[Para]Textually Here: Paratexts and Presence in Games

How Paratexts Extend the Game's Network

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> "It has also to be seen that a film must never end, that it must exist—and even before it begins, before we enter the cinema—in a kind of englobingly [*sic*] extensive prolongation. The commerce of film depends on this too, recognized in a whole host of epiphenomena from trailers to remakes, from weekly reviews to star magazines, from publicity stills to mementoes (rubber sharks, tee-shirts)."[1]

From the gentle hum of the hardware to studio logos appearing on-screen, for many, this signifies the start of a game, or at the very least the process towards a gaming experience. In many respects, this is a perfectly reasonable place to suggest as the 'start' of a game. Yet logically, our awareness of any game must span beyond the specific process or ritual surrounding the *intention* to play. In order to play a game, we must be aware of it, obtain it somehow, install or run it; in effect, we must negotiate many processes in order

1 Heath, Stephen: "Screen Images, Film Memory," in: *Cinetracts*, 1(1) (1977), pp. 27-37, here p. 28.

'to play.' This process is one of awareness, leading to desire, and then actuation but is not limited to the game itself; rather, the whole range of wider connected textual phenomenon draws our attention to it as an object of and for play. As Stephen Heath wrote of cinema, it must exist before it begins.[2] Expanding this further, I want to use this space to explore how we can see specific paratexts (trailers) as being both part of and separate from the game itself, outlining a kind of tension between presenting and representing the game itself.

Expanding Heath's observation, we can easily see how such surrounding materials connected to, but seemingly separate from a game not only constitute an extension of the game experience in the broadest sense but also act as the basis for orienting our behavior and helping us form meanings. In effect, and as reiterated by Consalvo, games, gameplay, and gaming do not occur within a vacuum, and a wide range of contextual and *paratextual* materials shape and inform this experience.[3] Consider that our basis for understanding games and gaming comes directly and indirectly from a range of experiences, including but not limited to our collective knowledge of prior games, footage of gameplay, alongside broader shared cultural knowledge; that the shiny circular disc needs to be inserted, or a certain controller is used in a particular way. To remove this contextual element from what we could call the 'central' object is to implicitly argue for a deterministic understanding of the medium that marginalizes human cognition.

As Nick Couldry argues in his work *Inside Culture*,[4] rather than exploring the spatial-temporal dimensions of a text in terms of where it stops and starts, we need to focus on how meaning is created within that, throwing the onus of responsibility of defining the text onto the consumers. Championing this, Chin and Gray[5] have put forward the robust case that textual meaning-

2 Ibid.

3 Consalvo, Mia: "When Paratexts Become Texts: De-centering the Game-as-text," in: *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34(2) (2017), pp. 177-183, here p. 178.

4 Couldry, Nick: *Inside Culture Re-imagining the Methods of Cultural Studies*, London: Sage 2000.

5 Chin, Bertha/Gray, Johnathan: "'One Ring to Rule Them All:' Pre-viewers and Pre-Texts of the Lord of the Rings Films," in: *Intensities*, (2) (2001); https://intens

making is done not through stopping and starting of each text, but through an accumulation of meaning and of shifting signifiers of engagement in an ever-changing "macro-text."[6] If, as Chin and Gray suggest, consumers negotiate information as it comes to them, and this adds to cumulative knowledge that enables meaning and comprehension to be negotiated ad-hoc, we cannot then separate paratextual instances of representation and information from a macro-textual network.[7] It follows then that we cannot separate this macro-text from its industrial context; who is doing the 'speaking,' how it comes to the consumer, and other developments in the industry. Logically then, there exists a connected nexus of game-specific content on one vector, identifiable as such through branding and shared discussion of a central object within a broader parallel vector of wider industrial development and discussions. Ultimately, we have two discourses at work—that of the macro-text situated within an interconnected and often overlapping network of shifting developments, industrial political, social, technological, etc. Few would accept that the promotional surround of a game can constitute the game itself in its entirety, yet nor can a game exist in isolation from these paratexts (at a minimum, a title is required to identify it, and the absence of such becomes a paratextual signifier). Instead, what we have here is an assemblage of units that make up different forms of a textual network. In this instance, it makes sense to map this concept onto existing work within the study of games; we can see that our understanding of a text is one of an assemblage of units of

itiescultmedia.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/chin-and-gray-one-ring-to-rule-them-all.pdf

6 Citing Bacon-Smith, Camille/Yarborough, Tyrone: "Batman: The Ethnography," in: Pearson, Roberta E./Uricchio, William (eds.), *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Super Hero and His Media*, London: BFI 1991, p. 112, in: Chin/Gray: "One Ring to Rule Them All."

