Film Dramaturgy: A Practice and a Tool for the Researcher

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36.1 Introduction

Dramaturgy is a practice and also an academic discipline. As the latter, it is a sub-discipline of aesthetics, which "is a particular historical regime of thinking about art and an idea of thought according to which things of art are things of thinking" (Rancière 2011, 5). Etymologically, dramaturgy is defined as the "science of the composition and production of plays", or more simply, as "making drama work" (Hay 1983, 75). Dramaturgical knowledge forms the conceptual basis for the organisation of structure, the design of the *sujet* [*suzhet*], the development of the *story* [*fabula*], as well as the corresponding character design—particularly the relation of character(s) in space and time in a narrative-performative artwork—and the design of the audio-visual narrative, among other aspects. One can describe dramaturgy as the art of thoughtful comprehension and logical abstraction of pattern passed on through time. It reflects on and presents models and correspondent possibilities for action, expressing an embedded, implied meaning, implicit theme, or aim. In the sense of being a regime of thinking, and thus a philosophical approach, dramaturgy applies to all elements of the aesthetic composition of a narrative-performative work in all its complexity—and more specifically to screenwriting, not only but starting from a concept, treatment, or screenplay. It can be characterised as a "practice-theory" and, as such, also as a "a reflective

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theory […] as production of and reflection on communication of communications to society about society" (Szatkowski 2019, 6). Thus, a dramaturg's work ideally provides knowledge, experience, and support at all levels of a production, is not restricted to one stage or department, and does not end with the finished script.

Consequently, this chapter argues that dramaturgical knowledge is core to screenwriting. Dramaturgy has been established as an academic discipline that can support the study of screenwriting, given the importance of screenwriting as the basis for the production of a film, providing the backbone of any screenplay for any film or TV series, no matter what length, and indeed in any time-based media production. This is true independently of whether the screenwriter's dramaturgical choices are made consciously or unconsciously. From experience, tradition, and academic reflection, as explored more in detail below, dramaturgy can serve as an analytical method of film analysis as well as an investigative tool for any other narrative or performative artwork.

Dramaturgical knowledge enables the researcher to investigate and recognise aesthetic means and artistic approaches that help give an artwork or film its affective quality. At the same time, this knowledge can be utilised to identify reasons for a work failing to captivate its audience. And while aesthetic analysis and philosophical reflection in dramaturgy are inseparable, it should be emphasised that the philosophical reflection derives from the analysis of the work and consideration of the production practice. It is not a free improvisation around the theme developed in the dramatic work. As with Rancière, "what aesthetics refers to is not the sensible. Rather, it is a certain modality, a certain distribution of the sensible" (2009, 1). Dramaturgical knowledge enables us to gain insights into creative and artistic decision-making. It also helps us analyse what might have inspired an artistic decision as well as understand the overall effect of a work or even the limits of the creative work in question. Dramaturgical knowledge provides recognition of the immanent processes inscribed in a work having a particular impact on the audience. Within a dramaturgical analysis one also reflects on cultural, moral, religious, and social traditions, regional peculiarities, and the Zeitgeist reflected on or mirrored in the work under discussion.

36.2   Roots and Tradition

Dramaturgy has a long tradition in the theatre, the performing arts, and in musical performance. Various key texts laid the foundation for dramaturgy as practice and theoretical reflection. Dating back to a period that spans between 500 BCE and 500 CE, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* [*Science of Drama*] "is the earliest and most authoritative Indian text on the performing arts" consisting of "a series of accounts on various aspects of theatrical arts" (Lidova 2014). Greek author, satirist, philosopher Lucian of Samosa, (c. 125–after 180) wrote an influential text on the art of dance that focuses on the spiritual diffusion of the narrated action, rhythm, the aesthetic realisation as a whole, and the understanding of

the performed story (see Franz 2014, 38; Lada-Richards 2007). Lucian's work had a wide-ranging impact on Western literature and theatre. Horace's *Ars Poetica* [*The Art of Poetry*] (19 BCE) (Horatius Flaccus and Schäfer 2002) too engages with all forms of artistic storytelling, broadening the approach beyond the tragedy of fate. Dating back to the tenth century CE, *Dasarupa* [*A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy*, also known as *Treatise on the Ten Forms of Drama*] is one of the most important works on Hindu dramaturgy: composed by Dhanamjaya, it is a brief manual presenting the basic rules of composition as derived from tradition (see Haas 1912).

