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## Praxis

### Fake and fan film trailers as incarnations of audience anticipation and desire

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[0.1] *Abstract*—In the lead-up to the release of some feature films, fake and fan trailers are created by users and uploaded to YouTube and other Web sites. These trailers demonstrate that users are literate not only in the form of the trailer itself, but also in the Hollywood system and how it markets products to audiences. Circulating in a networked environment online, these texts, which play with the form of the trailer, perform and embody users' and fans' desire to see not just the feature film but also the official trailer itself. I discuss these fake and fan trailers in relation to cinematic anticipation and describe how they navigate both spatial and temporal bounds. Using the architectural concept of the desire line, I argue that spatial frameworks can be usefully employed to consider how users navigate online spaces, media, and concepts through the form of the trailer.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Film; Film advertising; Mashup

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## 1. Introduction

[1.1] Anticipation is key to our understanding of cinema. Film trailers embody (or show our lack of) enthusiasm for the release of an upcoming feature film. The role of the trailer was originally to draw audiences back into the theater to see another film, thus providing a perpetual moviegoing audience (Kernan 2004; Johnston 2009). Buzz follows films, and films follow hype; digital spaces and tools of dissemination such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs allow this anticipation to be a visible trace of a network of audience anticipation. A

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trailer forms only part of the ways audiences perform cinematic anticipation through consumption and production. But increasingly, the trailer is used across multiple sites as an example of a film to share between friends as an embodiment of enthusiasm and anticipation. The release of a cinematic trailer by studios has also become an event; upon its release, a new trailer will be shared through multiple spheres in a culture of anticipation. Audiences have allowed the trailer to be an "early cross-media text" (Johnston 2008, 145), negotiating the trailer's existence into new media sites. Furthermore, fans and other viewers have negotiated original trailers into their own online spaces. The ease with which trailers have shifted across different media sites demonstrates audiences' willingness to view trailers, problematizing our understanding of the trailer as existing solely within advertising discourses. The presence of the trailer online represents the ways that audiences not only anticipate a film but also perform their desire to others. The trailers I consider here—trailers created by users and shared online—reflect the importance of trailers in the consumption and production of film. The fake and fan trailers I analyze demonstrate the important role that a trailer plays in the temporality of a film's promotional life and how fans and more casual consumers show, through the trailers they create, a desire to see films in a mode of anticipation and excitement long after they have been released.

[1.2] With this anticipation surrounding the release of a feature film, fake and fan trailers play into cinematic discourses of release and hype. They allow creators and consumers to perform their cinematic desire for a film, which may be focused on an actor, a popular book from which the film was adapted, or a director, for example. In some instances, the fake and fan trailers allow consumers and producers to bypass the typical path of promotion by preempting an official trailer with their own. I discuss the various ways in which fake and fan trailers, as performances of cinematic and digital literacy, play with the notions of anticipation, promotion, and hype. Using two case studies—fake trailers for *The Social Network*, (2010) and fan trailers for *Twilight* (2008)—I will present the ways in which trailers on YouTube and other online spaces have formed networks of literacy and anticipation in the lead-up to the release of a feature film. Introducing the concept of the desire line, I will use spatial frameworks to discuss the ways in which both individual and mass desire play out in online spaces through the form of the trailer. The desire line will be used as a frame of reference to show how the fan trailers for *Twilight* and the fake trailers for *The Social Network* bypass

the typical path of film promotion and incite others, both spatially and temporally, to create their own trailers.

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## 2. Defining trailers

[2.1] There is a difference between cinematic anticipation and hype, and fake and fan trailers are useful texts with which to analyze this difference. These trailers are typically created by users to be uploaded to YouTube. They can mash up footage from one or more sources to displace the narrative of a movie or to create a new movie that will never exist, such as *Brokeback to the Future*, a mashup of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Back to the Future* (1985), or *Scary Mary Poppins*. They may also use original footage, shot by their creators in order to create a fake sequel to an existing film or a parody of another film's advertising. They demonstrate a high degree of filmic literacy and knowledge of both the source texts and the ways in which these texts are sold, as well as of the form of the trailer. Fake and fan trailers can be grouped into two broad technical categories: recut trailers and original-footage trailers.

