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An Analysis of the Opening Credit Sequence in Film

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE OPENING CREDIT SEQUENCE IN FILM

by

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Abstract

This paper presents an analytical look at the opening credit sequences of movies. Starting with a chronological background, the study looks at the progress of opening credits based on historical and technological changes. This first section aims to identify some of the major names in the field, while marking the turning points for opening credits throughout five major time periods (1.Pre-credit Era; 2.1920s; 3.1930s-mid 1950s; 4.1955-1970s; 5.1980-Present). The second part of the study categorizes opening credits stylistically and associates these classifications with different stages in history. The third section raises the question of what makes successful credits, pointing out the ambiguity that stems from having different purposes for using a certain type of opening credit sequence in relation to various genre conventions. The next section consists of an analysis of a selection of contemporary movies through their credit sequences. This section demonstrates the extent of different uses for credits and supports the assertion that as the opening credit sequences are becoming works of art that can stand on their own, they are beginning to have a crucial role in the success of movies, especially in the action/thriller genre. The paper concludes with a look at the future of opening credits marking their ongoing evolution.

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Introduction

In *Motion Graphics,* Steve Curran explains, "film titles, to a large degree, are the afterthought of the movie production; their typical budget was described by one practitioner as 'whatever is left over after the caterer has been paid at the wrap party'" (129). Budgetary restraints naturally affect the title design, since high-level expenditure can be necessary to buy the extra time and talents required to achieve high-quality results, which do not seem to be a priority for many filmmakers. If film credits are indeed an "after thought," then why do they need to be studied more closely? This paper defends that the opening credit sequences are a pertinent aspect of film, as well as graphic design, in this day and age. Both in terms of their functional and aesthetic values, film credits are more important than they have been credited for.

At a time when copyright issues are so central in the entertainment industry, film credits are likely to become more and more important. Furthermore, in an environment full of clutter, the first impression of the film in the movie theater, or on the television screen, prepares the viewer for what is to come just like the cover of a book. In this respect, film credits fulfill the important role of outlining the filmmaker's intentions and setting up the expectations of those watching.

However, film titles have been overlooked for such a long time. Since this area is only a sliver of both film and graphic design history, there is not much research or analysis on film credits. As Emily King outlines, "While those engaged in film studies have for the most part ignored title sequences, historians of graphic design tend to treat them purely as graphics which through cinema technology have taken on a temporal dimension" (1). This lack of attention was part of the reason for initiating this study.

However, film title sequences have been becoming a more prominent area of study. Jeffrey Bellantoni and Matt Woolman go as far as to suggest that film title design is the mother of all moving typography, now common in music and art videos. One can even draw parallels between the development of film title design and how practices like Kabuki or jazz music have started off as part of pop culture and later turned into an art form, and got elevated to the status of high art.

In this context, I will argue that as the opening title sequences of movies are becoming works of art that can stand on their own, they are beginning to have a crucial role in the success of movies, especially in the action/thriller genre. My approach is a historical one, showing the evolution of title sequences as they become an integral part of film. I also categorize credits under four different stylistic groups, define and question the components of successful credits, and provide analysis of specific opening credit sequences, concentrating on the contemporary era, before moving on the future of credits.

Historical Look

In order to analyze film credits successfully, one needs to look at how and why film credits have evolved into their current form. This way, one can understand the influences behind contemporary title design and situate specific examples in a broader context. I have chosen to split the history of opening credits into two major eras: Pre-Saul Bass Era and Post-Saul Bass Era. This seems appropriate since his opening credit sequence to Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) has revolutionized this field. I have further categorized the timeline of film title sequences into five subcategories: 1.Pre-credit Era; 2.1920s; 3.1930s-mid 1950s; 4.1955-1970s; 5.1980-Present. This division was based on historical and technological developments that have influenced film title design significantly. Even though I have tried to break the history of film credits into specific time periods, the actual history is not so linear. In this respect, this classification is only meant to act as a guide, as there are many overlaps between different time periods.

a. Pre-Saul Bass Era

1. Pre-credit Era

The pre-credit era coincides with the beginning of movies in the late 19th century. The single shot clips of Lumière brothers are exemplary of the first movies shown in a commercial setting during this time period. These mini clips, showing simple scenes like workers leaving a factory, or a train pulling into the station, had no opening credit sequence. At this stage, only the filmmaker needed to get credit and Lumière brothers were present at the initial screening to receive such credit. Moreover, the lack of an

extended crew made it almost needless to have a title sequence – either at the beginning or the end of the film. Furthermore, the Lumière brothers were not so much worried about getting credit for the clips themselves. Their main concern was to get credit for their scientific contributions by developing Léon Bouly's cinématographe to shoot these clips (Naele).

However, when watching these short movies on DVD today, one can encounter various opening titles. When these films were remastered and archived, opening credits outlining the title of the movie and the name of the filmmaker were sometimes added to these types of early films. This makes it harder to overview the opening credit sequences of early movies, as it becomes a challenge to make generalizations about this time period.

2. 1920s

When the silent film era with intertitles and live music began, the viewing experience of movies started to change. These films were no longer short clips astonishing the audiences through the display of the moving image. The films of Georges Méliès, D.W. Griffith, and Charlie Chaplin had multiple shots and established complex story lines. Nevertheless, the opening title sequences for these movies were not very elaborate. As Sarah Boxer outlines, "The earliest titles, for silent films, were presented on title cards – cards with printed material on them that were photographed and incorporated into the film" (2). These title cards had text outlining the title of the film and the name of the filmmaker, and they usually consisted of a single frame held on screen as a still image. As King outlines, "the first titlers hired by the film industry almost certainly were trained sign-writers because from the start film credits were set out in templates derived

from nineteenth century hand-lettered signs" (1). Sometimes, a hand-drawn border or a still image accompanied the text on these title cards. Otherwise the credits consisted of a few lines of simple text.

In these early days of cinema even though techniques like the animated type as part of the titles were utilized, they did not extend to the opening title sequence. However, this technique was used in other parts of the movie, since title cards were an essential part of the narrative in silent movies. For instance, Méliès' work often incorporated innovative techniques and special effects in various parts of the film.

Furthermore, at this stage (in 1920s) there were only relatively small crews involved in the making of the film. However, these people were not considered important enough to get credit on screen. Most of the time, only the filmmaker, and later in history, the main actors would get on screen credit. The main purpose of the credits in this era was to show the audience what they were about to watch and distinguish the famous personas associated with the film. The opening credit sequence was more like a label rather than an introduction for the movie.

3. 1930s-mid 1950s

With the triumph of the studio system in the 1930s, large budgets were established to create large-scale productions like *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). During this time period, there was an anything goes approach as the addition of sound (1927) and Technicolor (1935) allowed further developments in opening credit sequences. Consequently, the titling of Hollywood films was not uniform during this era. However, even though there was variation, Hollywood movies mostly

used a graphic language that associated specific typefaces with specific genres. King explains this approach as follows:

> While Westerns were titled with the kind of typeface that would have been used on 'Wanted' posters for hardened bandits in Hollywood's version of the Wild West, the opening credits for romances were often written in letters that appear to be fashioned in pink ribbon and those for slapstick humor in 'paint-stroke' typefaces that suggest hastiness and incompetent workmanship. (1)

These typefaces created a Hollywood vernacular and started to establish certain genre conventions. They were appropriate and communicative, but no thought was given to the on-screen relationship of word and image. The text of the credits generally appeared drop-shadow, against a background of a single static image or a short sequence shot from an immobile camera pointed at an attractive background, such as a rippling sheet of silk or a rural landscape. The title sequence of *The Wizard of Oz* is in this style with images of clouds moving across the screen as the credits appear on top of the imagery. Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) also uses this approach with a clock as the background of the short and simple text that reads, "Charlie Chaplin in Modern Times."

