Three words to tell a story: the movie poster tagline

Johannes Mahlknecht

Published online: 16 Oct 2015.

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

Article views: 38

View related articles ⬀

View Crossmark data ⬀

Three words to tell a story: the movie poster tagline

JOHANNES MAHLKNECHT

Of all the possible paratextual elements and sub-elements that encircle and frame a film — such as title sequences, presentation of cast and crew, as well as film trailers — the movie tagline is perhaps the one that leads the most marginalized existence. This may not surprise us, as taglines consist only of one or two short sentences commonly found on film posters. As framing elements of framing elements, they may easily escape our attention. Their importance as paratextual enliveners of another paratext (the poster), however, cannot be denied. After all, there are people who can make a comfortable living out of writing a few witty words (often no more than three) that highlight a specific aspect of the film they are hired to advertise.[1] Producers, it seems, deem the tagline an essential tool of film marketing — one that definitely deserves closer scrutiny.

This article explores the functions, historical conventions, and style (in terms of use of rhetorical devices) of the movie tagline. In both form and function similar to a print advertising slogan, the tagline has long established itself as a useful tool to excite the interest of (potential) filmgoers, and has become a fixed element for the promotion of films. Although versions of it appear in all periods of cinema history, film analysts have hitherto given it little attention. There are a number of books[2] and articles[3] about the film *poster*, which occasionally mention and discuss the tagline, but they never do so in any detail. Their principal focus is invariably on the *visual* aspect of their chosen subject, and since taglines, consisting of writing, are often printed in small letters, they boast hardly any visual qualities, and can easily be overlooked. Thus, by highlighting a both marginal and marginalized element of the cinematic peritext, this article can be seen as an attempt to fill a void. It is an attempt to give due credit to an advertising tool whose tradition is almost as long and as varied as that of cinema itself.

The main questions that I seek to address are the following[4]: what major functions does the tagline perform other than that of trying to catch the viewer's attention? What is the relationship, if any, between the tagline (as frame) and the poster image (as the framed), as well as between the tagline and other elements found on the poster? What information does the tagline give us about the film it advertises, and in what way is this information conveyed? What major rhetorical devices (if any) does the tagline employ in order to achieve its intended effect? How do taglines differ, in their forms and functions, from each other and, finally, how did the tagline change in the course of history?

For the purpose of analyzing the tagline and being able to point out general tendencies concerning its use and functions, I collected around a thousand examples from all periods of cinema history. The data are taken from illustrated books on film posters[5] as well as from Internet sources, the most important being the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), which contains a vast collection. Also of great help were several lists published on the Internet, which attempt to present the best taglines ever written.[6] By drawing data from these different sources I have been able to gather a healthy mix of both classic and ordinary (that is, dull) taglines that allow for significant and reliable statements on tagline conventions and on the change of these conventions over time. The films that the various taglines advertise vary both in genre and in quality. All genres, from A-list romantic comedy to horror B-movies (whose posters often feature the most playful taglines) are included, and taglines for classic films (from *Birth of a Nation* to *American Beauty*) feature as prominently as those for films which are largely forgotten, such as *Girls on Probation* (1938, William C. McGann) or *On the Loose* (1951, Charles Lederer).

If not mentioned otherwise, all taglines in this article are taken from US American posters and one-sheets. Their origin has been double-checked with the *MoviePosterDB*, an online corpus of film posters from countries all over the world.[7]

But what exactly is a tagline? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it simply as "a catchphrase, slogan, or punchline." *Webster's Dictionary* gives two different meanings: "1. the last line of a play, story, speech, etc., used to clarify or dramatize a point. 2. a phrase or catchword that becomes identified or associated with a person, group, product, etc., through repetition." According to these definitions, the word "tagline" is not used solely in combination with movies, but concerns all (print) advertising, where it usually occurs at the bottom of the page of an advertisement — as opposed to the headline on top. According to *Webster's* first definition, it may even occur as part of literary texts.

Both, or rather all three, definitions capture some but not all of what makes a movie tagline a movie tagline. None links the tagline explicitly to film (the term is, after all, also used generally in print advertising[8]). Only *Leo Online Dictionary* does this, translating the term into German as a "kurze Inhaltsangabe eines Kinofilms" ("a short film synopsis") — a rather shaky definition that only applies sometimes, and then only up to a

point.[9] The back of a DVD cover also usually contains a "short synopsis," but that has little to do with the tagline.

In terms of its basic functions, the movie tagline is very similar to an advertising slogan for any product on the market, like Nike's "Just do it," or McDonald's "I'm loving it." In many ways the tagline *is* the film's slogan, and in literature that discusses the subject is also sometimes referred to as such. Gregory J. Edwards, in his book *The International Film Poster*, for instance, uses the term "slogan" throughout.[10] Likewise, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener define the tagline as a film's "advertising slogan."[11] In the advertising business, the practice of tagline writing is generally referred to as "writing copy."[12]

For the sake of accuracy, a distinction between tagline and headline — concerning the position on the film posters — would sometimes make sense, especially when we consider that some film posters, such as that for *The Crying Game* (1992), feature *two* lines — one at the top ("Lust. Murder. Betrayal. In Neil Jordan's new thriller, nothing is what it seems to be") and one at the bottom ("… play it at your own risk"). However, such examples are comparatively rare, and since the position of the words does not necessarily make for a discernible distinction in terms of their function and/or style, I will only use the term "tagline."

Being an element of advertising, the main function of the tagline is, of course, that of catching the interest of the potential audience and of luring them into the cinema — a function it shares with the element of advertising it is part of, namely the film poster. The following statement concerning the function of the latter was made as early as 1914 and still holds true today:

> It is evident that the mission of the poster is to attract people. The poster must bring the people across the street. Secondly, having gotten them there, you must tell them in as few words as possible what they will see when they get inside. You must excite their curiosity sufficiently to make them part with their nickel, dime, or quarter. Thirdly, you must appeal to their artistic sense, and managers are apt to underrate this quality of the general public's mind.[13]

"Bringing the people across the street" is, first and foremost, the job of the poster *image* — and possibly of the film's title and/or stars' names, provided they are written large enough to be read from a distance (which more often than not they are). As Robert Osborne, in his introduction to Dianna Edwards's *Picture Show: Classic Movie Posters from the TCM Archives*, says about posters from Hollywood's Golden Age: "The most important thing a movie poster could do was, in one quick glance, let a prospective ticket buyer know (a) the title of said film, (b) who's in it, and (c) its genre, be it a comedy, a musical, a western, or film noir drama."[14] And if the poster attempts to appeal to the artistic sense via more or less elaborate and extravagant styles of painting or photography, the tagline does the same by using the rhetorical techniques of poetry or prose literature (the most important of which are discussed later in this article).

