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## Typology of opening scenes in the new generation of TV series

### KEYWORDS

contemporary drama series,  
narrative complexity, quality  
drama, continuing series, teaser

### ABSTRACT

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The product of quality TV, modern TV series have undergone significant changes compared to traditional productions. TV series used to have a closed episodic structure, contained within a single episode. These days, the format marked by a narrative continuity prevails. The types of sequences that open TV series have changed, too. Filmmakers employ various 'opening strategies' to make their productions stand out and attract audiences' attention. The initial scenes highlight dynamic action, set the tone and express the central conflict. Other types of opening aim to explicate the main protagonist to make them intriguing. This article will provide the definition of 'opening scenes', and their typology will be discussed based on selected examples.

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### 1. New generation of series (contemporary TV series)

The American film critic and journalist Charles McGrath says that we have been observing another 'golden age of television' since 1995, mainly because of high-quality drama series. The content of quality productions has changed, and filmmakers have come to address topics previously avoided on the 'small screen'. TV

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series directors started using stylistic and formal devices that, according to Jason Mittell (2006), constitute complex narratives. The model of TV series distribution has evolved from TV broadcasting to the more and more popular web streaming, which means that TV series content is consumed differently – on computers, tablets and smartphones.

These factors have driven the increase in TV series productions being made. According to FX Networks Research, 495 different TV series premiered in the United States in 2018 alone, an increase of 136% against the production volume in 2002 (182) (Kozłowski, 2018). More and more companies (e.g. Apple, Amazon, Hulu...) produce their own content rather than just streaming TV series. Netflix, which produced its first TV series in 2003, has announced the release of 243 productions in 2020 alone. The Walt Disney Company merged in March 2019 with one of the largest production companies 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox to create a ‘media empire’, which has literally flooded the market with film and TV productions.

Undoubtedly, this rise of production does not translate into an increase in consumers’ ability to consume series content. While the running time of a feature film tends to be 90–120 minutes, a season of a TV series usually takes around 12 hours. This means hours of an ‘adventure’ and the need to give up watching other shows or just check some of them. What this ‘checking out’, this ‘tasting’ means is a matter of the viewer’s subjective perception. For some, it means one or two episodes; for others, merely several minutes in order to see if a given show is worth watching. Obviously, a conscious viewer is driven by many factors, including critics’ reviews, the pop-cultural allure, personal preferences; however, it is the opening scenes, especially expository ones, that contribute to subjective impressions about a given production. With the many TV productions out there, screenwriters are literally forced to secure the audience’s attention early enough so that they do not give up watching.

For years, we have seen a number of strategies used in feature films to attract viewers’ attention from the first minutes of a film. The scene of Don Corleone’s conversation (Marlon Brando) with the gravedigger in the *Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), or the robbery sequence at the restaurant in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) now symbolize these films. Based on her film inquiry, Katarzyna Ślebarska (2014: 54) speaks of the ‘first impression’ rule, pointing out that it is essential to provoke positive feelings in the viewer when presenting new content. This is because people are often unwaveringly driven by their first impression, and subsequent information is ignored, even if it is contradictory. This is related to another principle: the so-called ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, whereby the viewer has certain expectations of the content they consume: “if you make an assumption

that a given film is worthwhile, it is very likely that this will come true” (Ślebarska, 2014: 54). Marek Hendrykowski points out that the intriguing beginning of a film is like “a well-designed chess opening, which paves the player’s way to success” (Hendrykowski, 2017: 190), with “the first dozen or so minutes of the film being the decisive moment that leaves the viewer with the lasting first impression” (Hendrykowski, 2017: 190). Film producers and script selectors tend to read just the first five pages of a script. If they are not interested in the beginning, they doubt that the plot will become interesting (*Screenwriter-to-Screenwriter.com*, 2009). Such scripts are usually rejected without further review.

The above views are reflected in the study entitled “Lights, Camera, Action” conducted by Mastercard on the occasion of the Cannes Film Festival 2018, showing that 92% of respondents attach significant attention to the early film scenes (Mastercard, 2018).

The small screen is similar. There, the onset of a narrative has an essential bearing on the further success of a given production, both for the initial screenplay review and the pilot episode. In the most popular continuing series (the contemporary series), not only do the opening scenes contribute greatly to the plot of a given episode (as in procedural series), but also set long-term narrative trends. Committed to producing HBO series, the leading Polish producer Maciej Kubicki (2017)<sup>1</sup> points to the ‘strategies used to secure the viewer’ employed by American screenwriters, and argues that the ‘storytelling density’ of today’s series is far greater than that of feature films.

