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Chapter ?

Title Sequences for Contemporary Television Serials¹

Annette Davison

People want, when they're in the next room, then they hear that song, they know the show is on.

HBO's advice to David Chase, creator of *The Sopranos*²

All you need is the opening chords, or the image of the tree and it's so evocative, people immediately know where you are or what you're talking about.

Alan Poul, executive producer, *Six Feet Under*³

In May 2010, a lead story in *New York* magazine focused on television: "Televisonaries: An Extraordinary TV Season, and the Rules that Shaped It."⁴ Title sequences ranked among the topics it covered, and the sequence for Showtime's *Dexter* was presented as the exemplar. A brief commentary summarized how the sequence was produced, and the article presented a series of frame stills from the sequence alongside extracts of Rolfe Kent's music score in reduction (somewhat unusually for mainstream print media). The Blogosphere too has been in a state of excitement over television title sequences in recent years. Many sites list favorite examples of the genre and engage in detailed discussions of the music, the visuals, and their audiovisual interactions.⁵ Let me lay my cards on the table now: I agree with these critics. In recent years the main title sequences for high-production-value television serials, particularly those developed for broadcast on premium cable channels, have become fascinating

progenitors of new audiovisual aesthetics. Such sequences have undoubtedly been influenced by developments in music video and commercials. The title sequence is today a vital tool in generating and conveying brand identity.⁶

In this chapter I focus on the main title sequences for two recent serials commissioned by the influential North American premium cable channel, Home Box Office, aka HBO: *The Sopranos* (1997–2007) and *Six Feet Under* (2001–05). My interest lies in the relationship between the institutional context of these serials and the aesthetic character of their main title sequences. The two shows' title sequences are utterly different from each other in terms of their genesis and aesthetic character, but they are complementary in other ways, not least in the sense that like the signature music for any series, both must satisfy the prospective viewer while also remaining interesting to the returning viewer and fan. Both sequences ran unchanged for five or more seasons.⁷

Defining functions and characteristics

An opening title and/or credits sequence accomplishes several tasks simultaneously. Perhaps most tangible among these is to convey serial- and episode-specific information through text, most often including the show's title, the names of key cast members and creative personnel, and in some cases an episode title. Full credits are usually reserved for the end of a show—where interesting developments are also occurring of late. Both *The Sopranos* and, more recently, *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007–) use a different music track for their end credits each week, for example. Do such changes increase the interpretive space for viewers?

Title sequences pitch, or make desirable, the show that follows. As a result, signifiers that suggest the show's genre are often incorporated.⁸ Functioning as a trailer for the coming attraction, they seek to convert the distracted potential viewer into a repeat viewer/consumer, and use arresting images and notable music to achieve this.⁹ Simon Frith suggests that in

order to be televisual, “music must not only be visualised but given a sense of occasion. Television address — as a matter of both voice and setting — means inviting audiences to be part of something out there (while staying in their living rooms).”¹⁰

The music itself in title sequences acts to draw in distracted viewers, indicating that a particular show is starting. It functions as an auditory cue, a boundary in the “flow” of television’s continuous programming, particularly for potential viewers who are not physically in sight of the screen.¹¹ Indeed, as commentators such as John Ellis, Rick Altman, and Kevin Donnelly suggest, we “listen to television sometimes more than we watch it. [...] [It] tends to have sound cues that we can follow when our attention is drawn elsewhere. [...] [We] can glance away from the television only to be brought back by sounds that appear to signal action, excitement or interest.”¹² In this sense, title music acts as “curtain music,” signaling the start of a show, and the end of the commercials or other program trailers.

Title sequences also enable viewers to ready themselves for the move to a period of focus and engagement with a show. Given that many serials are originally broadcast in a weekly pattern (same day/time each week), such preparations may also become ritualized, born of anticipation and excitement for a planned period of escapism and/or engagement. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that for many viewers a title sequence is part of this ritualized experience. It signifies the return of the familiar along with the novel, favorite characters in new situations and developing story arcs. Title music may thus encourage the regular returning viewer to undertake certain behaviors: complete chores, prepare refreshments, end conversations, and/or sit and watch.

Viewers may well remain distracted today, but with the advent of digitization they are offered a variety of options for content delivery; in other words, they can determine where, when, and how they view that content. Thus, while a proportion of television’s audiences may still receive content via the set that plays continuously in the corner of the room, others

watch differently. There has been a growth in services offered “on demand” by certain channels and by cable/satellite distributors, for example, offering opportunities for the selection and downloading of content, viewable via a range of devices: television sets, computers, and hand-held devices such as tablets and mobile phones. Contemporary personal video recorders (PVRs) enhance the capabilities of the much earlier video cassette recorders (VCRs): viewers may set them to record an entire series at the push of a button; some PVRs can be programmed to record what the machine *judges* the viewer may wish to watch, given his/her previous consumer behavior. A growing number of viewers watch serials via box sets of complete seasons, previously on VHS video, now on DVD. Such modes of delivery enable (indeed, perhaps encourage) more intense viewing patterns than the original serials’ weekly transmissions allow, but which mirror the marathon (“weekender”) season re-runs that often precede the first broadcasting of a new season which digital/satellite multiplexing make possible.¹³ And these are just some of the legal options for viewing television content.

Television title sequences are short. The two I explore here are among the longest, clocking in at ninety seconds each. In terms of other formats, they are most like audio-visual commercials or compressed music videos and are similarly promotional: they are “barkers” for the show that follows. In his study of the television soap opera *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981–89), Jostein Gripsrud points out that the compressed character of title sequences generates the “abundance, energy, and intensity of experience” highlighted by Richard Dyer in his argument that “light entertainment presents, rather than re-presents, utopia.”¹⁴ *Dynasty*’s theme music, writes Gripsrud, provides

formal coherence, a degree of semantic clarification, and “narrative” progress and closure to the quite disparate, “poetic” visual montage, attempting to set or guide the overall mood of the viewing experience.¹⁵

The same certainly holds for contemporary title sequences, including those of *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*. However, older shows' title sequences tend also to emphasize the legibility of signifiers and often display a lack of subtlety; as Gripsrud states, the *Dynasty* titles present "A strong, almost aggressive announcement of quite clear-cut pleasures."¹⁶ I would argue that the similarities between the sequences discussed below and the *Dynasty* sequence(s) end here. To understand the context of these differences, we need to explore the place of these serials within the contemporary commercial television market.