In her book *Coming Attractions*, Lisa Kernan, while analyzing the persuasive functions of trailers, applies Aristotelian rhetoric to film advertising. The three main rhetorical appeals she discusses are the rhetoric of *genre, story*, and *stardom*,[15] appeals that we can easily transfer to the tagline as well. Tagline writers choose to focus on the one element of the film they believe has the most potential to draw audiences. And while a tagline may relate to two or even all three of the above appeals simultaneously, one usually dominates. The tagline for a film with an unknown cast, for instance, will seldom refer to the lead actors. Instead, it will address genre or story elements. In addition to genre, story, and stardom (and note that stardom here also includes directors and producers), I have added two more aspects of a film to which taglines may refer: the appeal of *quality* and that of *technical achievements*.

Below, along with concrete examples, is a list of these five appeals (there are more, but these are the ones that clearly dominate), which steer our expectations in a specific direction:

Story	*The 39 Steps* (1935): "Handcuffed to the girl who double-crossed him!"
	The Fugitive (1993): "A murdered wife. A one-armed man. An obsessed detective. The chase begins."
Genre	*The Fly* (1985): "Be afraid. Be very afraid."
	Anchors Aweigh (1945): "On waves of song, laughter and romance!"
Stardom	*Ninotchka* (1939): "Garbo laughs!"
	The Naked Gun 33 1/3 (1994): "From the brother of the director of *Ghost*"[16]
	Road House (1989): "The dancing's over. Now it gets dirty."[17]
Quality	*Citizen Kane* (1941): "Its terrific!"
	The Heiress (1949): "A truly great motion picture!"
Technical achievements	*The House of Wax* (1953): "The first feature produced by a major studio in 3D!"
	The Wizard of Oz (1939): "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's Technicolor triumph!"

Of course, several of these aspects can be combined in one single tagline, as in *Torch Song*'s (1953) "Tough Baby — a wonderful love story with the star of *Sudden Fear* and for the first time you'll see her in Technicolor!" The problem of integrating more aspects into one tagline, however, is that it may end up being too long. After all, part of the art of the poster's text, as mentioned, lies in conveying as much information as possible in as few words as possible. This may be one reason why some film posters have two or even more taglines. That of *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (1960), for instance, has one line on top that refers to genre and quality ("The uproarious movie from the big best-seller!") and another in the middle, which refers to the star of the film, Doris Day: "Hear Doris sing!" If passersby are not willing to read all of a longer text, so the philosophy seems to go, they might read two short ones.

415

What I have not mentioned in the list above is the fact that the tagline, just like the poster as a whole, should "appeal to [our] artistic senses."[18] The above appeals refer to *what* the tagline tells us and its artistry concerns *how* it tells it. I will discuss the art or, indeed, the poetry, of the tagline. Before, however, let us have a look at where, how, and how often we find taglines displayed on film posters.

Not every poster comes with a tagline, but that does not necessarily mean that the film has not got one. The famous poster for *Vertigo* (1958), for instance, which shows the stylized image of a man falling into a spiral, features no tagline. On a different poster for the same film, however, we read: "Alfred Hitchcock engulfs you in a whirlpool of terror and tension." The marketing department usually produces several posters for one film — and often also several taglines. A film may easily have up to five, or even more, different taglines,[19] each presented on a different poster and in a different manner. One poster version for *Citizen Kane* (1941), for instance, presents the tagline, "It's terrific!" in relatively small letters on top of title and image, and on another version it is presented in the middle, written across the image of Orson Welles, and printed in letters larger even than the title of the film itself.

It may well be, furthermore, that posters carrying the same images are released in two different versions — one with and one without a tagline. Or there may be many different posters for one film, with many different taglines. Prior to the release of *Beowulf* (2007), for instance, several teaser posters — which, just like teaser *trailers*, tend to reveal little about the film and nothing about cast and crew — were released. Each of these teaser posters sported the picture of one of the protagonists, as well as a tagline semantically connected to that particular character. The poster showing Beowulf (Ray Winstone) reads, "Pride is the curse"; that with the picture of the monster Grendel (Crispin Glover), "Evil breeds pain"; and the one featuring Grendel's mother (Angelina Jolie), "Survival is ruthless." The tagline on another poster, again showing Angelina Jolie, this time looking seductively at the viewer, twists Beowulf's character poster into: "Temptation is the curse." A further one shows a bare-chested Beowulf, sword drawn and looking fiercely at Grendel's mother (of whom we can see only the shapely legs, complete with high heels and dragon's tail). Here the tagline, "I will kill your monster," is taken directly from the screenplay, spoken by Beowulf as a promise to rid the Danish people of Grendel, who keeps terrorizing them. The tagline "Pride is the curse" also features on the definitive, full-release film poster containing the billing block with all relevant information about cast and crew. Some of these posters, however (again, there are more than one), do not feature a tagline at all. One further tagline on another full-release poster for *Beowulf* (with a different image) reads: "Face your demons."

The example of *Beowulf* shows that, in theory, *any* number of posters and taglines, and any number of poster–tagline combinations, are possible. We can see *Beowulf*'s taglines, along with the various poster images, as separate pieces of a large puzzle;

if we organize the information we can draw from each one in the correct manner, we have much of the complete story spread out right before us, even without actually having seen the film. It would be interesting to analyze how far one is able to reconstruct a film's story only by looking at its advertising materials, but that would go beyond the aims of this article. What concerns us here is the (potential) multitude of posters and taglines that exist for a single film. Indeed, professional movie tagline writer Jason Byers submits around fifty ideas for each project — and moviegoers "see only the winners."[20]

Speaking of the multitude of taglines a film may have, it should also be mentioned that for re-releases of particular films new posters and sometimes slightly altered versions of the original ones are often produced — as well as new, or slightly altered, taglines. Similarly, DVD covers may carry different taglines from that of the original poster. The original tagline on the poster for *Grease* (1978), for instance, presented next to the title, reads "… is the word." On the cover of the twenty-fifth anniversary DVD edition it is slightly, and aptly, changed into "… is *still* the word."

This brings us to the question of how the use of taglines evolved and changed over the decades. In his detailed account of "The Origin and Development of the American Moving Picture Poster," Gary D. Rhodes states that "by the year 1915 posters were firmly in place as a key part of marketing moving pictures."[21] They had, however, already been used sporadically years before that, and often were not designed individually for each film but reused for others.[22] As Janet Staiger, speaking about film advertising in general, states: "National advertising was common practice for many industries at the time movies were invented. … National advertising of individual films, not just company brand names, became widespread in the 1930s."[23] The tagline (or slogan, as Edwards refers to it), likewise, "had been used on posters right from the start."[24] The poster for the most famous early feature film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), in fact, already carries a line beneath its image: "The fiery cross of the Ku-Klux-Klan." Another one advertises the film as "D.W. Griffith's mighty spectacle." And in principle the uses of both posters and taglines have not changed until today.

