

M0053963NC

T2196 ✓

NC 0017968 X



**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**  
**FACULTY OF DESIGN**

**Department of Visual Communication**

**A DISCUSSION OF MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE DESIGN  
IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA**

**by Dermot Flynn**

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies  
in Candidacy for the Degree of B.Des Visual Communication 1999

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Introduction

Graphic Design in a Cinematic Context . . . . .	5
Aims. . . . .	7
Methodology. . . . .	7

### Chapter 1

Cinema: The Suspension of Disbelief. . . . .	9
Credits. . . . .	10
The Credit Sequence. . . . .	12
The Pre-Credit Sequence. . . . .	13

### Chapter 2

The Main Title Sequence. . . . .	17
Design considerations and parameters. . . . .	19
Developmental history. . . . .	21

### Chapter 3

SAUL BASS. . . . .	25
The New York School. . . . .	25
The Catalyst: Man with the Golden Arm. . . . .	26
The Collaboration with Scorsese. . . . .	29

### Chapter 4

KYLE COOPER. . . . .	36
Present State of title design. . . . .	36
The Se7en title sequence. . . . .	38
Elements of style. . . . .	42

Conclusion. . . . .	47
---------------------	----

Bibliography. . . . .	51
-----------------------	----

Publications. . . . .	52
Articles. . . . .	53
Filmography. . . . .	55





## LIST OF PLATES

## FIGURE No:

1. The use of print in the cinema: **Warner Bros studio logo**
2. The use of print in the cinema: **Citizen Kane** (1941)
3. Credit sequence from **Dangerous Liaisons** (1988)
4. Movie stills from **Hand that Rocks the Cradle** (1991)
5. Pre-credit sequence from **Fallen** (1998)
6. Pre-credit sequence from **Pulp Fiction** (1994)
7. Pre-credit sequence from **Copycat** (1995)
8. Pre-credit sequence from **Bram Stoker's Dracula** (1993)
9. Montage film-making: **Battleship Potemkin** (1929)
10. Title opening of **Citizen Kane** (1941)
11. Main title sequence of **Funny Face** (1956)
12. Main title sequence of **Man With the Golden Arm** (1956)
13. (a) Main title sequence of **Anatomy of a Murder** (1959)  
(b) Main title sequence of **Psycho** (1960)
14. Main title sequence of **Vertigo** (1958)
15. Main title sequence of **Seven Year Itch** (1955)
16. Main title sequence concept for **Cape Fear** (1993)
17. Main title sequence of **Cape Fear** (1993)
18. (a) Main title sequence concept for **the Age of Innocence** (1993)  
(b) Main title sequence for **Carmen Jones** (1962)
19. Main title sequence for **The Age of Innocence** (1993)
20. Main title sequence of **Casino** (1996)
22. Still from **Casino** main title sequence
23. Main title sequence of **Superman the Movie** (1979)
24. (a) Main title sequence of **Twister** (1995)



- (b) Main title sequence of **True Lies** (1995)
25. Still from main title sequence of **Seven** (1995)
26. Main title sequence of **Seven** (1995)
27. Main title sequence of **Seven** (1995)
28. (a) Still from main title sequence of **Seven** (1996)  
(b) Spread from Ray Gun magazine by **David Carson**
29. Main title sequence of **Island of Dr. Moreau** (1996)
30. Main title sequence of **Island of Dr. Moreau** (1996)
31. Main title sequence of **To Kill A Mockingbird** (1962)
32. Main title sequence of **Mimic** (1997)
33. Main title sequence of **Walk on the Wild Side** (1962)



## GRAPHIC DESIGN IN A CINEMATIC CONTEXT



(Fig 1) The Warner Bros Studio Logo.  
The first image seen by an audience is a piece of graphic design - the studio identity.

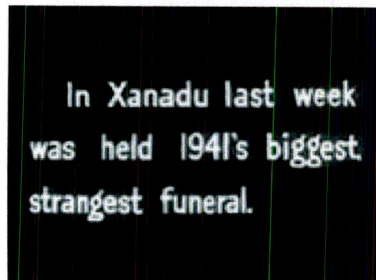
"It is possible to formulate a general rule about the use of print in film: print should be used as a means of supplying information that either cannot be imparted in any other way or that will reduce the amount of exposition....." (Dick, 1998, p.12)

The term 'title' is used in the Cassell Companion to the Cinema to encompass all printed material in film. Design for the printed word - graphic design - has one great commonality with film. They are both forms of visual communication. Their most basic function is to relay information in a concise manner to the eye.

'Printed matter in a film is a visual; as such it can make a valuable contribution to the narrative' (Dick, 1998, p.20). The written word in cinema can operate on a literal level: **Dead Again** (1963) opens with various shots of newspaper headlines, detailing a horrific murder in the past, which will come back to haunt the film's protagonists. At the same time, it can also act symbolically. The plot of **Citizen Kane** (1941) revolves around the attempts of a journalist to decipher Kane's last dying word - "Rosebud" (Fig 2). The murderer in **Jagged Edge** (1985) is revealed by an old typewriter with a faulty lower-case 't', while much of the plot of **Disclosure** (1996) is played out on a series of computer screens, where ominous messages and threats are sent to the main character via email.







(Fig 2) Other examples of the use of print in the cinema taken from *Citizen Kane* (1941) - (top) an intertitle, and examples of the written word as visual metaphor (middle and bottom)

However, printed matter in film is most evident in the presentation of production information. The opening image of all feature films consists of a piece of graphics - the studio logo (Fig 1). Credits consist of a complete list of all persons involved in the production of the film. Intertitles (Fig 2) are printed elements which appear periodically on the screen. First used by makers of silent movies, their function is to clarify the action and supplement the narrative. Subtitles are most common in the transmission of translated dialogue. They are most common in European-made films shown to English-speaking audiences. Opening titles can serve several functions. They can act as time/place designations, detailing the setting of the film. For example, *Star Wars* (1977) opens with a distinctly unique set of opening titles, which roll across the screen: 'A long long time ago, in a galaxy far away'. An opening title can also be a quotation or epigram. *Outbreak* (1994) opens with a brief written piece which states that the only true threat to man's existence on earth is the virus, which allows us to consider the film from this point of view.

So far the examples of graphics in the cinema which I have discussed are static in nature. However, one particularly exciting aspect of the combination of film and graphic design is the main title sequence - an example of kinetic graphics, design which not just exists in space but also in the double continuums of time and motion.





## AIMS

My primary aim in this thesis is to provide an in-depth discussion of main title sequence design. Material written on the subject is largely confined to ephemeral articles and profiles in design periodicals, as well as some articles on the Web, which are largely of a limited nature. Brief references can also be found in design compendiums. Having been unable to obtain a substantial publication on the subject, I therefore can only assume that there is not one available.

## METHODOLOGY

This thesis shall discuss main title design with particular reference to contemporary examples, as well as the roles of the designer and the director. Before discussing the main title sequence and providing an adequate definition, I shall put the main title sequence in its specific context. This shall be accomplished by examining other methods used by directors in beginning a film. The main title sequence shall then be examined both in terms of its function and from a design perspective, looking at the considerations which a designer must take into account. Its historical development shall then be discussed. Finally, the main part of the thesis shall concern itself with the work of two individuals who are widely regarded as leaders in the field of title design - Saul Bass, regarded as the main title sequence's inventor; and Kyle Cooper, a devotee of the new technology who is widely regarded as Bass's successor and "the groundbreaking sequence director of the moment". (Edgar. 1998, p.29) Both have been continuously mentioned in articles which I have obtained in the course of researching this



thesis. Their work shall be looked at in terms of the films to which they accompany.

Ultimately, I will consider whether or not the main title can be regarded as a valid form of artistic expression, and if so, can it develop into a genre of its own.

As the main title sequence is apparent in the context of a film's opening, it is therefore necessary to examine the various ways in which a film can begin. The first chapter shall therefore concern itself with other methods employed by a director in opening a film.



## CHAPTER 1

“.....a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy....” (Mulvey, 1989, p. 17)

The above quotation is from an essay by film writer Laura Mulvey entitled 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', a discussion of the theories of looking in the cinema. The essay is primarily concerned with issues of gender and feminism in film. However, one of the first arguments made in the essay is that viewing a film is essentially a process of brainwashing. One of Mulvey's remarks states that the cinema provides a perfect escape route from the outside world, as well as an outlet for voyeuristic viewing due to its enclosed environment.

Cinema could justifiably be described as an intense experience. The dark, warm surrounds of the theatre, filled with rows of seats facing a large, brightly-lit screen covered with flickering, seductive images enforces the film-goer's sensation of disembodiment from the outside world. Seated alongside total strangers, a film-goer ironically feels a sense of empathy with them, as they are side-by-side sharing the same experiences. The size of the screen, coupled with the close-up, allows a sense of intimacy usually not possible in ordinary existence. This further bolsters the illusion.



Essentially, what a viewer experiences during a film is the suspension of disbelief.

He/she is catapulted into an alternate universe in which anything can become possible. For an hour or two, the conventional rules which govern reality outside the doors of the cinema become irrelevant to the viewer whilst they are caught up the screen narrative in front of them.

How exactly to establish the break between reality and fantasy is a particular concern for the director. The director's ultimate aim is to engineer the film's formal structures, plot development and aesthetics into a unified whole. Therefore a film's opening has to be carefully considered. Audience first impressions are extremely important. A movie's beginning is a vital part of the mise-en-film.

### **Credits**

Cast credits have always posed an aesthetic problem for the director. In 1942 a significant attempt was made to abolish crediting which, unsurprisingly, proved unsuccessful due to union demands (Law, 1995). Credit lists are prepared by a studio's legal department and must follow a specific format; they are an outside interference which the director must contend with, as they do not come under his/her jurisdiction. Therefore the director has had to find ways of integrating them into the action of the film in a sensitive manner. The issue is even more apparent today. New technological development have resulted in more labour-intensive





pictures, causing credit lists to become progressively longer and longer. If nowadays a credit list is to appear in a picture's opening, it is usually an abridged one, consisting of the director, producer, starring actors, writers and key personnel. A fully comprehensive version usually follows after the film has ended.

Having considered credits, a director can take two approaches in executing a picture's opening. The film's beginning can be interpreted in a photo-realistic manner through the eye of a camera, or via a more stylised, graphic approach as envisioned by a designer employed by the director. A particular aspect of the film industry which continuously reminds us that it is first and foremost a business is its constant state of change, renewal and reinvention. Bernard K. Dick discusses the transient quality of the industry and how it has carried over onto the screen: "The main reason for being seated when the movie begins is that it is impossible to know exactly how it will begin". (Dick, 1998, p. 11). However, it is generally recognised that there are three frequently used methods of beginning a movie. The three methods, documented by Dick in his Anatomy of Film, are as follows:

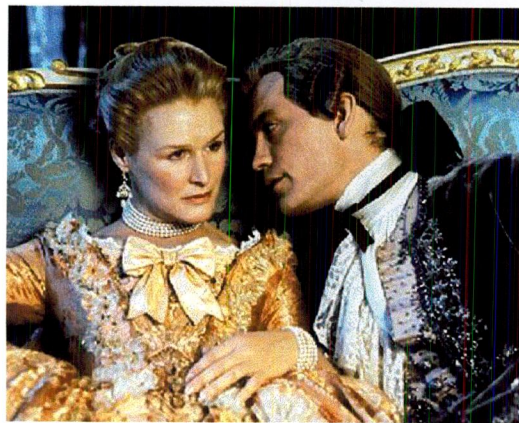
- (1) The Credit Sequence
- (2) The Pre-Credit Sequence
- (3) The Main Title Sequence

1. The first part of the report is a general  
introduction to the subject of the study.  
2. The second part is a description of the  
methodology used in the study.  
3. The third part is a description of the  
results of the study.  
4. The fourth part is a discussion of the  
results of the study.  
5. The fifth part is a conclusion of the  
study.  
6. The sixth part is a list of references.  
7. The seventh part is an appendix.  
8. The eighth part is a list of figures.  
9. The ninth part is a list of tables.  
10. The tenth part is a list of abbreviations.

