

Becoming-Film: A Brief Poetics of Trailers
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INTRODUCTION

“Where they react at all, it no longer makes any difference whether it is to Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony or to a bikini.”

-Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening”

In its present form, this essay can safely be considered unfinished. There are many concerns or reservations I have with talking about movie trailers that have not been given time to fully mature. For example, the task of translating a trailer into prose can produce either indulgent or expressive results. My attempts may have tended toward the former. The concept of the dissemination of trailers and trailer form is one that still eludes me. In Section III, I evoke theories of passive reception when faced with the problem of narrative summaries that spread like pop songs—as Adorno says, you can never hear them for the first time. Walter Benjamin formulates a theory of “tactile appropriation” through an architectural analogy. In various essays, Susan Sontag advocates “embodied intelligence” and a “style of knowing something” through invocations of eroticism. I on the other hand am not yet sure how to theorize this transmission. I have merely felt it.

This essay is a product of my fascination with the aesthetics of popular media “texts.” It comes from often witnessing friends have in simultaneous operation a television, stereo, and web browser in the same room and wondering what they hear, how they see. It is composed with only a novice’s acquaintance with the formal traditions of continental philosophy, cultural studies, and film theory proper. As such, it is a very particular kind of essay. But perhaps I can take heart in the example provided by its object of study. Rather than defining their objects, movie trailers deal in enigmas. They hint at and evoke, they present successive glimpses that begin to bleed into one another, but they never give away too much. Maybe at the points where

the different formulations of this essay seem to blend, purely suggest, or deteriorate altogether, it is just enough.

I choose movie trailers as my focus because of their relative stability as a textual corpus. I choose contemporary trailers partly because of their widespread availability in numerous formats and versions, and partly because I feel that this access is in itself significant. The first section of the essay sets in motion some of the defining terms of movie trailer form that animate later discussions of various tropes or methods of construction. Sections II through IV are a cataloguing of three characteristics of contemporary movie trailers: grid construction (the rapid moments of split second editing and soundbytes), background music (and images), and gap frames (the black space frequently placed in between shots). Each section contains several examples from trailers released in the past three years that highlight these features.¹ Though there are more tropes brought up throughout the essay that cut across the main divisions I make here, these three clusters of trailer commonalities say the most to me about what the form can do. Other, minor themes include the significance of studio logos, passages of key signature-establishing preface, dramaturgy or the construction of atomized narrative, and the function of gestalt forms. The three main sections will periodically return to these themes or tighten their focus on them, but at the moment, that is the only treatment I can offer. The aim of this essay is to give presence to what I can characterize as nothing other than a nagging gut instinct on the way media function in everyday life. The trailer, a miraculous vernacular, is expressive of potential and power in the circulation of new media.

¹ The predominance of action/thriller/drama films over comedy in this survey as well as in every other critical work on movie trailers that I have encountered is to be noted. Of the five main readings of trailers in Hediger's book on trailers, zero are comedies, and only three of the twenty seven in Kernan's. This may be due to the fact that trailers for comedies tend to parody the conventions of the trailer itself, using pompous voiceover and self-important tone for trivial subjects. Perhaps what is gleaned from this self-referential nature is too obvious for any interesting criticism to come out of it. Or perhaps the marketing demanded of the comedy genre—to showcase a procession of the film's best jokes and gags—is too rigid, and allows for little or no innovation within the form of the trailer itself. Perhaps trailers for comedy films are simply not as interesting as those for action/thriller/drama.

I. ATOMS AND ILLUSIONS: The Pull of the Absent Whole

The one fundamental trait that solidifies the movie trailer as a form lies in the necessity of deflection. The logic of selling a film establishes a teleology that overrides every other compositional concern: at every moment, the trailer must point to an object outside itself. Each constituent atom—whether a single sound effect, an image, a line of voiceover, or a graphic intertitle—traces an identical path from the trailer towards a notion of an object construed as both absent and whole. While artificial limitations construct the external contours of trailer form (an MPAA-imposed two and a half minute limit, the preceding green or red band that announce the trailer as suitable for all or restricted audiences, the frame of studio logos and credit block), the internal structure of the movie trailer is shaped by the fact that its constituent elements are selectively collected under the sign of a unity located elsewhere. In examining the various ways that trailers organize sound and image within this logic of deflection, strategies of projection and forecasting become apparent. In its diverse variations, trailer form constructs hypotheses about possible filmic worlds through ideologies of excellence and permanence. What follows is an explication of the three terms in this equation: the way the advertised film is conceptualized in the trailer as an absent whole, trailer form and the tidal forces that warp it, and the hypotheses produced by the conjunction of the two.

The Absent Whole

Before its advertising campaign even begins, an upcoming, unseen, and often un-shot film circulates through various media: trade publications, celebrity magazines, entertainment-television programming, message boards, fan sites, and word of mouth. The film in its most infantile state is already disseminated as buzz. This manifold existence is given singular

expression for the first time through the trailer. There have been only a handful of studies done on exactly how films can be so accurately expressed in such radically truncated form.² Readings of the way the trailer represents the coming attraction fall into two categories: codification and reconstruction. Vinzenz Hediger argues that contemporary trailers loosely take the form of a canonical, three-act suspense plot structure that breaks off with a cliffhanger by suspending the resolution (32). In this model, the expression of the advertised film comes through in the act of plugging it in to a conditioned, given framework, glimpsed through relative posturings of familiarity and novelty. In the second model, proposed by Lisa Kernan, the spectator literally reconstructs half-second shots and sound clips into an imagined, full-length film. “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.”³ Here, the trailer itself is the given framework, its interstices filled in by a chaotic, infinite set of meaning borne out of subjective desire.

Trailer as code and inspiration, absent whole as negotiation and dream—both models point to an assumption that is integral to the operation of trailer form, namely that “the film promises to be the solution to the riddle presented by the trailer” (Hediger 25). With every single iteration, the movie trailer purports the outside existence of a *unified* whole in the form of a full-length film. The catalyst for the inner workings of the trailer itself is in this implicit privileging

² For a comprehensive list of the very small body of critical work done on trailers, see Kernan (2004), p. 233. The majority of these seven articles are from the early 80s.

³ Kernan, p. 13. I would argue that this ‘underdeterminacy’ seems detrimental to the trailer’s effectiveness as advertisement. See Toumarkine “Tantalizing Trailers” and Sella “The 150-Second Sell” for a description of the attention that trailer houses put into split seconds. Studios hire between two and five ‘vendors’ to create trailers for a specific film and either pick the result closest to their goals or create a blend of two or more. Each trailer house creates over 100 versions and each sound and image is painstakingly selected to appeal directly to a certain demographic or quadrant. Studios can spend up to \$1 million on the production of a single trailer, and the trailer is solely responsible for 35% of any given film’s revenue.

of the film as a whole that promises fulfillment, and the distancing of the experience of watching that film as absent from the immediate materials presented by the trailer. The theatrical trailer for *Smokin' Aces* (Joe Carnahan 2007) contains an unusually stark delineation of this absent whole, and is a good example of the ways in which such an object is assumed. It promotes the apartness of the advertised filmic object with what essentially functions as a monologue threaded through various channels and prominently featured as the sovereign address of the trailer. Transitioning between voice-off, diegetic narration, and intertitles, this speech serves as a sort of preface to the film. It is both an epic catalogue of characters and a rallying cry to come and witness a massive spectacle. The trailer begins:

Here's the deal / *(Pause)* / I want Israel dead / Buddy Israel? / *(Pause)* / What's the rate? /
 One million bucks / These guys want him bad / Come on out here! Mr. Buddy Israel! /
 He's in Lake Tahoe at the penthouse level of the Nomad Hotel and Casino / So what's
 the time frame? / We have maybe a day / SEVEN HITMEN / We've got to get to Israel
 before they do / THEY'RE RUTHLESS / You tryin' to shoot a jumbo jet out the sky? /
 THEY'RE DEGENERATE / THEY'RE PSYCHOTIC / THEY'RE RELENTLESS /
 MAY THE BEST HITMAN WIN

The trailer presents a collection of volatile dimensions: the characters, the place, the target, the stakes, and the impossible odds. And it renders the full-length film the site of these elements' fullest expression. It shows the film as the only possible way to have them all combine and let rip. But this unified film is deferred when the trailer continues,

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF **NARC** / THIS JANUARY... / IN ONE PLACE... / AT
 ONE TIME... / ON ONE FLOOR... / ALL HELL IS BREAKING LOOSE. / You with
 me baby? / **COMING SOON**

These elements deflect the focus away from the materials of the trailer itself and into a future experience of the whole. The film seductively looms, but always just beyond the horizon. This is the necessary gesture of the trailer—to evoke the contours of an unknown and distant object through atomized samples of that object. The samples must draw as little attention to themselves as possible in order for the impression of the advertised film to be as clear and unified as possible. The absent whole exists like an object in orbit around the trailer, exerting tidal pressures that warp its materials in different ways. The exigencies of a process that transforms buzz into an independent and hypothetical object come to dictate the form the trailer is to take.

Trailer Form

Given both the isolated nature of its individual parts and emphasis on the without, the trailer exhibits an odd model of construction next to the conventional methods for organizing parts and wholes, while in some way or another having echoes of each.

<u>Whole</u>	<u>Part</u>
Sequence	Hierarchical
Set	Dynamic
Synecdochical	Representative
(Gestalt)	
Illusory	Atom

In the first model, the parts are arranged in a hierarchical order, each building successively upon the other until a view of the whole is achieved at the top. In the second, the arrangement of parts is level and the subject is free to order and shift the parts. As the perception of the parts changes in parallax, the whole is altered as well. In the third model, the evocation of a single part stands

in for the expression of the entire system and in the fourth, there is of course no distinction between part and whole, but complete unity of form.