7 Attempting to map this shared and often complicated knowledge is beyond the scope of any single contribution to the field; though attempts have been made; work by Wright does map how paratextual framing situates concepts of authenticity within selected Rockstar branded games, but the methods used cannot account for all forms of remediation of such a huge franchise. Cf. Wright, Esther: "Marketing Authenticity: Rockstar Games and the Use of Cinema in Video Game Promotion," in: *Kinephanos*, 7(1) (2017), pp. 131-164.

meaning regardless of our understanding of ontological or perceptual textuality.

Such is the assemblage of these interconnected units that we might draw on existing work in the field; T.L Taylor's work on the assemblage of games offers up the enticing possibility of a framework that enables us to not only take such paratexts as a key part of games but to integrate them within a framework rooted in game studies. Taylor's concept, after all, seeks to assess the possibility of creating "a framework to not only includes [*sic*] these parts but also makes way for others and their interrelations."[8] Indeed, we can see parallels between Taylor's attempt to make way for different interrelated systems and software and our own ontological and perceptual textual networks. The two elements are, in effect, addressing the same problem from different intellectual trajectories as Taylor notes, echoing Couldry:

> "While looking at a game as it is presented as a boxed product may tell us something about the given structure of the artifact or its imagined player, understanding it as a lived object—as a playful artifact—comes via an attention to the assemblage that constructs our actual games and play."[9]

While Taylor's work is devoid of the term paratext (perhaps understandably given the debate that often rages with the term),[10] in offering up a framework that spreads the object of study between different agents and sites, Taylor is implicitly creating a parallel argument that connects with much of the wider work in cultural studies. Discussing the framing capacity of WORLD OF WARCRAFT (2004) modifications, Taylor explores the framing practices of a paratextual element, not the game itself, but the experience connected to and emerging from the relationship between the contextual gameplay and the direct object of study—the modded interface. This is not, however, to subsume Taylor's excellent game-studies centric work under the hyponym of paratexts. As Barker has eloquently written, the term paratext itself is contentious and loose in much the same way as the notion of assemblage. Here I

8 Taylor, T. L.: "The Assemblage of Play," in: *Games and Culture*, 4(4) (2009), pp. 331-339, here p. 332.

9 Ibid.

10 Cf. Barker, Martin: "Speaking of 'Paratexts:' A Theoretical Revisitation," in: *Journal of Fandom Studies*, (5)3 (2017), pp. 235-249.

wish to distance the application of the term paratext from fan and media studies and move it more towards Taylor's concept. Barker rightly points out the difficulty in applying Genette's strict paratextual taxonomy,[11] and here I want to suggest that such a taxonomy needs consideration in light of the work of Couldry's inversion of textual definition. That is to say, while paratexts are inherently connected to a central text (and one we can often claim as having ontological priority),[12] there is little to be gained from discussions of types of paratext if we do not take into account consumer reaction and consideration of these. While disc art, for example, is firmly a paratext, Genette's work sees differences between paratexts that freely circulate (interviews, posters, etc.) and those that are indelibly connected (disc art, book bindings, save screens, etc.); little work exists on the status of this within the gamer community. Exploring how and why certain paratexts, for example, frame our understanding of a particular cultural object[13] has formed a loosely organized broader sub-field of study, spanning studies of games, film, literature, audiences, and the media theory, to name but a few. Yet, there remains a disconnect between studies as they exist in the wider literature and those within game studies. These areas remain largely under-explored in their own right. There have been attempts to rectify this, of course, and using paratextual material to gain an understanding of cultural framing and the industry is gaining ground with the field[14], and though that number is rising, there remains a comparative paucity of games-specific work on paratexts.

11 Genette, Gérard: *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997.

12 There are exceptions, of course, concept art, 'pitches': all have ontological priority as to texts until the commercial product is released—making yet another claim for considering the consumer's relation to the text at any given moment.