## The Credit Sequence

In a credit sequence the text of the basic cast and production information are simply superimposed over the main action of the film. This is conceived by the director, with some input by the designer in the overlying text displaying the cast and production information. The designer's chance to display creativity lies solely in the use of typography. However this method is largely the domain of the director and design elements are more or less dispensed with, being kept to a minimum. Often this sequence will feature an image or object that will feature again in the course of the film.

The opening of **Dangerous Liaisons** (1988) depicts both of the main characters, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont, undergoing their respective elaborate and ritualistic toilets (Fig 3). An elaborate costume drama based on the novel by Choderlos de Laclos, the film is a story of seduction and sexual intrigue. Its credit sequence has several functions. It grounds the film in reality by providing a sense of sumptuous period authenticity. The application of make-up and costume by both characters reminds us of the film's literary and theatrical beginnings. The sequence also introduces the motif and theme of the mask - both of which are central to the plot of Frears' film. The Marquise and the Vicomte are shown preparing their outward faces of gentility which they will present to the outside world. During the film, they flirt and parry both psychologically and verbally, before finally falling out and declaring war against each other. At the film's conclusion, the idea of the mask and the unmasking reoccurs, when the Marquise is shown tearfully removing her flawless opera



(Fig 3) Opening credit sequence of **Dangerous Liaisons**(1988)

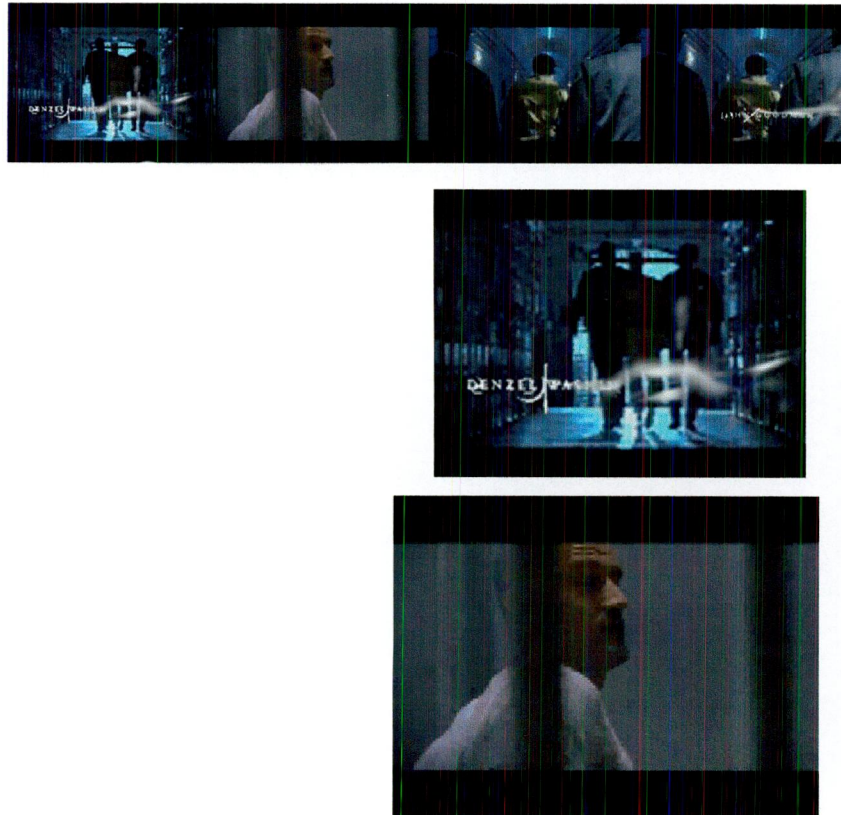
(Fig 4)threatening interiors(below) in **the Hand that Rocks the Cradle** (1991)







makeup.



(Fig 5)(Above) A combination of both pre-credit and credit sequences in **Fallen** (1998) showing cleverly-handled animated typography

Another example is **The Hand that Rocks the Cradle** (1991) the credit sequence of which features a series of lingering shots of the bright, sundrenched interiors of the fashionable home of the Bartels, whose domestic bliss is about to be destroyed by a vengeful nanny. A particular aspect of this film (Fig 4) is its exploitation of the sinister potential of ordinary domestic surroundings (Halliwell, 1998). By using these calm and serene images, director Curtis Hanson establishes the peace and harmony of this yuppie couple, thus emphasising the 'calm before the storm', as it were. The contrast of the menacing qualities exuded by the Bartel home during the homicidal antics of Peyton Flanders towards the end of the film provide a jarring contrast to the initially sunny and friendly impression that is given via the film's opening.

### The Pre-Credit Sequence

Initially, this seems to be the domain of the director, being purely cinematic in nature. The audience are thrown headlong into the action of the film through a cinematic prologue, which precedes the main film. Once the prelude is over, the title of the film usually appears.

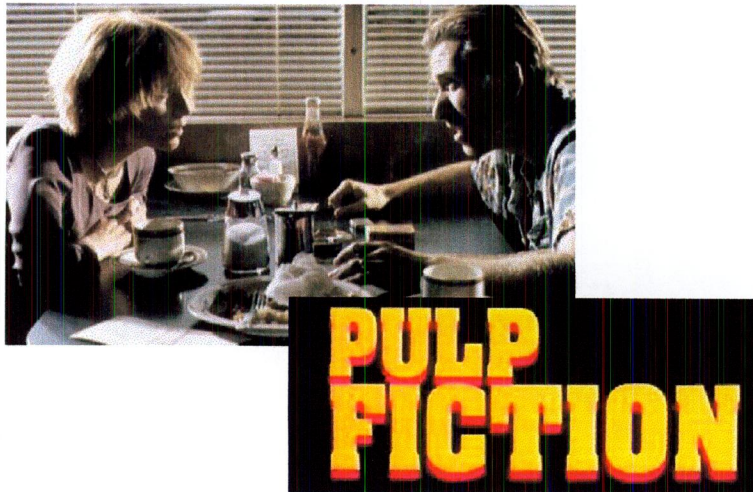
However, once the initial impact has been made, the director is not going to dilute it with mundane, unexciting crediting. Often the abridged version of the credits is dispensed

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting. The names are listed in alphabetical order.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were absent from the meeting. The names are listed in alphabetical order.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.

4. The fourth part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were absent from the meeting.



(Fig.6) Pre-Credit Sequence from **Pulp Fiction** (1994)

with totally and left to the end, or, is left in and interpreted in an imaginative manner. For example, **Fallen** (1998) concerns itself with a demon who can travel from person to person by the touch of a hand or the brush of an overcoat, resulting in a serial killer with a thousand faces. The initial pre-credits sequence (Fig 5) opens with a confrontation between the main protagonist and an incarnation of the demon, a notorious serial killer who is to be executed. As the killer walks down the corridor toward the electric chair, the credits, rendered in a mutated, quasi-ecclesiastical typeface, fade onto the screen, only to fade away in breaths of smoke. The typography in this case is a literal interpretation of the picture's central theme - conventional rules do not apply - meanings are plausible yet intangible.

The purpose of the pre-credits sequence is to keep an audience guessing about the identity of some character or the nature of some pivotal event which is to be realised later on in the film. Most often, it is regarded as a gimmick to attract the audience's attention; however it does have creative significance as it is primarily used to augment the plot. For instance, **Pulp Fiction** (1994) opens with two bank-robbers, Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, debating over how to rob a bank, finally deciding that the very restaurant that they are seated in will be far more profitable to hold up than any bank. The timeframe of the movie zips back and forth; this very same scene will be replayed again in the course of the film. However, the sequence has achieved its goal - it has grabbed the attention of the audience by shocking them, both with the obscene language of both characters and the high-octane Del-Tones music which follows.







(Fig 7) Pre-Credit sequence from **Copycat (1995)**  
An extremely violent and graphic pre-credit opening which is vital to the plot, being repeated in exact detail at the film's climax

**Copycat** (1995) concerns itself with a killer at work imitating the most notorious serial killers of the century. The film opens with a voiceover of a lecture on serial killers by Dr. Helen Hudson, set to an opening shot of a group of young female students sunbathing in one of the college quadrangles. On finishing the lecture, after a scare in which she imagines she glimpses a killer at large in the theatre, Dr. Hudson leaves for the bathroom, where she is promptly strung up in a noose by a serial killer, Daryl Lee Cullum. Like **Pulp Fiction**, the intention of this pre-credit sequence (Fig 7) is to shock the audience. For instance, particularly recognisable (and foul) language is used by Cullum, while the surroundings of the college bathroom are all white tile and chrome, suggesting an operating theatre. Weaver's character wears a bright red suit, suggesting blood and the violence which is to follow. This particular costume appears in two other occasions during the course of the film, one of which is the exact replica of the opening scene (yet another similarity to **Pulp Fiction**). This scene is also vital to the film's plot; one of its particular features is Hudson's agoraphobia, a result of this attack, which subsequently results in her self-imposed exile in her luxurious San Francisco apartment. The reoccurrence of the bathroom scene, in the climax of the film, is a carbon copy of that featured in the pre-credits sequence; however, it is carried out by the copycat killer of whom the title speaks, who is imitating Daryl Lee Cullum. This is a perfect example of a director carefully considering a film's opening to tie in with the main film.

Despite the decidedly filmic quality of this method of opening, it can also be quite graphic in nature. **Bram Stoker's Dracula** (Coppola, 1993) features an extremely stylish,





(Fig 8) Pre-credit sequence of **Bram Stoker's Dracula** (1993) an extremely stylised and graphic pre-credit opening which grounds the film in a historical context.

stylised and atmospheric pre-credits sequence, which at the same time is inherently plot-driven (Fig 8). As Coppola had reinvented Bram Stoker's classic novel as a love story, he felt it necessary to give some background 'historical information' as it were. Hence Dracula is reinvented as an actual person, Vlad the Impaler, and the story's plot re-concerns itself with his search to find the reincarnation of his dead wife. Coppola uses various motifs to suggest historical events; rather than actual film footage, thus establishing a break between previous history and the present day in which most of the film's action takes place. The shadow of a crescent moon advances over an ancient map, symbolising the advance of the Turks across Eastern Europe. Silhouettes of Dracula's battle with the Eastern invaders occur again in a scene set in an old London theatre featuring the camera obscura, while the priest who presides over the funeral rites of Elisabeta is most obviously Anthony Hopkins who plays the pivotal character of Van Helsing. All these elements combine to suggest a circle of eternal return, implying that everything which is to follow in the film has already been pre-ordained.

The various ways of opening which I have discussed in this chapter are largely literal and cinematic in nature, with some limited graphic input. I have discussed the problem of credits interfering with a film's action and two of the various methods, the credit and pre-credit sequences, which directors employ in dealing with the aesthetic dilemma which they present. The next chapter and indeed the rest of this thesis shall concern itself with the third method touched upon in this chapter, one which is decidedly different to both the credit and pre-credit sequence - the main title sequence.





## CHAPTER 2

### The Main Title Sequence

A main title sequence is a short piece before the start of the film, separate from the narrative, which showcases the cast credits. Its most significant difference from credit and pre-credit sequence methods is that its specific function is to act as a vehicle for production credits, as opposed to slotting them into the main action of the movie.

