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Resurrecting Television: Memories of the Future and the Anarchival Politics of Joy in *Arrested Development*

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An abstract painting with a vibrant, multi-colored palette. The top portion of the image shows a horizontal band of a landscape, possibly a field or a body of water, with a clear horizon line. Below this, the painting transitions into a complex, layered composition of colors. The central and lower portions are dominated by bright, saturated colors: a large area of green, a significant section of yellow, and a bottom section of red and orange. There are also areas of blue and purple, particularly on the left side. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional resonance.

Immediation I

Edited by Erin Manning, Anna Munster,
Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen

Immediation I

Immediations

Series Editor: SenseLab

“Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains”

– A.N. Whitehead

The aim of the Immediations book series is to prolong the wonder sustaining philosophic thought into transdisciplinary encounters. Its premise is that concepts are for the enacting: they must be experienced. Thought is lived, else it expires. It is most intensely lived at the crossroads of practices, and in the in-between of individuals and their singular endeavors: enlivened in the weave of a relational fabric. Co-composition.

“The smile spreads over the face, as the face fits itself onto the smile”

– A. N. Whitehead

Which practices enter into co-composition will be left an open question, to be answered by the Series authors. Art practice, aesthetic theory, political theory, movement practice, media theory, maker culture, science studies, architecture, philosophy ... the range is free. We invite you to roam it.

Immediation I

Edited by Erin Manning, Anna Munster,
Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen



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Toni Pape

Resurrecting Television: Memories of the Future and the Anarchival Politics of Joy in *Arrested Development*

Remembering Feeling

Think of a film or television series that marked you as a teenager. Remember it for a moment.

What is it that returns as a memory? Is it the story, a character, or a particular audiovisual style? Or is it, more vaguely and more intuitively, the feeling of that film or program? If you had to describe that feeling, that sensation, how would you articulate it? How exactly did that film, that television series *move* you?

This feeling—the affective tone that moving images can sustain for hours, months or, in the case of some television programs, even years—is something that the disciplines within the wider field of media studies rarely speak of. Wilfully or not, they often ignore that which is the most memorable about a film or TV series or novel, that which probably moved most of us to study and practice one or the other of these media in the first place: a singular aesthetic experience. This feeling is one of the ways in which artworks act in the world; it is also where their ethical and political projects partially play out. Were you moved to tears or laughter? Did you move in fear or fury? You name your felt singularity if you can. A radically empirical theory of immediation that starts from experience can help articulate the felt relations through which art is lived as well as their ethico-political potential.¹ The radical empirical impetus of this chapter consists in including the often-excluded *memory of affect*.

This is what the practice of reviving cancelled TV shows requires us to think as it draws on remembered feelings to reactivate a seemingly

defunct past. A considerable number of fictional TV series that were cancelled years ago now return to the screen in various ways. Consider the TV series *Veronica Mars* that ran on the network The CW (formerly UPN) from 2004 to 2007. Released to theaters in March 2014, the *Veronica Mars* movie revisits the heroine and former teenage private eye, now a lawyer in New York City. In May 2014, the channel Fox ran a ninth “limited event season” of *24*, which had gone off the air four years earlier. The HBO show *The Comeback* originally aired its first season in 2005, after which it was cancelled. Nine years later, in November 2014, the series had a comeback, with HBO airing a full second season. In the fall of 2015, NBC aired *Heroes: Reborn*, a miniseries that revisits the universe of the TV show *Heroes* (2006-2010). Fox has scheduled a revival of *The X-Files* (1993-2002) for January 2016 and the cable network Showtime announced in October 2014 that a new season of *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) would be coming to the network.² Clearly, there is a market for the recycling of television’s past, a trend that is enabled by a number of conditions which will be discussed below in due course. Beyond these conditioning factors, however, the trend towards resurrecting television series also speaks to a changed experience of the medium and its past. There is no market without desire. An engagement with the singular comedic project of *Arrested Development* (Fox 2003-2006, Netflix 2013) will show that resurrected programs can modulate the ways in which one encounters television and participates in its attention economy. This is not least because programs that return from the past challenge conventional notions of televisual time.