Trailer form, it seems, learns from the model of the set in that its constituent atoms are synthesized in malleable hierarchies. Unlike narrative film, in which images and sounds are specifically arranged according to the requirements of spatial and temporal continuity, trailers thrive off of a striking amount of plasticity in terms of spatiality and temporality.⁴ Excerpts from disparate spaces and times are extracted from the narrative arc of the advertised film and given a new order in the trailer. However, each part of the trailer does not acquire its significance by what is included (as it does in the set), but through a deflection into the advertised film by all of its various components. While in the set we collate and search for relationships among the parts, the trailer's constituent atoms always throw our gaze outward into projections of new arrangements and foreign parts.

Trailers, as well as other advertising media such as posters and print campaigns, can be seen to contain qualities of synecdoche in their usage of graphic themes. Narrative images such as Wolverine's three adamantine claws or the slashes left by them in the X-Men series of films distill the scope of an entire film (not to mention series or genre) into a single signifying image.⁵ Other examples of this are the two abstracted black rectangles in *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006), the intertitles scrolling through Arabic, Roman, and Hebrew characters in *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) and the use of the color yellow in *Layer Cake* (Matthew

⁴ See Hediger, pp. 40-41 and p. 235. While Hediger points out that spatial and temporal continuity is removed from movie trailers, he quickly argues that it is replaced by other forms of continuity: that of soundtrack, the "canonical suspense plot," and, somewhat like Kernan, by imaginary plot connections made by the viewer between disparate bits of narrative information.

⁵ See Hediger pp. 11-14 for a brief discussion of the use of a green glowing egg in the promotional campaign for *Alien* (TCF 1979).

Vaughn, 2004). But this model of synecdoche is hardly expressive of the total relationship between trailer form and advertised film.

Trailer form learns from the model of gestalt in that the most explicit internal relationship amongst its parts consists of a singular path towards a knowledge of and intrigue in the absent whole. Repeated motives in the form of intertitles, gap frames, sounds, and graphic typefaces carve out this unified path for each one of the disparate images and sounds in the trailer. In the example of *Smokin' Aces* above, intertitle phrasing draws each atom back to the single repeated theme of oh so many hitmen at once: “they’re ruthless / they’re degenerate / in one place / on one floor / at the same time...” Such elements bend each atom to the absent whole’s selfsame will and create a sheer redundancy of expression throughout. But, unlike gestalt, the whole of the movie trailer is presented as wholly removed from the parts that serve to represent it. While the relationship among its parts would seem to suggest the gestalt model of irreversible amalgamation, the relationship of these parts to whole is closer to telegraphic shorthand.

What we have then is a collection of disparate parts whose conversation with an illusory film covers over the conversation taking place between the parts themselves. Looking from the inside out, these parts auratically construct the whole through degrees of conjecture, dense signs, redundancy and hyperbole. But it is these suggestive riddles that initiate a distinct compositional logic so that in the friction between atoms and illusions, portents and schemata erupt.

Trailer Theory

The trailer is a simulation of full length filmic experience. However, it is a volatile simulation, destabilized by an illusory referent that coats and vectors the immediate materials of expression. The absent whole co-opts pieces of excerpted narrative and diegetic space so that each atom lays

down an impression of a film's complete architecture. But these glimpsed dimensions of story, character, style, and genre space are defined on a single plane. Every atom, regardless of its sensory medium or semantic content, is deflected towards and expressed through the singularly absent whole. The reason that movie trailers are so breathtakingly exciting rather than merely repetitious or merely propagandistic is that they render this assimilation expressive. Each strategy for organizing atomized information within a system of deflection produces a different type of hypothesis about possible filmic worlds. Methods of construction such as interlaced grids of simulated narrative and performative attractions, ethereal productions of mood and musical atmosphere, and displays of information dissolution into a trailer-specific flow render extracted filmic materials pregnant with amorphous projections. The path from the atom to the illusory promise of wholeness, fulfillment, and totalizing expectation is a dynamic negotiation of forms of experimentation, states of excitement, and styles of assimilation. To examine the ways that trailers organize information within the pressure exerted by the absent whole is to read the kinds of theory the trailer playfully displays.

II. THE GRID: Systemic and Atomic Vectors

Several terms and analogues have been applied to trailer form in order to position it within or distance it from categories of montage. The industry term for the narrative and temporal plasticity that trailers employ in order to communicate a large amount of information in a very short space is 'grid' (Hediger 40, Kernan 13)—in other words, those rhythmic and high intensity moments of split-second cuts, dialogue collage, and dense sound effects. Trailer producers speak of the grid mostly as an exigency of compression and a convenient way to either reach a wide demographic swath or deepen the appeal to any one single quadrant. Vinzenz Hediger on the

other hand, proposes that trailer form be termed “polyphonic montage.” He likens the ability of the trailer to shift its sovereign level of address between different informational channels to musical polyphony—the term in music theory for a composition that contains a non-hierarchical interplay of multiple voices (41-43). In this sense, the trailer can be seen as a bastion of structural listening in popular culture. The spectator or ‘aurator’ follows a melody line in terms of its dialectical relationship to the voices supporting it, reading the entire system through to its logical conclusion. However, the analogy does have its limits, the main difference lying in the fact that in the trailer the materials precede the form. Not only does this synthetic construction present a problem when attempting to line up any one level of address, it also demands a method for dissolving the individual identities of each sound or image (which as excerpt naturally merit a resistance to this) into a single, unified flow of information or mode of address. An analysis of grid form must take into account the function of systemic and atomic motives that allow such a synthesis.

Narrative Grid

Moments of grid can be classified into two groups: narrative and ludic. In order for grid to sustain narrative presentation, it must construct a framework of the advertised film by bridging disparate excerpts into some semblance of meaning. Narrative grid requires atoms to gesture to each other in certain ways. In examining these contrapuntal relationships between atoms, I would like to evoke the concept of the vector. While writers such as Paul Virilio and McKenzie Wark use the term ‘vector’ in talking about the paths within (news) media along which information, bombs, bodies, objects, and subjects can travel, I want to confine the connotations of the term (at least for this section) to its geometrical definition. In geometry, a vector has

defined values of magnitude and direction, but no fixed position on a plane. In this sense, we can think of the set values carved out within a dynamic interplay of excerpted spaces and temporalities as vectors. The plastic arrangement of disparate atoms in narrative grid is designed to exploit vectors such as story, genre appeal, sex appeal—in other words, “selling points” aimed at the heart of very specific demographic markets. In the simplest sense, an atom is vectored if it points toward another within the trailer and endows it with information. In another, an atom is vectored when it suggests a very specific aspect of the absent whole. Narrative grid consists of a matrix of systemic vectors that point not only to the substructure that relates constituent atoms, but also to the superstructure relating trailer to absent whole.

The American version of the full-length theatrical trailer for *Layer Cake* can be neatly divided into two acts, the first made up of narrative grid, the second, ludic grid. The first establishes genre, character, setting, and very ambiguous story. In order to view the arrangement of each element at the atomic level more clearly, a linear representation seems necessary. I have mapped out the trailer into a chart form, with each column representing a specific informational channel (image, music, lyrics, voiceover, dialogue, intertitles, and sound effects) and each row representing a discrete unit of time. In this case, because the image is the most frequently shifting temporal interval, the horizontal units are divided in terms of cuts.

The trailer begins with a prefatory section that establishes the ‘key-signature’ of the film through the presence of two recognizable actors, Colm Meaney and Daniel Craig, and an edgy establishment of genre:

	Image	Music	Lyrics	Voiceover	Dialogue	Intertitle	Sound
1.	Shot from inside a freezer on three men. X looks away in disgust.				“Oh!”		Eerie overtone effect, sound of icebox opening.
2.						<i>Blue Frame:</i> Sony Pictures Classics	whooshing
3.	Freezer shot				“You’re not in there because I like you.”		

In order to get at the grammar of this seven-second section, we must step back and compare it to that of the full-length film, for the trailer’s re-presentation of the film’s grammar is significantly doctored and enhanced. In the film, this immediate scene is originally preceded by X (the film’s unnamed protagonist) asking Gene where the Duke is. We then get a flashback of the Duke’s (admittedly comical) murder, and then a cut to the shot inside the freezer looking up as the door opens horizontally to the ground on Mortie, Gene, and X. The image of the opening freezer is appropriately accompanied by the sound of crackling frost.⁶ X shouts in disgust, and Gene says, “That’s where playing at being a gangster gets you.” Then a pause, and “You’re not in there because I like you.” The trailer’s alterations are several. It begins with the opening of the freezer rather than the causes leading up to this grisly death. On top of the original frosty sound effect, the trailer layers a low, A[#] tone that sounds briefly, is quickly subsumed by a descending, high-pitched overtone effect (familiar to anyone who has seen a horror movie—like a screeching on glass), and after which the low tone raises slightly upwards, not quite a half-step.⁷ Gene’s initial line is then cut out, replaced by the blue Sony Pictures Classics studio logo. This logo is

⁶ This audiovisual connection is defined by Michel Chion as “added value,” or the degree to which a sound enriches a given image and gives the illusion of natural complicity or synchronicity between the two.

⁷ The sound itself is in no way as several or gradual as this description seems. It happens as a unified utterance.

joined by a loud whooshing sound, as if the freezer is now releasing air pressure. This sound is not present in the film. Then, sound clears out altogether for Gene to deliver his punch line to X.

