

Manfred Jahn

Rev 11/24/2022 14:03

A Guide to Narratological Film Analysis

Full reference: Jahn, Manfred. 2021. A Guide to Narratological Film Analysis. English Department, University of Cologne. URL www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppf.pdf.

Project page: www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/ppp.htm

Homepage: www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/

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This tutorial offers a toolbox of basic narratological concepts, approaches, and models and shows how to put it to work in the analysis of film.

The revised text introduces an extended version of the 'filmic composition device' (FCD) and a film-specific adaptation of constructivist focalization. Apart from adding some pointers to recent research, new graphics, and some close readings, the new sections focus on 1) redefining the FCD as a creative intelligence in charge of composition and pragmatic communication ([4.1](#)), 2) a discussion of 'uncooperative' strategies such as the 'online perception illusion' trick (used by the FCD, [4.2.10](#)) and the hunt for goofs (pursued by viewers, [5.3](#)), 3) a definition of 'direct' and 'proximate' types of inside views, now including the 'view from behind' and the 'reverse POV shot' ([4.2.4](#)), 4) typical outside and inside view focalization modes ([4.2.5](#)), 5) a discussion of the pros and cons of knowledge-oriented vs perception-oriented models of filmic focalization ([4.2.13](#)).

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1. Film as a narrative genre

1.1. There are three common terms referring to our subject: cinema, motion picture (movie), and film. Because 'film studies' is the generally accepted name of the discipline I will prefer the term 'film' but reserve the other terms for occasional variation. Generally, I also want 'film' to cover related genres such as computer videos and TV series. Because film is a narrative genre my account will systematically borrow from the toolbox of concepts presented in this project's current narratology [PDF](#).

1.2. Like drama and the novel, film is a narrative genre because it presents a story – a sequence of action units involving characters. Often, a film is an adaptation of a novel or a drama. For instance, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* was based on the novel by Anthony Burgess and Milos Forman's *Amadeus* was based on the play by Peter Shaffer. For an excellent comparison of drama and film look up Burn ([2013](#)).

Approaching film from a narratological angle is not a new idea, in fact there are classic studies by Bordwell (1985), Kozloff (1988), Jost (1989, 2004), Chatman (1990), Deleyto (1996 [1991]), Branigan (1992). Recent works include the book-length studies by Schlickers (1997), Eder (2008) [characterization], Kuhn (2011) [this one is a massive 400+ pp account], Bietz (2013) [on TV news film] (see references for essay-length English versions of these). Not directly related to the narratological model, but interesting in their own right, are the 'phenomenological' and the 'multimodal' approaches discussed in Sobchack (2004) and Burn (2013), Hanich's (2018) study on the collective experience of cinematic performances, and Gallese and Guerra's (2020) neuroscientific approach to immersion and empathy.

1.3. Script and storyboard

Film is related to two kinds of paper media, the film script and the storyboard.

- **film script/screenplay:** a text containing a film's action narrative and dialogue. A film script is either a recipe for making a film (to use Searle's characterization of play scripts) or a written record of a finished film.

Alternatively, the film script is also called a blueprint, and the professional reader a blueprint reader. See Sternberg (1997: n60) for seven sources of this term. Using the terms suggested by Roland Posner (1997), the recipe script is a **pre-transcript** (preceding the final product or first performance), and the record script is a **post-transcript**, written after the finished film product.

- A **storyboard** is a comic-strip version of a filmic sequence. Like the physical film itself, a storyboard consists of a series of frames ('panels', in comic-strip terms) picking out a scene's main situations.

Unfortunately, storyboards do not in general survive in printed or otherwise publicly accessible form. (However, a closely related fictional genre is the graphic novel or *cinéroman* [Hescher 2016].) Like the film script, a storyboard can have either the status of a pre-transcript or a post-transcript. In the following, I will freely use post-transcript storyboards to substantiate definitions and sample analyses (some frames were photographed from a TV screen, the newer ones are screenshots). For a storyboard-film script comparison of the famous cropduster scene of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* see Giannetti (1993: 159-183; 353-357); for the rooftop chase scene of *Vertigo*, Auilner (2000: 39).

1.4. This is not the place to tell anyone how to write a film script. There are many excellent sources both in print and on the net (Epstein 2002 is particularly recommended). A film *typescript* has a unique standard format which is functional rather than attractive to read. As a rule of thumb, one page of text is approximately equal to one minute of performance time. Consider the following excerpt from the screenplay of *Rear Window*, which introduces the main character's friend Lisa:

```
INT, JEFF'S APARTMENT - SUNSET - CLOSEUP. ----- slugline
The two big profiles filling the screen. The girl
kisses Jeff firmly but not passionately. Then her ----- action text
```

head moves back an inch or two. She speaks.

LISA -----	speech prefix
(softly) -----	parenthetical
How's your leg? -----	dialogue
JEFF	
Hmmm - hurts a little. -----	dialogue

The excerpt begins with a **slugline**. A slugline usually consists of up to four specifications:

1. setting, usually either INT. (interior) or EXT. (exterior, out of doors),
2. name of location (JEFF'S APARTMENT),
3. time of day (lighting conditions),
4. type of shot (CLOSEUP).

Dialogue is introduced by a **speech prefix**; manner of speaking may be characterized by a **parenthetical** (also called **wryly**). The **action text**, also **scene text** (Sternberg 1997: 65), contains the descriptions of characters and objects as well as the narrative report of the nonverbal action (this is the filmic equivalent of **stage directions** in drama). See [4.2.6](#), below, for a storyboard frame of the situation presented in the excerpt.

Film scripts are notorious for their technical jargon, and they are often hard to read for the non-professional. Nevertheless, the technical terms are useful in film analysis, and the script itself can serve as both a record and a reference. Another point of interest, inviting cognitive and linguistic analysis, is that the action text is characterized by a high incidence of specifically "visual sentences" (Epstein 2002), and occasionally we may get a bit of evaluative judgment. More recently, the practice of booksellers and publishers (Faber & Faber, Macmillan) to offer a range of classic screenplays, as well as an increased attention to the literary qualities of film scripts has led some commentators to elevate the film script to an autonomous literary genre (Sternberg 1997; Korte and Schneider 2000).

2. Moving pictures: the visual data

2.1. The smallest unit on a film's visual plane is a **frame** or **cell** showing a single picture. If one projects a sequence of twenty-four frames per second on a screen the human eye is deceived into seeing a moving image. A **shot** is a sequence of frames filmed in a continuous (uninterrupted) **take** of a camera. A take stops when the camera stops rolling or goes offline. A sequence of shots makes up a **scene**. Some authors go beyond this and speak of **acts** (a sequence of scenes containing a major segment of the plot, eg setup, confrontation, and resolution). Finally, a sequence of scenes or acts makes up a film.

- a **scene** is a sequence of action segments which take place, continuously, at the same time and in the same place. "What's a new scene? A good rule of thumb is that when you jump from place to place, or from time to time, it's a new scene" (Epstein 2002). Another fine operational definition is this one by Dana (2000): "An event that takes place entirely in one location or time. If we go outside from inside, it's a new scene. If we cut to five minutes later, it's a new scene. If both, it's a new scene. Scenes can range from one shot to infinity and are distinguished by slug lines".

2.2. Shots

The conventional system of shot types is based on two distinguishing features: 1) the camera's distance from the object, 2) the size of the object. The system works fine as long as the camera's focal length is normal (ie, neither wide-angle nor telephoto) and the reference object is a person. The type of shot is much harder to determine when the object is not of standard human size or when the camera uses an unusual focal length. There is hardly any optical difference between the mountain range of the surface of a small object as seen through an electronic microscope, ie, an extreme close shot, and a true mountain range, ie, an extreme long shot. Nevertheless, the following terms are good enough for professional use and make up a main part of the vocabulary of the filmic visual code. The four central categories are close-up, medium shot, full shot, and long shot (frames 2, 3, 5 and 6,

respectively). Some common intermediate types are listed as well, as are the common technical abbreviations.



(Most of the graphics shown here were taken from CorelDraw libraries.)

1. **detail/extreme close-up (DS, XCU)**: a small object or part of an object shown large (a speaking mouth, a telephone receiver). Often a detail shot shows a plot-relevant object – a ring, a telephone number on an envelope, the countdown display of a bomb detonator, etc.
2. **close-up, close shot (CU, CS)**: full view of, typically, a human face. Sometimes the term **semi-closeup** is used to refer to a slightly wider shot showing the upper third of a person's body.
3. **medium shot (MS)**: a view of the upper half of a person's body, showing his or her bodily stance.
4. **American shot (AS)**: a three-quarter view of a person, showing her or him from the knees up.
5. **full shot (FS)**: a full view of a person, eg, a waitress balancing dishes.
6. **long shot (LS)**: a view from a distance, of a large object or a collection of objects (eg, buildings, a bridge). Often used to establish a setting (**establishing shot**). People, when present, are reduced to indistinct small shapes. The term **semi-long shot** is sometimes used to indicate a slightly closer view (eg, the facade of a house).
7. **extreme long shot (XLS)**: a view from a considerable distance (eg, the skyline of a city. If people can be made out at all, they are mere dots in the landscape).

