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Preemptive Narratives, Modes of Attention, and the Politics of Perception

Abstract

This paper looks at the narrative technique of the *preempted ending*, which consists in anticipating an episode's or season's ending at the very beginning of the episode or season. Focusing on the TV shows *Flashforward* and *Damages*, the paper explores the various ways in which this strategy connects innovative standards in writing, production, distribution and consumption around an *aesthetic experience of time*. First, the argument highlights the *technics* of preemptive narratives to investigate their technological conditions such as production-for-streamability and video-on-demand distribution. In a second step, the focus will be on the aesthetic potentials of preemptive narratives, which include different forms of suspense and modes of attention, to explore how we watch differently if we know the ending of a narrative. Finally, the paper addresses the relation between this narrative technique and contemporary trends towards *premediation* and a politics of *preemption*. In this way, the paper shows how preemptive narratives on TV connect *technical, aesthetic, and political concerns* in order to sensitize viewers to the perceptual dynamics of contemporary culture.

It is commonplace to say that television series have become increasingly complex over the last two decades or so.¹ And, undoubtedly, these complex narratives harness the possibilities of digital technologies in production, post-production, distribution, and consumption. But how is it precisely that technologies, writing strategies, and modes of distribution link in to connect viewers among each other and win their loyalty? What are the specific *techniques* that have developed at the intersection of new platforms, production standards, and viewing practices?

In this paper, I want to look at one particular technique, the *preempted ending*, to explore its various potentials for connectivity. What I call a preempted ending is as simple a narrative move as it is frequent in recent TV series: an episode begins by showing a final catastrophe, conflict, or stand-off between two characters, and then goes back in time – usually indicated by an intertitle like “12 hours earlier” or “six months earlier” – to tell the story

of everything that led up to the foretold ending. Within the large variety of *preemptive narratives*, I will focus on TV shows such as *Damages* (2007–2012) and *Flashforward* (2009–2010), which deploy this scheme over the length of an entire season. I want to suggest that, if this has become a standard device of TV storytelling, it is due to the ways in which it productively connects various elements in the media ecology² of television series. First, it relates an episode's or season's beginning to its very ending and therefore requires a particular rigor and consistency in writing practices. Moreover, the technique relates to practices of production for *streamability*, through online distribution on platforms like Netflix, and more recent modes of consumption such as *binge-watching*.³ Secondly, we shall see that it creates a particular kind of suspense that connects viewers to a program. In fact, I shall argue that, by activating the *interval of time* between the beginning and the foretold future, the preempted ending demands a mode

PREEMPTIVE NARRATIVES, MODES OF ATTENTION, AND THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION

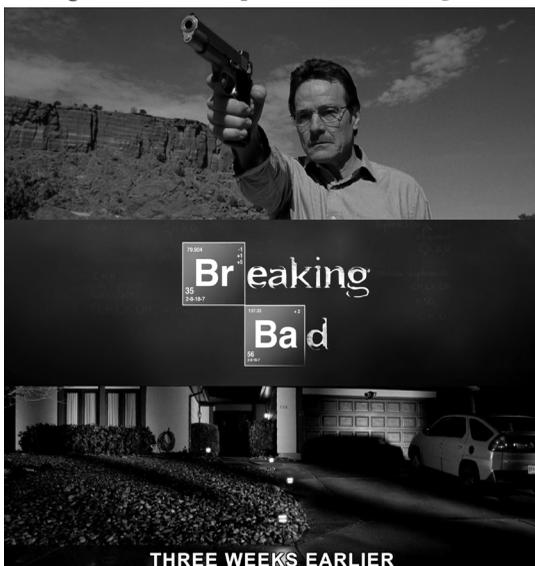
of *attention* and *speculation* that disperses across the above-mentioned interval of missing time. Finally, I will show how the technique links into contemporary political concerns of preemption and premediation.

Last Things First: Examples of Preempted Endings

Preemptive narratives begin by anticipating a specific future scenario or even their own ending. These narratives preempt their oftentimes catastrophic outcomes and only afterwards return to the beginning, a beginning now imbued with the gloom of disaster, to slowly unfold the events leading up to that catastrophe over the duration of an episode or an entire season.

Popular examples include the pilot episode of *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013), which opens on Walter White's frenzied escape in an RV through the New Mexican desert. The scene dramatically ends in a shot of Walter (Bryan Cranston) pointing a gun at his arriving pursuers. The image then cuts to the opening titles, which give way to a most conventional establishing shot of a residential house, Walter's, with the intertitle "three weeks earlier."

