CINEMA 13
JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE
REVISTA DE FILOSOFIA E DA IMAGEM EM MOVIMENTO

THE LEFTOVERS, PHILOSOPHY AND POPULAR CULTURE

THE LEFTOVERS, FILOSOFIA E CULTURA POPULAR

edited by/editado por

Susana Viegas

ISSN
1647-8991

CATALOGS
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
Emerging Sources Citation Index, Clarivate Analytics (ESCI) Web of Science TM
European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS)
Regional Cooperative Online Information System for Scholarly Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal (Latindex): 23308
Scopus
The Philosopher's Index

PUBLICATION
IFILNOVA - Nova Institute of Philosophy
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
Nova University of Lisbon
Campus de Campolide, Colégio Almada Negreiros Gab. 319
1099-032 Lisboa
Portugal
www.ifilnova.pt

WEBSITE
www.cjpmi.ifilnova.pt

CINEMA: JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE 13, "*The Leftovers*, Philosophy and Popular Culture"
Editor: Susana Viegas
Peer review (in alphabetical order): Catherine Z. Elgin, Catherine Wheatley, Delphine Letort, Dominick LaCapra, Emily Hughes, Florent Favard, Giovanni Tusa, Guillaume Dulong, Jakob Nilsson, James Hodkinson, James Williams, Jean-Thomas Tremblay, John Marmysz, Jônadas Techio, Lucas Nassif, Ludo de Roo, Marcelo Fornari López, Matilde Carrasco Barranco, Max Sexton, Patrícia Castello Branco, Robert Vinten, Saad Chakali, Sérgio Dias Branco, and Timothy Pytell.
Cover: The Leftovers (S3E5), Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta (HBO, 2014-2017)
Publication date: Dec. 2021

CINEMA 13

ISSN
1647-8991

CATÁLOGOS
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
Emerging Sources Citation Index, Clarivate Analytics (ESCI) Web of Science TM
European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS)
Regional Cooperative Online Information System for Scholarly Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal (Latindex): 23308
Scopus
The Philosopher's Index

PUBLICAÇÃO
IFILNOVA - Instituto de Filosofia da Nova
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
Campus de Campolide, Colégio Almada Negreiros Gab. 319
1099-032 Lisboa
Portugal
www.ifilnova.pt

SÍTIO ELECTRÓNICO
www.cjpmi.ifilnova.pt

CINEMA: REVISTA DE FILOSOFIA E DA IMAGEM EM MOVIMENTO 13, "*The Leftovers*, Filosofia e Cultura Popular"
Editora: Susana Viegas
Revisão por pares (por ordem alfabética): Catherine Z. Elgin, Catherine Wheatley, Delphine Letort, Dominick LaCapra, Emily Hughes, Florent Favard, Giovanni Tusa, Guillaume Dulong, Jakob Nilsson, James Hodkinson, James Williams, Jean-Thomas Tremblay, John Marmysz, Jônadas Techio, Lucas Nassif, Ludo de Roo, Marcelo Fornari López, Matilde Carrasco Barranco, Max Sexton, Patrícia Castello Branco, Robert Vinten, Saad Chakali, Sérgio Dias Branco, e Timothy Pytell.
Capa: The Leftovers (S3E5), Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta (HBO, 2014-2017)
Data de publicação: Dez. 2021

CONTENTS | ÍNDICE

ABSTRACTS

STAY BROKEN: NIETZSCHE, BADIOU, AND *THE LEFTOVERS*' NIHILISM

Patrick O'Connor (Staffordshire University)

ABSTRACT This article examines *The Leftovers* as a response to variations of nihilism: theological, existential and scientific. Situating *The Leftovers* within existential responses to nihilism—particularly Friedrich Nietzsche—will be addressed. However, to fully come to terms with *The Leftovers*' contribution to philosophy and popular culture it will be essential to examine the extent the series offers alternatives to nihilism. My argument will be that *The Leftovers*, as a form of film-philosophy offers a unique metaphysical art. *The Leftovers*, I argue, provides a type of "spiritual realism," blending both materialist and metaphysical themes charting a 'middle way' between materialism and supernaturalism. Firstly, I aim to examine how far *The Leftovers* can be classified as a form of film-philosophy. I argue that *The Leftovers* can be considered a form of ethical film-philosophy, one which thinks a specific confrontation with nihilism. Secondly, I will assess how *The Leftovers*' confrontation with nihilism specifically responds to affective disorders, or what Nietzsche called in *The Will to Power* the ways of 'self-narcotization.' *The Leftovers*, I argue, diagnoses the effects of nihilistic 'deadening,' most concretely through its illumination of affective disorder in the forms of anxiety, self-harm, violence, simmering aggression, social and political helplessness and fear for future generations. *The Leftovers*' aesthetic and atmospheric force stages humanity's vital response to a mélange of ongoing, looming and unfixed catastrophes, as posited in the series via psychological fragmentation, social collapse, familial breakdown, the apocalypticism of the Guilty Remnant. Finally, I will turn to Alain Badiou's philosophy of cinema to assess the extent *The Leftovers* offers a cogent response to political questions. *The Leftovers* does, I argue, offer a form of temporal response to the perplexities of absurdity and mortality. We see alternative values emerge in form of tenacious survival, human resilience, and the indefatigable desire to transmit the conditions of existence towards a future despite the apocalyptic challenges faced. In the last analysis, I will assess whether to 'let the mystery be' is a sufficient response to nihilistic collapse.

KEYWORDS *The Leftovers*; Nihilism; Badiou; Nietzsche; Ethics.

WE WILL NOT RECOVER FROM SCEPTICISM UNLESS WE AIM TO THE EXISTENTIAL: EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND POPULAR MUSIC IN *THE LEFTOVERS*

Enric Burgos (University of Valencia and Jaume I University)

ABSTRACT Our article is aimed at achieving two primary goals: on the one hand, detailing the main links that can be found between *The Leftovers* and Cavell's insights into scepticism and the moving image and, on the other, explaining different ways in which the use of pop songs in the show contributes to that reading in Cavellian fashion. We start by offering a general overview of Cavell's considerations on scepticism, including some remarks on the ontology of the moving image and the two movie genres—the *remarriage comedies* and the *melodramas of the unknown woman*—the philosopher focused his readings on. From that starting point, we go on to analyse the show's passages that are most relevant for our purposes, paying special attention to those in which popular songs best show their expressive potential in relation to the images they accompany. By following the evolution of the main character and focusing mostly on Season Two, the first part of the analysis highlights how the inclusion of popular music helps to outline crucial aspects that are related to the task of self-knowledge and self-transformation such as the fact of taking oneself as other, the conception of scepticism both as a threat and as an impulse to recovery and the cyclic condition of the sceptical menace. The second section deals with the notions of *avoidance* and *acknowledgement* through the examination of Nora and Kevin's relationship. We comment then as to the extent to which a song and its variations play a part in associating their attitude of remaining unknown to the other with their separation. Besides, we explain how the music outlines the couple's longing for re-establishing the relationship in the series finale. The last section of the analysis reveals that the possibilities of recovery *The Leftovers* offers to its spectator transcend the mere passive tracking of the main characters' path. Due to the attention paid to questions as identification, the intertwining of diegetic and non-diegetic songs and the use of anempathetic music or intertextual games we show the way the series displays a tense estrangement/closeness dynamics to the viewer, who is then forced into a hermeneutic exercise that cannot be reduced to logical operations.

KEYWORDS *The Leftovers*; Stanley Cavell; Popular Music; Scepticism; New Television.

WHEN THE CEMENT OF THE UNIVERSE BREAKS APART. HUME, CAUSALITY, AND *THE LEFTOVERS*

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

ABSTRACT According to David Hume, causation is the strongest of the basic associative principles which "are really *to us* the cement of the universe". Yet, Hume also argues that causal relations are nothing but regular connections which have been confirmed so far by our experience but, in principle, might be disproved by further experiences. The cement of the universe might break apart. I will argue that this is precisely what happens in *The Leftovers*. I will do so by analyzing some exemplary causal links and lacunas that the series represents. Specifically, I will track a minor character, Sam's mother, through the handful of her appearances along the series, arguing that this character is crucial to understanding the philosophical discourse that *The Leftovers* develops about causality.

KEYWORDS Causality; Hume; Science; Religion; Causal Explanation.

"WE'RE ALL GONE": A POSTSECULAR ACCOUNT OF *THE LEFTOVERS*' TRAUMATIC EXISTENTIALISM AS 'RELIGIOUS GROUND ZERO'

Ilaria Biano (Italian Institute for Historical Studies)

ABSTRACT With his adaptation of Tom Perrotta's novel, Lindelof made another step in a journey in which philosophical and specifically existentialist interrogations play a crucial role: questions about life, human existence, meaning and purpose, the role of the human being in the society, and at a cosmic, universal level. This article considers and explores *The Leftovers*' widely recognized existentialist dimension by, on the one hand, framing it within the overall postsecular narrative of the show and, on the other, suggesting both a literal and metaphorical reading of the Departure through the categories of structural and historical trauma.

The Leftovers manages to pose profound and far-reaching questions to its audience, about the meaning of human life in the universal scheme but also in other people's everyday lives, while at the same time using the Departure as a metaphor for the human condition in the contemporary traumatic age. In the words of Perrotta and Lindelof, the Departure is "a foundational event," in consequence of which characters live "in a religious ground zero." Different kinds of attitude, explanation, interpretation—ranging from the scientific to the religious, spiritual, and nihilistic—

all cohabit and complement each other within the narrative, embodying both a general demand for spirituality, various nonreligious choices, and different paths toward meaning. In this sense, it is possible to read the Departure, following Charles Taylor, as having a sort of Nova Effect that explodes and rearranges all previous beliefs. But the Departure also contains in itself different kinds of trauma: individual, historical, and also structural. It is thus possible to define *The Leftovers* as an expression of traumatic existentialism. All the different characters or groups of them represent different ways of coping with trauma and with different kinds of trauma; at the same time, different forms and different roles of memory are also embodied by different characters.

The aim of the present study is thus to show how, by bringing together reflections on the individual and cultural consequences of a collective trauma and existentialist meditations, the series realizes a journey from an aesthetic of disorientation to an affirmative ethic of relativity.

KEYWORDS Postsecularism; Postsecular Narratives; Structural Trauma; Existentialism; Memory.

TIME, GRIEF, AND GRACE: A BACHELARDIAN INTERPRETATION OF NORA'S JOURNEY

Michael Granado (Staffordshire University and Sora Schools)

ABSTRACT According to Edward Casey, philosophers have been preoccupied with a central question concerning time; namely, "is time continuous, or is it disruptive?"[1] The answer to this question also determines one's attitude toward a host of related topics, including grief. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard argued for the latter, claiming that "time is a reality confined to the instant and suspended between two voids."[2] Bachelard utilizes dialectical language to juxtapose the existence of the present instant and the nonexistence of the past and future. The benefit of such an approach, with respect to grief, is that it brings to the forefront the reality and persistence of bereavement throughout the individual's life. As Line Ryberg Ingerslev explains, there has been a tendency to view grief as "a process with the specific aim" rather than "an ongoing activity."[3] The deficiency of such an approach is that it fails to account for the fact

[1] Edward Casey, "The Difference an Instant Makes: Bachelard's Brilliant Breakthrough," in *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 19.
[2] Gaston Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, trans. Eileen Rizo-Patron (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 6.
[3] Line Ryberg Ingerslev, "Ongoing: On grief's Open-Ended Rehearsal," *Continental Philosophy Review* 51, no. 3 (2018): 344.

that grief is often a non-linear activity for the individual. Nevertheless, in this grief, Bachelard sees an opportunity for grace. This paper will explore the relationship between time, grief, and grace through the lens of the character of Nora. The character of Nora stands out because of her loss, and the depiction of her grief, but also because she seems to attain some sort of redemption in the end. Although the method by which she obtained such redemption is left vague, as it often is in life, Bachelard's concept of grace will shed some light on this development. Of special importance here are the ways in which Nora's character is depicted dealing with her grief and how this representation corresponds to discontinuous metaphysics of time.

KEYWORDS Gaston Bachelard; *The Leftovers*; Philosophy of Time; Portrayals of Grief on Screen; Grief Cycle.

THE END OF THE WORLD: CONFUSION IN *THE LEFTOVERS*

Keith Dromm (Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University)

ABSTRACT *The Leftovers* begins nearly three years after 2% of the world's population disappears, around 140 million people, in an event now commonly known as the Sudden Departure. The characters are still suffering from the emotional trauma caused by that event. The severity of that trauma decreases the further a person is emotionally from one of the Departed. It may be absent in some, for example, some residents of Jarden, Texas, the only city that did not lose anyone in the Sudden Departure, though sympathy or compassion have likely caused some degree of trauma in most people. The Sudden Departure has also caused *epistemic injuries* and these have afflicted everyone; these are injuries that harm to ability to know and understand. There is first of all the *ignorance* about the Sudden Departure. No one knows what caused the Sudden Departure. Some may think they know by believing any of various competing theories. It seems most others accept their ignorance, although they are not all necessarily content with it. The show's narrative favors no explanation; in fact, the show is more an examination of the effects of this mysterious event on its characters than an investigation of the mystery itself. But the effects of the mystery surrounding the Sudden Departure have caused more than ignorance in the characters. It is not consistent with many things they (and we) believe. People are not supposed to disappear like that. That is something that has never happened, and it does not fit with what we know about the world. This has left the characters *confused*. Confusion is the cognitive condition of holding disorganized, including incompatible, beliefs. The effects of it are

more severe than ignorance. To cure ignorance requires only being taught or learning something new. To remedy confusion, we must reorganize our beliefs or, if that fails, change what we believe and maybe even the way we believe.

In this article, I explore the effects of confusion on the characters of *The Leftovers*, including their different strategies for remedying it. I draw on Thomas Kuhn's examination of anomalies in science to explain some of these effects. Not much else has been written by philosophers on confusion, but there has been a lot written recently on what I identify as its cure, *understanding*. I draw on recent research on understanding by philosophers such as Linda Zagzebski, Catherine Elgin, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Duncan Pritchard to explain how we can cure our confusions. If we fail in that endeavor, as many of the characters do, we may despair of ever understanding and turn into skeptics, even nihilists. The Guilty Remnant are an example of this reaction to confusion. Confusion can also lead one to become overly credulous, as depicted by many characters throughout the series. It may even prompt one to adopt entirely new ways of believing. I elaborate on this last strategy by drawing on the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It is powerfully portrayed in the final season.