2.3. Moves

In the absence of further specification, the camera is assumed to be shooting from a stationary position. If the camera changes its position while shooting we get the following types of dynamic shots (see Gallese and Guerra [2020: ch3] for neuroscientific findings on corresponding empathetical effects):

- **pan**: the camera surveys a scene by turning around its vertical or horizontal axis.
- **tracking shot/pulling shot**: the camera follows (tracks) or precedes (pulls) an object which is in motion itself.
- **push in, pull back**: the camera moves in on or away from a stationary object.
- **dolly shot**: a shot taken from a camera mounted on a wheeled platform (a dolly). Normally used for moving through a location – eg, a dolly shot of a wedding party. Script text: "The camera dollies past a queue of guests waiting to be let in".
- **crane shot**: camera moves up or down on a crane structure.
- **handheld camera**: allows free movement in all directions, but the images are affected by shakes and vibrations.
- **steadicam**: a freely movable camera that largely absorbs shakes and vibrations.

- **zoom**: the camera moves in on or away from an object (**zooming in, zooming out**) by smoothly extending or shortening its focal length. Actually, this is apparent motion only because the object retains its original perspectival aspect and the camera remains stationary. Most film professionals prefer actual camera movement shots to zoom shots. Zoom shots are frequently used to direct attention to a particular stationary detail, however. For instance, the frame at right shows the camera in the process of zooming in on the necklace of mad Carlotta Valdes in *Vertigo*.



2.4. Cuts and transitions

A **cut** marks the shift from one shot to another. It is identified by the type of transition which is produced. The two major kinds of cuts are direct and transitional. The direct cuts are as follows:

- **cut, direct cut, straight cut**: an immediate shift to the next shot; a shift from one shot to the next without any transition whatsoever.
- **jump cut**: leaving a gap (ie, leaving out frames) in an otherwise continuous shot. The gap will make the picture jump. Jump cuts are indicative of either careless editing, or they may be used for intentional effect (an instance of the stylistic figure of 'baring the device'). Using jump cuts is an easy way of cutting a long sequence short. Jump cuts can be avoided or cured by inserting a **bridging shot** (momentarily showing some other object or activity) which covers the lack of continuity caused by the gap.

Transitional cuts, in contrast, are based on visual effects and usually signal a change of scene (2.1), ie, a temporal and/or spatial re-orientation:

- **dissolve**: a gradual transition created by fading out the current shot and at the same time fading in the new shot (creating a brief moment of superimposition).
- **fade out to/through (color)**: the end of a shot is marked by a fade out to an empty screen (usually black) followed by a brief pause; then a **fade in** introduces the next shot. (Roughly comparable, perhaps, to the white space of a chapter ending in a book.)
- **swish pan**: a brief, fast pan (so fast that only speed lines can be seen) suggestive of a sudden (possibly, reactive) move from object A in the current shot to object B in the next.
- **wipe**: a smoothly continuous left-right (or up-down etc.) replacement of the current shot by the next. Somewhat reminiscent of turning a page.

2.5. Angles

Camera angles are a result of the camera's tilt (if any): upwards, downwards, or sideways (all to varying degrees). On the screen, the camera's tilt translates into the following principal angles:

- **straight-on angle**: the camera is positioned at about the same height as the object, shooting straight and level (this is the default angle).
- **high angle**: the object is seen from above (camera looking down). A limit case of the high angle shot is the **aerial shot/bird's-eye shot** taken from a drone, helicopter, or airplane.
- **low angle**: the object is seen from a low-level position (camera looking up)
- **oblique angle**: the camera is tilted sideways showing a tilted view of an object. The oblique angle can be combined with any of the other tilt angles.

2.6. A fuller account of the elements of the filmic visual code would also include lighting, color values, lenses (standard, telephoto, wide-angle), filters, film stock and graininess, etc. A good account of this is given in Giannetti (1993: 74-76).

3. Sound: the audio data

3.1. A film's auditory sources of information are stored on a sound track (magnetic tape or digital medium). Unlike the visual track, the sound track is not a necessary element – there are silent movies but there are no films without pictures. However, although the visual channel contains a film's essential source of information, this must not be taken to mean that sound – especially in the form of music and speech – is in any way less important than the visual data. See Kozloff (1988: 8-12) for a survey of controversial positions on picture vs. sound.

3.2. Following Chatman (1990: 134), we will make a distinction between three main kinds of sounds (here treated as mainly self-explanatory terms): **noise**, **speech**, and **music**. Most technical terms correlate sound either to the current scene, or, slightly more narrowly, to what is shown on screen.

The following terms relate sound to what is present in the current scene:

- **diegetic sound** (Beaver 1994: **indigenous sound**): noise, speech or music coming from an identifiable source in the current scene ('diegetic' refers to *diegesis*, ie, the narrated world). Example: we hear a weather report and we know that it comes from a car radio which somebody has just turned on.
- **nondiegetic sound** (Beaver 1994: **supplied sound**): noise, speech or music which does *not* come from a source known to be located in the current scene. For instance, we see waves breaking on a desolate sea-shore and we hear a full-orchestra playing Vaughan-Williams's *Sea Symphony*. Nondiegetic sound usually creates mood and atmosphere; it can also have a commentative function (Chatman 1990: 134).
- **bleed-over, overlapping sound**: sound anticipated from the next scene or sound lagging behind the previous scene. Both are sound-oriented transitions.

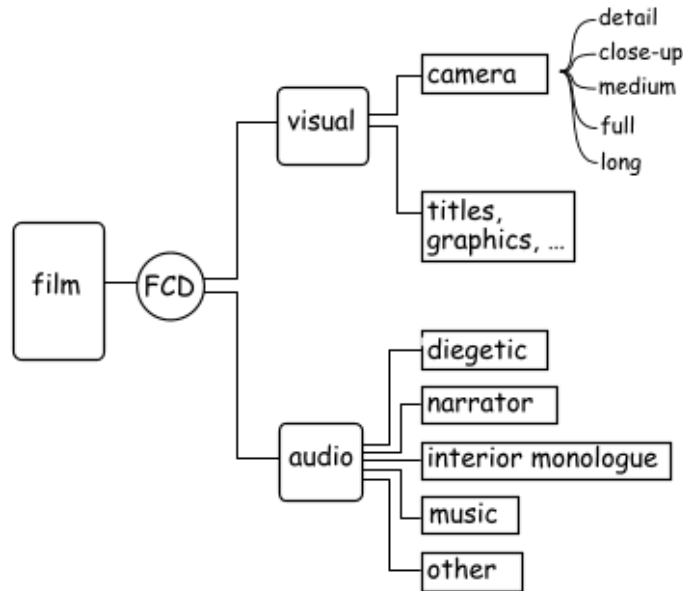
The following concepts relate sound to the current shot. Often, the meaning of the audio information is based on non-realistic but inconspicuous conventions (Goffman 1986: 145).

- **voice over**: there are two major meanings: (1) Representation of a non-visible narrator's voice (**voice-over narrator**); (2) representation of a character's interior monologue (the character may be visible but her/his lips do not move).
- **off screen**: diegetic sound coming from a source located in the scene but not currently shown on screen.
- **filter**: slightly distorted sound indicating, for instance, the speech of the remote party of a telephone conversation.
- **ambient sound**: a diegetic background sound such as the clatter of typewriters in an office or the hubbub of voices in a cafe. Often the volume of ambient sound is turned up slightly when there is no other sound or a lull in the conversation.

4. Composition, focalization, and narration

4.1. FCD: The Filmic Composition Device

4.1.1. The following model shows how the data from the various audiovisual channels is collected, arranged and exported by the 'filmic composition device' (FCD).



In the diagram, angular branches are and/or choices except for the visual component, which is the single obligatory element. Curved branches, such as the typical camera shots, are either/or choices. Remember that the diegetic audio represents the sound of the current scene; all other audio channels are nondiegetic as described in section 3. A truly minimal film would use nothing but plain unedited camera input, and the result would be superficially similar to a silent movie of the early 1900s. True sound films began to appear in the 1940s.

4.1.2. Let us try a mental experiment (but you can just as well make it a real one). In our digital age, creating a film is absurdly easy, and it is a good example of learning by doing, or even analysis by synthesis, if only, again, at a minimalist scale. All you need to have at hand is a camera application, a computer, and some editing software (one popular real-life editing app is actually called "Media Composer"). Take the camera, film a few shots, record some arbitrary sounds, and save that as video and audio raw data files. If you don't have a camera, simply download some video footage and sound bites from the internet. Then open your editing program (many come as freeware) and use it, first, to hack your footage to arbitrary pieces, and then to re-arrange it in random fashion. Most likely the editor software will allow you to type in titles, so give it a title and credit yourself as director and producer. The final step is to export the compilation to a suitable video format, and send this to your friends and relatives. Okay, strike that. Your film is not going to win you any prizes, but it demonstrates that the basic steps of film making are well within reach of virtually everybody. It probably also shows that there is much more to film-making than just randomly arranging some sounds and visuals. So what is the secret ingredient? The simple answer to this is: a film needs a vision that can be communicated, it needs an interest focus that relates to potential viewers, and it needs a story worth telling. That, certainly, is much easier said than done.