The present study will provide a definition of opening scenes, or the sequences that, apart from introducing plot events of a given TV series, maximize the watching experience. Then, the author will provide a classification of sequences opening contemporary TV series with complex narratives. Story development patterns used in series teasers will be analyzed. Even though European producers undeniably show a high level of artistic skill, this article deliberately focuses on American productions, since the changes in narrative patterns, dating back to the early days of television, have been driven primarily by the American series<sup>2</sup>. Using the methods of neo-formal analysis, this article will mainly focus on screenwriting decisions (stylistic means used by directors and directors of photography will be omitted), since it is the screenwriters in the so-called writers’ rooms who are the main decision makers behind the content and form of their series, unlike in film.

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<sup>1</sup> The co-owner of Telemark, a company behind the shows such as *Londyńcyzy*, *Without Secrets*, *The Pact* and *Illegals*, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Some of pioneering series marked by the new style of narration include: *Hill Street Blues* (MTM, 1981–1987); *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990–1991 resumed in 2017); *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999–2007).

## 2. Mysterious ‘opening sequence’

Within the inquiry into the opening strategies, one should look at the conceptualization of the opening scenes/sequences in film studies and address the question of “when do viewers lose their interest in a given story?” David Bordwell defines the so-called *in media res* opening (Latin: ‘in the middle of things’), where “the plot seeks to arouse curiosity by bringing us into a series of actions that has already started (...). The viewer speculates on possible causes of the events presented” (Bordwell, Thompson 2011). Its opposite is an opening scene that provides a ‘smooth’ exposition of the plot and characters, with the proper action unfolding several minutes later.

Oliver Schutte points to an opening referred to as ‘an overture’, “an element of the initial sequence, or the introduction. It is the beginning independent of the proper content of a film” (Schutte, 2015: 90). This kind of a beginning is often “misaligned with the chronology of film events” (Schutte, 2015: 90) due to a flashforward or a flashback “the main character is mired in” (Schutte, 2015: 90). While it is easy to identify the opening sequence in this case, especially if it disrupts the temporal layer of the plot, other cases might pose some difficulty in this respect.

It is worth mentioning another term from screenwriting theory, which might help us define what contributes towards greater viewership. This is the (screenwriting) hook, which Maciej Karpiński defines as something that can “surprise you with its originality and drama (regarding the characters, conflict, the concept – even the formal one), something that will set the action off and give it some direction” (Karpiński, 2006: 199). The use of the hook was developed in feature films in the era of postclassical cinema and usually consists of a single sequence, which, just like the Hitchcock earthquake, seeks to “catch the viewer, attract their attention and manifest a genre conventions that may match viewer’s preferences” (Ostaszewski, 2019: 130). This intriguing film opening is undoubtedly one of the first scenes that aims to make viewers curious about further plot.

Due to the specific type of structure that TV series have developed<sup>3</sup>, the so-called teaser (or cold open) is considered part of the opening sequence. It recaps key details of previous episodes or prepares the viewer for the events of the current episode. It is hard to specify the typical duration of a teaser, since, as Pamela Douglas points out, “it can equally be a one-minute hook or a ten-minute series

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<sup>3</sup> Multi-act composition. While it is said that feature films are composed of three acts, TV series have been divided into five or six acts due to the once commercial breaks.

of scenes that actually turn a teaser into a traditional act” (Douglas, 2007: 79). The TV series researcher Daniel Calvisi, who has analyzed the plot structures of today’s series, points out that teasers greatly arouse curiosity about a given episode in a series (Calvisi, 2016: 44).

The British TV screenwriter William Smethurst thinks of the time the viewer needs to form their own opinion about a production in very strict terms. He points out that the first minute of a production makes the viewer either change channels or continue watching. He argues that series creators need to use the said ‘hook’, an event that will intrigue the viewer, within this timeframe (Smethurst, 2009: 36).

### **3. Character vs. action**

An attempt to provide a typology of sequences opening contemporary TV series comes with the following question: what criterion should we adopt to make such a division? Apart from inquiries regarding the first scenes of the TV series, the literature offers no such typologies.