Context

Rogers, Epstein and Reeves (2002) present a history of commercial television marketing marked by three distinct phases: TV1 (c. 1948–75), TV2 (c. 1975–95) and TV3 (1995–). In the first of these, commercial television channels had as their goal to gain large numbers of viewers, any viewers, casual viewers; income from advertisers was reliant on raw ratings statistics. In the second phase, the income received from advertisers depended on the delivery of particular types of viewers in terms of audience demographics. With this move to a desire for *quality* demographics, content innovations, such as the blurring of genre boundaries and the development of "noteworthy and notorious programming," enabled and indeed encouraged the development of a new kind of viewer experience, "avid fanship."¹⁷ Such fanship has been described as involving "a level of quasi-religious engagement with television that may involve taping and archiving episodes, purchasing ancillary merchandise, and interacting with other fans in online discussion groups."¹⁸ The third phase is marked by an important change in economic terms: the key revenue stream for premium cable/satellite channels, pay TV, comes from the monthly subscriptions paid by viewers. This change represents a shift from second-order to first-order commodity relations; that is, viewers pay

directly for content they want to watch, rather than being delivered to advertisers, who in turn fund the channels of distribution that commission the shows. The change thus also drives content and affects consumer behavior.¹⁹

In order to provide “‘monthly audience appeal’ to as broad a subscriber base as possible,” premium cable services like HBO need to provide a wide range of exclusive content.²⁰ HBO has sought to develop high-production-value, original drama serials since the combined threat of the VCR and cheap movie rentals first appeared. Since potential viewers cannot easily sample shows that are available only by means of subscription packages, however, the premium cable channels need to create a “buzz” around their products to persuade potential consumers to subscribe.

Rogers, Epstein and Reeves argue that premium cable channels must establish a strong brand identity to set themselves apart from competition both in the ad-driven world of commercial television and their direct competitors in pay TV.²¹ Indeed, as technology and the television industry in North America have changed over the last five years, brand identity may well now be the key to success in this TV3 phase.²² Home Box Office has a distinctive brand identity, as encapsulated by a name that attempts to synthesize the cinematic and the domestic. The cinematic in HBO’s fare, and discourse about it, takes a variety of forms: it includes an emphasis on auteurism, more creative freedom and higher budgets and than are usually the case in production for television, and the use of production team members drawn from filmmaking, such as writers, directors, cinematographers, and actors.²³ In addition, HBO provides “programming free of commercial interruption and uncontaminated by the demands of advertisers,” and is “not subject to government and industry restrictions on profanity, sexuality, and violence.”²⁴ This lack of censorship means that the channel can develop content other channels cannot. Indeed, it has become a leader in adult-oriented content on television, particularly in terms of producing exclusive original programming.²⁵

HBO has been developing a brand identity built on content that exploits violence, sexuality, profanity, and the macabre since the mid-1980s, but for Rogers, Epstein and Reeves, it was only with *The Sopranos* that the channel found a show that represented this brand identity entirely successfully.²⁶ *The Sopranos* takes the staples of the channel's emphases, and places them in a context "where they all work together to become a unique and distinctive product".²⁷ In addition, the show's combination of serial and episodic elements "rewards avid fans without alienating casual viewers".²⁸ The show's season is shorter than many on broadcast networks--usually around thirteen episodes; more time, attention to detail, and money are devoted to individual episodes, resulting in higher production values. The show's buzz is kept alive in the hiatuses between seasons that result from these shorter seasons by ancillary content, web content, and marathon re-runs.²⁹

Title sequences enable these shows — and, by extension, HBO — to present their brand identity with intensity in a highly compressed time frame. The most successful not only tie appropriate music to a show, prompt viewers' expectations and persuade them to buy into the serial. They also visualize the selected music in a productive manner, matching the "values" projected by the audio-visual complex to those of the serial in holistic terms, and in this way assist the generation of a strong brand identity. Earlier examples of this strategy, which I suggest were the exception and not yet the rule, might include the sitcom *Taxi* (ABC and NBC, 1978–83) with title music by Bob James, and the David Lynch and Mark Frost serial *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990–91), with title music by Angelo Badalamenti.

The audio-visual in main title sequences

Scholars have attempted to analyze the interaction of sound, music and visuals in detail in recent years. This work has focused particularly on film music and music videos, but has also resulted in more specifically music-led studies of the analysis of musical meaning, and of

meaning in musical multimedia. Claudia Gorbman introduced the idea of “mutual implication” between music and images, taking scholarly dialogue an essential step forward in this process.³⁰ As an analytical tool, the notion allows the relationship between music and visuals to be understood as dynamic and processual, rather than static or fixed, and enables a move away from the long-used terminology of parallel vs. counterpoint, which inherently assumed the primacy of the image.³¹ In *Analyzing Musical Multimedia*, Nicholas Cook develops Gorbman’s notion, essentially by breaking the term down further. Building on the “enabling similarity” that Lakoff and Johnson see as a precondition of metaphorical association, Cook advocates submitting music/image relationships to a two-stage test process. The first explores the character of their similarity, the second, the character of their difference. A key aim for Cook is to enable the analyst to approach multimedia works free from “unconscious *a priori* assumptions.”³² He calls on media analysis to a) invert any medium-specific hierarchies that appear to prioritize one medium over another, b) seek out “gaps” — the absence of closure — since such gaps may not be left in all media,³³ and c) search for significant distributions of oppositions across media (“distributional analysis”³⁴). The analyst should problematize the comparison of media, and work to discover functional aspects that may involve more than one medium, such as rhythm.

A handful of scholars have produced analyses of television title sequences, among them musicologist Lawrence Kramer, who describes them as “the television equivalent of lyric poetry”.³⁵ Kramer’s analyses of the title sequences for *NYPD Blue* (ABC, 1993–2005) and *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993–2002) conclude a pair of book chapters concerned with musical meaning and mixed media. In analytical terms, his discussion of the generation of semantics in mixed media can usefully be read with the notion of “mutual implication” in mind:

musical meaning in mixed media is experienced in inverted form; it runs on a loop. The music seems to emit a meaning that it actually returns, and what it returns, it enriches and transforms. [...] as soon as meaning effectively runs from the imagetext to music along the semantic loop, the music seems to convey that meaning to and through the imagetext in preconceptual, prerepresentational form. [...]

This helps explain how and why the music-imagetext relationship may be complex, nuanced, ironic, ambiguous, and so on. It is not a simple question of matching meaning to music, like fabric swatches, but of meshing the two together and rearticulating both.³⁶

Kramer highlights music's promiscuity in the way it actively seeks mixture, in contrast to text and images, which are simply "amenable" to it. Yet music's attempt to mix with everything becomes a failure to "properly mix with anything."³⁷ There is a "remainder."³⁸ The remainder comes to our attention when the "fit" between music and imagetext appears "questionable," thus pushing the notion of mixture itself to the fore.³⁹ In this respect, Kramer's "remainder" is related to Cook's "gap."

