

Introduction

Film, Television, and Off-Screen Studies

A common first line for books on contemporary media, and for many a student essay on the subject, notes the saturation of everyday life with media. Certainly, my list of available cable channels seems to grow every month, while the list of movies in cinemas, on television, for rent, or available for purchase similarly proliferates at a precipitous rate. However, media growth and saturation can only be measured in small part by the number of films or television shows—or books, games, blogs, magazines, or songs for that matter—as each and every media text is accompanied by textual proliferation at the level of hype, synergy, promos, and peripherals. As film and television viewers, we are all part-time residents of the highly populated cities of Time Warner, DirecTV, AMC, Sky, Comcast, ABC, Odeon, and so forth, and yet not all of these cities' architecture is televisual or cinematic by nature. Rather, these cities are also made up of all manner of ads, previews, trailers, interviews with creative personnel, Internet discussion, entertainment news, reviews, merchandising, guerrilla marketing campaigns, fan creations, posters, games, DVDs, CDs, and spinoffs. Hype and synergy abound, forming the streets, bridges, and trading routes of the media world, but also many of its parks, beaches, and leisure sites. They tell us about the media world around us, prepare us for that world, and guide us between its structures, but they also fill it with meaning, take up much of our viewing and thinking time, and give us the resources with which we will both interpret and discuss that world.

On any given day, as we wait for a bus, for example, we are likely to see ads for movies and television shows at the bus stop, on the side of the bus, and/or in a magazine that we read to pass the time. If instead we take a car, we will see such ads on roadside billboards and hear them on the radio. At home with the television on, we may watch entertainment

news that hypes shows, interviews creative personnel, and offers “sneak peaks” of the making of this or that show. Ad breaks will bring us yet more ads and trailers, as will pop-ups or visits to YouTube online. Official webpages often offer us information about a show, wallpaper for our computer desktops, and yet more space for fan discussion, thereby supplementing the thousands of discussion sites run by fans or anti-fans. The online space also offers the occasional alternate reality game or particularly creative marketing campaign. Stores online and offline sell merchandise related to these films and shows, ranging from collectible *Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) “replica” swords or rings, to Dunder Mifflin t-shirts for *The Office* (2005–), to a talking Homer Simpson bottle opener. They sell licensed toy lines, linens, breakfast cereals, vitamins, and clothing to children. Bookstores and comic book shops sell spinoff novelizations and graphic novels. Game stores sell licensed videogames and board games. Fast food stores sell the Happy Meal or Value Meal. Music and video stores sell soundtracks, CDs of music “inspired by” certain films or shows, and DVDs and Blu-Ray discs rich with bonus materials, cast and crew commentaries, and extra scenes. Tour companies offer official *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) or *Sopranos* (1999–2007) tours of the New York area, while *Lord of the Rings*-themed tours of New Zealand are possible, and some fans lead themselves on their own tours of filming sites. Fans also write stories and songs and make films or vids about or set in film and television’s storyworlds. Film and television shows, in other words, are only a small part of the massive, extended presence of filmic and televisual texts across our lived environments.

Given their extended presence, any filmic or televisual text and its cultural impact, value, and meaning cannot be adequately analyzed without taking into account the film or program’s many proliferations. Each proliferation, after all, holds the potential to change the meaning of the text, even if only slightly. Trailers and reports from the set, for instance, may construct early frames through which would-be viewers might think of the text’s genre, tone, and themes. Discussion sites might then reinforce such frames or otherwise challenge them, while videogames, comics, and other narrative extensions render the storyworld a more immersive environment. In the process, such entities change the nature of the text’s address, each proliferation either amplifying an aspect of the text through its mass circulation or adding something new and different to the text. While purists may stomp their feet and insist that the game, bonus materials, or promos, for instance, “aren’t the real thing,” for many viewers and non-

viewers alike the title of the film or program will signify the entire package. Individuals or communities will construct different ideas of what that package entails, based on their own interactions with its varying proliferations, and on their own sense of its textual hierarchy. But rarely if ever can a film or program serve as the only source of information about the text. And rather than simply serve as *extensions* of a text, many of these items are filters through which we must pass on our way to the film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text.

While many consumers deride the presence of hype and licensed merchandise as a nuisance, we also rely upon it, at least in part, to help us get through an evening's viewing or a trip to the multiplex. Decisions on what to watch, what not to watch, and *how* to watch are often made while consuming hype, synergy, and promos, so that by the time we actually encounter "the show itself," we have already begun to decode it and to preview its meanings and effects.

We are all familiar with the vernacular imperative to not "judge a book by its cover." But we all do so nonetheless. Our world is heavily populated by promos and surrounding textuality, and these form the substance of first impressions. Today's version of "Don't judge a book by its cover" is "Don't believe the hype," but hype and surrounding texts do more than just ask us to believe them or not; rather, they establish frames and filters through which we look at, listen to, and interpret the texts that they hype. As media scholars have long noted, much of the media's powers come not necessarily from being able to tell us what to think, but what to think about, and how to think about it.¹ Mediated information and narratives are frames par excellence, trimming and editing the object of their attention for us with significant power and skill. Advertisers especially are charged with the task of creating frames for many of the items that surround us, harnessing semiotics and cultural scripts to frame everything from soft drinks to vacuum cleaners to back-pain medicine. They do so not simply by telling us to buy such products or services, but by creating a life, character, and *meaning* for all manner of products and services. Hype, in short, creates meaning. And by doing so, it regularly implores us to judge books by their glossy covers.

This book is about the machinations of those glossy "covers," about how hype, synergy, promos, narrative extensions, and various forms of related textuality position, define, and create meaning for film and television. Promotion is vitally important in economic terms, of course, as a proper understanding of media multinational corporations' strategies of synergy

and multi-platforming tells us much about the political economy of the mass media. But for synergy to work, meaning must first be established; otherwise, *why* would one buy a Disney toy, get excited about a movie sequel or television spinoff, eagerly anticipate the release of a DVD or podcast, or trawl through the Internet for spoilers or vids? Why, too, might one spend significantly *more* time with such spinoff- or promo-related items than with the film or television show itself? Synergy works because hype creates meaning. Thus, this book represents an attempt to study how this meaning is created, and how it both relates to and in part constructs our understanding of and relationship with the film or television show. It is a look at how much of the media world is formed by “book covers” and their many colleagues—opening credit sequences, trailers, toys, spinoff videogames, prequels and sequels, podcasts, bonus materials, interviews, reviews, alternate reality games, spoilers, audience discussion, vids, posters or billboards, and promotional campaigns.

Consequently, the book argues for a relatively new type of media analysis. While engaging in close reading, audience research, and structural/political economic analysis of films and television programs, we must also use such techniques to study hype, synergy, promos, and peripherals. Charles Acland writes that “the problem with film studies has been *film*, that is, the use of a medium in order to designate the boundaries of the discipline. Such a designation assumes a certain stability in what is actually a mutable technological apparatus. A problem ensues when it is apparent that film is not film anymore.”² This is also a problem with television studies, for, I would quibble with Acland, film has never been (just) film, nor has television ever been (just) television. Thus, while “screen studies” exists as a discipline encompassing both film and television studies, we need an “off-screen studies” to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television.

Of Texts, Paratexts, and Peripherals: A Word on Terminology

We might begin by finding a single term to describe these various entities. *Promos* and *promotion* involve the selling of another entity. Or, stepping beyond “normal” levels of advertising is *hype*. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines “hype” as “extravagant or intensive publicity or promotion.” Hype is etymologically derived from “hyper-,” meaning “over, beyond, above” or “excessively, above normal,” which is in turn from the Greek “*huper*,” meaning “over, beyond.” The term alludes to

advertisements and public relations, referring to the puffing up, mass circulation, and frenetic selling of something. Hype is advertising that goes “over” and “beyond” an accepted norm, establishing heightened presence, often for a brief, unsustainable period of time: like the hyperventilating individual or the spaceship in hyperdrive, the hyped product will need to slow down at some point. Its heightened presence is made all the more possible with film and television due to those industries’ placement—at least in their Hollywood varieties—within networks of *synergy*. Deriving from the Greek “*sunergos*,” meaning “working together,” synergy refers, says the *OED*, to “the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.” Within the entertainment industry, it refers to a strategy of multimedia platforming, linking a media product to related media on other “platforms,” such as toys, DVDs, and/or videogames, so that each product advertises and enriches the experience of the other. And whereas hype is often regarded solely as advertising and as PR, synergistic merchandise, products, and games—also called *peripherals*—are often intended as other platforms for profit-generation.

All of these terms have their virtues. Promotion suggests not only the commercial act of selling, but also of advancing and developing a text. Hype’s evocation of images of puffing up, proliferation, and speeding up suggest the degree to which such activities increase the size of the media product or text, even if fleetingly. Synergy implies a streamlining and bringing together of two products or texts. Peripherals, meanwhile, suggest a core entity with outliers that might not prove “central” and that might not even be doing the same thing as that entity, but that are somehow related.

Although each of these terms has its utility in given instances, all have inherent problems. Hype is often regarded in pejorative terms, as excessive. In addition to its listing of “hype” as “extravagant,” for instance, the *OED* provides a second definition, as “a deception carried out for the sake of publicity,” while the verb form means “to promote or publicize (a product or idea) intensively, *often exaggerating its benefits*” (emphasis added). The term thereby evokes the image of an entity whose existence is illegitimate, inauthentic, and abnormal, when I will be arguing that hype is often mundane and business as usual. Hype, promotion, promos, and synergy are also all terms situated in the realm of profits, business models, and accounting, which may prove a barrier for us to conceive of them as creating meaning, and as being situated in the realms of enjoyment,

interpretive work and play, and the social function of media narratives. To call such elements “peripherals,” meanwhile, is to posit them as divorced and removed from an actual text, discardable and relatively powerless, when they are, in truth, anything but peripheral. Moreover, hype, promotion, and promos usually refer only to advertising rhetoric, and synergy and peripherals only to officially sanctioned textual iterations. Thus, while fan and viewer creations may work *textually* in similar ways to hype, promotion, promos, synergy, and peripherals, they are nearly always unauthorized elements that are thus not covered by such terminology.

Throughout this book, then, while I will occasionally use the above terms as context deems appropriate, I will more frequently refer to *paratexts* and to *paratextuality*. I take these terms from Gerard Genette, who first used them to discuss the variety of materials that surround a literary text.³ A fuller definition of these terms will be offered in chapter 1, but my attraction to them stems from the meaning of the prefix “para-,” defined by the *OED* both as “beside, adjacent to,” and “beyond or distinct from, but analogous to.” A “paratext” is both “distinct from” and alike—or, I will argue, intrinsically part of—the text. The book’s thesis is that paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them. Just as we ask *paramedics* to save lives rather than leave the job to others, and just as a *parasite* feeds off, lives in, and can affect the running of its host’s body, a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text.

Paratexts often take a tangible form, as with posters, videogames, podcasts, reviews, or merchandise, for example, and it is the tangible paratext on which I focus predominantly. However, I will also argue that other, intangible entities can at times work in paratextual fashion. Thus, for instance, while a genre is not a paratext it can work paratextually to frame a text, as can talk about a text (though, of course, once such talk is written or typed, it becomes a tangible paratext), and so occasionally I will examine these and other intangible entities within the rubric of paratextuality too.

I must also be clear from the outset that throughout this book, I use the word *text* in a particular fashion. I elaborate upon and justify this use in chapter 1, but early warning should be provided to those readers who are accustomed to calling the film or television program “the text” or, in relation to paratexts, “the source text.” To use the word “text” in such a manner suggests that the film or program *is* the entire text, and/or that

it completes the text. I argue, though, that a film or program is but one part of the text, the text always being a contingent entity, either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation. The text, as Julia Kristeva notes, is not a finished production, but a continuous “productivity.”⁴ It is a larger unit than any film or show that may be part of it; it is the entire storyworld as we know it. Our attitudes toward, responses to, and evaluations of this world will always rely upon paratexts too. Hence, since my book argues that a film or program is never the entire sum of the text, I will not conflate “film” or “program” with “text.” When I call for an “off-screen studies,” I call for a screen studies that focuses on paratexts’ constitutive role in creating textuality, rather than simply consigning paratexts to the also-ran category or considering their importance only in promotional and monetary terms.

Nevertheless, the money trail might guide our initial foray into an off-screen studies, as an invigorated study of paratexts could address an odd paradox of media and cultural studies: while the industry pumps millions of dollars and labor hours into carefully crafting its paratexts and then saturates our lived environments with them, media and cultural studies often deal with them only in passing. How important are they? By late 2008, major studios were spending, on average, \$36 million per film on marketing—a full third of the average film budget—while blockbusters could require considerably more. Smaller companies such as Lionsgate habitually spend up to two-thirds of their budget on marketing.⁵ Meanwhile, DVD sales and rentals handily eclipse Hollywood’s box office revenues, with, for instance, 2004 seeing \$7.4 billion in rentals to theaters, yet \$21 billion from home video.⁶ Even blockbusters and box office giants are seeing vigorous “competition” from DVDs; New Line’s \$305.4 million of revenue for DVD sales of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) in 2003, for example, fell just shy of the film’s huge yield at the box office.⁷ And cineplexes are also being rivaled by the videogame industry—some of whose biggest hits are film and/or television spinoffs.⁸ In the world of television, as Amanda Lotz records, American networks and cable channels devote substantial advertising space to hyping their own programs. Network television alone, for instance, foregoes an estimated \$4 billion worth of ad time in order to advertise its programs, airing over 30,000 promos a year. In 2002, the old WB network accepted more ads from parent company AOL Time Warner than from any other advertiser, suggesting how one of the great economic benefits of conglomeration has been

the ability to advertise on commonly owned channels.⁹ Add to this the potentially colossal sums that media corporations can earn from merchandising, licensing, and franchising (in addition to *Lord of the Rings*, think Disney, *Star Wars* [1977], or *The Simpsons* [1989–]), and paratextuality is not only big business, but often much bigger than film or television themselves. Janet Wasko cites estimates that the licensed children’s products market is valued at \$132 billion, that licensed products in general generate more than \$73 billion a year, and that movie-based games earned the major studios as much as \$1.4 billion in 2001.¹⁰

And yet media, film, television, and cultural studies frequently stick solely to the films and television programs with a loyalty born out of habit. John Caldwell notes the film and television industries’ widespread devaluation of “below the line” workers as lesser than the “above the line” directors, producers, writers, and actors.¹¹ Media studies, too, often risk a similar devaluation of those whose labor and creativity can be just as constitutive of the text as that of the above-the-liners. While this move is evident in the relative dearth of materials studying or even theorizing “below the line” work on films and television shows, it is similarly evident in the relative lack of attention paid to the semiotic and aesthetic value of the “below the line” paratext, or to its creators. Synergy is seen in terms of profits, but too rarely in terms of *textuality*, as something that creates sense and meaning, that is engaged with and interpreted as is the filmic or televisual referent, and that can ultimately create meaning for and *on behalf of* this referent. A key starting point for this book, then, is that if the film and television industries invest so heavily in previews, bonus materials, merchandise, and their ilk, so should we as analysts. It is time to examine the paratexts.

The Movie of the Trailer

Illustrating the power of paratexts with a playfully parodic nod was a brief video released in spring 2008 by the online satirical news outlet *The Onion*. “*Iron Man*,” the Onion News Network’s faux anchor announced, “was one of the most popular trailers of last summer, but controversy is sweeping the fan community today, following the announcement that Paramount Pictures is planning to adapt the beloved trailer into a feature-length motion picture” (fig. 1.1). He then cut to a supposed entertainment reporter, who noted mixed reaction to the controversial plan to make a movie of the trailer:



Fig. 1.1. The Onion News Network speculates on whether fans will accept the film adaptation of the *Iron Man* trailer.

The *Iron Man* trailer is near and dear to a lot of fans' hearts, so you can imagine how worried people are about this news. Apparently, the plan is to expand that fast montage of very short shots seen in the trailer into full-length, distinct scenes, and in between those scenes, they plan to add *additional* scenes that weren't in the trailer.

She also speculated on the prospects of the studio taking the fan favorite Gwyneth Paltrow, whose "notable" appearance in the trailer they clocked at three-quarters of a second, and placing her at the center of a "tedious romantic subplot that [is] twenty or thirty minutes long." Both "reporters" react with mock incredulity at the notion that Paramount would jeopardize "the integrity of the trailer" and risk "alienating the trailer's core fan base" with such a move, but the entertainment reporter reassures viewers that at least Paramount has announced that they will keep everything that audiences loved, "right down to actual lines from the trailer," and have even brought Robert Downey, Jr., back to "reprise" his role from the trailer, and that they will release the film with eight "entirely new entertainment-packed trailers. So, even if the movie is no good, hopefully the trip to the theater will be worth it anyway."

The item plays with many anxieties of consuming media in a hype-, synergy-, and franchise-filled era, in particular the concern that the ads can prove better than the product itself, and that adaptations risk killing the core elements of the original. In doing so, it points to how complex our interactions with media are, and to how contingent they are on anticipation and expectation, on networks of paratexts, and on previous relationships to a story, character, actor, or genre. The parodic clip suggests the degree to which many if not all people going to watch the *Iron Man* film (2008) will already have started the process of making sense of it. Those who have read *Iron Man* comics, or perhaps played Marvel videogames, will have a sense of what lies ahead, as will (in different ways) those with a past knowledge of Downey's, Paltrow's, or director Jon Favreau's work. And many will have seen the trailer, which was indeed spectacular, thereby creating the groundwork for the Onion News Network's parodic story. Others will have seen posters, visited the website, read reviews, and heard or read interviews with Downey, Paltrow, or Favreau. Some viewers will have had expectations created simply due to the cinema in which the movie was playing, or due to the friends who invited them to come see it. Meanwhile, of course, thousands will have avoided the film, whether due to its genre, cast, or any of the above-mentioned instances of hype and synergy. In short, then, if we really wanted to make sense of the "moment" of interaction between film and audience, we would need to explore all those things that preceded the film, set the frames through which audience members would make sense of it, and set the stage for the kind of movie-going experience they would have. As categorically absurd as *The Onion's* suggestion that the trailer has "integrity" to uphold might seem, the trailer would play a key role in determining how audiences came to the cinema, and what they came expecting. The film would have begun in earnest, then, with the trailer, or with the comics, the videogames, the interviews, the reviews, the ads, and so forth. The text, the essence, of *Iron Man* began long before the film hit theaters, so that when the film finally arrived, yes, it could radically revise that text, but it would not be working with a blank slate; rather, it would need to work through, with, and/or in spite of the multiple meanings that had already begun to form in audiences' minds.

However, this book is not simply arguing that paratexts *start* texts, for they also create them and continue them. Thus, this book is also about the paratexts that we find after a text has officially begun, and that continue to give us information, ways of looking at the film or show, and

frames for understanding it or engaging with it. Their work is never over, and their effects on what the film or show *is*—on what it means to its audiences—are continual.

The Onion News Network's short clip plays with the notion of continuing paratexts, too, for in its suggestion that the integrity of the trailer might be jeopardized by the movie, the clip reflects on how each new iteration of a text—wherever it may be, and of whatever length (ninety seconds or ninety minutes)—can affect the public understanding of, appreciation of, and identification with that text. Quite simply, a “bad” adaptation will inevitably affect the public standing of a text, just as would a “good” one. But to be able to call an adaptation “good” or “bad” requires an audience member or community to have developed a notion of the ideal and proper text, and in this book I will argue that paratexts play as much of a role as does the film or television program itself in constructing how different audience members will construct this ideal text.

Where Is Springfield? Placing The Simpsons

Another illustrative example lies in the army of merchandise and spinoff products that surround *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* is, of course, one of the world's most successful television programs worldwide, having produced more than four hundred episodes by the time of writing. But surely few if any know *The Simpsons* solely as a television program, for it is also a brand, a world, and a set of characters that exist across clothing, toys, videogames, a film, ads, books, comics, DVDs, CDs, and many other media platforms. For the purposes of my argument here, though, I wish to focus on one particular platform: a set of online ads for *The Simpsons Game* (2007). Since this videogame followed in the wake of *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), in effect we have a third-level paratext: an ad for the game that followed the movie of the television program. As such, if we were to examine this as media studies has more traditionally examined such products, we would focus on it wholly as a hypercommercialized money-grab, as a synergistic attempt to squeeze as much as possible from a successful media product. Ads for games of a movie of a television show rate low on most traditional scales of artistic value.

However, upon closer examination of these ads, we can see a viable source of *The Simpsons* as text. Upon navigating to the webpage for *The Simpsons Game*, a visitor was met with a series of links to parodic trailers for supposed stand-alone videogames, each of which used *The Simpsons*

to parody established and popular games or game genres (and each a level in the actual game). Thus, for instance, *Medal of Homer* deftly parodies both the *Medal of Honor* games specifically (1999–) and war games and war films more generally. With a somber yet sweeping orchestral and choral soundtrack worthy of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the ad opens with a series of zoom-and-pan scratchy black-and-white war “photos” (yet drawn in *Simpsons* style), playing with the visual style of Ken Burns documentaries, and of *Medal of Honor*’s cut sequences (fig. 1.2). Title cards interlace such photos, reading “In the Last Great Invasion” “Of the Last Great War” “They Gave Each Other the Strength” “To Make History.” This reverent spectacle is interrupted following the third title card, though, as we cut to a shot of Homer and Bart in which Homer is scratching his butt. The irreverence then bubbles up further following the last title card, as a prancing Homer interrupts, “Oooh, I’m France, I’m a little girl. I don’t want to be bombed and attacked.” The ad continues to its conclusion, cutting between shots of, for instance, Homer belching flame, or rolling around as a huge human blob, and shots framed to mimic war movie trailers.

In short, many of the key ingredients of *The Simpsons* are in the ad. We see significant irreverence and bodily humor, especially from Homer. We see *The Simpsons*’ signature brand of attractive animation. We see and hear a smart, brilliantly executed media parody that lampoons the seriousness with which both war games and war films take themselves. And we see the snark for which the show is famous. All of this takes place in a brief, eighty-second clip, again replicating the television show’s style of offering short bursts of media parody. And while the *Medal of Homer* ad is executed with great skill, a deeply funny piece of work, so too is the *Mob Rules* ad, which parodies the *Grand Theft Auto* series’ (1997–) trailers and camerawork to a tee. The *Mob Rules* ad also parodies *GTA*’s signature use of violence and male bravado, parodically recontextualizing the line “we’re gonna clean up this town,” for example, as Marge’s appeal to Lisa to help her rid Springfield of the violent videogame. Two other ads parody *Everquest* (1999) and other role-playing games, and odd Japanese puzzle games, respectively. After watching these ads, one has gained an experience similar to that of watching the television show. As ads, the clips may be seen by some as less authentic, as simply hawking their wares, and as purely secondary to the primary text that is *The Simpsons* television show. But the clips produce and continue the text of *The Simpsons* with considerable skill. These third-level paratexts, in other words, are part of the text, becoming sites not only of the production of the text but also of engagement with it.

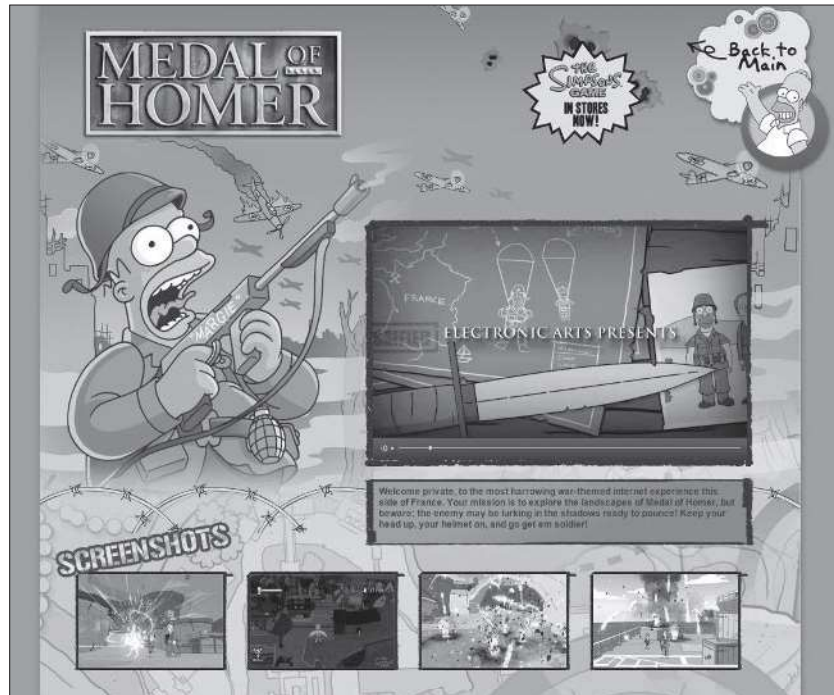


Fig. 1.2. An online ad for *The Simpsons Game* parodies the *Medal of Honor* franchise, complete with its nostalgic documentary-style cut sequences.

Nor are they alone in this regard, as *The Simpsons'* history, and many of its public meanings, has often relied heavily upon its paratexts. While above I suggest that the paratexts were viable parts of the text, at times the show's paratexts have done *more* to create the text as it is known than has the show itself. In particular, we might look at the furor that surrounded the show in its early years, directed primarily at Bart as irreverent youth, but one that centered on—and was in many ways ignited by—the mass popularity of t-shirts labeling Bart an “Underachiever,” while he responds, “And Proud of It, Man.” Many parents, teachers, principals, and pundits around the United States worried about children learning a slacker attitude from the t-shirt's sentiment, and as a result, many schools banned the t-shirts, and conservative rhetoric and complaints swarmed around the show.¹² This rhetoric completely failed to realize the sly message in the t-shirt: as Laurie Schulze notes, “Bart has managed to turn the tables on the system that's devalued him and say, ‘In your face. I'm not worthless,

insignificant, or stupid. If you want to label me an underachiever, I'll turn that into a badge of courage and say I'm proud of it."¹³ Nevertheless, as paratext, the t-shirt created an image for many Americans of *The Simpsons* as a show of little to no values, intent on corrupting children's minds.

Then, in 1992, at the Republican National Convention, another paratext further sealed this image of the show, when President George H. W. Bush insisted that the United States needed more families like the Waltons and less like the Simpsons. Just as Bush's vice-president, Dan Quayle, had brought *Murphy Brown* (1988–98) into the culture wars between conservative and liberal America, Bush made *The Simpsons* a front in that war (as did First Lady Barbara Bush, who also shared her hatred for *The Simpsons* with the press). While *The Simpsons* was already infused with Matt Groening's anti-establishment beliefs, sly satiric edge, and irreverence, the t-shirt controversy and the Bush speech suddenly amplified these qualities. Now, to watch *The Simpsons* and/or to wear the t-shirt was to posit oneself proudly against Bush's neo-conservatism, while to dislike the show and/or to ban one's children from seeing it was to publicly declare one's allegiance to those ideals. The paratexts made the show considerably more controversial, edgy, and anti-establishment than many of its episodes made it; certainly, in England, where the t-shirt controversy never bubbled up to the same degree, and where Bush's comments received considerably less attention, the show was often seen as endearingly *pro*-family values, to the point that Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has often proudly and unflinchingly sided with Bart over Bush, claiming that *The Simpsons* is "on the side of the angels."¹⁴

We must also turn to *The Simpsons*' paratexts if we wish to understand its relationship to advertising and consumerism. As I have examined elsewhere, *The Simpsons* is one of the only commercial television programs in the United States to have consistently attacked American consumerism and capitalism.¹⁵ It regularly savages advertising's ethics and style, and rarely involves product placement while doing so (thus avoiding the *Wayne's World* [1992] mock-yet-show strategy of parodying product placement), and many of its key figures serve allegorical functions with relation to consumerist capitalism—see, for example, Homer, the anti-hero who mindlessly buys anything he is told to; Krusty the Clown, the Ronald McDonald sell-out children's entertainer; Mr. Burns, the evil corporate overlord; and Lisa, the hero whose environmentalism and anti-consumerist ethos is all too rare on American television. So, were we to evaluate the show's relationship to and messages regarding advertising based solely

on the television program, we would likely judge it as resolutely leftist in sentiment. However, to do so would be to overlook the apparent hypocrisy that while it criticizes Krusty's lust to put his brand on everything, so too does *The Simpsons* brand at times appear to be on everything, and while it criticizes advertising, from the early use of Bart to advertise Butterfinger candy bars to countless other appearances in ads, *The Simpsons* has been complicit with more advertising than have most other shows on television.¹⁶ Yet some of its other paratexts also criticize ads, as with *The Simpsons Hit and Run Game* (2003, discussed further in chapter 6), in which destroying ads rewards one with money and quicker travel time, and whose story is based around advertising run amok. Matthew McAllister notes *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening's commitment to privileging licenses that are self-conscious and mocking of their commercialism.¹⁷ Thus, at the paratextual level, or, rather, between the level of the show and the level of the paratext, the text is deeply conflicted, complex, and contradictory when it comes to advertising, consumerism, and capitalism. Individual audience members will see it as either anti-consumerist, rampantly consumerist, or somewhere in between, based in large part on their own interaction with not only the television program, but also the paratexts. Once again, a central popular understanding, or understandings, of *The Simpsons* come to us in part through the meanings created by the paratexts, not just the show.