[2.2] Recut trailers take source footage from one or more texts and recut it, either to displace the film's original genre or to create a new film that will never exist. Their name refers to the use of the word *recut* to describe the editing of cinematic texts. An example of a recut trailer is Neochosen's "The Shining Recut" (video 1). I will discuss recut trailers created in the lead-up to the release of *Twilight* and its official trailer.

**Video 1.** *"The Shining Recut," by Neochosen, 2006.*

[2.3] Original-footage trailers, on the other hand, are trailers that use footage that is shot specifically for use in them. They typically parody an existing film or create a spin-off or sequel. An example of an original-footage trailer is

"Minesweeper—The Movie," a 2007 vid by CollegeHumor available on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHY8NKj3RKs>). I will discuss original-footage trailers in relation to the release of *The Social Network*.

[2.4] Fake and fan trailers may each use both recut and original footage. Fake trailers create a film that will never exist and often include footage shot specifically for the trailer. Fan trailers are made for actual movies, use original footage less often, and evoke fan traditions of vidding. Such traditions often involve uncovering a slash story line, giving a trailer a new soundtrack, or, as I will show, creating trailers for a film before the official trailer has been disseminated to demonstrate the fans' anticipation for the film.

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### 3. Defining anticipation

[3.1] The concept of anticipation that I am employing here is not based on one particular study but rather reflects the general use of the word: "I am looking forward to the film coming out; I can't wait for the film to come out." Anticipation is a concept that has not been studied in great detail in relation to cinematic desire and how audiences crave and create texts. I use it in two ways: to refer to how an audience looks forward to a film and actively engages with it prior to seeing it, and to refer to how an audience can predict the content, style, or appearance of the film, and feel familiar with it prior to having seen it. Both of these types of anticipation are present in the case studies I discuss.

[3.2] Closely related to the concept of anticipation—and more strongly aligned with cinema—is that of hype. Gray's study of hype for television shows focuses on the role of the advertisement in creating desire for the show. He argues that "hype works best by completely surrounding a text with ads, the goals being not only that as many people as possible will hear about a text, but that they will hear about it from industry-created hype" (2008, 33).

[3.3] Two ideas in this passage are important here. First, hype surrounds a text, rather than inhabiting it or existing separately from it. Here, Gray evokes a networked text that hype both takes from and feeds into in a type of feedback loop. Film trailers could be said to relate to a feature film in the same way. Similarly, the unofficial trailers I discuss here surround both the official trailer and the feature film or films they evoke. Second, Gray proposes that the goal of hype and advertising is to allow as many people as possible to hear about a text, while specifying that the hype comes from industry-related sources. The trailers I discuss here do not necessarily reflect either industry intentions to build hype or

fan practices. Fans, casual watchers, and people who dislike a film are all able to interact with the hype for it through production and consumption practices. They may simultaneously build hype for a film and deride it, and build hype for a film while portraying another that cannot exist and cannot be advertised but can be anticipated.

[3.4] Gray argues that "hype aims to be the first word on any text, so that it creates excitement, working to create frames through which we can make sense of the text before even consuming it" (2008, 34). This is similar to arguments made by Burgin, who claims that film promotion allows a film to "spill its contents into the stream of everyday life" (2004, 14), resulting in a potential viewer being familiar with a film before having seen it. Similarly, Kernan outlines how film trailers can make viewers "nostalgic" for a film that they have not yet seen (2004, 208). Nostalgia for a film that a viewer has not yet seen not only demonstrates familiarity with a film, but also highlights how hype is traditionally understood as being created by studios in order to build anticipation—the trailers allow the audience to enter the world of the film before they consume the feature, allowing them both to look forward to the film and to anticipate its contents. I use anticipation to demonstrate the ways in which audiences, as producers, consumers, and sometimes fans, build, enact, and perform their interest in a feature film or trailer.

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#### 4. Anticipation and the desire line

[4.1] A "desire line" or "desire path" is a path that deviates from the paved or prescribed path (Tiessen 2007). A desire line can be created for a number of reasons: it may be more direct or more scenic, or it may even be arbitrary. The desire line is determined as much by the individual as it is by mass desire; once one person creates the path, other people are likely to take it, and the path is more likely to become an obvious deviation in the landscape.