Although Aristotle's *Poetics* is often regarded as the most influential text within the tradition of playwriting, it "was treated by playwrights as prescriptive guidebook for hundreds of years after its rediscovery and translation into Latin" (Potolsky 2006, 32). It discusses only the texts of the imitative form of tragedy. As Aristotle himself emphasises, the "myth-based tragedy" is only one out of four different style types of tragedy which he summarises in short but does not discuss further (Aristoteles 2008, Chapter 18). Therefore, his treatise is relevant to only one tradition among a broad variety of narrative styles although already he discusses *epos* and *epic narration* in comparison with the myth-based tragedy (Aristoteles 2008, Chapter 5 b10–b20). In order to get a better understanding of the complexity of the traditions of narration, it might help to bring to mind here that the *Poetics* was originally written as pedagogical material with references to the texts, the plays, not the performance. This is why one can define the *Poetics* as the origin of drama theory, or as "the single most influential work of literary criticism" (Potolsky 2006, 32). It was part of a broader collection of texts, Aristotle did not intend it to be published, and it was almost forgotten for many centuries (Schmitt 2008a, 47; Busch 2008, xxvii; Gellrich 1988, 163–242; Potolsky 2006, 32). In the first century BCE, long after Aristotle had passed away, Andronikos of Rhodos edited and published a complete edition of Aristotle's lecture notes that included the *Poetics* (see Busch 2008, xvii). It was not until after 900 CE that the first known Arabic translations and commentaries were written: among others, by Ishaq ibn Hunain (see Arnzen 2021; Filius 1999), Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (see Aristotle et al. 1911; Matta Ibn Yūnus), Yahya ibn Adi (see Busch 2008, xix; Jahjā Ibn-ᶜAdī al-Mantiqī 1982), Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna (see Kemal 2007), and Averroes [aka Averroës] (Averroës and Butterworth 2000). Later, in the Middle Ages, the *Poetics* was first translated into Latin and commented on, followed by an intensive study of the text from the sixteenth century onwards—including new translations, new interpretations, and further commentaries (see Busch 2008; Gellrich 1988, 161–242; Frietsch 2009; Huss et al. 2012). As Schmitt emphasises, the *Poetics* is one of Aristotle's late texts within a broad corpus on rhetoric and philosophy (Schmitt 2008a, 48; 2008b). Referring to the rediscovery and corresponding reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Italian Renaissance, Schmitt points out that this was fundamental for the establishment of the "Aristotelian Canonisation" (Schmitt 2008a, 46), established within drama theory as *Regelpoesie* [*Canonisation*], a rule system

derived from formalism as presented in the *Poetics* (see Gellrich 1988, 166), and *Nachahmungspoesie* [*Imitation*] (see Armstrong 1941; Potolsky 2006, 50–54).

> Aristotle initiated a theoretical tradition that has persistently sought to approach drama as a system of patterns, which response [sic] to expectations of order. The systematic view of tragedy, beginning with the *Poetics*, has typically subscribed to the fundamental assumption that plays submit to reason. Within such an approach, indeterminacies and wonders that provoke irresolvable *aporia* are relegated to the margins of study or regarded as unfortunate anomalies. (Gellrich 1988, 5)

The rediscovery and interpretation of the *Poetics* established during the sixteenth century led to the dogma of the closed form in the tradition of the Western world—that is the linear-causal drama defined by strict rules as known from the Aristotelian canon, as e.g. the time frame of 24 hours, being hero driven, caused by a conflict to be solved through the *catarsis*—which became standard in Italy and Central Europe (Fiebach 2015, 106–10; see also Klotz 1980, Asmuth 2004, Stutterheim 2015). "Renaissance literary, one could say, performs a kind covert policing service, by bringing the works over which it assumes authority into line with established and general acceptable norms", thus reacting to the broad variety of themes and practices within literature and performative arts, which often were provocative and not meeting Christian norms of moral and behaviour, as, for instance, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532) (Rabelais 2016). Renaissance dramatic theory can be described "a Christian-humanists synthesis" (see Gellrich 1988, 173) derived from the that time rediscovery and new interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetic* "that renders moral coherence and instruction in virtue fundamental conditions of literary usefulness" (Gellrich 1988, 172). As Gellrich points out, "beginning with their colonization in the Renaissance, Aristotle's principles have assumed a kind of institutional power over the centuries" (1988, 5). *Imitation* [Nachahmungspoesie], associated with "moral coherence", contains until today two levels of definition. One is "the phenomenon of rhetorical imitation, the imitation of artistic role models, which for the long stretch of Western history between the height of the Roman Empire und the end of the eighteenth century was a central principle of literary production. In addition to imitating nature and human action, poets also actively sought to imitate exemplary forerunners and the artistic conventions they made authoritative" (Potolsky 2006, 50). This development in the field of dramatic narration has its counterpart in the visual arts, following the introduction of the linear perspective (see Goldstein 1988), and the "new image of the individual" and "clearly the beginning of a process that will culminate in the identification of the individual subject as the locus and source of meaning" (Tally 2013, 19).

