

*Arrested Development/Scrubs*

Excursuses on the Use of Fiction

by Matt Siemer

Program in the Humanities  
Duke University

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Program in the  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates two episodic television shows, *Arrested Development* and *Scrubs*, and attempts to establish why one succeeded with audiences and the other failed. Following the work of genre theory, it is asserted that the two shows resonate with opposing narratives framing lived experience. The former presents the institutional (or restrictive) force of language to guide one's thoughts, mark disassociations between the self and others, and determine action. The latter appeals to the creative (or liberating) use of dialogue and narrative to inspire agency. In privileging the concrete situations in which interactions with others enable growth without restricting the will, and in which others are engaged in the same self-investigation, *Scrubs* calls for an acknowledgement of others. *Arrested Development* points to the metaphysical language and power systems that make such acknowledgements impossible. It is argued thereafter that both world-pictures have their place. The opposition between *Arrested Development* and *Scrubs* develops into a dual affirmation of how ordinary uses of language have the potential to create arbitrary limits between the self and others, but also how ordinary language in a state of emergence from the particular lives of a multiplicity of speakers enables us to meaningfully communicate in the first place and antagonizes the metaphysical pictures that hold us captive. This thesis concludes by exploring the way that fiction, as a series of propositions, occupies the middle space between an epistemological opening up and closing off of the self to others, allowing it to be used for either purpose, or for both at once.

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“For we can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison—as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond.”

—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §131

### **Title Sequence: Establishment of Tone**

*Meditations on Quixote* is an unconventional close reading. It isn't a chronological working through of the relationship of plot, narrator, and character. Though *Don Quixote* gives Jose Ortega y Gasset's book its title, the novel is never cited verbatim. And yet there is no doubt that *Meditations on Quixote* is a rigorous reading of the novel. Instead of taking *Don Quixote* from the beginning and the end and working inward, Ortega takes the book and moves outward into reality. That is, he doesn't appear interested in showing how *Don Quixote* operates in a closed system, but in showing how the relationship between the text and world can be expanded in almost every direction. By the end of his book, Ortega has not done a close reading as Theory would typically recognize the term. His is not a reading that seeks to catalogue the structure of the text, but instead explores his relationship to points in the text that bear some resonance with his lived experience. In this way, I think Ortega is one of the few to provide an alternative to formalism, a way of reading not based on story but on affect. The result of his reading is a systematic application of the themes of the text, using his relationship with the novel *Don Quixote* to arrive at a philosophical framework of his own.

Ortega's method of reading, which he called foreshortening, is meant by him to be an alternative route to philosophy inspired by Nietzsche's argument that philosophy should start from the body, where a multitude of forces cohabit and struggle, working outward toward those places where they find a resonance. This assumes, as Bakhtin later

wrote, that the text and the body (and the *social* body) share much in common. The multiplicity of forces that Nietzsche said was the foundation of the will, Bakhtin finds in both the person's and the text's speech will, their heteroglossia.

My reading method is rooted in this relationship between the text and the reader. In scholarly discussions of whether meaning resides primarily in the author, text, or reader, there is too often an absence of consideration for the *positioning* of all three which is just as significant. It is possible, and in fact likely, that certain readers will have an easier time gathering meaning from a novel than others if their philosophical preoccupations, world-view, or overarching value system have deep areas of common ground with elements of the text and the author standing behind it. Furthermore, the author and the reader can both make efforts to shorten the distance: the author through continuing to write, giving interviews, and in any other way explaining issues that arise, and the reader by rigorous study and multiple readings of (when possible) multiple texts by the author. What is highlighted through addressing proximity is, importantly, the amount of investment one has in understanding another and in making oneself understood. If there is very little investment, the force of the reading will likely be weakened. Understood in this way, reading and other modes of human communication have very similar projects, even if what they seek to express is very different. While it is easy to mystify fiction behind the appeal to its status as art, and though that does have its use, one ought to also be able to acknowledge why we come to texts in the first place, and why we become invested in the ones that resonate. The affective relationship is the same in both art and life, which I suspect is why we find something captivating, or inexpressible, in art.

In this essay, I will use my own type of foreshortening to work through two specific and interrelated problems. First, I will look at two television shows (*Scrubs* and *Arrested Development*), broadcast during roughly the same time period, one of which garnered a very large following and one of which didn't garner much of an audience at all. Second, I will try to understand the relationship between fiction and its audience, which necessarily involves some accounting for what people hope to find in it, or what they hope to *use* it for. Although I find Wittgenstein's philosophy the most helpful for understanding (toward the end of this essay) how fiction relates to its audience, my more extensive investigation proceeds under the influence of a group of philosophers (Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Ortega, and Bakhtin) for whom complicated, or rather tangled, issues are opportunities for the evaluation of what causes these questions to arise as questions in the first place.



## Act I: Establishment of Conflict

In *How Novels Think*, Nancy Armstrong makes the case that “the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same.” (Armstrong, 3)

Characterized by a strong disconnect between interiority and social position, and a desire to be self-governing, the modern protagonist appeared first in the novel and was then imitated in other narrative forms and in life. (Armstrong, 5,6) As Armstrong describes it:

“[The modern subject] came into being, I believe, as writers sought to formulate a kind of subject that had not yet existed in writing. Once formulated in fiction, however, this subject proved uniquely capable of reproducing itself not only in authors but also in readers, in other novels, and across British culture in law, medicine, moral and political philosophy, biography, history, and other forms of writing that took the individual as their most basic unit. Simply put, this class- and culture-specific subject is what we mean by “the individual.” (3)

Of the same time period discussed by Armstrong, Noël Carroll writes, “Mass society itself begins to emerge gradually with the evolution of capitalism, urbanization, and industrialization, and mass art begins to develop in tandem with the onset of the printing press.” (Carroll, 3) In writing of mass society, Carroll wants to highlight the way in which individuals were taking on a greater sense of collectivity. So the rise of what Armstrong calls the self-governing individual coincides with the rise of what Carroll calls mass society, a greater collectivity. The simultaneous rise of “the individual” and “mass society” during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is contradictory, but that does not mean either of the two authors above is incorrect. How modernism could create a psyche that felt *more* isolated and *more* collective at the same time is a subject taken up in Moretti’s book on the *Bildungsroman* in which he writes that socialization is the internalization of precisely this contradiction. (Moretti, 10) I would argue that mass art—the product of modern mass-production technologies—plays to both unresolved inclinations in the

human spirit, and in fact, oscillates between an emphasis on the individual or collective impulse in human existence depending on which view will have the greatest resonance with audiences at any given time.

A claim like Armstrong's presupposes that the novel was an incredibly powerful and influential medium, one capable of asserting a radical reconfiguring of the self, either directly or indirectly. As the twentieth century began, serialized novels migrated from paper to radio waves. Radio series and serial shows, in turn, moved to television. Surely episodic television can be said to have influence equal to that of the novel. I would like to expand Armstrong's basic assertion, namely, that a group of texts can facilitate personal reorientation, beyond the novel into another medium of mass art: episodic television.

Over the course of this essay I would like to explore two subjects. First, how do the forms of life embedded in television shows appeal to the individual or collective impulse while still maintaining a vast difference in content from one another? The two television shows I will be taking as exemplars are, significantly, from the same genre and rough time period. I hope this will help the reader see that the individual (aligned with agency) and the collective (emphasizing the power of the environment over agency) impulses are not able to coexist because of differences in reader expectation due to a difference of genre.

My second aim is to scrutinize with some depth the way in which television shows can be said to facilitate imitation (if viewers *merely* imitate), despite the fact that the audience knows full well that the work is fictional. It seems to me that this latter subject is crucial to an understanding of why episodic fictional television remains incredibly popular, which leads to the broader question of why (or if) fiction itself is a moralizing narrative discourse. The objects of this investigation (the comedies *Scrubs* and *Arrested*

*Development*) are perhaps unconventional, but, as I hope will become apparent, nonetheless fitting.

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On first glance, *Scrubs* and *Arrested Development* have many innovative characteristics in common. Both are shot in variations of a single-camera style that are relatively rare in situation comedies. Neither relies on a laugh track or studio audience to indicate where the viewer should find humor. They also share an atypical blend of series and soap opera writing tropes, though perhaps on a spectrum *Scrubs* leans more toward a series while *Arrested Development* is rooted predominantly in the soap opera. Though at the time they were picked up by a major network (2001 for *Scrubs* on NBC, 2003 for *Arrested Development* on FOX) these shared traits would have placed them in the distinct minority, the tone and content of the two shows differ widely. Indeed, they must have had very little in common because their fates could not be more divergent. *Scrubs* gained a loyal viewership almost instantly,<sup>1</sup> is prominently syndicated in primetime every weekday on Comedy Central, and continued new episodes in primetime on ABC through this past year.<sup>2</sup> *Arrested Development* was always waiting for an audience of its own and never found a large one despite winning the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series its first year.<sup>3</sup> To the shock of its cult following (and many critics), the show was almost cancelled in its second season, and after being renewed for a third year, it was cancelled

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<sup>1</sup> In 2003, the year of *Arrested Development*'s debut, *Scrubs* was number 13 on Nielson's top 30 with a 10.3 rating. (Brooks and Marsh, 1696)

<sup>2</sup> Comedy Central show listings: Comedy Central. [Scrubs: About the Show](http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/scrubs/index.jhtml). 2010. 25 April 2010 <<http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/scrubs/index.jhtml>>.

ABC show listings: ABC. [ABC Shows: Scrubs](http://abc.go.com/shows/scrubs?cid=showsitelinks_search), 2010. 25 April 2010 <[http://abc.go.com/shows/scrubs?cid=showsitelinks\\_search](http://abc.go.com/shows/scrubs?cid=showsitelinks_search)>.