Televisual Time and Memories of the Future

The time of television has often been conceived as an ephemeral, yet persistent present. As early as 1962, Umberto Eco wrote that “the aspect of television that would seem most interesting and fruitful to our research is also *its most characteristic, unique to the medium*: namely, live broadcasts” (1989: 107, emphasis added). Liveness constitutes “the very particular ‘time’ of television, so often identifiable with real time” (106). According to Raymond Williams, the “defining characteristic” of broadcast television consists in the organization of programming into “a continuous flow” that supplants programs, commercials and announcements to keep viewers in its thrall (2003: 86, 95).³ Here too, there is an understanding that the medium harnesses the now of experience to generate its unrelenting, blurry presence.

Mary Ann Doane holds that the “major category of television is time,” and more precisely “an insistent ‘present-ness’ ... a celebration of the instantaneous” (1990: 222).

Though the importance of live broadcasting, flow, and instantaneity has been questioned and re-evaluated on many occasions,⁴ these accounts point to a key aspect of the medium in previous decades. The experience of television is characterized by collective amnesia, which also leaves its mark on the field of television studies, for instance in teaching. If students in 2016 only vaguely know of programs like *Twin Peaks* or *Sex and the City*, this is not because they are ill-bred philistines, but because the very notion of a *canon* does not operate in television studies in the same way it does in, say, film studies. And, from my perspective, that is not a bad thing. There is a legitimacy and felt necessity to revisiting the history of film—going by regions, periods, currents, genres, *auteurs*—that the medium of television does not seem to foster in the same way.⁵ The experience of individual programs comes and goes like little habits we pick up and drop. If we believe Umberto Eco, we are in fact giving in to the infantile pleasure of repetition that leads us to delight in “always and ever the same story” when we watch a serial on TV: every week, series like *Columbo* or even *Dallas* habitually contract into a repetition of the same narrative schema (1994: 86-87). In this sense, one might argue, the experience of television is more concerned with a continuous re-inscription of the present than a revisitation of the past.

But *habit* is perhaps more productive than this account gives it credit for. Habit may well ground experience in the present, but it describes a temporal movement that exceeds the undifferentiated recurrence of a past. We might think of habit as a pulse, contracting and releasing, that composes a “living present” (Deleuze 1994: 73). That the present is alive means that it *passes*, that it enfolds the past and unfolds into the future. In other words, the force of habitual repetition neither suspends us in an instantaneous present nor shackles us to the past; it forcefully pulls us into the future. Brian Massumi emphasizes this aspect when he states that habit understood as “repetition is a recollection of what has not yet come—a memory of the future” (2015b: 64). On the one hand, then, habit must be understood as both self-reinforcing and as carrying a charge of futurity. As a medium of repetition, television certainly crafts habits that pull us into their next contraction. These habits include not only various modes of viewing from weekly airing schedules to binge-watching. (The “just one more” of binge-watching is also the

“again” of repetition.) The habitual movement of television also sweeps up production schedules, distribution models, and narrative structures. In this sense, habit is indeed the pre-forming of an indeterminate future. On the other hand, the workings of a memory of the future are not confined to the re-inscription of a regular (or regulated) present. In fact, it can persist without contracting and hold itself in reserve over long durations. Following David Lapoujade, a memory of the future can be described as “something which has been present, that has been sensed, but *that has not been acted*” (Lapoujade 2013: 22). This unacted past retains an “explosive force” that is held in abeyance to be released in a creative act (89; see also 8-9). This is the case of many a cancelled TV show whose aesthetic, political or ethical project was cut short for pragmatic (mainly economic) reasons. Something that remains to be acted in images and sound emerges from the past and appeals to the present. Resurrected television series introduce this sense of a distant past and its lasting potential for future creation into the media ecology of television.⁶ In this, revivals must be distinguished from other televisual repetitions in the forms of reruns, remakes or reboots. Instead of airing the same material again or completely re-imagining and re-casting a preexisting program, the purpose of reviving a series is to give new life to the original incarnation, to continue the story of *this* particular character or group of characters, to reactivate an experience of pastness.

