In this section we present a case study of title sequences in film and television programmes. We draw on the concepts we have explored in the preceding chapters on media language. You may find this chapter valuable in considering how you might approach work on the close textual analysis of moving images.

Title sequences offer an interesting and rewarding area of study in our reading of media texts for a number of different reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it is their role in establishing initial contact with the audience and signalling to them what is to follow that makes them worthy of consideration. An audience receives from a title sequence an indication of the content of the text they are about to consume. As we have seen in the section on genre (p. 53), audiences usually approach a text with certain expectations.

Title sequences play a significant role in both raising the expectations of the audience and indicating how likely it is that these expectations will be fulfilled. Title sequences also signal to the audience an indication of the tone of the text that is to follow. They may suggest that it is light-hearted or serious. In doing so they have a clear function in both preparing and positioning the audience by putting them in an appropriate frame of mind to consume the subsequent text. News programmes have music that is serious and important-sounding. Comedy programmes, on the other hand, employ a lighter, more flippant style of music.

Consider how music is used to indicate to an audience the nature of a text and its role in establishing the tone. Think of a situation where you have been in another room and heard the title music for a television programme. How does this impact on you?
Title sequences can also be compared to magazine covers or the front pages of newspapers. All of these have the function of attracting an audience to come and consume the product that is on offer. An effective title sequence on television will call out to or hail an audience, through such devices as music, and invite them to consume the text. This invitation usually indicates the pleasures that lie in store for the audience if they choose to partake.

Louis Althusser argued that this process of interpellation is important in preparing an audience for the text they are about to consume. Part of its function, he argued, was to position the reader to be receptive to the ideological function the text was about to perform.

The idea of repetition also needs to be taken into account when we consider the functioning of title sequences. On television, many texts form part of a series that recurs over a period of time. News bulletins, for example, have individual time slots each weekday. Typically, a programme such as Newsnight has its own title sequence signalling to the viewer the programme that is to follow.

**NOTEBOX**

In communist states in the Eastern bloc, solemn music was broadcast several days before the announcement of the death of an important political figure. Part of the function of this music was to prepare or position the audience in readiness for the national mourning that was expected to follow this news.

**KEY TERM**

**INTERPELLATION** The process by which a media text summons an audience in much the same way as a town crier would ring a bell and shout to summon an audience for an important announcement.

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**ACTIVITY**

Look at the title sequences for typical news bulletins broadcast by each of the terrestrial channels.

- What similarities do they have?
- In what ways are they different?
- What does this tell you about the style of news presentation that each adopts?
Similarly, serial programmes such as soaps, sitcoms and quiz shows all have title sequences that are immediately recognised by an audience. It is important to producers that these title sequences remain recognisable to the audience. Even programmes such as soaps, which have run over long periods of time, have maintained very similar title sequences in order to provide their audiences with the reassurance of instant recognition.

**NOTEBOX . . .**

When a new series of programmes is launched, it is interesting to consider how the title sequence, although clearly individual to that programme, is likely to rely on links to other title sequences to programmes of a similar genre.

The idea of recognition is obviously not an issue with television programmes that do not form part of a series or with feature films shown both at the cinema and at home. In these cases the title sequence has other functions to perform. Besides summoning the audience and setting the tone of what is to come, these title sequences often function as the opening of the narrative that is to unfold. In this way they are likely to present a series of enigmas that work to engage us with the narrative in a similar way to a headline on the front of a newspaper. We are teased with information that invites us to involve ourselves in the narrative and to consume the rest of the text. At the same time we are promised that, through consuming the text, the enigmas that are teasing us in the title sequence will be resolved as the narrative is unravelled.

**NOTEBOX . . .**

As the name suggests, a title sequence provides the audience with details of the title of the film or programme that they are about to watch. In addition, according to the particular genre of the text, it sometimes provides other information, such as details of the actors or stars, the production company and director/producer. A more detailed list of people who have contributed to the production process is usually given at the end. These are known as the end credits. Why do you think some people remain in the cinema to watch all the end credits?

