Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers (Texas Film and Media)

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Movie trailers—those previews of coming attractions before the start of a feature film—are routinely praised and reviled by moviegoers and film critics alike: "They give away too much of the movie." "They're better than the films." "They only show the spectacular parts." "They lie." "They're the best part of going to the movies." But whether you love them or hate them, trailers always serve their purpose of offering free samples of a film to influence moviegoing decision-making. Indeed, with their inclusion on videotapes, DVDs, and on the Internet, trailers are more widely seen and influential now than at any time in their history.

Starting from the premise that movie trailers can be considered a film genre, this pioneering book explores the genre's conventions and offers a primer for reading the rhetoric of movie trailers. Lisa Kernan identifies three principal rhetorical strategies that structure trailers: appeals to audience interest in film genres, stories, and/or stars. She also analyzes the trailers for twenty-seven popular Hollywood films from the classical, transitional, and contemporary eras, exploring what the rhetorical appeals within these trailers reveal about Hollywood's changing conceptions of the moviegoing audience. Kernan argues that movie trailers constitute a long-standing hybrid of advertising and cinema and, as such, are precursors to today's heavily commercialized cultural forms in which art and marketing become increasingly indistinguishable.

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