SUGGESTIVE VERBALIZATIONS IN FILM
ON CHARACTER SPEECH AND SENSORY IMAGINATION

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"I think it's one of the most important things for a filmmaker:
to use the fantasy of the viewer.
The audience has to make their own pictures,
and whatever I show means diminishing the fantasy of the viewer."
(Michael Haneke)

1. FILM IS (ALSO) A VERBAL MEDIUM*

After a long and horribly detailed description of how she and her partner kidnapped, raped and killed a 15-year old girl, the criminal Claudia Hartmann (Nina Hoss) triumphantly and rather cynically asks the investigators in the Netflix series *Criminal: Germany* (2019): "Zufrieden? Genug Kopfkino?" The English subtitles render her questions as "Satisfied? Enough of a stroll down memory lane?" but her reference to a common German figure of speech literally translates as "Enough cinema in your head?" This is precisely what speech in cinema can do: It can 'project' a second 'film' on our 'mental screen,' and often it is a character who, through spoken words, creates this 'cinema in our head.'

Still, the philosopher Stanley Cavell (1981: 11, original emphasis) once felt the need to notice, with some exasperation, that spoken words in film do not get the attention at all they deserve from cinema scholars: "even those who are willing to believe that the details of every motion and position of what the camera depicts […] may be significant in determining what a film is about," Cavell writes, "even among these people it is hard to believe that the *words* spoken in the film should be taken with the same seriousness." Indeed: language skepticism has a long tradition among film scholars, a tradition that does not begin with Balázs (2010 [1924/1930]) and Arnheim (1957 [1938]) and does not end with Kracauer (1960).[1] In fact, research on film dialogue and other forms of spoken words is scarce and – barring exceptions like Sarah Kozloff's important work and some scholars following in its wake (Kozloff 2000, Jaeckle 2013, O'Meara 2018) – language skepticism still holds sway in Anglophone film studies. Equally important, mainstream practitioners, too, sneer at those who lend weight to words in films. To cite just one position as a proxy: According to screenwriter William Goldman in a film "you do not tell people things, you show people things" (quoted in Kozloff 1988: 13). For many years this "Show, Don't Tell" dogma has been firmly entrenched in screenwriting manuals and screenplay classes (Remael 1998). In her analysis of screenwriting manuals, film criticism and theoretical analyses, Kozloff (2000: 28) found a number of dogmatic prescriptions regarding film dialogue, among them "Dialogue should never give information that can be conveyed visually."

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* This text is a thoroughly revised version of an article originally published in German (Hanich 2014).

[1] More on this point, see Kaes 1987, Kozloff 2000 and Elliott 2003. Noël Carroll (2008: 35-52) opposes media purism and the thesis of a medium specificity of film.

When films do not exclusively rely on what are considered essentially cinematic means like montage or the photographic revelation of reality, the alarm bells of skeptical theorists, media purists and dogmatic practitioners go off: For them, film is only cinematic if the putatively 'essential' or 'unique' capacities of cinema are employed – otherwise they are haunted by the specter of the 'theatrical' or the 'literary.' To mention one prominent example: In his *Theory of Film* Kracauer unmistakably claims "Film is a visual medium" and "significant communications [of sound films] must originate with their pictures" (1960: 103). According to Kracauer, verbal communication shifts the affinity of the medium away from camera-captured reality to the theater: "emphasis on speech […] adds something new and extremely dangerous" (104), "[it] threatens to drown the significance of the accompanying pictures, reducing them to shadowy illustrations" (105).

What this media purism underestimates are the aesthetic possibilities of spoken words in film. And, this is particularly important for what I am interested in here, it ignores the powerful appeal to the spectator's *sensory imagination*: language allows and invites viewers to imagine – in various sensory modes – something that is not shown or heard.[2] This intertwinement of spoken words and the viewer's sensory imagination will preoccupy me in the following pages. As we shall see, there are good reasons to draw more attention to it, not least because it can have narrative and, more broadly, aesthetic implications for the poetics of film. But it also allows us to support recent attempts to define film not exclusively as an audiovisual medium to be perceived but also as a medium that depends on and, in fact, thrives on the sensory imagination of the viewer (see Hanich 2018b and Cooper 2019).

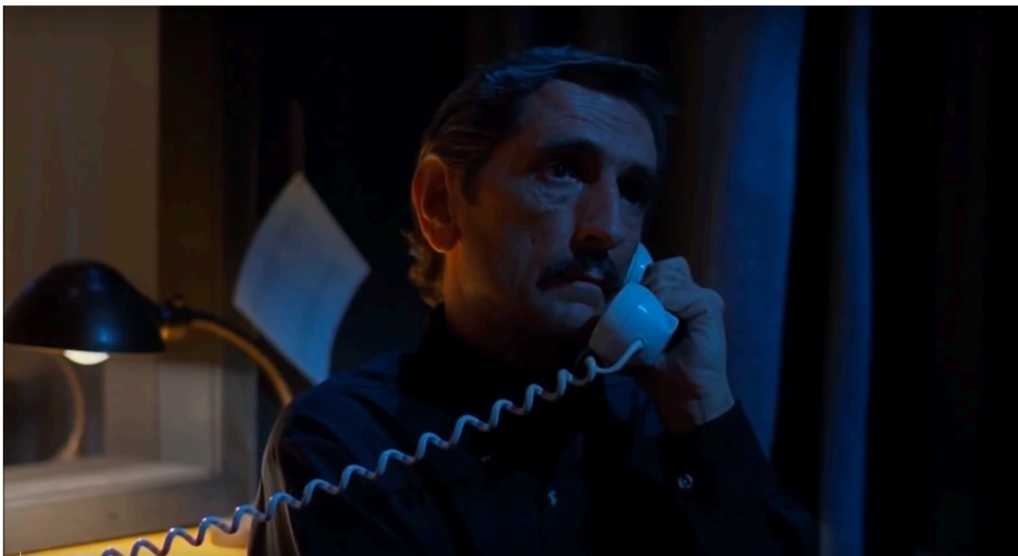

Figure 1. Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984).

[2] Interestingly, Kracauer was well aware of this effect on imagination, but he evaluated it quite the opposite way – not as enabling, but as constraining. In a footnote, he disapprovingly quotes René Barjavel who, in 1944, claimed that "the imagination of the spectator watching a dialogue film 'builds from the words showered down on him and replaces the images on the screen by those which the dialogue suggests to him'" (323).