This is not a mere edit or augmentation of the original but a complex evocation of genre space. Several factors are at work here. First, the fact that the camera's viewpoint is that of the object in the freezer is in itself horrific; as the three men look down with disgust, this angle puts the spectators into the position of the abject. While in the film the flashback makes it clear that this object is the body of the Duke, there is no such narrative information readily available to the trailer. Instead, the eerie overtone/low A[#] sound (along with X's visible disgust) is vectored toward this unseen object in the freezer, and suggests that it is something terribly unimaginable inside (rather than just plain food). This slight addition of sound stands in for an entire narrative subplot, radically condensing it into a single semantic cue. The cue in turn is then vectored by the studio logo that splits the excerpt from the full film in half. On one level, the logo stands in like a pause before the punch line to a joke. And on another, as this blue frame reading "Sony Pictures Classics" is reified through a concurrent hissing sound, it sets up a deflection for these three small bits of information—the angle, the sound, the reaction—away from the immediate filmic materials of the trailer and into the very first manifestation of the absent whole. This studio logo points toward an outside system of production that has created a foreign object only barely latent in the trailer. Slices of an absent whole, the angle, sound and reaction are vectors moving through this deflecting frame. It is a lens that deflects the quotation and negotiation of narrative topoi belonging to mystery or action films into *possibilities* of a future organization of generic traits. The logo triply announces itself as a part of the grammar of the joke, as a concrete part of the soundscape of the scene, and as a path on which information in the trailer will travel to a notion of the absent whole. As the scene comes back and the joke is completed ("You're not

in there because I like you”), humor complicates the previously established genre of mystery or action and suggests a new kind of absent whole. The tone of the film is so wonderfully established in this line because, while the humor alleviates some of the violence of this shot, it also confirms the worst fears inherent in it—that there is in fact a body, hacked to pieces and shoved into this freezer. This is narrative grid at its best: a complex matrix of interlaced vectors that take a mere seven seconds of isolated information completely out of context and use it to create numerous advanced hypotheses about an entire filmic world. The example of the studio logo is particularly helpful because it seems to crystallize the gestalt dynamics of systemic vectors. On the one hand, the logo is engrained in the grammatical system that organizes the trailer’s disparate atoms. And yet at the same time, it outlines the larger system that relates trailer to absent whole by deflecting the viewer’s focus away from the immediate materials of the trailer itself.

This duplicity or simultaneity of systemic vectors is the structuring principle that allows us to understand elements of character, setting, and story eventually added to the grid. Consider the sequence mapped out in **Figure 1**. Splayed out in such a fashion, the trailer is almost dizzying to piece through. As the grid becomes noticeably more dense, any semblance of continuity is done away with. Multiple spaces and times are extracted from the film and collide at a high rate of speed, with each shot averaging a mere one and a half seconds. In many instances, several linguistic modes of communication operate at once. One can imagine image and sound, image and music, image and dialogue, and perhaps even sound and music in simultaneous operation. But concurrent units of linguistic information seem to muddy one another in moments such as shot 22, in which the volume of the Duran Duran song is raised in the mix just as the lyrics come in. The words, “But I won’t...” play overtop of the written

Fig. 1—*Layer Cake* (2004), full-length theatrical trailer

	Image	Music	Lyrics	Voiceover	Dialogue	Intertitle	Sound
21.	X walking quickly out of a door marked 'private,' holding a briefcase.	Duran Duran, "Ordinary World."		"But I've always said, Quit while you're ahead."			
22.		<i>volume swell</i>	But I won't...			<i>Scroll from left: FROM THE PRODUCER OF SNATCH</i>	thundering whoosh
23.	X in shower		...cry for...				light water
24.	Water drops falling		...yesterday...				light water
25.	X opens door to be hit in the gut and taken away by thugs		...there's an...		<i>Nondiegetic voice over a phone:</i> "I want my cargo."		impact of the punch
26.	X shoved into laundry cart		...ordinary world,				grunt, thump
27.	Bently logo passing over the road		Somehow I				engine, low
28.	X being led by thugs		have to find...				
29.	X in bushes on cell phone.		...		"Just give me a date."		
30.	Sniper bullet hits grass in front of X		...		[grunts]		ground exploding
31.			And as I...			<i>Scroll from left: AND LOCK, STOCK, AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS</i>	thundering whoosh
32.	Beautiful girl reluctantly walking away from X		...try to make...				
33.	X in a cage-elevator		...my way,		<i>Nondiegetic:</i> "I am the target."		
34.	Man speaking with lollipop, making decapitating motion		to the ordinary...		"He's lobbing people's heads off"		
35.	Older businessman patting X's head with both hands.		...world, I will...				
36.	Shot rotating around X looking frantically around		...learn to sur...		<i>Nondiegetic over phone:</i> "I will be watching you."		
37.	Overhead of man placing gun on table.	<i>Fadeout</i>	...vive		"You're gonna need one of these."		
38.	Open cabinet with many guns, X takes one.				"I mean I hate guns! [pause] Although that one is really pretty."		

intertitle “FROM THE PRODUCER OF *SNATCH*.” What methods do we have for ordering such pluralities of textual information?

One way is to follow the line of most prominent address as it constantly jumps from channel to channel above permutations of atoms beneath it. This melody traded between voices above a strangely synaesthetic chordal harmony is the characteristic that inspires Hediger’s term ‘polyphonic montage.’ In **Figure 2**, we can see a rough outline of this sovereign level of address.⁸ Literally ping-ponging back and forth in shots 21 through 34, it eventually settles, handing off prominence between successive images and then successive lines of dialogue by the end of the sequence. Mapping the grid in this manner gives us an impression of the abstract compositional contours of the trailer. Each moment of prominence is buttressed by concurrent or preceding atoms. Take for example the intertitle of shot 22. In the same moment, the dynamics of the Duran Duran song swell, a thundering whoosh sound effect joins the lightening-fast scroll of the intertitle, and all culminate in a thundering downbeat: a B major chord in the song, the beginning of its chorus, a boom sound effect, and a freeze in the motion of the text, “FROM THE PRODUCER OF *SNATCH*.” This density is immediately reduced in frames 23 to 24 with the simple image of water falling and lyrics containing the word “cry.”⁹ The comparative simplicity of the sound in this frame emphasizes the music as the swell in song volume now overtakes all other aural elements. But emphasis is quickly swept away to another channel in shot 25 with an arresting visual motion as X is unexpectedly attacked. This shot is echoed by an exaggerated thump sound in shot 26. All the while, the grid is infused with less than subtle

⁸ The status of each atom as *the* sovereign voice in any given moment is of course open to debate.

⁹ The semantics of this shot become all the more explicit when viewed in relation to the music video. Trailers are littered with tiny music videos. Chion writes in *Audio Vision*, “But the music video is altogether different, since it does not involve dramatic time. [...]Rather than serving to advance action, the editing of music videos turns the prism to show its facets. The rapid succession of shots creates a sense of visual polyphony and even of simultaneity, even as we see only a single image at a time” (166).

Fig. 2—*Layer Cake* (2004), full-length theatrical trailer

	Image	Music	Lyrics	Voiceover	Dialogue	Intertitle	Sound
21.	X walking quickly out of a door marked 'private,' holding a briefcase.	Duran Duran, "Ordinary World."		"But I've always said, Quit while you're ahead."			
22.		(vol. swell)	But I won't...			Scroll from left: FROM THE PRODUCER OF <i>SNATCH</i>	thundering whoosh
23.	X in shower		...cry for...				light water
24.	Water drops falling		...yesterday...				light water
25.	X opens door to be hit in the gut and taken away by thugs		...there's an...		Nondiegetic voice over a phone: "I want my cargo."		impact of the punch
26.	X shoved into laundry cart		...ordinary world,				grunt, thump
27.	Bently logo passing over the road		Somehow I				engine, low
28.	X being led by thugs		have to find...				
29.	X in bushes on cell phone		...		"Just give me a date."		
30.	Sniper bullet hits grass in front of X		...		[grunts]		ground exploding
31.			And as I...			Scroll from left: AND LOCK, STOCK, AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS	thundering whoosh
32.	Beautiful girl reluctantly walking away from X		...try to make...				
33.	X in a cage-elevator		...my way,		Nondiegetic: "I am the target."		
34.	Man speaking with lollipop, making decapitating motion		to the ordinary...		"He's lobbing people's heads off"		
35.	Older businessman patting X's head with both hands.		...world, I will...				
36.	Shot rotating around X looking frantically around		...learn to sur...		Nondiegetic over phone: "I will be watching you."		
37.	Overhead of man placing gun on table.	Fadeout	...vive		"You're gonna need one of these."		
38.	Open cabinet with many guns, X takes one.				"I mean I hate guns! [pause] Although that one is really pretty."		

markers of deflection (intertitles in frames 22 and 31 proclaiming excellence through the reputation of previous films), and enigmatic fragments of absent events.

Many consider the primary map of grid construction to be story.¹⁰ Various trailer producers interviewed by Doris Toumarkine for *Film Journal International* insist on the importance of story in trailers. “Often the trailers that test best are those that tell the most story.” In fact, according to one executive, a trailer house “will typically submit a narrative script rather than a storyboard of visuals. [...]The early architecture of a trailer, its genesis, is words” (“Tantalizing Trailers”). Preceding shot 21, X introduces himself as the film’s protagonist through a first person voiceover: “I’m not a gangster. I’m a businessman, giving people, what they want. We work to a few golden rules. Keep a low profile. Never be too greedy. But I’ve always said, ‘quit while you’re ahead.’” Once his character is introduced, the events to come in the film are established. This section (shots 22 through 37) is bounded by both a foregrounded Duran Duran chorus and a recurring voice coming through a phone receiver. Michel Chion calls this “on-the-air-sound:” aural elements transmitted through electronic devices such as radio, television, or telephone, and sounded during a film (79). He points out that these types of sounds are able to cross multiple boundaries in cinematic space with great ease, operating as sound-off or ambient noise, but just as quickly gaining presence in the diegetic space of the film through an image of the phone or television set, etc. This voice is an unseen presence that begins to persecute X, manifested only through a voice over the phone. In shot 25, this voice of conflict is doubled by the concurrent image of X opening his hotel room door only to be hit in the gut by thugs and quickly whisked away in a hood. These two atoms are vectored toward one another, and are grammatically complimentary in the scheme of the trailer itself. Each gives the other

¹⁰ The main project of Hediger’s book is to trace the turn from the promotion of stars and spectacle in classical Hollywood cinema to the primacy of story in contemporary Hollywood marketing.

presence. This is the type of internal, telegraphic logic that allows a semblance of narrative to take place. These fragments are more than a summation of dimensions (story), and less than a causal map of events (plot). In this section of the chorus to the song “Ordinary World,” an ambiguous narrative structure is constructed: X wants to quit, but apparently has one last piece of business to conclude. He has something that other people want (shot 25). So he tries to arrange a drop off (shot 29) but his unseen adversaries are less willing to negotiate (shot 30). Through all this, X has very simple wishes (shot 32 and the lyrics “try to make my way”). But the problems continue (shot 34—the diegetic line, “he’s lobbing peoples heads off,” connected with Eddie Temple forebodingly patting X’s head in both hands in frame 35), and the outlook for his problems is bleak (the return of the mystery voice over the phone saying, “I will be watching you” in shot 36).