Bernard K. Dick describes the basic function of the main title sequence as "that of a program or playbill" (Dick, 1998, p. 12), the intention of which was to merely list all those involved in the production of the film. Lack of technology in the early years prevented credits from being integrated with the main film. During its early years, the main title sequence was regarded as a necessary evil, an annoying interference which would end as quickly as possible, and, ideally, should be dispensed with altogether. Indeed, a formal attempt was made in 1942 to totally abolish crediting which unsurprisingly proved unsuccessful. It existed primarily because of union demands which made the display of cast and production information mandatory.

The main title sequence would be invented and gradually develop between the years of 1930 - 1950. These were commonly known as the Studio Years, regarded as one of the most



fruitful periods of film production in the history of Hollywood. Unfortunately, this was not so for the title sequence. The creative aridity of the early examples is quite surprising when we refer to the 'hermetically sealed world' of which Laura Mulvey spoke of. If cinema is an escape from reality, should not the title sequence, which justifiably could be described as the transition point between reality and fantasy, be given greater consideration?

However, despite the fact that these sequences were visual presentations of important information, and therefore open to graphic interpretation, neither artistic expression nor creative possibilities were considered in their execution. Examples of the period were utilitarian, functional and extremely basic in nature, and bland in character. Graphis journalist Stuart Frolick describes them as "little more than obligatory displays of bad type, unrelated to the content of the movies that followed" (Frolick, 1991, p.95). Using a designer was not even considered; any decisions to be made were made by the studios, and these decisions were usually totally unsuitable and ill-informed. Clumsy and insensitive typography, overlaid onto static and irrelevant backgrounds were the full extents of the studio's aesthetic sensibilities. These celluloid eyesores were accompanied by blaring music from a 100-piece orchestra played at maximum volume in order to end 'popcorn time' - the ten minutes or so of chatting and eating before the start of the film. Indeed, according to film critic Joe Morgenstern, titles were regarded by most projectionists as such a nuisance that frequently they were shown upon the great curtains covering the screen, which would only open at the fade-in to the first scene (Coupland, 1998, p.103).





Presently, however, we are experiencing a golden age in main title design. Modern sensibility views the title sequence as an extremely important element of a film. This new-found interest in the main title has reaped its rewards. Main title sequences can justifiably be described as one of the most dynamic and visually exciting aspects in film today. They are often thoughtful, witty and creative forms of expression, imaginatively executed. Designer Dan Kleinman has defined the main title sequence as it is today as "a distillation of the atmosphere and the elements of the film in a very stylistic and dreamlike way" (Edgar, 1998, p. 29) Their role nowadays could be described as a precursor or prelude, which sets the tone, provides the mood and foreshadows the action of the picture. Besides presenting information, they establish audience engagement with the film from its opening scenes, and, most importantly, act as conductors from the world of fact to the universe of fiction. Missing one whilst out at the popcorn counter could be compared to entering an opera after the overture has finished and the first act has begun; a piece of music has been missed which is not necessarily part of the plot, yet an element which is significant to the opera as a whole is now missing.

### **Design considerations and parameters**

Capturing the cinematic flavour of a movie through the manipulation of text and image is a process which provides endless possibilities. A main title sequence may be conceived

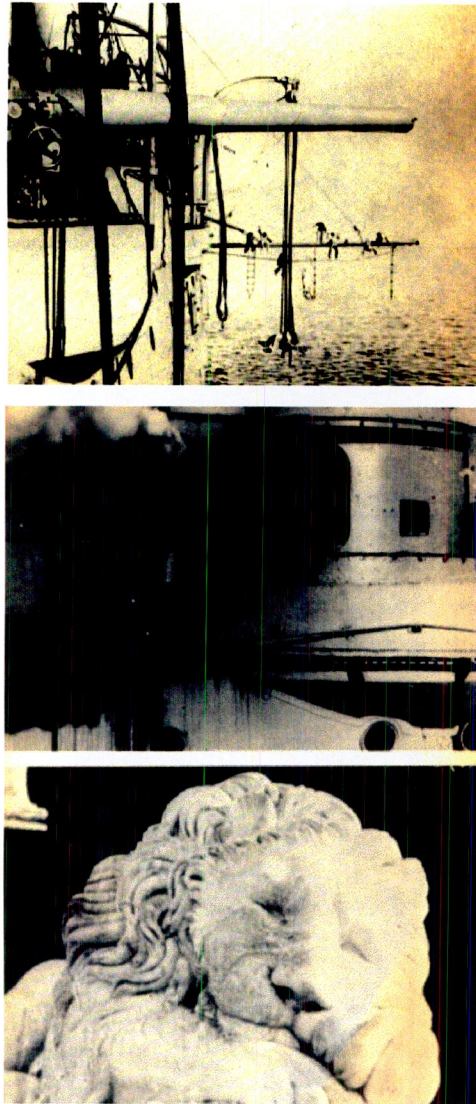


like any other print work which involves the juxtaposition of type and image. However, its unique quality as a graphic medium stems from its filmic elements of sound and particularly, motion. A main title sequence has a pre-determined length and consistency; it is a fleeting experience for the audience, as opposed to an ordinary two-dimensional piece of print work which can be viewed for an indeterminate length of time.

There is no definite rule with regard to how long a main title should be. Usually they are quite short in nature; most are between 2 -3 minutes in length. Due to its brief nature, a designer can avail of multiple opportunities to stylise, abstract and create metaphor. Any element of the film may be taken as a starting point. For example, a main title may consist of a micro-version of a film's plot; an added insight into or an introduction to a pivotal character in a literal or metaphorical manner; or a brief exploration of some particular aspect of the film, be it plot, tone, theme or environment.

The screen can be treated like a blank piece of paper - its edges and middle may be used or remain unused. Perspective can be employed; the plane of the screen may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional. A grid may be utilised; elements may imply movement or stasis; their effect may be balanced or unstable. Typography is extremely important. The basic rules such as kerning, leading, intervals, as well as the purity of white space, cannot be ignored. These principles which apply to design for print have also extreme relevance to main title sequence design, their purpose being not only to create something which is visually





(Fig. 9) Sergei Eisenstein's **Battleship Potemkin**, universally regarded as one of the most potent examples both of montage and of expressive film-making

pleasing, but also to create, heighten and emphasise meaning.

The stylistic use of film footage by a designer in a main title sequence must be different to that of a director, whose aim in using celluloid is primarily vested in establishing a film's plot. Due to the brevity of most main titles, camera work by a designer must be extremely expressive, visually potent and graphically eloquent. That is not to say that a director's use of the camera is not or cannot be all of the above. Rather, a title designer who is not allowed the luxury of time to unfold narratives, themes and subtexts must use a more 'graphic' brand of film-making.

### Developmental History

The graphic qualities of film were first truly explored by the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein in his use of montage. Many title designers have acknowledged Eisenstein's enormous influence on expressionist film-making; Saul Bass comments on his innovative use of the insert (Kirkham, 1995,p.19) Montage, evolved by a small group of elite artists prior to the Russian Revolution in 1917, was based on the theory that when the eye views two images placed side by side it automatically constructs meaning, linking the two into a coherent sequence. Eisenstein's brand of film-making centred around the philosophical belief that the world around us is in a constant state of flux, its very existence depending on a state of constant change due to the continuous collision of various separate elements. Through coupling









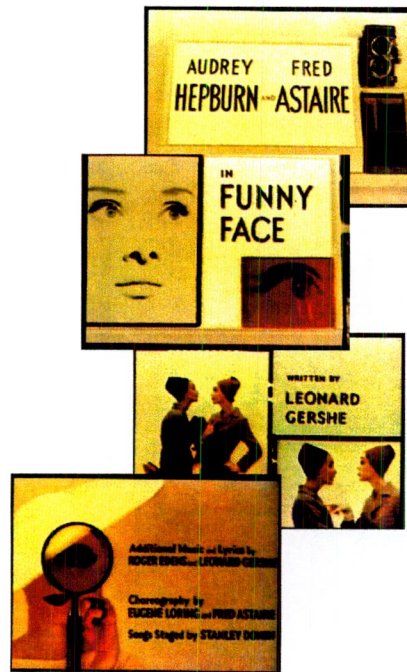
(Fig 10) Some early attempts of exploring the main title (above) by Orson Welles in **Citizen Kane** (1941)

this theory with that of montage, Eisenstein demonstrated that visual impact could be achieved if consecutive shots in a scene were entirely unrelated - e.g. the combination of shot A with shot B results in C rather than AB. A good example is his **Battleship Potemkin** (1929), based upon the true story of a mutiny which took place aboard the Potemkin in 1905. After innocent bystanders are mowed down by military gunfire on the Odessa Steps, the mutineers aboard the ship take revenge by bombarding the army barracks. In this section of the film, Eisenstein intercuts the main action with static scenes of carved stone lions in various stages of awakening, symbolising the awakening of the Russian people to new ideas and revolt against oppression (Fig 9). Montage is an ideal technique to use within the main title. Its decidedly non-linear nature is particularly suited to the main title's compressed nature. The unifying of separately composed shots allows the audience to experience a brief yet extremely effective exploration of concepts which the main narrative can explore more fully in the length of its duration.

This experimentation occurred before the great flowering of the film industry in America. However innovation and invention by film-makers such as Eisenstein went unnoticed. Main titles remained dull and boring; indeed, the use of film footage in a title sequence would not occur until the 1960s. Main titles were usually presented in the form of 'cards', photographs which would appear periodically on the screen. Some brief attempts to explore the medium occurred during the early years. In his widely-acclaimed **Citizen Kane** (1941) Orson Welles made an effort to render the film's opening in an imaginative manner.



Lasting only eight seconds, the credits at the opening consist only of the studio name, director and film title - all in stark white text rendered in three radically different typefaces on a plain black background (Fig 10).



(Fig 11) Main title sequence for **Funny Face** (1956) designed by Richard Avedon

Based loosely on the career of fashion photographer Richard Avedon, the Fred Astaire vehicle **Funny Face** (1956) contained (for the period) an unusually witty and quite stylish opening designed by Avedon himself (Fig 11). Taking the form of the above-mentioned 'title card', it consists of a series of photographs which Avedon took for Harpers Bazaar. The effect essentially was glimpsing the process of magazine editing before entering into the magazine's 'inner sanctum'.

However sequences of the period were largely visual disasters. **i-D** Magazine journalist Chee Pearlman described this stage in their development as:

'.....An era of kitsch conceits, where albums with magically turning pages listed the cast; or where credits came up branded on a cattle-hide to signal a Western or were rolled amid heaps of mused satin for a romance.....'

(Pearlman, 1990, p.39)

It can be assumed therefore that a graphic designer had no place in Hollywood in the early years of title design. Even if the services of a designer were employed, their creative output was largely smothered and ignored by the all-powerful studios who dictatorially made all decisions. Pearlman describes the studio mentality of believing that an audience's interest



lay solely in tragic romantic and sentimental fiction and melodrama. Anything before the film with any kind of expressive power was regarded as an interference which would affect box-office profits. However, this small-minded sensibility would not continue for much longer. The revolution in main title sequences would be kick started with a 1956 Otto Preminger film called **Man With The Golden Arm**. This film would feature a title sequence designed by a man whose very name has come to signify the creative uprising in main title design - Saul Bass.





## CHAPTER 3

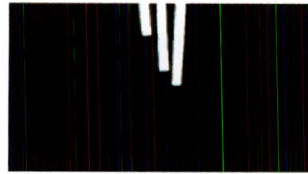
### SAUL BASS

#### The New York School

Saul Bass is regarded as one of the most important and influential designers of this century. Born in 1920 and raised in New York, he emerged during the New York School design movement during the '40s and '50s in America. 'The New York School' is a term used to describe the new Modernist approach to graphic design in the United States at mid-century. Modernism was brought to America by talented Europeans fleeing totalitarian regimes for a country in which freedom of speech was regarded as the most basic human right.

