades and tools...' (Figure 6.20). And a radio telephone illustrated the dramatic incidence, described in a text, of Hall, who used a satellite telephone to talk to his wife while dying on the south summit of the Mount Everest in 1996 (Figure 6.21).

### *Stories?*

Markus Kuhn's minimal definition of narrative given in Chapter 2 should serve as starting point for the examination. Kuhn considers the depiction of at least one change of state as necessary for identifying a text as narrative and the state before and the state after the change have to be represented explicitly (Kuhn 2011, 61). According to this definition, in the case of Schlagintweit the information given can be indeed considered as a story. As the same text explains, Schlagintweit wants to do surveying work in Nepal which is a difficult diplomatic terrain. He shows his clasp knife with forty different blades and tools to Nepalese despot Jang Bahadur. Bahadur is impressed and allows Schlagintweit to do his work. Indeed, two events are connected in a meaningful way; the first event causes the second one, a change takes place. Thus, following Kuhn, the basic requirement for a story is satisfied. By contrast, in Hall's case, only one event is described, because the actions named happen simultaneously. The leader of a commercial expedition is on the south summit of Mount Everest. He telephones with his wife by help of a satellite telephone while dying. Thus, this should not be defined as narrative. However, as Werner Wolf explains, it can be classified as 'indicative of narrative' (2002, 97), as evoking a narrative in the recipient's mind. The recipient can easily imagine the before (climbing Mount Everest) and after (Hall's death) of the state.

To explore the typical narrative structure of exhibition's further, as an important prerequisite for creating suspense, it is interesting to examine if these events are

complemented by information units provided in other sections. Hall is not mentioned again at any other point of the exhibition narrative. But Mount Everest is represented by a painting in S01 *Imagining* (Figure 6.22) and a relief in S10 *Exhausted* (Figure 6.24). Indirectly, this frames Hall's death and we could complement the event 'tragic death' with the events 'urgent wish to climb Mount Everest' and 'exhausting expedition' without knowing any further details.

### *Netlike structure*

But Hall's extraordinary telephone call could be also linked to two other events presented in the exhibition. There is first the broken rope from the English climber who died three years earlier than Hall during the descent from the Matterhorn (M-08-09) (Figure 6.23). In the same section, S08 *Hanging on*, a lithography depicts four mountaineers falling to their death on the descent from the Matterhorn in 1865 (M-08-05) (See Figure 6.25). Now, all single events (described in the texts and illustrated by the objects) taken together illustrate impressively the risky nature of mountaineering. It is striking that in no case the whole story is told. But all taken together, the topic 'risky nature of mountain climbing' intensifies.<sup>63</sup> The words 'mysterious passion' included in the exhibition title definitely gain deeper meaning while viewing these exhibits. It is noteworthy, too, that a line is drawn from an event happening in 1865 to events happening in the 1990s. The text accompanying the lithography states: 'The accident triggered a debate about the whole point of mountaineering which always flares up after a spectacular accident' (M-08-06). Thus, the text points implicitly also to the death of the English climber and Hall's tragedy.

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<sup>63</sup> Wuss (1996) demonstrates in his very instructive analysis of Michelangelo Antonioni's films how the director creates tension that develops along topic lines and is of a more analytical nature than dramatic suspense.

Vice versa, the text added to the broken rope refers indirectly to the disaster of 1865 by stating ‘Mountaineering is *still* dangerous’ (M-08-10). Here, the netlike structure of cultural historical exhibitions comes to the fore.

### *Fields of connotations*

To conclude: no plot is unfolded even by considering the connections between Hall’s death and other similar events presented. The events can be considered rather as aspects and embodiments of the same topic. And again, like stated for *Sawn* the exhibition narrative is characterised by a backward movement. We want to understand the present time by looking into the past. But not only these two features can be regarded as typical for cultural historical exhibitions. It seems to be characteristic, too, that even when stories are created by connecting several events meaningfully, they are not necessarily accomplished. Instead of talking about ‘telling a story’ it would perhaps be more appropriate in this case to speak of ‘opening fields of connotations’ (see Scholze 2004, 33) because the single events and their links keep a certain vagueness.

### *Micro-story*

But Schlagintweit’s story, using his knife to impress the Nepalese despot, can truly be called a ‘story’. But this micro-story is embedded and expanded on by more events presented in the following sections. It is noteworthy that (keeping in mind the fixed sequence of sections) Schlagintweit’s story is not told in a chronological order (see table below), and hence the plot differs from the underlying – and in this case real – fabula. But unlike classical Hollywood films where such a discrepancy would have been possibly used or consciously produced in order to create suspense, the gaps created in this way in the exhibition narrative do not support hypothesising on side of the visitors as no question is posed.

### *Different time levels*

This movement between different time levels manifests itself not only in respect to single characters but also in respect to mountaineering in general as can be seen in the table. A column is dedicated to Albert Smith because of his outstanding role for mountain climbing: he triggered the British passion for the Alps by his ascent of Mont Blanc in 1851. As other events related to this, listed in the table, show, the (hi)story of mountain climbing is not unrolled in its chronological order but pieced together like a collage or a mosaic. This narrative structure is demonstrated most impressively by the fact that only in the last section S12 *Remembering* a text speculates about mountaineering's origins, going back to Moses or Petrarch.

Even though classical Hollywood films may include flashbacks or flashforwards, this remains usually an exception. A strict chronological order is typical for such films and makes them easy to follow and comprehend as explained in Chapter 3 and 4. It also ensures that in this mainly gapless structure ellipses can be identified as triggers for questions and thus suspense. The reading of this exhibition narrative however is characterised by noticing gaps without bothering about them, because the audience's focus is on the information units actually provided and because, and this is important, they probably do not expect unity at all.

### *Turning points*

Another crucial point is that the outstanding importance of Smith's ascent of Mont Blanc in 1851 is told almost casually. It is kept for instance in the dark how he succeeded in triggering such a widespread passion and no portrait can be found in the exhibition. Neglecting the speculations about mountaineering's origins, the exhibition narrative spans roughly 200 years: The romantic period is the time when the mountain world has gained

great attraction and the peaks have come into focus. The middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is decisive for the creation of the modern Alpinism we are familiar with today. Smith's ascent is therefore a kind of landmark event of this process. The potential to arouse not only the visitors' interest but also to create suspense by highlighting such turning points will be discussed in the next chapter.

### *Objects*

The objects in *Mountains* serve quite diverse functions. Mainly, they serve to illustrate the events presented. In S02 *Packing* for example, Schlagintweit's use of his knife is visualised by exhibiting the knife of Leopold Vietoris, another mountaineer from another time period. The aesthetic qualities and the materiality of the objects do of course have effects and serve a purpose (see Chapter 7) but they are not relevant for this thesis with its focus on the possible narrative functions of the objects. As concerns their potential to create suspense, they do not move the plot forward like props in the selected Hollywood films. No exhibited item serves the purpose to answer a question posed in the sense described for the films or supports testifying a hypotheses, like the pair of bifocals in *Chinatown* (1974) which helps to find the murderer.

**Figure 6.26** *Mountains*: Fragmentary structure

	<b>Herman Schlagintweit / Nepal</b>	<b>Robert Hall / Mount Everest</b>	<b>Albert Smith / Mont Blanc</b>
<b>S01 Imagining</b>		Painting of the Mount Everest (1972)	
<b>S02 Packing</b>	Schlagintweit impressed Nepalese despot with his knife and could do his surveying work (in the 1850s).	Hall died on Mount Everest in 1996 while telephoning with his wife.	Smith triggered the British passion for the Alps by his ascent of Mont Blanc in 1851.
<b>S03 Looking</b>			Etching, aquatints and lithography of the Mont Blanc Group / The Mont Blanc Group became very attractive for European travellers since the middle of the 19th century.
<b>S04 Walking</b>			
<b>S05 Vertigo</b>			
<b>S06 Resting</b>			Smith's 1851 ascent of the Mont Blanc greatly contributed to early British enthusiasm for mountaineering in the Alps.
<b>S07 Recording</b>	After his expedition (with his brother) Schlagintweit was raised to the nobility. But he died (1882) impoverished and forgotten.		Aquatint and engraving of ascent (and descent) of the Mont Blanc / Naturalist de Saussure reached the summit of Mont Blanc in 1787, after 25 years of looking for a guide to take him there.
	Photograph of Schlagintweit and his brother / Manuscript and material volumes / The brothers had an obsession: they wanted to create a complete record of the mountains. They were sent to the Himalayas in 1854. They amassed an incredible volume of data.		
	Atlas of Panoramics and Views: India and High Asia / Drawing, lithography and watercolour of mountains, by the brothers		

<b>S08 Hanging on</b>		1865 marked the end of innocence in Alpinism. On their descent from the Matterhorn four people died. The accident triggered a debate about the whole point of mountaineering which always flares up after a spectacular accident. / Lithography Ascension du Mont Cervin	
		Broken rope / 1993 an English climber died during the descent from the Matterhorn. Mountaineering is still dangerous.	
<b>S09 At the top</b>	In 1856 the brothers visited and painted the Nanga Parbat.		Miriam O'Brien Underhill and Alice Damasme climbed one of the most difficult summits in the Alps, part of the Mont Blanc massif, in 1929.
<b>S10 Exhausted</b>		Relief of Mount Everest (1975)	
<b>S11 Getting down</b>			
<b>S12 Remembering</b>			

## Suspense while walking through the exhibition

### *Fragmentary character*

Once again, analysing the exhibition so thoroughly, manifold relationships and contents come to the fore which are included and sometimes concealed in the exhibition narrative. But whereas the close description revealed the fragmentary character of this exhibition, the topics and aspects perceived while walking through the exhibition and viewing it for the first time seemed even more piecemeal. Confronted with so many different ascents of so many different mountains it was a challenge to combine the information units related to one specific summit, one specific character or one specific time period. It is unlikely for

example that many visitors understood that one of the oil paintings in S01 *Imagining* shows Mount Everest like the relief in S10 *Exhausted* or that they understood the relation between Albert Smith and the two female pioneers who explored all three the Mont Blanc massif. Like in the case of *Sawn*, the fact that information related to a specific topic is spread over different sections is relevant in this respect, too (Figure 6.26).

### *Little evaluation devices*

Piecing together the single, in many cases only implied, stories is complicated, as it is in *Sawn* because the information is presented more or less on the same level. Texts which can be considered based on their content as key, like the first text in the whole exhibition (M-01-07) or the text describing the development of lightweight and multipurpose equipment (M-02-07), are designed like all other texts and have the same size. The inspection protocol reveals that I understood the room titles as such only after a while because they were printed in small letters at the bottom of the walls. But the protocol also reveals that I, after having understood their significance, looked for them first of all entering the next section as they helped me to orient myself. The protocol brings to light, too, that the function of the labels' captions which unite some objects (in most cases deployed in the same room) to one group was comprehended only while making the segmentation after the exhibition visit. No or little *evaluation devices* are used by the exhibition's authors, so it is difficult for us as readers to understand which information is more relevant than the other, a point I take up again in the next chapter.

### *Weak causal connections*

All in all, for us visitors the connections between the information units remain in most cases unclear. Actually the things are linked together by the curators in a meaningful way (Fayet 2005, 18-21; Martinz-Turek 2009, 16-7), alone by placing them in a particular



section and their meanings and contexts are explained in the labels and texts, underlined by the design of the furniture and rooms. But the focus is in many cases not on specific relationships between the objects. The solitary information signifies something on its own; the emphasis is on the events and not on their causal connections. Without any doubt one reason is the key role objects play for the exhibition medium, considering also its history. Collectibles have been shown because of their visual appeal or to make the visitors wonder (Habsburg-Lothringen 2015). In *Mountains* the single objects take centre stage, supported by strong room atmospheres (Figure 6.27 and 6.28). This ‘subtle narrating’ which is characteristic for *Mountains* shows by explaining rather casually how utterly important the Romantic period was for our modern perspective on the mountain world. Especially S03 *Looking* is crucial for understanding this paradigm shift. But it is difficult for us to see differences between the many pictures shown in this section. Compared to actual media images the colours of all pictures seem relatively pale and a closer look is necessary to depict the ‘sea of colour’ (M-03-29) and ‘new hues’ (M-03-36). It is therefore a legitimate question how many visitors take their time standing in the exhibition to reconstruct this historical and crucial development manifested in the aquatints, engravings and lithographs (Figure 6.29).

#### *Low degree of narrativity*

The crucial point is that even though *Mountains* can be understood as a narrative because all in all events are connected meaningfully depicting thus changes, its degree of narrativity is low compared to classical Hollywood films. The previous chapters have shown that in classical Hollywood films suspenseful hypothesising is closely connected to the development of the plot characterised by strong causal connections and by a linear course of events. Even if a central dramatic question had been posed at the beginning of *Mountains*, it would have been doubtful if the audience would not have lost sight of it

rather quickly when faced with all the manifold aspects. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

### *Exciting things*

It can be assumed, based on all features explored, that the exhibition makers' intention was neither to 'tell a story' nor to create suspense in the way defined but instead to show the different facets of mountaineering. Whereas the events in a classical Hollywood film are arranged like 'pearls on a string' (Field 2001, 211), the events in such an exhibition are like coloured glass stones in a kaleidoscope. Different people look through it and move it in different ways and see different fragments in different arrangements. This is exactly what the audience expects from such a visit: to discover interesting and fascinating things – things in the widest sense of the word (Wegner 2015, 73-5).

### *Mental saunter*

The inspection protocol confirms that: The leading question while walking through the exhibitions *Mountains*, *Passions* and *Sawn* was not *What will happen next?* but *What will I see next?* Discovering excitingly the different sections is the main activity, and the central cognitive activity can be described as a mental saunter. This posture is open to information and inspirations but it is unintentional. The recipients do not pursue a specific objective like finding out who the murderer is. If there is an objective at all, then it is the wish to satisfy one's curiosity and to learn more about mountaineering. The central thematic question defined for *Mountains* as *Why do people take the risk to climb mountains?* may sound specific but it is much more open than central dramatic questions typical for classical Hollywood films linked to a precise want. It is important to note that even though many pieces of information are provided about motives to explore the mountain world and its risks are visualised impressively, no categorical answer is given

to the question implied in the exhibition's title 'Mountains. A mysterious passion'. In the last section, S12 *Remembering*, many mountain climbers of today describe in length what makes the mountain world attractive to them but they do not weigh the pros and cons of mountaineering one by one. While walking through the exhibition a field of associations related to the motives and one related to the risks emerges step by step but we do not sort these aspects or think them through. Roger Fayet compares the reception of an exhibition with reading a highly complex column of figures which consists of polysemous single figures. The effort for comprehension is, Fayet explains, exhausting despite the pleasure which can be gained from this cognitive process. 'If no further help for understanding is offered, the visitor often is content with receiving the objects only by viewing and waive to deliberate the viewed' (Fayet 2005, 21).

#### *Like a poem*

Probably, it is precisely this indefiniteness and ambivalent nature of mountaineering, situated between pleasure and danger, between life and death, that makes it so attractive. This tension created by these different poles cannot be explained rationally. Every sane person ought to stay in the valley, the fact that many do otherwise – exactly this makes this passion mysterious. We visitors wander through these fields of connotations and ponder about questions like *Would I like to climb a mountain? Am I a coward if not? Where do I test my limits? What peaks do I climb?* The exhibition is more like a poem which evokes vague images and emotions than a straightforward story, and it owes its appeal to this particular character (Scholze 2004, 276-8).

#### *Individual visitors*

At this point the individuality of each visitor (which can not be considered due to methodological reasons in the scope of this thesis) is of high importance. It makes without

any doubt a difference if *Mountains* is viewed by a mountain climber or a person who prefers the lowland. In case of *Sawn* for instance, my association of some of the boards' motifs showing a deserted city place and their dull range of colours with paintings from the 'New Objectivity' in the 1920s and my idea of the Baroque as exuberant and golden, made it difficult for me to decipher and accept the backdrops as typical for the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This may exemplify that this vagueness leaves a lot of space for own associations which can be a bar to the communication of specific contents and points again to the relatively low degree of exhibitions' narrativity. This openness creates on the other hand good conditions for 'dream spaces' (Kavanagh 2000); museum studies literature often describe this openness as one of the greatest qualities of the medium (Scholze 2004; Basu 2007; Hanak-Lettner 2011; Jannelli 2012; Fraser and Coulson 2012; Witcomb 2013).

### *Visual signs*

So far the difference between the question typical for classical Hollywood films *What will happen next?* and the question essential for cultural historical exhibitions *What can be viewed next?* has been stressed. But observations noted down while walking through the exhibition and insights gained based on the analysis of the sequence protocols support the connection between these two distinct driving forces. Both questions could just as well be formulated as *What comes next?* The exhibition narrative may be characterised by a strong backward movement as the intention is to understand the past but spatially the visitors are drawn forward. The next chapter discusses if this momentum created in cultural historical exhibitions mainly by visual signs can be intensified by adapting the dramaturgic devices typical for classical Hollywood films.

## Further suspense techniques

### Telegraphing

#### *Looking*

The inspection protocols reveal that visual and acoustic signals play an important role in all three exhibitions in drawing us visitors into the next rooms. In *Mountains*, for instance, the model of the mountain (M-02-01) which stands right behind the doorway in S02 *Packing* can be seen already from the first section S01 *Imagining*. The wish to look at it and to understand its meaning supports potentially our motivation to continue our tour. Entering the room, we can hear noises and only after having arrived in the third section S03 *Looking* we comprehend that they belong to the artwork showing a film about Japanese tourists climbing the Alps (M-03-02). Other examples are the vistas which enable us to peep into subsequent sections like in S05 *Vertigo* where we can look, sitting in the stylised cable car, into the last section S12 *Remembering* or the showcases in S08 *Hanging on* through which we can see already S12 *Getting down*. These relationships between specific events are not arbitrary but make sense contentwise. Riding the cable car means collecting memories which can be indulged in after the mountain tour, the showcases in S08 *Hanging on* contain objects important also for S12 *Getting down*. But this is of secondary importance, crucial is the fact that these visual and acoustic signals support the narrative flow by attracting visitors to the subsequent sections. In *Sawn* several vistas play a similar role. Especially important is that it is possible to glimpse at the backdrops – the central objects – already while visiting the sections S03 to S07 (see Buschmann 2010; Walklate 2012).

#### *Vague nature*

Whereas scriptwriting literature explains that telegraphing means telling the audience explicitly what will happen in the future, by help of a dialogue or an action, and whereas

the examples found in the three selected films fit this definition, the examples discovered in the exhibitions include only visual and acoustic signals and are of a vague nature. The mountain relief or the backdrops can be spotted only vaguely while standing in the sections before, so that we visitors do not know exactly what awaits us but are informed that something comes next. Of course, this something has to be somehow attractive, otherwise – looking boring or even deterrent – it may prevent us from wanting to continue our tour. Remarkably, none of the exhibition texts include examples for telegraphing. Some of the texts in *Sawn* include cross references, mostly concerning the boards' motifs (for example S-08-27 or S-08-07) but they do not announce concrete objects or other events; the same is true for *Mountains*.

#### *Time versus space*

All these findings point again to the different nature of films and exhibitions in general, the first organised by time sequence, the second by room sequence. Added to this, the first (at least in the case of classical Hollywood films) are characterised by a high importance of dialogue, the second by a subordinate relevance of texts.

Summarising, the examples found in the exhibitions resemble telegraphing because they support the narrative flow by letting the visitors know what can be perceived in one of the next sections. The difference is that the information given is vague compared to the information given in classical Hollywood films. Another interesting point is that the information is situated in one of the next sections and not in the section itself. No examples can be found where for example an information included in a text in section 1 points to an event in section 2 or 3. The most relevant finding is that no example can be found in the selected exhibitions where this dramatic device is applied in order to create suspense.

## Dangling causes

### *No empathy*

As explained in Chapter 4, dangling causes are more emotionally charged than telegraphing and, as the analysis of the films suggests, connected probably in many cases to our empathy with the protagonists. This is probably why no examples can be found for this dramatic device in the three exhibitions: even though we may wander through the exhibitions fascinated and even excited we are not thrilled. Actually, there are some information given which look like dangling causes but their effects fizzle out. As described, the main text in S01 *Exposition* in *Passions* states: ‘Who knows when the passions might return.’ This resembles Margo’s foreboding in *All about Eve* (1950) expressed as the line ‘Even before the party started I could smell disaster in the air’ (36:12). But whereas we fear for Margo that the party will turn out as a disaster indeed, we do not fear the passions arriving ‘on stage’, for reasons elaborated on. The same is true for the beginning of *Sawn* where the text signs offer diverse options for the boards’ use. These options could ‘dangle’ in our mind while continuing our tour but they do not, probably because we have not yet understood how spectacular and precious the Baroque backdrops are and why we should care about their origin.