Turning to television title sequences, Kramer highlights that the format tends toward "encapsulating the fantasies underlying the shows' narrative formulas without the need to rationalize them or bring them to closure."⁴⁰ True, though I suspect that if a title sequence *were* to "rationalize [...] or bring [...] to closure" a show's narrative formula, there would be little need to watch the show itself. Title sequences present a "promise" of what is to follow⁴¹, but just enough to tantalize, inviting potential viewers to watch the show for possible answers. Indeed, with both of the title sequences he analyzes, Kramer found that

“the visuals tend toward a narrative that the music tends to repudiate.”⁴² In this way, a door is left open for the viewer...

The Sopranos

The title sequence for *The Sopranos* was created in-house by the show’s production team, who selected the music after the visuals were shot and edited together to form an impressionistic montage of a car journey. The sequence took a day and half to shoot, and was filmed from the interior of a car driven by Tony Soprano, the serial’s protagonist.⁴³ The movement and shifting focus of the camera imply subjectivity: the images approximate the view of a person sitting alongside Tony, watching what happens. In this way the title sequence prefigures the privileged position the audience is offered in *The Sopranos*. Indeed, the show’s pilot begins with Tony’s first visit to his therapist, and we are privy to the therapeutic session, the most private of exchanges. This conceit underpins all of the show’s six seasons, and brief shots of Tony reflected in the car’s rear-view mirror in the opening titles presage it, in presenting a visualization of the idea of self-analysis.⁴⁴ Tony is alone in the car, however, and as the show’s seasons unfold we may also understand the sequence’s image of a lone driver to encapsulate Tony’s loneliness.

The title sequence presents its own brief narrative--the journey, a frequent topos in recent title sequences.⁴⁵ Title sequences also operate as metaphorical journeys in themselves, of course, transporting the viewer into the world of the show. With *The Sopranos*, this “real” journey serves as our introduction to Tony and to the serial’s location and themes. Rather than featuring this “alpha male” directly, the sequence gradually reveals Tony’s limbs, then his face, phallic cigar, and body. The many shots of New Jersey taken from the car are intercut with these mysterious, fragmented shots of Tony, which comprise almost one in four

of the sequence's sixty shots. Characterization remains enigmatic, and thus viewers are obliged to watch the show to find out more.⁴⁶

The segment contains no static shots. The theme of driving is emphasized in the repetition of familiar signs of roads (such as white painted lines, metal barriers, and arrows), and by the massive letters painted on the side of an industrial storage tank that tell Tony to "Drive Safely." Indeed, the text of the credits behaves as an abstracted form of traffic in itself: the credits dash on screen from the left, halt, then rush offscreen to the right. The rhythm of this "action" is synchronized with the meter of the music: against a resolute yet unhurried tempo of around 88–90 beats per minute, the credits are all held mid-screen for around three beats, while the fourth beat covers entry and exit. Similarly, a number of shots and shot-sequences create rhythmic interest via their interrelation with the sequence's music: as happens with the images of separate then converging white lines, and the rhythms of occasional graphic matches and contrasts between shots through the sequence.⁴⁷

The sequence reflects the variety of New Jersey's urban, suburban, industrial and semi-rural landscapes that Tony passes through on his drive. The locations filmed are all real, with the exception of Satriale's Pork Store, though even this fictional location was created in a real-world site and retained throughout production.⁴⁸ Fans of the show have posted online lists of the possible locations featured in the sequence, inviting visitors to their sites to add to or correct this collective knowledge.⁴⁹ The identification of the music heard in each episode also became a locus of fan activity during the show's run, as the show's end credits do not include details of the music, only the name of the music editor, Kathryn Dayak.⁵⁰

Most shots in the sequence are around a second in duration. The longest ones focus on the approach of the car to the toll lanes for the New Jersey Turnpike and Tony grabbing a ticket (at seven and three seconds respectively), then the final shots that lead up the swooping curve of the driveway to the house, where Tony parks and leaves the car (at two, four, and

four seconds). It is partly through their extended duration that these moments seem to offer us insight into Tony's character — his aggressive snatch at the ticket implies impatience, for example —but he remains inscrutable. Mobile camera work during the lengthiest shot diverts attention from its duration, and allows time to read the text: “New Jersey Turnpike”.

The sequence uses the song “Woke Up This Morning” by London-based band Alabama 3 (called A3 in the USA). It was originally written about a woman who took revenge on her husband after more than twenty years of abuse. David Chase, the serial's creator, had heard the track on the radio some six months earlier, but only when it was placed against the edited sequence did particular lyrics begin to resonate.⁵¹ The mix of the song used, the Chosen One mix, has been edited to present a coherent structure in terms of the song, which in turn also forms the shape and dynamic of the visual sequence.⁵²

The edited mix of the song is marked by static harmony (alternating between I and IV) established by the vocal and chords played on a Hammond organ (or, synthesizer with a Hammond organ sound); thus, the song's harmony presents little sense of momentum. The song repeats the harmonic sequence throughout, twice in each verse, once in the chorus. The instrumentation is a little more unusual. On one hand it is organized around signifiers of gospel music and the blues, with harmonica, tambourine, the bass vocals of Larry Love, and the sampled voice of Howlin' Wolf, with a gospel chorus added in the refrains. On the other, it incorporates a more eclectic sound world, with trip-hop glitches that invoke the white noise of television sets, latin woodblocks, a pitched drum pad, analog synth, and distorted electric guitar interjections.

The sound intensifies as the song progresses; gradually it accumulates more instruments, textures, and figures, creating interest at formal boundaries. Structural climaxes in the song are not marked by syncretic hit points, however. On repeated listening, the edited mix yields an effect of a strangely delicate intricacy: it sounds busy all the time, but it

is also able to build to a climax despite the static harmony. *The Sopranos*' title sequence exudes a steady, controlled sense of continuity that climaxes with the final chorus and the gestures of closure in the coda, heard simultaneously with the shots of longer duration at the end of the sequence. The sequence has an ominous, brooding feel overall. The harmonically-static-yet-accumulative character of the music is primary in this, as is the repetition of certain lyrics, particularly when Love joins the gospel choir in singing the lyrics to the final chorus.⁵³ The word "gun" is emphasized here, and pre-empts the appearance of the gun as the letter *r* in the title card that follows, its typography an homage to the titles of the gangster movies *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972) and *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1990) frequently referenced in the show.