To understand why paratexts might be so powerful, we might reframe the issue as being one of time and place. In the United States, at the time of writing, *The Simpsons* plays on the FOX network, on Sundays at 8 p.m. when in season. Thus, the show itself is strictly contained by time and place, even if we factor in its syndication, and VHS, DVD, and DVR recordings and replays. However, *The Simpsons'* paratexts allow Springfield to exist well beyond those boundaries. Echoes of Springfield are in most shopping malls, throughout cyberspace, in countless souvenir stores worldwide (as Russian nesting dolls in the Czech Republic, as porcelain Homers in the night markets of Tijuana, and as soapstone carvings in Kenya, to list a few), in games and electronics stores, on newsstands, in comic stores and bookstores, in TV specials, lying on the floor of many a child's room, on many an adult collector's shelf, on people's chests and heads, and in countless other venues. Such is FOX's strategy of synergy: that people will not be able to escape Springfield. But when Springfield is seemingly everywhere, many people will only experience Springfield outside of the television show, and even many of those who regularly watch

the show at its scheduled time and place will also experience Springfield in countless other locales. In a very real sense, then, *The Simpsons* often exists in the paratexts, and those paratexts are fostering many of its meanings and its fans', non-fans', and anti-fans' reactions.

My task in this book, then, is to engage in a textual cartography of sorts, mapping texts and making sense of the complex social geography not only of Springfield, but of multiple other storyworlds. I will be examining the types of meanings created by paratexts, how they variously dovetail or clash with meanings from their related texts, and how paratexts give value and/or identity to texts. I will move through various types of paratexts, and various entertainment properties from film and television, offering both a theory of paratextuality and numerous illustrations of how it creates textual meaning.

An Overview of the Book

Paratexts, this book argues, are a central part of media production and consumption processes. But precisely because of their centrality, no single book can do more than scratch the surface of their overall importance to a better understanding of media and culture. The present book focuses on paratexts as textual entities, emphasizing the relationship between paratexts, films, and television programs and audiences. But given their textual properties, and their prominent placement in consumption cultures, greater attention should also be paid to how paratexts are created and regulated. Taking the eye off the paratext, as media studies has often done, impoverishes our understanding of production and regulation cultures, and hence our ability to intervene meaningfully in these cultures. The present project, however, limits itself primarily to consideration of the paratext's impact on texts and on audiences, as a way of establishing why paratexts matter in the first place.

The book also focuses exclusively on television and film paratexts, though of course the music, videogame, online, and print industries have their own thriving examples. And while theater layout and branding, channel identification sequences, and the like may work as paratexts, and are thus worthy of attention,¹⁸ they do so for multiple texts, whereas here I have chosen to stick to paratexts that "belong" to a particular show. The book's focus is also restricted mostly to popular and recent Hollywood film and television, in part because Hollywood produces so much paratextuality that it offers an embarrassment of riches for study, and thus

rich soil in which to plant a theory of paratexts that I hope can grow elsewhere too, and in part because many of these examples are more accessible than older, independent, or non-American products. I deliberately return to some texts (such as *Lost* [2004–] and *Lord of the Rings*) with different paratexts, so that readers can see various facets of their paratextual entourage, but I would like my readers to be able to fill in a fuller picture themselves, hence my choice to restrict most analysis to more prominent shows. By doing so, I do not mean to imply that paratexts are either a recent or an American phenomenon: Hollywood's current fondness for a franchise-based economy perhaps makes paratexts more voluminous today, but they have always existed and thrived, as they do outside Hollywood and America.

From the outset, it should also be noted that many of my examples are of paratexts attached to niche or fan properties, but the book is not about fan cultures per se. Rather, I argue that paratexts often construct some of the wider audience's scant encounters with the text, and thus while the *show* might be a niche or fan property, many of its paratexts (such as trailers, movie posters, hype, reviews, and audience commentary) are not only quintessentially mainstream, but also the mediators of niche and fan entities to both fans *and* the wider audience. Admittedly, not all will work this way. Paratexts are the greeters, gatekeepers, and cheerleaders for and of the media, filters through which we must pass on our way to "the text itself," but some will only greet certain audiences. Many fan-made paratexts, in particular, address only those within the fandom. Other paratexts will scare away potential audiences, as the semblance of being a "fan text" is often enough to detract some. In such cases, though, the paratexts create the text for the fleeing would-be audience, suggesting a "geek factor" or an undesired depth that may turn them away. In other instances, paratexts will insist that a text is more mainstream, less niche or fannish. However, regardless of whether the paratexts greet or turn audiences away, they often prove to be vital mediators of the niche or fan property to a wider audience: just as Bart Simpson t-shirts and Butterfinger ads constructed an idea of what *The Simpsons* was about, for non-fans arguably more than for fans, so too do paratexts regularly address the non-fan, even when attached to fan properties. As such, this book is neither about fan cultures nor not about them; it instead aims to make sense of the textual residue that often flows between all "audiences," fans, non-fans, and anti-fans.

Chapter 1 begins by defining the phrase "paratext" more precisely and situating it within other existing theories of what texts are, what work

they do, and how they do this work. The chapter establishes the textual importance of paratexts, examining the constitutive role they play in creating public understandings of the text. It also distinguishes between “entryway” and “in medias res” paratexts, the first being those that we encounter before watching a film or television program, the latter those that come to us in the process of watching or at least interpreting the film or program. All successive chapters examine a few central case studies, so that the depths of paratexts’ meanings, and of audiences’ interactions with them, can be examined up close. However, throughout chapter 1, in order to set up exactly why paratextual study might be necessary in the first place, I offer a wide variety of examples from film and television and from existing scholarship that further excavates the importance of paratexts.

Chapter 2 offers several examples of how paratexts work as gateways into the text, establishing meanings and frames for decoding before the audience member has even encountered the film or television program. The iconic examples here are movie posters, trailers, and advertising campaigns that surround films and television programs, not only encouraging us to watch the shows, but also establishing the frames through which we “should” interpret and enjoy the shows. Through examining first several movie posters, and then the promotional campaign in New York City for ABC’s *Six Degrees* (2006–7) and its official website, I argue that hype can determine genre, gender, theme, style, and relevant intertexts, thereby in part creating the show as a meaningful entity for “viewers” even before they become viewers, or even if they never become viewers. I then turn to trailers, examining the starkly different trailers for Atom Egoyan’s film *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997)—one American, one Canadian—and arguing that the difference resulted in the sale of, effectively, two different films. Finally, I maintain an interest in paratexts’ abilities to create “proper interpretations” that audience members are encouraged to adopt, by discussing television opening credit sequences and their roles as both mini-trailers for new viewers and ritualistic anthems for returning viewers. Ultimately, chapter 2 takes several examples of producer-created paratexts to study the degree to which producers can proffer interpretations and readings of their texts even before they begin.

If chapter 2 is about how paratexts create meaning for texts, chapter 3 is about how they create scripts of value for them. In particular, the chapter examines how author, aura, and artistry—all qualities often said to be lacking in the age of big-budget blockbusters and for-profit art—are hailed and awarded to texts by their paratexts. I begin by examining how

reality makeover shows' promise to serve society is given weight by their webpages' attempts to code them as philanthropic, community-generating programs with considerable civic value. Much of the rest of the chapter examines the particularly important role that DVDs play in giving value to fictional texts through their bonus materials such as commentary tracks, making-of documentaries, special effects galleries, and alternate scenes. I turn to the prominent example of the Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVDs of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, a four-disc set replete with various bonus materials. I argue that these materials richly layer the text, paralleling the cast and crew's travails in making the film to the epic campaign against the ultimate evil depicted in the tale. As a result of these materials, the DVDs posit the film as above the mundane products of a commercial industry, and as a crowning aesthetic achievement that represents an "older," nobler form of art. Part and parcel of this process, too, is the lionization of Peter Jackson, the film's director. Thus, I will also examine the role of DVDs, both *The Two Towers* and numerous DVDs for television shows, and of podcasts and other sources of authorial interviews, in attempting to resurrect the figure of the author that literary and cultural studies theory has long thought dead. My argument is not that television or film have improved with DVDs and podcasts, but rather that the DVDs and podcasts repeatedly insist that their shows are better, becoming a key site for the construction of discourses of value.

Chapter 4 focuses both on how paratexts manage a broader system of intertextuality and on how grouped, sequenced, or otherwise related films and television programs can become paratexts themselves, their decoding processes so intricately intertwined with those of their related films or television programs that we might regard them as occurring under the long shadow of former texts. My first case study draws on work conducted with Bertha Chin into online would-be audiences' reactions to the *Lord of the Rings* films before they had even been made. Chin and I found not only enthusiastic discussion of the films, but actual early interpretation and evaluation of them, and thus this case study examines the degree to which their proposed frames for making sense of the films had been inherited from the *Lord of the Rings* books by J. R. R. Tolkien, and how audience discussion managed this system. Continuing the story, I then look at how the *Lord of the Rings* films, after release, became their own paratexts for would-be viewers of Peter Jackson's next outing, *King Kong* (2005), and for the adaptation of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (2005). Next I turn to *Batman Begins*

(2005) to see how the film's plot and casting seem to have been guided in large part by an awareness of the dark shadow cast over the Batman franchise by the previous Batman film and cinematic atrocity, *Batman and Robin* (1997). Finally, I turn from films as paratexts to the author as paratext, examining online postings from the early days of television producer J. J. Abrams's *Lost* and *Six Degrees* that suggested fans were using Abrams's previous work and their constructions of him as artist to make sense of and predict plot threads in his new work. Through these various examples, chapter 4 aims to analyze how dependent all interpretation is on various other films and television programs, on audiences' varying levels of familiarity with those films and programs, and on how the paratext of audience discussion circulates and coordinates intertexts.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 all take products of the entertainment industry as their topic. Given Hollywood's huge coffers, its intense need to make each of its films and programs stand out in a media-saturated environment, and its success in turning many paratexts into revenue-generators, a large proportion of the paratextual world is commissioned into existence by Hollywood. However, it would be a grave mistake to consider audience-created paratexts as lesser in potential importance or complexity. Thus chapter 5 studies numerous examples of audience-created paratexts. Much has been written elsewhere on how fan fiction and mash-ups can be used to contest the "official" meanings proffered by Hollywood, but the chapter's first two case studies instead examine how paratexts can be used to intensify certain textual experiences, less working against the industry's version of the text than cutting a personalized path through it. First, I draw on work conducted with Jason Mittell into *Lost* fans' consumption of spoilers (advance information of what will happen in the plot) to study how this consumption shows a move away from the strict plot-based mode of engaging with *Lost* and toward a more puzzle-, character-, and/or experiential-based mode. Second, I examine "vids," fan-made videos that splice and edit together multiple scenes from a film or television program with a piece of music. While, again, vids have been studied within the framework of fan rebellion and critique, this section instead concentrates on how character-study and relationship vids can be used to examine a particular character's or theme's path through an otherwise busy film or program, thereby allowing time for the viewer to pause and reflect. Finally, I turn to press reviews as audience-made paratexts that do battle with Hollywood's own paratexts, usually before the film or television program has even aired, and I focus particularly on reviews of NBC's *Friday*

Night Lights (2006–) as an example of a show whose reviewers engaged in a concerted effort to reframe NBC's own publicity for the show. This final example grows from a discussion of the ways in which various audiences have differing levels of power and privilege to frame or reframe films or programs.

Many of the book's examples are of paratexts that have been appended to a text, either before or after the fact, but in chapter 6 my interests turn to paratexts that more directly challenge the binary of paratext and film or program, forcing us to wonder exactly what is "primary" or "the original" and what is "secondary" or "peripheral." *Star Wars* action figures feature first, as I examine their significant imprint and impact on the films, and on both public and fan understandings of them. Whereas cultural critics have long seen licensed toys as a particularly egregious instance of mindless and manipulative consumerism, I argue that the toys became a viable source of the text, framing and intensifying many of the film's themes, while also allowing the *Star Wars* universe to be inhabitable. This concern with making storyworlds accessible and inhabitable then extends into a discussion of various forms of film- or television show-related games that allow players into a text to explore, sample, and/or create parts of the storyworld interactively. In particular, I explore licensed videogames that place the player in control of an avatar situated in the storyworld, enabling a limited set of interactions with characters and places within the broader text. I also examine an increasingly popular form of game, the alternate reality game (ARG), focusing on the *What Happened in Piedmont?* ARG that preceded the broadcast of A&E's *Andromeda Strain* (2008), and that opened up significant room for audiences to learn about, engage with, and "taste" the storyworld independent of the mini-series.

Finally, since the book argues that paratexts create texts, in the Conclusion I discuss examples of the entertainment industry ignoring this logic and producing facile paratexts of little to no value or intelligence, or, alternately, embracing this logic and surrendering parts of their texts to their paratexts, often producing fascinating and significant results. Drawing from numerous interviews with paratext creators, conducted by myself and others, I briefly address the practical issue of how film and television creators can more meaningfully integrate paratexts into the storytelling and production process. To be of value or impact, and to be worthy of close study, paratexts need not be integrated, but by ending with a discussion of integration, I hope to highlight several key issues involved in the production and study of paratexts and their worlds.

Ultimately, through the book's multiple examples and through its theoretical wrestling with concepts of paratextuality and textuality, I hope to illustrate how vibrant and vital a contribution to meaning-making and the development of storyworlds paratexts offer us. While paratexts can at times be seen as annoyances, as "mere" advertising, and/or as only so much hype, they are often as complex and intricate, and as generative of meanings and engagement, as are the films and television shows that they orbit and establish. To limit our understanding of film and television to films and television shows themselves risks drafting an insufficient picture not only of any given text, but also of the processes of production and reception attached to that text. Paratextual study, by contrast, promises a more richly contextualized and nuanced image of how texts work, how and why they are made, and how and why they are watched, interpreted, and enjoyed.

1

From Spoilers to Spinoffs

A Theory of Paratexts

Paratexts surround texts, audiences, and industry, as organic and naturally occurring a part of our mediated environment as are movies and television themselves. If we imagine the triumvirate of Text, Audience, and Industry as the Big Three of media practice, then paratexts fill the space between them, conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape, and variously negotiating or determining interactions among the three. Industry and audiences create vast amounts of paratexts. Audiences also consume vast amounts of paratexts. Thus, paratexts' relationship to industry and audience is most obvious. However, the secret to understanding paratexts lies in working out their relationship to textuality: What is the paratext in relationship to the text? How does it contribute to the process of making meaning? And how does it energize, contextualize, or otherwise modify textuality? This chapter attempts to answer these questions by presenting a theory of paratextuality. To do so, first we must examine the nature of this relationship. I will then offer a definition of textuality that accounts for the paratextual, examining multiple instances of paratexts at work in the interpretive trenches. In particular, I will distinguish between paratexts that grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer's entrance to the text ("entryway paratexts"), and paratexts that flow between the gaps of textual exhibition, or that come to us "during" or "after" viewing, working to police certain reading strategies in medias res ("in medias res paratexts").

Watching on a Hope and a Prayer

Let us begin by asking how one makes sense of a text. A simple question, this has nevertheless challenged artists, scholars, politicians, and everyday readers for centuries and has yet to yield anything close to a simple answer.

Throughout humankind's long history of debates over what and how texts mean, and hence what they "do" to us and what we can "do" to them, the most common method of analyzing a text has been close reading. The intuitive purchase behind such a method is obvious: if you want to understand a finely crafted machine, you look at it and take it apart; so it would seem that if you want to understand a book, a film, or a television program, you could similarly look at it and take it apart. However, especially if we care about social meanings and uses—what place a text has in society—close reading does not suffice. Whether of machines or texts, close reading fails to reveal vital aspects of the object under analysis. In particular, just as taking apart a machine would not necessarily explain why a given person chose that machine over another tool or machine, close reading may tell us little about how a viewer *arrived at* a text. Why view *this* program, or *this* film, as opposed to the many thousands of other options?

Sometimes our consumption choices are motivated by previous consumption: "I loved it the first time, so let's watch it again." Thus, in such cases, the issue of context may seem rather trivial. But a great deal of our textual consumption instead involves new texts. When faced with a multiplex full of unwatched movies, or an extended cable television package full of unwatched shows, one must engage in *speculative consumption*, creating an idea of what pleasures any one text will provide, what information it will offer, what "effect" it will have on us, and so forth. As such, with all the hype that surrounds us, announcing texts from subway cars, website margins, or highway roadsides, we can spend a surprisingly large portion of our everyday life speculatively consuming new texts. Especially with film, as Thomas Elsaesser notes, buying a movie ticket is an "act of faith," in which we pay for "not the product itself and not even for the commodified experience that it represents, but simply for the possibility that such a transubstantiation of experience into commodity might 'take place.'"¹ If we do not like the film, we cannot get our money back, since we paid for the *chance* of entertainment, not necessarily for actual entertainment. Even watching television, though sometimes less deliberative an experience than going out to the movies, still requires an investment of time, and amidst channel-surfing, many of our decisions to watch are still based on prior speculative consumption, and hence on the hope, the possibility, of transubstantiation. Or, as Roger Silverstone notes, "We are drawn to these otherwise mundane and trivial texts and performances by a transcendent hope, a hope and a desire that something will touch us."² Much of the business of media, in both economic and hermeneutic terms, then, is

conducted before watching, when hopes, expectations, worries, concerns, and desires coalesce to offer us images and scripts of what a text might be.

Synergy, paratexts, and intertexts are responsible for much of this faith in transubstantiation—the high priests of and for much of the textuality that allows speculative consumption. To choose to watch a movie, for instance, we may factor in any of the following: the actors, the production personnel, the quality of the previews, reviews, interviews, the poster, a marketing campaign, word of mouth, what cinema it is playing at (or what channel it is on), or the material on which it is based (whether prequel, sequel, or adaptation). All of these are texts in their own right, often meticulously constructed by their producers in order to offer certain meanings and interpretations. Thus, in effect, it is these texts that create and manage our faith, and we consume them on our way to consuming the “film itself.”

Gerard Genette entitled such texts “paratexts,” texts that prepare us for other texts. They form, he notes, the “threshold” between the inside and the outside of the text, and while paratexts can exist without a source—as when we read commentary on films or television shows that have been lost to time, for instance—a text cannot exist without paratexts.³ Writing of books, Genette offered a long list of paratexts, including covers, title pages, typesetting, paper, name of author, dedications, prefaces, and introductions as examples of “peritexts”—paratexts within the book—and interviews, reviews, public responses, and magazine ads as “epitexts”—paratexts outside the book.⁴ He also allowed for paratexts of fact, so that, for instance, knowing an author’s gender could serve its own paratextual function. Genette argued that we can only approach texts *through* paratexts, so that before we start reading a book, we have consumed many of its paratexts. Far from being tangentially related to the text, paratexts provide “an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much difficulty from one world to the other, a sometimes delicate operation, especially when the second world is a fictional one.”⁵ In other words, paratexts condition our entrance to texts, telling us what to expect, and setting the terms of our “faith” in subsequent transubstantiation. Hence, for instance, an ad telling us of a film’s success at Cannes and Sundance would prepare us for a markedly different film than would, say, an ad that boasts endorsement from Britney Spears (even if both ads refer to the same film). Each paratext acts like an airlock to acclimatize us to a certain text, and it demands or suggests certain reading strategies. We rely upon such paratexts to help us choose how to spend our leisure time: they tell us which

movies and television programs to watch, which are priorities, which to avoid, which to watch alone and which to watch with friends, which to watch on a big screen, which to save for times when we need a pick-me-up, and so on. Thus, paratexts tell us what to expect, and in doing so, they shape the reading strategies that we will take with us “into” the text, and they provide the all-important early frames through which we will examine, react to, and evaluate textual consumption.

As such, the study of paratexts is the study of how meaning is created, and of how texts begin. Moreover, precisely because paratexts help us decide which texts to consume, we often know many texts only at the paratextual level. Everyone consumes many more paratexts than films or programs. When we move onward to the film or program, those paratexts help frame our consumption; but when we do not move onward, all we are left with is the paratext. Hence, for instance, when at a multiplex we choose to watch one of the ten films on offer, we not only create an interpretive construction of the film that we saw; we have often also speculatively consumed many of the other nine. Paratexts, then, become the very stuff upon which much popular interpretation is based. As analysts of media, making sense of the film or program itself remains a vitally important step, but such a step will only tell us what it means to those who have watched it. From *Star Wars* to *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *American Idol* (2002–) to *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991–), many shows have meaning for an “audience” that extends well beyond those who actually watched the show. To understand what texts mean to popular culture as a whole, we must examine paratexts too. If media audiences have for too long been seen as unthinking, purely reactive monads, this is in large part because the analysis of media has consistently underplayed the importance of worries, hopes, and expectations in preparing us for texts. As full as the world is of films and television programs, it is more full of worries, hopes, and expectations concerning them. Ultimately, therefore, paratextual study not only promises to tell us how a text creates meaning for its consumers; it also promises to tell us how a text creates meaning in popular culture and society more generally.

“Only Hype”: *From Soda to Soderbergh*

In creating worries, hopes, and expectations, paratexts work in a remarkably similar manner to advertisements. Ads, of course, are the pariah of the media world, and thus just as paratexts are too often discounted

as “only hype,” so too do ads often provoke more scorn than study. It is beyond the scope of this book to heap yet more scorn on ads. However, if we look beyond a moral evaluation of ads to see how they function semiotically, we find the same skeletal form that lies behind most paratextuality.

An ad’s purpose appears simple—to sell and brand a product. As Celia Lury and Alan Warde note, ads exist in such numbers because of “a permanent source of insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety for any producer: for they cannot *force* people to buy their products and can never be sure that people who already do use them will continue to want to do so.”⁶ Ads must continue the ministry of consumerism, making us want to buy their products, and giving us faith in the transubstantiation that they in turn promise. However, as many critics of advertising have noted, most ads have long since graduated from the form’s early days of merely listing what a product can do, and many have graduated from selling a specific product. Nike ads do not tell us that a particular line of Nike shoes pad our feet while playing sports, then let us decide whether to purchase them or not. They do not even *excitedly* tell us what their shoe is. Rather, as Sut Jhally observes, a key function of ads is often to *erase* much information of what a product is and where it came from, so that the entire history of how it came to be is a mystery: Nike’s labor practices in developing countries, for instance, are neatly left out of the picture, as is even a simple description of the product. Rather, ads aim to create new, metaphysical meanings for a product, so that “once the real meaning has been systematically *emptied* out of commodities [. . .] advertising then *refills* this void with its own symbols.”⁷ Much advertising aims to sell products by creating brand identity and by promising value-added—product *and* metaphysics.

Nike, for instance, is famous for its ads featuring basketball stars, a hip urban drum beat in the background, and stark, edgy black backgrounds and high-quality cinematography that highlight the stars’ remarkable displays of athletic prowess. As Judith Williamson explains, everything in an ad works as a gestalt and condensation of the product,⁸ so that here, by being hip, edgy, and urban cool, the ad hopes to create an image of Nike shoes as hip, edgy, and urban cool. By blacking out the background, the ads suggest that sports alone matter. By frequently featuring prominent African American athletes, the company hopes to suggest that it is “all about equality”; and since public mythology holds that many such athletes began playing in housing projects in inner cities, the ads subtly celebrate these athletes’ success and (Nike being the Greek goddess of victory) their

victorious navigation of the American Dream. The ads also rely on a racial stereotype of blacks as being more in touch with their bodies, perhaps offering the non-black consumer the opportunity to achieve parity. Thus, the ads aim to create a brand identity, a semiotic entity called Nike that represents victory, the American Dream, equality, urban hip, sporting excellence, raw masculinity, and looking cool while winning. In doing so, they imply that by buying Nike shoes, you are stating publicly your allegiance and dedication to this image. Meanwhile, of course, Nike aims to attach itself to the public images of the stars it uses, hoping that their aura and meaning will rub off on the shoes.

As Gillian Dyer observes in her close study of the semiotics of advertising, in ads, “the meaning of one *thing* is transferred to or made interchangeable with another *quality*, whose value attaches itself to the *product*.”⁹ For instance, the black background (one thing) is made interchangeable with hipness and edginess (a quality), which attaches itself to the Nike shoes (the product). Effectively, then, ads create elaborate semiotic chains, which might seem to be logical in the moment of watching, but which offer no necessary correlation upon examination. To take another example, many ads for snack foods offer an image of a family in a beautiful, tidy home, yet with a hungry teenage son; usually the mother rescues the day by offering the supposedly ideal snack food, restoring perfection to the family. In such a script, the semiotic chain, “snack food brings happiness to son, which makes son happy with mother, and mother a good provider,” shortens itself to “snack food equals family bliss.” With such stunning sleight of hand, ads frequently add a rich layer of symbolism to any product, literally giving it meaning, rather than simply explaining the product. As such, ads are constitutive of a product’s meaning. Sometimes the proposed meaning and the product’s actual function are related, with the former growing organically from the latter, but this is never a necessity. When Che Guevara or Gandhi can be used to sell computers, advertisers prove themselves capable of creating a whole new slate of meanings for any product. These meanings not only work for those of us new to a product, but they also aim to continue providing meaning and value-added for longtime or return customers, so that one’s already-made purchases either maintain their added meanings or gain new ones. Not all consumers will follow all ads’ semiotic chains (hence the need for ever more ads), but in intent if not always in actuality, ads aim to create meaning. Or to rephrase, we could say that ads aim to make products into texts and into popular culture.

Toward this end, moreover, contemporary branding practices require much more than just ads. Just as the use of stars in ads proves especially helpful, because ads can thereby attach their product's brand identity to an already established unit of meaning, so too have advertisers long since realized the utility of attaching their brand identity to other established texts, whether individuals, events, or shows. Hence, for instance, for many years, du Maurier cigarettes sponsored the annual Montreal Jazz Festival in an attempt to "borrow" the festival's meanings. Sears prominently sponsors the "miracle work" of ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2004–), in an attempt to become synonymous with good deeds, family values, great and selfless service, and a strong presence in local communities. Or, as Victoria Johnson notes of Dodge's longtime sponsorship of *The Lawrence Welk Show* (1955–71), the goal was to associate the automaker with "simple," "Heartland" values of family, community, and conservatism; as Johnson playfully notes:

Welk's "citizen" stature as a man of tradition, community, and character was essentially defined by his denial of conspicuous personal gain in favor of a rigorous code of moral and behavioral standards. If Welk refused to play Las Vegas because it might offend some of his staunchly religious fans, must it not be the moral thing to do to drive a Dodge?¹⁰

In each case, the advertiser attempts to create meaning for a product or brand not at the site of the product or brand itself (i.e., not by simply making a funky cigarette, or a moral store or car, whatever they might look like), but at the site of the ad or promotional venue.