In more recent times, the *Poetics* became most influential for screenwriting through Gustav Freytag's *Technique of the Drama* (published in 1897), which

was translated and published in the United States: much later, Syd Field would refer to the *Poetics* as presented by Freytag (see Field 1979). In the United States, this initiated a new scholarly enthusiasm for the linear-causal and hero-driven principle as derived from the reception of Aristotle's poetic. Consequently, the *Poetics* became dogmatised as the most relevant reference source for screenwriting, although mostly in countries primed by Christian religion, thus mirroring its rediscovery in the sixteenth century. However, the *Nyatasastra* and the *Dasarupa* are still influential in India (see Datta 2016; Bharata 2010; Muni 2016). And influence from the traditions derived from the other forms mentioned by Aristotle but not discussed in detail, is also evident in East European or Asian Cinema.

36.3   Influential Dramaturgs

To be aware of and possibly be educated about these various traditions, their context and practicalities, is a core background for any dramaturg, as it enables them to apply their knowledge in analysis and practice. The practice of working as a dramaturg within a theatre and as part of a creative team began with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing was a successful author of several plays— e.g. *Minna von Barnhelm* (1763–1767), *Emilia Galotti* (1772), and *Nathan der Weise* (*Nathan the Wise*) (1779)—but also a critic and a philosopher. Between 1767 and 1770, he served at Hamburg's *National Theatre*, Europe's first permanent national theatre. Lessing was appointed to advise the theatre management as well as the creative team which productions might interest and excite an audience. In addition, Lessing analysed all performances produced at this theatre during his period there. He focused on the relationship between the qualities of the playwright's work, the staging, the actors' performance, and the audience's reaction to the production in question (see Lessing 2011). The dramaturgical approach of combining aesthetic theory and knowledge derived from his own practical experience enabled Lessing to analyse and discuss the causes behind any failure of these performances. As a result, he published a series of texts, known as *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* [*Hamburg Dramaturgy*] (1767–1769). This collection of writings laid the foundation of theory and practice of dramaturgy as it is still known today.

Inspired by the concept of dramaturgy introduced by Lessing and propagated through his publications, a broad discourse about dramaturgical issues was initiated (see Hammer 1968, 1987; Szatkowski 2019; Börne 1987; Friedrich Hölderlin 1987; Wöhrmann 1967), which reflects on both Aristotle's principles and Lessing's writings. In his *Vorlesungen zur Ästehtik* [*Lectures on Aesthetics*]—held between 1818 and 1829, and later compiled in a volume in 1835—Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel analyses practices of storytelling and particularities of epic narration (see Hegel 1971, 2003). Other influential authors and philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Hölderlin, Arthur Schopenhauer, Heinrich Heine, Georg Büchner—and of twentieth century

such as Bertolt Brecht, Thornton Wilder, Heiner Müller), to name a few, analysed their own work as well as the work of others employing dramaturgical analysis resulting from Lessing's methodology and Hegel's theoretic reflection (see Börne 1987; Hammer 1968, 1987).

To this day, all theatres in Germany as well as many theatres and/or companies in Central Europe, the UK, Scandinavia, and around the world employ dramaturgs (see Romanska 2016b). Famous dramaturgs include Heiner Müller at the Berliner Ensemble, Ken Cerniglia in New York, Marco Paolini in Italy, Kentarō Kobayashi (小林 賢太郎, Kobayashi Kentarō) in Japan, Gideon Lester and Oskar Eustis in the United States, and Sami Parkkinen in Finland, to me.

36.4   Dramaturgy as Academic Discipline and Education

Dramaturgy became part of production considerations from the early establishment of national cinemas. To support the new art form, dramaturgy was either adapted from theatre to film production or taught in newly established film schools and film academies as well as through formative approaches within film companies. The first film school, founded as early as 1919 in the former Soviet Union, was the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK, now the Russian State University of Cinematography) where dramaturgy was taught since its inception. Vladimir Turkin, one of the professors at the department of Dramaturgy and Screenplay, provided the foundation with a series of lectures titled *искуство экрана* [*Screen Art*] (Marievskaya 2019, 138) and, in 1938, he published *Драматургия Кино* [*Dramaturgy of the Cinema*] (Turkin 2007). Boris Michajlovič Ėjchenbaum, Yury Tynyanov, and Viktor Shklovski among others have also been influential in the development of dramaturgy for film (see Ėjchenbaum et al. 2016; Beilenhoff 2005). The aim was to teach and discuss cinematic dramaturgy (see Hennig 2013, 147). In 1929, Sergei Eisenstein, who also taught at the VGIK, published his seminal text about the *Dramaturgy of Film Form* as a study of the dialectics of the style of film, introducing the concept of *visual counterpoint* as a cinematic form of conflict (Eisenstein 2010). One of the students was Frank Daniel who, decades later, would introduce the knowledge he acquired at VGIK to the United States of America (see Marievskaya 2019, 137) thus becoming a key reference for contemporary screenwriters.

