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Literary experience and the book trailer as intermedial paratext

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Abstract

The article explores the characteristics and variations of the book trailer genre in light of the different ways in which book trailers stage the literary experience of their source texts. The book trailer's intermedial character as audiovisual representation of linguistic texts raises a 'question of representation' that poses a significant artistic challenge and potentially violates the virtual quality of the literary reading experience. On the basis of an extensive sample, a number of book trailers are analysed and a tentative book trailer typology is established based on different modes of addressing the genre's inherent 'question of representation'.

Introduction

The 'book trailer' is a relatively new paratextual genre (Genette, 1997) that, as a literary counterpart to the movie trailer, is dedicated to audiovisual promotional representations of literary texts. Although the origin of the genre can be traced back to the 1980s,¹ it is during the last decade that the book trailer has been established as a common literary paratext that is systematically produced and distributed in large numbers on digital media platforms (Kneschke, 2012; Metz, 2012; Andersen, 2011).

This article will explore the characteristics of the book trailer, focusing on the genre's potential for promoting the experience of literary fiction. The book trailer has primarily been developed as a tool of promotion, guiding the consumers' selection of media texts, but as other paratexts it also serves important roles and the initiation of aesthetic meaning and experience (Mackey, 2013; Gray, 2010). Therefore, an important distinction must be made: the book trailer conveys a *promotion* of the text to which it refers (hereafter 'the source text') as a work and commodity, and most book trailers include a clear reference to the source text as an object for purchase, typically manifested in a final display of the book cover. But at the same time, the book trailer's promotional value primarily depends on its *framing* of the *reading experience* by communicating specific indications of the character of the text. Therefore, this framing will be the topic for the following pages: *What characterises the modes of framing of literary experiences in book trailers?*

In order to answer this question, however, the book trailer's distinctive *inter-medial* character must be taken into account. The genre is based on a medial discrepancy, where a literary (i.e. written) source text is represented through an audiovisual transposition. This condition creates a more detached relationship to the source text, as the book trailer (unlike the movie trailer) never can be a metonymic illustration of the source text's diegetic universe (Genette, 1995), but must be a metaphoric interpretation of the text as a medium of literary experience. In light hereof, the main question for this article must be rephrased: *How is the relationship*

between literature and audiovisual media staged in the book trailer and what does this mean for the framing of the literary experience?

These questions will primarily be approached from a *generic* perspective, concerning both the book trailer's intertextual affinities and its relation to the source text. The book trailer is a hybrid genre, whose internal variations can largely be explained by the trailers' respective orientation to other genres. Thus, the article provides a provisional typology of book trailers with regard to their modes of addressing the genre's intermedial condition. Here, 'genre' refers to a range of distinct textual types to which the book trailer relates by means of representation (source texts) or approximation (other paratextual genres). The concept of genre is not limited to the domain of popular culture, but is understood as a 'universal dimension of textuality' (Frow, 2005, p. 2), where every text contains 'category schemata' (Bordwell, 1989, p. 147) that create assumptions about the character of the text:

... genre is the guess that we make about what kind of thing this is, and this guess, the interpreter's preliminary generic conception, is then constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands and this remains the case until the generic conception is altered (Frow, 2005, p. 101).

Thus, genres are invoked through textual metacommunicational cues creating expectations to the text that guide the further reading and understanding. These invocations are, not least, promoted by the paratexts surrounding the text as an 'apparatus of external cues' (Frow, 2005, p. 101), and the analyses in the article will focus on how such cues are communicated by the book trailers in question.

Despite the extensive amount of book trailers on digital platforms, the genre has so far not generated much attention, neither in terms of public impact nor research interest. Thus, the current literature on the subject consists of 1) newspaper articles (Kneschke, 2012; Gunter, 2012; Metz, 2012; Berton, 2006; Chmielewski, 2006), 2) reviews and mentions on genre-specific and media-related websites (Book Trailer Café; Book Trailers For All; MediaBistro; Red14Films; Rumpus) and 3) hands-on manuals on the production and distribution of book trailers (Bates, 2012; Gunther, 2012; Book Trailer Manual; The Creative Penn). This body of literature provides useful information on the 'trend' of book trailers and points to a range of interesting examples, but does not offer any research perspectives for the study in hand. Therefore, these perspectives have been derived from areas more indirectly related to the book trailer, predominantly theories of paratexts (Andersen, 2012; Gray, 2010; Kernan, 2004) and genre (Frow, 2005; Bordwell, 1989).