Much of the world of media hype and synergy is pure advertising and branding: posters on subways and at bus-stops and construction sites; roadside billboards; ads in newspapers or magazines; usually one ad spot out of every television commercial break; trailers and previews; "next week on . . ." snippets following television shows; appearances by stars on talk shows or entertainment news programs; interviews in industry or fan magazines; a toy promotion at a fast food chain; a new ride at an amusement park. Even revenue-generating synergy, such as a toy or clothing line, a CD or DVD, or a videogame, act as advertisements in their own right. The product in question, though, is a show, and hence a text, with or without the ad/synergy/hype. This allows advertisers to draw more deeply from the show when constructing an image of that text, as with trailers that lace together multiple scenes from a film or program, or interviews that draw on a star's already well-manicured public image. Film and television shows

therefore often weigh down their paratexts more heavily than in the *tabula rasa* world of product advertising (where Hummer ads insist that the car is at one with the natural environment that we all know it's killing). Nevertheless, the advertiser is still faced with the same fundamental need to create a desire, hope, and expectation for the show that will convince a consumer to "purchase"/watch it. As such, hype, synergy, and promos are just as much about *creating* textuality, and about promising value-added as are ads for Nike or snack foods. As with other ads, too, they create this meaning away from the "product"/show itself. And just as the images and qualities attached to the "text" of Nike shoes by the company's ads often remain attached, so too then do the images and qualities assigned and attached to shows by their paratexts stick to them, becoming an inseparable part of "the text itself." In this way, paratexts help to make texts.

What Is a Text?

If paratexts fashion and/or act as "airlocks" to texts, what does the text itself look like? The strange merging of synergistic text with "actual" text and the resulting confusion in vocabulary of textuality demand a reappraisal of what a text is and how it works. Roland Barthes famously insisted that the text is always on the move and hence impossible to grasp or to study as a set object. Barthes drew a distinction in this respect between the *text* and the *work*. The work, he explains, "can be held in the hand," whereas "the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse," and is "*experienced only in an activity of production.*"¹¹ One can hold a roll of film or a tape of a television program, but that is the work alone—the *text* is only experienced in the act of consumption. However, Barthes defines this act of consumption as one of production because no text can be experienced free of the individual reader. In effect, all of us bring to bear an entire reading and life history to any act of textual consumption, so that each one of us will find different resonances in the same text. To offer an exaggerated example, when watching a war film, a person with a family member at war will likely experience a different text than will a second viewer in the middle of a fraternity's action film marathon. Thus, while the work consists of letters on a page or images on a screen, the text comes alive in the interaction between these letters or images and the reader. The text, as Barthes notes, "decants" the work and "gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice," thereby asking of its reader "a practical collaboration."¹² The magic and majesty of art rely upon the individual

spark that occurs between work and reader as the reader participates in the birth of the text.

Texts make sense because of our past textual experiences, literacy, and knowledge. At a basic level, for instance, if we are new to a language, we can only decode small parts of anything that we read or hear. But fluency extends beyond mere vocabulary and grammar, to visual, imagistic, and artistic literacy and experience. As such, intertextuality—the inescapable links between texts—creates added meaning. Stories that begin with “Once Upon a Time” immediately signal their fairytale roots for those of us who have heard such stories before. Should we hear a character in a television show demand “a room of my own,” if we have read Virginia Woolf’s famous feminist treatise “A Room of Her Own,” the demand may have added resonance. Or, should we be watching a film in which a hand-held camera is following a character by peering through foliage, a history of watching horror films will likely suggest that the character is being stalked, and that the camera’s “eyes” are those of the predator. Language, images, and texts never come to us in a vacuum; instead, as Valentin Volosinov notes, “*The utterance is a social phenomenon*,” for each shard of textuality or meaning comes to us in a given context. “Any utterance—the finished, written utterance not excepted—makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return.”¹³ This means not only that texts talk back to and revise other texts, either implicitly or explicitly calling for us to connect their meanings to previous texts, but also that we will always make sense of texts partly through the frames offered by other texts.

Much intertextuality is random, entailing links that an artist could never have predicted. Indeed, much communication is chaotic: change channels from a news item about a rise in local crime to a channel that is advertising home security systems, and the former text may handily intensify the effect of the latter. Or turn from the cannibal-serial-killer film *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) to a hamburger ad and one may be repulsed. But much intertextuality is intentional too. Michael Riffaterre in particular writes of intertextuality as a means by which writers “guarantee” that readers will come to the same meaning. He argues that all texts rely upon other texts for their meaning and value, so that “the most important component of a literary work of art, and indeed the key to the interpretation

of its significance, should be found outside that work, beyond its margins, in the intertext,” the recovery of which “is an imperative and inevitable process.”¹⁴ Riffaterre’s faith in intertextuality as conditioning and guaranteeing the “proper interpretation”¹⁵ is unrealistic, holding out for a world of perfectly informed readers. Similarly, his inability to recognize the disruptive force of invasive or corruptive intertextuality underplays the multiple roles that intertextuality plays in the reading process, as I will discuss shortly. Nevertheless, he is correct to point out the degree to which intertextuality can act both as a constraint upon reading and as a guide for interpretation. Character names, in particular, often offer intertextual “guides” on how to read a text, as do ways of filming, *mise-en-scène*, generic codes, and the like. Surfing through television channels, then, many of us need only a few seconds, if that, to determine a text’s genre, as many subtle and overt clues—film stock, mode of acting, use of color, rhythm of dialogue, and so on—immediately make sense to us based on our past viewing.

As Michael Iampolski spells out, to understand and to recognize “is to place what you see alongside what you know, alongside what has already been.”¹⁶ Thus our reading of any text is illuminated by potentially thousands of texts that have “already been,” each intertext serving as a different energy source, and the shape and nature of the resulting text for any given individual will depend upon from where the energy comes. If, then, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations,”¹⁷ Iampolski (echoing Barthes) notes, “only the viewer or reader can unite the text, using his [*sic*] cultural memory to make it one.”¹⁸ The text is the consequence of the meeting of work and reader, but each work and each reader will bring multiple intertexts that energize and animate the text.

Such a process risks sounding wholly individual, as indeed all interpretation is open to personal nuances, quirks, and redirections. Within the field of textual studies, Stanley Fish is most notorious for espousing his belief in personalized texts, as his reader response theory allows for readers *in theory* to imprint any meaning upon a text that they desire. However, Fish argues that *in practice*, reading and interpretation are limited by context and by “interpretive communities.” “I want to argue for, not against, the normal, the ordinary, the literal, the straightforward [interpretation], and so on,” he notes, “but I want to argue for them as the products of contextual or interpretive circumstances and not as the property of an acontextual language,” so that “the category ‘in the text,’ like ‘the ordinary’ [interpretation], is always full [. . .], but what fills it is not

always the same.”¹⁹ To Fish, context determines interpretation, so that, for instance, he recalls the radically different interpretations that two of his classes—one an early English religious poetry class, the other a literary theory class—made of the same string of names on the blackboard. Fish sees interpretation as constrained; the constraints, though, “do not inhere in language but in situations, and because they inhere in situations, the constraints we are always under are not always the same ones.”²⁰ In effect, he crowns context as king, and precisely because context of interpretation will often be shared by others, readings will tend not to be random and wholly individualistic. Rather, Fish proposes the “interpretive community” as the prime filter for reading, a group of similarly minded (or contextualized) individuals whose strategies for interpretation “exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.”²¹ When a text seemingly has one meaning, to Fish this only means that one interpretive community is dominant, effectively controlling the context of reception, setting the terms by which any reader will approach the text.

Fish’s siren rhetoric is wonderfully seductive, but he is guilty of overstatement. In particular, one is left wondering how interpretive communities form, or how one moves from one to another, if not through language, and if not, therefore, through textuality. His reading schematic is also considerably more acceptable when contemplating a single text; when a singular interpretive community is met with a second text, producing a different meaning, the schematic proves unsuccessful in attributing all meaning to the act of reading alone. Surely texts contribute to their meaning in some way. Nevertheless, having slipped out of Fish’s trap, we could still take away a better appreciation of the utter importance of context, and of how interpretive communities with set reading strategies exert considerable pressure upon the reading process. For all the problems with Fish’s theorization of textuality, therefore, his work still insists that we regard readers as often ready for texts before they encounter them and, not only as individuals but as groups, as predisposed to find or create certain interpretations.

Moreover, if we reintegrate Fish’s interest in context and interpretive communities with a belief in texts as having something to say in and of themselves, we can examine the role that texts and paratexts play in constructing the contexts and interpretive communities that will be activated when interpreting other texts. As such, intertextuality can be directed. Here, Laurent Jenny offers that if, following Ferdinand de Saussure’s

linguistics, *langue* is the system and rules of a language and *parole* is the given utterance, through intertextuality other texts can create a “super-*parole*” as the meanings and context-setting apparatus of other texts encircle the text at hand.²² Jenny writes of arguably the most obvious instance of such directed intertextuality: parody. As I have examined elsewhere, parody works as a form of “critical intertextuality” that aims precisely to bump a text or genre’s meaning-making process off its self-declared trajectory.²³ Works such as *The Simpsons* or *South Park* (1997–) thus gouge at all manner of traditional family sitcom rules, so that subsequent viewings of *Full House* (1987–95) or other similar happy-happy sitcoms renders them all the more obviously artificial and saccharine. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1999–) and *The Colbert Report* (2005–) teach a form of news literacy that sets itself up on the perimeter of news discourse, so that subsequent exposure to the news may be recontextualized. In Jenny’s words, the author of such parody works in order “to encircle [the parodic target], to enclose [it] within another discourse, thus rendered more powerful. He [*sic*] speaks in order to obliterate, to cancel. Or else, patiently, he gainsays in order to go beyond.”²⁴ More than simply speaking to individual viewers, successful parody has also proven remarkably adept at networking and encouraging interpretive communities to build around it.²⁵

Parody is certainly the most overt and flashy instance of directed intertextuality, yet it is a small subset of a much larger universe of texts and paratexts that refer to other texts and, in so doing, set up reading filters and create interpretive communities. For an example of a particularly successful para-/inter-textual network, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott offer the case of James Bond, a figure who exists across films, books, merchandise, and ads. Each of these sites of Bond, they note, work as “textual meteorites, highly condensed and materialised chunks of meaning.”²⁶ These meteorites orbit any interaction we might have with another Bond text, so that we approach the text with a sense of who and what Bond is; via the pre-existing para-/inter-textual network of Bond, we will always arrive at any new Bond text with a sense of what to expect, and with the interpretation process already well under way. Bennett and Woollacott see no need to reduce text to context, as does Fish, but they do argue that when texts such as any new Bond film are made sense of by first moving through the dense collection of intertexts and paratexts, we must therefore “rethink the concept of context such that, ultimately, neither text nor context are conceivable as entities separable from one another.”²⁷ In other words, as much as we may still use terms such as “text,” “intertext,” and

“paratext” for analytical purposes, in fact intertext and paratext are always constitutive parts of the text itself.

Getting into a Program: Entryway Paratexts

James Bond presents an especially rich example of para-/inter-textuality, given his appearance in multiple movies, books, and ads over the last fifty years. However, every text has paratexts. As Bennett and Woollacott also show, the para-/inter-textual network surrounding Bond works in two key ways: (1) not only will our history of Bond serve as an airlock into the world of any new Bond text, but in turn, (2) Bond is always open for re-decoding, for any new text or paratext can re-inflect our notion of who and what Bond in general is. Therefore, as noted earlier, we can divide paratexts crudely, and for analytical purposes alone, into those that control and determine our *entrance* to a text—*entryway paratexts*—and those that inflect or redirect the text following initial interaction—*in medias res paratexts*. I will now turn to instances of the former, so that we might see paratexts in action; later in the chapter, I will return to instances of the latter, thereby developing a notion of textual phenomenology.

One of the more detailed accounts of paratextuality—though not using that term—can be found in Jason Mittell’s *Genre and Television*. Mittell seeks to illustrate how genre is created as much outside of generic texts as within them, arguing that “we need to look outside of texts to locate the range of sites in which genres operate, change, proliferate, and die out.”²⁸ Mittell therefore charts how advertising, policy, patterns of exhibition, public talk, and so forth all position a genre, as do “trade press coverage, popular press coverage, critical reviews, promotional material, other cultural representations and commodities (like merchandise, media tie-ins, and parodies), corporate and personal documents, production manuals, legal and government materials, audience remnants, and oral histories.”²⁹ For instance, he notes that cartoons began their televisual life as texts that appealed to adults too; however, over time, public discourse surrounding cartoons penned them into a kids-only category that, although challenged by texts such as *The Simpsons*, still inflects how many people react to and consume cartoons. Elsewhere in his book, he charts how audience talk about talk shows delimits their boundaries in popular culture, especially since much of this talk originates from those who do not watch talk shows, or who watch small amounts, and is therefore not simply reactive to “the show itself.” Genre serves an important duty in the interpretive

process, of course, because it acts much as I have said paratexts do, by providing an initial context and reading strategy for the text—so that, for instance, if we see cartoons as a children’s genre, we will be more startled by crude adult humor in a cartoon than in a Judd Apatow comedy. But Mittell shows that paratexts play a considerable role in establishing genre, and hence that they control our interactions with and interpretations of texts. If genres are, as Stephen Neale notes, “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject,”³⁰ paratexts form much of this realm of the “between,” a realm through which we must travel in order to consume and make sense of a text.

Paratexts can also be seen to establish themselves around the interpretive perimeter of an entire medium. Highly illustrative here is Lynn Spigel’s examination of the role that women’s magazines played in establishing attitudes toward television in its early days. Spigel shows how ads and columns in magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *American Home*, and *House Beautiful* acted as arbiters of taste with regards to television’s place in the home.³¹ Not only would they dictate where one should place one’s television, but what one should be careful of and how one should use it. Manufacturers proposed that the television was a new member of the family, and these magazine paratexts offered instruction on how we should treat this relative. Certainly such lessons and moral guidelines remain prevalent today, as all media are surrounded by cautionary tales, “Best of” lists, enthusiastic ads, published effects studies, and a whole host of other paratexts that aim to delineate how we should or should not use such media. Whether these take the form of ads for home entertainment systems that encourage us to create a home fortress based around our televisions,³² or whether they take the form of conservative commentary on the liberal, immoral, anti-family values narratives that supposedly pervade film and television, paratexts draw many of the battle lines that surround media consumption. Beyond instruction on how to consume a given text or genre, they at least attempt to create entire interpretive communities and hermeneutic recipes for daily living in a media-saturated world.

As in the case of parody, some paratexts work as critical intertexts, actively trying either to deflect readers from certain texts or to infect their reading when it occurs. Reviews from journalists and/or religious or political figures are often obvious examples of critical paratexts. Martin Barker, Jane Arthurs, and Ramaswami Harindranth, for instance, chart

the effect that British moral panic regarding David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) had on viewers.³³ Cronenberg's film focuses on a group of individuals who become sexually aroused by car crashes, and when news of the film broke in England, several prominent politicians and newspaper columnists campaigned for it to be banned, thinking it perverse and dangerous. Interestingly, many of those who fought for a ban never watched the film; rather, they allowed the paratext of a small plot summary and/or descriptions of individual scenes to stand in for the text as a whole. But as Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranath show through careful qualitative audience research, the media circus that surrounded the text worked as its own critical paratextuality, inflecting the reading of the text for those who did watch it. Many of the research participants found it hard to look beyond the critical paratextuality, or to find alternative frames for viewing, to the point that the media circus and paratextuality virtually took over the text for many viewers. Even those who refused to precode the film as depraved often wanted to watch the film just to see what all the fuss was about, and hence still with a firm, controlled interest in the violent, sexual content. As the authors write of such a viewing position, "to go to see *Crash* to check if it is 'violent' or 'sensationalist' is not like looking to see if there is water in the kettle. It importantly *prefigures* how [viewers] prepare to watch it."³⁴ Similarly, we might observe that following the controversy regarding *Passion of the Christ* in the United States, few viewers could watch it without particular attention drawn to whether it was anti-Semitic or not, or a devotional text or not, following the critical paratextuality that, respectively, the Anti-Defamation League and prominent church figures threw around the text. Or, as Janet Staiger observes, given reviews and commentary on D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), few viewers can approach it expecting anything other than racist propaganda;³⁵ due to critical paratextuality, its racism has almost subsumed the text before one can even watch it.

Paratexts can also inflect certain parts of a media text or certain characters. David Buckingham notes, for instance, how the knowledge of an *East Enders* (1985–) cast member's past criminal record hit the press in England. The actor played a villain on the show, but knowledge of his life behind bars contributed to the tabloid press naming him "Dirty Den" and to their construction of him as a folk devil. For any viewer aware of the press commentary, Den's villainy was potentially amplified and made to seem all the more realistic and authentic.³⁶ As C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby insist, the daytime press has long played an important role for

soap operas. Soap opera magazines and news frequently announce storylines before they occur, sometimes testing the waters for fan reactions, or allowing viewers to “catch up” on what they missed. Moreover, “by rendering the subculture [of soap fandom] visible and accessible both to itself and to outsiders, the daytime press contributes in important ways to defining the boundaries of the subculture and to managing those boundaries,”³⁷ hence playing a key role in the construction of interpretive communities for soap viewing. In such instances, paratexts can amplify and/or clarify many of a text’s meanings and uses, establishing the role that a text and its characters play outside the boundaries of the show, in the everyday realities of viewers’ and non-viewers’ lives.

Soap magazines may direct criticism toward texts, but they also provide an example of what we could call *supportive intertextuality*. As innovative and as semiotically active as parody and criticism may be, many paratexts reinforce a text’s meaning or otherwise set up a welcoming perimeter. Here we reach the realm proper of hype and synergy. To take the average animated Disney film, for instance, before release, the film has usually been preceded by an army of plush toys, coloring books, watches, bedspreads, and action figures. It will likely have been advertised during a hit Saturday-morning kids’ show, and McDonalds or some other fast food company will have released a specially themed “Happy Meal.” Thus, the movie suggests fun and good things to children—it is associated with cuddly toys, playtime, good television shows, and sugary food. Meanwhile, of course, the average Disney marketing campaign so heavily populates the kid universe with film-related merchandise that any given child could understandably feel as though “everyone” is watching the film. Ultimately, then, when it works, Disney paratextuality creates a well-fashioned image of all that the film represents, and it exhorts the child to watch the film. Writing of such instances, Robert Allen states that “a film is no longer reducible to the actual experience of seeing it”—as if it ever was!—as this paratextuality not only precedes the act of watching, but feeds into, conditions, and becomes part of that act. The toys, burgers, and so on are now *part of the text*. Allen even suggests that in such a paratextual/synergistic marketplace, films are often no longer the text in the first place, but rather “the inedible part of a Happy Meal” and the “movie on the lunchbox.”³⁸ When Disney might make several hundred dollars’ worth of product sales off a single young consumer, compared to the child’s paltry five dollars at the box office, we might be foolish to see the film as ipso facto the “primary text.” Allen is

hyperbolically fatalistic in declaring that cinema has died and that “it is now time to write the last chapter of the history of Hollywood cinema and its audience,”³⁹ but the Disney hype and synergy machine nevertheless illustrates the increasingly hazy boundaries between primary and secondary textuality, or between text and paratext, boundaries that we will return to in chapter 6.

Disney is quite exceptional in the degree to which its paratexts fill stores and lives, but many other companies have followed its lead, resulting in the heavy population of the world with paratexts. Quite simply, in a cluttered media environment, all texts need paratexts, if only to announce the text’s presence. Thus, media corporations are investing ever more time, energy, and capital into producing previews and spinoff merchandise, into public relations tours that get their cast and crew on anything from *Entertainment Tonight* (1981–) to *The Late Show with David Letterman* (1993–) to guest appearances on reality shows, into creative marketing campaigns (such as when *Lost* announced its forthcoming arrival on television by covering a beach with ads in bottles), into inviting the press to preview screenings, into plugging their texts for Oscars, Golden Globes, or Emmys, and into various other traditional and non-traditional forms of hype and synergy. Paratextuality is a vital part of the media business, precisely because paratexts play the key role in determining if a text will sink or swim. The public, the press, and the industry regularly evaluate movies based on opening weekend box office draw alone, for, as Tad Friend notes, “If a film doesn’t find its audience the first weekend, exhibitors pull it from their best theatres, and eventual television-licensing fees and DVD sales fall correspondingly.”⁴⁰ Many network heads, too, will cancel a new television show after only two episodes. As such, the industry desperately needs its paratexts to work, since both industry and audiences habitually count on paratexts’ relative success or failure as an index to the success or failure of the text as a whole. Moreover, while paratexts have surrounded all media throughout history, as Hollywood grows fonder of franchises and multi-platform brands or characters, yet more paratexts are being produced. Simultaneously, though, with all sorts of random paratextual or intertextual collisions threatening the encoded meanings of texts, and with devious and critical paratexts or intertexts working to hijack their meaning-making processes, the industry requires a strong frontline of paratexts. A continuing question for this book, therefore, will be the degree to which paratexts overtake and subsume their texts, and the conditions under which they do so.

“We Interrupt This Broadcast”: Paratexts In Medias Res

Paratexts do not merely control our entrance to texts, and thus as much as Genette’s metaphor of paratexts as airlocks is evocative of some of their functions, its utility is limited. After all, many paratexts are encountered after “entering” the text. For instance, using the term and metaphor of “overflow,” Will Brooker writes of how numerous contemporary television series are accompanied by clothing lines, websites, CDs, and fan discussion forums. Speaking of his own interaction with one such series, the short-lived BBC program *Attachments* (2000–2002), he writes:

After watching the episode where Soph is punished by her boss for her article “Hell is Other People Shagging,” I went to the seethru.co.uk website, which treats Soph and her colleagues as “real” people, with no mention of BBC2 or *Attachments*. On the front page I was able to read the full article, which could only be glimpsed in the actual episode. I then took part in a quiz compiled by Reece, the series’ womanizing programmer, and sent a semi-ironic mail to the character pointing out that he’d misspelled a *Star Wars* reference.⁴¹

He goes on to ask: “At what point, then, did the show ‘end’ for me? Technically, I stopped watching television at 9.45 pm, but I was engaging with the characters and narrative of the show for at least an hour afterwards, even to the point of sending a mail to a non-existent programmer.”⁴² As such, Brooker proposes the notion of “overflow,” evoking an image of a text that is too full, too large for its own body, necessitating the spillover of textuality into paratexts. As much as synergy attempts to capture audiences’ attention and bring them to the show, much modern synergy is best understood as offering value-added, rather than simply announcing the show’s presence. Brooker points to the notable example of *Dawson’s Creek* (1998–2003), which while in active production had an elaborate official website via which viewers could navigate to the title character’s computer desktop (even reading his email) and that linked to a website for the show’s fictional university. American Eagle and J. Crew sold clothes worn by the cast. Each episode ended with information on how to buy the music played throughout the episode. And fan discussion forums ran 24/7, allowing critical, laudatory, or other talk by viewers.

Dawson’s Creek led the way at the time but has since been eclipsed by shows such as *Lost* with alternate reality games, podcasts, spinoff novels

written by characters from the show, and “mobisode” mini-episodes filmed for mobile phone or Internet distribution, for instance, by *Heroes* (2006–), with a supplementary online comic book and other transmedia initiatives (see chapter 6), and by countless other shows’ variously innovative or derivative “overflow” techniques. And while Brooker’s metaphor of “overflow” might suggest a movement *away from* “the show itself,” Henry Jenkins refers to such multi-platformed media texts as “convergence,” suggesting a grand *confluence* of media texts and platforms under the broad heading of the single text. Jenkins’s recent book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, charts the proliferation of many such franchised, convergent texts. For instance, he examines how *The Matrix* (1999) gave birth not only to two sequels, but to anime spinoffs (collected in the DVD *The Animatrix* [2003]), comic books, and a videogame that were authored either in part by or in coordination with the Wachowskis, so that the *Matrix* narrative weaved through various platforms. Meanwhile, fans create their own paratexts, writing fan fiction, making fan songs and films, and, as Jenkins notes, even staging fully costumed reenactments of scenes from *The Matrix* and other media texts in certain Japanese parks.⁴³

Rather than choose between metaphors of “overflow” or “convergence,” I find the ebb and flow suggested by employing both terms indicative of the multiple ways in which many media texts are now both moving outward yet incorporating other texts inward, being authored across media. Between the outward overflow and inward convergence of paratextuality, we see the beating heart of the text.

What, though, are we to make of such paratexts presented in medias res, and what control do they have over the text? To answer this, we must move away from questions of textual ontology—what *is* the text?—to questions of textual phenomenology—how does the text *happen*? In particular, we can turn to the textual theory of Wolfgang Iser and to Stanley Fish’s “Affective Stylistics” period that preceded his above-mentioned theoretical excesses. Both writers insisted on the importance of studying a text as it happens, from sentence to sentence, page to page. Fish argued that we as analysts too often interpret the text as a whole, hence forgetting how it developed and took form in the act of reading.⁴⁴ He wrote of literature as “kinetic,” in that it moves, and “does not lend itself to a static interpretation because it refuses to stay still and doesn’t let you stay still either.” He further reasoned that readers respond not only to a finished utterance, but rather to the “temporal flow” of a text: “That is, in

an utterance of any length, there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, and the report of what happens to the reader is always a report of what has happened *to that point*" (emphasis added).⁴⁵ Iser too was interested in how sequent sentences act upon one another, and in how texts leave "gaps" between sentences and ideas that readers must fill in, producing an ebb and flow (a beating heart?) of anticipation, retrospection, and accumulation, an "experience [that] comes about through a process of continual modification."⁴⁶ "Every moment of reading," he notes, "is a dialectic of protension and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled; the wandering viewpoint carves its passage through both at the same time and leaves them to merge together in its wake." Meaning arises, he argues, out of the process of "actualization,"⁴⁷ in the act of reading, and both he and Fish point to the active nature of texts—they are experiences, not just monuments, and so our interpretation of a text must occur as itself an experience, not in a lightning-strike moment of sense-making.

For television series in particular, the ramifications of a phenomenological approach to interpretation are profound.⁴⁸ Many shows take years to play out from supposed start to finish, and thus the televisual equivalent of the moment between pages in a book may be a week between episodes, or a summer hiatus. However, it would be ludicrous to think that we simply tuck away our interpretive efforts into small corners of our brains, waiting until after the series finale to make sense of a text. Rather, we constantly interpret as we go along. Furthermore, television shows give us significant time between episodes to interpret them, and so we will often make sense of them away from the work itself, in the moments between exhibition. As we have seen, though, these moments, or what Iser would call "gaps," are often filled with paratexts: as Brooker's narrative above illustrates, we might go online and read others' opinions of a show, we might consume tie-in merchandise, or we might consume any number of other paratexts.⁴⁹ Consequently, just as paratexts can inflect our interpretations of texts as we enter them, so too can they inflect our *re-entry* to television texts. For texts that destabilize any one media platform as central, each platform serves as a paratext for the others. Since our process of textual "actualization" remains open with most television series, paratexts are free to invade the meaning-making process. Especially, too, since many serial programs leave us wondering what will

happen next, frustrating the narrative delivery system by dragging it out over multiple years, many viewers will actively look for clues in producers' paratexts regarding what will happen next. Of course, a similar process occurs in serial films, so that, for instance, Brooker charts the debates and discussions among *Star Wars* fans about the films' many paratexts (games, novels, comics, etc.) as to what entails the "canon," or the accepted *Star Wars* universe.⁵⁰

With an increasing number of television and film serial texts opening up what Matt Hills dubs "endlessly deferred hyperdiegesis"⁵¹—huge, seemingly never-ending plotlines—and set in elaborate textual universes, we might expect both the frustrations of wanting to know what will happen, and the experience of a text as comprising much more than just the show, to increase markedly. Such cult texts invite their viewers in and give their imaginations acres of space in which to roam, and it is this openness that often proves most attractive to many viewers. Thus, these texts seemingly welcome in all manner of other texts and paratexts to delineate small portions of the universe, plotline, thematics, and characterization.

Arguably the most clear-cut example of an *in medias res* paratext at work is the "last week on . . ." or "previously on . . ." segments that precede many television serials. Such segments usually consist of a carefully edited fifteen- to thirty-second sequence of images and plot-points from previous episodes, designed to give audiences necessary backstory. For new viewers, these segments clearly serve as entryway paratexts, but they also act as reminders for returning viewers, designed to focus attention on specific actions, themes, or issues. Thus, for instance, if two characters are best friends, and yet five weeks ago we learned that one has betrayed the other, the "previously on . . ." segment will likely replay the moment of revelation only if this information is seen as pertinent to the current episode. Should the betrayed friend return the betrayal in this episode, the absence of a "previously on . . ." tip-off may result in us judging him negatively, whereas with the tip-off, we are more likely to understand or even forgive his actions. Beyond "previously on . . ." segments, though, *all* *in medias res* paratexts work in a similar way, offering frames through which we can interpret the text at hand, and subtly or radically inflecting our reading accordingly. In effect, they build themselves into the text, becoming inseparable from it, buoys floating in the overflow of a serial text that direct our passage through that text.

