CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The Wonder Years: nostalgia, memory and pastness in television credits
Authors	Williams, Kathleen
Publication date	2016-11-01
Original Citation	Williams, K. (2016) 'The Wonder Years: nostalgia, memory and pastness in television credits', Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 12, pp. 59-77. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.12.04
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/alpha.12.04
Rights	© 2016, The Author(s) - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-02 21:37:45
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/6014



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

alphaville
JOURNAL OF FILM AND SCREEN MEDIA

The Wonder Years: Nostalgia, Memory and Pastness in Television Credits

Kathleen Williams

Abstract: *Opening sequences on television have developed a complex and multifaceted relationship to pastness and memory—particularly in relation to nostalgia. Series such as* Transparent *(2014–) use the space of the credits to blur our understanding of memory and fiction. Others such as* Californication *(2007–2014) include fake home videos or Polaroids to lend authenticity to the constructed family memories they depict. In this article, I explore the nostalgic qualities of contemporary television credits and opening sequences. Title sequences occupy a unique temporal position: while they are repeated before each episode and therefore are familiar to repeat viewers, they also typically depict events outside of the temporal realm of the television episode they open. The relationship between retro filters and aesthetics and the playful nostalgic framing of pastness through title sequences provides a framework to play with notions of temporality in television. This article contributes to the limited literature on credits by conceptualising title sequences in relation to the evocation and representation of memory and materiality.*

The American television series *The Wonder Years* (1988–1993) opened with fake home video of the main characters each week. The footage was updated as the actors aged along with their characters. The excerpts presented all the aesthetic and rhetorical markers of home video: graininess, hand-held movement, the subjects waving to the camera, and a black frame. The credits served to make the story of the Arnold family a familiar one; the action depicted in the credits was sufficiently generic to belong to any family and, in particular, any American family. Although the show was set in the 1960s and 1970s, the nostalgic mode and mood (Grainge) of the series was established in its opening credits, which linked individual and collective histories. Opening sequences like these can create complex and multifaceted relationships to pastness and memory, in which objects of a generic, shared past are presented to audiences. David Johansson argues that by turning our attention to the title sequences we may get to the "heart" of the series (29). In this article, I explore constructions of pastness in title sequences through the evocation and reworking of the past through a nostalgic lens. I am interested in particular in examining how photography and home video are used in titles to play with time and pastness. These tropes are drawn upon in order to understand the relationship between individual and collective memories and nostalgia in highly stylised sequences.

Television shows often prompt discussions in the press around the prevalence of nostalgia in popular culture. Central to this article is Amy Holdsworth's work on nostalgia and memory in television. Her book makes the significant connection between memory and television—a connection that takes into account both the materiality of the televisual object and

© Kathleen Williams.
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

how television functions as a medium. In this article I replicate this interest and, in particular, I argue that the way television is being consumed should be taken into consideration when turning to objects such as title sequences, particularly through the nostalgic logic of streaming services and online sites such as YouTube, in which past consumption dictates future viewing recommendations. Indeed, while credits mainly serve to author the text and perform a clear promotional function, they can also be viewed well after the intended promotional window, separate from the main text. They can be consumed on YouTube decades after their original broadcast, to be revisited as a nostalgic, brief re-entry into a viewer's past media consumption habits.

This article explores the title credits for a series of television shows that are best described as "complex TV" (Mittell). Complex TV, examples of which are *Transparent* (2014–), *The Walking Dead* (2010–), *Arrested Development* (2003–2006; 2013) and *Californication* (2007–2014), marks for Jason Mittell a shift away from stand-alone storylines, meaning that entry into the show can be difficult and temporally disorienting. Complex TV rewards repeat or at least sequential viewing, arguably aided by the emergent conditions of television consumption through streaming, and the importance of DVD box sets in the early 2000s. Accordingly, it is crucial to go beyond the discussion of titles' role as a marker of the beginning of a show, or as a sequence drawing attention to the familiar. Increasingly, shows will not cut to the title sequence until several minutes into the episode. If complex TV is becoming the industry standard for fictional drama and comedy in a streaming era, so too are complex titles.

The recurring formal qualities of television opening credits rely on familiarity and literacy in audiences: through the combination of text, music and footage that is not specific to a particular episode, opening credits offer a complex temporality. As Holdsworth notes, discussions of temporality in television have predominantly focused on the live event of broadcasting (8). Paul Booth's work on temporality in television has aimed to shift the discussion to a more complex understanding of time, outside of the dominance of Raymond Williams's concept of "flow"—which, as Holdsworth argues, has come to stand in for lost time and lost images (9). I argue that turning to the credits as a material embodiment of the complex temporality of television provides a useful concept through which to understand contemporary screen practices.

Defining and Studying Titles and Credits

Title sequences occupy a unique temporal position: while they are repeated before each episode (thus encouraging familiarity with and deep understanding of the sequence), they also typically depict places and events that are not included in actual episodes of the television show they introduce. For instance, each season of *Californication* uses a similar title sequence with slight alterations, reflecting the actors aging over the series' seven seasons, but never depict specific events with which the audience are familiar. Frequently, these places and events refer to the past. How do title sequences build a sense of pastness, and what is this often-nostalgic frame directed toward? The notion of nostalgia to which I will refer draws upon the work of Paul Grainge, who advocates for the reading of nostalgia as a mood and a mode rather than a literal longing for what once was. Indeed, in most of the examples that will be discussed here, the

representation of the past blends fact and fiction—creating a realm that is not only inhabited by the fictional characters of that television show, but that also runs adjacent to our own personal histories. The relationship between retro filters and the playful nostalgic framing of pastness in title sequences, I will claim, provides a framework to work with notions of temporality in television beyond discussions of time-shifting (i.e., watching a show outside of its intended broadcast) and streaming, to also include materiality and memory.