I endeavor to show how these reactions to confusion, along with attempted remedies, occur for the confusions we face in our world. While none perhaps reach the magnitude of the confusion caused by the Sudden Departure, our confusions can range over facts that are of great importance to our lives, such as political or scientific facts. They can also be about small events, such as a missing phone or set of keys and the other small incongruities we often experience. All these confusions can cause anxiety, even despair, and they can have deleterious cognitive and/or epistemic effects. A study of the *The Leftovers* may improve our understanding of confusions, including strategies for dealing with these effects.

KEYWORDS Confusion; Understanding; Knowledge; Ignorance; Wittgenstein; Kuhn.

INTRODUCTION:
THE LEFTOVERS, PHILOSOPHY, AND POPULAR CULTURE

Susana Viegas (Ifilnova)

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.
— Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

FROM POP CULTURE TO PHILOSOPHY

The Leftovers (HBO, 2014–2017), created by Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta, begins three years after the disappearance of two percent of the world's population on 14 October 2011. One hundred and forty million people have disappeared, apparently without explanation. Where did they go? And why did they disappear?

The central problem to be overcome in the series is that of not knowing where or why. In a secular world, whenever such questions are left without a rational or scientific answer, various interpretations proliferate, including the solicitation of a higher power to fill this gap. The series aims to explore these themes through well-designed characters: believers, atheists, agnostics, and nihilists, all similar in the sense that within this post-disappearance world, all hope for meaning has been definitively shattered.

Although the general mood of the series is supernatural in nature (involving ghosts and resurrections), reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic sci-fi drama, its underlying character is realistic. The Sudden Departed has taken place in our world, and it is in this world that the leftovers must carry on with their lives. Indeed, the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack served as an inspiration for the writers.[1]

This convincingly contemporary setting makes the story all the more tragic; the series centres not on superheroes or otherworldly mythologies but on common, suburban humans. Mapleton's Chief of Police Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux) lives with his daughter, Jill (Margaret Qualley), and her best friend, Aimee (Emily Meade). His wife, Laurie (Amy Brenneman), has joined the Guilty Remnant, an obscure cult devoted to self-deprivation and annihilation, and his son Tom (Chris Zylka) has joined the Holy Wayne cult. His father, Kevin Garvey Sr. (Scott Glenn), the former chief of police, is now in a mental health institution.

Nora Durst (Carrie Coon) lost her husband and two children during the Sudden Departure and is now a bureaucrat in the Department of Sudden Departure.

The Leftovers has been described as "this decade's best existentialist television work,"[2] a series that "dares you to keep watching, and feeling."[3] Much like *Lost* (ABC, 2004–2010), with its complex narrative and flashback and flash-forward sequences (which are difficult to follow, let alone explain), the show itself is visually and narratively indebted to the main subject of Damon Lindelof's previous work (*Lost* was co-created with J. J. Abrams and Jeffrey Lieber): ignorance, or lack of knowledge. "Not knowing why we're here and not knowing how it all makes sense, the theme of being 'lost' wonderfully captures a basic part of our human situation." [4] More than lack of knowledge, the real problem is that of a structural unknowability.

Although the series has received critical acclaim, less attention has been paid to its philosophical, metaphysical, cultural, and political dimensions. Saying that a popular TV show has philosophical elements is not the same as affirming that philosophy has become popular, of course. On the contrary, philosophy is never popular—unless it appears in popular culture. And according to some, pop culture is no culture at all—unless it is intellectualized. The general thinking on this kind of co-dependency tends to focus on what pop culture gains and what philosophy loses in this uneven exchange.

"*The Leftovers*, Philosophy and Popular Culture," the thirteenth issue of *Cinema*, was inspired by this general debate on popular culture and philosophy. How does pop culture convert philosophical thought into something popular and widely appealing? To their many more or less explicitly acknowledged philosophical influences, Lindelof and Perrotta add a sense of modernism based on a particular view of pop culture. Indeed, there has been much debate on pop culture in recent years (music, film, television, fashion, sports, and food), and it would seem that more questions have been raised than answered. Can pop culture be considered "serious culture" at all? And what (or who) makes mass culture so popular? The people?[5] The issue is highly complex, and these are clearly valid questions. They are not the main focus of this introduction, however. Focusing on the three seasons of *The Leftovers*, these introductory notes are intended to explore the relationship between philosophy and the series once it has been contextualised within a broader understanding of the importance, for current philosophical thinking, of a debate that *approximates* philosophical culture to popular culture. In addition, they analyse the problem of adaptation and authorship, exploring the audio-visual adaptation of Tom Perrotta's book *The Leftovers* in the context of the related film philosophical debate on audio-visual adaptations of philosophical speech.

This issue of *Cinema* is thus dedicated to philosophically questioning pop culture by exploring the philosophical questions raised by *The Leftovers*, giving special attention to its

speculative and philosophical dimensions. The debate on the relationship between philosophy and popular culture is usually summed up in arguments either for or against their association. This duality seems to be based on a false dilemma, however, justified by the assumption that philosophy and popular culture are not identical from a cultural, epistemological, and educational point of view. In fact, however, they could have a different connection: as both Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze have argued in the context of film, film is *comparable to* philosophical works, rather than an art form to be *compared to* philosophy.

Films teach and transform their viewers just as much as philosophy does. The same can be said of other contemporary cultural objects. Nevertheless, pop culture is usually compared with *and* detached from (high culture) art, in both its classic and its avant-garde manifestations. But what differentiates it from the arts in general? It may have mass production and mass consumerism at its heart—a feature that led Walter Benjamin to include works of pop culture among the non-auratic mass arts and that has contributed to its comparatively lower status.[6] Of course, pop culture extends beyond so-called "mass art," yet it would nonetheless seem that, much more than cinema, television shows are the quintessence of mass art—artistic objects centred on mass serial production and mass consummation (with the continuation of seasons depending on TV shares and audience success) rather than the aesthetic or cognitive improvement of each individual. This does not mean that aesthetics and formalism have no place in pop culture. On the contrary, key examples of pop culture undermine any attempt to diminish the value of complex television narratives, taken in the sense of Jason Mittell's "narrative complexity."[7]

Finally, this issue of *Cinema* is also dedicated to determining the extent to which *The Leftovers* can be regarded as a "colossal thought experiment."[8] Philosophy is not unfamiliar with thought experiments, metaphors, and imagined scenarios—on the contrary, as Plato's many allegories show. Yet the contributions to this issue take a broader perspective on the subject, revealing the philosophical significance of popular culture for understanding contemporary formative and artistic experiences.

This issue thus comprises articles that endorse and give new life to the relationship between philosophy and popular culture, contributions that endeavour to provide a reasonable answer to Noël Carrol's request that we find a way to "meld popular genres with philosophical meditations."[9] Within this line of thought, it has become increasingly acceptable among contemporary philosophers to argue, or at least to *concede*, that certain television series are "valuable in dramatizing situations and experiences that raise philosophical questions about how to live, what kind of person one should be, and what, if anything, gives meaning to life. This is where philosophical explanations are most helpful."[10]

POSTMODERNISM, IRONY AND SERIOUSNESS

The story behind *The Leftovers* certainly touches on philosophical questions, alongside the compelling religious and spiritual issues that it also raises. Equally important, however, is the audio-visual mode through which these questions materialize—modes that question key religious, philosophical, and aesthetic canons themselves.

Included in this regard is Lindelof and Perrotta's use of irony—an aspect that Jean-François Lyotard identified as being central to the postmodern way of thinking—which inscribes the show within a postmodernist perspective that guides the viewer to an unexpected and imaginatively original aesthetic experience. Rather than providing easy answers or final truths, the series reinforces uncertainty, fragmentation, and incoherence. After all, from a postmodern perspective, this is the correct posture to take towards the world.

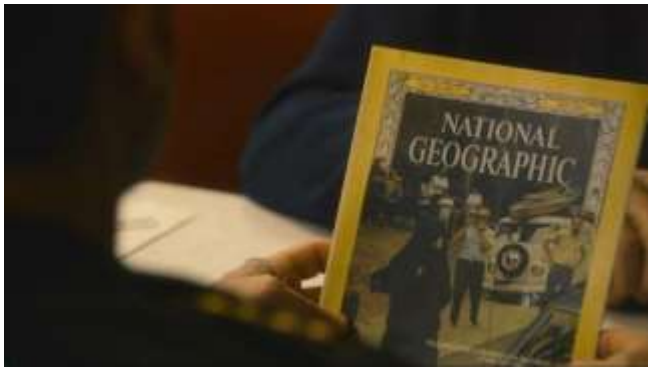
The series deals with the common suburban human; it has no superheroes but many false prophets and even a "reluctant Messiah" inspired by Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979).[11] Kevin seems to be capable of visiting the "other world"—the afterlife?—resurrected multiple times from what may well be the world of the dead. Or perhaps this is a manifestation of his subconscious, misguiding him, misguiding us. This uncertainty is intentional; as Lindelof explains, his aim was to portray a "reluctant Messiah." Kevin visits (dreams about?) the "other world," a reverse realm symbolized by a "hotel" where he meets the deceased Patti (Ann Dowd), leader of the Mapleton cell of the Guilty Remnant (S2E8; S3E1).[12]

Dark humour and irony are used frequently in the show, reinforcing the absurdity—and at times the paradoxical nature—of certain scenes and situations. For example, the episode "Two Boats and a Helicopter" (S1E3) recalls a popular joke about a religious man who, during a flood, refuses three times to be rescued because he believes God will help him. The man ends up drowning, goes to heaven, and asks God to explain what happened. God simply replies: "What did you want from me? I sent you two boats and a helicopter." The episode "Don't Be Ridiculous" (S3E2) pays homage to Balki Bartokomous's catchy phrase from *Perfect Strangers* (ABC 1986–1993), and in the episode "It's a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World" (S3E5) a lion, Frasier, considered by a pagan group to be a god, eats David Burton (Bill Camp), who in the series claims to be God but whom Reverend Matt (Christopher Eccleston) accuses of being unfair and indifferent to the suffering of others, in a scene in which the fourth wall is broken and Matt faces the camera.

The series is allegedly a secular response to the Rapture, an eschatological belief that dates back to the first American Puritans (one of the many prophecies about the end of the world), to which pop culture has been attracted, especially following the major success of the apocalyptical Christian novel *Left Behind*, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.[13] The First Thessalonians treatment of Jesus' Second Coming is read by Michael Murphy (Jovan

Adepo) in the episode "Axis Mundi" (S2E1). The series challenges traditional religious views of the Rapture, not only inverting the sinner/saint binary (thus undermining the traditional structure according to which those who were raptured were "the good ones") but in fact leaving it empty. If the Departed were heroes, fulfilling God's will, then the Rejects were villains (as Jill thinks). But the contrary is also possible. Matt tries to prove that the Departed were sinners, and thus that the event was not the work of God, without giving any special status to the Rejects. The Bible is not the only source of inspiration for the series, however. Further intertextual and metatextual references are to be found, (mis)guiding the viewer along a discontinuous, fragmented narrative: the Stoic philosopher Epictetus; a *National Geographic* magazine from 1972 dedicated to the centennial celebration of Yellowstone National Park; Stephen Crane's 1899 poem *War is Kind*; Mircea Eliade, historian of religions and author of *The Sacred and the Profane*; the Pixies song "Where is my Mind?"; Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Nabucco*; Bruce Chatwin's 1987 book *The Songlines*; Patti Duke's "The End of the World"; the late 1980s TV series *Perfect Strangers*; along with many other cultural references that attest to its postmodernist mixture of ideas, sources, and texts. Each of these references means something, but at the same time they may be mere McGuffins, easily catching our attention and deviating us from what really matters. But what *does* really matter when it comes to a fictional TV series? How are we to be serious about it without being over-serious?

These postmodern features undermine *The Leftovers*' status as a cult TV show. As a postmodern work, it demands close attention from the viewer, balancing humour and seriousness. For Linda Hutcheon, for example, postmodern irony is not anti-serious.[14] In this sense, the presence of the May 1972 edition of *National Geographic* or the concept of an *axis mundi* (the title of one episode) can be read in different ways, blurring the lines between seriousness and irony, politics and entertainment, high and low culture. The May 1972 edition of *National Geographic* was dedicated to the centennial of Yellowstone National Park and, among other subjects, contained articles on the ruin of once important civilizations, such as the Minoans and other peoples of the Bronze Age, as if providing a framework for the strange events of October 14th, contextualizing them within a possible worldly cycle of growth and downfall. Or it could simply be a nod to the fact that the Garvey family is moving to a national park themselves, Miracle, once known as Jarden, a place where no one disappeared, linking the secular and the religious conception of a "sacred" place to be preserved. The irony of celebrating the first North American national park, Yellowstone, is that it implied the exclusion and eradication of those who had always lived there and had contributed to its stable ecosystem, the Indigenous peoples of the area.[15] The same thing occurs in Miracle, a controlled and enclosed town with a limited number of foreign visitors.



1. “Axis Mundi” (S2E1)

Another example of this narrative device occurs in the episode “Axis Mundi” (S2E1). It begins with a pregnant cavewoman dying after giving birth, with her baby being rescued by another cavewoman, a survivor of the earthquake that has killed their tribe. The scene is followed without cuts by a cinematic ellipsis to the present day: there, were the tragedy took place, a group of young teenage girls are swimming and having a good time. One key to understanding this episode is its title. The *axis mundi*, a notion analysed by Mircea Eliade,[16] was an important cosmological concept for many ancient civilizations, understood as the centre of the earth, connecting the upper world of the gods to the underworld of the dead. This ancient cosmological model was replaced in the Hellenistic period with a geocentric model that gave rise to diverse mythological and religious types of interpretation, but both were abandoned in the post-Copernican era. The *axis mundi* has been symbolically represented by trees, mountains, ladders, cathedrals, or any other similar type of structure that could serve as a spiritual link between all three worlds. In *The Leftovers*, we can think of the well into which Kevin shoves young Patti (S2E8) and the Renaissance-type dome from the title sequence in season one as having this meaning: a circular object representing the realm of the gods, eternal life and immortality itself. This is perhaps also represented by the ladder that leads to the rooftop where Garvey Sr. awaits the apocalypse and by the skyscrapers of the “other world” from where, down below, Patti and Kevin, now “dressed up” as the president of the United States, witness the atomic bomb attack (S3E7). There is an intentional ambiguity in the use of the ordinary expression “the other side of the world,” which could refer either to the world of the dead, an imagined hallucinatory place, or simply to Australia, not to mention the non-existence of an *axis mundi*, the centre of the world, or the author of a narrative.