But although the basic functions of the tagline have remained the same throughout its history, the *way* it was, and is, used has undergone considerable change. Just as with the design of the poster artwork in general, several trends concerning the content and style of the tagline prevalent at a certain period in time can be observed. One significant difference between Classical Hollywood and later periods, for instance, is the way of using the tagline for advertising the production company as well as the film's stars. While contemporary film posters feature both company and stars, they are rarely mentioned in the taglines themselves. Only lines that tell us something about the director (usually reading "From the director of [*successful movie previously released*]") occur with any regularity. Posters for films made until the 1960s, however, are teeming

with taglines pointing out that in this film two stars are "together for the first time" (*It Happened One Night*, 1935); that the film in question features "the first, momentous clash of Hollywood's most dynamic stars!" (*All This and Heaven Too*, 1940); or that, in the film advertised, "Garbo laughs!" (*Ninotchka*, 1939).

Even more than referring to the stars, taglines of earlier Hollywood films feature the name of the respective film company, as in *The Love Parade*'s (1929) "Paramount's greatest talking-singing picture"; *Born to Dance*'s (1936) "MGM's dazzling successor to 'Great Ziegfeld'!," or in *Dive Bomber*'s (1941) "Warner Bros. thrilling new saga of the skies!" The most recent tagline listed on the IMDb that still features Warner Bros. Studios in its tagline is 1959's *Up Periscope* (tagline: "Warner Bros. 'Maverick' man! Bigger than ever now and ready right now in his big-screen big-excitement Technicolor smash!").

One reason why taglines promoted both studios and stars more aggressively in the past than now can be found in the rise and fall of the studio system, which lasted from the 1920s until the 1950s. During these years the eight companies that ruled Hollywood (Fox, MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros., RKO, Columbia, Universal, and United Artists) had control not only over actors and directors working for them under long-term contracts, but also over distributors and movie theaters. Since the power of the studio bosses reached into all aspects of film selling as well as filmmaking, each studio could be identified with a particular genre or style. Warner Bros., for instance, was known for its social films, MGM for musicals, and Universal for horror pictures. MGM promised glamour, Paramount showed European sensibilities in its filmmaking, and Warner Bros. was known for its realism.[25] Each studio had its own image to defend and to advertise. And since actors were contractually bound to a particular studio, selling their names and trying to increase their popularity was, for studios as well as actors, an investment that ideally paid off in later productions.

The much-cited Paramount case of 1948 forced studios to give up their control over movie theater chains, which gradually led to the end of their double functions as producers *and* distributors, and gave actors and directors more freedom to choose the studio they wanted to work for. All eight studios except RKO (which went out of business in 1959) still exist today, but now they are all part of larger media conglomerates, and thus their personal touch on individual films released under their banner has largely been lost. Company names and logos are still very much present. But since, generally speaking, contemporary audiences care little about who produced the film in which they are interested, to use the name as an advertising tool within the tagline has become all but obsolete.

Another, and perhaps the most obvious, tagline trend prevalent at specific periods in the history of cinema is the practice of advertising new advancements in film technology. During the transition period between silent and sound cinema, for instance, most posters for talkies used taglines that in one way or another highlighted the innovation. One of the most famous of these was *Anna Christie*'s (1930) "Garbo talks!" — Greta Garbo being one of the few silent movie stars who successfully managed to adapt to the new era of the sound film.[26] Other examples are *Tenderloins*' (1928) "Vitaphone's newest achievement! The picture that talks!" and *The Jazz Singer*'s (1927) "See him — and hear him sing!" (Al Jolson's famous line of dialogue in that film, "You ain't heard nothing yet!" would also have worked wonderfully as the tagline but was not used on posters.)

The arrival of Technicolor, first used for a Hollywood feature film in *Becky Sharp* (1935), prompted the start of the next flood of taglines advertising the novelty. Examples are *Dancing Pirate*'s (1936) "The first dancing musical in 100% new Technicolor!" or *The Dancing Years*' (1950) "Its gorgeous natural backgrounds and lavish spectacles filmed in color by Technicolor enchant the eye!" Sometimes the word Technicolor even took the place usually allotted to the production company, as in *Blossoms in the Dust*'s (1941) "Technicolor's greatest love story!" Interestingly, a mention of Technicolor in the tagline can be found on film posters until well into the 1960s[27] — as in *Cavalry Command*'s (1963) "Filmed in the blazing realism of Technicolor" — long after the novelty had worn off.

Two more technological advancements that caused a stir and were consequently used in taglines (both were introduced almost simultaneously in the 1950s) were Cinemascope, which allowed films to be presented on a wider screen, and 3D cinema. The tagline for *The Robe* (1953), for instance, boasts of "The first motion picture in Cinemascope — the modern miracle you see without glasses!" thus effectively mocking its soon-to-be-doomed rival, whose early representative, *The House of Wax* (1953), features the taglines: "The first feature produced by a major studio in 3D!" and "Its thrills come off the screen right at you!" The revival, or rather the rebirth of 3D cinema, considering the improved technology (which, however, still requires glasses) that is taking place today is likely to fare better than did the first attempts in the 1950s. Taglines today rarely include the word "3D" — for instance in *Clash of the Titans*' (2010) "The Clash Begins in 3D." None of the taglines for *Beowulf*, which was one of the first new 3D releases, mention anything about it. But this has certainly less to do with modesty than with the fact that the films, as of now, are mostly released in both conventional 2D as well as in 3D versions. And where the latter version *is* featured, the added spectacle actually is referred to, even if not necessarily within the tagline per se — and the reference is sometimes not very subtle, as the Blu-ray cover for *The Polar Express* (2004) proves (there is no 3D advertisement on the cinema release poster).

In the preface to her book *Strategic Advertising*, Judith Corstjens states that "ads now have to shout louder, appeal more strongly or seduce more subtly than in the past."[28] While generally speaking this statement may be true, when applied to taglines it is only partly so. The main difference between almost

all taglines of the Classical Hollywood period and more recent ones is that those produced from the beginnings to the end of the studio system definitely shouted louder than those produced in later years. No matter which aspect of the film in question they referred to (story, genre, stardom, quality, or technical achievements) they almost invariably ended with an exclamation mark. And while in a tagline referring to the (supposed) quality of a film, like Citizen Kane's "It's terrific!" this makes sense, in others, referring to story or genre, like *Alexander's Ragtime Band*'s (1938) "An American Cavalcade!" or *The More the Merrier*'s (1943) "Home is where you hang your guests!," the practice seems less comprehensible. It seems that in early periods shouting out the tagline was often as important as — or even more important — than its actual content.