Television opening credits have to serve a variety of purposes. As Valentina Re maintains, when consumed on broadcast television they draw audience attention to the fact that a familiar show is beginning and they help to guide an uninitiated viewer into the narrative, aesthetic and intertextual world of the show in question. Increasingly, they also punctuate our viewing when binge-watching episodes by acting as an anticipatory marker of what is to come; and they can simply be enjoyable, when viewed outside of their intended preparatory and promotional purposes on sites such as YouTube. Opening credits not only open up the world of the television show they preface, but they also allow audiences to re-enter the familiar. John Sellers, in fact, argues that they are "required viewing", drawing in audiences in their own right.



Figure 1: Opening sequence of *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005). Greenblatt/Janollari Studio. Screenshot.

Credits go by a number of names such as titles, title sequences, openers, opening credits, and credits. They are typically defined as "a brief audiovisual form (ranging from a few seconds to two minutes in length), which, placed at the beginning of a film or TV programme (either before its start or a few minutes into it), lists production, cast and crew credits and the distributor's trademark logo" (Picarelli). They can, however, also "set up the broader themes, concerns and narrative goals of a television series" (Klein 94). Picarelli builds upon previous studies of title sequences to extend analysis beyond interest in the aesthetic or narrative elements

of titles—which she argues has dominated prior study of title sequences. This is true of similar texts that have been labelled as being on the periphery; objects such as trailers or posters are often read only in relation to the "proper" text to which they are connected (K. Williams). According to Re, the majority of scholarly mentions of title sequences come from film studies and explore the specificities of the cinema. For this article, I make reference to studies of television credits only, extending and adapting Deborah Allison's work on retro title sequences in cinema and on how titles can provide a "generic revisionism" of the past. Such a generic revisionism can also be seen in many of the title sequences that will be discussed in this article, which is concerned with the specific temporal, technological and material specificities of television production and consumption.

The emergent interest in titles in the academy is mirrored by the industry's interest. In the 1990s, television shows' opening titles "attracted few resources and creativity", which changed alongside the shift to longer form premium cable shows in US-based channels such as HBO and Showtime (Picarelli). Since the 2000s, we can see the evolution of "quality openers" on premium cable stations to promote television series (Sellers; Picarelli). Picarelli argues that opening credits have "become a central instrument of industrial re-definition". Shows such as *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005), *Dexter* (2006–2013) and *Game of Thrones* (2011–) have demonstrated a willingness from their creators and networks to use titles sequences to explore the quality of the show itself, focusing more on themes and concepts rather than narrative or promotional rhetoric (Sellers). Amanda Ann Klein argues that credit sequences replaced traditional, promotional credits with "a sequence of disconnected, 'dreamlike' images that are more 'generic' and specific, more connotative than denotative" (94). These titles are closer to music videos in their rhetorical and aesthetic appeals, stressing "discontinuities in times and space to evoke abstract concepts" (Klein 94). So while they may give us an insight into the narrative and aesthetic world of a series they can also be disconnected and abstract, reflecting the overall creative energies of the show:

> Their commitment to detail, self-reflexive status, high-production values and use of advanced animation technology in fact conflate in a rich audiovisual experience and the object of mounting audience interest. The creative boost injected in this production field is often seen as a consequence of the involvement of directors and designers previously associated with the big-screen industry (Picarelli).

For Picarelli, the credits help to guide how the text is read, but also how the narrative is accessed, in the process ordering the "knowledge we create about it." In the late 2000s, the shift to "quality TV openers" (Picarelli) led to popular shows taking novel approaches to the use of music in opening sequences. Both *Weeds* (2005–2012) and *The Wire* (2002–2008) had recurring theme songs ("Little Boxes" and "Way Down in the Hole", respectively) that were covered by different artists throughout the broadcast history of the show. *Weeds* adopted this approach on a weekly basis during seasons two and three, and was dropped by season four. In *The Wire,* a different artist performed "Way Down in the Hole" each season, which reflected the thematic shift in each season's narrative (Mittell 20). These artistic decisions also served promotional functions. These themes (particularly in the case of *Weeds*) are arguably designed to generate interest in the show, as well as communicating to the audience the popularity of the show with celebrities: if Elvis Costello and Death Cab for Cutie want to cover the *Weeds* theme, the

audience has clearly chosen a superior show to consume. However, the shift in how cable television shows were being consumed at the time of the show's peak popularity is worthy of noting: the prevalence of DVD box sets meant that title sequences could be skipped, and that the shows were more likely to be consumed in a short space of time. This type of approach to music used in title sequences offers an interesting articulation of the relationship between memory and music on television, where, as Re claims, titles still function by "'framing' the ritual".