As an example, take the wonderful scene from Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984) in which Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) visits his former girlfriend Jane (Nastassja Kinski) in the peep-show cabin where she works. He takes a seat in front of the one-way mirror through which he can see her, but which doesn't allow her to see him. He decides to turn away, not able to bear her sight, and asks her if he may tell her a story. In a quiet voice, Travis slowly recounts the beautiful past of a couple that turned into a nightmare. Although after the many intervening years Jane does not recognize his voice, it gradually dawns on her that the story is *their* story. The static camera all the while focuses on either him or her, but never shows a single image from the past. "He'd come home from work and accuse her of spending the day with somebody else. He'd yell at her, break things in the trailer," Travis tells. At some point, the soundtrack adds quiet Mexican-sounding guitar music, while Travis continues to characterize the man as jealous and concerned about her willingness to leave him: "He knew she had to be stopped, or she'd leave him forever. So he tied a cowbell to her ankle, so he could hear it at night if she tried to get out of the bed. But she learned how to muffle the bell by stuffing a sock into it and inching away out of the bed and into the night." Although they had by now conceived a little boy, the man remains deeply apprehensive. One night he wakes up from a dream and finds the trailer burning: "There were blue flames burning the sheets of his bed. He ran through the flames toward the only two people he loved. But they were gone. His arms were burning. And he threw himself outside, and rolled on the wet ground. Then he ran."

Figure 2. Orson Welles's *The Stranger* (1946).

Here is a second example in which spoken words evocatively refer to something not shown: the scene from Orson Welles's *The Stranger* (1946) in which war crime detective Wilson (Edward G. Robinson) is playing a game of checkers with the local shop owner Mr. Potter (Billy House). Recurrently looking outside an unseen window to the left of the frame the two men comment on the clock of the church tower the suspected Nazi criminal Charles

Rankin (Orson Welles) repairs for the local community. Throughout the scene, a long-take of more than three minutes, the bell tower is kept in off-screen space. “Figure it to tell time rightly?” Potter asks, while Wilson, like Rankin an expert on clocks, is looking intently outside. “Mm-hmm,” the detective mumbles. “And will the angels circle around the belfry?” Potter continues to ask. After having made his next move Potter asks, again looking toward the unseen bell tower: “Is this a man or a woman angel, Mr. Wilson?” – “I don’t know.” – “Well, reckon it don’t make much a difference amongst angels.” After Potter has won the game, they start talking about Rankin. Looking again in the direction of the tower, Potter says: “Uh, he generally gets through up there about now.” – “Oh, yes. I know,” Wilson answers, while staring outside. Also looking out the window, Potter replies: “Gets dark earlier these days.” (fig. 2)

Figure 3. Stanley Kubrick’s *The Killing* (1956).

And while we’re at it, let’s take a look at – and listen to – a third example: a scene from Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956). Here five gloomy-looking men sit around a table in the semi-darkness. While drinking whiskey and smoking heavily, they discuss the details of a raid on a racecourse, which the gang wants to perform. Johnny Clay (Sterling Hayden), the head of the group, describes in a quick and insistent voice details about the security measures and the course of the money transport (see fig. 3). The guards of the racetrack, Clay says, usually come in an armored car: “That car arrives about five o’clock and parks directly in front of the main entrance to the club house. Two men stay in it: one at the wheel, the other with a machine gun at the turret. Two others enter the office to collect the dough. Now, they’re armed, of course, and so are the track detectives who cover them from the car to the office and back....”

These three scenes illustrate different shades of an intriguing aesthetic device I want to call *suggestive verbalization*. Through vivid and evocative language, suggestive verbalizations stimulate the viewer to imagine states and actions not shown – scenes that have taken place in the narrative past (*Paris, Texas*), are relegated to offscreen space right now (*The Stranger*) or will happen in the future (*The Killing*). With reference to speech-act

theory, Sarah Kozloff has pointed out that film dialogues can function as "narrative events" (2000: 41, original emphasis): "Speech-act theory, first promulgated by J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle in the 1960s, has taught us that all conversation can be thought of as events, as *actions*. When one talks, one is *doing something*—promising, informing, questioning, threatening, apologizing." But through suggestive language characters can also do something else: they can *evoke* a sensory mode of imagination among viewers.

Although suggestive verbalizations can doubtless have this astounding effect, film scholars have been hesitant to investigate them. Among the few who have dealt with the aesthetic upshots of extended character speeches is Michel Chion, who usefully distinguishes between *iconogenic narration* and *noniconogenetic narration*. Iconogenic narration refers to scenes in which the words of a character "cause," "evoke," "suscitate," or "conjure up" the film's visualization (Chion 2009: 396/397, 399 and 478). Consider the classic case of a tracking shot closing in on a narrating character which is followed by a flashback: The initial verbal description is either doubled by the following images; or the movie completely switches to the showing mode, silencing the voice of the character. The term *noniconogenic narration*, on the other hand, describes situations in which characters tell a story and only the narrator and the listener can be seen. No visual 'illustration' comes into play; the narrative is conveyed only through language (Chion 2009: 481). Chion uses the erotic character speech from Ingmar Berman's *Persona* (1966) as an illustration, but also mentions a number of other films in which characters talk explicitly about sex that remains unshown, such as *Carnal Knowledge* (1971, director: Mike Nichols) or *The Decline of the American Empire* (1985, director: Denys Arcand). Importantly, for Chion (2009: 401), *noniconogenic narration* is accompanied by the viewer's individual imaginings. This makes the proximity to the concept of "suggestive verbalization" particularly evident. Nevertheless, Chion's term is restricted to *narration*, whereby vivid and lively *description* is threatened to be lost out of sight. My concept, in turn, not only encompasses narration but also includes descriptive passages of objects or states.[3] What is more, the normative emphasis that comes with the adjective *noniconogenic* seems problematic: Since Chion uses the negative prefix "non," he deliberately or unwittingly sets visualizing narration as the norm and thus devalues the verbalizing mode. 'Suggestive verbalization' therefore seems more encompassing and less normative to me.[4]

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[3] These descriptive verbalizations could also be called *ekphrasis*, as long as one understands this classical term in a broader sense and does not restrict it to descriptions of works of art. In an influential essay, W.J.T. Mitchell distinguishes between two forms of ekphrasis: (1) ekphrasis as a literary genre in which poems describe visual art; and (2) ekphrasis as the general generic term for all verbal representations of visual representations intended for the purpose of putting persons, places, pictures, etc. before the mental eye (1994: 152/153). Ekphrasis, then, would be a *textual form* distinct from narration, describing for the reader, listener or audience things and events in a descriptive way, while *enérgeia* and *enárgeia* designate the *rhetorical devices* that serve to produce this effect. See also the recent issue of *Poetics Today* (vol. 38, no. 2, 2018) on "Contemporary Ekphrasis."

