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„Shades of Suspense: Narrative Tension in Casino Royale, The Prestige and Blow-Up“

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1. Introduction

Numerous scholars have discussed their views on suspense in motion pictures. A considerable amount of them have even published their own definition of this highly interesting and complex human emotion. Nevertheless, no single theory has been able to rise above the others by explaining suspense in a sufficient way. There seem to be several problems, such as the paradox of suspense or the ideological conflict between the structurualist and the cognitive approach that prevent the scientific community from reaching a consensus on the topic of narrative tension.

Instead of focusing his attention on finding one all-encompassing theory of suspense, Peter Wuss tries to further the understanding of narrative tension by broadening his gaze in terms of theory and in terms of the subject-matter of his studies. In his article "Narrative Tension in Antonioni", he moves away from the typical genres of detective, crime and horror films and discusses suspense in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*, which is an Italian art film from 1975. Wuss introduces the new concept of internal tension, as opposed to external tension, which is more prevalent in conventional suspense movies. Internal tension in Antonioini's film is rooted in a certain uneasiness of the audience caused by a lack of information which denies them the ability to predict the development of the story and thereby, the fate of the protagonist. Wuss argues that this emotion cannot be explained by relying solely on structuralist theories. Therefore, he chooses an interdisciplinary approach that combines film studies with psychology (see Wuss 52). He does not deny the validity of the research done by scholars like Zillmann, but simply choses a more appropriate theoretical framework (in this case cognitive psychology) to analyze *The Passenger*.

The following sections will try to build on Wuss' research and his scientific method by delving more deeply into the multifaceted nature of narrative tension. Three motion pictures will be discussed, which all belong to different genres and evoke distinct feelings of suspense. Furthermore, each kind of narrative tension will be elaborated on by applying different theoretical approaches.

The first third of the thesis will analyze a typical action-thriller, namely the James Bond movie *Casino Royale* from the year 2006. This motion picture, directed by Martin

Campbell, will serve as an excellent example for conventionalized Hollywood cinema that corresponds ideally with the findings of structuralist scholars. The second major section of the thesis will evaluate the suspenseful elements of Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*, by relying on schema theory which has been developed by cognitive psychologists. Lastly, the third part will investigate Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, which will prove to be the most idiosyncratic motion picture of the three and will call for the findings surrounding the research of problem-solving.

Even though Wuss leaves the beaten path of analyzing crime and detective films by elaborating on *The Passenger*, he does not describe it as a suspenseful movie, but only as one that creates the feeling of internal tension. For the German scholar, narrative tension consists of an internal and an external kind and suspense is a special case of the latter one. This thesis, on the other hand, will argue in favor of expanding the term of suspense in a way that would include some aspects of *The Passenger*, because they elicit the wish for active control within the audience. The ability to conjure this wish is also the most important feature that appears in all three of the motion pictures discussed in this thesis. This connection is not an obvious one, because just like in *The Passenger*, the wish for active control is only reached through eliciting of the wish for passive control *in The Prestige* and *Blow-Up.*

Analyzing the different shades of suspense will demonstrate that the distinct theoretical approaches existing within the field of narratology are not necessarily contradictory, but rather complementary in their common goal of understanding the complete spectrum of suspense. This thesis has by no means the intention of describing suspense in a complete way, but wants to broaden its definition and highlight its diversity in order to improve its understanding.

2. Casino Royale

2.1. Narrative Suspense

There seems to be a divide between scholars who are conducting their work in the field of suspense. On the one hand, researchers like Dolf Zillmann follow the traditions of structuralism, while on the other hand, scholars like Ed Tan or Ohler and Nieding are basing their studies on the findings of cognitive psychology. As Peter Vorderer has observed, Zillmann focuses his attention exclusively on the texts which are treated by him as unambiguous and purposeful entities. The variance between readers is generally ignored because they are thought of as standardized observers who passively process the information just as the text's creator has conceived it (see Voderer 236). Ed Tan and his peers have criticized this exclusion of the inter- and intraindividual differences between readers. They argue that the processing of texts depends extensively on the knowledge of readers, especially on their familiarity with certain text types and suspense inducing techniques. This heightened interest in the viewer has led the researchers into the already well developed field of cognitive psychology. The knowledge gained by the addition of another academic discipline has allowed for a deeper understanding of how suspenseful scenes are cognitively processed and how schemata are utilized in order to create narrative tension. Interestingly, despite being regarded as obsolete by some scholars, Dolf Zillmann's theories have withstood various field tests and have therefore been empirically proven to be correct (see Zillmann 157). Peter Vorderer explains this phenomenon by the specific text type that his colleague has been concentrating on:

> These are texts that – according to literary criticism – are marked by a lack of variation, innovation and ambiguity and do not demand that the readers be accomplished in actively generating meaning. (Vorderer 236)

Therefore Vorderer argues that Zillmann's research is sufficient and accurate when it is applied to a specific situation that involves a mainstream text that forces a willing audience into a passive and purely receptive role. Interestingly, this rather narrowly defined condition represents the norm, rather than the exception in Hollywood, which might be explained by the high incentives from the creator's and the consumer's sides. Due to the high budgets of Hollywood movies, producers try to avoid ambiguity and

aim for a predictable and effective emotional impact in motion pictures. Audiences might also avoid risky decisions due to high ticket prices and an overwhelming supply of competing forms of entertainment. These factors could at least partly explain the recent surge of summer blockbusters and event movies like *Casino Royale*.

Suspense in the twenty-first Bond movie should be analyzed by a structuralist approach, exactly because the movie is designed to trigger predefined emotions. The following section is going to describe how every aspect of the film is shaped to adhere to the rules described by structuralist scholars like Zillmann or Brewer and Lichtenstein, in order to maximize the suspense felt by the largest possible audience.

2.1.1. Enabling Suspense

In his article about suspense in drama Zillman discusses two fundamental entities that need to be introduced in a story for the creation of suspense:

1) Protagonists or substitute entities toward whom or which favorable affective dispositions are held.
2) Antagonists or conditions who or that can credibly threaten the welfare of the protagonists or substitute entities. (see Zillmann 220)

A quick glance at the story of *Casino Royale* already reveals that it features two easily distinguishable opposing forces. One is the MI6 represented by their young agent James Bond and the other is the banker of many terrorist organizations Le Chiffre. Zillmann argues in his article that the audience's decision of perceiving someone as a protagonist or antagonist is based on the action of the individual or the entities. Approbation of their action leads to a positive affect and the assignment of the protagonist role. On the other hand disapprobation of the actions leads to a negative affect and the assignment of the antagonist role. Therefore the categorization of the characters relies heavily on the moral judgment of the audience, which of course differs within each member of the audience. What makes *Casino Royale* so unique amongst the three motion pictures discussed in this thesis is that the actions of James Bond and Le Chiffre are evoking such fundamental, simple and universal moral issues that one might be struggling to interpret them in more than one manner. To put it more bluntly it seems that the two characters are designed in the least ambiguous way possible and the audience is almost forced to perceive them according to the wish of the filmmaker.

James Bond works for a democratic government and his job is therefore to serve the common good of his country's citizens. Over the course of the movie he repeatedly risks his life in order to save the ones of innocent civilians. One example of his morally unequivocal heroic deed is the chase after the bomb-maker in Africa (00:10:47). In an attempt to catch the athletic terrorist Bond jumps, skids and runs through a dangerous building site. Gas tanks explode right next to 007 and he is forced to climb on top of a gigantic crane in order to arrest the bomb-maker and find out who his employers are. The story reveals later on that Bond is trying to prevent an attack on an airplane. This schema of fighting for the innocent and against evil is repeated throughout the film and solidifies Bond's role as the protagonist. The accumulation of the secret agent's character traits renders it hard if not impossible not to see him as a protagonist. Some experienced moviegoers might find his character to be dull or unimaginative but they would still see him as the hero of the motion picture.

The identification of Bond as a hero is further strengthened by the morally condemnable nature of the antagonist. Le Chiffre is financing the cruel activities of numerous terrorist groups. The attack on the airliner serves as a good showcase of what the banker's funds are capable of achieving. The villain with the bleeding eye also undoubtedly threatens the welfare of the protagonist numerous times. One of the most cruel examples is the torture scene in which Le Chiffre tries to force Bond into telling him the password of the suitcase that contains the prize money of the poker game. James Bond is sitting naked in a chair which has been prepared in a way that his genitals could be hit by a large and heavy knot at the end of a hawser that is operated by the villain. Two topics, which will be elaborated on extensively in the following section, are very apparent in this scene namely crime and sex. The naked and sweating body of 007 seven has to endure the most cruel kind of pain while his sexual organ and therefore also his sexual power is repeatedly hurt and damaged by Le Chiffre. The inner workings of the suspense within this scene cannot be better explained than by the antagonist himself:

> It's not only the immediate agony but the knowledge that if you do not yield soon enough there will be nothing left to identify you as a man. (1:50:13)

Another revealing incident is the attempt to poison Daniel Craig's character (1:33:50). During the poker game Le Chifre's girlfriend puts a toxic liquid into Bond's drink. As soon as the secret agent starts to feel the effects of the poison he rushes towards his car

where he contacts MI6 in order to ask for a proper antidote. They are able to identify the correct one but it is too late, Bond goes into cardiac arrest. He is only saved by Vesper who finds him in his car. Nothing could clarify the relationship between the banker and the secret agent more than pushing 007 to the brink of death.

2.1.2. Maximizing Suspense

After identifying the preconditions of suspense Zillmann continues by discussing the elements that decide upon the intensity of suspense felt by the audience. The German scholar describes three major elements:

1) The intensity of experienced suspense increases with the magnitude of the respondent's positive affective disposition towards protagonists or substitute entities.
2) The intensity of experienced suspense increases with the respondents' assessed magnitude of harm threatening the protagonists or substitute entities.
3) The intensity of experienced suspense increases with the respondents' subjective certainty that the threatened harm will materialize, short of certainty about this outcome. (Zillmann 220)

This means, that once the role of the protagonist and antagonist is established and the audience believes that the protagonist's agenda is in jeopardy, the intensity of these three factors decides upon the intensity of the experienced suspense. *Casino Royale* and the entire James Bond franchise have created a character that is not only morally appealing but also, as a whole, extremely attractive to a relatively large portion of the audience. There are several aspects of 007 that lead to his irresistible nature. The life of a secret agent is exciting and full of thrilling incidents and according to Freud this makes him very interesting to audiences, who often see themselves as "a poor soul to whom nothing of importance seems to happen, who some time ago had to moderate or abandon his ambition to take center stage in matters of significance, and who longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his desires" therefore the spectator often "wants to be a hero, if only for a limited time" (qtd. in Zillmann p.221).

Another reason for the alluring quality of James Bond can be found in the research of Walter Koch, who in his work about the biology of suspense, describes the three pristine topics of texts as Crimen (murder, terror and criminality), Fructus (food, satisfaction, social status) and Sexus (sexuality).These form the prototypical story types which

according to Koch are of high interest to humans due to evolutionary reasons (see Koch 45). Two of these topics are heavily relied upon in James Bond novels as, for example, in *From Russia with Love*, which has been thoroughly analyzed by Eberhart Späth in his article, *J'aime les emotions fortes: Zu den Merkmalen des Thrill in Ian Flemming's From Russia with Love*. The strong emotions which are referred to in the title are elicited, as Späth argues, by the explicit and implicit use of sex and crime (see Späth 159).

The topic of sex and sexuality might be most apparent in the use of Bond Girls within the 007 movies. Some of them, like Ursula Andres, turned into the sex symbols of their generation. Oftentimes, the women can also be found on the movie posters, although at that point in time, most of them were fairly unknown. It is not their star power that should draw the audience to see the picture, but their physical attractiveness.

Figure 1, Ursula Andres

Figure 2, Quantum of Solace

Casino Royale features two Bond Girls, namely Vesper Lynd and Solange. Both of them are attracted to 007 and sexual tension is created between the agent and the two women in the film. The two model like creatures are always shown in tight and revealing clothes which underscore and intensify their physical attractiveness. It is noteworthy that the character of Solange is not introduced because the story demands it, but rather, only in order to create a sensual connection between her and Bond. At the moment of their meeting, both of them are almost naked, wearing the absolute minimum of what is necessary to attend a non-nudist beach. They glance at each other and their eyes meet. This short moment was not designed to drive the story forward, but to create an

initiating event that creates certain expectations in the minds of an audience that is familiar with the conventions of Bond movies. The glance between the agent and the woman means that the two of them are certainly going to meet each other in a more intimate situation. As Späth points out, the sexual aspects of the Bond novels are usually preferred by men because they are told from a very traditional masculine point of view (see Späth 164). Interestingly, in this film version of *Casino Royale,* for the first time, not only the women are presented as sex objects, but also Bond himself. In the scene at the beach described above, the camera focuses on Bond in a fairly unusual way. It is him who takes the place of Ursula Andres as he rises out of the water (just like the Swiss actress did in Dr. No) revealing his almost naked and flawless body.

Figure 3, James Bond at the Beach

It is definitely a female gaze that the frame above represents, which is of course a novelty within a Bond motion picture. It is no coincidence that Daniel Craig has been described as the sexiest Bond ever by countless magazines and reviews (see Dargis). By this clever technique, the producers of the movie double the impact that sexuality has on the audience. In *Casino Royale,* Sexus not only addresses men but also appeals to and therefore intrigues women. It could be argued that the first encounter of Vesper and 007 is much more rigid and hostile than the first scene with Solange. The book-keeper does not seem to fall that easily for the agent as the other Bond Girl does. Nevertheless, the dialogue almost exclusively consists of allusions and hints that indicate a strong sexual tension between the two characters. An excellent example would be the dialogue about the attractive behind of James Bond (1:01:46). *Casino Royale*, just like its predecessors, uses sexuality in order to attract the attention of the audience. Oftentimes it is not even demanded by the story and simply is there to create added interest.

Crimen including action is the second essential part of the 21st Bond movie, which in the novels, might have challenged Ian Fleming considerably. Späth, in his paper about *From Russia with Love,* points out that fight scenes tend to be difficult to write in a thrilling way. Fleming's style relies heavily on the involvement of the reader who should be able to identify with the protagonist. But whenever a fight is described in a lengthy and detailed way, the reader is unavoidably pushed into a more objective analytical position. Therefore Fleming tends to keep the action sequences short and instead focuses on the tense moments before the outbreak of violence. Späth claims that the suspense in *From Russia with Love* is generated most effectively by letting the reader feel that lethal battles could take place within any second and not from the action itself (see Späth 167). Of course, the medium of film does not suffer from this problem. Essentially, quite the opposite seems to be the case. *Casino Royale* is a prime example of how visually interesting explicit action in motion pictures can be. The gunfights, explosions and car chases are often described as breathtaking by critics (see Corliss 1).

James Bond's dangerous and exciting occupation, the Aston Martin that he drives, the exoticly beautiful women he meets and last but certainly not least his good looks render Daniel Craig's character irresistible to a very large part of the audience. Thereby the movie creators have not only established a beloved character but also a protagonist that generates such a strong positive affective disposition towards himself that he automatically pushes the level of suspense considerably high.

The second element that can possibly increase the level of experienced suspense, according to Zillmann, is also fulfilled to a very high degree by *Casino Royale*. The amount of danger that Bond is faced with throughout the motion picture is many times overwhelming. Moreover it is not only his life that is constantly threatened but also the lives of those that he likes or is supposed to protect. It seems to be quite trivial to discuss all the situations that endanger the life of the secret agent in *Casino Royale*. Therefore the second point of Zillmann's suspense increasing elements will not be elaborated on any further. It is sufficient to aknowledge that the second point is fulfilled to a very high degree, which similarly to the first point should heighten the suspense considerably.

A much more interesting and fruitful discussion should evolve around the third element that Zillmann has described as a suspense increasing factor. The subjective certainty that the threatened harm directed at the protagonist will materialize is of course very audience centric. Therefore the difference between the experience-level of the viewers must not be ignored. Firstly *Casino Royale* is the twenty first Bond movie and is quite similar to it's predecessors in its structure and secondly it is very close to the prototypical action-thriller. As Peter Voderer observed Martin Campbell's movie belongs to a certain textype that is marked by a lack of variation, innovation and ambiguity (see Vorderer 236). Whenever a viewer is familiar with this specific genre he or she might know that protagonists in action-thrillers and especially in Bond movies never die and always succeed in the end. Therefore any harm that the secret agent is presented with will only delay his succes but will not hinder it. Nevertheless the movie repeatedly manages to evoke the feeling of suspense which on the one hand could be explained by the wish for active control[1] and on the other hand by the discourse level that manipulates the viewer into believing that the protagonist might truly be in danger.

The following sections will describe how the presentation of scenes in *Casino Royale* alters the perception process of the viewers. Technical tools like the lighting, the camera angles and the editing will be discussed to illustrate their ability to create a believable and imminent danger to the protagonist.

2.2 Filmic Suspense

To delve more deeply into the cinematic world and to analyze its possibilities, Hitchcock's work will be an excellent starting point because many scholars and critics agree that he is the director who has mastered the art of suspense in films to the highest degree (see Brewer 114).

[1] Generating suspense by eliciting the wish for active control will be elaborated on in section three.

Figure 4, Marnie at the Vault

In the introduction to *Wie haben sie das gemacht Herr Hitchkock,* Francois Truffeaut describes suspense as the dramatization of the film material. Therefore it is something that is deeply rooted in the discourse level of film creation (see Truffeat 11). Suspense in motion pictures may be conceived by the screenwriter, but it is brought to life and enabled by the director, as Figure 4 illustrates. The still is taken from *Marnie,* one of Hitchcock's later movies. The heroine, whose name also forms the movie's title, is robbing a vault. At the same time, unnoticed by the protagonist, a cleaning lady is washing the floor of the corridor. The two women are not aware of each other, only the audience is, due to the carefully picked position of the camera. The director chooses to inform the audience about something that the protagonist can not know. This of course represents the initiating event that should generate a suspenseful fear in the minds of those viewers who are feeling empathy or even sympathy towards Marnie. Not only is the cleaning lady physically already very close to the woman who is performing an illegal activity, but she is moving closer and closer towards the camera and towards the point where she is finally going to be able to see Marnie. This point in time of course represents the outcome event.[2] The whole suspenseful scene is shown by just one

[2] Brewer and Lichtenstein describe suspense as a process that starts with an initiating event which creates anticipatory concern about the fate of the protagonist. Suspense in Brewer's and Lichtenstein's definition ends with the outcome event which is of major importance in the fate of the protagonist because it is the moment which decides whether he or she can solve the task created by the initiating event or not. (see Tan, 150)

continuous shot that Hitchcock has orchestrated in order to captivate his audience. It is important to stress that film differs enormously from literature in the case of suspense, because it can access a considerably wider toolkit in order to create it. To discuss some of those tools, the opening scene of *Casino Royale* will serve as a subject of thorough analysis. Many of the possibilities of generating suspense in a filmic way can be located here. The following sections are not supposed to be a complete discussion of the cinematic aspects of the scene, but should rather point out the wealth of techniques that were relied upon by the director during the production of *Casino Royale*.

2.2.1. Dutch Angle

Already in the first shot of the first character, information is communicated by the image that suggests an uncanny and unsafe feeling. The technique that was applied here is called the dutch angle. It refers to the angle of the camera which is not parallel to the floor. It is tilted in a certain way so that everything filmed by it would appear angular as well. The human mind is used to the fact that people are standing vertically on the ground and their bodies are perpendicular to the floor. The dutch angle changes this condition and therefore elicits a strange and uneven sense in the audience which will be amplified further on in the scene (see Mascelli 47).

Figure 5, Dutch Angle

2.2.2. Wide Angle Lens

The next still frame shows the same character, who has moved on to the elevator, while heading towards his office. The interesting feature of the frame is the choice of the lens that it was shot with. It has a short focal length and therefore is a wide angle lens. The peculiarity of such glass is that it distorts objects which are very close to it. To be more precise, it magnifies things that are close to it and shrinks those which are further away. This effect causes a very unnatural rendering of the face. The nose of the actor appears to be disproportionately larger than the rest of his face. Again this effect is very subtle and appears to be minor, but it affects the audience and puts it into a suspenseful state. The dutch angle and the wide angle lens almost act as a small initiating event by telling the audience that something must be wrong. Moreover there are additional clues hidden in the imagery which underscore tension (see Monaco 77).