By 2011, John Ellis noted an emerging trend in complex television in which the complex sequences are sometimes dropped in favour of a "sting" (62). Discussing *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012), Ellis describes how the complicated, playful, nostalgically referential opening sequence of the first four seasons was abandoned in the final series and replaced by a short, sharp indent—the production and acting credits placed over the narrative element of the show. This indent often appeared ten minutes into the show (Ellis 62), similar to what happens in *Lost* (2004–2010), and in the more recent examples of *The Good Wife* (2009–2016) and *Bates Motel* (2013–). This defies common logic surrounding the purpose of the title sequence, namely that it should draw consumers back to the television through repetition and memory—something that HBO pushed onto the producers of *The Sopranos* (1997–2007), whose title sequence did not change throughout the shows' history. "Woke Up This Morning", the song in *The Sopranos*'s title sequence, became emblematic of the show. As the narrative progressed, it became possible to read the sequence in relation to developments in Tony Soprano's (James Gandolfini) character.

Annette Davison explores the closing credits sequence on television, and considers how HBO series such as the aforementioned *The Sopranos* have used the "space" of the credits to integrate a fitting music choice, thus reinforcing the intended meaning or mood of the episode that has preceded it—that is, they help to order the knowledge of that episode. Davison's research outlines how the use of popular or recognisable music can help guide the reactions of viewers, and argues that television audiences pay a great deal of attention to the music choice in end credits, particularly when the music changes in each episode, as happens in *The Sopranos* or *Daria* (1997–2001). Some recent shows replace the usual end credits score with a song designed to hold some resonance from its use or status in popular culture to mark an important shift in the narrative—for instance, the death of a major character as Will Gardner (Josh Charles) in *The Good Wife*.

Despite the turn to more conceptual opening and closing title sequences and changes to viewing patterns such as binge watching and streaming, the specific temporal and promotional conditions of TV broadcasting still impact upon their reception. Some channels use the narrative action-free space of the end credits as a promotional space for other shows, confining the credits to a smaller side screen and silencing the music in favour of network announcements (Davison 195–6). This focus on promotion over any narrative or authorial role that end credits may play is reflected in the BBC's persuasion that credits are of "limited interest to our audience" (qtd. in Davison 196). Davison's work points to a frustration with this policy among UK audiences, particularly in relation to the superimposition of dialogue over end credits music. In this case, there is a chasm between the desires of both TV shows' audiences and creators and the promotional imperatives of the networks that disseminate them. In spite of such lack of consideration, title credits play a critical role in branding a television show. The shift to in-house

production by streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu is emblematic of this. Netflix's brand imprint is dominant in the title sequences for shows such as *Narcos* (2015–) and *Orange is the New Black* (2013–). However, and defying the streaming services' promotional use of title sequences for their shows, the technological and social features of streaming may lead to different patterns of consumption. In the course of a binge-watching marathon, the viewer, whether on streaming services or on DVD, can of course skip title sequences, but these are still something that they might happen to encounter several times in one day.

Jonathan Gray argues that studies of film and television tend to focus on what happens "*after* watching" (47; emphasis in original). As a result, historically there has been less interest in how meaning can be created prior to the consumption of a text. While there has been an increased scholarly interest in credits and titles, many of these studies tend to look at them as a reinforcement of the aesthetic intention of the television series they introduce. As Gray notes, the meaning drawn from a text often begins well before there is a film or episode to consume, through promotional material such as trailers and posters, anticipatory media such as reviews and general hype, and even in the lead-up to consumption, through title credits. Promotional texts that we encounter in our everyday practice (Burgin 11) can shape our understanding of the "final" text (if that is even their intended destination) through advertising alone, as seen in the recent controversy over *Man in the High Castle* (2015–) underground ads—wherein New York City underground carriages were decorated by advertisements of the show, presented as if Germany had won the Second World War and the Nazis now ruled the United States (Steinberg).

I want to complicate the notion that opening credits *precede* the text and, in the process, I wish to rethink the temporal position that credits occupy, pointing at how the "bits in between define the program" (Ellis 59). By turning to the way that title credits play with memory and time (at once announcing what is to come and representing past, future or unrelated moments in the show), we can use these objects to reflect on how television is used and understood. Although Fredric Jameson infamously claimed that "memory seems to play no role in television" (70), memory remains a consistent aesthetic and narrative driver of how we frame television shows. Indeed, the television text is suspended in its finality, ideally with no end date at the time of broadcast. The characters and world that a television show occupies exist in a suspended state, somewhere between the past, the present and the future, and titles that look to the past serve as traces of these complex temporalities.

Nostalgia for the Family and Home

As Holdsworth notes, both the concept of nostalgia and the television are tied to the home (3). Television has largely been a domestic technology that has been credited with domesticating other mediums such as film (Klinger 3–6). Like television, nostalgia is understood in relation to the home, and has been from the very beginning: the term was coined by a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, to refer to the pain or ache from one's longing to return home (Natali). However, since its original definition, nostalgia has come to take on a variety of meanings in our relationship to the past. For contemporary nostalgia scholars, nostalgia can be individual and collective (Boym xv), a mood and a mode (Grainge 28), and have a "distinctive aesthetic modality" (Davis 30). While nostalgia may mean wanting to return to a displaced home (the pain

felt at the inability to return), it can also become manifest culturally and aesthetically. For Boym, it can even derive from false memories or the romanticisation of bygone eras (xiii). By looking sideways rather than backwards, we can even be nostalgic for something that is being experienced in the present or is yet to be experienced.