[4] Another term is proposed by Markus Kuhn in his highly detailed *Filmnarratologie*. Kuhn proposes a distinction between the *visual* narrative instance and one or more facultative *linguistic* narrative instances. The latter come in the forms of *extradiegetic* linguistic narrative instances (such as voice-over, subtitles or inserts) and *intradiegetic* linguistic narrative instances (such as characters or documents like letters, newspapers, books). However, Kuhn is not concerned with spectator activity, aesthetic impact and a description of the film experience – the major point of the concept of "suggestive verbalization" lies precisely in its reference to the sensory imagination of the viewer.

Another scholar who has devoted attention to evocative character speech is David Bordwell. However, in his short essay tellingly titled "Tell, Don't Show" (2010) Bordwell exclusively focuses on long verbal accounts of the *past*.[5] The phenomenon is broader, though, and to show this (or should I say *tell it*?), I will ask the reader to accompany me into new territory. First, I will define more concretely what I mean by suggestive verbalization. Afterwards I will, by means of examples, go through a series of four types of suggestive verbalization. In the final section, I will not fail to discuss important functions this aesthetic device can have for film aesthetics and the viewer's experience.

Although my discussion focuses on narrative films with a fictional world, this does not mean suggestive verbalizations do not play an important role in other cinematic modes. We can certainly find instances of suggestive verbalizations in experimental cinema – just think of the many evocative narrations and descriptions in Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993). Likewise, in documentary films their importance can hardly be overestimated. This is true, no doubt, for *pragmatic* reasons. Since the camera often cannot have witnessed the decisive event, it has to be presented through verbalized memories and testimonies. Recent examples include the detailed and many-voiced memory reconstructions of true crime cases in American documentaries such as *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003, director: Andrew Jarecki), *Dear Zachary* (2008, director: Kurt Kuenne), or *Restrepo* (2010, directors: Tim Hetherington/Sebastian Junger).[6] But it is also true for *ethical* reasons, as some events simply must not be shown or re-enacted. For good reason Claude Lanzmann constructed *Shoah* (1985) out of linguistically conveyed memories.

2. Defining Suggestive Verbalizations

Through the vivid and evocative language of suggestive verbalizations, the viewer is invited, challenged and occasionally even forced to imagine something in visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, haptic and other sensory ways that is *audiovisually not present*. In order to evoke linguistically what is not presented audiovisually, all forms of language in the cinema come into question: character speech, voice-over narration, inserts, diegetic documents such as letters, newspapers or books, subtitles, the comments of a cinema narrator, etc. Film-historical changes are obvious here: While language in silent films was used suggestively via subtitles or a cinema narrator, the sound film featured voice-over narratives that reached a climax in American cinema of the 1940s (see Kozloff 1988). The most widespread use of suggestive language occurs in character speech and dialogue – and it is on them that I will concentrate. Usually the character can be seen, but sometimes he or she can also be heard from outside the frame as a voice-off. In addition, a single character can monologize, but in other cases several characters alternate in narrating or describing. If several characters are involved, they stimulate the viewer's imagination either through a montage

[5] The situation is different when it comes to *writing* in film. A number of recent studies have shed light on words on screen. See, for instance, Chion (2017) or Krautkrämer (2013).

[6] In their critical evaluation of what they call 'the talking witness documentary,' Spence and Avcı (2013: 299) write: "thanks to these women and men, the fractured stories that the younger generation grew up with and which fueled their imaginations and fantasies, but which never added up to a complete picture, are now transformed into something more concrete. And, because of the comfortable indexicality of those talking heads (the fact that the camera and microphone were present to record the witnesses' testimony), the stories are endowed with life."

of monologues, as in the aforementioned multi-voiced memory reconstructions in documentary films, or through dialogues.

Just as a film sometimes smoothly changes – or abruptly jumps – from narrative to spectacle (Laura Mulvey), from absorption to theatricality (Michael Fried), from a voyeuristic to an exhibitionist mode (Tom Gunning), it temporarily alters the register in moments of suggestive verbalization. Or maybe better: the film shifts its emphasis and switches from audiovisual presentation to linguistic evocation, from showing to telling, from direct visualization to indirect-visualizing. Obviously, a film never gives up its presentation mode entirely (even a blank screen would be a form of visual presentation), and the interplay between audiovisual presentation and linguistic evocation can have mutual feedback effects. On the one hand, the images, sounds and music accompanying a suggestive verbalization may influence its degree of evocativeness and even the sensory mode of imagining (be it visual, aural, tactile, olfactory etc.). As Kozloff (2000: 90) puts it, "words in a script become transfigured when they are spoken by an actor, filmed by the camera, edited together, underscored with music." On the other hand, a suggestive verbalization will likely have influence on how we perceive what is shown on the screen, not least because the viewer's act of imagining takes up cognitive resources and may lead to a backgrounding of the act of perceiving, a point I will come back to presently.

Furthermore, there are clear differences in *how long* a suggestive verbalization lasts. On the one hand, we find shifts of register that remain in place for long stretches of screen time: for instance, the sexually explicit verbalization at the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967) takes almost nine minutes. Here the unfortunately married Corinne (Mireille Darc), sitting half-naked on the desk of her psychoanalyst and lover, describes in detail a wild erotic experience she had with the newly married couple Paul and Monique a few days earlier. On the other hand, suggestive verbalizations often conjure up the unshown only briefly in the viewer's imagination. Consider a scene from David Fincher's *Seven* (1995), in which Detective Mills (Brad Pitt) finds a bucket at the crime scene of the first serial killer victim. He leans over it, lights it with his flashlight and suggests with his disgusted exclamation what the film visually withholds from us: "Fucking vomit!" (fig. 4) In conjunction with his disgusted reaction Mill's short exclamation, a brief description of what he sees, allows us to imagine in a sensory way what the film does not show.