13 I use 'object' here rather than 'text' to acknowledge that all texts are paratexts until perceptual ontological priority is established.

14 Cf. Arsenault, Dominic: *Super Power, Spoony, Bards, and Silverware*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2017; Booth, Paul: "Board, Game, and Media: Interactive Board Games as Multimedia Convergence," in: *Convergence,* (22)6 (2016), pp. 647-660; Vollans, Ed et al.: "'It's [not Just] in the Game': The Promotional Context of Video Games," in: *Kinephanos*, 7(1) (2017); https://www.kinephanos.ca/2017/introduction-its-not-just-in-the-game/; E. Wright: "Marketing Authenti-

Viewing a game as one element within a macro-network in this manner opens up the possibility of exploring any given text as a series of units of information, with the exact content or information imparted being unique to each individual consumer. All of this is occurring against a backdrop of a range of overlapping, and perhaps shared, knowledge adding to this context. Within the macro-network notion of a game, it follows logically that consumers can be aware of a specific game and even of gameplay without ever having played or experienced directly the central game object; only its paratextual surround. In effect, then, through promoting and discussing a central object, games can be remediated through the lenses of other media and other media forms, while themselves being a central text thanks to the emphasis we often place on them as part of economic exchange. These central objects are, after all, the products we purchase, and we only become aware that they *are* products thanks to the various remediational practices of promotion. Allowing for a shift from the micro to the macro paradoxically allows for greater focus on under-explored areas of study. Broadening the field to instances of interaction with varied content in different contexts allows us the chance to "to get into the nooks where fascinating work occurs."[15]

Instead of revisiting this debate in its entirety, I simply wish to re-frame it. Here I suggest that we have a textual network that often (but not always) surrounds a central object (e.g., the game). Such a textual network is an assemblage of elements along different vectors that constitute the central object for an individual. As a result of the emerging field of paratextual game studies, it is tempting to take 'as read' a range of existing truths; to apply the conclusions or wisdom born of studies from other disciplines in order to advance the field. Indeed, it is perhaps common sense to suggest that gamers respond in a similar way to game box art as film audiences do to DVD cases, or that trailers for games elicit the same kinds of discussion as trailers for films do. As Švelch claims:

"Just by watching the notice the spectator gets information about the paratextual quality of the video which would influence their expectations and interpretation of the

city;" Wright, Esther: "On the Promotional Context of Historical Video Games," in: *Rethinking History*, 22(4) (2018), pp. 598-608.

15 T.L. Taylor: "The Assemblage of Play," p. 332.

remainder of the video accordingly. Overall, the viewer knows that they are watching a promotional video for a video game or a movie."[16]

This common-sense notion, however, risks removing the unique characteristics of the game medium and industry, its history, its products, and more and denies the field more broadly from making its own journey of self-discovery. The suggestion that the viewer 'knows' automatically assumes a homogenous viewer and implicitly overlooks that which makes game promotion unique to the industry. Doing so risks obscuring the lack of similar viewer studies within the discipline and subsuming the findings and discussion from wider film and media studies into games studies—with the result that assumptions based on one media are implicitly applied to another unproblematically. As a way of countering this 'intellectual creep,' the discussion here focuses on a paratext shared by numerous other media industries to outline a way of furthering the field alongside intervening within the field of game studies: the trailer.

FOCUSING ON TRAILERS

Emerging from the film industry and appearing as a distinct category for games promotion only in the early 1990s, the game trailer has yet to be fully defined with any success. While trailers have been defined variously as "short films"[17] and "persuasive films,"[18] the definitions at work here are applied and emerging from work in the field of film studies. Increasing diversity in the kinds of the product promoted by trailers (such as games, books, theatre, etc.) challenges this in light of the macro-text discussion. The diversity is such that trailers have been considered a vernacular genre.[19] This

16 Švelch, Jan: "'Footage Not Representative:' Redefining Paratextuality for the Analysis of Official Communication in the Video Game Industry," in: Duret, Christophe/Pons, Christian-Marie (eds.), *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2016, pp. 297-315, here p. 303.