Rather than being nostalgic for a superior time or place, Susannah Radstone suggests that we use nostalgia "not as an end-point or theoretical home-coming but as a point of departure, opening out into those questions of knowledge and belief, temporal orientations and the cultural, social and sexual politics that it condenses" (189). We can therefore turn to nostalgia to unsettle our notions of finiteness and temporal borders—instead using the concept to show how culture and media feed into one another, consistently informing each other. Booth productively uses the term "transgenic memories" in his work on temporality in television to point to series that show the impermanence of memory (44–5). For Booth we make sense of our memories and past through our present, as it is in the present that we "inscribe *meaning* to [*sic*] that past" (Booth 45; emphasis in original). Booth turns to the narrative of specific shows, for instance, *How I Met Your Mother* (2005–2014), to explore how the representation of characters at once in the past, the present and the future "creates temporal displacement", in the process "symboliz[ing] the messy function that transgenic media have in augmenting or subverting our personal memories" (45). As title sequences can use "future" footage by including scenes from future episodes of the show, this temporal displacement is something that audiences consistently have access to. In *The Golden Girls* (1985–1992), the credits from the first season on the DVD re-release include footage from later seasons; the narrative context behind these momentary fragments does not support their reading as a narrative or promotional package for that particular season, to show what is in store. Instead, it flattens the temporal distance between the original screening dates of the show. As Re observes, there is an important element of familiarity in title sequences, particularly for repeat viewers, which is made apparent through the types of credits that use footage from upcoming episodes. When the credits are rewatched after consuming the entire series, these fragments *become* nostalgic—a glimpse into prior consumption. Re discusses this phenomenon in terms of seduction. Prior consumers of the show are seduced back in through familiarity, whereas new viewers are ideally seduced into a new show by the promotional efforts of the titles. In what follows, I aim to explore how memory and nostalgia as rhetorical and aesthetic devices—a mood and a mode—can draw viewers into the world of a television show.

Photographs, Memories and False Pasts

As already described at the onset of this article, a common trope adopted by television credits to construct a narrative of pastness and evolution is the use of photography or family video: the assemblage of typical material memory artefacts. This can be seen in family-based sitcoms such as the final series of *Roseanne* (1988–1997), whose titles morph an older photograph of each major cast member into their present-day likeness. This approach also highlights the popularity of long running shows (the drastic transformations of the actors through years of being on air is an instant marker of the show's success), as well as lending a deeper dimension to the characters themselves and to the world of the show. *Growing Pains* (1985–1992) famously used three photographs of the main cast members at different ages before they appeared on the show, melding the fictional self with the actor's past. These types of titles seek

to celebrate history and replicate familial bonds not only between the actors/characters, but also between the show and its audience. Through this intimacy, the world created by the show seems more concrete; one in which shared rituals like family slide nights or home videos are part of this detailed imagined world. Consequently, the sequence becomes less about a make-believe world and more about a family—projected back to the audience through photographs and portraits, whether appearing candid or staged.

At times, the form of the photograph itself and the retro aesthetics of Polaroids and slides can signify the passing of time. In the titles for *Californication*, the main characters—a writer called Hank Moody (David Duchovny), his on-again-off-again partner Karen (Nathascha McElhone) and their daughter Becca (Madeleine Martin)—appear in short clips surrounding their home in Los Angeles. The clips evoke photographs and slides and, therefore, memory through their framing, artificial degradation and filtered appearance, standing in as a metaphor for the relationships they portray. While *Californication* is not set in the past, the sense of pastness in the title credits serves as a metaphor for an idealised version of the family, as well as the overall thematic concern of the show, as Hank's past haunts his attempts at reuniting with Karen or being a better father. While all this is achieved through the title sequence, textual meaning is produced through the consumption of the show itself; and the meaning intended by the titles is reinforced through repetition and familiarity. The filters and borders used on this footage that is obviously created specifically for the title sequence embodies nostalgia for the house in which Hank never lived; an idealised but false memory of a past he did not experience, but a present and future he can desire, in which the family is together.



Figure 2: Opening sequence of *Californication* (2007–2014). Totally Commercial Films. Screenshot.

Family video is also used in *Transparent* to represent false memories and a networked blurring of past, present and future. The show (meant for streaming) begins with VHS static or tracking, setting the scene for the importance of the intersection between technology and memory. Throughout the credits, we are shown family home video footage that seems both familiar and unfamiliar. While in some shots it is unclear whom this footage depicts, in other shots we can identify younger versions of current cast members. By splicing together family footage from weddings and birthdays presumably from the cast themselves who are otherwise unrelated, *Transparent*'s titles act as a metacommentary on the role that memory and family play in the show. Speaking of *Homeland*'s (2011–) title sequence, Picarelli explores how the "discontinuity and lack of consistent narrative" reflects the role that "images and sounds have as object[s] of knowledge in the series". Likewise, *Transparent*'s titles serve as a reworking of lived experience and knowledge. As the main character Moira (Jeffrey Tambor) comes out as a trans woman, she relearns the role of gender in the familial world around her and the world more broadly. This play with memory and history is even more apparent in the second season, as characters from the family's more distant past are introduced without initial explanation as to how they fit into the story—the temporal world of *Transparent* now occupying both present-day Los Angeles and 1940s Berlin. These reenactment scenes serve as a bridge between the past and the present, a reading that is reinforced by the style of the credits, inviting individual histories to be examined in order to understand the collective history. This is emblematic of the type of temporal disjuncture Booth describes, where television shows use flashbacks as memory, despite them not being a memory of an actual event or an event that was previously depicted in the show (44–6), as well as embodying the transformative potential of nostalgia.



