



OPENING CHOICES

Introduction

This dossier on Opening Choices brings together a group of studies which are heterogeneous but also akin to each other in significant ways. In terms of differences, there is a considerable spread of periods of filmmaking represented, ranging in date from *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) to *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013), and a wide range of genres and types: thrillers of various kinds, a western, sci-fi, dramas revolving around single characters, intimate single settings and large scale historical, or quasi historical films, as well as different national cinemas. One takes videographic form, another addresses a television series.

What the essays have in common is the bias towards focusing on works which have been the subject of previous critical attention. That attention has looked at the whole, but such accounts have often skimmed over, or ignored the meanings and purposes of the opening moments. This is true of both the more heavily trodden ground of works by Hitchcock or Ophuls to the initial scholarly interest emerging with regard to the more recent films. In both cases, the weight of achievement, or the complexity of discussion which the works taken as wholes have received – or are beginning to receive – is taken to have deflected attention from their openings, and these pieces are addressing this imbalance. This seems to be

true where the openings are sharply distinguished in terms of qualities of style, setting, or mode from what follows, creating a division that explicitly announces them as prologues to the dramas that go on to be developed. But it is equally true where the distinction is much less sharp, where the openings would not immediately strike us as differentiating themselves in a clear way from the action that is to follow.

Again, what is largely the case is that the essays in the dossier are arguing for the overall coherence of the film and television texts they address. They claim that they can be better understood if we see exactly how these opening moments initiate and characterise some of the actions, interests or moods that will follow. Together they make a varied but strong case for the argument that works of substantial achievement know what they are doing in their opening moments, and that their openings invite particular ways of understanding what follows. With its wide range of source materials, what the dossier might be said to argue is that the opening choices of film makers will greatly benefit from critical analysis, when we pause to pay attention to them.

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