More abstract resonances also contribute to a match between music and visuals in the sequence, with notions of "authenticity," for example, which also connect with the brand values of the show in more holistic terms and, by extension, with HBO's adult programming. Chase's conception for the title sequence was an attempt to make clear that the show's representation of the mafia would be based in New Jersey, rather than in its more familiar mythic association with New York City. Certain cast members reputedly have connections to the mafia.⁵⁴ Visually, authenticity is performed in the documentary-style filming of the title sequence and use of real-world locations. Musically, references to the blues are key to such resonances. Additionally, Alabama 3/A3 has a claim on "authenticity" as a touring rock 'n' roll band. They don't currently enjoy mainstream success beyond the use of this track, but they have a loyal and sizeable fan base, built from eccentric and energetic live performances.⁵⁵ The casting of guitarist Steven Van Zandt as Silvio Dante, Tony's consigliere, adds a further blues/rock inflection for some viewers; a founding member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, Van Zandt is also a songwriter and producer, and he receives a text credit in the sequence.

On first viewing, however, Tony's drive out to the suburbs is incongruous with the music. Only with the serial's weekly return and the viewer's increasing familiarity with the show's characters and plot is this incongruity replaced by recognition of the sequence's resonance in relation to Tony. On one hand, he is a powerful mob boss; on the other, he is lonely and depressive and suffers from panic attacks. He is so concerned with his own identity that he seeks therapy. The serial emphasizes Tony as everyman: despite his connections, he has to pay the Turnpike toll just like everyone else.⁵⁶

The title sequence for *The Sopranos* doesn't just generate a strong brand identity. Through its gapped quality, the presence of "remainders," it also encourages the engagement and/or interpretation of the viewer, whether new or returning. Indeed, many such recent sequences function as little mysteries that actively elicit a response — a response that may indeed change over the course of a viewer's relationship with the serial. Digital Kitchen's title sequence for *Six Feet Under* is just as successful at presenting the show's brand identity as that for *The Sopranos*, and also offers an invitation to viewers, though this happens in an utterly different way.

Six Feet Under

Six Feet Under was the first major drama serial launched by HBO after *The Sopranos*, and like *The Sopranos* it is a family drama that features sex, violent death, and the macabre, though these elements are contextualized rather differently. The show was created and produced by Alan Ball, who wrote and co-produced the film *American Beauty* (1999), and focuses on a family of undertakers, the Fishers, and their funeral business in Los Angeles. *Six Feet Under* deals with many of the issues one would expect of a contemporary family drama, but also involves an unusually uncompromising exploration of death and mortality.

Immediately after the title sequence, each episode opens with an on-screen death, which frequently sets the tone for that episode.

Digital Kitchen designs and produces commercials, title sequences for films and television programs, and trailer campaigns to promote returning serials. Branding is key. As the company states on its website:

The TV title sequence is a branding endeavor and a legitimate art form. It is the sole, consistent, and iconic moment that carries through a show's lifespan and beyond. It's what you remember most. DK is the most Emmy-nominated firm in the category. We seek assignments that tell a separate, parallel story. These are little art films really, that find their own voice, all while arming audiences with each show's unique psychology and worldview.⁵⁷

As with the sequence for *The Sopranos*, the main title sequence for *Six Feet Under* is ninety seconds long, foregrounds motion (both camera motion and action within the frame), and features a journey. Just as the title sequence for *The Sopranos* was gradually enriched by viewers' ongoing relationships with the show and its protagonist, so the producers of *Six Feet Under* "wanted something that you would see week after week after week and be entertained enough to keep watching. Something that wouldn't completely reveal itself on the first viewing."⁵⁸

Unusually for the format, the music was created prior to work on the visuals.⁵⁹ Alan Ball invited Thomas Newman to watch the pilot and compose ninety seconds of music for the as-yet-undevised title sequence; at that point, the producers "didn't have any idea what [they] wanted picture-wise."⁶⁰ Following discussions with the producers, Newman produced a CD of brief (thirty-second) extracts featuring different types of "textures, sounds, and colors."⁶¹

The fragments that the producers felt created the right tone then formed the basis of the completed titles music. Newman's music for the sequence thus represents a more holistic response to the serial than would otherwise have been feasible.

Leading visual-effects houses were then invited to pitch their concepts for the title sequence on the basis of the show's pilot and a recording of Newman's ninety-second music track. On seeing the images of the solitary tree and of hands wrenched apart devised by Digital Kitchen, Ball remembers thinking "That's so elegant. [...] It's so cinematic. It's so unlike TV. I really loved that."⁶² In capturing something "so unlike TV," Digital Kitchen managed also to encapsulate the serial's relationship with HBO; the channel's tagline at the time was "It's not TV. It's HBO." But Ball recognizes that the success of the sequence is at least partly due to the fact that the visuals were created *to* the music.⁶³ Indeed, the sequence's editor, Eric Anderson, recognized the potential of Newman's completed track as soon as he heard it. He remembers thinking that "it was going to be incredibly beneficial to me to edit to that piece of music because it's going to make me look like a great editor."⁶⁴

Audio-Visual Relations: Choreographing the Visuals to the Music

Newman's score is organized around two central ideas: an additive sequence, built from two-bar phrases that combine new textures and musical ideas as the track continues, and disruptions *of* that accumulation. The main elements of these two-bar phrases are:

- 1) an accented triad on the downbeat, the major third replaced by a raised fourth, the discord striking, or, as Peter Kaye describes it: "Ching! [...] [The chord] is bright, almost cheerful; its attack sharp, like something breaking, and yet extremely restless and harmonically, ambiguously unstable."⁶⁵

- 2) an accompaniment figure on pizzicato strings that adds a more detailed sense of pulse. It is heard first in alternate bars then extended to two bars;
- 3) the entry of the main theme on oboe or cor anglais.⁶⁶

The repetition of particular elements, both musical and visual, adds symbolic weight and urges the viewer toward interpretation, perhaps in a similar way to the Magritte paintings that the opening images also invoke for some. Visually, the sequence depicts a person's journey from death through to the preparation of the body, display of the body, and finally its burial. The organization of Newman's music also helps to articulate the "chunking" of the visual component of the sequence (see Table 1, below). In broad terms, the bright lights, clean lines, medical equipment and fluids of segment 2 contrast with the more earthly and celestial tones of the outer sections.