These atoms enigmatically relate to one another; they are plotted in the loosest sense of the word. Rather than constituting a series of causal determinations, narrative grid can only be characterized thus: as the available materials increase in abundance, the absent whole becomes more workably manifest; as each new bit of empirical evidence is laid out, new hypotheses can be made. To read the grid by following its compositional contours or implied plotline is to map out a matrix of systemic vectors relating disparate parts and their projected whole. To ‘plot’ the grid is not to construct a linear narrative in any way, but rather to throw the gaze outward into an absent whole that is perpetually in the process of becoming.

Ludic Grid

If there is some sort of conceptual framework already laid out in terms of genre, characters, or story, then ludic grid can play on these previously established elements at a more blistering,

schizophrenic pace. Most contemporary trailers utilize a two-act structure wherein a section of ludic grid follows one of narrative (or increasingly, one of more speculative forms of address—*Babel*, *Superman Returns* teaser). Ludic grid is characterized by impressionistic displays of force, disparate moments of the film's highest intensity turned loose and pushed together with no reference to causality or continuity, and no logical space in between. These bass beats and explosions are spectacle. They have no reference to the parts around them and they remain atomized and isolated. Atomic vectors are of the most banal and mass produced type, aimed at assertions of technical prowess and immediate sensory jolts. If narrative grid is a kind of scientific method, a gathering of empirical evidence and organization of this data into a series of hypotheses, then ludic grid is a performative scientific method. It is an alchemical theater, thriving off an admixture of explosions and beats.

After the *Layer Cake* trailer pivots around an absence of music and gun quip in shot 38, its section of ludic grid begins. The soundtrack noticeably changes tone when “No Regrets” by the Von Bondies, a nondescript rock song with a fairly standard groove, begins to play. It is energetic and chugging. Its concurrent images have an equally tactile quality. Both the content and editing of ludic grid are visceral. Gunshots, running, lingerie, money, fights, and silent screams are all cut at a literally split second rate. While narrative grid operates through the discrete interplay between various channels and systemic vectors, ludic grid sets up a rapid succession of consonances. Every downbeat of the snare drum in the Von Bondies song is joined by a concurrent visual beat: cuts, X hitting the bed as Tammy throws him onto it, a van crashing through gates, a punch to the face, etc. These are atomic vectors, signifying nothing in particular and having no interrelationships. Ludic grid is a collection of atomized parts divorced from conversation with each other—a collection that only retains its formal contours as a set by

telegraphically projecting an absent whole: this action will be in the film; and *this* action will be in the film; and so on. In such a collection, where there is neither logical progression nor structural unity, there is no way to discern distance between the atoms and they collapse into one another. In the face of such an anti-textual mass, the question becomes, what exactly do we do with these quintessential trailer moments of high intensity?

The ludic act of *Layer Cake*'s trailer is unique in that it is organized around the single visual theme of opening doors. Of the roughly forty-five shots in the trailer (not including intertitles and black frames), twenty five of them contain doors as a part of the *mise en scène*. Thirteen of these doors are violently thrown open, a vision that becomes a sort of abstract solidification. This theme is prepared for by the preceding narrative grid. The freezer door opens the trailer. Gene and Morty are revealed behind an opening door. X exits a door marked 'private' as he nondiegetically speaks the line, "quit while you're ahead." And X opens up his hotel room door only to be hit and abducted. While in the narrative grid these images have an established place in an interlinked system of signifiers and suggestion, in ludic grid the atoms are extracted from all surrounding matrices. The atomic vectors of *Layer Cake*, their impressionistic architecture a series of resounding snare drum downbeats, come in the following order. A door opens on a seductive looking Tammy. X and Mortie walk through a door. A truck crashes through a gate. A SWAT team pours through open van doors. The SWAT team busts through a heavy metal door with a battering ram. The SWAT team runs through another door aiming a handgun. Sydney runs through a door escaping the SWAT team. A garage door opens on a florist, frightening Sasha who screams and shoots him. And a split second cut (almost too short to notice) of black van doors explode open with a white flash of light. Each of these atoms sets up identical, one-dimensional vectors that link an unseen film and a visceral response—atomic

vectors. The interesting thing about these vectors is that the ludic grid's immediate materials (reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's "asignifying particles or pure intensities") producing this impoverished meaning of viscera• excellence are simply not a part of its equation. They establish a link from a shudder in the nerves to a desire to repeat the experience with the full length film and then, with nothing surrounding them to grab on to, dissolve into an amnesiac haze of inexplicable excitement. Our remembrance of these enhanced material trajectories is tactile. It is a kind of knowledge that perhaps can explain that strange feeling of déjà vu when reencountering these pure intensities embedded in the narrative context of the full-length film, and the subsequent feeling of conditioned anticipation swirling around these events during repeat viewings of the film. The atomic vectors of ludic grid endow their recipients with a latent, tactile knowledge of film, released in the eventual experience of the coming attraction.

Mix

Grid construction in the trailer often acquires much of its energy from a dynamic fluctuation between systemic and atomic vectors set up by their constituent atoms. This synthesis of narrative and ludic grid logic creates a matrix of interlaced vectors, infused with forceful explosions of disconnected audio-vision. Here, atomic vectors act as free radicals in the fragile contingency of the narrative grid, knocking loose the set values of certain atoms. When narrative and ludic grid are pushed together, the semantic function of each individual atom is dispersed, made ambiguous, and pushed into the background. The theatrical trailer for *Babel* contains a prefatory opening section similar to that of *Layer Cake*, a sort of establishment of genre key signature. Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett) sit in an outdoor restaurant overlooking sand dunes. Susan: "Richard, why did we come here?" Richard: "To be alone."

Cate: [looks at other tourists, laughs] alone.” This section is pregnant with an electronic triplet motive pulsing lightly in the background. It consists of a higher pitched, rim-shot like pulse in smooth, even beats. Without intensifying in volume or tempo, without changing in any way, this pulse somehow anticipates the explosion of beats and images to come. At the conclusion of the preface, this light tapping suddenly explodes with a booming bass downbeat as an incandescent glow flashes on the screen and quickly fades into the Paramount studio logo. As the boom subsides, the triplet motive is revealed in an intensified form, pushed to the fore of the system. It now consists of a high-hat pulse which gradually weakens back down into the light rim-shot pulse before building up to another booming bass downbeat though a reverse cymbal splash. This system takes about four bars to complete, and each subsequent four bar system is divided by the bass beat. It is an abstract ‘verse’ that seems to hold sway over the images, to pull them into an intensive flow.

The first verse overlays onto the pulse: an Arab melody in the E Phrygian mode sung by a cantor over a loudspeaker, a shot of a tower with arabesque features, a busy Middle Eastern city street, the sound of a honking car horn, a moving shot of women wearing the hijab from a passing car or train, and a group of boys herding goats into a rock walled pen. The sound effects, soundtrack, and voice-off that loosely thread these images together are deliberately mixed according to several compositional principles. The pitches of the cantor and a car horn (the only sound-on in this verse) are harmonically consonant and seem to fit together. The gradual decrescendo in volume of the triplet pulse leads up to the event of the car horn, as if to allow this sound prominence for a moment before picking up again. And the cantor’s melodic line is bound by the bass downbeat; it begins directly after one bass division and then finishes its phrase as this verse comes to a close.

In the second verse, a voiceover from Brad Pitt is added to the mix: “In the beginning, all the world’s people, from all parts of the world, (shots of Arab boys, anglo-American Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, Japanese city streets) spoke one language (suggestive shot from behind of Japanese girls from the waist down in school uniforms walking away). Nothing they proposed (newly weds kissing) was impossible for them.” In this portion, the cuts become more rapid and the rhythm, while keeping the same triplet motive, plays with more variations. This visual and aural crescendo leads up to the most violent, striking moment in the trailer. It is so partly because of the new types of rhythmic iterations, and partly because of the oddity of the camera angles. The triplet is stalled out when a percussive pipe sound covers it up in an even pulse with various shots of people clapping. And then two lightening fast cuts, the first, barely intelligible, of a Japanese school girl on a swing who comes down from the top left side of the screen accompanied by a solo whooshing sound effect. This shot is intersected by the same girl on the swing, now coming from the right side of the screen with the camera’s perspective seemingly mounted on the swing, the cut between shots accentuated by a single, smacking beat. The images literally seem to collide into one another, coming from opposite sides of the screen and punctuated by the percussive smack. And finally, the third verse presents what Hediger refers to as the “initiating event” of the film. Two boys shoot a rifle from up in the mountains and accidentally hit a bus, where Blanchett’s vacationing character is hit. The trailer then moves into a section of conventional narrative grid.

To speak of this three-verse section as grid would be problematic to say the least. The preface of Richard and Cate’s short conversation does establish the basic architecture on which ludic grid can play. Several elements seem to be atomically vectored: the schoolgirls, the percussion, the rapidity of the cuts, the boys fighting in the water, etc. But then again, other

elements seem to have a narrative bent: the wedding, the American couple on a vacation, and the juxtapositions of setting and people (which makes it seem as if the coming together of these different cultures is an initiating event in itself.) Rather than classifying each individual atom into categories of narrative and ludic grid, of systemic and atomic vectors, it seems much more important when presented with trailer passages such as these to ask different questions. How is it possible for the stationary rim-shot pulse in the prefatory section to anticipate an eventual audio-visual explosion? As sound effects, soundtrack, voice-on and voice-off are indiscriminately mixed onto a single plane, what space are we in and how do we listen to these sounds? The construction of mix through the seductive play of fore- and background calls into question the existence of atoms as discrete units. At what level of scrutiny do they begin to break down, and how can we even begin to talk about an art object at a sub-atomic level? When it seems that sound is perfectly grafted onto image and image to sound, it is necessary to explore the operation of background.