In previous decades, the cancellation of a show would indicate the definite end of a program in that specific setup. As James Poniewozik notes in *Time* magazine:

Once upon a time, that would have been it, case closed. *Veronica Mars* was just one in a long line of series loved too hard by too few: *My So-Called Life*, *Freaks and Geeks*, name your passion.... Today, TV shows die the way characters do on *24* (coming back in May!): unless you cut off the head and burn the body, they can always rise again. (Poniewozik 2014: 56)

The increasing frequency at which what Poniewozik also calls “zombie shows” rise from the dead is enabled by a number of conditions. First of all, television programs no longer disappear as quickly as they used to. While this has been the case ever since the advent of the VCR, the availability of TV fiction has considerably increased through new modes of distribution such as DVD, video-on-demand (VOD)

services and illegal file sharing or streaming. On the one hand, these innovations have allowed the industry to extend chains of distribution and fund productions through additional sources of income (besides advertisement or subscriptions).⁷ On the other hand, they have created the possibility for wider audiences and fan communities to develop *after* the original airing of a program. For instance, the viewer data for *Arrested Development*, thoroughly mined by VOD service Netflix, indicated that “whereas most canceled cult shows maintain a small, diehard fan base, *Arrested Development’s* was getting bigger” (Poniewozik 2013). Thus, data mining must also be understood as a contributing factor as it makes the long-term development of fan cultures more transparent. Finally, a variety of new funding models allow for programs to return outside the more conventional production channels: besides the new content providers such as Netflix and Amazon Studios, these models include crowdfunding and selling shows between networks and their different audiences.⁸ These factors do not ‘cause’ the resurrection of TV shows in a straightforward way. Rather, they must be thought of as enabling conditions in a shifted media ecology that makes it possible for a memory of the future to be activated and propelled towards a resurgence in the present.

While the recent development activates individual memories of the future, it certainly does not invent them. Past experience always holds lasting intensities and creative potentials. Media pasts are no exception in this. Who knows how many desired revivals do not find the right conditions, how many unproduced scripts are lying in a desk drawer? Even so, that past is not dead and gone, but still animates the contemporary, waiting to make ingress in a present that cannot shake it off. What television discovers through revivals is that novelty is not a thing of the future, to be revealed once we overcome remaining obstacles; it can be launched from the past once the conditions for such an emergence are in place. A concept of immediation challenges us to think these relational complications of the present by pastness and potential and to consider how such immaterial yet felt aspects like memory and affect can be composed and how they factor into the actual experience of media.

The Comedic Topologies of *Arrested Development*

Mitchell Hurwitz’s *Arrested Development* has drawn on a nonlinear notion of time since its very beginning. As a short introduction, it may

suffice to say that the show tells “the story of a wealthy family who lost everything, and the one son who had no choice but to keep them all together” (“Top Banana,” Season 1, Episode 2). Indeed, nothing much changes about this situation during the first three seasons of the show (Fox, 2003-2006). “It’s arrested development,” after all. Despite Michael Bluth’s best efforts at keeping his dysfunctional family together, his selfish parents—George who’s been arrested for defrauding investors of the Bluth Company; the fabulously cruel matriarch Lucille; as well as his spoilt siblings, magician Gob, socialite Lindsay, and grad student Buster—continuously manage to upset the family fates. Until the end of the third season, nothing much has changed for the Bluths. The same goes for character development: besides the growing attraction between the children of the family, cousins George Michael and Maeby, and Buster’s loss of his left hand to a loose seal (read: Lucille), none of the characters undergo any growth to speak of. If anything, they become more set in their ways. What, then, is it, in the midst of so much apparent stasis that moves the series?

Arrested Development works as a growing archive of family trivia, as a web of cross-references that becomes denser with every episode. The show’s unconventional comedy relies partly on the ways in which the obnoxious relatives play each other and play off of each other. Thus, as the plot forever treads on the spot, eternally stuck at square one of developmental arrest, the viewer gradually accumulates an abundance of the Bluth’s quirks and oddities, their individual challenges and recurring failures. Indeed, much of the joy that the show creates arises from the flashes of recognition one experiences as one of the relatives rubs another’s shoulder (a family habit that expresses both compassion and contempt), as Lindsay’s husband and “nevernude” Tobias unintentionally conveys his suppressed homosexuality again, or as George Michael proves his inability to catch anything yet another time. In this way, the aesthetic experience of watching *Arrested Development* relies heavily on the creation and reactivation of a network of memories. Yet, unlike other TV genres that heavily rely on repetition, such as the traditional sitcom with its catchphrases and running jokes, *Arrested Development* tweaks repetition and habit in such a way as to allow for the unexpected. This has to do with two contrasting rhythms of the series: the speed of the narration and the slowness with which individual comic references return. In terms of plot development and dialogue, *Arrested Development* moves extremely fast, rarely allowing the viewer enough time to trace all the ramifications of a character’s actions