Bass was among a small group of designers, also including Paul Rand, Alvin Lustig and Bradbury Thompson, who established this new avant-garde approach to design. It was one of the most fruitful periods in the history of graphic design, where originality of concept was prized over all else. Fiercely competitive, designers sought to personally express themselves whilst providing clear, cogent solutions to visual communication problems.

Bass's genius has been recognised by many to be in his lightning-swift ability to identify the core of a design problem. His solutions are always honest, uncomplicated, breathtakingly stylish and simple. They have a wonderful sense of robust energy and an almost casual precision in their execution. His first involvement with the film industry occurred after



(Fig 12) Main Title Sequence designed by Saul Bass for *Man With The Golden Arm* (1956)





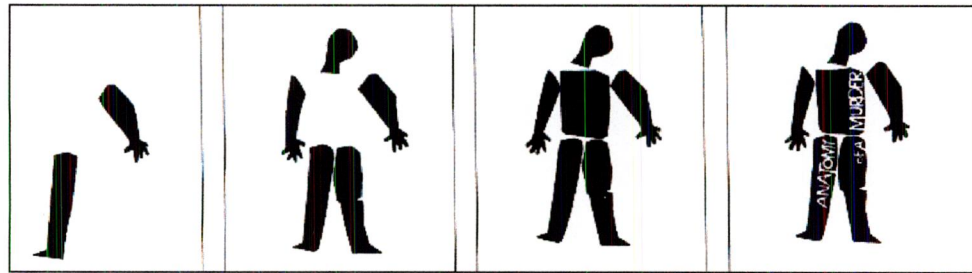
his move to the West Coast in 1946, when he was commissioned by Austrian-born director Otto Preminger to create marketing graphics for his film **Carmen Jones** (1954). In designing cinema material, Bass's approach was to produce a single graphic image which would be versatile enough to be used in all aspects of a film's advertising. For the film, Bass developed the symbol of a flaming rose, which was used in both the poster and the title sequence. The next Preminger film which Bass would work upon would be **Man with the Golden Arm** (1956).

### The Catalyst: Man With The Golden Arm

Preminger had already gained the status of a controversial director, having already proved himself quite ready to explore thorny and taboo subjects in his films. **Man with the Golden Arm** was no exception. It garnered media attention from the start, being Hollywood's first close examination of drug addiction, hitherto regarded as a no-go area. Bass' concept for the film's advertising was a pictographic symbol of a crooked arm, bracketed by the title and stabbing downward into a rectangle composed of slab-like bars. Initially, Preminger was extremely reluctant to use Bass's idea of animating the logo for the main title sequence, having originally conceived it as a static symbol. However, Bass eventually won him over to his way of thinking, and the result was a thrilling and eye-catching piece of graphic-design-in-motion (Fig 12).

'Like a "proun", the term that El Lissitzky coined to intimate a purity of space in painting - Bass' classic work of the 50's and 60's explored the line in it's basic form as a way of gradually establishing an abstract narrative...' (Edgar, 1998, p.29)





(Fig 13a) Main title sequence for **Anatomy of a Murder** (1959), and (13b) **Psycho**, particularly good examples of Bass' modernist philosophy which he used to great effect in many of his sequences

In the sequence, a single white bar thrusts downward into the centre of the screen, followed by three others. On reaching the screen's centre, text appears. The action is accompanied by throbbing, staccato jazz music. Three of the bars then fade, one remaining for the narrative, and then others jab in suddenly from the top, bottom left and right, framing the title of the film which materialises in between. All happens in perfect counterpoint to the strident sonorous jazz music.

Many writers have discussed how influential and ground-breaking this sequence was; an excellent example of Bass' practice of symbolising and summarising the films entire plot in a short timeframe. It alerted studios and film-makers to the need for a designer in executing a main title, as well as astonishing audiences who had never seen its like before. It also highlighted the importance of a films opening. According to journalist Pat Kirkham, when Preminger heard that the title sequence was being screened over closed drapes in movie theatres he made sure that attached to every print was a note instructing the projectionist not to run the first reel until the curtains had been drawn back (Kirkham, 1994, p.16).

The widespread acceptance during the 1950s of modernism in many aspects of American culture such as architecture and industrial design meant that Bass' style with its aesthetics of fragmentation and reduction (Figs. 13a, 13b) proved extremely popular. From 1956 onwards Bass experienced a period of widespread acclaim and adulation coupled with frantic activity. More collaborations with Preminger ensued on films such as **Saint Joan** (1957),









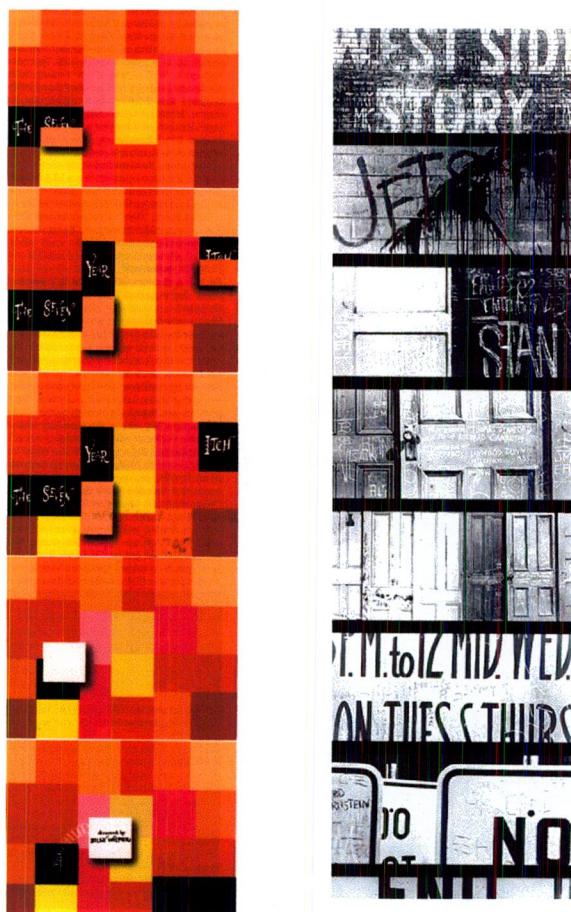
(Fig14) Main title Sequence for *Vertigo* (1958)

*Bonjour Tristesse* (1957), and *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), and with British director Alfred Hitchcock: *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960). Besides working with these famous directors, Bass also created many fine titles for films such as *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *West Side Story* (1960), *Spartacus* (1960), and *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962). While there is no particular style by which a Bass title sequence can be defined, there are a number of unique recurring motifs and images by which they can be recognised. Among these are hand lettering and elemental, almost crude forms clearly showing the influence of Matisse paper cut-outs (*Man with the Golden Arm*, *Anatomy of a Murder*), the eloquence of bisecting line and plain type (*North by Northwest*, *Psycho*), the layering of script over image (*Spartacus*), and fragmentation (*Anatomy of a Murder*).

Bass viewed music as an extremely important element. For example, in designing the title for *Vertigo* (1958) (Fig 14), he worked in close conjunction with composer Bernard Herrman in order to achieve a sense of musical and visual integration. Herrman's music blares in immediately over the studio logo; by the time Bass' sequence has begun it has faded to a quiet menace, introducing a haunting melody which symbolises the central characters obsession with her dead grandmother. Bass' title consists of a fragmentation of actress Kim Novak's face in close-up. The camera closes in on one of her eyes, as it does so the eye is overlaid by a mathematical Lissajous figure. As the technical credits appear, they are supplemented by crashing, violent chords. The music eventually building to a crescendo as the title nears its end, enhancing the sense of paranoid menace which is inherent to the film.







(Fig 15) Bass sequences always perfectly complemented the film for which they were designed. For Billy Wilder's **Seven Year Itch** (1955) Bass incorporated a series of pop-up boxes which revealed the credits, an upbeat treatment which suited perfectly Wilder's light-hearted comedy, while for **West Side Story** (1960) the graffiti-style credits perfectly suited the film's theme of urban gang warfare (15b).

These sequences are revealed at their most powerful when viewed in the context of the film to which they act as a prologue. Cast credits in the title of **The Seven Year Itch** (1955), a light-hearted romantic comedy, are contained in a jack-in-the-box format, popping up on to the screen (Fig 15a). The graffiti-style treatment for the opening of **West Side Story** (1960) ties in perfectly with the subject of urban gang warfare (Fig 15b). The street-graffiti motif is also carried through in the epilogue of the lengthy end credits, which act as a 'decompression chamber' after the tragic death of one of the main protagonists. **Psycho's** abstract, parallel, minimal lines and fragmented sans-serif type adequately suggest the tortured, psychotic mental state of Norman Bates; actor first and last names split apart, preparing the viewer for a creepy, sinister movie in which split personalities and slashing and cutting feature prominently (Fig 13b).

### The Collaboration with Scorsese

Unfortunately this period of frantic and fruitful activity in Bass' career was not to continue. From the mid 1960s onward, the quantity of film work executed by Bass grew less and less in volume, and eventually petered out altogether. Directors and producers suddenly began to view a film as incomplete and insufficiently packaged unless it contained a fancy treatment of the credits in its opening. Titles subsequently became a separate consideration where they should have worked in tandem with the main film. They degenerated into mere



displays of technical expertise. Bass himself described them:

'.....Producers, film-makers and title-makers began to regard the titles as a personal tap-dance that they did before the film began. All sorts of showing off went on.....we saw a lot of pyrotechnics and fun and games which did not necessarily support the film.....'

(Kirkham, 1994, p.16)



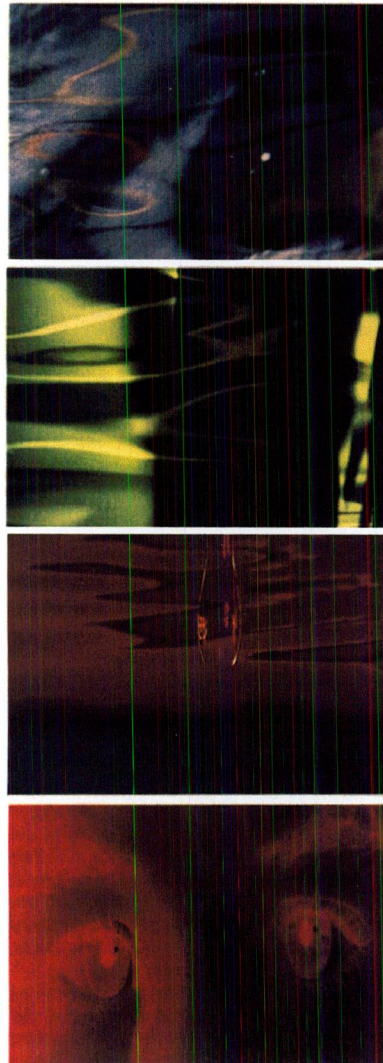
(Fig 16) Bass' talent for visual metaphor was amply demonstrated in his use of murky river-water to suggest submerged emotions in **Cape Fear's** title sequence (1991)

According to journalist Pat Kirkham, Bass' downfall within the film industry was a result of two main factors. The first was his being less sought after as cheaper imitators and 'fashionable' designers were employed to do what he had done previously. Also, as the invention and success of his work began to open up opportunities for designers within the industry, Bass paradoxically then found himself out of a job. As imaginatively-executed main title sequences were now acceptable, the next logical step was the idea of film-makers producing their own sequences. This proved to be the case as most directors were extremely reluctant to relinquish total creative control over a film to the extent that individuals such as Preminger and Hitchcock did.