Breaking Bad catches up with its foretold future within the first episode. Other TV series give themselves more time, several episodes for instance. This is the case in the first season of *Revenge* (ABC, 2011-present), which begins with



an attempted murder on a beach and then takes the viewer back to what happened "five months earlier."

Revenge takes fifteen (out of twenty-two) episodes of the first season to catch up with its initial flashforward. (The show repeats this preemptive movement in the recently aired beginning of its third season.) Finally, there are TV series that employ the technique of the preempted ending to give away the very ending of a season. The prime example is the legal thriller *Damages* (FX/DirecTV 101, 2007-2012), which repeats this narrative scheme in each of its five seasons. At the beginning of each season, we get a glimpse of its last moments. The narrative then resumes "six months earlier" and slowly leads us to that preempted ending through a series of further glimpses of the future, numerous red herrings and just as many plot twists.

Another example of this narrative procedure is *Flashforward* (ABC, 2009-2010), which modifies and complicates the narrative loop through the future. In this series, the characters themselves have a vision of their future six months ahead. *Flashforward* plays through what life would be like if we knew our future. One could assume that this kind of excess knowledge provides a useful tool for navigating the present. Interestingly, however, the characters in *Flashforward* experience their future visions as an affective shock that undoes all certainty and threatens to unravel the present. Even though *Flashforward* is pure science-fiction, its insights on the affective shock of future knowledge provide a first clue as to how preemptive narratives themselves make viewers connect. Besides the above examples, one could list numerous others



from shows like *Desperate Housewives*, *Modern Family*, *Hostages*, and many more. For the sake of clarity and conciseness, I will focus on *Damages* and *Flashforward* in what follows.

The Technics of Preemptive Narratives

There is something peculiar about serial narratives on TV that anticipate their own endings in this way. Think of earlier staples of televised fiction such as the soap opera or the police procedural. Conventional soap operas like *The Young and the Restless* or *The Bold and the Beautiful* (both still running) are in principle open-ended. In fact, one of the challenges in writing for a soap opera consists in creating story lines that can always be continued or create an opening for another storyline to unfold. In any case, unlike many contemporary TV series, soap operas are not written in view of a major season finale. There is no ending to begin with. The police procedural à la *Columbo* is surely the other dominant genre among traditional TV series. Though they work very differently than soap operas, they lack an ending in a similar way. Following the “one episode, one case” pattern, they rarely construct a season-long story arc that is characteristic of recent television series. All of this is to say that, from an historical perspective,

it is quite unusual for TV series to *impose* an ending as shows like *Damages* do, for them to not only ‘want to end’ but to *unfold with respect to* a specific ending. Indeed, my hypothesis is that such preemptive narratives in serial fiction on TV are a specifically contemporary phenomenon.

To unpack this proposition, I suggest thinking of preemptive narratives as a *technics*, that is, a complex of technological components and the techniques they activate.⁴ This means that modes of writing, production, and distribution co-evolve with their specific set of technologies. There are of course many reasons for the increased quality and complexity of television series, including enhanced image standards through digital recording, post-production and transmission, the practice of ‘narrowcasting,’ the production of ‘original series,’ and the migration of ‘human resources’ from cinema to television.⁵ But, I submit, the most important enabling conditions of preemptive narratives are DVD distribution and the narrative unit of the season (later reinforced with video-on-demand streaming).

During the 1990s, DVD made it possible to distribute an *integral archive* of a program. For the first time, a TV series could be bought and rewatched in its entirety.⁶ This continuity of the archive as a whole then produced a stronger internal discontinuity or segmentation by means of innovative *season formats*. For, while these developments seem to concern modes of distribution and reception predominantly, they also impact writing and production practices. This shows in the new concern for the *rewatchability* of a program.⁷ The question arises: Why would somebody want to rewatch an entire season or even TV series? What *techniques* and lures of storytelling are necessary to make new technologies of distribution economically viable? Many of these techniques coalesce around the narrative unit of the season; the complex set of enabling conditions activates the season as an aesthetic unit with its own potentials and requirements. Among these potentials, there are the long *story arcs* that most recent TV shows deploy and which create an incentive to rewatch a season as a whole.⁸ One of the requirements for the long arc is *consistency*, which – among other reasons – has led to shorter, more rigorous season formats with

