

Cinematic Narration and its Psychological Impact

Cinematic Narration
and its Psychological Impact:
Functions of Cognition, Emotion and Play

By

Peter Wuss

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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Preface

A half-century ago, as a pupil on fall break, I left my provincial East-German village to go to Berlin to watch the rehearsals in Brecht's theatre. The dramatist had recently died; but the members of his famous *Berliner Ensemble* did their best to do justice to his intentions and so, in their staging, the question often arose of whether they had "estranged" the performance according to his style and theory or not. When one of the actors interrupted their discussion with the argument that Helene Weigel, Brecht's widow, had just confirmed that this particular scene had been properly estranged, I was deeply amazed. Although I did not doubt the artistic authority of the great actress, I questioned the validity of evaluating an aesthetic impact which had been as carefully and frequently described as "estrangement" based on the subjective opinion of a single person. I thought, in my scientifically-trained pupil's mind, that there should be reliable and objective proof for such effects.

During my media studies at the Film Academy in Potsdam, I began to understand that such attempts to objectify the impact of works of art, and not just estrangement, cannot be realised in a simple way. It dawned on me that to progress in this area, film theory must at least reach out to the field of psychology. In the 1960s, while writing my doctoral thesis on estrangement in the contemporary cinema at the Moscow film institute VGIK, I applied psychological theories of learning, particularly those of Jean Piaget. At this time, I was fortunate enough to hear Piaget's famous lecture at the International Congress of Psychology at the Kremlin, where I had succeeded in sneaking in. This speech emphasized the significance of the cybernetic approach of information processing for the future development of psychology, and I shared the high spirits of the congress participants, who had new hopes that there would soon be remarkable progress in all fields of their discipline. Indeed, at this time the so-called "cognitive revolution" of psychology took place.

I mention these anecdotal reminiscences because they point to the mode of thought and the intentions of this book. At first, there

was the practical constraint, accompanied by a certain helplessness, of how to define the aesthetic impact of an artwork, followed by the naive idea that this might best be arranged in conjunction with psychology, and then increasingly raised hopes about new methods and the findings of other disciplines. Thus, the driving force of my activities was a mixture of a practical constraints, a naive reasoning and exaggerated optimism. The limits of such an undertaking were already obvious to me in my youth, but nevertheless, film studies have been searching for a productive approach to analysing the film's aesthetic impact on the viewer to this day.

In the Soviet Union of the 1960s, there already existed different attempts at developing a complex interdisciplinary research of the arts. I was mainly excited by the approaches to a modern analysis of the arts put forth by the Moscow-Tartu School of semiotics, especially Yuri M. Lotman's contributions to a semiotics of culture and theory of literature and the semiotic interpretations of Eisenstein's aesthetics by the versatile linguist Vyacheslav V. Ivanov. These studies often picked up the highly productive ideas which had already been developed in Russia in the 1920s by the exponents of the Formalist school of literary studies and their colleague and foremost critic, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, the film director Sergei M. Eisenstein, and the psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky. During the Stalin era, important writings of these authors were not published and their way of thinking was ostracized, a tendency that, unfortunately, continued for some time in several Eastern-bloc countries. Their theories greatly influenced my view on the arts and their analysis, and I was not surprised that I was able to re-discover—on a new level—many ideas of these early years in the best efforts of the Western scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, for instance in their discourses on the 'Open Work' or 'Cognitive Film Theory'.

After working for a dozen years in film production, I continued my theoretical attempts within the isolation of the Eastern Bloc. In 1986, I published a book on the open work of cinema and, in 1993, another about the analysis of film and psychology using a cognitive approach. These efforts have shown that some of my considerations are very close to the endeavours of my Western colleagues, whereas others are not, as they are based on different traditions of thinking, among them the tradition of the German aesthetics.

The present book develops these ideas. I am trying to outline a complex model which encompasses some important aspects of film's aesthetic impact, which I have, in part, published in separate articles over the last decade. The book is mainly addressed to people who are highly interested in the cinema, particularly in art films, and, of course, to students of audiovisual media who want to know more about the psychological components of film's influence on audiences.