<sup>3</sup> For Rating information: In Hurwitz, Mitch (Creator). *Arrested Development: Season One*. Beverly Hills: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Inc. (Distributor), 2004. Disc 2, Special Features. "The Museum of Television & Radio: Q&A with the Cast and Creative team of *Arrested Development*." (Courtesy of The Museum of Television & Radio). At 3:52-5:42; For Emmy information: Brooks and Marsh, 1674.

mid-season. After at first receiving syndication on a very small basic cable channel for video gamers called G4, *Arrested Development* is currently syndicated only in 'extended cable' on the Independent Film Channel twice a week.<sup>4</sup>

Occasionally a television show will succeed based purely on commercial factors, even though the writing of the show seems to be either outlandishly formulaic or downright stereotypical. Likewise, television shows with poor quality writing often get cancelled. The enormous critical acclaim both of these shows received suggests neither fall within the categories listed above—*Scrubs* was not created for pure commodification, nor was *Arrested Development* poorly written and deserving of cancellation. Yet when they were both presented to viewers, one succeeded and the other failed. This essay will find its starting point in that observation and use it as a lens through which to investigate these two situation comedies, whose success and failure deserve a meaningful explanation. Due to the difference in tone between these two shows, extracting the issues broached by the texts will require, as I hope will become apparent, a difference in approach for each. *Scrubs* aligns itself with the *Bildungsroman*, so some discussion will have to be given of that relationship. *Arrested Development* has no such trappings, and will have to be taken along the lines of a Menippean satire. The limits of the type of classification just described are notable, and so as not to allow the genre to substitute for close reading, this essay will use the terms only, as E.D. Hirsch would have it, as heuristic genres—accommodating those places where the text resists entry into easy taxonomy.

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<sup>4</sup> G4's press release for buying the syndication rights for *Arrested Development*: G4TV. The Feed: "Who Has Arrested Development? WE HAVE ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT!". 26 July 2006. 25 April 2010 <[http://g4tv.com/thefeed/blog/post/622906/who\\_has\\_arrested\\_development\\_\\_we\\_have\\_arrested\\_development.html](http://g4tv.com/thefeed/blog/post/622906/who_has_arrested_development__we_have_arrested_development.html)>.

IFC show listings: International Film Channel (IFC). Arrested Development: The Bluths are Back on IFC. 2010. 25 April 2010 <<http://www.ifc.com/arrested-development/>>.

## **Act II: Addition of Contingency, Heightening of Conflict**

A viewer of *Scrubs* will immediately be aware of many of the show's dominant characteristics. John Dorian (nicknamed J.D.) is a medical intern at the hospital Sacred Heart. J.D.'s first-person narration provides a frame for the episodes, which are most often based on characters' struggles to situate themselves within the hospital or their social group. *Scrubs* uses an ensemble cast, and thus although J.D. is often at the forefront, given his privileged position as narrator, the other characters spin out stories of their own that J.D. will link together based on a commonness of the obstacle with which someone is presented, or a mutual lesson learned. The show is permeated with a sense of vulnerability, since all of the interns are learning how to be good doctors while simultaneously treating patients whose lives often depend on their competence. This sense of vulnerability, along with each character's dependence on others, is highlighted in the brief opening credits, which match a fast montage of the cast merging into and emerging from each other with the lyrics, "No, I can't do this all on my own/ No, I know/ I'm no Superman."<sup>1</sup>

*Scrubs* episodes were initially composed of four story lines, all of which were given relatively equal time. J.D.'s primacy in the show was typically asserted by having two of the four stories revolve around situations in which he was entangled. Episode 6 of the first season, "My Bad," has this standard plotting: one story follows J.D. and Dr. Cox (his mentor) leading up to the Executive Board's vote on whether or not Dr. Cox will be fired (taking up a total of 5:59), another shows how Eliot starts to see a psychiatrist (3:35), a third is about Turk and Carla trying to juggle their relationship around Carla's

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<sup>1</sup> "My First Day." In Lawrence, Bill (Creator). *Scrubs: The Complete First Season*. Burbank: Touchstone Television and Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. (Distributor), 2005, Chapter 1. At :50. All citations to season one of *Scrubs* are hereafter noted as *Scrubs*.

elderly mother (3:59), and a fourth is about J.D. sleeping with Dr. Cox's ex-wife (6:14). Later, a second structure was introduced in which there would be only three story lines that would be more closely linked thematically, leading J.D. to a more involved meditation on the subject. The episode "My Sacrificial Clam" (episode 21 of the first season) is a good example of this type of structure. There are three plot lines: Eliot choosing between her job and her boyfriend (totaling 7:51), J.D. accidentally getting stuck by a needle full of infected blood (8:24), and Turk putting on weight because he doesn't have time to exercise (4:36).

In both structures there are a number of fantastical achronies which I think can be most accurately described as visual metaphors. These cut scenes are meant to be affective expressions of how J.D. feels about a situation. "My Sacrificial Clam," for instance, has a cut scene in which J.D., who has been talking about how he is now aware that there are contagious people everywhere, is standing in a circle of zombies dressed in hospital gowns who are all looking at him with a hungry expression. (*Scrubs*. Disc 3, Chapter 21, at 11:16) In another scene from the same episode, J.D. tells the audience that his crippling fear of contagious diseases has made him "lose respect for himself." (at 15:44) The camera then pans over to where J.D. is looking to find another J.D. shaking his head in disgust as he walks away. (at 15:47) These scenes occur very regularly in *Scrubs*, with as many as seven in one episode. The portrayal of interiority in this way is crucial to the show's narrative style (despite the fact that, significantly, these cut scenes are often not narrated with voiceover). They reinforce better than any description could how J.D. feels about a situation, or what his intuition is. The character J.D. does not have to try to describe his feelings to the viewer: they are shown first-hand through a type of visual

metaphor.

Virtually every episode title of *Scrubs*—and every title in the first season—begins with ‘My’ ( “My First Day,” “My Nightingale”). The “my” serves to underscore the diary-like narration and plotting of the show. The mission of the show is not necessarily to reveal every aspect of hospital life, but to pick out the exemplary moments in which conflict arises, in which the successes and failures carry the greatest intensity, and to present them in a shape that simulates how they might appear in hindsight through the mind of J.D. The implicit understanding between J.D. and the viewer is twofold: first, that his recollection or repackaging of events captures their essential features, and second, that his retelling is honest. Put another way, J.D.’s narration assumes that the story he is telling (an essential appeal to an oral tradition) is going to be worth the listener’s time—there will be some ‘lesson’ or problem that will resonate with the viewer’s lived experience. “My Sacrificial Clam” is, as the short description above indicated, an episode about how a doctor’s job entails certain sacrifices: doctors must accept the loss of a relationship, the loss of an attractive physique, or the contraction of a chronic disease in order to be the best in their field. This episode asks viewers to recollect a time when they had to give up something they enjoyed to get ahead in their jobs. At the end of the episode, J.D. consoles himself and the viewer:

You know, when you start med school they warn you that you’re gonna have to make sacrifices. But I guess that means different things to different people. Like giving up something you really want now for something you’ve wanted your whole life. Or spending less time on yourself so you can spend more time with someone you love. At some point you might even have to give up your own sense of safety and well-being. But after a while, it doesn’t feel like you’re giving up anything at all. (at 20:39-21:24)

The confessional tone the lessons take in *Scrubs* is significant since, as Stanley Cavell says, “in confessing you do not explain or justify, but describe how it is with you. And

confession, unlike dogma, is not to be believed but tested, and accepted or rejected.” (*Must we mean...*, 71) The confessional lesson is how the show conveys vulnerability. It asks the viewer to affirm the show through this explicit request for acceptance. The first person narration, the visual metaphors, and the confessional lesson are the techniques used by the show to make the narrator into a certain conception of a human being, to make the camera seem like the narrator’s eye and to make the viewer feel transported. This is how *Scrubs* asks the viewer to look beyond the fact that it is a show.

The lessons are also crucial to the way *Scrubs* rewrites the *Bildungsroman* model, an homage so strong that many of Franco Moretti’s descriptions of the structure and role of the *Bildungsroman* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are applicable with little modification. Youth is, in this show, “the most meaningful part of life,” (Moretti, 3) the time during which the occupation, habits, priorities, and moral temperament of individuals will be tested and solidified. There is a clear divide between the interns and the staff physicians. The latter remain static characters, all-knowing, throughout the course of the show. By contrast, the show portrays the interns as “in motion,” adjusting personal mantras and trying desperately to understand themselves and the world around them as new experiences force constant philosophical readjustments. Tension and humor are primarily the result of conflicting personalities, odd character idiosyncrasies, unmet expectations, revelation of false assumptions, and the postulation (that runs through most of the show’s writing) that life itself is full of absurdity. There is a clear sense of what Moretti calls the classification principle, a sense that all the show’s elements “have meaning insofar as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable.” (Moretti, 7) The



teleological end, the future that is anticipated, is stated by Eliot in “My Sacrificial Clam”:  
“if my internship doesn't go well this year, then there's no way I'm getting a good  
residency next year. And without the residency, there goes my fellowship.” (*Scrubs*, Disc  
3, Chapter 21, at 17:56) The path may be linear, but the obstacles are many, as the  
episode teaches, so that in many ways the show will document how the interns become  
more mature, finding their stable and final identity.