Serial television programs and films are not unique in being vulnerable to paratextual influence. Rather, all films and television programs can be

jostled by paratexts, whether we have “finished” reading them or not. As is especially evident in the case of serial television texts, each of us carries with us thousands of open texts that can be re-decoded and re-inflected at any point in their progression, whether this be one episode into a three-hundred-episode run or fifty years following the watching of a film. Of the latter instance, Annette Kuhn’s work with “enduring fans” of 1930s films is illustrative. Kuhn interviewed numerous women in their seventies who still enjoyed watching and talking about the films and stars of their twenties, and who still found new meanings in them. She argues, “For the enduring fan, the cinema-going past is no foreign country but something continuously reproduced as a vital aspect of daily life in the present.” As these women grew older, watched different films, and gained new experiences, they were able to return to their beloved texts with new interpretive strategies or nuances, hence keeping the texts alive and active for decades. “As the text is appropriated and used by enduring fans, further layers of inter-textual and extra-textual memory-meaning continuously accrue.”⁵²

Since intertextuality works by placing the text at hand into a conversation with previously viewed texts, not only will earlier-viewed texts be able to talk to a current text—the current text will also be able to talk *back to* earlier texts. We may well find, then, that many years, months, days, or minutes after we thought we had finished with a text, it is once more active, and we are once more consuming, decoding, and making sense of it. Such is the case with, for instance, many texts that we watched as children rather naively, only to learn of deeper nuances later in life, and such is potentially the case with any text that we find reason to think about, rewatch, or reference “after” consumption. As Mikhail Bakhtin ended his last-known article, in words poetically befitting the close of the great intertextual theorist’s career:

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contents of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and into the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never finally be grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue’s later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.⁵³ The intertextual dialogue and life of texts remains perpetually open.

If the notion of a paratext changing our understanding of a text “after the fact” sounds odd, we might think again of the analogy of product branding. Throughout their lifespan, many prominent brands have engaged in rebranding attempts, so that, for instance, McDonalds’ move from their “You Deserve a Break Today” campaign to their current “I’m Lovin’ It” campaign toggles the brand’s semiotics without any discernible change in the product whatsoever: the paratext of the campaign has aimed to change the text of McDonalds. Or, for another analogy, we might think of the construction and telling of history, wherein despite the seeming immutability of a past event, each retelling of the story can ascribe different symbolic value to it. Even the day after an event, one will often find stark differences in how that event is reported and framed from, say, CNN to Fox News to *Daily Kos* to a non-American source. “Anniversary journalism” will later, in all likelihood, assign new meaning to the event,⁵⁴ and with the benefit of hindsight, history books in years to come may reframe the event yet again: “every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.” In other words, each invocation of a moment in history can paratextually rewrite the text of the event, since, at the moment of the telling, the “text” is only accessible through the “paratext.” *The Onion* humorously illustrates this process of the infinite reassigning of value in a parodic article about the sinking of the Titanic, entitled “World’s Largest Metaphor Sinks,”⁵⁵ tipping its hat to the endless narrativizations of exactly what the ship and its sinking (the “text”) represented that have proliferated since the fateful event.

With texts alive interminably, forever open to toggling, paratexts may always work in medias res. Especially thoughtful reviews may cause us to reflect once more upon an already-seen film or television program; academic articles and close readings may open up whole new realms of texts for us; toys or games might place a text in a whole new setting, bit by bit shifting our understanding of it; and so forth. In other words, there is never a point in time at which a text frees itself from the contextualizing powers of paratextuality.

Wear the T-Shirt, Skip the Film: Paratextual Superiority

Nevertheless, paratexts sometimes take over their texts. A child can, for instance, eat the Disney movie Happy Meal, buy the toys and the coloring books, and play the game with his or her friends without actually watching

the film. Similarly, some fans recount the experience of falling more heavily for a text's fan discussion site than for the text itself. If today's television and film paratextuality extends the horizons of the narrative universe well beyond what "the text itself" offers, surely some audience members will find that the universe is more interesting at its horizons. In such cases, these audience members may still consider themselves fans or at least viewers of the text, but here rather than simply modify or inflect the text, the paratexts may in time *become* the text, as the audience members take their cues regarding what a text means from the paratext's images, signs, symbols, and words, rather than from the film or program's. As analysts, we might be tempted to think of the paratexts here as mere residue, or a long shadow, of the show, but individual audience members may not care to make the distinction between paratext and show. Precisely because the language of "paratextuality" is absent from everyday talk of film and television, and because the desire to delineate exactly what is and is not "the text" is often an analyst's alone, not an average audience member's, frequently we may find that audience talk of and reaction to a text may have originated with the paratext, yet been integrated into the individual audience member's conception of "the text itself."

Shunning the text in favor of the paratext may appear a somewhat anomalous practice, but as we have said, any given individual speculatively consumes thousands of texts over the course of his or her life. We cannot watch every show in order to choose what we would prefer to watch, and thus, by force of necessity, we all regularly allow paratexts to stand in for texts. As I have written elsewhere, non-fan and anti-fan texts in particular are often only partially consumed, therefore shifting the burden of textuality to the paratext.⁵⁶ *If* all paratexts were accurate depictions of their related texts, and *if* no paratexts introduced any meaning other than those meanings which are in the related shows, paratexts would be unremarkable. However, since paratexts have, as I have argued and as the remaining chapters will show, considerable power to amplify, reduce, erase, or add meaning, much of the textuality that exists in the world is paratext-driven.

2

Coming Soon!

Hype, Intros, and Textual Beginnings

Academic and popular accounts of film and television are frequently suffused with discussion of what happens *after* watching, following such questions as “What did you think of such-and-such a show?,” “What effects might it have?,” and “What does it mean?” The social science tradition of studying media has also produced considerable work examining what happens *before* watching, with, for instance, a strand of “uses and gratifications” research that studies the motivating factors behind one’s choice to watch, and another strand of production studies and political economy that explores the creative and economic processes that go into creating media. But comparatively little work exists from within a humanistic tradition examining how meaning begins and where *texts* come from, suggesting by its absence that texts begin when the first scene of a film or program begins. A refreshing exception is Charles Acland’s reading of multiplex geographies, construction, and contexts.¹ Exploring similar terrain for television (and for films on television), Barbara Klinger has also examined the geography of the home theater.² As important as such work is, and as much as it reminds us of the paratexts of geography and technology, in this chapter I argue that films and television programs often begin long before we actively seek them out, and that their textual histories are every bit as complex and requiring of study as are their audience, creative, or economic histories. This chapter is thus about the true beginnings of texts as coherent clusters of meaning, expectation, and engagement, and about the text’s first initial outposts, in particular trailers, posters, previews, and hype.

As was discussed in the Introduction, Hollywood invests large amounts of money, time, and labor into hyping its products. Therefore, just as one would not expect Nike to construct its ads half-heartedly, there should in theory be nothing random or accidental about the meanings on offer in

Hollywood's trailers, posters, previews, and ad campaigns. Clint Culpepper, president of Sony Screen Gems, warns, "You can have the most terrific movie in the world, and if you can't convey that fact in fifteen- and thirty-second TV ads it's like having bad speakers on a great stereo."³ As a result, DreamWorks' head of creative advertising David Sameth has said of trailers, "We'll spend five months to a year obsessing about them, every single cut and every single moment we use,"⁴ showing how carefully manicured many texts' ads are. In a rare academic account of trailers, meanwhile, John Ellis writes of them as offering a "narrative image" in which everything can be assumed to be there for a reason, and "can be assumed to be calculated. Hence everything tends to be pulled into the process of meaning."⁵ Rather than regard trailers, previews, and ads as textually removed from the shows they announce, therefore, Ellis suggests, albeit briefly, that they are *part of* the show's narrative, and that they are concentrates of the show's meaning. Precisely because trailers, previews, and ads introduce us to a text and its many proposed and supposed meanings, the promotional material that we consume sets up, begins, and *frames* many of the interactions that we have with texts. More than merely point us to the text at hand, these promos will have already begun the process of creating textual meaning, serving as the first outpost of interpretation. Promos often take the first steps in filling a text with meaning. The term "trailer" is a hold-over from when trailers followed films, but in today's media environment, movies and television shows are trailing the trailers and promos in months not minutes, slowly plodding forth while meanings, interpretations, evaluations, and all manner of audience and industry chatter are already on the scene. We may in time resist the meanings proposed by promotional materials, but they tell us what to expect, direct our excitement and/or apprehension, and begin to tell us what a text is all about, calling for our identification with and interpretation of that text before we have even seemingly arrived at it. This chapter will examine how texts begin, not in their opening scenes, but in their hype, promos, trailers, posters, previews, and opening credit sequences, and how these paratexts may continue to figure into the interpretive process even after the film or television show has started.

I will begin by discussing the role of promotional campaigns and trailers in initiating textuality, creating a genre, networking star intertexts, and introducing us to a new storyworld. This discussion leads into examinations of several movie posters and their initiation of their texts, and of a 2006 promotional campaign for ABC's *Six Degrees*. Looking at a New

York subway poster campaign and at the show's advance teaser website, I will argue that both set up a gender, a genre, a style, and an attitude for the show before it hit the air. This pre-text was not a wholly accurate reflection of the television program that followed, and so too is my next case study one in which the paratext and the show itself failed to work in concert with one another. Close-reading two trailers for Atom Egoyan's film *The Sweet Hereafter*, I examine how one film can "begin" in such starkly different ways depending upon the trailer that precedes it. Then, following this example, I ask what we are to make of the rise of trailers and hype, and of their increasing prominence on television and online in particular, especially given that, as I will argue, they play a constitutive role in establishing a "proper" interpretation for a text. This interest in "proper" interpretations finally leads to a discussion of television opening credit sequences as paratexts that can operate both as entryway and in medias res, telling us how to interpret a text, and then returning to remind us of this official, sanctioned interpretation, and serving a ritual purpose of transporting us once more into that storyworld. Throughout the chapter, my interests lie in where texts come from and how we return to them.

Hype, Promos, and Trailers: "A Cinema of (Coming) Attractions"

Trailers and previews have rarely warranted much attention from media studies critics, except as yet more advertising. But Hollywood takes them very seriously, and so it should. If we consider that most films make over a third of their box office in their opening week,⁶ and since high opening-week box office figures have a compounding effect, giving rise to further hype to bring in audiences for the rest of a film's run, we cannot underestimate the importance of a good trailer to the film industry. If a film triumphs in its opening week, good promos will have played a significant role in this victory. Thus, on average, movie studios will budget \$10 million per film for producing the marketing, even before adding triple that figure on ad buys.⁷ Some even hire multiple agencies to compete with each other for the best trailer.⁸ Meanwhile, the television industry similarly dedicates large amounts of money, time, and labor to hyping its shows. Especially in late summer, before the new television season begins, many cities are covered with various forms of advertising, as entire public transportation systems and roadways seem to be sponsored by the networks, newspapers garner full-page ads for new shows, and stars do the rounds of the talk show circuit. As with film, previews prove remarkably important for

a television show's tentative early weeks: many seasons have seen shows canceled after only two or three episodes, when Nielsen ratings are more effectively measuring how many viewers the promos attracted than how interesting the show is in and of itself.

The lone book-length study of film trailers, Lisa Kernan's *Coming Attractions*, opens on the note that trailers are "a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined." Playing with Tom Gunning's famous discussion of a cinema of attractions,⁹ Kernan notes that trailers are "a cinema of (coming) attractions."¹⁰ As with all promos, they are ads, but they are also a taste test of films to come, offering some of a film's first pleasures, meanings, and ideas. Film fans have long enjoyed arriving early at the cinema in order to catch a glimpse of what movies to expect a month or season from now. Trailers have thus become an important part of the cinema-going experience and ritual, serving as the transitional, liminal device that navigates us from a loud theater with unruly teens, over-affectionate lovers, and people on their cell phones, to a world of celluloid dreams and spectatorial, narrative pleasures. Trailers announce and introduce the film that follows them by announcing the wonders of the medium in general, and they bring to a head the joys of anticipation, like the opening orchestral hum before a live performance. All the while, they help to reinforce cinema-going as a repetitive event,¹¹ promising that yet another voyage to the world of dreams awaits, and that though you are watching such-and-such a movie now, *next time* you can watch any one of these movies on offer. Television previews act similarly, encouraging us to keep watching or to return later in the week or month, and creating excitement and anticipation, whether for a new show, or for the next chapter in a continuing narrative.

Moreover, as Kernan argues, trailers circulate discourses of genre and of the star system, often even more so than do films themselves, promising the continued life of a beloved genre or star, extending the joys of cinema-going beyond the presentation at hand. She points out that trailers tend to concentrate their efforts (1) on delineating a film's genre, (2) on celebrating and featuring its star(s), and/or (3) on providing an environmental sampling (as exemplified in the trite opening common to many trailers: "In a world where . . ."). Genre can be established before viewing,¹² outside the realm of the text, and yet since genre is not just a classificatory tool, but also a set of rules for interpreting a text,¹³ when trailers or other forms of promotion propose a genre, it may prove hard for an individual viewer to easily shrug off these rules. Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranth's

examination of would-be *Crash* viewers' responses to its negative hype, discussed in the previous chapter, gives us a window into how constitutive preliminary paratextual frames can prove for subsequent viewing and interpretation.¹⁴ Genres can work as strong paratexts because they frequently enjoy communal definition and widespread use, and because they are cultural categories used by the industry, reviewers, audience members, politicians, and policy makers alike, often with a relatively shared or at least dominant definition at any given point in time.¹⁵ Thus to say or to imply that a film is an action film, an eco-thriller, a sports biopic, or a romantic comedy is to summon entire systems of distribution, reviewer interest, and audience participation and reaction, ensuring interest, disinterest, and/or specific forms of attention from given studios, theaters, audience members, and would-be censors. Trailers and other advertising play vital roles in announcing a film's genre and in providing initial generic labels. Similarly, a star is his or her own generic signifier and intertext (think of the different filmic meanings and uses of, for instance, Clint Eastwood, Julia Roberts, Neil Patrick Harris, or Miley Cyrus), thus also offering interpretive strategies and expectations. Environmental sampling, too, seeks to outline for potential viewers the sorts of things that might occur "in a world where . . ." As particularly strong paratexts, then, trailers and previews may dictate how to read a text.

The archetypal examples here are trailers for action films, which may introduce us to key characters and/or plotlines, but tend to eschew complexity in favor of multiple fighting scenes, car chases, elaborate stunts, and awe-inspiring pyrotechnics, all accompanied by fast-paced, energetic music. A trailer for an action film that concentrates too heavily on its romantic elements will read as a romance, just as one that concentrates too heavily on a thoughtful plot may risk reading as a drama. That said, well-made trailers can often use scene selection to manicure genre more subtly too. Kernan provides the example of *Return of the Jedi's* (1983) trailer, which George Lucas used to try to insist that the film was not simply sci-fi, but rather a family adventure film.¹⁶ She also discusses *Men in Black's* (1997) trailer, which hailed subcultural appeal by steeping itself in Will Smith's urban cool, often bouncing this off Tommy Lee Jones as white straight man. Smith, she notes, "as the *black* man in black, thus adds a cool factor to the film's characterological and star dynamics, and [. . .] serves as a comic aside to African-American audiences, assuming and asserting (through the rhetoric of stardom) that the film holds special appeal for them while also amusing whites."¹⁷ Increasingly, films offer

multiple trailers for different presumed audiences, as, for instance, when *Bee Movie* (2007) pegged itself as a kids' film on Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon, but as the return of Jerry Seinfeld and his brand of urban ironic comedy on prime-time network television. Andrew Wernick argues that "a promotional message is a complex of significations which at once represents (moves in place of), advocates (moves on behalf of), and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entities to which it refers,"¹⁸ and a significant part of that representation, advocacy, and anticipation is genred by nature.

Trailers and other forms of promotion serve a vital indexical purpose, too, since the mediascape is simply too large for any one of us to watch everything. Promos allow us to schedule our media consumption patterns, working as something akin to a menu for future consumption, and quickly helping us to consign texts to our personal Must Watch, Might Watch, or Do Not Watch lists. Many of us know and judge much of the media world through promos alone, with every one of us having seen thousands of trailers, posters, and previews for shows that we will never watch. Indeed, while promotional materials are constitutive in terms of hailing an audience for a text, they also create meanings for those who will not be in the audience. For every person who has watched any given film or television program, there are likely more who have watched a trailer, poster, or preview of it and yet not the thing itself. To popular culture, then, and hence to media studies' subsequent analyses of what role a text plays in popular culture, the promo and its editor's or producer's meaning-making may prove more important than the meaning-making going on in the show itself. Even in the many instances in which a trailer results in us resolving to never watch the film, clearly some form of interpretation, judgment, and understanding has occurred *without the show*. As the term "preview" encapsulates, we have a paradoxical situation in which we can apparently view a text before viewing it.

*The Poster and Its Prey:
Movie Posters and the Beginning of Meaning*

To see advertising's intricate acts of meaning construction at work, we can turn first to movie posters. Though rarely as densely packed with meaning as are their video cousins, trailers, posters can still play a key role in outlining a show's genre, its star intertexts, and the type of world a would-be audience member is entering. Indeed, a browse through an

online archive of movie posters, *The Internet Movie Poster Awards* (www.impawards.com), quickly reveals a relatively limited and standardized set of poster styles. Action films regularly feature prominently the lone male (or occasionally female) hero looking steely-eyed and ready for action, with weapons on hand and/or muscles bulging (cf. *Rambo* [2008], *Mission: Impossible* [1996], *Walking Tall* [2004], *Gladiator* [2000], and most Bond films), while star-led comedies regularly offer a close-up of the smiling or goofy star(s) (cf. *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* [1994], *Bean* [1997], *Big* [1988], *Baby Mama* [2008]). Horror films often feature prominently either an icon of the murderer (cf. Jason's mask in posters for the *Halloween* franchise [1978–] or Freddie's claws in those for the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise [1984–]), or a symbol of innocence that has been disturbed (cf. the baby's bottle with a creature in it for *The Kindred* [1987] or the bloodstained Christmas ornament for a teaser poster for *Black Christmas* [2006]). Sex-driven comedies are fond of framing the action with or between women's legs (cf. *Artie Lange's Beer League* [2006], *Bachelor Party* [1984], *Porky's* [1982], *Losin' It* [1983]) or of encouraging leering at half-naked women (cf. *10* [1979], *Hardbodies* [1984], *Spring Break* [1983]). Romances show either the lead couple staring lovingly at each other (cf. *When Harry Met Sally* [1989], *What Women Want* [2000], *Serendipity* [2001]) or simply a close-up of a content-looking woman (cf. *Amélie* [2001], *My Best Friend's Wedding* [1997], *Becoming Jane* [2007]). And many other genres have their set image or style too, so that one glance at the poster in a multiplex or at a bus shelter will immediately tell a viewer what genre to expect. Moreover, since many movie posters prominently feature their star or stars, they hail that star as an intertext of all their past roles and their public performance.

Movie posters can also offer considerably more complex and involved meanings, as is evident in some of the art form's more famous examples. Consider, for instance, the iconic poster for *Home Alone* (1990), in which a young Macaulay Culkin has his hands to his face in (mock?) shock/horror as two clearly ne'er-do-well bad guys (Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern) look on through the window behind him. The top of the poster reads, "When Kevin's family left for vacation, they forgot one minor detail: Kevin" and the tag-line promises "A family comedy without the family," while type just below the center of the poster reassures, "But don't worry . . . He cooks. He cleans. He kicks some butt." Quite simple visually, the poster actually navigates delicate terrain. The set-up is given, namely that Kevin is all alone, having been abandoned by his family, and he's now clearly

under threat. This premise could easily be that of a horror film, or of a horrifying drama (as is played with in a parody of the poster available online that replaces Pesci and Stern with Michael Jackson). Yet the poster successfully manages to sell the film as a family comedy, not only because its tagline insists so, but also because Pesci's "evil face" is too comically overdone to be taken seriously, the initial set-up's sarcastic reference to forgetting Kevin as being "a minor detail" elicits humor, and Kevin's face is somewhat playful. The centered text also tries its best to assure us that Kevin is in charge. The poster alludes to a horrifying situation and one of seeming powerlessness, yet promises a flip in those power dynamics. Hence it also promises the child viewer a vicarious experience of power, complete with "I don't need you, mommy" sentiment, the naughtiness of "kicking butt," and the child literally and figuratively at the center of the action. A comic release of tension is hinted at, whereby parents and children can laugh off great fears and enjoy a magic-make-believe scenario in which an otherwise horrifying prospect is stripped of danger. All the while, too, this creates mystery and intrigue: since Kevin seems so obviously in peril, *how* will he reverse the situation and "kick some butt"? The poster speaks quite clearly to parental and kid tensions and concerns, but assuages them, while leaving a narrative hook to bring them to the movie theater.

Another famous poster for another beloved family film, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), works in a similar way, not only offering genre, but also working through tensions and calming them. The poster depicts Earth from outer space, with a mock-up of the Sistine Chapel's depiction of God touching Adam in the top half of the poster, this time featuring an alien hand touching a child's. Large print at the top of the poster reads "His Adventure on Earth," while smaller print lower down the poster reads, "He is afraid. He is totally alone. He is 3,000,000 light years from home." Aliens often suggest horror films, or at least sci-fi thrillers, and the vast expanse of space seen in this poster has been used in other movie posters (cf. *Alien* [1979]) to suggest isolation and vulnerability, especially when the poster's vantage point—looking down on Earth—would seem to be that of the (invading?) alien. Hence, as with *Home Alone*, this poster could risk scaring off parents and children. However, the text refers to E.T. as a he, not an it, and makes "him" sound like a lost puppy, invoking SPCA ads more than H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, even while calming these anxieties with the notion of his "adventure." "His Adventure on Earth" reads like the subtitle of an issue of *Boy's Own Journal* or *Tintin*, albeit with a science

fiction twist, and thus the invocation of both a lost puppy and a young boy's adventure tale significantly domesticates and tames the film's image.

Furthermore, the Michelangelo mock-up is an arresting image, in part because the calm in the child's hand suggests a reaching to touch the alien, not a retraction from doing so, in part because the alien's bent wrist makes the touch seem less like an aggressive lunge, and perhaps most obviously because of the allusion. Michelangelo's image literally and figuratively connects God and Man, and so this poster suggests that the film will connect extra-terrestrial and human lives, fates, and existence. While Michelangelo depicted God touching an adult, just as *Home Alone* gives kids all the power, this next great step forward will be with child, not adult. Consequently, the poster alludes to Spielberg's Twainian idolicization of adolescence. Instead of threatening nightmares, a fear of the dark, and of the aliens out there, *E.T.*'s poster (as would *Home Alone*'s poster years later) promises a film that will make the child feel more adventurous, more comfortable with the world, and more sure of his or her place in it. An evocative, alluring text, in short, has been created for both child and parent. Once more, too, multiple narrative hooks are offered: *How* will they connect? What does this alien look like? Will "he" get home?

Taking a markedly different approach, the equally famous poster for Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) actively feeds fears and tensions. A young woman is depicted swimming in the ocean, oblivious to the huge great white shark rocketing toward her, its mouth open and as wide as her body is long, brandishing multiple sharp teeth (fig. 2.1). The text at the top of the poster, reading "The terrifying motion picture from the terrifying No. 1 best seller," hardly needs to repeat "terrifying," as the poster captures the utter helplessness of the woman. The poster may well have *created* a fear of the ocean for many a viewer (myself included!), but it similarly encapsulates this fear, selling little else but the fear. Unlike the posters for *Home Alone* or *E.T.*, the *Jaws* poster offers no plot, and no real characters, other than the shark as predator and the woman as undoubtedly one of many victims. The genre is clearly horror, but rather than simply announce itself as such, it moves toward starting the horror at the poster, thereby seemingly allowing the audience member to sample the emotive feeling of watching the film.

All three posters create their texts, giving vivid ideas of what to expect, and transporting viewers into their storyworlds—as young Kevin ready to kick some butt in his own house, as the lost E.T. in a strange land, as the swimmer waiting to be attacked. Each of the three, in other words, opens its respective film's storyworld before the film has reached the scene.

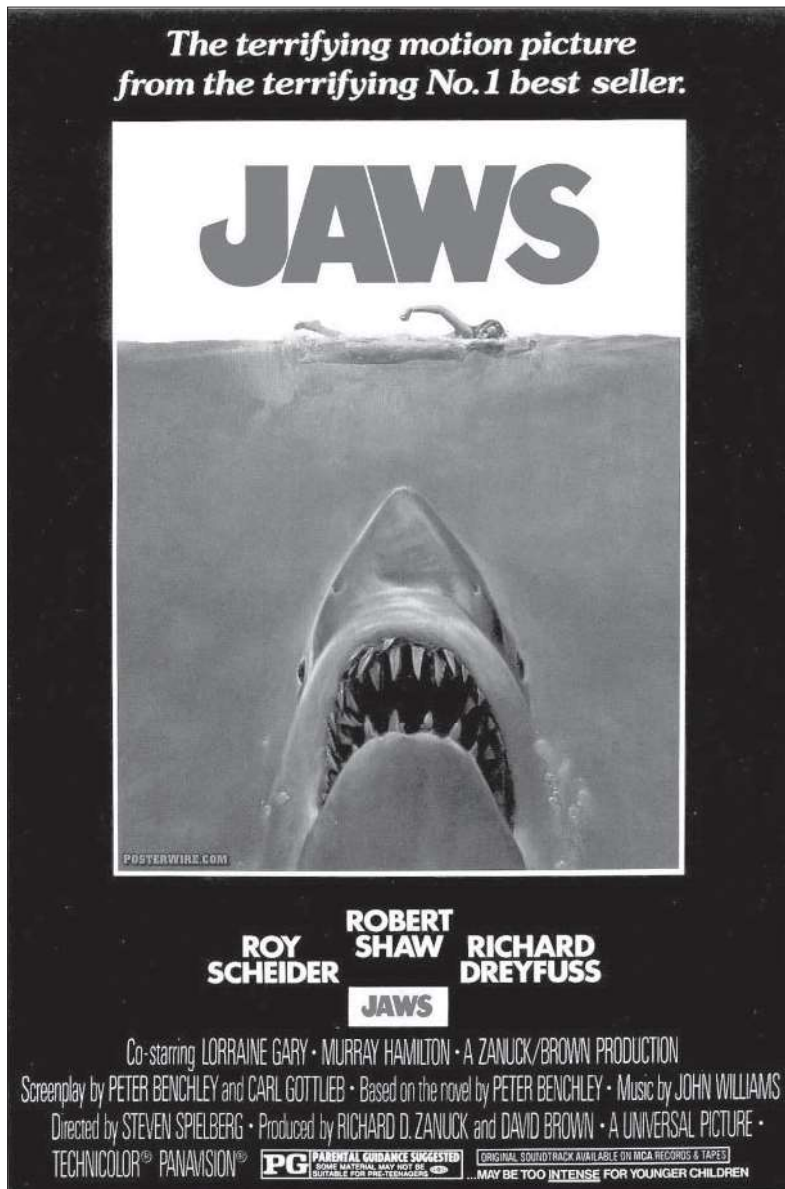


Fig. 2.1. The *Jaws* poster begins the horror with the image of Jaws' helpless, unaware prey.

Six Degrees of Promotion

Posters are often only one element of a concerted advertising campaign. A classic example here was provided by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Its poster art forebodingly sets up the ensuing horror, as well as the faux documentary style of the film, with a forest engulfed by darkness, a close-up of the scared looking Heather Donahue, and text that reads “In October of 1994 three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting this documentary . . . A year later their footage was found.” But the combination of the film’s advance website with “Heather’s Journal,” notes on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) for all three actors listing them as “missing, presumed dead,” and a faux television documentary, *The Curse of the Blair Witch* (1999), worked to compound the sense of real-life horror.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, then, *The Blair Witch Project* has arguably remained as famous (if not more so) for its creative and masterful promotion as for the film itself, since in many ways, the horror *began* online and in front of the television, not simply in the movie theater.