Based on these examples, one can see that the primary purpose of film credits during this period was to display the film's title, recognize the director, establish the hierarchy of actors, and possibly acknowledge the crewmembers. Longer title sequences were needed to fulfill all these tasks. However, these lengthy credits were so boring that at times, curtains would stay down during the title sequence before the film started. The curtains would be pulled back as the titles were ending. There did not seem to be much of

a point in showing a list of names before a movie started, since during these years the illiteracy rate in the United States was still pretty high.

Although most films tried to make the titles a little more interesting for the audiences, there were also films that ignored the opening credit sequence completely. The first sound film to begin without an extended opening credit sequence, besides displaying the title and the line "Color by Technicolor," was Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). The next film to begin with only a title credit was Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941). Yet this was a pretty uncommon practice for large-scale Hollywood productions during this era.

As James Counts suggests, "after the implementation of sound, titles began to function as a transition" (2). The idea of getting people ready for the feature film started to become a more prominent idea. Although most opening title sequences were pretty dull and ordinary, there were some exceptions that started to acknowledge the various possibilities. For instance, the title sequence for *King Kong* (1933) was exceptional in this period. This sequence utilized the latest technology to present the audience with more than simple text; yet David Robbins points out in *Motion Graphics* that these "were generally studio-created early experiments, used primarily as special effects" (15).

Additionally, during this era, many animations had more intricate and complicated credit sequences compared to feature length films. This was due to advances in cell animation by Max Fleischer and Walt Disney. This technique was an extension of Méliès' "trick photography" discovered in the earlier days of cinema. The invention of such techniques elevated simple cartoons to more sophisticated studies in illustrated

motion and graphics. Icons like Betty Boop, Popeye, Snow White, Pinocchio and Dumbo were created during this time period.

b. Post-Saul Bass Era

4. 1955-1970s

In late 1950s, Hollywood movies showed growth in production. Accordingly, larger, union-based crews were utilized in films. The increasing clout of Hollywood's labor unions was partially responsible for the development of the title sequence in the late 1950s. In order to acknowledge all the members of the crew more space was needed for credits. Although this led many filmmakers to move parts of the sequence to the end of the film, the opening credits were still longer than a few frames.

As the opening sequences became longer due to these extended crews, graphic design and typography started to become more integrated into the titles. According to King, the title sequences from mid 1950s until the late 1960s were "related in style to fashionable static graphic design" (1). The fact that Bass had a background in static graphic design seems to correspond with this claim. This also confirms King's idea about how "Bass argues that his talents for working in both moving and static graphic media are not strictly related because film-making requires a distinctive temporal awareness. But while he has suggested that it is purely coincidental that he is so able to work on both fields, he does not deny that they are connected in some ways" (4).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Bass designed various publicity materials for movies, ranging from film posters to other types of advertisements. His film posters followed the style of his static graphic designs and digressed from the typical poster

format of Hollywood movies before the 1950s. These early posters simply placed portraits of the major stars or a depiction of the climactic moment in the film above the movie title and the names of the stars (Herdeg). Bass diverged from these conventions.

His creation of publicity materials for films like *Carmen Jones* (1954) heralded his success in film title design. For *Carmen Jones,* Bass created the graphic identity with a rose depicted within a flame. The flame behind the rose was animated and the symbol appeared in the opening credits of the film. However, it was *The Man with the Golden Arm* that became a breakthrough in title design. The movie poster that Bass designed for this film was so successful that Preminger asked him to work on the title sequence of the film as well. It was a bold move not to use the famous face of Frank Sinatra, considering that in the 1950s, famous names were closely associated with the successfulness of a film. Instead, a disjointed, jagged arm was used on the poster of the film, shaping the self-contained title sequence, and tying the publicity of the film in a graphically coherent way.

The theme of *The Man with the Golden Arm* was the overwhelming struggle of a jazz musician Frankie Machine, played by Sinatra, trying desperately to beat his heroin addiction. The opening titles had a jazzy score creating a close synchronization between the visual and auditory rhythms, paying close attention to pace, rhythm and detail. Slim white bars on a black background jostled the actors' names before twisting into a disjointed, jagged arm. The animated paper-cut-out of an arm depicted in the German Expressionist style was a symbol of heroin addiction. With a reductionist approach, this single image condensed the story into one concept that could stand on its own. This was a powerful message, reflecting the schizophrenic mind of the addicted musician. Martin

Scorsese called this image of the arm "a malignant force reaching down into the world and the lives of the characters" (qtd. in Boxer 2).

When the reels of the film were sent to movie theaters a note was stuck on the cans to tell the projectionist, "Pull Curtain Before Titles!" As discussed earlier, most title sequences from the Pre-Saul Bass Era were pretty boring and it had become the norm to leave the curtains closed until the feature film actually started. Bass was to change this by using the potential of storytelling within the opening credits of the film by using techniques such as live action, type treatments, animation, and visual effects. The work of Bass often utilized abstract animation giving this technique a rebirth in film. In the 1920s avant-garde films such as Marcel Duchamp's *Anaemic Cinema* (1926) and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) incorporated abstract animation but did not extend this to the title sequence.

Bass not only reinvented the film title sequence but he also turned it into an art form. He had created over fifty titles sequences by the end of his life, for such diverse films as *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), famous Hitchcock thrillers, *North by Northwest* (1959), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960), *Spartacus* (1960), *West Side Story* (1961*), It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), and *Goodfellas* (1990). He even came out of retirement as a favor to Scorsese to make the titles for his 1995 film *Casino*. He depicted the protagonist of the film, Robert De Niro, unnervingly fall through flames that turn into the neon polluted strip of Las Vegas, as a symbol of the character's personal descent into hell.

Each credit sequence that Bass designed was a short film in and of itself that set the tone and prepared the viewer for what was to come in the subsequent film. His

techniques were not entirely orthodox either. He would place things into his titles that no one else besides him would notice, be it little graphics, or a scratch that appears for a single frame. When he was working with his second wife Elaine Bass on the titles of *Cape Fear* (1991), he enlarged a sign on a photocopier reading "CAPE FEAR" and submerged it in a tank filled with diluted ink. Then he used a hairdryer to create the ripples on the water while filming, and as the ripples settled the words slowly became legible.