17 Johnston, Keith M.: *Coming Soon*, Jefferson, NC: Macfarlane 2009.

18 Kernan, Lisa: *Coming Attractions*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2004.

19 Vollans, Ed: "So Just What Is a Trailer, Anyway?" in: *Arts and the Market*, 5(2) (2015), pp. 112-125.

suggestion is open to accusations of nominative determinism but emerges as a direct result of the trailer existing in multiple forms unified by its nomenclature.

The lack of definition creates a significant problem when discussing the trailer in any context but particularly within games studies. As Vollans notes, the game trailer's aesthetic overall differs from other industrial forms of the trailer as it includes not only the content of the game—often in a montage and format similar to the film trailer, dubbed the "narrative aesthetic"—but also includes footage of people playing the games.[20] This inclusion in effect positions the act of play or game consumption within a promotional narrative to emphasize the ludic elements of play; dubbed the "advertising aesthetic."

Regardless of aesthetics or definition, it can be said with some confidence that trailers contribute significantly to the macro-text, forming a key touchstone in a promotional campaign. Perhaps unlike any other promotional paratext, the trailer is capable of generating a vast amount of anticipatory discussion and represents an emerging 'nook' for study. Consider the number of anticipatory sites or features exploring and deconstructing promotional content or how key information is 'teased' in advance of a product's release. Such discussion falls under that which has been called "anticipatory culture,"[21] or as Chin and Gray term it, "pre-viewing of pre-texts."[22] In effect, both these are concerned with speculating on the kind of product that may or may not ultimately exist. While it can be said that the trailer as a visual medium for pre-release information and entertainment remains important, little explicit evidence exists to support this claim. Similarly, while discussions of their ability to represent have occurred in both the public sphere[23] and the

20 Vollans, Ed: *Cross Media Promotion: Entertainment Industries and the Trailer*, Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia 2015, https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/53382/

21 Johnston, Keith M./Vollans, Ed./Greene, Fred L.: "Watching the Trailer: Researching the film trailer audience," in: *Participations*, 13(2) (2016), pp. 56-85.

22 Bertha Chin/Jonathan Gray, "One Ring to Rule Them All."

23 Hayward, Andrew: "The 10 Most Misleading Video Game Trailers," in: *Complex.com*, January 5 (2012); https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2012/01/the-10-most-misleading-video-game-trailers/; Kuchera, Ben: "Is It Illegal to Release Misleading Game Trailers or Screenshots?" in: *Polygon.com* (2016); https://www.polygon.com/2016/10/14/13289128/bullshots-no-mans-sky-marketing

academic sphere,[24] there has been little further discussion of the role of the game trailer as a textual assemblage in its own right.

Resultantly, we are obliged to draw from work in film studies critically. Such studies suggest that trailers remain of high importance in decision making, sharing this role with interpersonal recommendations. The majority of findings within film studies point to paratexts that best approximate the medium of the product and that are most influential in shaping expectations of film consumption; typically trailers.[25] Yet the game trailer here is fundamentally a short video. It maintains the same semiotic channels as its cinematic counterpart while still being in effect a hyposemiotic translation. This removes the ludic element of the game and potentially manifests this on-screen through aesthetics. Exploring how these aesthetics are manifest forms a key part of understanding both the trailer as an entity and tool of the games industry, but also how, as a paratext within a macro-text, it positions itself as part of, yet distinct, from the game itself.

Yet how to explore the aesthetics of a game trailer when there is no clear definition remains a key challenge in this area. Work on trailers has typically relied on an archive[26] or has chosen trailers at random.[27] The obscured nature of these compilation processes risks undermining what we can call a 'trailer.' Rather, for the purposes of this study, we can explore instead instances where

24 Švelch, Jan: "Exploring the Myth of the Representative Video Game Trailer," in: *Kinephanos*, 7(1) (2017), pp. 7-36.

25 Cf. Faber, Ronald J./O'Guinn, Thomas C.: "Effect of Media Advertising and Other Sources on Movie Selection," in: *Journalism Quarterly*, 61 (Summer) (1984), pp. 371-377; Austin, Bruce. A.: "Film Attendance: Why College Students Chose to See Their Most Recent Film," in: *Journal of Popular Film*, (9)1 (1981), pp. 43-49; Michelle, Carolyn et al.: *Fans, Blockbusterisation, and the Transformation of Cinematic Desire: Global Receptions of the Hobbit Film Trilogy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017.