Figure 6, Wide Angle Shot from Above

2.2.3. Angle of the Camera

Next to the choice of the lens, the angle of the camera is also very crucial. Usually a low viewing angle is applied when scenes need to be rendered in a dramatic and visually impressive way. Objects filmed from below appear to be larger than life and therefore tend to have a stronger impact on the audience. This common effect is illustrated by Figure 7 which is taken from an action scene in *Casino Royale*. The elevator scene on the other hand is an example for the opposite effect, namely a very high viewing angle. Usually this position is chosen to create a geographical overview in order to visually orient the audience like in Figure 8. In this case, the high angle is certainly not allowing the viewer a better viewpoint to observe the location. It rather creates the notion of a security camera that is following the man it is aimed at. Therefore it enhances the paranoia that should be slowly creeping into the minds of the audience (Mascelli 37).

Figure 7, Low Action Angle

Figure 8, High Overview Angle

As the scene progresses and the character enters his office, the story elements step into the foreground and have a larger impact in generating suspense. Firstly, the man discovers that his safe has been opened. Secondly, the audience becomes aware of the fact that he has a gun which James Bond is unable to see. The audience should assume that the agent is unaware of the possibility that the man opposite of him might be dangerous. The suspense of the scene is heightened by the circumstance that it remains unclear how well equipped James Bond himself is due to the simple fact that large parts of his body and possible armor are covered by a shadow.

Figure 9, Vault

2.2.4. Lighting

The black and white frame only allows the viewer to recognize Daniel Craig's face. Due to the carefully placed lights and the choice of his clothing, it is impossible to see whether he is holding anything in his hands or not. The lighting mood that the scene was shot in is usually referred to as low key (see Peterson 66). It plays a crucial role within this scene because it enables the rise of suspense. If the audience would be be able to see from the beginning onward that Bond is holding the magazine of his opponent's gun in his hand, the movie at this point would not be able to generate any kind of heightened emotion.

The possible outcomes of the scene are defined. The protagonist might be in

Figure 11, Gun in the Drawer

Figure 10, James Bond in the Shadow

considerable danger. The audience seems to know more than at least one of the characters. The conditions of a prototypical suspenseful scene in Hitchcock's sense are

met, but the next shot does not represent the solution to this situation, but is rather a shocking effect.

2.3. Time Manipulation

The following sections will deal with an essential technique in *Casino Royale* that not only enables, but also improves suspense in the motion picture and creates the illusion of creadible threat to the protagonist. Time manipulation is a very powerful and complex topic within films and will not be discussed to a full extent here. The goal of this section is to illustrate specific examples of how film time and filmed time are diverging, in order to heighten the emotions felt by the audience.

Film time in this text refers to the length of real time of the screening of a motion picture. It describes the actual duration of the film, for instance, the time that passes on the clock on the wall of the theater or projection room. Filmed time, on the other hand, describes the amount of time that passes within a movie story or a given scene, i.e., some films tell the story of a character's lifetime within two hours of actual film screening time. Others might concentrate on only one day in the entire film. It is essential to understand that film time and filmed time are almost never identical and they are certainly never the same in *Casino Royale*. Nevertheless, the creators of the movie, sometimes for dramatic purposes, want to make the audience believe that it is actually witnessing a scene in "real time". The key to this trick seems to be continuity.

2.3.1. Continuity

Casino Royale is based on the novel by Ian Fleming that has been published under the same title. The novel by Fleming could be described from the perspective of aesthetic illusion as a great example of illusionary narrative fiction (see Wolf 21)**.** It tries to hide the artificiality of the text by imitating the process of real perception. His story seems to be unusual but certainly possible and believable. These principles were retained during the transformation of the novel into a screenplay and they were also not altered during the production of the motion picture. The principles were kept alive and intact because the director has implemented the concept of continuity, which is described by the T*he Five C's of Cinematography* as the following:

> A professional sound motion picture should present a continuous smooth, logical flow of visual images, supplemented by sound, depicting the filmed event in a coherent manner. It is the continuous aspect of a motion picture; it is the continuity that decides success or failure of a production. A picture with perfect continuity is preferred because it depicts events realistically. (Mascelli 67)

It seems to be evident that continuity represents an equivalent in the filmic space to what aesthetic illusion is in literature. The goal of the Bond movies and essentially most of the Hollywood pictures is to make the audience forget that it is watching a picture that is projected onto a screen. The producers would rather prefer to make the viewers believe that they are looking through a window into an exciting and thrilling world. In the research conducted by Ed Tan, this creation of the illusion is called involvement, which is opposed to artefact appreciation. These two types describe what certain kinds of spectators are looking for in films. Furthermore, it is stated that the general audience seeks involvement in motion pictures which *Casino Royale*, due to its fidelity to the principles of continuity, certainly delivers to them. Therefore, continuity helps to create the illusion that is necessary to make the Bond movies more thrilling and exciting (see Tan 35).

From the perspective of time manipulation, continuity also plays a very important role. Only if the audience can be convinced that it is looking through a magic window into another reality, where the rules of physics are the same as those on earth, can subtle changes in time have an impact. A good example would be if the director wanted to increase the speed of a fight and therefore simply increased the speed of the playback of the fight scene. If the audience noticed the trick, the scene would lose its effect. However, on the other hand, if the audience would not be aware of the fact that it is manipulated, but rather assumed that filmed time and film time were congruent, then the fighters would seem to be hitting harder and faster. As a result, the scene turns into a more dramatic and thrilling one, instead of becoming or looking ridiculous. The improvement of a fight scene through time manipulation can be achieved quite effectively through jump cuts. These unique cuts have been invented by Jean-Luc Godard during the editing process of his Film *A bout de souffle* (see Monaco 219). He decided to shoot his scenes from very few camera angles and therefore had difficulties to trim them in order to make them shorter and faster. To solve this problem he did something that broke the law of continuity which is to cut out a piece from the middle of a shot and stick the two ends together again. The result of this unconventional editing

technique were visible jumps in time. Often a character would stand in one end of the room and then would suddenly appear in the other end without cutting to another camera angle. Godard would also apply this technique during dialogue scenes where the cut appears to be even more apparent.

It is interesting that the French filmmaker has invented this trick in order to save time because later on it has been used for stylistic reasons. Nevertheless *Casino Royale* and many other action movies use it in order to manipulate time as well. To be more precise it is used by the editor in order to manipulate the perception of time. A perfect example would be the fight scene in the restroom at the beginning of the movie. Figure 12 shows a moment where Bond has already executed a punch at his opponent. His arm is stretched out and the head of the long haired man is turned to the side by the impact of the hit. Figure 13 shows the next frame in the movie which obviously cannot be the next frame on the original reel that the camera has produced. Something is missing because in this picture Bond's hand is pulled back as far as possible in order to maximize the strength of the next hit. Obviously the piece of film between these two frames has been the victim of a Jump Cut. By cutting out these few frames on several occasions the fight becomes not only shorter but also faster and therefore more intense. Of course this kind of Jump Cut is not a normal one but a hidden kind. It relies on the principle already mentioned above which is to manipulate time without the audience noticing it. Therefore the viewer thinks he is experiencing the reality but instead he is rather witnessing a heightened, improved and intensified kind of it. The dangerous nature of Bond’s situation is thereby increased. The audience feels disoriented due to the fast editing technique. The amount of information that is left out is so big that it is difficult to follow the course of the action. The audience has to concentrate real hard in order to fill in the gaps which are left out. This involves them even more because each second they are forced to reorient themselves.

Figure 13, Finishing the First Hit

Figure 12, Preparing for the Second Hit

Most of the fight scenes in *Casino Royale* use this technique which compresses time in order to increase the pace of the action and renders it more dangerous and threatening.

2.3.2. Real-time Effect

One of the most striking divergences between movies and literature can be found while investigating the abilities of film to create the illusion of real time. This feature is made possible by the different ways of processing film and literature. The pace of how quickly the story unfolds in the mind of the reader can be controlled by him or her almost entirely. A book can be read quickly or slowly, from cover to cover or selectively. The reader is in control and therefore it can be argued that reading is a much more personal and subjective undertaking. It is obvious that through this creative control that the reader possesses, reading can provide certain experiences that film can

not. Movies are ideally shown in cinemas where the audience is sitting passively in their comfortable chairs and the only option they have got is whether or when they leave to refill their popcorn or visit the restroom. They can not pause the film, nor can they increase or decrease the speed of it. They are forced to witness it as closely as possible to the way the director has prepared it for them. Therefore they lose a considerable amount of control, but they gain the possibility to experience the effect of real-time on the screen. Motion pictures make it possible to create the illusion that one second in the real world lasts one second in the movie, which means that film time and filmed time are congruent. This possibility that film provides is heavily relied upon in the tremendously successful television show called, **"***24"* where each episode represents one hour of a day**.** Of course in an earlier section, it has already been revealed that this seemingly straight correspondence is nothing more than a trick and a lie, but for now the focus remains on the perception of the audience.

A very powerful example of using the real time effect in *Casino Royale* and in many other James Bond movies is the underwater rescue (2:14:00). At the final climax of the movie, Bond jumps into the water in order to save Vesper, who is locked into an old elevator that is fully submerged. It is common knowledge that humans can only survive under water for a certain amount of time and therefore the viewer is provided with a deadline. Vesper will die in a considerably short amount of time if Bond is unable to help or rescue her. It is crucial to realize at this point that the audience can only receive the additional amount of information, namely the deadline, through aesthetic illusion and continuity, which makes the audience believe that one second in filmed time corresponds directly to one second of film time.

The realtime effect is used in several other occasions during *Casino Royale,* but in the next section, it will be discussed how it is causing the highest amount of suspense when it is creating or relying on a deadline, such as the scene in which Bond is going into cardiac arrest during the poker game illustrates (1:34:37).

2.3.3. Deadline

Many handbooks that are trying to teach the art of writing a screenplay claim that by adding a deadline to a situation and by putting the protagonist under time pressure, a mildly entertaining scene can be turned into a suspenseful experience that makes the

audience hold its breath (see Russin, Downs 201). Anton Fuxjäger has dealt exclusively with this claim in his dissertation in which he comes to the conclusion that temporal restrictions do indeed add to the suspense of a scene. Nevertheless, adding a deadline can not rescue a hopelessly flawed script, but it helps intensify a good one.

Fuxjäger argues that a time limit provides an additional layer of information to the audience and therefore makes the outcome event a more graspable concept and more increasingly terrifying (see Fuxjäger 349). A good example would be concerned with the lifespan of the sun. Scientists know as a fact today that the sun will eventually reach a point in its life where it has to explode and by that action, will destroy the earth. Nevertheless, the general public is not afraid of this event because it will only happen billions of years from now. Of course the anxiety level of humanity would experience a slight bump if in tomorrow's newspaper, several respected scientists would announce that a mistake had taken place in their calculations and that the sun would actually explode within a year. This statement should cause a mass panic because contemporary technology can not evacuate a large enough part of humanity in order to assure its survival, nor can it create a habitat for people to live in, anywhere in the universe. This leads to the second intriguing aspect of deadlines – it limits the possible solutions to the problem of a protagonist. Therefore, the task morphs into an even more difficult one and the question whether the hero can solve it or not becomes an even more fascinating one. On the other hand, the suspense of a scene can be killed by a deadline which is too short. People on earth would not feel any kind of suspense if the example from above turned into reality. This is due to the fact that the tight timeframe not only limits the possible solutions, but in fact totally eliminates them, which is of course useless in a motion picture or any narrative form because mind numbing suspense would turn into a fearful waiting for the end.

Fuxjäger has demonstrated in his paper that increasing the suspense of a scene is not simply solved by adding a generic deadline. The timeframe has to be skillfully crafted in order to maximize the suspense of a screenplay. Fuxjäger has defined three variables that have to be taken into consideration while constructing a stirring story:

- The length of a deadline.
- The difficulty of the problem the protagonist has to solve.
- Possible damage that the characters have to face if the outcome of the task turns out to be negative. (Fuxjäger 352)

Casino Royale is a motion picture that tries to maximize the suspense experienced by its audience. Therefore, it is highly understandable that its producers have applied the technique of the deadline several times in order to involve the audience and keep it on the edge of its seats. A thorough analysis of such situations where time is restricted will reveal that not only the concept of the deadline increases the suspense of the scene, but the three criteria defined by Fuxjäger have been exploited in order to create the highest level of suspense possible.

One of the finest examples of the application of the aforementioned technique is the scene in which Bond is poisoned by Le Chiffre during the poker game and his heart goes into cardiac arrest (1:34:37). The length of the deadline is ridiculously short but it is exactly long enough to allow Bond one possibility to save his life. Even though his situation seems to be hopeless, there is a slim but possible chance of survival. Of course later on, it turns out that Bond is unable to save himself and needs the unexpected help of Vesper, but from the moment of his poisoning, the audience roots for Bond because it has hope for a positive outcome. The difficulty of the situation is also extremely high, which is partly caused by the short deadline, but also by the fact that 007 does not know what kind of poison has been put into his drink. As one of the medical staff states during the scene, “they '[…] don't know what it is yet'” (1:36:08). Despite Bond's unusually high level of training, experience and skills, he is forced into a situation that demands his utmost concentration and even luck. The last criteria defined by Fuxjäger is the possible damage, which in this case, the protagonist could suffer. Again, this requisite is fulfilled in a way that it creates the most intense feeling of suspense. James Bond obviously is afraid to lose his life, knowing he has been poisoned.

2.4. Metafilmic Thrill

After clarifying how the discourse level of *Casino Royale* can increase the percieved danger that threatens the protagonist a further source of generating uncertainty will be discussed in this section. Meta filmic thrill is quite unique to the twenty-first Bond movie due to the different characteristics of its 007. Daniel Craig’s James Bond differs in some aspects considerably from his predecessors. This change has caused a heated discussion not only among critics, but also among movie goers (see Soyka 1). In order to understand the peculiarity of the situation and to be able to discuss how suspense has

been generated by it, it will be necessary to briefly study the history of the iconic British secret agent.

Ian Fleming gave birth to his most famous character in the year 1953 by writing a novel called *Casino Royale*. Eleven novels and two collections of short stories featuring the same charismatic protagonist followed. In the late 1950s, Harry Saltzman purchased the film rights for all of Fleming's novels except the first one in the name of the EON production company. In 1962, *Dr. No* was turned into a motion picture and the film career of James Bond started. It developed to be the most successful film series of all time. Nevertheless, the money made at the box offices started to decline at the end of the 1980s, when Timothy Dalton portrayed 007. It was the first real crisis that EON encountered and it caused the longest break between the production of two Bond movies. Finally the series was relaunched by a new director called Martin Campbell and featured a new leading man named Pierce Brosnan. Despite the great success of Golden Eye, Campbell refused to direct another Bond movie (see Cork and Stutz). After three additional 007 motion pictures, the series reached a crucial moment for the second time, which is described by film critic Richard Corliss in his article about *Casino Royale*:

> The 21st in the official series produced by the Broccoli family [...] tries to rejuvenate a 44-year-old franchise that was showing signs of tired blood and losing its appeal to the young-male action-film demographic. (Corliss 1)

Therefore, the goal of the first Daniel Craig James Bond film was to modernize the British secret agent. In order to do so, the movie rights of the first novel of Ian Fleming were purchased by the EON production company, which allowed them to create a kind of prequel to the rest of the series. It also allowed them to recruit Martin Campbell as a director again, who only agreed because he was given the creative freedom to portray a Bond who was entirely different from the one in Golden Eye (see Soyka 1).

These changes caused a highly interesting shift in the dynamics of the movie and were responsible for the creation of additional suspense on two levels. Firstly, due to the prequel character of *Casino Royale,* James Bond does not seem to have the confidence of the previous versions and therefore appears much more vulnerable. This, of course, automatically increases the level of perceived danger and suspense in all the precarious situations in which he finds himself . Secondly, the audience enters the 21st Bond movie with certain expectations, which at first do not seem to be fulfilled by Daniel Craig. The

question arises at the outset of the film whether the traditional Bond that many viewers have admired for years has become lost forever.

2.4.1. A Vulnerable Bond

The fight sequence of the opening scene of *Casino Royale* demonstrates very early on that it features a completely different Bond than the movies preceding it. The scene shows Bond's actual first murder, which is certainly not an easy one. Of course, 007 movies have shown cruel murders before, but the interesting difference here is that the murder does not only seem to be cruel in order to affect the audience, but also to show how it affects the young agent. The nature of the murder is also much more graphically violent and realistic than normally what is shown in previous Bond classics. Richard Corliss describes the fight as following:

> The killing is grimly realistic, as if to suggest that this Bond operates in the real world of real pain and has wounds that may never heal. (Corliss 1)

It is also explained within the first scene that Bond needs two kills in order to deserve a double ‘O’ status. Therefore he is still in training and is not the charming but deadly killing machine of the earlier films. He has neither got the practice, nor the experience of Pierce Brosnan's version. This is palpable not only in the first scene, but in many others. A great example would be the cardiac arrest scene from which the frame below is taken. Daniel Craig does not glide through his tasks like his predecessors but has to fight and try much harder to survive. These circumstances increase, of course by definition, the amount of suspense that the audience should feel during *Casino Royale*. The odds are against James Bond who gets pushed closer to the edge than ever before. By that he loses his much beloved elegance, but certainly gains many opportunities to increase the suspense.

Figure 14, James Bond is Suffering

Moreover, in *Casino Royale*, James Bond falls in love, which makes him much more vulnerable as well. He even realizes it himself by confessing to Vesper: “I have no armor left, you stripped it from me. Whatever is left of me, whatever I am, I'm yours” (1:59:32).

This love makes him careless and finally results in the climax of the movie, in which he himself almost dies and in addition, loses Vesper. Again this would not have happened to a more experienced Bond, who rather prefers to use women for his own interests than getting used by them.

Whether it is the lack of experience in love or in his profession, Daniel Craig is a different Bond. He is less elegant, less professional, less sovereign, but definitely more prone to being used as the key element in suspense inducing scenes.

2.4.2. Is Bond Gone Forever?

The new Bond might have changed and might even be more exciting, but the question that many fans of the old version of 007 must have asked themselves during their visits at the cinema was whether those features were gone forever or would eventually come back again.

Many prototypical Bond features seem to be non existent in *Casino Royale,* like the elegance and the irony of the secret agent. It is not only the character that seems to be affected, but also elements like the hi-tech gadgets or even the James Bond theme composed by Monty Norman seem to be missing at first (see Cork and Stutz). Over the course of the picture, bit by bit, many of the well known features are slowly earned by Daniel Craig. He wins an Aston Martin while gambling at the Bahamas and also receives a tuxedo chosen for him by Vesper. Nevertheless, the James Bond of the former versions is still absent until the very last scene of the movie. Out of nothing and with intimidating aplomb, comes a bullet that hits Mr. White (the last villain to be caught by Bond) in the leg. Suddenly, the well known 007 theme starts playing and after being asked who he was, Daniel Craig confidently states “The name is Bond, James Bond” (2:20:20).

Interestingly, this last example of a suspense inducing technique in *Casino Royale* is very different from the previous ones given above. The change in Bond’s character and

demeanor can only be noticed by viewers who are familiar with the previous 007 movies. Therefore, the creation of suspense in this case relies on external knowledge and even more importantly, on an active participation by the audience. Moreover, narrative tension here is not dependant on the actual plot of *Casino Royale*; it does not rely on the conflict between the hero and the villain, but rather on the expectations of certain audience members. In the following sections, the different nature of the analyzed movies will lead to numerous similar cases of suspense that rely much more heavily on the active role of the audience. Therefore, a general shift towards the cognitive approach will be necessary in order to understand *The Prestige* and *Blow-Up* in a sufficient way.

3. The Prestige

The Prestige is a motion picture that differs from *Casino Royale* in several aspects, but two of these aspects will prove to be of substantial importance to this thesis. Firstly, Christopher Nolan's film does not feature a linear plot, but rather challenges the viewer with a plethora of analepses and prolepses. Secondly, the movie tells the tale of two magicians who seem to share the role of the antagonist and the protagonist simultaneously. These two aspects are significant because they will force the theoretical analysis of the suspense in the movie to shift from a structuralist approach to a cognitive one.

Heavy temporal restructuring and the denying of a clear protagonist is a departure from classical Hollywood structures and pushes the audience to be much more mentally active during the perception process of the movie. Instead of being presented with an irresistible hero like in *Casino Royale*, the viewers of *The Prestige* are challenged to actively decide whom they are rooting for. Furthermore, the unraveling of the plot requires an increased mental effort in comparison to the Bond film. A third and very obvious example of the differences between the two movies are the action sequences. Whereas James Bond is constantly threatened by revolvers, guns, dynamite and knives, Borden and Angier are very rarely threatened physically and if so, the danger lasts only for a very short time. There are no car chases or shootouts in *The Prestige*; the dangers are only suggested or implied and almost always require the imagination of the audience. Due to this rise of individual cognitive labor that each audience member has to invest, the difference in the ways each and everyone is going to perceive the movie should differ immensely compared to more canonical motion pictures like *Casino Royale*. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask for a change of focus from a text-oriented approach to a reader-oriented one. This will not only render the analysis of the whole movie scientifically more valuable, but will also increase the ability of this thesis to discuss the full extent of suspense in *The Prestige*.