or consider the elusive references of a repartee. The editors of an online wiki for the series write: "Each episode crams enough jokes, flashbacks, cut-aways, call-backs, call-forwards, and subtle background jokes in 22 minutes that each viewing reveals more jokes."⁹ Every encounter with the image repotentializes it. In terms of individual call-backs, however, the show can be extremely slow and take episodes or even seasons to make reference again to a most insignificant plot element. Here is a small but noteworthy example: In the episode "Justice is Blind" (season 1, episode 18), Lindsay breaks her heel on a statue of the Ten Commandments in front of the courthouse and protests for it to be removed (to insist on the separation between church and state). Twenty-two episodes later, in "Righteous Brothers" (s. 2, ep. 18), we see the statue again during one of the family's numerous visits to/escapes from the courthouse; this time the statue is—more safely—placed on the courthouse lawn. Lindsay's activist work has borne its meagre fruit.¹⁰ On this second occurrence, no further reference is made to the statue; it is very easy to miss. And yet, there it is, carefully placed for the attentive viewer to spot. It is the *smallest joke*, one that probably does not land with the majority of the audience, let alone on a first viewing. It is a *minor* trait of the image—much less noteworthy than the episode's plotline or the characters' relations—that activates a past and pulls it into the present. All of a sudden, these two moments, separated in linear time by more than a season, move into experiential proximity. In the moment of recognition, the present episode is comically charged with layers of past. Moreover, the trait, if noticed, retroactively reconfigures the past, pulling out a thread of thought that was weaving itself through the series all along. Was the statue of the Ten Commandments more important than initially thought, perhaps as a sort of standard to measure the crooked morals of the Bluth family? Does it occur in more episodes other than the two mentioned above? These questions bring out the third aspect of the minor jokes in *Arrested Development*: they destabilize the conventional relation between foreground and background.¹¹ Here, the set is not merely a container for the protagonists' banter as in many traditional sitcoms (the living room, the kitchen, the café/bar). The Bluths inhabit a *milieu* through which the series' ethico-aesthetic project comes to expression. In short, because of this humour in the visually, temporally, and narratively minor mode, it is never quite certain where comedy happens or exactly when it is going to strike in *Arrested Development*. This is because the comedy of this show isn't topical; that is, pertaining only to the episode at hand: this joke right here, right now. Instead, the comedy of *Arrested*

Development is topological: the series is a dynamic spacetime that folds back and forth on itself in a continuous form-taking, creating new points of contact between its various elements. In so doing, *Arrested Development* continuously remixes characters, locations, props and past events.

Unlike conventional catchphrases or running gags, this remix of jokes does not feed off the regular re-performance of the same line by the same character. Catchphrases produce a little smile of recognition. The hilarity of *Arrested Development's* persistent jokes, by contrast, results from the show's ability to come to a recurrence differently each time, to wrest a feeling of surprise from the differential between the already known and the new set of conditions. In the minor comedy of the series, the components of the image behave like highly reactive free radicals that can fuse with almost any other component that comes their way in unpredictable ways. *While the catchphrase closes down or resolves intensity into a satisfying punch line, comedy in the minor key opens up and increases the intensity of the comic event.* On many occasions, the series goes to some narrative and aesthetic lengths to perform a well-known joke or character stereotype in an entirely new way and manages to inject the familiar with a certain amount of novelty. This minor twist is the spark to the powder reserve of as-yet backgrounded joy: the topological comedy of *Arrested Development* rides on past amusement to intensify the burst of joy in the present. The two forces of this movement are mutually reinforcing: memories of joy help leverage a present burst of laughter which, in its inventive variation on the theme, leaves a ripple on the surface of the comedic complex that may well up into another surge of delight as it encounters a fellow current running through the show. The result is a nonlinear "archiving of affective immediacy" that feeds the *experiential milieu* of *Arrested Development* (Massumi 2015c: 84). Following Alanna Thain, we might also describe this as an "anarchive" in which the past is constantly stirred up, remixed and reactivated (Thain 2010). What is at stake is not the archive as an orderly repository of information,¹² available for consultation when needed, *if needed*, but how the past—unacted but remembered—continues to shape the present. This dynamic constitutes the singular aesthetic shape of *Arrested Development*.