I am also trying to introduce my concept for the first time in an expanded form in the English language, particularly to a circle of colleagues working on Cognitive Film Theory, to whom I owe many of my findings and starting-points. How difficult this attempt would be, I—and my translators—came to realise in those cases where we had to deal with technical terms which, thanks to their different historic origins in German, have a different meaning from the Anglo-American terms. Among them were such central notions as “topic” and “stereotype”. Here I had to run the risk of being misunderstood by those readers who are not willing to accept the definitions of these notions given in my study.

This book brings together many ideas that were formulated in lectures at different universities and academic institutions and have since been turned into an academic self-learn course which includes film-sequences on DVD. The present publication attempts to preserve some advantages of this method of learning, thus, a collection of pictures showing parts of film sequences should help to commit to memory the scenes in detail to allow a more thorough analysis. Furthermore, I have focused my attention on a limited number of central film examples. To facilitate the understanding of some psychological arguments for non-psychologists, the text occasionally gives a more thorough explanation of some specific issues in passages which are presented in a smaller font size. This form also allows the reader to leap over these passages without losing the thread of the film studies.

I would not wish to conceal the fact that I should be very pleased if professional psychologists could find an interest in the subject of this book, and use its hypotheses as a starting-point for their own research.

I aimed to anticipate significant effects, emanating from various structures of cinematic narration, in the viewers' mind by using the

hypotheses about the films impact on the audience which have been able to be empirically verified by psychological experiments. Fortunately, there already exist some successful endeavours in this direction, but this book is in search of working hypotheses regarding further analyses.

Introduction

1. Why We Go to the Movies

Film provides experience potential. Certainly, there are many reasons why we go to the movies, but foremost among them seems to be the fact that the cinema realizes, broadens and creates human experience, an all-embracing experience which includes psychological as well as cultural and social components.

Moving pictures are made for viewers, for communication with people that assures an actual impact on the audience, a psychologically relevant effect on the viewer's mind with likely and often obvious consequences for cultural aims and social behaviour. Media practice acknowledges this function: The best ideas, pretensions and convictions of filmmakers cannot be realized without the viewer's involvement in the events on the screen, which integrate various processes of thinking, feeling and imagining. Not only the moving picture on the screen, with its artistic devices of performance, but also the proceedings evoked in the spectator's mind, have to be taken into consideration by the student or scholar.

This leads to the main task for film theory today: to study these processes of experience, and to do so on the right level. That means, analysis of the cinema needs to systematically assess the audience's experience, or more precisely, it must, at the very least, bring to bear a modern psychological knowledge about the film's impact on the viewer, a knowledge taking into account different components based on the mental activities of cognition, emotion and imagination.

We have known about this issue for a long time. The first book on film psychology was written by the German-American psychologist Hugo Munsterberg in 1916, and the author already speaks very clearly about these same goals 90 years ago. But the problem is not a simple one. Although the fact that there are more or less regular interrelations between the film's structure and its psychological effect on the viewer seems a matter of course or even a truism, the scholarly analysis of these interrelations turns out to be a task for interdisciplinary research for the future. Both

disciplines —film theory and psychology— traditionally have different tasks, different structures and different methods; they use different terminology and are therefore not compatible enough for immediate cooperation. The theorists of the cinema, for instance, are educated in the traditions of the human sciences using the hermeneutic approach, which can be translated as an “art-like” manner of interpretation of the film’s meaning using the vaguely defined terminology of aesthetics. Of course, film theorists have a specific professional understanding of what narration, conflict, character, editing, genre and so on are in accordance with the hermeneutic approach common in the theory of art. But what is the essence of these notions in terms of psychology, a discipline with an obvious element of natural science which follows the appropriate kind of experimental method? The crux of an interdisciplinary study already begins with an elementary problem of notification, of understanding one another. Strangely enough, nowadays the film theorist can’t ask the psychologist what he thinks about this or that aspect of the film’s aesthetic impact. He cannot ask, for example, about the emotional consequences of a specific kind of storytelling, because he is not able to describe different modes of narration in the language of psychology—a description indispensable in order to formulate his question precisely enough. But the issue is not merely one of simple communication or psychological interpretation of an assertion made by film theorists. A fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation needs hypotheses about cinematic structures that lead to data on their significant functions, i.e. moments of impact which are observable through psychology and verifiable experimentally. Finding, for instance, the right form of cinematic storytelling is always a central problem in the filmmaker’s creative process, and interdisciplinary research could help by providing assertions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of different modes of narration for a deeper understanding of the various kinds and strategies of storytelling, common as well as innovative ones.