The following sections will use different cognitive approaches to suspense in order to describe its application in the movie. The main analytical tool will be schema theory, which should provide an insight into the use of temporal ellipses and the transcendence

of viewer expectations and their ability to create suspense. These techniques both challenge the viewer to actively participate in their perception of the motion picture. Mystery boxes, a term first coined by J.J. Abrams, involve the audience even more. The thesis will not only elaborate on how these devices work, but will also locate their use in the movie. The last section that discusses *The Prestige* will begin the application of the problem solving process to the analysis of suspense. This third section explores the highest degree of audience involvement.

3.1. Deconstructing Structuralism

3.1.1. Story vs. Plot

The plot of *The Prestige* is a very complicated one. Once analyzed and dissected, it should become obvious that it consists of two stories, which are both broken into two parts. Each magician's life is a complete tale with one magician as the protagonist and the other as the antagonist. The alternation of the villain and hero role in the movie is dealt with in more detail in the next section. The life stories are divided into the early rivalry section, which explains the roots of the conflict between the two magicians, and the latter part, which describes the quest for the most impressive transported-man-trick. The old Borden, who is charged with the murder of his nemesis, is the first story that is introduced. The second story is recounted by Angier's diary; it reveals the way the elder Angier acquired the machine for his "Real Transported Man" and continues to describe his ventures as a magician. The third and the fourth stories are telling the tales of the young Angier and Borden and what turned them into eternal enemies. The stories are not arranged in a linear way because the earlier events are accessed, for the most part, through diary entries of the two magicians. Therefore, the audience is often aware of how certain quests and fights will end while they are witnessing them. One of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon is the new transported-man-trick that Angier wants to acquire on his journey to Colorado. The movie starts with the presentation of this exact trick in an immense theater that is sold out. A large number of fascinated spectators should indicate that either his journey to America was successful or that he gained access to the trick in another way which would render the failed journey to Colorado meaningless. Therefore, once the film reaches the scene that reveals whether

the real transported man will be a success or not, the audience's suspense should be relatively low because they already know the answer. Of course Noel Carrol and many other scholars have discussed this situation before and described it as the paradox of suspense. Carrol claims that a viewer who has already seen a film and therefore knows how every scene will end, can still experience the sensation of suspense while watching it a second time. He states that this is possible because "audiences are induced into a special sort of psychological state that might be described in terms of self-deception, denial or disavowal" (Carrol 89). It is arguable that this and many other approaches to the paradox of suspense truly explain the phenomenon. Nevertheless, all of the scholars who have investigated this problem agree that knowing the outcome of a suspenseful scene decreases the degree of tension that can be created in the minds of the audience. Therefore, analyzing the movie from a structuralist viewpoint might not lead to a satisfying understanding of how the temporal restructuring of the story in *The Prestige* leads to the creation of suspense.

3.1.2. Angier vs. Borden

As numerous scholars of the cognitive psychology movement have claimed, nobody can see into the minds of the audience and know how each and every one of them reacts to certain aspects of a story. By following this train of thought, nobody could claim to know that James Bond is always perceived by audiences as a positive hero. It is possible that some spectators perceive him as a negative character and even a villain. It is possible that these people root for his demise instead of his success. Nevertheless, it has already been discussed thoroughly that he adheres to the basic moral principles of the western world. He fights to protect people and not to harm them. He is driven partly by courage and a certain sense of duty towards his homeland and the Queen. Even though he sometimes risks his life just to impress a beautiful girl, the outcome of his actions always benefits characters who are presented in a similarly positive light. Therefore, it is likely that a considerable amount of viewers from the western world will root for him because they feel empathy or even sympathy towards the secret agent. He is a classic example of a protagonist in the structuralist sense (see Zillmann, 220). This of course cannot be stated about Angier and Borden. An exact analysis of their story will prove that they both serve as an antagonist and a protagonist.

The Prestige begins with a court trial that accuses Borden to be the murderer of Angier. He is the prime suspect because he has been found right next to the corpse of his rival immediately after his death. Angier had been locked up in a water tank and drowned, because help in the form of his partner Cutter arrived too late. The audience is not given enough evidence to believe that Borden was directly involved in the death of Angier. He looks more like somebody who is surprised by the situation when he enters the crime scene.

Figure 15, Borden Discovering Angier

His position as a victim is further emphasized by the introduction of a little girl who waves at him across the courtroom. She seems to be his daughter. This suspicion is turned into a fact when Borden is visited in prison by a lawyer who offers him 5000 pounds for his magic tricks. As soon as Borden refuses the offer, he is threatened by losing his daughter. According to Zillmann, this seemingly hopeless situation should qualify him as a character for whom a certain part of the audience might feel empathy.

This degree of esteem is immediately lost in the second major sequence of the movie which concentrates on the youth of the two magicians. Here a love interest in the form of an assistant named Julia is introduced. She and Angier are in a romantic relationship. The two of them and Borden perform regularly in the act of an elderly magician. In this act, Julia is tied up by the two young men in order to be locked up in a water tank. Her task is to free herself from the trick-knots and to climb out of the tank before the curtain is lifted. The first time the illusion works and Julia survives the feat. Before the next presentation of the trick, Borden criticizes the knot they are using and wants to improve

the design of the showpiece. He ignores the warnings of Cutter and Angier and calls them cowards. It is the first time that we discover a dark side in his personality. At the following performance, Borden hesitates before tying his knot. The movie audience has no way of knowing whether he is following his orders or using the new knot. The performance goes horribly wrong and Julia drowns in the water tank. This scene indicates two things: firstly, that Borden might be a reckless individual who puts his own will above the safety of others. Secondly, it connects this accident to the death of Angier, who has drowned in a water tank, just like the one his girlfriend died in. At this point, it would be hard to argue against the opinion that Borden is an unethical and potentially dangerous man. According to Zillman, this would disqualify him as the protagonist.

Analyzing the actions of the two main leading men suggests that neither one of them qualifies as a true hero of the movie. It may be argued that for short periods of time, one of them might gain the empathy of the audience. Nevertheless, neither one of them behaves in a consistently moral way over the course of the whole motion picture. Naturally, there are numerous heroes even within Hollywood blockbusters who are flawed and partly posess a questionable morale, but their negative actions are almost always directed towards characters that seem to deserve it due to their evil nature and cruel behavior. In the case of *The Prestige,* this is different. As soon as Angier is portrayed as a young and promising magician who wants to overcome the shadows of his past by re-launching his career, Borden is the one who wants to sabotage Angier's efforts. He destroys the magical cage, reveals the mechanics of it and thereby kills the act of his nemesis before it can gather any momentum. On the other hand, Angier shoots off two of his enemy's fingers in an attempt to kill him. By that, he not only endangers the whole career of the character portrayed by Christian Bale, but also the life and wellbeing of his wife and future child. The roles of protagonist and antagonist are constantly changing and therefore the film is denying the audience a true hero that it can root for up until the last scene, in which it can be argued that the true nature of the two magicians is revealed. This enormously subverts the development of suspense in a structuralist sense because the structure of the movie aligns the climax and the revealing of Angier's and Borden's character. Therefore, theoretically no anticipatory concern for the lives of any of them should exist during the scene that is usually the most suspenseful moment in a movie.

Instead of concentrating on simplifications like Carrol did with morality and Zillmann did with empathy, Vorderer takes a much more complex approach to the relationship between protagonist and reader. He relies on the rather advanced research that has already been conducted in the field of perspective taking and has introduced the following three conditions that define the relationship between hero and audience:

1) The type of text (are protagonists and antagonists presented in such a one-sided manner that conflicts can only arise with the antagonist […]?)
2) The readers/viewers (do they usually react emotionally to other persons?)
3) The situation (is the protagonist interesting or important for the reader? […]) (Vorderer 250)

The second point already comprises the possibility that the duality of the two magicians does not affect the viewing experience of *The Prestige* at all. If the reader does react emotionally to other people, then points number one and three are still to be discussed. The former point has been elaborated on already. Neither Angier nor Borden are presented as pure antagonists or protagonists. The third point is a much more interesting one. It can be argued that both characters have been put into challenging situations which reveal a lot about their true personality. Neither one of them gains an edge over the other in this category because they are both highly interesting and controversial. It seems as if no approach to the way a protagonist increases suspense in a movie can be applied to *The Prestige*. This indicates that the source of suspense has to lie somewhere else.

3.1.3. No Hero's Journey

The deviation from the mainstream blockbuster formula results in a different kind of suspense, which seems to have distanced itself from the struggle between good and evil. *The Prestige* does not simply depict the story of a struggling hero who has to overcome inner and outer conflicts in order to return home safely as a better man, which is a basic narratological structure that Joseph Campbell has identified and many Hollywood screenwriters follow religiously (see Campbell 30). Nolan's film seems to be circling around the mysterious sacrifices that the two magicians are willing to make in order to become the best performers they can possibly be.

Firstly, the role of these mysteries within the story is that they are unquestionably fueling the desires of the two main characters. Angier's highest goal up until his very

last breath is to find out how the most impressive trick of his nemesis works. He destroys his romantic relationship with his assistant Olivia, by persuading her to become Borden's employee and to spy on him. Angier travels to Colorado and spends approximately a year of his life there in order to buy a machine that would allow him to do the same trick as his nemesis. Furthermore, throughout his numerous endeavors, he spends a large amount of money, which pushes him to the brink of bankruptcy. The magician even kidnaps Borden's partner and threatens to kill him, even though Angier himself has never participated in any criminal activity up to that point. Once he accepts that he will never be able to reverse engineer Borden's trick, he is ready to use a machine, which forces him to kill his own clone at every performance. Finally, he stages his own death to trick Borden and thereby tries one last time to elicit his secret. Borden, on the other hand, loses his wife, two of his fingers and almost his daughter, due to the hard choices he had to make in order to protect his secret, which enables him to perform his version of the transported-man.

While being of the utmost importance to the motivation of the two main characters, their big secrets also drive the reception process of the movie. As already mentioned above, many questions in *The Prestige* are answered early on, due to the temporal restructuring of the movie. The big exceptions are Angier's and Borden's transported-man tricks and the mysteries surrounding them. One of these secrets, that is only revealed in the last act of the movie, is the way Angier died during his performance at the beginning of the film. Another example would be the ambivalent relationship that Borden had with his wife, which in the end led to her commit suicide. The crucial difference to films like *Casino Royale* is that these last two secrets do not decide the success or failure of Angier's and Borden's quest. Before the last scene of the movie, Hugh Jackman's character has finished his career as the most successful magician of the world and Christian Bale's character has managed to find a way to care for his daughter himself. The last two secrets only explain how they have managed to do so. This is of course very unusual, because in a Hollywood film, suspense is mostly motivated by the struggles of the main protagonist who is pursuing a moral cause and the climactic scene reveals whether or not that actor manages to reach his or her goal. A second differentiating factor is that in Nolan's picture, the true character of the magicians is only revealed in the last moment, which again underscores that morality and the hero's journey might not be the driving force behind suspense in this case. It is rather the

abstract concept of two beguiling secrets, which propels the movie forward and keeps the audience on the edge of their seats.

3.2. A New Kind of Suspense

The analysis of *The Prestige* has proven so far that its unusual temporal structure and the duality of its two main protagonists deny the application of structuralist definitions of suspense. Nevertheless, the movie has been described by critics and fans as a suspenseful one (see Nivair). This indicates that a different approach to suspense is required in order to fully understand the inner workings of *The Prestige*. Peter Wuss provides such a new perspective on narrative tension in his article *Grundformen filmischer Spannung* where he describes it the following way:

> So kann ein Film deutlich auf äußere oder mehr auf innere Spannung setzen, also entweder einem eng gefaßten Begriffsverständnis entgegenkommen, wie das etwa im Western, Kriminal-, Detektiv-, Abenteuer- und Horrorfilm oder in anderen populären Genres geschieht, oder statt aktionsbetonter dramatischer eine mehr "analytische" Spannung anstreben bzw. eine nahezu unfaßbare "atmosphärische", die die Anstrengung der Sinne fordert […]. (Wuss 101)

Wuss not only indicates that there are several kinds of tensions in movies, but also that tension can challenge the audience in numerous ways. Westerns and Dramas are not relying on the same cinematic and narrative tools and therefore, they are achieving different kinds of cognitive experiences. Depending on the genre, tension can not only take on different shapes, but there can also exist several ways for it to be created. It is important to note that Wuss does not regard ‘atmosphärische Spannung’ to be suspense. He always refers to it as narrative tension, which is a concept that involves many feelings, only one of them being suspense. Wuss starts his cognitive approach to tension by elaborating on the link between emotions and cognition. He thereby relies heavily on Leontjew:

> Die Besonderheit der Emotionen besteht darin, daß sie die Beziehungen zwischen den Motiven (den Bedürfnissen) und dem Erfolg oder der Möglichkeit der erfolgreichen Realisierung der ihnen entsprechenden Tätigkeit des Subjekts widerspiegeln. (qtd. in Wuss 102)

This process of emotions being the result of the need for certain actions to be successful can also be seen as an information processing concept in which emotions act as a certain

motor or motivator for the gathering of information about the specific situation of an individual. Furthermore, if this need for new pragmatic information is denied by any outside force, the result has to be an emotion, namely that of frustration (see Wuss 102). This implies that the cognitive process of information gathering can lead to emotion.

Another very similar approach to creating tension is the lack of passive control, which refers to the inability of making a prognosis about the future. According to Dörner, people prefer to have active control over their lives, which allows them to influence the course of things in a practical way. If this is not possible, they long for passive control, which enables them to at least be aware of possible dangers they could be confronted with. Furthermore, Dörner argues that actual or even anticipated loss of active or passive control results in certain emotions, the nature of which depends on the difficulty of the problem that caused the loss of control. It also depends on a factor that Dörner calls competence. Competence refers to the level of confidence that an individual has regarding his or her ability to cope with a problem. This confidence can be based on self-esteem or knowledge, but either way, it influences the emotions of a problem solver regarding a certain task. Dörner claims that a low level of competence might result in anger, frustration or even fury, but the right amount can lead to a certain kind of tension that will be shortly identified as suspense (see Dörner 63-70).

3.3. A Unified Suspense

Unfortunately, scholars so far have tried to separate suspense from other forms of narrative tension and have not investigated the relationship between the phenomena. Using the active and passive control approach introduced by Dörner for a unifying definition of suspense will illustrate how looking at the links between suspense and other forms of narrative tension not only creates a logical and helpful framework for narrative tensions, but also clarifies the term – suspense - itself. Nevertheless, before delving into the concept of active and passive control, it is important to discuss the different kinds of phenomena that scholars have identified so far.

3.3.1. Previous Approaches

In his work, Gerald Cupchik describes two mental processes surrounding narrative tension that readers can encounter. He labeled the first one: "uncertainty about an event outcome" and the second one is: "a problem in understanding the meaning of what is happening in a bewildering and ambiguous moment". He identifies the former mental process as suspense and claims that it is the driving element in stories such as police thrillers. Cupchik calls the latter mental process disorientation, which should be prevalent in more artistic endeavors like Absurd Theatre (see Cupchik 195). In a further step, the author argues that suspense directs the attention of the reader into the future within the narrative (e.g. driven by fearful apprehension, the audience forms predictions for the life and wellbeing of the protagonist). Disorientation, on the other hand, asks for an examination of the past within the story and also within the memory of the reader, in order to find helpful clues.

Cupchik's narrow definition of suspense and its segregation from disorientation is highly problematic for this thesis. *Blow-Up* is an art film, which according to Cupchik, is not part of a suspenseful genre and therefore would fail to qualify as a subject of interest for this thesis. Secondly, disorientation will prove to be an important part of suspense, namely in the sections examining temporal ellipses and the transcendence of viewer expectations. Disorientation will be of even bigger significance in the section analyzing Antonioni's work, which often misdirects its audience by suggesting one super-schema, just to undermine it later on. Nevertheless, Cupchik is not the only one who has linked certain emotions and cognitive processes like suspense to specific story types.

Vorderer differentiates between action stories and experience stories (see Vorderer 238). The former is much more easily processed because it relies heavily on physical activities and therefore demands causal understanding from the viewer. On the other hand, experience stories concentrate on aspects like the inner struggles of characters and ask the audience for an interpretation of intentionality. Vorderer continues to claim that: "readers have to perform partially different cognitive acts to make use of a text's cues"(Vorderer 238). This difference should have an impact on many measurable aspects of the reading experience including the speed of processing the text, the suspense and the involving nature of the narratives. Vorderer and his colleagues have

performed such experiments and discovered that experience texts were indeed processed much more slowly than action texts. Furthermore, the cognitively more complex stories were deemed more interesting, involving and more meaningful. Despite these great qualities, the experience texts have fallen short compared to action texts in the category of suspense. Readers have felt much more suspense in the structurally simple action texts than in their more involved counterparts. Reasons for this alleged shortcoming can be found very easily. One of them is the ambiguous nature of experience texts, which usually causes a multitude of possibilities and ways to perceive them. This is primarily caused by inter- and intraindividual differences in readers. Nevertheless, it seems crucial to highlight at this point that suspense has still been felt within experience texts, even though to a much lesser extent.

3.3.2. The Active and Passive Control Approach

Dörner has introduced the concept of the need for passive control in order to account for tension that is generated by disorientation. The German scholar also describes the relationship between passive and active control. Nevertheless, he misses the opportunity to describe how the desire for active control is linked to narrative tension. He only clarifies that passive control is needed in order to achieve active control:

> Die Unmöglichkeit zur richtigen Kategorisierung eines Sachverhalts beinhaltet die Unmöglichkeit, seinen zukünftigen Zustand vorherzusehen. Die Unmöglichkeit, den zukünftigen Zustand einer Situation vorauszusehen, beinhaltet die Unmöglichkeit, in dieser Situation Handlungen zu planen, die einen erwünschten Zustand der Situation herbeiführen. (Dörner 63)

The following section will try to illustrate that suspense can be generated in two different ways: firstly, by a lack of passive control, which is utilized in many art films and also to a large extent in *The Prestige*, and secondly, through the desire for active control, which is prevalent in many action movies and Hollywood Blockbusters like *Casino Royale*. Finally, the link between the desire for active and the desire for passive control will be elaborated on by arguing that the two concepts are complementary regarding their ability to create any possible kind of suspense.

The process of generating suspense through a lack of active control is best described by Aaron Smut's desire and frustration theory.

> If we are actively working toward the realization of a desired outcome, suspense is precluded. However, what we find in all suspenseful narratives and in all suspenseful situations in real life are factors that suspend our efficacy by frustrating our ability to work toward the satisfaction of a desire. Suspense only arises when our ability to make a difference is radically diminished. Suspenseful situations are those where we want to affect an outcome—that is, where we strongly desire to have a causal impact—but our desire is frustrated. (Smuts 284)

Smuts does not use the term active control, but it seems to be obvious that by describing 'a want to affect an outcome', he refers to the same basic concept. As soon as active control is regained, there is no possibility for suspense. Smuts uses the final seconds of a basketball game to elaborate on this point. Imagine a game in which the Miami Heat is leading by one point against the OKC Thunder. There is only one second left on the game clock and Kevin Durant (a player for the OKC Thunder) has two free throws. If he makes both shots his team wins. If he makes only one, then the game goes into overtime. If he misses both, then his team loses. Kevin Durant performs his first attempt and misses. Therefore his second miss would mean an immediate loss, but a basket would propel the game into overtime. What Kevin Durant is feeling while preparing for his second shot is not suspense. He has active control over the situation and his actions will decide the further development of the game. He might feel pressure or fear, but certainly not suspense. The audience, on the other hand, might experience an extremely high amount of suspense, which is caused by its inability to actively affect the situation. The Heat fans cannot deflect the ball and the Thunder fans cannot help it into the basket. They are forced to sit in their seats and wait for the situation to unravel. Of course, the people in the stadium would like to affect the situation because they have certain feelings for both of the teams. They are fans, which mean they are emotionally invested in one of the squads. Therefore, the fans have a desire for one of the teams to succeed. This desire is frustrated by the rules of the game, which deny them the ability to affect the outcome of the match in any game. Proof for this strong wish to be actively involved in the game can be found at every free throw attempt in the NBA. As the picture below illustrates, fans are often waving colorful foam tubes and other devices to distract the shooter of the opposing team. Interestingly, statistics have proven many times that the average NBA shooter is not affected by this technique at all. Nevertheless, the fans seem to cling to the only device at their disposal to give them the illusion of affecting the game.