36.5   The Merging of Dramaturgy for Theatre and for Film

During the 1910s, film established itself as the new form of entertainment in several countries—e.g. Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, and United States. Max Reinhardt and his theatres played a key role in applying

dramaturgy, as it was well established within theatre practice, into the new medium, not only in Germany. Deutsches Theater, like all of Reinhardt's theatres, permanently employed dramaturgs such as, for example, Carl Zuckmayer (known for *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* [*The Capitain of Koepenick*]) and at that time little-known but promising young author Bertolt Brecht.

Reinhardt established his own academy to educate talents for his theatres and film productions: authors, directors, and actresses worked for stage and film productions alike. One production worth mentioning is *Sumurûn* [*One Arabian Night*] (Freksa 1909). Reinhardt directed the first performance based on Freksa's play in 1910 at Deutsches Theater, with Ernst Lubitsch starring among others.

> Sumurun, a wordless play in nine scenes directed by Max Reinhardt, was conceived as an experiment. It opened at Reinhardt's 300-seat Kammerspiele Theatre on April 22, 1910. Because of its opening night success it was moved to the 1000-seat house next door, the Deutsches Theatre, where it entered the repertory in May 1910. In 1911 the pantomime was presented in Vienna and twice in London. On January 16, 1912, it opened in New York. After 62 performances at the Casino Theatre it toured Chicago in March and Boston in April, again in Shubert houses, and left for a Paris engagement. In 1913 Sumurun returned to the London Coliseum for another short run, less enthusiastically received, and was presented, not to Reinhardt's satisfaction, on the relief stage of the Munich Art Theatre. (Kueppers 1980, 75)

Short after the opening in 1910, Reinhardt directed and produced *Sumurûn* as film too, of which Lubitsch directed a new version in 1920.

Another significant figure of the Modern Theatre of the Weimar Republic was Erwin Piscator, mainly known for epic and multi-perspective shows. Piscator, Brecht, and Friedrich Wolf are regarded as the most influential representatives of Berlin Dramaturgy (Haarmann 1991).

Simultaneously, with the establishment of the Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft, better known as UFA, in 1918, dramaturgy gained even more prominence in German film productions. The early 1920s are described as the era of the "theatrification of cinema" and of the "cinemafication of theatre" (Fiebach 2015, 346–52). In fact, "[d]espite a few later successes, the German Cinema was never to know another flowering like this one, stimulated, as it was, on the one hand, by the theatre of Max Reinhardt, and on the other, by the Expressionist Art (it is essential not to confuse these opposing styles)" (Eisner 1994, 7–8). A few years later, Reinhardt, as well as some of his former students who were then famous actors such as Lubitsch, and Piscator too, would migrate to the United States and work for Hollywood studios, where they applied modern dramaturgy successfully in their work: for example, by presenting a female lead protagonist (*Ninotschka*, 1939); by organising the plot over more than one storyline and perspective (*A Midsummer Night's*

Dream 1935); by applying the alienation effect by introducing a narrator (*The Shop around the Corner*, 1940; *To Be or Not To Be*, 1942).[1]

The cross-enrichment between theatre and film dramaturgy was mirrored by one of the most influential academics in terms of establishing dramaturgy for theatre, film, and performative arts as an academic discipline: Max Herrmann. A professor at Humboldt University since 1902, in 1923 he founded the Theaterwissenschaftliches Institut [Theatrical-Scientific Institute], which focussed on dramaturgy as fundamental to understanding theatre history and practice, in order to educate dramaturgs for practice and academic analysis. Herrmann's outstanding achievement was the result of his change in the approach to narrative-performative arts within the academia striving for more "philological exactitude: the facts must be ascertained before synthesis can be made or even a pragmatic nexus established. Max Herrmann insisted that a method must be developed that would allow for a scientific approach to theatrical facts" (Nagler 1959, 22). Herrmann's approach can be understood as a response to the context of his time and it led to the integration of the tradition of dramaturgy as practice derived from philosophical reflection to the curriculum. His academic approach reflected the influence that modern urbanism, the merging of theatre and film, a vibrant cultural explosion reacting to World War I, and the flowering of capitalism and consumerism had on the practices and the interrelationship of theatre, political performance, and cinema productions. The core of Herrmann's pedagogical approach drew on the sensual aspect and on a new understanding of the relation between space and performance in the narrative-performative artwork. His theoretical fundament to German theatre—inspired by the work of Reinhardt, Wolf, Piscator, and Brecht among others—was to have substantial influence on American theatre theory too, others (see Corssen 1998; Herrmann 1998; Heuner 1999).