**Figure 1.** *Desire line.* Author's own, Sweden, 2010. [[View larger image.](#)]

[4.2] The desire line can be used as a framework to analyze the meaning, purpose, and popularity of these trailers. If we take a paved path as a metaphor for the typical path of promotion for a feature film, the desire line can be seen as the ways in which users of the space between a feature, a cinema, and promotional texts wish to perform and enact their desires. One of these ways can be the fake or fan trailer. In this instance, sometimes there is no end product, no feature film that can be obtained and consumed, as is the case with fake trailers. The end point of a fake trailer's desire line is not to bypass or speed up the typical path of film promotion. Instead, as there is no actual film, fake trailers suggest films that can never exist. Their creators wish only to revel in anticipation of what can never be obtained.

[4.3] According to Carl Myhill, the term *desire line* "originates from the field of urban planning and has been around for almost a hundred years." Myhill claims that desire lines "are an ultimate expression of human desire or natural purpose" and have been used in urban planning. For example, official paths across New York's Central Park were not laid down until individuals had been allowed to walk freely through it, and the official paths followed their desire lines (2004, 293).

[4.4] Myhill discusses the role of desire lines in understanding potential in design. Tiessen takes the concept of desire lines outside of the bounds of design or architecture, and instead discusses how they "compel...us to follow

particular trajectories as we go about our everyday lives" (2007, ¶1). He argues,

[4.5] Conventionally desire lines are defined by architects and urban planners as those trampled-down footpaths that deviate from official (i.e. pre-planned and paved) directional imperatives. These pathways of desire—physically inscribed on the earth due to the passage of people—cut across the fields of university campuses, they carve up the urban grid, they exceed the boundaries of the sidewalk; in so doing desire lines express the excess that premeditated constructions cannot foresee or contain. Frequently, desire lines are regarded as "eye-sores" by city planners—as "scars upon the landscape"; however, they can also be thought of as solutions to the problem of how to efficiently and pleasurably respond to and navigate the terrain that constitutes our sensorially mediated world. (2007, ¶1)

[4.6] The desire line is an important indication of not only efficiency and pleasure, but also play. It indicates anticipation of a path's end point. The desire lines that involve the spilling of people outside the bounds of the paved path to create scars on the landscape are interesting because they also indicate the role that pleasure, popularity, and use play in everyday environments and actions.

[4.7] Tiessen suggests that desire lines not only indicate human desire, or "merely a material expression of some aspect of the human imagination," but that they are

[4.8] the product of an earth—a natural environment—that desires us, an earth that beckons to us and that offers to us new pathways and potential circuits that expand the interconnected network—the interdependent relationship—between us and itself. To trace a desire line, then, is to respond to an invitation, to accept that a particular trajectory has been revealed. (2007, ¶2)

[4.9] Thus, desire lines reflect the "give and take that already exists between people and their environment" (Tiessen 2007, ¶2). The unique positioning of individuals between their potential as consumers of cinema and their potential as producers of cinematic texts against the space of the cinema can be related to the give and take between the individual and environment that Tiessen discusses. They give by engaging with studio-produced hype

and studio-endorsed trailers, and they take by using those elements to create new paths of desire. Trailers do not merely sell cinema to an audience; they are also a space for audiences to enact and perform their desire and anticipation for, and also their rejection of, cinematic modes of technology, narrative, and star appeal. A desire line also is a performance of anticipation: an anticipation of what is to come, and an anticipation of time and space, that come from familiarity with environments.

[4.10] The spatial environment of the cinema and the cinematic is important to consider here. Not only has the space of the cinema traditionally dictated our social and technological understanding of the cinematic, but cinema itself has spilled outside the walls of the theater and is an integral part of urban life. As film promotion is part of the everyday, the cinematic is integrated with the city. As trailers and films moved into the domestic sphere through VHS and television, they became part of our understanding of home cinema. The entry of the trailer into online spaces, and thus its availability for digital manipulation by amateurs, also points to the ways in which we integrate the cinematic into new spaces. This integration is driven not only by technology, but also by consumers and their desires. The typical path of film promotion invites play and pleasure; the methods of dissemination of promotional texts demonstrate and reflect use; and the technological capabilities that online spaces and services provide invite play with modes of anticipation and promotion.