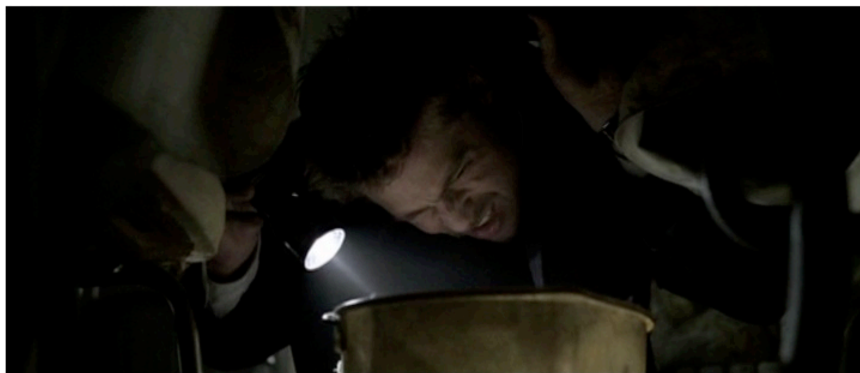

Figure 4. David Fincher's <u>Seven</u> (1995).

This also implies that in moments of suggestive verbalization the viewer's own activity switches in a decisive way. The activity of *perceiving* the film via the senses of seeing and hearing loses its dominance and creates space for visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, haptic and other sensory forms of *imagining*. I say "dominance," because the viewer is imaginatively involved in moments of perception, just as he or she also remains perceptually active in moments of imagination. What shifts is merely the focus. In short, the spectator enriches his or her perception-dominated experience of the audiovisual medium film through a – however vivid – imagination-oriented experience by mentally seeing, hearing, smelling, touching etc. Since suggestive verbalizations are often momentary and fleeting, the concurrent act of imagining can remain unnoticed by the radar of reflective consciousness, even though it leaves a mark on a pre-reflective, implicit level of consciousness. In other words: During the film we usually do not reflect on the fact that we have imagined, but afterwards we would be able to tell someone *that* we have imagined something during a given scene and *how* – for instance, how we have mentally visualized the revolting insides of the bucket in *Seven*.

The term *suggestive verbalization* combines two crucial aspects. First, the word *verbalization* refers to language as a central element, for there are suggestive evocations without language, like the sounds of a galloping horse in offscreen space or the music of Big Ben. In fact, all clearly and irrefutably identified sounds whose source remains unseen – Chion speaks of *immediately recognisable sounds* (2016: 114) – such as trains, police sirens, rain drops, footsteps, slammed doors etc. would qualify here. As mentioned above, suggestive verbalizations do not only comprise the verbal narration of events and actions but also the description of states and objects. For instance, in Ingmar Bergman's *Vargtimmen*/*The Hour of the Wolf* (1968), Mrs. von Merkens (Gudrun Brost) asks artist Johan Borg (Max von Sydow) to help her undress her stockings. With the inviting remark to look at her feet she directs the viewer's attention to something remaining outside the frame in the lower part of offscreen space, while vividly describing it: the shape and beauty of her feet. This *description* does not meet any of the minimum requirements we would expect of a *narration*.

Second, the adjective *suggestive* indicates an imagination effect and thus brings into play the addressee of the suggestion: the spectator. The qualifying addition *suggestive* is crucial because language does not necessarily put the viewer in the mode of imagining; when films use language in a commenting, argumentative or negotiating way, the suggestive dimension may be missing entirely. The extent to which film addresses the viewer's sensory imagination therefore does not depend on the sheer quantity of what is being said – it's partly a question of its vividness and evocativeness. To put it in the language of classical rhetoric: it's a matter of *enérgeia* and *enárgeia* (or *evidentia*). The term *enérgeia* refers to a dynamic style of animation and movement: The absent is suggestively presentified through an energetic and vitalized language. The term *enárgeia*, on the other hand, refers to a vivid and detailed style: the absent is made plastic by a clear and detailed description. In both cases we are dealing with techniques of 'putting something before one's eyes.' Naturally, depending on the degree of suggestiveness, different intensities of sensory imagination are to be expected.

For an example, let's take a brief look at the mysterious dream Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) describes, with a strong accent, at the end of *No Country for Old Men* (2007, directors: Ethan and Joel Coen): "I was on horseback goin' through the mountains of a night.

Goin' through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and [my father] rode past me and kept on goin'. Never said nothin' goin' by. He just rode on past... and he had his blanket wrapped around him and his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin' fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it." (fig. 5)

Figure 5. Ethan and Joel Coen's *No Country for Old Men* (2007).

Bell's description contains a number of elements typical of the style of Cormac McCarthy, whose novel the Coen Brothers adapt in their film: the warmth-coldness contrast of a winter mountain pass and a warming blanket wrapped around his father or the light-dark contrast of the nocturnal landscape and the snow. More importantly, almost every sentence contains verbs of movement (four times "going," three times "riding"). They lend the story a particular liveliness. And finally, with the contrast of a moving light source against the dark background of the night an element emerges that philosopher Elaine Scarry (1999: 89) calls "radiant ignition" and which she considers to be particularly conducive to imagining movement: "What is extraordinary about radiant ignition is the ease with which a point of light can be moved in one's mind, and the fact that by pairing this easily moved object with a solid object – a person or a horse say – we are able to move the latter mentally." The sheriff's dream can be vividly imagined based on the precise portrayal of light, movement and cold.[7]

But the degree of suggestiveness also depends on various facets of the actor's performance and his or her voice. Think of the speed and clarity of articulation, but also how strongly the acting itself is foregrounded: an actor who rushes through his text, an actress who mumbles and remains almost incomprehensible, a performer who overacts – all this can interfere with imagining. The more the content of what is verbalized and has to be imagined recedes, the less suggestive the verbalization will be. With regard to comparable cases in theater Christopher Collins (1991: 2) notes: "perceptual and verbal data both lay claim to visuality: what we see on stage and what actors' words evoke in our minds compete for visual attention. They are not merely concurrent; they are counteractive."[8] This is why the film often lowers its *audiovisual showing* mode when it changes into the *linguistic* mode,

[7] In this essay, I will not be able to further pursue in any detail the question *how* character speech becomes vivid and evocative. For some indications, see Hanich 2020 (forthcoming) . For a discussion of vivid and evocative language in literature, see, inter alia, Collins 1991 and Scarry 1999. The most extensive and convincing study I know is Kuzmičová 2013.