PREEMPTIVE NARRATIVES, MODES OF ATTENTION, AND THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION

a meticulously crafted sequence of arcs, beats, and rhythms.⁹ Among the narrative elements that are accentuated by more rigorous season models is the ending. Even as a series integrates contending arcs, rhythms, and discontinuities, the ‘season finale’ is kept firmly in view as a node for these movements to come together. Especially the season-long story arcs create a heightened expectation for the final episode. In some cases, however, the pull of the ending is harnessed as the central driving force of the narrative machine: the ending is posited at the very beginning of the series, the final disaster is preempted before the story even begins. This is the case in *Damages* and *Flashforward*.

The most important effect of this procedure is obviously not to spoil the ending; preemptive narratives do not provide excess knowledge to give the viewer an epistemic head start. *Their main project is to make the ending felt.* This feeling of the ending throughout the entire season acts as an aesthetic force.

The Aesthetics of Preemptive Narratives: *Damages*

By aesthetics, I mean the *perceptual* dynamics and intensities of *sensation* specific to a given media ecology.¹⁰ And when I speak of sensation, I do not only refer to the sense perception of images and sounds. The relation between audiovisual media and its viewers is far more complex, melting the senses into one another. We see and hear, obviously. But we also have goose bumps, cringe and flinch, gasp and cry. The important point is that, when for instance a horror film or series scares us out of our seat, our reaction does not pass through signification, representation or reflection. The horror film’s orchestral stab, often used to do the job, carries its name for a reason: it is a signal that directly hits the senses and produces a visceral reaction.¹¹ From this vantage, the “spectator is no longer passively receiving optical information, but exists as a bodily being, enmeshed acoustically, senso-motorically, somatically and affectively in the film’s visual texture and soundscape.”¹²

Just like the orchestral hit, an asignifying signal, the preempted ending does not so much ‘carry meaning’ as it creates an aesthetic experience, a sensation of time. This sensation creates an

affective connection between the viewer and the narrative: the preempted ending gives the viewer a *feeling* of the season’s wholeness; it supplements the intermittent and provisional character of serial narration with the foretold ending to create an impression of directionality and inevitability. In this way, the season is made felt as the overarching narrative project, of which the pilot is only the beginning. This sensation is oftentimes carried through the entire season. In *Damages*, for instance, the future visions are repeated in every episode before the events from “6 months earlier” continue. This back-and-forth between the future and the present continuously reactivates the ending’s pull on the viewer. By way of its repeated glimpses of the ending, *Damages* sinks its hooks deeper into the viewer’s attention with each episode. The preempted ending is certainly a technique of producing recognizable, ‘streamable’ and ‘bingeable’ content for online distribution.¹³ One could say, then, that this is simply a technique of suspense, of making the viewer want to know what will happen. But that doesn’t do justice to preemptive narratives like *Damages* because, in a way, the viewer already knows what *will have happened*. Since the future has already been revealed, the suspense of preemptive narratives does not or not only follow a logic of revelation. The preempted ending does not so much pull the viewer towards itself as it pulls her into the interval between the present and the future.

Damages loops around a gap in time. As the narrative continuously spirals from future to present, back to the future and from there to the present again, it slowly closes in on the time-in-between. This circling between the present and the future is also a tending-toward the interval, an activation of the gap: watching these series, you feel that what matters is precisely the stretch of time that is missing, that which is no longer the present and not yet the future. A no-longer-the-present that is not-yet-the-future is a *future-past*, the interval in which the past and the future fold into each other to creatively become the present. This means that the preempted ending delivers more than just a representation of separate moments in time. In *Damages*, time is no longer only represented as a content of narrative but experienced as the force of form. The series creates

an immediate sensation of a narrative's form-taking, of time-in-the-making. This may sound abstract but it becomes clear in *Damages* in a very concrete way: As every episode performs the loop through time, your vision of the future returns in the exact same images. But in every episode, some kind of plot twist compels you to reconsider what you think the future, still the same, actually is. In other words, every time you *see* the future, you have to think the *same* images *differently*. In this movement, you do not only experience the making of *meaning* in time. Perception and thought mingle to make you feel how reality as a whole *self-differentiates* in the interval of the future-past, to become what it will have been.