The scarce recognition of the genre can, among other things, be ascribed to the correspondingly low, amateurish quality of most book trailers due to a lack of artistic ambitions and/or resources:

If the concept has yet to make cultural inroads, the reason is obvious: Most book trailers are terrible (Metz, 2012).

This situation can, of course, be explained by the infancy of the book trailer. Thus, the genre's aesthetic maturation combined with the increasingly pervasive digitalisation of the literary culture will eventually create a broad audience for the book trailer and make it a central promotional and pedagogical tool, especially towards younger, more visually oriented audiences (Bates, 2012; Kneschke, 2012).

However, it is the hypothesis of this study that the situation must be addressed in light of the book trailer's affinity to the movie trailer – and especially the specific intermedial condition of the book trailer that separates it from the movie trailer. Due to widely different conditions of the two genres, the future of the book trailer as a relevant independent genre, and not as an inferior motive trailer, depends on the developing of cinematic modes of expression and relations to the source texts that diverge from the formulae of the movie trailer.

The article's first part will briefly outline the methodical design of the study and present a preliminary formal definition of the book trailer genre. The second part will compare the book trailer to related paratexts, first and foremost the movie trailer. Based on Lisa Kernan's definitions of the cinematic trailer (2004), the comparison will serve as a further elaboration on the book trailer's paratextual identity. In contrast, the third part will distinguish the book trailer from the movie trailer by addressing the genre's 'question of representation', its distinct challenge of providing anticipatory framings of literary experience, as it is comprehended within the framework of reader-response criticism (Ryan, 2001; Iser, 1980). The fourth part will by means of analytical case studies present a tentative typology of book trailer subgenres as different modes of addressing the genre's intermedial condition and related question of representation. Lastly, the conclusions of the article will be summarised and discussed, outlining recommendations for further studies into the field.

Method and scope

As no extensive research into the book trailer has so far been made, the study in hand will necessarily be of an explorative character. Methodically, the collection and selection of empirical material took place as a two-step procedure. Firstly, a large sample of 100 book trailers was assembled from social media platforms (YouTube and Vimeo), literary forums and the websites of publishing houses and production companies. The digital resources consulted are listed as 'web sources' in the reference list. For the sake of clarity, and due to linguistic concerns, the study was limited to fiction source texts in Danish and Anglo-American contexts. The explora-

tion was supported by a range of articles and digital resources on the subject, which provided references and recommendations for further investigation.

Far from giving an exhaustive coverage of the field, the aim has been to make the sample capture the typical as well as the extraordinary, common traits as well as original contributions among the encountered book trailers, and reflect the field's diversity in terms of length, impact, aesthetic characteristics and source text genres. In terms of formal traits, book trailers cover a broad temporal spectrum, ranging from 30 seconds to almost 10 minutes, but the large majority of book trailers last between one and three minutes. Most book trailers are made for popular genre literature (action, adventure, romance, crime etc.), but this is by no means a mark of distinction, as book trailers today are produced for all types of literature, including psychological novels and collections of short stories and poems (see Appendix 1).

Secondly, a smaller sample of trailers was selected as cases for this article (see Appendix 1; all trailers were ultimately retrieved from YouTube due to the availability of relevant data concerning origin and impact). This more manageable sample is as representative as possible of the diversity of the initial sample. The selection of the trailers was based on their informational value concerning the state and variations of the subject matter (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 229 ff.). In Bent Flyvbjerg's words, they represent *maximum-variation cases*, as they, due to their singular qualities, cover significant variations within the spectrum of book trailers as well as *paradigmatic cases*, because they can be regarded as prototypical examples of these variations (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 229 ff.).

In terms of internal differences, the book trailer as a digitally embedded genre reflects the digital media's radical democratisation of the accessibility of literary publishing and communication, opening unprecedented channels of production, distribution and reception (commenting, reviewing, recommending etc.). And a main discovery of the research was that the large amount of existing book trailers is partly due to the genre being used as a creative, pedagogical and creative tool by a variety of agents in the literary culture.