Similarly, Scorsese described the power of a Bass title sequence in *6 Chapters in Design* by suggesting, "His titles are not simply unimaginative "identification tags" – as in many films – rather, they are integral to the films as a whole. When his work comes up on the screen, the movie itself truly begins" (11). Bass' work enabled title sequences to evolve into more complete and complex narratives that are able to stand on their own, setting the tone, providing the mood, and foreshadowing the action. Counts suggests that "in the 1950s, titles began to move beyond pragmatic communication and evolved into complete narratives – establishing the mood and visual character of the film" (1). Alongside Bass, many other prominent title designers emerged in this era. Some of these names include Pablo Ferro, Maurice Binder, Stephen Frankfurt, and Wayne Fitzgerald. Accordingly, as title designs got more complicated, title designers started to get on screen credit for themselves, which supports the rising importance of a film's title sequence.

Another change during this period was the incorporation of pre-credit footage. These were short teasers showing a few scenes at the beginning of the film before cutting to the opening credit sequence. Towards the end of this period, in 1970s, there were longer teasers before the credits started rolling, and sometimes no opening credits at all.

More and more movies had the title sequences at the end, instead of the beginning of the film. These changes allowed the viewers to engage with the movie immediately.

However, what initiated these changes in the opening sequence of films still remains unclear. It may be significant that the increased complexity of film titles emerged in a period when the film industry had to fight the competition forced on it by television. During the mid 1950s there was a huge decline in independent and feature cinema. This was largely due to the explosion of television sets in the American marketplace in 1948-1949, as they became affordable commodities. Films had become "a product which was sufficiently differentiated from television to tempt people into theatres, but would still appeal to a primary television watching audience" (King 2). By the early 1960s sixty percent of cinemas had just closed down. More than seventy percent of these were independent. The B-movies and cartoons, which accompanied feature length films, practically stopped being shown as they had become too expensive to make. All that was left was the big motion picture. (James 126).

Without the B-movie or the cartoon before the feature, the audience was left with one feature film for the same price, when they could be at home watching television for free. What the audience needed was something to engage with before a film. It needed to be something that would compliment the main feature without being too complicated. The B-movies were simple, easy to follow and more importantly they were chosen to support a film. For example, a feature film in the horror genre like *House of Wax* (1953) would have a B-movie along the lines of *Killer Ape* (1953). In this context, the opening credit sequences developed into narratives to fill this gap.

In addition, the late 1950s heralded a number of technical achievements in cinema, like CinemaScope, Cinerama, Stereophonic sound, 3-D, and Smell-O-Vision. These were all designed to lure the public away from their television sets and into the cinema, as the large-budget, Technicolor, Hollywood features offered a big screen alternative. Even though these inventions were not very successful, they nevertheless allowed and demanded more sophisticated titles. King suggests that in 1950-60s, "graphically adventurous film title sequences flourished against the background of a generally ailing film industry, coinciding with the realization by filmmakers that they must develop strategies to attract increasingly reluctant audiences into movie theaters" (2). In contrast, Boxer suggests that as movies were put on television, "titles were squeezed and simplified so they could fit on the screen and be used as labels for tie-in toys" (9). Even though these are all reasonable assumptions, there is not enough evidence to back up the hypothesis that the introduction of television lead to longer pre-credit sequences and more complex opening credits. Further research involving a quantitative analysis of the length of the pre-credit sequences, and the complexity of the opening credits, before and after the introduction of TV movies could provide the necessary information.

5. 1980-Present

During the 1980s, many different approaches, techniques, and styles started to emerge. With technological improvements, digitalization and special effects became more prominent and affordable. Curran explains that "before the availability of desktop video and animation packages, most title designers worked with animatics and

storyboards. The final product was produced with technology available only at optical houses or computer-effects companies at a cost that left little margin for changes and creative exploration" (129). Especially after the introduction of the Macintosh in 1984, creative experimentation increased immensely since it became more affordable for graphic designers to try new techniques without being able to foresee the outcomes. This development democratized the playing field for graphic designers.

The launch of MTV in 1981 by the media conglomerate Viacom was another development in the 1980s that altered the landscape for motion graphics. As faster editing became popular among 'the MTV generation,' film titles started to speed up as well. The consumerist popular culture and increased advertising also affected the style of the film title design. Considering that the new generation is used to faster editing and that their attention span is much shorter, it is not surprising to see that title sequences are increasingly edited at a faster pace. As credits flash by faster and faster, it becomes harder to read all of the text. In many film titles it is not easy to concentrate on the text at all among other elements. This change indicates that the importance of the information has diminished while the importance of the overall effect has been amplified. Furthermore, it is now very rare to see opening title sequences with extended credits. The majority of the credits appear at the end of the film since most people do not have the patience to sit through them, which would explain why people start leaving the movie theaters before the end credits are over. Also, with resources like IMDB.com, one does not need to watch the end credits even if they would like to learn who worked on a specific aspect of the film. All this information is easily accessible through the Internet. Most of the information depicted on screen is not even interesting or relevant to the

viewers. It is there for the industry, serving legal purposes, which started to become more prominent in the 1950s with the unionizations of the labor force.

In this environment, brothers Robert and Richard Greenberg turned the film title design into an industry. R/Greenberg Associates, the commercial production company they have founded in 1977, created some of the most prominent and groundbreaking works in the following decades. As Curran suggests, "Their firm was among the first to approach film-title design as a collaboration of creative talent and technology. The firm broke new ground…. It also generated many technical innovations that changed the industry and was fertile breeding ground for outstanding talent in film and television design" (160). The Bauhaus inspired culture of R/GA turned film title design into an art form through motion graphics. For instance, Richard Greenberg's opening title sequence of *The World According to Garp* (1982) is famous for its depiction of a baby floating in the sky.

R/GA has also introduced many talented designers to the field of film title design. Kyle Cooper, who has revolutionized the pioneering work of Bass, is among these people. After Cooper's credit sequences to films like *Seven* (1995), *Gattaca* (1998), and *Dead Man on Campus* (1999), "a dark mood fell over the creative industries at the end of the decade" (Myerson 316). His introduction of the postmodern grunge to film title design transformed this area once again in the 1990s. However, motion design in opening credits was not a revolutionary process at this time. Bass had pioneered the work, but Cooper was one to take it a step further. He not only incorporated trends in print, advertising, and record industry graphics into his work, but also combined various old-school methods with new digital technologies. After getting individual recognition for his

successful title designs, Cooper moved on and founded his own internationally recognized design companies, Imaginary Forces and Prologue Films.

While many filmmakers have started to appreciate the importance of a powerful opening credit sequence, there are also many who have completely eliminated the opening credits in recent years. For instance *Van Helsing* (2004) has an elaborate closing sequence that one is used to seeing at the beginning of a film. *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Mummy Returns* (2001) are other such examples that have eliminated the opening sequence in favor of starting the action immediately and continuing it without any interruptions. There are other reasons for not having an opening credit sequence. For instance, there have been directors who were not satisfied with their work and for that reason refused to attach their names to the movie when it got released.

As illustrated above, many different factors have affected the evolution of the opening credit sequence since the early days of cinema. Opening credits have started to become more important for the film industry as prominent title designers created groundbreaking works. With further developments in technology and various historic changes in the film industry, different trends keep shaping the future of film title design.