[4.11] The desire line indicates the alteration of our environments by usage and desire. Just as a user who creates a trailer may bypass a paved path of promotion dictated by the studio, so too can a desire line show us the ways that people use space, where they congregate and where they deviate from the expected. The desire line also indicates anticipation or imagination of the content of a space (in order to create a shortcut, for example). We interact with the cinematic space by using a similar imagination. Jonathan Gray argues, "We may in time resist this, by not 'judging the book by its cover' or not 'believing the hype,' but first the cover and the hype tell us what to expect, fashion our excitement and/or apprehension, and begin to tell us what a text is all about, calling for our identification with and interpretation of that text before we have even seemingly arrived at the text" (2008, 34).

[4.12] Gray's discussion of the way that promotional materials attempt to direct our meaning-making processes can be related both to the trailer and to the concept of the desire line. Gray suggests that we may resist the meanings



proposed by promotional materials, but the fake and fan trailers indicate that those meanings can be appropriated, played with, and subverted. Just as, spatially, the desire line shows that prescriptions of meaning and experience can be subverted, the trailers I discuss also show subversion, even if it is slight. Studios wish to direct audiences' excitement, but audiences are also capable of directing and marking their own desire and anticipation.

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## 5. Analyzing networks of anticipation

[5.1] I next present two case studies through which to discuss the role of anticipation in fake and fan trailers. I analyze the trailers' connection to the release of feature films and the space of the cinema in relation to the framework of the desire line and shifting temporality. Furthermore, I draw upon modes of cinematic anticipation that demonstrate how these trailers belong not just to fans, but also to antifans (those who actively engage in derision of the text), nonfans, and casual consumers. By playing with the genres of film promotion, the fake and fan trailers become performances of knowledge of and intimacy with the Hollywood system. They also evidence a desire to share this knowledge. Capitalizing on the ways in which people seek out trailers, their makers use tags and YouTube's ability to suggest related videos to users to rapidly create a network of knowledge and capital surrounding the original trailer (which itself may not even have been released yet, as was the case with *Twilight*). Fake and fan trailers thus promote what I call a network of literacy. YouTube's "related video" function also creates an instant community; a line can be traced from one fake or fan trailer to others, as well as to the films and trailers they evoke. Each fake or fan trailer is thus situated in the context of others, to which it is linked not only by the films they all invoke but also by the practices by which they are made: recutting or using original footage.

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## 6. Fidelity and temporality in *Twilight* fan trailers

[6.1] Once the cast of *Twilight* was announced, a number of users on YouTube created trailers, on the basis of their knowledge of the book, that sought to mimic what the eventual official trailer might look like. Collating and editing footage from press spots, advertisements, and other films that the cast had appeared in, and so forth, they employed features of the trailer form, such as nondiegetic sound and text, in order to create an appropriate atmosphere for *Twilight*. Through these trailers, they attempted to embody

how they viewed the *Twilight* narrative world, and fans of that world were able to exhibit their knowledge of it in their shared enjoyment of the trailers. Makers of the trailers used music, title text, and other elements to situate the world of *Twilight* within a mode of anticipation. Their anticipation can be seen both in their looking forward to the release of the official trailer and the film itself and in their confidence, based on their intimate knowledge of the books, about what the trailer would look like. However, the producers of these fan trailers weren't striving for fidelity to the eventual feature film itself. They were concerned with performing their anticipation for it, and with being able to anticipate *Twilight* in cinematic form after anticipating it through the *Twilight* books.

**Video 2.** "*Fan Made Twilight Trailer*," Linzellovestwilight, 2007.

[6.2] Like many fan texts, these trailers were ways their creators performed their status as fans to the community of fans, who would discover the fan trailers as their own anticipation for the feature film spurred them to search for the official trailer. These trailers also provided a space for commentary among fans, showing how anticipation gathers momentum when shared among like-minded people.

[6.3] Kernan argues that

[6.4] as nostalgic texts that paradoxically appeal to audiences' idealized memories of films they haven't seen yet, [trailers] attract audiences not only to themselves (as attractions), nor even only to the attractions within the individual films they promote, but to an ever renewed and renewable desire for cinematic attraction per se. Like magnets, they attract (or occasionally, repel) in an attempt to draw bodies to a center, assembling their assumed audiences in a suspended state of present-tense

readiness for a future that is always deferred.  
(2004, 208)

[6.5] The fan trailers for *Twilight* demonstrate that audiences have memories of films they have not yet seen, and that these memories are attractions in themselves. Kernan's proposal that trailers draw bodies to a center with a "readiness for a future that is always deferred" does not appear to be as true of fan *Twilight* trailers as it is of other recut trailers that create a film that will never exist. However, *Twilight* and other feature films for which fan trailers are made do not and cannot exist as the fan trailers present them.