4.1.3. Over and above being an editing device let us allow the FCD to be the single creative intelligence responsible for orchestrating the data and realizing the film's overall vision. In other words, we are abstracting it from all real-life contributors (the usual team of directors, producers, music composers, scriptwriters, editors etc), and we are also liberating it from all historical production, equipment, and facilities conditions. Moreover, as the film's central creative intelligence, the FCD will also be responsible for viewing the film from the vantage of possible audiences. This latter provision will give us an indication of the type of pragmatic engagement it expects its viewers to join (4.1.4 for more).

(If you are wondering why the FCD, heavily loaded as it already is, is also saddled with a potential viewer function, remember what Henry James said about the narrator of a novel: "the teller of a story is primarily, none the less, the listener to it, the reader of it, too" (James [1934: 63]; qtd Stanzel [1984: 141]). And for film, there is the famous testimonial from Hitchcock himself: "I enjoy playing the audience like a piano" (IMDB [quotes](#), or watch this [video](#) essay) . Obviously, you have to have a relatively clear conception of your audience in order to successfully "play" it.

Luckily, the FCD is genderless and pronoun-friendly, but insofar as it attributes essentially human creativity and intentionality to a nonhuman device it may have to face the challenge of anthropomorphization. In the literature, various terms have been suggested for "Who Really Narrates" the film: the camera (of course), a grand image-maker (Metz 1974), an implied filmic author, a cinematic narrator (Chatman 1990), an implied director, an image maker (Kozloff (1988), and many more. Our present conception of the FCD is indebted to more recent terms, such as 'narrative intelligence' (a film's "structuralizing intentionality", Schweinitz 2007: 93), 'hypothetical filmmaker' ("the single entity to which the viewer ascribes conscious or unconscious motivations that actuated the professionals who were responsible for the making of the film", Alber 2010: 167), and 'hypothetical author collective' (Thon 2016).

Once the FCD is understood to be a film's creative intelligence, we circumvent the tempting but simplistic identification with the film's director. Of course, it is often said that it is Hitchcock who tells the story of *Rear Window*, that it is his film, and that he can be credited with all its good points and blamed for all of its flaws. However, none of this is true for all films and all directors, and the task of fully crediting all contributors would amount to the rather boring exercise of copying out the closing credits.

4.1.4. As viewers we are aware of the fact that a film is a composition containing large amounts of information flowing from different channels. Film analysis usually begins by inverting the FCD's composition process, that is, it decomposes the film and its various sources of information in order to assess their contribution to the composition as a whole. Often an important part of this exercise is to judge the relevance, function, effect, and reliability of the data.

The viewers' default, though not absolute, pragmatic expectation is that the film is a functional and effective composition that involves us in a cooperative type of communication similar to an ordinary conversation (Grice 1975). On this basis, viewers can expect the FCD and themselves to be guided by Grice's rules of giving and receiving the "right amount" of information – not too little, not too much, and only what's relevant. Our expectations may be primed to a certain extent depending on the genre of the film – a thriller, a courtroom drama, a science-fiction movie, a Western, etc. Generally, if a film provides us with all the information we need, when we need it, and in nicely apportioned chunks, then basic-level audiovisual comprehension will be intuitive and automatic.

4.1.5. Mind-benders

However, the FCD is rarely maximally cooperative at all times, and we usually do not expect it to be – actually we sometimes hope that things are not laid out entirely smoothly and transparently. The FCD may make it difficult for us by leaving gaps, by scrambling the chronology, or by deceiving us with all kinds of visual trickery (eg, 4.2.10). Such bending of rules is often done in the interest of surprise and suspense. Indeed, the FCD may confront us with rather serious cognitive challenges, such as logical paradoxes and masses of missing, ambiguous, incoherent and misleading data. Nevertheless, even so-called mind-bender films usually abide by one bottom-line principle, namely, that the FCD's behavior, however uncooperative it may seem, serves a worthwhile ulterior purpose which it is our task to figure out. As Willemsen and Kiss put it, "one may for instance infer that a narrative's incoherence forms the film's deliberate point, as, for example, signaling the fallibility of memory, illustrating the instability of perception, or representing a fundamentally ambiguous *condition humaine*" (2019: 139). Mind-bender films often cited in the literature include *Rashomon*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Pulp Fiction*, *L.A. Confidential*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Adaptation*, *Magnolia* and *Fight Club*. In 5.3.5 we will discuss a clip that is purposefully paradoxical; for more detailed accounts see Kiss and Willemsen (2017) [on 'impossible puzzle films'], Elsaesser (2017) [on 'mind-game films'], and Schlickers and Toro (2018) [on 'perturbatory films'].

By the way, if the FCD can bend the rules of pragmatic cooperation, so can viewers. See 5.3.1 for a wholly uncooperative viewing mode that allows the viewer to discover, and enjoy, a film's 'goofs'.

4.2. Focalization

4.2.1. Much, perhaps all, of a film's data stream consists of *perspectivized* data. **Focalization** refers to the ways and means of presenting information from the perspective and perception of **focalizers**. The general focalization question can be phrased as *Who perceives what from which point of view?*

The term perception as used here is meant to include **online perception** (ordinary perception) as well as **offline perception** (imaginary perception such as visions, dreams, and memories).

A film's **primary focalizer** is the filmic composition device (FCD) – it envisions, sees and hears everything that unfolds in the here-and-now of the film's actual or virtual performance. At any point in time, the FCD can approximate, shift to, or adopt the vision/audition of two types of secondary focalizers: (1) a **reflector** (or 'internal focalizer') is a character whose perception orients the current audiovisual data; (2) a **narrator-focalizer** is the teller of a narrative (usually a nondiegetic voice-over). A film can only have one primary focalizer (one FCD), but the FCD can delegate focalization to any number of reflectors and narrator-focalizers.

If two or more reflectors share a perception we will speak of **collective reflectors**. In the case of a nested scenario – such as a film within a film – we can refer to first-, second-, and n-order primary focalizers, and of similarly ordered narrator-focalizers and reflectors.

The central concept of focalization is **focus**, and it is prudent to call to mind that the word can refer to two different things, both of them essential: 1) the burning point of an eye's lens, ie the location of the focalizer's eye, ie his or her *literal* point of view; and 2) the object that is seen in focus – the focalized object or center of attention. Adopting a constructivist approach, we will assume that perception always involves 'seeing X as Y', a formula in which X is some sensory input and Y is the interpretation of that input. Crucially, a focalizer's interpretation of X depends on his or her **mindset**, a set of mental dispositions including state of mind, attitude, interest, attention, knowledge, preferences, norms and values, ideological orientation, interpretive strategies etc. Once we know a focalizer's mindset we can re-create, co-experience, or mentally simulate their seeing X as Y. Without a supporting mindset and a context, given or assumed, all filmic data is highly ambiguous or 'protean' (Sternberg 1992). Generally, the visual data presented can be the FCD's exclusive view of things, or it can be a presentation of a reflector's online or offline perception, and what the data is ultimately to be 'seen as' depends on the focalizer's assumed or known mindset. Hopefully, for all of this, focalization theory provides a framework, a set of concepts, and a number of research questions (N3.2.30).

There are interesting commonalities between real-life perception, filmic devices, and filmic reception. The cinecamera shoots from a point of view, the sound recorder records from a point of audition, and both centrally focus on an object of attention. Intriguingly, the human eye has a lens just like a camera has, it projects a picture with a focused center of attention onto an organic screen called the retina, and the raw data on the retina needs to be processed by the brain in order for us to actually see it as something. However, our eyes are capable of a 3D viewing mode, whereas films usually are 2D; on the other hand, film is able to operate zoom, stop, slow and fast motion modes, which our eyes cannot. If necessary, a camera can also make use of tele and macro lenses that far surpass ordinary human eyes. On the whole, the differences may be greater than the similarities and many film theorists nowadays tend to dismiss the issue altogether (see Kuhn 2011: 181 for discussion and references).

For a more detailed exposition of constructivist focalization in literary narrative, see sections [N3.2](#) in the narratology script. Further accounts of filmic focalization can be found in Jost (1989), Deleyto (1996 [1991]), Sternberg (1997: ch9.2), Kuhn (2009: ch3; 2011: ch4), Schlickers (2009). On the differences between knowledge-oriented and perception-oriented approaches see the discussion in para 4.2.13f, below.

4.2.2. To illustrate the constructivist principle of seeing X as Y, let us begin by analyzing a hypothetical case. Imagine the following screen to be an establishing long shot used at the beginning of a film.