26 Cf. L. Kernan: *Coming Attractions*; K. M. Johnston: *Coming Soon*.

27 J. Švelch: "Exploring the Myth;" Maier, Carmen D.: "Structure and Function in the Generic Staging of Film Trailers a Multimodal Analysis," in: Piazza, Roberta/Bednarek, Monika/ Ross, Fabio (eds.), *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2011, pp. 141-158.

trailers have been collated as part of a transparent study, and to date, only one instance of this has been found for games trailer in the work of Vollans.[28]

Using a blend of newspaper discourse to first identify objects circulating under the label of 'trailer,' and then triangulating this with hyperlinked YouTube videos sharing this nomenclature, Vollans builds a database of 446 games trailers from the broad period between 2004 and 2014.[29] The passage of time between the construction of this database and any socio-industrial developments potentially acting on the industry mean this database will not build a complete view of the kinds of trailers circulating for any given text, nor will it be indicative of trends or changes in the industry. Rather this database remains a snapshot of the games industry within the first decade of the new millennium. Indeed, here we must be cautious: while using such an existing database affords us the luxury of bypassing our own data collection and increased transparency, the fact that this specific database is in effect over a decade old will undoubtedly impact the responses gained. In this instance, the trailers comprising the data are itemized, which allows for repeated access and viewing, so by using an existing database, we can mine this area to build a framework of study that can be used regardless of the temporality of the dataset.

Vollans' work on the dataset identifies an aesthetic spectrum at work within the corpus overall. At one end of the spectrum are those trailers that show the game in a narrative designed to show the product's use. At the other end, a narrative that uses the product itself constitutes the promotion, akin to the montage of film trailers, with a third point between the two, whereby both the game-world and real-world consumption are given broadly equal status.

Exploring each end of this aesthetic spectrum in more detail, it is possible to unpack how texts within the macro-network position their respective products as being separate, while still constituting grounds for discussion themselves; a form of tension between being purely text or purely context. Both ends of the spectrum have shared features: studio logos and titles offer a key indicator of the industry in which the trailer belongs, and this serves in part

28 E. Vollans: *Cross Media Promotion*; Vollans, Ed: "The Most Cinematic Game Yet," *Kinephanos*, 7(1) (2017), pp. 106-130.

29 Vollans, Ed: *Appendices: Cross Media Promotion: Entertainment Industries and the Trailer*, Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia 2015, https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/53382/

to situate the trailer within a macro-network. The adoption of (film studio) logos has been fully explored in Grainge's excellent *Brand Hollywood*.[30] Indeed, Grainge discusses the use of logos to signify not only a particular kind of product experience but also notes that "logos [have become] the manifestation of a studio's 'corporate personality.'"[31] As Grainge discusses, the use of specific logos is deeply complex, and this space is in part a performance of a wider brand or stakeholder as much as it is a signifier of the kind of content to which it is appended; trailer, film, game, etc.[32] Indeed, despite being so briefly on our screens, they demonstrate the conflation of "capital and desire," the visual manifestation of a studio signifies its role within a capitalist economy while simultaneously signifying the kinds of pleasures associated with that studio.[33] Here we see a kind of spatial and temporal duality within the trailer that is echoed throughout its assemblage. It represents a kind of tension between the industrial considerations and the creative (like all forms of promotion to some extent). Similarly, the adoption of other overtly imposed elements of the trailer stands to illustrate this kind of tension. Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings similarly serve to signify the industrial context to which this text belongs, and in many cases may signify that this is a form of promotion within the games industry; consider that the PEGI rating often appears at the beginning of much promotional content announcing a 'game trailer.'

This kind of broader signification itself is separate from the gameplay experience and acts as a distinguishing barrier between promotion and product. Similarly, purchasing information such as release dates and the product's platform availability serves to indicate that the text immediately consumed

30 Grainge, Paul: *Brand Hollywood*, London/New York: Routledge 2008.

31 Ibid., p. 72.

32 For a video game specific application of this work, using the example of the way the Rockstar Games logo undergoes certain aesthetic shifts when associated with different game franchises (GRAND THEFT AUTO, RED DEAD REDEMPTION, L.A. NOIRE), see Wright, Esther: *Rockstar Games and American History*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Warwick, 2019.