Thus, three main groups of book trailers can be discerned:

- 1) *Readers' book trailers*: trailers made by ordinary readers in order to convey literary texts to other readers. This type of book trailer is predominantly located in the education system, where students make their own book trailers using programmes like Photo Story and Movie Maker (Weaver, 2009). Here, the book trailer is used as a pedagogical tool for improving the students' media production abilities as well as to encourage their reading and interpretation of literature (Bates, 2012; Gunter, 2012; Weaver, 2009; see e.g. www.schooltube.com).

- 2) *Authors' book trailers*: book trailers made by authors in order to promote their (usually self-published) books. The age of self-publication has induced a high rise in self-promotion, as authors try to save their works from invisibility in the literary landscape. Correspondingly, a large niche industry has emerged offering advice, inspiration and assistance in the production of self-made book trailers (see e.g. <http://www.gwextra.com>; <http://www.thecreativepenn.com/>).

The extensive production of amateur book trailers raises a range of interesting questions concerning sociology of literature and pedagogy, and does, of course, partake in a basic typology of the genre. However, the amateur trailers encountered in this study almost uniformly represent stereotypical productions rigidly based on manual templates, and do not contribute much to the study of the aesthetic potentials of the book trailer. Therefore, it was decided to exclude the first two groups from the scope of the study, which is limited to the last category:

- 3) *Professional book trailers*: a general term for larger productions, including the recording of original audiovisual material, which are created inside the world of professional media institutions. They are typically produced on behalf of publishing houses by directors or production companies (these agents are named in Appendix 1 under 'Producer/Director').

Book trailers and movie trailers

– paratexts of promotion and pleasure

Today, the book trailer is but one example of a growing diversity of paratexts in the current media landscape, where one's direct consumption of media texts (books, movies, games etc.) is always accompanied – and mostly outnumbered – by the indirect 'speculative consumption' (Gray, 2010, p. 2) of these texts through paratexts that serve as entries to and connections between them. This is also true of the book market, where the book trailer is part of the general visualisation of literary culture in recent years (Collins, 2010). Hence, a range of visual – often remediated – literary paratexts like book talks (or 'book hauls'), interviews and recitations partake in the still fiercer competition for the audience's attention (Lanham, 2007).²

However, the book trailer differs from the mentioned paratexts in that its visual representation is not limited to verbal description, but includes an iconic dimension. It tells – but also shows.

The book trailer not merely transmits a discourse on/from the source text(s) in question, but implies some sort of audiovisual suggestion of the character (and, thereby reading experience) of the text.

Book trailers are condensed audiovisual representations of more extensive source texts. Due to this condensation, they are semantically underdetermined texts, characterised by a withholding of information in order to stimulate the reader to fill in the empty places and thereby indulge in the mental, anticipatory construction of the source text.

The condensation thus leads to what could be named an aesthetic 'strategy of suggestion', a characteristic that also applies to the movie trailer, where it, according to Lisa Kernan (2004), is predominantly obtained through the montage's discontinuous juxtaposition of important (and often spectacular) scenes, only fragmentarily revealing the coherent whole of the narrative:

... alternation, combination and abbreviation of scenes construct a new, trailer logic, differing from (yet, obviously related to) the narrative logic of the film (Kernan, 2004, p. 7)

Originating as a literary version hereof, the book trailer has a strong generic affiliation with its cinematic counterpart. There is a lot of inspiration from the 'trailer logic' to be found in the book trailer genre; some book trailers are even fully exploiting the montage formula of the movie trailer (see e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dxZwsZWNmc>; Appendix 1, no. 4).

Apart from the strategy of suggestion, book and movie trailers also share a double identity: both promotional paratexts and unique aesthetic genres, thereby containing a combination and tension between 'selling and telling'.

On the one hand, both genres transform artistic texts into promotional texts or, in Lisa Kernan's words, transform the source text's narrative-cinematic (or literary) codes into rhetorical-persuasive codes (Kernan, 2004, p. 10). The trailer is the show-room of the text, a rhetoric device for drawing attention to the source text by wrapping up an extensive text in a short, intense format suited for the consumer's gaze. According to Kernan, the rhetoric appeal of the movie trailer is primarily founded on three features:

- 1) *Genre*: where genre cues are activated in order to appeal to the spectator's recognition and preferences.
- 2) *Story*: where the audience's narrative desire and 'epistethilia' are stimulated through the suggestively partial revealing of the narrative.
- 3) *Star/celebrity*: where the identification with and admiration of celebrities strengthen the text's appeal.