What do you see here? Take a moment to verbalize your own personal perception. Now compare your own seeing X as Y to the three interpretations I am at this point conjuring out of thin air: (a) a pattern of color pixels; (b) an attractive, if slightly hackneyed, picture postcard view of, presumably, an American city; (c) the dusk skyline of Kansas City, the place where I grew up in, and have fond memories of. [Note, all of these are invented interpretations, nothing hinges on them, and I have never been to Kansas City.] As you can see, the answers, to which feel free to add your own, all depend on a particular mindset. Significantly, too, we can apparently be prompted to change our mindset in order to replicate a different interpretation. Answer (a) is the typical nerd response, and it is as annoying as it is true (ie, totally). Answer (b) makes an attempt to identify the location, adding a cautious aesthetic judgment. Answer (c) demonstrates familiarity with the place – it actually is Kansas City – and expresses some personal and emotional attachment to it. Now, if we ask ourselves how the FCD sees the scene, and how it can reasonably expect us to see it, we must admit that we do not know – not yet anyway. Still, what we can say is that answer (a) lacks relevance; answer (b) might come close to what the FCD has in mind, even if its slight touch of negativity may prove uncalled-for (we'll have to wait and see); and respondent (c), though obviously well-informed, seems a bit too knowledgeable and subjective to represent one of the FCD's default viewers.

4.2.3. Of course, as the film progresses, the FCD can, and usually will, add further signposts and clues to what it wants us to see. For instance, it can let the diegetic audio render the concert of a thousand frustrated cars stuck in traffic. Or it might suggest an upbeat mood by playing the soundtrack of Wilbert Harrison's "Kansas City Here I Come". Or, for a seriously downbeat slant, it might let a voice-over narrator speak the following lines, lifted (slightly edited) from Peter Ustinov's novel *Krumnagel*, which also happens to be set in the Middle West:

The city had grown like a disease. There were, as is usual in such places, rather more secondhand vehicles for sale than potential purchasers, and come nightfall the neon-signs blinked and twinkled, and insinuated like prostitutes muttering to the passing trade. Then the sky would be red with hellfire, a sign that the electric oasis in the desert of oil and wheat was bubbling with the murky spring of life.

While this barbed description will certainly adjust and re-shape the viewer's initial interpretation, it remains to be seen whether the FCD allows this narrator to be in total control of the visuals or to act as its mouthpiece, neither of which follows necessarily. More clues may be needed to make us see X more closely the way the FCD wants us to see it. As noted in 4.1.4, if the FCD is in a cooperative mood it will give us supportive clues, if it is out to challenge us, it will leave things indeterminate or puzzling, and if it is in full contrary mood, all apparent clues may turn out to be false.

4.2.4. Outside and inside views

The FCD has two major options for presenting visual data: 1) **outside views**, which show settings, characters, and action from an external vantage exclusive to the FCD (ie, a vantage not shared by any of the characters), and 2) **inside views**, which show a story-internal reflector's view of things and events.

Inside views preferentially use the following shot types, sometimes designated 'subjective' or 'semi-subjective camera'.

- **POV shot:** the FCD assumes the point of view of a reflector and renders the object of attention of the reflector's perception. Occasionally, parts of the reflector's body can also be seen.
- **over-the-shoulder shot:** the FCD gets close to, but not fully into, the viewing position of a reflector. We see the shoulder of the reflector and we see what s/he sees.
- **view-from-behind shot:** the FCD moves back to show the reflector full figure, and at the same time shows what the reflector sees.
- **reverse POV shot:** the FCD shows the reflector from the front and the object of his or her perception in close-up.

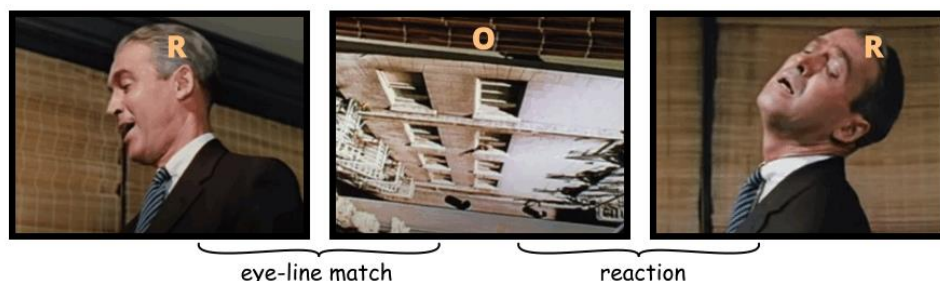
For illustration, in the following screenshots, let R indicate the reflector and O the object of his/her perception. In the POV shot, the reflector is a patient who watches three doctors giving him some good news. In the over-the-shoulder shot, the reflector is talking to his grandad. In the view-from-behind, we see a wanderer on a mountain top contemplating a *Sea of Fog* (actually, a famous painting by Caspar David Friedrich (dated 1818), in which he perfected the device of the *Rückenfigur* [perceiver seen from behind]). In the reverse POV, we see the reflector focusing a candle.



It seems sensible to call a POV shot a *direct* inside view, whereas the over-the-shoulder, the view from behind and the reverse POV shots are *indirect* or (preferably) *proximate* inside views. Also proximate inside views are the following two forms, which combine a shot of the reflector's face or body with a separate shot of the perceived object:

- **eye-line match:** a sequence of two shots: shot 1 shows a reflector looking at something off-screen; shot 2 shows the object looked at (possibly, but not necessarily, using a direct POV shot).
- **reaction shot:** a shot showing the face or body of a reflector reacting with interest, attention, wonder, amusement, annoyance, horror, etc, to what was shown in the previous shot, or will be shown in the next.

In the following sequence from *Vertigo*, Scottie climbs a stepladder to test whether he is still sensitive to dizzy spells. Accidentally looking out of the window he learns that he still is.



Note that the reflector's face or bodily attitude must be recognizable as being indicative of some perception-relevant mental state or activity. Viewers generally engage in this type of shallow mind reading as part of an acquired social competence, now generally termed 'theory of mind' (a subject of great interest in recent literature, see Zunshine 2006, 2012). Naturally, mind reading is just a likely inference, and the FCD may exploit any errors for purposes of its own.

A reflector's thoughts, feelings, and emotions can also be represented by visual effects such as tinting, camera movement, slow motion, psychedelic distortion etc. Other channels may supply nondiegetic

(mentally heard) sounds and voices (example: *Psycho*), music (*Wonder Years*, see 5.2.3), and titles (*Annie Hall*). See Alber (2017) for further forms of audiovisual subjectivity indicators. Because the FCD is a focalizer, too, its own data may also appear in distorted or filtered form (as in underground films).

4.2.5. Types of focalization

In order to define the main types of filmic focalization we will consider the following features: (1) choice of outside or inside view, (2) presence or absence of characters in the scene, (3) the focalizer's point of view and object of perception. Three typical focalization modes can be distinguished (plus many sub-modes when including online/offline status, shot types, audio data etc).

- **outside view:** the FCD freely positions itself so as to show the story's setting and action from an external vantage point. Two variants can be distinguished: in variant A there are no characters in the scene; in variant B there are one or more characters in the scene, but none of them is used as a reflector.
- **proximate inside view:** the FCD uses over-the-shoulder, reaction, eye-line match, and similar shots or sequences (as itemized in 4.2.4) correlated with, and approximating, a reflector's perception.
- **direct inside view:** adopting the position of a reflector, the FCD uses POV shots to show what the reflector sees.

To this, let us add the following notes and provisos.

1. The categories are not intended to be water-tight; intermediate cases and subtle transitions are by all means possible. For instance, if the FCD pans the camera away from a reflector, or if the reflector walks out of the frame, then focalization may change from proximate inside to outside view A; or the other way round, should a previously off-screen reflector move into a view-from-behind position.
2. Should the types listed be too verbose for the purpose of close analysis, abbreviations such as OV (possibly OVA, OVB), PIV, and DIV may be used.
3. All four modes can render a reflector's offline perception. For instance, if we encounter an outside view representing a reflector's memory, dream vision, or hallucination we can tag it as *off(reflector)*. For example, frame 2 in 4.2.10 could be coded as *OVB/off(Scottie)*.
4. A voice-over narrator's discourse also creates focalization patterns, but it would be distracting to go into full detail here (see definitions listed in N3.2.17-21). The Ustinovian voice-over of 4.2.3 would be categorized as *panoramic outside view (no characters)* – "in a scene without any characters the narrator freely positions him- or herself so as to report happenings and describe existents from a panoramic, bird's eye, close up, or detail point of view" (note the almost identical phrasing of the shot's visual focalization pattern). Note the sharp moralist stance of the text is expressive of the narrator's current mindset.

4.2.6. Turning to an actual example, consider the following sequence condensing an early scene from Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. The scene introduces the protagonist's friend Lisa and establishes their slightly problematical relationship.

In frame 1, Lisa (Grace Kelly) is shown in close-up, kissing the sleeping Jeff (James Stewart) (see the



script text quoted in 1.5). As she moves around in Jeff's apartment, we gradually see more of her, until she finally presents herself in a full shot (frame 2). Frames 3 to 5 cover the ensuing conversation.

4.2.7. Which focalization patterns are employed in these storyboard shots? At this point, the viewer already knows that Jeff is generally used as the film's main reflector. However, neither Jeff nor Lisa nor a voice-over narrator (*Rear Window* doesn't have one) is in a position to see or describe the couple kissing exactly as is shown in frame 1. Hence frame 1 reflects a position assumed by the FCD alone, and the focalization mode is *close-up outside view B*.

The interesting thing about frame 1 is that it inverts the sleeping beauty motif – it is the princess who kisses the prince awake, rather than the other way round. Indeed, the film's FCD is often ironic in this fashion, and from the point of view of plot analysis it is quite literally true that Jeff has to wake up to a full appreciation of Lisa.