Before Herrmann established theatre theory as a discipline in its own right, teaching theatre and performative arts postulated that every aspect of a narrative-performative work depended on written and spoken dialogue as shaped by *naturalism* and resulting from the concept of *imitation* as described above. As Nagler observes, with Herrmann "[…] the meaning of the verbal text is unchanged, but it ceases to be the only one. The theatrical performance is the played version of the text of a play" (Nagler 1959, xxi). Both dramaturgy and the practice of a dramaturg support such an understanding of performative arts as well as of the relation between the text and the complexity of the performance.

Consequent to the developments summarised here, one can recognise the nature of theatre and its central aspect of *symbolic action* [*symbolisches Handeln*] in today's audio-visual works—as, for example, feature films. Performative presentation results from communicative practice and human creativity, defined as *mimesis* [imitation] (see Aristoteles 2008, 1451b8–10; Plato 2021,

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[1] For more detail on these examples, see Stutterheim (2019, 21–27).

book 10; Schmitt 2008a, 118–20; Weimann 1988; Gebauer and Wulf 1995; Foucault 1970; Fischer-Lichte et al. 2005, 201–08; Potolsky 2006). Therefore, dramatic art is always a symbolic act, be it on a stage, observed in public, in politics, or in a media production: using technological tools to produce images and sounds does not take the dramatic moment away from any representation of human beings. What is defined as *theatrical* can be recognised in human culture of all times all around the world (see Schechner 2010; Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz 2013; Fiebach 2015) and, in particular, in contemporary media productions as well as political or ideological performances of any kind.

In this sense, via Herrmann and his successors, the experience of practice became an integral part of the concept of teaching dramaturgy as an essential part of the studies of performative arts globally. Early cinema productions, not only in Germany but in other countries of continental Europe, the United States, the Soviet Union, Latin America, and other regions, drew on this tradition of applying dramaturgy. Early film theorists, such as Ricciotto Canudo, also referred to dramaturgy as a relevant aspect of cinema (2017). Although film dramaturgy had already been taught in Moscow and Berlin, the (most likely) first book on dramaturgy for film was published in Budapest in 1925: *A filmjáték esztétikája és dramaturgiája* [*Aesthetics and Dramaturgy of the Film Play*] by Iván Hevesy (1925). Hevesy was a film critic and playwright who taught film dramaturgy at Bela Gaal's private school in Budapest.

> Hevesy's approach is an original mix of theory and practice: he applies to the new art form the theoretical apparatus he acquired during his studies and that he had already applied in writing on art history, literary and art criticism, and music. As to practice, Hevesy had a keen sense for the technical aspects of filmmaking of the day. (Szekfü 2018, 56–57)

Although this book got never translated into any other language, one can suppose it has influenced Hungary-born Bela Balázs and his writings, since he published a book on film dramaturgy as well (Balázs ca. 1926). As screenwriter (see Balázs 2019; Bartók and Balázs 2018; Grosz and Balász 2006; Balázs 1936; *Das blaue Licht* [*The Blue Light*] 2010), dramaturg (e.g. for *The Threepenny Opera*), and film scholar (see Balázs ca. 1926, 1966, 1970, 2001, 2013a, 2013b, 2021), Balázs' creative as well as theoretical work (e.g. *Theory of the Film*, 1970) is still considered of fundamental importance nowadays.

In light of these examples, it seems obvious that film dramaturgy was broadly discussed in Europe throughout the 1920s. Dramaturgy was then exploited and perverted by dictatorial regimes for their film propaganda, in Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, and beyond. As a result of its political instrumentalisation in the 1930s and 1940s, dramaturgy fell into disrepute. Herrmann's institute, closed by the Nazi regime, was re-opened no earlier than 1961. However, film dramaturgy became part of academic education at most film schools in Eastern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s—at FAMU Prague (Czechoslovakia), Łódź (Poland), HFF *Konrad Wolf* and Humboldt University Berlin (both in the former GDR)—as well as at other academic institutions

around the world, including Aalto University Helsinki (Finland), La Fémis in Paris (France), Filmakademie Vienna (Austria), ZhdK Zuerich (Switzerland), Middlesex University London, Southbank University London (UK), Academy of Arts Banska Bystricha and Academy of Performing Arts Bratislava (Slovakia), Saint Petersburg State University of Film and TV (Russia), Kampala Film School (Uganda), ERAM—Universidad de Girona (Spain).