Figure 3: Opening sequence of *Transparent* (2014–2016). Amazon Studios. Screenshot.

This relationship to a nonlinear, fictional past is relevant to José Van Dijck's work on mediated memories. She argues that mediated memories "are the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies for creating and re-creating a sense of

our past, present and future selves in relation to others" (171). These memories act as a material bridge between individual and mass, in turn creating a collective consciousness. In *Transparent* and *Californication* in particular, this link between the individual and collective takes the form of a stylistically nostalgic title sequence that uses the material artefacts of past media technologies as a historical spectre that haunts the present. The past is written on the future selves of the characters, even if it is idealised or located beyond the lived memories of individuals, consequently leading audiences to see the impact of the characters' current actions in the narratives presented to them. Nostalgia here functions as an aesthetic style and a modality (Grainge), rather than necessarily being a longing for a lost home. In *Transparent* and *Californication*, this home is merely representative, pieced together from fragments that are not part of the show—from footage that does not depict the actual storylines or scenes depicted in the show itself, but either from idealised versions of the Moody family in *Californication* or presumably real home video of the actors cast in *Transparent*.



Figure 4: Opening sequence of *Mad Men* (2007–2015). Lionsgate Television. Screenshot.

In the title sequence for *Mad Men* (2007–2015), a retro drama set in the 1950s around an advertising agency, an animated man stands in his office as furniture and wall hangings dissolve around him. He falls down in front of skyscrapers containing (now) retro-looking advertisements of families and couples, while he is still a single black graphic mass. The nostalgic qualities of *Mad Men* as a show are writ large on these illustrated skyscrapers, as the figure falls between photographs of women and families. While the previous examples have individuals returning to the past, in this instance the individual falls through hyper-stylised renderings of the 1950s—his individual self not recognisable to the viewer, which reflects the "profound ambiguity that marks the television series" (Re). Since its premiere, *Mad Men* has provoked discussion about the role of nostalgia on television. The nostalgic representations of technology in *Mad Men* connect

individual and collective renderings of the past, linking "old media to contemporary masculinity and the ephemeral nature of new media in order to question what significance the baby boom era holds today" (Bevan 546).

Referring to *The Sopranos*' opening sequence, David Johansson explores how the physical signposts that gang member Tony Soprano drives past in it are not just recognisable signifiers for Soprano and New Jersey, but they are "*American* images, from the industrial to the upper class, a running catalogue of familiar symbols which initiates the viewers' identification with Tony" (29; emphasis in original). The titles for *Mad Men* take a similar approach. While the family plucked from pages of advertisements and photographs may be connected on an individual level to the character, the use of familiarly nostalgic images ensures that they remain traces of a collective, idealised past. The figure seems to fall through romanticised versions of an era, representative of the complex relationship of title sequences with nostalgia—both individual and collective (Lizardi 3).

The form of the photograph can also be used to introduce characters and clearly communicate their personas, presenting a lineage of the characters to audiences. This is an approach popular in series centred on a family. In *Arrested Development*'s opening sequence, photographs are used of the main cast (each a member of the Bluth family) with narration introducing them, as well as text linking each character to the main character, Michael Bluth (Jason Bateman). In the 2013 Netflix reboot of the series, the sequence uses updated photographs of the cast in the style of Polaroid frames with a new version of the original song. This approach is mirrored in *Fuller House* (2016–), the Netflix reboot of *Full House* (1987–1995), with stills of the cast posing for family photographs before we enter into familiar elements of the original credits. "Everywhere You Look", the theme song of *Full House,* is rerecorded with subtle changes by Carly Rae Jepsen. As each of the Tanner daughters are introduced, we are shown two vignettes of footage from earlier title sequences across the show's history, before showing the cast member in the present day. In the extended version of the *Fuller House* intro, each of the Tanner brothers and other "special guest stars" appears in a side-by-side reenactment with footage from the original title credits: Jesse Katsopolis (John Stamos) plays guitar alongside his younger self Danny Tanner (Bob Saget), who in turn plays with a basketball. *Fuller House*'s sequences embody the role of titles and credits as fleeting and transitory. Viewing an updated version brings to the fore the otherwise transient nature of the previous title sequences—revisiting them is inherently nostalgic, drawing upon both individual and collective memories, as well as adopting nostalgia as a mood and a mode.

In the titles for zombie drama *The Walking Dead*, photographs are used to represent a world that cannot be returned to, that decays and remains frozen in time In the first four seasons, smashed photo-frames and aged photographs stand in not only for the past lives of characters but also for what the world was like before the zombie outbreak at the centre of the narrative. As people are mainly represented through yellowed newspapers, photographs inside broken frames or graffitied warnings, movement in the titles is reserved for what is left of humans: zombies approaching doors and walking across fields, and flags waving in the wind. As audiences, our present becomes the past through the title sequence, with decay and ruin overlaying family homes, bedrooms, kitchens and public spaces like hospitals and schools. The way in which memory is inscribed in *The Walking Dead*'s title sequence opens up how we might consider

nostalgia and pastness; the production of the past is not just left to time, but can be made and enacted through aesthetic framing.

