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Trailers: A Cinema of (Coming) Attractions

railers, or previews of coming attractions, are both praised and reviled by film scholars and regular moviegoers alike. "They give away too much of the movie." "They're better than the films." "They only show the spectacular parts." "All the best jokes are in the trailer." "They lie." "They're the best part of going to the movies." "They're too loud." At the same time, they are used by both groups precisely as they're meant to be used, as free samples to aid in moviegoing decision making. And in the contemporary market, trailers' reach is ever expanding, with their inclusion on videotapes, DVDs, and on the Internet, where they are an increasingly popular and influential marketing tool. Yet very little scholarly attention has been paid to the *way* trailers characterize films, and thus presume audience desire, in order to sell them.[1]

While trailers are a form of advertising, they are also a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined (whether happily or not). Thus this book is not a study of film advertising as a whole, and will not treat television advertising for films, nor key art such as posters. I am defining a movie trailer as a brief film text that usually displays images from a specific feature film while asserting its excellence, and that is created for the purpose of projecting in theaters to promote a film's theatrical release. Trailers are film paratexts that are especially important to study in an era when promotion and visual narrative have become increasingly difficult to disentangle in all kinds of popular media, whether music television, children's cartoons, "infotainment," or films themselves. Indeed, as Jane Gaines noted as early as 1990, "Today, the analysis of culture as commodity may have lost its explanatory potency since we are left with so few examples of uncommodified relations."[2] And more recently, scholars

are finding that global capitalism's pervasive systems of cultural marketing necessitate a rethinking and re-visioning of the role of "screen studies" in contemporary media analysis.[3] Neither advertising theory nor narrative film theories adequately address what consequences the current ubiquity of the promotional message might hold for contemporary definitions and understandings of moving-image narrative forms. The study of trailers, a long-standing popular form of promotional narrative (which both sells and tells a reconfigured version of a film narrative), may shed historical light on the emergence of this particular convergence of spectator and consumer address, and the project of this book is to further that investigation.[4]

By offering audiences concise, direct-address cinematic texts that serve as both attractions and as a form of persuasion, trailers allow audiences to read the phenomenon of promotional narrative in a particularly dramatic way. Trailers *are* a cinema—of (coming) attractions. Analysis of trailers as a unique cinematic form can bring a greater critical awareness to audiences' readings not only of trailers themselves, but of the variety of marketing-laden texts comprising the contemporary visual culture industry as a whole. Trailers' unique status as cinematic promotions of narrative—and narrativizations of promotion— enables a treatment that transcends a mere marketing critique and has the potential to contribute to a social history of desire.

Generally present in popular film, the processes of filmic narration that ensure that audiences are caught up in identifying with fictional film worlds and suspending disbelief result in a familiar relationship (analyzed by countless film theorists)[5] between audiences and the films unreeling before them. Shot-reverse-shot structures and other framing conventions ordinarily keep viewers from looking directly into the eyes of characters, and even voice-over narrations, while addressed to viewers, generally tell their part of the story without directly invoking the audience. Trailers, on the other hand, have often spoken to us directly, frequently telling us to SEE! COME! JOIN IN! THRILL TO! . . . , even at times using characters or actors shown looking directly into the camera and at the audience (although contemporary trailers usually display such injunctions more obliquely).

The actual identity of this "us" that trailers and other promotional discourses address—the historical, gendered, racially and class-specific spectator of American popular film—is now a prime object of film reception studies. Indeed, the recent and widespread "return to history" within the field of film studies addresses this historical spectator in

two important ways. First, many ethnographic investigations of the consumption behavior of film spectators attempt to ground the field on a more material basis from which to make claims about the cultural contexts of film reception; and second, a number of archival investigations of the extratextual discourses (such as posters, pressbooks, reviews, exhibition documents and fan magazines) surrounding films themselves are being performed that shed new light on the industrial, institutional and cultural influences that shape both audiences' interpretations of films and the ideological underpinnings of Hollywood production practices. A study of trailers seems a logical fit that would continue both these approaches. But my interest in trailers and audiences lies more in the process by which audiences are implicitly defined by promotional discourses, as the studios attempt to know what "the audience" wants. Rather than exploring the actual spectator, I am interested in the hypothetical spectator that can be read within trailer texts themselves: an "audience study" through the looking glass of the Hollywood film industry.[6]

My project of reading trailers to discern who the film industry *thinks* it is addressing within trailer texts is designed to invite a more critical approach to spectatorship itself—for the benefit not only of scholars but also of "rank and file" spectators. People watching films need not do in-depth primary research on film reception to get a handle on the ideological implications of the commodity relations of film spectatorship. Trailers provide unique and specific rhetorical structures that fold visual and auditory evidence of the film production industry's assessment of its actual audience (as well as its desires for a potential audience) into a one- to three-minute cinematic experience. Film studies has explored various models for considering those who watch films: among these, semiotic and psychoanalytic theories treat them as (ideal, implied, constructed or historical) *spectators*; in commodity theories they're considered *consumers*; in historical reception studies they tend to be called the *audience*. While my perspective draws on all three models and each of these words may be called into service depending on whether the aspect under consideration is semiotic, economic or historical, trailers are most interesting to me for the ways they can vividly illuminate (more than merely measure or document) how the motion picture audience was imagined by the film industry—a historical fact in its own right.

This approach comes from an urge to resist the current trend in film historiography to eschew textual analysis of films in favor of archival document research, to the degree that it sometimes seems film historians

aren't writing about movies anymore. I suggest that the (understandable) reaction against the totalizing forms of textual analysis favored by earlier structuralist approaches has resulted in scholars occasionally "throwing the baby out with the bath water,"[7] as film studies valorizes certain styles of industrial and institutional historiography while at times minimizing the importance (indeed, inevitability) of grounding film history within a *point of view* about our actual historical object, the cinematic text. Regardless of its occasional lapses into historical relativism, the advances of poststructuralist theory still apply. "History" is not written by a unified, centered historical subject who stands apart from the object of study and can freely consider "facts" and documents as objective—to the contrary, history often "writes us." Analysis of film texts is as crucial to the historian as visits to the archive, although of course any analysis must be couched within as much acknowledgment as possible of his or her own subject position. This book represents an effort to posit nontotalizing, accessible, yet theoretically informed methods for analyzing film texts and paratexts *as* primary archival documents. As ecologists can analyze a tree to determine facts about its entire ecosystem, a rhetorical textual analysis of trailers can facilitate a cognitive mapping of where we stand in relation to the cultural and historical "ecosystem" of the commodity relations of Hollywood film.

My own subject position as a middle-class WASP second-generation film scholar coming of age in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century has obviously influenced my interest in trailers. During an informal seminar at UCLA in 1992, historian Hayden White encouraged film and television students to "privilege your neurosis to tell you what interests you," and expressed interest in theories "based on unease, on what embarrasses." Coming from my particular class and family background, it embarrassed me how easily I can be seduced by all kinds of promotional texts. While I have always imagined that I am not drawn to select brand-name products on the basis of advertising, trailers, as ads for watching, are the perfect seduction for me because movies are a "product" I "consume" extensively and (almost) without shame. Yet contradictorily, the impulse to resist the pull of images has been with me almost as long as their seductiveness, thanks to a film scholar mother who would "bare the device" of movie scenes that scared me as a child and who introduced me to the films and theories of Jean-Luc Godard as a teenager. At times my resulting tendency to survey and examine, more than participate in, film and media culture has also been a source of unease, given my (also class-based) desire not to set myself

apart from or above "the masses." I have pursued this work on trailers partly as an attempt to model the kind of critical spectatorship I would like to be able to experience naturally: a reconciliation of critical distance and emotional engagement.

This positioning results in my research emerging from an inevitable point of view, or in Kenneth Burke's terminology, a "terministic screen."[8] One reason I have been drawn to rhetoric as a methodology is precisely its acknowledgment of vantage point in the context of scholarly research. Indeed, David Blakesley's anthology of recent work on film and rhetoric takes Burke's concept as its title. And while "rhetoric's function as a filter or screen, enabling some things to pass through clearly, obscuring or repressing others" requires of rhetorical film scholars a vigilance to avoid allowing pet theories to determine, a priori, our analyses, we must acknowledge that "what theory 'produces' . . . is in part a consequence of its terministic screen," that is, the speaking position of the theorist.[9]

I rely on classical rhetoric, the art of persuasion, to analyze trailers because they are quintessentially persuasive cinematic texts. While looking to rhetoric is a move that places my work strongly within a structuralist/semiotic tradition, my overall methodology and purpose is that of ideological critique within a social-historical framework. The recent re-visioning of the uses of rhetoric for film studies—and specifically for ideological critique—is surveyed in Blakesley's anthology, which attempts to "map the emergent field of rhetorical studies of film."[10] By integrating a rhetorical method within a social history of trailers I participate in this re-visioning and thereby hope to demonstrate the ongoing use value of textual analysis for film historiographic investigation. Aristotelian rhetoric offers a method by which one can pinpoint textual evidence of trailer producers' assumptions about their audience(s). The enthymeme, Aristotle's word for those figures of speech wherein commonplaces shared by the listener are incorporated into a speaker's assertions, is key to locating this evidence. I identify enthymemes as components of trailers' promotion of three principal textual features of films: genres, stories and stars, in the process assessing some of the broader ideological implications of the industry's assumptions about its audiences' interest in these features.