[8] Psychologists call this phenomenon 'within-modality interference.' For more information on 'within-modality interference' in film, see Hanich 2020 (forthcoming).

thus enabling the viewer to imagine more easily the absent in a sensory way. Against the background of the rarefied image on the level of perception, the figure can stand out on the imaginary plane as a Gestalt.

In addition, to be suggestively effective, what is narrated or described must not be seen simultaneously *as* a film image or *in* the film image. The object mentally visualized by the spectator should remain a visual spot of indeterminacy (to borrow Roman Ingarden's term), which is only substantiated by the supplementary activity of the spectator. If the film provides the viewer with illustrative images, they may hinder the act of imagining or even block it. This is because we cannot *perceive* one and the same intentional object and *imagine* it at the same time, as philosophers like Wittgenstein or Sartre have pointed out.[9] However, it should be stressed that in principle the range of potential contents of imaginings evoked by suggestive verbalizations is identical to the range of contents elicited by ordinary verbalizations outside of film contexts. The words uttered in a film are thus not distinctive in their imagination-eliciting capacity compared to ordinary verbalization.

This, in turn, implies (and this is where media purists like Kracauer get particularly nervous): suggestive verbalizations are not unique to film. Although film can put a different emphasis on them through close-ups, zooms, particular types of voice recording, acting styles, music or other stylistic devices, they are transmedial and can be found in all kinds of media in which language plays an aesthetic role. In fact, they are as old as Western literature. Just think of the messenger reports in dramas like Aeschylus' *The Persians* or Euripides' *Medea* (see, for instance, Zeppezauer 2011). Or consider the role that teichoscopies play in Homer's *Iliad* and later in ancient drama. Both the messenger report and the teichoscopy are forms of suggestive verbalization. However, this transmedial dissemination has not been acknowledged appropriately: Neither are film scholars keen on emphasizing the connection to literature and theater, nor do theater scholars always succeed in viewing over the walls of their own discipline. Theater scholar Peter Eversmann (2005: n.p.), for one, writes in an essay on messenger reports and teichoscopies: "in the … novel and in the film we do not find these kind of stories. … not even with film adaptations of theatre plays." As I will show in the following section, messenger reports and teichoscopies certainly do appear in film, and particularly the former occur much more frequently than acknowledged.

3. Four Types of Suggestive Verbalization

Now, if we scan the various instances of suggestive verbalization, what might be useful distinctions? I propose to differentiate suggestive verbalizations by their *temporal reference* and to divide them into four types. The crucial question is: Does the suggestive verbalization refer to something already past, simultaneously happening, lying in the future, or something 'super-temporal' that either persists in a stable state or returns regularly? The main reason for this distinction is that it allows me to relate suggestive verbalizations to the two aforementioned categories from drama theory which also differ according to their temporal

[9] When film images illustrate the verbalization, they reduce the suggestive effect and thus the viewer's imaginative activity. However, this does not mean that the verbalization in these cases would have no effect on the images. The accompanying verbalization, often criticized as redundant, draws attention to the linguistically emphasized aspects of the image. Like a searchlight, it illuminates certain parts; others sink into the undescribed darkness. The images threaten imagination – but the verbalization exerts power over the autonomy of the image.

reference: While the messenger report alludes to an action or a state of affairs from the *past*, the teichoscopy presentifies a *concurrent* event or condition. To be sure, other forms of categorization could have been imaginable – for instance, according the various sensory modalities evoked. Nevertheless, I have settled for these four types to make both the historical roots and the transmedial character of suggestive verbalizations more recognizable. As we shall see in the final section, suggestive verbalizations share some of the pragmatic, narrative and aesthetic functions with messenger reports and teichoscopies. And although this is not something I will pursue in this essay, it opens the possibility to compare differences between evocative character speeches across media.

3.1. Verbalization-of-the-Past: Imagining What Has Been

In the first category the time vector points back to the past: here the state described or the action narrated is already complete. Think of confessions, testimonies, self-revelations, stories, dream portrayals or actual messenger reports. The character or narrator must not necessarily have witnessed the past him- or herself, but can recount something he or she has been told or has found out by investigative means. The commissioner at the end of a whodunit or the lawyer in the final plea of a courtroom drama would be cases in point. The suggestive verbalization answers the question: how *was* it? Consequently, its dominant grammatical time form is the imperfect or perfect.

Of the four major forms, the verbalization-of-the-past seems the most widely used, and many of the examples mentioned so far – from *Criminal: Germany* and *Paris, Texas* to *Weekend* and *No Country for Old Men* – fall into this category. Past verbalizations usually have a narrative rather than a descriptive character. The figure can assume a witness position and report what he or she has *observed*. An example would be the cruel-drastic account of the nurse Pat Archer (Cara Seymour) in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, director: Terry George), in which she reports on atrocities she was forced to observe in the Rwandan civil war. But often characters also report what has happened *to them personally*. Consider the extensive description that Signora Vaccari (Hélene Surgère) recounts of her defloration in Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) or the drastic scene from Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) in which Georgina Spica (Helen Mirren) tells how she was beaten, humiliated, and sexually abused by her husband.

3.2. Verbalization-of-the-Present: Imagining What Is Important Right Now

The second type refers to events not shown that take place concurrently or unseen objects and states that are important at this moment. The verbalization gives an answer to the question: how *is* something right now? The temporal vector refers to the diegetic present; the grammatical tense is the present. Verbalizations-of-the-present often remain brief; examples that are comparable to the long monologues in some verbalizations-of-the-past are rare. But this does not mean that they cannot have a vivid effect. Especially horror movies make affective use of it.[10]

In most verbalizations-of-the-present, the things or events not shown are located in offscreen space. In a much-cited essay, Noël Burch (1981) points out altogether six ways how filmmakers can bring offscreen space into play: from characters or objects entering or

[10] For some examples, see chapter 4 in Hanich 2010.

stepping out of the image to camera movements that inevitably bring something *from* off-screen space into the frame and at the same time relegate previously seen elements *into* the off. Interestingly, Burch forgets to mention character speech that narrates or describes – much like in a classical teichoscopy – what currently lies in off-screen space and that viewers therefore have to imagine.