Frame 2 presents Lisa from Jeff's point of view using a direct POV shot (type *direct inside view*). Lisa, the focused object of his attention, is a beautiful woman in a fashionable dress. Agreed? Wait for a tiny twist on this. For frame 3 the FCD's assumes a different observer position viewing both protagonists in a medium shot outside view. The conversation itself is shown by the FCD moving closely behind Jeff (frame 4), partly showing him, partly showing what he sees in an over-the-shoulder shot (a proximate inside view), and then, in frame 5, for the duration of the reverse angle shot over Lisa's shoulder, Lisa is briefly used as a reflector herself (another proximate inside view). Practically all of the time, Jeff is present in the scene, both in outside and in inside views. For most of the outside views on Jeff we are invited to interpret his facial expression and guess his mindset, using our normal theory-of-mind reasoning. (Deleyto 1996 [1991]: 227-8 also has a discussion of this scene.)

4.2.8. Now, for an important point, let us revisit frame 2. It is a POV shot alright, but the question is: do we viewers really see what Jeff sees? Or could it be that even though the FCD lets us see what Jeff sees, what we and the FCD see, even in using Jeff's eyes, is *not* the same as what Jeff sees? Remember, in order to see what Jeff sees we have to use not only his eyes but also his current mindset. The film script actually tells us that frame 2 shows us a picture of a woman who is "beautifully groomed, and flawless" (24), which is a clear indication of what the FCD expects us to see, and, I take it, that is what we see. In the film, however, we know that Jeff has strong objections to Lisa in general, and to her high-style evening wear in particular. "If only she was ordinary" (19), he is heard to mutter earlier, expressing his belief that she will never make a suitable partner. Thankfully, the plot will prove him wrong, and it is remarkable how well this sequence prepares us for the further course of the film's romantic subplot.

4.2.9. Intently looking at an object of attraction is often referred to by the word **gaze**, a concept that has acquired interesting ideological and psychological connotations in film studies (Mulvey 1999 [1975]; Kaplan 2000 [1983]; Elsaesser and Hagener 2010: ch4). 4.2.6's frame 2, above, could serve as a typical example of a male gaze, even though the judgment may need to be qualified in view of what we just found in 4.2.8. Giannetti (1993: 403) describes the implications of the male (and female) gaze as follows:

A number of feminist film critics have written about "the male gaze" [...]. The term refers to the voyeuristic aspects of cinema – sneaking furtive glances at the forbidden, the erotic. But since most film-makers are males, so too is the point of view of the camera: Everyone looks at the action through male eyes. The gaze fixes women in postures that cater to male needs and fantasies rather than allowing women to express their own desires and the full range of their humanity. When the director is a woman, the gaze is often eroticized from a female point of view [...].

As far as frame 2 is concerned, Jeff's looking at Lisa does not "cater to male needs and fantasies", quite the contrary, as we have argued in the preceding para. But the case may well be different for the FCD, Hitchcock, and the majority of male viewers.

4.2.10. Online/offline perception

In 4.2.1 we drew attention to the distinction between online perception (ordinary perception) and offline or imaginary perception (visions, dreams, memories etc). If the FCD uses a reflector the screen may display either type of perception. Generally, lacking any evidence to the contrary, we tend to interpret any inside view as suggestive of the reflector's online perception. Imaginary perception, in contrast, often advertises its status by being less realistic – it may be unrelated to anything known as actually happening, it may be color-tinted or black and white, it may have that dream-like look and feel to it, or it may be accompanied by other explicit cues and transitions. Often it is also marked by music and sound effects, all of which is used in *Vertigo's* famous nightmare scene:



Frame 1: Scottie, sleeping restlessly; frame2: a hallucinated scene; frame 3: experiencing a falling-from-height sensation; frame 4: waking up with a scream.

However, if all offline-perception signals of this kind are missing then it is easy to mistake the one for the other. Indeed, the FCD may intentionally trap the viewer into believing that the current shots represent an online perception of the story's real world when in reality it is a reflector's *verisimilar* dream or hallucination. Let's call this the **online perception illusion** (OPI for short). Even when experienced viewers know that OPI is a legitimate trick they will experience a (usually pleasurable) shock of surprise when the true state of affairs is revealed, with everybody muttering "ah, it was all a dream". Adjusting our mistaken interpretation, we will usually try to discover the ulterior motive behind the FCD's momentary lack of cooperation. Possible motives might be 1) to upset the viewer's trust in what looks real; 2) to foreground a vivid imaginary vision against the background of dull reality (*Walter Mitty*, "undefeated to the last"); 3) to allow the viewer to share in a moment of epiphany (Proust's *madeleine*). See Jahn ([1999](#)) for a general theory of 'garden paths' and their cognitive effects.

4.2.11. For a further exploration, let us analyze the following sequence from *Rear Window*:



This is a proximate inside view sequence just like the example shown in 4.2.4. Specifically, the FCD combines its own close-up outside view of Jeff's face with Jeff's perception: frame 1 indicates that Jeff is noticing something of interest – that is what our theory of mind reads into his facial expression – and frame 2 shows the object of his attention via a POV shot. Frame 3 is a reaction shot. Here is what the script has for the sequence.

INT. JEFF'S APARTMENT - (NIGHT) - CLOSEUP

Without taking his eyes from the scene, Jeff picks up his glass and drinks. As he drinks, his eyes move slightly over.

SEMI-LONG SHOT

THE CAMERA HAS PANNED slightly to the woman's living room window. A small, candle-lit table is set up, with dinner for two. The spinster sweeps into the room, smiling. She goes to the door, opens it, and in pantomime admits an imaginary caller. She pretends to kiss him lightly, take his hat, and place the hat on a chair. Then she shows him to a seat at the table, disappears into an unseen kitchen and returns with a bottle and two glasses. She sits down, pours two drinks. She lifts her drink in a toast to the imaginary man opposite her.

CLOSEUP

Jeff gives a faint, sympathetic smile, and subconsciously raises his glass in response. (32-33)

4.2.12. Now compare the foregoing pattern with the following, which superficially looks very similar:



DAWN - CLOSEUP

A big head of Jeff. He is still in his wheelchair, sound asleep. The CAMERA PANS off his face, out through the window. The rain has stopped, and the general light of dawn is coming up. The CAMERA COMES TO REST on the salesman's apartment and corridor, which is still dimly lit by the electric lights. We see the salesman emerge into the corridor, pause a moment to allow a woman to proceed him. Her back is to the CAMERA and we do not see her face. They move away, down the corridor. The CAMERA PANS BACK into Jeff's sleeping face. (50)

Frames 4 and 6 show a close-up of Jeff's face. This time he is "sound asleep", and his face does not betray any mental activity of any kind. He may be dreaming, but we do not know. In earlier scenes, Jeff was frequently used as a reflector, approximating his point of view via direct and proximate inside views. Now, having fallen asleep, Jeff no longer functions as a reflector, and therefore 4 and 6 are purely the FCD's chosen outside views. In frame 5, the FCD purposefully turns to a position where it can direct its (and our) interest focus on what's happening in the apartment opposite. Specifically, it now presents what Jeff would see if he were awake. When it pans back to Jeff's face in frame 6, it lets us know that Jeff is still asleep and that he has not seen anything. In other words, the FCD allows us to exclusively witness a potentially significant piece of the action of the impending murder plot (but, actually, it is a false clue).

4.2.13. Perception and knowledge

This is as close as our present take on focalization comes to the approach proposed by Schlickers (1997, 2009) and Kuhn (2009, 2011). In certain respects, however, there are significant differences, and I will use the occasion to briefly discuss some issues. If you are not particularly interested in definitory niceties feel free to fast forward to 4.3.

Building on Jost (1989, 2004), Schlickers and Kuhn ground their model of focalization on the property of relative knowledge. Any perception-centered modalities are separated out as 'ocularization' (vision) and 'auricularization' (audition). In Kuhn's account, focalization, ocularization and auricularization are controlled by two superordinate 'instances': a "showing" visual narrative instance and a "telling" verbal narrative instance (both of which are in turn controlled by an implied director). Regarding focalization, the authors distinguish (a) zero focalization when a narrative instance shows/tells "more than the character(s) know", (b) internal focalization when it shows/tells "as much as the character(s) know", and (c) external focalization when it shows/tells "less than the character(s) know" (Kuhn 2009: 263; 2011: 123ff). Similar definitions are provided for the two perception modalities, where one gets zero/internal/external ocularization/auricularization when a shot or scene presents more/the same as/less than what the character(s) see/hear. Factoring out the alternatives one gets $3 \times 3 = 9$ categories, which can cluster in eight possible combinations, plus multiples thereof considering the variant knowledge states of the characters present (Kuhn 2011: 138). 4.2.12's frame 5 shows the

pattern of zero focalization, zero ocularization, and zero auricularization, meaning Jeff does not know, see, or hear what can be known, seen, or heard. Thus we, and the two narrative instances, and the implied director, can proceed from a state of superior knowledge with likely significant consequences for the film's further presentation and reception.