Figure 16, Kevin Durant Preparing for a Free-Throw

Hitchcock's very narrow definition of suspense seems to be even more ingenious from the perspective of active control. In the director's version, the audience's wish to affect the situation is maximized because he or she knows exactly how the protagonist could be helped. Nevertheless, a movie does not allow for such action and very much like during the basketball game, the audience is forced to remain in their seats and wait for the unraveling of the situation.

Despite its exceptional effectiveness, relying solely on Hitchcock's definition of suspense would create an incomplete theory that might fail to explain many interesting occurrences of narrative tension. Eliciting the desire for passive control should also belong to the suspense inducing techniques for two reasons. Firstly, it serves the same psychological purpose from the perspective of a director as the desire for active control does. As filmic devices, mystery boxes and disorientation through temporal ellipses keep the audience on the edge of their seats and motivate them to keep watching. Therefore, the filmic purpose of a misleading superscript is the same as the purpose of a physical fight scene between a villain and a hero; it creates the feeling of uncertainty, which forces the audience to create predictions about the final outcome of a scene or a movie. Secondly, the desire to obtain passive control is always fueled by the desire to reach active control. Without passive control, there can be no active control and therefore, suspense is in both cases motivated by the same human need.

A good example for the link between the need for passive and active control would be the unpleasant situation of getting lost. Let us imagine a scenario in which a hiker reaches a crossroads where he is faced with the choice between three trails. Even though he is in possession of a map, he does not know where he is located on it and therefore is unable to choose the correct path. The hiker has lost active control because he cannot act upon his desire, which in this case is to keep moving towards his destination. More importantly he has also lost his passive control because he cannot predict the consequence of his actions. The hiker does not know where the roads will lead him until he can find out where he is located and assign the three paths to the markings on the map. The situation of the hiker clarifies two very crucial phenomena. Firstly, even though his primary goal is to reach his final destination he needs to orient himself first. Therefore regaining passive control is a precondition of obtaining active control. Secondly the hiker probably only wants to know where his position on the map is because he wants to know which path will lead to his goal. Whenever passive control is a precondition for active control the desire for reaching the former will always be fueled by the need for obtaining the latter.

Therefore, techniques like disorientation have to be a part of suspense because they are a relatively effective tool to momentarily deny the audience its passive control and force the viewers to regain their ability to predict the upcoming events of the movie. As the later sections will illustrate, the creators of *Blow-Up* are repeatedly utilizing this technique and are thereby creating a suspenseful mood that permeates the motion picture from the beginning to end.

3.4. Schema Theory

3.4.1. Introduction

Schema theory is an essential part of the cognitive approach to suspense and therefore has to be discussed before delving deeper into the narrative processes of *The Prestige*. Rumelhart and Ortony have described it the following way:

> [Schemata are] data structures for representing the generic concepts stored in memory. They exist for generalized concepts underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions, and sequences of actions. (Rumelhart 101)

Schemata are knowledge in a very abstract form. They store structures that individuals have recognized due to being exposed to them repeatedly. A good example would be going to a birthday party. Most people know the common elements of a birthday party, such as a cake with candles, presents, party decorations, guests and generally a positive celebratory atmosphere. Once a certain amount of birthday parties have been attended by somebody, a schema starts to develop in his or her brain that stores all the details mentioned above. Schemata are supposed to simplify the otherwise overwhelming avalanche of information that reaches people every day. By knowing what one can expect at a birthday party, its attendance becomes much easier and involves much less processing power. These knowledge structures of course also affect the reception process of movies. Concepts like genres, clichés or archetypes are all ascribable to schemata. Therefore, structured knowledge of the past heavily influences the way new knowledge and information is dealt with. Every new movie and character that is experienced for the first time is compared to the vast amount of motion pictures and narratives that have been stored in the memory of the viewer.

Rumelhart has identified several other features of schemata. Firstly, they have slots, which can be filled with variables. In the case of the birthday party, a valid example would be the age slot of the birthday child. Every age has its slightly different rules. It would be considered strange to play hide and seek at a thirtieth birthday but completely acceptable at a kindergarten age. Furthermore, almost all schemata consist of several other schemata. A birthday contains numerous conventionalized structures like cakes, party hats or decorations. Therefore, schemata can represent knowledge at all levels of abstraction. Lastly, one of the most important aspects of schemata from the perspective of cognitive suspense is their flexible nature. Schemata can always be revised and improved upon. They are in no way stable structures that remain unchanged after being created. It is not only their content that is flexible, but also their application. People can make a mistake and apply the incorrect schema to a situation and therefore they are always looking for information to support their chosen knowledge structure or to help them find a more accurate one.

Schemata are cognitive structures that simplify the perception of the world around us. The following sections will illustrate how they can be used in order to generate a very

specific kind of suspense that elicits a more active participation from the viewer than the narrative tension found in *Casino Royale*.

3.4.2. Transcending the Expectation Horizon

The first technique discussed in this thesis that capitalizes on the information gap in order to create suspense has been identified by Ohler and Nieding as transcending the expectation horizon of viewers. This method can be found several times in *The Prestige* mostly in combination with other techniques. The two authors define this method the following way:

> […] the presentation of cues in a text is manipulated so that the cues cannot be integrated into the viewers' mental models of the story. The viewers under those conditions are forced to fundamentally revise their systems of assumptions and expectations. (Ohler 139)

This means that the viewer uses schemata in order to produce predictions of how the story they are presented with is going to unfold. This is, of course, not the result of a conscious effort, but happens automatically in the background. Additionally, it can also be claimed that during the presentation of the movie, the audience does not use the latest information to constantly create new super-schemata, but rather relies on the one created in the early stages of the movie. This state is constant until the viewer is confronted with a scene that forces it to reevaluate its actual schema. At this point in time, Ohler and Nieding claim that the viewer's expectation horizon is transcended. This implies a state of chaos and disorientation in the minds of the audience. Instantly, the weight of the local information provided by the movie is deemed much more valuable and new clues for a correct super-schema are hunted for. Being disoriented and feeling uncertain in this specific situation can be called suspense according to Ohler and Nieding, and is also congruent with the active-passive control approach. The audience loses its ability to predict future events because the super-schema has proven to be wrong. Once enough information has been gathered to create new and more secure predictions about the future, the audience's care for local information decreases and the viewer enters a more relaxed state of mind. Therefore, passive control is regained and the suspense fades out.

An excellent example of the transcendence of the expectation horizon of viewers in *The Prestige* is located approximately at the center of the motion picture. At this stage

Angier is obsessed with the only trick of his nemesis, that he is unable to comprehend namely “the transported-man”. He is willing to sacrifice substantial amounts of his time and money to reveal the secrets of the trick. He even decides to persuade his assistant called Olivia, who is also his lover, to infiltrate his enemy, by becoming Borden’s assistant, until he reveals to her the precious trick. Of course, Angier has to pay a high price for such a cold-blooded decision. The magician not only loses his lover, but also is embarrassed by his rival for not improving his performances. On the other hand, Borden’s stage presence is vastly elevated by the appearance and show-talent of Olivia. After breaking his leg and being ridiculed by Borden in front of his own audience, Angier suddenly seems to reach his goal. Just as planned, Olivia accomplishes stealing the diary of her new employer and hands it to her former boss. Unfortunately, the notebook is protected by a code and needs to be deciphered. Angier’s ruthlessness heightens one more time and he decides to kidnap Borden’s engineer in order to exchange him for the secret of the precious trick. Nevertheless, he only manages to force one word out of his enemy, which is supposed to be the key to the diary and the secrets of the transported-man. The word is TESLA, who is a scientist living in America. Once Angier locates him, he manages to persuade him into building a machine that can accomplish the trick that he has envied Borden for. Tesla agrees, but does this only in exchange for a lot of money and he warns his business partner that this assignment will take a substantial amount of time. Angier agrees and uses his free time to decipher the diary, which is supposed to contain all of Borden’s secrets. While the magician is waiting for Tesla’s breakthrough, the super-schema of this thread of the story has probably been identified by the majority of the audience. The protagonist struggles and fights his way towards his goal, which he seems to be approaching slowly, but steadily. He has sacrificed a substantial amount of his time, money and energy to do so and is close to a breakthrough. The predictions for future developments might include the following scenario: Angier will return to London where he will finally solve his problem of having to rely on a double. He will be in possession of a trick that is equal to the one of his nemesis and due to his supreme showmanship, the race for the best magician of England and possibly the whole world will be decided in his favor. Unfortunately for Angier, he and also the audience have to realize that at (1:22:26), this prediction is incorrect. The last pages of the diary reveal that his former assistant has betrayed him and has helped Borden to trick Angier into believing that Tesla is the key

to the "real transported-man". It is explained that Tesla represents merely the key to deciphering the diary, a diary which is of a fake nature and therefore useless for the purposes that its latest owner has intended it for. At this moment, the whole schema of Angier's struggle towards success is destroyed. He is no longer the magician with the upper hand and will not be able to return as the improved and possibly superior magician to England. The audience had no way of being certain that this twist of events was going to occur and are therefore forced to update their entire model of this branch of the story. The information presented right after this crucial scene immediately gains importance and has to be analyzed carefully by the viewers in order to create a new and working model that is able to predict future events. It is of paramount importance to note that, by using schema theory to analyze the scene described above, the creation of suspense does not rely on the wish of the audience for Angier to succeed. Suspense at this point is much more motivated by the urge to regain passive control by finding a schema that allows for more accurate predictions of the future. Furthermore, this particular transcendence of the expectation horizon should be creating a strong emotional response because it changes such a large amount of assumptions made during the course of the movie. The twist at (1:22:26) proves that Olivia has betrayed Angier; it implies that Tesla is a conman and most importantly, that Borden's trick is still a mystery to Angier and the audience. The more of the viewers' assumptions that are proven to be incorrect by an unexpected twist, the bigger the chaos is that is created by it. Therefore, it can be argued that the state of suspense that is created by such unforeseen actions increases by the number of schemata that are affected by it.

The creators of *The Prestige* have not only created a suspenseful scene by keeping the number of the schemata high that have been affected by the twist, but they also accomplished the difficult task of creating a truly unforeseen change of events. Ohler and Nieding argue that transcending the expectation horizon loses its effect once it is overly conventionalized:

> Should viewers frequently encounter a particular type of information contrary to their expectations, they will, step by step, generate new abstract schemata from the combination of schemata, episodic memory traces, and indices involved in their attempts to interpret the situation. The new schemata guarantee a better interpretation of the particular type of information. (Ohler 141)

Therefore, twists that have been used repeatedly will lose their effect and cease to be suspenseful. Fortunately, this is not the case in *The Prestige*, due to numerous reasons. The most important one is the unconventional duality within Angier's character. As already illustrated above, he is neither a hero nor a villain, which increases the difficulty of predicting the probability of his success immensely. Furthermore, due to the inconsistent time structure of the motion picture, the audience has already witnessed a very spectacular version of Angier's transported man, which might indicate that his endeavors in the USA should be successful.

There are many more examples of transcending the expectation horizon of the audience in *The Prestige*. Oftentimes, these phenomena occur in combination with a narratological technique that is elaborated on in the next section.

3.4.3. Teaching Schemata

Teaching schemata in order to create suspense refers to the practice of showing a certain course of action and thereby explaining to the audience the possible dangers that accompany that action. In a second step, the course of action is repeated with a slight variation, which indicates that those dangers mentioned before might indeed harm the protagonist. This process occurs quite often within the tale of the two magicians and it can be argued that it is partly due to the profession of Angier and Borden, namely performing dangerous and elaborately planned magic tricks. Firstly, this section will discuss how teaching schemata works and secondly, the combination of taught schemata and transcending expectation horizons will be elaborated upon.

As Wuss points out in his article about Narrative Tension in Antonioni, schemata are abstract structures of knowledge that have been acquired over time. This learning process is not limited to the actual physical world, but also extends into fiction and different forms of literature. Therefore, authors can rely on several kinds of knowledge-structures in the minds of their audiences:

> […] three structural forms with varying characteristics can be defined in film. The processing of information during the reception of a film occurs quite differently depending on whether (a) an external structure caught on film is to be appropriated in the context of perceptional formation of invariants by the internal model of the viewer, or (b) whether it has already had a sufficient mental representation so that it can already submit itself to thought, or (c) whether its shape has long since been formed into a stereotype by communicative use. (Wuss 56)

Wuss calls structure (b) a conception based one. It is enough to see a conception based structure just once, in order for it to take effect, which means that it is appropriated by the audience and it will be recognized on a second occurrence. The magic tricks presented in *The Prestige* can be identified as knowledge structures of a conceptual nature. The audience knows what the crucial details are and what could possibly go wrong when they are either executed incorrectly or when they are possibly sabotaged. This prospect of failure is underscored within every explanatory scene in *The Prestige* and is therefore the source for the sensation that this paper is most interested in.

The water cabin trick is the first great example of how magic tricks are turned into suspenseful events in Nolan's film. The segment starts with the demonstration of the ideal script. The audience is confronted with a sequence of actions that result in an impressive magic trick. The girl is presented to the audience and then two spectators seem to be randomly selected. Of course, the attentive viewer of the movie recognizes the disguised Angier and Borden, who move excitedly and seemingly surprised towards the stage. They are asked by the magician to tie the assistant's hands and feet up by a knot. Angier does so in a routine fashion, but Borden has a problem with his knot. He can only complete it on his second try. After the girl is tied up, Angier swiftly kisses her leg and she is pulled up into the air in order to be sunk into the water cabin. The cabin is locked and the magician conceals it with a curtain. Cutter, the technician and engineer, starts his stop watch and from this moment on, the assistant has to hold her breath until she is able to free herself and escape the cabin. Thirty seconds after the stopwatch has been started, the curtain is pulled and a wet but free assistant is revealed. Everything went according to plan and the magic trick has been successful. It is important to mention the small details in this scene that foreshadow possible danger. Cutter not only uses a stop watch in order to time how long the girl has to hold her breath, but he also grabs an axe right at the start of the trick, which strongly indicates that there is a realistic possibility of something going wrong. Later on, the two unusual aspects of the

magic trick, namely the kiss and the knot problem, are explained. It turns out that Angier and the lovely assistant are a couple and very much in love with each other. They are planning their future together and Angier's girlfriend Julia even proposes a new stage name for her lover, namely the great Danton. It is sincere and profound love that the audience is presented with. Borden, on the other hand, is depicted as a reckless youngster, whose only interest is the spectacle on stage. He wants to try a new knot and has no respect for the wise Cutter, who commands him to stay with the old and safe solution. It could be argued that the second presentation of the water tank magic trick has all the classical ingredients of a suspenseful scene. The protagonist's wellbeing is in danger because his girlfriend has to go through a hazardous ordeal. The antagonist might even be increasing the difficulty of the task by changing the old knot into a new and more dangerous one. Therefore, there are the two possible outcomes: survival and death. Nevertheless, one would miss an important aspect of this scene if the suspense induced by schemata had been left out of its analysis. The crucial moment in the second presentation of the magic trick is the time on Cutter's stopwatch. The audience has learned from the first presentation that it takes Julia approximately thirty seconds to free herself. As soon as the watch hits the crucial half-minute mark, the audience of the movie expects the curtain to fall and the assistant to smile and wave towards the spectators. It is because of the newly acquired water tank schema that suspense is strongly reinforced past the thirty-second mark on the stopwatch. The viewer knows what should happen, but the scene that unfolds in front of his eyes does not coincide with the mental plan in his or her brain. A negative outcome of the scene is becoming more and more likely and the danger that Julia might suffocate increases with every second. This is not something that the viewer sees, but something that he or she can only infer. It is not like a fistfight that is played out on screen. There are no physical and visible threats to the protagonist, like in James Bond. Suspense is not evoked by visual information, but rather by a mental process. A schema that has been first planted and then activated in the viewer's mind is creating this fear for Julia's wellbeing. If the audience had not seen a successful presentation of the trick before, it would not have been so clear that Julia is in great danger. It is the inferring of information that creates suspense in this scene and therefore it differs profoundly from those countless hazardous situations that have been created in *Casino Royale*, where danger is seldom generated in the minds of the audience, but is much rather visualized on screen.

The creators of *The Prestige* have combined this already effective concept of teaching schemata with the technique of transcending expectation horizons, in order to heighten the sensation of suspense. One of the numerous scenes where this combination is clearly visible is the dove in a cage trick that Angier performs during his first large-scale show. In order to clearly distinguish between the combination of the two techniques and simply teaching schemata, it will prove to be very helpful to compare Angier's trick to Borden's bullet catch scene.

The sequence starts when Borden's wife demands that the magician explains this seemingly reckless trick to her. Borden obeys and reveals to her that a piece of cloth is placed between the bullet and the gunpowder, which allows for the removal of the projectile before the trigger is pulled. After demonstrating the trick successfully to his wife, she inadvertently insults him by deeming the trick a bit simple. Borden answers that the trick, although simple, could still turn out to be dangerous if somebody managed to put a button or even a bullet into the barrel without the magician noticing it. This explanatory scene, which teaches the audience the schema of the trick, is immediately followed by the following two shots:

Figure 17, A Bullet in Angier's Hand

Figure 18, Angier

Figure 17 shows a bullet in the hands of the man depicted in Figure 18. This might suggest that Angier plans to do exactly what Borden has warned his wife about. As already mentioned before, the danger is only implied and is not a result of a physical manifestation on the screen. Up until the moment when Angier points the gun at Borden, there is no direct visual indication of any threat. Nevertheless, the attentive audience member will have little doubt about whether Borden is in distress or not. The suspense is built up slowly and is increased with every little detail that helps the viewer predict the forthcoming events: Angier's trickery with the bullet (picture above), the close-up of the gun that is handed to the volunteer during the performance of the actual trick in which something is clearly inserted into the barrel, and finally the disguised, but determined face of Angier who is staring at his nemesis. These are all clues that amount to an increasingly precise prediction, namely that Borden's life is in serious danger. The predictions have been enabled by the schemata presented at the beginning of the bullet catch sequence.

In contrast to the steady rise of emotions during Borden's trick, Angier's presentation works differently. Here, important information for a correct prediction is held back from the audience and the suspense rises rather quickly.

The sequence starts with Angier's engineer, who presents the apparatus that will enable him to perform the last and hopefully most impressive part of his magic show. It is a dove trapped in a cage and the magician's task is to make the animal and the cage

disappear. The novelty of the trick is that while usually magicians hide the cage behind a piece of cloth for the climax of the performance, this time Cutter (the engineer) has developed a way which enables Angier to let the cage disappear while it is in plain sight and two different people are holding its sides. Before the trick is performed in front of an audience, it is explained in detail to the viewers of the movie. Angier wears a mechanism on his back that pulls the cage apart into two pieces, flattens it and hides it in his sleeves. In addition to the basic functionality of the mechanism, the audience is also presented with the exact steps that have to be performed in order to create the perfect illusion. Before the film moves on to the actual performance, Angier and the owner of the theater have a last conversation, which underscores the importance of a successful premiere. If Angier fails to impress the audience, he will lose his spot on stage immediately and another entertainer will replace him. This conversation of course increases the importance of a flawless show and therefore should strengthen the suspense felt by the audience.

On the day of the performance, everything starts out as planned. Two volunteers are chosen in order to inspect the cage and place their hands on different sides of it. As soon as the last hand touches the magical instrument, the probability of a successful performance decreases drastically.

Figure 19, Borden's Hand on Angier's Cage

The missing pinky and ring finger on figure 19 indicate that the deformed hand belongs to Borden which is immediately confirmed by a camera tilt to his disguised face. At this point, the schema of the trick is no longer valid. Whatever the movie's audience has

been expecting is changing instantly. Instead of relying on formerly acquired knowledge connected to the trick, the viewers have to look for new clues and other information stored in their memory that allow them to generate a valid assessment of the situation. Borden has just lost his fingers due to the sabotage act of his nemesis. Therefore, one valid prediction would be that Borden is trying to act out his revenge and destroy Angier's act. No matter what the precise prediction of each audience member is, the film destroys their previous theories and forces them into a state of chaos that Ohler and Nieding would certainly describe as suspense.