36.6   DRAMATURGY AND SCREENWRITING

As argued above, dramaturgy supports screenwriters in their work. Dramaturgical knowledge provides a range of established principles and models that screenwriters can rely on and apply to their writing, thus anticipating a film: "Dramaturgy […] is a process of making sense for the production and the audience. A good dramaturg helps to articulate that sense" (Hay 1983, 67). As mentioned, the dramaturg's unique skill is to support the artistic–practical activity of the entire creative team, not just the writer, combining scholarly knowledge and experience derived from professional practice and practice-based research. It is the combination of practice-based and scholarly knowledge, on the whole aesthetic complexity of the performative work that distinguishes dramaturgy from narratology, among other disciplines. Narratology focusses on written or verbally performed texts, literature mostly, rather than the full and varied aesthetic range of performative arts; and, to my knowledge, there is no such profession as a *narratolog* within the practice of performative arts.

> Meaning is central to human existence and art. Every artist must seek meaning for himself. In the performing arts, the quest is more complicated because some kind of consensus has to be reached first with the group of artists and then with the larger tribe represented by the audience. The drama does not work, and cannot be made to work, if the artists and audiences that are involved do not seek a meaning of their own work and of the work itself. I am not suggesting that there are always answers when the questions are asked, only that there can be no meaning to play-making without a serious quest for that meaning. Every good production is the quest itself. (Hay 1983, 75)

This is especially true for film productions of any kind (feature films of any length, TV series, and so forth), where the production process is even more specialised and separated than in theatre, because "the dramaturg, inasmuch as he is concerned with the text, must have a more lasting perspective both backwards and forwards in time than the director who is in charge of the momentary performance and meaning" (Hay 1983, 15). Hence, the work of a dramaturg is dedicated support for everyone involved in achieving the best possible overall aesthetic realisation of a production, supported by knowledge derived from tradition and sense of the Zeitgeist: "The dramaturgical skills of analysis, critical and structural thinking, and interconnectivity also

become tools that gain applicability in a world outside of theatre" (Romanska 2016a, 8).

Ideally, a collaboration of the screenwriter (and the director and/or producer) with the dramaturg starts the moment the idea evolves, continues throughout the development of the screenplay and the production until its release. A dramaturg can support any of the creative team with dramaturgical advice, sometimes also interpreted as artistic advice. The work of a dramaturg—or of a writer/director applying dramaturgical knowledge that derives not only from drama theory—results from the long-standing tradition that predates the establishment of film as outlined above. However, it must be acknowledged that the role of a dramaturg is not common—or known under the same term—everywhere. Sometimes, their position gets split into different roles—as script editor, script doctor, artistic advisor, and editor—or is understood as one of the responsibilities of the director, which reduces the impact that dramaturgical support can have on a film production. This is because a dramaturg can give an additional view and knowledge to a production by combining professional reflections on practice and academic theory derived from aesthetics and philosophy to support a production of a narrative-performative work (see Romanska 2016a, b; Gindl-Tatárová 2008; Reichel 2000). As Brustein put it: "The dramaturg is potentially the artistic director's Good Angel" (1997, 36).

> Dramaturgy is a concept with expanding borders, functionally, theoretically, and geographically. Dramaturgy today provides us with important knowledge on how values are at work in theatre, film, television, the internet, and other performative media practices where human body-to-body communication is communicated to society. (Szatkowski 2019, 32)

For screenwriters, dramaturgy is relevant to design a solid and entertaining plot structure. Dramaturgical knowledge also facilitates the organisation of explicit and implicit levels of the story, which is central in contemporary and especially in poetic and postmodern media productions. Dramaturgical knowledge can support the screenwriter and their story when reflecting on society and human interaction to address and attract an audience. Screenwriters create the basic dramaturgical structure and can anticipate or inspire the implicit level of a film, its cinematic narrative. To reiterate, this is true even if screenwriters do not consciously think about dramaturgy or interact with a dramaturg, when studying structures and contexts of cinematic storytelling, traditional as well as contemporary. Screenwriters decide on a structure that they think works best to present their story. Nonetheless, a good screenplay requires more than a perfect structure. Shklovski wrote in this regard that, when focussing only on the story, one could compare the work of the screenwriter to shaking a kaleidoscope to get new variants of the fabula/story (Shklovski n.d., 68). Dramaturgy affords the search for those variants.