Bass subsequently returned to the corporate design arena in which his career had been based before his involvement in film. The late 60s and 70s proved very successful for him in terms of graphic design and other aspects of film-making, which raised the profile of Saul Bass and Associates to that of one of the most respected design firms in the United States. Projects undertaken included logos and identities for companies such as United Airlines,







(Fig 17) The unsettling main title sequence for **Cape Fear's** opening (1991), suggestive of menacing psychological undercurrents and impending doom.

Warner Communications, Minolta and AT+T, and a series of short independent films which Bass directed and produced with his wife Elaine, most notably **Why Man Creates** (1968). However, in 1987 Bass returned to title design when he was 're-discovered' as it were by director James L. Brooks, who commissioned him to make titles for **War of the Roses** (1988) and **Big** (1989).

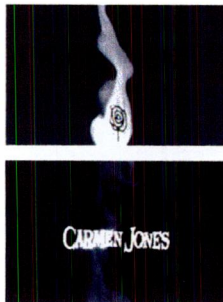
Italian-American film-maker Martin Scorsese learned that Bass was back in main title design from a relative newcomer named Kyle Cooper, whom he had commissioned to do a graphic treatment for the opening of **Good Fellas** (1990). Cooper, to whom Scorsese had remarked that it was a pity that Bass was not working in the medium any more, assured him to the contrary, and promptly found himself out of a job - he was immediately replaced by Bass who provided Scorsese with the exact type of opening that he was looking for. (Coupland, 1998, p.105)

Scorsese had always been a fan of Bass' film work. In him Bass found his most sympathetic and faithful collaborator. From 1990 up until his death in 1996, Bass created title sequences for **Good Fellas**, **Cape Fear** (1991), **The Age of Innocence** (1993) and finally, **Casino** (1996).

When creating a title for a Scorsese film, Bass would focus in on a particular theme or concept through which the whole movie could be described. For Scorsese's remake of **Cape Fear**, he decided to use the film's subtext of submerged emotion as his starting point.







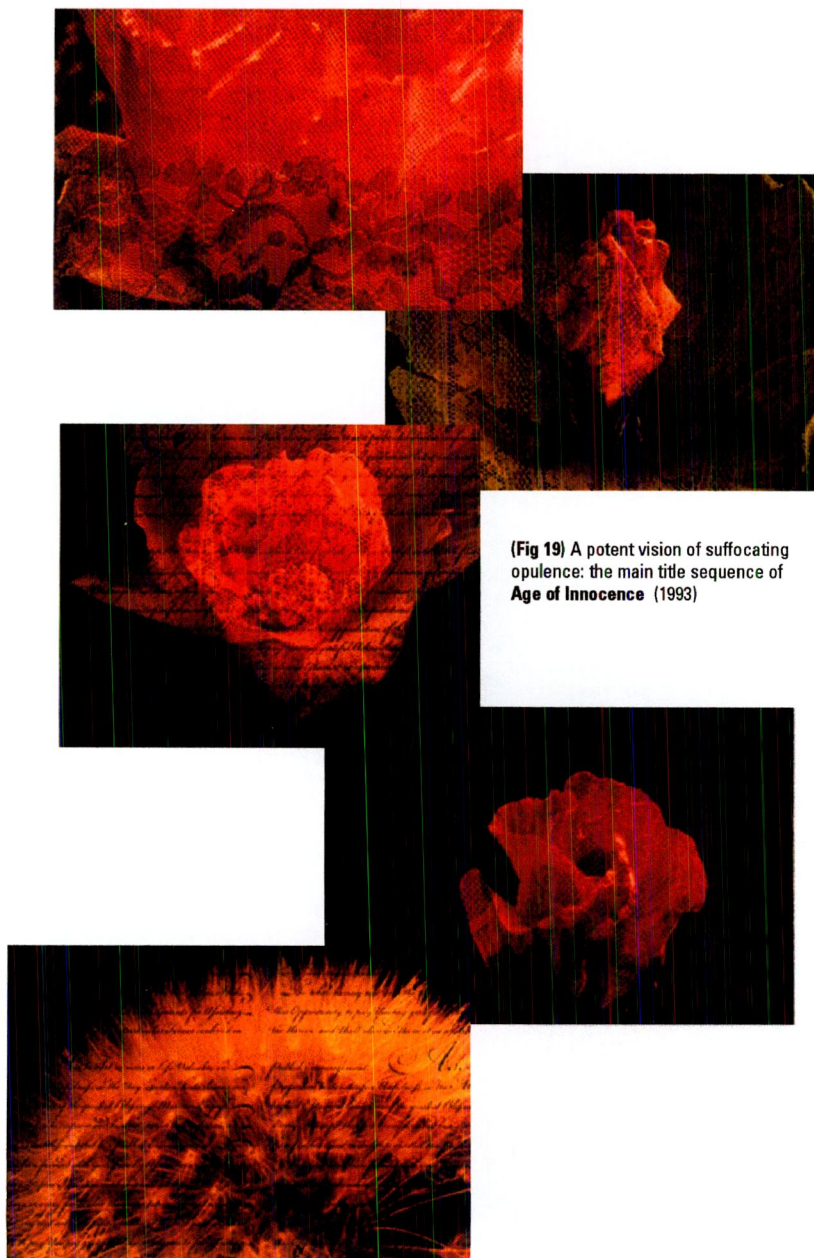
(Fig 18a) Bass' motif of the rose used for **the Age of Innocence** (1993) which had occurred earlier (18b) in his title sequence for **Carmen Jones** (1962)

Intended to give "a very simple signal of dysfunction" (Kirkham, 1994, p.18) the sequence's crux is water, which changes constantly through its course; gradually becoming more and more abstract until it becomes a series of glittering green, gold and blue reflections (Fig 16). More disturbing images are introduced; a vulture; a shadowy face onto which the ripples of the water are overlaid, and a threatening mutated figure looming over the water, which then turns blood-red. Water symbolises the slightly uneasy yet relatively settled existence of the Bowden family, which is abruptly pulled asunder with the introduction of the violent element of Max Cady. In contrast to the complexity of the visuals, typography in the sequence is extremely simple yet stylishly handled, cut in half and off-set to reinforce the sense of dysfunction. From the outset the sequence provides the viewer with a sense of threat (Fig 17). When De Niro's character first appears on screen, his tattoos are quite horrifying, where as without the ambience created by the main title they would be viewed as being merely strange.

Advances in technology and the use of the computer as a design tool meant that what was viewed as impossible thirty-five years ago would be regarded as quite easy to achieve in the present. However, both Bass and his wife Elaine preferred to take a low-tech, hands-on approach to title design, which could often be extremely labour-intensive. Such an example is **the Age of Innocence**, regarded by many as one of Bass' best sequences and one of the most elegant main titles ever created. Its degree of complexity seems almost impossible to comprehend or achieve in this digital age when we consider that it was completed totally without the use of computers. A lush and seductive montage of stopmotion floral photography,







(Fig 19) A potent vision of suffocating opulence: the main title sequence of *Age of Innocence* (1993)

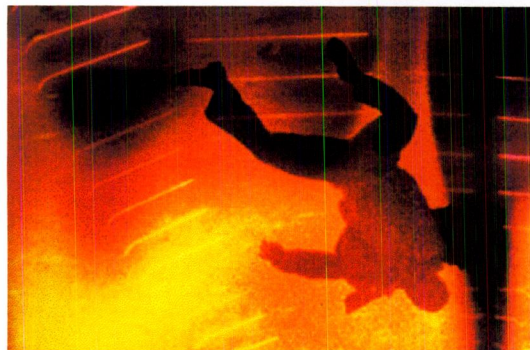
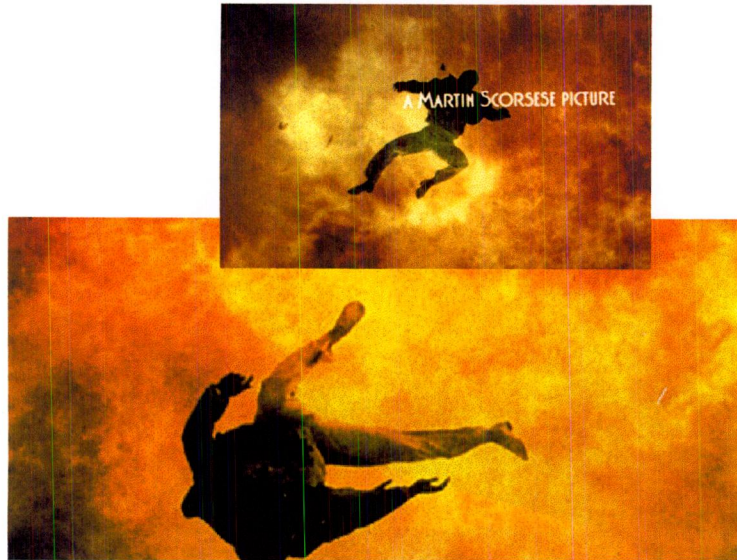
it was constructed with complex opticals. Scorsese editor Thelma Schoonmaker described the process used as being so exhaustive that the internegatives used in the printing process became worn out and had to be replaced. (Coupland, 1998, p.105)

The *Age of Innocence* was a remarkable departure from Scorsese's usual brand of film making, which usually features gangsters, the Mafia and extreme violence as its prime subjects. It is an extremely refined, elegant and modulated adaptation of Edith Wharton's novel, which is noted for its obsessive period detail (Scorsese hired a food historian and an etiquette specialist as part of the production, amongst other things).

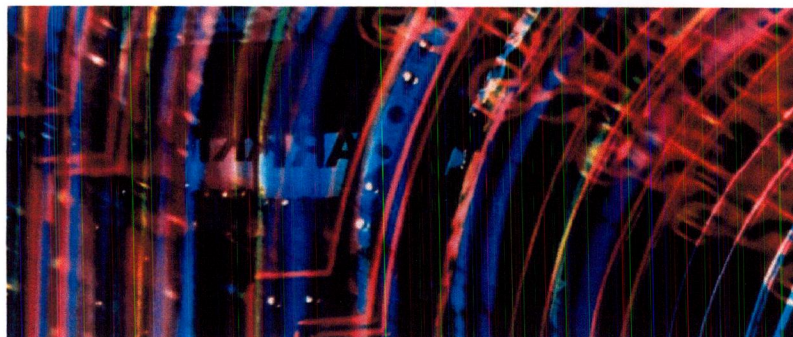
As the film's title carried a sense of ambiguity, the Besses decided to concentrate on conveying the romantic, antediluvian aura of the period whilst still revealing the undercurrent of emotion and suppressed sensuality between the two main characters. Cut to the overture of Gounod's *Faust*, the sequence consists of three layers: an array of opulent, endlessly blossoming flowers filmed using time-lapsed photography; a layer of super-imposed lace; and finally, calligraphic patterns taken from a Victorian book of etiquette (Fig 18a). Each of the flowers begins as a closed bud, which slowly and inexorably begins to fill the screen. Roses were chosen to suggest the lavishness of the period as well as their continuous reappearance throughout the film as tokens of love. As the flowers open and fill the screen the textures of lace become much more bold and defined, becoming a layer through which we view the blossoms (Fig 19). The calligraphy acts both as a vehicle of suggestion for the literary origin of the







(Fig 20) Main title sequence for *Casino* (1996) which compresses the tale of the central character's fall from grace from three hours to two and a half minutes.

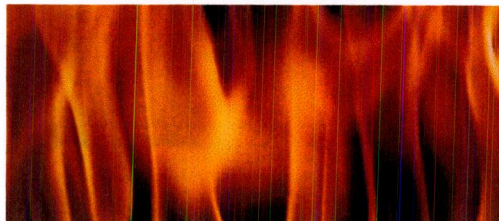


film as well as a metaphor for the strict social manners which upper-class society had to abide by during the period.