1.	Sky (no earthly referent), crow, then camera pans down to reveal tree, then hands separated onscreen in the foreground (the moments before death) Death and the first stage of the delivery of the body to the professional
BREAK	(1 x 6-beat bar) Clouds in the sky with no earthly referent
2.	(Main theme) – the body begins its journey on the gurney and reaches the table of the mortuary technician
BREAK (extd.)	(1 x 6-beat bar, plus 2 + 1 + 2 x 4/4) The body is embalmed, the body's surface cleaned, the body is displayed (lilies wilting)
3.	(Main theme) – coffin arrives at the cemetery, crow re-appears in close-up
BREAK	(1 x 6-beat bar, plus 2 + 2 x 4/4) Cloud/sky with no referent, then panning down to solitary tree, titles appear in tree's abstracted root formation

Table 1: Outline form of the sequence, as choreographed to Newman's music.

The most salient aspect of the sequence is its organization around a series of hit-points that punctuate the sequence's surface, providing such a degree of satisfaction that it may even be felt bodily. As Ball puts it, "There's that moment where the wheel on the gurney turns just as the percussion track kicks in. It's such a wonderful synthesis of picture and audio that I still get chills when I watch it."⁶⁷ Such "chills" are implicit in Anderson's visceral description of his role as editor: the music understood as muscle, and the visuals as a layer of skin, he sees it as *his* job to create "nerve endings."⁶⁸

Moments of excitement and felt satisfaction occur where the two media conform in a context that is elsewhere characterized by complementarity, even contest in places (to use Cook's terminology). Both music and image are "gapped," but complement one another contextually throughout. Within this context, the hit points, the moments of synchresis across the media stand out, notably at the start of the sequence where an early but short lived pattern of predictability is initially set up. Table 2 represents this audio-visual structure.⁶⁹ The table incorporates downbeat hit points between music and text, editing, and some of the significant action within the frame (marked by "x"), but cannot capture motion.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

Overall, the sequence demonstrates a sophisticated dynamic by combining familiarity with novelty. It presents a satisfying shape, and narrative, that incorporates moments of repose and ethereality, without compromising the sense of momentum that builds throughout. The disruptions that arrest the sense of accumulation also build anticipation, a desire for a return of the previous rhythm. As shown in the table, the regular hit-points of the first segment are disrupted by the first break (the 3/2 bar at 13). After this interruption, the sequence continues to build musically, with the addition of the main theme. The second break is more complex. It begins with a hit point between the entry of jangly percussive rhythms, and the first of three shots of a container of embalming fluid; the shots get progressively

shorter in duration, and more extreme in close-up as the fluid drains, and excitement builds. Next, another hit point, and a (false) return of the two-bar phrases: a body's still turned head is shown. Another bar of a percussive break, this time created from samples of a quirky Brazilian *quica*, as a body on display, with crossed hands, passes beneath the camera; a hit point, but a little weaker. A stronger hit point accompanies a slow-moving two-chord entry that reverses the raised-fourth/major third suspension (the latter now moving to the former), as time-lapse photography shows the wilting of lilies. With the return of the main theme in bar 28, hit points again occur more regularly, though now twice as frequently as before, building momentum, only for this to dissipate in the final shots/bars via the last interruption/coda. The editing emphasizes the downbeat only once more, with a final, lower register chord synchronized with the appearance of the serial's main title (bar 39); the music sounds both pitched and not pitched.

Much more could be said about this sequence, not least how its shiny and clean, even arguably antiseptic sound so beautifully matches the tone of the serial that follows. My aim here, however, is to highlight how the sequence differs from that of the *Sopranos*, while also drawing attention to aspects that the sequences share, particularly in terms of function. These contemporary sequences for HBO serials accomplish much the same work as earlier title sequences, but are also more consistent in their own right visually, and through their interaction with the music they present a brand identity that coheres holistically with the serial itself and, by extension, with the commissioning channel. It is in the interaction of music and image that the viewer is invited to participate in interpretation: these sequences have been devised to bear, or even encourage, repeated viewing. This may occur through a relatively high level incongruity between music and image, as with *The Sopranos*, or in terms of the expected/unexpected patterning of exaggerated hit points across media, as with *Six Feet Under*.

Conclusion

More recent serials have offered variations on the title sequence models that *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under* present. The highly structured opening title sequence for HBO's *Treme* (HBO 2010–) draws on strategies used in both of these sequences, though its most noticeable feature is undoubtedly the apparent mismatch between music and images. Scenes showing the aftermath of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans are presented alongside John Boutté's contagiously effervescent performance of his rhythmically buoyant "Treme song": a song about life in the city composed before the storm hit. In addition, however, the sequence begins with brief shots of documentary footage foregrounding the lived cultural heritage of the city as performed through the decades, thus matching the song's celebration of this heritage. There are hit points too. Twice, eighth-beat drum fills that conclude with splash cymbal on the downbeat, are synchronized with image editing: first these signal the shift from black and white to color footage of parades; second, from footage of the storm in action, to that of its consequences. After extended shots of water damage to homes, against which the text credits are placed, celebratory footage is gradually mixed with that of ruined homes, trailer parks, personal photographs that captured memories of New Orleans in happier times, and close-ups of photographs destroyed by water damage. Built into a single sequence, these strategies complicate any simple conceptions of the city and its musical culture as before/after or vibrant/tragic.

Like *The Sopranos* and *Treme*, the main title sequence for HBO's *The Wire* (HBO, 2002–2008) was created by the show's production team⁷⁰, and while they elected to use the same song for the sequence in all five seasons, each season presented a different performance, or cover of the song.⁷¹ The images used in the sequences were modulated to reflect each season's theme, with some images retained across all five seasons.⁷² *The Wire's*

sequence also invites repeat viewers through an increase in the experience of “too much information”: an effect achieved by presenting an extreme fluctuation in the duration of shots, rather than presenting many more shots per se.⁷³

In the case of *Weeds* (Showtime, 2005–), also produced for a premium cable channel, the main titles were created by the Thomas Cobb Group, a motion graphics design and production company. The same song — “Little Boxes” by singer-songwriter Malvina Reynolds — was used for the first three seasons. But while a recording of Reynolds performing the song was used for the first season, the second and third seasons used a different performance, or cover, for each episode, culminating, at the end of season three, with Reynolds’ version used with the opening titles, and a version sung by Pete Seeger (which subsequently made the song a hit in 1963) heard over the closing credits.⁷⁴