Streamed and Nostalgic: Traces of a Technological Future

Although the constant presence of the old against the new is not limited to contemporary shows, and has long been a practice of television programming through reruns (Spigel 18), the space of YouTube is important to consider here. YouTube and its popular uses have played a role in making these title sequences available to audiences outside of their intended purpose. Rather than drawing attention to an upcoming episode or drawing together the thematics of a long-running series, titles taken outside of their context can be used in a multitude of ways. They can be used to punctuate discussion, to nostalgically revisit a past series in a condensed way, or simply to revisit a title song. This mirrors what J.P Kelly claims about television in the online era—i.e., that it is not a "radical break" from the older uses of television, but rather "an amalgamation of both old and new media logics, extending established practices or broadcast flow while capitalising upon the new promotional, economic and textual possibilities inherent in digital media" (123). The cultural and technological dynamics of YouTube encourage a database-logic for older content made available to anyone who searches for it (Chua). The plethora of videos that collate the title sequences from across the lifespan of a series (many of which have hundreds of thousands or even millions of views at the time of writing) confirm my claim that titles serve a variety of nostalgic functions outside of their original intent. Put simply, there is demand for them. This demand may be understood in relation to technical specificities—for much of our recent history, the short clip has dominated online video, due in part to bandwidth, connection speed, storage, mobile-friendly content, and YouTube's previously imposed ten-minute maximum length. This has led to what some describe as "the culture of the clip" (Hilderbrand 54), in which short videos are used to generate discussion or to stand in for something larger (Kelly 132). In this cultural shift, trailers, advertisements, short excerpts from scenes and similar texts such as title sequences stand in not only for the texts they refer to, but also increasingly for our relationship with film and television. Clip programming on television and online is nostalgic programming, where the past is interacted with as a pleasurable way to access memory (Holdsworth).

This contributes to an emerging temporal logic to television and our relationship with it. While there are countless articles online calling for the end of a perceived obsession with nostalgia and with revisiting media such as the *Gilmore Girls* (see Street-Porter), networks and streaming services are arguably responding to a demand. Nostalgia here should be considered in parallel to its original definition (the desire to return to one's home) and can be considered as a desire to re-experience, to remember and re-evaluate—making sense of our present through a shared past. Do audiences really want to return to a "full house", or to the time in which they originally experienced it? With the sheer amount of content available online at any given time and the numerous databases that contain a previously unthinkable amount of television, the ephemeral media of titles plays a role in how individuals negotiate these changes.

The Independent's Janet Street-Porter claimed in 2015 that nostalgia was "killing" television culture. Out of the ruins of the superior past of television, there emerged reruns and

reboots—not dissimilar to the zombies pictured in *The Walking Dead*. This happened slowly, but purposefully. Today, these reboots and revisitings are undoubtedly popular; media-based nostalgia seems to be everywhere, dictating the production of new content and the rhetorical promotional appeals of networks and streaming services. The Australian streaming service Stan has even built in a category for film and television entitled "Nineties Nostalgia", showing how the concept of nostalgia can dictate the design of platforms and encourage nostalgic viewing. However, it is important to note that this is not a new concern. Lynn Spigel's 1995 article chronicles how nostalgic programming and the promotion of it were aimed at the time toward younger consumers through Nick at Nite's programming of shows from a recent past (19). Articles like Street-Porter's almost seem to suggest nostalgia for a time before nostalgia.

Taking this cultural moment to its extreme, Adult Swim released a parody in 2014 of 1980s and 1990s sitcoms entitled "Too Many Cooks", which promptly went viral. Running at eleven minutes, it first premiered at 4 a.m. and was repeated each day that week. The clip ambitiously parodies shows such as *Roseanne* (1988–1997), courtroom drama *Law and Order* (1990–2010), sitcom *Family Matters* (1989–1998), and at one point even makes reference to director Lars Von Trier. While the overly earnest theme song proclaims "too many cooks can spoil the broth", the title sequence introduces family member after family member, distant relatives, people a family might know, objects and eventually concepts—all characters in this show that will never be realised. The titles also change genre multiple times during the course of the eleven-minute credit sequence. A generic family home acts as the entry point into the world of "Too Many Cooks", and photographs "coming to life" as well as in-world family photography act as spatial and temporal markers between genres and scenes.



Figure 5: "Too Many Cooks" (2014). Adult Swim. Screenshot.

While "Too Many Cooks" parodies specific sitcoms, it is playing into something much larger. In an era of nostalgia television and the nostalgic logic of streaming services that never forget what has been watched (our future consumption is constantly dictated by our viewing past), "Too Many Cooks" parodies the nostalgic approach to programming and consumption. In November 2014, *Fuller House* had been the subject of countless newspaper articles asking if this reboot was the sign of the end of quality television, as for some commentators it demonstrates the power nostalgia has over programming and production (Robinson). Contrary to the other dominant narratives around television—such as that we are currently in a Golden Age due to the amount of quality, long-form serialised narratives (Carr)—television is also simultaneously critiqued for relying on nostalgia (Street-Porter). Indeed, even the announcement of a new nostalgic reboot often garners critical attention for pandering to nostalgia, rather than quality (Robinson). These types of announcements invite audiences to imagine what the eventual series will look like and, as the intended audience is familiar with the original, they are also familiar with the reboot without having seen it. "Too Many Cooks" parodies this relationship between audiences, familiarity and promotion, demonstrating that literacy of television generic formulas means that an entire series need not exist.