This movement of perception leads to an exercise in attention. In *Damages*, the preempted ending works in conjunction with another technique: the plot twist. Together, they continuously reroute the viewer's expectations and ask her to disperse her attention across the interval of missing time. This is how this works: as the six-months-later scenes are repeated and expanded in each episode of a given season, they continuously remind the viewer of what will have happened and pull her attention beyond the present into the undetermined in-between. In this way, *Damages* relentlessly catapults the expectant viewer into prediction mode. The series clearly invites the viewer to speculate and project possible narrative trajectories leading toward the end. This is where the many plot twists in *Damages* come in to intensify its specific sensation of time. For whatever narrative trajectory you have projected across the gap in time, the plot twist falsifies it and throws you back into the interval. But speculation immediately kicks back in and asks for a new scenario to be constructed. Consequently, a new trajectory will branch off from the initially anticipated line of events. Now, as the plot twists proliferate over the course of a season, so do the branches of potential trajectories. Each twist stalls linear projection, splits it and re-infuses it with potential, thus leaving an ever-denser "thicket" of branches between the present and the future. The speculative back-and-forth through the interval continuously remixes the possibilities that the narrative holds within and constantly reactivates attention.

This relates to questions of connectivity as it allows us to complicate the ongoing discussions around television and its attention economy. The baseline of these discussions, continued in recent years by thinkers like Bernard Stiegler and Jonathan Crary, is that 'television kills attention.' In *Telecracy against Democracy*, Stiegler draws on studies with children who, exposed to television as toddlers, develop attention deficit disorders by the age of seven.¹⁴ Jonathan Crary, in his recent book *24/7*, draws on a largely criticized study that suggests a "correlation between television viewing by very young children and autism."¹⁵ Crary is careful to mention the controversy around the study and, with a deferral to what "future research may prove or disprove," leaves the question of its scientific value open. But precisely this openness lets the general suspicion about television's deleterious effects linger. To state my point bluntly: The attention economy of television does not begin and end with toddlers. While I wouldn't expose my three-year-old to hours of daily TV-watching either, I'm not prepared to dismiss the medium as a whole. (I also don't give her scissors – however, that doesn't mean that 'scissors are evil,' but simply that they're not made for children.) What's more, the problem with arguments like Stiegler's or Crary's is the reductive understanding of 'attention' as the deep concentration on one specific object of consideration and the capacity to follow a line of argument or information. Anything else falls under the purview of distraction or attention deficit. This facile distinction has recently been questioned by media archaeologist Petra Löffler. She develops the concept of *distributed attention* as "a synonym for distraction. This means that attention and distraction cannot any longer be regarded as distinguishable mental states, and hence their assumed opposition collapses."¹⁶ This complicated understanding of attention is more adequate to the requirements of contemporary media ecologies (with their hypertexts as well as multiple screens, windows, and tabs) and to *Damages's* exercise in the *dispersal of attention* across a multiplicity of possible narrative trajectories and into the interval of missing time. Which plot element might prepare the next reversal of events? Which character will remix the story all over again? The joy of engaging with *Damages* consists precisely in distributing

PREEMPTIVE NARRATIVES, MODES OF ATTENTION, AND THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION

one's attention across all these potentialities and in tentatively moving with the narrative. The show's complex remix of time, its network of temporalities, aims at stretching and scattering our attention to meet the requirements of its narrative procedure. So not only do contemporary television series not necessarily distract; they can create their very own, quite specific modes of attention.

The Politics of Preemptive Narratives: Flashforward

Thus far, we have seen how the preempted ending allows us to connect new technological possibilities and modes of distribution to narrative procedures, which, in return, can draw viewers into a specific attention economy. In so doing, preemptive narratives also relate to contemporary "preemption politics."

Brian Massumi distinguishes the doctrine of preemption from prevention or deterrence politics in that it evokes a threat that has not yet materialized, that is still in potential. The reality of the threat is *affective*; it exists as the *fear* that it creates. Preemption is a "perception attack."¹⁷ And instead of preventing or deterring the realization of that threat, the goal of preemption is to materialize the threat in order to control it and react to it more adequately.¹⁸ This dynamic is portrayed in the science-fiction series *Flashforward*. In this show, every person on the planet blacks out at the same time and has a vision of their future exactly six months ahead. As I suggested earlier, these "flashforwards" into the future do not produce a useful resource for navigating the present. Instead, the characters of the show experience them as an affective shock that immediately changes the present and that actually *brings about* the scenarios from people's future visions instead of preventing them. As a result, people's flashforwards quickly turn into *self-causing futures*.