The main title for *Dexter*, mentioned at the start of this chapter, features an integrated choreography of music and image that approaches more closely that taken on *Six Feet Under*: indeed, Digital Kitchen’s Eric S. Anderson edited both sequences. Here though, the visuals preceded the music, though Anderson created his first cut of the sequence to music by Bernard Herrmann composed for an Alfred Hitchcock film. The decision to use music by Rolfe Kent that was much more distanced from the content of the images, and the serial’s content of serial killing, was made by the producers, with the incongruity of Kent’s “cabaret music [making] it all the more creepy.”⁷⁵

Far more of these sequences are worthy of comment than I have space here to mention, not least those for *True Blood* (HBO, 2008–) and *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007–). In relation to *Mad Men*, it is also important to note that just as non-premium channels have sought to emulate the success of HBO’s original programming⁷⁶ — AMC is a basic cable channel supported by advertising — so they have produced opening title sequences that are equally fascinating, despite suggestions that in some commercial markets such sequences are

being squeezed almost out of existence.⁷⁷ Indeed, the opening title sequence for *Mad Men* is just as efficient and impressive in its audiovisual aesthetics and the branding it has generated, arguably even more so given that it is significantly shorter than those discussed above at around thirty-six seconds.⁷⁸

It is perhaps not entirely surprising that recent television title sequences function as signifiers of the commissioning channel's brand identity, but a detailed history of the aesthetics of the format has yet to be written, and particularly one that explores media interaction within the sequences in detail. In many respects the format is at the cutting edge of production and digital design, something we have long come to expect of the music video. It is intriguing to wonder where these intense little films/videos will go next, but it would also be productive to look back and explore the format's history. Additionally, we know little about how viewers regard or use these sequences. Exploring this interaction seems even more pressing in light of recent changes to modes of content delivery. What does the loss of the "water cooler" moment mean for the future of the television title sequence?

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² "Music of the Sopranos," David Chase interview with Will Dana, accessed July 13, 2010, <http://www.hbo.com/the-sopranos/#/the-sopranos/inside/index.html> Also available on *The Sopranos*, Series 6 — The Final Episodes. (HBO Home Entertainment, 2007). DVD.

³ Alan Poul, "Under the Main Titles" (A featurette on the creation of the *Six Feet Under* opening titles). *Six Feet Under: The Complete First Series* (HBO Home Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

⁴ *New York Magazine*, 24 May 2010: 31–45. With thanks to Jeff Smith for drawing my attention to this.

⁵ Andrew Dignan's detailed analysis of *The Wire*'s Fourth Season title sequence for *The House Next Door*, the official blog of *Slant Magazine*, is among the best of these. Dignan, "The Wire and the Art of the Credit Sequence," accessed 30 July 2010.

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Dignan has also produced a series of video essays on each season's sequence (with Kevin B. Lee and Matt Zoller Seltz) for New York's *Museum of the Moving Image*. Dignan, Lee and Seltz, "Extra Credit, Part 1," accessed 30 July 2010.

<http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/extra-credit-part-1-20080728>

⁶ For more on this, see Bethany Klein, *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

⁷ A shot of the twin towers was removed from *The Sopranos*' sequence after the terrorist bombings on 9/11.

⁸ Not all title sequences signal genre unambiguously; a situation that has become more frequent with the blurring or hybridization of genres that has become a feature of shows that sought particular types of viewer, as mentioned below.

⁹ This is particularly true of the title sequences to series' pilots. The title sequence for the pilot of *Twin Peaks* was a full minute longer than the ninety-second version that was used for the rest of the episodes.

¹⁰ Simon Frith, "Look! Hear! The Uneasy Relationship of Music and Television." *Popular Music* 21/3 (2002): 288.

¹¹ As Simon Frith states, "Music on television is less often heard for its own sake than as a device to get our visual attention." *Ibid.*, 280. See also, Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 1974); John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Film, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982).

¹² K. J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI, 2005), 111. See also Ellis, *Visible Fictions*; Rick Altman, "Television/Sound," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 39–54.

¹³ Marc C. Rogers, Michael Epstein, and Jimmie L. Reeves. “The Sopranos as HBO Brand Equity: The Art of Commerce in the Age of Digital Representation,” in *This Thing of Ours: Investigating the Sopranos*, ed. David Lavery (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 54.

¹⁴ Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995), 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷ Rogers, Epstein and Reeves, *The Sopranos as HBO Brand Equity*, 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*. Although online activity is clearly the most recent of these behaviors, fan use of newsgroups focused on television soap operas date back to the mid- to late 1980s. By the early 1990s, such activity had grown exponentially. See Nancy K. Baym, *Tune In, Log On: soaps, fandom, and online community* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 1–34.

¹⁹ That is, with premium cable channels content is developed for the viewer with the goal of gaining (and retaining) maximum subscriptions, rather than in order to deliver a particular demographic to an advertiser. See Rogers, Epstein and Reeves, *The Sopranos as HBO Brand Equity*, 47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*.

²² “In the era of TV III, it is just a matter of time before channels such as HBO become a relic of the past, replaces with new technologies of distribution like on-demand program streaming [...] By building an identity that is separate from the physicality of a conduit, HBO may survive as a brand long after it has lost its relevance as a premium channel.” Michael M. Epstein, Jimmie L. Reeves, and Mark C. Rodgers, “Surviving ‘The Hit’: Will *The Sopranos*

Still Sing for HBO?,” in *Reading the Sopranos: Hit TV from HBO*, ed. David Lavery (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 25.

²³ Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, “It’s not TV, it’s HBO original programming,” in *It’s not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, eds. Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 87–88. See also Avi Santo, “Para-television and discourses of distinction: The culture of production at HBO,” in *It’s not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, 29, n. 1, 42.

²⁴ Rogers, Epstein and Reeves, *The Sopranos as HBO Brand Equity*, 46, 51.