In the wake of *The Blair Witch Project*, Internet advertising has become par for the course with new media products, and innovative campaigns that tread into the spaces of everyday life are all the more common. Such was the case with ABC’s *Six Degrees*, which in August of 2006, one month before its television premier, boasted an interesting website and a New York City subway blitz, both of which produced an attitude, a genre, and a gender for the forthcoming program. ABC had purchased all the ad space in numerous subway cars, plastering them with a series of provocative statements: “The man by the door will someday be your boss”; “The girl across the aisle is flirting with you”; “The guy next to you will someday be a good friend”; and “You and the woman in red have a shared secret” (fig. 2.2). Interspersed between these pronouncements were several panels announcing “Everyone is Connected,” each of which included the URL www.u-r-connected.com. Clearly, these ads aimed to grab commuters’ attention, but more specifically, they encouraged commuters to look around a subway car full of seemingly random faces. Declaring that “Everyone is Connected,” they provoked any individual commuter to think about how s/he was connected to fellow commuters, and by extension to the city at large. Moreover, with two of the four statements positing the connection in a future “someday,” and a third involving flirtation and hence a *hope* for future connection, they alluded to a notion of serendipity, fate, and destiny.



Fig. 2.2. Ads for *Six Degrees* in a New York subway car pique interest, while giving the show a definite style and character. Photograph by the author.

Meanwhile, the fourth statement posited a shared past, and thus, as did all of the panels, it suggested a common history and link between, if not all passengers in the train, at least a small select few. In doing so, the ads were quite playful, of course, eliciting the occasional shared smile or grimace as two real-life “women in red,” for instance, laughed off their momentary allegiance. All of the statements were on the long ad panels above commuters’ heads, making them easily visible, while an ad actually linking the slogan “Everyone is Connected” to *Six Degrees*—announcing the premier date, network, and producer J. J. Abrams’s involvement—could be found lower down, by the doors. Further adding to the intrigue and mystery, this explanatory ad was therefore obscured from view during peak-hour commutes by commuters’ heads for all but those closest to it.

If one followed the URL for clues, a black screen gave way to a series of photos of New York City street life, all time-exposed so that the people in the photos looked like blurs, and so that no faces were clearly visible. Overlaid on these photos, at first text announced, “There is a theory that anyone on the planet is connected to any other person through a chain

of six people . . . No one is a stranger for long,” before more statements of the subway variety (“One day you’ll work with someone you bumped into this morning”) followed one by one. After a few seconds of this, the website implored one to “Tell us a little bit about yourself and discover a new connection,” before giving way to questions such as “Who Are You? I am my work; I am the sum of my experience; I am my future; or I am my contribution”. After six questions, the website would then show six characters, one of whose pictures would be enlarged, as the site announced that you shared a connection with this character. A “character video” would then load, showing character-specific clips from *Six Degrees*. The site also offered one the chance to “Find a New Connection” and start the questions again.

To begin to interpret this elaborate marketing scheme, we might first observe that both sites of advertising clearly evoked dating services. The subway ads were either written in soft purple or printed on a purple background, with phantom pictures of the program’s attractive, yet not necessarily recognizable, cast in the lettering. New York subways are frequently home to ads for online dating services, and thus the stereotypically feminine color scheme, pictures of the handsome Jay Hernandez, Campbell Scott, and Dorian Missick (one Latino, one white, one African-American, and hence suitably multi-ethnic—another mainstay of dating ads in New York), and allusions to finding connection in the sea of faces that is New York immediately suggested an online dating service. Within such a framing, the photos of Hope Davis, Bridget Moynihan, and Erika Christensen appear to depict happy customers. Even the URL—u-r-connected.com—sounds like a dating site.

Moreover, the interest in serendipity and fated connection in New York sets up direct links to romantic comedies that have drawn heavily on an ethos of Manhattanite serendipity. Prominent examples of such films include *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), which famously unites its two lovers atop the Empire State Building; *Serendipity*, which involves many scenes of the hero scouring New York for signs of his would-be lover; *Kate and Leopold* (2001), which sees a character transported through time to meet his lover in modern-day New York; and *When Harry Met Sally*, which sees New Yorkers Harry and Sally bump into each other over a number of years, and gradually come together as a couple. Even when one seeks out the URL, the “Tell us a little bit about yourself” and stylized answers (“I am my future”) recall not only the profile forms that dating services would require one to fill out, but also the personality quizzes common to women’s

magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. In many ways, the advertising campaign alludes heavily to women's genres of the romance and the magazine personality quiz, to direct its further allusion to dating sites toward women specifically, coding *Six Degrees* as a female-focused text that believes in the fairytale romance qualities of serendipity and fate.

The website's act of "computing" answers to six fairly mundane questions in order to suggest a connection to a specific character also announces a fairly clear pretension to be something akin to the next *Sex and the City*. *Sex and the City* was a hugely popular program during its six-year run, gaining canonic status, particularly in New York City and for a female "post-feminist" audience. The show followed the lives and many loves of four close female friends as they interacted with the city around them, the female equivalents of Baudelaire's "flâneur." In the wake of *Sex and the City*'s popularity, pop culture became suffused with fan declarations that "I am Samantha," "I am Charlotte," "I am Miranda," or "I am Carrie," depending upon which lead character the speaker identified with the most. Such declarations are still common and widely available on t-shirts or mugs. *Six Degrees*' website, without much subtlety, mimics this identification game, by twinning a web-visitor with one of the six characters.²⁰ Not only does such a strategy declare that *Six Degrees* too will be a show endemic to the city and its ethos of interconnection, but it also suggests something of the sexual politics of the show, given that *Sex and the City* was most (in)famous for its frank discussion of sexuality, and it promises that this show too will offer characters who are "just like you," with whom the viewer can relate, and who represent the various facets of New York life. By referencing *Sex and the City*, too, this promise is once again directed at prospective female viewers in particular, given *Sex and the City*'s huge female fan following.

Such a message and such an intertextual network address a New Yorker with the promise of yet another "insider" show. The *New York Times* reviewer for *Six Degrees* picked up on this most poetically, when she wrote, prior to the network premier, that "the show's forte, for viewers like me who don't mind piety on television, is its ambience of faith, particularly in the ebullient Whitmanian idea of 'contact' in the city," further elaborating that, "there's an amorphous but powerful religion in New York, and just about every newcomer undergoes some kind of conversion to it. [. . .] The shared citywide creed might be called Manhattan paganism: a private, almost secretive belief in coincidence, chance, accident and serendipity."²¹ Even by taking its advertising to the subway in such a quirky

campaign, the marketing for *Six Degrees* is keen to make it appear a “New York show.” Indeed, early television ads played with J. J. Abrams’s involvement by observing that Abrams—an executive producer of the castaway-gone-wrong series *Lost*—was turning his attention to “a new island,” Manhattan. The island on *Lost* is a complex entity unto itself, and thus such ads similarly suggested Manhattan’s own complexity, mystery, and intrigue. However, if all this advertising aimed to flatter New Yorkers and insist that the show “got” the entity that is Manhattan, such an advertising technique also stood to be equally as evocative for potential viewers who visited New York, were alerted to the advertising campaign by media reports, or watched ads and read reviews. The ads seemingly promised to transport viewers from elsewhere to the hard-paved yet magical streets of Manhattan. Just as *Sex and the City* sold a trip to Manhattan for those off the island, *Six Degrees*’ advertising and early buzz offered a similar act of teleportation.

Ultimately, then, without watching *Six Degrees*, and based only on seeing its subway ads and its early website, one could already have a quite developed construction of the program: as intended primarily for women; as quintessentially New York, and modern, hip, liberal Sex-y New York at that; as romantic in genre and ethos; and as a show about characters “like you and me” and their feelings. If the website’s questionnaire aimed to capture an image of its visitors (“I am my future”), it similarly suggested that on a weekly basis it would capture images and moments in the life of New York, reducing the seemingly anonymous, hostile, and gargantuan metropolis to the intimate circle of six people. Also, lest this seem some pretender to the throne, the mere presence of J. J. Abrams’s name in marketing (despite later press that questioned the depth of his involvement with the show) gave a firm stamp of quality. Hot on the heels of the ratings giant *Lost*, and of the hip *Alias* (2001–6), Abrams had established himself as one of the medium’s premium auteurs (see chapter 4), and through his early involvement with the urban love tale *Felicity* (1998–2002) he had proven his familiarity with New York. Abrams is particularly well-known and -loved for his character-driven writing, and for his ability to handle rich backgrounds and large casts. With *Lost* and *Alias*, too, he had garnered a name for the boldly original and out-of-the-ordinary, and so his name alone seemingly promised a high level of quality, and a text that would develop over time in intriguing and unique ways. Before *Six Degrees* hit the air, ABC’s marketing team had therefore already offered many audiences the chance to decode its genre, style, tone, mood, quality,

prospects for development, and characterization. At the outskirts of the show, these paratexts had fashioned a text.

Interestingly, looking back on the advertising now, long since the show was first put on a lengthy “hiatus” and later canceled, and after having watched several episodes, I conclude that the paratexts were by no means purely indexical or metonymic. *Six Degrees* focused on relationships, and so in this slight respect may be coded more “feminine” than the overtly masculine run-and-gun worlds of shows such as *24* (2001–); but its world was more gritty and less magical-make-believe than either the romantic comedies to which its advertising alluded, or than its proposed “fore-mother,” *Sex and the City*, and it seemed equally open to male viewers. With three interesting male leads in particular, it hardly hailed female viewers alone. For its marketing campaign to label it as an urban romance for women was not entirely inaccurate, but nor was it a label that truly fit. By December 2006, *Six Degrees*’ future was in jeopardy, and one might wonder to what degree the advertising had contributed to alienating audiences who may have liked it, and/or to attracting audiences who were doomed not to like it. A show’s ultimate failure to stay on air is a product of many things, ranging from the luck of the time slot, to network dedication to the series, to actual quality, and so it is impossible to attribute the program’s cancellation to poor advertising alone, especially when the poster campaign described here ran only in New York and Los Angeles. But its ads hardly seemed wholly appropriate for the show, instead creating a different referent text for potential audiences and non-audiences alike. Given the disjuncture between the meanings of the promos and the meanings of the show once it began in earnest, we might speculate as to how many texts fail and get canceled in part because of a poor marketing campaign, and hence because of paratextual dismantling. Many a show’s death may be predetermined at birth by its previews and trailers.

However, the television industry does not use previews just to communicate with would-be audiences; previews also play an important commercial role in selling the program, and the entire network, to would-be advertisers. As Amanda Lotz describes, one of the American television industry’s more important yearly rituals and events is the Upfront presentations in mid-May, when each network announces a tentative schedule for its fall programming, with much pomp and pageantry in a lavish party in Manhattan.²² Each network’s returning programming is already a known quantity, its Nielsen ratings and audience demographics a matter of public record among advertisers and their designated ad time buyers.

But the Upfronts allow networks a chance to present previews for their newly commissioned shows and to create “buzz” about their schedule. As Lotz describes, the ad buyer’s role at the Upfronts is to try to read the buzz, to gauge not only how successful individual shows will be, but how coherent a programming strategy the network has as a whole. A network that appears confident, with a strong slate of programs, can not only set higher ad rates for new programs, but can increase ad rates for all its shows, whereas “a network that reveals itself to be anxious, hesitant, or internally conflicted in its message or programming sends a clear message to advertisers to resist rate increases and buy elsewhere.”²³ And since traditionally 75 to 90 percent of a network’s advertising time has been sold immediately following the Upfront week,²⁴ little room exists to make a mistake. Confidence is sold in part by hoopla, with actors in attendance, glitz, and glamour, but good previews that evoke a favorable audience reaction can go a long way toward attracting advertiser money. Ultimately, then, preview production is arguably one of the most important steps in the creation of a new show, with good previews attracting both advertisers and audiences, and bad ones costing a network sorely. Both semiotically and economically, shows and their networks utterly rely upon the strength of their promos.

Trailers and Their Sweet Hereafters

If trailers and promos give birth to a text and promise an audience a mise-en-scène, a genre, and a set of meanings, then different trailers or promos might create wholly different texts. Comically illustrating this point was one of the hottest viral videos making the rounds in 2005, a trailer for *The Shining* (1980).²⁵ A series of staffers at video production and editing company PS260 had set themselves the task of changing a famous film’s genre by weaving together existing footage to create a new trailer. In its new incarnation, *The Shining* became a feel-good father-son bonding film, simply called *Shining*. The newly minted voiceover began by introducing us to Jack Torrance, “a writer looking for inspiration,” and Danny, “a kid looking for a dad,” before explaining that while “Jack just can’t finish his book,” he’s about to learn that “sometimes, what we need most is just around the corner.” At this point, Peter Gabriel’s upbeat song “Solsbury Hill” cues, as we are treated to a montage of the film’s loving family shots and snippets of dialogue such as “I’m your new foster father” and “I’d do anything for you.” While the pleasures and humor involved in watching

this trailer depend upon being aware of how inaccurately it advertises Stanley Kubrick's film about a father who goes crazy in an isolated and haunted mountain hotel, and while it was unlikely to have changed an audience member's understanding of *The Shining* as such, it once more illustrates a trailer's ability to play with and radically augment a film's genre. Similarly, another PS260 mock trailer turned the romantic musical and *Romeo and Juliet* retelling *West Side Story* (1961) into a *28 Days Later* (2002) style zombie horror flick, reframing dance sequences as zombie attacks.²⁶

Such genre changes are by no means restricted to parody alone, however. Through reruns, the repurposing of television is a daily and pervasive practice, with hype and previews encouraging certain (generic) viewing strategies. Lynn Spigel, for instance, notes how Nick at Nite regularly advertises older sitcoms as camp²⁷; parody can be created by viewers as much as by writers or directors,²⁸ and Nick at Nite encourages audiences to watch its shows as camp, where their original broadcast previews would have presented them as straight. If reruns can be turned into parody, though, as Derek Kompare notes, they can also be turned into classics, parts of our television heritage and national history.²⁹ Thus, while Nick at Nite is playfully ribbing older shows with its paratextual framing, TV Land in particular presents many of its reruns as the best of television past, steeped in nostalgia and added significance. To rerun a program in the first place is to send a subtle message regarding the show's worthiness of replay, especially for what has often been an ephemeral medium. Beyond simple statements of worth, though, as Kompare notes,³⁰ cable television in particular has found past television shows invaluable for laying claim to a generic and brand identity. Cable channels will regularly fill their schedule with reruns and films that match the channel's intended tone and identity, but in choosing these programs and films, and in labeling them as such, they further attach certain genres to the apparent surface of the text. For example, if Lifetime were to play *Charlie's Angels* (either the television show [1976–81] or the film [2000]), its advertising and brand identity alone would most likely encourage a "girl power," post-feminist reading, celebrating the three tough and resourceful women, whereas if Spike were to play *Charlie's Angels*, we would now likely be encouraged to see the film as an action romp with women in skimpy costumes.

In this manner, as Jason Mittell states, "Production is an ongoing process in the majority of television, revising notions of genre throughout the run of a series as producers respond to the ongoing cultural circulation

of programs,³¹ and each time a show or film is replayed, its surrounding paratextuality “produces” it and its genre anew. Mittell’s interests lie in how genre is “a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts,”³² and hence in how, over time, various agents and paratexts inflect dominant understandings and uses of a genre. These processes clearly apply to an individual text, too, so that textual meaning will shift across time as its paratexts direct our reading strategies. Of course, any given text will have limits to its uses, but promos and previews can still determine significant variation within a text’s broad set of meanings. For instance, we could possibly imagine *Charlie’s Angels* receiving play on BET as part of a series on films influenced by blaxploitation, but it is highly unlikely that any preview could convince viewers to see it as a film *about* the African American experience.

Various previews’ abilities to inflect texts over time can make for dense and intricate textual histories, but texts can be further complicated within any given moment in time due to differences in promos and previews across space. Just as Mittell notes the varying understandings of cartoons as a genre over time, we should expect genres and texts to change meanings as they travel the planet, according to their different paratextual entourage. Such is the case for the American and Canadian trailers of Canadian director Atom Egoyan’s film *The Sweet Hereafter*.³³ Egoyan was well-known in Canada due to his prior films, including *Exotica* (1994), *Calendar* (1993), and *The Adjuster* (1991), but had no popular cachet in America. A “quirky” director whose work rarely conforms to established genres, Egoyan poses a particular challenge to marketers trying to visually summarize his films in two minutes. *The Sweet Hereafter*’s American and Canadian trailers render this difficulty in vivid detail, as the former aimed to peg the film generically, while the latter could rely upon audiences’ familiarity with Egoyan as his own genre. As a result, when the film opened in 1997, two starkly different movies were on sale in the two different nations’ trailers.

Based on Russell Banks’s novel of the same title, *The Sweet Hereafter* is a stunning if grueling film that examines a small mountain town’s grief following a school bus accident that kills all but one of the town’s youth. Ian Holm stars as a lawyer come to town in the aftermath, trying to find someone to blame, while he struggles with his own feelings of guilt inspired by occasional calls from his drug-addicted daughter whom he is powerless to help. A film about parenthood, protection, grief, loss, and

childhood, it garnered widespread critical acclaim, including the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, an Independent Spirit award, and Best Direction and Best Adapted Screenplay nominations at the 1998 Oscars. However, while bringing Egoyan one of his largest box office outings, with a little over \$3 million grossed, it failed to register with the American public more widely. Inevitably, the question of why it failed to attract a larger audience produces many possible answers: audiences may have considered it too bleak, too slow, too dark, “too Canadian,” not star-studded enough; it may have been released on too few screens; or any number of other reasons. Another possible answer that I want to advance, though, is that the American trailer sold a different film with a different genre, one that was formulaic and uninteresting. Especially when compared to the Canadian trailer, the American trailer hijacked and augmented the film, confusingly offering audiences a different product than the one they would actually have received should they watch the film.

The American trailer includes a voiceover in typical Hollywood style, offered by one of its typical voice talents. As images from the film shoot by, with interspersed dialogue, the announcer reads:

In a town where no one is a stranger, in a place where everyone feels like family, something has happened that will change their lives forever. Now, one man must find the truth. But who can you trust when everyone has a secret? Who can you blame when no one is innocent?

At no point do we see the bus veer off the road and crash, nor do we see the obvious aftermath; rather, we are left with oblique references to something awful that has happened, likely involving children, and the viewer’s attention is pointed toward one man’s quest for “the truth.” Ian Holm’s Mitchell appears to be one part lawyer, one part detective, and in the absence of the knowledge of exactly what sort of accident or incident took place, one is left to assume a murder of some sort. The trailer poses a lone investigator stuck in a town in which “everyone has a secret,” yet “no one is innocent,” implying widespread complicity in whatever has happened. Numerous snippets of dialogue suggest a cover-up, with the trailer giving particular prominence, through muting all background sound when spoken, to Mitchell’s declaration, “As far as I’m concerned, there is no such thing as an accident.” This is *The Wicker Man* (1973) with snow, or, given that the trailer ends with Sarah Polley’s Nicole reading the “Pied Piper of Hamelin” fairytale, possibly a *Children of the Corn* (1984) scenario. When

I showed the trailer to a class of 250 undergraduates at University of California, Berkeley, none of whom had watched the film, the clear consensus among the students was that the town as a whole had committed a ritualistic murder. Or, taking their cue from the final interior shot of Nicole approaching a window at night, only for a blinding light to be emitted from outside, some students felt that supernatural, even alien causes might lie behind the “accident.”

The trailer slots Mitchell into a long tradition of American detectives trying to “cut through the crap,” vaguely referencing their forerunner in the Western hero nobly taking on the bad guys and the environment all by himself. Noir with the blanc of pervasive snow, following in *Fargo’s* (1996) footsteps, but without the humor. The eeriness of the music and the set-up suggest a thriller, complete with the foreboding threat to Mitchell, as made explicit by a scene in which Bruce Greenwood’s Billy demands that he stop asking questions. The film’s title suggests death has occurred, but also suggests a continuing threat of more death, with a promise from Nicole that she will not lie offering the hero his only shred of help, and yet another nod to a seemingly formulaic thriller, in which the nice young girl helps the tired old detective. The trailer announces the various awards won by the film, but viewers are left to suppose that this was due to its artful camerawork—of which we see plenty in the trailer—or Holm’s performance, or the gimmick of moving this old Hollywood formula into the snow, since little else about the film seems original or award-worthy. Without much apparent originality, and without star power or sex appeal, it promised to fall too easily into the no-man’s-land between art-house and multiplex viewing cultures.

As should be clear, though, the movie that the American trailer offered hardly resembles the actual film. For a closer approximation, we must turn to the Canadian trailer, which while using many of the same shots and dialogue, is markedly different in tone, detail, and hence generic delivery. Eschewing the standard Hollywood “In a world where . . .” voiceover style, the Canadian trailer uses voiceover only at the end to announce the film’s director and title, and instead uses title cards, reading, “Sometimes the past can’t be forgotten. Sometimes justice can’t be found. And sometimes the truth is just the beginning.” Importantly, since Egoyan was a known quantity to Canadians, and known for dark, peculiar characters and plots (*Exotica*, for instance, follows a taxman’s obsession with a stripper who once babysat for his child, who was abducted and killed), the trailer had the luxury of not needing to place this ungeneric, original



Fig. 2.3. *The Sweet Hereafter*'s Billy watches in horror as his children's school bus sinks into ice. Decontextualized in the American trailer, the reason for his horror is considerably clearer in the Canadian trailer.

director's work into a generic box, as did its American counterpart. Instead, then, this is advertised as "an Atom Egoyan film," a quantity that would have more meaning for its Canadian audience. Moreover, the Canadian trailer uses considerably more shots of the school bus, at first full of children, and later hauntingly empty and destroyed. The trailer also adds the sound of children screaming in the background to one shot, and it adds shots of the bus cracking through the ice, and of it driving off the roadside, followed by a fade to white. Thus, whereas American audiences were being encouraged to imagine an eerie detective thriller, Canadian audiences were offered the shock of the actual accident from early on.

I distinctly remember audience members gasping in horror during many of the trailers' showings in 1997 in Vancouver. Billy's reaction shot, as the father of two children who is riding behind the bus when it crashes (fig. 2.3), though used in the American trailer, now gives the audience an immediate point of identification, and a set of parents' eyes through which they can watch the incident. With this shot added, with the intertextual knowledge of Egoyan's past work alluded to, and with the title cards focusing on the *absence* of meaning and announcing that "sometimes the truth is just the beginning" instead of promising the truth, audiences could now immediately understand Mitchell's mission as futile. Similarly, Billy's act

of threatening Mitchell is recontextualized as giving voice to desperate anger and grief, and the entire film is framed as being about dealing with loss, not discovery. Meanwhile, the title now gains a grim quality—this is anything but “sweet”—and the Pied Piper tale becomes quite clearly about loss, childhood, and parenthood, not about cultish killings or alien abductions. The trailer speaks to us in a markedly different tone, capturing the spirit and genre(lessness) of the film with considerably more accuracy.

Here, then, we have a stark example of how two different trailers can offer two different films. Interestingly, though, if one watches *both* trailers, the genre-refusing nature of the film becomes all the more impressive, precisely because the American trailer shows the genres and formulas that Egoyan’s film frustrates: this is clearly *not* a film where the detective will get his man, and it is clearly *not* a puzzle movie with an answer at the end. The American trailer, as such, shows the backdrop to the film, while the Canadian one shows the development and foreground. Such a reading, though, is left mostly for the Egoyan or *Sweet Hereafter* enthusiast watching both trailers on the DVD. At the time of release, with YouTube several years away, and barring a jet-setting lifestyle, North American viewers would have been left with only one of the two trailers. Initially, viewers would have made a decision to see the film or not based on their reactions to the trailer they saw, and perhaps based on discussions with others who had seen the trailer. Without Egoyan’s past films serving as active intertexts screaming out that the director’s films aren’t usually so simple, American viewers would likely make this judgment with faulty “advice.” If a trailer is a window into a movie, windows point in different directions, giving us different angles of vision, some refracting or otherwise distorting. And in case my above account suggests that the Canadian trailer encapsulated the film perfectly, we could certainly envision another trailer that would accurately encapsulate elements of the film, yet focus on different themes; for instance, the incestuous relationship between Nicole and her father might feature more prominently, as might Mitchell’s relationship with his daughter, likewise pointing to a film about parenthood, childhood, damage, and loss, but now highlighting the threatening, tenuous nature of the parent–child relationship. While I hesitate to write in hypotheticals, were viewers to watch this imaginary third trailer, they might watch the film with such themes more firmly in mind, yet again shifting their expectations and changing the nature of the text that they experience. Therefore, while Egoyan directed the film, the stark differences in trailer editing gave the studio significant powers of authorship

that in part superseded his own, and would likely have proven constitutive of the frames with which viewers would watch the film.

Hence, trailers and promos not only question how textuality works, but also how the author works. If the author, director, or writer is assumed to be s/he who creates a text, scripting its characters, themes, genre, and so forth, trailers and promos may rob this figure of some of his or her creative powers. Admittedly, we would be foolish to regard any cinematic or televisual creation as coming from a single creative figure, and even when fans talk of creator figures in reverential terms, they nearly always recognize film and television to require communal acts of creation. When we speak of authors, as will be discussed further in chapter 3, we often speak of what Michel Foucault dubs the “author function”—not a real figure but a projection, “in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice.”³⁴ This author function may prove its own powerful paratext at times, as chapter 3 will examine. However, at the same time, the trailer’s or promo’s power to create an initial interpretive framework for a text—sometimes as much as a year before the show is delivered to its audience—or to propose a new framework later in the text’s life, means that a considerable component of textual creation comes from neither the author figure nor the author function, but from the studio’s hired marketing staff and the editors who compose the trailer or promo. These editors must work with footage filmed by the film or program’s creative personnel, so they do not have *carte blanche*, but as the case of *The Sweet Hereafter* illustrates, editing allows one remarkable freedom of creation and re-creation.

The power of the trailer editor is often most evident with generically complex films and programs, such as *The Sweet Hereafter*. Similarly, for instance, M. Night Shyamalan’s movies have also posed a challenge to their editors. Shyamalan’s films (*The Sixth Sense* [1999], *Unbreakable* [2000], *Signs* [2002], *The Village* [2004], *Lady in the Water* [2006], and *The Happening* [2008]) are renowned for their plot twists, but they all mix genres too. Trailers for *The Village* tried to peg the film as horror, focusing on creatures in the woods, and including several standard horror film scenes, such as the creature’s apparent stalking of the young female lead, and the listing of rules for avoiding the creature. Granted, *The Village* draws from the horror genre, as Shyamalan uses horror as decoy for the movie’s twist, but ultimately it is not horror, and audiences who went to

the film expecting that genre—primed as they may well have been by the trailers—would have been sorely disappointed. By contrast, Shyamalan's next films, *Lady in the Water* and *The Happening*, had suitably vague and generically open trailers that more accurately pegged the films as odd mixes of, respectively, drama, character study, fairy tale, and horror, and horror, sci-fi, and bio-disaster.

Ultimately, a film need not mix genres for a trailer to play with or augment its framing. Trailers for dramedies notoriously tend to include all the film's funniest lines, thereby suggesting an out-and-out comedy; trailers for thrillers can suggest an action film by focusing only on the more high-paced moments; character-rich films might be pitched as plot- or action-based; trailers for sequels might fail to acknowledge a change in tone; films designed for a niche audience might deliberately be pitched as for the whole family; in the wake of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy's success, many films in the fantasy genre are pitched as action films even when they are not; and so forth. A great deal of movie-going in particular is about expectation, and since trailers play a key role in setting expectations, they become a key contributor to a text's meaning and can be central to an audience's reaction to that text.