In some respect, the situation of psychology is similar. Although there have been successful attempts to establish a specific media psychology in the last decades regarding the study of different reactions in the auditorium, precise analyses relating to the particular aesthetic effects of the film are lacking to this day. For a

long time, research on the influence of art phenomena and aesthetic forms in the cinema rarely took place. Indeed, until the sixties of the last century, psychology had little chance of initiating cooperation because this discipline itself employed many different approaches elaborated by various psychological schools and was therefore not unified as a theoretical system and not capable of posing or answering questions to film theory researchers in an unequivocal language. It was not until the second half of the century that so-called cognitive psychology emerged and founded the various tendencies of psychological research based immediately on the information approach of cybernetics. This afforded new conditions for cooperation between both disciplines, because film theory could follow the same mode of thinking as psychology using the paradigm of information processing. More precisely, these new conditions, in making compatible the two systems of thinking, which for a long time had existed rather theoretically, have over the last 20 years brought noticeable results in interdisciplinary research.

This research, taken on by more or less isolated scholars in different countries, began step by step from both sides, but the bridge between the disciplines has not become a solid and homogenous construction. Rather, there are many thin ropes from one side to the other, and the scholars taking part in this enterprise often have to balance across like tight-rope walkers. And doing so today, they are not better off than their predecessors. Thus, the following study should be read rather as a guide for tight-rope walkers than a manual to an interdisciplinary approach to film studies, because there remain many unsolved problems. For instance: Looking for joint research we have nowhere to start. It requires phenomena of the cinema as subjects for analysis which, on the one hand, are relevant and interesting for film theorists as well as for psychologists and, on the other, can be described easily in the terms of cognitive psychology. Only in such a way can cooperation really be effective and helpful in the future, because the results of the exertions on both sides would stimulate the progress of the whole enterprise as well as the development of each respective discipline.

The subject most suitable as a starting-point for interdisciplinary research seems to be cinematic narration. Filmmakers and theorists

have known for a long time that the principle of narration is responsible for the connections between the events shown on the screen. Thanks to narration, situations can be linked and unfolded into a coherent story. Due to narration the film, which includes different actions, images and other stimuli, appears as a whole that can guarantee the continuity of meaning construction in the viewer's mind and, at the same time, the emotional organisation of processes of experience. In other words: Narration seems to be a relevant factor in filmmaking as well as media studies, and without doubt it has clear consequences for the film's psychological impact on the spectator. It thus recommends itself as a point on which to fasten the hook for our rope to the other side.

Attempts at interdisciplinary research actually began with the psychological modelling of cinematic narration, and until now, narration has been the central topic of so-called 'Cognitive Film Theory'. It remains the starting-point for the most important analyses of film experience. That is so in general and also in my own efforts. For this reason, this book will focus on this issue. The chapters are organised in line with an aesthetical theory which places in the forefront the aspect of narration leading to the film's psychological impact. This approach is directly linked to the work of 'Cognitive Film Theory'. While I draw upon the notion of aesthetic theory to characterize my concept, I do not reject the highly productive direction modern film theory has taken, but hope to avoid misunderstandings regarding the interpretation of "cognitive" which are historically driven. When the cognitive approach began to prevail in psychology and was adopted by film theory a quarter century ago, it was based on the abstract cybernetic model of information processing. This model was very apt for describing certain processes of information, namely those connected to comprehension or rational thinking, i.e. consciously realized mental activities. Cognition, then, was bound to the criterion of "obligatory consciousness". Meanwhile, psychologists' interests have shifted to mental activities and kinds of information processing that are less conscious, and the cognitive approach in film theory has recently expanded its sphere of action as well. The traditional understanding of "cognitive" processes, as a result, is no longer deemed to be adequate. In addition to the more or less conscious and rational processes of human cognition, new film

studies also try to encompass relatively unconscious ones connected, for instance, with perception, emotion, imagination, fantasy, play, and so on. Artistic forms evoke a whole range of such interacting psychological functions for which suitable terminology is sometimes lacking. These components may, however, be essential to the true attraction and aesthetic value of cinematic experience. When people go to the movies, it is safe to assume that it is not just because of their cognitive value, which is itself reason enough to look more closely at the other aspects of the movie experience.