Subtlety, especially in the first decades of tagline writing, was very rare indeed. Edwards states that early taglines occurred only "in such usually unimaginative and meaningless forms as 'The Season's Laugh Treat' or 'It's so Romantic.'"[29] Only Warner Bros.' posters, he claims:

> have been consistently inventive in using a few words to tell the public exactly what to expect, as in *The Great Lie* (1941) with Bette Davis and George Brent: "There are some things a woman has to lie about … to a man!"; and Errol Flynn's character in *Rocky Mountain* (1950): "Part renegade, part hero … a rebel whose guns turned treason into glory … for his captive Yankee girl!"[30]

But even Warner Bros. released a fair number of unoriginal run-of-the-mill taglines, like *The Jazz Singer*'s (1927) "Warner Bros.' supreme triumph" or *June Bride*'s (1948) "Warner Bros.' new laugh-team in the happiest hit of their lives!!!" True attempts at wit during the classical Hollywood era, like the *double entendre* in *The Maltese Falcon*'s (1941) "He's a killer when he hates," did occur but, as already mentioned, only rarely.

More or less subtle experiments can be observed not only in the taglines themselves, but also in their visual presentation on the poster, and particularly in their relationship with the poster's image. Just like film itself, a film poster draws our attention initially because of its visual properties and not because of its written ones. There are a number of posters where the writing dominates over visuals but they are clearly in the minority. One example is the poster for *All the King's Men* (1949), on which the title and tagline ("The Pulitzer Prize winning novel becomes a vital, very great motion picture") together occupy twice as much space as the poster image. Speaking about print ads in general, James Leigh states that "the headline has long been considered to be the most important part of a print advertising."[31] Concerning the tagline, this is certainly not the case, at least not when it comes to the recipients. They are more likely to be more interested if not in the poster image, then in the stars' names. For the advertising company, however, tagline writing is crucial. As Jon Mooallem states: "writing ad copy for posters and trailers is generally the first step in marketing a film, setting a

strategic direction for what are often multimillion dollar campaigns."[32]

The relevant question, however, is not which element dominates over the other, but whether or not tagline and poster image complement each other, and if so, how much. In print advertising it is a generally held opinion that to establish a link between headline and image has a positive effect on potential (ticket) buyers, since they "convey … a unified concept."[33] A unified concept, after all, is easier to remember than a combination of non-interactive elements. The relationship between text and image may range from a verbal repetition of picture content to a less marked relation of one element to the other.

In many cases both the image and the tagline speak largely for themselves. While one element often emphasizes or reinforces one or more aspects of the other, the tagline or the poster image respectively, it is not dependent on it, at least not in terms of our ability to understand its meaning. To take an example of a mutual reinforcement of tagline and image, let us consider the poster for *The Mutilator* (1985), with the tagline: "By sword. By pick. By axe. Bye bye." Even without seeing the image we are likely to guess that the film in question not only belongs to the horror or slasher genre, but also, given the crude (or brilliant, depending on one's frame of mind) pun involved, that it will be one of its cheaper and quite possibly gorier representatives. Likewise, we can draw the same information from the (again rather crude) painting of four young adults hanging from a wall, apparently dead or scared to death. In the foreground we see the threatening image of a hand holding what looks like a very large fishhook. The tagline thus, in a way, repeats the basic message contained in the poster image and elaborates on it a little — after all, the image does not show us that the mutilator uses other weapons and which ones in order to kill (or at least, mutilate) people.

There are, however, quite a number of examples in which the relationship between tagline and poster image is more important, in which the one element is used not to repeat but to *explain* the other. The tagline for *Gilda* (1946), for instance, even refers directly to the image. Positioned next to the image, which shows a woman (presumably the titular Gilda) being slapped by a man, it reads, "I was true to one man once … and look what happened!" Here the relationship between word and image approaches that established by the common use of speech bubbles in comic books.

Alternatively, the poster may contain several images, beneath each of which we find one relevant part of the tagline. In *The Dirty Dozen* (1968), "Train them!" is written above an image of a soldier being drilled by a drill sergeant; "Excite them!" above that of a soldier holding and kissing beautiful women; "Arm them!" above an image of paratroopers in action. Finally, "… then turn them loose on the Nazis!" is written above the larger central image portraying Lee Marvin at the head of the "Dirty Dozen," toting guns in the midst of a depiction of war mayhem.

Historically speaking, we may say that direct links between tagline and image are phenomena encountered mostly on posters for films made before the 1980s and especially within the period of Classical Hollywood cinema. If there is a pronounced link between poster image and tagline in examples of more recent years, this link tends to be of a different, and usually subtler,[34] nature. The tagline for *Fargo* (1996), for instance, reads "A homespun murder story." Taking the meaning of the word "homespun" literally, the whole poster, including the tagline itself, consists of a cross-stitch showing the bloody corpse of a man lying face down in the snow.

The relationship between tagline and title

Just as the tagline may explain or elaborate on the poster image, it may also be connected to the *title* of the film it advertises. One possibility is making the title part of the tagline, either at its beginning, like *Grease*'s "… is the word," or at the end, like *The Ring*'s (2002) "Before you die, you see…" It is interesting to note here that the first example refers to none of the five appeals discussed earlier (story, genre, stardom, quality, technical achievements).[35] The second, although bewildering, at least points to genre, so that we can guess that we are dealing with a horror movie. Whether the tagline can be considered, however, an example of effective advertising (do we want to see the film if we will die afterwards?) is another question.

The tagline that incorporates the title is typical for classic Hollywood films. Usually, the line is written in small letters above the large-lettered title, and three full stops establish the link. Generally such taglines are rather uninspired as, for example, "You hear what you see while enjoying…" (*In Old Arizona*, 1929). More stylistically elaborate ones, such as "Thrill crazy… Kill crazy…" (*Gun Crazy*, 1950), are much rarer.

Another possible connection between tagline and title is the question/answer relationship; the tagline asks the question, the title answers it — e.g. *Ghostbusters*' (1984) "Who ya gonna call?" (on the DVD cover of the twenty-fifth anniversary edition). The tagline may also consist of several questions, as the poster for *Barbarella* (1968) shows: "Who gives up the pill? Who takes sex to outer space? Who's the girl of the 21st century? Who nearly dies of pleasure? Who seduces an angel? Who strips in space? Who conveys love by hand?"

The tagline can also explain the title or elaborate upon it. *The Sheepman*'s (1958) tagline, for instance, tells us that "They called him the stranger with the gun" and *Robocop* (1987) is "Part man. Part machine. All cop" and, according to a second tagline, "The future of law enforcement."