This dynamic – science-fictional though it may seem – relates very much to the ways in which television and other media connect into contemporary politics via people's lives. Richard Grusin uses the term "premediation" to describe this phenomenon. He argues that, after 9/11, American news networks have tapped into the "affectivity of anticipation" to develop "a form of

medial pre-emption."¹⁹ Media no longer only mediate preexisting content. In a globalized and accelerated world characterized by uncertainty and fear, they cover possible future events as much as the past, potentialities as much as actualities. Grusin's stock example is the war in Iraq, which was mediated at least a year before it started: "the mediation of war and its aftermath always preceded the events themselves, [...] such real events as war and its aftermath occurred only after they had also been premediated by networked media, by government spokesmen, and by the culture at large."²⁰ This means that individual and collective futures are conditioned and created by the medial representations that precede them. Whether a premediation is accurate or realistic is secondary. "It will have been real because it was *felt* to be real. Whether the danger was existent or not, the menace was felt in the form of fear. What is not actually real can be felt into being."²¹

Consider *Flashforward* once more. Most of time, the characters in the show ask themselves whether their flashforwards can be prevented from happening or not, whether the future is "all mapped out" or "unwritten."²² Others are more proactive and harness their flashforward to preempt the future they saw. In episode 2, for example, we meet a pot-smoking, unemployed slacker who, after the blackout, applied to become an airport customs official only because he saw himself working as such in his flashforward. In another secondary plotline, window-cleaner Timothy becomes a motivational trainer and founds the religious self-improvement forum "Sanctuary" because that's what he saw himself doing in his vision (ep. 11). The question arises: Would this have happened at all without the future vision? – I could list further cases of flashforwards *effectively* and *preemptively* causing the predicted future, as when the protagonist Mark Benford (Joseph Fiennes) saves a hostage because his flashforward contains the information on how he will have saved this hostage (ep. 12). But the example that probably illustrates best the self-sufficiency of the future concerns the very foundation of *Flashforward's* plot: the main reason why the FBI team around Mark Benford is appointed chief investigator of the blackout is that, in Benford's future vision, he was chief investigator of the blackout (ep. 5).²³ This means that the series

does not simply unfold towards its ending, *an* ending. The entire story of *Flashforward* seems to have been *caused* by its specific, foretold ending. If there is something terrorizing about *Flashforward's* experiments with time, it is this strange quasi-identity of cause and effect, in which the future directly imposes itself as the present. In light of this, the question that the show itself continuously raises, which is whether the future is “all mapped out” or “unwritten,” does not constitute the central problem; it actually covers up it up. The central issue here is that, as people ask themselves whether their future visions can be changed or not, the FBI as the law-enforcing authority has already used these visions to leverage the future *now* and to impose its own roadmap.

That this dynamic goes easily unnoticed – by characters in and viewers of the show alike – leads me back to the questions of attention. For going beyond the false alternative of an all-mapped-out or unwritten future requires a sensitivity to *Flashforward's* backhanded narrative strategies. Once the overall movement of self-causation is attended to, it becomes clear that the present in *Flashforward* is entirely backformed from the characters' future visions. The eerie, overwhelming affective tone, which resonates from (but in spite of) the show's heroic fight for national security, is the result of this utterly disempowering certainty: the future no longer shows itself for humans to either submit themselves or counteract. The science-fictional thought experiment points beyond these two strategies to a future that only mediates itself to *immediately* cause itself. The interval of the future-past has been consumed by a future-already-present.²⁴

TV series like *Damages* and *Flashforward* can sensitize us to the affective strategies of preemption. To attend to the series' narrative procedures is to learn how to look differently. *Damages* asks you to consider, say, the telling look on a character's face, a give-away smile, a minor difference that can make *all* the difference for how things will subsequently unfold. Disperse your attention across all plotlines and characters and hold all the potential you can find. *Flashforward* invites you to attend to its preemptive *procedure*, the narrative's *movement* through time, instead of just its story. Focus on the storyline and you are

likely to fall into the trap of preemption, to accept the self-causing futures under the shock of the perception attack; but attend to the movement of the narrative itself and the very same TV series makes you sense that preemption loops through the future to better control the present.