This time, the term milieu does not refer to the content of the image. This experiential milieu is not the complicated fictional world depicted *in* the series but the relational field of which the series itself is a component along with the viewer, technological devices, etc. I qualify

this milieu as experiential to emphasize the field effect, created in the assemblage of various components, as that which is *immediately* perceived or “directly experienced” in William James’s words (1996a: 22). This conceptualization is related to current theorizations of *media ecologies*, in which “parts no longer exist simply as discrete bits that stay separate [but] set in play a process of mutual stimulation that exceeds what they are as a set” (Fuller 2005: 1). This excess can come as “an explosion, a passion or capacity,” in any case it acts as a force within the world (*ibid.*). This aspect of an *effect* that *exceeds* the material components of the assemblage is crucial to a concept of immediation because it allows us to think lived experience itself as the arena for the ethical and political project of a media ecology.

Such an approach can create new avenues for television studies, especially the kind that has made its way into the cul-de-sac of narrative complexity. Largely following the structuralist tradition of narrative studies, it focuses on TV series as a discrete object to be analyzed for its structures, for its relation between discourse and story (as the narratological equivalents of signifier and signified). As a result, the lived experience of narrative is oftentimes ignored or reduced to a characteristic of the program itself. Thought in this way, a program’s importance resolves itself in its structural components and their meaning. Research can still register that which a program composes for: an effect, a lived experience. But it has difficulty thinking this doing. Consider Jason Mittell’s description of *Arrested Development* as relying on an “operational aesthetic” (2006: 35). This kind of aesthetic calls “attention to the constructed nature of the narration and ask[s] us to marvel at how the writers pulled it off; often these instances forgo realism in exchange for a formally aware baroque quality in which we watch the process of narration as a machine rather than engaging in its diegesis” (35). Mittell, too, is struck by the workings of *Arrested Development*. He stands in awe of what he repeatedly calls the “pyrotechnics” of narrative complexity (35, 36). Effects are registered: explosions everywhere. But instead of tracing the ways in which they make their way into lived experience, they are looped into self-reflexivity. Marvel and joy lead right back to the complex narrative structures from which they lifted off. “How did the writers do it?” is a question that engages with the “making of” the series rather than its aesthetic doing, with the components of the media ecology rather than the immediate experience they effectuate. It’s like saying that seeing fireworks makes you think about the pyrotechnician’s recipe of

chemicals. As a consequence, the enjoyment that lifted off the narrative is attributed to the series as its structural element. The vitality of the experiential milieu is reduced to a merit of the series as research object. Enjoyment is reduced to prestige value.

A concept of immediation does not lead back to (narrative) structures and components. It starts from these to see what they bring into lived experience and follows these effects. In the case of *Arrested Development*, the field effect of the nonlinear folding of multiple pasts unfolding into new comic bursts is a feeling of *vitality*. As the series twists and turns its past into novel encounters, the most palpable experiential yield is a steady undercurrent of joyful agitation, a vibrant milieu-wide grin. The corollary for composing the milieu is a heightened attention and elastic perception that allow for nonlinear aesthetic, affective, and narrative tracings across the comedic topology. In this way, the comedy of *Arrested Development* functions as a “social gesture” (Bergson 2009: 20). According to Henri Bergson, the social dimension of comic laughter consists precisely in resisting the “easy automatism of acquired habits” and perceptual “rigidity” through which life, both individual and collective, settles into stale circuits of action and reaction. Minor comedy in its radical freedom throws sticks into these perceptual circuits and “softens down whatever the surface of the social body may retain of mechanical inelasticity” (19-21). Bergson’s argument is one for collective vitality: the comic is “a living thing” through which a society “obtain[s] from its members the greatest possible degree of elasticity and sociability” as conditions for “living well” (2, 21, 19). In other words, comedy is a way of life to make more of itself. Thus, if the functional principle of *Arrested Development*’s comedic milieu is a memory of the future, the field effect is comedic *joy* understood as the “self-affirming value of the process itself,” as the “immediate experience of a qualitative ‘more’ to life, a surplus value of life that is lived intensely, such that its very living is its own reward” (Massumi 2015c: 70).

The Anarchival Politics of Joy

In order to grasp the social and political valence of this joy more specifically, it is necessary to determine the “easy automatisms” that *Arrested Development* counteracts. Which perceptual circuits and social rigidities does the show allow us to break with?