Trailers, of course, are not the only film texts that demonstrate the extent to which spectatorship is institutionalized within cinema practice as a term of the text: this is a historical condition of Hollywood film.[11] Theatrical trailer spectatorship is, however, a heightened spectatorial

mode, an arena where spectators tend to evince greater awareness of themselves as a collectivity, even as they are subjected to a more pointed ideological thrust by trailers' specifically promotional forms of address than they may be in the general experience of film spectatorship. There is a carnivalesque atmosphere to the trailer segment of the theatrical exhibition experience that contradicts trailers' supposedly disciplinary or instructional function.

In quoting from the films they promote and giving spectators "free samples" of them, trailers can be seen to reframe their original fictional film narratives into a (window) shopper's world. Much recent film scholarship has called attention to the relationships between film spectatorship and shopping, and specifically to the "shop window" analogy.[12] Trailer spectatorship increases the implied distance of the speculative consumer contemplation involved in cinematic window shopping;[13] it also removes the commitment to enter the familiar contract of "suspension of disbelief" entailed in the process of watching a complete narrative film (we aren't "buying it"), doubly distancing spectators from either a lived-world agency or an imaginary one. At the same time, trailer spectatorship is one of the primary sites where audiences are pointedly "shopping" for films. Contemporary audiences sometimes express awareness of the greater distance entailed in the theatrical trailer viewing experience by manifesting interactivity among themselves—as when hisses, cheers and other editorial comments punctuate the exhibition of trailers or fill the silences between them.

The distance from the source text's narrative pull entailed in trailers' *quoting* from the films they promote thus enables a greater closeness to other spectators *as* consumers and critics. Susan Stewart's phenomenological study of narratives of exaggeration and nostalgia comments on the transformative aspect of quotation:

> In quotation we find the context of production transformed and the utterance detached from the authority of that context. . . . As Bateson has explained in his studies of the message "This is play," the play message signifies a transformation of interpretive procedures, a transformation partaken of by members of the situation and which they understand as a device for entering into an abstract and metaphorical play world.[14]

One sometimes experiences such "an abstract and metaphorical play world" in the movie theater when trailers are screened, and editorial

comments exchanged among strangers during the trailers are perhaps less likely to be "shushed" than talking that occurs during the film itself, at least in the contemporary era (and I have found no evidence indicating this was any different earlier). The recent popularity of repertory trailer compilation screenings as nostalgic, camp, and/or ironic spectatorial experiences underscores the appeal of the sort of detachment Stewart characterizes. Whether "bought" or not, the transformed narrative coherence of this quotational "world" inhabited by spectators of trailers constitutes the diegesis of the promotional film text.

In this aspect, trailers resemble a prenarrative system of filmmaking that evokes Tom Gunning's influential work on early cinema. Gunning uses Eisenstein's notion of a "montage of attractions" to characterize pre-1906 cinema as "a cinema of attractions," which he describes as "less . . . a way of telling stories than . . . a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power . . . and exoticism; . . . a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator."[15] In trailers, images are selected and combined in ways that privilege attracting the spectator's attention over sustaining narrative coherence. Yet trailers also maintain a relationship to the narrative they promote, and in this relationship between promotional images of attraction and coherent cinematic narrative lie the unique characteristics that constitute the rhetoric of trailers.

To be precise, trailers are film paratexts. As Gérard Genette has characterized them, paratexts are those textual elements that emerge from and impart significance to a (literary) text but aren't considered integral to the text itself, such as all prefatory material, dust jacket blurbs, advertisements and reviews. Specifically, trailers can be seen as instances of a film's "public epitext."[16] Because of their heavily quotational aspect and the way they rhetorically reconfigure scenes from the film, endowing them with persuasive content, I would suggest moreover that trailers are both para- and metatexts. Communication theorists remind us that to analyze metacommunication is to "look for the abstract structural frameworks and systemic processes, the codes and constraints, which allow only certain messages to be transmitted in the system."[17] Thus an analysis of trailers' promotional rhetoric speaks to the ideological and cultural conditions of, or constraints within, Hollywood cinematic narrative itself in specific historical moments.

As both narrative and promotional texts, trailers themselves can be seen as a hybrid *genre* within the canon of Hollywood film. They offer

film viewers an italicized, alluringly reconfigured narrative space of ellip-sis and enigma, where features such as characters' gestures and gazes, spatial relations, character and camera movement, dialogue, narration, music, and evocations of film's narrative structure have particular signi-fying characteristics, as will be explored in these pages. Considering trailers as a genre of film practice—and this book as a genre study—helps us look at these particularities as partaking of more than merely a type of advertising: to see trailers as cinematic textual practices among others. This in turn reminds us that the intersection of selling and telling in these little pieces of film varies perhaps only in a matter of degree from that of Hollywood films themselves.[18] It also reminds us to consid-er trailers' place in the cultural imaginary of Hollywood film reception: that is, as more than a mere reflection of their industrial role as a mar-keting practice constituting one facet of a promotional campaign. Trailers are at once ads and more than ads. People who are incensed to see product advertising on the big screen (a phenomenon that is on the increase) rush to be in their seats in time for the trailers. During the course of my research I have repeatedly heard "I *love* trailers" in reaction to my topic, and invariably, what's meant is not just "I love being shown ads for new movies so I can decide which ones to go to," but rather an appreciation of the unique visual and narrative/promotional qualities of these short film texts.

Like many film scholars, I often find viewing films a divided experi-ence. As mentioned, I can feel the detachment of retaining an awareness of the artifice of filmmaking[19] while simultaneously losing myself in the seductive qualities of projected celluloid, "going along with" the mechanisms of spectator-construction that I know are operating in most narrative feature films. The two modes of viewing are inscribed in each other in that any attempt to describe the one relies on a knowledge of the other, yet their coexistence in my experience of movie spectatorship seems irreconcilable, impossible.

Trailer spectatorship heightens the presence of this doubleness. The contradictoriness of trailers is perhaps their salient feature, and for me at once their greatest source of pleasure and the point where they most incisively display Hollywood's view of its audience(s). In fact, trailers operate as a unique sort of cinematic gyroscope in which a host of con-tradictions are briefly (for one to three minutes) sustained in balance—not the least of which is the quality of nostalgia for a film we haven't even seen yet.[20] Because they are anticipatory texts, they need no reso-lution. For all the weightiness of their narratorial pronouncements and

the booming sound effects of their cataclysmic imagery, they are breath-less, liminal and ephemeral. They are fun because they play (or *trail . . .*) at the edges of narrative cinematic sense. Like the brief moment in which the cloaked Klingon "bird of prey" warships in *Star Trek* must become visible (and thus vulnerable) in order to have enough power to discharge their weapons, trailers are where Hollywood displays its con-tradictions right at the point where its promotional message is most direct. Describing the play of rhetorical features in this zone of contra-diction and potential dialectic within and among trailer texts comes as close as anything to satisfying my desire to understand some of the con-tradictions of my own relationship to spectatorship.

GENERIC FEATURES OF TRAILERS

As suggested earlier, there are common features among trailers from all eras as well as historical transformations within the genre. Most trailers have in common a few generic features: some sort of introductory or concluding address to the audience about the film either through titles or narration, selected scenes from the film, mon-tages of quick-cut action scenes, and identifications of significant cast members or characters. The genre of trailers also has much in common with other kinds of advertising. Audiences for advertisements are con-stantly re-creating meanings as they read or watch them. They mediate between particular ads and "referent systems"—or the body of social knowledge on which advertisers and audiences alike draw and rely—and in this process audiences co-constitute the meanings of ads.[21]

Yet film as a product differs from most other advertised goods in that the referent systems that trailers use and audiences transform in the process of constructing meaning are more than a body of social knowledge. They are that, plus a body of specific cinematic conventions, a body of expectations about what films can offer narratively, and a set of desires. These desires are not to consume an object, but to engage in an experience, in a process of meaning-production through narrative film, a "free sample" of which the trailer constructs. If a trailer can "pig-gyback" the captive and willing movie audience's desire to see a given film (the one they've come to presently see) onto, first, a desire to see another film (the one being promoted), and next, to *other* desires the audience is believed to hold, the audience is more likely "sold" on the promoted film. This principle is the basis of the film industry's exploita-tion practices as a whole, which owe as much to the historical precedent

of P. T. Barnum as to other advertising. Through trailers, the use value of narrative (enjoying a film) is subsumed to its exchange value (wanting to see another film) by a process of transforming the codes of narrative fiction into the codes of promotional rhetoric. In this process, new narrative (or more precisely, narrative/promotional) codes or rhetorical devices are produced.