These features are also, in various degrees, easily discernible in book trailers, which will be illustrated in the case studies below. Moreover, the features are all intertextually based on references to and recognition of other texts, contextualising the source texts by placing them in *intertextual* networks (Andersen, 2012).

On the other hand, movie and book trailers are also aesthetic texts in themselves, conceived as sources of aesthetic experiences and ‘narrative pleasure’:

While trailers are a form of advertising, they are also a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined (whether happily or not) (Kernan, 2004, p. 1).

In the title of Kernan’s study of the movie trailer, ‘A cinema of (coming) attractions’, the parenthesis points to this ambivalence as a question of double temporality. The trailer is simultaneously an attraction in itself in that it evokes an intense presence due to its own spectacular display, *and* it creates an anticipatory mode by guiding the audience’s attention towards future (not-yet experienced) attractions.

Moreover, as book trailers are primarily distributed on social media, their persuasive value is closely related to their potential for dissemination. The promotional effects of the book trailer are not to be found in its repetitive exposure on broadcast media or in public domains, but in its capacity for generating viral effects by being shared by media users. Thus, the value of the book trailer as an autonomous source of aesthetic experience and pleasure is an important factor in its potential success.

The book trailer and the ‘question of representation’

Despite their resemblances, the conditions of the book trailer differ significantly from the movie trailer. This also applies to production, as widely different resources are spent on the two genres (Metz, 2012; Fox, 2006) as to the context of reception. Traditionally, movie trailers are consumed as preludes to watching movies in cinemas or on home video, thereby being integrated parts of the ‘movie experience’, whereas book trailers are generally detached from the experience of literary consumption. However, this difference may eventually be modified, as some see the book trailer’s future in a closer attachment to the e-book as a peritextual element in the literary experience (Kneschke, 2012), thereby imitating the movie trailer’s integration in the context of consumption.

However, the crucial difference in this study concerns, as mentioned above, the media language of the source texts. Here, movie trailers have an isomorphic relation to their source texts as they share the same audiovisual language. The book trailer, on the other hand, has a more heterogeneous relationship to the source text, as it, like a movie adaptation, must represent a purely linguistic text (with the exception of children books and graphic novels) by means of auditory (speech, music, sound effects) and visual (stills, moving images) elements. Whereas movie trailers can be composed of scenes and imagery from the movie (although these may be manipulated and new material may be added; Kernan, 2004), the book trailer must be created as an independent text with its own media material.

Thus, the first dimension of what we have referred to as the ‘question of representation’ refers to the book trailer’s aesthetic challenge of conveying an appealing impression of a literary text in an audiovisual product. A challenge that also implies an artistic freedom that could partly explain the genre’s diverse range of representation modes, some of which will be presented in the case studies below.

Here, an important discriminatory factor will be the concept of diegesis, as derived from Gerard Genette’s distinction of diegetic levels of narration: (intra) diegetic (the narrative universe of characters, thoughts/feelings and actions), extradiegetic (a position of narration outside the diegetic level) and metadiegetic (stories embedded and told from inside the narrative universe) (Genette, 1995, p. 227ff.). The typical movie trailer is constructed as a montage of diegetic fragments connected into a comprehensive unity by an extradiegetic voice – over-narrator.

But when it comes to the book trailer, there is no source material to support such a convention, and therefore, the question is: does the book trailer attempt to represent the diegetic level of the source text – and if so, to what extent – or does it use other more indirect, non-diegetic ways of conveying an impression of the source text?

This issue is related to the second more *critical* dimension of the question of representation, as the book trailer’s audiovisual representation of the source text challenges the trademark *virtuality* of the literary experience (Ryan, 2001; Iser, 1980). As a unit of purely symbolic, linguistic signs, the literary text is an object of potentiality that is actualised through the individual reading process. This actualisation occurs in the reader’s subjective translation of the linguistic signs into mental representations and thereby decoding and filling of the text’s empty places. Thus, the literary text represents a high degree of indeterminacy which leaves ample space for the reader’s personal interpretation and imagination.

Thus, by representing the virtual indeterminacy of the source text by means of concrete visual imagery, the book trailer runs the risk of becoming a medium of disclosure and pre-interpretation that actually short-circuits this virtuality and thereby impoverishes the reading experiences it attempts to stimulate. If it eliminates the imaginative process of the reading experience, the book trailer jeopardises the appeal of reading and thereby its own *raison d’être*.