It is worth remembering here that the series is about a filthy rich, lazy family and its dubious business practices. The Bluths will do anything and hoodwink anyone (including family members) to make a buck and maintain their standard of living. They are the infamous 1%. In fact, George Bluth Sr. himself presciently contributes to the growing housing bubble: his “light treason” consists in selling prefab homes to Saddam Hussein (“Visiting Ours,” Season 1, Episode 6), thus linking the nightmare of the 2008 financial crisis to the other American nightmare, the war in Iraq. After the family business goes down, it comes as a shock to the Bluths that they might actually have to work in order to make a living. When Michael insists that his sister Lindsay get a job, she, who sees herself more as a philanthropist doing charity, can’t help but find Michael’s obsession with remunerated work “materialistic” (“Key Decisions,” Season 1, Episode 4). The Bluths are an example of neoliberalism’s self-interested subjects caught up in a cycle of desire–consumption–satisfaction. Their rigid mentality and social ineptitude are the real star of the show: arrested development. The series’ politico-aesthetic project consists in moving beyond the capitalist modes of (media) consumption to the extent that the joy it creates as a qualitative surplus value of life is irreducible to the quantitative surplus value of capital.

To clarify this, I will follow Brian Massumi in distinguishing joy from the “infernal alternative” between (deferred) satisfaction and instant gratification (Massumi 2015c: 72). The important difference is that both satisfaction and instant gratification put the self-interested subject center-stage thereby reducing fielded joy to an individual attribute. They consume the vitality of the experiential milieu. Consumption towards the goal of satisfaction drains experience of its anarchival richness, of the perception of unactualized potentials stirring the experiential milieu, because it primes experience for an aesthetic object that is recognizable both in content and form. This holds as much for the Bluths¹³ as for our modes of TV consumption. As an example, think of the depleting effects of binge-watching a show like *24*: its real-time aesthetic of urgency is at the same time a lure for sustained consumption and the narrative trick that justifies all of Jack Bauer’s unconventional methods of investigation and interrogation in the face of a threat to national security, including torture. In this particular case, the perceptual field is reduced to a kind of tunnel vision that allows for the perfect alignment of media consumption and security politics. Even though *24* is extremely suspenseful, it works

from the very beginning towards the resolution of tension in the final, recognizable revelation. For this reason, “consumptive satisfaction is the antiaesthetic of capitalism,” no matter for how long it is deferred (Massumi, 2015a: 72). Instant gratification, on the other hand, “is an activity that is entered into for its own sake, and is self-affirming. But it is consuming, not creative” (72). Consider the short-lived fun of casual gaming. Each mini session provides a charge of pleasure that is just as soon lost. That is why the next instantaneous hit is so tempting, even if it requires a micro-payment for continued playing. Casual gaming integrates the mini-pleasures of instant gratification with an economy of micro-transactions. Think Candy Crush.¹⁴ The Bluths are stuck in one or the other of these modes: Michael and George Michael are the sad poster boys for deferred satisfaction; the rest of the family is constantly instantly gratified.

If I suggest that *Arrested Development* and its anarchival joy brush against the grain of these consumption habits, this is not to say that the series operates outside of market dynamics. The point is rather that, while the show was first proposed within the existing business and narrative models of network television, its low ratings and cancellation indicate that it did not function properly under those conditions. *Arrested Development* works at the limits of broadcast television’s procedures for the creation of quantitative surplus value the better to enrich the experiential milieu in qualitative terms. Against the antiaesthetic of satisfaction it posits the overfullness of the image, operating on the assumption that an image’s vitality cannot possibly be consumed on a single viewing, that in fact it grows the more the viewer engages with the image. This means that the aesthetic field is continuously recharged with potential perceptions, the more so as the viewer develops her sensitivities for perceiving across the entire surface of the image and across the living archive of episodes. Thus, if “capitalism is the process of converting qualitative surplus value of life into quantifiable surplus value,” then *Arrested Development*’s ethico-aesthetic project consists in mediating a mockery of the latter in order to intensify the immediate sensation of the former (Massumi, 2015c: 77).

Arrested Development is a situated alter-economy that sends ripples across the smooth neoliberal seas which well up into waves and culminate in a series of “splashes,” with comedic joy as the sparkling “foam, feathery and frolicsome,” that dances at the crest of the wave (Massumi 2015c: 42 passim; Bergson 2009: 200).