### *Objects*

An example for an object which could potentially serve as a dangling cause is the water colour box in *Mountains* (Figure 6.30). It is situated right at the end of the section S02 *Packing*, near to the next section S03 *Looking*. The corresponding label evaluates the box as highly important: ‘For the Alpine tourists of the early 19th century, the paint box became an essential piece of equipment, and the scenery literally became “picturesque”. *Without the development of the paint box, the Alps might never have become a popular destination*’ (emphasis added). Considering the fact that the rising popularity of mountaineering, with

a focus on the Alps, is the central topic of the exhibition, its creators consider this box obviously as key. But no connection is drawn explicitly between this exhibit and the next section where all events revolve around how pictures of the mountains have influenced our concepts of the mountain world.

### *Questions*

It is striking that none of the explicit questions posed in the main texts of *Passions* and in all texts of *Mountains* invite the audience to hypothesise about possible answers given later in the exhibition narrative. In *Passions* the questions fulfil the function to aid the audience to interpret the objects and space design like the main text in S01 *Exposition* asks ‘So this is where the passions live?’ or to draw attention to passions’ nature like the question posed in the same text: ‘What are these passions, anyway?’ Questions are also employed in order to invite the audience to rethink their own point of view like in S02 *Conflict* where the main text asks: ‘Which side do I belong on?’ In *Mountains*, questions are posed only rarely and if so they are answered immediately afterwards without giving the audiences the opportunity to take part in hypothesising, like ‘How beautiful is the alpenglow?’ or ‘Did mountaineering go back to Moses, to Petrarch or to the Emperor Maximilian?’. In the case of *Sawn* several texts include questions still open related to the backdrops’ origin. The questions may inspire the audience to ponder about diverse possibilities in which context the boards were used, but they are not guided, as in classical Hollywood films, by the question *What will happen next?* And for the reasons described, the focus is not on the question but on the manifold information to absorb.

### *Conclusion*

Concluding, neither the dramatic device telegraphing nor dangling causes can be detected in the selected exhibitions even though the narrative flow is supported by visual and



acoustic means. This supports the finding based on the analysis of the (absent) dramatic tension that the exhibition narratives are not ‘told toward the future’ like classical Hollywood stories. It also supports the result that the emphasis is not on the connections between the single events but on the events themselves. Third, it stresses the spatial character of the exhibition medium compared with the temporal character of the film medium.

### **Dramatic irony**

No examples for this dramatic device can be detected in the three exhibitions. Remember: suspense is produced by this mean when the audience knows more than one or more characters and is excited to find out what will happen the moment the truth is revealed. Walking through an exhibition about Van Gogh’s life with the knowledge about his poverty and being conscious at the same time of the record price his paintings obtain today, may create an ironic tension. But no scene of ‘recognition’ can take place as Van Gogh will never learn this information, and this seems to be characteristic for all cultural historical exhibitions as they report by nature mostly about historical figures.

### **Planting and payoff**

There is only one single example in the three exhibitions that can be understood as an attempt to apply this dramatic device. It is an example for Type II, defined in Chapter 4: an information is planted that potentially raises a question in the spectator’s mind which is answered later on during the course of events. The example, taken from *Passions*, sheds light again on how important linearity and the precise placement of information is for the effects of this particular device.

## *Crocodiles*

In every one of the first four sections of the exhibition, an object is shown which represents a crocodile. It is not unusual, of course, that different objects of one kind are deployed in one and the same exhibition. In this case however the prominent placement of the crocodiles in the first and third section is striking: both are presented conspicuously at the beginning of each ‘act’, suggesting their importance for the exhibition narrative. The first, taxidermied, crocodile hangs above the table in the otherwise normal looking dining room and looks straight at the visitors with its mouth wide open (Figure 6.31). The other crocodile, a work of artist Carsten Höller<sup>64</sup>, made from orange synthetic material and three meters long, lies on a low white pedestal directly at the entrance to the third ‘act’ (Figure 6.32 and 6.2). Our assumption that both may be significant is supported by the text accompanying the first crocodile as this is labelled explicitly as ‘symbol for the passions’. To decodify the meaning of the crocodiles promises therefore to comprehend passions’ essence, and thereby meets the objective of this exhibition.

### *Passions – dangerous or useful?*

The idea to use crocodiles as plants and payoffs resembles the use of this dramaturgic technique in films where props often fulfil this function, as in *The Conversation* (1974) and *Chinatown* (1974). This is confirmed by the meaning of the single crocodiles. Actually, the first crocodile raises potentially a question which could be answered, step by step, by the following crocodiles. The label belonging to the first crocodile, the preserved specimen, explains that humans have been always fascinated by crocodiles and that these animals often hung under the ceiling in cabinets of wonder. It continues: ‘Like their predecessors

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<sup>64</sup> *Krokodil* [Crocodile], 2002.

this crocodile wants to evoke amazement in its vis-à-vis, too. As a symbol of the passions it intends to attack and eat us up with its gaping mouth – or merely smile at us? *Be curious!*<sup>65</sup> (emphasis added). In a nutshell: Are passions dangerous or useful? This question is amplified by an illustrated book displayed on the dining table which shows the photograph *Crocodile Eating Ballerina* (1983) by Helmut Newton. It depicts a naked woman whose torso disappears in a crocodile's mouth. This crocodile oscillates in its meaning between seduction and destruction as it is difficult to judge, considering the graceful pose of the ballerina, if she finds herself in this difficult position by choice.

The next crocodile is exhibited in S02 *Conflict*. As described before, different and contradictory historical value judgements concerning passions are introduced in this section. A hand-carved wooden sculpture represents a crocodile in human form. Casually, it buries its hands in his pockets. The label describes Charles Darwin's theory, passions can be compared to animals' instincts and are important for self-preservation. Therefore we decodify this crocodile as 'Passions are useful'. The crocodile by Carsten Höller is exhibited in S03 *Climax* in which damages created by passions are visualised. The label calls it 'scary' – and thus it could be considered as an answer to the question raised by the first crocodile, signifying 'Passions are dangerous'. The last crocodile can be found in S04 *Turning point* where different methods are discussed how to tame passions. It is a glove puppet from a Punch-and-Judy show. The label explains that Punch-and-Judy shows enable and teach us to control our powerful emotions because Punch always beats the evil crocodile (Figure 6.33). Thus, the answer to the question at the beginning of the exhibition

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<sup>65</sup> The German text says: 'Seien Sie gespannt!' and refers thus explicitly to suspense [Spannung].

(Are passions dangerous or useful?) is: ‚Passions may be dangerous but if tamed by help of particular methods, they can be useful.‘

### *No suspense*

The analysis suggests that the employment of the crocodiles is indeed a kind of planting and payoff. Notwithstanding the fact that no suspense was produced, as the inspection protocol reveals. Interestingly enough, even though writing down the question ‘Are passions dangerous or useful?’ already in situ, I have converted the information immediately into the statement ‘Passions are ambiguous’. Admittedly, I was curious to learn further attributes of passions in the course of the exhibition but I was moved by no question.

### *Expectations*

One possible explanation might be the expectations typical for museum visitors which Werner Hanak-Lettner describes. To my knowledge, Hanak-Lettner is the only other scholar who discusses the technique planting and payoff in the context of cultural historical exhibitions even though he does not use this term. His examples show however the typical traits of this device (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 182-6). Writing about suspense in general, he explains, beginning with schemes applied to films:

Firstly, there are scripts in our heads which tell us that suspense is building. Secondly, we trust that these open questions will eventually be answered. Should the film fail to provide these answers, we might hold this weakness against it, but initially the principle of trust applies. In an exhibition, however, the information must be provided immediately. (ibid., 26)

### *Knowledge*

According to him, this is due to the fact that we are used to ‘interpreting exhibitions primarily as spatial, rather than as temporal constructions’ (ibid.). When information is not supplied near or next to where the object is displayed, we react frustrated because, as Hanak-Lettner explains, the core of popular films is entertainment, but the core of cultural historical exhibitions is knowledge. If an answer is not given on the spot, the visitors question themselves and think that they should know the answer themselves (ibid., 183). While watching classical Hollywood films by contrast, no knowledge is expected from the visitors, the only requirement is that they get involved and trust the game of information, the withholding and transfer of pieces of information, that the film makers play with them. Therefore it is possible that the schema I had internalised through manifold exhibition visits debilitated the effects of the question provoked by the first crocodile because I did not expect to find answers while continuing my tour.

### *Complexity*

Another possible reason why I noticed the question without experiencing suspense might be the complexity of the exhibition situation. As prominent as the first crocodile is placed in the room, as difficult it was for this object to assert itself in view of the multitude of inrushing information. Exactly here, at the start of the exhibition tour, I was challenged to orient myself: Where is the introductory text? What kind of objects will I see? Popular films can be without any doubt multi-layered and skilfully woven, but whereas they present to us one image after the other, the ‘space images’ in exhibitions compete for our attention (Thiemeyer 2013).

### *Fixed schemata*

In addition, popular films are characterised by relatively fixed schemata and even clichés which however facilitates orientation and comprehension. A dining room in a cultural historical exhibition like in *Passions* is unusual and visitors have to decipher the exhibition space first of all as ‘dining room’. Moreover, the crocodile under the ceiling does not seem so unusual because objects are presented in this section everywhere. The exceptional crocodile hangs in an exceptional dining room and loses thus its particularity.

### *Importance of objects*

Apart from this, the central role objects play for this medium might explain the absence of suspense facing the first crocodile. It seemed neither dangerous to me nor useful. Without the label the intended question would not have come to my mind. The orange crocodile however did not seem scary to me because of its smiling mouth and its funny colour. The effects of the objects themselves had a higher priority than what the labels stated. Without any doubt, the information given in filmic narratives can be characterised by a strong ambiguity, if we have difficulties to accept an actor, for instance, whom we personally do not find attractive, in his role as seducer. But the connection between the words uttered by actors or the gestures they perform, is closer than those between an object and its description in an exhibition.

## **Conclusion**

In all three exhibitions the dramaturgic suspense techniques were only applied rudimentarily, even though it is stated, in the case of *Sawn* and *Passions*, partly otherwise in the exhibitions texts. Instead of dramatic questions, thematic questions are the key elements

all information is structured around. They raise interest and micro questions are connected closely to them but they do not support hypothesising about possible story outcomes. Neither are there clearly defined and convincing protagonists with whom the visitors could share the thrill or at least could empathise with. As a further obstacle in creating dramatic suspense an overbalance of gaps could be detected. Interrelated information and mini plots are often spread widely over different exhibition sections which makes discovering and comprehending causal links difficult. Equally, events essential for understanding questions and answers are presented often on the same level as information of lesser importance. Selecting relevant information for constructing the exhibition narrative becomes thus a challenge for the recipients.

Turning points turned out to be crucial elements for not only comprehending the thematic questions and their answers but also for potentially producing suspense. It seems promising to highlight them, in a similar way as in the film medium characterised by time, in the exhibition medium characterised by space, in order to strengthen the visitors' interest. This spatial, instead of temporal, character of exhibitions came to the fore during the analyses also in respect to the objects' role. Different from popular films, they were not used in the exhibitions as plants triggering questions regarding the further course of events. Neither were there any examples for dramatic irony in the exhibitions nor (efficient) examples for telegraphing or dangling causes even though acoustic and visual signals are used to support the narrative flow and to draw the visitors into the next rooms and sections. However, the analyses revealed, by describing the exhibitions' qualities, how effectively the wish to discover and view the objects and spaces functions as motivating factor. Interest and fascination is sustained successfully by presenting attractive objects in an attractive way.

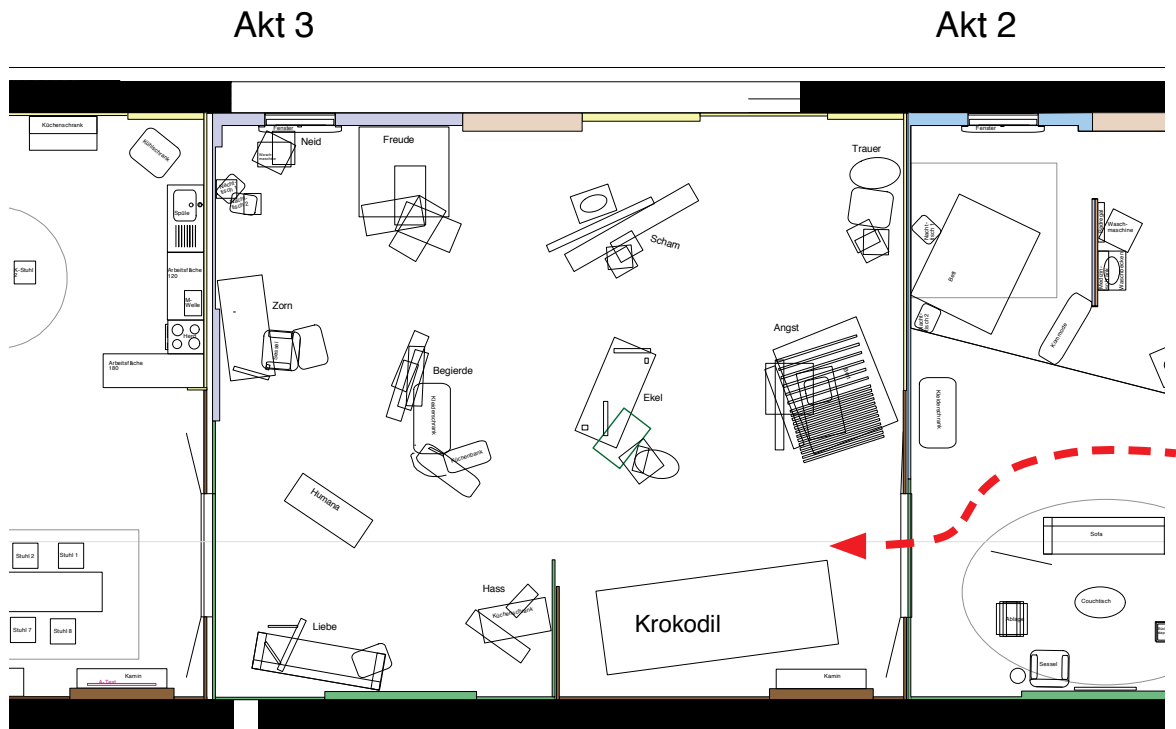
As the absence of dramatic suspense in all three exhibitions does not necessarily mean that such a narrative suspense is impossible to create in the exhibition medium, the next chapter

will perform a thought experiment. Can exhibitions' specific narrativity be used or modified in such a manner that the dramaturgic suspense techniques described so far can be applied?



# Exhibitions

**Figure 6.2** *Passions*. Floor plan: S03 *Climax* (as of August 13, 2011)  
Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden.



**Figure 6.3** *Passions*. Foyer. Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden.  
Photograph by Oliver Killig.





**Figure 6.4** *Passions*. The ‘emotional household’, peaceful.  
Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by David Brandt.



**Figure 6.5** *Passions*. The ‘emotional household’, disarranged.  
Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by David Brandt.





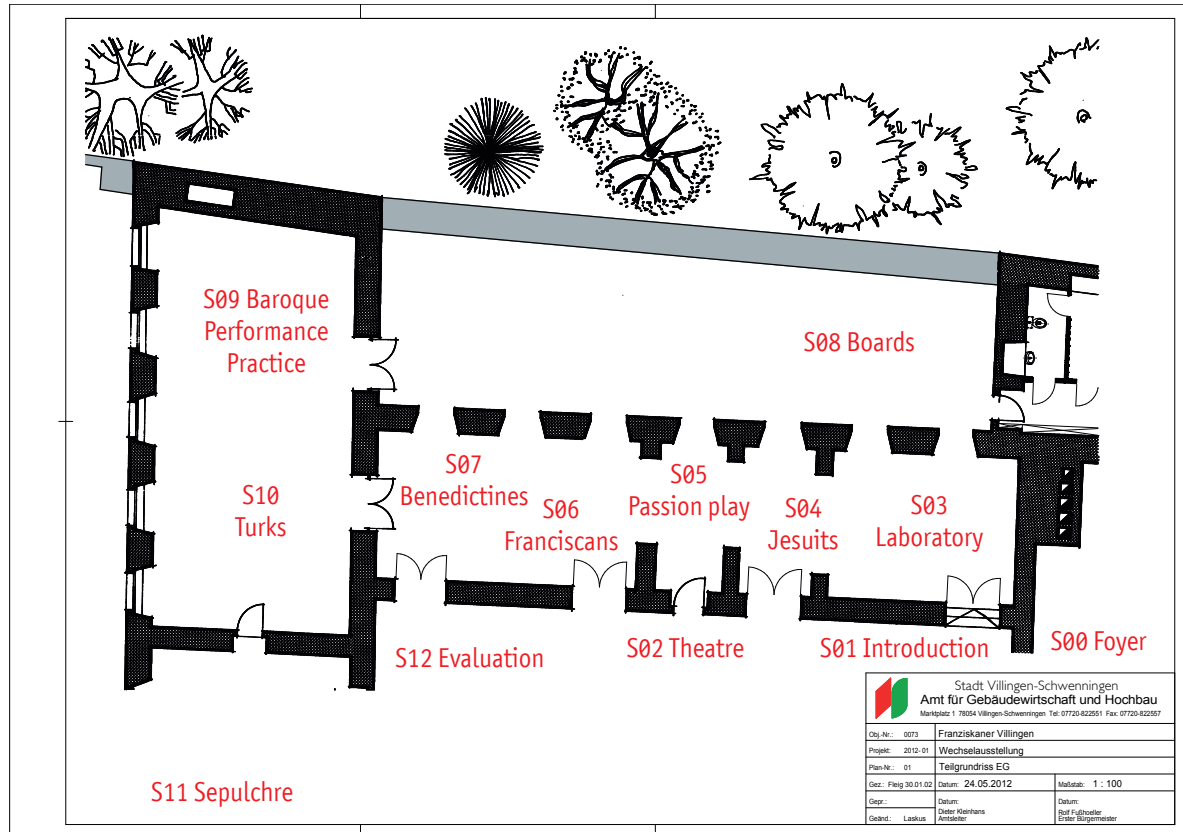
**Figure 6.6** *Passions*. Tilted floor in S02 *Conflict*.  
Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by Oliver Killig.



**Figure 6.7** *Passions*. 'Scissor Spider' by Christopher Locke.  
Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by Oliver Killig.

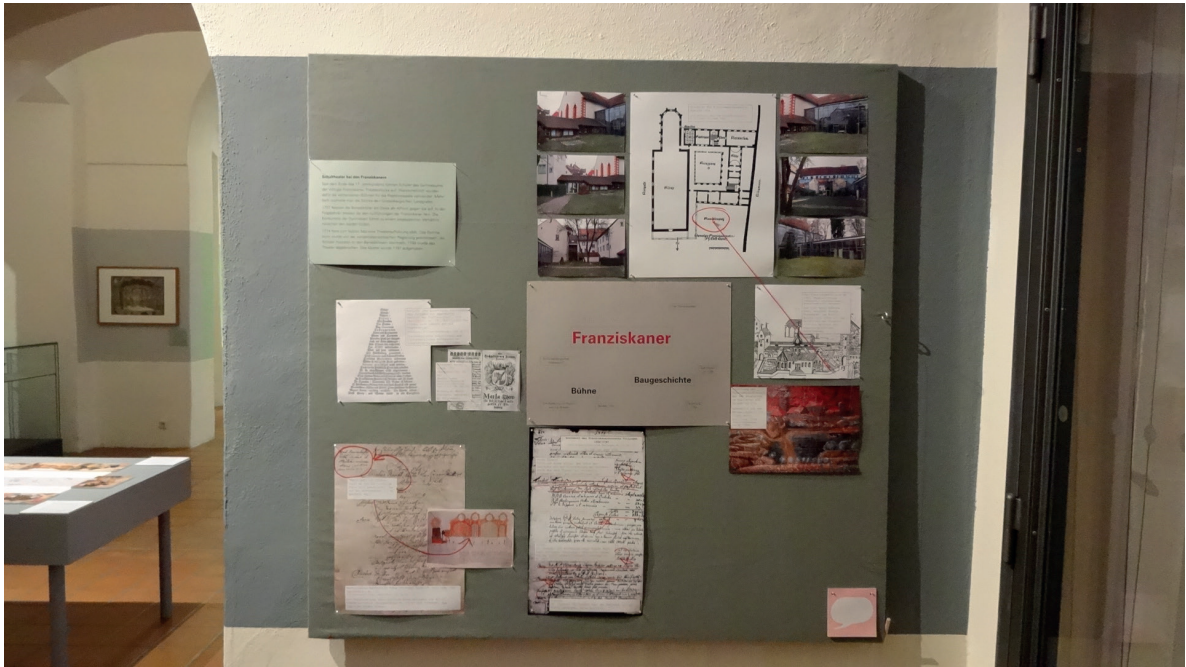


**Figure 6.9** Sawn. Floor plan.  
Source: Franziskanermuseum, Villingen.





**Figure 6.10** *Sawn*. Pinboards support the atmosphere of ‘work in progress’.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.11** *Sawn*. Some of the backdrops are arranged like wings on a stage.  
Photograph by author.