Trailers' contribution to meaning may even be growing, given their increasing presence in all forms of media. Many cable providers now offer a free Movie Trailers On Demand channel, while many a commercial break contains at least one ad for a film or television program. YouTube, Hulu, Facebook, and MySpace, meanwhile, all circulate trailers and previews, as does IMDb. Movie trailers regularly attract more views on video-sharing sites than do even some of the most popular viral videos,³⁵ and television promos can easily top a million views. Thus, where trailers were once limited to the space before movies (whether in a theater or on a VHS tape) or to television ad breaks, they can now be found in various other locations, as Hollywood has used new media to circulate ads for its shows far and wide. In such an environment, producers and marketers may well be gaining considerably more control over the meanings of a text. When trailers were limited to a few minutes before movies, or a few television ads, their effect may have been more muted, but today's proliferation of trailers means that most of us watch each one multiple times, often unable to escape them even if we wanted to do so. Today's culture of trailers sets the stage for parodic items such as The Onion News Network's on the *Iron Man* trailer discussed in the Introduction, or Stephen Colbert's occasional segment on *The Colbert Report* called "Trailers That

Are Ruining America.” Their constructions of meaning, suggested modes of viewing, and tailored calls to specific viewing audiences are repeated incessantly, and are constantly available for repetitive viewing. With each viewing, the director’s text potentially dissolves yet a little more, with the marketing team’s text replacing it. Final cut is relative, as the high trade in trailers and promos over YouTube and similar sites puts ever more power into studios’ hands to pre-purpose and repurpose films and television shows.

*The Twenty-Second Text:
Opening Credit Sequences and “Proper” Interpretations*

So far in this chapter, many of the examples have been of promos or trailers as entryway paratexts, either setting up the initial framework(s) for viewing or establishing a new framework years later for a different audience. Many trailers and promos on television in particular, however, work in medias res. Ads for rerun television shows and replayed films may just as likely address themselves to repeat viewers. Even beyond reruns, after a new show is up on its feet, its network hardly stops advertising it, nor do networks direct their continuing ads for a show only at non-viewers, attempting to convert them into viewers or fans. Rather, many ads preach to the converted, welcoming longtime viewers back, and serving both as continual reminders of a show’s time and place in the weekly schedule and as narrative lures. When addressing new audience members, promos can set frameworks for expectation, can give a text a definite character, and can generate a text prior to viewing. When addressing returning audience members, promos can on one hand begin to construct the text of the individual episode, while on the other hand, at the level of the show in general, they offer producers the chance to reiterate their version of a text, and rerun broadcasters the chance to recontextualize the text. In the wake of Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding Model and its reliance on a notion of a text’s “preferred reading,”³⁶ Justin Lewis answered David Morley’s question regarding where the preferred reading originates—with the text, audience, or analyst³⁷—by stating, “The answer must inevitably be: *the audience*.”³⁸ Instead, I would pose that paratexts often tell us how producers or distributors would prefer for us to interpret a text, which audience demographics they feel they are addressing, and how they want us to make sense of their characters and plots. In short, promos offer “proper” and “preferred” interpretations.

Working in a similar fashion, moreover, are opening credit sequences and recaps. Like promos, opening credit sequences and recaps serve an entryway function for new audiences, introducing them to the characters, genre, themes, relationships, and general subject matter. Take, for instance, the opening credits for *The Simpsons*. The camera pans down from the clouds to Springfield Elementary, and into a classroom window, where we see Bart writing lines on the blackboard before he leaps on his skateboard and heads home. Next, we find Homer working at the nuclear power plant, so excited to get off work that he doesn't notice the glowing uranium ingot attached to his clothing till he is halfway home, an ingot that he simply tosses out the window. Mother Marge is shown buying the family groceries and losing sight of Baby Maggie, who gets scanned for a price, before they too head home in the family station wagon. Meanwhile, Lisa is shown playing saxophone in the school band, and is banished by the band teacher for interjecting a virtuoso solo performance into an otherwise typically cacophonous school band song. Unfazed, she leaves the room and cycles home. Then all the family members converge on their living room to watch television, allowing the animators a quick moment of play, as each week the "couch gag" involves doing something silly to the family, such as when they "beam" onto the couch, *Star Trek* (1966–69) style. All the while, Danny Elfman's theme song, a rather frenetic orchestral piece, plays in the background, until finally, as the song crescendos, we cut to the family's television, to creator credits, and then the sequence is over.

Though only seventy-five seconds long, the sequence serves as a formidable introduction to the characters, tone, genre, and style of the show. Famously, each episode begins with Bart writing a different set of lines, giving a sense of him as a serial mischief-maker, as does his reckless skateboard trip home. Marge's momentary loss of Maggie codes her as a busy mother, while Lisa's introduction codes her as gifted, soulful, and, per force, solitary. Homer's introduction visually references the opening sequence to *The Flintstones* (1960–66), thus establishing him as a similarly dumb but well-meaning comic hero. The upbeat tone of the background music, the 2.5 kids, the numerous comic moments in the intro, and the final destination of the family living room all clearly announce the text as a family sitcom, though some of the quirks, such as Maggie being scanned for a price or Homer discarding a uranium ingot, allude to the show's intent to play with the rules and tone both of family sitcoms and of realistic depiction. While Homer is presented as somewhat stupid from the

outset, and Marge as simply flustered, Lisa's sax solo and the suggestions of Bart's intelligence from some of his lines written on the blackboard (such as "I do not have power of attorney over first graders" or "I am not the new Dalai Lama") immediately tell us that these kids are not normal sitcom kids. Occasional blackboard lines also announce the show's meta approach, as, for instance, when Bart writes "I will never win an Emmy" or "I should not be 21 by now." And with the final shot being of the television, the credit sequence subtly suggests the degree to which the show will be about television as much as it is about family life. Thus, by the end of the seventy-five seconds, viewers know the central characters and genre, have been adequately warned of its offbeat, subversive nature, and know to expect the unreal.

The Simpsons' opening credit sequence is a particularly effective one, but all opening credit sequences work in similar ways to create genre, character, and tone. Many involve remarkably fast editing, with more frames per second employed than anywhere else on television, as characters and character relationships are introduced. Colors, background music choice, and relative use of naturalistic or computer-doctored images can tell prospective viewers a lot. Watch *CSI: Miami's* (2002–) opening credits and one knows to expect a style-conscious, sexed-up procedural, just as *ER's* (1994–) pulse-like music and somber tones announce a more realistic, gritty drama, *Desperate Housewives'* (2004–) opening credits announce a playful, tongue-in-cheek tone, *The Wire's* (2002–8) discordant theme song penned by Tom Waits prepares one for a dark and uncompromising look at Baltimore's drug trade and at urban poverty in general,³⁹ and *Dexter's* (2006–) eerie tight close-ups of the titular character cutting his bacon and eggs, flossing his teeth, shaving, and squeezing a blood orange (fig. 2.4) put one on edge and ready for a show about a serial killer. So central are opening credit sequences in offering "proper interpretations" of genre and character that some of the recent class of genre-mixing serial dramas such as *Lost* and *Heroes* have eschewed using them, relying instead on a simple title-card and a "previously on . . ." segment, thereby refusing to pin down a broader sense of genre, character, or theme.

However, credit sequences are also powerful in medias res paratexts. Raymond Williams's account of televisual flow is famous, his argument being that broadcasting's "defining characteristic" was the "planned flow" between program and program, program and ad, ad and channel identification, and so on, so that "these sequences together compose the real flow, the real 'broadcasting.'"⁴⁰ He contrasts this to meetings, concerts, or games



Fig. 2.4. A close-up image of a blood orange being squeezed from *Dexter*'s opening credits looks distinctly fleshy, hence contributing to an unnerving and disturbing sequence.

that we might attend elsewhere, all of which set up their own internal conditions and responses so that one's "most general modes of comprehension and judgment are then closely linked to these kinds of specific and isolated, temporary, forms of attention."⁴¹ But opening credit sequences frequently serve an important function of setting the tone for programs as they begin, and thus of redirecting the nature of the flow and setting up their own "specific and isolated, temporary, forms of attention." Opening credit sequences, in short, serve an important ritual function. Earlier I wrote of the trailer's role in transitioning us from a noisy theater to the world of celluloid, and most performative events require similarly obvious, repetitive rituals to signal their beginning. In live theater, it is the dimming of the lights and raising of the curtain. In classical music performances, it is the orchestra's tuning of their instruments. In a sports game, it is the playing of the national anthem. And in television, it is the opening credit sequence. Opening credits help to transport us from the previous textual universe to a new one, or out of "real life" and into the life of the program (even if a growing number of shows are opting for cold starts to throw the viewer right into the action). Hence the importance of tonal shifts in opening credit sequences, and hence the utility of story-style opening credits (as in *The Simpsons*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* [1990–96], or *The*

Brady Bunch [1969–74]). If trailers frequently announce “In a world where . . .,” imploring us to move with them to that “world,” an opening credit sequence is similarly entrusted to take us to its text’s world.

Thus, David Johansson notes that the opening credit sequence to *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) is “a ‘road movie’ in miniature,”⁴² taking us as viewers alongside Tony Soprano in his ride through the urban, sterile environment of New Jersey. He notes that the “Drive Safely” sign on the turnpike “grows in absurdity every time the viewer sees it since this is a world where no one is ever ‘safe.’” He also writes of the toll booth as representing “impersonal bureaucracy and a faceless government—the system. Tony must enter it like anyone else who wishes to drive down the highway of the American Dream.”⁴³ And he states of the trip with Tony:

He’s a bad guy certainly—but we’re with him, inside the frame with his face, his hairy hands, his brute strength, his air of danger, but within the intimate bounds of the car we get a sense of strength in repose, the alpha male at rest, his guard down, vulnerable. And this deepens the viewer’s sympathy for the “hero” because, even though he *is* a bad guy, we’re *right there* with him, in tight proximity, where the sense of Tony’s physical presence—his aura—feels private, as though we are being trusted. He may be a tough guy but for now he’s alone, as naked as the rest of us.⁴⁴

I am less interested here in the universality or “correctness” of Johansson’s rather close reading than in how it illustrates the degree to which opening credit sequences inspire close readings from all viewers, thereby becoming spaces for the projection of personal interpretations. Or to change metaphors from projection to uploading, we might think of the opening credit sequence as providing time for our memories and preferred reading strategies to be uploaded, preparing us for the episode at hand. This role also pertains to theme songs, which over time similarly come to represent the entire program, and the joys and memories of that program.

Through repetition, opening credit sequences may also reaffirm what a show is about, how its characters are interrelated, and how we “should” make sense of them. Precisely because it and its theme song can represent the show, standing in for it metonymically, its constituent parts declare what a show is about. This is most obvious when performing what Barthes calls the “commutation test” of replacing one or more elements to see how the meaning of a text changes,⁴⁵ and many stark and clear examples are offered by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s (1997–2003) opening credit sequence. To begin

with, this sequence is one of the most densely packed in television history, using more than one shot per second to introduce the show's large cast and novel concept at lightning speed. As the show aged, though, it frequently remixed the intro, so that new characters, character details, and character relationships could be reflected. Indeed, it is worth speculating on the degree to which *Buffy* was aided in picking up many fans later in its lifespan—as was required, given that its original ostensible genre of high school soap meets gothic horror was not an immediate and easy fit with the “quality television” label for which it would soon come to be known—by its remarkably comprehensive “cheat sheet” opening credit sequence. By contrast, opening credit sequence-shunning serial dramas such as *Lost* and *Heroes* can prove deeply confusing for newcomers (leading to the former's need to play reruns with pop-up style background notes). *Buffy*'s opening credits adequately introduced, for instance, the complexities of Angel, the vampire with a soul, showing both his kinder, somewhat stock tall, dark, brooding romantic lead character, and the killer Angelus. In time, too, the sequence would adapt to suggest the depths of Spike, another vampire seeking a soul. *Buffy* would also play with its opening credits occasionally, as in “Superstar,” an episode in which local nerd Jonathan casts a spell to make himself revered by all, thereby producing a remixed intro in which Jonathan replaces Buffy in many shots. Or, when the show added a sister for *Buffy*, the opening credit sequence added her seamlessly, as though she had always been present.

Similarly, Victoria Johnson is able to rest much of her analysis of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s (1970–77) construction of a proudly urbane American Midwest “Heartland” on its developing opening credits. Over several pages of rich close reading of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s first five seasons' credit sequences—wherein, for instance, the first season's lyric, “You might just make it after all,” in the second season becomes the more famous, “You're gonna make it after all,” while images of Mary encountering the city are replaced in later seasons by images of her integrating within the city and as a single head-of-household—Johnson shows how these intro sequences

“evolved” to offer a “balanced” view, portraying Minneapolis as a site of public liberation and private self-actualization. In this sense, the program promoted an idealized vision that suggested 1970s downtowns might be “reclaimed” (particularly for young, white, female professionals) as liberating, joyful spaces of tourism, labor, and consumption in an era post-1960s upheavals and political traumas.⁴⁶

As did *Buffy* years later, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* communicated and framed its title character's and its setting's "evolution" as well as the "evolution" of its theme, argument, and hence "proper" interpretation through its evolving opening credit sequence, such that Johnson can chart these varying evolutions largely through the sequence alone.

Arguably the greater commutation test, though, can be witnessed by watching multiple fan-made opening credit sequences. After all, if production personnel can "prefer" certain meanings through official opening credit sequences, fan edits can prefer their own readings, while at the same time illustrating the many different introductory frames and filters that can be provided for any one show. One *Buffy* fan-made intro sequence, for instance, removes the Nerf Herder rocked-out theme song, replacing it with *Buffy* spinoff *Angel's* (1999–2004) more somber strings and rock theme, thereby setting the show up as darker and less frenetically peppy. Various other songs replace the original theme song in other fan-made trailers, too, each giving the show a decidedly different spin. Similarly, the fan-made trailers string together different frames from the series, in the process offering different interpretations of the characters and their interrelationships: some downplay Buffy; others show her to be a more tortured figure; some show her to be an angry, vengeful character; and yet others suggest a romantic bond between Buffy and Spike, Buffy and Willow, or Angel and Spike. In this way, as will be explored in considerably more detail in chapter 5, viewer-end paratexts can repurpose the "proper" interpretation, posing their own frames for viewers, and shrugging off the official frames that (in this case) Mutant Enemy Productions put forward. But to repurpose the proper interpretation requires that it has already been stated, and the television industry's opening credit sequences often make this interpretation clear, underlining and repeating it on a weekly basis.

Conclusion: More Show than the Show Itself?

Whether in their fan-made or more official varieties, opening credit sequences, trailers, posters, and ad campaigns often build the text at its outskirts. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that films and television programs will prove unable to overcome or to challenge these meanings in due course, for undoubtedly a viewer who eventually watched *E.T.*, *Six Degrees*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* would find quantitatively more textuality on offer, and a more coherent, realized narrative,

than their respective poster, ad campaign, trailer, or opening credit sequence offer. The point, therefore, is not that paratexts necessarily kill or become their texts. Rather, in preparing us for the text and offering us our first encounters with it, entryway paratexts hold considerable power to direct our initial interpretations, telling us what to expect and establishing genre, gender, style, attitude, and characterization. Working in medias res, paratexts also attempt to police proper interpretations, insisting on how they would like us to read the text. At the same time, though, while paratexts do not necessarily become their texts, especially for eventual viewers, it would be a trap—and a trap into which media studies analysis often falls—to concentrate only on what texts mean to their eventual close viewers and fans. In the case of casual viewers, paratextual frames are likely to rise in importance, precisely because there is less countervailing textuality on offer from the film or television program itself to challenge the paratextual frames. And in the case of non-viewers, of the millions who saw the *E.T.* poster, *Six Degrees* ads, *Sweet Hereafter* trailers, or *Buffy* opening credits, then decided to take their media consumption elsewhere, now there is no countervailing textuality to challenge the paratext, meaning that the paratext may well be, for such (non)viewers, the entirety of the text. Regardless, then, of whether they address eventual fans, eventual casual viewers, or non-viewers, and regardless of whether their meanings dovetail with or diverge from those of the film or television program, introductory paratexts are a vital part of the interpretive and consumption process, the first outposts and the beginning of textuality.

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3

Bonus Materials

Digital Auras and Authors

As examined in chapter 2, Hollywood and its marketers often mobilize paratexts to proffer “proper interpretations,” some preceding the show’s arrival in the public sphere, thereby setting up pre-decodings, and some working in medias res to subtly inflect the public understanding of an ongoing and open text. Many such paratexts will aim to strike a balance between simile—insisting that a show is “just like X,” or “a mix of Y and Z”—and metonym—encapsulating in microcosm the fuller diegetic world that exists in the show. In doing so, as I have argued, they are not always successful or even uniform, sometimes employing similes or metonyms problematically, and thus setting up unrealistic expectations that cannot be met, and offering various versions of what therefore becomes only nominally the “same” text. In all cases, though, they allow the text to be created in part outside of its supposed borders, so that public understanding of the film or program is generated in multiple sites by multiple paratexts. However, while chapter 2 offered numerous examples of paratexts creating or maintaining frames through which we are invited to make sense of what a text is ostensibly “about,” who it addresses, what are its basic themes, and who populates its diegesis, paratextual frames can also prove remarkably important for how they assign *value* to a text, situating it as a product and/or as a work of art. Tony Bennett notes that “value is not something which the text has or possesses. It is not an attribute of the text; it is rather something that is produced for the text.”¹ This chapter argues that paratexts are the source of much of this production.

Here we reach a dilemma for hype, promos, and synergy. For on one hand, media producers have found them to be absolutely necessary to attract audiences and encourage them to enter their textual worlds. Given the considerable textual clutter and the easy availability of endless shows in multiplexes, in video stores and libraries, on television, and on a

mushrooming number of other devices and technologies, marketers must find ways to cut through the clutter to announce their show(s) as offering a better viewing experience than the thousands of other available options. Hype, promos, and synergy, with their pre-decoding scripts and either promises or reminders of diegetic pleasures, are thus imperative. However, on the other hand, hype, promos, and synergy contribute to the clutter that often bothers many a would-be audience member, thereby devaluing the show and losing would-be audiences with their mere presence. This dilemma proves particularly challenging for films' and television programs' claim to artistic status. Hype, promos, and synergy can easily remind us that a film or program is first and foremost a product of a studio machine, especially when their pitches start to look and sound remarkably similar. Many a film trailer, for example, "invites" one to "journey to a world where _____, and one man must fight for _____." But how do you succeed when all the odds are against you?" . . . and so on. If Hollywood itself often proves to be a paint-by-numbers industry, with recombination and outright copying behind much of its production,² the hype, promo, and synergy industries can be even more obviously standardized, as in the above instance of Mad Lib trailer-making. As I explained in the Introduction, one of the motivating factors in writing this book has been that too often we in media studies do not bother to look beyond paratexts as instances of crass consumerism that detract from a business that could and should be about art, not industry. The fact that work on paratexts has often stopped at this obstacle speaks to the degree to which many viewers, and not just media studies analysts, detest and/or resent many paratexts.

Nevertheless, if hype campaigns, advertising, and merchandising can engender such skepticism about paratexts as being meaningful, complex entities, and about their accompanying texts as being legitimate art, other forms of paratexts try to offset the damaging effect of their culturally suspect counterparts. Just as some paratexts label a film or program as yet another mindless industrial product that "if you only see one this summer" absolutely *must* be this one, other paratexts actively create artistic aura for their associated text. In an impressive act of alchemy, numerous paratexts create an author figure, surround the text with aura, and insist on its uniqueness, value, and authenticity in an otherwise standardized media environment, thereby taking a heretofore industrial entity and rendering it a work of art. It is to these paratexts that this chapter turns.

Before I examine how paratexts attempt to give artistic and aesthetic value to fictional texts, I will first explore how they can similarly attempt

to surround even nonfictional programming with greater aura and authenticity, thus attempting to increase such programs' moral and civic value. This process could be charted in the fetishistic invocation by any number of news programs of their websites or blogs, an act which draws attention to the supposed excess of facts, information, and opinion that they can marshal, and suggests a mastery of news and an overflowing concern for their citizen-viewers. Instead, though, in keeping with the book's interest in entertainment media, I will look at how makeover and improvement shows rely on their paratexts to battle pervasive critiques of reality television as exploitative, excessive, unreal, and pointless with an image of the shows as philanthropic, caring, and important.

If paratexts can change one's understanding of the authenticity of supposed reality programming, their powers to change one's appreciation of fictional, artistic texts are even starker. Hence, since I have spoken of paratexts as alchemists, I next turn to DVD "silver," "gold," and "platinum" editions, complete with their extensive bonus materials. Many of these bonus materials, such as "restored" scenes, interviews with creative personnel, commentary tracks, production stills, and making-of documentaries, stamp their texts with authenticity, insisting on that text's claim to the status of great art. While Walter Benjamin famously noted that "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art,"³ today's DVD digital reproduction often proves constitutive in assigning a text a sense of aura. Thus, I will study how the *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVDs append aura, author, and authenticity to the text. Such is the success of DVDs in creating authenticity that they are regularly regarded as containing the true version of the film (the "Director's Cut"), the real work of art, and I will examine how DVDs have managed to lay discursive claim to the real text. Following my extended example of the *Two Towers* DVD, I will then examine how this discursive claim has proven particularly important for television programs. I will explore how television authors can be "born" in paratexts, and how they conduct their, the industry's, and the audience's bidding in this realm, working as signifiers of value for all in question.

Ultimately, though Benjamin declared the death of aura, and Roland Barthes declared the death of the author,⁴ this chapter argues that, mixing alchemy with necromancy, various paratexts have resurrected both aura and author, becoming primary sites for the generation of both as discursive values in today's mediated environment. I do not mean to imply

that artistry, authenticity, aura, and authority exist *only* in paratexts, nor that such values will be acknowledged equally by all audience members: speaking personally, for example, I cannot imagine how any amount of paratextual pomp and pageantry could convince me that *Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo* (2005) is anything other than a cinematic crime. Nevertheless, to a certain degree, paratexts can often determine what counts as cinematic and televisual art, aura, and authority, necessitating our close attention to them.

The Doctors' Rounds: Becoming the Real Deal

Since reality television hit the American market in full force in the early 2000s, the genre has commanded little respect, more commonly spoken of as hurting society than helping it, and as appealing to escapist and devalued impulses, not reflective and valued ones. However, in recent years, a variety of shows dedicated to the improvement and “making over” of participants have sought to counter the image of reality television as contrived, exploitative, and a waste of televisual space by touting themselves as contributing to the bettering of the nation. In their recent book *Better Living through Reality TV*, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay link the expansion of shows promising to change the lives of guests, subjects, and viewers alike to a trend toward off-loading welfare, social services, and citizenship instruction to television. Through such programs as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Supernanny* (2005–), and *The Biggest Loser* (2004–), reality television, they argue, is “being reinvented as an instructional template for taking care of oneself and becoming self-enterprising as a path to (among other things) ‘empowered’ citizenship.”⁵ The shows in question stage “interventions” in order to give explicit and implicit instruction on issues as varied as how to dress, eat, decorate, exercise, and raise one’s children, taking as their premise the curing of bad personal behavior, style, and/or living environment. I argue that if the supposed bastard child that is reality television can muster the chutzpah to purport to be helping and educating Americans, its paratexts have often proven vital in making this rhetorical move possible. Makeover and improvement shows’ paratexts, in other words, have given their texts value.

Many of these shows, after all, risk collapsing at their supposedly warm and fuzzy centers due to four intrinsic dilemmas. The first, as noted above, is that reality television has a bad reputation, its shows being coded as a waste of time. The second is a result of their frequently hyperbolic mode

of address, which boasts of their supreme philanthropy. As networks and cable channels have realized the potential for makeover shows (broadly defined) to serve as sterling corporate public relations, their boasts regarding their shows' positive, transformative effects on society have become commonplace. However, most shows help a statistically insignificant number of people, while rejecting a statistically significant number of applicants for "help." Especially when the show's home network or channel is one of the world's more profitable companies, clearing millions or billions of dollars each year in profits, and when they have proven so resourceful in pawning off most fees to corporate sponsors and selfless volunteers, these shows run the risk of seeming callous, exploitative, and uncaring at worst, or irrelevant and inconsequential at best. A third dilemma centers on these shows' ethos of surveillance. As Ouellette and Hay note, a paradox exists when shows balance their message of civic education on the value of the free society, yet flagrantly violate personal freedoms by using Big Brother-like surveillance techniques to reach their goal.⁶ Finally, and relatedly, they must assuage the viewers' potential guilt at being reduced to passive voyeurs of a spectacle, who are complicit with its surveillance, when the shows' call to improve oneself seemingly demands that audiences be more active and "do something."

Of course, contradictions exist throughout television and televisual pleasures, and many other shows similarly promise a value, then undercut that same value. But central to reality television's attempts to solve the above dilemmas are its paratexts, as the interventions that the shows perform frequently overflow into web pages, mailing lists, books, merchandise, and other platforms. For instance, writing of NBC's weight-loss competition, *The Biggest Loser*, Ouellette and Hay observe:


The "text," in the old sense of broadcast media, is only one element in a network of cultural technologies that coalesced around the *Biggest Loser* concept. Viewers are invited to take part in its interventionist ethos by applying an array of technical suggestions and motivational strategies to their own weight-loss regimes. NBC has constructed an interactive website complete with nutritional guides, dieting tips, sample recipes and menus, customizable exercise regimes, and weight-loss tools, including a body mass index calculator. Tie-in merchandise—including workbooks and the *Biggest Loser* exercise DVD—is available for purchase, and participants are also urged to join the *Biggest Loser* email club and sign up for informative podcasts. Finally, for people on the go there is also the

much-promoted *Biggest Loser* wireless service. For only \$2.99 per month, anyone with a cell phone can sign up to receive a daily health tip, an exercise pointer, or inspirational message.⁷

The “old sense of broadcast media” they allude to is, I would pose, that of the show-based model. In the “new” model, the text is now dispersed across not only the show, but also its multiple paratexts. The website serves as a portal into various sites of *The Biggest Loser*, of which the television show is merely one (fig. 3.1). Similarly, ABC’s hit *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* lives on in its Better Community website; NBC’s short-lived *Three Wishes* (2005) tried to circulate dollar bills with *Three Wishes* stickers on them so that audiences would use them to help others’ dreams come true; and *Supernanny* Jo Frost wrote a best-selling book on raising children. All of these paratexts encourage viewers to act upon the messages learnt, to continue the process of learning and self-evaluation, and/or to extend the philanthropic ministry beyond the shows and across multiple spaces of everyday life.

Many of these paratexts, then, *broaden* the shows’ mission to countless others, asking for viewers to transform themselves into versions of the shows’ contestants and self-help gurus, revolutionizing their or others’ lives. Importantly, too, they also afford promos the opportunity to boast of this broader mission. By doing so, they address the first and second dilemmas noted above by suggesting a huge, “nationwide” pool of prospective recipients of help, recoding the show as mere catalyst, not as the sum total, of a philanthropic endeavor that goes well beyond the television screen. As for the third dilemma, the paratexts recode the surveillance as necessary, and as a small cost, so that audiences can “participate” in the push to improve themselves and their surrounding communities. Also, since the paratexts prove constitutive in the attempt to mobilize a broad base of self- and world-improving viewers, the final dilemma is seemingly erased, as the paratexts both call upon audiences to “do something” and give them skills and resources for doing so, thereby allowing viewers the opportunity to feel part of the broader mission. The paratexts, as such, aim to “cure” the texts.

Across reality television, paratexts have frequently attempted to make texts more accessible, more welcoming, and hence more popular, but they have also worked to “solve,” or at least gloss over, seemingly inherent problems with the genre. It is at the level of the paratext where much improvement television attempts to refine its address. Importantly, no guarantee



TUESDAYS 8/7c on NBC

The Biggest Loser Club!

Drop Weight and Change Your Life.

Mark lost 129 lbs!
Kelly lost 109 lbs!
Roger lost 164 lbs!
All Lost 112 lbs!

Be Part of the NBC Phenomenon!
Get online access to the diet & fitness program used by the contestants - personalized to fit your goals and lifestyle.

▶ **SIGN UP NOW**
▶ **LEARN MORE**

Username: Password:

[Forgot Your Password?](#) [LOGIN](#)

Free Profile Enter information below to get started and get a free diet profile

Or, skip the profile and [go directly to signup!](#)

Weight: lbs.

Height: ft. in.

