

The title sequence's significations offer a provocative example of the ontology and phenomenology of a televisual flow whose primary activity is the circulation of branded televisual significations. As such, any reading of the formal issues of the title sequence must take into account the way that the sequences function as branding devices and the way that branding affects the televisual.

One initial question raised by the foregrounding of branding as a televisual practice is how to read the placement of the title sequence at the start of the episode. The title sequence appears to be the location of the most explicit brand promotion during an episode because it explicitly acknowledges the name of the program, establishes the program's key elements, and introduces a shift in the schedule. The repetition of elements from the title sequence within the program, however, suggests that readings of the title sequence's evocation of brand identity can't restrict themselves to only the first few seconds of the program. Even in the age of the DVR and DVD, a viewer can only see a program for the first time once. While the very first time the viewer sees the program, the title sequence functions like an establishing shot -- an introduction that establishes the program's brand signature and invites the viewer to locate that signature in a variety of modes throughout the episode -- eventually it serves as a prompt that engages what the viewer already knows about the program. In this way, we can read the title sequence as less an introduction and more an intensifier: an affective reminder of the lure of any one program's signature.

When we read the title sequence as one element of the visual, aural, and narrative markers of the program's brand identity among many, it becomes clear that it should be read as a unique element of televisual signification that is both intertext and paratext. The USA Network's blue skies and generic actors, *Two and a Half Men's* grating musical leitmotif, Aaron Spelling's boldly stylized graphics, and Jennifer Aniston's evolving hairstyles provide us with provocative models for the consideration of the title sequence's affectively dense, allegorical

articulation of brand identity. Whether it is a title card or an elaborate staging of the program's themes, characters, locations, and style, the title sequence serves as a signal of the program's identity. The title sequence evokes elements that we can read as signs of star image, televisual style, narrative, and industrial history, among others.

Though this argument can be made of title sequences from an era before television viewing became multi-modal and cross-platform, it is particularly interesting as an element of digital televisuality, when decentered viewing practices unhook the title sequence from its traditional position as a transitional object. In the elements of the title sequence, we see flexible and floating signifiers of the program's brand identity that are no longer restricted to just the first few seconds: they are intertextual, paratextual, and can be located not only in the program, but in promos, interviews, fan-produced work, and other ephemera. When we read the title sequence as both inter- and para- text, we acknowledge the way that post-broadcast viewing practices rely on branding to locate the viewer within televisual flow.

This model suggests that elements of the televisual that are typically foregrounded in interpretive readings – such as narrative, star image, or programming directives – should all be read as existing equally. This type of approach offers a decentered model that accommodates a plurality of readings, viewing practices, industrial modes, and scholarly interventions. In this model can be read as intertexts rather than paratexts: as such they should be read with the

What's in a title (sequence)? Opening and Closing Sequences in Television

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same tools used to read star image, televisual style, narrative, and industrial history.