



Sequel-baiting

Description

Sequel-baiting is the practice by film-makers to construct their plots in a way that encourages audience speculation about potential sequels. In the case of hanger endings, there's the technique of introducing characters and events that suggest a continuation of the story once the main story is over.



Such is the virulence of 'sequelitis' that fans make up their

own trailers to films they would like a real film maker to produce, and they publish these on YouTube, as if goading James Cameron into announcing a sequel to *Avatar*. The amateur trailer is usually assembled from clips out of the original film.

There are fake sequel trailers for *Avatar*, *Inception* and *Titanic*, to name a few. The editing tools for mashing up video content are available on anyone's laptop. This isn't user generated content (UGC) so much as user-generated teasers, mock-prequels and movie trailer parodies.

It seems as though a fake trailer induces massive numbers of hits to its creator's YouTube channel, at the cost of having to bear an interminable thread of comments from angry and frustrated visitors, when they realise there is no sequel.

Sequel-baiting is a commercial and instrumental indication of a basic human propensity to will some event into existence. Not only media, but also consumer products, succumb to this chain of expectation, as evident in recent speculation about an iPhone 5.

Naming and numbering heightens expectation. There's the role of version numbers in keeping a project open and edging it ever onwards: NASA's Apollo space missions 1 to 17+; Windows 1.0-10.0+; Web 2.0, inviting expectation of a 2.5, 3.0 or more.

These sequencing tactics are indicators of a propensity within the human species to project forward, to anticipate, and to be ever expectant, which are in a way also about *constructing* a future, and even making the *idea* of the future.

Science fiction stories heighten anticipation for what might be, though we know they are as much about the present as the future.

Looking forward, and inventing a future, is also a looking back, and inventing a past. In a sense every looking forward is an attempt to get back to something, often to something even better. The forward look references what's already gone.

This is also the nature of *utopia*, looking to a better place and circumstance that in many ways transforms the past: the Celestial City (or Heavenly Jerusalem) as a return to a renewed Garden of Eden; William Morris's utopian future in which there are no factories and no commercially-induced division of labour, a return to an idealised pre-industrial state.

This tendency of human beings to project, anticipate, and indulge in *hope* is a strong theme in the writing of the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Expectation is far from frivolous or in vain. Without having a *fore-project* there would be no understanding – which is to say we could never understand anything: a movie, a trailer, a book, this blog. We are creatures always expecting, with pleasure or dread, and it is this concerned projection (into a future) that enables us to make sense of things. It's also a two-and-fro movement where expectations undergo inevitable revision in light of expectations that are unmet, or realised differently.

It seems that in life as with media we are always looking for more or less of the same, and this compels us to think and act, and drives people to invent. All this constitutes the *fore-projection of understanding*: future-baiting of a sort.

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1. Techno-utopias

Tags

1. Heidegger
2. sequel
3. UGC
4. user-generated content
5. utopia

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Author

rcoyne99

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