Age:

Gender: Female Male


E-Mail:

[See Our Privacy Policy](#)

GET YOUR FREE PROFILE



"I am the Biggest Loser. I believed it when I said it and I believe it now."
- All Vincent
Biggest Loser Contestant



"Thanks to the Biggest Loser Club I am celebrating a weight loss of 33 pounds and 4 dress sizes!"
- Johnna Zeigler
Biggest Loser Club Member




"Oh my god, I did it. I did it. I did it. This is amazing!"
- Kelly Fields
Biggest Loser Contestant




"I plan on remaining a Biggest Loser Club member for support, motivation and information!"
- Romney Engel
Biggest Loser Club Member

What You Get:

-  **Lose Weight with The Biggest Loser**
Use the diet and fitness program being followed on the show and interact with The Biggest Loser experts and Contestants.
-  **Daily Meal Plans & Recipes**
Personalized plans featuring foods and recipes that helped the contestants lose weight and eat healthier. Plus get shopping lists and recipes.
-  **Customized Fitness Program**
Burn calories with our circuit program you can do at home or at the gym. Our demonstrations show you how to exercise safely and effectively.
-  **Connect with Other Biggest Losers**
Our message boards are full of tips, support and advice from other club members as well as contestants from the show.
-  **Personal Progress Journal**
Share your experiences and success with other Club members, Contestants, and Trainers.
-  **Newsletter, Tips, and More**
Get inspiration, motivation, and the information you need to succeed through e-mail and online.

Exclusive Video!

Say 'Basta' to Pasta!



After you've whipped up an amazing low-cal spaghetti sauce for dinner with ground turkey and peppers and onions--do you reach for the pasta? NO! All Vincent has a better idea?

Fig. 3.1. *The Biggest Loser's* website offers multiple extensions and weight-loss tools, suggesting a *Biggest Loser* mission, not just a television program.

exists that these paratextual valuations will *work*. Moreover, as my liberal use of scare quotes suggests, we need not take the promotional, philanthropic rhetoric at face value; on the contrary, some such paratexts may increase some viewers' cynicism, as the attempt at halo-construction irks them more than the programs themselves. Hence, it is at the level of the paratext where much improvement television *aims* to complete its texts and to become "the real deal," illustrating in the process how paratexts can create value—moral, ethical, civic, and entertainment—for a text. But it is also at the level of the paratext where such shows can lose value and increase or seemingly justify viewers' and non-viewers' skepticism.

The Extra Texts, Bonus Texts, and Ideal Texts of DVDs

If paratexts can brand and recode reality, fictional universes prove an even easier target for branding and recoding. And while fictional films and television shows frequently boast many of the same types of paratexts that makeover shows have, a particularly strong paratext has been the DVD, complete with bonus materials ranging from making-of documentaries to commentary tracks, deleted or alternate scenes, and interactive games. In the first half of 2008, DVD sales and rentals in the United States produced \$10.77 billion,⁸ serving as further evidence of the market's strength. In an early article on DVDs, Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus also note their near unique status as paratexts, or, as they call them, extra texts. Many other paratexts are spatially distanced from their film or program, meaning in turn that producers and marketers can never be sure that all audience members will have access to them. Thus, for instance, the *Six Degrees* ad campaign discussed in chapter 2 required a would-be audience member to see the subway ads or the webpage, or to have heard about them from others. By contrast, Brookey and Westerfelhaus observe that "by including such interrelated [para]texts in a self-contained package, the DVD turns this intertextual relationship into an intratextual relationship."⁹ Barbara Klinger writes that DVDs have an "instant built-in and changeable intertextual surround that enter into [a film's] meaning and significance for viewers,"¹⁰ but as Brookey and Westerfelhaus suggest, this "intertextual surround" can easily become part of the text itself, making the DVD "perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself."¹¹ Bonus materials' contributions to the text may only be seen by some, and Brookey and Westerfelhaus somewhat overestimate

the likelihood that all audience members will bother watching them.¹² But they are nevertheless correct in pointing to the ease with which DVDs bring all sorts of other paratexts—trailers, documentaries, interviews, ads for merchandise and videogames, and so forth—to those audiences who do watch bonus materials, rather than rely on happenstance or active exploration on the audience member's behalf.

Moreover, they note that these paratexts' appendage to the film or program through the DVD lends them and their meanings extra authority, precisely because they are now a digitally integrated part of the show itself. Brookey and Westerfelhaus exhibit particular interest in how this affects the status of the creative personnel's observations in commentary tracks and documentaries. "Individuals involved in the film's production," they argue, "are presented in the extra text as having privileged insights regarding a film's meaning and purpose, and, as such, they are used to articulate a 'proper' (i.e., sanctioned) interpretation."¹³ Though DVDs promise the illusion of interactivity, and hence their add-ons and "Easter eggs" can seem like shreds of evidence discovered by the attentive forensic investigation of a given viewer, in fact little real interactivity exists, as instead viewers are given a carefully crafted set of meanings.¹⁴ Using the example of *Fight Club's* (1999) DVD, Brookey and Westerfelhaus show how the bonus materials and commentary tracks add an authorial voice that instructs readers on how to make sense of scenes and themes, and that in particular downplays the film's obvious homoeroticism, thus constructing a clear "proper interpretation." But their research also examined reviews of the film, and while the movie's post-theatrical release reviews were a mixed bag, its post-DVD release reviews were overwhelmingly positive, with many reviewers turning to the commentary tracks to divine the "real" text and hence the real way to interpret it. Commentary tracks and documentaries were even able to provide retorts to negative post-theatrical release reviews, explicitly attempting to "delegitimize" unfavorable critiques.

Brookey and Westerfelhaus's study of the *Fight Club* DVD once more suggests the potential for paratexts to establish proper interpretations, as well as the degree to which they can at least try to hide or overpower other interpretations (here, a homoerotic reading of the film). But it also suggests that DVDs can enrich the entire textual experience: if DVDs can be seen as offering the real text, then they can perform a quick sleight of hand, reducing the authenticity of the cinematic release or original television broadcast while elevating the paratext in status. P. David Marshall

similarly writes of DVDs' ability to "encircle, entice and deepen the significance of the film for the audience,"¹⁵ foregrounding the degree to which DVDs add value and meaning to texts, not just interpretive frames. Elsewhere I have examined the peculiarity of *Blade Runner* (1982) fans who for more than twenty years held out for a "true" director's cut DVD of the film. The original "Director's Cut" DVD was notable for one particular added scene that suggested that the central character Deckard was himself a replicant, though this was known not to be director Ridley Scott's preferred cut, and so fans were often excited at the prospect of Scott finally releasing the film as he wanted it. A paradox therefore existed of individuals who had remained active fans of the film for years, posting about it online and basing friendships around the shared love of the film, yet who maintained that the true object of their fandom—the ideal, legitimate *Blade Runner*—had as yet been denied them. The DVD, as such, represented the real work of art.¹⁶

The DVD market has grown so strongly in recent years that proclamations of the DVD's contribution to the text should not seem peculiar. As Charles Acland puts it, after all, "film texts *grow old elsewhere*," living on in other venues and on other viewing platforms, and hence "the influence of individual texts can be truly gauged only via cross-media scrutiny."¹⁷ Most prominently, Disney and other children's film producers often reap significantly more profits once a film becomes a DVD.¹⁸ Independent films, too, Acland notes, regularly view the DVD as the centerpiece of the marketing strategy. He quotes *Playback's* description of the release strategy for Lars Von Trier's *The Kingdom* (1995): "It is [. . .] hoped that the rep release campaign will boost video sales, sort of like running a trailer for video." Acland also defends Canadian film's success against its many skeptics, arguing that "focusing on the space of the cinema ignores the fact that people see far more films in other locations. Indeed, Canadians see far more Canadian films at other locations. As David Ellis notes, a single broadcast of a Canadian film on television can expect to have an audience double those expected from theatrical release, pay-TV and home video combined."¹⁹ While this last example points to the strength of Canadian broadcasting, not DVDs, in developing the value of Canadian film, Acland nevertheless reminds us that a film's value, both monetarily to its producers and popularly to its audience, will develop over time, with various platforms for re-release and various paratexts playing potentially constitutive roles in creating our understanding and valuation of the text.



Fig. 3.2. The stylishly designed *Lord of the Rings: Two Towers* Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVD box immediately aestheticizes the films, suggesting something above the humdrum Hollywood film and/or DVD.

Fellowships of the Disc

To examine further how DVDs assign value to a text, I delved into the four-DVD Platinum Series Special Extended Edition of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. While director Peter Jackson's films had received countless accolades upon theatrical release, their DVDs were no less remarkable. Packaged in an attractive "Elven"-designed box set (see fig. 3.2), the discs offer not only approximately one hour of extra (previously deleted) film footage, with scenes worked seamlessly into the cinematic text, complete with visual and sound effects, scoring, and so forth, but also four full four-hour commentary tracks, thirteen documentaries with more than seven hours of material, 1,917 photographic stills (219 of which come with commentaries), and interactive split-screen, map-, and audio-based features. With a credited production crew of 163, and with a total of 113 members of the film's cast or crew interviewed, the *Two Towers* DVDs open up the film and its production to viewers as few other artistic works in history have, creating well over thirty hours of bonus textuality, just as the *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* DVDs did before them and as would the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* DVDs after

them. In watching all this material, I saw numerous themes repeating themselves: the bonus materials seek to enrich the film's quest narrative; they actively construct an aura of supreme artistry around the films that hearkens back to a mythical pre-culture industries vision of art; and in doing so, they create a fantasy realm of cinematic production and reception into which producers, cast, crew, and fans alike can enter. Effectively, they create a Middle Earth of artistic creation, with an author (or two), an aura, and authenticity. *The Lord of the Rings* is an epic tale of an unlikely group of heroes who, through comradeship, resilience, and compassion, manage to overcome the odds and triumph in the face of immense adversity. The DVD bonus material, meanwhile, replicates this narrative continuously, superimposing it onto the cast, crew, director, Tolkien, and New Zealand.

Lending the production of three films considerably more gravitas and mythic resonance, the DVDs' producers paint a picture of multiple other fellowships, innocent and struggling hobbits, charismatic rangers, and sage wizards. Most notably, the cast often transpose their filmic roles onto their own personages, or have the act performed by others. For instance, Orlando Bloom talks of what a privilege it was to come out of drama school and work with the likes of Ian McKellen, who, he notes, brought his "wise old wizard" ways to the cast, becoming a real-life Gandalf. Likewise, numerous cast and crew members discuss Viggo Mortensen's charisma and leadership as if he was his character, the ranger who becomes king, Aragorn. The stuntmen claim that his hard work and dedication on the gruelling Helm's Deep set inspired them. We learn of Mortensen's personal pull in convincing cast and crew alike to camp out the night before a dawn shoot. Colleagues talk of him as an earthy, nature-loving man. And Second Unit Director John Mahaffi even declares, "If I was going into battle and I needed someone to be on my right shoulder, it would be Viggo." Meanwhile, Dominic Monaghan and Billy Boyd provide much of the DVDs' comic relief, reprising their roles as the cheeky, prankster hobbits. In the cast commentary, they constantly toy with the film's register of reality, joking that a dreary, rocky scene looks just like Manchester, for instance, or that the film's huge dragon-like Balrog never bought a round when at the pub with them. Whereas most of the fifteen cast members contributing to the commentary were recorded individually, Monaghan and Boyd are recorded together, hence allowing their back-and-forth banter. Interestingly, too, while Elijah Wood and Sean Astin were recorded with them for the *Fellowship of the Ring* commentary, and similarly joked

around as carefree hobbits, the *Two Towers* commentary separates them from Monaghan and Boyd. Paralleling Frodo and Sam's path into darkness, Wood and Astin's commentary takes on a more pensive, reflective nature.

In the *Fellowship of the Ring* commentary, the cast repeatedly referred to their bond with each other as their own "Fellowship," and once again, the *Lord of the Rings* vocabulary is used in the *Two Towers* DVDs. Monaghan notes that it was strange to be split up from the others for *The Two Towers* filming, an act which Wood describes as a "literal breaking of the Fellowship." Yet they and the DVD producers are at pains to describe how much of a complete team they were. Frustrations are downplayed, laughed away, or (likely) cut, as instead we are offered the picture of a group who all respect each others' work incredibly, enjoyed and relished each other's company, and are now sad to be apart. Barbara Klinger notes that despite DVDs' exposé style, "viewers do not get the unvarnished truth about the production; they are instead presented with the 'promotable' facts, behind-the-scenes information that supports and enhances a sense of the 'movie magic' associated with Hollywood production."²⁰ Here, the script on offer is of a real-life Fellowship. We are even told of a bizarre habit that developed between the cast and stuntmen of headbutting one another and are shown footage of Mortensen and Sala Baker headbutting at a premier, hence suggesting an intimate, ritualistic bond shared by all. What is more, cast and crew remind us continuously of the hard work and dedication that all gave to the project. Bloom, Mortensen, and Brett Beattie suffered broken ligaments or bones and yet forged on, we are told; Andy Serkis braved a frozen river in only a lycra suit; many extras and cast worked countless nights under rain machines in damp prosthetics for the Helm's Deep scenes; Brad Dourif shaved his eyebrows off five times; and all faithfully returned to New Zealand months later for pickups. The bonus materials insist on the cast becoming their own Fellowship, united by compassion, respect, and dedication, and determined to succeed in their own gruelling quest.

The tale of the Little Hobbits Who Could plays out on multiple other levels, too, as Peter Jackson particularly is raised by all commentators to an amalgam of the sage Gandalf, the charismatic Aragorn, the bumbling Merry or Pippin, and the erstwhile Frodo. Elsewhere, writing of George Lucas's image and "role" as independent film producer, Steve Bebout writes of how Lucas "performs" this role by voicing discontent with Hollywood in interviews, but also by keeping public appearances to a minimum, by

talking about his work not his life, and by wearing the plaid-shirt-and-jeans “costume” of the American everyman.²¹ The *Two Towers* bonus materials similarly assign Jackson the role of humble and unassuming geek next door, depicting a rather hobbit-like man with frizzy hair, no shoes, and no film school training, whose childlike simplicity left him open to practical jokes or the odd tumble into a bog, and yet whose energy, enthusiasm, easygoing and simple nature, and mastery of vision successfully helmed one of cinema’s boldest projects to completion.

The design team, meanwhile, is given the role of the rag-tag group of hobbits, dwarves, elves, and humans who make up the foot soldiers who repel Sauron. Conceptual designer John Howe, for instance, talks of how Weta Workshop’s creative supervisor Richard Taylor assembled a hardworking group who cared not for the fame, but who just loved the work and were dedicated to the cause. As one might imagine, much of the DVD bonus material studies the great feats of computer programming, set design, artwork, costuming, and other production details that made *The Lord of the Rings* such a lavishly rich project, and we are often hit with remarkable numbers and information: Edoras took eight months to build for eight days of filming, only to be completely dismantled afterwards, while Helm’s Deep’s set creation was preceded by three months of moving concrete and rock alone. True to *The Lord of the Rings*’ democratic interest in all the “little” people who make up the grand front, the DVDs introduce us to many of these crew members who contributed to making it all possible, as the entirety of the Fellowship is fleshed out. From groundskeeper to foley artists, we are shown how huge this Army of the Ring is. Wood enthusiastically declares that “everyone put in everything they had” for the sake of the quest, and others on the DVDs repeat this assertion as if it is religious creed.

Throughout the documentaries, this multi-layering of quests is left not only to cast and crew discussion, as music from the trilogy’s soundtrack is also cleverly used to embed certain themes. It is illustrative to focus briefly on the “J. R. R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle Earth” documentary, whose producers use Howard Shore’s compositions to welcome Tolkien himself to this Fellowship and to depict his act of writing the trilogy as its own grand quest against publishing norms, academic suspicion, and historical obstacles. The documentary begins by telling us of Tolkien’s friendship with C. S. Lewis and their common commitment to a different mode of storytelling, while the soft, inspiring flute of Shore’s hobbit theme plays in the background. Then, we are told of these writers’ shared experience

of World War I, and as several stills of the war are shown, the harsh and throbbing warrior Uruk-Hai theme accompanies them. Later, after Brian Sibley grandiosely describes the completion of the trilogy and its delivery to the publisher as coming “like lightning out of a clear sky,” the trilogy’s Fellowship theme, or quest music, cues in the background. This piece is again utilized when Jude Fisher describes how the one book was divided into three. Thus, at these four points, musical themes are used to underline, respectively, the camaraderie and nostalgic traditionalism of Lewis and Tolkien, the cruelty and terror of war, and, in the last two instances, the birth of a great epic. At the same time, though, the music serves to *equate* Tolkien’s struggle to those of his characters, and in literal concert together, they parallel his life to the trilogy’s quest. As in countless other moments in the documentaries (as, for example, when any cast or crew tomfoolery is accompanied by the light and playful music from Shore’s “Concerning Hobbits”), the DVDs propose that we view all manner of events and characters associated with the film production predominantly through diegetic *Lord of the Rings* glasses, superimposing Frodo and company’s quest and ultimate victory onto Tolkien, Jackson, the cast, and the crew.

Even New Zealand and its inhabitants are painted with a *Lord of the Rings* brush. As the title on one feature, “New Zealand as Middle Earth,” suggests, the DVDs engage in a certain degree of conflation (fig. 3.3). Commentary track discussion often insists with awe, for instance, “That’s really there,” and New Zealand’s landscape is imbued with all of the magic of Middle Earth by cast and crew alike, only occasionally interrupted by the revelation that a location was actually constructed in a parking lot or is a matte painting. Meanwhile, from the notable presence of a local accent on many of the crew, combined with little information on their previous (if any) work, to the noted “discovery” of a local acting talent, such as Karl Urban, to the use of cricket fans to record Uruk-Hai chanting for Sauron’s Nuremberg-like rally, and to the relatively unknown director himself, regional content in the DVDs is often presented with considerable pride, almost with the suggestion of hobbit-like recluse in the world, mixed with remarkable resourcefulness. Finally, in the DVDs’ closing documentary, ““The Battle for Helm’s Deep Is Over . . . ,”” Philippa Boyens solidifies the link between the cast, crew, New Zealand, and Middle Earth when she remarks that “anytime you get back together with the cast and other crew, it’s great and special . . . especially in Wellington.” Boyens thus declares New Zealand as the rightful home of this magic alliance between cast, crew, and diegetic world.



Fig. 3.3. The *Two Towers*' DVDs elide New Zealand and Middle Earth.

This multi-layering results in a formidable “stacking” of the narrative of the film, so that in addition to being a tale of Frodo, Aragorn, and Middle Earth, it is also one of the cast, the crew, Jackson, and Kiwis. Everyone, it seems, lived the movie. Remembering, too, that the *Two Towers* Platinum Edition was released prior to the cinematic release of *The Return of the King*, this stacking imbues the final chapter of the trilogy with significantly more meaning: no longer would we just be seeing Frodo’s victory, but also the cast and crew’s multi-year quest would come to an end, Jackson’s quest would end, and a (coded) Kiwi film would triumph in the almost Mordor-like world of Hollywood. For many who have seen the *Fellowship of the Ring* or *The Two Towers* DVDs, *The Return of the King*’s eventual Oscar monopoly would seem only just and deserved, since the DVDs (and other surrounding hype) added more mythic resonance than any of its competitors mustered. Of course, individual viewers may choose not to care about the multiple quests, and may refuse to actualize the DVDs’ proposed multi-layering. If primed to accept, though, this is also due to the DVDs’ masterful act of bathing the text in aura.

The Aura of the Ring

The multi-layering of the *Two Towers* text by the DVD bonus materials contributes to the steeping of the text in a significance and richness that

tries to announce its difference from quotidian Hollywood fare. Taken as a whole, the bonus materials conduct a large-scale project to surround the text with aura. As Walter Benjamin famously declared, the age of mechanical reproduction supposedly killed aura. Benjamin's argument rests on the notion that mechanical reproduction "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition," thereby depreciating its "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." "And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object."²² Art, he notes, had aura because of its history, presence, and ritual value. Ultimately, then, his concern is about context and about how contexts of viewing, reading, and listening are created. But context, as I have argued, is created largely by paratexts, and this observation is as true for the original as for the reproduction. For instance, if a painting is widely regarded as a wonderful work of art, a testament to national character, and a landmark in a given family's history, such qualities are in large part figured by its framing, where it hangs, the glowing descriptions and accounts that precede it, and its cost. Or, to rephrase, its value is in large part paratextually constructed. If that same painting is now made into a mousepad and sold in tacky souvenir stores at a discount if three of the same item are purchased, if its aura, presence, and value to the art world plummet as a result, once again paratexts are responsible. Thus, while Benjamin writes of aura as though it is born with the text, aura must be assigned with paratexts; his concern lies with the degree to which aura and value can be reassigned with different paratexts. As Benjamin writes of close-ups or slow motion, they reveal "entirely new structural formations of the subject," so that "a different nature opens itself to the camera [that employs such techniques] than opens to the naked eye."²³ Again, we might rephrase this by saying that different contexts of delivery and the paratexts that often provide such contexts expand the text, in the process offering different possibilities for its valuation. If "aura" is the sense of a text's authenticity and authority—which, by nature, could never be an actual, uncontested quality of a text, only a discursively constructed value—while Benjamin focuses on how reproduction can *lessen* aura, surely we might explore ways in which reproduction might change the text, add context, "tradition," and "presence," and thereby *increase* aura.

The *Two Towers* DVDs wrap the film in aura; housed in an attractive, high-quality box, the discs are filled with explicit and implicit grabs at the title of "Work of Art." If anything, the sheer volume of information,

explanation, interpretation, and extra footage suggests an *excess* of artistry from the cinematic release, as if there was far too much to fit into a mere three hours. In the commentary track, for example, Wood explains how much work was put into one scene and yet, “as our luck always is [. . .] it didn’t end up in the theatrical edition.” At other points in the cast commentary, actors express delight at seeing a scene returned to the text, often expostulating at length the virtues of the scene. They also occasionally discuss the rewards of seeing certain (uncut) scenes in the theater, separating themselves and their involvement with the film to marvel at its artistry. Meanwhile, the cast and crew alike positively gush with praise for one another’s performances and work. Wood tells Serkis, for instance, “You’re an absolute blessing to that character [Gollum];” continuing, “It’s just, uh, it’s a marvel, Andy.” Similarly, the design team is credited with inspiring many a scene and with themselves being gifted artists.

Beyond merely *telling* us how great the work is in an entertaining if exhaustive manner, the galleries and documentaries *show* us how superb a job everyone did. Revealing painstaking attention to detail in every portion of the film, and the immense amount of work put into getting any one element “right,” for example, the galleries present hundreds of stills of sculptures, paintings, and sketches, many with accompanying genealogies by their artists. While allowing the viewer to slow down the film to study its minutiae, these galleries become filmic versions of art galleries with audio tours, rendering the individual works—and, by extension, the entire film—as gallery-*worthy* art. At the same time, the documentaries include film of all of the artists at work and information on the technologies and artwork, how they work, and how the crew revolutionized the forms. The DVDs teach a significant amount of production literacy, familiarizing audiences with the vocabulary of pickups, foley work, mime passes, second units, matte painting, and key frames, even while creating new phrases, such as Big-atures. Much as an art gallery’s audio tour or an art history class may, then, the DVDs work to give us the information and teach us to appreciate the work. They also aim to impress with tales of individual artists’ creation values. Howe in particular is depicted as a lifelong Tolkien fan dedicated to getting everything as authentically Middle Earth-ish as possible, whether this meant working from archaeological finds from Sutton Hoo to closely approximate a suitably Tolkienesque culture, or placing the stables at the top of the Edoras set to reflect Rohan’s love of horses. Klinger notes that DVDs are “in the process of expanding the notion of aesthete [. . .] to include more mainstream consumers,”²⁴ and true

to form, the *Two Towers* bonus materials teach us how and why to admire the film, thereby suggesting the degree to which that film definitively is an object of art deserving of appreciation.

Interestingly, and almost surprisingly, for all the big-budget effects that in many ways characterize the film, neither the documentaries nor the commentaries paint the film as an effects bonanza. Rather, commentators often hold up as sacrosanct the primacy of “the story” and “the way Tolkien wrote it,” frequently with a flourish of Shore’s Fellowship theme underscoring the sentiment. As described above, the DVDs liken the movie to Frodo’s quest, and given the nostalgic simple English countryside ethos this valorizes, especially in the face of Sauron and his dark post-industrial world ethos, the cast and crew often highlight the human’s presence in, and placement above, the film’s effects. The Gollum documentaries and discussion, for instance, talk at length of how all the computers and programs at Weta could not bring life to the character until Serkis arrived, and a split-screen feature shows how closely the animators based the CGI performance on Serkis’s (fig. 3.4). Similarly, we are frequently told of how production staff used “simple” and more “natural” answers for design dilemmas instead of technical, CGI ones. And, of course, the aforementioned narrative of the three-year cast and crew Fellowship suggests its own adherence to an “older, better” way of doing things. In other words, with nostalgic hobbit music in hand, the DVDs depict *The Two Towers* as an organic project, natural in all possible ways, and utterly human. This too, then, contributes to setting it apart from other Hollywood films, and to its obvious desire to be seen as Art with a sense of tradition, Art with ritual value, Art with aura.

The Return to Celluloid Hobbiton

As part and parcel of this construction of aura, the DVDs are keen to offer us an author. To a certain degree, they actually offer two, as Tolkien and his intentions are used as a mantra of sorts. All cast and crew pledge enormous fealty to Tolkien and his wishes, and Christopher Lee and Sean Astin in particular talk of wanting to capture specific scenes’ Tolkienesque essence. All diversions from Tolkien’s text are met with apologia, in which it is usually explained that the diversion was necessary to remain true to the “spirit” of the books. Beyond Tolkien, though, Jackson is lionized as a true director. Most cast and crew at some time or another glow about how he kept “his own vision” throughout, as Wood states. We are shown and



Fig. 3.4. A split-screen feature shows how Andy Serkis's performance determined the CGI Gollum's performance, further suggesting that special effects followed human ability, not vice versa.

told how Jackson would maintain last say on seemingly everything, checking in on second units or post-production via phone or satellite, acting as final judge on all artwork, set design, and costuming, and finding time to discuss important decisions with all cast and crew. Almost paradoxically, at the same time, the DVDs' act of introducing viewers to the many artists behind the film, including many of those traditionally labeled "below the line" workers, and hence regarded by Hollywood as non-creative by nature, serves to expand our understanding of who "counts" as an author, potentially undercutting the myth of the single author. Ultimately, however, all of these mini-authors are shown to report back to, and serve at the pleasure of, Jackson, the real Author.

As for Jackson's intentions, the DVDs often offer them to us, an act that is itself a powerful sign of the medium's adherence to a pre-Death of the Author world. As Peter Lunenfeld notes—and as Brookey and Westerfelhaus note of the *Fight Club* DVD—the medium fosters the intentionalist fallacy, calcifying the director's version of how to read a film.²⁵ Moreover, Jackson's stated intentions are all artistic, as neither he nor others (even the producers) violate this claim to authority by framing him as a man with a set "job" in yet another product of the money-seeking culture industries. Likewise, the DVD bonus material is happy and keen to make the film Jackson's, not New Line's or Time Warner's.

Once again, then, the DVDs engage in a nostalgic layering of the text, whereby even their production process claims to suggest a return to a mythic golden age of artistic creation. Pushing against the studio, for instance, the DVDs include several moments when Jackson or others describe clashes between New Line's narrow-mindedness and Jackson's bold vision, such as when Jackson says of New Line's early desire to have less of Gollum, "It's tough to deal with that, really, because they don't quite have the imagination or vision of what's going to be there that we do, so you just have to ignore it simply." Meanwhile, the simple act of including extra scenes, and the general happiness with which cast and crew commentary welcomes them back, implies dissatisfaction with the way New Line "made" Jackson cut the film. Many of the additional or extended scenes are from the books, too, and so the DVDs not only allow Jackson as author to overcome the studio system's desires, but seemingly allow Tolkien as author more presence as well. Characters that were missing from the theatrical version rejoin the film, scenes return, and Jackson's, Lee's, and Howe's Tolkien scholarship is offered in commentaries to fill in gaps with Middle Earth lore and legend. In many ways, the DVDs suggest that, as good as the theatrical version may have been, the DVDs offer the Real Work of Art as ordained by Jackson and Tolkien. Certainly, *The Two Towers* was in a unique position in film history, seeing that the *Fellowship of the Ring* DVDs had conditioned viewers to know that the Real, full-length, Author's version of *The Two Towers* was to be found in the DVDs, not in the cinematic release. One might also note that this division of textuality is in keeping with the nostalgic picture of artistic creation that DVDs revel in, for whereas a cinematic release is an event and an experience,²⁶ DVDs allow personal *ownership* of the text. Much as an art collector can hang an acquisition in his or her own living room, DVDs better suit this

image of austere art in allowing the freedom to see them whenever and wherever their “owner” would like.