All of this can enrich the way in which we think about television connectivity on at least three accounts. First of all, it becomes clear that connectivity does not restrain itself to formal technological set-ups for, say, interactivity, user-generated content, or on-demand distribution. Television has always been part of a complex media ecology in which heterogeneous domains – technology, perception, politics – interrelate in productive ways. The question is how *exactly* these domains intersect at any singular point in time. This specificity is not fully accounted for by major categories for media constellations (say “new media,” “web 2.0,” or “post-network era”) but can come into effect as relatively unsuspecting *techniques* such as the preempted ending. In return, these minor techniques can resonate across a growing variety of narrowcast programs and attune diverse audiences to certain viewing habits. Preemptive narratives, for instance, are as frequent on the big networks as they are on subscription channels. Secondly, these techniques of connectivity do not only function at the level of representation, that is, of mediated content. They can harness the asignifying forces of aesthetic qualities such as color, texture, plasticity, and, in the case of this particular study, the image's movement through time to create an immediate impact.²⁵ In *Damages* and *Flashforward*, the preempted ending is television's technique to link in to contemporary questions of justice, law enforcement, and the geopolitics of terror. Thirdly, then, the inconspicuous technique of the preempted ending shows that the aesthetic is already political. Accordingly, a television series' political investment and affiliation must be immediately *sensed*. We have seen that the narrative movement of *Flashforward* loops through the future in order to reduce divergent timelines and unify the image into linear narrative progression. And it does this *even though* the characters in the story constantly stress how open, changeable, and fragile the future is. That the televisual image is immediately political also means that it does not

PREEMPTIVE NARRATIVES, MODES OF ATTENTION, AND THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION

represent, 'imitate' or 'adapt' a separate political ecology. *Flashforward's* techniques of suspense are *exactly the same* as those of affective attunement to fear and apprehension.²⁶ The series directly participates in a wider cultural ecology that sets its agendas by evoking catastrophic future scenarios (climate change, terrorism, etc.).

Conclusion

'Preemptive narratives' give an example of the various ways in which *technics*, *aesthetics*, and *politics* connect in contemporary television. Through the narrative strategy of the preempted ending, TV series like *Damages* and *Flashforward* harness recent writing, production, and distribution standards in order to foreground the season as a consistent aesthetic complex. The project of these shows consists in creating a sensation of time and, more specifically, a sensation of the season as an irreducible whole. This creates a strong connection to viewers in two ways. First, the narrative lures the viewer with the ending to be regained; this creates a feeling of suspense in the traditional sense, following a logic of revelation. Secondly, and more importantly, the preempted season ending draws the viewer into the interval of time between the beginning and its foretold future, asking *how* the ending will come to be. This gives a strong sense of necessity to everything that occurs in between the beginning and the ending. Finally, this narrative strategy relates to issues of *preemption* and *premediation* in contemporary politics and media. This doctrine and its corresponding media strategy evoke future threats to actualize them in the

present in a controlled and controlling way. If our perception is constantly under perception attack – as many publications such as Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*, and most recently Bernard Stiegler's *États de choc* suggest – then preemptive narratives like *Flashforward* and *Damages* can sensitize viewers to the profound political investment of this perceptual dynamic. For this purpose, I have suggested, we must pay attention to the aesthetic forces of the image activated by minor techniques such as the preempted ending.

This attentiveness is itself a technique for giving television its due in terms of complexity and connectivity. It is a (true enough) commonplace that television distracts, depotentializes, and anesthetizes – in short, that it *disconnects*. But such sweeping dismissals – such as the above-mentioned criticisms by Stiegler and Crary – disconnect us even further from individual programs and their aesthetic and political projects. If this is where thought begins, in generality and judgment, it will probably never get to any one program in particular and find it worthy of its attention. If, instead, it begins with individual programs and their specific techniques, then research itself can connect into the media ecology of television in productive ways. In short, we do not necessarily need different, more highbrow media as a remedy against disengaging TV. Nor do we need to take a step back and critique it from, say, a media-sociological perspective. It may suffice to engage differently with contemporary TV series and their demanding complex narratives. Preemptive narratives are such narratives that require their own, very specific modes of attention and engagement.

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Notes

1 See Jason Mittel, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, March 2012–July 2013, <http://mcpress.media-commons.org/complextelevision/> (accessed on December 10, 2013).