**Figure 6.12** *Sawn.* Boards with garden architecture.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.13** *Sawn.* Part of a city scene.  
Photograph by author.





**Figure 6.14** *Sawn*. The use of the board with skulls is still unclear.  
Photograph by author.

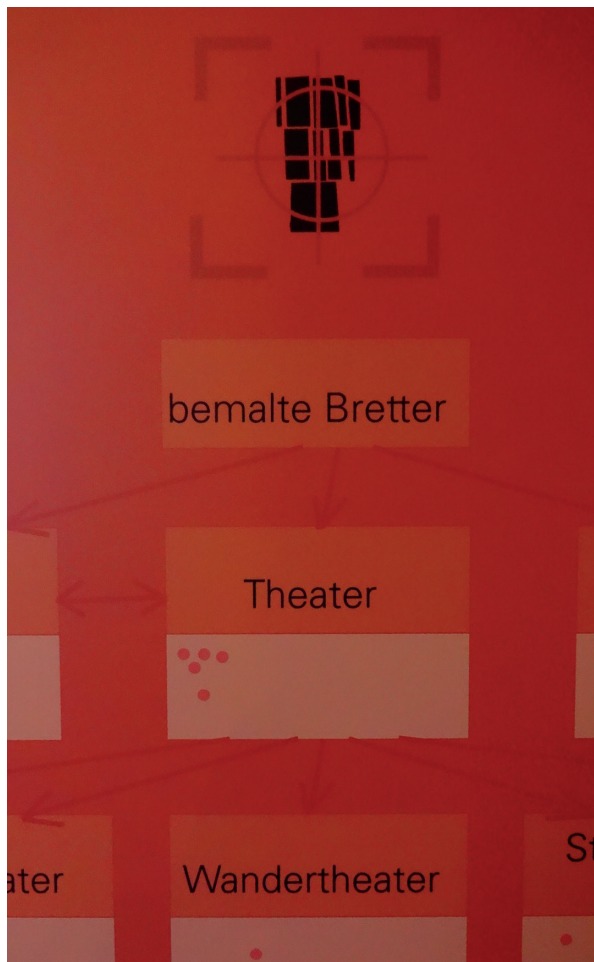
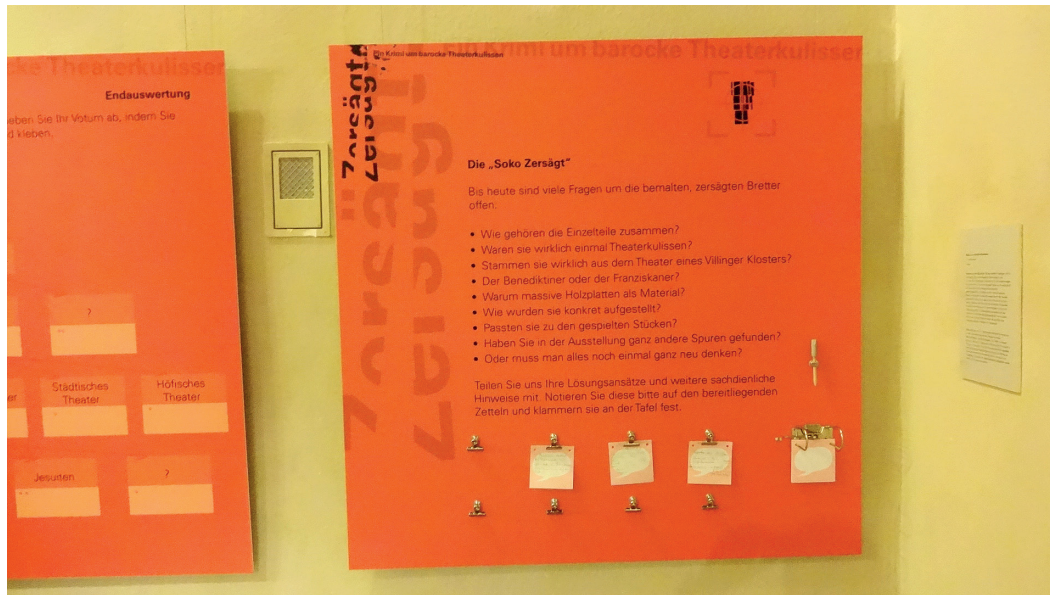


**Figure 6.15** *Sawn*. The use of this board with a drop curtain is neither known. Photograph by author.



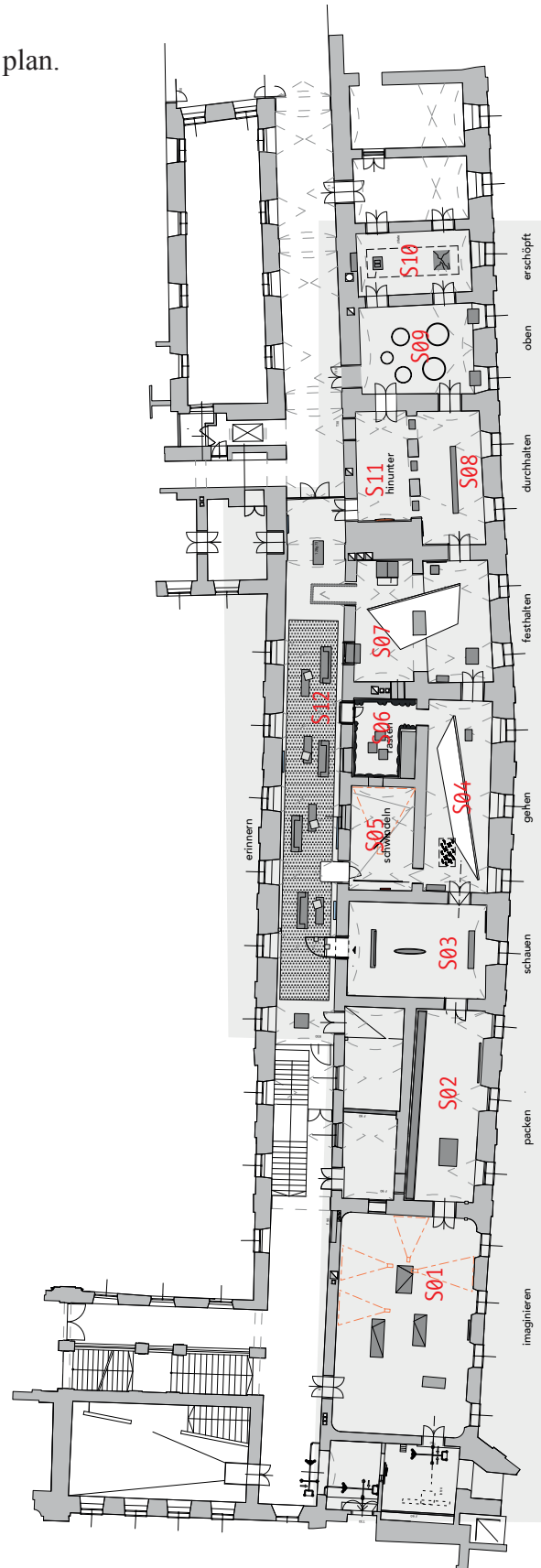


**Figure 6.16** *Sawn*. 'Final Evaluation'.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.17** *Sawn*. 'Final Evaluation',  
detail.  
Photograph by author.

**Figure 6.19** *Mountains.* Floor plan.



**Figure 6.20** *Mountains*. Knife of Herman Schlagintweit.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.21** *Mountains*. Radio telephone illustrates Robert Hall's death on Mount Everest. Photograph by author.





**Figure 6.22** *Mountains. S03 Looking* with painting of Mount Everest.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.23** *Mountains. Broken rope.*  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.24** *Mountains. S10 Exhausted* with relief of Mount Everest. Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.25** *Mountains*. Lithography with mountaineers falling to their death on the descent from the Matterhorn in 1865. Photograph by author.





**Figure 6.27** *Mountains. S09 At the top.*  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.28** *Mountains. S04 Walking.*  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.29** *Mountains. 'Sea of Colour'.*  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 6.30** *Mountains. Paint box.*  
Photograph by author.





**Figure 6.31** *Passions*. Taxodermied crocodile (plant 1). Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by Oliver Killig.



**Figure 6.32** *Passions*. 'Crocodile' by Carsten Höller (plant 2). Source: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Photograph by Oliver Killig.





[illegible]

## 7. A Thought experiment

### Introduction

Based on the material presented in the last two chapters, this chapter addresses the central research question, how far dramaturgic devices used for scriptwriting can be applied to create suspenseful exhibition narratives, anew. So far, the question how dramaturgic techniques are used in classical Hollywood films to create dramatic suspense, has been answered extensively, by help of film studies and scriptwriting literature and based on the film analyses. The differences and similarities between exhibition and film narratives and the question of how the specific characteristics of exhibitions shape, influence or prevent the adoption of these techniques have been approached but will be refined in this chapter.

The finding that the suspense devices have been applied in the three exhibitions only in rudimentary ways, does not necessarily mean that they could not have been used more extensively. Consequently, this chapter will discuss in a thought experiment (see Brown and Fehige 2017) how such an adaptation might look. A thought experiment is understood here as ‘a judgement about what would happen if the particular state of affairs described in some imaginary scenario were actually to obtain’ (Gendler 1998, 398). This method ‘can show us whether or not a situation is possible’ (Cooper 2005, 339). Important throughout the experiment was to distinguish between narrative features inherent in the exhibition medium and those bound to curators’ values and preferences and being thus of a flexible nature. An exploration of *Sawn* should serve as main example, supported by reflections regarding *Passions* and *Mountains*.

Major contact points filtered from the above analysis will be used as starting points for the following exploration: the existence and importance of characters, the fact that questions function as organising principles and the sisterhood of suspense and curiosity. Is it thinkable to change, in cultural historical exhibitions, characters into protagonists, thematic into dramatic questions and curiosity into suspense? Briefly: is it possible to learn from Hollywood?

## **Shaping the journey of discovery**

### *Protagonists versus recipients*

Both, the creators of *Sawn* as well as of *Passions* have addressed the visitors in the exhibitions as protagonists. In *Passions* they are considered as humans confronted with and potentially overwhelmed by stormy emotions, in *Sawn* they are invited to join the investigators to discover the origin of the boards. But as the analyses have shown, in none of the exhibitions the visitors can really fulfil the allocated role.<sup>66</sup> In *Passions* they are never confronted with passions in the sense that they could feel them and in *Sawn* they are not equipped to investigate the boards independently or to truly reassess the presented hypotheses. Without any doubt both approaches chosen by the curators fit in very well with the modern comprehension of visitors as active agents in the process of meaning making (see Hooper-Greenhill 1991; Hein 1998; Macdonald 2006; Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006; Falk 2007). But instead of exploring how, in this sense, the visitors' participation could

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<sup>66</sup> Stogner's approach to distinguish between different visitor roles is useful in this context. She differentiates between passive (spectator/observer), active (explorer/discoverer) and interactive (contributor/curator) visitors (2011, 120-1).

have been fostered more effectively, the question will be further pursued if suspense could have been created by differentiating clearly between protagonists and viewers, as classical Hollywood films do.

This could mean in case of *Sawn* to allocate to the scholars introduced clearly the role as protagonists, while allowing the visitors to observe their voyage of discovery. This voyage could be shaped based on the exhibition's thematic question which is 'What were the use and meaning of the painted boards?' Its answer – they were backdrops used in theatre performances during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably at monastery schools – could be defined as the final point of the narrative, and this hints at possible ways to shape the course of events.

### *Different beginnings*

The action the protagonists would choose to discover the use and meaning of the boards, is obviously to investigate, herein no difference exists to the actual exhibition. Various beginnings are thinkable. Either the experts start their investigation with the assumption the boards were Baroque backdrops, based on their knowledge of monastery school theatres in Villingen in this period and of backdrops in general, or they approach the subject totally unbiased. The first option is potentially more suspenseful because it would create a starting situation in which visitors could understand more easily what is at stake for the scholars. Presuming that the painted boards look rather unremarkable for a layperson, communicating their potential value is highly important for making the recipients as interested as possible in the investigation process. Highlighting thus at the beginning that such Baroque backdrops would be unique and the trove therefore a sensation seems decisive for creating suspense. Communicating the meaning and value of the backdrops would be supported by making clear to the audiences that the backdrops had been created perhaps exactly in and for the former Franciscan monastery, now the museum, the visitors are situated in while walking through the exhibition space. Only if they were identified

indeed conclusively as backdrops used in a Villingen monastery school theatre, starting the exhibition with the ‘solution’, similar to the prologue in *All about Eve* (1950), would have been an attractive option. But, as the analysis has suggested, exactly the reasonable doubts and still open questions around the boards are at the heart of the exhibition narrative.

### *Central conflict*

This could be taken up as central conflict for the protagonists: even though so many indications hint to the boards’ use as backdrops in the Franciscan monastery school in Villingen and even though no true counter-argument could be found hitherto – the scholars have to keep to the strict standards science is committed to if they do not want to loose their credibility. As scholars they are therefore forced to stress the still open questions but as human beings and following common sense they probably would like to confirm the assumption. Exactly this could be used as a strong connecting factor with the museum visitors who are probably familiar with the urge to state something against one’s better knowledge. All this is already implied in the actual exhibition but defining and arranging all elements more clearly and consequently holds the potential to provoke suspense on the side of the audience focussing on the protagonists, empathising with them and wishing to learn the answer for the central question.

### *Wants*

Such a greater clarity seems desirable, considering the findings of the film analyses, also in respect to the protagonists’ want. In order to support suspense, it seems instrumental to express these wants, and more than once. Actually, these wants are mentioned partly on the corresponding ‘evidence sheets’ and also in the interviews themselves (for example S-06-13 and S-07-01), but they are described neutrally. For fostering suspense, it would be helpful if the experts would communicate to the visitors what a positive or negative finding

of their specific search request may mean for them personally (see Becker-Proriol and Chanay 2012, 318-22; Kramper 2017, 59-61). The analyses of the films have shown how influential the protagonists' reactions are for the audience's understanding of the relevance and meaning of the events and how closely the audience follows the emotional journey of the heroes and heroines. In the frame of *Sawn* this could have meant to express an intense scholarly interest or an excitement over the beauty of the backdrops or to stress the relevance of the boards if detected really as backdrops from the Baroque or even from the Franciscan monastery.

Hence, it would probably support the emergence of suspense to state at the beginning of each section clearly the specific question or goal the relevant expert intends to pursue, and at the end if and how the question could be answered; creating a micro suspense as described in Chapter 4. But, taking up the explications before, every want should be expressed evidently by the expert him- or herself and this in a passionate way. Likewise, it would be essential that the central dramatic question is expressed at the exhibition's starting point in an unmissable way and the final result is presented at the end easy to find. The danger is that such an obvious and repetitive strategy could create boredom instead of suspense. The film analyses have shown that the protagonists' wants are not expressed always explicitly but that they are interwoven elaborately into the course of events. For instance the scene in *Chinatown* (1974) in the barbershop where Gittes explodes because another client implies that he is motivated by greed. Probably, only a few spectators would interpret his reaction as an expression of his want to protect his reputation but many would think, when the danger threatens him again being made ridiculous: 'Ouch, this will make him suffer!' The crucial point is that this provokes the question on side of the audience how Gittes will react and 'What comes next?' If and how the protagonists' wants could be told in a similarly elegant way in an exhibition, still provoking questions the visitors want to know the answer for, has to be explored in practice.



### *Several protagonists*

Even though the difficulty of ensemble films has been described in Chapter 4, it does not seem impossible for the creation of suspense that more than one protagonist is introduced. In *Dead Poets Society* (1989)<sup>67</sup> for instance some protagonists can be identified with as diverse wants as winning the heart of a girl, playing the leading role in a school play, and so on. But all these wants are united by the superior objective to follow fearlessly one's own path, embodied impressively in the character of the new literature teacher, performed by Robin Williams. Moreover, one of the pupils, Neil, is featured in particular. To understand why in this case an ensemble film works well, would need further analysis (see Chapter 8) but in this case it seems essential to communicate the diverse wants and the superior objective empathically and to highlight one of the protagonists.

### *Accessories*

Taking up the explications of Jens Eder et al. in *Character in Fictional Worlds* (2010, 29) about the identification of protagonists by help of accessories, it could have helped in case of *Sawn* moreover to equip the experts with a typical investigator's insignias. Actually, a trench coat, some pipes, a peaked cap and a magnifying glass are exhibited on the table situated between S06 Franciscans and S07 Benedictines (Figure 7.1). In the actual exhibition these seem to be the belongings of an abstract investigator, but letting the engineer holding a pipe instead of his glasses while being interviewed or placing a magnifying glass prominently on the conservator's desk could have helped the visitors to identify them continually as investigators and therefore protagonists (Figure 7.2).

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<sup>67</sup> Script: Tom Schulman



### *Dramatic question*

If the experts had stated their wants and interests more explicitly and emotionally, this could have been supported the participation of visitors in hypothesising about possible story outcomes. It is important to note that positioning the experts thus more clearly and exclusively as the protagonists, changes the nature of the audiences' hypotheses and supports the transformation of the central question from a thematic into a dramatic one. Instead of asking themselves curiously 'What were the use and meaning of the painted boards?' while walking through the exhibition, visitors would wonder excitedly 'Will they succeed or will they fail in finding out?' Even though the audience would focus thus their attention on the protagonists' experiences, 'en passant' the content could be communicated and the thematic question answered as well.

At this point it should be noted that the idea to personalise exhibition narratives is of course not new (see Hennig 2004; Wegner 2015; Becker-Proriol and Chanay 2012). New is the attempt of this thesis to build continuous arcs of suspense closely linked to specific characters. At the entrance to the permanent exhibition at the *Deutsches Auswanderer Haus* [German Emigration Center] in Bremerhaven, for instance, every visitor gets a 'boarding pass' belonging to a real emigrant. With this pass it is possible to call up information about this person's story at certain points in the exhibition. Whereas this may function well as a hook to get the audiences interested and also to connect with single exhibits, it does not create a continuous storyline. An aspect the next section will explore.

### **Building a suspense arc**

Framing each section by the relevant micro question and its answer, suspense, it has been suggested, could be provoked motivating the visitor to discover also the next sections.

Only by a linear arrangement however an intensifying suspense, it seems, can be raised. The increase of suspense, closely connected to the division of a story into acts, including a climax etc., has not been discussed explicitly in this thesis so far. Eder, however, expanding thus, as mentioned before, Bordwell's description, includes it as one important characteristic into his definition of popular films. He writes:

With respect to their potential impact, events in popular films are arranged in a way that steadily builds up the cognitive, emotional and sensual suspense. This suspense then culminates in a climactic event of great intensity that both resolves the central problem and answers the key question. (Eder 2007, 78)

With reference to Peter Hant (1992, 67-8), Eder explains that the central problem (which the protagonist has to overcome in order to achieve his or her goal) increases in more than one way. Every conflict is stronger than the previous one, the situations allow fewer and fewer options to solve the problem, more and more characters are involved, the hero or heroine is increasingly under a strain and time pressure can intensify the problem massively. In case of *Sawn* it would be thinkable to create a fictional frame story and to invent a reason why the experts have to hurry in order to discover the use of the boards.

As binding the audiences emotionally to the story is no end in itself in cultural historical exhibitions but is supposed to support learning, the alternative not to aim at an emotional increase but at a cognitive one shall be discussed. Eder explains that in this case the questions triggered become more and more interesting and relevant and the hypotheses more and more exclusive and probable. The range of the protagonists' options is reduced and this either-or situation increases the suspense. The recipients feel that the solution of the problem and the answering of the central question approaches (Eder 2007, 76-7). How could such an arrangement look in case of *Sawn*?