ON ADAPTATION AND AUTHORSHIP

One major question that the audio-visual adaptation of Tom Perrotta’s book *The Leftovers* touches on is the problem of adaptation and authorship. On this specific subject, Tom Perrotta explains: “Our intention was never to simply translate the book into another medium; we

wanted to create something new that was rooted in the book, but that had its own independent identity."[17] The adaptation of the novel was regarded as an original work, not merely an audio-visual translation of its story.

The philosophy of film has become a popular discipline among philosophers. Given improved access not only to films but also to TV series, these media have come to play a greater role in the philosophical debate on contemporary culture and its representation. Thus, just like films, TV series have become a vehicle for disseminating and popularizing philosophical questions, prompting the audience informally to examine and debate them, even if unintentionally. Just like films, TV series are useful for philosophy. For Thomas Wartenberg,[18] the claim that moving images are didactic, illustrative, or fashionable vehicles is not necessarily negative, since, as noted above, philosophy itself has long used images, metaphors, and imagined scenarios in its arguments.

According to Noël Carrol, a certain group of films "performs the function of popular philosophizing—of bringing to mind truths about the human condition that have been forgotten, neglected, or repressed."[19] We might be tempted to find connections between arguments linking philosophy and film and those linking philosophy and popular culture. Unless the topic is strictly avant-garde or independent films—as in the work of Barbara Loden, Maya Deren and Bela Tarr—it is now not uncommon for pop directors such as Howard Hawks, Orson Welles and David Lynch to be mentioned in film philosophical analyses. In the film and philosophy debate, the frontier between high and low culture has become less important, and the relationship between film and philosophy has become legitimized.

But can we say the same when it comes to TV shows? Do TV series think, or make us think? For some time now, and preceded by a similar phenomenon regarding film and its philosophical interest, TV shows have begun to receive attention from serious philosophical and critical scholars, viewed as cultural objects that demand reflection rather than being immediately rejected or depreciated. Recalling Gilles Deleuze's concerns regarding the transition from moving images to televisual images, this shift has involved finding new philosophically relevant fields to explore, in a search for "major pedagogical lines (not just Rosselini, Resnais, Godard, and the Straubs, but Syberberg, Duras, Oliveira…)."[20] Besides that, as Paola Marrati and Martin Shuster describe, we "wrongly assume that we know in advance what a philosophical object is; whereas the interesting question is: what *becomes* a philosophical object? *When* and *why* do specific 'objects' provoke philosophy to think, to renew its problems and assumptions in the face of things and events that take place outside its own domain as it has been defined so far?"[21]

Moving images in general have become philosophical objects. Bringing this problem into a wider film philosophical debate on audio-visual adaptations of philosophical speech, it is

interesting to note that, just as Catherine Constable observes in her book *Adapting Philosophy: Jean Baudrillard and* The Matrix Trilogy, the development of the problem of film philosophy is limited by the relation between the original discourse and its remake.[22] This observation is applicable not only to Baudrillard's philosophy and The Matrix Trilogy, but also to Soren Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*, which inspired Danièle Dubroux's 1996 homonymous film; Peter Forgács's *Wittgenstein Tractatus* (1992), an adaptation of the famous book; and Thom Andersen's *The thoughts that Once We Had* (2015), an adaptation of Gilles Deleuze's two books on cinema.

Rather than referring to these works as being *adaptations* of philosophical works, however, which reinforces the idea of their triviality, we should perhaps refer to them as *dramatizations* of philosophical works, not just because the passage from the written text to an audio-visual medium implies its modification, but because adaptations never exhaust the "original." In other words, an adaptation is not an inferior simplification of the original idea expressed in the written text. Issues regarding faithfulness or adequacy—or of "fidelity," as the term appears in many adaptation studies based mainly on a comparison of the original and the copy, reinforcing the sense of the pristine uniqueness of each work—are no longer of central relevance. Although it was not intended to be a defence of film philosophy, Virginia Woolf's 1926 short essay on cinema clearly has something to say to us: moving images, which have the potential to alter our perception and understanding of the world, can do more than retell the stories in novels and books. Unaided by words, moving images create a "secret language which we feel and see, but never speak."[23]

In *The Leftovers*, this view is supported by the original author's contribution to the TV adaptation. Not only did Perrotta write new material, but he changed the internal dynamics between the characters. The series itself is far more complex than the original novel; not only is each episode internally coherent and aesthetically independent, introducing new elements (including its musical elements), but each is designed to cohere with the narrative developed in the novel as a whole, which the author himself had no problem "rewriting" with Lindelof. Different "metadaptational strategies" are used by the showrunners and screenwriters to break "open" the novel's narrative system into new plots that transition between seasons, thus securing continuity, as in the two flashbacks that open *The Leftover*'s season two and season three, for example.[24] Nevertheless, there are substantial differences between the novel and the series. For example, reverend Matt is Nora's brother rather than a friend, thus changing the course not only of Nora's tragic story but also of his marriage to Mary (Janel Moloney)—who, as the result of a car accident, is rendered catatonic when the Sudden Departure occurs—and of their desire to have children, which is more evident in season two. Whereas in the novel he only appears a couple of times, showing an interest in Nora and exposing her unfaithful departed husband, his character is much more fully developed in the series.[25]

The problem goes beyond certain circumscribed differences between the novel and the series, however, insofar as it concerns the latter's philosophical mission. As mentioned above, one of the central questions in the philosophy of film is how film fulfils this mission. As theorists have argued, it does not do so by merely paraphrasing philosophical ideas (even philosophers paraphrase other philosophers' ideas and arguments);[26] recall Jacques Aumont's claim that "audio-visual images" is a better term than "cinema" in this regard insofar as all audio-visual images *think*, albeit in a different way than artistic images (e.g. paintings), on the one hand, and verbal language (e.g. philosophy texts), on the other.[27]

THE LEFTOVERS' PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

There'll come a time when all of us must leave here
Then nothing Sister Mary can do
Will keep me here with you
As nothing in this life that I've been trying
Could equal or surpass the art of dying
Do you believe me?
— George Harrison, "Art of dying"

The Leftovers is not primarily interested in explaining how the Sudden Departed occurred. What is significant is what happens *after* the Sudden Departed, in a post-disappearance world in which each character attempts to solve the mystery—with faith, radicalism, scepticism, or nihilism. Without remains, it is impossible to scientifically determine a cause of death. In the absence of a reasonable explanation for their sudden disappearance—since they clearly did not *decide* to disappear (much like the "social disappearance" of "invisible," marginal, poor, and homeless members of society),[28] possible explanations for their disappearance include a deadly virus, alien abduction, a natural phenomenon… The randomness of all attempts to find a rational answer or to construct meaning merely postpones the grief process to an indeterminate moment in the future. Without their remains, it is possible to imagine that they are still alive somewhere, in this or that parallel universe, giving the series, which is clearly not a forensic crime drama so much as a sci-fi, post-apocalyptic tale, an atmosphere of uncertainty, absurdity, and strangeness.

Is God testing the characters in the series (S1E3), or was it wave radiation that vaporized a percentage of the population? In a 2017 interview for TIME magazine, Lindelof explains: "There's a difference between 'Who killed Laura Palmer?,' which is a mystery the show owes us, and requires an explanation, and then, 'What is the meaning of life and why is this character behaving the way they are?'. The more you explain, the more ridiculous it seems, because everybody behaves in ridiculous ways that don't make any sense."[29]

Heeding Lindelof's words, it is not our intention to explain the mystery but rather, echoing the title of the second season's opening theme, to "let the mystery be"—by

problematizing its deliberately philosophical themes, examining how it contributes to the philosophical significance of popular culture and ultimately exploring *The Leftovers* as a "colossal thought experiment."

What would happen if two percent of the world's population were to disappear without explanation? The question seems hypothetical, but the world has indeed witnessed the "sudden departure" of entire groups of people in the form of political persecution, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Would life as we knew it still be conceivable, were we to be touched by such an event? Or would we need to consider alternatives to a life that we know is inherently precarious? When we interpret *The Leftovers* as depicting collective trauma, are we thinking of the trauma of never knowing who (or what) was responsible for the disappearance of 140 million people, of the trauma of those willing to forget and move on? In Miracle, the town attempts to preserve a pre-disappearance way of life and community bond, as if the Sudden Departed had never happened. It is ultimately unsuccessful; although its borders are closed and only a small number of visitors are allowed, everyone wants to take part, and chaos ensues. In the end, the town is destroyed by a terrorist attack perpetrated by the Guilty Remnant, led by Meg (Liv Tyler).

The Leftovers addresses questions of life and death, but an insurmountable distancing of popular culture (such as music, film, and sports) from the issues that really matter to our lives is evident in the series. In the novel, Tom's character endorses this sceptical position: "He'd lost his taste for pop culture after the Sudden Departure and hadn't been able to get it back. It all seemed so hectic and phony now, so desperate to keep you looking over there so you didn't notice the bad news right in front of your face."[30] This position reflects a common understanding of pop culture—as a distraction from what is happening in front of us, alienating us from real problems.

The series follows a different path, however, forcing us to face the "bad news" we would prefer to avoid. This is precisely what the Guilty Remnant tries to do and represents in the series: its members have accepted the end of a meaningful world. They do not want to be distracted from what happened—they want to face it every day, always. Although they do not want to move on with their lives, neither do they wish to grieve. They are living reminders of what everyone wants to forget. "Stop Wasting Your Breath!" they silently preach, because there will be no normality again, ever. Their perspective is the opposite of the community's: they think the Leftovers are dead but have not realized it yet. Like the undead, they do not speak and impose their upsetting, repulsive, and soulless presence on a community that is trying to move on with daily, suburban life.

2. “Pilot” (S1E1)

Their all-white outfits are deceptive, reminiscent of angel-like figures representing innocence and goodness when in fact they provoke anxiety, unsafety, and hostility. But their Wittgensteinian silence suggests a deeper understanding of life and the mysterious events that have shaped their present reality. If the central core of *The Leftovers*’ narrative is the Departed, its focus is the Leftovers—or the Rejects, as they are called in the novel—and an apparently simple set of complex and distressed characters who somehow become a community. How they attempt to solve the mystery endorses their own behaviour. Pre-departure, Megan is an upset bride-to-be who, post-departure, becomes involved with the Guilty Remnant, replacing her wedding vows with a vow of silence. She ends up being radicalized, leading the terrorist attack in Miracle (Jarden). Her vow of silence mirrors Mary’s catatonic state and the pregnant cavewoman’s muteness (S2E1), as well as the sensitive content warning regarding Australian Aboriginal culture displayed at the beginning of certain episodes of season three.[31]

“Becoming who one is” is an ancient philosophical process grounded in a daily practice dating back to ancient philosophy, which Michel Foucault called the *technologies of the self*. To be understood in connection with self-knowledge and one’s social identity, it permeates the series. In the hotel, as Kevin is getting dressed, a sign on the wardrobe door features a famous quote by Epictetus: “Know, first, who you are, and then adorn yourself accordingly” (S2E8). Throughout the three seasons, we meet different sides of Kevin: husband and father, chief of police, international assassin, messiah, and president of the United States. Each of these roles is related to power and control and emphasizes Kevin’s own physical hyper-masculinity (and the contrasting fragile Kevin). This is also the case for the Guilty Remnant’s white outfits, although in this case the opposite occurs, signalling a lack of personal identity.

Yet the main question is not one of dressing up accordingly, or of imagining that to care for oneself is to embellish and dress up to please others. The inner self dictates (because it daily examines any “planned” self-to-be) the exterior’s becoming other. Epictetus’ quote, which originally occurs in a passage in which he is teasing a young rhetoric student, has a relevant consequence for the narrative interpretation of the series: it prompts meditation on life and death, giving access to the philosophical life as care of the self (*Epiméleia heautoû*). As

Deleuze observed, referring to "new modes of subjectivation," the "late Foucault" was chiefly concerned with aesthetics and ethics, critical self-knowledge, and the care of the self.[32] In its double sense of subjectivation and subjugation, the process of "assujettissement" implies both receptivity to the force of the other and the ability spontaneity to affect others and oneself (*s'affecter soi-même*), as a "folded" force. According to Foucault's reading of Plato's *Alcibiades*, Alcibiades is asked the central question of Greek education, and implicitly of our own: "Suppose you were offered the following choice, either to die today or to continue leading a life in which you will have no glory; which would you prefer?"[33] This daily spiritual exercise, the exercise of the last day, is a meditation on life and death, an acknowledgment not only that dying is a possibility but that death is always present. This Stoic exercise functions as a massive "what if…?", a colossal thought experiment on the art of dying, which freezes the march of time and guides life towards perfection and decision-making. One potential answer takes the form of the many near-death experiences courted by some of the series' characters, as if they were confronting a greater kind of freedom.

The six articles that make up this issue centre on the idea that *The Leftovers* can be considered a form of (film) philosophy. Although grounded in the work of different philosophers—including Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Hume—and even different definitions of philosophy itself, they address issues related to philosophical problems such as nihilism, scepticism, existentialism, human finitude, causality, grief, confusion, the absurd and the death of God.

In "Stay Broken: Nietzsche, Badiou, and *The Leftovers*' Nihilism," Patrick O'Connor (Staffordshire University) analyses the series' proposed theological, existential, and scientific responses to nihilism. Through mainly the philosophical thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and Alain Badiou, O'Connor argues that the series not only confronts nihilism but also offers alternative values.

Enric Burgos's (University of Valencia and Jaume I University) "We Will Not Recover from Scepticism unless We Aim to the Existential: Emotional Engagement and Popular Music in *The Leftovers*" provides a Cavellian interpretation of the series' use of popular music. Departing from Stanley Cavell's remarks on scepticism and the moving image, Burgos highlights how pop songs are the expression of the main characters' processes of self-knowledge and acknowledgment.

"When the Cement of the Universe Breaks Apart. Hume, Causality, and *The Leftovers*," by Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa), is based on David Hume's views and doubts about causation and the universe's unity. Terrone argues that the series originally develops strategies to show what actually happens when causation is no longer demonstrated.

In "'We're All Gone': A Postsecular Account of *The Leftovers*' Traumatic Existentialism as 'Religious Ground Zero'," Ilaria Biano (Italian Institute for Historical Studies) frames the

series as a postsecular narrative in which historical trauma (the experience of loss) is conflated with structural trauma (the experience of absence). Biano compares the Sudden Departure to Charles Taylor's Nova Effect, thus grounding belief in an anthropocentric vision of the mysteries' existential dimensions.

In "Time, Grief, and Grace: A Bachelardian Interpretation of Nora's Journey," Michael Granado (Staffordshire University and Sora Schools) analyses how a philosophy of time can determine how grief is viewed. Based on Gaston Bachelard's temporal discontinuity, Granado explores the relationship between grief and grace in *The Leftovers*.