33 P. Grainge: *Brand Hollywood*, p. 79, citing Elsaesser, Thomas: "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, But Not Everything Goes," in: Lewis, Jon (ed.), *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the 1990s*, London: Pluto Press 2002, p. 16.

is not the intended central product. Pointing towards a date and a platform for purchase highlights both the temporal and spatial 'other.' Platform availability is a key element of promotional rhetoric; directing attention to a platform that may not be the current platform on which the promotion is viewed. Similarly, pointing to a specific release date likewise creates a form of distancing between the promotional text and the object of purchase: 'coming soon,' 'available on…,' etc. all serve to ground the trailer as 'not the central text,' pointing to an object to be purchased. Such indicators may not be present in every trailer; different jurisdictions have different requirements for rating information and release information. Similarly, the aesthetics variations of the trailer may well play with this to garner 'buzz' and increase speculative consumption of the product itself. Each of these signifiers serves to perform elements of the product; 'speaking' to consumers in a manner that signifies both the kind of promotional content immediately present and the kind of absent product promoted. While such broad signifiers serve to perform the industry, and the promotional role of the trailer itself, they garner distance from the product within the promotion. The wider aesthetics, too, are particularly useful in this manner. Thus, using Vollans' spectrum of aesthetic, we can further see that the two ends of the spectrum build this distance in different ways and to different effects.

NARRATIVE AESTHETIC

The narrative aesthetic proposed in the core work stems from the movement towards what we could call the 'traditional' film trailer: a montage of product footage (or footage representative of such), a seemingly direct view into the game itself. Though there is very little that is 'traditional' about them. As Cassidy puts it, within the video game trailer idealized by the limited literature: "The product is presented not as a game that enthusiastic teens enjoy playing, but rather like a digital movie. Storyline is emphasized and characters speak lines of dialogue."[34]

Here Cassidy is describing not only the conventions of the video game trailer when compared with the film trailer but implicitly suggests the lack

34 Cassidy, Scott Brendan: "The Videogame as Narrative," in: *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 28(4) (2011), pp. 292-306, here p. 298.

of a wider causal frame of narrative that we might see in more traditional advertising. Within this aesthetic, no explicit depictions of any form of player are found, though this tends to be implied through the depiction of gameplay interface—targets and game menus primarily. The gameplay is fundamentally constructed through a meta-narrative of footage. As Kernan writes of the film trailer, the act of taking sequences from the product (regardless of their fidelity to it) acts like a form of "window shopping," the game's footage (both gameplay and cutscene) here can be seen as "quoted" with the quotation marks taking the form of studio logo, product title and release information. This act of quotation can also be seen as showing while withholding a product.[35] Zanger refers to this as the double articulation of the (film) trailer, and we can see that such quotations, through following their own logic of promotion, may both tell one story (the trailer) while withholding another (the product).[36] The very act of elevating some aspect of the product as being worthy of use in promotion further suggests a withholding of other elements deemed less titillating. This act, however, serves in much the same way as all elements of promotion; providing access to a product before its release is a key element of the promotional context inviting consumers in while still maintaining the exclusivity of the forthcoming product.

Reviewing Vollans' work, we can see that trailers in the narrative aesthetic format typically use perceived elements of the product to constitute the promotion with the additional inclusion of voiceover, studio logos, release date. While a rapidly edited montage structure is at work within the majority of these trailers, there are many instances where longer sequences are used to convey narrative action, and so it must be said that montage in the strictest sense is not a defining element alone but rather works within the micro-text to create that which Kernan calls a "narrative of discontinuity."[37] Unlike Kernan's initial discussion, however, we must be clear not to imply a deterministic understanding of montage; Kernan's work has come under heavy criticism for suggesting that montage creates the desire for the product in the viewership. Rather, I want to suggest that these temporal and spatial rifts within the discontinuous promotion show a fragmented product and these