When we undertake the analysis of a media text, it is always useful to have a checklist of the things we need to look for, similar to the worksheet given on p. 98. When we consider the title sequence of a television programme or film, it is important to keep in mind the function that the sequence has been designed to perform. For example, it may be a title sequence from a long-running series designed to remind the audience of a familiar programme. Alternatively you may be looking at a sequence for a film or a one-off television programme, which, as we have indicated, will work rather differently.
WORKSHEET FOR ANALYSING TITLE SEQUENCES

It is always useful to have any moving image text that you want to analyse available on video. This will enable you to watch it as many times as you wish. In addition you will be able to use the pause and slow-motion facilities on your video recorder to consider the framing of individual shots.

The following ideas may help you when you get started in your analysis of a title sequence:

- What sort of text is the sequence introducing? For example, a fictional/factual text?
- What tone is being set? Serious, light-hearted, flippant, or comic?
- What is the function of the text? Information; entertainment?
- What type of audience is being addressed? You might like to think in terms of age, gender, background, cultural experience.

Some further points to consider:

- Is the sequence live action or an animation? If the latter, why do you think this medium has been chosen?
- How has the sequence been edited? Short, fast-moving edits or long sequences? What is the effect of this?
- What does the soundtrack contribute to the sequence? You should consider use of music, voice-over and sound effects, for example.
- How long is the sequence? Is there a clear division between the end of the title sequence and the beginning of the text?
- What links does the sequence have to the text itself? How does it work as an introduction to the text? Is it, for example, an opening scene from the film or television programme?
- Is any iconography used that will be significant in the text to follow?
- How does the sequence link to other sequences introducing texts of the same genre?

CORONATION STREET

Coronation Street is the longest-running serial drama on television. It attracts an audience in the region of fifteen million viewers for each of its scheduled slots every week on ITV.

The title sequence for Coronation Street was revamped in January 2002. This was the fifth version of the title sequence in the show’s forty-two-year history. Despite the many
technical innovations in television production at the time of the revamp, it is interesting to note that the key features of the title sequence have remained very much the same as throughout the programme’s history.

Clearly the main function of the title sequence is to announce to viewers that a familiar programme is about to be broadcast, rather than to entice them to watch a new one. In fact, the sequence introducing Coronation Street (Figure 1.19) will be familiar to the majority of the population, even those who are not regularly part of the vast audience.

The sequence itself runs for approximately twenty seconds. It is preceded by an animation that uses familiar chocolate-coloured images of the street to advertise the sponsor of the programme, Cadbury. The opening shot of the sequence is a crane shot. It creates for us an interesting contrast, with the screen split from top to bottom into three parts. At the very top of the screen we see, in the distance, a block of 1960s high-rise flats. These are separated by an area of what looks to be parkland from the back-to-back terraced houses that are Coronation Street and its immediate neighbourhood, the fictional town of Weatherfield. The camera slowly pans across the terraces, with smoke rising occasionally from a chimney, as the title ‘Coronation Street’ fades up. As the camera pans, a car turns into a side street and as the camera comes to rest a milk float makes its way across the screen down Coronation Street itself. The street is recognisable from the corner shop and the garish stone-clad fascia of the Duckworths’ house at number 9.

Afficionados of the series may wonder how a street that is in fact a set built within the Granada Studios in Manchester can find its way into the back streets of a real Manchester suburb. Clearly in developing the new titles the producers have used computer-generated images to locate the ‘fictional’ set into the ‘real’ world.

The two types of housing shown in the opening shot are set in contrast. The brick-built terraces suggest an old-fashioned, close-knit, working-class community, while the two blocks carry with them the connotations of the alienation of impersonal life in the inner city, with all its incumbent social problems. This long shot from a high angle is important in establishing for us the inner-city context of the drama, with both its old and new architecture, as well as providing us with the name of the programme, which is overlaid on the image. On a connotational level there is a contrast between the lasting values and sense of an old-fashioned, close-knit, working-class community represented by the brick-built terraces and the decline of these same community values implicit in the images of the impersonal concrete tower blocks.