Coming Back

What propels a defunct program into a revival is this anarchival potential to inflect the present's more mechanical habits, to recharge the perceptual field, and to propose alternative, directly lived modes of thought. Of course, this potential can just as well be captured for the purposes of telling the same old story within the same old format to encourage the same old modes of consumption. One could show that is what happened in the case of *24*'s revival. Though shortened from a slightly outdated (and more expensive) season model of 24 episodes to a twelve-episode "event season," the show still follows American hero Jack Bauer in real-time as he saves the world once more from terrorists and traitors. And, picking up the theme of drone warfare, Jack Bauer shows us in half an action-packed day that unmanned aerial vehicles are indeed evil weapons in the hands of evil people but can safeguard the geopolitical order when operating under Western democratic control. *24: Live Another Day* is a zombie of post-9/11 security politics.

Anarchival memories of the future do not repeat the past but create an opening for the unacted to ingress in the world. One of the things *Arrested Development* sparked *after* its cancellation is a wiki page on which fans collectively map the major and minor comedic traits of the show, to enrich future viewings of already existing episodes.¹⁵ The growing online fan community relied on post-broadcast distribution through DVD and Netflix. Inversely, the encyclopedic mapping that wikis enable and foster rewatching. New modes of distribution as well as watching and fan activities are mutually beneficial. *Arrested Development* belatedly took advantage of this. It can be said that the same complexity that sealed the show's death on broadcast television is also what gave it its unexpected afterlife.

More importantly, though, the show functioned differently when it returned for its fourth season on Netflix. Instead of comfortably settling into the new, seemingly optimal Netflix distribution model, *Arrested Development* explored the limits of what is possible within the changed media ecology of TV. This becomes evident in the way the show's writing harnesses Netflix' strategy of publishing entire seasons at once. Usually, this model is thought of as targeting viewers and inciting binge-watching, although writers have taken this development into account and adapted the writing conventions for television (see e.g. Klarer 2014). *Arrested Development* pushes this development to its limit when it largely abandons linear narration altogether: if all the episodes

of one season are available at the same time, why insist on linear succession? For example, the calamitous events immediately following the ending of the third season are recounted seven times throughout the entire fourth season,¹⁶ each version offering the perspective of a different Bluth family member, each proposing a new, slightly different beginning to the same line of events. The show stretches a scene of about five minutes in length across its entire season and meticulously pieces it together as it moves through it again and again and again. This also means that by episode five you are hardly any further in terms of narrative progression than you were in episode two. You are literally still watching the same scene (and then some). Therefore you might as well watch them out of the suggested order. This is arrested development in the times of Netflix: the show challenges the received conventions for writing, distribution and reception to intensify both the stasis of its plot and the nonlinear foldings of its topological comedy (not without frustrating numerous critics and fans). In this way, *Arrested Development* recharges its anarchival practice with futurity, giving the fourth season itself several curious afterlives: Only days after its initial release, a first chronological re-edit of the entire season appeared online. Such re-edits are anarchival in their profound engagement with the source material, the meticulous process of re-mapping it towards coherence, and the animated fan discussions they give rise to. In the meantime, creator Mitchell Hurwitz is himself preparing a re-edited version of the season, complete with new voice-over narration, also in preparation for what's next.¹⁷ Even though this may constitute a return to linear narrative progression, it is still the working of the anarchival, not least because such a comprehensive re-edit by the original showrunner is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in the history of television. The anarchival is what generates the force to transform itself in the most unexpected ways. It is the potential that stirs in and around media, a potential to act in the world, to enable new immediate encounters. As a concept, the anarchival is indispensable to a theory of immediation, which does not focus on what media mean or signify but wants to come to grips with what they do, how they inflect life. Did you cry or laugh? Were you scared or angry? And which other feelings were there that aren't as easily pinned down but nonetheless color the fabric of experience? These stirrings are the workings of the anarchival; the work of a concept of immediation is to bring them into thought.