To be sure, teichoscopies in the true sense of the word – 'viewing from the walls' – are comparatively rare in film. Apart from the example from Orson Welles's *The Stranger* mentioned at the beginning, we come across teichoscopies in Josef von Baky's *Münchhausen* (1943), *Duck Soup* (1933) by the Marx Brothers, *Nicht versöhnt oder Es hilft nur Gewalt, wo Gewalt herrscht/Not Reconciled* (1965) by Jean-Marie Straub/Danièle Huillet, Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995), Roy Andersson's *Sånger från andra Våningen/Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) or an episode of the animated television series *South Park* (2005, season 9, episode 4), to which I will come back below. Less literal forms of teichoscopy include narrations of actions that are blocked or descriptions of objects seen from the backside. Here we could think of descriptions of unseen paintings or photographs in Guy Ritchie's *RocknRolla* (2008), *Fallen Angels* (1995) by Wong Kar-Wai, Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Bergman's *The Hour of the Wolf*, Leo McCarey's *An Affair to Remember* (1957) or the Henry James adaptation *The Innocents* (1961, director: Jack Clayton) (fig. 7).

Figure 6. Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961).

In most of the examples mentioned so far, we are dealing with forms of offscreen space in which something is either hidden *inside* the frame, is *adjacent to* the image field or could be found at least *in its environment*. But there are also cases in which things or events *in distant spaces* are illustrated by characters speaking to us *from far-away places*. These include telephone conversation partners or radio messaging transmitters, who verbally clarify absent states or events and who are themselves visually absent. Think about the radio reportage in the famous final sequence from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun/The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979), in which Herbert Zimmermann's live reportage of the 1954 World Cup final between Germany and Hungary can be heard in the background for about ten minutes. Here a voice whose source lies in what I call the 'medial off' recounts or describes an event or condition that also lies in off-screen space. Thus, we are

dealing with a double visual absence here: neither the verbalizing character nor the event or object are visibly present in the image.[11] These cases show us that the classical concept of teichoscopy is too narrowly construed for our purposes.

This becomes even more evident when we think of verbalizations-of-the present that bring into play intangible and imaginary spaces. An effective case can be found in Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) where the clairvoyant 'precog' Agatha (Samantha Morton) describes to John Anderton (Tom Cruise) for almost two minutes a vision of his deceased son: "He's on the beach now, a toe in the water. He's asking you to come in with him. He's been racing his mother up and down the sand...." Here we are dealing with the metaphysical realm outside the image that Gilles Deleuze has called the "absolute off" to demarcate it from the more conventional "relative off." For Deleuze the absolute off is a radical elsewhere, beyond homogeneous space and time, with which the spiritual comes into play and which therefore no longer belongs to the realm of the visible (1986: 17).[12] Thus comparable to verbalizations of past dreams, in verbalizations-of-the-present the ontological status of what is currently not shown is not decisive: what is absent onscreen can comprise things hidden in offscreen space that actually exist within the diegesis; but it can also refer to the content of immaterial visions, daydreams, hallucinations or drug highs that a character is currently experiencing and describing.

3.3. Verbalization-of-the-Future: Imagining Plans and Prophecies

The third type of suggestive verbalization points to the future and leads the viewer to imagine something that is expected to come, regardless of whether this actually happens later in the film or not. Here we can think of plans, intentions, visions, prophecies and threats. Also, in commands, orders and demands the time vector points to the future, because they cannot have been implemented at the time of verbalization yet and sometimes hold the future vividly 'before our eyes.' In these cases, the suggestive verbalization answers the question: how will (or could) it be *later*? Grammatically the future tense predominates. In drama theory, there is no term for character speeches directed to the future comparable to messenger report and teichoscopy, but they can certainly play a vivid role in films.[13]

For example, at the beginning of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Ermey) spews out drastic exclamations of violent or scatological content.[14] At one point the drill instructor yells at a GI: "You had best unfuck yourself or I will unscrew your head and shit down your neck!" Or: "I will gouge out your eyeballs and skull-fuck you!" More extended examples are the motivational speeches Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) gives to his Jewish American guerilla troupe in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009, director: Quentin Tarantino) and General George S. Patton (George C. Scott) addresses to an invisible audience

[11] On more of these cases, see Hanich 2020 (forthcoming).

[12] Consider also a scene in episode 9 from *Too Old to Die Young* (2019, director: Nicolas Winding Refn) where the character played by Jenna Malone functions as medium and describes what she can see in another 'world.' She is explicitly asked by her companion: "Tell me what you see." Here we have a connection to a medial off in another sense of the word 'medial.'

[13] Again, although my examples are taken primarily from fiction films, suggestive verbalizations also play a central role in other modes. In Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's documentary *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996), for example, there is a bloodcurdling future verbalization, in which the stepfather of a murdered boy threatens the alleged perpetrators in the deepest Southern twang and with Old Testament anger.

[14] James Naremore (2007: 36), too, speaks of "vivid scatological imagery".

of soldiers at the beginning of *Patton* (1970, director: Franklin J. Schaffner) (fig. 7). The latter, which is peppered with drastic and suggestive passages, points to both the *near* future of the struggles against the Nazis in Europe and the *distant* future in which the soldiers will look back on the battles of World War II: “We're not just going to shoot the bastards. We're going to cut out their living guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks. … Thirty years from now when you're sitting around your fireside with your grandson on your knee, and he asks you, ‘What did you do in the great World War II?’ – you won't have to say, ‘Well, I shoveled shit in Louisiana.’”

Figure 7. Franklin J. Schaffner’s *Patton* (1970).

3.4. Verbalization-of-Generalities: Imagining the Universal and the Recurrent

While the time vectors of the three preceding categories point in a specific temporal direction, this is different in the less frequent verbalizations-of-generalities. In this case the temporal reference is either switched to a permanent state; or the vector refers to recurring points in time. It is not important for the audience to imagine how it once was, how it is right now or how it will be at some point. Rather, the viewer is called to imagine something general, either because it is permanently like this or because it recurs. Hence what is said does not evoke the particular but what is universally valid, not the special case but what is recurrent, not the token but the type. The suggestive verbalization answers the question: How is it in general or again and again? Sometimes it is above all the *context* that decides whether a character speech is to be categorized as a verbalization-of-generalities. Consider a character who vividly describes an oak tree. This character can refer to the oak as a *type*: What do oak trees typically look like? But he could also describe a specific oak in offscreen space as a *token*: What does this particular oak tree look like right now? In the latter case we would deal with a verbalization-of-the-present.