This can be compared to the prevalent disappointed receptions of movie adaptations, where the audiovisual translations of the texts’ conceptual images, turning the literary texts’ ‘plurality of textual worlds’ (Ryan, 2001, p. 44) into one world, are experienced as reductive in retrospective comparison with the reading experience (McFarlane, 1996, p. 5). Here, the book trailer’s status as an *anticipatory* visualisation (due to its function as ‘entryway paratext’ – a promotional ‘threshold’ to yet unknown literary texts; Gray, 2010, p. 26) only makes the problem more acute: how

to frame the potential reading experience of a text without devaluating the experience in the process?

The next chapter will analyse how this predicament is addressed, or evaded, in a number of book trailers.

Book trailers – a tentative typology

In the following a number of book trailer types will be presented as modes of addressing the book trailer's 'question of representation'. Far from being an exhaustive coverage of the field or representing more than provisional genre categories, the typology reflects the main findings of this study's research.

The animated book cover: A common way of evading the question of representation is to import the book trailer's material from other paratexts. This goes first and foremost for the book cover, which in itself is an assembly of other paratexts (blurbs, genre labels, author photos etc.), making it a vital and manifold 'precontextualisation' (Andersen, 2012, p. 254) of the text. The mentioned display of the mentioned book cover paratexts is a common trait of the book trailer genre, and a large proportion of trailers can be labelled as 'animated book covers' in that they are crafted as collages of tableaux, void of characters or dramatisation, that elaborate on the motive and style of the book's cover. For example, in the trailer for Khaled Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqUSXduXa74>; Appendix 1, no. 7) the motive of the book cover evolves in front of us, as a tree in silhouette it rises and blooms on a background of nebulous mountains. Simultaneously, a medieval Arab poem is gradually displayed on the screen, alluding to unbreakable love and friendship bound to the Afghan soil as being (again) a main topic of Hosseini's novel. (For another example, see McMahon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUkWL6bHJ40&list=UULN9zp99BacW5K3VvUleo_Q; Appendix 1, no. 8).

The partial adaptation: As an audiovisual representation of a linguistic text, the book trailer has a structural affinity to the cinematic adaptation of a literary source text, and in a few cases the book trailer's identity as anticipatory visualisation is taken to its extreme, as trailers are made as adaptations of coherent (typically introductory) parts of the source text. These overtly diegetic and quite extensive trailers can be compared to the reading extracts offered by publishers and book stores, as they provide a synecdochic impression of the story in order to spur the reader's curiosity.

The trailer for Michael Connelly's detective novel *Echo Park* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ndCN3uHinE>; Appendix 2, no. 2) is a close adaptation of the novel's first chapter, where the crime riddle is presented. The displays of the book cover,

which frame the trailer, and a concluding teaser ('See what happens next in *Echo Park*') are the only non-diegetic visual elements in what appears as a very realistic cinematographic depiction of the novel's narrative. Correspondingly, the auditory dimension of the trailer consists exclusively of the characters' dialogue, apart from a raspy, extradiegetic voice-over, setting the scene by reciting the first lines of the novel, and an occasional, discreet musical theme.

In the trailer for Adam Cushman's novel *Cut* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdCQwfNsUw4>; Appendix 1, no. 9) we follow the presumed protagonist into a suburban house, the setting of the trailer, where knife fights are being held. Here, a combination of split screen and front shots are used to alternately depict the ongoing fights and the spectators' reactions. The combatants are presented through numbers (fighter xx) and short written quotes that give a hint of their personal, conflicting reasons for participating, alluding to a metadiegetic level in the novel. Unlike *Echo Park*, the diegetic sound and speak have been replaced by a hypnotic dub rhythm, which together with the character's anonymity contributes to the impression of a universe detached from the normal world. Whereas the realist universe of the *Echo Park* trailer is reminiscent of traditional crime TV series, the *Cut* trailer's cinematic style, musical score and allusion to violence as a source of vitality are cues pointing to a generic relationship with movies like *Fight Club* and *Trainspotting*. And where Connelly's trailer focuses the reader's attention on the riddle in the story, the *Cut* trailer moves the attention to the mystery of the story itself: what is going on, who are these people?