Finally, Keith Dromm's (Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University) "The End of the World: Confusion in *The Leftovers*" is centred on the idea of confusion. Departing from the tension between knowledge and ignorance of the Sudden Departed, and within a Wittgensteinian approach to the problem, Dromm explores the characters' reactions to confusion and their emerging new modes of belief.

We close the issue with six book reviews written by Maria Irene Aparício, Alexandre Nascimento Braga Teixeira, Diego Hoefel, Manuel Oliveira, Philipp Teuchmann and Sofia Sampaio, and with a conference report by William Brown titled "The Conference as Zoo(m) (Exagium In Memoriam Eileen Rositzka)." On behalf of the journal, I would like to sincerely thank those who reviewed the manuscripts and to express my gratitude to the authors for their invaluable contributions.[34]

---

[1] James Hibberd, "Damon Lindelof Interview: *The Leftovers* Showrunner Gets Brutally Honest," *Entertainment Weekly*, September 1, 2015, https://ew.com/article/2015/09/01/damon-lindelof-interview-leftovers/.

[2] Lucien Waugh-Daly, "The New Nihilism of 'The Leftovers' and 'The Discovery'," *Luwd Media*, April 3, 2017, https://medium.com/luwd-media/the-new-nihilism-of-the-leftovers-and-the-discovery-3eee5dddcf14.

[3] Matt Zoller Seitz, "Review: HBO's *The Leftovers* is all Bleakness all the Time," *Vulture*, June 27, 2014, https://www.vulture.com/2014/06/tv-review-the-leftovers.html.

[4] Jeremy Barris, "*Lost* and the Question of Life after Birth," in *The Ultimate Lost and Philosophy: Think Together, Die Alone*, ed. Sharon Kaye (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 117.

[5] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1-2.

[6] William Irwin, "Philosophy as/and/of Popular Culture," in *Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture*, ed. William Irwin and Jorge J. E. Gracia (Lanha, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 41–63.

[7] Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 17.

[8] Sophie Gilbert, "The Brilliant Nihilism of *The Leftovers*," *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/08/the-brilliant-nihilism-of-the-leftovers/375563/.

[9] Noël Carroll, *Minerva's Night Out: Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 204.

[10] Steven M. Sanders, "An Introduction to the Philosophy of TV Noir," in *The Philosophy of TV Noir*, ed. Steven M. Sanders and Aeon J. Skoble (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 1.

[11] Adam Chitwood, "Damon Lindelof on 'The Leftovers' Finale, Ambiguity, TV Criticism, and What's Next," *Collider*, June 9, 2017, https://collider.com/damon-lindelof-the-leftovers-finale-interview/#season-3.

[12] Kevin seems to be lost in the hotel, which Guillaume Dulong relates to Justin Theroux's role in the music video for Muse's "Hysteria," where, confined to his hotel bedroom, he loses his mind. His performance "probably is the matrix of Kevin's orphic character." See Guillaume Dulong, "*The Leftovers*, the *Lost* fever," *TV/Series* Hors séries 1 (2016): 8. DOI: 10.4000/tvseries.4371.

[13] Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort, "Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience... Resolution?," *TV/Series* 12 (2017): 1. DOI: 10.4000/tvseries.2170.

[14] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 39.

[15] Isaac Kantor, "Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks," *Public Land and Resources Law Review* 28, no. 41 (2007): 42-62.

[16] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1961).

[17] Joseph and Letort, "Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality," 2.

[18] Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[19] Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009), 196.

[20] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 71.

[21] Paola Marrati and Martin Shuster, "Philosophy and New American TV Series," *MLN* 127, no.5 (2012): ix.

[22] Catherine Constable, *Adapting Philosophy: Jean Baudrillard and* The Matrix Trilogy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

[23] Virginia Woolf, "The Movies and Reality," in *Film and/as Literature*, ed. John Harrington (New York: Prentice Press), 266.

[24] Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort, "How to end with an opening: TV series continuity and metadaptation," in *Adapting Endings from Book to Screen*, ed. Armelle Parey and Shannon Wells-Lassagne (London: Routledge, 2019), 112-123.

[25] For other differences between the series and the novel, see Boris Kachka, "Tom Perrotta on 7 Ways *The Leftovers* has Diverged From the Novel," *Vulture*, July 7, 2014, https://www.vulture.com/2014/07/leftovers-tom-perrotta-book-tv-changes.html.

[26] Noël Carroll, "Philosophizing through the moving image: the case of *Serene Velocity*" in Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (ed.), *Thinking through cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 182-183.

[27] Jacques Aumont, *À quoi pensent les films* (Paris, Séguier, 1996), 47-67

[28] Gabriel Gatti and Jaume Peris, "The leftovers. The dead in life and social disappearance," *Death Studies* 44, no. 11 (2020): 681-689. DOI: 10.1080/07481187.2020.1771851.

[29] Daniel D'Addario, "Damon Lindelof on *The Leftovers*, Faith and the End of *Lost*," *TIME*, April 14, 2017, https://time.com/4732113/damon-lindelof-leftovers-lost/.

[30] Tom Perrotta, *The Leftovers* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), 165.

[31] *The Leftovers Wiki*, https://the-leftovers.fandom.com/wiki/The_Book_of_Kevin.

[32] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 105. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 100: "Morality presents us with a set of constraining rules of a special sort, ones that judge actions and intentions by considering them in relation to transcendent values (this is good, that's bad…); ethics is a set of optional rules that assess what we do, what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved."

[33] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 32.

[34] This work was funded by national funds through the FCT-Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the Norma Transitória-DL 57/2016/CP1453/CT0031 and UIDB/00183/2020.

ARTICLES | ARTIGOS

STAY BROKEN: NIETZSCHE, BADIOU, AND *THE LEFTOVERS*' NIHILISM

Patrick O'Connor (Staffordshire University)

Existing debates within film-philosophy are grounded on an opposition between film as a vehicle for explaining philosophical ideas and film-as-philosophy, where film directly enunciates thinking itself. The problem of nihilism potentially disrupts this debate since film risks inherent nihilism due to the medium's separation from reality. However, this does not preclude the possibility film and televisual art can challenge, disturb, and even exceed epistemological and moral nihilism. While film-philosophers need to acknowledge the mediated nature of film as well as its separation from reality, a more sustained account of film and television as a metaphysical art is required to confront nihilistic motifs. The rationale for this research is that *The Leftovers* stages exactly this.

Nihilism, generally understood, concerns the collapse of moral values.[1] However, this basic understanding does not explain nihilism as a philosophical theme. Nihilism as a philosophical concept takes ontological absence as its necessary condition: that is, reality itself is without foundation. This proposition has attendant consequences for other major branches of philosophy. If existence has no foundation, then moral principles themselves are groundless, since anything which *is* includes moral activity. Moral nihilism overlaps with psychological nihilism. If there are no moral foundations, the content of any subjective consciousness—thoughts, emotions, will—must also be bereft of meaning. Psychological collapse and alienation become a chronic subjective norm. The outgrowth of these various strands of nihilism is political cynicism. Since all existence, subjectivity, ideals and values are as equally valid as each other, consequently, no political project—conservative, socialist or liberal—has any value, because if existence is without foundation, any political organisation of that reality is equally valueless. Furthermore, aesthetics, the branch of philosophy concerning art and creation, is thus inherently undermined since any act of creation is implicitly destructive. Hence, what is at stake in the discourse of nihilism is the possibility of philosophy itself.

The Leftovers (HBO, 2014-2017) addresses all these primary philosophical themes.[2] To understand *The Leftovers*' contribution to philosophy and popular culture it is necessary to examine how the HBO series offers alternatives to epistemological and moral nihilism. Its importance resides in showing how film and television are not a mere surface art of figures,

perspectives, and semblances, but instead can screen forms of truths, and ethical alternatives transcending the series' own mediated nature. My aim herein is to use *The Leftovers* to explain how metaphysical film and television are conceivable. *The Leftovers* is a particularly instructive example as it continually screens—through character development, *mise-en-scène*, editing—a desire for encountering the real, epistemologically, aesthetically and ethically. I use the term "real" in a prosaic sense, referring to things which exist or occur in fact, as opposed to something imaginary or supposed.

While film and television series are certainly art-forms, and not real in the same sense as the objects one encounters in everyday life, they still, if only minimally, indicate reality, which is to say a film's object of concern is at least minimally existent. This claim is crucial for film-philosophy, since if this position is not assumed from the outset, the whole discourse becomes unintelligible. As such, filmed and televisual artworks which directly confront nihilistic themes, such as *The Leftovers*, are implicitly well-placed to tackle the question of reality as well as the dearth of the real which nihilism implies. Filmic representations of nihilism are especially cognisant of their own conditions of intelligibility since they tackle more directly whether the filmic representation is a candidate that accounts for real things, and consequently, whether this representation may have any purpose or value. In the context of film-philosophy, the reason we should assess films and television series with nihilistic motifs is obvious. Since nihilism precludes the possibility of thought, it also precludes the possibility that films can engender any philosophical reflection.

My argument herein is that the significance of *The Leftovers,* as a form of film-philosophy, offers a distinctive style of metaphysical art. As such, *The Leftovers* provides a type of "spiritual realism," blending both materialist and metaphysical themes without recourse either to a crass secularism or to supernaturalism, the upshot of which is an articulation of ethical, psychological and political renewal. This article will begin by situating *The Leftovers* in the context of nihilism in film and television, as well as explaining how it reflects conventional epistemic debates within film-as-philosophy. Once I establish how *The Leftovers* aesthetically foregrounds an absence of the real, I will assess the ways in which it offers an alternate confrontation with nihilism, specifically responding to what Friedrich Nietzsche calls in *The Will-to-Power* the ways of "self-narcotization."[3] The importance of *The Leftovers* rests in its effort to represent the human ability to think beyond the idiosyncrasies of character psychology or any yearning for individual emotional resolution, which I will elaborate more fully in the third section's account of the core characters. *The Leftovers* is noteworthy because of its attempt to screen a philosophical rejection of subjective interpretation as the ground of truth. In addition, the series makes an argument for constructing more universal and egalitarian responses to grief and trauma against a backdrop anxiety of sameness and replication. *The Leftovers* diagnoses the effects of nihilistic "deadening" in line

with Nietzsche's death-of-god philosophy but does not adopt the Nietzschean alternative. I will draw on Alain Badiou's philosophy of cinema to assess the extent to which *The Leftovers* offers a cogent response to nihilistic malaise and metaphysical collapse.

1. NIHILISTIC PRECURSORS

That *The Leftovers* directly tackles nihilism begs the question of other cinematic or televisual precursors. Quantitatively, filmic treatments of nihilism are innumerable, ranging from Wallace McCutcheon's silent film *The Nihilist* (1905), to the existential vacuity of the central protagonist of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), the aimless existential meanderings of Generation X movies like *Reality Bites* (Ben Stiller,1994), or the scatological humour of animations like *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* (Trey Parker, 1999). Also, filmic representations of nihilism are not restricted by genre. For example, see the hateful nihilism of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) in John Ford's western *The Searchers* (1956), or the comedic excoriation of nihilists in the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998). Nihilism is even broached in the gritty urban realism of *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993), the suburban ennui of *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), and the collapsing political metropolis of *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019).

Equally, in what is now called "quality television," similar patterns can be detected. Some of the most lauded exemplars of quality television directly tackle nihilistic themes. For example, *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) represents nihilistic masculine violence and hedonism, *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) examines urban social and economic decay, *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) reflects despairing nascent cultures of advertising consumption and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) shows Walter White's (Bryan Cranston) nihilistic descent from maladroit science teacher to narcotics mastermind. That nihilism is prevalent on screen, and given film and television's most critically lauded exemplars entertain nihilistic themes, it begs a question of film-philosophy. Is there something essentially nihilistic about film and television?

If film and television are mediated artworks rather than immediate experience, it is, as John Marmysz explains, possible to suggest the inherent nihilism of film.[4] If a strict demarcation exists between filmed-object and immediate experience, the film is removed from the reality it represents. This demarcation corresponds to the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality. This opposition cannot be explained away easily, and has potentially nihilistic consequences since the real, truth, and meaning, cannot be present within the filmed media. Worse, the proliferation of filmed images and sounds could be argued to perpetuate nihilism. I hope to show that this is not necessarily the case, and that *The Leftovers* specifically demonstrates how epistemic and moral nihilism can be challenged within the medium.

However, it should be acknowledged that film and television, as much as any other artform, work with an epistemic gap, since what filmed objects refer to is simply not immediately present.

Debates in film-philosophy tend to replicate the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality. The debate anchors on a basic opposition between films as representations or instructive examples of philosophical problems, and the idea of film-as-philosophy. On one hand, we have the appearance of particular films as useful, but ultimately secondary representations of reality, and on the other, we have film-as-philosophy, which considers films as an actualisation of reality itself. Typical exemplars of the latter approach are Daniel Frampton and Gilles Deleuze. However, the extent Deleuze and Frampton's methods can confront nihilism is unclear as both still endorse a separation between the real and the appeared, even if couched in different terminology.

Frampton's filmosophy is less concerned with the technical organisation of the material processes of film production—editing, acting, performance, shot selection—and more with the totality of movement constituted through the filmic object.[5] Frampton's approach is expressly valuable when interpreting the organic movement of a film-object's unfolding thinking, reasoning and ideas, and where criticising psychological models of film analysis i.e. films as analogous to mental processes.[6] Still, for Frampton, there is a deeper reality at work beyond the viewer in the ontological reality the film occasions.

Frampton's most direct philosophical precursor, Gilles Deleuze, has a comparable problem. For Deleuze, if a film-object generates affects, these should not be indexed to the psychology of individual viewers.[7] The film-object self-generates its own possible world, one not restricted by the material processes of film-making such as shot selection, montage, screenplay, character arc and so forth. In Deleuze, we find an opposition between the reality occasioned by the film-object and the localised emergence of particular films or, in Deleuzian terms, a relation between the virtual and the actual.[8] There is no other way of really classifying Deleuze and Frampton's approach than as a form of pan-psychic realism, where films have minds of their own which are instances of a broader reality. We are therefore left with the same gulf between the real and the apparent. Consequently, the epistemic gap between appearance and reality remains intact. These methods thus do not surmount the nihilistic absence of the real.