Conclusion

Ranging from the faux-home video of *The Wonder Years*, to the abstract plays with memory as seen in *Transparent,* to the literal representations of an imagined past in *Fuller House*, title sequences are a highly stylised space through which to guide a viewer's overall understanding of a television show. Title sequences remind viewers of the overarching aesthetic and narrative aims of the show, as well as of the broader thematic concerns that govern those aims. Witnessing characters, or versions of characters, through brief, stylised and repetitive segments reinforces the way a show should be viewed—at least according to its creators. The past can be depicted as technological nostalgic metaphor, as in a show like *Californication*, or as a slow morphing depicting the aging of the actors who are playing main characters, the title sequence standing in for time passing itself, a material record of temporality. In each case, the playful evocation of collective and individual memories serves as a way to force the present, past and future to coexist in a space where memory can be constructed, "rather than disappearing with the rest of television's amnesiac flow" (Holdsworth 13). In a title sequence, we can tease out the industrial, aesthetic and promotional concerns of television. The constructions of pastness in credits, in turn, reflect the individual and collective nature of memory and nostalgia. The architecture of streaming services and video-sharing sites such as YouTube change the nature of how titles are consumed. Audiences can dip in and out of the world of a series without watching an episode, or skip through the titles while watching episodes back to back. As the intended temporality of titles changes, the ways in which they play with individual and collective memories offers us insights into how the rituals of television are negotiated within new temporal conditions.

References

Alabama 3. "Woke Up This Morning." *Exile on Coldharbour Lane*, One Little Indian, 1997.

Allison, Deborah. "*Catch Me If You Can*, *Auto Focus*, *Far From Heaven* and the Art of Retro Title Sequences", *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 23, May 2003. sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/retro_titles/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

Arrested Development. Created by Mitchell Hurwitz. Imagine Television. 2003–2006; 2013.

Bates Motel. Created by Cruse, Carlton, Kerry Ehrin, and Anthony Cipriano. American Genre, 2013–.

Bevan, Alex. "Nostalgia for Pre-Digital Media in *Mad Men*." *Television and New Media*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2013, pp. 546–59.

Booth, Paul. *Time on TV: Temporal Displacement and Mashup Television*. Peter Lang, 2012.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001.

Burgin, Victor. *The Remembered Film*. Reaktion, 2004.

Californication. Created by Tom Kapinos. Totally Commercial Films, 2007–2014.

Carr, David. "Barely Keeping Up In TV's New Golden Age." *The New York Times*. 9 March 2014. www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/business/media/fenced-in-by-televisions-excess-of-excellence.html?_r=1. Accessed 3 Nov. 2016.

Chua, Eu Jin. "A Minoritarian Digital Poetics of YouTube." *Screening the Past*, vol. 32, 2011, www.screeningthepast.com/2011/11/a-minoritarian-digital-poetics-of-youtube/. Accessed 15 May 2016.

Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. Free Press, 1979.

Davison, Annette. "The End is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials." *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2014, pp. 195–215.

Daria. Created by Glenn Eichler and Susie Lewis. Tenth Annual Industries and MTV Production Development. 1997–2001.

Desperate Housewives. Created by Marc Cherry. Cherry Allen Productions, 2004–2012.

Dexter. Created by James Manos Jr. John Goldwyn Productions, 2006–2013.

Ellis, John. "Interstitials: How the Bits in Between Define the Programmes." *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, edited by Paul Grainge, BFI, 2011, pp. 59–69.

Family Matters. Created by William Bickley and Michael Warren. Miller-Boyett Productions, 1989–1998.

Fredrick, Jesse. "Everywhere You Look." Universal, 1995.

Full House. Created by Jeff Franklin. Miller-Boyett Productions, 1987–1995.

Fuller House. Created by Jeff Franklin. Jeff Franklin Productions, 2016–.

Game of Thrones. Created by David Benioff and D.B Weiss. HBO, 2011–.

The Golden Girls. Created by Susan Harris and Warren Littlefield. Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions, 1985–1992.

The Good Wife. Created by Robert King and Michelle King. Scott Free Productions, 2009–2016.

Grainge, Paul. "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes and Media Recycling." *Journal of American and Comparative Literature,* vol. 23, no. 1, 2000, pp. 27–35.

Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts*. New York UP, 2010.

Growing Pains. Created by Neal Marlens. Guntzelman/Sullivan/Marshall Productions, 1985–1992.

Hilderbrand, Lucas. "YouTube: Where Cultural Memory and Copyright Converge." *Film Quarterly,* vol. 61, no. 1, 2007, pp. 48–57.

Holdsworth, Amy. *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Homeland. Created by Howard Gordan and Alex Gansa. Teakwood Lane Productions, 2011.

How I Met Your Mother. Created by Carter Bays and Thomas Craig. Bays and Thomas Productions, 2005–2014.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 1991.

Jepsen, Carly Rae. "Everywhere You Look." Universal, 2016.

Johansson, David. "Homeward Bound: Those *Sopranos* Titles Come Heavy." *Reading the Sopranos: Hit TV from HBO*, edited by David Lavery, I.B Tauris, 2006, pp. 27–38.