The commentary/mockumentary and the cult of the author: Whereas the partial adaptation accentuates the appeal of *the narrative*, a lot of book trailers focus on the *celebrity appeal* of the author (cf. Kernan above). In recent years, the author as public persona, and even celebrity at times, has gained a major role in the promotion of literary works (Forsild & Olsson, 2009). This development is also traceable in the book trailer where authors in different ways are put on display as paratexts for their own texts. One way is the *referential mode*, well known from other paratexts like the book cover, where verbal praises (reviews, blurbs etc.; see e.g. Appendix 1, no. 4 & 8) or iconic pictures of the author are included persuasively in the trailers.

In other trailers, however, the author appeal is used in more *performative* ways. A famous example is Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (Kneschke, 2012; Andersen, 2011) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2daNrsfwDgY>; Appendix 1, no. 10) where the notoriously enigmatic author delivers a very rare performance as narrator of the trailer.³ In a series of trailers for his thriller novel *Afspreet*, the author Michal Krefeld is placed inside the real environment of the novel (a neighbourhood in Copenhagen), acting as a 'game master', who addresses the readers directly giving them leads to

a treasure hunt that follows the track and settings of the novel (see e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnPSxXyUJ8A>; Appendix 1, no. 18). And the author Jeff Carlson is placed in an even more ambiguous position in the trailer for *Plague Year* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU-i0faBPkY>; Appendix 1, no. 11), both commenting on and diegetically embedded in a partial adaptation of the novel – and even killing another character to prove his point about the rough nature of the novel's post-apocalyptic society.

A distinct version of the 'author book trailer', however, is the mock commentary, where authors act as themselves in ironic commentaries on the source text's biographical background. In stark contrast to the adaptation, this subgenre is totally non-diegetic as it neither visually nor verbally reveals any direct information about the source text. Instead, by means of the positioning of the author, they provide an indirect impression of, especially, the tone of the source text. An exquisite example of this is the acclaimed mockumentary trailer for Gary Schteyngart's *Super sad true love story* (Metz, 2012; Pixie Awards) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Efzu-Ou4UIOU>; Appendix 1, no. 12) that is a parody on the proliferate mutual blurbing of the literary world (Andersen, 2012), which is used as a strategic tool in the media creation of the author persona. Apart from the author himself, fellow authors (e.g. Jeffrey Eugenides and James McInerney), Schteyngart's editor and a group of students attending his literature class all appear in the trailer. None of these persons, however, has anything nice to say about neither Schteyngart's person nor his literary abilities. Instead, all their attempted praise exposes the author as a foolish, uneducated fraud, making fun of his looks and Russian descent in the process, an image which is affirmed by scenes with Schteyngart exalting in absurd behaviour. The trailer, however, plays a double game of irony. Schteyngart's affiliations with well-known author colleagues have an implicit blurb effect that, despite the mocking of the 'author celebrity', affirms Schteyngart's celebrity status as widely acclaimed author. Thus, the trailer is cleverly crafted as a long video blurb disguised as an anti-blurb that also reflects the satirical style of Schteyngart's work. The trailer's ironic play of mocking and recognition also implicitly defines the book's target audience as high-culture readers who understand and appreciate the ironic tone. Correspondingly, the trailer's abundant intertextual references to authors like Oscar Wilde and Anton Tjechov address readers who are familiar with these references.⁴

The allegory: In the trailer for Monica Drake's *The Stud Book* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abrBjpkGuME>; Appendix 1, no. 15) a female voice is (presumably) reciting from the novel, representing the voice of the extradiegetical first-person narrator. The recitation is accompanied by a cyclical xylophone score while the visual dimension is minimalistically limited to alternating shots (total, close-up, extreme close-up) of one – sometimes two – white rabbits tranquilly sitting, jump-

ing and ‘posing’ in front of the camera in an anonymous and equally white setting. The first impression is one of puzzlement. What does this *mise-en-scène* tell us about the novel? The answer is to be found in the *allegorical* relation between recitation and images.