4.2.14. Pros and cons. Indubitably, Schlickers and Kuhn offer a finely detailed and powerful analytical toolbox of concepts in the best tradition of narratology. Prioritizing knowledge differentials (an option present in Genette's original account), their model is particularly suited to analyzing suspense structures and effects – and Hitchcock's films are prime examples of effective suspense management (Schlickers 2009; Duffield 2018). That said, there is a downside to taking perspectivation apart and scattering it across three components. To begin with, one gets an excess of quaintly named categories (which Schlickers and Kuhn themselves find regrettable). Like many narratologists (myself included) they also do not like Genette's 'zero focalization', but, after defining it slightly differently, they retain it anyway (I don't). Unfortunately, the modified definition clashes with Genette's concept of 'external focalization', so Kuhn gives that a new definition, too (unlike Jost and Schlickers, who abolish it; I replace it by 'outside view'). With so much in apparent need of redefinition, one wonders whether it is a good idea to keep the original terms purely for the sake of their being well-established (which they are not if you are redefining them).

Looking at the definitions, it is above all the phrase "the character(s)" that strikes one as fairly imprecise – it could refer to one or more special characters (reflectors, for instance), or to any character in the scene, or to all characters, on-stage or off-stage. Not mentioned for some reason, but clearly also relevant, are the viewers (added to the mix by Schlickers [2009: 248]). Let us put the definitions to the test and reconsider 4.2.2's establishing shot of Kansas City. Right off, all definitions provided fail for the simple reason that there are no characters in the scene. It is fairly certain, however, that the two theorists will follow Jost in rating this as a "nobody's shot", which for them amounts to a case of zero focalization (Kuhn 2011: 128; Jost prudently admits zero characters to his definition [2004: 76]). Nevertheless, the "zero" classification is notably unintuitive. To begin with, it makes little sense to say that the narrative instance knows more than nobody does. Surely the common-sense categorization would be 'external', a term available and applicable in Genette's original model, but there the very opposite of zero focalization. The Ustinovian voice-over, on the other hand, would count as zero focalization for Genette – unhappily, term-wise, as there is nothing 'zero' about it).

Since our invented example seems less than helpful, let us take a look at frame 4 of 4.2.6, which at least is part of an actual shot sequence. Here we have a standard over-the-shoulder shot, which Kuhn categorizes as internal focalization plus zero ocularization (2011: 145), and the internal-zero variance in this judgment supposedly justifies keeping ocularization distinct from focalization. Translated into ordinary language, the shot shows what Jeff knows (internal focalization), and at the same time shows more than what Jeff sees (zero ocularization). And, again, the categorization is perplexing. If the shot shows more than what Jeff sees then it also shows more than he knows, doesn't it? Alright, third time lucky, let us return to the male gaze item discussed in 4.2.8 (frame 2 of 4.2.6). As a POV shot it is a straightforward case of internal focalization plus internal ocularization, so, thankfully, no problem here. But then we also found some evidence to suggest that the FCD and the viewers see Lisa as flawless while Jeff sees Lisa as objectionable. On this view, the question of whether the participants have the same, or more, or less knowledge seems not only unanswerable but beside the point. Different people are likely to see things differently, that is a brute fact, and it is the exact baseline premise of the seeing X as Y approach proposed here. Moreover, if we accept the FCD as a primary focalizer, subject, like everyone else, to seeing X as Y, then all bases seem to be covered, with one relatively straightforward definition fitting them all. As for knowledge, knowledge is part of the dynamic mindset conditioning in this model, and focalization, together with other means, can be used to create a film's "knowledge landscape", as Duffield puts it. At this level, it seems, ends can be made to meet.

Let me stress that the local doubts voiced here do not in any way detract from the two authors' comprehensive elaboration of film narratology. For yet another take on ocularization in the tradition of Jost, but at the expense of focalization, the reader may wish to look up Hescher's (2016) in-depth study of graphic novels.

4.3. Narration

4.3.1. Not all films make use of narrators. If and when they are present, they come in two kinds depending on whether they are visible on-screen or not. Both are speaking parts but only the on-screen narrator is a speaking *as well as* an acting part.

- **off-screen narrator**, also **voice-over narrator**: an unseen narrator's voice telling a story.
- **on-screen narrator**: a narrator who is bodily present on screen, talking to the (or an) audience, shown in the act of producing his or her narrative discourse.

Obviously, a narrator can be *temporarily* off-screen or *permanently* off-screen. Or, looked at differently, a narrator can be temporarily on-screen or permanently on-screen (however, the latter is not a likely configuration). (For a borderline case consider a split-screen scenario, however.)

Not covered by the two definitions above are narrators of written texts, especially inserts, intertitles, introductory written background histories, or closing outlooks ('prolepses') on the future fates of the characters, etc.

Depending on whether a narrator tells a story in which they were involved themselves, or a story about others, they are either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic:

- A **homodiegetic/first-person narrative** is a story of personal experience. The homodiegetic/first-person narrator of the story (the **narrating-I**) also appears as a character (the **experiencing-I**) on the level of action.
- A **heterodiegetic/third-person narrative** is a story about other people. Seeing the story from an outsider's position, the heterodiegetic narrator is often in a position of absolute knowledge and authority that allows her/him to know everything about the story's world and its characters, including their thoughts and unconscious motives.

N1.10ff in the narratology doc has a discussion of the implications of these types when situated in specific narrative situations.

4.3.2. As in a novel, filmic narrators are situated in a **discourse-here** and a **discourse-now**, which generally postdate **story-here** and **story-now** (N6.3 and N5.1.4 in the narratology doc). Frame 1, below, shows Peter Falk performing in the heterodiegetic narrator role of the text of *The Princess Bride*, and the scene is situated in the discourse here-and-now of the face-to-face story-telling situation. Frame 2 cuts to the fairy-tale setting of the book, ie the story's here-and-now. Occasionally, the fairy-tale action is supplemented by Falk's off-screen narration, and at regular intervals the display also returns to the story-telling scenario, as when the boy complains, "They're kissing again! Do we have to hear the kissing parts?" and Falk (Grandpa) famously replies, "Some day you may not mind so much".



4.3.3. The TV series *Wonder Years* uses a first-person narrator who is generally only an off-screen voice-over presence. Episode 21 ("Square Dance", first shown 2 May 1989) is an exception, however, because it opens with the following sequence:



Frames 1 and 2 are POV shots showing the narrating-I's hands leafing through the pages of the Kennedy Junior High School Yearbook of 1969, and that is all we are ever going to see of him (in the whole series, as far as I know). Frame 3 zooms in on the picture of one particular girl, and frame 4 executes the flashback to the story-now of 20 years ago – the moment when Kevin (Fred Savage), the experiencing-I, aged twelve, learns, much to his dismay, that he has been partnered with "three-pigtails" Margaret Farquhar for square-dance lessons. The temporal narrative distance between discourse-now (1989) and story-now (1969) is 20 years, and, logically enough, the narrating-I's text is not spoken by the actor who plays young Kevin (Fred Savage, aged 13), but by a mature actor (Daniel Stern, aged 32). In section 5.2 we will take a closer look at another *Wonder Years* episode that uses the identical structural setup.

5. Case studies

5.1. Fixed inside view focalization: MASH 158 ("Point of View")

The CBS TV series *MASH* ran through eleven seasons, from 1972 to 1983. In 251 episodes, it portrayed life in a "Mobile Army Surgical Hospital" during the Korean War (1950-53).

5.1.1. In episode 158, fittingly entitled "Point of View", the FCD consistently assumes the point of view of a single character, repeating Robert Montgomery's famous experimental version of *The Lady in the Lake* (1946) in rather more convincing fashion. Quoting the Internet *MASH* guide, "in this unique episode, the camera becomes the eyes of a young wounded soldier. It records his sensory responses to being wounded, flown by helicopter to the 4077th, examined, operated on, and treated in post-operation."



All the shots in the episode are direct POV shots, and the focalization mode is *direct inside view* throughout. The reflector is always the same character, Private Rich, of whose body we see nothing but an occasional boot, as he is wheeled in on a stretcher (frame 1), or his hand holding a clipboard (frame 9, below). Rich has a throat injury, and for a while the clipboard is his only means of communication. There are no outside views or proximate inside views, and the mirror trick (N3.3.10) that might show us Private Rich's face is not used either. In other words, the actor who plays Private Rich does not have to dress up, and that boot that you see in frame 1 might well have no body attached.

5.1.2. In a novel, consistent focalization of this type is known as fixed focalization (N3.2.4), and the most likely narrative situation to exploit it is figural narration (N1.18, N3.3.7). In the *MASH* episode, fixed inside view focalization is supported and strengthened by a number of techniques indicating the reflector's subjective conditions. For instance, scene-opening and scene-closing shots coincide with particular states of the reflector's consciousness – with fade-ins signaling waking up, and a fade-outs signaling falling asleep or losing consciousness. Pans and oblique angles reflect the movement of the reflector's head and eyes – in frame 2 he watches the chief nurse at work, in frame 4 he is spoken to by a fellow patient. Other movements of the head (eg, nodding/shaking yes or no) is also replicated by camera movement. As far as the audio data is concerned, all diegetic sound is carefully aligned with

the spatial position of the reflector's head, ie his point of audition. The episode ends on a shot which shows some members of the camp seen through the frosted windscreen of a departing ambulance (frame 5) (cp Gombrich 1980: 249 on creating a perspectival effect by showing partially obstructed views).