3.4.4. Temporal Ellipses

Previously, it has only been clarified how the restructuring of the story has had negative effects on suspense in *The Prestige*. This section is going to illustrate how the reorganizing of the story leads to the creation of a certain kind of suspense that is again very different from the one in *Casino Royal*. The James Bond movie is told in a very linear way. Therefore, the future is uncertain and serves as the main source for suspense. The viewer is constantly making predictions hoping for a positive outcome and fearing a negative one. A good example would be the chase through the airport in which Bond tries to stop a terrorist who wants to drive a fuel wagon into the largest airplane of the world. The secret agent is at a disadvantage because he has grasped the plan of his enemy too late. Therefore, he has to hunt down the truck first before he can disarm his opponent and stop the attack. The odds are against his moral and benevolent plan and the outcome of this conflict is unknown to the viewer because it lies in the future. This scene is of course a classic example of a suspenseful moment, according to Zillmann. In *The Prestige,* the temporal structure is non-linear and often quite complex. This creative decision has created many interesting effects, especially in the field of suspense. There is an increased number of temporal ellipses which leads to narrative tension in numerous kinds of ways. The first narrative phenomenon that results from the omission of a certain part of the story is explained excellently by Ohler and Nieding. They claim that the audience forms a certain superstructure for the movie that they are watching. Once the temporal ellipsis occurs, this global schema might not be applicable and local coherence building mechanisms must be activated in order to cope with the new information. These mechanisms create predictions which are imprecise, but active, until further information allows for adapting the global schema correctly. This process

is very similar to the technique of transcending expectation horizons. The authors describe it the following way:

> The cognitive system attempts to integrate information elements of the locally constructed text base into the mental model as quickly as possible to create a continued instantiation of the stored schemata relevant to the development of the plot. Any delay in these operations leads to an imbalance of the system and thereby forms the basis for the development of suspense experience. (Ohler 143)

Examples of this phenomenon can be found repeatedly within *The Prestige* due to its plot structure. One of the first occurrences is the temporal and spatial jump from Borden's prison cell to Colorado, where Angier is supposed to look for a trick that matches his rival's transported man. The scene starts with picturesque images of a train working its way through the Rocky Mountains. In the train sits a young Angier, who is trying to decipher Borden's diary. The nature of the movie seems to have shifted from a court drama to an adventurous journey that is still wrapped to a large extent in mystery. The audience knows that the character played by Hugh Jackman is on a quest to find an apparatus for a magic trick, but they do not know how he is going to accomplish that and what challenges he is going face. The train keeps moving and seems to enter into a different world. It transports the magician from sunny and warm valleys to a snow-covered town called Colorado Springs that has been built close to the highest peaks of the cold and dark mountains. As soon as Angier steps out of the train, he notices something peculiar, something that is out of the ordinary and should not be found in a settlement that is hundreds of miles away from the civilized cities of the east coast. As the sun slowly vanishes behind the enormous mountains, a streetlamp is turned on right next to Angier and he realizes that the town has electricity (shown in figure 20).

Figure 20, Angier Notices a Streetlamp

At this point, the audience might infer that Angier's quest is going to be an unusual one which correlates quite nicely with the peculiar nature of the magician's task. The eerie quality of the town is reinforced by further observations by Angier. He takes a carriage to a hotel that is built right into the side of a rocky cliff which is covered by gigantic blocks of ice. Once he arrives at his accommodations, the surprised traveler is greeted by the complete staff of the hotel. While he enters the lobby, the magician realizes that he is the only guest. At this point, many theories and predictions can be constructed by the audience. Obviously Angier has invested a lot of time, money and physical effort in order to get to quite a remote and hidden town. It could be possible that the town's hidden nature has been appealing to people who would prefer to be left alone and stay unnoticed by the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the nature of these mysterious people remains uncertain and the only hint to their profession is the electricity that powers the streetlamps of the settlement. The audience has to keep guessing until Angier reveals his intentions to the receptionist. Jackman's character orders a coach for the next day that would bring him to the top of the mountain. The man behind the counter warns him that the peak is closed due to scientific experimentation. Angier answers: "Yes I know, that's why I'm here" (00:09:30). At this point, the viewer's predictions might gain in precision. The electricity in the streets was no coincidence. The town seems to be the home of one or several scientists. This hint might even reveal the actual goal of Angier's journey. It is possible that he intends to ask the scientists to build a machine for his new magic trick. Again, further information allows for more precise predictions. A crucial clue is provided to the audience when Angier reaches the top of the mountain

only to be stopped by a man who asks about the magician's intentions, to which he answers: "I've come to see Tesla" (00:10:58). This is the final piece of the puzzle and allows for rebuilding a superstructure for the movie that is consistent and reliable. Angier traveled to Colorado in order to ask Nicola Tesla, a real world character and well-known electrical engineer, to build a magical machine. Tesla is not only famous for being one of the brightest minds of his time, but also for being a futurist and eccentric. He would be the perfect scientist to build a machine that was shown at the very beginning of the motion picture during Angier's performance. At this point, the audience has the chance to regain passive control over the movie and the suspense should decrease drastically. These temporal ellipses can be found repeatedly in *The Prestige*, but as the following chapter will illustrate, there is more than one way to use them in order to create suspense.

3.5. Secrets and Mysteries

3.5.1. Temporal Restructuring

Christopher Nolan's film does not only feature prolepses, but also numerous analepses. Therefore the audience often knows the outcome of an event beforehand, which should, according to Carrol, decrease the potential for suspense. Interestingly in *The Prestige*, the effect caused by the plot is occasionally the complete opposite: Knowing the outcome without being informed about the actions leading up to it can create a certain mystery that the audience wants to unravel. This desire can then be leveraged in order to create suspense.

An intriguing example of this technique is the presentation of the first transported-man, which is part of Borden's show and is witnessed by Angier. The story of this sequence is a simple one. Angier disguises himself and confesses to his assistant that he is going to spy on Borden. He visits the show, watches it silently, and waits for the last trick, which is the transported man. He sees the trick, is stunned by it, and walks back to his assistant to tell her that he has just witnessed the most amazing magical performance of his life. In the movie, the presentation of the scene starts with Angier, who is disguising himself and explaining his plans to his assistant. Afterwards, he watches the show, but before the last and most important trick, the audience is propelled forward to be presented with a baffled and impressed Angier, who is at home again and is removing

his disguise, while explaining to his assistant that he has just witnessed the most amazing magic trick of his life. At this point, some viewers might become curious about the magical performance that has been left out by the prolepsis. One could argue that the look on Angier's face, his somewhat shaky voice and the eerie music suggest that something important and profound has been witnessed by the smitten magician.

Figure 21, Angier Describes Borden's Trick

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the audience might feel the urge to see the magic trick. This curiosity is turned into suspense by delaying the crucial information that would reveal the mystery as long as possible. The desire of the audience for active control, which in this case is to see the trick, is frustrated by the filmmaker. Therefore, this example of suspense is fundamentally different from the ones in *Casino Royale*. In the first transported man scene, tension is not generated by the fear for the protagonist's wellbeing, but simply by curiosity. Therefore, the definitions of Brewer and Lichtenstein or Zillmann would fail to account for the narrative tension created in the situation described above. Only theories that are not tied to a protagonist like Aaron Smuts' desire frustration theory can serve as an explanatory framework. In order to prove that this scene is indeed fundamentally different in its nature, it will be helpful to see Zillmann's and Smuts' theories fail when they are applied to the first transported man, as if its suspense would rely on the wish for Angier's wellbeing.

Zillman argues in his article about suspense and drama for the following relationship between narrative tension and the protagonist: "The intensity of experienced suspense increases with the respondent-assessed magnitude of harm threatening the protagonist

[…]" (Zillmann 220). According to this line of thought, suspense should be diminished at (00:52:16) because the motion picture has already proven that the older Angier will be an enormously successful magician, by letting the audience witness his magic show in an immense, sold out theater. He appears to be way more successful than the young Angier who sits disguised in a small hall in order to spy on his rival. This should imply that no matter what Angier sees and no matter how impressive the last trick of Borden's show is, he is going to be a rich and successful magician. It seems to be contradictory to fear for someone's career if it has already been shown to end on a high note. Of course scholars, who have analyzed the paradox of suspense, claim that even repeated viewing of a movie allows for suspense to be created (see Gerrig 100). Therefore, one could still argue that anticipatory concern can be felt for Angier, even though the audience knows that the magician is going to be able to improve his career. Nevertheless, it would be a foolish narratological decision to limit the experience of the viewer already at the first screening of the motion picture and diminish the suspense by the aforementioned temporal restructuring.

It becomes even more apparent that suspense in the first transported man scene does not rely on the fear for the fate of the protagonist, but rather on curiosity when Smuts' theory is applied the incorrect way. If the desire of the audience in this scene is the wish for Angier's career to be successful and the frustration is rooted in the fact that the viewer cannot assist Hugh Jackman's character in reaching his goal, then Smuts' approach fails to explain the situation at (00:52:16). There is no action that the viewer might want to prevent or information that he or she would wish to tell Angier. The viewer cannot root for anything in the scene, except for Borden's trick to go poorly. Of course, the protagonist has just explained that Borden's last trick was the best one he has ever seen. Furthermore, the performance is not even shown in its entire length, which means that the viewer is denied the possibility of forming his or her own opinion. The director decides to cut to Michael Cain's astonished face before Borden is able to finish his presentation. The audience had not even seen the second man who is supposed to come out of the closet and catch the rubber ball as the two pictures below illustrate.

Figure 22, The Last Visible Frame of Borden's Performance

Figure 23, Cutter Watching Borden's Trick

Instead of letting the audience witness the trick, it is explained in its entirety by the dialogue between Cutter and Angier. By denying the viewers the chance to build their own opinion of the magic performance, the desire for it to be bad cannot be frustrated. The viewer is not able to judge the trick's quality without seeing it; therefore he or she cannot be disappointed or frustrated about its uniqueness.

Looking at the story level does not seem to lead to a satisfying analysis of the suspenseful characteristic of the scene, which indicates that the source for excitement lies within the discourse level. It is the way the sequence of events is presented to the audience that generates a certain expectation. The temporal restructuring is only one piece in Nolan's toolkit. The effect of the scene is also heightened by the mood that the

director is able to create in the room. Borden's initial tricks seem to be trivial and are not appreciated by the seemingly uninterested audience.

Figure 24, A Bored Audience Watching Borden's Trick

The colors in the theater are kept in a dull brown that makes the magician almost disappear on stage due to his similarly colored outfit. Nobody seems to enjoy the presentation, which only increases the mystery surrounding the last trick. The audience of the movie must ask itself how Angier could have come back from that show so impressed. What incredible trick must he have seen that could obliterate everything that preceded it? The steady rise of strings in the background supports the increasing tension. Even the rhythm of the scene seems to add to the eerie quality. Long silences are repeatedly punctuated by short and abrupt sentences. Olivia asks Angier two questions during the scene. The first one is "What happened?" (00:53:51). It takes Angier 16 seconds to reply and even after such a long time, he does not really answer the question. The magician states with a concerned look on his face: "He had a new trick". The audience has to wait a further 15 seconds for Olivia to ask her second question: "Was it good?" Again the assistant's utterance is followed by a pause until Angier simply admits that his biggest fear has come true: "It was the greatest magic trick I've ever seen!" All of these elements increase the anticipation of the audience and simultaneously delay the climax of the scene.

This section has tried to demonstrate how suspense is facilitated by curiosity in the first transported man scene. It has also been indicated that curiosity was created through temporal restructuring. A further analysis of several other examples of curiosity driven

suspense within *The Prestige* will not only clarify that temporal restructuring is not the only possibility to create a mystery, but it will also allow for a deeper understanding of this unique kind of suspense.

3.5.2. The Mystery Box

Due to its effectiveness, motivating narrative tension through curiosity is not exclusive to Nolan's work and has been described in detail by Hollywood director J.J. Abrams in his TED talk in 2008, where he called it the "Mystery Box". In his presentation, he even brings an actual mystery box on stage with him that he bought in a magic store and has never opened in his life. Abrams describes the concept and its influence on storytelling very vividly:

> You look at stories, you think, well, what are stories but mystery boxes. […] If you look at Star Wars you've got the droids they meet the mysterious woman - who's that we don't know: Mystery Box! Then you meet Luke Skywalker then he meets the Droid, he sees the holographic image, you learn - oh she wants to find Obi wan Kenobi, he's her only hope. But who the hell is Obi wan Kenobi – Mystery Box. So then you go and he meets Ben Kenobi, Ben Kenobi IS Obi wan Kenobi! Holy Shit! (TED)

J.J. Abrams has implemented the concept of the mystery box in his own work in an extremely successful way and the analysis of his writing should not only prove the effectiveness of mystery boxes, but also ease their understanding in *The Prestige*. Abrams was the co-creator and screenwriter of *Lost*, which was one of the top ranking TV-shows of the last decade (see Nelson 1). It can be argued that the most appealing aspect of his story, that tells the tale of the survivors of a plane crash who are stuck on a seemingly uninhabited tropical island, is that it was full of inexplicable incidents like the attack of an ice bear in the middle of a jungle. The concept of the show is that the daily struggle of the islanders is intercut with flashbacks of their previous lives at home. All of them have a secret that lies in their past, which then explains their behavior and role on the island. Nevertheless the island itself and its secrets are the most intriguing aspect of *Lost*. One question was asked during every interview conducted with the cast members and especially J.J. Abrams – What is the island? (see TED 00:00:33). Abrams of course never answered this question up until the last episode of the last season, but whoever has watched his TED talk must realize that the island is nothing more than a big mystery box. The amount of websites and threads in Internet forums discussing and

predicting the role of the island proves that an enormous interest in revealing the secrets of *Lost* has existed (see Nelson 1). Viewers could not wait to see the next episode of the show even though they slowly understood that every episode would only end with a new question. Just like Abrams described it in his speech: "Every mystery box is followed by a new one" (TED 00:05:57).

The reason for this seamless stream of new questions is quite simple and is even explained by Borden in *The Prestige*. At (00:20:02), he talks to Sarah's nephew, whom she brought to a magic show in which Borden performs as an assistant. The boy cries because he thinks that the magic trick presented to him has cost a bird its life. In order to calm him down, Borden gives the boy a special coin with identical sides for a simple coin toss trick as a present. Before the magician hands his coin to the boy, he warns him: "Never show anyone. They'll beg you and they'll flatter you for the secret but as soon as you give it up you'll be nothing to them. […] The secret impresses no one" (00:20:10). As soon as a secret is revealed, it becomes trivial and loses its appeal. Therefore, every mystery must be followed by a new one in order to keep the interest of the audience alive.

A crucial aspect of the mystery box that is not mentioned by Abrams in his presentation is the relationship between the secret and the story. The suspense created by an intriguing secret can be heightened by weaving it into the story in a way that the box's content has a profound effect on the outcome of the narrative. In the case of *Lost*, the secret of the island explains not only why the survivors have ended up there, but also whether they will ever be able to leave the island alive. Similarly to J.J. Abrams' work, there are many mystery boxes in *The Prestige*. Two of the most prominent ones have already been discussed in a section above - namely the secrets behind the transported man tricks. Just like the mystery that surrounds the island, the magicians' secrets have a tremendous impact on the reception process of the film. Angier goes to great lengths in order to mimic the illusion of his nemesis because he cannot accept that it is simply performed by a double. If the real transported man would truly have an ingenious invention behind it, Angier's troubles and sacrifices would be much more justified. Because Borden "simply" uses his twin brother, Angier's efforts seem ridiculous and unnecessary.

This idea of tying a mystery box to a plot point is compliant with Ohler's and Nieding's schema theory. The mystery box has the largest impact on suspense when its content decides the assignment of a slot that has two default values and the assignment of that slot influences a large amount of open slots, which are all important for the further development of the story and cannot be assigned a value until the content of the main mystery box is revealed. Therefore, secrets fit very well into the cognitive framework and do not call for a new definition of suspense.

So far the mystery box concept has only been discussed as a technique that fuels the desire of the audience to gain active control. By indicating that a secret might be revealed in a short amount of time, a narrative can nurture the wish of its audience to be inducted into the mystery. Once this wish is denied, suspense is generated and the viewers also might start to actively engage in the story and try to look for clues which allow them to unravel the secret themselves. This endeavor is not always possible due to a lack of valuable data or insufficient motivation amongst the audience. Nevertheless, it is congruent with the wish of regaining passive control. In other words, mystery boxes can also function as suspense inducing techniques that are nurtured by the wish to regain passive control. This situation might occur whenever enough clues are presented to a member of the audience and he or she might feel the possibility to solve the mystery alone and thereby avoid the need to wait for the answer provided by the movie. This process might become more visible by comparing two canonical story types: Consider situation a) a showdown in a Hollywood western. It is the duel of an unknown foreigner who wants to save the town from the cruel villain. The two opponents are facing each other while they are waiting for the clock to strike noon. The audience has no possibility of predicting the outcome of this deadly conflict (if it is assumed that the shooting skills and weapons of the two participants are of equal quality). The viewers of this scene are forced to wait until the gunmen have both fired their weapons. There is no possibility of regaining passive control before that moment. On the other hand, consider situation b) the information gathering process of a detective in a 'Whodunit'. The protagonist is trying to find the killer and collects every bit of information that he can from the witnesses and the crime scene. In this scenario, the audience is not forced to wait passively for the climax of the story that will finally reveal the villain. Every clue is a new possibility to regain passive control and predict the outcome of the story. The differentiating features of situation (a) and (b) are also present in the dichotomy of

Casino Royale and *The Prestige*. In the James Bond movie, the majority of the suspenseful scenes are motivated by physical action. The film relies heavily on races against time like in the drowning scene of Vesper Lynd or physical fights like the one in the airport scene. These occurrences of suspense are comparable to the one in situation a). There are neither possibilities for clues nor very much time for the audience to build theories and predictions. *The Prestige* generates a relatively large amount of clues due to its temporal restructuring and also subtle hints in the dialogue. Therefore a completely new layer is added to the suspense of the movie. The basic sensation of the narrative tension is still affecting the viewer, but in this scenario, he or she can try to actively participate in the movie and solve its riddles. There is even the possibility of suspense being generated from trying to unravel the mysteries before reaching the climax of a certain scene or even the entire movie.

Even though *Lost* and *The Prestige* have many similarities regarding the mystery box concept, there is one crucial difference. Whereas Abrams' work never allows for an autonomous unraveling of the secrets, Nolan's film does. The prime example of the misleading nature of the mysterious events on the island is the aforementioned ice bear. Abrams admitted it himself in an interview that the bear is nothing more than a red herring. It is never explained in the show, nor is it a helpful clue in order to understand the secret of the island. Despite many efforts on the internet, there has been no prediction to the knowledge of this thesis that could precisely explain the content of *Lost's* most important mystery box. This is probably not the result of a lack of effort, but has been hindered by the nature of the clues that Abrams and his creative team had offered its audience.

On the other hand, *The Prestige* offers a plethora of hints, which when combined together, would enable at least a fraction of the viewers to predict the ending of the movie before it is presented on the screen. The identical top hats that have been created by Tesla's machine are the first shot of the movie, accompanied by the off screen voice of Borden: "Are you watching closely" (00:00:58). The magician's comment could even be interpreted as a challenge to start looking for clues. The hats of course are indicating that the apparatus of the great inventor has been working already during the first test runs. The fact that Borden's whole existence, including the concealment of his twin brother, is part of his act has already been hinted at by the Asian magician who

pretends to be an old man the whole time, simply to render his tricks more impressive. Furthermore, Cutter is shown at the beginning of the movie how he is entertaining Borden's daughter in the magician's workshop, which indicates that the engineer is going to switch sides in order support Borden and not his former employer Angier. Scarlet Johannson's character Olivia notices that Borden has makeup and fake mustaches lying around and she even has a theory about how Borden must have a double. In the same conversation, Angier claims that Borden is so dedicated that he makes his tricks part of his life, but he uses it as an argument against his assistant's theory. The film contains even more clues, but those listed above already prove that Nolan has never intended to deny his audience the possibility to solve the mysteries of his film on their own.

3.5.3. Problem Solving

Therefore, the experience of the movie could be described as a problem solving process. This approach has already been discussed by Wuss and in the case of *The Prestige*, it seems to be very fitting (see Wuss 1993, 103). The audience is not only faced with the concrete problem of the mystery box, but also has the possibility to solve it. The idea of looking at experiencing suspense as a problem solving process (from now on abbreviated as PS) has several advantages. The psychological research in this area is relatively advanced compared to the literature surrounding suspense. PS is a reader based approach and therefore more contemporary than the structuralist efforts. Most importantly, PS could describe in a very precise manner what the cognitive steps of a viewer might be during a suspenseful scene as the following psychological dissection of a problem illustrates:

> Aus psychologischer Sicht ist ein Problem bekanntlich durch drei Komponenten gekennzeichnet: (1.) durch einen unerwünschten Anfangszustand, (2.) einen erwünschten Endzustand, (3.) eine Barriere, die im Moment die Transformation vom Anfangs- zum Endzustand verhindert. (Dörner 1979, 10)

PS, in its most basic definition, is the process of changing the "Anfangszustand" into the "Endzustand" by overcoming several hurdles. A basic example of this process within *The Prestige* would be the unraveling of the mysteries behind Borden's transported man. Initially, the audience has no idea how Borden might accomplish the trick. Due to the urge for passive control, the viewers desire a state in which they know

how the trick works. The barrier that hinders the audience from immediately reaching the "Endzustand" is the incomplete and partly contradictory information that is provided by the movie in very small portions. Nevertheless, the task is not impossible and attentive viewers are able to realize that Borden must have a twin brother who is hiding behind a disguise and pretends to be his engineer.