The last sequence which Bass would complete for Scorsese would be that for *Casino* (1995), the violent story of the rise and fall of a gambler put in charge of a Las Vegas casino by the Mafia. The film documents the 'fall from grace' of both the central character, Ace Rothstein, and the casino industry. The film's main title sequence opens with a shot of Rothstein walking to his car in his trademark lurid clothing, accompanied by a voiceover discussing the necessity for trust in love. As he turns the key in the ignition, the car explodes, the roar of flames being accompanied by the theme from 'Camille' by Bach. As the sequence progresses, Rothstein's figure sails slowly across the screen in a slow-motion tumble, against a background of pulsating neon and roaring flames (Fig 20). The sequence catalogues the casino industry's peak in the 1970s and returns to the hellfire of the present into which de Niro's character is seen descending.

Remaining true to his Modernist sensibility of fragmentation; Bass ultimately finds the only true beauty of Las Vegas in the reduction of its empty glamour and inherent tackiness to its most basic component - neon. Recreating the abstract lines seen in *Anatomy of a Murder* and *Psycho*, its cold glow bathes the credits in soft blue light, providing a significant contrast to the elemental heat of the flames (Fig 21). As both melt into each other, the film's title, in plain white type gradually and serenely ascends on to the screen.

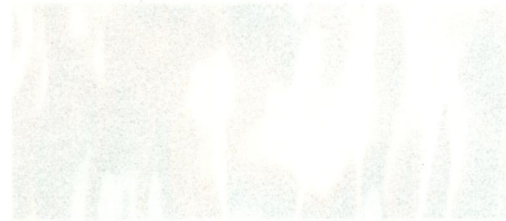




(Fig 21) Still from **Casino** main title sequence

These titles are unique in their lush intensity, however they also hark back to the stylish simplicity of Bass' early work. The rose and the flame in *Carmen Jones* can be seen in different forms in both the *Age of Innocence* and *Casino*; the silhouette of de Niro is reminiscent of the crude abstract corpse in *Anatomy of a Murder*. The sequences for Scorsese's movies act as a fitting swan song for Bass, who died in 1996. Continuously keeping abreast of trends and technological developments through the decades, he simultaneously managed to remain true to his beginnings. The Scorsese titles provide a fittingly majestic swan song for his career. Bass died in April 1996. At a memorial service held in New York in May of that year, Scorsese provided the following eulogy:

.....He is responsible for creating some of the most creative moments in movies.....  
his titles introduce a film the same way an overture introduces an opera; his best sequences pierce deep into the soul of the movies they introduce, they crystallise their poetry and at the same time preserve their mystery .....  
(Scorsese, 1997, p.107)





## CHAPTER 4

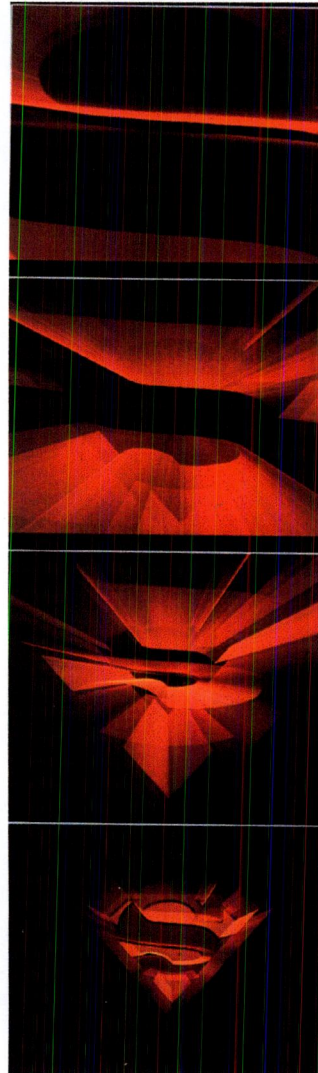
### KYLE COOPER

#### Present State of Title Design

Technology nowadays plays a major part in main title design. Sequences are now created by optical houses who specialise in film components and special effects, rather than being the exclusive domain of designers. In recent years optical houses have recognised the need for good design in a main title. Since Bass' death a new generation of title creators has manifested itself, who combine the endless possibilities presented by digital technology with pain-staking craftsmanship and a lively design sensibility.

One of the most prominent individuals of this new generation is Kyle Cooper, whom Scorsese had replaced with Bass on *Good Fellas*. In the few short years since Bass' death, Cooper has established himself as possibly the most prominent of this new crop of designers. Embracing the new technology, yet at the same time adopting a strong conceptually-driven approach, Cooper has prompted comparisons to Bass, and has often been referred to as his successor.

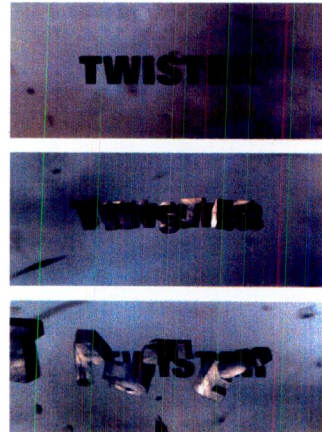
After graduating from the University of Massachusetts, Cooper progressed on to Yale where he studied under Paul Rand - one of Bass' New York School contemporaries, who encouraged him at a formative stage to study Eisenstein's use of montage. Employment at



(Fig 22) Main title sequence by  
RG/A for *Superman the Movie*  
(1979)







(Fig 23a) Main titles for **Twister** (1995) and (23b) **True Lies** (1995) showing New York School sensibility of typography as metaphor, coupled with cutting-edge technology



New York firm R/Greenberg and Associates was to follow. One of the largest and most technically proficient design/optical houses in operation, R/GA are renowned for their use of advanced technology. The firm's mammoth computer mainframe allows for complex animation and editing facilities which allow for highly sophisticated special effects. They are involved in almost every facet of visual communication today - print, interactive media, corporate identity and film. Already the firm had made a significant profile for themselves in the area of title design, having designed motion graphics for films such as **Superman the Movie** (1978) (Fig. 22), the **Untouchables** (1987) and **Blue Steel** (1990).

Cooper's style has been described as a 'hybrid pedigree of Rand-inspired simplicity and Gen-X smartness' (Lynch, 1987 p.58). Message drives design. For Cooper, typography is a poetic tool; many of his sequences have demonstrated his versatility in providing a purely typographical solution. Whilst paying attention to these traditional parameters, Cooper embraced the use of the cutting-edge digital technology available in R/GA's offices. However he is simultaneously careful not to allow the computer to take over. For example, in **Twister**, (1996), the largely special effects-driven tale of a pair of meteorologists chasing tornadoes, Cooper devised a computerised sequence where the title of the film is blown off the screen by a windstorm (Fig 23a). **True Lies** (1994) features three-dimensional blocks bearing the word 'True', which then spin and rotate to reveal the word 'Lies', representing the life of a secret agent who leads two separate lives, both of which must remain completely independent of each other and totally secret (Fig 23b). In this digital age, titles such as **Twister** and **True Lies**

1951-1952

1951-1952

1951-1952

1951-1952

1951-1952

1951-1952

are inevitable progressions of the New York School philosophy of visual metaphor and strength of concept.

### The SE7EN Title Sequence

Inherent to Coopers' design sensibility is a close reading of the film itself:

'.....A great title sequence should get an emotional response. If its successful it will break down the movie to get the central concept across...'

(Zappatera, 1997, p. 16)



(Fig 24 ) Expressive typography used by Cooper in the rendering of Seven's title (1995)

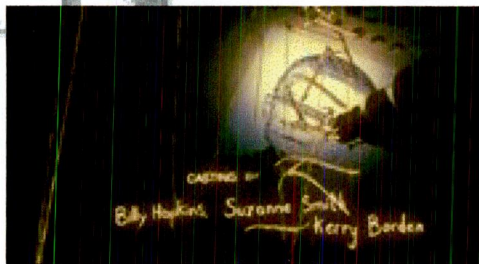
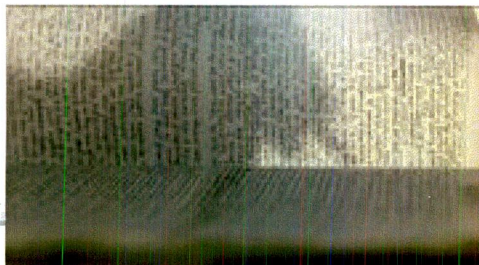


In 1995 Cooper undertook a project which would elevate the main title sequence to a level previously unscaled in the firmament of film. It consisted of a title for David Fincher's **Seven** (1995), a thriller starring Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt. The sequence would prove to be one of the most talked about pieces of graphic design/film-making to be ever made. The award-winning piece has featured in many articles in quarterlies such as i-D and Creative review. Indeed in the course of my research I found that almost every magazine article which dealt with the state of title design today mentioned this sequence in some form or the other.

**Seven** is a dark, disturbing and unconventionally downbeat film. Its subject is a pair of detectives, one new to the job, the other about to retire, who are on the trail of a serial killer who has committed a series of horrific murders based on the Seven Deadly Sins. The film is noted for its dark glittering cinematography and its power of visual suggestion; the actual acts







(Fig 25) The **Seven** title sequence (1995)

are never depicted themselves, rather they are shown in all their grisly aftermath. Fincher wanted to make it abundantly clear to the film's audience that they were not going to see a banal 'star-vehicle' for Pitt or Freeman. Rather, he wanted to terrify the audience by using the sequence to augment the sense of impending doom and evil throughout the film.

**Seven's** titles are unusual in that computers were not used at all in its construction. The whole two minute and fifteen seconds of its duration was constructed entirely using opticals and film. As the killer is not properly revealed in the film's narrative until half an hour from its end, Cooper decided to further delve into his motivations and provide the audience with a further insight into his behaviour. The murderer himself, John Doe, is a quietly-spoken, well educated and methodical individual, whose merciless viciousness is matched only by his patience. His crimes have a didactic quality. The murders are acts of forced attrition; for example, for Gluttony, a grossly obese man is forced to eat himself to death, while a vain woman has her nose cut off 'to spite her face' for Pride. For his starting-point, Cooper used the scene where the detectives visit Doe's apartment and find a room filled with 2000 hard-back notebooks containing his plans, thoughts and reflections. Regrettably the contents of these homicidal journals are hardly even touched on in the film except for the reading of a brief quotation from one by Morgan Freeman's character.