Things look slightly different in screenwriting textbooks written by practitioners. Smethurst puts forth three types of openings, respectively: curiosity, mystery, suspense. The curiosity opening, Smethurst claims, is to provoke strong curiosity about the ensuing story, which rests on our natural drive to uncover secrets. The second type of opening is to depict logically unjustifiable situations. In this case, the audience’s interest is driven by the need to see some logic behind the events presented rather than by their curiosity. The third kind of opening is suspense, which leads to drama resolution. The viewer follows the plot as they fear the danger to be faced by characters. Since this typology is based on emotions, it might not come with guaranteed regularity, as identical events might trigger curiosity in some viewers and be considered ‘illogical’ by others.

Even though Calvisi does not provide a typology of opening scenes, he lists the elements that should appear in the early minutes to attract the audience. The main principle is to introduce a fascinating character to intrigue the viewer from the very beginning of the series. The opening sequence also sets the narration process by presenting the topic of the plot, the protagonist’s universe and the central conflict that will be narrated in the plot of an episode. The series opening ends with a catalyst that sets the drama proper in motion and adds dynamism to the story (Calvisi, 2016: 44). The elements depicted by Calvisi are thought of as equivalent rather than hierarchical. However, screenwriting practice shows that one of the factors tends to prevail, with filmmakers highlighting an intriguing character (the

main protagonist) and focusing the audience's attention on them or introducing spectacular events to delineate the central conflict of a story.

Note that film studies make a distinction between character-driven and story-driven stories. Film and series stories with drama driven by the main characters and their emotional lives, their dilemmas making a sort of 'dramatic engine' [*ressort dramatique*], which helps us make sense of overall and local factors behind situational tensions and the course of action (Souriau, 1976: 276), are referred to as character-driven. When the characters themselves become subordinate to spectacular action that has a leading role, we may speak of a *story-* or *plot-driven* scenario. Of course, in the era of genre hybridization, most series productions cannot be easily classified into one of these types. However, a closer look at particular scenes, especially opening ones, shows that either of these factors clearly dominates, and this can be the basis for a typology of opening scenes.

### 3.1. Intriguing character

The building of a rapport between the audience and the main protagonist is addressed by psychoanalytical film theories. For this rapport to occur, "cognitive and emotional processes have to be triggered and mutual interaction between them" is essential (Ostaszewski, 1999: 151). Analyzing cognitive film theories, Jacek Ostaszewski (1999: 161–162) puts forth three states of identification:

- Recognition (character-building process) – physical representation of the character, a virtually automatic process;
- Alignment – a series of audiovisual data that brings the viewer closer to the character – the moment we learn about a character's thoughts and feelings;
- Allegiance (viewers come to like or dislike a character), i.e. the moment of the viewer's proper identification with the character.

'Allegiance', according to the storytelling theory (Karpiński, 2006: 226), is key to building the relationship between the viewer and the character; however, it is difficult to clearly identify the moment of identification with the series character. This type of phenomenon is a process with a duration that depends on the viewer's subjective characteristics. For the early scenes, we shall refer to "identification and alignment," or the process of the viewer's getting to know the character. This is to arouse the audience's curiosity about characters' unconventional behaviour rather than morally judge them. In such openings, the viewer can observe the character in an environment alien to them or in a situation that is unnatural to them, which drives their atypical behaviour as one of series opening strategies.

Such a dramatic maneuver has been used in two productions that have a similar plot pattern: *Boss* (Starz, 2011–2012) and *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013–2018).

Both series feature strong politicians who seek to reinforce their political power, although in the *Boss* series, it is played out at the level of a mayor's office, and in the *House of Cards*, Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) gradually makes his way to the presidency. In the opening sequence, the politicians are introduced with various means of expression. For the first two minutes of the *Boss* series, we are watching the face of an anonymous man listening to his health report. He learns of an incurable disease that will end his life within five years' time. The extremely static site of conversation – a closed animal slaughterhouse has a metaphorical significance and also means that the politician wants to keep the information about the disease secret. After the meeting ends, we can see the emotional response from someone who has just learned about his death sentence. While driving a limousine, the politician bursts into tears, but these must be wiped away, as in the next scene, at a conference, he plays a self-confident smiling politician – the mayor of Chicago. The opening sequence is complete. The following one begins with the theme of building an airport in a former cemetery.