If Moretti's analysis requires any amending in a discussion of *Scrubs*, it is in his  
assertion that the *Bildungsroman* is a compromise between self-determination and  
socialization. Toward the beginning of the pilot, J.D. states, “I became a doctor because I  
wanted to help people, but orientation yesterday...didn't really focus on patient care.”  
(Disc 1, Chapter 1, at 1:13) Instead of J.D.'s expected orientation about how best to help  
patients, the motivation of the capitalist-corporate Sacred Heart hospital is foremost:  
how to avoid lawsuits and any other loss of money. The name of the hospital, Sacred  
Heart, expresses the ideal that a hospital functions in an altruistic way, helping those who  
need it regardless of economic circumstance. The hospital's policy, in treating patients as  
merely irritating but necessary objects that must be dealt with in order to secure capital,  
pits the institution against the ideal. Or, more precisely, it sets Sacred Heart hospital  
against the hospital management. Contrary to the classical *Bildungsroman* in Moretti's  
analysis, maturation does not equate to “the *interiorization of contradiction*,” (Moretti,  
10) but to a hardening of choices that lead an individual to fall on either one side or the  
other of an opposition marked by Dr. Cox and Dr. Kelso (the hospital's Chief of  
Medicine).<sup>2</sup> The tone of the show places an emphasis on rejecting an ethical system based

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<sup>2</sup> In later seasons this opposition is blurred slightly with interesting results, but even then the two  
characters retreat to their respective positions at the end of those episodes.

on an appeal to systemic rules in favor of one based on individual determination and personal responsibility for action (a position remarkably similar to Kant's Categorical Imperative), but part of what makes the appeal important is the live option that the doctors *could* end up like Dr. Kelso. The episode "My Two Dads" makes this struggle explicit, as Dr. Cox tries to get J.D. to help him perform an operation on a woman without insurance (against the hospital's policy), and Dr. Kelso (the enforcer of the policy) argues the opposite position:

Kelso: Rules are there for a reason. If you break one, why not break them all?

Cox: You know that before medicine ever became a business, the only rule was to do your best to help the patient.

Kelso: Like it or not, medicine is a business. If the hospital shuts down, who are we helping then?

Cox: So, what, only people with money deserve medical treatment?

Kelso: It's about what's best for the hospital.

Cox: It's about what's best for the patient. (Disc 1, Chapter 5, at 13:30-15:24)

Perhaps the only instance of socio-political criticism in *Scrubs* is its stance against a power system that allows profit to pollute and obscure a doctor's (or rather, the show's idea of a pre-capitalist doctor's) ideal mission of care. J.D. later describes the argument between Cox and Kelso as "an old story, really. Good versus bad. Right versus wrong." (at 20:14) Part of socialization is the departure from a system of ethics based on instances of following a rule, which will inevitably contradict what is "good" to an individualist ethics of care.

A sense of the broader ideology espoused by this television show can now be offered. The first-person point of view that links the viewer to J.D. implies a stream of honest communication, as if the viewer were being given a diary. Because of its ties to the *Bildungsroman*, the viewer knows that this stream of communication will be about the learning process that brings one from youth to maturity. But what is learned? In one

sense, the interns are judged on how effectively they can treat patients. That is, of course, why the pilot episode is about J.D. overcoming his fear to help someone on the verge of death. (Disc 1, Chapter 1, at 21:09) But even treating patients seems to capture only a fraction of what the lesson is supposed to be. The *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin tells us, is a “novel of human *emergence*.” (“*Bildungsroman*,” *Speech Genres*, 21) There is a correlation, for Bakhtin, between a novel of emergence and a perceived national-historical emergence. (“*Bildungsroman*,” 52) In this model, the milieu of J.D. has some relationship to the politics of its viewers. J.D.’s struggle and emergence from struggle—which also includes the way in which resolution comes about, as well as the delineation between conflicts he can’t resolve and those he can—becomes very important because it can say something about how a certain group conceives of its collective narrative. Bakhtin also writes, “Understandably, in such a novel of emergence, problems of reality and man’s potential, problems of freedom and necessity, and the problem of creative initiative rise to their full height.” (“*Bildungsroman*,” 24) A dichotomy exists, as we saw in the argument between Dr. Kelso and Dr. Cox, between freedom (the freedom to aid) and necessity (the necessity of restriction on aid). Yet that is only one register in which such a distinction exists.

The theme playing over the opening credits reminds the viewer of the show’s perspective on humanity: “I can’t do this all on my own.” Other human beings and the spectrum of relationships that communication with them inevitably brings is not, for this show, something merely desirable; it’s necessary for survival. This fundamental belief is underscored by J.D. in the pilot when he says, at the end, “you see, I can’t survive on my own.” (at 22:25)

To say that without other people—without society—individuals could not survive is to say that all people have a certain *lack*, a part of the self that is not self-sufficient. There is a vulnerability and dependence that necessitates (ontologically) not only the presence of other people, but *relationships* with other people. The hospital, with its emphasis on the effective treatment of patients, is a metonym for society itself. Learning symptoms and treatments, learning to read others, to comfort them, to understand their pain and to care for its removal is part of what it means to be a physician. To know and care for the pain of others, as a doctor, is to acknowledge the lack that brings another to you in the first place. Cavell writes that in acknowledging others “I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge,” or rather I act on the knowledge that others exist and (more importantly) they require my intervention. (*Must we mean...*, 257) To deny, as a physician, a mutual dependence would be an avoidance of an obvious fact, and a slip into solipsism. Since even learning itself is dependent on human interaction, one could say that *Scrubs* ultimately assumes that others are knowable (at least to the extent that they can be effectively treated) and that communication can be sincere (to the extent that ailments can be effectively described) and, or rather, that intention matters.

What I am pointing to is a certain capacity to understand necessary for treatment. The wracked body, the body in pain, can occasionally be treated easily with a surface reading. Occasionally various limbs and torsos and heads will readily display their ailments to the world, highlighting the important area of the text in blood. In *Scrubs*, however, the quick diagnosis based on tests and a chart can be problematic. The doctor who reaches for answers too easily makes mistakes, forgetting that there can be complications (as when Dr. Cox too hastily transplants organs from a donor who had

rabies in “My Lunch”), or there could be an interrelation of complex problems (as we see in “My Fifteen Seconds” when J.D. and Dr. Cox ignore a patient who talks too much only to discover later she had attempted suicide.) Cavell warns that “the crucified human body is our best picture of the unacknowledged human soul,” (*Claim of Reason*, 430) and in issuing his warning he seeks to remind us that every act of negligence or inattentiveness has meaning in multiple registers beyond (strictly speaking) what we think. (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 131)

That is not to say that physicians *must* acknowledge others. The statement that all people have a certain lack does not mean that all people accept this deficiency in others as something requiring their participation or intervention. Dr. Kelso, as the counterpart to Dr. Cox, inhabits a position insulated from others, practicing a type of Cartesian skepticism in which one sees others, as Cavell writes, “not beyond my knowledge, but past my caring.” (*Claim of Reason*, 430) The connection between Dr. Kelso and Descartes bears some fleshing out, as it brings to light an agreement in approach.

The method used by Descartes to arrive at the *cogito* takes knowledge acquisition to be linked solely to self-examination. In Meditations I and II of *Meditations on First Philosophy*, we see a divorce between the realm of cognition and the realm of the senses mirrored in a divorce between the realm of reflection and the realm of action. In the synopsis he gives before Meditation I, Descartes writes rather boldly that “here it should be noted in passing that I do not deal at all with sin, i.e. the error which is committed in pursuing good and evil...And there is no discussion of matters pertaining to faith or the conduct of life, but simply of speculative truths which are known solely by means of the natural light.” (Descartes, 11) And he reinforces the separation by writing (in Meditation

I), “I know that no danger or error will result from my plan, and that I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task now in hand does not involve *action* but merely the acquisition of knowledge.” (15, emphasis mine) In marking and maintaining a distance between action and knowledge acquisition, Descartes begins the philosophical trend Nancy Bauer rightly identifies as “epistemological solipsism” (or “metaphysical solitude”) (Bauer, 51, 61). Without action, there is no pressing need for ethics, and by making action secondary to cognition Descartes is able to make the case for an isolated *cogito* that allows doubt of others to remain after a doubt of the self has ceased to exist.

Solipsism arises precisely because Descartes doesn't see thinking as linked with action. That is to say, he doesn't see thinking as the dynamic act of learning, teaching and interacting—from, to, and with others. The cleaving out of morality from the foundation of philosophy, as if it were a tangential concern to the epistemological basis for one's existence, has serious philosophical consequences. Perhaps the most dramatic corollary is to take ethics (as the study of what to do in concrete situations) as something that can be discussed only *after* the self and the relation of the self to metaphysics has been established. Descartes is not able to convince himself fully of the existence of others until Meditation VI, and even then as a sub-genre of “material object” that is known only through refraction off his knowledge of God. (Descartes, 52) The existence of others is tenuously but fundamentally linked to an abstraction instead of a lived reality (human interaction). Furthermore, if one conceives of the existence of others solely through metaphysics, the logical conjecture is that morality denotes, primarily, a relationship between the self and God or some other universal system, with concrete consequences of

moral action being a secondary concern.

In the context of the hospital, a misreading, or perhaps we could call it an *underreading*, can be dangerous for the patient. But since the self and other people are tied together epistemologically—which is to say, in the context of the show the self can only be enriched in relation to others—the reduction of others is also a reduction of the self. An action that avoids the existence of others as human (say, denying treatment for lack of insurance) contracts the personal conception of one's own humanity, slipping further into a definition of the self that can't accommodate others, and is therefore metaphysically isolated. The *Scrubs* conception of others as beings that can be read (and, sometimes with terrible consequences, misread) assumes that reading is an action linked fundamentally to ethics. The contrary position, held by one who imposes a metaphysics regardless of consequence, is that of Dr. Kelso.