Categorizing Credits

Throughout the evolution of film title design, different styles have become commonly utilized. These different styles have developed over decades of film history and they are all still in use, which shows that the history of film title design is not completely linear. Certain elements keep coming back, while certain decades witness various exceptions. This section is meant to categorize film titles stylistically in order to facilitate the analysis of specific examples.

a. Titles superimposed on a blank screen

The simplest titles are the ones that are superimposed on a blank screen. These kinds of titles utilize different typefaces, usually in white, over a black background. Since early films had no color, black and white titles were the only option. Even though an extensive color palette is available now, this simple color scheme is still widely used. Movies like *Dressed to Kill* (1980) have this type of opening credit sequence. While some filmmakers take the easy way out by using simple black and white titles due to their low cost and lack of complexity that minimizes effort, there are also filmmakers who choose this type of credit sequence very intentionally. This type of title design can give an old-fashioned and authentic, or classic and refined look to the film. Looking at the opening credit sequences of movies like Gas Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) or *Last Days* (2005) one can see that the director meant to achieve a serious and sophisticated look through the title design.

However, this has not remained a common practice simply out of convention. Since a black background has lower brightness, it tires the eyes of the viewer less.

Therefore, black background has been preferred over lighter background alternatives. For the text to be legible, there needs to be high contrast between the background and the foreground. Consequently, white text is preferred over other options.

Charlie Chaplin movies mostly used this type of opening credit sequence. Since title cards were the main method for creating a title sequence, these consisted of hand drawn images. At this stage, making film titles was a craft, far from being considered a form of art. However, currently titles are more often than not created in a digital format which makes it even easier to create titles superimposed on a blank background. While, the digitization allows for a wider choice of effects and transitions, it has also increased the value of hand-made title sequences in contemporary movies.

b. Titles accompanied by still images

Some of the earlier title cards incorporated hand drawn borders and other images. This was the beginning of adding more than text to the title sequence to make it more visually appealing. The development of titles accompanied by still images coincides with credits getting longer to incorporate more than the name of the filmmaker. In this sense, the studio system supported the development of more elaborate title sequences.

The next stage was to use still images as the background. This kind of title sequence is somewhat more elaborate than the white text black background combination, as the plain background is replaced with various images. Since this effect cannot be achieved in camera, it required combining different media.

Usually a score accompanies these types of credit sequences. For instance, in *Last Tango in Paris* the title sequence uses a single score and combines the music with two

paintings by Francis Bacon. These two images represent the two main characters of the film, relating the diptych paintings to the spatial alienation of the characters. However, this is all done in subtle manner. At the beginning of the film this sequence helps establish a disquieting and somber mood that ties to the visual look of the film, rather than leading to character analysis. This example shows that by introducing a narrative element still images can enhance an opening credit sequence that only incorporates text.

c. Titles accompanied with a series of moving images

Titles over a series of moving images can range from a simple view of clouds moving in the sky, like we see in the opening sequence of *The Wizard of Oz*, to a more intricate sequence of images that incorporate camera movement, like the opening sequence of Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). This sequence, which is created by Stephen Frankfurt, shows a pan across different objects inside a cigar box. These are a child's treasures that grow in significance as the film progresses. The sounds of a flute, a piano, and a child humming accompany these images. The close ups of a pocket watch, a safety pin, a marble, pennies, crayons, a mirror, a whistle, and wooden dolls present these objects from unfamiliar angles, allowing the viewer to rediscover these simple items. Through this kind of depiction, the viewer can focus on their status as singular and unusual objects divorced from their purposes in the wider world. The de-familiarization of everyday objects is consistent with the film's overall perspective.

Like we see in the example above, most title sequences that are accompanied by moving images have music in the background. However, there is usually no dialogue and the meaning of the images remains somewhat ambiguous until later in the film. The title

sequences of *Forest Gump* (1994), where titles appear as the camera follows a feather floating in the air, and *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), where the text appears with a virtual shadow over the image of a rotating barber's pole, have soundtracks accompanying these symbolic imageries.

There are also various credit sequences that appear along with the narrative thread. This is especially common in action movies. In most of these cases, the story begins with the title sequence and the meaning of the images is immediately recognizable. There might even be dialogue as part of the sequence. Parts of the opening credits for *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966) fits into this type of title sequence. Even though there is an opening sequence that incorporates still images and animation, as the film continues, the three main characters are introduced through titles. Various events take place that reveal the personalities of these characters and the end of each sequence the following text "The Ugly," "The Bad," and finally "The Good" appears along with a freeze frame of that character. Since the story continues through these credits, this kind of sequence moves along with the narrative of the film.

Other examples include *Erin Brokovitch* (2000), where the titles appear when the narrative slows down, and *Devil Wears Prada* (2006), where title sequence consists of the protagonist getting ready in contrast with a series of other women who have very different styles and personalities. Although these types of sequences that relate to the narrative add another layer to the credits, stylistically, they can still be categorized under titles accompanied with a series of moving images, or titles built around animation and motion graphic if they appear in a different style.

d. Titles built around animation and motion graphics

In the late 1990s animating text started to become more and more popular. However, animation has been used since the earlier days of cinema. In Edward Blake's film *The Pink Panther* (1968) the title sequence is designed by Friz Freleng, who had became famous with Bugs Bunny. In this opening credit sequence, the text comes spinning around and starts mixing together. The Pink Panther runs around the text and mischievously tries to block it by getting in the way. The animation is all attune to the score composed by Henry Mancini. This soundtrack had a more distinct sound compared to some of its cliché cartoon counterparts of the day. After the success of this film and its title sequence the Pink Panther became a popular cultural icon and even landed its own television series.

A more contemporary example of an animated title sequence would be *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004). This film opens with fake credits as if the movie is a happy and cheerful tale called *The Littlest Elf.* Midway through there is a sudden pause in the soundtrack and everything goes dark as the narrator explains that this is not the movie we are about to watch and mockingly suggests, "if you wish to see a movie about a happy little elf, I am sure there is still plenty of seating available in theater two." Then somewhat sarcastically he tells the audience what the movie is about. The rest of the title sequence is not animated and it includes dark images of a graveyard and the silhouette of a man walking. The opening credit sequence ends with the narrator introducing himself as Lemony Snicket, which is the pseudonym of the story's author Daniel Handler. While this play with the audience cues the viewer into the witty and

playful nature of the film, the introduction of a narrator refers to the children's tale aspect of the story and introduces the character of Lemony Snicket.

Many contemporary movies rely on animation in their titling. The opening credit sequences of *Spider-man* (2002), *Spider-man 2* (2004), Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005) and *Sin City* (2005) are some examples from the past five years. There are also many films that rely on moving images combined with animated text like *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*. *Mission Impossible* (1996), and *The Ice Storm* (1997) also have these types of titles. Although I have chosen to categorize these credit sequences under titles built around animation and motion graphics, they can also fit into the previous category. These types of ambiguities reflect the difficulty of trying to establish strict categories for opening credit sequences. It is such a broad area of design with endless artistic possibilities that these categories can only do limited justice.

Defining Success

One way to measure the success of an opening credit sequence is to see what kind of recognition the title designer gets during the credits. Certain title designers who have created successful sequences take credit for themselves in the opening credits. However, this is not a common trend. While names like, Saul Bass, Maurice Binder, or Kyle Cooper appear within the opening credit sequence, most title designers get credit in the closing sequence, along with hundreds of other crewmembers. Even though looking at where title designers get credit can point out some of the principal names in this industry, it is not a precise or reliable measure, especially considering that some of these title designers are mentioned in the opening credits since they collaborate with the director on other aspects of the film as well.