Kelly, J.P. "Beyond the Broadcast Text: New Economies and Temporalities of Online TV." *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, edited by Paul Grainge, BFI, 2011, pp. 122–37.

Klein, Amanda Ann. "The Horse Doesn't Get a Credit: Analyzing the Western Syntax of *Deadwood*'s Opening Credits." *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By*, edited by David Lavery, I.B Tauris, 2006, pp. 93–100.

Klinger, Barbara. *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies and the Home*. U of Texas P, 2006.

Law and Order. Created by Dick Wolf. Wolf Films, 1990–2010.

Lizardi, Ryan. *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media*. Lexington Books, 2014.

Lost. Created by Jeffrey Lieber, J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof. Bad Robot, 2004–2010.

Mad Men. Created by Matthew Weiner. Weiner Bros, 2007–2015.

The Man in High Castle. Created by Frank Spotnitz. Amazon Studios, 2015–.

Mittell, Jason. "Previously On: Prime Time Serial and the Mechanics of Memory." *Intermediality and Storytelling*, edited by Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan, Water de Gruyter, 2010, pp. 78–98.

Narcos. Created by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard, and Doug Miro. Gaumont International Television, 2015–.

Natali, Marcos Piason. "History and the Politics of Nostalgia." *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 5, 2004, pp. 10–25. ir.uiowa.edu/ijcs/vol5/iss1/3. Accessed 6 Apr. 2016.

Picarelli, Enrica. "Aspirational Paratexts: The Case of 'Quality Openers' in TV Promotion." *Frames Cinema Journal*, issue 3, May 2013. framescinemajournal.com/article/aspirational-paratexts-the-case-of-quality-openers-in-tv-promotion-2/. Accessed 20 Apr. 2016.

Radstone, Susannah. "Nostalgia: Home-comings and Departures." *Memory Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2010, pp. 187–91.

Re, Valentina. "From Saul Bass to Participatory Culture: Opening Title Sequences in Contemporary Television Series." *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, Spring 2016. www.necsus-ejms.org/saul-bass-participatory-culture-opening-title-sequences-contemporary-tv-series/. Accessed 17 Aug. 2016.

Reynolds, Malvina. "Little Boxes." *Malvina Reynolds Sings the Truth*, Columbia Records, 1967.

Robinson, Joanna. "Netflix's 'Full House' Is the Worst Kind of Nostalgia." *Vanity Fair*. 2 Apr. 2015. www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/04/netflix-reboot-full-house-worst-nostalgia. Accessed 3 Nov. 2016.

Roseanne. Created by Matt Williams. Casey-Werner Productions, 1988–1997.

Sellers, John. "TV's Golden Age of Opening Credits." *Salon*. 18 Feb. 2012. www.salon.com/2012/02/18/tvs_golden_age_of_opening_credits/. Accessed 2 May 2016.

Six Feet Under. Created by Alan Ball. Actual Size Films and The Greenblatt/Janollari Studio, 2001–2005.

The Sopranos. Created by David Chase. Chase Films, 1999–2007.

Spigel, Lynne. "From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age: Women's Memories and Television Reruns." *Screen,* vol. 36, no. 1, 1995, pp. 16–33.

Steinberg, Brian. "Amazon To Pull 'High Castle' Ads Suggesting Nazis From NYC Subways." *Variety*. 24 Nov. 2015. www.variety.com/2015/tv/news/amazon-man-in-the-high-castle-ads-suggesting-nazi-control-nyc-subway-tv-advertising-1201647886/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

Street-Porter, Janet. "No More Blackadder, Please—Our Obsession With Nostalgia is Killing Our TV Culture." *Independent*, 29 Aug. 2015. www.independent.co.uk/voices/no-more-blackadder-please-our-obsession-with-nostalgia-is-killing-our-tv-culture-10477074.html. Accessed 2 May 2016.

"Too Many Cooks." Created by Adult Swim. *YouTube*, 7 Nov. 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrGrOK8oZG8. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

Transparent. Created by Jill Soloway. Amazon Studios, 2014–2016.

Van Dijck, José. *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford UP, 2007.

Waits, Tom. "Way Down in the Hole." *Franks Wild Years*, Universal, 1987.

The Walking Dead. Created by Frank Dabaront. AMC Studios, 2010–2016.

Weeds. Created by Jenji Kohan. Lionsgate Television, 2005–2012.

Williams, Kathleen. "Never Coming to a Theatre Near You: Recut Film Trailers." *M/C Journal*, vol. 12, no. 12, 2009. journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/139. Accessed 2 May 2016.

Williams, Raymond. *Television*: *Technology and Cultural Form*. Routledge, 1974.

The Wire. Created by David Simon. Blown Deadline Productions, 2002–2008.

The Wonder Years. Created by Neal Marlens. The Black-Marlens Company, 1988–1993.

Suggested Citation

Williams, Kathleen. "The Wonder Years: Nostalgia, Memory and Pastness in Television Credits." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 12 (Winter 2016): 59–77. Web. ISSN: 2009-4078.

Kathleen Williams is Head of Journalism, Media and Communications at the University of Tasmania, Australia. Her current research is focused on the relationship between media, materiality and memory, particularly through the intersection between film/television and digital media. Her work has been published in screen studies anthologies, and in *Transformative Works and Cultures* and *Media Culture Journal*. Despite her research interest in nostalgia, she did not make it past the first episode of *Fuller House.*