Despite all of these advantages of the PS approach, there seem to be several inconsistencies and problems concerning it, especially in connection with *The Prestige* and films of the same narratological structure. Ohler and Nieding address one of the most profound weaknesses of the PS approach, which is the fact that viewers always have the choice to remain in a state of mental relaxation during the perception of the motion picture. They can simply wait until the conflicts are solved by the protagonists of the film, who in the last act usually neatly explain the solution to the majority of the problems presented in the movie. This is exactly what happens in the last dialogue between the two magicians of *The Prestige*. After their lifelong battle is decided and Angier is crouched on the floor slowly bleeding to death, Borden and his Nemesis clarify the contents of the major mystery boxes. Borden reveals the secret of his twin brother and Angier, on the other hand, explains what his new and improved transported man has cost him. Those audience members who were not able to or did not want to bother with the clues provided by Nolan seem to be able to understand the movie to the same extent as the rest of the audience through this explanatory dialogue. What is even more significant is that their experience of suspense has not been harmed or reduced by their limited cognitive effort. By providing the audience the last pieces of the puzzle, everyone in the screening room is able to fill the remaining empty slots of their mental models and create a working schema for the film. They regain their passive control and instead of losing interest in the story, they experience the satisfaction of a complete mental journey.

Therefore, cognitive processes similar to those of problem solving can occur during the perception of *The Prestige*, but they are neither essential, nor the source of feeling suspense. Mystery boxes can capture the attention and inspire the imagination of the audience and they are even able to motivate viewers to try and unravel as many secrets as possible, which in itself can be a suspenseful experience. Such mysteries are only another layer to suspense and not a whole new approach. In order for problem solving

to become the main source for suspense, the movie would have to force the viewer to actively engage with the understanding of the film. It would have to be of a much more ambiguous nature and deny the viewers an explanatory scene. PS would have to move from a subconscious effort to a much more active endeavor. As Ohler and Nieding argue, this might be the case in more artistic art-house type movies, which usually have all the characteristics mentioned above.

This section has analyzed the theoretical adjustments that have to be accomplished in order to understand the differences between the two narratological styles of *Casino Royale* and *The Prestige*. The last section will proceed with this trend of moving away from the conventionalized and stereotypical Hollywood narrative toward a more experimental and artistic one, by moving from the ambiguous protagonists of *The Prestige* to the ambiguous and seemingly contradictory plot of Antonioni's *Blow-Up*

4. Blow-Up

Unlike *Casino Royale* and *The Prestige*, *Blow-Up* has been discussed extensively in the academic world. Many different and sometimes opposing interpretations and theories exist that surround Antonioni's alleged masterpiece. The reason for these disagreements and discrepancies might be that *Blow-Up* is a very ambiguous motion picture full of loose ends and unfinished storylines. It seems to be the opposite of a coherent Hollywood production that has a clearly defined premise and an ending that reveals the mysteries introduced during the movie. In order to fully grasp the confusion that might be experienced by some viewers of the motion picture, it will prove to be very fruitful to analyze those parts of the story first which are concerned with the murder. The following sections will try to illustrate that these sections, on their own, form a coherent story that can be identified as a suspenseful one according to the standards of structuralists and cognitive psychologists. The second part of the analysis will then demonstrate how Antonioni is subverting these suspenseful elements. On the one hand, this process renders the story less coherent, but on the other hand, it opens it up to numerous interpretations. It is exactly this uncertainty that is the source of suspense in *Blow-Up*. The viewers lose their passive control and cannot predict the outcome of the scenes that are unfolding in front of their eyes. The audience has to pay much closer attention and is always on the search for a schema or even a basic understanding that is compliant with the motion picture. Suspense in *Blow-Up* has to be much more dependent on the reader due to its ambiguous nature and will probably on average be felt to a much lesser extent than in its Blockbuster counterparts. Some scholars like Gerald Cupchik even argue that in so-called "art or art-house films", suspense can never occur due to the reflective nature of the mental process that texts like *Blow-Up* evoke (see Cupchik 195). Nevertheless, widening the definition of suspense in section three of this thesis allows for the thorough analysis of narrative tension in Antonioni's film using the active-passive control approach.

4.1. Subverted Suspense

4.1.1. Story

Thomas, the main protagonist, is very similar to Cary Grant's character in *North by Northwest*. He may not seem like Hitchcock's classic everyman, due to his quite eccentric life as a fashion photographer, but he is not connected to the criminal world in any way. He is neither a trained agent, nor a seasoned criminal. Murder and deadly plots are as foreign and unusual to him as they would be to a typical member of the movie audience. He is in no shape or form prepared to meet criminal activity in a safe and professional way. The situations that he is confronted with are as dangerous to him as they would be for the general public. Additionally, the way he becomes entangled in the murder plot is very similar to Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*: he is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, which is in this case a park in London in the afternoon. The story that is reminiscent of the film noir era of American cinema truly begins when Thomas escapes his studio work to take some pictures for a book he is working on, which depicts the real and unseen side of London. He is looking for something beautiful and serene to finish it off and is hoping to find that mood in a peaceful park. He discovers a couple kissing and starts to photograph them right away. As soon as the woman realizes that her intimate moment is being documented, she confronts Thomas and demands the film roll from him. Already at this moment possible danger is foreshadowed because the woman's reaction seems oddly emotional and fearful. It might suggest that her kisses were not supposed to be seen by anyone. Therefore, it would be reasonable to argue that a forbidden romance schema might be activated at this point in some viewer's minds. A possible outcome to this story might be that the photographs end up in the woman's husband's hands or in front of her kissing partner's wife's eyes. This possibility is kept alive by Thomas, who refuses to hand over his film to her, and then simply ignores the woman and leaves her in order to fetch his editor at a restaurant. During their lunch, a man is inspecting Thomas' car. He seems to be trying to get to the glove department where the camera has been stored. As soon as the photographer exits the restaurant to confront the stranger, the mysterious man flees. At this point, already two people have expressed directly or indirectly their desire to acquire the pictures from Thomas. The photographer's peace is disturbed a second time by the woman from the park, who catches him right before he wants to enter his studio.

The woman introduces herself as Jane and she repeatedly begs the photographer to hand her the pictures. Thomas refuses the request, which seems to be impossible for Jane to accept. She undresses herself and offers sexual favors in exchange for the precious film roll. Again this indicates that the content of the photographs have to be quite important to her and must not be seen by anyone else. By undressing, she also behaves like an archetypical femme fatale who uses her beauty to manipulate the main protagonist. Very much like in *North by Northwest*, it is uncertain whether Jane is only offering her body to Thomas for practical reasons or whether she is genuinely attracted to him. Even though she thinks the photographer has handed her the crucial film roll, she still stays undressed and starts to kiss him. The mystery surrounding her intentions only grows once Thomas realizes that he has been given a fake telephone number by Jane before she leaves him. Many aspects of the woman's behavior remain mysterious, but it is certain that she wants to destroy any possible evidence that has documented her actions in the park. Therefore, not only the main protagonist, but also the audience might be increasingly interested in the pictures. At this point, due to the femme fatal and the mystery surrounding the film roll, the super-schema of a film noir movie might be activated, which would imply further complications surrounding the roll of film and also possible danger for Thomas. After Jane leaves, the photographer starts to develop his work immediately. First, he only sees what he witnessed in the afternoon, namely a couple kissing. Nevertheless, a further inspection of the photograph reveals that Jane seems be looking at something in the bushes quite close to her and the man she was kissing. The photographer's interest is peaked and he starts a series of blow-ups of the pictures in order to find out what she is looking at. It takes some trial and error, but finally Thomas unveils the first part of the mystery. He discovers a man holding a gun, who is hiding in the bushes. He quickly surmises that somebody was attempting to kill the man whom Jane was kissing in the park. This epiphany changes the situation of the protagonist immediately and radically. By witnessing criminal activity and even possessing proof of that activity, he himself has gotten into danger. Already, two people seem to know about his presence in the park and as soon as Jane realizes that she has been given the wrong roll of film, she or even somebody more dangerous might return. This situation also qualifies as a transcendence of the viewer's expectation horizon. The script of the forbidden romance has proven to be incorrect and is immediately replaced by a murder script.

Furthermore, it is not only a state of danger that the main protagonist is in, but also a situation which might allow him to unravel even more about the attempted murder. The photographer is confronted with a problem that might lead to his own death and by unraveling the mystery of what he has witnessed, he might do something morally valuable and uncover a deadly plot. With this information, Thomas might even save somebody's life and stop a ruthless killer. He is not trained for this task and the only source of helpful clues is the enlarged photographs that he took in the park. The odds seem to be against him, but Thomas does not fold and continues to study the pictures. During a second inspection, he discovers another important detail. In one of the last pictures that he took, Thomas finds a body lying on the ground. It looks very much like the dead body of the man that Jane has been kissing. This would of course imply that Thomas has not witnessed an attempted murder but a successful one, which puts him into an even greater danger and should heighten the suspense of his situation even more due to a second transcendence of the viewer's expectation horizon. The attempted murder has been replaced by a successful one, therefore the stakes have been raised and after visiting the crime scene again and finding the dead body, Thomas can have no doubt about what has happened.

At this point of course, few people would really expect this movie to culminate in a suspenseful and clear-cut Hollywood ending. The suspenseful elements mentioned above have been subverted so often during the course of the motion picture that anything else but an absurd and open ending would be a surprise. Antonioni seems to fight suspense instead of creating it. Every exciting scene is followed by a lax and diverging one, every new clue is washed away by meaningless banter and muted eroticism. Hitchcock's movies are not a role model for Antonioni; he rather uses them like a quote or a reference, just like the 39 on Thomas' house, which probably alludes to the movie *39 Steps*, according to Richard Wendorf (see Wendorf 60).

The first instance of weakening the suspense in *Blow-Up* is Thomas' purchase in the antique store. He does not seem to feel the urge to develop the pictures from the park right away, but rather browses through a store that he has visited just hours before. Of course, it would be possible to interpret this action as a delay of further information in order to heighten the suspense, but the photographer in fact is not forced to postpone his initial intentions by an outside force. Rather, he himself decides that buying a gigantic

and utterly useless propeller is more important than developing pictures of a possibly forbidden love affair and murder. The second example for even stranger behavior is the erotic scene right after Thomas has discovered the person holding the weapon in his pictures. First, he calls his partner Ron with the intention to inform him about his findings, but he decides to postpone the conversation in order to answer the doorbell. This might be hard to understand for the audience, given the abnormality of the information he possesses and the inexistence of important meetings or guests that Thomas has arranged. The scene that develops next is even harder to justify. Instead of chasing off the two groupie girls that have returned to his home, he invites them in and seduces them. There are numerous seduction scenes in *Casino Royale* which seem to postpone the action in the movie, but they always turn out to be influencing the outcome of the following events. When Bond gets invited to Solange's home, he accepts because he wants to find out more about her husband. Thomas cannot expect to further his investigations by seducing the two young girls and it is apparent that they are not going to become relevant later on in the movie's plot either.

The absurd and detached behavior of Thomas culminates in his dialogue with his partner Ron, whom he finally finds at a pot party. At this point, the photographer has been looking for his friend and confidante for quite some time in order to tell him about the dead body that he has discovered first on his pictures and then in real life. What makes this dialogue so fascinating and also representative of all the divergences from the canonical suspense movie is that Thomas is not insisting on informing the police about the murder, but rather on taking more pictures of the corpse in order to put the resulting photographs into his art project.

Thomas' behavior is not only absurd on a human level, but also is inconsistent with the schema of a crime movie. Corpses are usually reported to the police and upright citizens are normally expected to assist the work of investigative forces. Therefore, it could be argued that the photographer's action is transcending the expectation horizon of the viewers. As already mentioned above, this usually leads to suspense, unless the transcendence does not meet the criteria developed by Ohler and Nieding:

> Suspense can only be induced with this mechanism [meaning transcending viewers expectation horizon] when viewers, either during or before the reception process, build up a tacit expectation that their expectations will be manipulated. Besides that, an infringement of the viewers' expectations may not transcend the boundaries of a very abstract mentally represented frame for stories of that type. Should one of these conditions not be satisfied, transcending the expectations of the viewer becomes a means of creating surprise rather than suspense and, in extreme cases, it can lead to disorientation. (Ohler 139)

Of course, transcending the boundaries of a very abstract mentally represented frame is a vague description and will vary from viewer to viewer. Nevertheless, it seems to be a reasonable argument that this criterion is not fulfilled by *Blow-Up* in the case of the unreported corpse. Large parts of the audience might be disoriented by Thomas' decision. At a certain point, they might even stop looking for local information surrounding the infringement, in order to form new working schemata. Some might even become frustrated and leave the theater due to the repeated infringements of the crime movie schema. Interestingly, it is exactly this repeated violation of the narratological boundaries that can create suspense for one part of the audience and frustrate the rest. Because the transcendence of viewer expectations happens so often in *Blow-Up,* some viewers might recognize this pattern and start to look for a reason why it is occurring. It is imaginable that the audience might adapt in a way that the two conditions defined by Ohler and Nieldung would be fulfilled again and the excitement of suspense would prevail.

The story element is not the only one that is utilized by Antonioni to subvert the schema of the crime story and to challenge his audience. A thorough analysis of the motion picture reveals that several other filmic elements are relied upon to achieve this very peculiar effect. Time, music and light are only three examples of Antonioni's vast repertoire, but these sections should be sufficient to illustrate how pervasive the subversive and intellectually challenging efforts of the filmmakers are in *Blow-Up*.

4.1.2. Time

The important role of time within the process of creating suspense has been discussed extensively in the section about *Casino Royale*. Therefore, it is not surprising that the way time is managed in *Blow-Up* is a crucial aspect in the analysis of the motion picture. One of the most striking features of the movie is how little temporal compression is applied to its action. This is especially palpable when Thomas is

changing locations. Unlike in James Bond, where a match cut is transporting the audience from the Bahamas to Chicago in a split second, Antonioni's camera follows the protagonist for almost the entire length of his travels. The result is a plethora of car driving scenes and walks along the streets of London. This vacuum of any action that is relevant to the plot might trigger a certain script in the audience's mind, which is later proven to be faulty, just like the crime movie superscript. In many horror movies and thrillers, it is a common technique to stop the action for a short moment of time and concentrate the viewer's attention on a single object, such as a door only, just to then suddenly let it be crushed by a monster or kicked in by the killer in order to shock the audience. This technique of creating expectations by stopping the flow of the story to increase the expectations and the desire of the audience is applied in the opening scene of *Casino Royale*. James Bond's target arrives with a car, enters the building and takes the elevator to reach the floor where his office is located. The lack of temporal compression is relatively similar to the ones in Antonioni's car scenes, but in *Casino Royale,* the waiting that the audience has to endure seems to be justified. The director can increase the suspense in a viewer's mind because he or she probably knows that James Bond movies are filled with action and thrill and that it is therefore only a question of time until somebody will attack the man, who is working his way to his office. By delaying the attack, the director is creating suspense. It is crucial to note that at the end of this entering scene, the business man is in fact killed by Bond himself and the expectations of the recipients are fulfilled. This satisfaction is of course denied by Antonioni in *Blow-Up* and thereby the foreshadowing schema that might have been activated in the audience's mind proves to be incorrect. The general pace of action that is established by the two consecutive fashion shoots at the beginning of the movie is broken by a disproportionately long car drive that is not culminating in anything important, significant or surprising. The absence of these surprises creates a problem for the audience that has to be solved without the help of any additional explanation. The viewers have to find a suitable excuse for these vacuums of action. Until they have done so, the viewers will not regain their passive control. This of course results in tension and a longing to grasp these invariant structures.

A second interesting feature of the use of time in *Blow-Up* is the application of the real time effect while Thomas is unraveling the mysteries of the murder. The scenes that show him analyzing the pictures are shot in extremely long shots and very few cuts.

Those cuts that are applied do not compress time. Furthermore, there is no indication for temporal ellipses because after each cut, the room and Thomas' position within it remains the same. Because the audience has the identical information and the same amount of time to solve the problem that the protagonist is working under, the audience has the same ability to solve the problem as Thomas does. In fact it has to solve the problem on its own because what the protagonist realizes during his efforts is explained only later on in the movie. This demanding quality is persistent in many aspects of the movie and involves the viewer actively. By doing so, *Blow-Up* relies heavily on the cognitive abilities of its audience and therefore risks to be misunderstood or even not understood at all.

4.1.3. Music

In the director's commentary audio track of *Gladiator,* Ridley Scott discusses the way music should be composed for the dialogue scenes in his movies. The British director argues that the ideal score is achieved by mirroring the emotions of the characters during their conversation (see Scott (00:31:30)). The approach to the film score in *Casino Royale* and *The Prestige* is identical. Not only during dialogue scenes, but also overall in the entire movie, music underscores and heightens the emotions of the scene. This is by no means the case in *Blow-Up*, which uses almost no score at all. Only in a few cases does it rely on music which is always diegetic. In general, Antonioni chooses to renounce music throughout the majority of the motion picture, which is particularly interesting during those scenes in which Thomas is trying to solve the mysteries of the photographs he has taken in the park. Just like in numerous other instances, the audience cannot rely on the film to tell it what to think, but has to be actively trying to come to grasp with the material in front of it. Antonioni generally chooses to leave the music score out in order to engage the viewer's mental activity and when he inserts it, he does so in pursuit of the same effect. As Richard Wendorf in his article about *Blow-Up* describes:

> The songs of the soundtrack actually summarize the action (and inaction) of the narrative: the models are photographed to the sounds of "Did you ever have to make up your mind?"; the receptionist's radio wails "Didn't know you had troubles / Got my feet in the water"; the Yardbirds sing "Stroll On." (Wendorf 63)

Unlike in the *The Prestige* and *Casino Royale* songs are not used emotionally in Antonioni's work, they rather enrich the text intellectually. Furthermore, not only the lyrics and the song titles are important, but also is the subculture from which they are emerging. The Yardbirds epitomize the kind of London around which *Blow-Up* is circling. It is the hip young city of a new generation that is depicted in the movie and that idea is reinforced by the soundtrack.

4.1.4. Light

It seems as if every aspect of the filmmaker's toolset is used in order to engage the audience mentally. The director consciously diverges from the Hollywood concept of catering to the audience's needs. This is also evident in the use of light. Similar to the music score, light in the other two movies is used to create mood and the right atmosphere. *In Blow-Up,* lights and especially colors are applied symbolically. In general, the sets are lit evenly. There are no harsh contrasts, dark shadows or piercing bright lights. The spotlights are arranged so uniformly that their effect almost disappears. This is most apparent if the following two frames from *Casino Royale* and *Blow-Up* are compared.

Fig. 11, James Bond in the Shadow

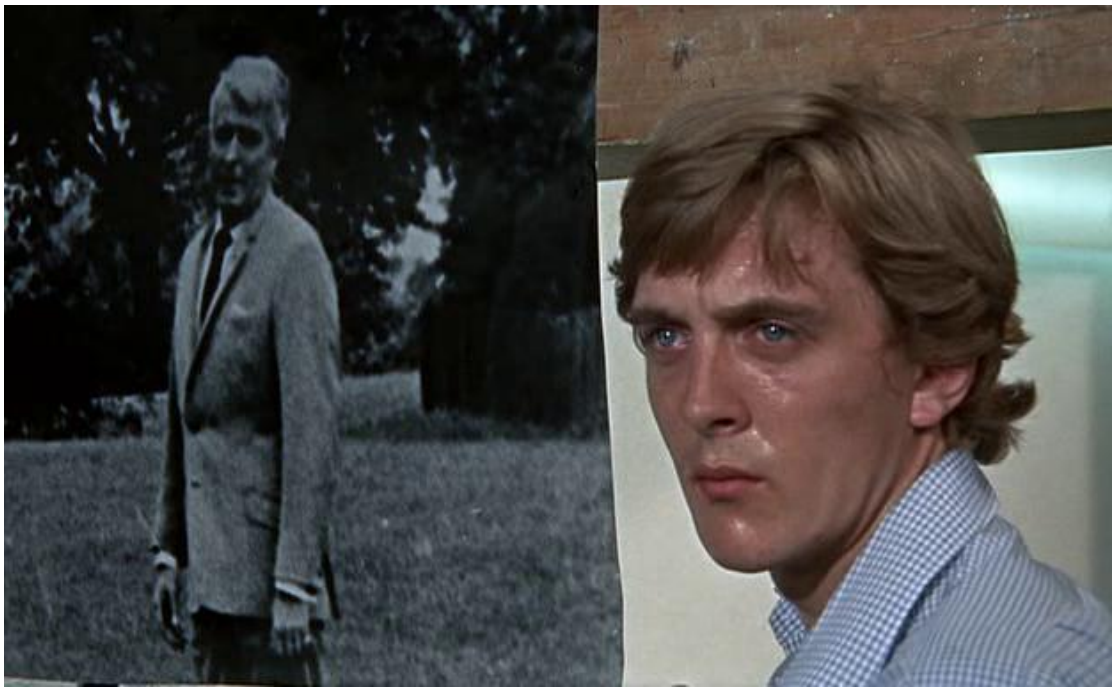

Figure 25, Thomas Unraveling the Mysteries of his Photographs

The first screenshot depicts Bond awaiting his target in an office. Most of the frame is filled with darkness and only one half of the protagonist's face is illuminated. This setup of course underscores the dangerous and uncertain situation. The two characters' fate literally lies in the dark. On the other hand, in the next screenshot, Thomas' face is perfectly lit and so is the background, even though he is unraveling a brutal crime in this particular scene. Instead of using the interplay of lights and shadows to reflect the emotional quality of a scene, Antonioni has decided to use color in a symbolical way to underscore the prevalent concepts of his motion picture, which is also indicated by the scrupulous attention to detail in the choice of backgrounds.