In order to better define the success of an opening credit sequence, one has to look at the purpose of the credits first. Only then one can move on to evaluate whether these purposes are valid and whether the credits have reached these goals. After all, when judging the success of a movie one can use many different criteria, ranging from economic to artistic goals, and define success in relative terms. Similar criteria should apply to the credit sequence as well.

For the earliest movies, the opening credit sequence was meant to display the names of the film and the filmmaker. The purpose was to communicate this information efficiently. As legal obligations started to become an issue, the opening credit sequence evolved to give credit to not just the filmmaker, but also the actors and the rest of the crew. One can argue that at this time the success of titles was based on whether they were legible and aesthetically pleasing in some way. Whether this is a valid evaluation or not,

decades later, such simple criteria remain insufficient in determining the success of film title design. For instance, in Michael Hanake's *Caché* (2005) the titles are purposefully displayed in a very small font. The entire opening credit sequence appears in a large paragraph over the image of a house that is viewed through a secret camera. In many other contemporary films the titles are edited so fast that one can barely read all the text. These examples show that the purpose of the opening credit sequence has evolved in conjunction with with its design and content.

After Bass' revolutionary title sequences, the purpose of film credits have moved beyond the simple objective of displaying names and started to develop more complicated goals. For instance, graphic designer Louis Dorfsman sees credits as a combination of intellect and emotion, describing them as "infusing the whole through a vision, both literary and visual" (14). Graphic designer Jamie Maffett takes on a different approach and defines the success of a film's opening credit sequence based on the elements of 'excitement' and 'foreshadowing.' According to him the opening credits should draw the viewer into the movie and provide an introduction so that when one goes back to the film, one can have that 'ah!' moment as he/she realizes the proleptic value of the sequence. Maffett also suggests that different viewers find different snippets of information in credits. So to provide a multilayered credit sequence seems to be important in this respect.

Although Curran acknowledges this perspective, he also suggests that an opening credit sequence does not have to comply with these standards to reach its goal. "Some filmmakers want those first moments to be breathtaking; they create titles that kickstart the adrenaline glands and thrust the viewer into the film's momentum. Some filmmakers

raise a question or provide a clue. Other directors prefer that a title sequence be almost invisible, seamlessly and quietly woven into the beginning of the film" (129). He outlines that based on the filmmaker's intentions and the nature of the movie, an opening credit sequence may have different purposes, which means that different criteria for success should be applied. In this respect, designer Nina Saxon's comment seems to be an appropriate way of judging the success of credits. She claims that the opening credits are a component of the film as a storytelling medium. Therefore, she suggests, "the title sequence should feel integral to the movie, like something that was written in the script to begin with. If it feels disconnected, I don't think it's a success, even though it may be very elaborate and wonderful on its own" (qtd. in Benenson 22).

In this context, it is important to remember that the titles need to support and serve the rest of the film, and not subdue it. Based on an interview with Bass, the author of the article *Bass Instinct* outlines that "Bass would be the last person to have titles and credits overwhelm the narrative… However creative the titles are, he is adamant they must work as an intro, a scene-setter, and not become self-obsessed graphic statements" (48). King also observes that Bass' titles were intended to serve the movie. She comments:

> He believes that a picture's content should be addressed in its opening sequence to establish emotional or historical context and create a rapport with its audience. Bass has dismissed graphically adventurous title sequences that do not deal with the substance of the film as 'irrelevant tap dances.' Bass' conviction that his work within film must properly fulfill a function was derived from a European

> modernist's faith in simple, effective and appropriate forms of communication brought to a native enthusiasm for the North American film. (1)

Like his predecessor Bass, Cooper also believes that a title sequence should not be graphically innovative just for the sake of being innovative. As Jeremy Myerson suggests, "Cooper's work reflected the belief that technology should be the servant of the idea, not the other way around" (316). Accordingly, successful title sequences closely relate to the film that follows, even though most of them are able to stand on their own as pieces of graphic design in motion.

While a good opening credit sequence needs the serve the film that follows and act as a proper introduction, it also needs to provide a theatrical atmosphere, establish the visual characterization of the film by relying on certain genre conventions, and put the audience in an expectant mood. It can also establish a style and if necessary can clarify the story content by presenting an abstract or symbolic reference to some elements of the film. Besides these values, a good title design can also greatly stimulate public interest and provide an overall atmosphere for a film through the buzz it creates. An example of this phenomenon is the James Bond movies and their iconic gun barrel sequence, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the 'Case Studies' section.

Accordingly, there is usually a keen audience appreciation for a well-designed title sequence. For instance, although the end credits contained hundreds of artists' and technicians' names, in *Around the World in Eighty Days,* the audience not only stayed till the very end but also applauded, admiring the graphic invention and witty visual ideas brought onto screen by Bass. Since there were so many people involved in the making of this film, the end credits were pretty long. An animated story that is a condensed

recapitulation of the film helped establish continuity and maintained the interest of the viewers. In this sequence, the main elements of continuity are the top-hated clock and its bicycle, which are symbols for main characters Phineas Fogg and his valet Passeportout. The action is sprinkled with caricatures of characters and puns on their roles in the film. After the clock and the bicycle repeat the journey of the actual characters, the clock falls open in a collision revealing its works and transforms into a beating heart. Since the epilogue, after several hours of cinema, had to be compelling, strong colors were combined with amusing parodies of incidents from the film in this sequence. Far from being an anticlimax, these end credits often evoked applause.

It is harder to measure the effectiveness of opening credits in a similar manner, since audience members are less likely to applaud and cheer at the beginning, disturbing the flow of the film. However, it is not unusual today for film critics to pinpoint his/her appreciation of a credit sequence and express his/her displeasure for the film itself. For instance, Elvis Mitchell commented in his *New York Times* review for the film *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), "the opening and closing credits are so good, they're almost worth sitting through the film for" (qtd. in Gibson 142). The director of the film Zach Snyder confirms the success of Cooper who designed the credit sequence. He comments that some filmmakers have refused to work with Cooper because he is "the guy that makes title sequences better than the movie" (qtd. in Gibson 142). Even though the credits seem to overshadow the film in this case, the title design can still be considered a success since it relates to the content of the movie.

In spite of all this, there are certain filmmakers who do not conform to these types of norms. Even though Stanley Kubrick was a well-respected and successful director,

most of his opening title sequences are aesthetically pleasing but they do not mean more than what they are. In this light, it becomes clearer that the criteria outlined above cannot be applied to all films. Accordingly, there are other notable filmmakers like Orson Welles and Jean-Luc Godard who use their title sequences to go against cinematic traditions of Hollywood. These directors use the opening credit sequence to make a statement about the nature of their films as they take a transgressive stance against classic film narratives throughout their work. For instance, in *Citizen Kane* (1941) the absence of a title sequence represents a "defiance of the cinema industry" (Marie 6) as Welles refuses to give credit to his cast. Similarly in Godard's *Breathless* (1960) only the title of the film appears in black and white, covering the entire screen without leaving any room between the text and the edge of the screen. By ignoring the title safe window, Godard goes against traditional norms of movie making. In *Contempt,* another film by Godard, the credits are spoken over the opening shot and there are no on-screen credits. Since the purpose of such credits is very different, their success needs to be analyzed on a different level as well.