²⁵ It is possible to trace this back to its earlier focus on trying to attract a demographic that broadcast channels struggled to attract: 18–34 year old males. It is also possible to understand several of HBO’s flagship serials, including *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, as exhibiting the “new sensibility” that Jeffrey Sconce detects in “certain corners of North American cinema and culture over the past decade, one that manifests a predilection for irony, black humor, fatalism, relativism and, yes, even nihilism.” Jeffrey Sconce, “Irony, nihilism and the new American ‘smart’ film,” *Screen* 43/4 (Winter 2002): 350. While the collection of films Sconce discusses under the label of new American “smart” film are varied, they share both a target audience and a “set of stylistic and thematic practices” (ibid., 352). From an aesthetic point of view, they share experimentation with “tone” rather than the experimentation with film style and narrative strategies that art films of the 1960s–70s undertook in order to critique codes of “‘bourgeois realism’ and/or ‘bourgeois society’” (ibid.). Indeed, the “‘social politics’ of power, institutions, representation and subjectivity so central to 1960s and 1970s art cinema” has been replaced, with new American smart film, by a concentration, “often with ironic disdain, on the ‘personal politics’ of power, communication, emotional dysfunction and identity in white middle-class culture” (ibid.). While there are clearly commonalities between the sensibility Sconce describes and some of the key HBO serials of

the same period, it is important to recognize the differences too. Though critics have certainly been as critical of *The Sopranos* as they have been of new American smart films, praise has been conferred on the shows' richness of detail, complexity of storytelling, and of characterization, the fantastical dream sequences, of standing back and letting the audience interpret the show. Many critics and fans also write about identifying with Tony, and the problems in brings. Audiences arguably seem to care more about the characters in these serials, as opposed to those presented in American smart films. But perhaps this is also a key point of difference in the mode of delivery: art/smart films are, usually, one-offs wherever they are viewed, whereas television serials require a desire for audiences to return, weekly. Affiliations with, and aspirations to cinema associated with these serials should also be tempered with a recognition that they are also reliant upon, yet simultaneously defined in opposition to, the industrial and aesthetic strategies associated with network television. Although the cinematic can be located in such serials' production teams, they are also rife with people trained and experienced almost exclusively in television; David Case is a case in point. As Tony Kelso puts it: "Maybe HBO is not completely different, but it's different enough." Tony Kelso, "And now no word from our sponsor: How HBO puts the risk back into television," in *It's not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, eds. Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley, 59. See also, Santo, "Para-television and discourses of distinction: The culture of production at HBO."

²⁶ Ibid., 51.

²⁷ Ibid., 53. Or, as McCabe and Akass suggest, "the channel takes control of the illicit and encloses it within its institutional discourse of quality—implied as an original tele-literary product that places emphasis on smart writing, compelling stories told in an innovative way, high production values and a unique creative vision behind each project." McCabe and Akas, *It's not TV, it's HBO original programming*, 89.

²⁸ Ibid., 54.

²⁹ Ibid..

³⁰ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London and Bloomington, IN: BFI and Indiana University Press 1987), 15.

³¹ Ibid.. See also Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: cinema soundtracks in the 1980s–1990s* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 41 n. 44, and chapter 3.

³² Nicholas Cook, *Analyzing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 133.

³³ Where a gap in one medium is filled by an element from another, Cook calls this “contextual complementation.” Ibid., 104.

³⁴ Ibid., 142.

³⁵ Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Towards a Critical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 188. Television title sequences have also been discussed by Robynn Stilwell and John Richardson: Robynn Stilwell, “The sound is ‘out there’: score, sound design and exoticism in *The X-Files*,” in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60–79; John Richardson, “*Laura* and *Twin Peaks*: Postmodern Parody and the Musical Reconstruction of the Absent Femme Fatale,” in *American Dreams, Nightmare Visions: the cinema of David Lynch*, eds. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison, (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 77–92. Philip Tagg is a key figure in the analysis of titles music and semiotics, with a book-length study of the title sequence for *Kojak* and, with Bob Clarida, a detailed study of the semiotics of *Ten Little Title Tunes*, several of which are from television. In the latter, the authors’ focus is not on the interaction of music and visuals, however: Philip Tagg, *Kojak: 50 Seconds of Television Music: Towards the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (New York: Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, Inc., 2011/1979); Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes* (New York: Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, Inc., 2003). Within the nascent field of television

studies, the title sequence is usually discussed only in passing. Exceptions include a section on the title sequence for *Dynasty* in Gripsrud's *The Dynasty Years*, 189–197, and an analysis of the opening titles for the mini-series, *War and Remembrance* (ABC, 1988–89) in John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: style, crisis, and authority in American television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 160–192. Jon Burlingame provides a history of the title theme in North American television in *TV's Biggest Hits: The Story of Television Themes from Dragnet to Friends* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996). More recent studies have begun to explore television's interstitials -- the bits "in between" the programmes as broadcast -- and other paratexts. Such approaches may well offer a productive way of thinking about main title and end credit sequences. Examples include John Ellis, "Interstitials: How the 'Bits in Between' Define the Programmes", in *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, ed. Paul Grainge (London: British Film Institute), 59–69.

³⁶ Kramer, *Musical Meaning*, 153, 154.

³⁷ Ibid., 179.

³⁸ Ibid..

³⁹ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁴¹ Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years*, 191.

⁴² Kramer, *Musical Meaning*, 191.

⁴³ Brett Martin, *The Sopranos: The Complete Book* (London: Headline, 2007), 30–31.

⁴⁴ Shots 32 and 59 feature Tony's reflected image.

⁴⁵ Other examples include *Mad Men* — the journey or "fall" of the man in the suit — and the journey of the body in *Six Feet Under*.

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that while title sequences from earlier periods often introduced key characters visually, in a number of contemporary title sequences there is a refusal to show *any* characters visually (e.g. *Six Feet Under*, *Weeds* [Showtime, 2005–]), or they present characters only in an abstracted or fragmented form (e.g. *Mad Men*, *The Wire* [HBO, 2002–8]).

⁴⁷ Examples of the latter include the graphic match between street lamps, shot from beneath, and a plane taking off from nearly Newark airport (shots 17–18).

⁴⁸ Martin, *The Sopranos*, 31.

⁴⁹ See, for example, “Soprano Sue’s Sightings,” accessed July 13, 2010.

<http://www.sopranosuessightings.com/openingcredits.htm>. The official HBO website for the show also incorporates a virtual mini-tour that identifies some of the key locations of the sequence. “The Sopranos: Inside the Opening Credits,” accessed July 13, 2010.

<http://www.hbo.com/the-sopranos/inside/behind-the-scenes/slideshow/inside-the-opening-credits.html>.

⁵⁰ See, for example, “Soprano Sue’s Sightings,” accessed July 13, 2010.

<http://www.sopranosuessightings.com/sopranosmusictrivia.htm>. Synopses for each episode on the show’s official HBO website now also include music listings, with the opportunity to buy some tracks via a web link to iTunes. “The Sopranos: Episodes,” accessed July 13, 2010.

<http://www.hbo.com/the-sopranos/index.html#/the-sopranos/episodes/index.html>.

⁵¹ “Music of the Sopranos.” The edited version of the song used for the credits is taken from the “Chosen One Mix,” released on CD 1 of a CD Maxi: Alabama 3 and Street Angels Choir, NYC, “Woke Up This Morning.” Elemental Records. ELM 41 CDS1. Elemental Records is an autonomous label set up by London based independent record label, One Little Indian.