This epistemic gap should not suggest that particular films or television series automatically endorse moral or epistemological relativism due to the simple fact of their existence. It is far more productive to suggest that where film or television directly tackles nihilistic themes—the negation of value, truth and meaning—they recognize the epistemic gap between appearance and reality, and thus bring the question of reality into view. If the real is of concern, if it matters, then for every nihilistic gap between the real and what appears, there

is also a promise that reality does exist. By forcing questions of absence, lack, and nihilism to the forefront, art implicitly makes a claim for the real. This is more than just an avant-garde meta-reflection on artifice; filmed art-objects indicate the metaphysical. This impulse is evident in *The Leftovers*' constant imposition of philosophical questions on its audience about perspectival uncertainty, hallucination and reality, the effects of simulation, the moral consequences of absence, and meaninglessness itself. *The Leftovers* foregrounds metaphysical absence in order to reveal things that matter. In *The Leftovers*, mattering matters.[9] What make the series philosophically unique is its commitment to showing a fragmentation and clash of perspectives which the departure announces, and on the other hand, its effort to reconstruct a sense of possibility and newness out of the traumatized fragments left behind after the departure. *The Leftovers* confronts the segmentation and relativity of reality itself. If everything is broken and meaningless, then there is no philosophy. *The Leftovers* valiantly attempts to think otherwise. It is thus necessary to draw on a different set of thinkers and concepts, namely Badiou and Nietzsche, to grasp the metaphysical possibilities of film and television as demonstrated in *The Leftovers*.

2. IN PURSUIT OF DEAD GODS

In G.W.F. Hegel's famous defence of art, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, he explores the regenerative capacities of art with an apocalyptic tone. For Hegel, the fact that early-1800s German art had become an object of philosophical speculation and criticism, was equivalent to an announcement of the end of art. Art could no longer be considered a universal phenomenon entwined with the ethical substance of a culture, as it was for the Homeric oral traditions of Ancient Greece.[10] If art is not entwined with the totality of life, then single artworks are valuable solely as items of criticism. As such, Hegel prefigures the question of nihilism. If understanding an artwork is restricted to specific objects, it no longer matters, since it is not embedded in broader historical, cultural, or spiritual processes. *The Leftovers*, in its unique interrogation of secular apocalypticism, confronts a similar problem. While Hegel is obviously not a film-philosopher for chronological reasons, *The Leftovers* retains a sense of Hegel's desire for aesthetic substance to overcome a world of fragmented identities, whether individual, familial or national.[11]

The Leftovers is ostensibly a direct response to epistemological and moral nihilism. The deployment of the Rapture trope ingeniously enables the screening of a Nietzschean thought-experiment. What happens when all human life is universally affected by a mysterious absence? The departure leaves the world grief-stricken and broken, with populations scrambling for alternative identities to alleviate the trauma. For a series as emotionally over-determined as *The Leftovers*, what fascinates is the way it undermines its own affectional tone

with a more capacious accommodation of metaphysical questions. As Noël Carroll suggests, obviously moving-pictures generate distinct feelings, intuitions and emotions; however, such affective tonality is a sufficient but not necessary condition of a film's philosophical propositions.[12] To understand *The Leftovers* metaphysically, the series needs to be situated as combining Nietzsche's diagnosis of the nihilism of perspectives and identities, and Badiou's effort to explain transformative and new events as an antidote to a nihilistic morass of fragmented identities.[13]

That the "reality" presented in the series is fragmented, broken, and disjointed places us squarely in a confrontation with nihilism. The most obvious philosophical index is Nietzsche's treatment of nihilism. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche warns of the unleashing of nihilistic forces after the death of God.[14] With no eternal foundation, humans are left to cope with a multiplicity of epistemological and moral alternatives, each as valid as any other. Nietzsche accepts this reality as the truth, whilst repudiating an unthinking nihilistic relativism. In *The Leftovers* we find a similar situation. The Rapture-like event that disappears two percent of the world's population subtracts broader historical purpose from individuals and groups, leaving only a discordant clash of perspectives and identities. All identities become homogenous and unworthy of distinction.

If nihilism demands a "restoration of belief" due the world no longer being comprehensible as stable or permanent, the converse is equally true.[15] Nihilism is not nothingness, but rather a plurality of beliefs, since after the death of God there exists a multiplicity of competing alternatives of veneration. The adoption of prosthetic belief systems requires, for Nietzsche, a denial of the inherently perspectival nature of life. Due to a frightening abyss between the chaos of reality and our subjective perception, we cling to various God-substitutes or idols to stave off the chaos. Instead of adopting a healthy scepticism, we revert to veneration and idolatry. As Kevin Stoeher puts it, nihilists who end up clinging "to a fixed perspective, as though it were the *only viewpoint* possible, also deny their own opportunity for self-transformation and life-enhancement."[16] Thus, nihilism entails a projection of value onto an absent world.

As Nietzsche argues in *The Anti-Christ,* the primary consequence and danger of nihilism is ego, or the self which projects its interior life as if it were all reality.[17] For Nietzsche this is a baleful outcome, one where personal immortality envisages all other perspectives as one's own. Counter to common interpretations of Nietzsche as a radical subjectivist, it is rather the case that Nietzsche's critique of nihilism requires a radical depersonalization. Depersonalization is particularly relevant to *The Leftovers,* where Matt (Christopher Eccleston), Kevin (Justin Theroux) and Nora (Carrie Coon) all embark on divesture of their own self-conception. *The Leftovers* directly offers a metaphysical alternative to nihilistic self-absorption and cynicism. The primary characters, as I will argue, do not find their own

individual salvation; it is rather that they become *anybody*. Their grief is not personal, introspective or idiosyncratic; it is impersonal, common and placeless. Thus, they exemplify Nietzsche's distinction between active and passive nihilism.[18] Passive nihilism, for Nietzsche, denotes the grief, resentment and resignation that is a response to a universe of fragmented perspectives. The departure condemns characters to inwardness and introspection, and they allow themselves to be passively constructed by a momentous historical event. In contrast, active nihilism denotes the construction of concrete acts of renewal despite the metaphysical absence which pervades *The Leftovers*, in opposition to the false gods and idols proliferating throughout it, for example, Wayne Gilchrist (Paterson Joseph) or the sex party lion-worshippers in the episode "It's a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World" (S3E5).

The levelling of perspectives noted above is underlined in the first season through numerous examples of replacement idols. We are informed that a variety of celebrities and notables of varying political persuasions are among the departed: Adam Sandler, Anthony Bourdain, the Pope and Vladimir Putin. Thomas Hibbs underlines this point, arguing that nihilism undermines the heroic since heroes no longer have worthwhile nemeses or a claim to moral superiority.[19] Elsewhere, the levelling of perspectives is evidenced by the untethering of religious and scientific worldviews from their epistemological foundation. For example, the religious, such as Matt Jamison, have the substance of their faith eroded, as they occupy a world where they are not among the "saved." Rationalists, scientists and atheists also have their world evacuated of meaning as they must now scramble to explain a world in which a quasi-miraculous event is possible. The show's multiplicity of competing perspectives leads to a drive towards absorption within identities.

In *Untimely Meditations*' "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche argues that a distinguishing feature of nihilism is the misguided temptation to understand the human being as having a distinct essence.[20] This perspective is mistaken because it presupposes humans can be essentially complete.[21] Here, the human cannot become anything other than what they are now, i.e. their currency. For Nietzsche, the nihilistic are actually devoted beings, condemned eternally to experiment with idols of religion, hedonism, economics and politics, vainly attempting to fill the metaphysical absence. Likewise, *The Leftovers* sees characters erecting idols in faith, science, anger, hedonism or the simulations of technology to help them cope with a meaningless world. We find characters embedded in, or on the cusp of, identarian entrenchment, pursuing prosthetic salvation for the metaphysical absence at the core of their reality. For example, Wayne Gilchrist, Tom Garvey (Chris Zylka) and Laurie Garvey (Amy Brenneman) experiment with cultic indoctrination. Jill Garvey (Margaret Qualley) seeks meaning in the blunted hedonism of communal sex, self-harm and death rituals: "Mind if I jerk off? Be my guest" (S1E1). As Sophie Gilbert shows, even Nora Durst, a more rationally inclined character, seeks solace in idolising games, simulations and technology, by soliciting a

sex-worker to shoot her while she wears a bullet-proof vest, simulating sex with a macabre doll, and her eventual adoption of the LADR technology.[22]

The Leftovers shows identities and tribes as prosthetic idols for alleviating the affective deadening created by grief. In *The Will-to-Power*, Nietzsche reflects on the psychological effects of nihilism.[23] The psychological iteration of nihilism is specifically attained when one voluntarily asserts perspectives, beliefs, and ideologies as absolute: "Nihilism as a psychological state is reached when one has posited a totality, or a system."[24] *The Leftovers* reflects Nietzsche's concern about nihilism: our historical age is defined as a world where only our specific perspectives count. At the heart of *The Leftovers* is a Nietzschean reflection on a world where specific identities are forced to be true. It should be noted that this nihilistic relativism differs from an acknowledgement of the truth of multiplicity itself, which is Nietzsche's deeper point. First, we accept the nihilistic condition. However, accepting the contingency of identity is radically different to accepting a particular identity as true. *The Leftovers* too makes a claim for metaphysical reality rather than the relativisms of fragmented identities. All its characters desire a passage to the new, the future, or a real world where things make sense again. As Nora says at the end of the first season (S1E10): "There is no going back. No fixing it. I'm beyond repair. Maybe we are all beyond repair…I have to move towards something. Anything."

The metaphysical absence the departure precipitates locks individuals into multiple entrenched identities condemned to a purgatorial cyclic repetition of past mistakes, anxieties, and trauma. There is a reason a *Looney Tunes* episode plays while Jill Garvey attends a house party. Wile E. Coyote's futile cycle of death and rebirth mirrors the perpetual inability of the series' main characters to escape the concrete particularity of their immediate trauma and grief. Jill's experimentation with hedonism foreshadows Kevin Garvey's own ceaseless deaths and rebirths to restore the basic family unit, his sanity, and the social harmony of Mapleton and Miracle (Jarden). Thus, all characters are constrained within particular identities, whether familial, psychological, or tribal, confined between a past 'now' they wish to return to, and a future 'now' they aim to get to. We find clear examples with Laurie Garvey and John Murphy (Kevin Carroll): Laurie in her absorption into the tasks and activism of the Guilty Remnant; John in his frantic vigilantism to ensure Miracle remains the same. The various characters of *The Leftovers* hence find themselves trapped in a particular identity. The departure achieves a world where humans only view themselves in preordained roles and perspectives, incapable of a transformative encounter with the new, as is especially underscored in the absence of departed children. Children function as an avatar of futurity and newness; their loss denotes a world without possibility. Thus, each episode of the first season begins with references to children, and the season closes with the revelation of Laurie's departed foetus.

If the metaphysical absence pervading *The Leftovers* defines the reality of the world, then does this leave the viewer in a state of nihilistic absurdity? For Nietzsche, that there is no ground beneath our feet is simultaneously debilitating and liberating. Liberating, as we are free to adopt any perspectival alternative we choose; debilitating in the sense that existential meaning remains provisional. The latter points lead towards what Nietzsche calls the "ways of self-narcotization." Self-narcotization unleashes the deadening effects of whichever idols we adopt to cope with metaphysical absence. The effect, for all denizens of *The Leftovers*, is anaesthetic rather aesthetic, numbed and present rather than creative. If everything is broken, all that is left is to turn to siloed splinters of opinion, perspective, and tribal entrenchment. As such, the emptiness is not "let be," as the theme song ("Let the Mystery be" by Iris DeMent). Characters, religious and scientific groups all try to name and explain the void. And as Nietzsche suggests, when we attempt to fill the void, we only do so through aping absent gods.

The prison the departure inflicts on the world is one in which opinions, beliefs and identities are all equally valid. It is unclear whether the departed are dead or alive; those who remain are unclear as to whether they are saved or damned. *The Leftovers* challenges us with the null and void itself. Rather than accepting atomisation and entrenchment of identities, the series makes a claim for a discomforting but necessary metaphysical truth. Metaphysical absence haunts characters and intra-dramatic groups with the question of universalism. Those left behind are neither exceptional nor different in their suffering. The affective deadening induced by the departure is no different to any other disappeared population, whether it is those who died in 9/11, the Disappeared of Chile, those lost to Covid-19, or the dead and missing of the Troubles in Ireland. *The Leftovers*' departures reveal that meaning is elsewhere, and is not found in clinging to identity, whether psychological in Kevin's confrontation with himself, provincial in Miracle's desire to preserve its immunity from outside events, or religious in the case of Matt's dogmatic faith.

If the series were nihilistic it would revel in the atomised and insular nature of dissonant identities emerging after the departure. This is not, however, the case. While *The Leftovers* stages the passage from passive to active nihilism, it falls short of advocating nihilism outright. From the beginning, the malaise of an atomised and siloed culture is subverted. However, *The Leftovers* does not adopt the Nietzschean solution. We could not say, for example, that any characters resolve into a serene nihilism, nor is it obvious that Nietzsche's *übermensch* is advocated. So, while *The Leftovers* adopts the Nietzschean diagnosis, it does not adopt the Nietzschean alternative. Here we can see strains of Badiouian philosophy emerge.

Badiou advocates for metaphysical events. In Badiou's ontology, the event is defined by rupture and uncertainty. An event occurs when prevailing customs, convention and opinion are overturned, and subjects become confronted with the possibility of new truths. Politically, for

example, a real event is the presentation of a new solidarity, which announces meaningful equality in opposition to forces of market fragmentation, entrenched identity, competing interests, and political hierarchy.[25] *The Leftovers* also conforms to Badiou's argument about the power of cinema, which he says resides in film's ability to reveal the undecidable. Neither the old or the new, the discontinuous or continuous, tradition or innovation, are given precedence in *The Leftovers*. Instead, for Badiou, cinema operates as an exceptional promise, a promise that we can reconstruct ourselves and our society from the nihilistic fragments we inhabit.[26] *The Leftovers*' Badiouian themes show particularly in the effort to contemplate the metaphysically universal dimension of human experience.

Above the jarring clash of differences, intensive psychological breakdown, and networks of identities, the series entertains the possibility of a real equality.[27] This is not the homogeneity of nihilistic levelling; *The Leftovers* boldly attempts to surpass any fetishization of sectional differences or identitarianism. While this attempted address to universal humanity is, as I will show, only partially successful, *The Leftovers* should be commended for its attempt to transcend the parameters of community, state, location and province. It is not a "matter of geography," as the scientists who blithely patronise Nora say when explaining how the departure affected her disproportionately (S2E2). The point is that Nora is *not* exceptional. What is happening to her is happening to all, hence *The Leftovers*' eerie equality, its optical democracy, to borrow the words of Cormac McCarthy.[28] The series does not revel in a plurality of perspectives; instead, *The Leftovers* grasps that a clash of perspectives is secondary. Real equality must take place in a reconstruction of the new, wherein no one perspective, community or identity may be elevated at the expense of others.