We will return to the Cartesian articulation of the existence of others a bit later. In the meantime, it is important to note *Scrubs*' resistance to those who do try to mediate their relations to others through a metaphysical proposition. The show highlights a danger in believing the hospital could exist without patients, as if it had value in itself or sprang into existence prior to or apart from its use as a tool. In fact the inverse is true. The relationship between the self and others existed prior to institutional abstractions, and the existence of institutions continues to depend on the epistemological and ethical ties between the self and others. The grave personal danger inherent in Kelso's retreat from others works itself out in many episodes of *Scrubs*. In detaching yourself from others, it is also possible for others to detach themselves from you.

If one is to grant that human beings are necessarily linked to each other

epistemologically, and therefore *must* live socially, an ethics follows necessarily. At the same time, it would be irrational to advocate one take on the responsibility of treating every person (or patient) as individual cases all the time. One uses the easy diagnosis because it makes sense that common symptoms can be counteracted by a similar treatment. And yet the swift diagnosis will inevitably lead to error, to underreading. One does not, then, have the option of avoiding error. What is at question is how much one is willing to take responsibility for errors when they arise. “The problems of morality,” Cavell explains, “then become which values we are to honor and create, and which responsibilities we must accept, and which we have, in our conduct, and by our position, incurred.” (*Claim of Reason*, 325) This constant renegotiation of the spectrum on which one considers the particularity of others is the site of ethics.

There will, in a word, be moments of negligence for which some account must be given. Those events that strike the individual in such a way as to demand a response, those situations in which *something* must be done, are where ethics are applied, whether the actant has a consistent moral system in place or not. How we act, in turn, is governed entirely by what we conceive of as our possibilities for action. This larger field is a collection of narratives learned from others, through either speech or text, and there is some vested interest in a person being equipped with as many resolution tactics as possible before such situations arise. Though I will discuss this at length later on, one can at least say that as long as there is social living there will be conflicts, misunderstandings, and underreadings.

I hope it has been demonstrated by now that *Scrubs* leans far toward allowing the individual a position of primacy over the collective, so much so that it is willing to



demonstrate, through the metonym of the hospital, that within the patients one ought to look past the reading of bodies to acknowledge the individual contexts in which a problem has arisen. In doing so, one opens oneself up to others not only in an epistemological way, but an ethical way. The show tells its viewers that all are responsible for, even in those cases in which it appears necessary or appropriate, underreading at the expense of the acknowledgement of another's humanity.

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Before transitioning from *Scrubs* to *Arrested Development*, something should briefly be said about how the differences between these two shows requires, in analysis, somewhat of a different method. Both fall within the television format of situation-comedy, which is a similarity that might produce certain rules, but certainly says little about the content produced within those rules. In Northrop Frye's model, we could also add that *Scrubs* shares characteristics with both a Novel and a Romance. Like a novel, *Scrubs* "deals with personality, with characters wearing their *personae* or social masks." (Frye, 6) It also relies on the "framework of a stable society." (6) The social mask adopted would be that of a working professional—a doctor. And all of the characters rely on a stable society into which they hope to gain full initiation: the hospital hierarchy through which they will be promoted in rank.

Like a romance, however, the personal lives of the characters exude sentimentalism, as they oscillate between extreme emotional states and, as Frye says, "something nihilistic and untamable" (6) comes through. In fact, I find that the professional and personal lives of the characters are often played against each other. Dr. Cox is the best doctor in Sacred Heart: a mentor to J.D., and a figure of resistance against

the capitalist ideology of Dr. Kelso. But his personal life is anything but exemplary. He is alone, depressed, divorced (in early seasons), and chronically insecure. Likewise, the tumultuous relationship between Eliot and J.D. is impervious to lesson-learning. In fact, a pervasive theme in *Scrubs* is the inability to learn lessons from others when it comes to love, as if the personal side of life is exempt from the *Bildungsroman* and likely to shift between moments of ecstasy and despair indefinitely. Frye says that a Romance creates “stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes,” (6) a characteristic that certainly holds true for the personal relationships presented.

If *Scrubs* fits somewhere between Novel and Romance, *Arrested Development* is of a completely different sort: the Menippean satire. The satire, as Frye points out,

deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior. The Menippean satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent. (Frye, 10)

Though *Anatomy of Criticism* is a very helpful text for marking the broad sense in which satire departs from other genres, I want caution against putting too much stock in this description alone. Over the course of my discussion of *Arrested Development*, I hope the reader will see that (as with *Scrubs*) I am using Frye’s taxonomy only very loosely to mark, it could be said, a difference in tone between the two shows. A Menippean satire is not meant to be full descriptions of the content of the show; in fact a discussion of *Arrested Development* will, of necessity, be distinct from that of *Scrubs* because there is very little in *Arrested Development* that can be compared to something else. The persistent weakness of Frye’s analysis is that it is only able to tell the surface features of a

text, and is not equipped for deeper analysis of how certain structures and characters are used to lead to a moral conclusion. With that in mind, and having put forward the philosophical tenets of *Scrubs*, I would like to turn to *Arrested Development*, the show that struggled to find its audience.

*Arrested Development* begins with George Bluth's arrest for stealing from his company. In the pilot and the first few episodes, Michael, his son, acts as a straight man for the antics of the rest of his family. The audience is made to understand the irrationality in the actions of the rest of Michael's family only through a contrast with his two reasonable desires: to keep his family together and get his father out of prison. Episodes 2 and 3 feature Michael asking a member of his family (Episode 2, his father George Sr.; Episode 3, his mother Lucille) for documents that have been demanded by the prosecution. To his frustration, in both cases his request isn't taken seriously. The viewer is repeatedly shown scenes of Michael trying to emphasize to unresponsive or oblivious family members the extent of their legal troubles. This dual struggle (to exonerate his father and to serve as a respected father-figure to his immature family) plays on the two meanings of the show's title and is underscored by the narrator in his voice-over during the opening credits: "Now the story of a wealthy family who lost everything, and the one son who had no choice but to keep them all together."<sup>3</sup>

Since a primary source of tension in the first few episodes is Michael's inability to communicate meaningfully with the other members of his family, the conclusions of early episodes are intimate moments in which Michael and another family member bond or come to some understanding. I suspect that this traditional move to end on a touching

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<sup>3</sup> "Top Banana." In Hurwitz, Mitch (Creator). *Arrested Development: Season One*. Beverly Hills: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Inc. (Distributor), 2004, Episode 2. At 00:00. All citations to season one of *Arrested Development* are hereafter noted as *Arrested*.

note helped endear the show to its audience—and may even be the result of writers quickly developing content after the pilot was picked up by the network (it could have also been a smokescreen against FOX, then trying to brand itself as upholding “family values,” in a bid to get picked up for more episodes). Whether or not that was the case, as early as the third episode this mode of writing begins to disappear.

From episode four onward, a number of characteristics can be discerned about the writing of the show. There are five distinct plot lines per episode: one primary plot that involves Michael, three secondary plots that take up virtually equal time, and another narrative arc that is not expected to evolve over the current episode, but serves to ground important character traits or relationships so they can be used in later episodes. There are also “stories-within-the-story”—analeptic inset narratives that are complete in themselves, featuring past events that give some alternate perspective on, or background information to, a tension that appears in the episode. These cut scenes are also the show’s main device to link story lines that develop over the course of multiple episodes. They are occasionally bracketed within the show by a white border and are accompanied by strong voiceover narration by Ron Howard. Depending on how many arcs from previous episodes appear in the current episode, there will be less or more of these embedded narratives, but the average is three per episode and they tend to be, as one might expect, toward the beginning. It is important to note that these “stories-within-the-story” typically, but not always, use footage from previous episodes. There are notable occasions in which an inset slightly alters an earlier situation or changes it entirely.

“Key Decisions” is the fourth episode of the first season, and along with providing useful examples of the writing structure as outlined, it also highlights a few

additional standard practices. The primary tension in this episode (totaling 7:32) is between Michael and his brother Gob (pronounced like the biblical Job). There are also three secondary plot lines: one in which Lindsay has to get an activist to stop living in a tree that is to be bulldozed (3:41), another in which Gob tries to prove he's a great magician by breaking out of the prison where his father is incarcerated (5:11), and a third that establishes a love triangle of sorts among Buster, Lucille, and Lucille 2 (4:17). A sub-story, which has George Michael acting out the crush he has on his cousin Maebly, is passive in this episode. It takes up little time (25 seconds) but keeps the story in the viewer's mind so it can be developed later. There are four "stories-within-the-story" in "Key Decisions," all of them within the first six minutes of the show.

"Key Decisions" reveals the type of humor typical of *Arrested Development*. The situations, as with soap operas, most often come from rivalries and love pursuits. In this case, the major story follows two characters' opposite desires. Gob is in a relationship with Marta, but feels like Marta is taking away his freedom. (*Arrested*. Disc 1, Episode 4, at 1:04) Michael wants to have a committed relationship, but doesn't have one. (at 1:29) In the course of setting up this tension, the show continues an opposition that runs rather explicitly through virtually every episode: the desire for freedom (agency, escape) and the constraint of family (submission, sacrifice). Marta is set up in this episode as having the same desire as Michael, so one presumes that the resolution of the tension will be that Marta and Michael are joined while Gob gets his freedom.