Since the first and foremost function of the tagline (and of movie advertising in general) is that of making the potential audience want to see the film, it seems only natural to expect that most taglines will boast of the respective film's quality. And there are indeed a great number of posters from the silent period up to the Golden Age of Hollywood that do exactly that, often using superlative after superlative. *The Ghost of Slumber Mountain* (1918), for instance, is advertised as "The crowning triumph of the motion picture" (a rather grandiose claim for a film that lasts only eighteen minutes); *The Jazz Singer* (1927), similarly, as "Warner Bros.' supreme triumph"; and the tagline on the poster for *Citizen Kane* (1941) all but shouts, "It's terrific!" — in letters larger even than those of the film's title. The tagline for *Woman* (1918) — "The season's most unusual screen offering" — seems almost humble in comparison.

While the above examples tell us nothing about the actual content, theme, or genre of the film in question, there are many that combine praise with concrete information. *Hell's Angels* (1930) is sold as "Howard Hughes' thrilling multi-million dollar air spectacle"; *Cleopatra* (1934) as "A love affair that shook the world set in a spectacle of thrilling magnificence!"; and *Blue Skies* (1946) is "Paramount's Melody Masterpiece Featuring All of Irving Berlin's Biggest Hits!"

The tendency on the part of production companies to glorify their own films excessively was, in fact, spoofed by Hollywood itself as early as 1947, in the (meta-)trailer for *Miracle on 34th Street*. The trailer begins with the claim "You'll love *Miracle on 34th Street*," followed by the presentation of a number of standard ejaculations: "It's hilarious! Romantic! Delightful! Charming! Tender! Exciting!" We then suddenly hear an annoyed voice interrupting, and cut to a screening room, in which we see a studio boss criticizing the anxious trailermakers for their lack of focus, telling them to "make up your minds, it can't be all of those things!" Only after he himself has seen the film does he change his mind and even adds "Groovy!" to the others.

To a contemporary (potential) audience such overflowing glorification of a film on the poster will seem either hopelessly dated, or even ridiculous (after all, which company does *not* want us to believe that its own product is the greatest of them all?). A line such as that on the British poster for Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) — "An amazing, awesome, pumping powerhouse of a movie" — is only acceptable because it is a quotation by a critic who officially reviewed the film,[36] *and* who is credited on the poster.[37] Today such critics' praise can be found very frequently on movie posters and DVD/Blu-ray covers. But while serving the same basic purpose as the tagline, i.e. luring audiences into the cinema (or urging them to buy the DVD or Blu-ray respectively), such praise cannot, however, be defined as such, for the simple reason that it was not originally written by the film's marketing department.[38] For *Reservoir Dogs*, then, the *real* tagline remains "Let's go to work."

The gradual move from studio-written praise to quotations by film reviewers, according to the posters I scanned, started in the 1950s, the first example I discovered being *Marty* (1955). Other early film posters containing review excerpts are those for *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956), which is littered with them, and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). The reason for this change is easily explained: if every second film claims to be

"The greatest film in the history of cinema," the statement will quickly lose its credibility. That posters largely feature reviews more than simple studio praise is a sign that film audiences gradually became more demanding, and bolsters Corstjens' claim that "ads now have to … seduce more subtly than in the past."[39]

One should note, however, that even if the praise comes with quotation marks and an indication of source, its authenticity is not necessarily guaranteed. A British poster advertisement for the comedy *Me, Myself & Irene* (2000 — tagline: "From gentle to mental") contained a "quotation" from *Total Film Magazine*, reading: "If you don't laugh out loud you need your head examined." In the review that was *actually* published the sentence was a little longer, reading, "If you don't laugh out loud *at least once* you need your head examined"[40] — a substantial difference.

If in their marketing campaigns production companies continuously try to outdo each other at having their products praised, it is hardly surprising that there are some who (possibly out of protest) turn in the completely opposite direction. In a seemingly perverse act (at least in terms of conventional marketing strategies), the poster for *Lost Highway* (1997, David Lynch) featured the damning verdict of film critics Siskel and Ebert: "Two Thumbs Down." Similarly, even if perhaps a little more cleverly, a British advertisement for *The Hottie and the Nottie* (2008) carried above its title in large print the words "The number one film," and directly underneath (in much, much smaller letters): "imdb (bottom 100)." It goes without saying that such examples are exceptions, and that neither of the two films had substantial success at the box office.

But what about the rhetorical properties of taglines? What "literary" techniques do they use in order efficiently to draw our attention? As early as 1910, the French art critic and art historian Roger Marx discovered that commercialism and art do not have to be, and in fact are not, mutually exclusive.

> The fact is, that to be sure to make an impression and better to convince, Advertising has called upon Art for help; it has borrowed the poetry of allegories, it has become image and its beautiful appearance has bestowed upon it, with unexpected efficiency, the indefeasible right to the aesthete's attention.[41]

In terms of film advertising, this statement clearly relates more to the visual aspect of the early poster than to the tagline, which at that time was still in need of development. The poetry, or "literariness,"[42] of the taglines that *did* develop in the course of the decades to follow can best be appreciated when looking at some of the many rhetorical figures that they may employ.

Rhetorical figures are defined as "a generic term for any artful deviations from the ordinary mode of speaking or writing."[43] In advertising, their use is intended to increase the effect of persuading potential customers to buy a specific product:

> Rhetoricians maintain that any proposition can be expressed in a variety of ways and that in any given situation one of these ways will be the most effective in swaying an audience. Hence, when persuasion is the overriding goal, the rhetorical perspective suggests that the manner in which a statement is expressed may be more than its propositional content.[44]

While the tagline, as I have already mentioned at the beginning of this article, has been hitherto largely neglected by scholars, there is significant work on the rhetoric of the print advertising slogan in general that has been conducted in the most recent decades, notably by Leigh,[45] McQuarrie and Mick,[46] and Cook.[47] Drawing on their findings, the following paragraphs attempt to show that the tagline can be seen as a (persuasive) literary genre all its own — although admittedly it requires some good will in order to define *Volcano*'s (1997) "The coast is toast" or *Armageddon*'s (1998) "Time to kick some asteroid" as literature or poetry. But then, as Corbett states, persuasive activities "can be said to fall within the province of rhetoric" even if they only "*approach* the condition of art."[48]

In analyzing a particularly widespread form of tagline, the list, the following paragraphs will show how "artful deviation" is used in order to lure audiences.