It is important to understand that *The Leftovers*' equality does not indicate any objective social identity *per se*.[29] This equality is not about equality of income, economic status or social capital. Indeed, what is impressive about *The Leftovers* is the way it asserts the undecidable multiplicity of identities, projecting without judgement or preference a universal humanity without entrenchment into fractionalised identities. The emphasis on transformative encounter is shown again and again throughout. No character is defined by their adopted identity. For example, even less sympathetic characters such as Wayne, Meg (Liv Tyler) and Patti (Ann Dowd) are not roundly condemned. Meg grows weary of the bureaucratization of the Guilty Remnant for her own impish terrorism. Tom drifts from cult to cult, eventually finding a place in law enforcement. Laurie moves from successful professional, to cult member, to cult leader, to ex-cult therapist, to her last scene, where she works in a caring capacity. These character trajectories are curiously modernist, demonstrating humans' capacity to reconstruct the new out of fragments of the old.

Furthermore, no character is defined within a specific identity. Identities are contingent and thus may be otherwise. Philosophically, *The Leftovers* is refreshing due to its lack of

resolution and *telos*. The equality of the innumerable perspectives is not cast as a goal to be reached. Instead, the show inaugurates a mysterious equality. The departure reveals a radical equality, transcending differences, communal belonging and the conventions prohibiting characters from glimpsing new, transformative and meaningful encounters. The good can be taken up again and again, irrespective of group affiliation, geographical fate, class alignment or individual preference. Thus, individuals and groups are thought in terms of capacities and powers of renewal rather than in terms of what they are. Such capacities do not belong to anyone particularly, but instead unveil a common fate, a power belonging to anyone.

3. DIVESTED SUBJECTS

The Leftovers' equality is particularly evident in the narrative arcs of Matt and Kevin. What binds them is the emptying of their personal sensibilities towards a universal and generic view of humanity, rather than sinking into nihilistic identitarianism. With each character, we start with a generic type: priest and lawman. Firstly, Matt is Job, a prophet without a prophecy, willing to believe irrespective of the countless tragedies befalling him.[30] Throughout, Matt is divested of his religious subjectivity. The function of Wayne, or "just another asshole who thought he was God" (S1E10), is to sharpen the dramatic effect of Matt's narrative. Wayne revels in prophetic identity, with the power, status and opportunities for sexual gratification it affords him. Matt, in contrast, engages in an incremental divesture of his religious sentiment. When we first see Matt preaching to a sparsely populated church, we observe the word "epiphany" behind him. The message could not be clearer: Matt is turning his back on revelation and realisation, to force the truth of his own religious identity. Matt demonstrates Nietzsche's point about the nihilism of personal immortality, where personal salvation and religious identity are assumed to be momentous when, in fact, religion is just one identity among many. As Christopher Eccleston, when discussing his role as Matt, suggests, the arc of Matt's story depends on his ability to put himself into question, challenge his own ego and sense of self-importance, and undermine his prudery and repression.[31] Throughout, what Matt holds dear is drained, as he becomes undocumented and scapegoated in the second season, loses his family in the final season and, most abjectly, is finally forced into the role of an atheist refuting God.

When Matt finally confronts David Burton (Bill Camp) as God, we have a truly remarkable scene, consistent with *The Leftovers*' effort to transcend recalcitrant perspectives. The scene emphasises the atheist's desire to act as God's confessor, revealing rational atheism as just another perspective. This scene also draws the Heavens to the earth: it depicts God as absolute nihilist, fickle, cruel, filled with malign caprice. "Because I could," he answers when questioned on the reason for the departure (S3E5). Burton confronts Matt with the egotism of

his faith, proposing that Matt's devotion is selfishly motivated. This confrontation is required to stage Matt's secular redemption in his moving final scene with Nora. Finally, Matt is robbed of certainty, moral assuredness and piety. He is no longer overladen with the idiosyncratic burdens of subjectivity, ego, emotion, and sentiment. Instead, he can now serve someone other than himself without recompense; freed from religious tribe, judgment, and sermon, he is there to do, to be, and to reconstruct an undecidable world:

> MATT: How can I ever stand in a room full of people and convince them that I have the answers when I have no idea what the fuck I'm talking about? (S3E8)

The other example of divested subjectivity in *The Leftovers* is Kevin. He is sheriff, lawman, a stern but kind patriarch motivated by returning to the normalcy of the family unit he has betrayed. Essentially, Kevin is a fragile and weak sovereign, epitomised by the paper crown he wears in the opening episode of the third season. Kevin, like Matt, is emptied of his subjective orientation as the series unfolds. Throughout, he is a weakened, brittle version of the stoic, self-reliant lawman, yearning to restore both psychic and social order. Once his psychic order is restored it should follow that worldly disorder would also be neutralized. That the fate of social and political order is synonymous with his own quest for personal salvation reveals the fragility of his self-knowledge. While Matt offers the divesture of religious subjectivity, Kevin's character arc equally offers divestment of the subjectivity and perspective of the stereotypical patriarchal enforcer.

Kevin is submerged in the cyclical trauma of the grief-stricken. Newness is foreclosed because he cannot find a place in the world. At one point his father Kevin Garvey Snr (Scott Glenn) chides his restlessness, "Every man rebels against the idea that this is fucking it…All in search of greater purpose. You have no greater purpose, because *it* is enough" (S1E9). That Kevin struggles against replicating his father's trite conservative advice to "Be thankful for what you got," is a testament to *The Leftovers*' philosophical aspiration to contemplate the unverifiable as a source of wisdom. This is also evidenced by Kevin's fraught moves to new environments such as Miracle and Australia. Like Matt and Nora, what is important is not Kevin's place in the world, but his irreducible placelessness.

Kevin's therapy requires overcoming his sense of self. The dead Patti who haunts Kevin is a version of himself he must put to death. The sovereign must kill the sovereign. In the episode "The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)" (S3E7), Kevin's idealized international assassin twin provides him with the comic fantasy of an all-powerful version of himself, immune to the fragile subjectivity he clings to in waking life. Kevin's cyclical births, deaths and rebirths, manifested most obviously in his plastic bag asphyxiation rituals, show that what he truly seeks is not himself, but the negation of himself. Thus, Kevin's moral authority, political leadership and social privilege is inherently contingent, accentuated by the porosity of his domestic spaces. Kevin's quest for personal

coherence is just one more nihilistic identity or opinion, one wholly disintegrated when he kills his immortal counterpart, an act emphatically marked by the instigation of a nuclear apocalypse against the afterlife, undermining any reconciliation of reality with the destination of the departed. All that remains is effectively his thereness, the sheer fact he exists in the real, with all its attendant possibilities.

What ties Matt, Kevin and Nora together is their salvation from salvation—hence the metaphysical undecidability attached to *The Leftovers*' denouement. Nora, for example, moves from a question of "want[ing] fucking closure" to affirming metaphysical absence by resolving not to communicate with her children after her transmigration to the world of the departed (S3E6). Since children operate as a symbol for futurity, remaining tied to a previously lost future is overcome, allowing other possibilities to manifest. It is only through dissolving the self into concrete acts beyond communal affiliation and attachment that the irredeemable past, present and future become palpable, for everybody and anybody. Grief is neither exceptional, hierarchical nor sacred.

4. EQUALITY WITHOUT HIERARCHY

Throughout *The Leftovers* the question of hierarchy recurs. From the first series' opening credit sequence depicting bodies ascending upwards, to cracks in the road covered in a protective glass box in Miracle, to Kevin's Dante-esque submergence and descent into the underworld with his guide Virgil (Steven Williams), the questions of levels, altitude, depth and tiers are at the forefront of the show's *mises-en-scène*. The philosophical resonance of this visual thematic is interesting as it provides an aesthetic representation of an eerie equality. In *The Leftovers*, ascent and descent are undermined in favour of the mid-level. At the beginning of the second season, we witness an Edenic scene where a rockslide kills a family, forcing a pregnant woman to give birth on her own. She eventually succumbs to a snakebite from below, dying while protecting her baby. While the Biblical resonance is obvious, the philosophical point is more fascinating. Salvation is not found in the depths, nor vertically in the heavens, as framed by the shot of a bird the dying woman witnesses. Renewal is found on the material ground level. The power of this primal scene lies in the tenacity of earth-bound survival. The mother's replacement inaugurates unconditional equality, one not tied to blood, family, place or location, but as enmeshed in the possibilities of a concrete this-worldly solidarity.

The condition of renewal is defined by rootlessness, and thus *The Leftovers* contains a remarkably egalitarian impulse. This aesthetic logic of levels is replicated in other places. We see it in the drone strike that kills Evie (Jasmin Savoy Brown)from above, the earthquake draining the river from below, the nuclear strikes raining down on high and destroying the

immortal realm, the Millerites looking to the Heavens for salvation, and Nora who is submerged in the LADR tech. Most distinctly, the symbology of ladders in the final season highlights this equality. Rather than nihilistic segmentation, ladders draw levels together. The Millerites use ladders to climb to the roofs, Kevin Garvey Snr climbs a ladder to fix equipment, Kevin and Kevin Garvey Snr discuss the non-apocalypse on a roof, the technology Nora uses is called LADR, and there is a ladder in the final shot resting against Nora's house. The final scene (S3E8) also shows birds landing on the middle level, negating depth and ascent, while a goat departs, indicating the departure of the bestial life haunting Kevin throughout. The final scene forcefully makes a philosophical point: it repudiates both overworld and underworld in favour of a material reality pregnant with possibility and renewal. Kevin, now with a pacemaker, in a state of suspension between life and death, acknowledges mortality rather than immortality. Nora relates her forsaking of the suprasensible and otherworldly on her journey to the world of the departed. *The Leftovers* thus makes an ontological and ethical point. The ontological point is that metaphysical absence always can remain a form of thereness. The ethical point is that any effort to remain entrenched in identity misses the blunt reality of common acts of reconstruction and the mixing of perspectives. This perspectival mixing is bluntly underlined in the final episode in the slightly unusual sexual pairing of the nun and the biker and, more directly, in the serene mixture of spiritualism and materialism, science and faith they represent.[32]

For all its philosophical ambition, rejection of hierarchical identity, and insight into the equality of the human condition, there are some elements of *The Leftovers* requiring pause. Kevin and Nora have a meaningful encounter, offering a unique secular ecstasis in the final shot. However, in political terms, the last frame is marked by a retreat to the domestic and private as an evacuation of the political and public. In one sense this is welcome: political opinions can be as entrenched as any other worldview. However, the absence of a political metaphysics is notable. Political life and its representatives are notably nihilistic and homogenous. When government agents assault Wayne's compound in a Waco-esque conflagration they are faceless, dismissive and removed, as we also see with the Government's drone strike on Meg and Evie. In the first season a congressman visiting Wayne to disburden his grief is equally lost. Also, in the first season, the mayor of Mapleton is sullied by the compromises and negotiations of local democratic politics, resorting to the empty rhetoric of gestural commemoration. Governmental responses to the departure are filtered through the actuarial and calculative Department of Sudden Departures (DSD). Essentially, state and political actors are deemed abstract or ineffectual.

That the political world is at a remove from the action elicits questions about class and wealth. Predominantly, the acquisition of money is never really an issue for principal characters. There are some exceptions with less central characters. For example, Virgil, a

suspected sex offender, dwells as an impoverished outcast in a trailer outside Miracle. Also, Christine (Annie Q.) alongside Tom, struggles with new motherhood in the face of poverty, and in Season Three we see Kevin Garvey Sr. scramble to appropriate the spiritual wealth of Australia's less affluent Aboriginal community. Poverty is explained away with a gambling win as Matt struggles to save his church. Nora, herself a bureaucratic functionary, receives financial compensation from the DSD as well as a windfall when her house is purchased by benefactor-scientists. There is only one significant exception to the absence of the political in *The Leftovers,* and that is through the representation of economic disparity of those within and without Miracle's gated community.[33]

Outside Miracle we find a poorer community. Although not necessarily poor in monetary terms, they are certainly poor in terms of the perceived safety, security and spiritual wealth which Miracle offers. This sharp demarcation between inside and outside speaks to many political issues affecting the American *demos* with its portrayal of gated communities, a sheltered class oblivious to the plight of outsiders, immigrants and runners, documented and undocumented, a security and surveillance state with militarized police, and the general paranoia exemplified by John's erratic vigilantism. However, in the eventual overrunning of Miracle by the mob we see a destructive intermingling of classes. Intermingling and common participation is negatively coded as an anarchic and motley feudal mob. The gathering of inner and outer, the blurring of those who belong and do not belong, and the equalising of privilege and scarcity is left as it is. Letting in the mystery thus equates to political passivity. While *The Leftovers* offers compelling aesthetic, ontological and ethical alternatives to nihilism, a political response is somewhat wanting. The series does not illuminate how a multiplicity of identities might be coordinated into newer forms of solidarity or integrated action across different classes, tribal affiliations or political identities.

Despite its struggles in framing political metaphysics, *The Leftovers* does still provide a refreshing reflection on equality. As I have argued, the departure disrupts all hierarchy, leaving the left-behind with a nihilistic levelling of segmented identities and perspectives. This equality is not, however, authentic equality. The equality of nihilistic levelling only offers an appearance of equality, where every idol, perspective and subjective orientation is taken as absolute, and is thus synonymous with substitution for a lost hierarchy. Real equality must be unqualified and unconditioned, concrete, axiomatic and new, there to be taken up perpetually irrespective of to whom it belongs.

Nonetheless, the show does confront an anxiety over sameness and substitution. For example, the replacement of the baby Jesus doll reveals anxiety about a dearth of the sacred. The miraculous Christ-child, supposedly irreplaceable, is as replaceable and expendable as any commodity, which is why we also see the Christ-doll being made alongside dozens of other identical plastic "babies" in a factory production-line. Wayne's interchangeable pregnant

girlfriends also indicate a twisted inversion of spiritual maternity. Kevin too is constantly fretful at the prospect of replicating Kevin Garvey Snr's mental illness, and he ends up directly confronting a twin counterpart. Furthermore, *The Leftovers* continually riffs on prostheses, dolls, simulations, mock-ups and replications. The characters' nihilistic anxiety of sameness saturates the show with a dearth of particularity, a situation where nobody knows who they are, whether they are special or exceptional. Overcoming the anxiety of sameness is essential to *The Leftovers*' ontological and ethical repudiation of nihilism. This is particularly so with the Guilty Remnant's nihilistic levelling.