Trailers construct a narrative time-space that differs from (and creates desire for) the fictive world of the film itself. The fast pace of most trailers accentuates the film's surface of cinematic spectacle, displaying the film's shiniest wares, or most *attractive* images, positioning it as a commodity for sale. Narrative, however, does not disappear in this process. Trailers are themselves little stories constructed within the anticipatory dimension of capitalist realism in which carefully selected individual cinematic images, dynamically combined in highly teleological editing structures, shine with a surface gloss of exaggerated spectacularity.[22]

In particular, as I will explore, trailers commonly utilize codes of voice-over narration, sound and sound overlapping, music, graphics, and most importantly, editing, or montage. A system of discontinuous continuity editing—which I call *dis*continuity editing—operates through alternation, combination and abbreviation of scenes to construct a new, *trailer* logic, differing from (yet, obviously, related to) the narrative logic of the film. One shot in a two-minute trailer is called upon to stand in for a number of narrative elements, such as character subjectivity and relations, plot development and suspense. Of course, this can be true of film in general, but since in trailers each of these abbreviated stand-in images is part of an ad for an as-yet-unseen film, they become charged with excess signification. Faces, for example, bear tremendous weight as carriers of various emotional signifieds and enigmas. The Bazinian emphasis on the capacity of human facial physiognomy to reveal interior life[23] is endowed with a promotional kick: in trailers the intensity of facial expressions acts as a window not onto the world or the interior spiritual state of a human being, but onto a sort of imagined narrative plenitude of whatever film is being promoted. Images of faces also draw upon a large cultural lexicon of photographic portraiture, endowing shots such as one of Denzel Washington as Malcolm X staring at the camera from behind prison bars with extra emotional punch (in trailers, photographic cliché can work to advantage).

Similarly, gestures and movements create impressions of narrative thrust, whether compatible or not with their actual narrative function in
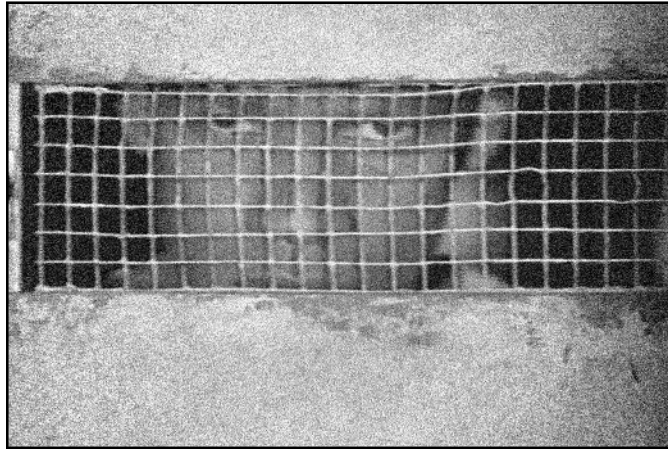
Figure 1.1. Denzel Washington as Malcolm X
behind prison bars in the *Malcolm X* trailer.

the film. Indeed, the "Kuleshov effect" gets fresh validation in the occasional repositionings of the meanings of shots from a film to better fit a trailer's narrative trajectory.[24] Thus, a shot of Meg Ryan falling on her bed in the trailer for *You've Got Mail* (1998), which in the film is a gesture of sadness and frustration after the character is stood up by her cyber-date, appears in the trailer to be a swoon, thus better contributing to the film's overall generic positioning as a romantic comedy. Moreover, a trailer can imply plot developments that are false (such as Kurt Russell apparently dying in the trailer for *Unlawful Entry*, 1992); can contain conversations that never happen (juxtaposing two lines of dialogue unconnected in the film so that the second appears to reply to the first); or provide false narration (in which spoken lines of dialogue are abstracted from the drama and inserted as trailer voice-overs). Additionally, shots are sometimes included in trailers that do not appear in the finished film (such as a "silly walk" Jack Nicholson does in the trailer for *As Good As It Gets*, 1997). Trailers get away with numerous falsifications in the interests of promotion, just as other ads do, but because these advertisements are for a product that is a longer form of the same type of cinematic text, a trailer's truth claims "claim" different kinds of "truth" about the films they promote than other ads do, thus potentially creating a range of responses in audiences that may vary from their responses to ordinary advertising rhetoric.

In these "montages of (coming) attractions," spectacular features such as explosions and car crashes are often emphasized, with a frequent

Figure 1.2. Meg Ryan's apparent swoon in the *You've Got Mail* trailer.

result that trailers are the loudest part of moviegoing.[25] Trailers' less cataclysmic imagery, such as the requisite star identifications and expository dialogue, are thus dynamically punctuated with an excess of affective cues that assure audiences of action films, for example, that there will indeed be action. Shots of nature and other scene-setting devices are endowed with a graphic and textural "feel" that emphasizes the travelogue aspect of locations, and the experience of seeing the full film is often equated with travel by voice-over narrators or titles enjoining spectators to "come" or "voyage to . . ." An intriguing contemporary variation on this invitation is an evocation of the film's time and/or space as different from "ours" by narrations that begin "In a time when . . ." or "In a world where . . ."[26] Christian Metz's "Grande Syntagmatique," an early exploration of rhetoric as an analytic tool for identifying significant units of film, offers a singularly apt term for these types of texturizing sequences of generalizing scenes so common to trailers: the "bracket syntagma," a nonchronological set of scenes that serve as successive examples.[27]

Indeed, many codes of shot combination in trailers can be seen as variations on Metz's categories of the bracket and parallel syntagmas.[28] Metz's parallel syntagmas, which are *alternating* series of shots without any spatial or temporal relation to each other, are often called into play in trailers, wherein elaborate systems of counterpoint are constructed between two or more different scenes, sometimes attenuating dialogue scenes by insertion of parallel shots of some kind; or presenting a variety of scenes crosscut with a recurrent graphic element such as a title

(for example, the big "X" in the *Malcolm X* trailer). This very common convention of trailer crosscutting is known in industry parlance as a "grid."[29]

Wipes, seen primarily in trailers of the classical and transitional eras, can serve different purposes, but their overall effect is to endow the trailer with a graphic surface that prohibits our ordinary cinematic relation to the screen (the suspension of disbelief required of narrative film spectatorship). Like graphic elements in magazine ads, they also keep us more aware of the promotional message than of the photographic image per se. Contemporary trailers often utilize sound effects and title graphics for the same purpose (while they too use wipes, if less frequently). Regardless of which type of (historically specific) transitional device is used, the montage structure of trailers is key to their production of meaning, and transitions other than straightforward cuts are generally utilized to participate in a trailer's "hype," calling attention to the advertising function of these short film texts. In the process, they also can function to promote genre (such as heart-shaped wipes in the classical era or the slamming sound effects which cue action-adventure in the contemporary era) and story features (such as a mirror-cracking wipe in the *Casablanca* trailer).

The narrational component of trailers is also key to their production of meaning. Early trailers of course relied on intertitles, but beginning in the 1930s titles would work in conjunction with voice-over narration. Both modes were sustained throughout trailers' history, although contemporary titles are more sparse and schematized. Many trailers have experimented with minimal narration, but the persistence of the (nearly always male) narratorial voice is overall a striking feature of trailers, again functioning to maintain viewers' awareness of the promotional message.

Trailers offer figurations of felicitous spaces so as to make audiences wish to be there or, conversely, horrific or suspenseful spaces to create audience desire to experience the "safe" fear and terror of the movies. The restriction of trailers to a few minutes of carefully selected and edited shots and scenes endows what we do see, from faces to car crashes, with a kind of pregnancy or underdeterminacy that allows audiences to create an imaginary (as-yet-unseen) film out of these fragments—we desire not the real film but the film we want to see.[30] This filling-in of trailer enigmas with an idealized film thus heightens trailers' promotional value, as well as the visibility of the production industry's assumptions about what its hypothetical audience desires.