We could be amply justified if we regarded cynically this maneuver of conjuring aura, seeing in it and the multi-layerings of the text a deft yet sly move of the culture industries. After all, with few exceptions, film budgets and big-bucks Hollywood visual extravaganzas come no bigger than *The Lord of the Rings*. Jackson may have been a reasonably unknown director handed a huge and daring project, but he was hardly forced to produce it as he did his first picture, *Bad Taste* (1987), baking effects in his parents’ oven and starring in it with friends to deal with a tiny budget. *The Lord of the Rings* fits comfortably in a long line of effects-driven blockbusters with big-name actors and the full force of one of the world’s richest industries firmly behind it. Thus, to coyly pretend that it is a film from yesteryear, an old-style artistic work (even if this construction of pre-industrial filmmaking is mythological and ahistorical) aligning itself with the simplicity and wholesomeness of Hobbiton and Frodo Baggins, seems a garish ploy to efface its production history, and, pre-eminently, to act as if it is something it is not. From a marketing standpoint, this is a coup: with the *Two Towers* DVDs acting simultaneously upon release as an ad for the then-upcoming *Return of the King*, they offer the viewer multiple sentimental and nostalgic reasons to “support” the trilogy and its supposedly humble quest by going to the cinema, maybe even multiple times. Likewise, the DVDs’ suggestion that *The Lord of the Rings* represents a return to Real and Authentic Art, and to a respect for the craft as it was meant to be practiced, would be a reading its marketers no doubt hoped would attach itself to other *Lord of the Rings* products. On one level, then, the DVDs fully illustrate how multimedia corporations can employ networks of paratextuality to brand their products and increase the salience and depth of their meanings across the synergistic spectrum. Doubtlessly, studio executives have discovered of late the powers that DVDs hold.

Nevertheless, to chalk up the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs solely as marketing tools or ammunition would be to crudely posit multimedia corporations as Sauron-like all-seeing eyes calling to their directors, cast, crew and viewers as the Palantir to Pippin, or the ring of power to Frodo. While this level of analysis tells part of our tale, it does not tell it all. Rather, we must also recognize the utility and attraction of the *Two Towers* DVDs’ artistic creation myth to the creative personnel and to the viewers. If *The Lord of the Rings* risks being just another Hollywood item fresh off the conveyor belt, not only does the studio want us to believe it truly stands

above and beyond other films, but the entire cast and crew would surely also like to believe that they are involved in something special, and the audience would surely like to believe that they are more than the supposedly average, spectacle-awed, bread-and-circuses crowd. To this end, the DVDs often play with notions of different audiences and posit their own audience as a more knowing, savvy, aesthetically attuned, and sensible lot. At multiple points in the commentaries, cast or crew refer to being aware of Tolkien fans' high standards, but never shirk these off, instead speaking of them with great respect. Sean Astin, for instance, recounts how important it was for him to capture Sam's reaction to seeing oliphants after reading a fan letter that spoke of how much meaning that scene in the book had to the writer. Even the inclusion of Jackson's extended explanations of why he removed certain scenes from the books assume that DVD watchers will be aware of their exclusion; and the insistence on how much attention to detail went into the project, along with the declarations and "outings" of Tolkien fandom amongst the cast and crew, could be read as presentation of credentials to Tolkien fans and discerning cinephiles.

The last and arguably most important Fellowship, then, is forged as the cast and crew ally themselves with the viewers against other filmmakers and audiences (including some theatrical version audiences) as members of a small, elite band. Frequently, the DVDs share intimate "secrets" of the filming as well as jokes, pranks, and gossip from the set. For example, we learn that Howe would sword-fight other designers at lunch, or that Mortensen fell for a beard-wearing stunt woman, and we see most of the cast and crew playing around in the various documentaries. Hence, the DVDs welcome us as viewers into the Fellowship, even to the point of adding a final track to the credits that lists all of *The Lord of the Rings* official fan club's members. The DVDs foster an intimate bond between cast, crew, and audience, one that combines with their construction of the film as Work of Art, and with their construction of the DVD audience as discerning and requiring art aficionados, cloaking the entire circuit of production, text, and consumption in an aura of artistry and excellence. The DVDs allow director, cast, crew, and audience to participate in an elaborate role-play in which they are transporting themselves back in time to an age of true art, pre-mechanical or digital reproduction, and thus pre-loss of aura—or better yet, that this age has been recovered.

It would be easy to see this role-play as a ruse, ironically befitting its fantasy text's genre. We should by no means underplay or underestimate the political and economic ramifications of such DVD branding, nor

should we forget the industry's control over the rings of power that are the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs. However, this role-play also shows us the degree to which both aura and author are not necessarily dead. Granted, as Benjamin and Barthes have detailed, aura and author have changed.²⁷ But perhaps in a digital era, and under the rubric of new media, we are witnessing an earnest struggle to create a new variety of aura and author and to return (at least symbolically) to "older" models of creation and viewership. Here, I have illustrated how the *Two Towers* DVDs layer the text, so that *The Lord of the Rings* is an even more epic tale, and so that a blockbuster trilogy could be recontextualized as true art created by a rag-tag, hobbit-like group that set out to challenge Hollywood and its logic of production, and that magically found a way to do so.

My focus has been on one particular set of discs, but just as the *Two Towers* DVDs tell their central story multiple times over, so too does this story exist across a range of DVDs and other forms of bonus materials that insist upon their artistry, aura, authenticity, and author. Thus, for example, writing of a *Cinescape Insider* interview between George Lucas and Rick McCallum about their *Star Wars: Episode 1—The Phantom Menace* (1999), Robert Delaney notes Lucas and McCallum's heavy use of "metaphysical codes like 'spiritual' and 'soul' [to] elevate their product to another plane of existence, a level which, according to them, one will find in no other film."²⁸ Or, Daniel Mackay writes of how a Smithsonian "*Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*" exhibit—bonus materials in lived space—actively creates cultural capital for the trilogy, insisting on its mythological, "timeless" value. Since the Smithsonian is an austere Protector of Culture, Mackay observes that "they must increase the cultural worth of their object [here, a trilogy of popular films] before they use that object." Hence, they are determined to "change the phenomenological experience of the film," and to reveal it as possessing deeper, hidden meanings and cultural value.²⁹ Albeit to different degrees, many bonus materials claim that their films are from celluloid Hobbiton.

The 4.7-Inch Diameter Canvas: DVDs and Televisual Art

Above, I have discussed the paratextual resurrection of aura and author in terms of film, but if anything, the necromancy of the paratext becomes even more evident when we turn to television. After all, film has now long held considerable aura as a bona fide art form, and film scholarship and audiences have long upheld the value of the author or auteur. With

film, then, the industry, cast and crew, and audiences have often needed to mobilize paratexts simply to *restore* or *maintain* aura, authenticity, and authorship where it has been at risk of perishing. Big blockbusters such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy risk seeming wholly the products of mass production, necessitating discursive moves to rescue aura, authenticity, and author, while special edition DVDs for “art house” films (the Criterion Collection, for instance) discursively reaffirm a claim to artistry and aura³⁰ that has already been staked in theatrical release, and through the paratexts of the independent theater playing the film, the high-end magazines or newspaper articles discussing the film, and the academic essays surrounding it. By contrast, since its first days, television has been considered a “lower” form of culture, derided by many, and often regarded as the ultimate exemplar of the accuracy of the Frankfurt School’s damning assessment of the culture industries as producing standardized, factory-line mulch.³¹ Heavily influenced by this assessment, Todd Gitlin argued, “Although executives may not be allergic to what they deem quality, the networks as a whole aim to create not purposeful or coherent or true or beautiful shows, but audiences. Any other purpose is subordinated to the larger design of keeping a sufficient number of people tuned in.”³² With such criticisms being commonplace regarding television, its surrounding paratexts have often been charged with the task of outright *creating* value and the semblance of art, aura, authenticity, and authorship.

As Derek Kompare notes, a huge obstacle to television being considered truly artistic and meaningful has been its ephemeral nature.³³ Large amounts of early television simply do not exist any longer because they were never recorded, and stories still abound of how little value many networks place on archiving their work. Television has often broadcast programs and then moved on, losing the shows to time and memory. This process also long restricted the development of a vibrant study of television’s meanings, for whereas film critics and scholars could obtain copies of the film to study at length and in detail, television scholars were often forced to work with memory alone. And, of course, if scholars and critics had little to hold onto, so did audiences, thereby restricting the degree to which serial television could develop as an art form. As Kompare shows, reruns and the industry’s warm embrace of the logic of repetition in the 1970s and beyond therefore did wonders to establish television as something beyond the trivial. Through reruns, television became “a cultural and historical resource for all generations,” “a cultural touchstone,”³⁴ and its programs were recast as classics, as our “television heritage,” thereby

“validat[ing] the medium in ways that it had never been before, giving it an acknowledged role in the recent life and memory of the nation, and thus an assured place in American cultural history.”³⁵ Ultimately, the impact of the DVD on television would prove equally monumental in the medium’s attempt to raise its cultural status.

Kompare observes that DVDs do not just record television, they reconceptualize it.³⁶ Once television is available on DVD, several changes occur. First, one can now archive television, having it available on command, rather than relying on the vagaries of local scheduling. Admittedly, VHS allowed the same, but issues of relative software size, quality, and ease of use made the recording, storing, and watching of VHS more tricky. DVD availability now encourages viewers to think about which shows they would like to *own*, rather than simply what they would like to watch this week, or what they must remember to record and watch on the weekend. With this comes an increase in the value of television: that which is worth recording, worth keeping, and worth purchasing takes on more artistic value. Second, as Barbara Klinger points out, a “hardware aesthetic” develops among audio-visual aficionados, as some DVDs become valued for their superior sound-editing, picture quality, and bonus materials, independently of the quality of the story recorded on them.³⁷ Hence, along with HDTVs and home theater systems, DVDs have helped to aesthetically revolutionize the look and sound of television.

Third, pricing issues allow television in some cases to leapfrog over film in stores or in personal DVD collections, in terms of cultural value. Foreign imports and Criterion Collection versions of films are expensive, but most other films can be purchased for about ten to twenty-five dollars, and for as low as five dollars in bargain bins, or even less when pirated. By contrast, a season of a television series regularly costs about thirty to sixty dollars. In other words, TV DVDs are often the ones one must save up to buy, that need to go on wish lists, and/or that are bought as special treats for oneself, while film DVDs—especially at Wal-Mart, Target, or Amazon bargain prices—become more quotidian purchases. At the same time as HBO was staking its claim to high cultural status with the slogan that “it’s not TV, it’s HBO,” ads in the New York transit system around Christmas insisted that DVDs of HBO shows were “the gift they really want.” Perhaps it’s not TV, it’s DVD TV? Box set pricing alone has made television more valuable, even to those who remain true to their VCR or DVD burner, recording off television, since they are now aware that their labor and recording efforts are saving them, for instance, sixty dollars’ worth of

DVD purchase. That said, box sets have themselves been aestheticized.³⁸ *Northern Exposure* (1990–95) comes wrapped in a parka, the original edition of *Battlestar Galactica* (1978–80) comes in a Cylon-head-shaped case, and one can buy the entire *West Wing* (1999–2006) in a portfolio-style design. Meanwhile, external packaging aside, DVD internal packaging is often intricate, as menus open up to yet more menus with original artwork, Easter eggs, and all manner of other goodies adorning the entire viewing experience. And since the average television season takes five or six discs, producers have often had to provide yet more bonus materials, which in turn—as this chapter has already suggested—results in a heightened claim to artistic status and aura. When the Season 1 box set for *Lost*, for instance, includes a series of set photos by actor Matthew Fox, their inclusion demands simultaneously that the show and the set design are true art, and that the actor is a true artist. Or when a DVD of an older show is released brimming with bonus materials, it reframes a show that was likely relegated to daytime television on obscure cable channels as something worth studying closely. In multiple ways, then, DVDs up television's aesthetic ante, surrounding their programs with significant aura and value.

Resurrecting the Television Author

In this regard, however, DVDs are not alone in the paratextual world, for much of what can be found on them are paratexts available in other forms elsewhere. DVDs often present multiple interviews or making-of/behind-the-scenes specials, but versions of these can also be found on television as filler material or as “On Demand” items from premium cable channels, as well as in the programming that plays before movies in the theater. Similarly, the 7 to 8 p.m. time slot on American television is often full of entertainment news programs such as *Entertainment Tonight*, *Extra* (1994–), and *Access Hollywood* (1996–) that give “sneak peaks” and “exclusive” interviews, and these programs have multiple counterparts in the magazine world (*Premiere*, *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly*), in the entertainment news sections of most major newspapers, and in the ever-increasing number of websites that specialize in entertainment news (such as *ComingSoon.net*). Late-night and daytime talk shows regularly invite stars and directors on to discuss their work, too, making the celebrity interview one of the more common forms of content on television. Moreover, numerous television shows are now experimenting with offering

podcasts, as cast and crew record weekly versions of DVD bonus materials, commenting on a range of issues, from production minutiae to their intentions and hopes for various scenes, sometimes fielding fan questions, and releasing extra information. In short, one does not need either to buy, rent, or rip a DVD to be able to access an extensive amount of information made available by cast and crew.

For television in particular, the explosion of websites, the increase in entertainment news magazines and programs, and the advent of DVD bonus materials and podcasting have made executive producers/showrunners considerably more visible than in earlier years of the medium. With this visibility, these individuals are more and more able to add their voice to the audience's understanding of their products, and thus are increasingly able to construct themselves as authors, televisual counterparts to Peter "Frodo" Jackson.

In this light, it is worth returning to Roland Barthes's famous declaration of the "death of the author," especially since it would appear to preclude the existence of authors, even when our media environment seems to be giving us yet more authors. Importantly, Barthes's essay was more of a strategic, rhetorical killing than an actual obituary. He saw the study of texts "tyrannically centred on the author, his [*sic*] person, his life, his tastes, his passions," thereby neglecting the fact that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [. . .] to reach a point where only language 'performs,' and not 'me.'"³⁹ As discussed in chapter 1, Barthes believed in the need to separate the "work" from the "text" in analysis, yet found the specter of the author to be an impediment to this move, since his or her authority risked presiding over the work, denying audience members the right to create a text. To Barthes, if textual studies were to adequately study language and how it works, how meaning comes to be, and the full range of a text's semiotic and social relevance, the author would forever remain an obstacle, and so, Barthes closed his article, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."⁴⁰

However, writing on the heels of Barthes's pronouncement, Michel Foucault noted that readers themselves often have multiple uses for the author as concept. Authors, as such, are not solely external authorities; rather, they are texts that audiences utilize to make meaning and to situate themselves in relation to other texts. He argues that "it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author)."⁴¹ People still talk about authors, he notes, not necessarily as real people, but as projections of our

hopes, expectations, and established reading strategies for texts. In particular, the author—or “author function,” as Foucault calls it—takes on the role of being classificatory, indicating “a constant level of value,” “a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence,” “a stylistic unity,” and “a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number of events.”⁴² Henry Jenkins uses Foucault’s schema to analyze the ways in which *Star Trek* “author” Gene Roddenberry is used and discussed. Roddenberry as concept helps classify what is *Star Trek* and what isn’t.⁴³ He also serves as shorthand for a set of values, themes, and aesthetic moves that are seen to be consistent across his work. And to make him an author is to demand that *Star Trek* is of a certain quality: “Seeing *Star Trek* as reflecting the artistic vision of a single creator, Gene Roddenberry, thus allows fans to distinguish it from the bulk of commercial television which they see as faceless and formulaic, lacking aesthetic and ideological integrity.”⁴⁴ Playing off this last use for the “author function,” and following from the above discussions of DVDs, aura, and value, we could add that the value function of authorship can more generally lend weight and substance to an entire medium.

In many ways, we can read Foucault’s notion of the author function as responding not only to Barthes’s act of murder, but also to the Frankfurt School’s own killing of the author. Barthes “killed” the author so that the reader might live, yet Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno simply declared that industry had killed art altogether. In other words, while Barthes wanted the author dead, the Frankfurt School would rather s/he was alive, but saw no signs of life. Foucault’s concept of the author function allows a middle ground, wherein the author is denied outright authority, but exists as a discursive entity that channels and networks notions of value, identity, coherency, skill, and unity. This is an alternative to believing in Horkheimer and Adorno’s faceless “iron system” in which “there is the agreement—or at least the determination—of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves.”⁴⁵

Especially when we consider television authors, moreover, Barthes’s key objections to the author become less relevant. His complaint about book authors was ultimately one of temporality, as he argued that “book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he [*sic*] exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.” He proposes and prefers a situation whereby we consider that “the scriptor is born simultaneously

with the text [. . . and] there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*.”⁴⁶ However, throughout the run of a television series, its author(s) and the text can only exist at the same time: unlike literature (or film), the author rarely writes the material then exits the scene. Instead, a television author or authorial team writes one or more episodes, which are broadcast, then they return to the job, these in turn are watched, and so on. The dichotomy of antecedent author and active text rarely exists with television series, and so the rhetorical importance of Barthes’s argument diminishes. Barthes killed the author in order to open the text, but a television series is nearly always already open.

Writing of fan fiction and Barthes’s killing of the author, Francesca Coppa notes that “the author [of the source fan object] may be dead, but the writer [of the fan fiction]—that actively scribbling, embodied woman—is very much alive. You can talk to her; you can write to her and ask her questions about her work, and she will probably write back to you and answer them.”⁴⁷ Film and television still like their *authors*, and interacting with them is rarely as easy as the situation that Coppa describes with fan fiction writers, as authors and readers are separated by PR departments, personal assistants, legalities that ask that television writers not listen to unsolicited ideas, and their own constructed auras. Nevertheless, albeit in the often heavily mediated form of interviews, podcasts, bonus materials, and visits to fan sites or conferences, television authors (and some film authors) engage in significantly more interaction with audiences than did Barthes’s “death-worthy” authors.

Television authors still try to exert authority and control over “their” texts, for as I have argued, producer-end paratexts hold significant power in inflecting audiences’ interpretive frameworks. When creators try to exert control, the paratexts of interviews, podcasts, DVD bonus materials, and making-of specials are their preferred means of speaking—their textual body and corporeal form—as they will try to use paratexts to assert authority and to maintain the role of author. But rather than serve as gospel, as soon as a show has begun, television authors’ words become in medias res paratexts that must compete with all manner of other paratexts, including audience-created paratexts (see chapter 5). Jurij Lotman wrote of reading and interpreting as a “game” between writer and reader, whereby, as one reads, “The audience takes in part of the text and then ‘finishes’ or ‘constructs’ the rest. The author’s next ‘move’ may confirm the guess [. . .] or it may disprove the guess and require a new construction

from the reader.” However, Lotman sees this process inevitably ending in the same way: “the author wins; he [*sic*] outplays the artistic experience, aesthetic norms and prejudices of the reader, and thrusts his model of the world and concept of the structure of reality upon [the reader].”⁴⁸ Television texts, by contrast, are continuing “games,” with no such easy predictability of outcome. Within these games, each paratext is a move; but whereas in a book or film, most of the author’s moves have already occurred, meaning that s/he does not truly “respond” to the reader or viewer’s “moves” at all, in television, authors both can and must respond to moves, meaning in turn that audience moves have more importance. With perhaps the lone exception of retrospective commentary offered by a writer after a show has finished, to an audience member who has watched the entire show, the game continues.

Take, for instance, Joss Whedon’s response, in a *Science Fiction Weekly* interview, to a question about whether fan commentary influenced how he wrote *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*:

To an extent it does. For example, when I saw that people were rejecting the Oz character when he was first introduced, I realized how carefully I had to place him. I wrote scenes where Willow falls in love with him in a way where fans would fall in love with him too. You learn that people don’t take things at face value; you have to earn them.⁴⁹

Alongside this example, we might add several others, such as Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof’s reflection on how *Lost* audience reactions have at times shifted their scripting of the show, most notably when Michael Emerson became a quick fan favorite for his portrayal of Benjamin Linus, leading Cuse and Lindelof to write him into the core of the story.⁵⁰ *Babylon 5* (1994–98) creator Joe Straczynski posted more than 17,000 replies to fans,⁵¹ illustrating a clear interest in (some might say obsession with) his fans’ opinions. Or, most curiously, responding to widespread criticism of the opening episodes of Season 2 of *Heroes*, showrunner Tim Kring apologized to viewers via *Entertainment Weekly*, insisting that “we’ve heard the [fans’] complaints—and we’re doing something about it,”⁵² and promising that he and his writing staff would henceforth work on addressing the multiple criticisms of the show. Meanwhile, several writers are popping up on fan boards, and each passing year seems to bring yet more writers to Comic-Con. While both trends are no doubt motivated by a need to solicit fans in a niche broadcasting, post-network era, some

writers' presence on fan boards and at fan conventions shows (and is read by some fans as) an earnest interest in fans' opinions. Writers rarely prove wholly responsive to their fans, in part due to issues of chronology (once the fans are watching any given episode, numerous subsequent episodes have already been filmed), in part due to conflicting fan desires, and in part due to personal creative intuition and impulses,⁵³ but many nevertheless realize the importance of interaction and dialogue.

Whether through posting online, contacting production personnel directly, or simply watching or not watching, audience members and communities regularly play "moves" in the game of television, and any savvy author must now know how to react to these moves, how to counter.⁵⁴ Yet far from seeing this necessarily in the framework of "winners" and "losers" that Lotman provides, we might also note that many authors and fans regard the productive act as more communal and participatory. Responding to a question about fan adulation, Whedon notes in an interview with *The Onion AV Club*, "It doesn't feel like they're reacting to me. [. . .] I feel like there's a religion in narrative, and I feel the same way they do. I feel like we're both paying homage to something else; they're not paying homage to me."⁵⁵ If we take him at his word, Whedon has internalized the "practical collaboration" of reader with text that Barthes asks for as expected practice.⁵⁶ Later in the same interview, Whedon states:

I wanted [*Buffy*] to be a cultural phenomenon. [. . .] I wanted people to embrace [the show] in a way that exists beyond, "Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers, let's have dinner." I wanted people to internalize it, and make up fantasies where they were in the story, to take it home with them, for it to exist beyond the TV show.⁵⁷

Interestingly, then, Whedon positions himself as working toward the same goal as his readers, not "competing" with them. In doing so, he deliberately confuses author and reader roles by adopting part of the reader role himself, and yielding part of the author role to the reader. Admittedly, one might regard this as a discursive move, an attempt to fashion himself as "just one of the fans," when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship. But he both steps away from the author as antecedent role to which Barthes objected, and he reflects on the degree to which, as a public figure, he is an author function, a text/paratext authored by audience members and their uses for him, and a way for people to talk about the artistry of *Buffy* more than he is a specific individual to *Buffy* fans.

Joss Whedon is one of a brand of television authors who have realized the importance of engaging with their fan bases, and *Buffy's* success arguably was all the greater for this realization, and for his eagerness to at least partly, in Barthesian terms, kill himself as author. As is only fitting for the author of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Whedon was an undead author. But he is by no means alone, joined by others such as Cuse and Lindelof, Straczynski, Kring, Doris Egan, Aaron Sorkin, Jane Espenson, Jason Katims, Toni Graphia, Erik Kripke, Rob Thomas, Josh Schwartz, and others, and preceded by *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry's strong rapport with his fans. All of these figures are known to most audiences only through paratexts. Whether they are "really like that" becomes as much a question for them as it is for Hollywood stars, though, because they and their studios' marketing teams are often able to author them as paratexts, and author some of the paratexts in which they appear, with significant care. They are authored by audiences, too, with their own paratexts. Like Foucault, then, I have little interest (as a scholar) in the "real" Whedon, Cuse and Lindelof, Kring, or so forth, realizing that they are discursive constructions. But as author functions, as signifiers of value, as messages to or from the network and/or to or from the fan, and as paratextual entities that frame both value and textual meaning (see chapter 4 on the latter), they are considerably important. As such, we might regard television authors as mediators between the industry and audiences, and the author function as a discursive entity used by the industry to communicate messages about its texts to audiences, by the creative personnel often conflated into the image of the author(s) to communicate their own messages about these texts to audiences, and by audiences to communicate messages both to each other and to the industry. A considerable danger exists of romanticizing the degree to which *actual* writers mediate effectively between production and audiences, but producers and audiences alike often use them as *discursive* constructions and mediators. Paratexts carry these messages, and thus frequently serve as both the words and the content of discussions among text, audience, and industry.

Paratextual Turn-Offs and Turn-Ons

At the outset of the chapter, I noted that hype, promos, and synergy turn off many a would-be viewer. Thus, while the chapter has examined the role that paratexts play in adding or restoring value, often their mere existence devalues a text. Much hype betrays a text's industrial roots too

obviously for some audiences, thereby disqualifying it for consideration as art. Meanwhile, the presence of many in medias res paratexts codes a text as a fan text, thereby invoking the high-cultural critique of the popular that hounds all fan texts. As such, some would-be viewers cling to a heavily romanticized notion of the singular Work of Art that neither needs nor has a paratext, the noble cowboy text riding across the prairies and fighting the elements all on its lonesome. Ultimately, though, paratext-less shows simply do not exist. Granted, some texts claim more paratexts than others, with, for instance, blockbusters and cult texts often sporting sizeable posses. But all shows have paratexts. In discussing paratexts and value, then, we might realize how any would-be audience member or community gives value to certain forms of paratexts in and of themselves, yet is turned off by others in and of themselves. Since genres often address specific communities of viewers, moreover, film and television producers tend to surround their shows only with those paratexts that are likely to add value to their desired audience.

For instance, foreign and independent films often rely upon upscale audiences who flatter themselves as being discerning, (high-)“cultured” viewers. A vigorous hype campaign centered on subways, ad slots during reality television shows, and a videogame could thus harm a foreign film’s chances more than help them. But it still requires paratexts to offer value, whether in the form of awards from film festivals, an evocative poster, a director’s talk before the film, and/or a positive review in the *New York Times* or other high-end publications. With more than half of the average foreign film’s domestic box office coming from New York City alone, as Michael Wilmington has noted, the *New York Times* has “veto power” over a foreign film’s future.⁵⁸ Or, television procedurals have significant appeal as contained stories that do not require devoted viewing, and thus podcasts or alternate-reality games might ruin some of their seemingly pared-down appeal. But procedurals often rely on special event advertising both for renewing a claim to value and for a sense of realism upon which that value may be based. *Law and Order* (1990–) ads, for example, tout “ripped from the headlines” stories with considerable enthusiasm, as do those for *JAG* (1995–2005) and *NCIS* (2003–). Conversely, favorable *New York Times* reviews or “ripped from the headlines” ads will likely prove relatively unimportant for other genres, such as sitcoms or sci-fi series. Over and above the specific meanings on offer by any given paratext, then, and over and above any given paratext’s specific claims to art, aura, and authenticity, sometimes the type of paratext sends its own messages.

All shows have paratexts, and all require their paratexts to create frames of value around them, but different genres will favor or disfavor different types of paratextuality.

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated the degree to which new media such as webpages, DVDs, and podcasts surround texts with a paratextual veneer of artistry, aura, and authority that aims to be decidedly “old school.” Paratexts, and various forms of bonus materials in particular, aim to play a constitutive role in creating value for a film or television show, even if in practice this value is not created equally for all audiences. Some audiences will seek out such paratexts precisely in order to reaffirm their sense of the film or program’s value. Others will regard the mere existence of paratexts and hype as the clearest example of the lack of artistic integrity, seeing them as akin to a painter selling his or her work in a shopping mall storefront with a gaudy neon sign. In either situation, the paratext helps create a sense of value (whether positive or negative).

Authority, value, and meanings, however, do not simply circulate via the film and television industries, their stars and directors, and their marketing teams alone. Chapters 4 and 5 therefore turn to other modes of paratextual circulation and function. Chapter 4 explores how films and television shows themselves can come to serve paratextual roles, whether by design or by happenstance. It also explores how, paratextually, audience discussion creates both intertextual networks of understanding that render certain shows as paratexts to other texts, and understandings of the author function that inflect readings of other texts. Then, chapter 5 examines viewer-created paratexts and the ways in which they either challenge industry-created paratexts’ “proper” interpretations or otherwise carve out space for personal or communal readings of film and television shows.

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