In the first part of the recitation the narrator praises the adorableness of babies, which is reflected in shots emphasising the cuteness of the rabbits. Next, she touches on the topic of conception in a dark-humoristic way (‘conception is a harsh business’), whereby the rabbits take on another signification, bearing connotations to intense breeding and potential overpopulation – a connection that is visually supported by making the two rabbits merge into one and then split up again. While the light tone of the narration is maintained, the humorous content is hereafter harshly interrupted, as the narrator relates the topic of children to the unlived lives of her three dead children. Correspondingly, at the narrator’s mentioning of the loss of the children, the rabbits move towards the corner of the screen, away from the viewer’s perspective. The sinister allusion to personal tragedy leads to a short introduction to the life situation of the protagonist (relationships and work) as shaped by this triple loss. This shift retrospectively answers the question of the trailer’s choice of metaphor (why are babies represented by rabbits instead of real babies?) as the rabbits become a substitution for the absent children. Finally, the circle is completed by the narrator pronouncing, ‘Yes, babies are adorable, but none as adorable as the one I’m going to have’, thereby teasingly foreshadowing the narrator’s ‘maternal quest’ as a main topic of the book.

In the allegorical logic of the trailer we are made to see what the narrator apparently sees: the rabbits/animals as symbols and objects of a desire for maternal love and simplicity. However, the straightforward allegorical relationship between recitation and images is challenged by the tension between the dramatic shift in the narrative content and the continuous verbal and visual calmness of the trailer, leaving the reader in doubts about the character of the source text.

By means of this simple (and low-cost) allegorical composition, the trailer provides an ambiguous impression of the tone and main themes of the book (or maybe an impression of the book’s ambiguous tone?), while renouncing from any visual interpretation of the diegesis of the source text. This includes the traditional exposure of the book’s cover at the end; instead, the viewer is informed that the rabbits in the movie are ‘available for adoption’. This final twist can be accused of opportunistic political correctness, but also provides a further, metatextual cue to the topic of transferable affection (between children and animals).

The literary short film: This last subgenre includes trailers which fully exploit the strategy of suggestion by experimenting with extensive and aesthetically ambitious cinematic visualisations of the literary universe that still leave a suggestive and

open-ended impression of the source text. An illustrative example is Jamieson Fry's book trailer for T. C. Boyle's *Stories II* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdsShUIp_IY; Appendix 1, no. 16). Fry is part of the book trailer production company Red14 Films that has put the aim for balanced suggestion at the core of their 'poetics':

Cinematic book trailers create the opportunity to squeeze in more than you can with a blurb or a jacket synopsis [...] to spread the idea of your book in a way that's engaging to readers and expresses the plot and tone of your book without compromising the reading experience (<http://red14films.com/about/>).

In the trailer Fry follows a twofold strategy by composing the trailer in two parts: an extensive presentation of one story, followed by a collage introduction to a selection of other stories from the collection.

The first part displays a scene in a diner where a woman and her baby are sitting at a table with two guys who are showing ostentatious aversion to the family situation and flee into the toilet to engage in juvenile drinking. At their return the woman has put on lipstick and walks out on the two dumbstruck men who are left with the baby. However, this is not the narrative of the extradiegetic voice-over, where a male narrator tells of a friendship with a 'he'. By this heterogeneous relationship between the visual (diegetic) and auditory (extradiegetic) level, the trailer presents two diegetic universes (a linguistic and a visual) that may or may not be connected in skewed ways. In Roland Barthes' terms, while the spoken narrative is not directly related as an *anchorage* to the visual narrative, its tale of male friendship can be interpreted as referring to the two protagonists of the film, giving the recited story a *relay* function of mutual augmenting of the two universes (Barthes, 1977a). But even if this is so, the identity of the narrator (and, respectively, the 'he') and the exact relation between the verbal and the visual level remains open-ended.

In Fry's trailer the indication of the literary experience of the source text, however, is not to be found primarily in the unfolded narrative, but in the suggested emotional correlation between the atmosphere of the trailer and text. Hence, the muting of diegetic sounds by the voice-over and a loud music score creates a distance to the narrative universe that emphasises the alienation of the two male characters. And the narrator's discourse on human relations lends itself to be interpreted as a general statement for the entire collection. His personal account of frustration and unfulfilled wants (never telling his friend about the son he hardly sees anymore) sets a poignant bleak tone, which pervades the trailer and connects the stories in a common atmosphere, accentuated by the gloomy, slightly discordant music score and the grey colour that fills the first and last screen shots, thereby framing the trailer.