The episode's three secondary plot lines, foreshadowing Michael's inevitable attempt to wrest Marta away from Gob eight episodes later, play out scenarios of unrequited love with tragic consequences. Of the three, the story line between Lindsay

and Johnny Bark, the activist trying to save the tree, is perhaps the most notable. Johnny Bark's pursuit of Lindsay is the result of an innocent delusion, when he misinterprets one of their conversations as her proposing they elope together. More importantly, Johnny Bark had to sacrifice something to approach Lindsay—he had to leave the tree he was trying to save. Since, in the broader storyworld, Johnny Bark is a bounded character, his relevance to the story is tied to the tree. In leaving the tree, he becomes a homeless character, a plot device out of place. The pursuit of Lindsay requires Johnny Bark to risk his existence, and it bears remembering that he fails. Johnny Bark's failure introduces a storytelling device that will remain with the show for the rest of its run: teaching and learning lessons (with an explicit epimyth). When Johnny Bark confesses his love, he is turned away and he hears a bulldozer smashing his tree in the background. Having neither saved the tree nor had his love affirmed, Johnny Bark can only bow his head and sadly say, "That's why you never get out of the tree." (at 16:42) A number of subsequent episodes include a stated lesson to conclude a story arc. Many of these moral assertions happen within the analeptical embedded stories earlier discussed, allowing them to remain bracketed from the rest of the show. Because they frequently appear as oral stories, are complete in themselves, and end with a firm lesson, they are undoubtedly meant to parody folktale storytelling.

Jokes most often come from misunderstandings (wordplay/sensory deficiency), illusions (when a situation leads to a false sense of reality), condescension, and duplicity (in both senses of the term). As opposed to *Scrubs*, very few jokes rely on absurdity (unexplainable situations) in *Arrested Development*. In fact, the show swings far in the opposite direction—taking pains to link every new story to the actions of other characters

in prior episodes.

The constant antagonism between freedom and family, along with the show's concerted attempts to link all plotlines to past actions, creates an interesting affect: something like claustrophobia. The viewer is aware that the show's premise relies on the family staying intact. As a result (and as with Johnny Bark), the narrative structure destroys any chance at freedom and predestines Michael to failure. This underlying premise, that the characters are not entirely free, is explicitly stated by Ron Howard over the opening credits: "the one son *who has no choice* but to keep them all together." (emphasis mine.)

A vast majority of the jokes in *Arrested Development* rely heavily on an idea of linguistic play. They reinforce a distinct perspective: language itself is full of puns, double-entendres, ambiguities, and metaphors that are vague enough to indicate a number of possible correct interpretations. In *Arrested Development*, the intention of the speaker is not always clear, or even relevant, as the characters act upon their own interpretations without any desire to know whether the speaker thinks their reading is valid or not. One example from among the many comes in the episode "Marta Complex," in which Michael makes a Valentine's Day toast in front of his family. Highlighting certain aspects of his speech to ground their actions, the members of the family act out various projects: Lindsay decides to divorce her husband, Buster decides to leave his mother, and Marta decides to leave Gob. All interpretations are, of course, born from a speech that was meant to laud couples staying together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Arrested*. Disc 2, Episode 12. At 5:19. His speech is: "We've all had a tough couple of months. I think we're all really figuring out who we are and what we really need in life, and that can be painful. However, you can't really heal yourself until you stop living a lie. But I promise we're all going to be a lot happier in the long run. So on a very unusual Valentine's Day, cheers to Mom and Dad, to Buster and Lucille, to

This particular view of language allows the show to question a swath of ideologemes and to show that the meaning of certain ideas cannot arise from the empirical instances in which they appear, so that using a word to refer to an empirical instance exposes the term as problematic. An example of this can be seen in the episode just discussed, “Marta Complex.” Buster calls Michael while he is crouched down, hiding from his mother behind an armchair. He tells Michael he can’t talk because he believes his mother is listening in on their conversation (which she is). From this position of complete impotence, Buster tells Michael, “I am a man,” and then more emphatically, “I am a *man*.” (*Arrested*. Disc 2, Episode 12, at 7:14) One is forced to wonder in what sense Buster means “man,” or if there hasn’t been a confusion of the self-identification of gender with the socially-constructed stereotype. An appeal to the self-identification does not, in this case, mean automatic initiation into the social stereotype. So what, then, is the use of the social stereotype? If all men aren’t *men*, then the term applies to two different groups that don’t necessarily overlap. If there can be a man who isn’t a *man*, can there be a *man* who isn’t a man? And if man and *man* aren’t equated, is there even some use to having one term refer to both? Could the term even be said to provide an adequate definition of the criteria for either use? To further confuse the situation, we must remember that Buster is living at home with his mother. His assertion of *man* could also be meant as an assertion against a charge that he is a child. If so, is it a mature body or a mature consciousness that allows an appeal to the word *man*? It is left unclear whether Buster means *man* to be a marker of gender or maturity (or both), and also whether he means for the word to refer to manly behavior he has already exhibited, or *in place* of that

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Lindsay and Tobias, and to George-Michael and...*shakes his head*. I almost said to George Michael and Maebly. To Gob and Marta: to love and happiness. I love you all, Marta.”



behavior. This case of ambiguity between man and *man* can't be easily dismissed as an anomaly in the writing because it recurs again in a broad array of contexts as a variety of self-identified "men" feel the need to appeal to *man*.

One other example arises immediately from the Bluth family's constant appeal to the term "family." In what sense can they be called a family? If a family is based on bonds of kinship, many members are disqualified immediately. Even if the various rivalries and occasions of cruelty are omitted, a number of family members are entirely apathetic to each other—as with Lucille and her "son" Gob, with Buster and his "father" George Sr., and with Gob and his "sister" Lindsay. If instead the criterion for family is a biological relation, the viewer is once again confronted with a problem of identification, as Maeby's birth is ambiguous, Annoyong is adopted, Buster's quest to find out who his father is spans seasons two and three, and in the end, it is revealed that Lindsay is adopted. In this recitation, half of the biological family relations are bracketed as ambiguous or non-existent.

A third option would be that a family can be defined as a group of people who want to be together, that there is an element of intention in their coexistence—or even that there was an initial choice to enter into a family. Two people who get married, for instance, make a choice and are afterward referred to as a family. This qualification, too, is questioned within the show. Lucille *accidentally* adopts Annoyong, and *accidentally* conceives Buster. Moreover, George Michael and Maeby accidentally get married, Gob accidentally marries a woman whose name he doesn't know, and Lindsay only married Tobias out of spite for her parents. Michael almost marries a woman with severe mental retardation, raising issues of consent that undermine any intentionality that can be

attached to the term ‘family’ as well as the institution of marriage. If the characters don’t like each other and they aren’t biologically related, can their self-assertions of family alone provide enough validity to allow them to be called a family? And, more importantly, if the application of language is the only criteria for identification (if merely calling something a family *makes* it a family), how can one talk about “instances” in the world providing criteria for a word? I do not mean to say that *Arrested Development* uses the word “family” improperly. The problem is that there is a group of people who are using the word “family” (and the word “man,” for that matter) in a grammatically correct way, but the thing the word signifies is impossible to pin down and is liable to change depending on the use—sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways. In reminding the viewer of the unconventional way words are used, *Arrested Development* questions whether a single, narrowly defined “conventional” use exists at all.

Returning to the show’s espousal of the thesis that family is opposed to freedom, one is in the uncomfortable position of asserting that the *word* family is a force of oppression strong enough to exclude personal agency, and indeed Michael is forced to try to make a corresponding signified appear in reality to fulfill the ambiguous conditions of the word. There is a picture of a family that he would like to act out in life, one conjured up by the seductive uses of the word, but the indeterminacy of the word defies such an acting out. The opening credits end with a picture of the family tilting as if about to fall. The lived experience and the word can’t keep up a correspondence despite Michael’s best efforts. One could say, as Wittgenstein does, that this situation arises because “a picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §115) Michael and

his family use the word as if there is a singular, ideal meaning behind it, as if there is a ‘family’ out there that must be acted out. But in taking the meaning of the word as given, they allow it to shape their behavior and restrict the field of possible action. That is, they take for granted that the majority consensus that creates the field of possibility for a word must be, as Nietzsche would call it, a “Truth,” a “dogmatic” or “legislative” valuation accepted at the expense of critical thought. (*Basic Writings*, 243, 326) The socially created idea of family is not the only concept powerful enough to condition behavior: one could go so far as to say social institutions en masse create pictures of the world that holds the society captive. This would be the point behind *Arrested Development*’s barbed depiction of the United States’ invasion of Iraq—the conflation of George Sr.’s trial to Hussein’s trial, and the parallel of false evidence leading to war and false evidence leading to George Sr.’s incarceration. There is a point at which *Arrested Development* would like to say that words can be used as a web to ensnare, and until one realizes the meaninglessness of words, the arbitrariness of their use, agency will continue to be suppressed by determinism.

Whereas *Scrubs*’ objective is to make all of the characters as relatable as possible, *Arrested Development* erects a wall between the viewer and the characters within the show. The detached third-person narration of Ron Howard is perhaps the most recognizable device through which a distance is maintained. But equally important is the method the writers use to make sure jokes within the show come at the expense of one of the main characters. In “Key Decisions,” Lindsay’s blindness to her contradictory desires (materialism and activism) is the subject of the jokes—not the motivation of Johnny Bark, the activist who wants to save the tree. Likewise, when Lucille says something

racist, homophobic, or classist, the joke is never at the expense of the person she intends to demean, but in Lucille's detached bigotry, in how her privileged economic position has stripped her of her ability to recognize certain people as human beings. Mitch Hurwitz (the show's creator) sees this ability to have all jokes fall back on the Bluth family as one of the triumphs of the show.<sup>5</sup>

The third but only slightly more subtle way of distancing the audience from the characters was to write in a number of off-putting or uncomfortable character traits. Michael is unabashedly arrogant and condescending to his family. George Michael, his son, spends the whole of the series trying to get his cousin Maeby to fall in love with him (with varying degrees of success). The middle of season two, when Buster has his hand bitten off by a seal, and season three in which Tobias gets (and keeps) hair plugs that make his scalp bleed and confine him to a wheelchair, might provide two of the most extreme examples from the many constructed over the course of the show's run.