In addition to being a genre of sorts of their own, trailers (along with other promotional discourses) have been instrumental in the formation or legitimation of Hollywood genres, steering our interests in a given film into established or emerging generic categorizations and heightening our interest in the genre as a whole, facilitating the film's positioning as a commodity. Trailer producers' rhetorical appeal to spectators' familiarity (or desire for familiarity) with a genre or genres is one of several primary rhetorical tropes that inform trailers. In their efforts to persuade viewers to see a film, trailers may also appeal to spectators' desire for story, emphasizing a film's plot and characters, or to the spectators' attraction to well-known stars (or alternatively, directors or authors as stars). Often, the rhetoric of trailers combines all three appeals—genre, story, and stars—each of which has its own conventions. (These three are not the only types of appeal, but are trailers' primary *rhetorical* appeals, as will be explained. Other, extratextual appeals are occasionally invoked as well: notably reviews, awards, and box-office figures.)

The rhetorical appeals in turn rely on certain affective expectations, or qualities of experience that the viewer brings to the trailer. These affective expectations are what reception theorist Wolfgang Iser calls textual "gaps," or what Judith Williamson calls the "transformational spaces"[31] the text leaves open for spectators' expected emotional, physical, aesthetic or other responses.[32] In effect, as trailer producers have variously described,[33] the industry assumes these gaps will be filled in by the spectator in habitual ways. For example, within any one of the above three primary categories of appeal, a trailer's rhetoric might privilege a film's heartwarming qualities, its verisimilitude, or heightened spectacle. However, the realization (or not) of affective cues dwells in the experience of the spectator, not within the rhetorical tropes of the trailer itself. This distinction is important to clarify in ensuring that this analysis is indeed a *textual* analysis, treating the trailer's visible textual features (appeals to interest in genres, stories and stars) in order to discern underlying assumptions that can be read therein, rather than generalizing from the analyst's subjective responses to a trailer's affective cues. This summary of the way rhetoric is being brought to bear on my analysis of trailers will be detailed in the following chapter, wherein I characterize and describe the operations of the three primary types of rhetorical appeals under discussion—the rhetorics of genre, story and stardom.

Demographics has an impact on trailer rhetoric, as quantified by market research and/or as imagined by trailer makers.[34] Different markets are made visible in trailers by textual evidence of "targeting," or

appeals to specific genders, age groups, or other categories of subjectivity within trailers' overall mission to expand the audience. Comparisons of a film's theatrical trailer with other facets of its promotional campaign, such as pressbooks, print advertising, or TV spots, affirm the trailer's role as a sort of coalition of the campaign's various demographic strategies. The semiotic density of trailers allows for many buttons to be pushed at once, making the trailer operate as a nucleus, or "navel," of the promotional campaign.[35] Television ads are an important subject in their own right, as are presskits, posters, key art, and in the classical era, exhibitor ballyhoo. But while I do refer to other elements of a film's promotional campaign, this study of the implied audiences rhetorically inscribed within Hollywood promotional texts limits itself to the original theatrical trailer.[36]

As the nuclei of the promotional effort, trailers resemble a larger cinematic unit—not only the film they promote, but the entire film bill of which they are a part (here I am thinking specifically of the classical-era film bill). The first-run theater film bill in the classical Hollywood era was an ideological smorgasbord that offered to the public commodified views of all things visible, as Eric Smoodin has pointed out.[37] Smoodin argues that the film bill's visual cornucopia of different modes, genres, lengths and styles of film within the theatrical exhibition space (which, although unavailable for his study, prominently featured previews of coming attractions) also contributed to social control by communicating acceptable cultural norms and marking out a zone where sights and sounds were assembled for the purpose of commodification.[38] The variety and diversity of the bill came to signify the peaceful coexistence of potentially conflicting ideas or values, and became "part of the mythology of pluralism."[39] Trailers themselves contribute to such a mythology, I would suggest, by their concatenation of promises to fulfill the diverse narrative and generic desires of a variety of demographic groups. "Something for everyone," as will be seen, is a primary ideological underpinning of much trailer rhetoric, begging the questions this book asks: who are they calling "everyone" (and how do they know what we all want)? Throughout their history, trailers have contributed to the naturalization of a variety of social desires that will supposedly be fulfilled by going to the movies. "All the emotions of a lifetime!" proclaims the trailer for Disney's *Pollyanna* (1960)—"For years to come, you'll remember. You'll remember this girl and this motion picture."

Trailers' unique temporal status as, paradoxically, nostalgic structures of feeling for a film we haven't seen yet cues us to their status as
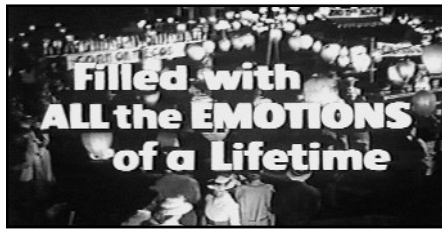
Figure 1.3. Nostalgia for the future: the *Pollyanna* trailer.

fundamentally contradictory texts.[40] Their rhetorical appeals reify not only (fictionalized) past experience but also the future—the anticipated experience of future moviegoing, and even future memories of past moviegoing.[41] Examples of this are rife throughout the trailer corpus. Yet if all trailers did was reify cinematic experience, I suggest that they would not hold such powerful appeal. Many kinds of feelings are in play as we watch them. At their most provocative, they can also evoke what Ernst Bloch, in his Frankfurt school–era Marxist study of daydreams and utopian hope, attempted to formulate as a historical consciousness of a collectively hoped-for future, an "anticipatory consciousness,"[42] as we invest them with our fondest hopes for a movie to come—and at times, for a world to come. Again contradictorily, the mythological aspect of trailers is thickened by the unique capacity of their montage structures to evoke real hopes.

While today's feature film exhibition experience no longer contains the range of types of film texts that it did in the classical era, today's trailer "supertext"—that is, the total "set" of trailers preceding a given film—offers its own metasignifying properties, often indicating to audiences the assumptions studios and/or exhibitors have made about the demographics to which the particular film will appeal.[43] These "supertexts" are of particular critical interest when the film that follows the set of trailers in question is one that studios assume is of interest to a certain race, gender or age group. Research into which trailers accompany "chick flicks" or "black-themed" films, for example, might reveal studio assumptions about demographics in ways that the individual trailers alone cannot.[44]

Of course, trailers don't necessarily "work" in the ways they are intended to. In the contemporary market, we can all cite anecdotal examples of the antipromotional capacities of trailers. The most common remark I tend to hear is that today's trailers give too much away—"if you see the trailer you don't need to see the film." (Since I began my research, this has been the most frequent response to my subject.) Thus, although this is not an audience study per se, it is important to acknowledge that trailers can be received in oppositional ways by audiences, yet as will be seen, viewing trailers oppositionally is not necessarily incompatible with trailers' promotional effect "working" on audiences.

ATTRACTIONS AND COMING:
TRAILERS AND TEMPORALITY

The model proposed by Tom Gunning of the "cinema of attractions," which he uses to distinguish spectacle-driven early cinema texts from those that exemplify the emergence of cinematic narrative, has become a popular concept to apply more widely to nonnarrative moments or modes within Hollywood cinema of any era. Gunning himself points to the contemporary persistence of the cinema of attractions "in the interaction between spectacle and narrative so frequently observed in Hollywood genres,"[45] and another scholar has pointed specifically to trailers, as texts that foreground cinematic attractions in the process of promoting various features of a film without giving the story away.[46] Regardless of the specific rhetorical appeals they exemplify, trailers themselves are cinematic attractions par excellence, and like other sorts of attractions, they possess a unique temporality that sets them apart from narrative cinema.

Elaborating on his formulation, Gunning characterized the temporality of attractions as fundamentally different from that of narrative: "In effect, attractions have one basic temporality, that of the alternation of presence/absence which is embodied in the act of display. In this intense form of present tense the attraction is displayed with the immediacy of a 'Here it is! Look at it.'"[47] However, attractions are often augmented by an "announcing gesture," such as the sweep of the hand or bow of the magician designed to call the audience's attention to a transformation about to take place, and that such announcements,

> beyond enframing (and therefore calling attention to) the act of display, . . . also perform . . . the important temporal role of announcing the event to come, focusing not only the attention but the anticipation of the audience. The temporality of the attraction itself, then, is limited to the pure present tense of its appearance, but the announcing gesture creates a temporal frame of expectation and even suspense.[48]

Trailers, I would argue, are attractions that combine and/or alternate these two temporal modes, offering an intensified present tense into which is woven the anticipatory dimension of the "announcing gesture." Trailers are a specific, persuasive kind of attraction: while they continually invoke a heightened presence through their display of spectacular

images, essentially the announcement (of a not-yet-seen film) *is* the event. Thus, the temporality of trailers comprises a present that is thoroughly imbricated in an anticipated future: truly *a cinema* of (coming) attractions. Trailers are a unique cinematic form that embodies a unique temporal mode.[49]

Trailers are both like and unlike the precinematic attractions to which Gunning compares early cinema. But their overall ideological function to promote the experience of cinematic spectacle, naturalizing cinema as spectacle and creating expectations for it, has obvious echoes in precinematic attractions and their "announcing gestures." The notion of spectacle, or "the show" as experience or attractions rather than narrative content, precedes film, in such forms of entertainment as vaudeville (and other popular theatrical forms) and the circus, which exemplify different ways of combining attractions with an anticipatory promotional address to audiences.