### *Different arrangement of sections*

In the actual exhibition the visitors can enter the central exhibition rooms from the cloister through five different entries, arriving first either at S03 *Laboratory*, S04 *Jesuits*, S05 *Passion play*, S06 *Franciscans* or S07 *Benedictines*. For enabling the visitors to follow the investigation process closer and with marked attention it would make sense to start with the most basic classifications of the boards. Based on the explications so far, the question which bothers the investigators would read: Are these painted boards *really* Baroque backdrops from the Franciscan monastery school, formerly situated *exactly here* at the museum? Therefore it would be logical to start with the *Laboratory* where the age of the backdrops is determined by help of dendrochronological research because an older age would invalidate the hypothesis most likely, a younger one straightaway (Figure 7.3). The second step would be to determine the boards as backdrops and this goes hand in hand with dating them to the Baroque period. It would be helpful to let the visitors therefore pass first the section *Baroque performance practice*, by explaining thus the characteristics of stage settings in this historical period and to train the visitors' eye and then to confront them with the original backdrops themselves (Figure 7.5 and 7.6). The visitors would leave this section with the knowledge that despite some uncertainties and still open questions, the experts assume at this point of the narrative, that the boards were Baroque backdrops indeed. They could turn then to the question in which kind of theatre the backdrops were used, and after eliminating travelling theatre, city theatre and court theatre, they could turn to the hypothesis that they were created for a monastery school theatre. Before the hypothesis if and in which Villingen monastery the boards had been made for will be discussed finally, the two alternative uses, for passion plays or for sepulchres, could be treated then. In this way the narrative would end with the most exciting and specific question, if the backdrops had been made for the Franciscan monastery indeed. The visitors would learn in this section

that in 1710 the play *Irene* was performed at the Franciscan monastery school theatre to which the motifs of the exhibited backdrops fit exactly but that a hall where plays were performed existed most probably at the Benedictine monastery school as well, and that therefore it cannot be stated for sure if and at which of the monastery school theatres the boards were created.

The sections would thus be arranged in this order:

*S00 Foyer – S01 Introduction – S03 Laboratory – S09 Baroque Performance Practice – S08 Boards – S02 Theatre – S04 Jesuits – S05 Passion play – S11 Sepulchre — S06 Franciscans – S07 Benedictines – S12 Evaluation*

In this way the line of argumentation would intensify and the end – that the initial question cannot be answered for sure – could take full effect. The thematic question has been thus answered partly, the dramatic one ambiguously; a semi-victory for the protagonists if you like. If the urge to know and to prove was introduced convincingly, the visitors should be able to emphasise with the experts, understanding their inner conflict. But not only that, they would have learned to ‘see’ the Baroque backdrops and a lot about the historical period in which they had been created. The objection that such an arrangement would be fictitious because the research process was in reality much more complicated holds true for the actual exhibition as well: the fabula, thus the factual course of events, was shaped here into a plot, too.

#### *Advantage of a linear arrangement*

But not only an increase of suspense would be possible by a linear arrangement of the sections, it would also allow the visitors to follow the unfolding of the argumentation more closely and to comprehend the consequences of specific questions and research results

better. Thus, the advantage of linearity or chronology, discussed in Chapter 3, for making the sequence of events followable and intelligible (Sternberg 1990, 903) can be used. Like in *Chinatown* (1974) where the confrontation of Gittes with Evelyn's father Noah Cross at the end of the film takes its full effect only because we as spectators are now well informed about the concern of his criminal acts. Only after having seen, for instance, the original backdrops in *Sawn* the importance of the fact that the boards used for a sepulchre are decorated with human figures (whereas the backdrops are not) can be fully understood (Figure 7.4). In both cases the recipients can take part in the investigation process more actively because they are capable to evaluate the hypotheses better.

## **Planting and payoff**

### *Fixed sequence*

Whereas it is thinkable, up to this point, that suspense can emerge in single sections and sub sections even though they are not arranged in a linear order and no continuous arc of suspense is constructed, a fixed sequence seems to be mandatory for the technique planting and payoff. Moreover, whereas suspense may be provoked on the side of the audience by noticing the sections' main questions and answers and not necessarily viewing or reading every single exhibit or text, not only a precise placement of the plants and their payoffs but a close reception and understanding of them seem obligatory. Only when first the plant is perceived as a plant, suspense can unfold and only when the payoff is noticed afterwards, suspense resolves.

Remember, that plants may work if they are expressed explicitly as questions, like in *Citizen Kane* (1941), but also when they are introduced more subtly like in *The Prestige* (2006). Decisive is that the information given somehow bemuses us or that it somehow

seems out of place, like two grown-ups arguing furiously about an apple core in *Chinatown* (1974). Or an ordinary detail of no further importance is highlighted a little bit too much so that an experienced movie spectator is able to decipher it as a plant. In all cases it is essential to ascribe to the information which serves as a plant exactly the right importance. This comprehension is guided often by the reactions of the protagonists which balance out this delicate relationship between importance and insignificance as the film analyses have shown.

### *Exact placement*

Presuming now that the exhibition narrative is told in a linear order, it seems not impossible to integrate this suspense technique even though the analysis of *Passions* has pointed to the difficulties. As it touches the general question how exactly information can be placed in exhibitions in order to create suspense, the possible implementation of this technique will be explored here again. Inspired by the sewing kit presented in *Mountains* (M-02-06), it will be reasoned if and how knitting needles could be used as a plant in a mountaineering story. This object, an entirely fictitious example, turns out to be the key rescue tool in a life-threatening situation.

### *Film*

In a popular film the needles could be introduced carefully. For instance, a mountaineer planning the ascent of a mountain the same day, wants to bring his daughter her workbag to school which she has forgotten at home because he knows that she needs it urgently. Perhaps we have seen the daughter before working busily on a scarf for tomorrow's birthday of her beloved older brother and therefore we do not question the logic of the scene. But on his way to school something forces the mountaineer to start his mountain hike immediately and instead of delivering the bag he leaves it in his backpack. Later on,

caught in a dangerous situation on the mountain, he ties the half-done scarf around his neck, feeling awfully cold and in desperation, and comes across the knitting needles which he can use to rescue himself. Perhaps it would suffice as well to place the plant by a slight hesitation of him while packing his backpack. We would be probably bemused that he takes a pair of knitting needles on a mountain tour but when at the same time something happens which attracts our attention the fact would be deemphasised.

### *Exhibition*

However, to plant an information in this way in an exhibition narrative, though arranged linearly, seems to be much more difficult even if the protagonist has been established successfully. It seems to be far more tricky to let the mountaineer in the exhibition interact in such a precise way with the object, in this case the knitting needles. That is, the confusion triggered by or special significance connected to the object has to be created by something different. Texts would be one possibility but the analysis of the crocodiles shown in *Passions* suggested that texts have an effect weaker than the object itself. Assumed that the needles would be placed in the showcase in S02 *Packing in Mountains*, the selection of the other objects being shown at the same place, would be crucial. The needles should appear unusual, perhaps even unlikely as part of the equipment but not impractical. No other object in the showcase should raise the same kind of attention but at the same time the other objects should not appear too normal (Figure 7.7). One important difference to the imaginary film is that the other things the mountaineer in this story puts into his backpack are of no further importance, at large they would signify ‘equipment’, but for the exhibition every single object is selected with care and for a particular reason. Therefore it seems to be more reasonable to underline the significance of the knitting needles by help of design. For instance, it could be placed, like the sewing kit in the actual exhibition, in an immersion



of contrasting colour (Figure 7.8). Anyway, also in this thought experiment it seems to be difficult to place plants in the same precise way as in classical Hollywood films.

## **Turning points**

Even though turning points are mentioned in some manuals in the context of tension and anticipation (e.g. Dancyger 2002, 7; Field 1994, 122), implementing them is not explicitly described by their authors as a dramaturgic device for creating suspense. Anyway, turning points are an underresearched topic in literary and cultural studies in general, as Ansgar Nünning and Kai Marcel Sicks state in their book dedicated to ‘those points or decisive moments at which a very significant change occurs’ (Nünning and Sicks 2012, 3). The analysis of the exhibitions however revealed their significance in respect to communicating important meanings of the narratives and raised the question if highlighting them may support suspense.

In order to answer this question, Eder’s definition of turning points (introduced by Syd Field (1994, 114-5) as ‘plot points’), is especially useful. He writes:

1. A “plot point” is an event (or a set of events) within the plot in which the protagonist achieves or misses a subgoal and subsequently contemplates a new subgoal on the way to the solution of the central problem.
2. This event provides viewers with an answer to a second-order macro question (i.e. one which is less global than the central question of the film) and, at the same time, poses a new question. (Eder 2007, 86)

This description makes clear how closely this dramaturgic element is connected in popular films again with the protagonists. It also becomes clear why turning points indeed hold

the potential to provoke suspense: because they raise questions, the answers to which the audience is eager to learn.

Usually, two turning points can be detected for a classical Hollywood film. The first is situated at the end of act one, the second one at the end of act two (Field 1994, 115). In *Chinatown* (1974) the appearance of the real Evelyn Mulwray can be defined as the first turning point, leading to Gittes' want to find out who is responsible for the intrigue. At the end of act two, as the analysis has shown, he has understood the crime around the water distribution and knows which role Cross played in this context. But when he learns from Evelyn that Cross is her father *and* the father of her daughter, which marks the second turning point, his want changes into protecting her from Cross (Figure 5.4).

### *Sawn*

Even though *Sawn*, arranged in the way proposed in the thought experiment, would have been not divided into three acts, it seems possible to situate a kind of turning point at the end of every section, closely connected to the experts' wants. The first section *Laboratory* would be based on the question pursued by the conservator how old the boards are. The answer, that they can be dated back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and some to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, could be understood as a point causing the next question if they were used indeed as backdrops in this time period, and so on. These points would mark a change in action (the conservator carrying out dendrochronological research, the historian analysing sources, the engineer investigating the structure of the monastery school building etc.) and would at the same time express important insights. This holds the potential to evoke questions on side of the audience and to support their wish to learn more about the meaning of the central objects.

## *Mountains*

Introducing in *Mountains* a fictitious mountaineer as the story's protagonist could lead to structuring the exhibition narrative indeed into three acts. The first act could show the mountaineer preparing a hike, still struggling with his fears and doubts. Dealing with the experiences of other mountaineers, he could be finally inspired by meeting one of them describing enthusiastically a mountain tour (the first turning point) to put his wish into practice. The second act could consist of climbing a mountain, ending on a sour note, standing totally exhausted at the peak, not being able to enjoy this experience (the second turning point), promising himself never again to take this risk. These turning points would, following the classical Hollywood scheme, be closely connected to the hero and whereas the first one would define his want as 'climbing a mountain', the second one would change this into 'somehow descending this mountain to feel safe again'. These developments would reflect the exhibition's theme – the ambivalent nature of the mysterious passion mountaineering – well. As a matter of fact, the actual exhibition is arranged in a linear order which would support a division into three acts.

## *Passions*

Actually, the real version of *Passions* is in fact divided into three acts and one section is explicitly named 'turning point'. The analysis showed however that this structure does not truly reflect a course of events in which the protagonists' want is modified. The section 'turning point', introducing diverse techniques and institutions which have been used through history in order to tame passions, can be understood again more as enhancing the theme 'passion's nature' as advancing the plot.

### *Significance*

The exhibition analyses revealed that changes having occurred in history seem to be significant for communicating the essence of the exhibition narratives. In case of *Sawn* for instance, learning that the limited imagery of set decorations which had been developed during the Renaissance was enhanced during the Baroque by new motifs, was crucial for being able to assign the boards to this later time period because some of the boards show exactly this kind of new motifs. For understanding the exhibition narrative of *Mountains* it seemed especially important to recognise the Romantic era as the time period in which those ideas and concepts were shaped which define mountains and their peaks as places of longing and goals of concrete expeditions and which influence mountaineering till today decisively. Of course, it would be more exact in these cases to speak of transitions instead of points. Some turning points described in the exhibitions however relate actually to specific dates, like the tragedy on the Matterhorn on 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1865 which caused a debate about the dangers of mountaineering. Importantly, following the argumentation of Hayden White, these events situated on the fabula level can also be understood as being ‘plotted’ because historical time periods or turning points are defined always in retrospect and are constructs (Nünning 2012, 33-4).

### *Constructive character*

Interestingly enough, as argued in the last chapter, important developments and changes are narrated rather casually in the actual exhibitions. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that the exhibition makers, aware of the constructive character of such historical narratives, want to avoid to impose their interpretations on the visitors. Instead, their research results are presented more like an offer. This is expressed explicitly in the companion volume of

*Mountains* where one of the exhibition makers, Gottfried Fliedl, writes<sup>68</sup>:

We wanted to convey neither message, nor (individual) interpretation, nor a history of alpine triumphs, nor one of male pathology. (...) Visitors and viewers should be free to draw whatever conclusions they see fit and to deal with the material presented in whatever way they choose. (Fliedl 2010, 16)

The research results underlining the important role turning points can play for fostering a narrative's relevance, are supported by Nünning's examination of the concept of turning points in the framework of narratology. He writes:

Since the qualification of an event or episode as a "turning point" implies that it is assumed to be significant and eventful (...), it suggests that the story is highly worthy of being reported and that it deserves a great deal of interest from the listener or reader. (...) When a narrator announces, in a metanarrative comment, that he is about to narrate a, or even the, turning point in his or her life, he thus raises the reader's expectations, generating interest as well as suspense. (Nünning 2012, 47).

Nünning finds a 'strong correlation between turning points and a high degree of tellability' (ibid.) and concludes that 'the construction of turning points is one of the most important sense-making, and self-making, strategies that narrators have at their disposal' (ibid., 50).

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<sup>68</sup> For once, the analysis includes the explicit intentions of the exhibitions' makers.

## Discussion

Exploring the nature of classical Hollywood films precisely and going through a potential application of single suspense techniques suggests that it does not seem impossible to create theoretically an exhibition which focuses exclusively on one protagonist to whom a distinct want is allocated which is communicated clearly and passionately and which is connected closely to a central dramatic question. In such a way contents could be nonetheless imparted and a theme displayed. It seems, worded with the utmost caution, possible to align in this individual case all curatorial decisions with this central one, thus to select, for instance, all objects in order to tell this single storyline, to reduce the scale of the exhibition in order to ensure that all information can be gathered by the visitors and to fix a definite, linear, order.

### *Cognitive schemes*

But in order to decipher such an exhibition and to make it possible that the dramaturgic effects can unfold, it would be necessary to change the cognitive schemes internalised by the visitors so that they would comprehend that they should perceive the exhibition like a popular film. It is questionable if this could work in practice because most media users have incorporated these schemata automatically and unconsciously with which they decode classical Hollywood films. This implicit knowledge ought to be made explicit so that it could be applied also to exhibitions or it ought to be adjusted step by step while visiting such exhibitions repeatedly.

Especially the perception of objects ought to be changed, in the sense that the visitors should view them guided by the goal to find out which distinct message they are meant to communicate in the context of the narrative, with which precise intention the curator has therefore deployed them. The question rises not only if such a decoding of the objects and

meanings would be possible at all for visitors used to perceive museum objects mainly as triggers for manifold connotations but also how entertaining this would be.

### *Moving visitors*

Furthermore, the visitors – unlike film viewers – would still have to move through the space, and it has still to be explored how this fact alone, for instance the awareness of one's own body (see Leahy 2012), influences the perception process. In addition, there are diverse other elements making up a popular film which have not been considered in this thesis because they are not related primarily with suspense but which however intertwine with the techniques explored. For instance, the construction of the central dramatic question or the introduction of the first turning point can be understood and take its full effect only when the protagonist and his or her world have been introduced carefully during the first act. Even though this might not be so exciting, the film viewers sit this, in the strict sense of the word, usually out, whereas museum visitors could skip such a section easily. How all narrative features in such an exhibition might actually work together in order to produce similar suspenseful effects as in classical Hollywood films must therefore remain open eventually and ought to be put to the test in practice.

However, even though the creation of such a specific suspenseful exhibition based on the model of classical Hollywood films – despite all doubts and restrictions and still open questions – does not seem impossible, even more important is the question how far the dramaturgic devices carved out could be applied to common exhibitions.

### *Struggle*

The analyses have shown that the described dramaturgic devices were applied in the selected exhibitions if at all only rudimentarily. The thought experiment demonstrated that it seems possible to enhance those approaches by defining and outlining for example the



protagonists and the central questions connected to them more clearly or by arranging the sections in a different order. But at the same time it became also clear that these approaches must remain finally exactly this: approaches. While writing this chapter it was as if with every movement towards suspense a counterforce came into operation which emphasised the fact that the exhibition medium is flexible up to a certain point, at which however it starts to struggle against such a restrictive and orderly narrating. A consequent and precise storytelling as it is typical for classical Hollywood films, seems to be out of reach in this form for exhibitions.

### *No strict linearity*

First, it is in most cases difficult to communicate the events in an exhibition due to their three-dimensional nature in a strict linear order. Thomas Thiemeyer explains in *Simultane Narration – Erzählen im Museum* [*Simultaneous Narration: Narrating in the Museum*] (2013):

Exhibitions are first and foremost simultaneous phenomena because they impart their themes as (space) image and offer different objects and stagings at the same time. They are less able to control the perception of the recipients, also because the temporal succession of their visual impression is hard to calculate. (Thiemeyer 2013, 482)

### *Multitude of storylines*

Additionally, because of the complexity and multitude of the presented storylines typical for exhibitions representing cultural phenomena throughout history, the events belonging to the different storylines intermingle. Threads introduced become thus porous or fray and even if they are revived elsewhere, it is a challenge for the visitors to see the connections. All sorts of texts, media as well as conceptual-narrative devices, as Hanak-Lettner argues,

add to this ‘polyphonic narrative structure’ (2011, 125). For creating dramatic suspense, too many gaps are thus created so that they are not conceived any more as provoking questions but more as spaces for own associations. Second, the polysemous nature of objects is likewise responsible for this rebellious nature of exhibition narratives. Even though texts or design means might help to contain their meanings, the chances remain high that they are interpreted by the visitors other than intended by the exhibition makers (Falk 2007, 4-6). This fragmentary character of cultural historical exhibitions is not least due to the fact that historical objects were passed down only selectively and that past worlds can be represented by objects therefore only in fragments (Korff 2002, 143; Knell 2007, 25-6; Buschmann 2010, 162; Thiemeyer 2013, 480).

#### *Sensory character – and gaps*

But more than that: would such a narrowing down of possible meanings not necessarily reduce the exhibition medium’s power to create ‘dream spaces’ (Kavanagh 2000)? Precisely its indeterminacy and sensory character is viewed in the museum field often as one of its strongest qualities. This can cause reservations about, as Thiemeyer (2013, 483) classifies them, such ‘narrative exhibition strategies’ aiming at linearity, causality, teleology and closure. He states: ‘Museums as sensory media open spaces of connotations and experiences because their objects contain an emotional (auratic) surplus that cannot be conceptualised but only perceived’ (ibid., 481). Sandra H. Dudley takes a stance against the manner in which objects merely feature as ‘grammatical marks punctuating a story being told, rather than as powerful items in their own right’ (Dudley 2012, 3). She explains that ‘the physicality of the object itself can (...) trigger personal, emotional and sensory responses that may have a significance of their own as well as in enhancing subsequent understanding’ (ibid.). Nicola Lepp criticises in *Diesseits der Narration. Ausstellen im Zwischenraum* [*On this Side of Narration: Exhibiting in the Space between*] (2012)

the focus of exhibition theory and practice ‘on narration as a language and text-based dramaturgic mode’ (Lepp 2014, 110) because this would mean to accept the priority given in modern age to world appropriation by concepts instead of things and senses (ibid., 111). She considers the objects’ presence as equally important because ‘An exhibition is no open book that can be experienced only through reading, but operates always on the double layer of hermeneutics and sensory-spatial experience’ (ibid., 112-3). Even if combined with texts, she continues, there remains a gap between abstract concepts and material objects which is, as she argues, ‘no deficit which we as curators ought to eliminate by suggesting that we could make the things talk’ (ibid., 113; see Söderqvist and Bencard 2010). Annabell Fraser and Hannah Coulson who explore the potential of incomplete stories to enrich museum visitors’ experience, state likewise:

In the museum, there is a space between an image or object and its label, between a narrator and their audience, and between history and our imagination. Though we cannot see it, this space is a key player in the way we construct museum narratives. This space, ripe with possibility, often contains the essence of what we are looking at and can be where the most exciting things are happening. (Fraser and Coulson 2012, 223)

Even though ‘narrative exhibition strategies’ explored in this thesis imply the danger to neglect or even to damage the sensory effect of objects and poetic quality of scenography, and even though they even may lead to communicate contents in an authoritative, restrictive and manipulative way (Thiemeyer 2013, 485), carefully balanced they still hold the potential to inspire and inform the audiences.