One might think that verbalizations of something general or regular could hardly be suggestive. The following brief examples refute this. In *Seven*, Wild Bill (Martin Serene), the owner of an S/M store, says of his client John Doe (Kevin Spacey), “I thought he was one of them performance artists, that’s what I thought. You know the sort of guy who pisses on a cab onstage and then drinks it. Performance art.” Wild Bill does not refer to a *concrete* performance artist. Rather, he puts John Doe in the category of performance art and explains what he thinks is *typical* for it. Similarly, in *Meet John Doe* (1941, director: Frank Capra) Long John Willoughby (Gary Cooper), in his long populist radio address, describes in

alternate degrees of vividness and liveliness the characteristics of the average American: "He's inherently honest, but he's got a streak of larceny in his heart. He seldom walks up to a public telephone without shoving his finger into the slot to see if somebody left a nickel there. He's the man the ads are written for. He's the fella everybody sells things to."

4. Functions

At the end, I would like to mention at least some of the functions we can ascribe to suggestive verbalizations, functions that go beyond what Sarah Kozloff discusses with regard to film dialogue more generally (see chapter 1 in Kozloff 2000). This discussion seems necessary because a die-hard follower of the 'show, don't tell' dictum might still object: Why not show everything directly? Why resort to suggestive language, while the film could show it in a vivid way?

First of all, there are a number of pragmatic reasons (see Hanich 2010: 111/112). These can have a political-legal background: Where the explicit representation of violence or sexuality is taboo or even legally prohibited, suggestive verbalizations can ask viewers to imagine the forbidden. Moreover, economic reasons can play a role: By not directly showing states, objects, acts or events but indirectly illustrating them, the filmmakers can address a larger audience which would otherwise be limited by censorship or age restrictions. In addition to the higher revenues thus obtained, the very economic and technical reasons apply which gave the messenger report and the teichoscopy an important role in ancient theater: Shifting to language makes it easy to visualize things that are either very expensive or require a lot of technical effort – battles with numerous extras, natural disasters with a high amount of CGI wizardry, war scenes with challenging stunts, etc. (on the 'talk is cheap' slogan in US independent cinema, see O'Meara 2018).

Aesthetic intentions often play a crucial role as well. For one, suggestive verbalizations allow to keep the tempo high: "The adage attributed apocryphally to Hitchcock, that you should never use dialogue when you can show it in pictures, is often reversed in the genre film – even in Hitchcock's films. Whenever it takes too long to show it, say it instead," Thomas Sobchack points out (2003: 107). Moreover, suggestive verbalizations allow for a unity of space and time. Referring to Alma's highly erotic verbalization of the past in *Persona* Bordwell (2010: n.p.) notes: "by presenting this monologue wholly in the present, Bergman gives us two layers of action simultaneously, a charged sex scene and its long-range emotional consequences. But there's more. Had he given us flashbacks, he could not preserve the flow of the present-time action. The staging and cutting during Alma's confession use simple film techniques, but they add another layer to the scene." This simultaneity of two actions can create interesting tensions: between the narrowness of the diegetic space in a room where the past is recounted and the expansiveness of the imagined scenery at a beach (as in *Persona*), between the static now and the kinetic turbulences of the verbalized future (as in *Patton*), between the frugal now and the erotic then (as in *Weekend*) etc.

In addition to these *synchronic* discrepancies, suggestive verbalizations also allow the use of *diachronic* contradictions – that is, fruitful discrepancies between what came first and what follows. A preceding suggestive account can later turn out to be wrong because of a single unreliable character. Take the scene in *Game of Thrones* (2011, season 1, episode 2) in which the evil queen Cersei Lannister (Lena Heady) recounts the death of her son while standing at the bed of little Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead Wright), whose coma and

potential death she is partly responsible for. She had urged her brother Jaime Lannister (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) to throw Bran from a tower when he had caught them red-handed in an act of incestuous intercourse. Bran's mother Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) listens intently to Cersei's story, not knowing that Cersei may not tell the truth. Here the verbalization-of-the-past avoids lending too much objectivity to Cersei's potentially made-up story. Would the film show us what had happened in a flashback, we could assume that Cersei is telling the truth. Because of the reliance on a suggestive verbalization the past can remain ambiguous. Should the story turn out to be wrong later into the series, it would not be the narration as a whole that is considered unreliable but only the character.

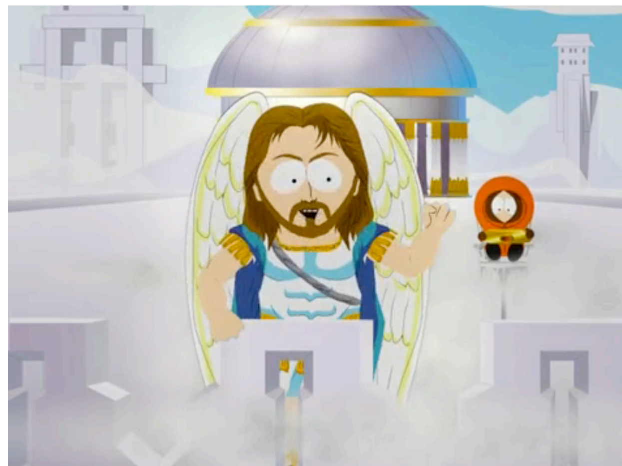

Figure 8. *South Park* (2005, season 9, episode 4).

Moreover, when viewers are forced to acknowledge that how they had sensorily imagined a specific scene turns out to be wrong, an effect of irritation, surprise or frustration can arise. Even comic effects are conceivable if the film first suggestively verbalizes the present, but a little later offers illustrative images that conflict with the viewer's mental visualizations. In the episode from *South Park* mentioned above, the Archangel Michael stands on the walls of the Celestial fortress and describes, much like a sports reporter, the ultimate battle between the divine legions and Satan's hellish army (fig. 8): "My god, this battle is epic! ... Oh, they're bringing in their demon dragons. Look at the size of them! My god, this is even bigger than the final battle in the *Lord of the Rings* movie. It's like ten times bigger than that battle." During the teichoscopic verbalization the battle cannot be seen. But a short time later, after the Archangel has declared the forces of heaven victorious, we see the battlefield: There are only seven angels and a few small pools of blood.

Figure 9. Ingmar Bergman’s *Tysnaden/The Silence* (1963).