In the *House of Cards*, the unconventional behaviour of the characters is shown when they are confronted with an accidental event. Hearing abrupt braking, Frank Underwood runs from his home into the street, where he sees his neighbour's dog hit by a car. The politician, however, does not save the animal; instead, he suffocates it and says: "There are two kinds of pain. The good one, one that motivates you and makes you strong. There is another kind of pain – one that is useless, a symptom of plain suffering. I choose the former. I have no patience for the latter" (S01E01). After the murder scene, he comes back and helps his wife prepare for the New Year's ball at the White House. From the first minutes on, the filmmakers build an intriguing character (not necessarily morally right), while at the same time using a soliloquy, which is rarely used in TV series. The actor addresses the audience directly, as if they were his good friends and reveals his thoughts to them. At the New Year's Eve party, he becomes a kind of a White House guide and introduces major politicians, cynically commenting on their ambitions and how they have achieved their high political standing.

A similar type of opening (one highlighting an intriguing character) was used in the series that initiated the third golden age of television and set a new style, namely *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1990–2007). In the initial shots, Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) is waiting for a session with a psychiatrist, Dr. Jennifer Melfi (Lorraine Bracco). The gangster is looking at an ancient sculpture of a woman in the corner of the waiting room. He scrutinizes her mysterious facial expression with some bewilderment. The series DoP pictures Tony between the legs of a statue, which can be associated with the classic shot from Mike Nichols's film *The Graduate* (1967),

with Benjamin Braddock shown ‘through the legs’ of Mrs. Robinson. While the latter grapples with the opposite sex, Tony Soprano grapples with his mother, wife, daughter, sister, the female psychiatrist, and the many women he has affairs with. The door is opened by Dr. Melfi, an attractive, well-groomed, middle-aged woman. Tony enters the office and takes a seat. He sits down comfortably, crosses one leg over the other, and confidently grabs the back of a chair. He is a massive, smartly dressed middle-aged man; trousers of a good-quality suit, a black shirt and polished boots. He has got a gold bracelet and signet on his right hand, and a gold watch on the other to manifest his success. The psychologist encourages him to speak. He admits that he struggles to open up with psychiatrists, but Dr. Melfi manages to get him to talk. Tony talks about his life, while viewers can see retrospective shots presenting the other characters in the series.

In this case, we can see a strategy similar to that in the *Boss* series. None of the series presents spectacular action – the protagonist is the focal point. It is them and their secrets that should attract the audience’s attention. The men in both series hold powerful positions (Tony Soprano, as a gangster; and Tom Kane is the mayor of Chicago) and their situations are problematic to both of them, not just because of their health problems, but also because of their social status.

To finish the discussion of character-driven opening scenes, it is worth taking a closer look at the opening sequence in the *Newsroom* series written by the ‘master of dialogue’ Aaron Sorkin (HBO, 2012–2014). In a scene that takes less than five minutes, we watch three journalists debating about the political situation in the U.S. The main character William McAvoy (Jeff Daniels) stands out with his reserve about the questions asked. He answers briefly, ironically, yet the host keeps prompting him to answer a question posed by one of the students: “Why is America the greatest country in the world?” To some students’ surprise, or even disgust, McAvoy says ‘America is not the greatest country’ (E01S01) and then takes two minutes to justify his point. He is very direct, he uses colloquialisms or even offensive words, but he supports his views with statistical data. However, he does not want to deprive the Americans of hope and ends his argument by describing why they used to be the greatest nation in the world.

In this case, the character introduced in the opening scene voices a controversial opinion and sets himself in the opposition to his interlocutors and the audience, who all expect him to support the thesis about American greatness. This opening strategy somewhat connotes the initial sequence of the TV series *House of Cards*. Even though the two main protagonists show radically different behaviours, they both violate accepted behavioural standards.



### 3.2. Spectacular action

As opposed to the character-driven series, the action-driven solution offers a spectacular opening scene driven mainly by the highly dynamic events. An excellent example of this is the American series *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–2020), with an in media res opening scene. Navigating the streets of Baghdad, the CIA agent Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) is discussing potential anti-terrorist activities during a phone conversation with her boss. Even though she learns from him about the end of the engagement, she says she is on her way to a prison, where she expects to secure important information from her informant. There, she manages to negotiate two minutes to interview the convict (Abu Nazir). The use of time pressure is typical of the action-driven opening sequences. Carrie seeks to get Nazir to provide her information with no success. However, before the Iraqi soldiers force her out, the informant reveals a secret essential to the subsequent plot. Note the retardation, or deliberate delay in the resolution. Nazir's secret is revealed only later on in the series. According to the agent's knowledge, Sergeant Brody, found in one of Iraqi prisons, is collaborating with the enemy to mount a terrorist attack against the United States.