From its very beginning the sequence is an exercise in disorientation, anxiety and menace. The essence of its subject matter can be described as 'a day in the life of a serial







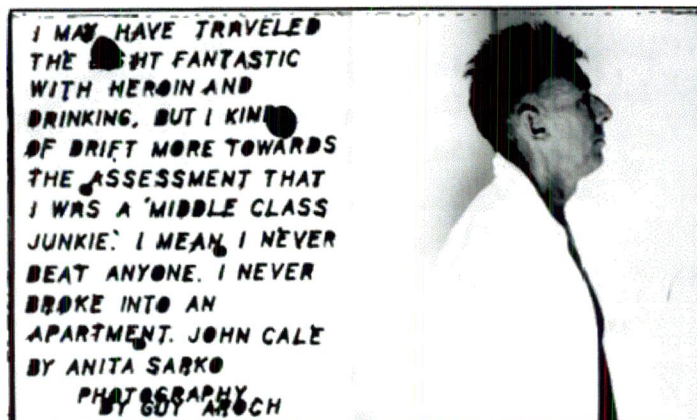
(Fig 26) The *Seven* title sequence (1995): the killer's hands are shown constructing the scrapbooks which will feature at a later stage in the film.

killer.' Cooper discussed the approach taken thus, displaying a brand of dark humour:

'.....Its like his job...he wakes up every day and shaves off his fingers. Then he has a cup of tea. And then he plans on how he is going to kill people - then he eats a sandwich for lunch.....the guy is nuts, what would he do?' (Edgar, p.27, 1998)

*Seven*'s mise-en-film is notable for its dark rain-drenched look, and appropriately, its titles begin with a rumble of thunder. The expressive use of typography endemic to the New York School sensibility is evident in Cooper's treatment of the cleverly skewed 'V' in the films name - 'Se7en' (Fig 24). Filmed in expressive tones of black, white and sepia, the sequence details the making of one of Doe's scrapbooks of horror. Suspense is created by focusing on the killers hands which are his principal instruments of torture (Fig 25), rather than on his face. His obsessive habit of writing is dwelt on repeatedly. Cooper filmed Doe's hands transcribing in his recognisably cramped and squiggly style both close-up and in silhouette through the pages of the journal which documents his psychotic observations (Fig 26). His dirty, bandaged fingers surreptitiously bind the book by stitching it with needle and thread, pasting in grisly photographs and underlined references from a text entitled 'Transsexualism and Homosexuality'. A rusty razor-blade is used to shave off his fingertips. One particularly memorable image shows a scalpel cutting out the word 'God' from the dollar-bill slogan 'In God We Trust'. Text materialises, disappears and reappears throughout the course of the sequence, it is ominous, suggestive and a portent of doom:





(Fig 27a) Still from the *Se7en* title sequence and [27b) a spread from *RayGun* magazine, showing the similarity of Cooper's work to David Carson's end of print style

'.....if the ultimate mortal sin is to kill, in design it is to obliterate the letter . Cooper assaults and maims the medium in which he works, creating a highly effective metaphor for the film's Seven Deadly Sins .....' (Edgar, p.27. 1998)

The luxurious footage used in the filming of the title sequence is deliberately marred by the inclusion of every single editing and paste-up mistake used in its construction. The treatment of the credits is no less innovative. Cooper merely took a razorblade and scratched the primary cast credits on to the original footage. Other text is rendered in a sans-serif typeface, yet it is no more legible, being usually out of register or subjected to the scalpel.

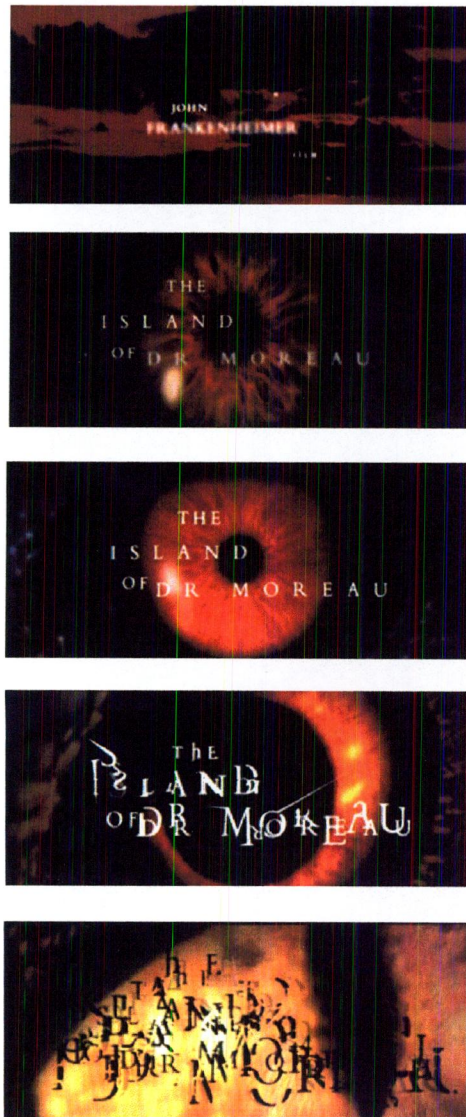
The *Se7en* sequence bears a noticeable resemblance to the end-of-print style used by American designer David Carson in his work for *Ray Gun* magazine (Fig 27b). Cooper's mentor, Paul Rand subsequently derided his work on Fincher's film as 'trash art' (Abrams, 1996, p.79). Cooper responded thus:

".....I think his position has validity. A lot of work that comes across as experimental seems as kind of a mess..." (Abrams, 1996, p.79)

".....People who emulate David Carson of the style of *Se7en* are just copying the form. They are not copying what its all about and that sort of experimental type does get pretty messy. You have to have some really good typographic training and then you break it down....." (Edgar, 1998, p.27)







(Fig 28) Savage computer animated typography as metaphor used in the *Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996)

## Elements of Style

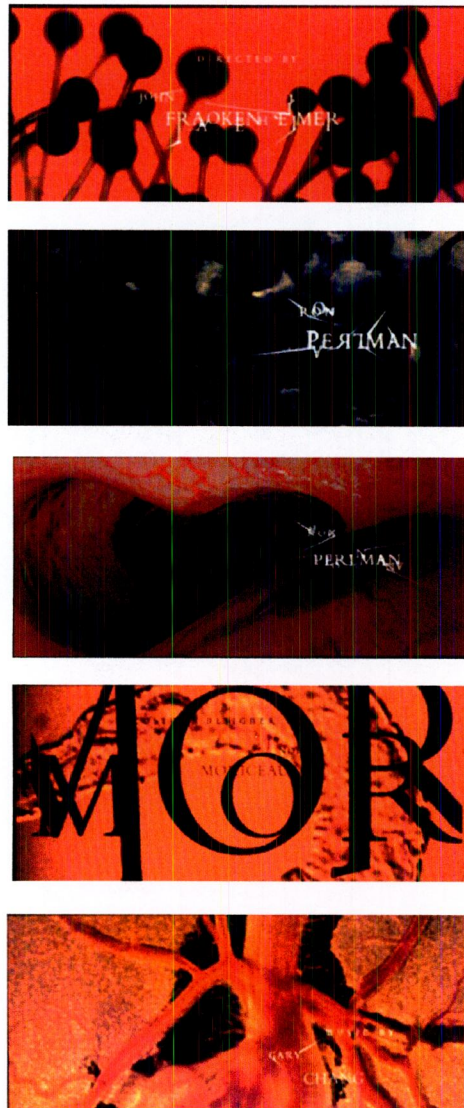
The innovation shown by Cooper has carried through to many other examples of title work which he has done. Many of these have been both praised and rewarded for their strength of concept and technical excellence. Distorting type features again in a sequence project which had originally been given to Saul Bass - John Frankenheimer's **Island of Dr. Moreau** (1996). Bass had been approached to make the title in the last months of his illness and therefore was understandably unable to do it. However, he did come up with an initial concept for the sequence, relayed it to Frankenheimer, who then mentioned it to Cooper after taking the project to him.

**Island of Dr. Moreau** is an example of a film of which the opening sequence is a hundred times more visually effective and engaging than the main film itself. Set on a remote South Pacific Island, the film is a largely incoherent tale of a group of genetically altered human beings with animal characteristics, who revolt against the mad scientist who has created them. For the sequence Bass had envisioned a 'microscopic war suggested by cellular violence.'

An adaptation of the novel by H. G. Wells, **Island of Dr. Moreau** is a disturbing and slightly incoherent thriller which deals with experiments in genetics. Dr. Moreau himself is an insane Messianic figure, of bizarre appearance whose justification for his diabolical experi-







(Fig 29) A horrific journey through the body in *Island of Dr. Moreau* main title sequence (1996)

ments is that evil is an essential component of human existence.

Like **Seven**, Cooper takes a secondary aspect of the film and develops on it until it encompasses its entire narrative. 'An American Werewolf in London' being cited as one of its influences, the titles are a horrifying vision of genetic engineering. They are essentially a journey through the body, yet the viewer is unable to distinguish if the body in question is human or animal.

These titles are a totally different departure from **Seven**, being rendered entirely on computer. Cooper and his team assembled stock footage of eyes, cells and microscope photography from a vast array of sources. The entire two minutes of the sequence, which consists of more than 20,000 frames, was edited on a new resolution compositing and image manipulation programme called Inferno, while the animated type was rendered using Adobe AfterEffects. The illegibility of **Seven**'s end credits on video alerted Cooper to the level of interference with the text posed by the dramatically shifting imagery of the background. Therefore the shrapnel-like type remains on the screen for a considerable amount of time, longer than that of most other titles.

The sequence's action switches between blood flowing through veins and the point of view of a metamorphosing animal running through an open field (Fig 29). Parts of the human body rendered in closeup become abstract visions of lurid colour; fractured anatomical



imagery suggests the combining of two alien elements. Clouds morph into cells, patterns of blood vessels meld into cracks of lightning. Cells and organs pollinate, mutate, fertilize, separate and regenerate. The film's title continually flies at the viewer on-screen. Initially, both it and the credits are rendered in an elegant serif upper-case typeface. However, as their individual length on screen progresses, this initial immaculate quality is destroyed by the theme of distortion and mutation which is carried through from the imagery. The type moves in a demonic dance across the screen (Fig 28). Spikes, horns and other appendages stretch outward from the text, before snapping off. Letterforms re-configure upside-down and back-to-front variations. The overall effect is of bones cracking, changing and reforming to form something horrifically different.

Genetic engineering features again in the plot of one of the most recent films for which Cooper has created a sequence. The plot of **Mimic** (1997) initially concerns itself with the story of a plague spread by cockroaches which affects only children. The film documents a new breed of cockroach created to combat the disease, and how the insect itself eventually turns on its human creators. Both the director and producer had approached Cooper, asking him 'to provide a poignancy to .....a horror film that in their view needed a back story about the victims..' (Edgar, 1998, p.84)

In creating **Mimic's** main title, Cooper used as his inspiration the wonderful sequence designed by Stephen Frankfurt for **To Kill A Mockingbird** (1966). One of the first to introduce a humanistic element to the craft of title design, the sequence is a sensitive and wistful evoca-







(Fig 30) Stephen Frankfurt's main title sequence for *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), a starting point for Cooper's sequence for *Mimic* (1997)

tion of childhood. Scout, the film's central character, sings quietly to herself while she sorts through an old cigar-box filled with treasured objects, which has the two-fold function of providing an insight into the magical aura of her small world whilst at the same time defining its boundaries (Fig 30).

The title sequence of *Mimic* (Fig. 31) concerns itself with the plague at the film's outset, which the main action barely touches on. The tone is decidedly melancholy. Both sad and disturbing, it ranges from the plaintively childlike to the disturbingly macabre suggesting the death of humanity and the inheritance of the earth by insects. Colour palettes are quite muted, ranging from warm greys and pale golds to dark sepias and blacks. Poignant holy communion pictures of children are pinned up on a missing persons notice-board. These scraps of humanity are juxtaposed with the desiccated, dusty bodies of insect specimens which deteriorate both on top of their pins and in their respective envelopes. Film noir-style lighting flickers across rows and rows of static insect wings, imbuing them with a sense of false life. As it progresses, the tension of the sequence becomes progressively more and more pronounced, suggest the panic of New York city in the throes of the epidemic. Cockroaches scurry over a map of the city. Rows of wings are replaced with the disconcerting image of a rolling eye, pinned open. All these facets draw together to create a subliminal feel of ominous threat as fearsome as the night-time activities of the mutated insects. Like that in the rest of Cooper's work, the typography is sensitively and imaginatively handled, utilising the typeface employed by entomologists in cataloguing insect specimens. Names of actors such as Mira Sorvino and





(Fig 31) Main title sequence for **Mimic** (1997)

F. Murray Abraham are given serial numbers. The on screen title of the film is initially presented as a small lower-case word slightly off-centre in the screen. A flare of light, reminiscent of the lense on a microscope being drawn back reveals the screen to be covered with a proliferation of the word, essentially 'mimicking' it.