> Antonioni's control over the backgrounds of Blow-Up has been justly celebrated: the entire park was painted a luxuriant green for the specific effect he desired (this in contrast, of course, to the photographer's casual use of the grassy plot as a background for his own "work"). Entire neighborhoods appear to have been painted, as well as the cars and buses that run through them. (Wendorf 66)

While analyzing *Blow-Up's* color scheme, it becomes apparent that Antonioni uses two pairs of color in the majority of the motion picture. The first pair is black and white, which is connected to Thomas' profession and the make believe world that is surrounding it: The studio is made of white walls and black pillars, of course the

photographs are all black and white, taken with a black camera. The photographer's car had to be painted black as well. A further element in the movie to which this color scheme has been applied to is the first photo shoot.

Figure 26, Climax of the Photo-shoot

This scene does not only depict working in a studio, but also has a palpable sexual undertone. The model wears a black dress on her white skin standing in front of a black wall. Interestingly, Thomas is wearing a purple shirt which seems to be the color that is mostly connected to sexual encounters in *Blow-Up* and is therefore featured as well in the background and in the sheets in two more scenes. Both of these scenes can be observed in the still frames below.

Figure 27, Thomas Playing with a Groupie

Figure 28, Thomas Flirting with Jane

Green seems to be linked to the murder that Thomas has witnessed. Of course the park and its especially painted grass are green, but so is the light in the dark room in which Thomas is developing the precious evidences of the crime.

Figure 29, Thomas in his Darkroom

Figure 30, Thomas Taking Pictures in the Park

By committing himself to link colors to certain intellectual concepts, Antonioni rejects the possibility of using colors for varied emotional responses and denies the audience an

easy access to the emotional quality of a scene. Therefore colors are always used symbolically and not emotionally. The park has probably not been painted green in order to achieve a calming effect but rather because this specific color as a certain meaning within the theoretical structure that Antonioni is continuously building in *Blow-Up.*

4.2. Abductive Suspense and Topics

In the course of the movie, Thomas visits his neighbor, who is a painter. On one occasion, the artist explains to the photographer that he really does not understand his own paintings until they are finished:

> They don't mean anything when I do them. Just a mess. Afterwards, I find something to hang on to. Like that leg. Then it sorts itself out. And adds up. It's like finding a clue in a detective story. (00:16:05)

This utterance could be very easily interpreted as an allusion to Thomas' own detective story. He himself needs to look at the pictures that he took and sort the events out, find little details in them like a gun, a face or a body. Apart from this obvious link to Thomas' quest, the painter's utterance can be interpreted as an explanation of the whole perception process of the movie. Only when the last scene has played out can *Blow-Up* really start to make sense at all. Throughout the movie several clues are planted by the filmmakers, which indicate that the film is not about unraveling the mysteries of a crime, but about something completely different. The dead body has disappeared, the crime has not been solved, the killer has neither been identified, nor punished, and the death of a human being has no visible consequences at all. Numerous other conflicts and storylines that have been introduced by Antonioni have not been resolved, such as Thomas' relationship to Jane or even the propeller that the photographer bought in the antique store. Therefore, due to its ambiguity, open ending, and the plethora of unusual visual symbols and cultural references, *Blow-Up* does not adhere to the relatively strict rules of mainstream crime movies. The viewer is forced to look for helpful clues for him or herself in order to create a meaningful interpretation of the actions presented in the movie. Antonioni does not allow for a final explanatory dialogue like the one between Angier and Borden. For some, the movie's overall meaning might not be

evident at all at the moment the final credits are starting to roll across the screen. It might take several viewings and a thorough analysis to find something to hang on to and at a certain point, possibly everything might eventually begin to add up.

4.2.1. Abduction

This active effort that the audience has to invest into the understanding of the movie is described as Abduktion by Wuss and it has been defined by Charles S. Pierce as the following:

> Abduktion geht von den Tatsachen aus, ohne von Anfang an eine spezielle Theorie zu verfolgen, obwohl sie durch das Gefühl motiviert wird, daß eine Theorie erforderlich ist, um die Überraschenden Tatsachen zu erklären. (qtd. in Wuss 1993, 108)

This definition seems to precisely describe what many members of the audience might feel while watching *Blow-Up*. Abduction is an effort that is born out of a lack of understanding and is an absolute necessity in Antonioni's movies in order to gain any level of appreciation. The need to explain certain surprising events in the narrative is very prevalent in *Blow-Up*, in particular to those members of the audience who have been led to believe they are watching a crime movie. They expect the murder storyline to unfold which does not ever happen. The viewers have activated the wrong super-schema and need to reevaluate the motion picture. The problem the viewers are facing is to find a new and more appropriate super-schema. Until a solution to this problem is found through abduction, the viewer will remain in a state of tension. This feeling of uneasiness is caused by the lack of passive control. Viewers who are not able to allot the correct super-schema will not be able to predict any future developments in the movie. Therefore, the audience will automatically try to search for clues in order to identify the right schema and regain their passive control. Therefore, it can be argued that despite being fundamentally different from James Bond and *The Prestige*, *Blow-Up* is indeed actually a very suspenseful film. Even though Antonioni's movie leads to a completely different experience than watching *Casino Royale*, where active individual participation is either not encouraged or not even possible, there is one element that connects these two completely different motion pictures, which is the audience's wish for active control. The Bond movie elicits the desire for active control directly while Antonioni's work does it through the desire for passive control.

In order to gain that passive control, the viewers are faced with two concrete tasks, namely to realize that Antonioni's picture is not a suspense movie in a classical sense and then to find the true kernel of meaning of the movie, which should lead to a fuller understanding of what the story is actually about. The former point has already been discussed extensively above and the latter one will be the subject of analysis in the following section.

4.2.2. Topics

Once the audience understands that it should not bother to look for clues that lead to the murderer, but rather only to try to look for patterns or symbols, the movie might start to make sense. Depending on the skills and motivation of the individual viewer, certain invariant structures might emerge. These structures are called Topics by Umberto Eco:

> Der Topic ist eine Hypothese, die von der Initiative des Lesers abhängig ist, der sie auf etwas undifferenzierte Weise und in Form einer Frage formuliert ("worum zum Teufel geht es?") und die infolgedessen in einen Vorschlag einen vorläufigen Titel übersetzt wird ("wahrscheinlich geht es um dies und das"). (qtd. in Wuss 1993, 114).

The possibly most important part in the description of the Topic concept is the active role of the audience. Topics are not explained nor specifically addressed in any art-house movie. They need to be found by the audience itself. Additionally, the film's interpretation might differ from viewer to viewer. In an analysis of another Antonioni film named *The Passenger*, Wuss argues that one of the major Topics in the movie is the breakdown in communication. What renders this Topic so effective is that it describes a reoccurring invariant structure in *The Passenger* (see Wuss 1993, 107). There is a failure of communication which can be observed in numerous scenes and by realizing this, the audience has acquired a key that allows for interpreting the action effectively and to be able to see past its absurdness. An adequate Topic not only enables the viewer to gain intellectually from the viewing experience, but also rearms him or her with passive control.

George Slover points out in his paper about *Blow-Up* that the movie circles around a concept which is namely - make believe worlds (see Slover 768). This structure might represent a Topic for some viewers because it reappears numerous times and also

renders many creative decisions by Antonioni that weaken the suspense plot as meaningful.

The Topic of make believe worlds appears already in the very first scene of *Blow-Up*. The straight lines, order and calmness of a grey business district is disturbed by a loud wildly gesturing crowd of pantomimes who are driving chaotically through the streets. It is a collision of two worlds which exposes the absurdity of their rules. The uniforms consisting of suits and ties are matched with the uniformly painted white faces and black shirts of the pantomimes. Whereas in one world it is celebrated to display emotions as openly and loudly as possible, in the other world, such behavior is vehemently frowned upon. Every world has its own rules and within a certain world the rules not only make sense, but also keep the world together and functioning. This concept is very prevalent throughout the movie.

All of the make believe worlds presented in *Blow-Up* have nothing in common with reality. The most prominent example is of course the whole world of photography. When Thomas inspects the photographs he made in the homeless shelter for the first time, he describes them using the adjectives ‘fabulous’ and ‘great’. It is hard to imagine why somebody would describe the naked bodies that show the brutal effects of homelessness and years of addiction as ‘fabulous’ and ‘great’ unless it is in the context of photography. Thomas is probably delighted that the pictures are sharp, correctly exposed and provide insight into a place that regular people might never see. His ignorance of the cruelty and poverty in the homeless shelter is shown a second time by him instructing his assistant to burn his disguise that he used. He achieved what he set out to do and he will not return there again. He used the homeless and poor men’s’ bodies for his professional goals. Once he had finished his work, he drove off in his Bentley without giving anything back to anyone there or expressing his gratitude. The same attitude reappears just moments later in the most sexual scene of the movie (even though the participants are not undressing themselves). Thomas starts to photograph a model called Veruschka, who ironically plays herself and was a model in real life. He circles around her as if it were foreplay. He instructs her to touch herself and to let go of her inhibitions. Thomas keeps encouraging Veruschka and repeatedly whispers something into her ear that makes her giggle. Finally, he positions his knees left and right of her pelvis and sits on her lower body, which is illustrated by figure 26. This

position could not only easily be mistaken for a sexual one, but was also significant enough for the creators of the film to put it on the movie poster. While pressing the shutter button for the last couple of times, Thomas ecstatically screams “yes”, as if it would be some sort of climax. As soon as he is finished, the photographer walks away and plunges into a sofa. He seems exhausted and so does Veruschka, who keeps lying on the ground. The artist’s brutal and careless way of treating the subjects of his work is even more apparent in the next set of photographs. This time, Thomas arranges five models into static and unnatural poses. He is not pleased by the lack of energy and effort they are putting into their work and after several adjustments and increasing frustration, he screams at them to smile, which they cannot do because they are terrified of the photographer. The discrepancies between the make believe world and the actual one could not be any clearer.

People are repeatedly exploited in order to create a polished product that has been heavily manipulated in order to achieve a certain effect. The fake nature of this world can also be observed in little details, like the price tags that are hanging out of some models’ clothes. They have not been purchased and of course they do not belong to the girls who are wearing them. The clothes are probably lent by a designer exclusively for the photo shoot. The tags are quickly hidden by an assistant to prevent them from destroying the perfect illusion.

Another aspect of the make believe worlds Topic is how seemingly senseless some activities in one world are if they are observed from another one. The most striking example is the rock concert that Thomas is drawn into. The guitar player of the band is annoyed with one of the speakers that keeps crackling and disturbing their performance. Therefore, he starts hitting it with his instrument until it breaks. He decides to throw one piece of it into the crowd, which launches a mass hysteria and a violent fight for the broken piece of guitar. Every member of the audience seems to be willing to give their life for a piece of broken wood. The musicians seem not to be surprised by the reaction of the audience and the band keeps playing and the intensity of the fight is matched by the music. It is a heated situation that unleashes the primeval instincts of the crowd. Their behavior is understandable at that moment in time and the context of the rock concert. Thomas is part of them and he is fortunate enough to get a hold of the piece of wood. He starts to run and flee from the mob that is following him in order to take his

treasure away from him. Thomas manages to shake them off and once he reaches the streets of London, none of the rock concert's audience is hunting him anymore. He has left one world and entered another. Thomas is surrounded by ordinary middleclass citizens. An elegantly dressed lady in a purple dress and a matching hat walks by him and is surprised by his appearance and the broken stick in his hand. He seems to look strange to her as if he does not belong there. Thomas seems to notice that himself because he immediately adapts to his environment, drops the broken guitar and walks away from it. What was worth fighting for moments ago is now completely worthless, which is confirmed by another inhabitant of the new world. A young man, who has noticed that Thomas has dropped something to the ground, walks up to the damaged instrument, inspects it and immediately throws it away again. This is the proof – a broken guitar is worthless in this world.

Repeatedly, the Topic of the make believe worlds shows its usefulness precisely at those moments of the movie which diverge from the murder film super-schema. It unveils that seemingly incomprehensible actions are parts of indifferent structures that can be spotted numerous times in *Blow-Up*. The sequence in which Thomas is looking for his partner Robert after finding a corpse in a public park just to tell him that they have to photograph it was extremely incompatible with the principles of the crime movie. Nevertheless, in the context of the world of photography, his actions are completely coherent. He must photograph the body because it is the most sensational part of an intriguing and certainly unique story that he has discovered in his pictures. This last piece of the puzzle will elevate his art project to a new level and is therefore extremely valuable. Thomas' actions prove that he is completely immersed in his own world which results in apparently robbing him of his basic common sense. His situation is mirrored by the model Veruschka, whom he meets at the pot party just before he spots Robert. The photographer and the model engage in a short conversation in which Thomas asks the woman why she is not in Paris as she has told him to be during their photoshoot at the beginning of the movie. Veruschka simply answers that she is in Paris. Just like the model is completely convinced that she is not lying, but rather telling the truth, the photographer is convinced that he is doing the morally correct thing by not calling the police and returning to the body in order to snap a picture of it.

It can also be argued that *Blow-Up* is Antonioni's comment on his own work because evidently, a director is one of the most powerful creators of make believe worlds of anyone in society. What seems to fascinate the Italian artist is the degree to which his main character adheres to his (Thomas') own fake world. After finding the dead body and realizing that the killing has been real, Thomas still does not call the police. He resists turning back into a human being and remains a photographer who wants to carry out his profession. This might be repulsive to some members of the audience, even though they are no strangers to the lure of the make believe world either. Each and every one of them has accepted to stare at a screen for two hours and pretend that it is a window to another reality. They are forcing themselves to remain in a purely artificial world. Interestingly, Antonioni has decided to remind his audience of this crucial circumstance at the very end of the motion picture. He forces them to face the fact that they are not very different from the protagonist, because he transports them into a new imaginary world in unison. When Thomas is asked to throw the nonexistent tennis ball by the pantomimes in the park, he is reluctant at first. Before this incident, Thomas has always behaved benevolently towards the pantomimes, but has never participated in their actions. In the very last moment of the movie, he decides to do so and throws the nonexistent ball back onto the court. By doing so, he becomes part of their world, which is also indicated by his eyes, which start to follow the back and forth motion of the imaginary tennis ball, once the game resumes. Of course he has not entered this world alone, but is accompanied by the audience, which is able to hear the steady rise in volume of the sound that the ball makes when it hits those rackets made of air. Lastly, the dream that the audience has dreamt together with the protagonist is not ended by the credits as usual, but by a last trick of the director. After enchanting the audience into an imagined reality, Antonioni decides to wake the viewers up by confronting them with its fake nature. First, he shows the lost photographer on a vast green field, only to then let him vanish magically in a split second. Antonioni thereby breaks with the rules of aesthetic illusion, which he has adhered to up until that point. Now the viewer has to face the fact that all he has seen in the last two hours was nothing more than a manufactured reality created by makeup, costumes and actors.

Therefore, the Topic of the make believe worlds seems to deal effectively with the problem of the sabotaged suspense story. Of course, it is not the only Topic that can be identified in the movie, nor are Topics the only tool to analyze *Blow-Up*. They are

simply enabling at least a part of the audience to understand Antonioni's choices and to see past the unsuccessful superscript of the crime movie. Without the ability of identifying reoccurring indifferent structures in this motion picture, audiences would always be either disappointed or determined to analyze Antonioni's work again and again, until they have solved its mystery. The method that helps the viewers to find Topics is abduction and what motivates them is the urge for passive control. In order to analyze this mental process even further, it will prove to be helpful to look at it as a problem solving process. The following section will firstly try to prove that the cognitive tasks, which the audience is faced with in *Blow-Up*, can be rightfully described as a problem solving process. Secondly, the research that has been conducted in this field by cognitive psychologists will provide additional tools to analyze the suspense in Antonioni's motion picture.

4.3. The Problem Solving Process

The concept of applying the knowledge gained by the research surrounding the problem-solving process to the analysis of suspense has been supported by numerous German scholars, especially Wuss (see Wuss 1993, 103). Nevertheless, this approach seems to have several weaknesses, some of which have been addressed by Ohler and Nieding. Their main argument against problem-solving as a reception theory of films and especially suspense is the fact that most movies just like *Casino Royale* and *The Prestige* can be suspenseful without the active participation of the audience (see Ohler 145). In problem-solving experiments like the tower of Hanoi, on the other hand, a conscious effort by the PS is absolutely necessary in order to reach the goal. The goals and aspirations of numerous protagonists of mainstream movies can be described as interpolation problems or synthetic problems. The interpolation problem is defined by a known original state (usually the beginning of the movie, where the problem or the obstacle that the hero has to overcome is introduced), a known final state (usually reached after the climax of the movie, the goal has been reached or the obstacle has been overcome) and known operators (the actions that can be taken in order to reach the final state). The difficulty of an interpolation problem lies within the combination of the operators or simply the vast number of operators, combined with a small amount of

time or possibilities to try them. A typical example would be a game of chess, where every possible move of every piece is known in advance, but only the right combination of moves leads to victory. An example in the movie world would be most sports-movies. In sport, the initial state and final state is clear and also the operators have been clarified beforehand. It can be argued that numerous suspenseful sports-movies exist; nevertheless, the suspense does not arise by the audience's ability to solve the problem of winning a certain game. The audience can sit back and enjoy the movie passively and simultaneously experience a vast amount of suspense due to the lack of active control over the actions of the players. The situation is very similar in the case of synthetic problems, where the initial and final states are clear but the operators have to be decided upon. A real world example would be the problem of increasing the profit of a company. The goal is well defined, but the solution lies in the difficult task of finding the correct operators. The experience of *Casino Royale* and also many other action movies could be described as a synthetic problem. A hero has to succeed against a villain and in the course of this battle many operators are introduced and tried out, until at the very end, one of them proves to be successful. Again the audience is not asked to participate in the quest for the right operator. James Bond always defeats the villain no matter which audience is watching him doing it. Therefore, problem-solving as a reception theory of films seems to be rather problematic in many cases, especially in mainstream movies. Nevertheless, as Ohler and Nieding indicate at the end of their article, art-house films might be an exception (see Ohler 146). In *Blow-Up*, the nature of the problem that the audience has to face is of a completely different kind than in the other two movies mentioned above. The problem for the audience in *Blow-Up* is not identical with the one that the main protagonist, Thomas faces. Antonioni is not challenging his viewers to find out who the murderer is. The goal is not to figure out a method that allows for the identification of the killer, but rather to understand the cultural commentary that the movie, in its entirety, tries to communicate. The solution to the latter problem is, of course, not revealed to the audience at the climax of the motion picture. Therefore, the audience has to actively engage in the viewing process of *Blow-Up* in order to gain any knowledge about the Topics that are hidden in the movie. The problem that the audience has to solve is described by Sylvia Brander as a dialectical one (see Brander 113). Only the initial state is clear, the operators and the final state are not defined. A helpful example would be the general human problem of

an unhappy life. The PS is clear about the issues in his or her life, but it is part of the problem-solving process to find out clear-cut goals and possible operators that could lead one to have a happy life. The situation that viewers are faced with, who have applied the wrong superscript to *Blow-Up*, is very similar. The audience probably feels uncomfortable during the presentation of the movie and tries to find out what it could really be about. They try to identify a correct superscript and maybe Topics which allow them to understand the narrative.

Therefore, the application of the problem-solving process to the reception of movies seems to be inadequate in the case of mainstream movies, simply because it is not necessary for audiences to actively behave like a PS. Interestingly, this observation seems not to be valid in the case of *Blow-Up*. Here the audience is clearly faced with a problem that is in no way solved or explained by the filmmaker.