Perhaps one could unify all three of the aforementioned tools (detached narration, jokes at the expense of the main characters, and uncomfortable character traits) under a larger banner of keeping the perspectives of all the main characters equally illegitimate by not allowing any character to be entirely sympathetic. After the first few episodes, the character of Michael shifts from trusted straight man to a victim of the same vices as the rest of his family: engaging in petty rivalries, trying to mislead or manipulate his siblings, and only occasionally surfacing for moments of lucidity. As Michael's point of view loses its privileged position, the audience finds itself no longer able to decipher which characters can be trusted and which ones can't. As a result, all of the perspectives offered

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<sup>5</sup> *Arrested*. Disc 2, Special Features. "The Museum of Television & Radio: Q&A with the Cast and Creative team of *Arrested Development*." (Courtesy of The Museum of Television & Radio). At 7:42.

by various characters must be viewed with a certain level of skepticism.

Where *Scrubs* gains authority the more the audience forgets the actors are actors, *Arrested Development*—in pushing the audience away—maintains the television show as a television show. It invites the viewer to see it as a form, to admire the cleverness of the structure, to laugh at the deft way the writers can keep an unlikable family watchable. I am tempted to say that *Arrested Development* revels in the texture of a television show, in a manipulation of common television plot structures that expose those types of storytelling formats themselves as funny. This would be the justification behind an explicit “teaching of lessons” that don’t actually convey a useful message (as with Johnny Bark and his tree), or “Next time on *Arrested Development*” tags that portray events that don’t appear in the next episode. Likewise, it pushes the content into a reminder of form, hence the significance of the Bluths living in a fake home advertising a housing development that will never exist, in the middle of Orange County, California, a pocket of civilization built on top of a vast desert.

Ortega y Gasset writes, “We come to understand that things have two sides. One is the ‘sense’ of things, their meaning, what they are when interpreted. The other is the ‘materiality’ of things, the positive substance that constitutes them before, and independent of, any interpretation.” (Ortega, 141) In *Arrested Development*, the *sense* of things is what is on trial. As the characters spin out their various rivalries and affections, their sense has an asymptotic relationship with the materiality of things. No character is able to grasp something in itself—the meaning of a situation, the effects of an action, or the identity of another—but rather the characters are aware of the mirage only after they have walked all the way up to it, and by then they have set their eyes on the next mirage.

The desert is their milieu. They find themselves in a barrenness of meaning, overcome by a sense of things that is often distorted to the point where two characters think they perceive entirely different objects. When, in season three, Lindsay and Tobias separately ask Michael (a fitness instructor, not the main character) out on a date, one sees him as male, the other female. Their separate senses don't grasp the full materiality of a transgendered individual, much less the further fact Michael is—on top of being a fitness instructor—also a prostitute. The characters never appear to know when they've finally reached the truth of the matter, or whether there will be another layer that must be stripped away, revealing again their obliviousness.

It is important to remember, within the parameters of the show, that however fragmented and polemic the perceptions of the characters are, the materiality of things is beyond question. One cannot speak of a difference between noumena and phenomena because there is not a part of the object that remains outside the possibility of perception. Though the trajectory of distinct projects might cause characters to paint the object with a color that fits what they want to see, the thing itself remains independent of various interpretations, as a positive substance in its fullness. If the show has a tendency to emphasize the fractured nature of sense, the ways in which people can inhabit a common milieu without ever realizing the extent to which it is indeed shared and also unquestioned, it is due to a feeling of loneliness, an articulation of solipsism expressed by a culture that sees itself more fractured than full.

At the close of my discussion of *Scrubs*, I put forward the idea that institutions (and, more broadly, social customs) rely on epistemological and ethical ties between the self and others. I noted this to emphasize the danger of forgetting (as Descartes did), and

therefore not accommodating, the fragility of our condition. Other people don't have to associate with us. We don't have to be viewed by them as human, as worthy of care.

There is a reciprocity that underlies human interaction, a way in which the self cannot be constructed without a continued reliance on others.

In making a claim to reciprocity, however, one must not negate the countless ways in which human relations are anything but reciprocal, in which one is ostracized not as a result of personal carelessness (as with Dr. Kelso) but because of a social carelessness. As Nietzsche often pointed out, freedom finds its limit in "the conditions of life," both bodily and socially. (*Notebooks*, 16, 47) The variety of interactions one is liable to have are entirely dependent on the embodied reality of the self, so that some will find it easy to have reciprocal relationships with others while many will meet with varying levels of oppression, hostility, and violence. What I do mean to point to, and what I think is demonstrated by both of the shows in question, is the link between oppression and metaphysics (classifications, institutions) mediating our relations with others. The important difference between the two is that *Scrubs* puts forward a picture in which reciprocity and care can exist so long as there is a sincere effort to communicate while *Arrested Development* gives a picture in which the power structures are so embedded in the conditions of life that one person's sincere efforts to care for others can have the reverse effect by either perpetuating their oppression or convincing them that a good intention was actually a hostile one. In such situations, it is difficult or impossible to speak of intention, since the interlocutor's understanding isn't guided by the speaker but by the institutions of use that compose the constellation of a listener's value system.

Because intention comes second to the listener's perception of the speaker and the

words being used, this framework isolates the speaker from the listener, creating the perception that the two are independently constitutive. It leaves very little room to find ontological ground between the self and the other *without* the mediation of, or appeal to, a language that though shared in some sense also perpetuates a metaphysical force that, through diminishing intention and allowing misunderstandings, keeps others concretely apart. Especially for those who are the victims of perpetual violence or hate, the decision to disassociate the self from others must be viewed as legitimate, as there are concrete conditions that stratify groups of people and perpetuate misunderstandings and outright hostility. Why would someone in that position want to accept that the self is dependent on others?

And yet the construction of the self apart from others carries the danger that the self will restrict its conception of what constitutes its humanity to the point of solipsism at the expense of future growth. Bakhtin refers to the rhetorical move to see the self outside of dialogue as monologic, and he writes that such framings have a tendency to “take the listener for a person who passively understands but not for one who actively answers and reacts.” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 280) And he tells us, “insofar as the speaker operates with such a passive understanding, nothing new can be introduced into his discourse; there can be no new aspects of his discourse relating to concrete objects and emotional expressions.” (281) In other words, the person who tries to negate dialogue in favor of a self-sufficient and self-contained self negates the possibility for further enrichment of her or his conceptual horizon. The lines drawn for those people one is willing to meaningfully dialogue with and those whom one is willing to dismiss ought to be drawn with the greatest care, if for no other reason than the detriment one causes to



oneself by drawing such lines.

For the above reasons, I have a lingering sense that Descartes' framing of the self's epistemological grounding (in self-reflection) is not so much incorrect as it is incomplete. The I is indeed constructed through introspection by constituting the events from an individual past, always also framed by the concrete conditions we choose not to interrogate (a topic which will have to be returned to later), as part of a narrative arc that makes future projects arise as fruitful. What is left out, however, is the way in which our relations to others problematize, bend, and sometimes change our conceptions of all three elements in play: the events in our past, the conditions we take for granted, and the relevance of the projects we've chosen. The multiplicity of reorientations that occur in the course of lived experience is on such a scale that examples of how others can either allow or mandate a reconception of narrative could never encompass them all. There is a whole field of self-enrichment that only becomes available in the interventions of others, and a conception of self is not possible unless it can accommodate the dynamism such relationships mandate.

Because the characters in *Arrested Development* are unable to trust each other, they devalue learning from each other. As a result, the characters collapse what they can know to what they can know *right then* through introspection. The construction of the self apart from others leaves character construction in stasis so that misconceptions can never be changed and development is arrested.

While *Arrested Development* may very well be an accurate perception of how things are, it is not a statement of how relations must always be. This, indeed, may be the key to knowing why *Arrested Development* struggled to endear itself to the population at

large. By the time of its debut in 2003, the image of lived experience the show espouses—a space in which the senses are often mistaken, language is a tenuous adventure that leaves one unable to know if one has expressed what one means, and the given milieu of social institutions determines individual action more often than intention—was losing its currency. That isn't to say that it was refuted, but merely that a larger group of people transitioned and adopted a different view of existence, a new confession that more adequately expressed their idea of the human spirit.

### **Act III: A Successful Intervention, Relief of Tension**

This, at last, we can say about these two shows: *Arrested Development* is entrenched in a philosophy that emphasizes institutions over individual action, the supremacy of an ambiguous language over empirical reality, and an exposure of forms *as* forms that can be played with to produce different effects; while *Scrubs* is a show that tells its viewers that personal agency is not subordinate to institutions, that it is through taking responsibility for personal action that one learns, a show that wants its characters to be seen as stand-ins for the viewer, and that functions as an homage to a classical *Bildungsroman* in its emphasis on youth coming to the world. Now that these differing world-pictures have been established, something must be said about how they relate to Moretti's internalized contradiction of the individual and the collective, though I think the problem can now be more specifically stated as the contradiction of, or incoherence of, the view of life in which we can speak of relationships and responsibility, and the alternate view of life in which we speak of collective others, institutional oppression, and cultural mandates. It is my belief that this contradiction is mirrored in language use, and in fact I think the two are bound together by a mutual condition: my speech (my utterance, my narrated picture) is both my own and that of a community, "breaking through," as Bakhtin writes, "to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others." (*Dialogic Imagination*, 277) Language has both an individual, creative aspect (which, I might add, is always *emerging* in new speakers), and a communal, imitative aspect (which is institutional: a word has a specific field of use that can't be changed). Proceeding from a

view of narratives as pictures created by and communicated through uses of language, I would like to reopen the discussion of what broader significance can be attached to the analysis of episodic television narrative forms, which for me is identical to questioning the significance of mass art more generally, and how fiction, as Wittgenstein says of language, has the dual potential to oppress and to liberate.