List and twist

In terms of their syntactic organization, one of the most frequent kinds of taglines is the list, often consisting of no more than three words. These lists can be found on early film posters, like that of *The General* (1927) — "Love, locomotives, and laughs!" and they have not lost their popularity up to the present day, a recent example being *Match Point*'s (2005) "Passion. Temptation. Obsession." On the contrary, their frequency of use has, in fact, increased steadily over the decades. Very often, especially on posters from the Classical Hollywood era, alliteration is used in order to make the tagline sound catchier and more melodic, as in *The General* above or in *The Outlaw*'s (1943) "Mean… Moody… Magnificent!" If each element of the list consists of more than one word, then repetition of syntactic structures can also be used in order to achieve the same effect. Examples are *The Dirty Dozen*'s aforementioned "Train them! Excite them! Arm them! … then turn them loose on the Nazis!" or *The Lusty Men*'s (1952) "A fast buck… a fast bronc… a fast thrill!" The use of alliteration and parallelisms in lists can also, of course, be combined, and, as the tagline for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954) proves, the list is not necessarily reduced to three elements: "Caleb kidnapped Ruth. Ben borrowed Dorcas. Eph encircled Martha. Gideon grabbed Alice. Dan decoyed Liza. Frank fetched Sarah … and Adam abducted Milly." Here the same sentence-pattern is used seven times. The parallelism thereby exists not only on a formal, syntactic, but also on a semantic level. In order to examine the semantic qualities of the tagline as list, let us look for a moment at Algirdas Greimas's concept of isotopy, a

Table 1. Frequent schemes used in movie taglines.

Kind of scheme	Description	Tagline	Film
Rhyme	Repetition of syllables at the end of words	How would you like to tussle with Russell?	*The Outlaw* (1943)
		The bride gets the thrills! Father gets the bills!	*Father of the Bride* (1950)
		Remember, remember the 5th of November.	*V for Vendetta* (2005)
Chime	Key words in a phrase begin with identical sounds or letters	A horror horde of crawl-and-crush giants clawing out of the earth from mile-deep catacombs!	*Them* (1954)
		Beware the stare that will paralyze the will of the world	*Village of the Damned* (1960)
Assonance and alliteration	Three or more repetitions of a vowel or consonant	The Man… The Music… The Madness… The Murder… The Motion Picture… [added emphasis]	*Amadeus* (1984)
Anaphora	Repetition of words at the beginning of phrases	Come to Laugh, Come to Cry, Come to Care, Come to Terms.	*Terms of Endearment* (1983)
Epistrophe	Repetition of words at the end of phrases	Be afraid. Be very afraid.	*The Fly* (1984)
Epanalepsis	Repetition of a word toward the beginning and end of a phrase	A She-Bang To End All She-Bangs!	*Cat Ballou* (1965)
		Boys will be boys.	*Space Cowboys* (2000)
		Enough is enough.	*Enough* (2002)
Anadiplosis	Repetition of a word toward the end of one phrase and the beginning of the next	A general who became a slave. A slave who became a gladiator. A gladiator who defied an emperor.	*Gladiator* (2000)
Parison	Marked parallelism between successive phrases	Fear can hold you prisoner. Hope can set you free.	*The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)
		Her life was in their hands. Now her toe is in the mail.	*The Big Lebowski* (1998)
Antimetabole	Repetition of a pair of words in a phrase in reverse order	The year of the movie. The movie of the year.	*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984)
Antithesis	Incorporation of binary opposites in a phrase	High school girl by day… and a woman by night…	*On the Loose* (1951)
		Life is in their hands — death is on their minds!	*12 Angry Men* (1957)
		After a night they can't remember comes a day they'll never forget.	*Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000)

term he borrowed from nuclear physics and applied to the study of semiotics. Greimas defines isotopy as "the principle that allows the semantic concatenation of utterances."[49] As summed up in Winfried Nöth's *Handbook of Semiotics*:

> Greimas develops the theory of textual coherence on the basis of his concept of contextual semes: the "iterativity" (recurrence) of contextual semes, which connect the semantic elements of discourse (sememms), assures its textual homogeneity and coherence…. In its syntagmatic extension, an isotopy is constituted by all those textual segments which are connected by one contextual seme.[50]

Each utterance in the tagline for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* consists of three elements, and in each utterance, the first, second, and third element is semantically linked, analogously, to the first, second, and third element of each of the other utterances (let us not consider the "and" in the last one). The first element is always a male name; the second is a verb whose various manifestations can be subsumed under the contextual seme "to take"; and the third consists of a female name. Since we can easily, or even automatically, establish a semantic link between the various elements, we see the tagline as a coherent text. If we look at the poster for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, on which each of the seven sentences is written next to an image of a man holding a woman on his shoulders and walking away with her, the coherence is established even more easily. The interplay between the various elements (title, tagline, image) on this particular poster is a prime example of (even if unsubtle) conceptual unity.

But even if the coherence is there, the originality of the tagline primarily lies in its formal aspects (alliteration, parallelism) rather than in its actual meaning. It will be remembered (if at all) more for its form than for its content. And while these formal aspects of the tagline-as-list were extremely popular during the Classical Hollywood period, in more recent times the trend has moved to a more content-based approach in order to make it more effective. A tagline like *Match Point*'s "Passion. Temptation. Obsession." can be seen as an exceedingly minimalist "concatenation of utterances" with "textual homogeneity and coherence"; so minimalist, in fact, that it only just about qualifies as a text. While each of the words individually may be seen in a context other than a sexual one, taken together (and especially seen in connection with the images of the stars Scarlett Johansson and Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), "sexuality" will be the most likely category under which to file the three elements of the tagline in order to make for semantic unity.

But what about the tagline for *Fight Club* (1999) — "Mischief. Mayhem. Soap." — which syntactically is structured in the exact same way as that of *Match Point*? While the first two elements can be linked and categorized under the concept of "chaos" or perhaps "lawlessness" (and can also be linked on a formal level, both having the same initial letter as well as the same number of syllables), the third does not seem to fit at all. What has taken place here is a deliberate isotopic breach. We are led to expect an element (say, "Madness") that fits with the others into a same contextual seme but our expectations are

Table 2. Frequent tropes used in movie taglines.

Kind of trope	Description	Tagline	Film
Hyperbole	Exaggerated or extreme claim	The most magnificent picture ever!	*Jezebel* (1938)
		MGM's love story with 1,000 laughs!	*The Reformer and the Redhead* (1950)
Rhetorical question	Asking a question so as to make an assertion	She has a nice job. And a nice baby. What more could a single girl want?	*A Touch of Love* (1969)
		What did you learn after school today?	*3:15* (2009)
Epanorthosis	Making an assertion so as to call it into question	This man will bring order to the universe … or not.	*Chaos Theory* (2007)
Ellipsis	A gap or omission that has to be completed	When all else fails, they don't.	*G.I. Joe* (2009)
Metonym	Use of a portion, or any associated element, to represent the whole	<u>The Fastest Gun</u> To Kingdom Come! From Tombstone to Abilene even the best of them feared Cole Younger! [added emphasis]	*Cole Younger, Gunfighter* (1958)
Metaphor	Substitution based on underlying resemblance	Their Love was a Flame that Destroyed!	*The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946)
		Crime is a disease. Meet the cure.	*Cobra* (1986)
Oxymoron	Yoking of two terms that are ordinarily contradictory	The true story of a real fake.	*Catch Me if You Can* (2002)
Puns:			
Antanaclasis	Repetition of a word in two different senses	He's quite engaging. She's otherwise engaged.	*Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994)
Paronomasia	Use of words alike in sound but different in meaning	Exorcise your rites.	*The Craft* (1996)
Syllepsis	Use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs	Sea evil.	*Ghost Ship* (1998)
		Don't get mad. Get everything.	*The First Wives Club* (1996)
Paradox	An apparently self-contradictory, false, or impossible statement	Bernie may be dead, but he's still the life of the party!	*Weekend at Bernie's* (1989)
		An epic of miniature proportions.	*A Bug's Life* (1998)
Simile	Explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature	Falling in love with Redhead is like falling around with a buzz saw … you're sure to get hurt!	*Redhead* (1941)
		Hate is like a loaded gun!	*Crossfire* (1947)
Irony	A statement that means the opposite of what is said	Check in. Unpack. Relax. Take a shower.	*Psycho* (1998)
		A nice place to visit.	*Abduction* (2009)