## Conclusion

During all attempts to create, at least hypothetically, suspense in exhibitions, there remains a major difference between them and popular films, caused by the characteristics described, often appreciated in museum theory and therefore reinforced in practice. Albeit viewers of popular films are not aware permanently of the central dramatic question, it is present in the background the whole time, so that it is possible for them to dock to it any time, and its answer forms the focal point everything is directed towards. This is not the case for exhibitions. Even though in the best case all parts are likewise connected to the central thematic question, the attention of the museum audience is not pulled by the end; teleology is no core narrateme for cultural historical exhibitions. Spoilers cannot ruin a museum visit. There is not the one dramatic question the visitors urgently want to learn the answer for but many small thematic ones which are not necessarily answered unambiguously and sometimes even not answered at all. Whereas popular films are closed narratives, cultural historical exhibitions are open ones (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 234). Closure, so characteristic for popular films, is no narrateme typical for exhibitions.

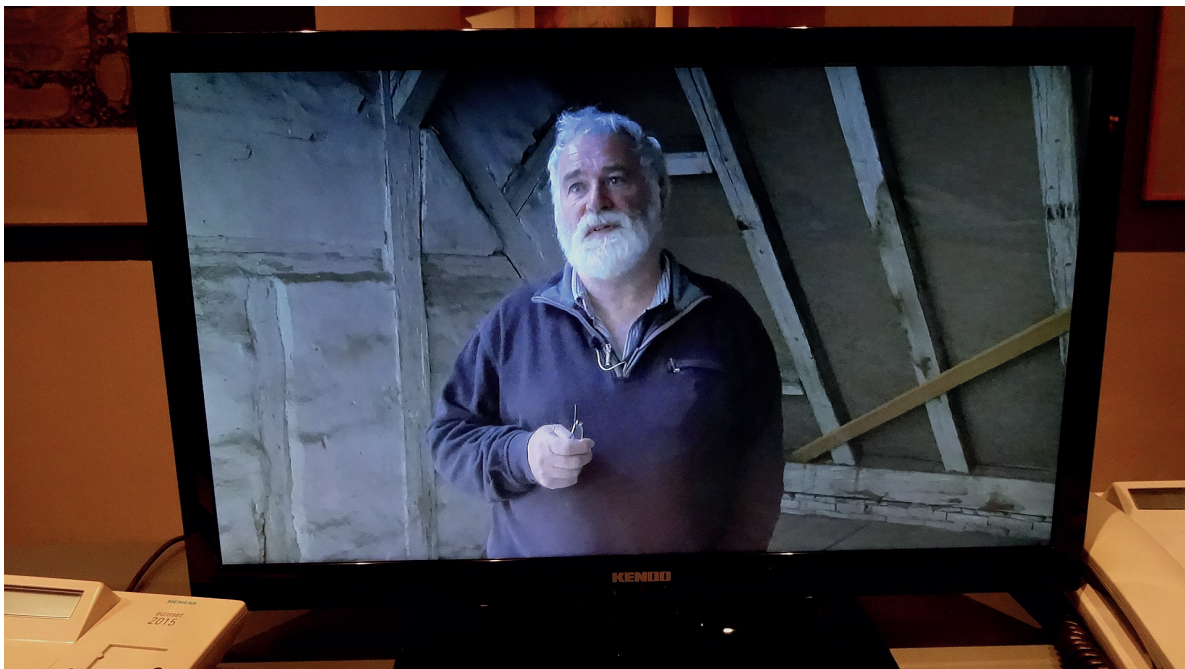
All the findings, taken together with the results from the literature research, suggest that it is very difficult to create suspense as fundamental element in cultural historical exhibitions in the way it is used in classical Hollywood films. But at the same time it still seems possible and promising to introduce exciting moments and suspense elements in order to increase exhibitions' attractiveness. For exploring this further, the next chapter discusses hybrids of open and closed narratives, drawing on the analyses of dramaturge Dagmar Benke (2002) who compares popular with unconventional films.

## Thought experiment

**Figure 7.1** *Sawn.* Table with a typical investigator's insignias.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 7.2** *Sawn.* Interview with the engineer (holding a pair of glasses).  
Photograph by author.





**Figure 7.3** *Sawn. S03 Laboratory.*  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 7.4** *Sawn. The Sepulchre panels show human figures.*  
Photograph by author.

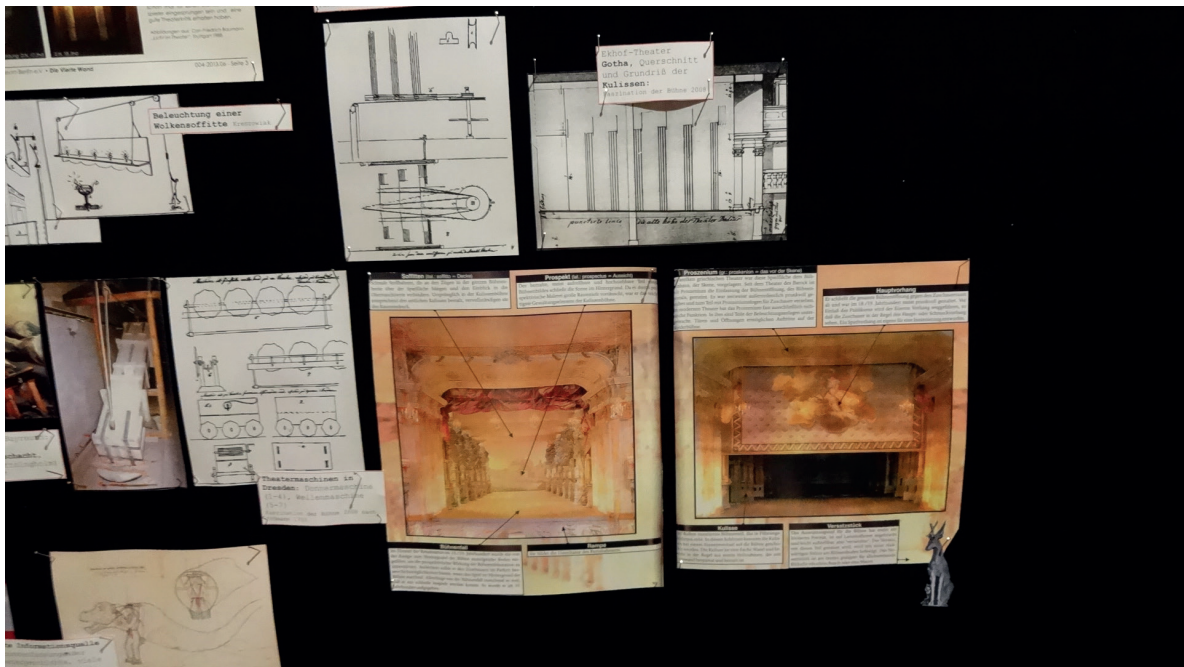




**Figure 7.5** *Sawn.* Baroque performance practice is explained in S09. Photograph by author.



**Figure 7.6** *Sawn.* Detail of pinboard in S09 *Baroque performance practice*. Photograph by author.





**Figure 7.7** *Mountains.* Showcase with hiking equipment.  
Photograph by author.



**Figure 7.8** *Mountains.* Sewing kit.  
Photograph by author.



## 8. Epic Suspense: Fragments and Balance

### Introduction

The analyses combined with the thought experiment have shown that the crucial difference between classical Hollywood films and cultural historical exhibitions concerning suspense is that whereas the films are shaped strongly by teleology and closure, this is not the case for the exhibitions. Instead of testing hypotheses in order to wonder how the central dramatic question will be answered finally and if the protagonist will fail or succeed, museum visitors puzzle usually about single exhibits or sequences, linked however by one topic. Films are first and foremost characterised by time, exhibitions by space.

Moreover, and closely related to this, the results suggested that suspense can be provoked only rudimentarily and selectively in exhibitions because of their polyphonic, more or less non-linear structure, the autonomous movement of the visitors and the polysemous character of objects which all together makes it difficult to create a stringent storyline and a continuous arc of suspense. But this ambiguous and fragmentary nature which makes the creation of suspense challenging is not only due to these features which are a mark of exhibitions compared with popular films, but to a high degree also to the functions ascribed to them based on preferences and values in contemporary exhibition making. This aspect will become important in this chapter.

All this taken together, identifies classical Hollywood films as a paramount example for *dramatic* narratives. By contrast, the results indicate the *epic* nature of cultural historical exhibitions (see Hanak-Lettner 2011). Comprehending exhibitions as epic makes it possible to describe their master schema and to gain a deeper understanding of how the phenomenon

of suspense takes or does not take its effect in combination with other typical features of this narrative form.

Therefore it seems promising to examine how the analysed suspense techniques are employed in films which differ from the typical schemes of classical Hollywood films and which resemble instead the epic character of exhibitions. Instead of asking ‘If and how *dramaturgic* techniques used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense can be applied to cultural historical exhibitions?’, the research question will be modified for this chapter to ‘If and how *dramatic* techniques used in classical Hollywood films to create suspense can be applied to *mainly epic* cultural historical exhibitions?’

More specifically, the chapter addresses the following questions: Can suspense have its effect in narratives without a stringent main storyline? How could a combination of dramatic and epic narratives look like concerning suspense? Do epic or non-classical films include a different concept of suspense? And which other dramaturgic techniques are used by their authors in order to arouse interest and curiosity and to create fascination?

For exploring these questions, this chapter turns to dramaturge Dagmar Benke’s guide *Freistil [Freestyle]* (2002) which is one of the rare scriptwriting manuals addressing non-classical or, to use her term, unconventional<sup>69</sup> films whose authors combine dramatic and epic devices. Because of the diverse meanings of *epic*, it is necessary first to define the term briefly.

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<sup>69</sup> Pramaggiore and Wallis call them ‘independent films’ and distinguish them from ‘avant-garde films’ which explore technological and artistic capabilities of the medium, usually without telling a story (2006, 246-8).

## Definition of epic

### *Epic, lyric, drama*

The term is used firstly to differentiate epic from the other two literary genres drama and lyric. In classical narratology drama and lyric were not considered as narrative genres at all because, usually, the narrating voice is absent (Hühn and Sommer 2013). Whereas in epic texts, like for instance the novel, the actions are mediated by a narrator (not to confuse with the author), in drama, meaning theatre plays, the happenings are shown unmediated, presented directly by actors on a stage. The difference can be summarised as *Telling* versus *Showing*. This is the reason why *epic* is used commonly synonymously to *narrative*.

However, narrative strategies are also used in drama, mainly for transmitting information (Nünning and Sommer 2011, 218). And in lyric there exists for example the epos, a long poem telling of a hero's deeds. By acknowledging that the line between the single genres becomes often blurred and by not considering the existence of an obvious mediating agent as indispensable factor for defining a text as narrative at all but rather as defining its degree of narrativity (Hühn and Sommer 2013, paragraph 3), postclassical narratology addresses increasingly the functions and applications of dramatic or epic strategies instead of keeping to strict categories.

### *Epic theatre*

Secondly, epic designates the specific theatrical approach, unified, developed and made popular by Bertolt Brecht. Decisive for the choice of the narrative techniques typical for Epic Theatre is that they should create an 'alienation effect' [Verfremdungseffekt] and enable the visitors to view the happenings on stage with a certain distance, allowing them to develop their own, critical opinion. For this purpose, happenings are for instance not shown directly on stage but reported by an actor or scenes are introduced by projected titles

(Steinweg 1995, 40). The use of such techniques makes the process of narration visible and indicates that all drama's events are narrated and not actually taking place, even in case the narrator is not visible. Martin Esslin concludes that 'the "epic" theatre is strictly *historical*; it constantly reminds the audience that it is merely getting a *report* of past events' (Esslin 1984, 115). Brecht himself designates his theatre form as non-Aristotelian. The Aristotelian form, also termed classical or dramatic, corresponds, despite some few differences, with the structure of popular films (Eick 2006, 38-9, 41).

### *Artistic method*

Alexander Weber aims in his study *Episierung im Drama. Ein Beitrag zur transgenerischen Narratologie* [*Episation in Drama: A Contribution to Transgeneric Narratology*] (2017) at a revision of the theory of episation because, as he explains, this had been an underresearched field due to the strict separation between dramatic theory and narratology (Weber 2017, 5). He delivers himself from an understanding of epic à la Brecht and develops a comprehension of the epic first and foremost as an artistic method which can be applied to any text genre. He writes: 'I assume that its application is not linked per se with a socio-critical and ideological impetus such as is found in Brecht's plays or in naturalistic dramas ...' (ibid., 12). I principally agree with Weber and employ epic to designate specific dramaturgic strategies, too. Because of the research subject, suspense, for which the question of immersion and thus of closeness and distance is key, these strategies have to be discussed however in case of exhibitions related to their makers' agenda.

If a text is characterised mainly by an application of epic devices, I will call it *epic*.<sup>70</sup> If dramatic features prevail, I will speak of *dramatic* narratives or films.

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<sup>70</sup> 'Epic film' is consequently not used in the common sense as historical film (in German: Monumentalfilm).

## Characteristics of epic narratives

Before analysing five unconventional films whose authors combine dramatic and epic devices, Benke (2002, 23) sets out to characterise epic narratives which cannot be categorised simply by a set of rules. Nevertheless it is possible to filter out some central features which will be summarised here.

### *Presence of the narrator*

In contrast to dramatic narratives where the narrator is by and large invisible and where the story seems to be formed by the acting persons themselves, in epic narratives the narrator's presence is notable (ibid., 28):

[The narrator] is able to shape the story at will, reporting details he considers to be important, withholding others, even commenting on the events. He is able to move through space and time at leisure and sometimes he even intervenes in the story (ibid., 29)

### *No active protagonists*

A second important difference is that instead of a protagonist driven by a specific want, the main characters in epic films do not have to be active, as Benke states. They can have no objective or more than one, and they do not have to move the plot forward, but are often moved by the plot (ibid., 32). Unconventional films focus often on describing a 'condition, a life situation, a sense of life' (ibid.). This is important concerning suspense, as Benke argues:

The viewer is not fraught with tension anticipating the end of the story. Instead, the suspense, *the viewer's interest*, results from the presentation of the events. Or, to put



it differently: in a dramatic film, the way is defined by the goal, whereas, in an epic film, the way is the goal. (ibid., 33; emphasis added)

#### *No causality*

Crucial for dramatic films is that at the end of the film the main characters have solved their problem by their decisions and actions or have at least had a chance to do so (ibid., 34).

Epic heroes or heroines however are not in control of their own destiny, and events are not by all means causally linked with each other, this is another characteristic Benke describes for epic films. The protagonists' decisions are not made inevitably but for reasons not really comprehensible for the viewers. 'Things happen – just like that' (ibid., 36). Including chance, strictly refused in dramatic narratives, is another characteristic element of epic films. Benke concludes: 'Chance dissolves the common thread of inevitability: it enables viewers to notice the intervention of the narrator and thwarts their empathy' (ibid., 36).

#### *No empathy*

This attitude towards empathy is, according to Benke, perhaps the most important difference between dramatic and epic narratives (ibid., 36-7). She refers to Brecht's objective not to kidnap the viewers into a world full of illusions but instead to introduce them to a real world, with an open mind (ibid., 38).

#### *Epic broadness*

The last feature Benke states for epic films is epic broadness. Whereas dramatic films are characterised by a dominant, clearly defined main storyline with subordinated subplots, epic films include a variety of equal storylines, either positioned side by side or following each other (ibid., 42; see Krützen 2010). For instance, the subplot in *Chinatown* (1974),



besides the water scandal as main plot, is Evelyn's planned escape with her daughter from her father.

It becomes obvious that in epic films, all parameters are missing which have been worked out so far as qualifications for the creation of suspense. If it is not possible to empathise with the protagonists, the audience neither feel fear nor hope. If the viewers do not have the feeling to witness the hero's or heroine's emotional journey immediately, but if a distance is created by a noticeable narrator, suspense is prevented. If the protagonist's decisions are not comprehensible, the viewers are not able to hypothesise about the further course of events. And if there is not only one main storyline but many equal ones, the challenge to manage all information and to keep in mind for instance plants and to connect their payoffs correctly, is unlikely greater.

#### *Epic character of exhibitions*

It is of paramount importance that Benke's description of epic narratives reads indeed like a description of cultural historical exhibitions. Usually, they include a variety of storylines, presented with epic broadness, and tell the story of real human beings struggling more than mastering the uncertainties of life. Moreover, museum visitors are invited to observe and learn about the characters' destinies and decisions instead of feeling with them. Even though the stories of individuals are presented (one thinks of the mountaineers in *Mountains*), they are important as representatives of certain social groups or currents. Perhaps one of the most important aims of cultural historical exhibitions is to portray and to explain social circumstances and developments and not to stop at the individual. Instead of moving through the story, looking at history is the position intended for the audience. To create the distance necessary for such an observant attitude, is the function unifying all epic dramaturgic devices.

### *'Dramatic-epic hybrids'*

As stated in the literature review in the Introduction, Werner Hanak-Lettner is the only other scholar turning explicitly to suspense in the exhibition medium and interestingly enough he describes exhibitions as epic, too, precisely as epic drama. Whereas the first half of his study is dedicated to a historical comparison of exhibition and theatre reaching back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the second part examines similarities of both media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turning explicitly to Brechtian Epic Theatre. Drawing on Brecht's and Aristotle's dramatic theories, Hanak-Lettner characterises exhibitions as 'dramatic-epic hybrids' (2011, 110). Dramatic because a plot unfolds through the visitors moving through the exhibition space which he considers as 'stage' (ibid., 162). Epic because of the frame in which the exhibition's dramaturgy unfolds for which texts play a major role, creating a distance between visitors and the events (ibid., 11, 112, 229). Other features Hanak-Lettner classifies as epic are exhibitions' missing teleology (ibid., 119) and closure (ibid., 113), their polyphonic narrative structure (ibid., 17) and that their plots resemble a collage (ibid., 117). All these features contribute to or express the fragmentary nature of cultural historical exhibitions.

## **The fragmentary character of epic narratives**

### *Closed narratives*

The specific fragmentary character of epic narratives which is of outstanding importance for cultural historical exhibitions and the exploration of suspense, shows fully while Benke analyses the selected films. Authors of popular films, as explained, put a lot of effort into creating coherent and meaningful stories characterised by unity. Every event presented is motivated. Manuals even offer tricks how to 'plug holes' (e.g. McKee 2007, 398-401).

And although scriptwriters and viewers know theoretically that the protagonist have had and will have a life before the film starts and after it ends, even this before and after would fit in perfectly and without contradiction into the self-contained plot. Ideally, every scene mirrors the whole story and their arcs of suspense are determined by the overarching one, all defined by the main dramatic question. All events are logically linked with each other. Exactly these are the reasons why such narratives are called ‘closed’. Literary scholar and dramaturg Volker Klotz who established with his volume *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama* [*Closed and open form in drama*] (1960) the conceptual pair, writes:

Dramatic works with closed structures seek to convey *intellectual totality*. In order to achieve this effectively, the empirical and factual must be largely subdued. Integrity, unity, and the fixed nature of its components characterise the plot, which presents an extract of something that is pragmatically, temporally, and spatially bigger and more complex. This partial aspect of its nature is, however, erased in many ways, so that it is precisely restriction and dissociation which turn a dramatic work into a unified, closed whole. (Klotz 1960, 228; emphasis added)

### *Open narratives*

Authors of open narratives however aim at ‘empirical totality’ (ibid., 230) and intend to portray (historical) reality, being aware – and this is the crucial point – at the same time of the impossibility to depict it in all its variety. This finds its expression in a structural openness which, as Manfred Pfister writes,

consists in the fact that the story is no longer presented as a closed, hierarchically arranged whole, but as an ensemble of individual sequences that are relatively autonomous and isolated from one another. The individual sequences are no longer

woven together, nor do the various actions and events interfere or overlap (...) and as a result the sequences appear to be relatively independent. (Pfister 1993, 243)

Again, it should be noted that the characterisation of the epic or open form reads like a description of cultural historical exhibitions. Hanak-Lettner, too, describes exhibitions as open, reasoning this again with the visitors' role. He writes: 'Exhibitions are not closed dramas. They are wide open. Visitors introduce the time factor into the exhibition space and, as seekers, drive the plot forwards. Exhibitions – and, therefore, museums – are thus places of open outcomes' (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 234). Importantly, he continues: 'If we accept this fact as an opportunity, nothing will prevent these places from generating significant meaning in a critical and experimental way' (ibid.).