For Wittgenstein, different types of pictures (ranging from the literal to the narrative) are understood in roughly the same way. I think it would be most helpful to start with a drawing—the most straightforward type of picture—and work outward toward its relationship to narrative. Let's say that the drawing in question is a human face: a person with an expression that is both kind and timid, sketched in, roughly, a realist style against the backdrop of a window. On pictures of this sort Wittgenstein states:

What does it mean to understand a picture, a drawing? Here too there is understanding and not understanding. And here too these expressions may mean various kinds of thing. The picture is, say, a still-life; but I don't understand one part of it: I cannot see solid objects there, but only patches of colour on the canvas. —Or I see all the objects, but I am not familiar with them (they look like implements, but I don't know their use). —Perhaps, however, I know the objects, but, in another sense, do not understand the way they are arranged. (*Philosophical Investigations*, §526)

From this complex paragraph, we can see that there are three levels at which understanding and not understanding occur. The first would be if “I cannot see solid objects there, but only patches of colour on the canvas.” I take this level to be the level of sense: the viewer is not able to properly see the empirical object in all of its contours. Perhaps, in this case, the person forgot his or her glasses. Since she sees only patches of color, she isn't able to make the connection that the thing represented is very specific: a human face. Now imagine that another person views the drawing. This person's eyesight

is not as bad. It is readily understood that a face has been sketched. But this person is all the same perplexed and thinks aloud, “I know the objects, but I don’t understand the way they are arranged!” That is to say, this person is unfamiliar with the logic behind the drawing. Perhaps the composition isn’t understood—why is it sketched from one angle and not another? Or, why is the color of skin, hair, and eyes only added for inflection and not fully colored in? Issues of cropping, technique, and method remain a mystery.

Suppose a third person arrives in time to hear the musing of the second, and intervenes with a correction: “My friend, it is the simplest thing. The light coloring and asymmetry of the composition are attempts by the artist to impart an ambience of effortlessness and tenuity.” Now the first and the second person look to the third, though more than likely the first person sees only a moving mass and not a body. “I understand that now,” says the second. “But what does it *mean*? I’m sure this color-inflected face is meant to convey something, but I don’t know the use of it.” This utterance speaks to the moral behind the drawing—the point the artist is trying to communicate through the sketch of a face in front of a window. Here is where a reading of content would take place: the purpose of the window, the face, and the expression on the face; *along* with the composition, and style; *and* informed by an idea of the period in which the sketch was drawn (with other relevant details). It is not necessary, or even possible, to have a full understanding of the context surrounding the sketch in order to have it mean something. Our asymptotic relations to others are mirrored in our relations to texts more broadly. In fact, we use the word “understanding” with a broad spectrum of conditionals ranging from “rudimentary” to “keen.” But what Wittgenstein indicates is that there are three levels upon which construction and understanding of a picture are built: empirical

propositions, logical propositions, and what I call moral propositions.

As in the example above, empirical propositions make up the whole of assumptions the interlocutors (in this case, the viewer and the artist) must share for the picture (or a sentence, for that matter) to be recognizable. Both parties must, for instance, know what a face is, what a window is, what a sketch is, and so on. More precisely, these types of propositions that ground meaning are what a person learns when he or she learns a language. They are part of what one is indoctrinated with as a native participant in a culture, what Bakhtin refers to as the “socio-ideological conceptual horizon.” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 275) Furthermore, there should be no doubt about these—they are not up for debate. As Wittgenstein writes, “It may be for example that *all inquiry on our part* is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route traveled by enquiry.” (*On Certainty*, §88) Logical propositions direct the thing represented in what could loosely be called a narrative way, which is to say that they structure the picture. Identifications by genre, style, and other issues of ordering fall into this category, but logical propositions could more broadly be conceived of as ‘ways of doing things’ or institutions. “To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions).” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §199)

If empirical propositions are those elements in the sketch that the artist is unaware of, logical propositions are the conscious structuring. Wittgenstein writes, “Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §206) This is a dual training. The writer is trained to write to an audience, to find moments in life where a question arises and requires a solution. A genre-picture looks back on what was executed within genre. That

is how writers learn the limits of their trade. And that backward glance, in turn, determines the rules for the genre going forward. I believe that's what Wittgenstein means when he writes that "One wants to say that an order is a picture of the action which was carried out on the order; but also that it is a picture of the action which *is to be* carried out on the order." (*Philosophical Investigations*, §519) Formats construct platforms through which to engage specific sets of issues. That is to say, the format acts as a frame that allows a set of related conflicts (moral propositions) to be investigated while resigning other parts of the human experience to the realm of empirical proposition, as something given.

Moral propositions express the relevance of the work, its conflicts: *what* is the viewer to take away from the sketch? Why should a sketch of a kind and timid face resonate with a viewer? Most important, how do we draw meaning from, which is to say find a use for, pictures? One way to use a picture is as a pedagogical tool. Wittgenstein writes, "Imagine a picture representing a boxer in a particular fighting stance. Well, this picture can be used to tell someone how he should stand, should hold himself; or how he should not hold himself; or how a particular man did stand in such-and-such a place, and so on." (*Philosophical Investigations*, §22) The aforementioned picture of a face could tell someone an appropriate way to express kindness, and could reaffirm the power of a smile.

Another way, just as significant, would be to see the picture as advocating a legitimate position against conflict. The drawing shows the face juxtaposed next to a window, with the person inside, isolated from others and perhaps even finding solace from contingency by retreating to a place that has clear boundaries and provides a

modicum of control. The fragile ambience invoked by the sparse valuing of the picture underscores the vulnerability of the subject's position. The drawing could indicate that it is easier to be kind when one is within their sphere of influence. Since the person could be preparing to greet people instead of retreating, the drawing could suggest that kindness is a viable position to bring to the world. The framing of a question or a conflict is, in this case, not polemical and therefore opens itself up to a number of directions. But without a doubt the moral proposition limits the number of correct readings and guides the viewer into a certain type of inquiry.

Surrounding the author's conflict is a field of possibility for reorientation that is reader-dependent. A story, as a series of emplotted events, leaves open the possibility that any one of those events can carry a mimetic power apart from the larger movement. The ability of a work to illicit a reaction depends on the charge it carries so that the moments of entry into a text aren't given, but chosen. These moments of resonance lead in all sorts of unexpected directions, and I consider them as conflict or moral propositions as well. Indeed, quite serious conflicts can arise in this way, exposing shows' empirical propositions of misogyny, bigotry, and class domination. "The picture," Wittgenstein writes, "did indeed *suggest* a certain use to us, but it was possible for me to use it differently." (*Philosophical Investigations*, §139)

Though the analysis above is meant to clarify the subject of drawn pictures and not fiction, Wittgenstein acknowledges a relationship between the two.<sup>1</sup> What is left is to see how this conception of drawings relates to fictitious narratives, or how fiction constructs pictures to be used. Wittgenstein writes that within language, it is possible to

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<sup>1</sup> Most clearly in §520 and §524, with the overlap of paintings and drawings with films and fictitious narratives.



create logical propositions that claim to express some broader maxim. In the *Tractatus* he claims they fall under the general logical form “this is how things are,” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §114) which is to say that they assert an abstract expression meant to be placed over lived experience. Simple examples of a proposition might take the form “a color can be either black or not-black, but cannot be both” or “either he loves me or he doesn’t,” but they can take complex forms as well. A story, I argue, is built upon, and constructs, a series of propositions. Of all storytelling types, it seems to me that the most obvious examples of this are folktales and creation myths. In the story of “The Tortoise and the Hare,” for example, the epimyth is that “slow and steady wins the race.” The moral is not meant to be applied only to the limited instances of occasions when tortoises and hares race, or instances when other species of animal are racing, or even those times when humans are literally racing. It is to be taken metaphorically as a position that can be applied to human occasions where a person in competition with another could impose the idea of a race onto their behavior to better understand how he or she is to act.

The moralizing tale is conveyed as a metaphysical proposition applicable to a variety of disparate experiences precisely because the content has plotting that is logically possible (a hare can fall asleep, a tortoise can plod forward), while keeping the assertion outside the litmus test of whether, strictly speaking, it is true or false. You can’t determine the truth of the fable by its content (we don’t say, “since it worked for the tortoise, it must be true”). The moral that “slow and steady wins the race” has already asserted itself as more true than any one instance of its use, and has put the task to the reader to *find* the situation in which the moral is applicable. Moreover, the moral is applied to situations in which it can only be proven true. If people on a beach see a tidal

wave coming, they don't apply the maxim "slow and steady wins the race" when they run for higher ground. The successful application of a moral doesn't necessarily mean that the moral *is true* in itself—the instances of use don't reflect back on the moral in that way. What is instead determined is whether or not the individual has correctly identified a situation that calls for its application. The proposition is *more true* than empirical reality, and it modifies the landscape of reality into a series of events that can be used to prove itself.

These story-propositions can also be called world-pictures. Wittgenstein writes, "The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules." (*On Certainty*, §95) I take him to be saying that a host of rules are learned together as the strictures of specific games. These bundles of rules aren't questioned, but are assumed as facts about the world that must be adopted in order to play the game. Stories that teach us how to act, which is to say stories that have a moral, must teach the conditions under which the moral can be seen as a legitimate move. That inevitably means imparting a foundation of rules that aren't explicit. Some are logical propositions. In the story of the tortoise and the hare, for instance, it seems to me that the story is meant as a consolation to those people who, when comparing themselves to another, find that they aren't as apt. Part of the moral is that the inapt person can compensate for being slow by putting in more hours of work than the apt person. The moral breaks down if the faster person never stops working, or works with such efficiency that no amount of surplus hours will be sufficient to tip the balance. Others are empirical propositions. Above all, people must be in competition in

order for the moral to be relevant. When a person applies “slow and steady wins the race,” she or he is tinting the situation with the colored lens of a specific power dynamic that has been implied by the proposition and accepted by the listener. Applying the epimyth alters the orientation of the self toward others.