Despite the fact that the further part of the series sheds some light on the private lives of the agent (e.g. her mental illness) and Sergeant Brody, the early scenes strategically focus on dynamic plot development.

A much more spectacular opening, one meeting Alfred Hitchcock's call to make films with an earthquake at the outset and continuously mounting the tension, is that of the series *Lost* (AMC, 2004–2010). The early scenes use a motif typical of catastrophe films: people struggling with the consequences of an airplane accident. The very opening sequence is one of the most expensive in the history of TV series. It is worth noting that the preceding scenes are in a way isolated from the events presented. The spectator sees an elegantly dressed man lying in the jungle, who takes an empty bottle out from his pocket. The man is stunned. He spontaneously jumps up, starts to break through the jungle and soon enters the 'eye of chaos' on the beach. The following shots present the consequences of a plane crash, where a group of survivors are trying to save themselves and other passengers. This is a evident example of the plot being delineated without paying great attention to characters. Even though the early shots focus our attention on one of the main characters, it is the crash sequence that is the hook, and the protagonist presented early on blends into the backdrop of events and becomes one of the survivors.

While in *Lost*, the characters are visible from the very beginning of the series, the opening sequence in the *Game of Thrones* series (HBO, 2011–2019) does not introduce the characters at all, even though it has a number of main characters, some of them ‘avoiding’ death until the final 8<sup>th</sup> season. The opening sequence depicts one of the dangers that all feuding kingdoms ultimately face. While patrolling the forest on the other side of the wall (the northern kingdoms, inhabited by savage tribes), a group of scouts of the night guard stumbles upon dead creatures. Only one guard survives the confrontation and receives a death sentence for apparently having betrayed their colleagues. This is one of few cases where a teaser shows a spectacular event without introducing the main characters<sup>4</sup>.

Productions with a clearly defined plot line often use cross-cutting, a device known since David Griffith’s day. In the series about a motorbike gang *Sons of anarchy* (FX, 2008–2014), the audience alternately follows two actions. In one of them, the main character, Jax Teller (Charlie Hunnam), rides a motorbike across a city in the south of America where the action is set. In the second theme, thieves steal weapons from shipping warehouses. While Teller finishes shopping at the all-night store, the other action is brought to a resolution. The nighttime silence is cut by a loud explosion in the gun warehouse, which Teller is watching in front of the shop. The next scene shows bikers riding to the accident site. The warehouse where they were holding illegal weapons was looted and blown up by the Maya gang.

The cross-cut opening sequence (with one action taking place at night, and the other during the day) was also used in the American version of the series *The Killing* (AMC, 2011–2014). The opening scenes show two women running. One of them runs for the joy of it; the other is being chased by an attacker. Individual shots showing the latter step up the tension as her life is threatened. However, in the opening sequence itself, we do not see a spectacular finale in which the assailant catches up with the victim. The filmmakers provoke a situation in which viewers expect the other running woman to discover the victim’s abandoned corpse, but she ultimately finds a dead animal. The viewer learns about the murder itself further along the story. In this case, the creators have used a trick similar to the one in *Homeland* series, when the action hinted at in the opening scenes is resolved only in the ensuing minutes of the series.

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, this is a screen adaptation of G.R. Martin’s novel, but the selection of opening scenes of TV series is made at the screenwriting stage.

### 3.3. Temporal disruption

While in the above-mentioned opening sequences a storyline would be aligned with story structure (Plesnar, 1990: 204), TV series with complex narratives sometimes employ drama devices stylistically evocative of postmodern cinema, as they alter the chronology of events. The story linearity in the opening minutes of a TV series is disrupted “without [providing] any scenes or signals that would separate them from the reality” (Mittell, 2015: 172) to disorient the viewer. Flashforwards are the most popular compositional devices used to alter the chronological order of the opening events. Filmmakers open the series with sequences of future events that come contain a turning point. As a result, the audience is ‘thrown’ into the heart of events. The events shown in a flashforward are usually suspended at a culminating point, and the resolution occurs later along the story (usually at the end of the pilot episode). The remaining part of the story is developed in a linear way. Such openings can be seen in the series *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010–2014) and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008–2013). In contrast, flashforwards in productions such as *Revenge* (ABC, 2011–2015) and *Damages* (FX, 2007–2012) precede the events of the first episode by a great deal, as the resolution of the initial event takes place only at the end of the first season.