4.3.1. Difficulty of a Problem

As already mentioned above, Ohler and Nieding have discussed the negative effects that over-conventionalizing a dramatic technique can have on the development of suspense. Their specific example was the transcendence of the viewers' expectation horizon. The two scholars argue that if an audience is faced with information that does not match with their expectations too often, they will form new schemata that are more accurate and deny the narrative the chance of surprising its audience again in a similar way (see Ohler 139). This very specific example of a rather simple cognitive process already indicates that choosing the level of difficulty for a problem that the audience has to solve is an extremely difficult task. If it is too easy, the narrative technique might miss its intentions. On the other hand, if it is too difficult, the audience might lose interest and become frustrated. Furthermore, Ohler and Nieding are describing a dynamic process. Viewers have the ability to learn and to adapt and therefore, problems which have been perfectly adequate at their onset can turn into dull exercises after a certain amount of time. Research in the field of the problem solving process has agreed on three factors that decide the difficulty of a problem: The first one is the knowledge of the problem solver. This knowledge can be internal and also external. The first source of information is the semantic and episodic knowledge of the PS. External knowledge is comprised of all sorts of information sources that the PS has access to. This includes other people, the media or any kind of input from the outside. In the case of the movie

audience, this can only be either a fellow viewer or something that has been learned by the PS in the past. Of course, several viewings of the same movie enable the PS to gather information from reviews or articles. In the specific case of *Blow-Up*, it would be of course tremendously useful to see the previous work of Antonioni beforehand. This could solve the problem of applying the wrong super-schema because Antonioni has always based his movies on archetypical storylines, but never adhered to them completely. Antonioni himself discusses his use of this technique in an interview with Seymour Chatman:

> You've always liked to play off narrative conventions, for instance, the roman noir: Yes, but in fact narrative conventions have given me a lot of trouble. Also cinematographic conventions. I always try to avoid them. However, it's not always possible, because you risk failing to communicate. Since the public is used to a certain kind of story, it's necessary to follow conventions a bit, but only a bit. One can't risk being incomprehensible. (Chatman 6)

It seems to be evident that Antonioni has been evaluating the amount of mental effort that he is able to demand from his audience. This balance is even harder to find considering the second category that defines the difficulty of a problem - availability of resources. This category can refer to the mental qualities of a PS or many other resources, like the time he or she is able to invest into a problem. The final category that defines the difficulty of a problem is the aspiration level. Every dialectical problem can be solved in varying degrees due to its weakly defined goal. If a viewer is satisfied by simply realizing that *Blow-Up* does not follow the super-schema of a crime movie, he or she will find it much easier to unravel the mysteries of Antonioni's work than the viewer who is eager to find a suitable Topic. The psychological term that describes this phenomenon is called the satisficing strategy. Everybody who is moving and looking for a new place to live is trying to find the perfect flat, but objectively, probably nobody or only an enormously small percentage succeeds in this endeavor. Even if it would be possible to do so, it would not be economical to invest the amount of time and energy to truly find the one perfect flat. Therefore, people have learned to accept solutions to their problems that are close to the goals they have set for themselves. In other words, the satisficing strategy is hedging the goals of the PS in order to prevent him or her from investing senseless amounts of time and energy to solve a problem. Every PS has a different satisficing strategy, meaning that they hedge the problems by a different amount.

These three factors are crucial to the suspense that might develop during *Blow-Up* because they decide whether a viewer is mentally equipped to be able to solve the problems that the movie is confronting them with or not. If the audience is overwhelmed with the task, it might become irritated. On the other hand, if the problem is too trivial, then they will probably become bored. It is tremendously important to understand that these three categories are deciding whether every individual viewer might experience any suspense at all during the problem solving process. The conundrum that the director is therefore faced with is that viewers are extremely inhomogeneous within these three categories, which renders it almost impossible to find a problem that can be solved by a large amount of people in a suspenseful way. It can be argued at this point already that problem solving as a source for suspense will only be effective within a relatively small group of viewers and will therefore probably never be a popular choice in mainstream cinema.

4.3.2. Restructuring Heuristics

It has been stated in a nonscientific and rather heuristic way that the first problem large parts of the audience might have to solve while watching *Blow-Up* is to distance themselves from the superscript of the crime movie. The methods of the psychological analysis of problem solving now allow for a much deeper understanding of this problem. Oftentimes, a PS is faced with a task that he or she has difficulties with, due to a wrong or misleading understanding of the initial state. An excellent example for this unfortunate and very hindering situation are pictures that in German are called Vexierbilder. These optical illusions can have many different shapes and forms and can always be read in several ways.

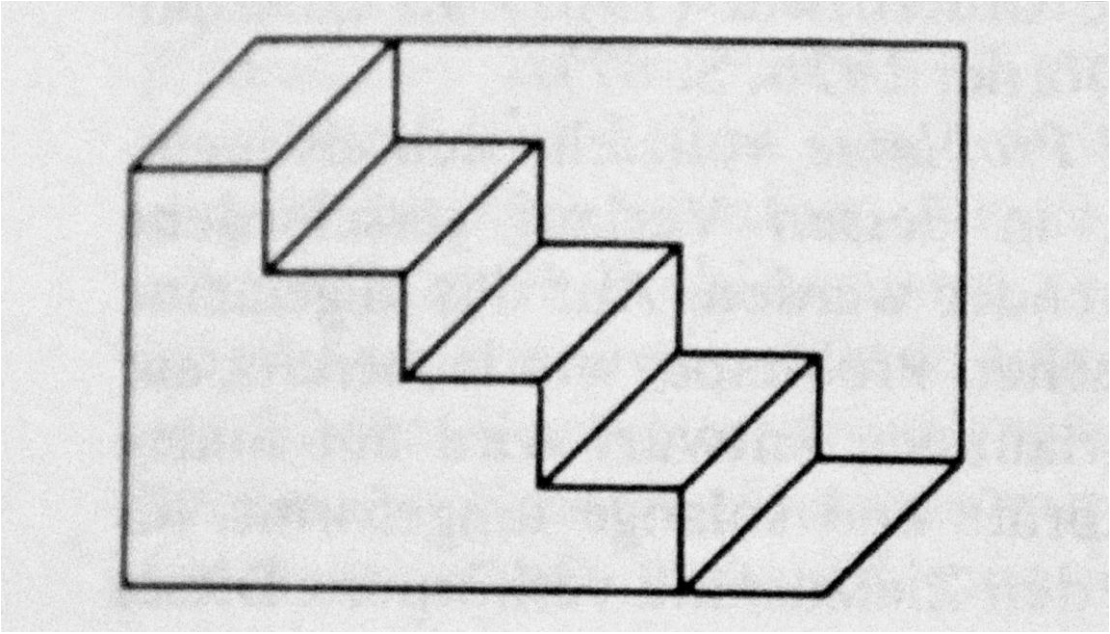

Figure 31, Optical Illusion

Figure 31 shows two kinds of stairs (Brander 132). The first one is conventional in the sense that its steps are facing upwards which would make it possible to walk on them. The second set of stairs is upside down and the surface of its steps is facing downward. This latter staircase can only be perceived if the PS is able to stop seeing the first one and allow for the perspective to shift. The method that helps the PS to reach this new perspective is called Umstrukturierungsheurismus in German. The term describes heuristic methods of rearrangement which enable to reevaluate the way objects are linked to each other and how they are linked to concepts in the brain in the initial situation (see Brander 132). The PS has to be flexible enough to avoid a fixation, which refers to the inability of disbanding the initial mental links. In the case of the super-schema problem, a fixation would lead to the application of incompatible and therefore unsuccessful operators. Every operator that has been chosen with the incorrect super-schema in mind will not be able to fulfill its purpose, which will probably lead to the frustration of the PS.

4.3.3. Identifying Operators

Once initial problems like fixations are overcome by the PS, the general way to solve a didactical problem is to generate ideas which will then be tested for external and internal conflicts. A solution is found if a satisfactory amount of these conflicts is solved. There are several heuristic methods that can help the PS to produce ideas in an efficient and goal oriented way. Some of the heuristic methods are analogies, abstractions and imagery (see Brander 160). Abstraction refers to a process which starts with a given problem and creates generalized solution. This abstract solution can then be applied to many new and concrete problems. An excellent example would be Wuss' discovery of the Topic – 'failure of communication' in *The Passenger*. This specific solution can be generalized and applied to many Antonioni movies which can be interpreted much easier using Topics. Analogies are solutions that have been taken from one specific field and applied in a new one. This is a process that happens repeatedly in the area of mechanical designs where engineers try to emulate nature and its creations. The third method that has been listed here is imagery and describes the process of creating a visual representation of a problem like a graph or a drawing. Scholars use this technique repeatedly to organize characters and their relationships in difficult and convoluted stories.

In order bring all these different elements and processes mentioned above into a single model, Brander has created a graph of the interactive and recursive problem solving process which is depicted by figure number 32 (Brander 164).

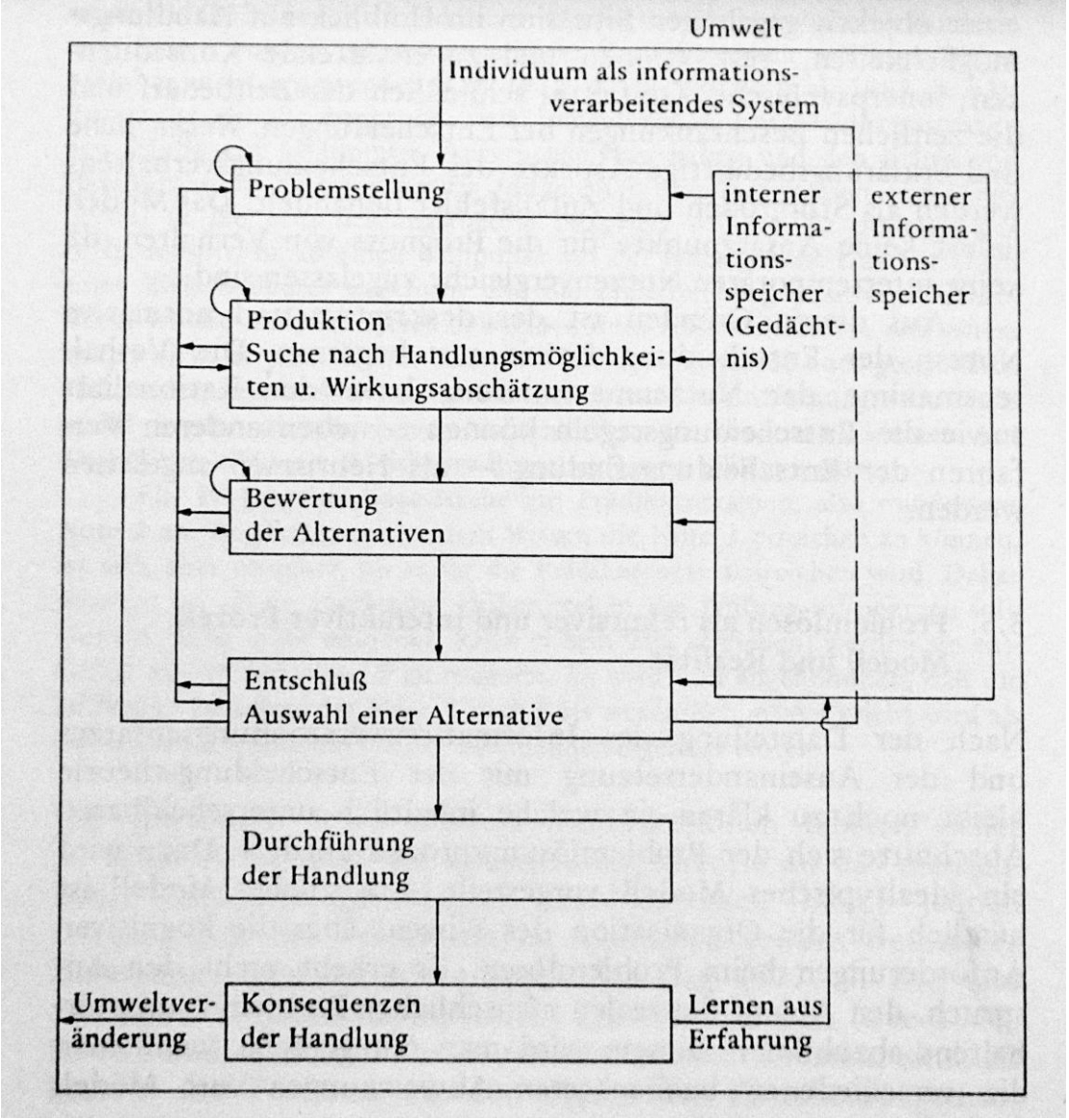

Figure 32, Interactive and Recursive Problem Solving Process

The model shows six stages which are not necessarily processed in the same order. The first stage on the illustration is the detection and the enunciation of a problem. In the case of *Blow-Up*, this might be the missing Topic. The next step is the production of ideas. This is followed by the testing of the ideas and an evaluation of alternatives. At this point, the PS might come up with several versions of Topics and start to test them on different scenes of the movie. Some will prove to be more effective than others. After the testing process, the ideas are applied and finally, the consequences are evaluated.

As the interactive und recursive process model of problem-solving illustrates, during the reception process of a movie, the PS is constantly and actively formulating and testing new ideas. Because the information that the motion picture provides the PS with is continuously growing, the solutions can be tested with an ever-increasing accuracy. If they prove to be incorrect, new and probably more valid solutions can then be created. The audience has a strong internal desire to regain passive control and to understand what the movie is truly about and therefore remains in a constant state of internal tension, which according to the definition stated in this thesis, can be described as suspense. This becomes even more evident once the PS's situation during the presentation of *Blow-Up* is compared to the mental state of a viewer who has just been faced with temporal ellipses that force him or her to adjust the schema of the scene. The viewer has to increase his or her awareness and process the presented information in order to quickly find an accurate schema. During this uncertain period, the audience experiences suspense, just like the PS who is trying to find a satisfying Topic that can be applied to Antonioni's film.

5. Conclusion

It has been thoroughly discussed and illustrated over the course of this thesis that *Casino Royale, The Prestige* and *Blow-Up* create narrative tension in very distinct ways. No single theory could be found that would have been able to account for the tension in all three of the films. Therefore, each story has been examined by the one specific theoretical approach that proved to be the most suitable. This unconventional method has already indicated that many narratological theories in the field of suspense are complementary instead of contradictory. The comparison of the motion pictures has also clarified their two main differentiating features and the one crucial element that connects them all.

As already mentioned in the introduction, the initial approach of this thesis has been based on the research of Wuss. Interestingly, the German scholar would not have referred to the narrative tension in *The Prestige* and *Blow-Up* as suspense. His quite narrow definition has been widened in the sections above due to the framework of active and passive control. Every situation in the motion pictures has been referred to as suspenseful if it was designed to evoke the desire for active control and hindered the audience from obtaining it. This could happen either directly or indirectly through the wish for passive control.

This binary choice of creating suspense forms the first feature that differentiates narrative tension in this thesis. The second feature is viewer involvement, which steadily increases throughout the three movies. In *Casino Royale*, the characters are so archetypal that the audience does not have to investigate very thoroughly in order to reveal that James Bond is the protagonist and Le Chiffre is the villain. There is almost no room for interpretation and ambiguous situations are seldom. Usually, suspense in *Casino Royale* is created by forcing the hero into dangerous situations, which seem to have only two possible outcomes. One is always clearly negative for the secret agent and the other one is positive. It could be argued that not everybody within the audience will feel the same emotions during these potentially suspenseful moments, but it is certain that they at least know what they are supposed to feel. *Casino Royale* follows the dramatic conventions so closely that minimal mental effort is demanded from the

audience and almost no deviations exist during the interpretation of the action. Therefore, the structuralist approach proves to be the simplest and most effective tool to describe narrative tension within the spy movie. *The Prestige* has increased the involvement of the spectators by introducing ambivalent protagonists who simultaneously served as antagonists as well. Suspense has not been created by depicting perilous action, but rather by implying danger. The audience has to pay closer attention in order to acquire certain schemata that are essential in order to create narrative tension. The need for active viewer involvement increases even more in the case of Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. The Italian director works intentionally against the conventions of a film noir thriller and thereby confuses his audience. Each individual spectator has to solve the problem of finding a fitting Topic in order to gain any understanding of the movie. Therefore, high viewer involvement leads to a very personal and scarcely predictable latent sensation of suspense, whereas lower viewer involvement leads to a prevalent sensation of narrative tension, which is of a foreseeable nature.

How much each movie challenges its audience is closely linked to the concepts of active and passive control. *Casino Royale's* genre abiding structure tries to lure the audience into liking the protagonist and by putting 007 into dangerous situations, creating the wish within viewers to be able to help James Bond. Thereby, the movie elicits the desire for active control, which relies on emotional processes, rather than logical deductions. In *The Prestige* and *Blow-Up*, the audience is often misled or disoriented and therefore struggles to regain passive control, which is a much more demanding mental process. Finally, it seems to be crucial to stress that none of the three movies relies solely on one of these two techniques. It is rather the idiosyncratic mixture of the two that makes suspense in the three movies so distinct.

Broadening the definition of suspense and discussing the wide spectrum of narrative tension in this thesis has by far not been a complete process. Therefore, further research might try to define, label and categorize different kinds of suspense. Wuss has already initiated this endeavor in his article "Grundformen der filmischen Spannung", but results in this field are still at a very basic level. Furthermore, the application of the study of problem-solving has only been performed in a very rudimentary way so far.

Additional research of the interplay of suspense and cognitive psychology could lead to an even deeper understanding of suspense.

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Abstrakt

Die Intention der Arbeit ist es die drei Filme *Casino Royale*, *The Prestige* und *Blow-Up* auf ihre filmische Spannung (Suspense) zu untersuchen. Alle drei Werke weisen dabei eine spezielle und von Grund auf verschiedene Art der Spannung auf. Diese Eigenarten werden zuerst identifiziert, um danach den best möglichen theoretischen Ansatz zu finden, der es erlaubt, die inneren Abläufe des Suspense zu beschreiben. Diese differenzierte Herangehensweise ist notwendig, da es noch keinen theoretischen Ansatz gibt, der es möglich macht, alle nervenaufreibenden Elemente der drei Spielfilme ausreichend zu beschreiben.

Casino Royale ist der erste Film, der analysiert wird und dient als klassisches Beispiel eines konventionalisierten Hollywood-Thrillers. Die Ansprüche an die Zuseher, aktiv am Rezeptionsprozess teilzunehmen, sind relativ gering. Auf Grund dieser Tatsache wird ein strukturalistischer Ansatz für die Spannungsanalyse gewählt, da dieser die Perspektive des Zuschauers zum großteil ignoriert, aber ein sehr detailiertes und effizientes Beobachten von Suspense erlaubt. Der James Bond Film erweist sich als ein Werk, das einen klaren Protagonisten und Antagonisten aufweist und auf eine klassische erzählstruktur aufbaut. Spannung entsteht durch den Wunsch des Zuschauers, dass der Held (in diesem Fall James Bond) sein Ziel erreicht und den Schurken (Le Chifre) zur Strecke bringt.

The Prestige ist bereits ein komplexeres Werk und weicht vom Hollywood-Schema in mehreren Bereichen ab. Einer der herausragendsten Unterschiede ist die Dualität der zwei Hauptcharaktere. Angier und Borden sind sowohl Protagonisten in ihrer eigenen Geschichte als auch Antagonisten in der Geschichte des Anderen. Dadurch und auf Grund zeitlichen Umstrukturierung der Erzählung, ist der strukturalistische Ansatz bei *The Prestige* weit weniger effektiv als ein kognitiver Zugang. Spannung wird hier mit einer viel stärkeren Einbeziehung des Zuschauers generiert und durch den Einsatz von Schemata und Mystery Boxes erschaffen. Trotz der tiefgreifenden strukturellen Unterschiede zwischen zwischen *Casino Royale, The Prestige* und später auch *Blow-Up* gibt es Elemente, die die drei Werke miteinander verbinden. Diese Gemeinsamkeiten werden in einem neuen Theoretischen Ansatz, der auf dem Wunsch nach aktiver und passiver Kontrolle aufbaut, aufgezeigt.

Blow-Up repräsentiert den unkonventionellsten und künstlerisch anspruchsvollsten Film der drei Werke. Diese Eigenart macht sich auf mehreren Ebenen, wie der Doppeldeutigkeit, des offenen Endes und vor allem des Spielens mit Genre-Klischees bemerkbar. In diesem Fall werden die Erkenntnisse aus der Forschung rund um das Problemlösen herangezogen, um den Suspense in Antonionis Film so genau wie möglich zu beschreiben.

Lebenslauf

2005 – 2013	Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien.
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