III. TRAILER FURNITURE: Theorizing the Background

French composer Erik Satie wrote a series of pieces between 1917 and 1923 that he described as *musique d'ameublement*, or “furniture music.”¹¹ These compositions consisted of short, repeated passages and were performed live during concert intermissions or various other social functions such as lunches, grand receptions, and marriages. However, Satie specifically designed his furniture music to remain unnoticed by its listeners. As an experiment in mood and atmosphere, it was meant to stay in the background of a given situation, if not create the background entirely.

¹¹ The pieces are: 1st set (1917), for flute, clarinet and strings, plus a trumpet—*Tapisserie en fer forgé* - pour l'arrivée des invités; *Carrelage phonique* - Peut se jouer à un lunch où à un contrat de mariage. 2nd set (1920), *Sons industriels* for piano duet, 3 clarinets and trombone—*Chez un bistrot* and *Un salon*. 3rd set (1923), for small orchestra—*Tenture de cabinet préfectoral*.

The point was to see what responses lit up between the background and foreground, between the music and the activity in its performance space. This gesture of furniture music denies the listening ear just as much as it privileges it as an organizer of numerous extra-musical spaces and affects, provoking the indefinite and the auratic in a genuine way.

The idea of background and its construction invites some of the most intriguing and wide-ranging questions on film sound in the 1947 book *Composing for the Films* by Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler. In examining the function of music and sound in the context of motion pictures, Adorno and Eisler critique the widespread use of film music that is specifically meant not to be noticed or considered, a device that largely remains the rule in narrative film today. This music designed to remain in the background and its proposed mode of reception are judged as “banal,” “indolent,” “dreamy,” and “dull” by Adorno and Eisler. The film music that they propose in opposition to background music and admire the most is that which exists in a dialectical relationship with the image. Several examples are given by the authors that highlight what is at stake in “solving” the problem of the function of music in relation to the motion picture: “movement as a contrast to rest,” “suspense and interruption,” and “sham collectivity” with blatantly sarcastic march time in the anti-war film *No Man’s Land* (pp. 23-30). Each example uses music in a Brechtian capacity in order to alienate the viewer from the image or compose a certain gestus. Though they contend that music, if anything, should never operate in a capacity subordinate to the image, the admission does come that what they conceive of as film music proper (that is, music proper—dialectical, conceived of structurally, an art object in itself) is inappropriate during certain moments. For example, in scenes containing dialogue, the insertion of music would be disturbing to the action of the film. Here, where a type of background music would typically be applied, Adorno and Eisler argue that the addition of

“extra-musical sound,” or diegetic sound, is most appropriate. It is proposed that this type of sound, originating from the space of the image, may serve to contribute to the realism¹² of the scene and enhance its fictional space with the greatest “economy of means.”

The problem here lies in the assumption that extra-musical sound can flawlessly graft itself onto the image while music cannot. Sound is believed to be somehow naturally complicit with the image because it seems to originate from and participate in the same space. But to Adorno and Eisler, the moment any sound is consciously crafted, it becomes music and must be given conscious attention in relation to all the other elements around it. They believe that music always remains separate from the image, with the viewer’s attention directed towards the relation between the two. This method assumes a mode of viewing that is aware separately of music and image, both at once and never both as one. And it also ignores the fact that in film, every single sound is in some way crafted. It is precisely because of the conscious attention given to each diegetic sound in terms of microphone placement, sound effects, and mixing that Adorno and Eisler so easily associate it as a “concrete” part of the image. Their theory of dialectic film music merely asks what contrasts surface when two discourses are slapped together rather than having a genuine interest in the way that each discourse is individually effected when submitted to a singular compositional logic. As a relationship between subtle sounds and fleeting images, background finds multivalent resonances in the trailer: in the interplay between narrative lacunae and vectorial compensation, in the fragmentary creation of diegetic space and its performance against that of a specific site, and in the rhythmic dynamism between image and

¹² The authors place a great deal of importance on realism in film, and even assert that “every motion picture is a documentary” (8). Though this topic is not within the scope of this essay, it seems important to note that the misplaced emphasis on both film and photography as an unmediated representations of life provides insight into Adorno and Eisler’s theories of film sound: doubly in service to the believability life’s representation and to the tenability of that representation’s message, the ideal goal of this model of film perhaps being a presentation of real world dialectics. Sound cements the presentation, music participates in its inner forces.

sound in grid construction. The purpose of Satie's *musique d'ameublement* was not to foreground the social function or performance space it inhabited, but to foster conditions in which a plastic mix of these elements was possible. The trailer employs *musique d'ameublement* in this capacity.

Atmospheric Narratives

In the semantic construction of film, background music is traditionally considered to serve only a dramaturgic function in that it fills spots where action or suspense is interrupted. As Adorno and Eisler note, "Music serves as the stop-gap for drama in the novel. Its legitimate dramaturgic place is wherever intensity wanes and action assumes the form of exposition, which music alone can retranslate into direct presence" (30). But in the trailer, the function of the type of music—and sound—that Adorno and Eisler lightly dismiss in *Composing for the Films* as "banal" or "dubious" extends beyond questions of narrative movement. While in full length films the object of this relationship between back and foreground is the seamless movement of plot, trailers negotiate far more subversive interactions between far more subtle poles. The atomized structure of trailer form dictates that background must not *support* narrative movement, but subsume it entirely.

The Kingdom (Peter Berg, 2007) is a political thriller about a terrorist attack on a western housing compound for families living and working in Saudi Arabia. The preface of its theatrical trailer uses background as an agent of atmospheric narrative initiation. This section lasts exactly six seconds and consists of a community softball game and a unison F. Both these images and sounds fade in at the same time. Each shot in the sequence lasts less than one second: a shot down the third baseline towards a batter waiting for the pitch, a catcher's eye view as the ball is

underhanded from the pitcher towards the batter, a cut farther to the right of the batter for a slow swing and a miss, another player watching from behind the fence smiling, and a cut to the pitcher with his hands out in a taunting gesture. The concurrent sound consists of two synthesized notes: a low, droning F comparable to the sound of a cello and a higher F several octaves above, approximating the sound of a bowed marimba or vibraphone. Both continuous notes are *senza vibrato*, or without vibration, and produce a smooth, level bed for the other elements in the opening moments. These two notes are joined by the sound of cheering and clapping families watching the game at about an equal volume as the F. Though there is no minor third, nor any other note that could be used to construe this chord as minor, the sound has a distinctively ‘minor’ quality to it. Before any other elements are added to the trailer, the conjunction of certain unison F’s, cheering families, and cuts of middle aged adults and their families playing slow pitch softball creates an eerie, foreboding atmosphere.

Closing this section is the intertitle “WESTERN HOUSING COMPOUND / KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA,” joined by a whooshing sound effect and two beats of a drum, also tuned to a low F, that match the appearance of each line of text. Then come shots of what Vinzenz Hediger calls the single “initiating event” of the film: a view from binoculars overlooking the scene, gunshots, confused people running and screaming, and bombs detonating. What is there in the opening section that weighs it towards this event, that creates the feeling of dread or anticipation? It contains nothing plotted in the strict sense, no indication of genre (perhaps until the appearance of the first intertitle), and none of the film’s stars or main characters. Perhaps this effect is achieved with a conditioned familiarity with trailer form, and viewers simply know that trailers tend to swirl around the initiating event. Another factor could include what Lisa Kernan terms as the trailer’s “supertext” which includes the feature film that the trailer is

attached to and the other trailers it is shown along with. Because trailers always advertise films in genres similar to the feature, viewers may automatically assume a certain genre coding to the film. But these theories do not account for viewing conditions of trailers outside of the theater, and do not seem to be adequate explanations of the workings of the *mise en scène* in moments such as this one.

The opening six seconds of this trailer serve as the minimum narrative background by setting up future deflected organizations of plot, genre, stars, and setting—the narrative of the film itself. At the most elemental level, each of these projections are eventually possible because of an initial interaction between back and foregrounds. The success of the trailer as an advertisement is dependent on its ability to create an operative *musique d'ameublement* for the absent whole. The preface to *The Kingdom* trailer contains the trailer material itself: six seconds of a unison F, the sound of cheering families, and images of community softball. Individually, these atoms produce neither atomic nor systemic vectors; they do not yet have a place in any narrative matrix, and do not gesture to anything. They merely create an atmosphere. But considered together, these atomized materials produce impressions of genre and style, and expectations of narrative actions. The form of background is in auratic, gestalt expressions. The overwhelming mood of something dangerous on the horizon is one not achieved by the images themselves, nor is it achieved by the sound itself. Each element enters at the same time, rather than in a tiered, gradual entrance. This diverts focus away from a process of addition or a relationship between the elements. The materials of the preface are a unified mix. The mix fundamentally alters each of its constituent atoms in the same way that a G[#] placed above an F creates a minor chord rather than setting up a dialectic relationship between the notes. Once joined, that G[#] sounds differently—G[#] is not a minor third without an F beneath it. In the same

way, there is nothing particularly foreboding about a unison F until the image and noise of a peaceful community softball game gets inside that sound and mutates it. While each atom can be considered severally, once these specific elements are conjoined we have no true recourse to their original state. The mix bends each atom to its selfsame will. That F, the man happily watching the game from the dugout, and the unknowing laughter of the families all sing only of suspense. In fact, their laughter only seems unknowing because of the elements surrounding and getting inside of it. Background exists as intuited vibrations and atmospheric histories produced by an overdetermined mood. The gestalt expressions of background produce a very specific view of the absent whole. This is the standardization of *musique d'ameublement* and the creation of a distinct language of distraction. An experiment that was originally meant to form aleatory connections between back and foreground is now utilized as a force of overdetermination and demographic targeting.