5.1.3. Rich, the reflector, knows very little about the characters of this MASH unit. This is significant because evidently many viewers of the series know them very well. Indeed, as in many episodes in which the camp is seen from a visitor's point of view, this one is largely a study in character. Consider the following shots:



On the whole, the MASH regulars -- Pierce (frame 6), Father Mulcahy (7), Pierce and Winchester (8), Colonel Potter, the camp commander (9), Pierce, Potter, and "Radar" O'Reilly (10) -- try to appear their best -- they introduce themselves, they explain how the camp is run, they crack the usual dead-pan jokes, and so on. In frame 6, Pierce (Alan Alda) introduces himself as follows (qtd Kalter 2000: 144):

PIERCE. Hi there, I'm Captain Pierce. I want to peek under your bandage. Army regulations. Okay, what I'm going to do is take that shrapnel out of your neck and put a tube in so you can breathe easier. When the swelling goes down, your voice should come back. I know you're thinking, 'This guy looks as if he couldn't fix a bicycle tire.' Well, I can't, but I'm gonna get you through this.

The unusually high incidence of straight-on shots -- characters looking directly into the camera when talking to the reflector -- is clearly well suited to the type of close-up characterization aimed at in this episode. In other respects, unlike in novels, persistent direct inside view focalization in film has some very obvious drawbacks. What is specifically missing is the variance afforded by proximate inside views (Peters 1989; see also Branigan 1992: ch5 for the topic of subjectivity in film in general, and a case study of *The Lady in the Lake* in particular).

5.1.4. One does not have to be a confirmed *MASH* enthusiast to appreciate the excellent quality of many of the episodes. In addition to no. 158, I particularly recommend nos. 92 and 191. In 92, "The Novocaine Mutiny" (1976), "Frank has Hawkeye up on charges of mutiny for various infractions when Potter was away on leave and Frank was the C.O". Frank Burns's account of the "mutiny" is presented as a Mitty-ish wish-fulfillment recollection, amounting to a demonstration of unreliable narration. Episode 191, "Dreams" (1980), is a famous highlight of the series -- "The 4077th can't escape the Korean War, even in its dreams. Exhausted after two days without sleep, members of the 4077th steal away for cat naps and experience dreams that reveal their fears, yearnings and frustrations". The haunting dream scenes are excellent examples of offline perception focalization or what Kawin (1984: 41) terms 'mindscreen'.

5.2. Homodiegetic voice-over narration: *The Wonder Years*, episode 24

The ABC series *Wonder Years* ran through seven seasons 1988-1993. In 115 25-minute episodes it portrayed the formative years of Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage) aged twelve to eighteen. On a more general scale, the series presents a miniature historical picture of life in America in the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies. As Katy Pearce puts it in one of the fine *Wonder Years* pages available on the net:

What makes *The Wonder Years* so appealing is that many Americans can identify with what was happening in Kevin's life. Not only could those who lived through the 60's and 70's relate to the historical events, but almost anyone who was a teenager can relate to Kevin's personal adventures. Kevin is the universal American teenager. Most of us get our first kiss, our driver's license, and experience all these other pivotal stages on our trip through puberty and adolescence into adulthood. These times really are wonder years, the time when we learn how the world and its people work. ([URL](#))

5.2.1. In 4.3.3, I already referred to a *Wonder Years* episode in order to illustrate homodiegetic narration and establish concepts like discourse-now, story-now and narrative distance. The narrative voice, spoken by Daniel Stern, is a distinctive feature of the series, and in this section, I will make an attempt to work out its special functions and effects.

The *Wonder Years* episodes are not only excellent examples of filmic homodiegetic narratives but everything that was said of typical first-person narrative situations in the narratology script (N3.3.2) is applicable to them as well. In particular, we can recognize what some theorists call the I-I structure of first-person narration, ie, the split of a narrating person into two "versions": (1) the individual who acts as a narrator (mature Kevin Arnold, aged 33, technically, the narrating-I), and (2) a character on the level of action (young Kevin, aged 13, the experiencing-I). Many effects are, in fact, direct consequence of the perceptible distance (temporal *and* psychological) between present and past self. Moreover, the episodes usually enact a story of initiation – a story about a young person's introduction into a new sphere of experience. Indeed, Pearce's quote, above, aptly describes what initiation stories are all about.

5.2.2. Episode 24 of *Wonder Years* is entitled "Summer Song" and was first shown on 3 October 1989. Here is a brief sequence from the beginning of the episode showing Kevin reading a letter from his girlfriend Winnie. Because the storyboard gives a good impression of the visuals, I have made drastic cuts to the detailed post-transcript (available [here](#)).

NARRATOR. By the end of that summer of 1969, a lot of things had changed. The Mets were headed for first-place. Woodstock was a household word. And Winnie Cooper's dad had moved to Chicago.

KEVIN looks at a letter from Winnie.

NARRATOR: Winnie wrote about how bored she was in Maine with her mom... [...] But then...

Close shot of the letter.

NARRATOR: She'd met somebody. "I've met somebody. His name is Chip and he's a lifeguard at the club my aunt belongs to. He's also in training to be an Olympic diver when the next Olympics come. We've been..."

KEVIN sighs.

NARRATOR: His name was Chip. And he was the All-State champ of everything. She deserved it - I guess. And even though I'd never met the guy... I was pretty sure I hated him.



In the beginning, the narrator executes one of the most common narratorial functions – he presents a block exposition mentioning dates and historical events, all helpfully illustrated by appropriate visual clips. Then he situates Winnie's letter and begins to read it out (parts of it are actually legible in frame 2). In other words, the narrator lends his voice to articulate the perceptions and thoughts of young Kevin. A multitude of different forms and channels is used for presenting the various bits of information and also the point-of-view indicators that tie them to different originating focalizers. For further tools of analysis in these matters see the narratology page's section on forms of speech and thought presentation (N8). For instance, saying "She'd met somebody", the narrator quotes Winnie by using the technique of free indirect discourse. Interestingly, the original ('direct') version of this free indirect quotation is present as well, both in the immediate context and in the visual data.

5.2.3. In the foregoing sequence, the audio track that renders young Kevin's voice has no other output than a single sigh. Later scenes, however, present a more complex interaction between the voices of the experiencing-I and the narrating-I.



Not very surprisingly, perhaps, the main story line of episode 24 is about Kevin meeting a girl. Strolling along the beach, Kevin picks up a stray straw hat. Somebody addresses him (frame 1), asking him to give it back. A POV shot (frame 2) shows us Teri ("with an RI"), the owner of the voice (Holly Sampson). Nondiegetic music ("Good Vibrations" by the Beach Boys) emotionally asserts how very taken Kevin is with her appearance – the song includes a line about "the way the sunlight plays upon her hair". The script continues with this stretch of dialogue:

NARRATOR: Well I guess that was that. Who was I kidding anyway? This girl was definitely out of my league.
 TERI. How old are you?
 NARRATOR. How old am I? Well, uh, gee. Lemme see here.
 KEVIN. Fourteen.
 NARRATOR. Forgive me!
 KEVIN. How old are you?
 TERI. Guess.
 NARRATOR. Uh-oh. I'd heard about these feminine traps before. There was no right way to answer this one. Then again...
 TERI. I'm fifteen.
 KEVIN I was gonna guess fifteen.
 TERI. Sure you were.

She brushes his leg with the back of her hand.

NARRATOR. My God, she touched my leg! Was that an accident?
 TERI. So, you want to sit down?
 KEVIN. Yeah!
 NARRATOR. My adolescent mind was spinning out of control. This was amazing! This was...incredible! This was...an older woman!
 MUSIC -- Beach Boys.
 "I'm thinkin' 'bout good vibrations"
 "She's givin' me excitations"

Here, again, the narrating-I's voice expresses the experiencing-I's thoughts. We can also see that the coveted humorous effect is entirely due to the FCD's expert orchestration of focalization, voices, and music.

5.3. Verisimilitude and goofs

Film viewers usually come with a large number of (mostly unconscious) expectations about how the filmic medium presents a real or fictional story. Above all, one often assumes that the film creates a verisimilar or at least likely world, a world that runs on laws of nature, logic, and consistency and is, by and large, compatible with what might count as a fact or possible experience in our actual world (on the strength of the 'principle of minimal departure', as Ryan [1991:ch3] calls it). The less this principle is disturbed the greater is the film's 'reality effect' (Barthes 1982). If the reality effect fails to materialize it becomes difficult to make proper sense of the film. When we are facing difficult, incomprehensible, or illogical data, we usually try to relate it to a different, but still familiar, pattern of experience (a process called 'naturalization' by Culler 1975). If necessary, we will also locally modify normal assumptions for the purpose of dipping into the stranger worlds of dreams, visions, cartoons, fairy-tales, science fiction, alternate histories, and so on. These, too, ultimately work on laws of consistency and logic.