Even though it can be acceptable to oppose conventional measures of success in this way, most filmmakers do not want to take risks. Considering the already established genre conventions, good credit sequences are usually different enough to stand out, but not too out-of-the-box to get the viewers confused. Therefore, no one puts credits in the middle of a film, or writes them upside down. However, someone like Quentin Tarantino can subvert various genre conventions to achieve a desired effect. His latest film *Grindhouse* (2007), utilizes established genre conventions to create a spoof and cue in the audience for the rest of the film. Before the credits appear there are two fake trailers that

situate the film in the correct context, as they resemble the B-movies of earlier decades. After the fake trailers, bold yellow text appears on top of the images of a go-go dancer. In this sequence the grainy film stock and the reflection of the camera in the mirror allude to the low quality of the films in the 1970s under the grindhouse genre. Tarantino uses these old conventions in a contemporary film with the purpose of creating a complete movie experience. These kinds of greater goals can be achieved through the opening credit sequence, while making use of genre conventions.

There are also other conventions and principles related to the opening credit sequence in terms of legal obligations. For instance, an actor's billing (where his or her name appears in the roll of credits) indicates role size or importance. The actor whose name appears first is said to have “top billing,” and actors whose names appear before the film's title have “above-the-title billing.” Sometimes “last billing” (having one’s name come up last) is reserved for a special appearance or celebrity. Such conventions relate to contractual agreements and reflect the salaries or the celebrity status of these people.

Consequently, the success of a film’s opening credit sequence can be a complicated matter. Yet, it remains uncertain whether the success of the opening credits is an important factor for the success of the film as a whole. Considering that the success of a film depends on many different factors and can be judged based on various criteria (ranging from box-office success and DVD sales to critic’s comments to online viewer ratings), the title sequence cannot be an unequivocal definer of a film’s success. Nonetheless, while a successful opening credit sequence can improve the viewing experience of a film, a substandard one can ruin that experience, since the opening credit sequence establishes someone’s first impression of the film.

Case Studies

This section concentrates on Post-Saul Bass Era credits under the action/thriller genre, as these types of credits usually have the most interesting title sequences with their inherent need to create suspense. The case studies include a series of James Bond movies *Psycho, Seven, and Catch Me If You Can.* All of these opening title sequences combine highly evocative images with equally powerful musical scores, and they all address the issues of exciting the viewers by creating suspense, setting the general tone of the film, and providing foreshadowing for later sequences. Stylistically, they are all under the categories of titles accompanied with a series of moving images and/or titles built around animation and motion graphics, as these types of title sequences allow for more in-depth analysis.

a. James Bond movies

The evolution of the opening title sequences for James Bond movies, from *Dr. No* (1962) to *Casino Royale* (2006), is significant since these titles sequences maintain certain elements throughout the decades while evolving other aspects based on the technology and aesthetic values of the time. These credit sequences combine titles accompanied with a series of moving images and titles built around animation and motion graphics.

In addition, there are three different title designers associated with James Bond movies. Each designer has his own style, and this switch allows one to compare and contrast the different values that become prominent for the credits. The first title designer of the James Bond movies is Maurice Binder, who created fourteen opening credit

sequences starting with that of *Dr. No.* There was also Robert Brownjohn who carried the Bond allure a step further in *From Russia With Love* (1963) and later in *Goldfinger* (1964). Finally, there is Daniel Kleinman who has been creating the latest title sequences since the 1995 film *Goldeneye.*

Traditionally, for each James Bond movie, an already famous musician (such as Madonna, Paul McCartney, Duran Duran, or Carly Simon) is invited to work on the main song, which becomes the soundtrack for the opening credit sequence. This song is often combined with the familiar James Bond theme song, which has been retained throughout the history of James Bond movies. In this manner, the opening credit sequences both rely on a new theme song to be innovative and retain their traditional identity through the use of the signature tune.

Hearing this signature alone is enough to hint that one is about to see a James Bond movie, which follows an established set of standards. Thus, one is prepared to see the new Bond girl, the new gadgets and vehicles, the new stunts, and the new plot that always results with James Bond saving the world from evil. In this context, James Bond films are always known for their action, sex appeal, explosions, guns, Bond girls, vehicles, and the opening credit sequences that have a sense of eroticism and mystique.

Accordingly, all of the Bond films open with the trademark gun barrel image. This sequence has become the logo of James Bond films throughout the years. Although the title sequences in general have become part of the Bond brand image, this particular sequence is the recurring trademark that provides continuity. It was used extensively throughout the promotion of the series and has been parodied many times. This sequence

is a great example of the power of an opening credit sequence in terms of establishing audience expectations.

The gun barrel sequence was originally designed as a part of the opening credits for *Dr. No*. This image has been updated since Binder's original shoot. In 1995 Kleinman created a more realistic version utilizing 3D animation software for the forthcoming film *Goldeneye*. The sequence was improved once again for the latest Bond movie, *Casino Royale.* Initially, Binder came up with the idea of gunshots across the screen, expanding into the barrel of a gun. To achieve the right effect of looking down a gun barrel, Binder filmed through the barrel of a .38 revolver (Davies). The viewer is placed inside the shaft of a gun, looking down the barrel as the weapon scans the screen. Then one sees Bond walking across the screen as a silhouetted figure. Then Bond turns around and fires directly at the camera, leaving a trickle of blood behind. The gun barrel and the background fades away, leaving a white dot on the screen which transitions into the next part of *Dr. No*'s opening credits.

The single white dot transform into an abstract animation of various colored dots. These dots were in fact animated price stickers. (This part of *Dr. No's* title sequence resembles Piet Mondrian's famous painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-43). Considering the dates of the film and the painting, it is possible that this Mondrian was an influence for Binder.) A few minutes into the sequence the music slows down and fades into a samba rhythm. The visuals then turn into different colored silhouettes of people dancing. These primary colors were enhanced further by the use of an optical printing process. This enabled Binder to replicate and change different images for artistic license. After this sequence, the music changes again to a different rhythm and the images on the

screen change to symbolize the lyrics showing silhouettes of 'three blind men.' This image fades into the actual characters in the film as the feature begins. This method of fading the credits into the actual story was used time and again by Binder in the future Bond releases. Following the success of the film *Dr. No* and its titles, Binder became an acclaimed and successful designer. As a result of this he was unavailable for the next two films in the series.

Brownjohn designed the titles for *From Russia With Love* and *Goldfinger* using Binder's assistant Trevor Bond. The title sequences he created are technically different from Binder's own stylized credits but they still fit in with the ongoing look and overall feel of the title designs for the Bond series. Brownjohn was in many ways closer in style and technique to Bass rather than Binder. Bass pioneered the idea of having one solitary image to reflect the mood of the film and to market it during the 1950s, and Brownjohn utilized this concept for *From Russia With Love* and *Goldfinger.*

Influenced by his mentor Moholy Nagy's light workshops, Brownjohn wanted to project the titles of these films onto still and mobile forms. The idea was pretty simple, yet the execution was more complicated. The title sequence for *From Russia with Love* showed projections of text in brightly colored sans-serif capitals onto a semi-clad dancer's body. The female form acted as a screen for the titles. However, the movements of the dancer created a problem, since there was no way of control the focus of the titles. So the dancer had to carefully move up and down in a specific way to keep the credits legible. Brownjohn and his team used a high-powered projector, as well as different colored lenses and gels to get the right kind of effect in camera. The sequence still looks somewhat distorted but the text is mostly legible.