Distraction

Traditionally, the trailer is processed through the same performance space as that of a full-length narrative film with only a few modifications. While trailers presented before the feature use identical sound reproduction equipment and projectors, the house lighting is brighter, the behavior of the collective audience is typically less focused, and the overall volume of the film sound is higher.¹³ Now that trailers are increasingly exhibited in new forums—the internet,

¹³ TASA (Trailer Audio Standards Association) is a group formed at the request of the National Association of Theater Owners (NATO). The development of digital sound in the mid-90s allowed louder sound reproduction without the resultant distortion of analogue. After many audience complaints about the excessive volume levels of movie trailers, TASA began to regulate trailer volume levels. The current upper limit is Leq_m 85. Technically different from 85 decibels, Leq_m was developed by an engineer at Dolby Digital. Leq_m is a unit measuring average audio levels over time, and only those in the mid to upper range frequencies, which have been judged as the most “annoying” to audiences. The interesting thing about this unit of measurement is that “the trailer with more quiet spaces can have louder explosions and still comply with the TASA Standard. The trailer that tries to be loud throughout, however, must be relatively lower in volume, and have lower peaks, to pass. Also, because Leq_m

iPods, cell phones, DVDs, rental stores, specialty television channels, and on-demand services—background is effected in dramatic ways. Trailers on Apple’s website contain plot synopses that provide the background of the film’s characters and story. One cannot help but glance at this paragraph while the trailer loads, or even while it is playing. The operation of *musique d’ameublement* is bound to be different in a trailer viewed on the go through a one-inch mobile phone screen. In this wide dissemination of trailer texts, the semantics of background must be tailored to adequately function within a multiplicity of performance spaces. For example, slight alterations are often made to theatrical trailers for use as television spots. A less attentive audience is assumed for television advertisements, and so atoms are often made more blunt. The slow motion shot of Maggie Gyllenhaal rushing to find her loved ones in the theatrical trailer for *World Trade Center* is in a wider angle version for the television spot in order to include a view of her low cut shirt as she walks with a slightly unnatural bounce in her step. The image of the American flag is augmented by an exaggerated sound of rustling cloth that is not present in the theatrical trailer. And the television soundtrack contains drums added overtop of the original strings in the theatrical trailer.

The presentation of the background to a film’s story is intimately connected to the semantic function of *musique d’ameublement* precisely because the narrative commodity value of the trailer is strategically trusted to diverse sites of distraction. These sites and their extensions are mobile labs wherein the economy of film and the future production of filmic desire are constantly being negotiated through market research, ticket returns, and demographic targeting. It has been learned in these mobile labs that the reverberations of a single atom honed

emphasizes mid-range frequencies that are more irritating to the audience, the trailer that derives its volume from lower frequency bass sounds can be “louder” than the trailer that derives its volume from mid-range sounds.” The TASA standard was adopted on April 1, 1999 by all American studios and the MPAA. Since then, low subwoofer rumblings have become a type of aesthetic standard in trailers.

to a scientific degree of precision are potentially worth millions of dollars. And the purpose of experimentation is to replicate results. The brilliance of this science is the control of *musique d'ameublement* through multivalent vibrations and across countless media outlets. Six seconds of community softball and a unison F must sing of a catastrophic coming event no matter the conditions of its performance. The trailer could be given a user-specific performance through the pause, rewind, fast forward, and volume control of online viewings. It could be sounded through a personal cinematic space in the headphones of an iPod that drown out the background noise and signature of its mobile performance space. It could be given an elevator music reception through the floating television sets in a video store. Regardless of the space or method of its dissemination, background must have certain set values. Once again, the model of the vector is significant in that atmospheric narrative contains within itself defined values of narrative production or entertainment value while having no fixed position. The overtones that stand in for an entire subplot in the trailer to *Layer Cake* are an example of this. The triplet motive that pulls images into a stylized flow in the *Babel* trailer are another. The trailer is evidence that atmosphere can no longer be thought of in terms of a benign sound space that relates a two dimensional image to an interpreted or affective three-dimensional distance. The construction of atmosphere is an industry of “tactile appropriation,” of ubiquitous narratives, of distraction.

Dissolution

The theatrical trailer to *Apocalypto* (Mel Gibson, 2006) is unique in that its only linguistic means of communication is through intertitles. None of the Yucatec Maya language used in the film or its English subtitles are present in the trailer. As a result, the narrative significance of the

trailer's scenes remains largely ambiguous, which makes for a particularly interesting treatment of background. About a quarter of the way through, there are scenes of filial warmth and gatherings around a fire, backed by a serene flute melody. The image/sound relationship at this point seems to fulfill Adorno and Eisler's description of film music that picks up the slack where visual action wanes, keeping some semblance of dramatic narrative in motion. This section ends with a shot of Jaguar Paw from behind as he slowly turns around, as if he hears something behind him. Then the pitch of the flute slowly slides downwards and gives way to the sound of strong winds and an image of clouds blowing over a mountaintop. This slide is the transition of the soundtrack away from its dramaturgic function and into *musique d'ameublement*. The next section contains a toneless subwoofer rumbling over images of heads turning and eyes squinting to see, a conjunction that produces a foreboding atmospheric narrative. But this gestalt expression is strangely torn by gap frames separating each cut. The audiovision comes in pulses divided by black silences, with the pauses and the shots each spanning an equal amount of time. The deceptively simple addition of gap frames in this instance has a concretizing effect on the ambiguity of background. While background creates subtle interactions between layers of simultaneous information, gap frames punctuate this gestalt atmosphere into percussive, singular expressions. Though this completely deletes any vestiges of a sound space or diegetic space that could be gleaned from the trailer, they solidify a different type of expression. The information in each image/beat is meaningfully dissolving into the chasm. Shots are linked through and across the gap in various and significant ways. Questions must be raised here about the effect of this punctuation of filmic space. Does this deletion create new information about the absent whole, or does it create a calculated interruption of its negotiation? Gap frames and their ability to

isolate and objectify individual filmic moments or expressions must be viewed more closely as a multifaceted isolation and dispersal within already tight methods of atomistic construction.

IV. Three Ways of Looking at a Black Frame

Among recent trends in contemporary trailers—lack of voiceover, decrease in shot length, increase in overall volume—the now widespread trope of placing black frames in between shots is the most striking. These frames are not black outs. Rather, they delete the space of the image and move the trailer into an abstracted plane. By allowing each individual excerpt to have differentiated beginning and end points, gap frames endow the shots they divide with small, impressionistic lives of their own. They end up sculpting the contours of the image, collapsing the temporal, and seemingly rendering the cinematic photographic. Though these gap frames cut across the grid and tear the surface of gestalt background expression, various types of sound survive into and through the gap frames. Leading tones of dialogue or ambient noise can thread images across the black space, and low bass rumblings usually mark the transition point from scene to black and back again. The way in which sound reacts to the loss of its concurrent image is key to understanding how individual filmic scenes can be encased, isolated, and objectified. Coupled with a simultaneous deflection into the absent whole, gap frames produce in these scenes a constant slippage between isolation and dispersal, between figuration and abstraction.

Dramaturgy

Because almost every cut is expanded by gap frames, nearly twenty five percent of the theatrical trailer for *Shooter* (Antoine Fuqua, 2007) consists of a black screen. Placing space around each filmic expression allows individual clips to have a birth and death of their own, and to have

contours independent from the flow of the grid as a whole. In the trailer's preface section, the shots instantaneously cut out to black, and then gradually fade back in. These gap frames are equal in length to the clips they divide. The preface shows the protagonist in his initial situation: a man living a quiet life up in the mountains with his dog and girlfriend. Rather than jumping around in space and time, this preface seems to gut a single, continuous scene, stripping it of inessential moments of transition. The shots are ordered: a mountain flyover, Bob Lee Swagger (Mark Wahlberg) walking through the mountains with a rifle, his dog running, Swagger yelling "come on boy!," Swagger and dog walking up the steps of his cabin, Swagger kissing Sarah (Kate Mara) in the cabin, the dog pulling a beer out of the refrigerator, Swagger taking the beer from his dog and Sarah smiling at him. Though at a very high level of scrutiny one can see that the shots are in fact not temporally consistent (Swagger has a ponytail at the beginning, short hair in the middle, and a ponytail again by the end), these atoms are so tightly gridded that their visibility as a grid construction dissolves.

Each individual clip has its diegetic sound attached to it—mountain winds, barking, dog tags rattling, refrigerator opening, and beer opening, but each sound abruptly ends as the image is cut out, allowing no traces of the diegetic space to remain. However, moving through each shot and continuing on through the gap frames is a soundtrack of solo acoustic guitar lightly doodling blues riffs. The function of the blues in this preface is interesting, as the soundtrack seems to be rhythm-less. It consists of free floating chromatic blues melodies while the editing of the clips (cut out, fade in) is evocative of a slow 12/8 blues meter: an abrupt stop on the first eighth note, with a dragging re-entrance across the third eighth into the next downbeat. The soundtrack provides the melody while the gap frames suggest the rhythm.

At the onset of the narrative grid, the gap frames begin to linger for longer periods of time. As the blues soundtrack is replaced with foreboding, toneless bass rumblings, the editing of the gap frames changes as well. The longer period in the dark increases the immanent anxiety in this moment as it ruins the placid surroundings of the preface. Rumblings in the dark are all that is needed to change the tone and smooth over a narrative transition from a single, gutted mountain scene to the schizophrenic grid introduced by Colonel Isaac Johnson (Danny Glover) showing up to let Swagger know that someone is out to assassinate the president. Due to Swagger's expertise as a sniper, he is the only man who can catch this would be killer. As the narrative grid progresses, the gap frame transitions freely play between cut out/fade in and fade out/cut in. Each of these transitions has a different semantic effect on the atoms they divide. Shots that cut in tend to be ludic vectors, such as the shot taken at the president, Johnson blowing out smoke in slow motion, and a tracking shot on an intense looking Swagger in his car. Their content is as energetic as their birth. Shots that fade in tend to be systemic vectors, such as "there's going to be an attempt on the life of the president," and images of Swagger with Johnson's voiceover "out of all the men alive on the planet you're one of the few who knows what to look for" and "I didn't do whatever they said I did." They make their entrance gradually as they weave their way into and alter the narrative grid. Frames that cut to black leave a striking loss on the gap frame, and are usually compensated for by an increased presence of sound: rumblings or ambient, diegetic sounds. And frames that fade to black are usually threaded through to the next with extant dialogue. Gap frames function as part of the abstract contours of the grid by adding pacing and affect. By enhancing the spatial and temporal difference dividing these shots, gap frames isolate an individual facet out of the complexity of a grid matrix and give

it a life of its own, an enhanced narrative trajectory. They then cleanse the palate in preparation for the next.