Unfortunately, my introduction to psychology-oriented film study is not ripe enough for an overarching theory and does not yet include all the necessary steps towards an empirical study of the film's psychological impact on the viewer, but it attempts to offer a blueprint of some elementary models connecting film theory and psychology and, at the same time, focussing on structures of film that probably evoke significant psychological reactions. It is to be hoped that this will be helpful in forging a path for future empirical analysis.

At present, the inclusion of concrete film examples in film studies has merely provided the opportunity to link theoretical ideas with our practical experience regarding individual films in a more palpable way. Nevertheless, the modelling of the aesthetic experience of film that I introduce here has specific advantages. To understand these peculiarities, however, it is necessary to look at some preconditions of their existence.

2. Some Elementary Ideas on Modelling the Aesthetic Experience

The prerequisites of the contemporary development of reception-oriented studies of art, including the cinema, are very complex. They have their roots in different disciplines and are, therefore, often not easy to survey for scholars of other fields of study. They have seldom been explicitly described as basic requirements for scientific progress, although most attempts have promised the greatest possible methodological transparency. Therefore, I would like to delineate some elementary theoretical positions in the

development of this approach without which the whole framework could not exist.

The crucial methodological prerequisite for the analysis of art and its experience comes from different results of systems research in aesthetics and studies of art. This method is based on the idea that one can analyse the phenomena of art not only from the inside and by hermeneutically interpreting their spiritual essence, but that one can also view art phenomena as entities, as systems that can be described from the outside in their behaviour as complexes of functional structures. Such a description of functional structures leads to the construction of a scientific model, an artificial system which shows analogies with the researched object and can therefore be temporarily substituted for this original in the research process. Scientific models are not identical with the object, but due to their similarities or behavioural analogies they can systematically provide an approximation to the original and serve as aids in order to gain information about the original in such cases where other ways are not possible or not practical. For instance, one can more easily describe the complicated method of a film's storytelling by using more elementary models of narration.

During the last century, in the history of aesthetics and the theory of art, various different kinds of model were employed: elementary structural ones, semiotic ones, and cybernetic ones, which are mostly based on information processing. Belonging to the integrative sciences, the last-named models in particular systematically provide compatibility of knowledge and make it easier to construct bridges between different disciplines. Although the mentioned types of modelling developed step by step and attained to a certain extent a consecutive status, their central ideas also emerged parallel to one another. Therefore, to delineate briefly the complicated development of the system approach to art seems otiose, but focussing on the steps towards modelling of cinematic narration, I would like to emphasise three central ideas in its development for the purposes of background.

2.1 Art as a Device for Mental Stimulation: Narration as Stimulus

One fundamental approach concerning the analysis of the functions of literature and art comes from the Russian Formalists, whose work began in the 1920s at the former Petrograd/Leningrad. These scholars, particularly Boris Ejkenbaum, Yury Tynianov and Victor Shklovsky, studied the basic rules for the functioning of art as well as the various modes and aspects of narration found in literature and film. The starting-point for their evaluation of the artwork's influence on the recipient can be characterised as "ostranenie", i.e. "defamiliarization" or "making strange". The term refers to a category of "devices" which enable the work in its entirety, as well as in detail, to intensify its psychological impact on the reader or spectator.

The keyword *ostranenie* has its roots in two terms originating in Broder Christiansen's *Philosophy of Art* (1909): the "difference-quality" (Differenzqualität) of an uncommon or innovative artistic form, which leads to a "difference-sensation" (Differenzempfindung) in the process of aesthetic experience, may be considered as the reason for the intenseness of the reader's or spectator's stimulation by the artwork. This stimulation effect helps, in the opinion of the Formalists, to destroy the tendencies of "automatization" in the recipient's perception of a work and evokes in his mind original feelings and phases of full awareness and increasing consciousness (cf. Shklovsky [1916] 1965, 11ff.).