However, we generally also grant the FCD the right to bend the rules of cooperative communication in order to pursue a particular purpose (4.1.4). And this goes for us, too: as emancipated viewers we may disagree with the FCD's mindset and therefore decide to see things differently; or we may find it

interesting to focus on a detail we are not supposed to focus on. It is this bending of rules on the part of the viewer that enables us to pay attention to a film's unintentional faults, or, as they are now commonly known, goofs.

5.3.1. If a filmic element cannot be accepted as natural, plausible, or possible, even allowing for special circumstances, then we have found a fault for which we can blame the filmmaker.

- A **goof** is a production fault which disturbs, inhibits, or undermines the reality effect. Specifically, it blocks the viewers' instinct to protect the assumption that the film shows a verisimilar world (their 'suspension of disbelief', a phrase used by the poet Coleridge).

Note that what may look like a goof to someone who has no firm grasp of the rules of the medium is *not* a goof when it occurs: (1) in the context of a standard filmic convention (for instance, in interior monologue voice over [3.2] a character is visible and we hear her/his voice, but her/his lips do not move – but that is a meaningful convention, not a goof); (2) embedded in a representational medium which is part of the fictional world itself (eg, a fault in a "quoted" home movie clip); (3) as a deliberate disruption serving an ulterior purpose, such as creating an 'alienation effect' (D6.3), intentionally revealing the displayed facts to be an artifact.

5.3.2. Many goofs will simply be ignored by ordinary audiences. Consider one of the most obvious goofs, the heavy-suitcase goof (not a technical term). How often can one see characters implausibly lugging around seemingly heavy suitcases which are evidently empty and thus not heavy at all. Of course, watching a film, nobody normally cares. As viewers we focus on the verisimilar world that we expect to see rather than the distractive detail that might undermine the reality effect. While this holds true for ordinary viewers, whose primary interest lies in immersing themselves in the fictional world, it is less valid for professional and enthusiast viewers, who have special obligations, interests, and viewing habits. (I recently saw an advert for a DVD player whose main selling point was that it allowed easy detection of goofs.) Indeed, for many peripheral audiences, especially on the web, goofs have become collectibles. If you conduct a web search using the term goof plus the title of a film you are certain to get many hits.

Because goofs tend to go unnoticed by general viewers, they throw considerable light on the interpretive impact of media expectations. As will be demonstrated in 5.3.5, below, the cognitive shock that comes with the recognition of a goof can also be exploited for entertainment purposes. Increasingly, goofs are also presented paratextually (at the closing margins of the film or show), usually for comic effect.

5.3.3. Goofs can be categorized according to verisimilarity violation (factual, logic, chronology), area of responsibility (eg, editing), material causes (mirrors, shadows, etc.), and shooting conditions. In the following, no attempt has been made to create watertight (exclusive) categories, hence a chronology goof' can imply a logic goof, a logic goof a factual goof, and so on. (The examples were collected from goof web pages whose links are no longer active.)

- **logic goof:** a goof which defies the given world's logic. Such goofs occur easily in long-running series like *Wonder Years* and *MASH*. Not only were these written by different scriptwriters, apparently nobody took the trouble to draw up (and update) detailed character profiles. Hence,
 - *MASH*: In one episode Colonel Blake's wife is identified as Mildred, later she is Lorraine (no, there wasn't a divorce); over time, one character has two different blood types, another two Army serial numbers, and somebody who is an only child in one episode sends greetings to his brother and sister in another.
 - *Wonder Years*: "Kevin gets a D on his first math quiz. He also gets a D on his second quiz. If you look closely, you'll see that they are the same test".
- **factual goof:** a goof which defies the given world's known facts.
 - *MASH*: "Henry was given a discharge because he had enough 'points' but the points system wasn't used for doctors in the Korean War".
 - *Wonder Years*: "Solar eclipses are gradual, but in this episode the eclipse was nearly a sudden event, like turning off a light".

- **chronology goof** (also **anachronism goof**): a goof which upsets the given world's chronology. Do not confuse with *anachronies* (like *flashforwards* or *flashbacks*, [N5.2.1](#)), which are rhetorical devices and do *not* upset a narrative's underlying chronology.
 - *Wonder Years*: "When Norma is putting her stuff in the car after being fired, her calendar says 1974. The show actually plays in 1971".
 - *MASH*: "Hawkeye is in the Swamp finishing his letter to President Truman, yet in an earlier scene he had finished it, sealed it, and asked Kellye to send it out".
- **continuity goof**: a detail which shows that two supposedly continuous shots were not, in fact, continuous. This ever-present peril of the production process typically affects objects that are prone to short-term state changes. Because the camera requires a temporal break between takes in order to move to a different position (and actors may need their makeup freshened up), candles typically burn out, cigarettes get extinguished or relighted, clouds move, flowers wilt, and beverages get drunk up or replenished.
- **device goof**: a goof which inadvertently bares a technical device used in the take (typical case: a dangling microphone). However, 'barring the device' can also be an intentional effect of Brechtian anti-illusionism or alienation. See 5.3.4., below, for an example from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.
 - *Wonder Years*: "In the beginning of episode 81 [...] they show a young Kevin in his grandpa's car [...]. At one point the car drives away. In the reflection of the rear window, you can clearly see the camera and two men".
- **fluff goof**: distortion or mispronunciation of a line ("He was prone to fluff his lines"). This type of goof is particularly virulent when the text contains bits of foreign language. (An interesting paradox of the fluff goof is that everybody fluffs in real life; hence fluffing should theoretically be a reality effect, not a goof.)
- Further types: out-of-character goof, *paralepsis* goof, *metalepsis* goof (see N2.3.5, N3.3.15, eg, a characters gets addressed by their real rather than their fictional name).

5.3.4. In the following sequence from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Scottie and Judy are shown driving towards San Juan Bautista, the missionary settlement where Judy will meet her fate :((. Both characters know this stretch of road because they have traveled it before, in a different car. But one doesn't even have to know these details in order to identify the goof that surreptitiously undermines the verisimilitude of the sequence.



What is that?! Without any cause or reason, Scottie is driving on the left side of the road in frames 2 and 3.

As Auler (2000: 91) points out, Hitchcock used back projections for most of his car shots. All backgrounds for *Vertigo*'s many driving scenes were shot separately, then added later with the characters sitting in the sound studio's car mock-up. "Though somehow car work is always obvious," Auler says (2000: 110), "the projection shots in *Vertigo* are of the highest quality" (2000: 110). Nevertheless, as the example shows, goofs rule okay.

Here is an attempt to explain what really happened. When the back projection was filmed, this was in the very early stages of the production, it was shot from the passenger's (not the driver's) seat. You can verify this by printing out this page and looking at it, against the light, from behind. The view presented in frame 2 could be the result of inadvertently projecting the reverse side of the background footage. At any rate, this would shift the car to the wrong side of the road, as we see it now, and the POV would be the driver's (Scottie's). Hitchcock wouldn't have noticed because he was a Brit and therefore used to driving on the left side. Also, when viewing the footage his focus of attention would be on the characters, one of them doomed, and the other relentlessly pursuing his horrible suspicion.

5.3.5. For an interesting case of a pseudo-goof, consider a shot which is part of a TV commercial advertising the "Bayern Alpha" culture channel in Germany. In the frame shown on the right, three channels/sources of information are concurrently open. Two of them are visual, one is auditory. The first visual channel shows a suburban apartment block. The second visual channel shows an insert title saying "Concertgebouw, Amsterdam". The auditory channel plays a piece of classical music.



If, as is natural, one understands the title as identifying the building, there is a jarring contradiction – the Concertgebouw is a Philharmonic Hall, not an apartment block. On the face of it, this is the result of a factual goof, a fault apparently perpetrated at the editing table. At the same time, one feels a strong impulse to come to grips, to make sense of, the conflicting data – just as one tries to make sense of a seemingly nonsensical phrase such as Wordsworth's "The child is father of the man". Indeed, there is one aspect in particular that encourages us to make the best of the goof: it is too obvious. Hence one repair strategy is to impute an intention to it. The jarring effect created by it may be there for a purpose. Could the apartment block actually be called "Concertgebouw" (and if not actually, then ironically)? Well, it is a naturalization of sorts, but not a satisfactory one because it does not get us anywhere. Pursuing a different tack, one notes, however, that the seemingly wrong text is actually quite compatible with the classical music playing on the audio channel. On this basis, with a bit of effort, we can construe the message that ultimately makes pretty good sense of what is after all a carefully composed complex of information – that the Bayern Alpha channel brings the music played by the Concertgebouw to your home, wherever your home may be – even if it happens to be one of those ugly apartment blocks. Hence the pseudo-goof turns out to be a clever move to overcome one's natural instinct to ignore TV commercials.

6. Film websites

- <http://www.imdb.com/> The Internet Movie Database, "visited by over 8 million movie lovers each month", and no wonder, this is an Internet service at its best.
- <https://www.simplyscripts.com> Links to film scripts.
- <http://www.bfi.org.uk/> The British Film Institute. Very good general jump page, also to London's MOMI (Museum of the Moving Image).
- [Jack's Movie Reviews](#) Excellent video essays including one on *Rear Window*.

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