Continuum

The trailer to *Star Wars Episode III* (George Lucas, 2005) leads up to a crisis point wherein the forces threatening to tear apart the galactic republic come to a head. But rather than previewing this moment through a type of ludic grid, something different happens. While we do have scenes of high intensity, their diegetic sound effects exist only in muted echoes: the haunting scream of Senator Organa: “No!” is muffled, a blaster sounds tinny and distant, and the explosion of a spaceship is only a tiny rumble. Replacing the expected intensity of these sounds is a reverberating tribal drum beat of two dotted quarter notes and one quarter note. The image flicks on at the first downbeat, and off on the quarter note. Every shot either zooms in, or contains an object within the frame that moves toward the camera. When the latter happens, the beat is joined by a reverse cymbal splash effect, increasing in volume as the object moves toward the camera. The sequence begins with Palpatine’s menacing line, “Are you threatening me, Master Jedi?” The images that follow are:

(beat) Palpatine attacking Jedi (beat) ship flying away from planet (beat) droids circling around and closing in on Obi-Wan (beat) huge spaceship on fire and falling (beat) Senator Organa screaming “No!” (beat) ship flying on barren planet (beat) Anakin hanging down elevator shaft (beat) lava planet (beat) Obi-Wan ducking General Grievous’s punch / a Wookiee jumping from a destroyed moving vehicle (beat).

Rather than isolating narrative excerpts or punctuating grid construction, gap frames here unify disparate excerpts into a single signifying space. All diegetic sounds are all muffled in the same

way, as if they emanate from the same unseen, isolated location. The internal rhythms of objects or movements, and the external rhythms of cuts are all synchronized with the beat of a drum. Gap frames delete the function of spatiality or temporality in these scenes. While ludic grid shows facets of a film's future events, each image here is returned to a singular theme as it decays identically into a black space. Every shot is an instantaneous formulation that immediately dissolves into a signifying continuum, an audiovisual song about the absent whole. Like the Beckett-pause, these gap frames interrupt diegesis and carve it up into a gestalt collection of abstracted spaces and affects.

Nocturne

There is a danger to the gap frames in *World Trade Center's* advertising campaign. The delicate relationship between 9/11 and aesthetic considerations is amplified when the object in question is the trailer. Deflection and advertisement require a willful audience—the discourse of trailer form is structured around an enthymeme that basically says, “You are going to want to pay for this entertainment.”¹⁴ But the horror and proximity of 9/11 lay bare all the self-effacing machinery of the trailer. How absent or whole can the film seem when its subject is an event whose reverberations are an ongoing part of everyday life? As if to lessen the impact of this uncovering and perhaps even re-clothe the motives of the trailer, the film's official website provides several disclaimers. The first is a section on the website's video page (which includes the trailer) entitled “In Their Own Words.” It is a collection of twenty-four video interviews with people directly involved in the rescue efforts and on whose lives the film is based. Most speak appreciatively of the film's faithful reproduction of the tragedy's material reality and the

¹⁴ See Kernan, pp. 42-44 for a discussion of enthymemes in the trailer.

importance of giving the world a first hand perspective of that day. The second disclaimer is a link to information about the trailer located on the homepage. It states:

Please be advised that the “World Trade Center” trailer is currently playing in theaters. Exact trailer placements vary by local theater. Additionally, the TV campaign for “World Trade Center” is also now airing nationwide. “World Trade Center” is a true story about courage and survival. It seeks to honor the good that we saw on September 11, 2001 in the face of such evil. Paramount Pictures is extremely proud of the spirit of this film, but understands the obvious sensitivities in releasing a movie about September 11th. To that end, Paramount has been communicating with 9/11 family and survivor groups since last fall on all aspects of the film. Recently, we have shared information with these groups pertaining to the movie trailer specifically, and which movies it will be paired with, as a way of preparing those directly impacted by the attacks. We wanted to make this information available to all visitors to this site due to the sensitive nature of the trailer and TV Spots, in the event that a 9/11 family member, survivor, or other concerned party may wish to avoid these materials for any reason. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

The studio’s description of the film’s intentions is not far behind a “never forget” bumper sticker appeal (usually accompanied by reverent silhouettes of the towers while nevertheless evoking the popular John F. Kennedy quote, “Forgive your enemies but never forget their names”).

However, the defense of these intentions through a strategic control over the trailer’s dissemination suggests a far more reactionary thread running through the reemergence of aesthetic considerations of 9/11. Artistic representations of the attacks begin to acquire characteristics reminiscent of the rhetoric used to explain America’s military response:

“carefully targeted actions,”¹⁵ “precision,” “focused, deliberate and proportionate”.¹⁶ With a close eye to the politics of representing events, the trailer to *World Trade Center* carefully restructures the relationship of trailer form to absent whole around surgically placed vectors and reverent, tactical gap frames.

The fine line Paramount was walking in releasing advertisements for this film is immediately evident in the variety of its international campaigns. The opening shot in the U.S. version of the trailer contains an American flag flying in the breeze. The sounds of its flapping cloth comfortably carry over into the next shot by transitioning into a representation of the rustling sheets of John McLaughlin (Nicholas Cage) and his wife Donna (Maria Bello) in bed on the morning of the attacks. The French, German, Japanese, and British versions of the trailer remove this shot of the American flag. And curiously, the French version raises the pitch and tempo of the *adagio piano* and strings, much like a 33 played at 45 rpm (one would think that this is in order to shorten the length of the soundtrack so that it matches the images now that the shot of the American flag has been removed, but the French version is in fact the only one to alter the music). The tagline at the end of the American version of the trailer reads “The world saw evil that day. Two men saw something else.” And the French tagline reads, “L’histoire vraie d’un combat pour survivre” [“The true story of a fight for survival”].

One unchanged aspect of the trailer’s negotiation of 9/11 across all versions is the way its materials move through the moment of impact—and I use the word “impact” in the singular because the trailer distills the double strikes into a single initiating event:

¹⁵ President Bush 7 October 2001 Address to the Nation before military actions in Afghanistan. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia01.htm>>.

¹⁶ “Mission Accomplished” speech, 1 May 2003. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/05/01/iraq/main551946.shtml>>.

Image	Music	Voiceover	Dialogue	Sound
GAP	Adagio piano			
McLoughlin speaking to officers	Adagio piano <i>(fades out)</i>		“As always, protect yourselves, watch each other’s backs.”	
GAP				
Jimeno directing tourists on map, shadow passes overhead darkening scene, all look up				Jet engine approaching from left
Shadow outline of a jet passes across yellow building and <i>Zoolander</i> billboard				Jet engine receding right
GAP				Far off jet engine echo
Police officers in station around water cooler, building vibrates and the cooler shakes as they all look up. Camera zooms in on sloshing water				Toneless subwoofer rumbling, sound of sloshing water
GAP				
Officers walking to look out unseen window, look at each other		Newsreporter: “We have unconfirmed reports this morning that...		
GAP		...a plane has crashed into one of the towers...”		

Each shot gently fades in and fades out of blackness. It is significant that the sound of impact is not heard within the space of one of these gap frames. The rumbling sound fades in at the same rate as the image does, and the boom sound does not land until the image is safely present. The sound of impact without an image attached to it would be far too terrifying, immediate, and of course, tasteless. But the gap frames are enough to produce a safely domesticated feeling of

danger. There is calculated ambiguity in each of these dark punctuations. Susan Stewart, in a discussion of vision in the dark, or the nocturne conventions of Western art, writes:

As organisms of diminished vision, human beings in the night rely upon kinesthesia, touch, and imagination in order to proceed. An absence of clarity and distinctness of phenomena, an inability to organize the visual field, and a problematic relation to depth perception are managed by means of heightened senses of tactility and hearing. In the night we rely upon connotation; we gather information in time; we tolerate ambiguity; and we proceed by means of subjective judgment. (149)

The steady ambiguity of evening light in the nocturne is gradated into perpetually fluctuating degrees of light and darkness in the gap frames of a trailer. We move between polar extremes, from daylight to black and back again. The figurations of daylight fade into abstraction and then complete nothingness before reappearing in a new indeterminacy gradually unmaking its own ambiguities. If the experience of the nocturne is one of “gathering information in time,” the trailer punctuated by fading gap frames is a guided tour through that time. The gap frame directs vision. It shows us how to unmake ambiguity and how to let go of pieces of information by rapidly moving on to the next forgetting. This reorganized nocturne is a selected history.

CODA: The Rhetoric of the Event

“Music as an art has always been an attempt to circumvent this taboo, to transform the indolence, dreaminess, and dullness of the ear into a matter of concentration, effort, and serious work. Today indolence is not so much overcome as it is managed and enhanced scientifically. Such a rationally planned irrationality is the very essence of the amusement industry in all its branches. Music perfectly fits the pattern.”

-Adorno and Eisler, *Composing for the Films*

In an essay that examines the differentials within media times and media spaces, McKenzie Wark writes, “the time of everyday life not only differs from the time of news media and the

time of scholarship, it differs from the time of capital flows and global power. The latter appear in everyday life as images that flash up, not just in moments of danger, but as moments of danger. The moment when they flash up is the moment of the event” (266). The confounding thing about the event is that it leaves no space for aesthetic mediation. This is a problem often brought up by staged performances of violence. The works of Sarah Kane and Martin McDonagh come to mind. Critics of these playwrights seem to be uncomfortable watching displays of torture or sex unless it explicitly contains an aesthetic or an ethical attempt to “say something.” This dialectic within mediation runs through documentary objects as well. Peggy Phelan in a lecture on performative photography cites the response to Richard Drew’s photograph “The Falling Man” as being “ghoulish, pornographic, cold-blooded.”