⁵² Given the structural limitations, musically speaking, involved in editing the track down to ninety seconds, it’s possible that the visual edit was tweaked a little to fit.

⁵³ For example, the acquisition of a gun that morning, that he (the subject) has been chosen, that he was accursed, born “under a bad sign,” that his father didn’t teach him wrong from right. That the world had “turned upside down” when he woke this morning, and that the “Blues” have arrived.

⁵⁴ Many of the cast are Italian-American, and had previously met on the sets of earlier mob/gangster films/series such as Scorsese’s *Goodfellas*. Some of the actors — such as Tony Sirico/”Paulie Walnuts” — allegedly also have a mob-related past, while others acknowledge that they have friends or relatives who are involved in the mafia.

⁵⁵ The band formed in 1996 and describe themselves as “a pop band, a punk rock, blues and country techno situationist crypto-Marxist-Leninist electro band. We never went on X Factor or Pop Idol or Stooze Quest. We did it the old fashioned way.” “About Alabama 3,” accessed July 13, 2010. http://www.alabama3.co.uk/en/general_articles/about

⁵⁶ On Tony’s everyman appeal see David Johansson, “Homeward Bound: Those *Sopranos* Titles Comes Heavy,” in *Reading the Sopranos: Hit TV from HBO*, ed. David Lavery (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 27–36. See also Noel Carroll, “Sympathy for the Devil,” in *The Sopranos and Philosophy: I Kill Therefore I Am*, eds. Richard Greene and Peter Vernezze (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing), 120–136.

⁵⁷ Digital Kitchen, “Main Titles (*Six Feet Under*),” accessed July 24, 2010. <http://www.d-kitchen.com/projects/main-titles>.

⁵⁸ Alan Poul, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁵⁹ Alan Ball knew Thomas Newman from his score for *American Beauty* (d. Sam Mendes, 1999); Ball won an Academy Award for the film’s script.

⁶⁰ Ball, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶¹ Poul, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶² Ball, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶³ Ball, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶⁴ Anderson, “Under the Main Titles.” Newman’s theme music won an Emmy Award in 2002 for “Outstanding Main Title Theme Music” and two Grammy Awards in 2003: “Best Instrumental Composition” and “Best Instrumental Arrangement.”

⁶⁵ Peter Kaye, “I’m dead, wow, cool: the music of *Six Feet Under*,” in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, *Reading Six Feet Under: TV to Die For* (London and New York: I B Tauris, 2005), 192–206. Thomas Newman states that the team discussed “starting with a kind of something, something kind of [plays chord], that evoked something celestial or heavenly, which was always for me kind of raised fourth degree.” Newman “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶⁶ The main theme is minimal, emphasizing tonic and subdominant with appoggiatura figures that ornament this and add a flattened leading note and raised fourth (tritone), giving a modal inflection to the music’s harmony. It describes a falling (semitone or tone) two-note figure, but one that does not always fall. Essentially it is a single-bar figure, developed to create a two-bar figure.

⁶⁷ Ball, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶⁸ “What I do is hopefully, I’m making all these nerve connections, like I have, you know, a layer of muscle and a layer of skin, and the layer of muscle is the music piece, the layer of skin is the visual, and I create these, um, nerve endings and when I feel that moment is happening, I think that’s when the nerve endings between the two elements are aligned, and they’re really working together.” Anderson, “Under the Main Titles.”

⁶⁹ That the table approximates what the sequence might look like in Logic or Final Cut Pro perhaps tells us something about the role of software the development of the sequence.

⁷⁰ For an excellent analysis of these title sequences, see Andrew Dignan, “*The Wire* and the Art of the Credit Sequence,” *The House Next Door Blog* (accessed June 14, 2010)

<http://www.slantmagazine.com/house/2006/09/the-wire-and-the-art-of-the-credit-sequence/>.

⁷¹ I am grateful to Anahid Kassabian for pointing out to me that *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984–1992) also used a different performance of the same song for each series. At the time, this was considered highly unusual.

⁷² Changing some images while retaining others is not in itself a new approach to title sequences in the case of long running serials (or indeed soap-operas). However, in the past, such changes have usually been made to reflect changes to the cast, and/or characters' hairstyles, or other changes in appearance. The emphasis on thematic content in *The Wire*'s sequence is thus significant.

⁷³ This characteristic of “information overload” is taken to extremes in Digital Kitchen's sequence for *True Blood* (HBO, 2008–).

⁷⁴ Subsequent seasons rejected this approach.

⁷⁵ Eric S. Anderson, cited in Emily Nussbaum, “A Great Opening Montage is a Bloody Good Idea”, *New York* (May 24, 2010), 43. See also Catalin Brylla, “Why do we love Dexter Morgan in the Morning,” *The Art of the Title Sequence*, accessed May 30, 2010, <http://www.artofthetitle.com/why-do-we-love-dexter-morgan-in-the-morning/>.

⁷⁶ A point made by a reviewer, quoted by Avi Santo, is apposite in this respect: ““For years, HBO has gone with the tagline “It's Not TV, It's HBO”. But recently TV has become a lot more like HBO’ (Goertz, 2002a: 63).” Santo, “Para-television and discourses of distinction,” 39.

⁷⁷ In Spring 2010, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences sent out a ballot to members, proposing that the category “Outstanding Original Main Title Music” be replaced with “Outstanding Music Composition for a Documentary Film.” According to composer Mark Watters, one of the two Television Academy Music Peer Group Governors, “the industry has abandoned this great art. Many shows have no theme what so ever. Most are less than 15 seconds. The reason for this? Easy, as shows become more expensive to produce, more time

is given up to commercials thus leaving less and less time for the show itself. The main title is shortened or eliminated in order to give time to the narrative of the episode. A sad but unavoidable reality, I'm afraid." The category remains, however. Mark Watters, web comment made on March 13th, 2010 at 14:23 to "Emmys Considering Dumping Main Title Theme Music Category to Create Documentary Music Category", *Film Music Magazine*, accessed July 30, 2010, <http://www.filmmusicmag.com/?p=5152>.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this sequence see Gary Edgerton, "Falling Man and Mad Men," the adjoining "Curator's Note," (April 2009), and the many posts and responses to Edgerton's analysis that followed, *In Media Res: A Media Commons Project*, accessed 30 July 2010.

<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2009/04/19/falling-man-and-mad-men-154>.