This establishing shot then dissolves into a ground-level shot of a road going under an arched bridge with a high brick wall to the right and a somewhat uninviting and unoccupied bench next to it. Through the frame of the bridge we can pick out more terraced houses, the glint of sunlight on one of them serving only to remind us of the greyness of the rest of the scene. Through the bridge a group of young boys run across the otherwise deserted street with their football. The whole scene is dominated by the bricks; the grey bricks of the arched bridge, the high brick wall and the brick-built houses beyond. There is a solidity and permanence about this gloomy environment from which the camera moves gently, almost imperceptibly, back.
As this scene dissolves into the next, the titles fade down. The next scene depicts a cobbled pathway, or ginnel, between the backs of the terraced houses, again shot from above. These are the characters’ back yards, where they hang their washing and put rubbish in the bins. A black cat confronts a neighbouring feline along a wall between two houses and a blue van drives past the bottom of the ginnel. The scene then dissolves to a high-level shot above the roofs of the houses as two chimney pots fill half the screen. We see for the first time that Coronation Street is a street of contrasts; on one side Victorian terraces and on the other side bijou modern residences with token front gardens filled with greenery. We also notice that the street is one of the few remaining cobbled streets. Our eye also catches a denim-clad character walking away from the camera to the end of the street. This then dissolves to a ground-level shot of the street, showing the Rover’s Return pub on the left of the screen with a board outside advertising its special deals. The director’s name appears on the dissolve and as we look down the street a Greater Manchester tram runs across the viaduct at the top of the screen, left to right, before the action cuts to the first scene of the evening’s episode. The movement within each shot suggests that the mise-en-scène has been carefully orchestrated to suggest real-life activity going on within the static townscape.

The music that acts as a soundtrack to these titles is an instantly recognisable tune associated with Coronation Street throughout the course of its history. The brass instrument playing in a minor key provides a plaintive accompaniment to the images on screen. The association of brass instruments with northern industrial life is clearly an element contributing to the effectiveness of the title sequence. Allied to the images, it presents us with a sense of timeless northern working-class life with its connotations of a down-to-earth community in which the lives of people are played out against a backdrop of industrial grime and squalor.

There are a great number of similarities between the new title sequence and those that preceded it. It remains a strong affirmation of the idea of community in what many would see as a rather nostalgic and even outmoded way. There has clearly been some attempt to enhance the sense of realism through firmly locating ‘Weatherfield’ within the framework of Greater Manchester. This is achieved first through the computer manipulation of the images to place this fictional stage alongside its real-life counterparts and, second, by the presence of the tram speeding across the bottom of the street, binding the programme into the wider context of Manchester and northern culture.

It is worth noting that although the tram runs past the bottom of the street, there seems to have been little protest or even comment from the street’s residents, who collectively rose in spontaneous protest when the local council sent the boys from the blackstuff to tarmac over their precious cobbles.

**Activity...**

Look carefully at a video of the title sequence for Coronation Street.

- Why do you think there are so few people featured in any of the shots?
- Why do you think dissolves have been used as transitions between each shot?
Figure 1.19  Coronation Street, opening shots. Source © Granada Television, courtesy of Pinewood Studios.
The title sequence to Neighbours (Figure 1.20) makes an interesting contrast to that of Coronation Street. Neighbours is an Australian-produced soap, broadcast on BBC One at lunchtime each weekday and repeated early evening. The early-evening time slot and the preponderance of characters in their teens and early twenties have made it popular with a young audience. In fact the slot it occupies in the early evening immediately follows the end of children’s television.

The programme is based on a community who live in a suburban street of an Australian city. Unlike Coronation Street, in which no one appears in the title sequence, Neighbours uses its opening credits to introduce all the major characters currently featuring in the serial.

The title sequence opens with a couple of ‘dramatic’ sequences from recent episodes of the soap. Each presents the audience with an unresolved narrative conflict involving characters who appear in the episode that follows. Each is a narrative enigma designed both to tease and remind the audience, and to ensure their interest in the current episode, which promises some development or even resolution of the conflicts.

Accompanying this opening is the instantly recognisable Neighbours theme tune. The melody, which is much more upbeat and jolly than the plaintive tones of Coronation Street, is at this stage an instrumental version of the well-known melody.

The reprise sequence runs for around thirty seconds before cutting to a montage of approximately twenty seconds that introduces us to the characters at play. The montage is interesting because of the way in which it employs a split-screen technique to introduce a group of central characters currently in the series. These short scenes are set outdoors, where, in contrast to the grim urban landscape of Coronation Street, the bright sunshine of Australia beats down on the dramatis personae as they relax on the lawn in family and domestic groups. The use of the split-screen technique, particularly effective in widescreen format, allows the left-hand two-thirds of the screen to be used primarily for long shots of the groups of characters, while the right-hand side picks up on close-ups of individual characters and objects in the garden such as the lawn sprinkler. The audience find themselves trying to locate the close-ups in relation to the broader picture framed opposite, rather like fitting in a jigsaw piece.