Another key point in this title sequence is that the images do not fit perfectly with the theme music. It is likely that the song was composed before the production of the title sequence. Although the synchronization of the sound and image is somewhat off, the basic rhythm of the song still fits the movement on screen. This shows that while traditionally most film music is composed to accompany already shot sequences, the James Bond tunes can stand independently of the movies, which can be a helpful marketing strategy.

Brownjohn used the same concept of projecting onto a torso for the follow up film *Goldfinger*. The text was viewed separately from the images, exemplifying how the title design has moved from just a simple information tool to a powerful storytelling medium. The simplicity of the storytelling was the key to the success of this sequence. Brownjohn used the body of a girl painted in gold. He projected scenes with key plot points from the forthcoming film. This appeared to be a short and stylized version of the film condensed into a few minutes. The new Aston Martin was shown featuring all of the new gadgets and the revolving number plates. More importantly, all the characters were introduced by these images and text. Once again, like in *From Russia with Love*, all of this was done in camera without any laboratory work.

In 1965 Binder was asked to design the titles for the next bond film *Thunderball* (1965). It was shot entirely underwater in a tank at Pinewood studios in London. Some of these scenes were censored due to depictions of nudity. Starting with this film, Binder's titles for James Bond movies were elaborate filmic sequences rather than somewhat abstract moving graphics. While the previous opening credits for the Bond films were subtler in terms of reflecting the themes of sex and violence, Binder took a more direct

approach. In *Thunderball* he had women harpooned under water, and in *License to Kill* (1989) women were shot from gun barrels. Along these lines Binder went on to produce some of the most captivating and stimulating title designs for all the Bond films up until his death in 1991. At this point Klein took over the title design for the opening credits.

Klein's first title sequence in the Bond series *Goldeneye* is depicted as a lush fantasy in which the fall of communism is shown by silhouetted female figures smashing communist iconography. The three-minute sequence took three months to make. Klein says, "I wanted the titles to be symbolic as opposed to particular… dreamy and sexy and with a wry sense of humor in the Bond tradition" (qtd. in Purtell 43).

All of Klein's titles sequences, including the latest James Bond movie *Casino Royale* features similar imagery, combining abstract forms, silhouettes, and various icons. While most Bond movies start with the trademark gun barrel sequence, followed by either the opening credit sequence or an action packed pre-credit sequence, *Casino Royale* was the first Bond movie to start with a pre-credit sequence that tied into the gun barrel sequence, followed by the rest of the opening credits. *Casino Royale* is also the first Bond movie that does not incorporate female figures in the opening credits and instead uses the James Bond character as the central figure. In this respect, it does not give in to the voyeuristic male gaze and digresses from its earlier counterparts.

b. *Psycho*

Alfred Hitchcock collaborated with Bass for many of his film. Even though the title sequence for *Psycho* seems graphically simple, the synchronization of the image and sound is very powerful and effective. This sequence can be categorized under titles built

around animation and motion graphics. The fact that there was a cameraman (Paul Stoleroff) and an animation director (William Hurtz) involved in creating this short sequence shows the need for a team of people working in different capacities. Furthermore, Stephen Rebello records in *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* that out of the total cost of $806,947.55 to produce the film, the opening credit sequence cost about $21,000 (including $3,000 as Bass' salary). Considering that the average budget of a Hollywood film was about $2 million in those days, *Psycho* had a pretty low budget and the opening credit sequence was a relatively large expense.

Bass' title design for *Psycho* incorporates the theme of duality and hints at the aggression that surfaces later in the film. In this sequence, names form on the screen from horizontal bars, and then violently split. The splitting and the cutting of the image continue throughout this title sequence, which relies on the power of the line as a graphic element. The shape, thickness, direction, formation and length of a line can express a variety of moods. Although lines are abstract, they can be seen as angry, happy, quiet, exciting, nervous, romantic, or comedic. Usually, in contemporary Western cultures horizontal lines imply stability and lack of motion (such as a body lying at rest), whereas vertical and slanted lines show motion, excitement and turmoil (such as a body in motion). The lines in this sequence resemble structures like prison bars, city buildings, and sound waves, which bring forth added connotations.

It is haunting to see the horizontal and vertical bars sweeping across the screen in a manic, mirror motif at the beginning of the film. As Donald Spoto suggests in his book *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, the use of the mirror image contributes to the idea of a haunted double (317). In the movie, Norman has a split

personality since he takes on the character of his dead mother and turns into a psychopath. Marion is also split between stealing the money and doing the right thing. To emphasize this dichotomy, we see Marin holding the money in front of a mirror, although she is unable to face her own reflection. Besides the characters, the images of the film also support this duality. In many instances the space of the scene is split. For instance, in the opening shot a crane bisects the horizon of Phoenix. Later on, Marion's parked car is divided by a telephone pole. Also, in many instances, the doorframes split the rooms, positioning characters in separated spaces.

The use of sound is another element that is very conspicuous and effective in this sequence. Bernard Herrmann's score for a string orchestra compliments the staccato nature of this title sequence and reflects Norman Bates' fractured psyche. The piercing sounds used throughout the opening sequence are similar to the sound effects used in the famous shower sequence later in the movie. The lines cutting through the text is also reminiscent of the stabbing action. In this respect, the title sequence has great proleptic value as it foreshadows that things are going to turn ugly. The success of this opening credit sequences comes from its ability to offer a complex reading of the film and its themes before the film even begins. The stylistic and graphic elements combined with the material figures and actions allow this to happen in the opening sequence.

c. *Seven*

This opening sequence can be categorized under titles accompanied with a series of moving images. However, as Counts explains, "Cooper incorporated the computer to reconcile traditional and modern techniques. In doing so, he revitalized film industry

titles and redefined their visual style" (6). Cooper's concept of combining older techniques that require hands-on work with contemporary digital design shows that cutting edge title design can incorporate many different techniques.

Cooper was a creative director at R/GA at the time when he created the opening credit sequence for the psychological thriller *Seven.* He introduced the grunge aesthetic to graphic design through this title sequence. The fetishistic survey he portrays is a view of a serial killer, John Doe, assembling a diary documenting the murders he will execute during the film. Since the killer is not seen until about forty minutes into the movie, the titles serve to introduce the villain and help bridge that gap. However, the face of the villain is not revealed to maintain suspense. Myerson describes this sequence as follows:

> Cooper's celebrated opening titles for David Fincher's *Seven* sets the dark mood of the film with their jumpy, out-of-register graphics superimposed on fetishistic shots of a serial murderer's grubby paraphernalia. The normal practice of using a pin-register camera to prevent titles from 'weaving' against the background plates was deliberately avoided in order to exaggerate the out-of-kilter sense of menace. (316)

To achieve the degraded look of the footage, Cooper first hand-scratched the film stock with a needle – frame by frame. This gave the footage a raw and textural feel. Then he superimposed the jumpy looking text over shots of Doe's diary. The kinetic feel of the credits was achieved by jostling the camera as it filmed the words. The text was created with a hand-drawn alphabet, which draws attention to the physicality of the image-making process. With the scratching, blurring and double exposure, the letters disintegrate to the industrial rhythms of a remix of the song "Closer" by Nine Inch Nails.