When trying to challenge given expectations about the formatting of a story to be presented, the choice comes back to dramaturgical basics, which offer a unique approach while, at the same time, respecting the basic elements of storytelling. Jean-Claude Carriere describes such a situation from his own experience when, early on in his career, he wrote the screenplay for *The Milky Way* (*La Voie lactée*, 1969) with Luis Buñuel trying to ignore all known rules. As they were outlining their screenplay it became obvious that a few rules cannot in fact be ignored; that there is a "secret order" that has to be respected (Carrière and Bonitzer 1999, 207). Dramaturgy offers the key to that secret order. Especially in film, a few basic rules form the basis to the "secret of cinematic storytelling" (Carrière and Bonitzer 1999, 143 and 207): most importantly, all elements of a movie or TV production should be non-replaceable and immovable (Aristoteles and Schmitt 2008, Chapter 8, A30–A35). If one can omit or rearrange a word, gesture, sound, or image without it affecting the narrative that element is superfluous and breaks the attention flow (see Carrière and Bonitzer 1999): one should respect the importance of being in the moment.

Another aspect of dramaturgy that I wish to emphasise here is that one cannot postulate a strict formula (such as the three-act or the five-act structure) as the best and most efficient for all themes, stories, and specific cultural traditions within different regions. Consequent to the context described above, there are very different structures from the tradition and the range of possibilities. From this spectrum, one can choose a form that best supports the story to be told. One element relevant to the organisation of the explicit structure is the act. We know from theatre and film history that the term *act* describes a particular section of the plot. In it, a subplot might take place—either in a place that does not change or in the context of a certain group of people. If something happens that permanently changes the quality and course of the action, one act ends and the next one begins. Thus, a film can have one, three, four, five, or more acts. In the 1920s, films usually consisted of six or eight acts, whereby an act coincided with the length of one reel of film (i.e. 10 to 15 minutes). The writers were advised to consider the running time of a reel when designing the dramatic action, since there was often a break when the reels got changed. More recently, *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock USA 1959) can be interpreted as either a three-act, five-act, or nine-act structure; *The Shining* (Kubrick UK/USA 1980) was developed according to the structure of a symphony and consequently comprised of four acts. The key point is to decide on a structure that best helps structure the story being told, not the other way around, and to use a specific descriptor, as *anagnorisis*, *peripetia*, *tragic moment* to name a few, and definition for each of the so-called turning points. Thus, the first turning point is either called the establishment of the *conflict* in a linear-causal structure or the impetus to action or *collision* in a work that applies modern dramaturgy. These terms include corresponding derivations that have grown out of tradition and a screenwriter and/or a director can apply them to the respective media realisation. The impetus to

action, for example, differs from conflict in that the main character(s) have not themselves contributed to the creation of the challenging situation, nor has someone from their family or social group. Such an impetus may result from a natural disaster, a war situation or simply a relevant change that has a significant impact on the situation of the main character (see Carrière and Bonitzer 1999, 216).

Dramaturgy offers a broad range of possible combinations of constant and variable elements to develop a screenplay (see Stutterheim 2015, 2019, 35; Klotz 1980). *Constant elements*—e.g. beginning, *recognition* (*anagnorisis*) and *reversion* (*peripeteia*), resolution and end—provide stability and are recognisable for creators and audience alike. Many Anglo-American publications mention the so-called midpoint, which is known in dramaturgy as a combination of two constant elements: the interaction of *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*. One can intensify or supplement these with the variable element of the *tragic moment*. These dramaturgically significant aspects of a plot occur one after the other and interact.

Anagnorisis contains the change from unknowing to knowing, through (re)recognition of a person or situation, by means of a relevant conclusion resulting from the plot, which gives a new meaning to the whole event—either of the main character(s) or of the audience (Aristoteles 2008, Chapter 11; Stutterheim and Kaiser 2011, 369, Stutterheim 2019, 43–47). Aristotle (2008, Chapter 16) defines six different kinds of possible recognition: through signs or icons; invented by the poet/writer; triggered by memory; by conclusion, or by fallacy of the audience caused by a false messenger or such; and the one he likes most—one that results from the sequence of actions when, according to probability, an affect action occurs.

Anagnorisis leads into *peripetia*, which defines the moment in the action marking the reversal of the action activity of the main character and/or of the hierarchy of power between protagonist and antagonist in the plot (Aristoteles 2008, Chapter 10 a15, Chapter 11 a25). A character who has been reacting up to this point has been able to develop an understanding of his or her situation through a situation called *anagnorisis* and can now readjust their activities in a situation defined as *peripetia* and consequently react actively to a situation. Alternatively, a previously active character understands the serious opposing forces they face in the *anagnorisis* and will have to react in advance to the unfolding events, marked by the *peripeteia*. This is the most important turning point, which cannot happen without the *anagnorisis* preparing it. Often, these are combined with the *tragic moment*. This, in turn, involves a situation that occurs unexpectedly for the main character, but is nevertheless probable or explicable for the spectator from the previous course of action, and thus brings about the *peripetia* or supports it in retrospect (Stutterheim and Kaiser 2011, 368; Carrière and Bonitzer 1999, 214–15; Stutterheim 2019, 43–47). It appears forcefully and with serious consequence for the lead character and—for the mind of the spectator—in logic correlation to the events of the action so far (see Freytag 1895, 95).