I would suggest that there is a "vaudeville mode" and a "circus mode" of audience address in trailers, and while the individual models become less distinguishable within actual trailer promotional practices, they can be seen to utilize these strategies. In trailers, the vaudeville mode appears to be the source of the representation of a given film as having "something for everyone," participating in the rhetoric of generalization and inclusiveness, and thus incorporating a given film's attractions within the broader context of promoting the film narrative as a whole. The circus mode more directly encourages or invites audience participation (like the circus barker) and emerges from a rhetoric of hyperbole (like the circus poster), usually singling out the film's attractions as the phenomenon or event that will draw audiences to the theater.[50]

Early cinema borrowed much from the tradition of vaudeville, including, as Miriam Hansen has pointed out, differentiation between genres.[51] Just as early film genres emerged from vaudeville roots, their promotion in trailers often relied on a vaudeville or popular theatrical model to sell cinematic spectacle. Early sound trailers often contain literal vaudeville echoes, such as stars standing in front of stage curtains and directly addressing audiences (as in the trailer for *The Jazz Singer*, 1927), introductory titles that set up subsequent film scenes like vaudeville placards (and like silent cinema intertitles), or smorgasbord samplings of the variety of the film's features (as exemplified by the *Day at the Races* case study to follow). And just as contemporary

trailer graphics can be seen as echoes of silent-era intertitles, trailers' salesmanship of the varieties of cinematic experience still resonates with a vaudeville model of audience address.[52]

Trailers that exemplify the vaudeville mode of promoting spectacle tend to address the audience as if talking to them in front of a stage curtain (which some trailers literalize), an approach resembling less hype than the straightforward address of a lecture hall setting, or at times even of an informal conversation or a comedic interaction with the implied audience. They present the film as a variety show or cornucopia of generic and narrative features as well as attractions, announcing a range of different kinds of pleasures the film will offer, implying that whatever "you" want, the film will provide it, in the process acknowledging audiences and acknowledging that audiences have a choice and have preferences. They may specifically (through direct address or, more commonly in the contemporary era, through montage structures) offer the audience a range of reasons to choose the film, assuring them that no matter who they are, the movie's "variety show" is for them. This invoking of audience discrimination as a feature of film promotion is more direct in the vaudeville model than the circus model's hyperbolic assumptions that spectacle is universally appealing.

The rhetoric of "something for everyone" is usually posited within the generalized framework of an individual genre. By quantifying or encapsulating aspects of the films' generic appeals in this way, such trailers construct genre at the same time as they construct genre-transcending commodity-units of spectacle (or attractions), aiming to land as broad an audience as possible to see a genre film by emphasizing the range of different aspects that might appeal to audiences within the specific genre.[53] Thus, the vaudeville mode of trailer address emphasizes the role of attractions along with narrative and generic elements, all considered as equally desirable aspects of commodified spectacle.

In the contemporary era, this mode persists particularly within trailers for films that rely more on human interaction than dazzling visual effects: a range of star types, story situations, and/or genre signifiers is often offered up in order to appeal to the broadest possible audience by emphasizing the film's variety. If spectacle is emphasized in this type of trailer, it is presented as one element among many, interspersed within rapid-cut montages of clips of differing dramatic, spectacular or comedic registers. By privileging accumulations of dialogue scenes

removed from their narrative context, vaudeville-mode trailers posit them as attractions too: in the realm of trailers, anything that can be promoted as stirring any sort of emotion in spectators tends to be on some level reconfigured as an attraction. Again, trailers promote these attractions within their own particular, anticipatory yet present, mode of temporality.

Another precinematic mode of spectacle is the circus. Early cinema publicity borrowed much from P. T. Barnum's brand of showmanship and the rhetoric or "hyperbolic discourse" of the circus.[54] Trailer hyperbole often contains distinct circus echoes. While the model of promoting film spectacle as variety relies more on generalization than hyperbole, perhaps prefiguring the strategy of selling spectacle by emphasizing inclusiveness rather than targeting segmented audiences, the circus mode relies more on hyperbole than generalization. Trailers frequently offer literal hyperbolic statements such as the *Brigadoon* (1954) trailer's claim that it is "the most spectacular singing-dancing entertainment ever produced!" The commanding injunctions to audiences to experience film spectacle rely on strategies drawn from a long American tradition of blatant exaggeration made famous by P. T. Barnum. Jane Gaines compares early film publicists' exploitation stunts to Barnum's "promotional antics," characterizing their use of a rhetoric of excess in a manner that holds true for trailers as well:

> *By definition, hyperbole is always more than the literal meaning. The pleasure afforded by hyperbolic representation is actually in this going beyond the literal or going "overboard," yet the hyperbolic mode is straightforward and unmistakable. Knowing this, motion-picture showmen following Barnum have conceived of their craft as the attempt to construct the perfectly hewn blatant message. . . . American culture, to a certain degree, equates hyperbole with value. . . . In a culture that depends upon notions of "bigger" and "better" to evaluate all aspects of life, verbal exaggeration itself may be seen as a measure of worth. Puffery must be proportionate to the excellence of the product.[55]*

The hyperbolic pole of the circus mode of trailer rhetoric in the promotion of spectacle differs from the pole of generalization exemplified by the vaudeville mode in its manner of audience address. Where the vaudeville mode chatted with or lectured to an implied audience who was assumed to desire a range of choices among a variety of spectacular

features, evoking individual genres, stars and stories as vehicles for expressing the full and generalized variety of consumer choice, the circus mode exhorts an undifferentiated audience that the spectacles it offers, regardless of their particularities, will provide unqualified pleasure and undisputed excitement to all. This mode more blatantly emphasizes the promotion of cinematic attractions in Gunning's sense, over the vaudeville mode's broader conception of spectacle.

The circus mode does evoke a range of possible relationships between the attractions and the spectator beyond that of a seated audience facing a curtained stage at a distance—as does the circus itself. Posters heralding a coming circus as well as shouting barkers invite audiences to See! Hear! and Feel! the circus's many features. The sideshow barker invites the audience to "step right up" to experience sideshow attractions. The circus comes to the audience when it comes to town, with the circus parade's arrival as much a part of the show as the circus itself. The circus mode of trailer rhetoric similarly invites audiences to experience features of the promoted film and to join in the fun. It also alerts audiences that the film spectacle—or, particularly in the contemporary era, event—will in some way come to them.

The "see/hear/feel" imperative hyperbolically touts the sensory appeal of the film's spectacular elements, often including an announcement of special technical features enabling this appeal, and often (in classical trailers and later ones that satirize them) actually hailing spectators with the words ("See!" "Hear!" or "Feel!") in spoken narrations or titles. The THX and other sound system trailers that often precede coming attractions trailers in contemporary theaters are a good example of the persistence of the hyperbolic "hear!" rhetoric into the contemporary era, while earlier examples of "hear!" are most frequently found in trailers for musicals, which list and sample the songs from the film that audiences are assumed to desire to hear in full.[56]

In the "see!" vein, trailers for musicals or comedies hyperbolically evoke visual pleasure, alliteratively announcing the movies' spectacular sights in titles or narration. Musical trailers of the classical era often add to this emphasis on glitter and shimmer with sparkling letters and graphic borders surrounding trailer imagery. The "see!" motif is also called upon in trailers for adventure films or thrillers to emphasize visual oddity or unusual sights, like the circus's presentation of wild animals, foreigners or "freaks." Thus a strange or mysterious visual (generic) atmosphere is enlisted to sell audiences on a barely described story. Or the "see!" motif can make an adventure film resemble a travelogue,

emphasizing exotic locales as spectacles. Another use of "see!" is to promote a film version of a steamy or controversial work of literature that formerly could "not be seen."