Conversely, a *subsequent* report can prove to be wrong in an effective way if it runs counter to what has been *shown* before. For one, in Ingmar Bergman's *Tysnaden/The Silence* (1963) Anna (Gunnel Lindblom) describes to her ill sister Ester (Ingrid Thulin) an event in a variety theater previously shown in the film (fig. 9). However, her report and how we imagine it is only half in line with what we could previously see. The second half of her narrative deviates clearly: While Anna had fled in shock from the theater after watching a couple having sex, she now claims that a man had come to her in the box and had sex with her on the floor. This narrative construction gives the viewer an advantage over Ester, because the information surplus makes Anna's sadism more graspable. Anna tells the story to shock and repudiate Ester, because Anna cannot handle the fact that her sister is in love with her.

These are only some of the many functions suggestive verbalizations can have on the *narrative level* in the narrower sense. However, with reference to the media-theoretical reflections of Walter Ong and Mary Ann Doane’s Lacanian interpretation of the pleasure of hearing, Sarah Kozloff (1988: 128) has also emphasized a particular impact of the character’s (and actor’s) *voice*: “There seems to be widespread agreement about the voice’s power to create a feeling of connection and intimacy.” This touches upon the manifold effects suggestive verbalizations can have on the *level of the characters*. Even more so than audio-visual ‘illustrations’ of events and states suggestive verbalizations can produce closeness and attachment – as well as distance and aversion – to the characters through voice and extended close-ups. They therefore play an important role in terms of focalization (alignment) and taking sides for or against characters (allegiance).[15] For example, suggestive verbalizations often include moments that social psychologists call “social sharing of emotion”: those who reveal intimate emotional states create a stronger connection with the public and tend to be liked more than others (Rimé 2009: 73). In addition, if a character tells or describes something verbally the content can be more easily influenced by his or her subjective psychological state; it can contain comments, evaluations, opinions and wishes, something more difficult to achieve if the film would show the content directly. And of course, the voice not only transmits semantic content but also emotions and affects: the anxious whisper of the threatened, the heavy breathing speech of the agitated, or the confused stuttering of

[15] The terms *alignment* and *allegiance* come from Smith 1995, p. 83-86.

the embarrassed character. As the phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (2010: 180, my translation) writes: “The voice appears as something in which the psyche of a living being *expresses itself*, while noises and sounds are generated *by mere force*.”

Figure 10. Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999).

In addition, suggestive verbalizations often allow a view of the speaker *and* the addressee. Thus, they can make possible a high degree of emotional ambiguity. Just think of the detailed description of a nightmare in *Eyes Wide Shut*: We can see *both* the highly emotionalized Alice Harford (Nicole Kidman) recounting an erotic dream in which she cheated on her husband and the reactions of the irritated, even shaken husband Bill (Tom Cruise) (fig. 10). By bringing together the verbalizing and the reacting characters in one shot, or at least one scene, contradictory tendencies clash: Alice's fears and guilt feelings, on the one hand, and Bill's jealousy and thoughtfulness, on the other hand. In both cases, we get important information about the characters that are critical to empathizing. Additionally, in Bill's case we even see him imagining Alice's nightmare, which might lead to a rapprochement between character and spectator activity.

Suggestive verbalizations can also have a concentration effect on viewers – in the best case, they focus attention. Michel Chion (2009: 401/402) points this out in his discussion of noniconogenic narration: “It has long been evident for the sound film that … with noniconogenic narration, something important is at stake. It gives a particular density and gravity to what is spoken; it creates a specific real time, that of the storytelling accompanied only by our own individual mental imagery. ... In each case the absence of visualization of what the character recounts focuses our attention as if to say, ‘Get serious, listen up, you have to remember this’; it’s as though the cinema were laying itself bare and saying, ‘This is all you get, words with the image of the person saying them, believe them or not.’” By switching to the linguistic register, the film emphasizes what is not shown, thereby giving it a special weight. This is particularly true in cases of extensive suggestive verbalizations: the longer the verbalization gets along without illustrative images, the more it contradicts the expectation of the audience, at least in mainstream film. Thus, there is a formal *foregrounding* in the sense of the Russian formalists, as the film appeals to viewers in an unusual way to concentrate and listen.

Incidentally, an additional effect of suggestive verbalizations is revealed when we consider the phenomenological differences between the acts of perceiving and imagining.

What is verbally suggested by the film and sensorily imagined by myself feels, in a certain way, 'closer' to me than what the film audiovisually shows and what I perceive as 'outside' of me on the screen. In other words, when I watch a scene that the film shows directly, I always experience it as *there on the screen*, even in moments of strong immersion; instead, when I imagine the scene that is verbally suggested, it does not lie somewhere outside of me and cannot be localized in an external filmic world, but is experienced as a 'cinema in our head' on our 'mental screen.' Moreover, suggestive verbalizations give me the opportunity to concretize what is only alluded to with my *own* imaginings and memories, which in turn can result in a greater phenomenological closeness to the film. Thus, potentially not only the degree of attention, but also the degree of mineness increases (Hanich 2018a: 436-439).

This leads us to yet another important aesthetic effect: If suggestive verbalizations stimulate us to imagine sensorily, indeed force us to do so, we can escape these imaginations less easily than the filmic images on the screen: Since looking away would be of little help in these moments, we would have to cover our ears or actively think of something else – which often comes too late when we decide to do so. In a sense, *indirect* visualization through suggestive verbalizations can affect us more directly than the *direct* visualization through audiovisual moving images. Horror films and thrillers often use this effectively (see chapter 4 in Hanich 2010).

Moreover, with Markus Kuhn we could refer to the high narrative economy of linguistic narrative instances (2011: 99): Suggestive verbalizations simply allow for a certain aesthetic parsimoniousness and alluring simplicity. Following Sarah Kozloff (1988: 128 and 2000: 56), we could point out that suggestive verbalizations betray a yearning for simple oral storytelling and the intrinsic gratifications that come with it. Last but not least, suggestive verbalizations – and verbalizations-of-the-general in particular – make it easier to incorporate the abstract or the universal. According to Berys Gaut (2010: 248/249), a disadvantage of photographic images derives from the fact that they necessarily present particulars instead of generalities: They always have to show a *specific* John Doe and not the average John Doe American *in general*. Instead, the verbalization-of-the-general can easily refer to such generalities – as we have seen in the example precisely from *Meet John Doe*.

Here an analysis of the functions of suggestive verbalizations certainly does not come to an end. The preceding remarks could only indicate cursorily what eventually has to be worked out in more detail: the manifold uses of suggestive verbalizations in film.

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