[6.6] The success of some trailers that build or work with anticipation is dependent on the temporal bounds of the way the trailer is watched: as a route between a point A and a point B in a path. The paradoxical nature of this anticipation ensures that much of the cultural capital of the *Twilight* fan trailers is short lived; once the real trailer is released, the fan trailers become antiquated and criticized, although they continue to exist, archived on YouTube. They no longer fit on the typical film promotion path because they no longer promote a forthcoming film, and fans can now compare them both to the official trailer and to the feature film itself. Once the official trailer and the film have been released, comments on fan trailers created earlier tend to deride the lack of knowledge and skills exhibited by their creators. The makers of these trailers often annotate their videos to show that they are aware that their creations are not faithful to the end product but are prescribed and encoded in a particular mode of anticipation. These trailers rely upon certain temporal conditions in order to make meaning for some fans or even for casual viewers.



**Figure 2.** Annotation on *Twilight* movie trailer, *singingupagain*, 2008. [[View larger image.](#)]

[6.7] Categorization of uploaded videos is encouraged by YouTube's architecture, and properly categorizing a video increases its likelihood of attracting viewers. *Twilight* fans tagged their videos in a variety of ways, hoping to reach their intended audience but also to provide caveats to their viewers, encouraging them to encode the video within a specific temporal boundary. Video titles tended not to use the

word *fan*; instead, most titles signaled a concern with fidelity by calling the video a "*Twilight* trailer." Most commonly, the video's description, and sometimes its annotations, alerted the viewer that the video was fan made. For some of these trailers, such a note was unnecessary at the time of their release because there was no official trailer. These annotations and descriptions have been added in response to critiques of the inaccuracy of the videos, such as the following comment left in 2010 on a *Twilight* fan trailer from 2008:

[6.8] Uhh...I hate to rain on your parade, but it sucks! I mean, wtf is going on?!?!?! Nothing is even remotely like the movies, the actors don't look alike, etc, etc, etc—I could go on FOREVER!

[6.9] This comment is symptomatic of comments I have observed on *Twilight* fan trailers since 2009. They function both as critiques of the techniques used by the creator and as insults to their fannishness; by pointing out inaccuracies, the commenters assert themselves as more intimate with the text, and thus more capable of being a fan. People who are familiar with the practices of fan trailers and fan vids generally leave comments complimenting or debating creative choices in the video (generally in an amicable way), or discussing the types of software used to recut and splice the source footage.

[6.10] The *Twilight* trailers often formed part of a competition started by a YouTube user. These competitions embody the one-upmanship that is often visible in fan trailers. They are similar to the circumstances that generate a desire line, where one person taking a path can incite others to do the same, creating a scar on the landscape as a result of use and desire. While running a competition is an obvious call to arms, summoning other users, as a fan community, to create texts, the spatial elements of YouTube also allow others who are not part of that community to be involved in this type of creativity. Using the metaphor of the desire line, we can say that these consumers follow the path created by others, deviating from the paved or promoted path, and engage in the modes of play and deviation as others have before them. While following that path, the creators of trailers reference the original path but exist on a different one, engaging with each other in a shared narrative and temporal space.

[6.11] The competitiveness of these trailers also indicates the media literacy involved in their creation and dissemination; knowing who the cast members are is integral to understanding the trailers, and the comments on them become a place where users can share information about actors who have been cast and debate their merits, offer

alternative casting suggestions, and describe how they pictured the *Twilight* characters while reading the books. Such conversations, then, not only are about fidelity but also acknowledge the differences in aesthetic interpretation among fans, while still subjecting those interpretations to taste judgments.

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## 7. Social networks, speed, and literacy

[7.1] In 2010, a trailer appeared for the widely anticipated "Facebook movie," written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by David Fincher, which chronicled the life of Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg. Its teasers (shorter versions of trailers that often use only a small amount of footage—if any—from the feature) and trailers presented very different versions of what *The Social Network* would look like and be about; the teasers did not include live-action footage and presented *The Social Network* as a film embedded in Facebook's architecture and history, whereas the trailer introduced live action, depicting the film as a sprawling epic retelling one man's rise to success.

**Video 3.** "*Social Network—In Theaters 10/1/2010*," Sony Pictures, 2010.