The "feel!" motif abounds in horror and adventure trailers in which various kinds of attractions are promoted as sensory assault. A hyperbolic form of "feel!" is the exploitation gimmicks pioneered by William Castle in the fifties and continued by Samuel Z. Arkoff and American International Pictures (AIP) in the seventies, in which audiences were reminded of the power of horror films to assault them physically (such as ambulances parked outside theaters or vomit bags issued as audiences purchase tickets). Again, wild animals and exotic geography can be "felt" as well as seen in trailers for adventure films. Contemporary variants of "feel!" include trailers that choose lines from the film that indirectly address audiences in addition to their diegetic function, such as "Ready everybody? Here we go again!" (*Return of the Jedi* trailer, 1983) or "Fasten your seatbelts!" (*Men in Black* trailer, 1997). The physical effects of spectacle and attractions on audiences are assumed across genres to be desired as part of the moviegoing experience, and such trailers promote spectacle by rhetorically implying that the boundary between the screen and the audience might be crossed through spectatorship.

This boundary is also crossed via the circus mode's "join in" or "step right up" motif, which lures audiences to see the film by inviting them inside the screen as if they are stepping into a sideshow tent, to participate in the film's discourse in some way. Related to the "join in" motif is the "everybody's talking" motif, which piques audience interest by assuming that interest is already there, in the case of well-known presold properties, in which case a book's readers or a play's audience become the film's assumed audience (as in the trailer for *Peyton Place*,

Figure 1.4. Promoting presold
properties: the *Peyton Place* trailer.
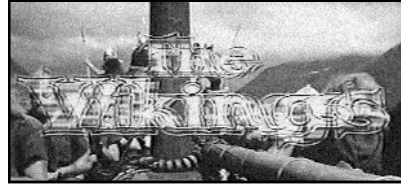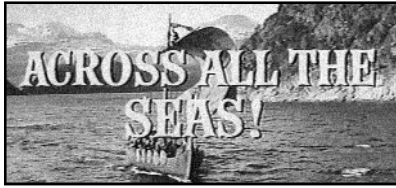
Figures 1.5, 1.6, and 1.7. The movies come to you: the trailer for *The Vikings*.

which announces, "At last! It's on the screen!"). Trailers also tell audiences that the film they promote will come to them, just as the circus comes to town, both in graphic or narrated tags announcing (some variation of) "coming soon to this theater" and by metaphorically demonstrating that the film will enter audiences' physical or psychic environment in some way (". . . Across the screen come The Vikings").

The circus mode thus overwhelmingly promotes spectacle by emphasizing attractions as cinematic events that transcend narrative—that indeed come to, or *at*, you. This feature is seen repeatedly in contemporary trailers for blockbusters or "event films," a term that emphasizes the increased importance of the initial release as the moment during which a film has a heightened "event" status (a moment that can even be seen as a sort of "prepublicity" for films' now attenuated lifespans in a range of formats).[57] Indeed, one critic calls attention to the extent to which the anticipation of films as events pervades not only trailers but film content itself, such that by the latter half of the 1990s, a sort of generalized cinematic imminence is deeply felt and overdetermined. The "event" is both the film and the expectation of the film: "advent and event become indistinguishable."[58] Many nineties films incorporate scenes of expectation or anticipation within their narratives (*Dante's Peak*, *Volcano*, *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *Independence Day*), and there is a general prevalence of weather and war narratives evoking global destruction surrounding the promotion of "blockbuster" films, from the general notion of a "media blitz" to specific visual motifs like the hurricane or tornado.[59] Moreover, today the role of trailers is ever broader, as they proliferate in new types of exhibition formats in the

consumer market (on DVDs, in store displays, on the Internet), and they are increasingly necessary to the assimilation, regeneration and replication of the film event. The pure cinema event is thus sensed as *never* present, but always coming—the attraction of the contemporary event film is "an attraction of coming."[60] Trailers do, however, retain their particular function of withholding the fullness of the cinema event, even as they display a unique sense of heightened presence.[61]

Regardless of the historical moment in which trailers are produced, the circus mode and the vaudeville mode exemplify ways in which trailers embody a temporal zone that both emerges from earlier forms of attractions and possesses its own unique features (combining a heightened present tense with an "announcing gesture"). The anticipatory nature of this zone, whether comprising an anticipation of boundless variety and abundance or of an intensity of imminent sensation, is both a feature of reification and commodification, as we have seen, and simultaneously speaks to audiences' broader and deeper hopes (and fears) for the future.

TRAILERS AND/IN HISTORY

Trailers are thus also interesting as evidence of Hollywood's expression of a historical consciousness in twentieth-century popular culture that occasionally gives us glimpses of ideology's utopian dimension. As Jane Gaines points out in her recent resurrection of Ernst Bloch's work for film studies, Bloch has tended to be neglected in past appropriations of Frankfurt school critiques of media culture, wherein utopianism has for the most part been discarded in favor of a paradigm of resistance.[62] But when it comes to Hollywood's industrial-strength film production and its attendant marketing regimes, the idea of consumers/spectators effectively resisting the influence of commodity culture through "reading against the grain" has limited use value in an era when even oppositional cultural forms can contribute to commodification. For some time now, the old sacred cows of left filmmaking practice—self-reflexivity and Brechtian distanciation—have been subject to recuperation within a cultural climate in which even ads display their own conditions of production, and popular culture encourages consumer behavior *by way of* ironic attitudes toward consumption.[63] New critical relationships to commodified culture are needed beyond the ironic, in order for both scholars and consumers/spectators to navigate new levels of corporate dominance while sustaining, as much as might still be possible, a sense of connection to the human community through culture.

What is especially interesting about applying Bloch's incorporation of hope into historical consciousness is that his theory is, according to Gaines,

> *a purely socialist dream, not a theory of dreams or wishes in general[.] . . . [A]lthough it is about the anticipation of materially better lives, it is* not *about the achievement of more in capitalist terms. Ironically, in this theory of the good dream factory, capitalism gives us glimpses of the socialism we have never known and may never know in our lifetime. Bloch's theory is a theory of the longing for change, for world-transforming revolution, and therefore it is a theory* for *the mass audience without whom the theory is incomplete.*[64]

In other words, Gaines sees Bloch's theory as potentially empowering for movie audiences in that it expands the notion of popular historical representation to include a hopeful future. Trailers, the quintessential anticipatory cinematic texts, can occasionally evoke this type of audience empowerment even while, contradictorily, their assumptions about audience interests reify their source films specifically, and cinema and the social world in general—their anticipatory dimension more often than not restricted to the commodifying parameters of capitalist realism. While the hopeful dimension of trailers often lies in the spaces between the montage of promotional images (the ideal film we create out of the trailer's fragments), thus belonging not so much to the texts as to an often amorphous anticipatory potentiality available in the trailer spectatorship experience, they are thus enriched as metatexts where Hollywood history can fruitfully be interrogated—both in the sense of the history of Hollywood and Hollywood's view of history—in ways that do not necessarily *merely* reduce this view to that of a consumer.

The history of trailers themselves is only now beginning to be explored.[65] Attempts were made to advertise films with trailers as early as 1912, and beginning in 1919, a company called National Screen Service (NSS) made crude 35 mm film ads from transferred film stills (without the studios' permission) and sold them to exhibitors to run following feature films—hence the term "trailers." The studios soon realized the potential of trailers and began supplying NSS with film footage. Early trailers are simply scenes spliced together in a "long-running newsreel format," but they quickly demonstrated increasingly sophisticated editing and graphic techniques.[66] By the early 1930s

trailers had already begun to look very much the way they would continue to look until the end of the old studio system in the late 1940s. That is, as a "genre," they utilized somewhat routinized structures of address emphasizing the studio star machinery and other characteristics of studio-era publicity familiar to anyone who has seen old trailers: hyperbolic titles and narrations enjoining audiences not to miss the film, visual and graphic linkages between romantic storylines and exotic settings, and identifications of cast members reminding audiences of stars' previous successes. At various times many of the major studios produced their own trailers, although Warner Bros. was the only studio to do so throughout the early sound era.