The music that accompanies this sequence contains lyrics that celebrate and idealise the virtues of neighbourliness, suggesting that Neighbours can ‘become good friends’. Frequently, however, the subsequent narratives suggest that this is not always the case, despite the insistence that everybody needs good neighbours, a sentiment that clearly seeks to universalise the theme.
As the title comes to an end the title sequence offers us the name of the location by way of a street sign that we never see in its entirety, again offering a piece of a jigsaw that we are invited to fit together. As the title sequence draws to an end the title ‘Neighbours’ appears on the screen. It is interesting to note that both Neighbours and Coronation Street end by emphasising the setting of the drama and with it the connotations of communities and the people who live in them.

Figure 1.20 Neighbours, title sequence. Source: © Pearson Television.
As we have noted previously, title sequences for films and one-off television programmes function differently from those for a television series. The latter work through a form of interpellation which relies on audience familiarity and recognition. The title sequence of a feature film will almost certainly be new to the audience when they encounter it. It therefore needs to perform several important functions, not the least of which is to gain and hold the attention of the audience. This is especially true when a film is being shown domestically rather than at the cinema. When we watch a film at home, even by means of a rented video, it has to compete not only with other choices of media consumption (other television programmes, radio, computer games), but also with a multitude of distractions, such as the telephone or unexpected visitors. The title sequence of a film, however, does much more than grab the attention of the audience. It is an important signalling device to show us what we can expect from the text we are about to consume.

**TAXI DRIVER**

*Taxi Driver* is arguably one of the most important films of the last century. Released in 1976, it is director Martin Scorsese’s study of an obsessive loner, alienated from society by his experiences in the Vietnam War. He finds work as the eponymous taxi driver, and the opening to the movie provides the audience with an insight into the man who is to be the focus of attention in the action that follows (see Figure 1.21).

The opening shot is a cloud of steam emerging from a New York street that fills the screen. From the steam emerges a yellow cab, which drives in slow motion towards us and across our field of vision, in close-up, leaving us with the screen again filled with the steam. Both the steam from the street and the yellow cab are powerful, almost indexical, images of New York. The image is accompanied by a discordant soundtrack of percussion instruments, which adds to the eerie nature of what we see on the screen. The title credits, in the same yellow as the taxi, appear on screen against the backdrop...
of the white steam and accompanied initially by the discordant music, which itself gradually develops a clearer melody, until the screen dissolves into an extreme close-up image of Travis Bickle's (Robert De Niro's) face bathed in a red light, as his eyes scan across the screen. The music has now become a mellow-sounding and harmonious saxophone solo. The scene then dissolves into a point-of-view shot through the windscreen of the cab.

The image through the screen is blurred by rain on the windscreen itself. Even when the wipers clear the screen, the image remains distorted and unworldly as we try to pick out the New York night-time street scene with its garish lighting and ghostly figures. As the scene dissolves into a clearer and closer shot of people crossing the road in front of the cab, the music again shifts from melodious sax to discordant percussion. The figures crossing the road are shrouded in the steam and bathed in the same red light, giving them the appearance of creatures of another world, perhaps even some kind of hell. The image again dissolves to an extreme close-up of Bickle's face as his eyes pan across the screen. Again his face is coloured by the same red light that pervades the night-time street. Finally the image dissolves into the dense white steam that again fills the screen, as the music hovers between the melody of the saxophone and the discordant sound of the percussion.

This opening sequence runs for a little over a minute and a half before dissolving into a shot following Travis Bickle into an interview for a taxi-driving job. On a denotational level we can read the sequence as a man driving a taxi at night through the streets of New York, On a connotational level, however, this title sequence is rich in themes and

\textbf{Figure 1.21} \textit{Taxi Driver (1976). Source: Kobal Collection © Columbia.}
ideas that prepare the audience for much of what is to follow in the film. There are a number of images in which what we see on screen is blurred or distorted, for example the clouds of steam and the rain on the windscreen. Psychologically, Travis Bickle is a man who finds it hard to see the world clearly, at least from a moral perspective. His experiences in Vietnam have clouded his judgement. The blurred images on the screen can be read as a metaphor for the confusion that exists inside his head. Similarly the recurrence of the colour red, on two occasions on Bickle’s face, suggests the anger that is pent up inside him – an anger that ultimately finds its release in a bloodbath, when Bickle decides to play the avenging angel. The music’s movement between harmony and discord again suggests the volatile state of Bickle’s mind, moving between controlled calmness and sudden bursts of anger.