This sequence captured the disturbed mind of a serial killer and set the tone for the entire film with its abrasive and stylized look.

While shooting this sequence Cooper admits that he had a hard time getting into the mind-set of a psychopath. He says, "I had some moral objections to using a shot where a razor blade is cutting the word God out of a dollar bill… But then I thought, John Doe would do it" (qtd. in Purtell 43). His confession reveals the amount of work put into credit sequences and once again shows that a deeper understanding of the film and its characters is necessary for the success of an opening credit sequence.

Cooper's other films include *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996), *Mission: Impossible* (1996), *Twister* (1996), *Flubber* (1997), *Sphere* (1998), *The Mummy* (1999), *Spider-man* and *Spider-man 2*. Even though these movies might not be cinematic classics, Cooper's work has impressed the insiders of the industry, as well as the audiences. Co-producer of *Spider-man* and *Spider-man 2*, Grant Curtis commented, "It's a unique blend of auteur and creative genius that makes his sequences memorable – but not at the expense of the film" (qtd. in Gibson 143).

d. *Catch Me If You Can*

In *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) the co-designers Olivier Kuntzel and Florence Deygas of Kuntzel + Deygas make use of a combination of modern and retro styles. As Deborah Allison points out, there is a resemblance between the opening sequence of *Catch Me if You Can* and *Pink Panther* titles. This resemblance is achieved through the combination of visual imagery with a Henry Mancini-like score of *Catch Me If You Can*. Since the film takes place in the 1960s, it is appropriate to reference the titling styles of

the era that is depicting. Accordingly, there are elements in this sequence that resemble Bass' early works as well. This was by no means the first use of a retro title sequence referencing its relation to earlier works. However, it is an important development that shows the growing self-awareness in the field of title design.

The whole opening credit sequence is an animation, which summarizes the plot. However, this is not obvious until a second viewing of the film, since the plot summary can only be appreciated after watching the whole movie. Therefore, the initial effect of watching this sequence is more about getting a feel of the restless and playful tone of the story that is about to follow. Allison argues, "it may indeed prepare the audience for the main narrative but at the same time it provides an almost entirely separate work that contributes, like trailers and advertisements, to the diversity of the programme" (7). This is part of the reason that makes this title sequence able to stand on its own as a successful example.

The sequence features a series of silhouetted designs within a brightly colored geometric plane. Silhouettes of the two main characters move fluidly across the two-dimensional screen and recreate the extended chase motif that takes place as part of the film's narrative. As the sequence moves from one location to the next (including an airport, a pool, a hospital, a library, and a wedding party) the color scheme keeps changing. As the two characters travel through these spaces, they disguise themselves and shift identities starting with a pilot. The chase sequence ends with the two characters sharing the same frame. However, the story remains open-ended in order to maintain the suspense of the actual film.

The Future of Credits

The importance of motion graphics has been rising and seems likely to continue its progress throughout the twenty-first century. The developing technologies are both reducing the cost of complex title designs and making it possible to have increased experimentation. In general, these developments lead to more creative works. With all these innovations and improvements, film credits are becoming closer to works of art. There is still no Academy Award for title design, but nevertheless, designers are getting more credit for their work and are recognized for their achievements. As Cooper suggests in the introduction of *Motion by Design*, the advances in title design are "making information an art in and of itself" (16).

Many graphic designers of our time support this view. Curran goes even further and suggests:

> The optical process moves closer to obsolescence with every advance in digital tools. As more designers do breakout work, respect and demand for good title design is beginning to rise in Hollywood. And as more and more designers like Geoff McFetridge (who designs film titles out of a one-person studio) throw industry convention out the window and discover new ways of working, the rules of the game can change as quickly as the flash of a frame of celluloid. (129)

However, although the use of special effects and motion graphics in title design have been increasing, it is unlikely that these practices will take over the industry completely in the near future. Considering that there are many filmmakers who want to achieve different goals at the beginning of their films, the mix of different styles used in different types movies is likely to remain.

Furthermore, as the field keeps getting creatively more competitive, imitation becomes an increasingly problematic issue. Curran calls this "The Hollywood plague of me-tooism… wherein clients want to repeat a solution that worked in the past for somebody else" (129). As post-production costs decrease, the technology to produce these types of title sequences is becoming more widespread and accessible. The complicated effects created by the pioneers of the industry start to get digitized and become more easily produced, and therefore more commonplace. A second-tier of designers, replicating the styles of others, start to emerge. These imitations devalue the creative and original work in the industry. As Boxer argues, "With desktop filmmaking on the horizon, the very notion of auteur title designers seems quaint. The writing of history beings when an era is ending" (9). According to her, film title design has already reached its heyday.

However, Boxer's take on this issue is very cynical. Title design might have hit a high point and it will be hard to top these great works, especially at a time when movie theaters are not filled to capacity and DVD sales are outweighing the box-office success of many films. Yet, considering that in the last fifty years there have been many title designers who have revitalized the industry with their creative achievements, it is likely that there will be more groundbreaking opening credit sequences in the future of cinema. Taking on a more optimistic point of view, Cooper states "a lot of the innovations in print and video have been slow to come to main titles, but I think that's going to change. When directors see that it's possible to have these wonderful openings to their movies, some of them are going to come to us to try it out" (qtd. in Lynch 58). This comment not only

suggests that there might be hope for the future of title design, but also shows that there is more work to be done in this field.

Having said that, it is likely to require more than a lucky amateur to create the next groundbreaking opening credit sequence. All title designers who have made a name for themselves in this industry have a good understanding of the film they are working on, as well as the filmmaker's vision. They combine this knowledge with their creative talent and a good understanding and competence of latest technologies, as well as traditional methods. So while the 'me-tooisms' of the industry are bringing down the status of title design, there is still room for improvement. With further advances in technology and increased experimentation, it is likely that the field will get more creative, leading the way for auteurs and elevating title design into an art form.

Conclusion

As Counts argues, “The main-title sequence – the opening credits – can be the most important moment in a film” (1). The film industry has taken about fifty years to realize the importance of the opening credit sequence and see that graphic art can be its helper in this area. Today the medium of the integrated film image with the title design as its centerpiece is an accepted part of graphic art and an important form of activity for leading graphic artists. Film title sequences have come to rival commercials and music videos as the leading indicator of contemporary visual style in motion graphics. With the advent of successful opening credit sequences, attention has been directed to this newly found form of art that has long been considered an afterthought. In this context, the opening credit sequence in film has come a long way in terms of establishing a new field for itself. It has also reminded the film industry that every component of a movie can be pertinent to the success of the work as a whole. This ongoing evolution and its noteworthy impact is a sign that the opening credit sequence needs to get the credit and the attention it deserves.

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