Beginning in the 1950s, trailers broke away from prior formulas, and while they retained their unifying function of attempting to bring as many different kinds of audiences as possible into the theater, trailers displayed a great deal of variety and experimentation up until the emergence of new promotional formulas in the mid-seventies. Trailers and other film advertising come under the jurisdiction of the same regulatory bodies as feature films (the Production Code in the classical era, the MPAA in the contemporary era), although in the classical era, as Mary Beth Haralovich argues, ads tended to get away with more than the films did (she points to posters for Warner Brothers' 1943 film *The Outlaw*), because the industry acknowledged the importance of heightened sensationalism in the selling of films.[67]

There is usually only one final theatrical trailer made per film, and it has generally been designed to draw as large an audience as possible to see the film.[68] (This has begun to change, in conjunction with the increased importance of the Internet, as will be discussed.) Throughout the period of time I treat, this single trailer's job has been to lay out all the advertising campaign's major elements (which in other media may be broken down to appeal to specific audiences). Thus, unlike television advertising for films (which market studies suggest currently ranks first, above trailers, second, and newspaper advertising, third, among sources for audience awareness of upcoming films),[69] most theatrical trailers through the end of the twentieth century have not placed great emphasis on the targeting of particular demographic groups. Indeed, according to one trailer producer, the job of the trailer is not so much to appeal to a specific audience as to avoid alienating *any* potential audience.[70] Trailers are thus a unique site where the film production industry "talks" to its audience in the broadest possible terms, in the process displaying—through its rhetoric of address—its own notion of who that audience is.

The precursors to trailers were magic lantern slides resembling posters, each film identified with titles and images of its stars or significant elements of its iconography. These were projected between features much like today's slides of local restaurant advertising and movie trivia quizzes. According to Lou Harris, head of Paramount's trailer division in the 1960s,

> *The first trailer was shown in 1912 at Rye Beach, New York, which was an amusement zone like Coney Island. One of the concessions hung up a white sheet and showed the serial "The Adventures of Kathlyn." At the end of the reel Kathlyn was thrown in the lion's den. After this "trailed" a piece of film asking Does she escape the lion's pit? See next week's thrilling chapter! Hence, the word "trailer," an advertisement for an upcoming picture. They've tried calling them Previews or Prevues of Coming Attractions, but everybody in the trade calls them trailers.[71]*

Harris notes that trailers weren't much beyond assemblies of scenes cut from the film until the coming of sound. But by 1935 optical wipes and superimposed graphics were used, and by 1938 trailers had their own scores and material written especially for them.[72] As mentioned, most trailers in the classical era were made by National Screen Service, which had exclusive contracts with all the major studios for use of footage from their films from 1922 through 1928. In 1928 Warner Bros. opened its own in-house trailer operation, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer did the same in 1934. In turn, NSS brought its trailer production to the West Coast and assigned producers to the studios still under contract. In 1960 Columbia broke away, in an attempt to remake the studio as a self-sufficient marketing and distribution concern.[73] Setting aside subtle differences marked by studio imprimaturs or signifiers, the look and structure of NSS trailers and the in-house studio-produced trailers are very comparable during the classical era. As the classical-era case studies will detail, they are characterized by lots of wipes; dazzling titles that move and grow and shrink to interact with the image; frequent use of a narrator to augment title information; and the elaboration of formulaic rhetorical appeals to audience interest in stars, genres and story.

The periodization of Hollywood movie marketing is inseparable from the familiar landmarks of the broader history of American film. The well-defined period of the classical Hollywood cinema—an industry-based classification of the time between the invention of sound and the

post–World War II antitrust legislation, a time when the "big five and little three" major studios dominated production (along with distribution and exhibition) to a degree never matched in American film history—also produced "classical" trailers. The term "classical Hollywood cinema" has recently been problematized by Miriam Hansen, whose salutary concept of "vernacular modernism" is useful in conjunction with trailers, which can be seen as significant contributors to the emergence during this era of "something like the first global vernacular,"[74] to which I will return. Although I have viewed trailers from throughout their history, I am forgoing close analysis of silent trailers, since the first trailers to demonstrate a coherent and consistent rhetoric emerge largely in the early sound era, when interactions among diegetic sound, music and narratorial voice become elements. Silent trailers tend to present longer clips and less dynamic montage structures.

While the classical era is generally considered to have ended with the Paramount divestiture decrees of 1948, Hollywood continued to turn out films and trailers whose aesthetics and economies were more or less reflective of the studio-era mode of production up to the end of the 1940s (and even, in many ways, into the 1950s, as will be seen). Another industrial factor affecting changes in film promotion at the end of the classical era was the emergence of television, which, while ultimately enabling an economically auspicious reconfiguration of the studio system, contributed (along with suburbanization) to a crisis at the box office and sent Hollywood producers in search of new means of ensuring the biggest possible audiences for feature films. Both Hollywood filmmaking as a whole and movie marketing underwent an "identity crisis" during these years that in many ways paralleled broader problems facing American cultural identity/ies. The postclassical pre–New Hollywood era of trailer production falls roughly into two periods: the 1950s, and the era from 1960 to the early 1970s. This distinction does not coincide with precise industrial benchmarks, but rather reflects the fact that the fifties and sixties are important intervals in the American cultural imaginary. The break between those two periods does fall in about 1960, with the end of the Blacklist and the beginning of the Kennedy "Camelot" era.

The gradual loss of studio-era production mechanisms during the fifties was reflected in many by-now familiar compensatory gestures in the film industry, such as the proliferation of widescreen formats, new sound systems and new paradigms of "realism," reflected in increased location shooting, shifts in performance styles (exemplified by method

acting) and increased use of unknown faces. All of these efforts were strongly foregrounded in trailers of the time. During the fifties, the need to reinscribe faith in Hollywood films was a clear mandate for the industry and its promotional mechanisms at a time when television was captivating audiences, most of whom had moved to suburbs and away from the city center's traditional site of movie spectatorship; and when sociopolitical events such as the HUAC and Kefauver hearings had rendered the industry insecure about its role in society. One ideological function of fifties trailers was thus to promote the cinematic institution as a whole (much as films themselves were made to do in the early days of cinema), along with new features such as widescreen formats. Studios can also be seen to more pointedly aim at specific market segments, notably the teenage audience, a strategy that went hand in hand with the industry's first serious interest in market research, although it wouldn't be until the 1970s that studios figured out how to systematically use it.[75]

The era that fell between classical Hollywood's formulaic trailers and New Hollywood's formulaic blockbuster-driven trailers thus stands out as a transitional period when no formulas seemed to work. While echoes of studio-era formulas abound in the trailers of the fifties, there is also a great degree of variety and experimentation, with both NSS and studio-produced trailers exhibiting comparable confusions and concerns about what to promote and how to bring flagging film audiences back into theaters.[76] The trailers that, as a group, follow most closely the formulas of the studio era are those for lower-budget exploitation films such as the works of William Castle, Sam Arkoff and, later, American International Pictures. These trailers often reference classical trailer formulas in ways that can be seen as self-parody.

When austerity measures hit the studios in the 1960s, many in-house trailer departments were scrapped and independent trailer producers flourished (many from the ranks of former studio "trailer men"), and the era of "boutique" trailer production took shape. Whereas during the fifties and well into the sixties, a large percentage of trailers were still produced by NSS or studio trailer departments, by the late sixties "the current system began to emerge, with each studio running a more or less important in-house operation which more often than not has to compete with vendors (depending on the wishes of the producers)."[77] National Screen Service continued to produce trailers up to the early eighties, but its importance to the industry was increasingly relegated to its role as the primary trailer distributor.[78]

The sixties expanded the trend toward both big-budget "road-show" set pieces from the major studios (mostly widescreen spectacles, presented limited showings with reserved seating) and smaller-scale and independent productions, with a corresponding shift in trailer hyperbole. Furthermore, the influence of foreign films on domestic product was evident in trailers' increased reference to prestige signi-fiers such as directors' names, film festival awards and critics' quotes. With the discovery of the potential impact of youth-oriented films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969), dif-ferent "buttons" start to be pushed in trailers, with appeals to audience interest in story elements increasing in importance (to rival genres and stars). New film genres are explored—and increasingly during this time trailers can be observed to contribute to the formation of genres by positing them as such, whether successfully or not. While the industry continued to have difficulty bringing audiences into the theater, the six-ties thus saw more pronounced efforts to redefine Hollywood cinema. As sixties trailers illustrate, promoting the cinematic institution became even more about promoting difference and novelty (as much in order to reinvent itself as to court the counterculture) than about celebrating new ways to enjoy Hollywood's traditional fare.

In response to the trend toward smaller-scale youth-oriented filmmaking, the early seventies became "an incredibly rich period of American film history; in many ways, the years 1969–1975 can be char-acterized as a period of extensive experimentation in industrial prac-tice, film form, and content."[79] Yet trailers from this time still exhibit confusion as to who their films' audiences are and how to appeal to them.[80] As market returns for "the iconoclastic, antimyth films"[81] began to wane in the mid-seventies and the New Hollywood blockbuster era emerged, trailers reasserted tried-and-true appeals to the elements of genre, stardom and more formularized story appeals designed to bring a number of different types of audiences into the theater; but the formulas that emerged in the blockbuster era were very different from earlier studio-driven ones, as will be seen.