#### *Intention of curators*

Indeed, the open and fragmentary character inherent in the exhibition medium is appreciated in contemporary museum theory and therefore reinforced in practice in order to inspire audiences to think critically. This is one important objective ascribed commonly to exhibitions today. Daniel Tyradellis for instance underlines in *Müde Museen. Oder: Wie Ausstellungen unser Denken verändern können* [*Tired Museums, or How Exhibitions Can Change our Thinking*] that the crucial function of exhibitions should be to question 'evidentness' (2014, 136) and Brigitte Kaiser calls museum exhibitions 'places of experiences of difference and reflection' (2006, 376). Their task is, she writes, 'to ask questions deliberately, to break viewing patterns and also to initiate experiences of foreignness' (ibid.). To create incomplete, open-ended exhibition narratives and to stress objects' polysemous character, hence to introduce gaps in manifold forms is considered as means to achieve this goal (Korff 2002, 39; Witcomb 2003, 130; Scholze 2004, 271; Krasny 2009, 140-1; Fraser and Coulson 2012; Jannelli 2012, 354). How far this approach influences the creation of suspense will be discussed conclusively in the next chapter.

### *Connective function*

It is important to note that the openness of epic narratives makes it necessary (if not an absolute dissolution of the context of meaning is intended) to adapt a variety of devices in order to create coherence and to prevent that the ‘diverging event particles’ (Klotz 1960, 231) scatter. This is the reason why Benke examines during her analyses the dramatic devices used for the predominantly epic films especially for their connective function. This function however touches and overlaps with the function to create suspense. By connecting the single elements and especially the scenes with each other, the momentum and forward movement of the plot is intensified. As momentum was identified as an important parameter for the creation of suspense, the question has to be posed if suspense can be supported in epic narratives by introducing certain dramatic devices sustaining impetus.

The question can be asked however the other way round, accepting the difference between the two forms which Klotz characterises pointedly:

In dramatic works with closed structures, the conscious timeline of the whole obliterates the presence of the parts. In dramatic works with open structures, however, the timeline of the whole fades beneath the overwhelming presence of the moment. Scenes are no longer links in a chain forged through references to past and future. Instead, each scene is now autonomous. (Klotz 1960, 122)

Is it possible to experience suspense even though such a forward movement and chain is missing and the recipient dwells on the single moments? Following the understanding of suspense worked out so far, also in this case the information presented should be perceived as puzzle piece which contributes to answering a question which is felt as important.

Before scrutinising this comprehension of suspense in the next chapter, the next section asks, examining Benke's findings, how a combination of epic and dramatic devices could support the audiences in perceiving narratives attentively.

## **Combining epic and dramatic devices**

### *Lack of empathy*

The main characteristic of epic narratives, according to Benke, is the lack of empathy with the protagonists, so that viewers reflect about the protagonists' decisions. All epic devices in unconventional films support this goal: the introduction of not only one but many protagonists, several equally important storylines, a nonlinear narration or the intertwining of different time levels by using flashbacks or flashforwards (see Krützen 2010). All these dramaturgic tools cause breakings which interrupt the narrative flow and thereby prevent potentially the creation of suspense. Essential are therefore the dramaturgic or dramatic devices Benke identifies during her analyses which serve to reduce this distance and which support coherence and forward movement.

### *Dramaturgic techniques*

Actually, almost all devices (except dramatic irony) authors of popular films employ in order to produce suspense are identified by Benke for the selected unconventional films, too. As the analyses in Chapter 5 have shown, not all of these devices are used in every classical Hollywood film and if in different degrees, and this applies also to unconventional films. Benke (2002, 238) introduces with foreshadowing another dramaturgic device which is closely related with planting and payoff. It resembles Type III, described in Chapter 4, when a plant is not noticed consciously. Foreshadowing is likewise subtle, almost

subliminal but not provoked by an information or hint but an image or idea which is thematically related to the event happening later.

### *Goal-driven protagonists*

Most striking is that all of the films Benke analyses are structured by introducing goal-driven protagonists, too. *Short Cuts* (1993) is the only exception, but even if the 22 (!) protagonists are not driven by specific goals, the story is told alongside their problems and this produces a similar structure, as Benke demonstrates convincingly. Script writers Robert Altman and Frank Barhydt tie together the characters' threads of fate; conflicts arise, grow and are finally solved. In this way, in all analysed films arcs of suspense are created with climaxes and turning points. As suspense is not Benke's main concern, she does not explain in detail the difference between creating one main tension typical for popular films and introducing manifold arcs of suspense. She comments only generally:

Dramatic arcs that viewers will be able to follow with bated breath will arise from the goals and impart cohesion and structure to the film. This, however, means that the suspense (Will the character achieve their goals?), once initiated, cannot be lost in the undergrowth of the various characters and storylines. Instead, it must eventually be resolved. (Benke 2002, 211)

### *Planting and payoff*

Benke neither explains in detail how the other devices to create suspense like planting and payoff or foreshadowing are used precisely in her selected films. This could be clarified only by another analysis focussing on these aspects but this goes beyond the scope of this study. However, Benke's descriptions of how these tools are applied to the unconventional films, combined with the research results gained through analysing the three classical



Hollywood films provide nonetheless instructive insights into the possibilities and problems how to adapt dramatic devices also to cultural historical exhibitions.

Benke states that in *Short Cuts* (1993) both foreshadowing and planting and payoff are used in order to signal to the audience that it is worth waiting because something will happen (ibid., 238). For instance, a young girl who commits suicide at the end of the film, feigns death in a pool at the beginning (the plant); thus the drowned body of another woman appearing later is foreshadowed (ibid., 239). The death of a boy is also prefigured, in fact several times. ‘Both of the emotionally important deaths can, therefore, be anticipated far in advance. The drama does not come as a surprise. The viewer feels that a tragedy will occur and this, too, creates suspense and cohesion’ (ibid.). Benke declares also for *Memento* (2000) that script writer and director Christopher Nolan ‘purposefully uses dramatic devices (such as planting and payoff, foreshadowing and repetition) in order to continuously feed and enhance the viewer’s level of suspense’ (ibid., 284). Repetition is a dramatic device identified by Benke for several films, creating coherence (Wolf 2003, 187) and also potentially suspense. Benke describes one case: In *Before the Rain* (1994)<sup>71</sup> at two times a protagonist imagines the appearance of another protagonist in the rain (Benke 2002, 319). Also for this film Benke proves planting and payoff and foreshadowing.

#### *Alternatives to goal-driven protagonists*

For curating, Benke’s proposals how to create suspense in a narrative without goal-driven protagonists are especially interesting. One possibility is to shift the drama from the protagonist to secondary characters or to the society he or she is living in and to let him

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<sup>71</sup> Script: Milčo Mančevski

or her observe strange dramas, like in *Pelle the Conqueror* (1987)<sup>72</sup> or in *Forrest Gump* (1994)<sup>73</sup> (ibid., 140). In the last film the static, eponymic hero operates at the same time as catalyst for other characters (Benke 2002, 136). Another option is to introduce a first-person or omniscient narrator who introduces and ends the story and comments it (ibid., 140). This suggests for instance that writing exhibition texts from a first-person perspective may help to create suspense in a cultural historical exhibition which uses in large parts epic devices.

### *The right balance*

For authors who combine dramatic and epic narrative features it is crucial to find the right balance for the film in question (ibid., 42-3). Interestingly enough, Benke describes the theme, inspired by Frank Daniel, as one of the most important links between these areas. As cultural historical exhibitions usually focus on a thematic instead on a dramatic question, this aspect seems to be of outstanding importance for curating. She describes a film's theme as a kind of 'emotional leitmotif' (ibid., 43) which should always be linked to the characters' 'need', their unconscious yearning. It relates to universal human feelings like love, trust, responsibility, crime and punishment, etc. which appeal directly to the audience's emotions (ibid.). Even though the author may not have selected the theme consciously, his or her attitude towards it is always revealed, at least through the kind of ending chosen. 'Not every film has a theme', Benke writes, 'but a film with a theme not only has a structure; it also has a soul' (ibid., 44).

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<sup>72</sup> Script: Bille August, Per Olov Enquist, Bjarne Reuter

<sup>73</sup> Script: Eric Roth

## Conclusion

Benke's analyses support the findings of the analyses undertaken for this research project and the conclusions drawn from the thought experiment: even though it is difficult to create a continuous arc of suspense in cultural historical exhibitions, it should be possible to create micro suspense. This can be realised by connecting single issues with specific characters who not necessarily have to pursue a goal but should – as Benke's analysis of *Short Cuts* (1993) demonstrates – be equipped with a conflict. The unfolding and resolution of these conflicts could structure single storylines and arouse potentially the interest of the audiences who want to follow the micro stories till their ends. The construction and connection between the storylines can differ: it is possible to tell one episode after the other (like in *Before the Rain* (1994)) or to interlink the micro stories with each other (like in *Short Cuts* (1993)).

Furthermore, the techniques of planting and payoff and foreshadowing seem to be effective for supporting suspense also in a more general sense. Instead of triggering concrete questions and hypotheses, they make the viewers potentially curious to learn what will follow. How exactly such vaguer expectations can be supported by repetition only a further analysis could clarify. Benke underlines the importance of introducing universal themes for binding the audiences emotionally to the film, reducing thus the distance between story and recipient, a tool promising to explore further for curating as well.

To summarise: the techniques used to create dramatic suspense in classical Hollywood films can be applied, in modified forms, to unconventional films for unifying the narrative and for supporting the narrative flow. Because Benke speaks in this context of suspense, a revision of the understanding of suspense is necessary. So far suspense has been developed against the background of dramatic narratives like classical Hollywood films, now a

broadening and refinement considering also epic narratives seems useful. This is the task of the next chapter.

## 9. Suspense Revisited: Mild versus Wild

### Introduction

Two insights give cause for a critical revision of the understanding of suspense. On the one hand the observation that Dagmar Benke's description of the cognitive and affective effects caused by viewing unconventional films as vague (Benke 2002, 238) is congruent with the kind of emotions evoked and questions provoked while visiting and analysing the cultural historical exhibitions and partly even while viewing and exploring the classical Hollywood films. On the other hand the realisation how crucial it is that the *discourse force*, to use William F. Brewer and Edward H. Lichtenstein's term (1982, 477), of epic stories is less to entertain but mainly to inspire critical thinking. Both taken together indicate that authors of epic narratives, including curators, may not aim at producing full-scale suspense like authors of dramatic narratives, risking thus to evoke strong emotions clouding the recipients' minds. But as they are also interested in motivating recipients to proceed, it can be assumed that they intend to create a milder kind of suspense. This chapter outlines therefore the difference between and transition from interest to suspense and suggests conclusively to distinguish between *mild* and *wild* suspense. But first, the chapter recapitulates briefly why suspense was understood in the beginning of this research project exclusively as dramatic suspense.

### Dramatic suspense

Even though no conclusive definition was given so far in this thesis, the understanding of suspense as the recipients' hypotheses, accompanied by feelings of hope and fear, about

the achievement or non-achievement of a specific goal linked to protagonists has been operative. There are several reasons for this.

First, the focus on dramatic suspense within this research project reflects a similar emphasis in suspense research, described in the Introduction. This focus was supported by a bias on my, the researcher's side: to create thrilling stories à la Hollywood seemed to me to be a valuable source of inspiration for curating exhibitions which are still often experienced as unapproachable or boring (Bartlett and Kelly 2000; Tyradellis 2014; Drotner et al. 2017). It was reinforced by choosing cognitive film theory as theoretical background, classical Hollywood films as comparatum and scriptwriting manuals as source which centre also mainly on popular films. Consequently, David Bordwell's definition of suspense as 'anticipating and weighing the probabilities of future narrative events' (Bordwell 1985, 37), the close link to the protagonist's journey as well as the understanding of suspense mainly as highly emotional phenomenon was influential.

This tendency was supported furthermore by the deficit of research about suspense and epic narratives, explained also in the Introduction. For instance, it has been hardly explored if and how suspense can be created by introducing a passive protagonist or no protagonist at all – typical precisely for epic narratives.<sup>74</sup> This deficit mirrors that creating suspense is not a priority for authors of epic narratives, that some even intend to effect an alleviation of tension [Ent-spannung]. Moreover, how to create epic stories is neglected in scriptwriting literature because most manuals teach writing economically successful films. Further reasons for this neglect (see Benke 2002, 8; Dabala 2012, 17-8) are the fact that epic narratives are more complex and less schematic than popular films and therefore specific

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<sup>74</sup> Exceptions are e.g. Vorderer (1996) or Wuss (1996).

dramaturgic devices more difficult to classify and to describe and that writing epic or unconventional films is considered rather as art than a craft.

All this together suggested the absence or neglectable existence of dramaturgic suspense techniques in epic narratives. But bringing together Benke's observations with the research results gained through the film and exhibition analyses, fostered by a careful re-reading of the research literature from this angle, reveals that suspense devices are applied indeed also to epic narratives, but that they differ in their modes of operation and intensity of their effects (Irsigler et al. 2008b; Borgmeier and Wenzel 2001). Authors of epic narratives are also interested in motivating their audiences to continue their reception process. One only needs to look more precisely at how they achieve this aim, and a refined definition of suspense is necessary.

## **Epic suspense**

### *Unspecific questions and emotions*

The findings suggest that suspense arises not only connected to hypothesis testing and to feelings recognisable as hope and fear but also in relation to more unspecific kinds of questions and emotions. The analyses of the three classical Hollywood films revealed that often vague expectations emerged connected to the feeling that 'something is wrong'. Moreover, many questions were not guided by the main dramatic question but directed towards the actual events and could be summarised as 'And now?' In other words, film viewers seem not to be busy all the time with concrete questions and assumptions but moved by a feeling 'that it is worth waiting because something will happen' (Benke 2002, 238).



This observation is supported by Ed Tan's and Gijbert Ditegweg's research who explored, taking up doubts expressed in research literature about narrative comprehension, if film viewers really make predictive inferences while viewing the film. Their working definition of suspense follows Dolf Zillman's understanding (see Introduction) and includes a threat situation for the protagonist (Tan and Ditegweg 1996, 152). Tan and Ditegweg interviewed 15 test persons while watching a selected short film. They conclude that predictive inferences are indeed generated during suspense sequences but state also that some findings 'give rise to the surmise that more global expectations may be at work that are difficult to verbalize, even in response to the experimenters' fairly open prompt.' They continue: 'It sounds silly to report that "things are going to happen," a verbalization made by some subjects nonetheless. It may be that such an extremely vague expectation remains in the background due to lack of articulation' (ibid., 172-3). The fact that this phenomenon is only rarely taken into account, should not be interpreted therefore as evidence for the non-existence of such vague effects but can be read as difficulty to study them (Ackermann 2008, 35-6).

### *Suspense versus tension*

There are basic approaches to identify and comprehend non-dramatic kinds of suspense (e.g. Bonheim 2001). Literature which addresses explicitly non-popular texts distinguishes usually between (dramatic) suspense and tension, the latter meaning 'static forms of suspense' (Wenzel 2001, 22; Ackermann 2007, 102; Irsigler et al. 2008a, 9). One problem is a missing fixed terminology (Langer 2008, 16-7), Doris Wieser for instance speaks of 'diffuse suspense' (2007, 178), Eric S. Rabkin of 'subliminal suspense (1973); and originally all kinds of suspense (also tension and thrill) were termed in German with only one word: *Spannung* (Bonheim 2001, 3; Wenzel 2001, 22, 24).

Another problem is that these forms of suspense summarised under the term *tension* feature a wide diversity. Daniela Langer (2008, 31) provides a helpful attempt to systematise these

diverse forms. She differentiates mainly between two groups: one is characterised by an uncertainty of the reader how to classify and understand a text, caused by contradictory information,<sup>75</sup> the other by a tension caused by ‘structural ambiguities, conflicts and discrepancies in form of stylistic, semantic, syntactic, rhetorical or metric peculiarities of the text’ (Langer 2008, 31).<sup>76</sup>

This thesis does not adapt the term tension for non-dramatic suspense because instead of its static, its dynamic quality should be highlighted, expressing that it supports the readers’ wish to learn how a story unfolds too, even though not as strongly (Langer 2008, 18; Singer 2008, 144). Exactly this dynamic nature is what defines this kind as suspense at all and differentiates it from interest, a point to return to in the next section. ‘Epic’ should express its difference from dramatic suspense and underline that suspense plays an important role for epic narratives, too.

### *Mystery*

There is another difference to the approaches found in literature: whereas most authors (e.g. Wenzel 2001; Ackermann 2007; Wieser 2007) differentiate between tension on the one hand and suspense and mystery, both defined as plot-suspense, on the other hand, mystery is subsumed here under epic suspense. Interestingly enough, Langer asks if mystery could be considered a hybrid of suspense and tension because on the one hand it invites the reader to hope and fear with the detective or other characters, on the other hand the mystery itself challenges the reader intellectually (Langer 2008, 31). This cognitive activity triggered

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<sup>75</sup> See Cupchik (1996) or Ohler and Nieding (1996)

<sup>76</sup> See Fill (2007)

makes mystery especially interesting for epic narratives. Benke explains the function of mystery as follows:

The retrospective dissection of past events is fundamental to any elucidative activity, no matter whether murder, great misfortune, incest or reversed identities are involved. This also explains why crime plots are never part of the emotional genre. The structure of a crime story per se is aimed at the thinking viewer. He or she should follow the “dissecting” of what has already happened with analytical interest, rather than with deep emotional involvement. (Benke 2002, 167)

Mystery might cause a ‘pleasant glow of the experience of enlightenment’ (Zillmann 1991b, 295). As its precise effects and modes of operation have only been explored randomly (Ackermann 2005, 126), the question has to be left open at this point how mystery could be used in exhibitions, identified as epic, to provoke suspense.

#### *Subtle level*

For the same reason, the question can not be answered further at this point, how exactly non-dramatic suspense can be provoked. Benke’s suggestions how to apply modified dramatic suspense techniques remains still the most promising approach. Anyhow, suspense seems to be effective also at a more subtle level than considered before. Therewith the focus turns to the question how intensely suspense has to be felt in order to be still classified as suspense? At which point does suspense stop to be suspense and fades into interest? For exploring these questions, the next section addresses again which intentions authors of epic narratives, including curators, have.

## Suspense versus interest

### *No thrilled audience*

Bertolt Brecht got to the heart of the difference between dramatic and epic theatre concerning suspense with the wording that in the first case ‘Spannung auf den Ausgang’<sup>77</sup> is decisive whereas in the second ‘Spannung auf den Gang’<sup>78</sup> is the objective (Brecht 1982, 37). Nothing could be further from his mind than letting the audience be self-forgotten and thrilled because provoking them to *think* was his ambition (Esslin 1984, 114-5). His aim was to attract the attention of the spectators towards each single scene, emphasising the single elements by separating them distinctly from each other (Brecht 1982, 37). The before-mentioned projected titles used for this purpose, also serve to inform the audience about the subsequent events, causing an alleviation of tension (Jendreiek 1969, 85-6). ‘Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis’, Brecht writes, ‘is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up’ (Brecht 1982, 38). His ideal was the individual being relaxed enough to smoke a cigarette while watching (Jendreiek 1969, 69).

The function Brecht attributes to Epic Theatre resembles the function curators intend for modern exhibitions (Hanak-Lettner 2011, 121), as explained in the previous chapter. They also want to stimulate visitors to reflect and to question the exhibition narratives. This implies that they similarly want the visitors to focus not so strongly on the story’s progression but on the single exhibits, especially because the information given in cultural historical exhibitions is more complex than the events shown in classical Hollywood films or even in Brechtian plays. Instead of provoking suspense, curators are more interested

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<sup>77</sup> Eyes on the finish

<sup>78</sup> Eyes on the course

in arousing so called situational interest and curiosity meaning ‘motivational states that encourage a person to interact with the environment in order to acquire new information’ (Renninger et al. 1998, 13). Employing dramaturgic means which enable recipients to immerse into a story or exhibition and which propel them too strongly towards the end, are regarded in the museum field therefore with caution if not scepticism (e.g. Hanak-Lettner 2011, 233-4; Jannelli 2012, 354; see Habsburg-Lothringen 2015, 337-348). But as authors of epic literature don’t want their recipients to stop reading, curators don’t want their recipients to stop walking. For this purpose, dramaturgic means to support recipients to continue become essential for curators, too. Even Brecht was aware that a certain degree of entertainment is necessary for keeping audiences involved (Steinweg 1995, 42).

It goes beyond the scope of this study to describe the psychological state defined as interest in depth. Crucial is here only that being interested can be expressed by the question ‘What is that?’ while experiencing suspense can be expressed by ‘What comes next?’. Whereas the wish to learn more about *this* object is interest, the wish to learn more about the *next* object is suspense (see Bonheim 2001, 5).