The Constructivist approach to *ostranenie* turned out to be very productive, because it connected a structural offer to the recipient with a functional one, a decision concerning form with a psychological effect. It returned to the principle of originality dominating the traditional aesthetic ideas of the last centuries, but also employed to a basic conception of psychological stimulation and mental activities. By applying the principle of originality radically to all levels of art analysis, the Formalists upgraded it into an axiom: Striking originality leads to defamiliarization and in this way to aesthetic perception (cf. Wuss 1989a).

One can find a similar model in a recent theory of perception. According to James Gibson (1979, 249), perception is generally based on a "pick-up of information" provoked by so-called "affordances" of reality, mainly of those coming from new or

uncommon stimuli patterns. Following this general approach to perception, the accordance of formal difference-quality and psychological difference-sensation of art reception can be seen as a provoked pick-up of information, i.e. as a source or starting-point for mental activities, particularly cognitive ones on the level of perception.

The exponents of Russian Formalism who applied the model of active aesthetic experience to the problem of storytelling tried to describe different modes of narration in literature (cf. Striedter 1988) and film (cf. Beilenhoff 2005), often in order to evaluate peculiarities, historical changes and complete shifts in approaches to narration. In doing so, they stressed the fact that narration, with its specific “devices”, is always involved in processes of psychological stimulation.

Of course, in the 1920s, the activities of the mind evoked by artworks were only known insufficiently, and therefore the Formalists’ references to psychology remained rather theoretical. But half a century later, the situation had changed. Following its turn to cognitive psychology, this discipline reached a new level of development.

In the same years, it is possible to see parallel progress in the study of art and aesthetics.

2.2 Artwork as “Proposal for Reception”: Narration as Structured Reception Proposal

This research temporarily named here ‘Reception Theory’ covers a wide range of very different activities, including Information Aesthetics (Max Bense, 1954-1960, Abraham Moles, 1958, Helmar Frank, 1959, 1964, 1965), the Constance School of reception aesthetic (Wolfgang Iser, 1972, Robert Jauss, 1970) and their opposite numbers and critics from the Academy of Sciences in East Berlin (Manfred Naumann et. al., 1976); further, the Leningrad School of complex research of art and literature (Boris Mejlach, 1977). Terry Eagleton’s (1983) overview of some important positions of this international stream includes also Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish. This list can be extended to include Yuri Lotman and Umberto Eco, scholars whose famous work is linked with the development of ‘The Semiotics of Culture’.

The outstanding contributions of these different schools of

reception aesthetics undoubtedly deserve a more careful and detailed acknowledgement than I can give here, but in regard to the genesis of contemporary modelling of cinematic narration, I will elaborate on only a few aspects.

It is important to state here that all of the theories used are more or less explicitly based on the communication model, which allows the study of experience of art as communication and an information process coming from the author and his creative activities of art production, via the artwork and a specific reception phase of the recipient's, i.e. reader's or spectator's, mind (cf. Mejlach 1977, 145).

Focussing on the later relationships in this chain means a reevaluation of the reception process and the viewer's mental activities. This is important for a differentiated understanding of the connections between the artwork's performance as well as its psychological impact, because one can study the aesthetic function of an artwork as a process of communication, semiotics or information. The mentioned directions of research sought to do this.

According to Naumann (1976, 35), one can generally regard the artwork as a "proposal for reception" (Rezeptionsvorgabe) structured by the author and programming the response of the viewer. This formula also allows us to describe narration as a central component of these reception proposals in a structured way. In the realm of information theory, one attempted to describe, for instance, the process of storytelling as a message which contains components of innovation as well as of redundancy. Or, according to semiotics, as a pattern, using signs of different codes and hierarchic levels. Such basic structures of narration as the classic plot could be interpreted as so-called "super-signs". The convergence of central ideas of semiotics and information theory made it easier to join them together with the paradigm of 'Information Psychology,' a precursor of contemporary 'Cognitive Psychology'.

For example, simple but of important consequences is the hypothesis of information aesthetics that the mind of the recipient has a limited access capability because the working memory serves as a channel with a specific capacity for information flow from outside to the conscious mind (cf. Frank 1959, 50ff.; 1965, 357). An optimal aesthetic experience depends, probably, on a rate of

information flow which ensures that the channel is neither over-utilized nor under-utilized. Certainly, techniques of storytelling have to do with this management of information flow, and consequently the evaluation of structures of narration can be based on rules of information processing. However, these rules are hardly obvious. An important goal of psychological research is connected with the establishment of a theory of learning.