The year 1975 is significant as the year Hollywood moved into the contemporary blockbuster economy, as a result of the success of new levels of saturation booking and advertising for the opening weeks of release of the film *Jaws*.[82] Thomas Schatz has argued for consideration of the release of *Jaws* as a marker for the beginning of the New Hollywood era:

> *If any single film marked the arrival of the New Hollywood, it was* Jaws, *the Spielberg-directed thriller that recalibrated the profit potential of the Hollywood hit, and redefined its status as a marketable commodity and cultural phenomenon as well. The film brought an emphatic end to Hollywood's five-year recession, while ushering in an era of high-cost, high-tech, high-speed thrillers.* Jaws' *release also happened to coincide with developments both inside and outside the movie industry in the mid-1970s which, while having little or nothing to do with that particular film, were equally important to the emergent New Hollywood.*[83]

Those developments, according to Schatz, are the rise of mall movie exhibition and of a post–baby boom mall-wandering and repeat-viewing audience; the waning of the "Hollywood renaissance" of the art cinema movement; the growth of the "star director" phenomenon and increased influence of the Hollywood talent agency; and three major changes in the relationship between cinema and television: greater emphasis on television advertising for motion pictures, the emergence of pay cable channels, and the home video revolution.[84]

In conjunction with these changes in exhibition practices, a number of financial changes begun in the sixties were being felt in the industry, characterized by Timothy Corrigan as "an age of inflation and conglomeration" that enabled many of the new production structures Schatz details, and as a result of which, audience address changed as well. Corrigan writes:

> *The studios transformed the fundamental nature of the film product by forcing massive alterations in the relation of a film to an audience, since to return . . . massive investments meant appealing to and aiming at not just the largest possible audience (the more modest strategy of classical films or the alternative art-house audiences of early auteur film culture) but* all *audiences. No longer is investment capital directed at differentiating one audience, however dominant, from another. Instead, those investments must aim to "undifferentiate" the character and desires of different audiences, usually by emphasizing the importance of that investment as a universal value in and of itself. . . . [I]t becomes the only methodology that makes sense to a conglomerate's bottom line.*[85]

This era's trailers, from the mid-seventies to the present day, demonstrate a consolidation of marketing strategies developed during the formation of the blockbuster era. The prevalence of "high concept" films and their marketing fulfills the corporate methodology cited above—where product is now differentiated by way of an "undifferentiation" of audiences. "High concept," defined in Justin Wyatt's pithy phrase as, "the look, the hook and the book," delineates those contemporary films characterized by "the emphasis on style in production and . . . the integration of the film with its marketing."[86] The increased embeddedness of marketing within film production practices results in a contemporary body of trailers that is at once highly formulaic and predictable—at times almost neoclassical—and visually dynamic and arresting.

Contemporary trailers are now big business, their production costing anywhere from $40,000 to $100,000 and up. With the increased importance of television advertising for films, market research has proliferated for film promotion and is utilized from the earliest preproduction stages of most film productions. Again, the theatrical trailer is but a single facet of a larger promotional network.[87] But, as Vinzenz Hediger notes, in the contemporary market, trailers are very cost-effective since they utilize approximately 4.5 percent of the advertising budget of a given film, while generating at least 20 percent of the film's box-office revenue.[88] They are also increasingly available for sustained study, as one of the most frequent components of ancillary "value-added" features that are included in DVD versions of films.

For all the changes in trailer production practice, one of the striking things about viewing a lot of trailers from throughout film history over a short period of time is the sense one gets of continuity of trailer technique in certain respects. For example, trailers are where intertitles "went" after the arrival of talkies. The interspersal of a graphic title card with a film scene was a familiar cinematic rhythm for audiences of silent films, and one that disappeared with the sound film. This silent film convention, however, helped naturalize trailers' continuation of a graphic regime that used titles to connect—and simultaneously hype—the disjointed scenes.

In early trailers, graphics resemble silent film intertitles (or at times their precursors in vaudeville placards), but titles soon come to dominate the visual impact of classical-era trailers in familiar and oft-parodied ways. And the graphic element is still evident in many contemporary trailers, where, for example, words or phrases from the title are intermittently

formed letter by letter or word by word in a bold or colorful typeface, intercut with or laid over scenes, with the entire film title then flashed as an element of the trailer's denouement. Or less frequently, a promotional "tagline" will be graphically presented. In each era of trailer production, graphics are an important aspect of rhetoric. Like the presence of a narrator (also significant to trailer rhetoric throughout the sound era), they serve to distance viewers from ordinary spectatorial involvement with the scenes presented and remind them of the film's status as a package. They also present a graphic "look" that is often consistent with other features of the film's promotional campaign or title graphics, such as the repetition of the animated snake-and-apple motif in both the credits and the trailer for *The Lady Eve* (1941), or the baby carriage image with its tagline "Pray for Rosemary's Baby," seen in both posters and the trailer for the 1968 film.

The case studies in this book break down trailer practice along the lines of the periodization I have traced here, examining those from the classical era (approximately 1927 to 1950), the transitional era (1950 to 1975) and the contemporary era (1975 to the present).[89] Over seven hundred trailers were viewed for this examination of trailer rhetoric. I used the rich and comprehensive collection of trailers at the UCLA Film and Television Archive, and at first viewed as many as possible, taking only brief notes to assess their typical characteristics.

The next step was to determine an appropriate sampling method that would both suit this book's focus on trailer *rhetoric* (beyond just a history of trailers per se), illuminating the special features of audience address that I argue make trailers a unique form of cinema, and at the same time provide adequate evidence of the *range* of typical characteristics of trailers. I first rated the main corpus of viewed trailers in two ways. I selected out trailers that clearly and interestingly demonstrated the rhetorical inscription of assumptions about the film's audience and its desires in one way or another; and I selected a group of trailers that were representative of the larger group—whether of their era's trailers in general, or of specific aspects of trailer rhetoric. My goal was to include in these smaller groups enough trailers that the entire corpus of viewed trailers was fairly represented—both by calling attention to the prevalence of interesting forms of audience address in trailers and without omitting any major typical trailer characteristics (although many anomalous ones inevitably got left out). The smaller group of about eighty trailers were viewed again and rough shot analyses were performed.[90]

The twenty-seven case studies in this book were selected to present a range of genres, story types, studios, budget and popularity levels and years within each era, while sticking to trailers for films that are fairly well known. At best, these analyses are imperfect and partial, both because they are filtered through a selection process that privileges trailers that foreground their own address to audiences in one way or another and because any selection by an individual is evidence of that individual's own speaking position. My purpose here is not so much to draw an accurate picture of the universe of sound-era trailers as to vivify for the benefit of *real* movie audiences the ways trailers' rhetorical tropes construct imaginary ones. While this selection process demonstrates my "terministic screen," or the ways in which my research is inevitably influenced by the questions I am asking of the material, I present a range of trailers that I feel can fairly stand in for the larger group in the sense of both typifying trailer rhetoric and highlighting the unique capacities for audience address that I argue make trailers qualify as a "cinema of (coming) attractions."

Theatrical trailers, central components of any film's promotional campaign, make assumptions about their audiences. Displaying the variety of these assumptions through rhetorical analysis of trailers throughout the history of Hollywood film adds to our understanding of the way narrative film is promoted, thus enhancing the use value of trailers by encouraging a more conscious critical spectatorship. Trailers, of course, are a prime site for a *less* conscious sort of critical spectatorship by virtue of their conventional function, wherein audiences are encouraged to turn their critical eye on a trailer solely for the purpose of a thumbs-up or thumbs-down (will they spend money on the film it promotes?). Popular critical spectatorship thus tends to be reduced to a *consumer* critical spectatorship by the trailer exhibition experience.

Once we are in the movie theater with our popcorn and our heightened spectatorial readiness, we often allow ourselves to be tucked into the rhetoric of "previews of coming attractions" and their appealing mininarratives in ways that haven't yet been analyzed either by media scholarship or by the literature on advertising. Increasing our knowledge of trailers' patterns of address allows us greater critical awareness of these packaged assumptions about our desires, which in turn can help clarify how our own real hopes and desires are brought into play in the contradictory experience of trailer spectatorship. Thus a critical trailer spectatorship can help accustom us to distinguishing between the two (assumptions about our desires versus real desires) as we watch other

popular media as well—particularly those corporate/commercial media texts with a stake in managing our desires. Rhetorically mapping Hollywood studios' ideas of how they broadly conceived of their audience(s) enables us to more effectively place such assigned spectatorial positions in perspective, as a historically determined industry imaginary, while potentially allowing trailers themselves to contribute to the awakening of audiences to their own role in the commodity relations of Hollywood film.