35 L. Kernan: *Coming Attractions*, p. 6.

36 Zanger, Anat: "Next on Your Screen: The Double Identity of the Trailer," in: *Semiotica*, 1/2 (1998), pp. 207-230.

37 L. Kernan: *Coming Attractions*, p. 10.

fragments serve to indicate that this promotional text is not the product itself. Playing with the temporal and spatial remediation of the product within the montage, however, relies on shared product knowledge, as well as the shared cultural knowledge of trailer aesthetics (in the broadest sense) to help consumers understand the form and purpose of the promotion. Indeed, this distancing is occasionally further aided by the layover "not game footage."[38] This assemblage of key signifiers creates a network that themselves suggest this is not the product, and this window-shopping narrative is reinforced by such micro signification; we can consider these as banners, labels, or promotional stickers on the window, reminding us of the barrier between us and the product. As Švelch writes, "To sum up, the paratextual aspects of the trailer which are manifested by some of the individual parts of the trailer but also by the interplay of many other parts, inform viewers that they are watching a trailer."[39] The issue within Švelch's work, aside from a lack of definition for 'trailer,' is that it assumes a single form of aesthetic within trailers, similarly seeing them as a homogenous mass with standardized modes of address; directly at odds with the premise set out by Vollans. While the work overlaps within discussions of the trailer and narrative aesthetic, the description of the advertising aesthetic also functioning within games promotion necessitates further discussion.

ADVERTISING AESTHETIC

In many ways, the advertising aesthetic put forward by Vollans is a broad category that could be said to exist merely to account for deviations in the trailer aesthetic within the database underpinning the work. Discussions of trailers elsewhere have largely focused on the role of montage within the work, and anecdotal evidence suggests that 'trailers' need to have a montage to be considered belonging to this category.[40] Yet, given the aesthetic

38 Švelch has conducted a more direct study: J. Švelch: "Footage Not Representative."

39 Ibid., p. 304.

40 L. Kernan: *Coming Attractions*; Haralovich, Mary-Beth/Klaprat, Cathy Root: "Marked Woman and Jezebel: The Spectator-in-the-trailer," in: *Enclitic*, 2 (1981),

variation within the original term ('trailer' pertaining to all promotion on the shorts reel)[41] and the range of promotion within the film industry that uses a non-montage aesthetics,[42] we cannot entirely rely on montage as a defining characteristic. Indeed, the history of games promotion is such that, as Young has observed:

> "Home videogames and videogame systems were once advertised in a manner quite similar to staple items such as clothing, food, or activities. Commercials for these products, like those for early videogames, focused on showing how much pleasure individuals derived from consuming the product and *typically showed the consumer actually enjoying the product."*[43]

Similarly, as Bernadette Flynn notes, early promotion for games focused on family-oriented themes, and this necessitated showing not only the game but the family within a communal space, often within the home.[44] This is, in effect, the rise of what Chambers calls family-centered gaming and underpins the concept of the advertising aesthetic.[45] This aesthetic principally relies on some form of on-screen gamer space in order to show the product (the game and/or the console) in use.

This kind of aesthetic is typified by the JUST DANCE 3 (2011) promotional campaign. The promotional material here combines footage of on-screen

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pp. 66-74; Maier, Carmen D.: "Visual Evaluation in Film Trailers," in: *Visual Communication*, 8 (2009), pp. 159-180; J. Švelch: "Footage Not Representative."

41 Staiger, Janet: "Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking about the History and Theory of Film Advertising," in: *Cinema Journal*, 29(3) (1990), pp. 3-31, here p. 26.

42 Examples here include Alfred Hitchcock's direct address to the camera from the 'lot of my next movie' in which he describes the film PSYCHO (1962) without showing the film itself.

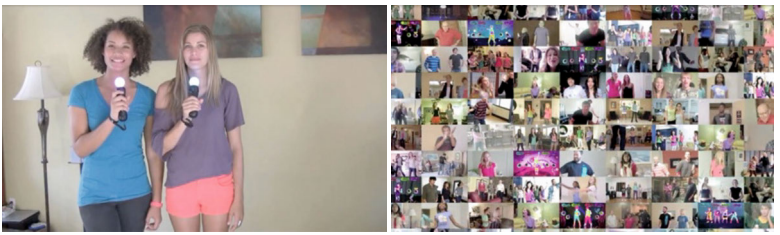
43 Young, Bryan Mitchell: "The Disappearance and Reappearance and Disappearance of the Player in Videogame Advertising," in: *Situated Play DiGRA 2007 Conference* (2007), pp. 235-242, p. 235, emphasis added.