2.3 Reception of Art as a Process of Learning and Cognition: Narration as Generating Cognitive Structures

In the 1960s, psychologists focused on adaptive processes and developed a general concept of learning that could also be used for the modelling of art reception. According to this theory, one can view learning as "the formation or rectification of individual memory store" (Klix 1971, 348).

During a lifelong process within society, an individual will always strive to optimise his or her behaviour in order to best cope with conditions in his/her environment. Individual memory is regarded as an internal model or schema of the world outside, described by Dieter Langer (1962, 14) as follows: "With regard to the totality of environmental occurrences, we look upon our knowledge of 'what is connected with what' and 'what follows after what' as the expression of a pattern of expectations of (what might be called) stochastic nature."

This internal model is normally updated and improved through the individual's confrontations with objective reality, but it can also be updated in modified form by art reception, for instance by watching a film which, being depictive in character, offers a fictional reality. In the case of both practical confrontations with life and fictional confrontations with art, the events depicted are not chaotic, but structured, linked by certain rules to learnable patterns. Therefore, film reception can be seen as a learning process, programmed by the work's structures. These structures can be discerned on many different levels of a film. They constitute a kind of network, sometimes clearly visible and sometimes less so, representing the overall composition. There have been various attempts to use this network for a descriptive model of narration.

The most effective attempt, 'Cognitive Film Theory' as

developed by David Bordwell in the 1980s, relies on a specific type of learnable structures which are particularly clear and obvious, one can also say: highly significant, ratio-morph and given to thinking. Declaring himself in favour of “Neoformalism” (cf. Thompson 1988, 29), Bordwell connects some principles of the Russian school with the new paradigm of cognitive psychology, i.e., the information processing approach. In his famous book *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), Bordwell pioneered the cognitive theory of film examining the perceptual and cognitive aspects of film viewing. The basic premise of his treatise is “that narration is the central process that influences the way spectators understand a narrative film” (Buckland 2002, 170). Moreover, he argues “that spectators do not simply absorb a finalized, pre-existing narrative, but must actively construct its meaning” (170). Indeed, Bordwell defines: “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*” (1985, 53; emphasis in original). According to Bordwell, the *fabula* is “a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences” (49).

Returning to the theory of learning from the 60s, one can say that narration is a process which uses and develops the “patterns of expectation” in the spectator’s mind. The spectator wants to know about the direction of events. He wants to foresee the solution of the conflicts. And, involved in this endeavour to anticipate the events, he permanently generates hypotheses and inferences concerning the current dramatic decisions and the flow of the story.

The viewer’s expectations are based on his life-experience and particularly on his knowledge, and the most important principle for the construction of expectation patterns seems to be the law of causality. Human beings are not able to survive without an appropriate dealing with the causal relationships in their environment. They have to foresee possible causal chains in order to cope with their situation at different levels. Therefore the principle of causality is highly relevant for storytelling and its understanding, and Bordwell’s model of cinematic narration is mainly reliant upon specific cases of causality. Buckland has noted: According to Bordwell, “narrative films cue spectators to generate inferences or hypotheses—but not just any inferences. When

comprehending a narrative film, one schema in particular guides our hypotheses—the one that represents the canonical story format” (2002, 170).

This canonical story format has been well-known since the time of Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is the causal chain of situations which creates specific norms or conventions for the construction of classical drama:

Introduction of setting and character — explanation of a state of affairs —complicating action/crisis — ensuing events —outcome—ending.