2 See Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

3 See Todd M. Sodano, "Television's Paradigm (Time)Shift: Production and Consumption in the Post-Network Era," in *Time in Television Narrative: Exploring Temporality in Twenty-First-Century Programming*, ed. Melissa Ames, 27-42 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012) and Barrie Thorne, "The *Seven Up!* Films: Connecting the Personal and the Sociological," *Ethnography* 10, no. 3 (2009): 327-40. Both authors suggest that there is a correlation between practice of binge-watching and the creation of more complex temporalities in recent television series.

4 In this, I follow a number of contemporary media theorists including Andrew Murphie, "Clone Your Technics: Research Creation, Radical Empiricism and the Constraints of Models," *Inflexions* 1 (2008): <http://www.inflexions.org/volume_4/n1_murphie.html>, and Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13. See also Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxx.

5 Among the Hollywood actors who have turned (and, in some cases, returned) to TV are Glenn Close, Laura Linney, Jeremy Irons, Steve Buscemi, Laura Dern, Anjelica Huston, and Kevin Spacey. As for directors-cum-producers, consider for instance Martin Scorsese's involvement in *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010-2011) or Steven Spielberg who, in 2011 and 2012 alone, has executive producing credits on three TV shows: *Terra Nova* (Fox, 2011), *The River* (ABC, 2012), *Smash* (NBC, 2012). David Fincher directed the two first episodes of *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013). In fact, this migration of workers from film to television is already a *positive feedback effect* of the previously mentioned transformations in quality standards.

6 Obviously, the VCR has fundamentally changed the media ecology of television. It did however not have a major impact on the aesthetics of TV series. With respect to TV shows, the VCR's main uses were 1) private recordings of television programs to be watched at a later time (the notorious 'timeshifting'), and 2) "Best of" boxes, containing favorite episodes from popular television series. While such "Best of" boxes do have an economic effect, they remain miscellaneous collections of relatively disparate episodes. This archiving method is still too loose to generate new modes of storytelling.

7 Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad Is Good For You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 166-170, and Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58 (2006): 29-40, esp. 31.

8 Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58 (2006): 16-28.

9 Sean O'Sullivan, "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television, and the Season," *Storyworlds* 2, no. 1 (2010): 59-77.

10 Such an understanding of aesthetics has the advantage of reminding us of the original Greek meaning of the term, which is 'perception' or 'sensation' ("aesthetic, n. and adj.," *OED*).

11 See Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2-12.

12 Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10.

13 Simone Murray, "Brand Loyalties: Rethinking Content within Global Corporate Media," *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 3 (2005): 415-435.

14 Bernard Stiegler, *La télécratie contre la démocratie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), xv. This book has been partially translated as "Telemetry Against Democracy," *Cultural Politics* 6, no. 2 (2010): 171-180.

15 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London/New York: Verso, 2013), 85.

16 Petra Löffler, "Bodies of Distraction," in *Body and Time: Bodily Rhythms and Social Synchronism in the Digital Media Society*, ed. Bianca Maria Pirani and Thomas S. Smith, 8-20 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 10.

17 Brian Massumi, "Perception Attack: The Force to Own Time," in *Theory After Theory*, eds. Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, 75-89 (London, New York: Routledge, 2011).

18 See Brian Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption," *Theory & Event* 10, no. 2 (2007): no pagination. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2massumi.html and, by the same author, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 52-70 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

19 Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4 and 2.

20 Grusin, *Premediation*, 45.

21 Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact," 53-54.

22 Both citations are from *Flashforward*, season 1, episode 7. Since this show ran for one season only, I will hereafter cite in the body of the text, indicating episode numbers only.

23 Consider also the remarks of his sidekick Dmitri in the pilot episode ("No More Good Days"): "This is kind of insane. I mean we're running point on all this because he had a vision of us running point on this?"

24 This line of argument leads me to disagree with Patricia Pisters, "Flashforward: The Future is Now," *Deleuze Studies* 5, suppl. (2011): 98-115. Pisters argues that *Flashforward* is a "database narrative" which "represent[s] the countless possible variations of the future" (112). This is, as I have argued, only the *stated* concern of the series, which covers up a preemptive movement that aims at imposing consensus and creating a single and unquestioned political roadmap in the name of national security. The narrative constantly works towards *reducing* possible futures and creative potential.

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26 For the concept of affective attunement, see Brian Massumi, "Fear (The Spectrum Said)," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13, no. 1 (2005): 31-48.