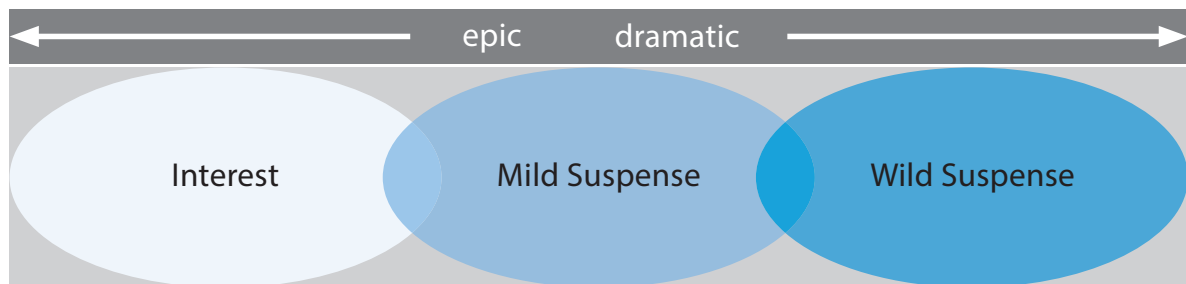
To summarise: it can be assumed that authors of epic narratives intend above all to raise interest in the events presented but that they also want to make the recipients eager to know what follows; but this suspense should not be too intensive in order not to attract the recipients’ attention too strong towards the subsequent events and distract it thereby from the moment.

#### *A milder kind of suspense*

Whereas the dramatic devices which have been described and analysed in detail can be used in order to provoke an intense suspense, they can also be applied, modified, for evoking a finer kind of suspense, as Benke demonstrates. There seem to be also dramaturgic

techniques (which are still to be qualified and explored) specific for epic narratives causing more subtle suspense effects and which are possibly of a more intellectual nature. The insight that cultural historical exhibitions can be understood as epic combined with the finding how difficult it is to introduce dramatic suspense techniques into the exhibition medium, makes the identification and research of suspense techniques used in other epic narratives all the more important and promising. In order to make this differentiation operable, a distinction between *mild* and *wild* suspense is proposed (Figure 9.1).<sup>79</sup>

**Figure 9.1** Mild and wild suspense



The transition between pure interest which does not motivate recipients to care about the story's progress or further exhibits and *mild* suspense is fluent, as well as the transition between *mild* and *wild* suspense.

<sup>79</sup> This conceptual pair was inspired by Bonheim who calls interest an 'even milder version' of suspense (2001, 6).

## Conclusion

The question which specific epic suspense techniques can be found in films and texts must be left unanswered, for the reasons given. Therefore it must remain open which of these devices are or might be applied to cultural historical exhibitions. The central research question focusing on the applicability of dramaturgic suspense devices used in popular films to the exhibition medium can be answered however. Benke's analyses proved that it is possible to introduce these (modified) dramatic techniques to mainly epic films in order to create suspense. The analyses performed for this research project together with the thought experiment indicate that such an use seems to be possible also in cultural historical exhibitions to a certain degree even if under difficult conditions due to the nature of the exhibition medium.

Whether such a combination proves effective, depends, as Benke explains, on the question if exactly the right balance between epic and dramatic elements for a specific project can be established. This 'rightness' is connected to the story's subject and the objective the creators try to achieve, i.e. whether they try to spark mainly critical reflection or emotional involvement (Benke 2002, 45). It is exactly a combination of the techniques which holds the potential to achieve both and which is in Benke's opinion the decisive criterion for successful unconventional films. She concludes: 'They raise emotions and appeal to the intellect. They are films for the heart and the brain' (ibid., 9). The findings of this research project will hopefully contribute to creating exactly this: unconventional exhibitions for the heart and the brain.



# Conclusions

## Introduction

The starting point for this research was an assumption that narrative suspense could be used as a powerful tool for strengthening exhibition visitors' eagerness to learn, contributing thus to an enjoyable museum experience. Classical Hollywood films were chosen as comparatum because they are able to excite broad and diverse audiences by telling entertaining stories, and because suspense plays a key role in them.

Specifically, this thesis investigates if dramaturgic techniques used by script writers in order to produce suspense in classical Hollywood films could be applied to cultural historical exhibitions. For this purpose, the films *All About Eve* (1950), *Chinatown* (1974) and *The Conversation* (1974) were compared with the exhibitions *Zersägt. Ein Krimi um barocke Theaterkulissen* [*Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops*] (Franziskanermuseum, Villingen-Schwenningen), *Berge, eine unverständliche Leidenschaft* [*Mountains, a Mysterious Passion*] (Alpenverein-Museum, Innsbruck) and *Die Leidenschaften. Ein Drama in fünf Akten* [*The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts*] (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden).

Drawing on semiotics and cognitive film theory, the films and exhibitions were considered as *dynamic texts*, exploring the textual features which potentially provoke the recipients to hypothesise about the progress and outcome of the story, accompanied by feelings of hope and fear. As such dramatic suspense is characterised in film studies literature (Bordwell 1985; Carroll 1988) and scriptwriting manuals (Howard and Mabley 1993; Gulino 2004; Cunningham 2008).

The findings suggest that whereas it is not possible to provoke a similar dramatic suspense as typical for popular films in exhibitions, it is possible to create the kind of suspense as can be found predominantly in epic narratives which resemble, with their complex and fragmentary master schema, the exhibition medium (see Hanak-Lettner 2011). The thesis proposed to call this kind of suspense *mild* in order to distinguish it from dramatic suspense for which the term *wild* is suggested. The results of this study indicate that the dramaturgic devices used for provoking dramatic suspense, like telegraphing, dangling causes and planting and payoff and establishing central dramatic questions closely linked to the protagonists, can also be applied, even though in modified forms, for creating mild suspense. And these devices are used for this purpose even in popular films. Additionally, drawing on a manual addressing unconventional films (Benke 2002), the introduction of an ‘emotional leitmotif’ seems a promising device for motivating museum visitors to continue the reception process as well as the use of foreshadowing.

The question how close or distanced recipients feel from the stories told emerged as key throughout the research project for creating or preventing and for intensifying or diminishing suspense. The more immersive a story world is (Herman 2002, 16-7), the more exciting it is potentially (Jabobs 2015, 149-150). At this point, the intentions of the film and exhibition makers, explicitly neglected at the outset of the research, came into focus. Since, for creating suspense it is decisive that whereas the authors of popular films intend to amuse their audiences, modern curators’ main objective is to inspire critical thinking (Schärer 2005; Witcomb 2013; Tyradellis 2014). To put it straight: whereas popular films are supposed to entertain, cultural historical exhibitions are supposed to enlighten. As one indirect objective of the research project was to explore the particularity of the exhibition medium’s narrativity further, it is important that here features inherent in the exhibition medium, especially its predominantly fragmentary nature (complicating suspense production), intermingle with value judgements of curators. To involve the audiences

emotionally too strongly and to focus their attention too much on a clearly defined plot, is considered as counterproductive for developing independent thoughts (e.g. Jannelli 2012, 354). Therefore, often techniques are applied which enhance the medium's open and fragmentary character.

This thesis offers through its findings an alternative to either creating exhibitions which dominate and manipulate their visitors by evoking emotions, particularly suspense, or ignoring emotions and specifically suspense's great potential to motivate audiences and to get them interested in the stories told. By exploring dramaturgic devices and their potential effects precisely and in as unbiased a way as possible, and by learning from authors and analysts of other narrative media, a careful application to exhibitions, finely balanced, can be achieved.

This final chapter specifies the above findings by reflecting on the research process. It then contextualises the results within suspense research, transmedial narratology and museum studies, opening them up for future possibilities – and possibilities how to narrate a suspenseful exhibition story.

## **Learning from Hollywood**

Film studies literature (Bordwell 1985) as well as scriptwriting manuals (Field 1994) demonstrate how closely the typical structure of classical Hollywood films is determined by introducing a protagonist who has a specific want and pursues a specific goal. Whether he or she is able to obtain this goal is the central dramatic question, and the uncertainty if it is answered in the negative or affirmative, creates the so-called main tension. This tool is the most powerful of the dramaturgic suspense techniques (Gulino 2004, 10-2) which could be identified. The other techniques are telegraphing, dangling causes and dramatic irony,

all of them serving a cataphoric function by pointing to later events and supporting thus the spectator's wish to learn how the story unfolds. Certain types of the technique planting and payoff serve the same function.

Dramatic suspense was described as an intense feeling, characterised by hope and fear, coupled to the cognitive activity of hypothesising (Bordwell 1985; Carroll 1988; Hiltunen 2002). This drew a picture of highly active viewers asking themselves continuously questions, weighing consciously the different possible answers.

By applying the method of first analysing the films' structure on basis of the sequence protocols, concentrating on the textual features, and then, in a second step, my responses based on the viewing protocols, a crucial difference could be made visible. Even though the analyses of the films showed that all three narratives were indeed structured by establishing and answering the central dramatic questions, they also revealed that this stayed on the sideline from the recipient's perspective, while watching the films. The wish to learn the resolution was effective in fact, but not constantly present. The findings, supported by the study of Ed Tan and Gijsbert Diteweg (1996), suggest that the viewers' attention is concentrated likewise on the micro questions even though all are connected (at best) to the central one and this in a very vague form (see Zillmann 1996). Besides developing concrete hypotheses, the general question seems to be as effective: what happens next?

This not only pointed to the possibility to build small suspense arcs by raising small questions which all together sustain the recipients' interest, probably even independently from a central dramatic question; an insight important for making exhibitions which usually have an episodic character. First and foremost it showed, and this turned out to be highly important for the research question, that while viewing popular films a vaguer form of suspense seems to be at work, too. It is difficult, however, to distinguish exactly between when a gap for instance is noticed consciously or subconsciously and to determine

how intense the wish to close the gap is. Here, further research including psychology and reception studies would be important.

The analyses further showed, that all other dramaturgic suspense techniques described in the literature, were employed in the three films, too, even though with varying frequency. Only when the research developed, did it become clear how important the finding was that these techniques were used in the films not only for creating dramatic suspense, thus for raising concrete questions the audiences desire to learn the answers for, but also for supporting the narrative flow and, in some cases, to unify the narrative. Only by including unconventional films into the research, it became apparent how closely these functions intertwine with creating mild suspense.

Another key insight gained from the film analyses was how important the protagonists are not only for structuring the narratives and for creating the main tension but also for weighting the events and communicating their relevance to the audience: their reactions filter the viewers' understanding. This was elucidated while analysing plants. In order to fulfil their narrative functions they must neither be seeded too obviously nor too indistinctly, and how plants are noticed, or not noticed, by the protagonists is key for the audience for being able to detect and decipher them.

Generally, the analyses revealed how effective the pleasure gained from accompanying the protagonists' journey is for keeping the viewers interested even though nothing extraordinarily happens. Watching other humans act whose needs we can relate to, turned out to be a very effective factor for sustaining interest in the story's progress. Interestingly, Dagmar Benke describes a film's theme as ideal means to bind the viewers emotionally to stories when it is linked to the characters' needs, their unconscious yearning (Benke 2002, 43). Reflecting universal human feelings, these themes can also serve as an 'emotional leitmotif' in films without goal-driven protagonists. To strengthen topics taken up in

exhibition narratives in this direction, raising not only interest but presenting issues the audiences truly care for, is promising (see Habsburg-Lothringen 2015). The analyses showed as well how closely all aspects of the films work together, be it for attributing relevance or for creating interest and suspense, this applies also for narrative and style (see Rabkin 1973).

The guiding questions for the analyses of the exhibitions were if the dramaturgic techniques had been used in the exhibitions in order to create dramatic suspense and if suspense or similar responses were actually experienced while visiting. In retrospect it can be stated how vital the intention was to stay nonetheless open for other means used possibly to create perhaps different kinds of interest, not yet explored. Taking the outstanding importance that protagonists have in popular films into account, the exhibitions were searched for similar agents. Did the narratives include protagonists like in classical Hollywood films, pursuing a specific goal and moving thus the plot forward?

In *Passions*, neither the visitors nor the passions themselves, even though explicitly designated as protagonists of this ‘drama’, truly fulfilled this role. Following the script communicated via the texts but also the selection and presentation of the objects, the central dramatic question could be interpreted as how the visitors would react the moment they were confronted in the exhibition with passions – would they try to defeat or accept them? But as the exhibition did most probably not succeed in triggering passions in the visitors, as the findings suggest, it never got to this confrontation. As reasons for this the analyses identified that the passions were present in this setting always mediated via symbols, metaphors and allegories expressed verbally or visually, never directly, and second that objects and design only indicated actions – like the passions ravaging –, not showing the happenings completely.

In *Sawn*, titled by its makers as crime, the visitors were explicitly invited to join the experts in their investigations around the exhibited painted boards. This suggested that visitors and experts were understood as protagonists, especially because the question for which purpose the boards had been created, was introduced at the exhibition's entrance as open. A close description of the line of argumentation unfolded throughout the itinerary, however, revealed that even though the experts can till today not answer the question for sure, it is virtually certain that the boards were used as backdrops in the Baroque period, perhaps for monastery school theatres. This ambiguity, presenting the question at certain points as open, at other as long since answered, underlaid the whole exhibition narrative and caused the suspense to fade away early. Another factor which probably hindered the visitors to engage in answering the main question was their lack of expertise which left them the role of observers, following the experts' research. But neither did the experts function in this crime as protagonists like in popular films because it was difficult to connect with them, many as they were and rationally as they argued.

The third exhibition, *Mountains*, was obviously not intended by its makers as a dramatic narrative, and was chosen as an example for a common cultural historical exhibition. It was examined likewise for protagonists. Some reasons were identified for not following the stories of the mountaineers in the same way as following protagonists in a popular film struggling to obtain their goals. This was despite the fact that these stories were in many cases quite dramatic and (nearly) all of the characters shared the same want to climb a mountain. One reason was that a vast number of mountaineers were introduced and that in many cases only fragments of the expeditions, experiences and biographies were mentioned and illustrated by single objects. Another one was that even in the cases when the stories were complemented by other fragments, they were spread, often in a non-chronological order, over the different sections. This made it challenging for visitors to draw connections and to assemble and comprehend the mini-plots.



This fragmentary character was especially evident in *Mountains*, but it was a feature of the narratives of *Sawn* and *Passions*, too. All three narratives resembled more loosely woven nets than cause-effect-chains typical for classical Hollywood films. Concerning a potential creation of suspense, the insight was of outstanding importance that gaps lose in such a fragmentary narrative their extraordinary significance and therewith their signalling function, triggering questions and hypotheses on the side of the audiences. Additionally, the cataphoric function of the techniques is ineffective in these exhibition narratives consisting of so many different storylines interwoven and often in non-chronological order. Indeed, the analyses showed that in the rare cases when the dramaturgic techniques had been applied in the exhibitions,<sup>80</sup> they were applied only rudimentarily, their effects fizzling out.

An important finding was that this was also due to a lack of evaluation devices (Labov and Waletzky 1967) used by the exhibitions' makers. It was challenging to understand in all three exhibitions which events were more important than the others, thus identifying important gaps and questions was difficult. Likewise, to establish a firm foothold (Bordwell 1985, 38) for hypothesising was often nearly impossible. Additionally, turning points were told in *Sawn* and *Mountains*<sup>81</sup> rather incidentally, missing thus their potential to add structure and meaning to the narratives which can support suspense, too, a potential which is underlined in scriptwriting literature (Eder 2007, 86; Field 1994) and also in narratological research (Nünning and Sicks 2012).

Crucial was the observation that even though no dramatic suspense was created in the exhibitions, a wish to discover which objects and stagings could be seen next was

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<sup>80</sup> No example for dramatic irony could be detected in the exhibitions.

<sup>81</sup> The meaning of turning points can not be clarified for *Passions* because an extensive analysis was not possible for reasons explained.

nonetheless effective. Interest and fascination were sustained successfully by presenting attractive objects in an attractive way. Thus – and this is important – exactly those media which feature a more descriptive character and with a relatively low degree of narrativity, objects and space, seemed to be vital for the narrative’s momentum. This vague and subtle desire of wanting to learn what is next, resembled the feeling noticed while watching the films. Interestingly, telegraphing was used in *Sawn* and *Mountains* in a form modified exactly for this purpose, by placing visual and acoustic signals which drew the visitors into the next sections, eager to see what is behind this.

The finding that even in the cases when the curators had tried, as it can be assumed, to create dramatic suspense in the exhibitions it did not work out, could have been interpreted as evidence for the impossibility to create suspense in exhibitions. Especially because the analyses showed clearly the complex, static and fragmentary character of exhibitions, complicating narrating a thrilling plot. First, however, the analyses of only three exhibitions did not signify that creating dramatic suspense was impossible per se for the exhibition medium, particularly because their creators did obviously not intend to narrate à la Hollywood. Second, the vague feeling which showed up while watching the films and visiting the exhibitions, seemed to have the power to motivate the recipients, too, and seemed worthwhile to be examined more closely. For this reasons, the research was expanded by the thought experiment.

The starting point for the thought experiment was the insight gained through the comparative analysis that instead of dramatic questions thematic questions took centre stage in the exhibitions. The experiment asked therefore exemplarily if the thematic question in *Sawn* could be changed into a dramatic one, by developing the experts into true protagonists. It turned out that building small suspense arcs could be possible by starting each section with one specific expert and his or her want, concluding it with the question

being answered if he or she succeeded or failed in obtaining their goals. This finding opens up possibilities to create more consciously micro suspense in exhibitions. Constructing one single, continuous arc of suspense however seemed to be not possible because of the multitude of the characters, storylines and information.

More important was the finding that even if an exhibition could be reduced to just one protagonist and one storyline, fixing its order in a linear way and keeping the scope to a size where the visitors would be able to perceive every single piece of information in one visit, the autonomy of which information to absorb and when, would be still greater than the autonomy of viewers of popular films. Probably, because of the visitors moving around, the necessity to switch between different reception modes due to different media and the objects' static and three-dimensional character which causes a distance between different objects and between objects and texts, the visitors would not be transported to the story worlds to the same level of intensity as film viewers. Somehow, the narrative flow would be interrupted. Thus, while an approximation seems to be possible in theory, it is probably not possible to narrate an exhibition as dramatically as a classical Hollywood film.

The thought experiment underlined the fragmentary character of the exhibition medium which has been shown already during the analyses and is often described in museum studies literature (Scholze 2004; Hanak-Lettner 2011; Thiemeyer 2013). It also demonstrated that this fragmentary nature could not be resolved completely even if intended and proved thus to be an inherent feature of the exhibition medium. The film medium, by contrast, can be used to tell fragmentary stories as well as closely knitted narratives (see Gunning 2009).

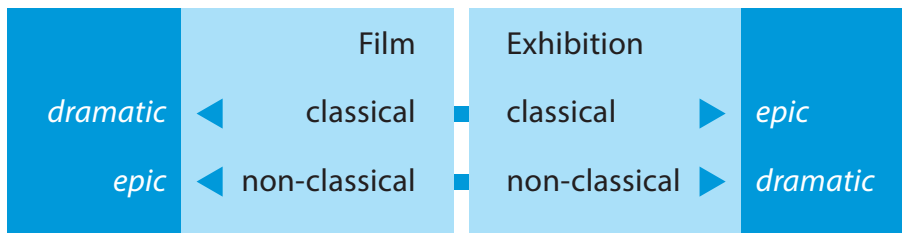
As a consequence, the question became of interest how suspense can be created in unconventional or non-classical films which resemble with their complex and fragmentary character cultural historical exhibitions. Drawing on Benke's manual *Freistil* (2002), the subtle wish, experienced while watching the three films and three exhibitions, to learn

what could be seen next, could be identified as a form of suspense, too. Understanding that this vague feeling indeed shared with dramatic suspense the common denominator to motivate recipients to continue the reception process and could thus be likewise understood as suspense, provoked a differentiation between wild and mild or dramatic and epic suspense respectively. ‘Epic’ because the unconventional films, Benke analysed, were all characterised by a predominantly epic character while including dramatic devices, too.

Important in answering the research question was Benke’s judgment (2002, 45-6) that it is probably impossible to create an epic thriller. Taking the strong parallels between unconventional films and cultural historical exhibitions, and considering the findings of the analyses and thought experiment, creating a thrilling exhibition seems likewise to be impossible, because creating suspense seems to be possible in exhibitions only up to a certain point. Introducing mild suspense, thus the findings combined with Benke’s analyses suggest, by help of the dramaturgic devices described, seems however possible and feasible and can blend into dramatic suspense as the transition is fluent, like it is between interest and mild suspense.

Exploring unconventional films for which epic devices play such an important role and seeing their resemblance with cultural historical exhibitions, led to the insight how fundamentally epic exhibitions are. Werner Hanak-Lettner (2011) had already identified exhibition as a dramatic-epic hybrid, as elucidated in Chapter 8, but only by detaching epic from theatre, especially Brecht’s theatre, and by including unconventional films into the research, a matrix appeared within which not only the devices to create *mild* or *wild* suspense could be located but also the master schemes of popular films *and* cultural historical exhibitions (Figure 10.1).