In the case of the classical plot, the rational schema of linear causality on the screen works together efficiently with the most common experience of the spectator, where cause-and-effect schemata dominate everyday life. Narration has been seen as a process generating specific cognitive structures, which occur as hypotheses and inferences regarding the flow of actions. Thus, the cognitive approach, founded on hypothesis and inference generation, could already explain a very important mode of cinematic narration in the first phase of its development. However, the subject of the analysis was then mostly film comprehension, or more precisely, the consciously perceived structures of storytelling. The advantages of the cognitive approach of this period consisted in the rational transparency of its models. Its limits, however depended on the fact that only certain modes of storytelling were suitable for their adequate representation and modelling, namely those whose structural description was practicable. According to George Mandler (1984a, 112ff.), we become aware of many relationships only through their structural description. In the case of cinematic storytelling, this chance for awareness occurs mainly owing to descriptions of causal connections between events. Where cause-and-effect relations are lacking, an analytical grasp of the process of storytelling becomes very difficult and requires additional efforts. Regarding the opposition between Hollywood's classical narrative and some other forms of storytelling, Bordwell (1989b, 27) points out: “By contrast, the tradition of ‘art-cinema’ narration encourages the spectator to perceive ambiguities of space, time and causality and then organize them around schemata for authorial commentary and ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ realism (Bordwell 1985). The claim is that in order for films to be composed

in the way they are and to produce the effects they do, some such mental representations must underpin spectatorial activity." Yet there are numerous modes of filmic storytelling which develop the aforementioned tradition of art cinema, and some of them have played an important role in the history of film culture.

However, the difficulties in analysing different modes of storytelling cannot be reduced solely to the issue of their structural description. In order to judge narrational processes in a more differentiated way, one should examine them in a closer context to other aspects of film dramaturgy and style, which would lead to a considerable widening of the present cognitive theory of narration.

In addition, the so-called cognitive approach in psychology is now changing, and our cognitive film theory, which is founded on its principles, has come to a shift. Figuratively speaking, the cognitive model was the Trojan horse of the film theorists for invading the viewer's mind. Today, the occupants of the horse's belly are leaving this place to swarm out and explore the unknown areas of perception, emotion, imagination, play and so on. A study of film experience has begun that does more justice to the psychological complexity of its aesthetic impact.

Under these conditions the profile of the cognitive approach is changing entirely. The former explicit rationality of cognitive processes, with their "obligatory consciousness," gives way to a weaker notion that also covers initial stages of conceptualisation and consciousness, connected, for instance, with the viewer's preconscious activities of perception or attention. At the same time, it tends to encroach on the systems of emotion, imagination and play.

At present, it sometimes seems that film psychology should follow the trend of diluting the notion of cognition or even abandoning the cognitive track. But this would be unproductive, insofar as human life is based on rational behaviour, and the mental functions that are subordinated to this purpose can find their optimal description through the model of information processing—the core of the cognitive approach.

As matters stand today, it would be than presumptuous to try to develop our studies of cinematic narration and their different components of impact into a consistent theory. This leads to the issue of how to realise a productive analysis of the subject under the current circumstances.

3. Some Intentions of this Book

My study relies upon a kind of double strategy, insofar as it attempts, on the one hand, to argue as closely as possible to film practice, and, on the other, to follow a heuristics based on a differentiated cognitive approach.

Among the immediate practical issues with which filmmakers and theorists are confronted in their daily work are, for example: How can we objectify our impressions of filmic events of a lower degree of awareness by structural descriptions, and why does it help our understanding of film experience? What is happening in storytelling, and how may we describe the cognitive structure of different modes of cinematic narration? What role does the principle of conflict play for the narrational process, and what are the ensuing consequences of the conflict situations on the screen for the viewers' cognitions and, above all, for their emotions? Further: What is cinematic tension, i.e., suspense, and how do different strategies of narrative tension work in various types of film? What is the essence of the so-called "reality effect" in fiction films and how can it vary in different modes of storytelling? How does the integration of the protagonists' dreams, fantasies and play behaviour work in the course of events for storytelling and also for the development of the viewers' imageries and intentions? And finally: How do film genres function, particularly regarding the viewers' cognition, imagination and emotion?

A deeper understanding of some aspects of dramaturgy should already emerge in the use of a differentiated model of cognitive schema formation which allows the recognition of various structures with a specific narrational function, among them those with lower awareness, which the spectator receives rather pre-consciously or nonconsciously. The cognitive model helps also to explain how conflict situations and discrepancies on the screen engage the viewer in creative thinking and problem-solving. And the emergence of cognitive schemata on the level of stereotyping also renders explicable the way in which genres, which develop in a specific phase of cultural learning or stereotyping, may occur and function in the process of film experience.

The cognitive schema approach is connected with a heuristics that directs attention to the dynamics in the narrational process, insofar as it stresses the principle of innovation manifested in the