Subverting the linear structure does not preclude the use of any of the opening types (character- or action-driven openings). However, in most cases, the use of flashforwards comes with the need to highlight a clearly defined plot line. This aims to arouse the audience’s interest, the opening sequence being followed by the ‘calm’ part, focusing on the characters.

## 4. Conclusion

The product of quality television, contemporary TV series depart greatly from the patterns established in the series culture since this medium came into being. Today’s TV series address a range of controversial topics and break taboos. Violence, drug addiction, corruption and other types of social problems are extensively covered in contemporary TV series. Nowadays, filmmakers no longer compete for viewers with content alone, but also with innovation, play with conventions, artistic quality and narrative experiments. This pursuit of new trends and new ways of content delivery translates into the dynamic development of series narration. Apart from computer games, it is hard to name another medium evolving so rapidly, with more and more as yet unnamed series sub-genres emerging.

It is also worth acknowledging the educational aspects of TV series, which often draw upon historical facts<sup>5</sup>. In her article “Za co Kochamy i dlaczego nienawidzimy seriali” (“Why we love and hate TV series”), Alicja Helman argues that one of the reasons behind TV series popularity is their informative and educational aspect: “I have heard a lot about the educational values of the TV series, about my interlocutors’ interest in exotic landscapes and customs, history of Japan, Brazilians’ mentality, and the Second World War” (Helman, 1991: 17). It should be stressed, however, that this aspect is not the only one that demonstrates the educational value of the contemporary TV series, since they often refer to social problems such as discrimination, illegal immigration, drug addiction, young people’s suicides and stalking. The topics that investigate the risks of civilization can also be considered an educational asset. A characteristic feature of television genres (mainly TV series) is that current social issues are dynamically reflected in series content. TV creators, mainly screenwriters and producers, respond to social changes and address ‘sensitive’ issues much more quickly, as opposed to cinema filmmakers, who need time to ‘digest’ new phenomena and threats before they start processing them into feature scripts.

While examining the contemporary TV series, one should keep in mind that these are commercial products and viewing figures are still the key factor behind the decision to produce another season. No matter what element of the narrative we investigate as the one that makes TV series different from other audio-visual products, in the era of mass production, the initial minutes of these productions are crucial for further viewership. The great ‘production machine’ delivering hundreds of new TV series each year has developed various methods to attract audiences’ attention to new productions. The opening sequences essentially shape the discourse around screenwriting practices, especially as regards pilot episodes, tests of sorts for new TV series – the level of their success may make producers choose to continue or drop a new series. Despite the analysis of opening sequences, it is hard to say by how much the viewership can change before and after an opening sequence. There is no official way to access minute-by-minute ratings. Global telemetry data are publicly available for the viewership watching a given episode, yet stations provide no access to the data for individual minutes. As HBO has completely withdrawn from telemetry and instead has focused on audiences’ opinions and subscription numbers, the impact of opening scenes on viewership can in this case be analyzed in theoretical terms only. However, web rankings of the best

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<sup>5</sup> Examples: *Rome*, *The Tudors*, *Marco Polo*, *The Crown*, *The Borgias*, *Catherine the Great*, *The Pacific*, *Band of Brothers*.

opening sequences made by fans are available online (e.g. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF\\_h9fI3dQs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF_h9fI3dQs)).

The proposed typology of the sequences opening contemporary TV series does not cover this topic exhaustively. Both for character- and action-driven opening sequences, it is possible to come up with further sub-types based on more detailed criteria. It is also worth noting that, unlike feature films, TV series are audio-visual fictional forms with a running time of several or even dozens of hours. With the principle of thematic continuity extending across all episodes, TV series have become genre hybrids both in terms of the content they cover and plot structure. Thus, series creators use vast arcs of change in their characters and present their inner lives, and also impress audiences with spectacular action. Whether a given opening sequence is based solely on the dynamic development of an event at the cost of the character's exposition or the other way around is hard to identify. The opening sequence in *Breaking Bad*, for instance, presents two men in a fast-paced car escape. At the same time, one of them, Walter White, is clearly introduced – through his intriguing behaviour (reading the farewell letter in front of the camera; ineffective gun handling; wearing only underwear in the desert; gas mask on his face, etc.).

However, despite the noticeable story/character hybridity in the scenes opening the contemporary series, their creators always seek to emphasize one of the elements to intrigue the viewer. Hence, one dominant type of opening can be identified in each series.

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