The Guilty Remnant offers the clearest exemplar of the anxiety of sameness. This striking visual cult unsettles the townsfolk of Mapleton, and latterly Miracle, by confronting their sameness and replicability with Dada-esque agit-prop. The Guilty Remnant's activism advocates sameness. That they all wear white illuminates their adherence to uniformity; that they do not respect boundaries underlines their desire to undercut markers of property, distinction and propriety; that they continually smoke indicates their worship of death as the great leveller. The Guilty Remnant are effectively accelerationist nihilists, attempting to inaugurate the mass suicide of humanity. However, as is common with death-cults, The Guilty Remnant fail to discern any possibility of renewal or transformation. Here, Badiou's distinction between false and true events is instructive.

It would be inaccurate to suggest the departure is the type of political event Badiou has in mind due to his explanation of the difference between a false and true event.[34] For Badiou, a real event is defined as the rupture of the new supervening existing identities. The event does not replicate existing situations; as such, it is new and inexistant.[35] A false event is defined by a counterfeit universalism, where a particular event is assumed to be universal and is conditioned on the continued repetition of a particular past.[36] Hence, The Guilty Remnant's activism remains fundamentally tied to memory. As is typical of death-cults, The Guilty Remnant are reactive, insular and reactionary, offering a façade of authentic equality in the guise of a particular hierarchy. This point is consolidated as they morph into a bureaucratic institution when Meg confronts the limitations of their administrative hierarchy. The Guilty Remnant render the metaphysical point clearer: real equality must demythologize any form of closure, whether psychological, communal or tribal. *The Leftovers* does not prescribe to the hierarchical privilege of any territory, location or identity as an alternative to nihilism. Instead, there is a refreshingly different option: "let[ting] the mystery be," as the theme song exhorts, gestures towards configuring a different type of equality, one unqualified and unconditioned, marked by the palpable possibility of newness, transfiguration and indefatigable resilience, as manifested in Kevin and Nora's final meeting.

CONCLUSION

Distinct from its evangelical pop-culture predecessors, *The Leftovers* uniquely screens a philosophical alternative to nihilism. My overall thesis in this essay is that *The Leftovers*, as a form of film-philosophy, offers a thorough and singular attempt to repudiate nihilism. *The Leftovers* addresses the different facets of nihilism as they relate to the different branches of philosophy. Aesthetically, the departure screens a representation of reality purveyed by metaphysical absence. Existentially, reality *is* absence. The programme screens a thought-experiment as to how individuals, families and social groups respond, overcome, or fail to overcome, the ethical and political malaise precipitated by this ontology—most markedly, as I have argued, in the key characters' divestiture of their own psychological identity. Even if the political dimensions of human existence are left somewhat untouched, with little offered as to how new social systems might emerge, *The Leftovers* still offers a glimpse of an alternative metaphysical life. Metaphysics is the point: the absence of the departure shows how concrete real life always reasserts itself. The programme is remarkable for its commitment to undecidability, disruption and multiplicity, without recourse to cynical self-indulgence, moral sentimentalism or identarian entrenchment. *The Leftovers* performs Nietzsche's reflection on the relativity of perspectives after the death of God. Thus, it depicts the moral and ontological consequences of a relativity of values, identity and perspectives. Thus, *The Leftovers* offers a metaphysical response to moral and epistemological absence, in its effort to construct a new reality, a new equality out of the multiplicity of fragments. Rather than succumbing to the temptations of nihilism—cynicism, hedonism, dogmatism—*The Leftovers* offers a thoughtful reconstruction of psychological, cultural, and traumatic fragments into real, meaningful events and encounters. The philosophical purchase of *The Leftovers* lies in its effort to perform the possibility of the new. And reflecting on absence is key to revealing the show's enduring desire to consider the world anew, as if for the first time. Transfiguration can come into existence even in the worst of all possible worlds. This message tentatively percolates throughout: change is possible, it is not impossible. *The Leftovers*' eerie secular ecstasis is the its primary philosophical achievement, showing how film and television can convincingly and decisively tackle epistemological and moral nihilism.

---

[1] For a thorough account of philosophical nihilism, see Nolan Gertz, *Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

[2] One branch of philosophy I do not address is logic. This would be possible in the context of logical nihilism, that is where all logical propositions are meaningless. However, this would require another article entirely.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will-to-Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1968), 20. Hereafter *WP*.

[4] John Marmysz, *Cinematic Nihilism: Encounters, Confrontations, Overcomings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P, 2017), Introduction, Kindle.

[5] Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 169.

[6] Frampton, *Filmosophy*, 92.

[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 22-24.

[8] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 82-85.

[9] Rebecca Goldstein, "Mattering Matters," *Free Enquiry* 37, no.2 (February-March 2017), https://secularhumanism.org/2017/01/cont-mattering-matters/.

[10] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (Harmondsworth: Penguin 2004), 10-12.

[11] Badiou makes a good fist of showing how Hegel prompted film-philosophical thinking. See Alain Badiou, "Hegel, the Arts and Cinema," *Journal of Continental Philosophy* 1, no.1 (April 2020): 97–116.

[12] Noël Carroll, "Movie-Made Philosophy," in *Film as Philosophy*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 282.

[13] While Badiou and Nietzsche are not aligned philosophically, this does not preclude the possibility of analysing *The Leftovers* as a response to both.

[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181.

[15] Darren Ambrose, *Film, Nihilism and the Restoration of Belief* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), 5.

[16] Kevin Stoehr, *Nihilism in Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 15.

[17] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 23, 168.

[18] See Nietzsche, *WP*, 17-19.

[19] Thomas Hibbs, *Shows about Nothing*: *Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld*. (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999), 148.

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), 164-165.

[21] Nietzsche, *WP*, 267-268.

[22] Sophie Gilbert, "The Brilliant Nihilism of *The Leftovers*," *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/08/the-brilliant-nihilism-of-the-leftovers/375563/.

[23] Nietzsche, *WP*, 19-26.

[24] Nietzsche, *WP*, 12.

[25] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 174-175.

[26] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 219.

[27] Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justice Clemens (London: Continuum, 2005), 53-54.

[28] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 1989), 247.

[29] Alain Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 27.

[30] According to Tom Perrotta, Matt is explicitly a Job figure. Tom Perrotta, "*The Leftovers*' Co-Creator Tom Perrotta on Mysteries, Grief, and Getting Weird with Damon Lindelof," interview by Tom Phillip, *GQ*, April 14, 2017, https://www.gq.com/story/the-leftovers-tom-perrotta-interview.

[31] Christopher Eccleston, "*The Leftovers*' Christopher Eccleston on Matt's Boat Orgy Breakthrough and Why His Character is Actually Damon Lindelof," interview by Ben Travers, *Indie Wire*, May 14, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/05/the-leftovers-christopher-eccleston-interview-matt-is-damon-lindelof-season-3-1201816845/.

[32] In the show's trivia notes, consulting producer Reza Aslan suggests LADR technology is a portable *axis mundi*, "The concept of the LADR is this notion that here is this kind of mystical, supernatural thing - the departure - that is beyond explanation. And yet here is a 'scientific' explanation for it that is as much mystical as it is rational." "*The Leftovers*, The Book of Nora, Trivia," IMBD, accessed March 10, 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5338044/trivia.

[33] Having watched the second season of *The Leftovers* in January 2021, the overrunning of Miracle bore striking resemblance to the storming of the US Capitol by an insurrectionary mob on 6 January 2021. The producers and creators should be commended for diagnosing nascent strains of political rebellion within the US demos.

[34] Interestingly, for Badiou, evil confuses an event with a simulacrum of the event. Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 73.

[35] Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 83.

[36] For a good summary of Badiou on evil see Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 263.

WE WILL NOT RECOVER FROM SCEPTICISM UNLESS WE AIM TO THE EXISTENTIAL: EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND POPULAR MUSIC IN *THE LEFTOVERS*[*]

Enric Burgos (University of Valencia and Jaume I University)

INTRODUCTION

The Leftovers (HBO, 2014-2017) presents us with the various human reactions to the "sudden departure" of 2% of the world population. Some refuse to accept what happened and face its consequences, a few try desperately to find an explanation for the event, others prefer turning the page anyway and some others just make everyone remember the day everything changed. Almost all of them, however, are at odds with the situation and show their problems in order to live with uncertainty.

The series' storyline offers itself to be read alongside Stanley Cavell's approaches to scepticism. It is not in vain that the characters of the show are involved in the difficult task of acknowledging the truth scepticism can teach us, namely, that our relationship with the world, with the other minds and with ourselves is not to be understood in epistemological terms but in existential ones. In parallel, *The Leftovers* places its audience in a similar position. If we want to enter into therapeutic dialogue with the series we have to abandon our obsession with certainty and continue watching (and living) in the presence of doubt.

Within the dual possibility of recovering from scepticism via the *pathos* that *The Leftovers* presents to both its characters and its viewers, the series' soundtrack plays a fundamental role. Three reasons impel us to focus our study on the music of the show and, more specifically, on popular songs which have been included: first, the overwhelming presence of pop songs throughout the show's three seasons; secondly, the will to give the aural the place it deserves in the analysis of the audio-visual and to value its contribution to philosophical reflection; and thirdly, the special link the series establishes with pop culture through these tunes.

Therefore, our writing aims at two main goals: making explicit those which we consider the main links that can be found between *The Leftovers* and Cavell's point of view on scepticism and moving image and, primarily, explaining different ways in which the inclusion of pop songs in the TV series supports (and contributes to) that reading in Cavellian fashion. In doing so, we will analyse a series of passages that are particularly relevant for our purposes,

paying special attention to those in which pop songs best show their expressive potential in relation to the images they go with.

The structure of our essay will be as follows: first, we will offer a general overview of Cavell's considerations on scepticism, including some remarks on the ontology of the moving image and the two movie genres the philosopher focused his *readings* on. Then, we will proceed with the analysis of the selected scenes, which will be carried out in three separate sections. The first one will deal with the question of self-knowledge by following the evolution of the main character and focusing mostly on Season Two. The second section will draw attention to the relationship between Nora (Carrie Coon) and Kevin (Justin Theroux) with a special emphasis on Season Three. We will evaluate their obstacles towards acknowledgement, their separation and final reunion. In third place, we will examine the peculiar bond the show establishes with its audience. Finally, we will summarize the main contributions of our article in the conclusions.

CAVELL'S APPROACHES TO SCEPTICISM

According to Stanley Cavell, modern scepticism constitutes a new version of the constant human desire to deny its humanity. Notwithstanding, there is a substantial difference between modern and earlier scepticism: "The issue posed is no longer, or not alone, as with earlier skepticism, how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world. Our skepticism is a function of our now illimitable desire."[1] After God's death and the advent of the so-called new science, the *ethos* characterizing the old approaches to scepticism is substituted by a theoretic perspective. Thus, the modern desire to obtain an objective proof of existence aside from our experience sets out the Cartesian obsession with the requirement of certainty that traditional philosophy will take on. Moreover, this same desire is found in the pointless attempt to refute scepticism that ends up succumbing to it. Yet for Cavell scepticism is not only a philosophical problem but also a problem related to the way we experience our human condition in our day-to-day lives[2] and a problem casting reflections on our culture's diverse manifestations.

As claimed by the author, the sceptical scenario shows three interrelated faces: scepticism about the external world,[3] about the other minds[4] and about the self. With regard to scepticism about the external world, Cavell maintains that "the presentness achieved by certainty of the senses cannot compensate for the presentness which had been elaborated through our old absorption in the world"[5] and that "we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for *claiming* something to be so."[6] In Heideggerian fashion, Cavell offers a diagnosis of the modern condition that helps us appreciate our disconnection with the world: "Our condition has become one in which our natural mode of perception is to view, feeling unseen. We do not so much look at the world as look *out at* it, from behind the

self."[7] Conceiving the world as an object and excluding the subject from the knowledge of its ordinary reality lead to a gap between the individual and the world that cannot be bridged rationally. Moreover, the subject who views himself outside the world as a whole evades his responsibility of acting on the world and avoids the commitment to his finiteness, escaping from his human condition.

Considering the problem of the other minds, we find a similar epistemological difficulty. The individual's intention to obtain a knowledge of the others which is similar to the one he has of his own states results in the disconnection from them. In such a situation, "we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him."[8] This avoidance of the other (and the avoidance of revealing oneself to the others) goes hand in hand with the side of scepticism that affects the self: "the surmise that I have not acknowledged about others, hence about myself, the thing there is to acknowledge, that each of us is human, is not, first of all, the recognition of a universal human condition, but first of all a surmise about myself."[9] The individual's conscience remains in its insularity, in that isolation that subjectivity provides and that leaves the human creature closed in its privacy, unknown and unacknowledged.

Scepticism therefore means denying our ordinary forms of life,[10] a state of complete unfamiliarity with the world,[11] an installation in the false ordinary's damaged relationships which drowns out the human voice both in academic philosophy and in our everyday life. This is why Cavell proposes the return to the authentic ordinary as the way to recover from the life we have inherited under the conditions of scepticism and regain human confidence in autonomous existence in community. Nevertheless, this way back home is only possible if we accept the truth scepticism can teach us, i. e., that our connection to the world, the others and ourselves is not a function of knowledge.[12] Indeed, the ordinary can be embraced through experiential and existential approach and not through epistemological effort or intellectual means. We can consider then the *two faces of scepticism*: on the one hand, it implies a *threat* but, at the same time, it serves an *impulse* to restore the ordinary connections that let us recover from scepticism itself.

This recovery entails an acceptance of the world and its uncertainties, a will to introduce ourselves in the mystery of the world's existence,[13] as the world is not to be known but lived. In parallel, we can mend the gap between ourselves if we let the *pathos* guide us. In other words, it is not enough to know the others and their circumstances; we must do or reveal something in the face of that knowledge, we must respond (with responsibility) to our fellow human beings. Or, as Cavell would say: "The world is to be *accepted*; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged." [14] My acknowledgement of the others (as well as the acknowledgement I get from them) is intimately related to the achievement of selfhood: "Without following our own thinking, we cannot know the minds of others. And without following the thinking of others, we cannot know our own minds, cannot have conviction in our

thoughts, cannot claim them as our own." [15] Not coincidentally, Cavell's perfectionist considerations suggest that self-knowledge can be understood as that kind of acknowledgement of myself I can reach by taking myself as other, by being able to cope with the uncanniness of a self-distanced perspective which can guide me to learn something new about myself—which can drive me from the *mourning* of the dead self to the *morning* of the new one.[16] But, despite these chances of recuperation, it is worth noting that in the opinion of Cavell scepticism cannot be erased once for all and we are called to continuously accept the presence of doubt. [17] Consequently, our recoveries from scepticism are never an ultimate overcoming of it and we are destined to *cyclic* renewals that allow us to live with scepticism without living in it.