44 Flynn, B.: "Geography of the Digital Hearth," in: *Information, Communication & Society*, 6(4) (2003), pp. 551-576.

45 Chambers, Deborah: "'Wii Play as a Family': The Rise in Family-centred Video Gaming," in: *Leisure Studies*, 31(1) (2012), pp. 69-82, here p. 78.

players dancing in their own homes, juxtaposed with images of gameplay, in this instance of players' avatars dancing. In using a real-world context (dancing on the sofa with friends) and in incorporating this with footage of corresponding gameplay, the trailer here shows not only the game within a fictionalized narrative but also serves to illustrate that viewers of the promotion are not engaging with the game in this manner. This kind of aesthetic places the game and its console not only within a 'real-world' context but places the game firmly within its socio-technical assemblage. Under this kind of aesthetic, the console becomes a key element of the game itself, occupying space in the home and importantly demonstrating the interaction between on-screen participants and the console itself. This aesthetic lacks the kind of continuous narrative of product placement typically found in advertising for tangible consumer goods; there is a comparative absence of the physical product, emphasizing the experiential aspects of consumption; gameplay, that presumably viewers of this promotion are not participating in.

Figure 1: JUST DANCE 3 trailer: using participation as both promotion and gameplay



Source: Ubisoft/Ubisoft Paris 2011; Screenshots by E. Vollans

Consider that the 2011 JUST DANCE 3 trailer is composed almost entirely of footage of on-screen gamers playing a predominantly unseen game. The trailer combines direct address to the camera with a montage of gamers and their avatars dancing through the use of a discontinuous narrative.[46] The dislocated space is given continuity through the use of overlapping dialogue to create a unified promotional message. This ties together the disparate locations, which reflects the rise of not just *family-centered* gaming that typified

46 L. Kernan: *Coming Attractions*, p. 10.

the launch of the Wii platform,[47] but rather gaming as a social communal space, both inside the home, and across domestic (and geographical boundaries). This fragmentation serves to reinforce the distancing between the promotion and the product by reflecting different social spaces designed to reflect our own.

The JUST DANCE 3 trailer provides a spatial focal point from which to introduce the game and the domestic space needed to play it. This sits in contrast to the metanarrative of a trailer for any product composed entirely of diegetic world footage. Showing the interactive element of the game in action, the idealized player serves implicitly to underscore that this is not the game itself, that specific actions from players are required for the game to function as such. This, in effect, is drawing attention to the lack of gameplay for the viewers, which leads to a distancing between the advertisement and the product.

CONCLUDING NOTES

Although somewhat reductionist here, exploring in the broadest sense the different aesthetic constructs at work within promotional trailers, we can see that their very construction as trailers necessitates the fragmentation of the game product. Their existence as a promotional paratext is signified by the 'other,' that this piece of promotion is not the product itself but a deeply fragmented version of it. The key signifiers of the trailer—logos, montage, gamers, ratings—all serve to act as an assemblage of both entertainment and economic considerations. This tension between entertaining promotion (that stands in for an entertaining product) and the economic purpose of the promotion—to not be more entertaining than the product—, echoes the tension between the micro-text (trailer representing the game) and macro-network (the game and its associated promotion). This tension is, in effect, a form of distancing that works not only to demarcates the trailer's paratextual role and textual identity. Rather, we see a remediating performance that actively keeps viewers 'out' of the product, while simultaneously referencing this 'other' product and thus drawing them in.

47 Cf. B.M. Young: "The Disappearance and Reappearance."

This chapter earlier argued that we could see the nature of the game text as belonging intrinsically to a wider network. Within this network, we can see that the remediation of the game here is, in effect, a way of advancing the central text's presence while simultaneously keeping it at a distance. The game is paratextually here, often long before it is actually in our presence. The entire rhetorical stance and economy of the paratext depend upon this effect and, in doing so, offers a fascinating nook to further explore how we make sense of the macro-text overall. That the micro-texts too can be seen as an assemblage of elements suggests we could start to see games and gaming as existing within a wider spectrum of engagement, but at the moment, this runs the risk of textual determinism. Without fully exploring the viewer's response to this, we cannot be certain how these paratexts form part of the wider meaning-making structure. If we want to explore this further, we need to work towards a sustained study of the consumer's response and use of all such pre-figurative paratexts to understand the kinds of meaning and meaning-making role in wider consumption and thus to explore the game and its surround as it is seen by consumers; those who bring meaning to it.

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