In Wark’s sense of the term, the event confuses narrative strategies that produce a sense of reality, as well as the powers behind those strategies. In the face of an event, media rush to fill in the space between the real and the represented in a virulent play for power. Perhaps in this sense, the trailer can be seen as a simulation of the temporal ripples caused by the event. Temporal shifts in the trailer are not merely a function of disparate excerpts packed together, but a matter of simulated shifts in modes of experience—that of everyday life, of catastrophic events, of flows of entertainment capital, and that of allegorical representation, to name a few. In directing vectors and redirecting vision, the trailer plays with what Wark calls “narrative coping strategies.” The trailer simulates that moment of crisis wherein an event interrupts flows of information which in turn rapidly attempt to adapt. However, in the trailer the experience of this adaptation becomes an object of aesthetic inquiry and focus in itself. Ostensibly non-aesthetic or documentary representations of the event, produced most visibly by news media, are now the experience of the event in everyday life. The trailer co-opts the non-aesthetic and renders its

experience—that of narrative invasions and self-effacing appropriations—aesthetic. Place an absent whole around a field of information and vectors and projections will form. I am interested in further exploring the possibilities of trailer form as a mobile concept.

APPENDIX: Aesthetics and Events—Presentation at Rutgers University 4/20/07

I was drawn to the study of movie trailers by a set of theoretical questions that I've carried through other areas before this, namely the theater. I'm interested in texts where information comes through different media simultaneously. In the case of the theater, lighting, spoken word, music, mimetic movements of the body, etc. are all operating at once. How do these different channels or media interact, and how can that synthesis effect the information they carry? And, if one is seeing, hearing, even feeling, how is knowledge produced differently? Because the trailer operates through many simultaneous channels—image, voiceover, sound effects, music, lyrics, etc.—it was the perfect site for me to study textual pluralities.

A great portion of the final project was devoted to a poetics of the trailer, looking at its form and cataloguing tropes. But towards the end of my project I found myself increasingly interested in two threads that had been running under the radar. I want to pursue these a little more today, diverging a bit from the content of the written document of my thesis.

The first thread is *background* as a concept, both as background to a story, and background music, sound, and images that create the atmosphere. Now that trailers are increasingly exhibited in countless new forums—the internet, iPods, cell phones, DVDs, rental stores, specialty TV channels, and on-demand services—background is effected dramatically, and I mean this in the double sense, both as background of stories and the background of the specific performance space. Because studios can spend up to \$1 million on the trailer, and the

trailer alone is responsible for 35% of any given film's revenue, trailers are scientifically tailored to convey information through a multiplicity of performance spaces. We can see these considerations in the slight alterations often made to the theatrical trailers for use as television spots. A less attentive audience is assumed for the television, and so information is often made more blunt. In the theatrical trailer for *World Trade Center*, which we'll be seeing a bit of later, there's a slow motion shot of Maggie Gyllenhaal rushing to find her loved ones. In one of the TV spots, this shot has been edited into a wider angle to include a view of her low cut shirt as she walks with a slightly unnatural bounce in her step. In all of the television spots, the image of the American flag is augmented by the exaggerated sound of rustling cloth, and energetic drums are added to the original strings and piano of the theatrical spot.

Each film has a narrative commodity value [importance of story in selling] that must be conveyed through diverse performance sites wherein the trailer is almost always *not* the focus. Basically stated, there is something in trailer form that allows it to effectively transmit information in environments where people aren't necessarily paying attention. These sites and their extensions are mobile labs wherein the economy of film and the future production of filmic desire are constantly being negotiated through market research, ticket returns, and demographic targeting. It has been learned in these mobile labs that the reverberations of a single atom honed to a scientific degree of precision are potentially worth millions of dollars. And the purpose of experimentation is to replicate results. The brilliance of this science is the control of background through multivalent vibrations and across countless media outlets. The trailer could be given a user-specific performance through the pause, rewind, fast forward, and volume control of online viewings. It could be sounded through a personal cinematic space in the headphones of an iPod that drown out all other noise. It could be given an elevator music reception through the floating

television sets in a video store. But regardless of the space or method of its performance, the entertainment industry needs these trailers to have certain set values. The trailer is evidence that background and atmosphere can no longer be thought of in terms of a benign sound space that relates a two dimensional image to an interpreted or affective three-dimensional distance. The construction of background is an industry of “tactile appropriation” and ubiquitous narratives, of directed distraction.

The second thread I want to pick up on is the event. I’m going to proceed a little speculatively here in looking at the narrative strategies used to understand the event by comparing how an event is presented by the news media to the ways the trailer represents the event of a feature film. The trailer for World Trade Center highlights what is at stake in the reemergence of aesthetic considerations of 9/11. The delicate relationship between 9/11 and aesthetics is amplified when the object in question is the trailer, simply because advertising requires a willfull audience. [explanation of Enthymeme] The discourse of trailer logic is basically structured around an enthymeme that says, “you are going to want to pay to see this entertainment.” But the horror and proximity of 9/11 lay bare all the self-effacing machinery of this trailer, one that seeks to represent an event whose reverberations are an ongoing part of everyday life. As if to lessen the impact of this uncovering or even to reclothe the motives of the trailer, the WTC website contains this disclaimer before we get to the trailer: “Please be advised that the “World Trade Center” trailer is currently playing in theaters. Additionally, the TV campaign for “World Trade Center” is also now airing nationwide. Paramount has been communicating with 9/11 family and survivor groups since last fall on all aspects of the film. Recently, we have shared information with these groups pertaining to the movie trailer specifically, and which movies it will be paired with, as a way of preparing those directly

impacted by the attacks. We wanted to make this information available to all visitors to this site due to the sensitive nature of the trailer and TV Spots, in the event that a 9/11 family member, survivor, or other concerned party may wish to avoid these materials for any reason. We appreciate your patience and understanding.” The defense of these intentions through a strategic control over the trailer’s dissemination suggests a reactionary thread running through the reemergence of aesthetic considerations of 9/11. Artistic representations of the attacks begin to acquire characteristics reminiscent of the rhetoric used to explain America’s military response: “carefully targeted actions,” “precision,” “focused, deliberate and proportionate”. With a close eye to the politics of representing events, the trailer to *World Trade Center* carefully restructures trailer form around surgically placed vectors and reverent, tactical gap frames. [Play first minute of trailer—pay attention to the gap frames, listen to the sounds]

Leading up to the strike, each shot gently fades in and fades out of darkness. It is significant that the sound of impact is not heard within the space of one of these gap frames. The rumbling sound fades in at the same rate as the image does, and the boom sound does not land until the image is safely present. The sound of impact without an image attached to it would be far too terrifying, immediate, and of course, tasteless. But the gap frames are enough to produce a safely domesticated feeling of danger. There is calculated ambiguity to the perpetually fluctuating degrees of light and darkness. We move between polar extremes, from daylight to black and back again. The figurations of daylight fade into abstraction and then complete nothingness before reappearing in a new indeterminacy gradually unmaking its own ambiguities. This trailer punctuated by gap frames is a guided tour through the event; it directs vision. It shows us how to unmake ambiguity and how to let go of pieces of information by rapidly moving on to the next forgetting.

So what is there in this comparison between the news media's presentation of events and the trailer's representation of events? The formal features of the contemporary popular news media are immediately comparable to that of the trailer: there's sound bytes, rapidly shifting scenes, voiceover, music in the background, scrolling text, and so forth. But beyond that, I really think what's at stake here is a politics of aesthetic thinking about the event. McKenzie Wark in a recent essay writes of how the confusion of the event produces a convergence in modes of experience and types of time. Scholarly time, which is deliberately slow and reflective operates differently than the flow of everyday life, which is different than the flow of catastrophic events, which is different from capital flows in the stock market, and so on. Wark argues that the event, for a moment, synchronizes all of types of time. I want to argue that perhaps in this sense, the trailer can be seen as a simulation of the temporal ripples caused by the event. Temporal shifts in the trailer are not merely a function of disparate excerpts packed together, but a matter of simulated shifts in modes of experience, a moment of immediate danger. In directing vectors and redirecting vision, the trailer plays with what Wark calls "narrative coping strategies." The trailer simulates that moment of crisis wherein an event interrupts flows of information that in turn rapidly attempt to adapt. [*Prime example of this 9/11*] However, in the trailer the experience of this narrative adaptation becomes an object of aesthetic inquiry in itself. The trailer co-opts the news media's supposedly non-aesthetic or documentary representations of the event and renders its experience aesthetic.

I came across short essay by Adorno earlier this week, titled "Music in the Background" from 1934 that I want to briefly quote to close up. Adorno writes that background music of course does not have an audience, but that it exists for people sitting in a café, for example, as "an objective event among, above them." This group of people becomes "caught up and bound

together” by this music. He goes on, “But it is the appearance of music in the background that lights up for them. No—that lights them up. They do not change in it, but *their image* changes. It is brighter, sharper, more clearly defined. When cafe music falls silent, it sounds as if a miserly waiter is turning off a couple of electric bulbs. Background music is an acoustic light source.” This background music Adorno is speaking of is constructed of fragments of famous classical pieces that a contemporary audience would be very familiar with. These would be played over loudspeakers in cafes or in arrangements by small orchestras, little snippets of which would be heard subconsciously. This music creates an atmosphere to the degree that “their image changes.” It frames a scene of everyday life.

The background of trailers and of the news media isn’t atomized classical but instead genres of film we’ve all seen, familiar semantic cues, types of glances that actors make, sound effects and noises that have integrated themselves into the soundscape of everyday life. These atoms are now used both in the news media and in movie trailers to restructure and recreate the event as an immediate danger that one is brought increasingly close to, while always preserving a certain aesthetic distance, staying just far enough away for it all to feel only like a film.

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