These and the other constant features relate to our experience of reality, which is shaped by perception as well as by *cultural memory* (see Assmann 2011, 2018; Assmann and Livingstone 2006; Kahneman 2012). *Variable elements* also play a significant role in explicit dramaturgy. They are relevant to the construction of a plot and derive too from tradition: for instance, overture/upbeat, conflict or collision, tragic moments, catastrophe/catharsis, secondary characters, and more. When writing a screenplay, one can chose the form and structure that best support the underlying theme and plot as a way of driving narrative and action. The chosen form of explicit dramaturgy as a combination of constant and variable elements, addresses that part of the human brain that stores experience and accumulated knowledge, which is structural and strategic, as in the *slow thinking* described by Daniel Kahneman (2012). Furthermore, dramaturgy considers how this particular cinematic narrative is going to be based on an inseparable relationship between explicit and implicit levels of such performative narration. Even for the explicit level of structure, i.e. plot construction, one can combine different patterns derived from the tradition of theatre, performative arts, and film. The explicit level of a movie, and hence of its script, addresses *structural slow thinking* (see Kahneman 2012). On the other hand, the implicit level triggers *associative, fast thinking*, which gets entertained by surprises as well as by well-designed aesthetic solutions for those aspects of the story, either connected to the experience and knowledge of the audience, or by activating or imagination. Implicit dramaturgy is inscribed in the visual and sonic design of a movie. Examples can include: colour dramaturgy in *The Ghost Writer* (2010) and *Miami Vice* (1984–1989); visual and acoustic references in *The Shining* (1980); references to tarots, the Holy Grail, and the history of the Cathars in Southern France in *The Fifth Element* (1997); visual references to Arnold Böcklin's *Die Toteninsel* (*Isle of the Dead*), that is San Michele, Venice's cemetery island, or the weather conditions mirroring the state of mind of the protagonist in *Shutter Island* (2010); Maverick's jacket in *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), to mention just a few.

Dramaturgy reflects on both levels: the structural, explicit level of a narrative-performative work, and its implicit aspects (Rohmer 2000). Thus, either in interaction with a dramaturg or by applying dramaturgical knowledge, a screenwriter can tailor their story efficiently to a theme, the production context, and everything else to consider. As a result of this, they can successfully address their future audience.

36.7   DRAMATURGY AS TOOL FOR ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

According to the argument outlined above, it is evident that dramaturgy can serve analysis effectively—its knowledge derived from practice and philosophical reflection and abstraction, as a sub-discipline of aesthetics. Dramaturgical knowledge allows the detection and investigation of practices, patterns, and particularities of screenwriting and filmmaking. Supported by dramaturgical

knowledge, one can analyse a work in regard to its use of film language and its *grammar*. It enables one to *read* and interpret a work. One should study the screenplay as an independent work, even though the creative team have transformed it into a movie. More specifically in this regard, this not only allows a well-argued understanding of the impact of the screenwriter and their creativity or art, but it also allows a closer look at dramaturgical intentions of the screenwriter.

The challenge the researcher faces is to not get immersed in the work but to develop an analytical approach to the screenplay. This enables the researcher to distinguish or compare the screenplay and the final film production. Dramaturgical theory prepares the researcher to investigate and identify how a film is made, in terms of artisanship and artistry. Based on the further differentiation into explicit and implicit dramaturgy (see Rohmer 2000; Stutterheim 2015, 2019, 37–54), one can, for example, identify the relationship between *fabula* and *sujet* or plot and story, between the structural and aesthetic design of a work. This knowledge also supports the identification of whether a performative artwork is linear-causal, that is driven by a hero and their conflict; or epic, that is telling a story caused by external circumstances (see Hegel 2003; Carrière and Bonitzer 1999; Stutterheim 2019); and following the structural concept of an open or closed form (see Eco 1989; Klotz 1980; Szondi 1978, 1987; Stutterheim 2015, 2019, 43–47). With the dramaturgical approach one can also detect the "identity of a conscious procedure and an unconscious production, of a willed action and an involuntary process. In short, the identity of logos and pathos", the core elements of an art work (Rancière 2011, 28).

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