**Figure 10.1** Matrix



The dramaturgic devices analysed had been examined up to this point from the angle of how effectively they can be used to provoke suspense. Now, however, the question how effectively they can be applied in order to unify the narrative and to support the narrative flow, became vital. One crucial difference between dramatic and epic films is that the first are characterised by a high degree of unity. As David Bordwell describes, the goal-oriented activity of the viewer of such films, hypothesising, makes only sense and can only be successful because he or she knows for sure that every event is motivated and that in the end every question will be answered (Bordwell 1985, 33-4). The character of epic films by contrast, is fragmentary, they resemble open artworks (see Klotz 1960). Not-motivated, not-connected events are no exception, quite the contrary. Precisely for this reason, dramaturgic techniques which can be applied to prevent the fragments from scattering, are essential. Transferring this to cultural historical exhibitions and presuming that curators are interested in presenting ‘meaningful structures’ (Jannidis 2003, 43), this means that these techniques are of great interest for exhibition making.

Comparing cultural historical exhibitions with classical Hollywood films demonstrated how completely different these both narrative forms are. Thus, learning for curating from Hollywood seemed not to be possible or useful. By drawing unconventional films into the

research, connecting factors could be found so that, by making a detour as it were, it proved that yes, it seems practicable to profit from the knowledge and experience of Hollywood.

## **Suspense**

The thesis adds to the growing body of research that addresses the suspense phenomenon in all its variety, including, beyond dramatic suspense, more subtle forms (Vorderer 1996; Wuss 1996; Borgmeier and Wenzel 2001; Ackermann 2007; Irsigler et al. 2008b). It contributes to this differentiated picture, also by introducing the conceptual pair of mild and wild suspense, emphasising thus the phenomenon's variety and relevance for all narratives. There is, besides Hanak-Lettner's study (2011), no research at all about exhibitions and suspense. Precisely by taking into account the exhibition medium which is on first sight non-exciting, finer forms of the phenomenon could be recognised. As strongly as most curators refuse to create popular and sensational narratives and to enthrall audiences, as strongly they are, this can be presumed, interested in making their audiences attracted to and fascinated by their creations. This research contributes to how this could be achieved, not least by bringing together different dramaturgic techniques.

Despite including many suggestions, it must be left open however, how these techniques could be applied precisely to the exhibition medium in order to provoke suspense. For one thing because the importance of the techniques used for creating mild suspense showed only during the research process. For another thing because there is, besides Benke (2002), no further research literature about how to create epic suspense from a dramaturgical point of view, on which this thesis could have drawn. What is the difference between creating suspense, supporting the narrative flow and unifying narratives? How exactly can the cognitive and affective responses be described which together form mild suspense? Do

the cognitive parts prevail? Is mystery, as discussed in Chapter 9, especially effective for creating mild suspense? Of which nature exactly are the questions which the techniques, evoking mild suspense, provoke?

Considering the knowledge about suspense's variety, a revision of the museum studies literature used for this research project would probably reveal instructive examples for mild suspense in exhibitions (e.g. Witcomb 2013, 259-61), helping to understand the nature of it and possible applications more fully. Another question worthwhile to explore further is how mild and wild suspense can work together in keeping exhibitions' audiences interested. Another task would be to describe the difference between interest and suspense more precisely; for this, learning theories could be especially useful (see Hooper-Greenhill 2007, 175-6; Serrell 2006, 110-4). This thesis has, intentionally, used the term learning in the broadest sense but further research could specify which kind of learning could be supported by suspense, and how. The method used by John H. Falk and Katie L. Gillespie (2009)<sup>82</sup> to explore the relationship between learning and emotions or arousal, seems promising for this purpose, too. Suspense is an exquisite example for how cognitive and affective responses can be triggered simultaneously, therefore exploring it further may reveal interesting findings about the interplay between learning and emotions in the museum context in general.

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<sup>82</sup> A modified Russell's Affect Grid



## **Narrative**

To describe the exhibition medium's narrativity comprehensively, as Markus Kuhn did for film (2011), was not the objective of this thesis. By choosing with suspense however a phenomenon which is key for a text's or medium's storytelling capacity (Sternberg 1978, 1992; Baroni 2007), this thesis contributes significantly to understand exhibitions' narrative specificity more profoundly. Exhibitions have been approached, as the literature review showed, only seldom from a narratological perspective. This thesis picked up this thread but adds to the research a new dimension by comparing exhibitions to films in depth, integrating thus the exhibition medium into transmedial narratology. Drawing on research from this field, operating with the conceptual trinity narrative, narrativity and narrateme proved particularly useful (see Wolf 2002). With the help of these concepts, essential differences and similarities between classical Hollywood films and cultural historical exhibitions could be characterised.

Briefly summarised, the literature research and film analyses demonstrated that classical Hollywood films feature the narratemes temporal succession, causality, teleology, closure and tellability which had been carved out in Chapter 2 as important for creating narrative suspense, in a high degree. The findings showed, too, that the existent protagonist, in this case a human with a specific want, was especially important for creating dramatic suspense in the films, as well as a high degree of experientiality. The analyses, supported by museum studies literature (Hanak-Lettner 2011, Thiemeyer 2013), demonstrated that all these narratemes are usually missing in cultural historical exhibitions, or rather that they are featured only in a relatively low degree. The thought experiment suggested that by strengthening chronology, causality, teleology and closure as well as tellability or relevance in exhibitions, suspense could be intensified – but because of the inherent features of the exhibition medium only up to a certain degree. Importantly, spelling out however all

meanings too explicitly and schematically, holds the danger to create boredom instead of suspense (Herman 2002, 91, 103).

An insight which might be of interest for transmedial narratology in general is that particularly those features which possess a low degree of narrativity in themselves, objects and spaces (because of their static, more descriptive character), seem to be mainly responsible for motivating the museum visitors to continue the reception process, thus evoking suspense. This emphasises the importance of the spatial setting for the exhibition medium and opens up perspectives for conducting research by curators and designers together. It could be of interest, for instance, to integrate the findings from this thesis with Tricia Austin's approach (2012), briefly explained in Chapter 2, to use scales of narrativity for creating narrative environments. This result also shows again how closely all aspects of a narrative are intertwined. It would be therefore interesting, for instance, to compare exhibitions with narrative films and examples for the 'cinema of attractions' which Tom Gunning (2009) explored and which is characterised by presenting visual attractions.

Particularly useful was the decision to work with different characterisations of narrative for defining the boundaries within which exhibitions and films as media with different degrees of narrativity could be explored comparatively. Using Fotis Jannidis' (2003, 43) definition of narratives as 'meaningful structures' allowed to include exhibitions into transmedial narratology research at all, while understanding them, following Kristin Thompson (1999, 10), as cause-effect-chains helped recognize features causing a high degree of narrativity like in popular films. Drawing on Kuhn's minimal definition of narrative (2011), introduced in Chapter 2, and based on the analyses, the capacity to tell stories can be attributed to object-centered exhibitions because the state before and the one after a change can be illustrated with the aid of objects, but as they have difficulty in showing the change itself, this capacity is comparatively poor. It can be increased however by using other media

whereas it remains still more difficult to attribute in this way precise meanings to the exhibits.

On the scale of narrativity, the exhibition medium is therefore to locate, because of its distinct static and descriptive character, at the low end, compared to the film medium, and especially compared to popular films which can be truly regarded as ‘super stories’ visualising actions and happenings very well. Similarly, it is possible to arrange the single case studies on this scale (see Austin 2012). Thus, for example, *Passions* has a higher degree of narrativity than *Mountains* which rather resembles a collage, and *All about Eve* has a higher degree of narrativity than *The Conversation* which remains in a way mysterious till the end.

Additionally, this research broke new ground by transferring findings from cognitive film theory to museum studies. This comparative approach made it possible to define the master schema of cultural historical exhibitions, by using the master schema of classical Hollywood films, characterised by the rather simple ‘drive-to-a-goal-pattern’ (Bordwell 1985, 35), as background foil. Whereas Syd Field describes the dramatic structure of popular films as the ‘strand that holds the story in place, like a string holding pearls’ (Field 2001, 211), the structure of exhibitions can be visualised as a complex mobile, challenging the recipients to figure out the connections between the single elements. As the concrete manifestations of this abstract master schema to be found in exhibitions differ more widely than the ones of popular films, procedural schemata which help to adapt and integrate new template and prototype schemata are more important for the reception of cultural historical exhibitions than of classical Hollywood films.

Researching exhibitions from the perspective of cognitive narratology, opens up a whole new range of possibilities. For instance, it would be highly interesting to combine visitor studies with the finding how important the expectations of the recipients are for

experiencing suspense. How exactly does the unwritten contract look like visitors and curators have signed or how can the goal-oriented activity of the visitors be described more precisely (see Museums Association 2013; Wegner 2015)? How it could be possible to change the visitors' expectations in order to be able to decipher for instance plants in exhibitions better? Considering the fact that recipients expect stories to be more meaningful if fictive (Wolf 2003, 187) – what are the consequences for cultural historical exhibitions which are based mainly on facts? Could suspense only be created in exhibitions when all of them would resemble each other? Or would it be possible to create a genre of its own, the audiences can learn to recognise as 'exciting', knowing that it would be worthwhile to read them like popular films? Last but not least, cognitive narratology seems to be a promising approach to explore the interplay between cognitive and affective responses while visiting exhibitions. How strongly, for instance, does the environment and setting (being in a public space like a museum or watching a film at home) influence the experience (see Watson 2013, 285)? Also in this case, conducting visitor studies seems to be especially promising, outweighing the weakness of cognitive theory to work with a hypothetical recipient.

Finally, one aspect is worth underlining. Like there is not only one definition of story, as Chapter 2 argued, the understanding of exhibitions as epic narratives is one particular perspective on the medium. This understanding is due first to a focus on differences between exhibitions and films, reasoned in the Introduction, second to the chosen comparatum, popular films, and third to approaching stories from their function to evoke suspense. All this placed special emphasis on the static, multilayered and fragmentary character of exhibitions. Even though Hanak-Lettner (2011) describes exhibitions as epic, too, he understands them as action and by this as drama because the pivotal point of his reasoning is that the walking visitors set them in motion. Mieke Bal (2009; 1992) focuses instead on the narrator's position and tries to make it visible and criticisable, hence her view of exhibition narrative as perspective. Instead of considering these different views

as mutually exclusive, taken together they help to decodify and describe the complicated nature of narrative and the many-faceted character of the exhibition medium. Not least, these approaches can be combined for curating understood as dramaturgical work, focusing either on the curator's, the visitor's or the narrator's role in the complex process of meaning making.

## **Dramaturgy**

As stated before, the question how the dramaturgic devices explored could be applied exactly to create suspense in cultural historical exhibitions must be left open at this point. By being aware however of the techniques' functions which the thesis described comprehensively and of the related questions which have been carved out as essential during the research process, possibilities for curating and also for further research about the dramaturgy of exhibitions open up.

There is first the cataphoric function which foreshadowing, telegraphing, dangling causes, dramatic irony and certain types of planting and payoff fulfil. Likewise, for creating dramatic tension it is key to raise first the questions, pointing thus to possible answers given later. The most important question in this context is: how can suspense be effective independently from a linear arrangement, considering the museum visitors' movements? Is it possible to create a texture of parallel and offset announcements and hints or questions and answers which triggers the vague wish of wanting to know what will happen next and provokes thus mild suspense? The technique of repetition, described by Benke (2002) as unifying the narrative and which is possibly also effective for creating suspense, is worth a closer look as it seems more easy to apply to a non-linear story. To explore 'interactive dramaturgies' of new media seems especially promising in this respect (see Hageböling

2004b, 262-8; Ryan 2006). The technique dramatic irony is worth a closer look, too. Did the thesis explore it only marginally because only few examples could be found in the films and not one in the exhibitions? Or is it indeed difficult or even impossible to apply the technique to cultural historical exhibitions?

Second, there is the techniques' immersive function. In classical Hollywood films this is also fulfilled by raising questions the recipients want to know the answer for, but more than that, by bonding the audiences via empathy to the protagonists. To establish protagonists in cultural historical exhibitions as consequently, is problematic because it holds the danger to use emotions as argument and thus to manipulate the visitors. Applied with care, it may nonetheless work well in exhibitions (see e.g. Hourston Hanks 2012, 29). An alternative proposed by this thesis is to use an exhibition's topic in order to involve the visitors emotionally. Inspired by *Sawn*, the thought experiment pursued the idea to develop the interviewed experts to protagonists by letting them express their passion and fascination for the Baroque backdrops (see Becker-Proriol and Chanay 2012). At the same time, thus the relevance (as argued, important for creating suspense) of the topic or a specific aspect could be highlighted and communicated to the audiences. Benke's (2002) proposal to use a topic as 'emotional leitmotif', featuring its universal human core every recipient can connect with, is another means worthwhile to research and try out further in order to create attractive cultural historical exhibitions visitors care about (see Habsburg-Lothringen 2015). There is a rich body of research about immersive design techniques the findings of this thesis can be linked to (Bitgood 1990; Harvey et al. 1998; Mortensen 2010; Stogner 2011; Lau 2012; Austin 2012; Bauer 2015; Cox 2016).

The thesis included results from design studies and research about museum education only randomly, in order to approach exhibitions consequently from a curatorial perspective. To embed the findings into future research considering the expertise of designers to create

narrative environments and the knowledge of museum educators about storytelling devices, is more than promising.

Analysing the techniques' functions revealed how strongly a propulsive interest, as which suspense can be defined, depends on a continuous narrative flow. The more fluent the story unfolds, the more effectively suspense can be provoked. For applying the techniques it is therefore helpful to be aware of exhibitions' fundamental epic character because it constantly threatens to interrupt the narrative flow, as the analyses of the exhibitions and the thought experiment demonstrated. Without any doubt, there lies a danger in immersing the recipients too strongly in a storyworld because transportation, as research shows (e.g. Green and Brock 2000), can actually hinder recipients to think autonomously and critically. Applied with care however, the techniques can counteract the opposite danger: that based on the epic character of the exhibition medium and reinforced through the application of epic devices, the distance between story and recipients grows so strongly that visitors react with boredom and frustration and lose their interest. 'Meaningful structures' become thus meaningless. The thesis expanded and refined the curator's toolbox so that she or he can decide consciously, carefully and hopefully also courageously, which dramaturgic device, may it be of dramatic or epic nature, to use for which project or exhibit – and which one not.

Also in another sense, the thesis intends to achieve a balance. Quite rightly, the formerly neglected role visitors play in the communication process has been enhanced over the last decades, supported by visitor studies (see Hooper-Greenhill 1994b; Serrell 2015; Roberts 1997; Black 2005). Often linked however to a criticism about the museum as authoritative institution (see de Lourdes Parreiras Horta 1992, 330; Stam 1993) and in combination with a, postmodern, preference for open artworks (see Basu 2007; Hanak-Lettner 2011; Jannelli 2012; Witcomb 2013), this caused not only the relevant attempt to use gaps to involve



the audiences and to encourage critical thoughts but often also an anxiety to fix meanings restrictively. The intention not to impose certain interpretations on the visitors can lead however to a frustrating and incomprehensible vagueness and can be used, as Lisa C. Roberts states, as ‘an excuse for not doing the hard work of making exhibits communicate clearly and effectively’ (1997, 145). Interestingly enough, both approaches, narrating more open or more closed exhibition stories, can, as the findings suggest, inspire visitors to put seemingly obvious facts into question and has thus an enlightening potential. For instance, by explaining contexts, narrating chronologically and highlighting turning points the constructive character of cultural historical phenomena can be demonstrated.

Moreover, the fear to patronise audiences in combination with the knowledge about visitors’ great individuality influencing their use of museums and interpretation of exhibits strongly (Falk 2007; Schröder 2013, 35-36) can cause a peculiar invisibility of the exhibition makers which implies the danger to make it more difficult for the visitors to ‘make connections which unlock meaning’ (Simon 2016). Ironically, exactly such a downplaying of the curator’s role can make it difficult for visitors to comprehend ‘that exhibitions are in reality like signed columns rather than news releases and that each producer, like each columnist, has a point of view’ (Heumann Gurian 1991, 187). To enable the visitors to realise the subjective nature of any exhibition and to make the exhibition narratives thus arguable, is one of the most important claims of current museum work (Bal 1992, 572; Ferguson 1996; Roberts 1997, 145-6; Martinz-Turek 2009, 26-8; Fraser and Coulson 2012, 227).

Against this backdrop, the thesis asks for a strong curatorial handwriting. Strengthening the curators’ position does not mean however to underrate the role visitors play. Quite the opposite. The curator as author may be dead (Mason 2006, 27). But the curator as storyteller is more alive than ever before. And this implies a curious audience.

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## Films

### Primary

- All About Eve* (1950) Written and Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz [DVD]. USA: 20th Century Fox.
- Chinatown* (1974) Written by Robert Towne/Directed by Roman Polański [DVD]. USA: Paramount Pictures.
- Gosford Park* (2001) Written by Julian Fellowes/Directed by Robert Altman [DVD]. UK, USA, Germany: Entertainment Film Distributors.
- Music Box* (1989) Written by Joe Eszterhas/Directed by Constantin Costa-Gavras [DVD]. USA: TriStar Pictures.
- The Conversation* (1974) Written and Directed by Francis Ford Coppola [DVD]. USA: Paramount Pictures.
- The Queen* (2006) Written by Peter Morgan/Directed by Stephen Frears [DVD]. UK, France, Italy: Pathé/Miramax Films.

## Secondary

*American Beauty* (1999) Written by Allan Ball/Directed by Sam Mendes. USA: DreamWorks Pictures.

*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) Written by David Newman, Robert Benton and Robert Towne/ Directed by Arthur Penn. USA: Warner Bros. Pictures.

*Before the Rain* (1994) Written and Directed by Milčo Mančevski. Macedonia, France, UK: Mikado Film et al.

*Citizen Kane* (1941) Written by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles/Directed by Orson Welles. USA: RKO Radio Pictures.

*Dead Poets Society* (1989) Written by Tom Schulman/Directed by Peter Weir. USA: Buena Vista Pictures.

*Forrest Gump* (1994) Written by Eric Roth/Directed by Robert Zemeckis. USA: Paramount Pictures.

*Jaws* (1975) Written by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb/Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA: Universal Pictures.

*Memento* (2000) Written and Directed by Christopher Nolan. USA: Newmarket.

*Pelle the Conqueror* (1987) Written by Bille August, Per Olov Enquist, Bjarne Reuter/ Directed by Bille August. Denmark, Sweden: Svenks Filmindustri, Kærne Film.

*Short Cuts* (1993) Written by Robert Altman and Frank Barhydt/Directed by Robert Altman. USA: Fine Line Features.

*The Full Monty* (1997) Written by Simon Beaufoy/Directed by Peter Cattaneo. Great Britain: Fox Searchlight Pictures.

*The Prestige* (2006) Written by Jonathan and Christopher Nolan/Directed by Christopher Nolan. USA: Buena Vista Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures.

*The Shop around the Corner* (1940) Written by Samson Raphaelson and Ben Hecht/ Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.



## Exhibitions

### Primary

*Berge, eine unverständliche Leidenschaft* [*Mountains, a Mysterious Passion*], temporary exhibition 30 November 2007 to 31 October 2014. Curated by Philipp Felsch and Beat Gugger/Designed by Ursula Gillmann, Matthias Schnegg and Margarethe Greiner. Alpenverein-Museum, Hofburg (Innsbruck) as of 26 and 27 July 2012 and 7 and 8 October 2014.

*Die Leidenschaften. Ein Drama in fünf Akten* [*The Passions: A Drama in Five Acts*], temporary exhibition 25 February to 30 December 2012. Curated by Catherine Nichols/Designed by Mariame Clément and Julia Hansen. Deutsches Hygiene-Museum (Dresden) as of 30 December 2012.

*Zersägt. Ein Krimi um barocke Theaterkulissen* [*Sawn: A Crime Featuring Baroque Backdrops*], temporary exhibition 30 November 2013 to 23 February 2014 (27 April 2014). Curated by Michael Hütt, Anne Schaich and Grit Wendicke/Designed by Grit Wendicke (assisted by Colin Eltze). Franziskanermuseum (Villingen-Schwenningen) as of 13 to 15 December 2013.

### Secondary

*Martin Scorsese*, temporary exhibition 10 January 2013 to 12 May 2013. Curated by Kristina Jaspers and Nils Warnecke, Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen (Berlin) as of 24 February 2013.

*Permanent exhibition*, Bremerhaven: Deutsches Auswandererhaus – German Emigration Center (Bremerhaven) as of 19 September 2016.