Cooper's work on **The Island of Dr. Moreau** shows technical excellence. It look has been described by himself as quite artificial, however, on a close reading of the film, one realises that this manufactured quality is eminently suitable. At the same time, the luscious footage used in **Seven** and **Mimic** show a concern with top-notch craftsmanship. Whatever technological path is decided for the title to take, the most vital ingredient in the sequence is a clear understanding of the main title's function and the film which it accompanies. In these ways, Cooper truly is a successor to Bass.





## Conclusion

In my thesis, I have tried to convey my excitement and interest in main title design. Unfortunately, type-and-design in motion is not a format which converts well to the printed page. The full impact of these marvellous pieces of 'micro-film-making' ( can only be experiences in the cinema and to a limited degree, on video.

Bass' and Cooper's film sequences distinguish themselves in their eminent compatibility with the film to which they are set. They are unique, inventive and are extremely imaginative, both in concept and construction. However, their true ingenuity lies in their not interfering with the film's narrative rather acting as a suitable accompaniment.

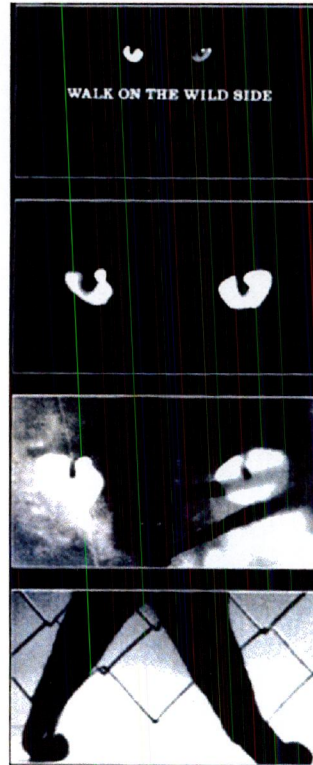
While main title design is an extremely potent medium in which to work, creating a sequence is a process fought with difficulties. Nowadays, they are 'a battlefield where actors, directors, producers, musicians, designers and their respective agents play out Hollywood power struggles on the screen (Pearlman, 1990, p.42). Studio demands are imperative. The market for a title sequence is quite limited, being restricted to high budget features by established directors, who regard a designed sequence as a necessity to their vision. Credits are always a bone of contention. Actors demand contracts which express details such as the exact size of their names on screen and the order in which they are listed, right down to the colour in which they appear. Lawyers come in with measuring-tape later to verify that the





requirements stated previously in the contract have not been breached.

Also, working with a director can be a thorny and sensitive experience. Whilst the main title has to act as essentially a visual overture for the film, it cannot exist as an autonomous element. Mimi Everett of New York title design firm Balsmeyer + Everett expressed this concern: '.....I don't think we (title designers) want to be noticed.....its like going to a wedding where you're not supposed to be prettier than the bride' ('Vickers, 1998, p.33)



(Fig 32) main title sequence from **Walk On the Wild Side** (1962)

Bass is a case in point. His design for Edward Dmytryk's **Walk on the Wild Side** (1962) (Fig 32) was the only bright part of what otherwise was regarded as a decidedly mediocre and forgettable film. The sequence, a beautifully rendered black-and white montage composition detailing a fight between two cats, featured moving type perfectly integrated with the sinuous feline movement. It is regarded as the only piece of excitement in what has been called '.....the dreariest and most verbose of self-conscious melodramas' (Halliwell, 1998). In a posthumous article for *Graphis* magazine, Kenneth Coupland recounts a singularly uncomfortable lunch between Bass and Dmytryk, after a film review in *Time* magazine urged audiences to stay for the credits, rather than the film (Coupland, 1998, p.104). The designer had completely upstaged the director; the compelling quality of Bass' sequence had totally eclipsed Dmytryk's film. At the opposite end of the scale, the titles created by Bass for Scorsese's films are virtual paragons in terms of beauty, suitability, compatibility, and creativity. In comparison to a film such as *Cape Fear*, whose title sequence perfectly complements the director's



vision, *Walk on the Wild Side* demonstrates that no matter how dynamic and visually arresting a sequence is it cannot bolster up a boring, mediocre and badly directed film. As I stated earlier, the film industry is first and foremost a business, and therefore is ultimately commercial in nature. Directors and film-makers who are not as well-established as, say, Scorsese or Coppola, usually are forced to compromise and bow to studio demands. The intention and vocation of most title designers is to produce something which is beautiful, and suitable to the film's overall exposition. Therefore, he/she cannot be expected to produce something lacklustre and mundane to match the quality of the brief.

That said, it is a case in point that most designers prefer to work around restrictions, creativity being a result of necessity. When present-day title designers avoid the pitfalls of creating indulgent self obsessed stylistic statement, anything is possible. Main title sequences are more powerful than other cinematic methods of commencement due to their separate nature and their ability to create their own plane of existence. My reason for choosing the subject is that it signifies the complete and deliberate crossover of film and graphics. In discussing creators of main titles, I have used the term 'designer' to distinguish from director. However, a designer who employs the use of film footage in his work can justifiably be called a film-maker. The title sequence has been elevated from a functional mundane aspect of film-making to a true artistic medium. The jewel-like creations of Bass and Cooper amply illustrate this.

Bass is an obvious choice to discuss. His career has documented the full develop-





ment of the main title sequence, from oppression, to revolution, to complacency and stagnation, back to invention and the creation of true art.

Kyle Cooper has described the present trend in main title design as 'taking the stuff that has been experimented with in music videos, and with typography in print and getting the title world to catch up' (Edgar, 1998, p 29). Cooper is one of those in which its future lies. Technology can be a two-edged sword; while advances in computers and digital editing software have made a macroverse of inventive possibilities available to the designer, with it comes the tendency to use its capabilities as a crutch for bad design. This is also true of the film industry as a whole. In recent years we have seen a proliferation of movies which are low on plot but high on special-effects driven wizardry. However Cooper's modulated use of the computer, coupled with a strong design ethic and attention to detail assures one that while blatant disregard for design principles may proliferate itself, there will always be an element which will use the technology as a tool, a means to achieving an end, rather than an end in itself.

The best main title sequences created today are those which augment a film's plot, which elevate the narrative to a higher level of consciousness in the viewer's mind. They are more powerful than other methods of beginning due to their separate nature, creating their own plane of existence, which at the same time melds seamlessly with the directors vision. The renaissance continues on apace.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY



## PUBLICATIONS

DICK, Bernard K. Anatomy of Film New York St. Martin's Press 1998

HOLLIS Richard Graphic Design: A Concise History, Great Britain Thames and Hudson 1994

LAW, Jonathan (ed.) Cassell Companion to the Cinema, Great Britain Wellington House, 1995

MULVEY, Laura Visual and Other Pleasures , Great Britain, Macmillan, 1989

MEGGS, Philip History of Graphic Design, US Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1994

NELME, Jill (ed.) Introduction to Film Studies Great Britain Routledge 1996

WALKER, John (ed.) Halliwel Film and Video Guide 1998 edition Great Britain Harper Collins 1998





## ARTICLES

ABRAMS Janet, Where Credit is Due, Balsmeyer and Everett

ABRAMS Janet, Eye Openers, i-D (NY) v.43 November 1996 p. 76-79

BIERUT Michael, Catching the Big One, i-D Vol 42 January/February 1995 p. 48

COUPLAND Ken, Saul Bass: The Man Behind the Titles. Graphis Vol 316, July/August 1998 p. 101 - 105

COUPLAND Ken, Imaginary Forces: Taking all the Credits Graphis Vol 317, September/October 1998 p. 66 - 73

EDGAR Ray, Micro-Film, World Art, Issue 18 'Small Wonders' p. 24-29, 84

FAZIO Daryl, The Art of the Film Title Sequence, 1997  
[http://www.people.memphis.edu/~dlfazio/thesis\\_paper.html](http://www.people.memphis.edu/~dlfazio/thesis_paper.html)

FEATURE ARTICLE, Bass Instinct, Creative Review May 1995 p. 48-49

FROLICK Stuart, Saul Bass Graphis Vol 47 No 247 November/December 1991 p 94 - 105

GARSON Jesse, The Motion Picture Opening Credit..... Graphics Awards, 1997  
<http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~jwgF92/TypeAwards.html>

KAPLAN Michael, The More Things Change: R/G& A Print Vol 44 November/December 1990 p. 100-115

KAU, Edwin, Great Beginnings and Endings by Orson Welles, 1998  
[http://www.imv.aau.dk/publikationer/pov/issue\\_02section\\_3/art3A.html](http://www.imv.aau.dk/publikationer/pov/issue_02section_3/art3A.html)

KIRKHAM Pat, The Jeweller's Eye, Sight and Sound Vol 7 April 1997 p. 18-19

KIRKHAM Pat, Saul Bass and Billy Wilder in Conversation, Sight and Sound, Vol 5 June 1995 p.18-21

KIRKHAM Pat, Looking for the simple idea Sight and Sound Vol 4 February 1994 p. 16-20

LYNCH Robin, i-D 40, i-D Vol 44 No 1 January/February 1997 p. 58

OBITUARY, In Memoriam: Saul Bass (1921-1996) Graphis Vol 307 January/February 1997 p. 107

OGUNDEHIN Michelle, Masterpiece of Dementia, Blueprint no. 126 March 1996 p. 20



PEARLMAN Chee, Roll Call, i-D Vol 37 March/April 1990 p. 38-45

SCORSESE Martin, Giving Credit to Saul Bass, i-D Vol 43 No 5 , p. 28

VICKERS Graham, Screen Two: Balsmeyer and Everett, Creative Review April 1998 p.33

ZAPPATERA Yolanda, First Impression, Design Week Vol 12 No 18 May 9 1997 p. 16-17





## FILMOGRAPHY

**Age of Innocence**(1993, dir Martin Scorsese)

**Blue Steel** (1990, dir. Kathryn Bigelow)

**Bram Stoker's Dracula** (1993, dir. Francis Ford Coppola)

**Cape Fear** (1991, dir Martin Scorsese)

**Casino** (1996, dir Martin Scorsese)

**Citizen Kane** (1941, dir. Orson Welles)

**Copycat** (1995, dir. Jon Amiel)

**Dangerous Liaisons** (1988, dir Stephen Frears)

**Fallen** (1998, dir Gregory Hoblit)

**Hand that Rocks the Cradle** (1991,dir. Curtis Hanson)

**Island of Dr. Moreau** (1996, dir. John Frankenheimer)

**Man With the Golden Arm**(1956, dir Otto Preminger)

**Mimic** (1997, dir. Guillermo del Toro)

**Psycho**(1960, dir Alfred Hitchcock)

**Seven** (1995, dir. David Fincher)

**True Lies** (1995, dir. James Cameron)

**The Untouchables** (1987 dir. Brian de Palma)

**Vertigo** (1958, dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

**West Side Story** (1960, dir. Robert Wise)

APPENDIX

1. The first part of the

2. The second part of the

3. The third part of the

4. The fourth part of the

5. The fifth part of the

6. The sixth part of the

7. The seventh part of the

8. The eighth part of the

9. The ninth part of the

10. The tenth part of the

11. The eleventh part of the

12. The twelfth part of the

13. The thirteenth part of the

14. The fourteenth part of the

15. The fifteenth part of the

16. The sixteenth part of the

17. The seventeenth part of the

18. The eighteenth part of the

19. The nineteenth part of the

20. The twentieth part of the