not met. Only if we think a step further and apply the contextual seme "anarchy" (which is a major theme of the film) can we see the third element as motivated. In the film, the protagonists are anarchists intent on destroying the established political system and structure; on the poster, the word "soap" is the anarchist that destroys a potentially well-structured and intelligible sequence of utterances. This deliberate isotopic breach results in a bewildering twist, one intended to rouse our curiosity further and make us want to see what the whole thing actually is about. And once we *have* seen the film and know the larger context, we are able to understand that "Soap" actually fits very well with "Mischief" and "Mayhem"; for we learn that soap can be used as a main component for explosives. Only if we know this do we realize that the isotopic breach is actually no breach at all.

The "list with a twist" is one that we encounter very frequently in contemporary taglines. Other than in *Fight Club*'s example, however, the isotopic breach is much more often used for creating humor than for confusing potential audiences.[51] The isotopic breach is, after all, what often constitutes the punchline for jokes. *Johnny English*'s (2003) tagline, for instance, reads: "He knows no fear. He knows no danger. He knows nothing." All three utterances are analogous, and seemingly coherent, in that they refer to different things the

protagonist does not know. The breach, however, lies in the fact that, while the first two elements point out his heroic (and thus positive) qualities, the third refers to his stupidity, hardly a positive characteristic. The parallelism of the syntax, which we would expect to be analogous with a semantic parallelism, is coupled with a complete opposite. The mixture of the rhetorical figures of parallelism and antithesis (i.e. "the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas")[52] results in humor. Other examples, in which the same principle is at work, are the taglines for *Lake Placid* (1999, a film about a man-eating alligator): "Part mystery. Part thriller. Part missing," *Army of Darkness* (1992, about a man who, along with his car, is sent back into the Middle Ages to fight zombies): "Trapped in time. Surrounded by evil. Low on gas," and *Ed Wood* (1994, a biopic about the allegedly worst film director of all time): "Movies were his passion. Women were his inspiration. Angora sweaters were his weakness." These are only a few of many more examples; in fact, there are so many that a twistless tagline-as-list today, such as *Match Point*'s "Passion. Temptation. Obsession," is almost original again.

There are, of course, many more rhetorical figures other than alliteration, parallelisms, and antithesis that are used in film taglines. To discuss each one independently and in detail would, however, reach beyond the scope of this article. For

some more examples, see tables 1 and 2, which show the most frequent schemes and tropes used in taglines.[53]

This article has analyzed the movie tagline both in its contextual relationship with other framing elements as well in the ways in which it works as an independent genre of its own. Focusing mainly on the use of rhetorical figures it has tried, where possible, to draw comparisons between the use of taglines in earlier periods and the present. The results show that the tagline, semantically, stylistically, and historically speaking, is a highly varied tool, perhaps more varied than its apparently subordinate role on the poster might lead us to expect.

This variety and complexity of the tagline, especially in terms of its interrelationship with other (para-)texts, is, however, problematic. Like all paratexts, the tagline is essentially a minor text — subordinate to a main one (the poster as a whole and, more importantly, the film it advertises). To see it as an independent genre therefore automatically means to limit the range of its importance. While this article has pointed out some of the interrelationships between the tagline and other elements of film and film advertising, they are only the tip of the iceberg. Since the tagline is considered to be "the first step in marketing a film,"[54] just as pitching a screenplay is the first step in *making* a film,[55] its reverberations are felt in every other aspect of film advertising (particularly in trailers, which often contain very similar, if not the same, lines). Further research might therefore explore more fully the ways in which the tagline affects other paratextual elements. As both *Syriana*'s (2005) and *Cloud Atlas*'s (2012) taglines claim: "Everything is connected."

NOTES

1 – For more insight into the job of a movie tagline writer, see Jessica Liebmann, "Big Screen, a Few Small Words," *Bizjournals*, http://upstart.bizjournals.com/careers/job-of-the-week/2007/07/31/Movie-Tagline-Writers.html?page=all (July 31, 2007, accessed November 26, 2014).

2 – For example Emily King, *A Century of Movie Posters: From Silent to Art House* (Hauppauge, NY: Barron's, 2003), and Gregory J. Edwards, *The International Film Poster* (Salem, NH: Salem House, 1985).

3 – For example Gary D. Rhodes, "The Origin and Development of the American Moving Picture Poster," *Film History: An International Journal* 19, no. 3 (2007): 228–46.

4 – They are largely in line with Werner Wolf, "Introduction: Frames, Framings and Framing Borders," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 1–40.

5 – Specifically, Bruce Hershenson, *Best Pictures' Movie Posters* (West Plains, MO: Bruce Hershenson, 1999); Edwards, *International Film Poster*; and Tony Nourmand and Graham Marsh, eds., *Film Posters of the 30s: The Essential Movies of the Decade* (London: Evergreen, 2003).

6 – Most notably Tim Dirks, "Great Film Taglines," *AMC Filmsite*, http://www.filmsite.org/taglines.html (accessed November 26, 2011).

7 – For the *MoviePosterDB*, see http://www.movieposterdb.com/.

8 – For example, Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, "Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 424–38.

9 – "Tagline." *Leo*, July 28, 2015, https://dict.leo.org/ende/index_de.html" \l "/search=tagline&searchLoc=0&resultOrder=basic&multiword ShowSingle=on" \t "_blank" https://dict.leo.org/ende/index_de.html#/search=tagline&searchLoc=0&resultOrder=basic&multiwordShowSingle=on/.

10 – Edwards, *International Film Poster*.

11 – Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Filmtheorie — zur Einführung* (Dresden: Junius, 2007), 40.