In the second part of the trailer the vertical absorption into a single story is replaced by a 30-second horizontal presentation of a large number of stories from the collection. The presentation is performed as an asymmetrical, accelerating dis-

play of shots, starting with three scenes from the same story, then narrowing down to one shot per story, and ending in a temporal crescendo that overwhelms the viewer's optical capacity. Hereby, the trailer transmits an impression of the book's vastness of narrative universes (Boyle's book consists of 58 stories), but it also delivers important suggestive cues guiding the reader's expectations of the source text.

Firstly, the velocity of the collage is supported by the majority of shots showing scenes of movement and tension, which, supported by the music, augments the trailer's atmosphere of restlessness and distress. Moreover, while the snapshot stylistics of the collage can only provide a scarce impression of the stories in question, this scarcity is even accentuated in that the shots do not appear as illustrative metaphoric tableaux of the stories' setting, character or motives, but as casually emblematic fragments extracted from the stories' in media res action. Thereby, they create a *claire obscure*-like illusion of offering glimpses into underlying visual-narrative universes, while leaving a maximum of empty places for the potential reader to fill out by imagination – or by reading the book.

Conclusions

In this article I have explored the characteristics and generic variations of the book trailer. The main focus of the study was the staging of literary experience in light of the intermedial character of the book trailer as audiovisual representation of linguistic texts. Based on an extensive sample of book trailers the article related the large amount of existing book trailers in the digital environment to the many amateur book trailers and made a preliminary, internal distinction between readers' book trailers (primarily a pedagogical and creative tool), authors' book trailers (primarily a tool for self-promotion) and professional book trailers, whereof only the last group was included in the study. Hereafter, the definition of the book trailer was further elaborated by comparing it to its cinematic counterpart, the movie trailer. The article, however, also pointed to the book trailer's intermedial condition as a factor that separates the two genres, a condition that constitutes a 'question of representation' which poses significant artistic challenges and potentially violates the virtual quality of the literary reading experience. Due to the different medial conditions of the two genres, the book trailer should not be seen as a literary derivative of the movie trailer, but as an independent genre that develops multiple modes of expression and relations to the source texts that diverge from the formulae of the movie trailer. Attempting to discern such modes the case studies analysed and typologised a number of book trailers as examples of different generic modes of addressing the question of representation. This resulted in the presentation of five types, or subgenres, of book trailers: the animated book cover, the partial adaptation, the commentary/mockumentary, the allegory and the literary short film.

As the book trailer so far has remained neglected in media research, this study has gained new insights into the genre. These insights, however, can only claim to be heuristic and leave ample space for future studies of both a text analytical, typological and sociological nature. For example, due to lack of space this study has not analysed the important role of *written language* in many book trailers. Here, the medium of literature is integrated as a main object and ‘actor’ in interaction with the auditory and visual dimensions, seeking to stimulate an enhanced reading experience (see e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcR1B-48lK4>; Appendix 1, no. 17; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yy5gx3beC-I>; Appendix 1, no. 19). These creative mergings of writing, viewing and listening would be a highly relevant research topic in order to gain a further understanding of the book trailer genre’s handling of the intricate ‘question of representation’.

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 Rumpus: <http://therumpus.net/2013/06/fantastic-book-trailers-and-the-reasons-theyre-so-good/>
 The Creative Penn: <http://www.thecreativepenn.com/>
 YouTube: www.youtube.com

Notes

- 1 The birth of the genre is generally ascribed to the promotion video made for John Farris' 1986 novel *Wildwood*, where a B-movie-like composition of theatrical tableaux, dramatic voice-over and blatant graphic effects was used to promote Farris' novel (Appendix 1, no. 1).

- 2 Here, the book trailer often takes part in a facettet promotion strategy, where several supplementing visual paratexts are being launched on media (Kneschke, 2012; See Appendix 1, no. 3 for an example).
- 3 For more about the trailer for *Inherent Vice*, see Andersen, 2011.
- 4 A similar high-culture, intensively intertextual mock commentary is found in B.J. Novak's trailer for his book *One More Thing* (Appendix 1, no. 14). The trailer is made as a metatextual film noir pastiche, comically depicting the author's profane motivations for writing the book by contrasting stereotypical French pretentiousness and American platitudes.

Download 'Appendix 1': <http://www.soundeffects.dk/article/downloadSuppFile/20330/1290>