More complicated structures like episodic television shows have world-pictures embedded in them as well. When watching an episode of a show, it is not part of our viewing experience to look at, say, Eliot’s decision to break up with J.D. and ask if it is true or false. Likewise, a viewer doesn’t turn to a friend and ask if Tobias’ decision to become an actor is true or false. We *are* asked to put together the extended circumstances leading to (and following from) those decisions and determine whether they appear reasonable, and reasonable also means whether we can understand ourselves or someone we know reacting that way based on the evidence given. As with the folktale, the television episode asks us to find the situations in our own lives in which that type of behavior makes sense. The conclusion being that the situations presented in television shows aren’t judged primarily by the criteria of right or wrong, but by resonance. As in the confession, we either find a *use* for the moral or we forget it: they are not refuted, but accepted or rejected.

In this way it is impossible to have fiction without a moral, at least to the extent that a story, novel, show, or play, must assert its relevance to the audience. Though the guidelines for relevance have expanded a great deal since the time of Aristotle, encompassing as they do now the inward turn to explorations of form, interrogations of traditional subject matter, and a host of other avant-garde practices, still they must espouse *something*, no matter how small the audience to which the work will be

applicable. For episodic television, more specifically, the show must document some resonant experience in a way that is internally consistent, and the experience must be in some sense understandable to the reader or (in this case) viewer. This, I believe, is the crux of the matter, because it is intelligibility that requires the use of cropping to what is logically possible, which is the use of a picture. (*Philosophical Investigations*, §520)

Wittgenstein uses parables and other stories to put forth philosophical positions with remarkable frequency, and I find it telling that a person so wholly committed to bringing words from metaphysics back to their everyday use would use stories and dialogue as the ‘everyday’ philosophical mode of discourse over the construction of concepts and analytical, objective statements common to Russell, Moore, and Frege. I take it as Wittgenstein’s affirmation of the power of storytelling, that its power to teach is equal to or greater than that of philosophical discourse (though, as we see in Plato, philosophy and storytelling were not always separate occupations). This does nothing to diminish a story’s unique ability to present a limiting case—a trajectory in which the events presented lead to an end only by obscuring, minimizing, forgetting, or negating other potential trajectories or sources of information that could be brought to bear. While this is not a new insight, it remains an important one since the successful completion of a story *can* be viewed (and implemented in life) as the only legitimate trajectory. One need only look to the performances generated by religious texts to see the full influence a picture can have on lived experience.

These pictures become hazardous when used to circumvent acknowledgement of the existence of others. As espoused in *Scrubs*, encounters with other human beings—and the variance of narrative re-orientations that communication with them brings—is how

we learn. The use of fictional, autobiographical, and historical accounts to shape narrative are undoubtedly a critical epistemological tool. On those occasions when Wittgenstein commends pictures, it is because they do something productive or facilitate action. Wittgenstein writes, for instance, “The picture of the earth as a ball is a *good* picture, it proves itself everywhere, it is also a simple picture—in short, we work with it without doubting it.” (*On Certainty*, §147) He also famously states that “The human body is the best picture of the human soul,” (*Philosophical Investigations*, II, p. 159) an articulation that highlights clearly the relationship between story and life, or how we read another to understand how they think. The problem with pictures seems to lie in our taking them as irrefutably true despite our inability to know for sure if we are correct. Because a story is nothing but a hypothesis, it can also be misleading. Norman Malcolm, a disciple of Wittgenstein’s, recalls an excellent example of Wittgenstein’s about how a picture can lead someone astray:

At one of the at-homes, Wittgenstein related a riddle for the purpose of throwing some light on the nature of philosophy. It went as follows: Suppose that a cord was stretched tightly around the earth at the equator. Now suppose that a piece one yard long was added to the cord. If the cord was kept taut and circular in form, how much above the surface of the earth would it be? Without stopping to work it out, everyone present was inclined to say that the distance of the cord from the surface of the earth would be so *minute* that it would be imperceptible. But this is wrong. The actual distance would be nearly six inches. Wittgenstein declared that this is the *kind* of mistake that occurs in philosophy. It consists in being *misled by a picture*. (Malcolm, 46)

Pictures, if assumed, can lead to mistaken beliefs and errors in judgment. At the very least, accepting the limiting case of something like a folktale diminishes other equally valid courses of action. Pictures become a liability when, as in Descartes, they are positioned as mediator between the self and others, as a stable metaphysical category instantiated by people in the world. Ortega y Gasset advances the same point one step

farther when he writes that “Justice and truth, too, like all expressions of the spirit, are mirages produced on matter. Culture—the ideal side of things—tries to set itself up as a separate and self-sufficient world to which we can transfer our hearts. This is an illusion, and only looked upon as an illusion, only considered as a mirage on earth, does culture take its proper place.” (Ortega, 141,142)

I find an almost identical strain in *Arrested Development*, though the show is far more emphatic in its belief that pictures mislead. What is true (or verifiable, or factual) changes through the course of the show. The mirage shifts in new directions as the characters approach, and releases itself from their grasp to reappear among the dunes on the horizon. What was illusory becomes real, as in the case of the puppet Franklin becoming a ‘real’ witness. What was illegal becomes legal, as the viewer sees from Wayne Jarvis’ use of the PATRIOT Act. What was just becomes unjust, as in the case of George’s incarceration. Indeed, it is only by traveling to the Iraqi desert itself that the Bluth family is able to know whether their father is innocent or guilty, as if they had to see the desert for what it was before they could sense the materiality of the thing. And yet—as Ortega y Gasset describes—understanding the illusory quality of culture does not negate the need for the illusion. It merely allows it to take “its proper place.” Moreover, it is the proper role of philosophy to reconcile these disparate illusions with lived experience and with each other, to release those people being misled by illusions brought about by language. As Wittgenstein says, “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §109) How one goes about this, importantly, is also through language, though the shared can only be questioned on the level of the individual. By calling words back to their everyday

context, and questioning whether they have a use in one's relations with others, one can again allow a tactic to take its proper place as one among many that are viable, but not determined.

One should keep in mind also that over time what was once a helpful way of seeing the world can become irrelevant, irrational, or incoherent, so that proximity is not just spatial but temporal. When Ortega y Gasset states that “each epoch brings with it a basic interpretation of man,” (Ortega, 113) expressed through fiction, he is not saying that this interpretation appears fully formed, or that it is the only one formed, or even that it must be logically consistent in every aspect. Rather one could say the interpretation is a cluster of interconnected, embedded assumptions perpetuated through fictive utterances that gain popularity over the course of an epoch, and that the combination of these instances will give a conception of what Wittgenstein would call their shared form of life. Each work of fiction will lend its voice in an expansion or manifestation of how it was with that group of people at that time. What may be tacitly alluded to in one author might be made explicit in another. Moreover, it is not necessary, or even possible, for all works to be consistent with each other. Where the pictures overlap is where they gain cultural significance with the majority, but when they differ in voice and experience they have a personal resonance—I would argue that both are necessary for mimesis, which is to say that *both* aspects are criteria for the word's use. Obviously this is not peculiar to literature or mass art. It is a result of social living, and as elements of the external world change—the addition of mechanized labor, or war, or internet communication—the way in which people conceive of their situation with others (and the language they use to express it) will bear the burden of adaptation to allow us to remain social.

Ortega y Gasset's remarks indicate that there is some value to be placed on what stories were chosen by a social group to speak for them. *Scrubs*, as a story that resonated with a group of people as a common social expression, is significant precisely because there are philosophical underpinnings embedded in its propositions that must be accepted in order for the events portrayed to have any meaning. Because the situations presented on-screen influence personal behavior and are conditioned by social behavior, that is to say they have both a personal (creative) and social (imitative) expressive quality, any television show has the potential to fall too far into either direction. The shows that collapse into solipsistic personal fantasies with no regard for intelligibility (with the possible exception of *Twin Peaks*) never make it onto television in the first place. Those that emphasize the imitative aspect—often arising out of commercial interests—have so little creative capacity that they fail to express anything but regurgitation or kitsch. Though there are many of these types of cultural objects (and by no means are they unique to television!), they have a very short shelf-life. Only when speaking of blindly commercial shows that are purely imitative do I agree with Jacques Rancière that keeping a viewer equates to keeping the viewer passive. But that is not episodic television's primary function, nor its potential. Bakhtin sees speech and art as inciting action, and he writes, "[The listener] either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or impartially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on." (*Speech Genres*, 68) A show expresses something, teaches something. An active audience consents to it or not; learns from it or not; *uses* it or not. A picture gains its meaning from its use inside a form of life. Its relevance, or irrelevance, its confusions and inconsistencies, lucid suggestions and broader implications, can (and will) be tested. My choice of *Scrubs* as an exemplar



indicates my assumption that the philosophical points put forward in that show are also being espoused by a vast number of other mass art objects. Indeed, I do see a great deal of resonance between this show and what could be broadly called the cultural landscape.

As a final thought I will also add that there is great value to how a society conceives of its genealogy: what past works present artists use to influence their creations, so a show like *Arrested Development* that failed in its initial temporal moment could have a more powerful resonance with a later social movement. So though the works that gained acceptance are important, as important are the mass art works that were not chosen, and even those that were never allowed to be part of the choosing process. I hoped to emphasize this through choosing *Arrested Development* as a contrast to *Scrubs*. If such a show's fate is due not to the lack of merit of the work, but to a philosophical statement that is not considered part of the basic interpretation of humanness a social group has chosen, the failure of one says a great deal, albeit in a negative way, about the form of life that conditioned its birth and, for some texts, the future generations that will make it their own.

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