Notes

1. In his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, William James proposes that, “[t]o be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” (1996a: 22). This chapter is an attempt to take the direct experience of media as a starting point and see where else that can lead thought in the field of television studies. The argument proposes that it can lead to the politicality of immediation or what will later be called an anarchival politics of joy. This consideration of the relation between aesthetic experience and ethics/politics is informed by the philosophy of Félix Guattari and in particular his book *Chaosmosis* (Guattari 1995: esp. 98-118).
For a theory that takes aesthetic experience as its starting point, the distinction between art and non-art is secondary. Provided that all its “elements” and singular conditions are accounted for, any experience counts for a radical empiricism, be it of “art,” “media,” or another aspect of reality. This chapter considers television art on the grounds of its rigorous composition for singular aesthetic experiences.
2. All examples mentioned here originally ran on the US networks mentioned in parentheses. For the announcement of the *Twin Peaks* revival see: <http://www.sho.com/video/33371/a-special-twin-peaks-announcement>
3. Williams famously based his conception of flow on his confusing experience of American broadcast television: “I can still not be sure what I took from that whole flow. I believe I registered some incidents as happening in the wrong film, and some characters in the commercials as involved in the film episodes, in what came to seem—for all the occasional bizarre disparities—a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings” (2003: 92).
4. See Feuer 1983, Corner 1997, Uricchio 2004, White 2004 and Lotz 2007.
5. Histories of television are oftentimes concerned with institutions, technologies, genres and formats. When individual programs are considered, they usually stand in as tokens of the same (conceptual) type (see e.g. Eco 1994: 85).
6. There are some older cases which show that this practice was not unheard of in earlier decades: *Dragnet* returned in various incarnations; lieutenant *Columbo* came back from an eleven-year hiatus in 1989; *Perry Mason* was rebooted after seven years off the air in 1973. In comparison to the above list of contemporary examples, it is clear however that the number of revivals has increased remarkably in recent years.
7. Generally, this holds for the film and television industries alike. For cinema, Elissa Nelson notes that “[e]ver since 1987, the majority of film revenues are earned in ancillary markets, not at the box office” (Nelson 2014: 62). It is interesting to note however that, at least in the case of Netflix, streaming technology connects much better with the television industry whereas DVD rentals were more aligned with the film industry: “As streaming became a bigger part of Netflix’s business, so did TV shows. Studios were more

reluctant to license movies for streaming, and fans were more likely to watch TV series on Netflix when they didn't have to rent DVDs. (According to the company, TV series made up 18% of its DVD rentals at most but about 70% of its streaming traffic)" (Poniewozik 2013).

8. Poniewozik once more: "There are enough channels that someone else can pick up your show, as TBS did with ABC's *Cougar Town*. It can be revived by popularity in DVD format or online, as were *Family Guy* and *Futurama*. It can be brought back by Netflix, as was *Arrested Development*. And now, as happened with *Veronica Mars*, fans can bankroll a comeback themselves" (2014: 56).
9. http://arresteddevelopment.wikia.com/wiki/First_Time_Viewer's_Guide_to_Arrested_Development
10. For stills from both episodes, see http://arresteddevelopment.wikia.com/wiki/The_Ten_Commandments.
11. For a different use of the foreground/background relation for comedic ends in *Arrested Development*, see Vermeulen and Whitfield 2013.
12. In fact, the various distributors of *Arrested Development* are unable to even agree on what would constitute the orderly archive: The order in which the DVD box set lists the episodes differs slightly from the listing on Netflix.
13. The intimate theater of *Arrested Development* exposes the dysfunctionality of the neoliberal economy in the face of the passions. What undermines the ideal of growth is self-interest itself. To pose the world as a resource for a subject's satisfaction in no way requires the subject to engage with the world creatively. None of the Bluths (besides Michael) have an interest in their company except to bleed it dry. A little more money for another kick: When some of the company's frozen assets are released, the family's money habits kick in: Lucille's priority is to treat Buster's clicking jaw; GOB and Tobias invent a fake coffee company, Gobias Industries, to get their hands on the money; Lindsay needs some cash flow to entertain an extramarital affair which is meant to boost her self-esteem ("Whistler's Mother" Season 1, Episode 20). Money is conceived as a tool that makes the material world available for individual consumption for the purpose of satisfying individual needs.
14. For an investigation of the relation between casual gaming and modes of consumption, see Heaven 2014.
15. See <http://arresteddevelopment.wikia.com/> and try the "random page" button. See also <http://recurringdevelopments.com>.
16. The events at the Harbormaster's Lodge are shown in episodes 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, and 14 of the fourth season.
17. See Pretentious Film Majors 2014. In July 2016, it was reported that Hurwitz had finished the re-edited version which consists of 22 shorter episodes instead of the original 15 (Schneider 2016). As of writing (August 2016), it is not certain if and how the re-edited version will become available to audiences.