12 – See, for instance, Jon Mooallem, "How Movie Taglines are Born," *Boston Globe*, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/02/29/how_movie_taglines_are_born/?page=full (February 29, 2004, accessed November 26, 2014). In this essay Mooallem states: "Writing ad copy for posters and trailers is generally the first step in marketing a film, setting a strategic direction for what are often multimillion dollar campaigns. This April, the Key Art Awards, a pseudo-Oscars for film marketing sponsored by *The Hollywood Reporter*, will award its first 'Best Print Copy Line' prize after 32 years of honoring virtually everything else — from best trailer to best 'theatrical standee,' as those cardboard cut-outs standing by the popcorn counter are known."

13 – Scotson Clark, quoted in Rhodes, "The Origin and Development," 228.

14 – Robert Osborne, in Dianna Edwards, *Picture Show: Classic Movie Posters from the TCM Archives* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), 9.

15 – Lisa Kernan, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 14.

16 – Here, the absurdity of the tagline (the fact that the director of *The Naked Gun 33 1/3* and that of *Ghost* are relatives has no real informative value) also points towards the film's genre, i.e. slapstick comedy.

17 – The tagline indirectly refers to the star (Patrick Swayze) by (again indirectly) referring to his previous film.

18 – Scotson Clark, quoted in Rhodes, "The Origin and Development," 228.

19 – For the horror film *Silent Hill* (2006), for instance, the IMDb lists as many as eleven: "Enjoy your stay"; "The game is on"; "Welcome to Silent Hill"; "The Silence Will Be Broken"; "Not so silent anymore"; "Once you enter Silent Hill there is no turning back"; "Welcome to Hell"; "Welcome to paradise…"; "Some towns should never be entered"; "Population: ZERO"; and "We've been expecting you."

20 – Liebmann, "Big Screen."

21 – Rhodes, "The Origin and Development," 242.

22 – Around 1910, the A.B. See Lithograph Company of Cleveland, for instance, "printed posters with stock borders in two or three colors incorporating the company's trademark. Onto the central area of these posters were printed the title of the film, a plot synopsis and a photograph supplied by the producer. The photos were usually taken by the film cameraman during production" (Edwards, *International Film Poster*, 56).

23 – Janet Staiger, "Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking about the History and Theory of Film Advertising," *Cinema Journal* 29, no. 3 (1990): 3–31, at 14.

24 – Edwards, *International Film Poster*, 71.

25 – James Monaco, *Film Verstehen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001), 246–47. For more detailed information on the studio system and its politics, see Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005).

26 – Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in *Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History*, ed. Angela dalle Vacche (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 69–84, at 79.

27 – It even reached into the 1970s. The IMDb lists a tagline for *And Now the Screaming Starts* (1973), reading: "A Technicolor film set in a ghostly gothic manor house, England 1785."

28 – Judith Corstjens, *Strategic Advertising: A Practitioner's Handbook* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), vii.

29 – Edwards, *International Film Poster*, 71.

30 – Ibid., 71–72.

31 – James H. Leigh, "The Use of Figures of Speech in Print Ad Headlines," *Journal of Advertising* 23, no. 2 (1994): 17–33, at 17.

32 – Mooallem, "How Movie Taglines are Born."

33 – Leigh, "The Use of Figures of Speech." Hartmut Stöckl also observes that the combination of text and image can result in a stylistic element of its own which, if well employed, may considerably enhance consumers' disposition to buy (see Hartmut Stöckl, *Werbung in Wort und Bild. Textstil und Semiotik Englischsprachiger Anzeigenwerbung* (Frankfurt am Main 1997: Peter Lang), 111).

34 – A notable exception is the combination of tagline and image on the poster for *The Hottie and the Nottie* (2008), which we may safely describe as the pillar of unsubtlety. The poster shows the beautiful Paris Hilton in a bikini next to an "uglified" Christine Lakin. The first half of the tagline is written to the left of Hilton's smiling face, the second half to the right of Lakin's pimply and gap-toothed mug. Complete, it reads, "That's hot. That's not."

35 – A similarly information-empty, but nevertheless witty, title-related tagline is *Saturday Night Fever*'s (1977) "Catch it."

36 – In this case Neil Norman, writing for *The Evening Standard*.

37 – The tagline on the poster for another Tarantino film, *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), which reads "An inglorious, uproarious thrill-ride of vengeance," is *not* a quote from a review. It is deliberately old-fashioned, and works mostly stylistically, because of the similarity between the words "inglorious" and "uproarious."

38 – Exceptions are proverbs or quotes, like *Schindler's List*'s (1993) "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire" (from the Talmud) or *V for Vendetta*'s (2005) "Remember, remember the 5th of November," which were also not originally written by the marketing department but still qualify as a tagline. They have been deliberately chosen and taken from one specific context to be put into another (namely that of the film they advertise).

39 – Corstjens, *Strategic Advertising*, vii.

40 – "Me, Myself & Irene," *Total Film*, http://www.gamesradar.com/me-myself-and-irene-review/ (September 22, 2000, accessed November 26, 2014) (emphasis added).

41 – Quoted in Edwards, *International Film Poster*, 10.

42 – To use a term introduced by Russian Formalism. Literariness is "that which makes a given text a work of literature. Literariness, for the Formalists, inheres in the form of a text, its characteristic ways of deploying style and convention, and especially in its capacity to mediate on the qualities of its form" (Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* (New York 1992: Sight Lines), 10).

43 – Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 379.

44 – Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, "Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 424–38, at 424.

45 – Leigh, "The Use of Figures of Speech."

46 – McQuarrie and Mick, "Figures of Rhetoric."

47 – Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

48 – Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric*, 396 (emphasis added).

49 – Algirdas Julien Greimas, "Dialogue with Hermann Parret," in *Discussing Language*, ed. Hermann Parret (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 55–79, at 60.

50 – Winfried Nöth, *The Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 319.

51 – In fact, the whole marketing campaign for *Fight Club* was designed to puzzle, or even to unsettle, audiences. One teaser trailer, for instance, had Brad Pitt look into the camera and tell us: "Did you know that urine is sterile? You can drink it." Although highly original, financially speaking the campaign was a failure; Jon Gertner, "Box Office in a Box," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/14/movies/14DVD.html?_r=0 (November 14, 2004, accessed November 26, 2014).

52 – Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric*, 382.

53 – Schemes are rhetorical figures that alternate sentence or word structure, and tropes are figures that use words to deviate in meaning from how they are commonly understood. For a similar chart with advertising slogans see McQuarrie and Mick, "Figures of Rhetoric," 430–31.

54 – Mooallem, "How Movie Taglines are Born."

55 – And very often the tagline is nothing but a condensed version of the (already condensed) pitch, as in *American Gigolo* (1980): "He's the highest paid lover in Beverly Hills. He leaves women feeling more alive than they've ever felt before. Except one."