The sequence creates a sense of weirdness: familiar images are filmed in such a way as to seem dislocated or out of context. The effect is achieved in several ways, such as the use of slow motion and the garish colours. The sequence seems to have been constructed specifically to suggest the hero’s emotional and psychological state as well as to introduce us to the nature of his job and the environment in which he works.

NOTEBOX . . .

The reason that Robert De Niro’s eyes move so slowly and deliberately across the screen is that the camera was over-cranked in order to shoot the scene in slow motion to create this particular effect that the director wanted.

FURTHER WORK . . .

*Taxi Driver* is a rich and complex film that rewards detailed study and analysis. This is not the case with many films. It is, however, still a useful and worthwhile process to look closely at the opening of a film or television programme to identify:

- how it has been constructed
- why it was done in that way
- how this affects the audience’s reading of the film.
PART 2: MEDIA AUDIENCES

In Part 2 we look at:

- how audiences are made up
- the ways in which audiences have changed over time and how our engagement with media forms is patterned and determined
- ‘passive’ and ‘active’ views of the audience
- some of the issues around the ‘effects’ debate
- some of the research that has been carried out on audience behaviour
- terms such as ‘hypodermic needle theory’, ‘uses and gratifications’, ‘mode of address’ and ‘situated culture’.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF AUDIENCE

In one sense everyone is part of the audience in that we are all, to some degree or another, exposed to media texts. However, it can sometimes be difficult to stand back and think about the different ways in which our daily lives interact with the media. It is well worth considering the extent to which, in an average day, we will be part of many different audiences for a wide range of media. (The activity on p. 3 of the introduction will help you classify your exposure to different media forms.) This may include being part of a radio audience in the morning as we get ready for college or work, watching breakfast television or reading the newspaper, listening to music on an MP3 player, surfing the Internet, or glimpsing advertising hoardings as we travel to school or work.

Throughout the day we will be, either consciously or unconsciously, exposed to different media products – becoming part of many different types of audience. As we mentioned in the introduction, it may be as part of an audience of over fourteen million people all watching the same episode of *EastEnders* at the same time. It may be as part of an audience sitting alone in their cars listening to the same radio show, or as one of 200 people watching a film in a cinema. It can also be through the more personal and private consumption of newspapers, either local or national, or
magnets, or through the one-to-one communication of the Internet. We may work in an environment in which a radio is on in the background, or somewhere – for example a hospital or a shop – that has its own radio station.

WHY ARE AUDIENCES IMPORTANT?

There are several reasons why audiences are important. The first is perhaps the most obvious.

- Without an audience, why would anyone create a media text? What is the point of a film that no one sees?
- Audience size and reaction are often seen as a way of measuring the success (or otherwise) of a media product. One of the reasons why we say that the Sun newspaper is successful is because it sells over three million copies a day and is read by nearly twelve million people.
- Audiences who buy media texts are providing income for the media companies which produce them.
- Much of the media available to us, however, is free or subsidised; it is financed by advertising, and the advertisers want to know that they are getting value for money.
- In other words, they want to know which, and how many, people are seeing their advertisements.
- As the media become more central to our lives, so many people want to know how we use the media, what we understand of what we consume, and the effects that the media have on our lives.

HOW HAVE AUDIENCES CHANGED?

Concerns about the size and impact of the media on audiences, the ‘effectiveness’ of advertising, and how audiences interrelate with the media have been with us since the development of a ‘mass’ audience at the beginning of the twentieth century.

We know that the media are constantly changing, and this means that audiences, too, must be changing, partly as a result of the changes in media technology but also because of the changes in the way we live our lives and because we as individuals change. Consider Figure 2.1; it shows cinema audiences in the 1950s wearing special glasses to watch such films as *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Creatures From the Black Lagoon* (1954), which were made with special 3D effects that made the monsters seem to come out of the screen to attack the audience. (If you study the figure closely you may notice that the audience is predominantly male and that there appears to be one man not wearing special 3D glasses.) Although this was seen as a gimmick in the 1950s and the films quickly disappeared, there has been a reappearance of 3D effects in recent years, especially through the growth of IMAX cinemas, where, once again, audiences wearing special glasses can see characters and objects appearing to fly around in space in front of them.