Cavell's diverse approaches to moving image are closely related to his views on scepticism and moral perfectionism. What is more, we can hardly dissociate his philosophical investigation from his study on the moving image and readings of films, as both interests often interweave in his writings. In the light of considering this fact as well as the use of some Cavellian notions we will make later, we find it convenient to add some brief reflections about the link between the ontology of the moving image and scepticism as well as some remarks on what the author names *comedies of remarriage* and *melodramas of the unknown woman*.

According to Cavell, photography and cinema are able to preserve the world's presentness without representing it by virtue of their automatism. So, photography and cinema seem to satisfy the "wish for the power to reach this world,"[18] the "wish for the world re-created in its own image."[19] However, this does not solve the problem of reality at all but brings it to some ultimate head "since the connection is established by putting us the condition of 'viewing unseen', which establishes the connection only at the price of establishing our absolute distance and isolation. And this is exactly the price of skepticism."[20] To rephrase it, film leaves us, as viewers, in the same position as the subject of the sceptical scenario who looks out at the world from behind the self. This is what makes Cavell maintain: "Film is a moving image of skepticism: not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist—even alarmingly, because it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes."[21]

Hence, film holds the world at a distance from the viewer and continually questions its reality, but can we speak about television in similar terms? And, moreover, is it legitimate to follow Cavell's studies on film in reading television series? The philosopher's exploration of the differences between film and television seem to deny that possibility. While the author calls the material basis of movies "a succession of automatic world projections" which is connected to the *viewing* mode of perception, he characterizes the material basis of television as "a current of simultaneous event reception" and links it to the *monitoring* mode of perception.[22] Our attempt to read *The Leftovers* in the light of Cavell's approaches to films becomes complicated if we consider that, for him, the serial procedure is undialectical[23] and the format appears to be

crucial: "My claim about the aesthetic medium of television can now be put this way: its successful formats are to be understood as revelations (acknowledgements) of the conditions of monitoring, and by means of a serial-episode procedure of composition, which is to say, by means of an aesthetic procedure in which the basis of a medium is acknowledged primarily by the format rather than primarily by its instantiations."[24]

Throughout "The Fact of Television" Cavell presents arguments like these in order to support the assertion made in the first paragraphs of the article: "Certainly I have been among those who have felt that television cannot have come of age, that the medium must have more in it than that has so far been shown."[25] Now, forty years after the writing's publication, we are moved to think that the medium has come of age, that certain television series stand for the emergence of something new as television and that they can be treated as unitary works of art, comparable in their form and function to films or novels.[26] As Martin Shuster says: "[R]oughly with *Twin Peaks*, film and television become intertwined historically and aesthetically in ways that suggest a novel medium, a medium that combines elements—automatisms—of each (…) Noting the connections between these media is the best way to set up an elaboration of the genre of 'new television'."[27] Those are the main reasons why the author takes the challenge of reading some television shows (which are representative of the mode of "new television"[28]) through Cavell's point of view on films. We will follow Shuster's example and keep our goal of dealing with *The Leftovers* in Cavellian fashion by referring occasionally to some ontological questions the show raises and mainly, by establishing connections between the television series and Cavell's remarriage films and melodramas of the unknown woman.[29]

Considering firstly remarriage comedies, the most salient characteristic of this genre of movies (and what drives its plots) is the couple's reunion after being separated.[30] According to Michael Fischer,[31] we can identify the five main plot elements that are shared by the films constituting the genre: 1) the dispute between man and woman, 2) the present threat of divorce/separation (the sceptical disconnection that menaces the couple), 3) man and woman's individual metamorphosis (their respective self-knowledge achievements), 4) the conversation that leads to mutual acknowledgement (which happens away from the city and far from interferences[32]) and 5) the restoration of the relationship under a new perspective (and in a non-ultimate way[33]).

Melodramas of the unknown woman also explore the question of what it is to constitute a marriage, but this second genre manifests the dark side of remarriage comedies.[34] In fact, the defining features of remarriage films are negated systematically by these melodramas.[35] The main negation in melodramas affects marriage itself, as it is not re-conceived and provisionally affirmed but transcended.[36] The couple in melodramas cannot solve their differences in the way the protagonists of the comedies do. Their past "is frozen, mysterious, with topics forbidden and isolating"[37] and their present is not much different. Their verbal interchanges are not real

conversations (those conversations that lead to conversion) since they, in denying one another, do not speak the same language.[38] The man is unable to face transformation—to get into the dynamics of mutual education marriage can imply—and the woman realises that her claim for acknowledgement cannot be satisfied by the man.[39] As a result, the woman takes her private torments as the means of providing humanity with a further perspective of herself.[40] She acknowledges her isolation and unknownness and she traces her new identity on her own, she metamorphoses outside marriage.

But the recovery from scepticism that Cavell finds in these both genres is not restricted to their protagonists' journey in the film. Following the main characters throughout the path that takes them from sceptical disconnection to recovery, the viewer is offered the chance to get out from his isolation and inhabit the world in a different way. Of course, this does not just happen after watching a remarriage comedy or a melodrama of unknownness, but every time a film (or, why not, a TV series) encourages us to be enriched by the personal experience of watching and *reading* it. Each film presents its particular way to move us and stimulates us to discover it without neither forgetting the film itself nor our own and inalienable experience of it.[41] In other words, film and viewer engage in a therapeutic conversation where the film plays the role of a friend or mentor that impels the viewer to find for himself his own route to self-knowledge and self-realization.

KEVIN'S HALFWAY TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Since the pilot episode (S1E1) Kevin Garvey is presented as a lost person with difficulties in emotionally handling his life and the post-October 14 world. The Guilty Remnant (GR) challenges him as a police chief who has to ensure the order of his community in the face of the chaos that the sect intends to spread. But the GR soon stands as a symbol of everything Kevin is going through, and not just professionally. His fight against the GR becomes more and more personal until it gets materialised in the figure of Patti Levin (Ann Dowd), who embodies Kevin's darkest part he will have to deal with. This becomes more apparent when, after kidnapping Patti in his confused state of sleepwalking (S1E8), Kevin admits something is wrong inside him and the confrontation with himself is unleashed.

After burying Patti, Kevin begins hallucinating conversations with her (S1E10). Patti's ghost becomes a kind of "other self" Kevin will have to get along with. These conversations are strongly characterized by uncanniness. It is not just because of the unearthly apparitions of a dead person, but also due to the above-mentioned uncanniness involved in the act of facing the self as other and by reason of the disturbing revelations Patti makes to Kevin. That is the case of the two scenes in which Patti discloses Kevin's attempt to kill himself and tries to make him reflect on the way it contradicts his so-called love for his family (S2E4). Both scenes include

fragments of Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" that are sung a cappella by Patti: "I just wanna tell you how I'm feeling / Gotta make you understand / Never gonna give you up / Never gonna let you down / Never gonna run around and desert you." Apart from affixing another disconcerting element to the scenes, the song highlights Kevin's impossibility to simply get rid of Patti. He will have to face himself as ineluctably split or doubled and to accept his way to self-knowledge's endless condition, that is, his perpetual quest of the (Emersonian) *unattained* but *attainable* self.[42] While in these scenes the sense of menace to Kevin's present self prevails, he will end up appreciating the loving chance (just as loving as the song's lyrics) the challenge of self-transformation (of death and resurrection) implies.

Two episodes earlier (S2E2), the song "Where Is My Mind?" had already linked Kevin's uneasiness and frustration to the inner struggle he settles through his confrontation with Patti's ghost. The dreamlike and surreal atmosphere in which we are immersed by the verse (and by the question the song title formulates and the chorus repeats) brings us closer to Kevin's insane confusion and loss of control. As The Pixies song is playing an extraordinary montage sequence shows the main character contemplating the devastated Mapleton, his vain attempts to repair the washing machine, flashes of Patti's last hours and burial and Kevin's purchase of the shovel he unearths Patti's body with. The intense bridge that links the chorus with the verse (the moment of greatest instrumental chaos and noisiness in the song) underscores Kevin's driving: he sees a police car entering the road which he overtakes to recklessly run the risk of being accused of carrying a corpse.

The next episode (S2E3) will recur to the same melody—this time in an instrumental version—to go beyond the specific case of Kevin and extend its scope to the respective struggles faced by other characters in the series. A new montage sequence built around Maxence Cyrin's piano performance of "Where Is My Mind?" shows Laurie (Amy Brennman) writing her book on the GR and her (along with Tommy's) efforts to reintegrate former cult members. The slow tempo of the song (*andante*), the use of *rubato*, the *dolce* character and the rich timbre of the piano exploit the expressive potential of the original composition and offers us a different face of the musical theme. The two performances (The Pixies/Cyrin) respectively illustrate the *threat* of scepticism and the *impulse* it involves if we acknowledge its truth. The lyrical variations Cyrin includes in the verse's chord progression provide the climax of this kind and sweet version. Not by chance, this fragment is made to coincide with ex-GR Susan's emotional reunion with her son and husband.

Both versions of the music theme will be concatenated in perfect continuity in a couple of later scenes (S2E7). While Cyrin's cover sets the conversation between Kevin and Laurie about Tommy (Chris Zylka) in Jarden, the original song by The Pixies goes along again with Kevin driving in a hurry and looking for John (Kevin Carroll), who will in turn take his fingerprints and end up incriminating Kevin in the disappearance of Evie (Jasmin Savoy Brown). The

juxtaposition of the two performances dwells on the *two faces of scepticism*, this time by illustrating Kevin's contradictory urges: on the one hand, his desire to assume his responsibilities as a family man—*his search for home*—which can be connected with the *impulse* to recovery that scepticism implies if we acknowledge the truth it teaches us. On the other, Kevin's drive to flee and his self-destructive tendency—*his running away from home*—that relates to the despair in which scepticism throws us if we just take it as a *threat*. In any case, both divergent needs are entirely human since "it is natural to the human to wish to escape the human."[43] Similarly, we could add that the search for home and the running away from it are equally a part of our human condition. After all, "[w]e are (…) in relation to the ordinary both at home and not home; it is uncanny."[44] As we are about to see, Kevin's two propensities will be soon more explicit with his comings and goings to purgatory.

Kevin's first journey to the afterlife hotel (S2E8) culminates in his murder of the little girl Patti. As David Burton (Bill Camp) tells Kevin on the bridge, he will not be the same after killing her. From that point onwards, the main character will not face himself through Patti's ghost in the world of the living but through his trips to the afterlife hotel, where he will go on interacting with Patti as his other self—though Kevin will also have to deal with different versions of himself in the realm of the undead. That purgatory is a place for Kevin to hideaway and avoid his responsibilities but, at the same time, a place where he is able to find himself and experience the need to resuscitate and come back to life renewed, transformed (to put it in another way, *his need to return home*). This is the wish he expresses during his second stay at the mysterious hotel (S2E10). After being shot by John, Kevin visits the realm of the undead again, where Burton encourages him to sing at the karaoke to fulfil his will of going back. Dressed as Garvey, the Police Chief of Mapleton—and not as the international assassin Harvey, like last time—the main character accepts the illogical (stupid, nonsensical, even humiliating) challenge of singing to come back to his family. It is an emotional and existential urge that makes him act, that makes him sing and stay alive. This action frees him from the burden of doubt and gets him closer to the world he is interacting with, no matter how fake it can be. As long as he is (inter)acting, that world is, at least to a certain extent, real for him. And this perspective which acknowledges that our existence, our thoughts and actions are embedded in a shared world is precisely the one that allows us to stop conceiving scepticism as a mainly epistemological problem.[45]

Simon & Garfunkel's "Homeward Bound" starts to play. After the first chorus, the close-ups of an uncomfortable and nervous Kevin are mixed with flashes from previous episodes that match perfectly with the lyrics of the song. The words "Every day's an endless stream / Of cigarettes and magazines" are sung by Kevin while editing juxtaposes a shot of the main character secretly smoking and an image of the volume of *National Geographic* Kevin Garvey, Sr. (Scott Glenn) gave to his son. When Kevin pronounces "I'll play the game and pretend" a

shot of the party in honour of Kevin Garvey, Sr. (S1E9) reminds us of a family that no longer exists together with deteriorated relationships and pretence that Kevin must abandon to move forward. Holding back his tears and sniffling, Kevin faces the last chorus of the song: "...I need someone to comfort me. / Homeward bound / I wish I was / Homeward bound / Home, where my thought's escapin' / Home, where my music's playin' / Home, where my love lies waitin' / Silently for me". As soon as he finishes singing this last line, a brief close up of a smiling Nora with wet eyes fills the screen.

Kevin wakes up and goes to Erika's nursery. When John arrives, he cannot believe Kevin is not dead. While cleaning Kevin's wound, John confesses in tears: "I don't know what's happening". The first quiet notes of Cyrin's version of "Where Is My Mind?" start sounding and the main character replies: "Me neither." John's nervous crying contrasts with Kevin's quietness and the louder piano riff of the song provides the emotional approach to the overwhelming moment. While the chorus is playing, John and Kevin are on their way back home. The tune concludes when John opens his home's main door, remarking the aforementioned dual use of the song to underline despair and to illustrate moments in which the way out to that despair is glimpsed.

In the beginning of the series, Kevin tried to be the incarnation of law and order (as police chief, as father of a family), he wanted to stay away from his father's insanity and could not accept his own mental problems. After confronting himself through Patti's ghost and his two visits to purgatory, the protagonist is on his way to face his situation in other terms. The last two commented scenes accentuate Kevin's ongoing self-renewal. First, he has been able to break his logical barriers and take the ridiculous challenge of singing at the karaoke (to keep on living, because he *deserves* to do so). Then, he has shown no stress at all when admitting he does not *know* what is happening before John. Kevin is not so much repressing his darkest part but trying to come to terms with his "other self" and he seems to be unblocking his *pathos* and taking responsibility for his claims. To put it another way, the main character is starting to walk the perfectionist path which entails "an expression of disgust and disdain for the present state of things so complete as to require not merely reform, but a call for transformation of things, and before all a transformation of the self."[46]

The recurrent appearance of "Where Is My Mind?" throughout the second season can also be associated with the *cyclic condition of scepticism* we suggested above, that is, with the periodical efforts of recovery we are destined to make since it is not possible to overcome scepticism once for all. Those circles drawn by "Where Is My Mind?" are similar to the ones traced by the theme "Departure" and its variations, which not only accompany the scenes where the big trauma of October 14 is recalled and many others where we witness the little deaths of scepticism but also those moments that aim to the hope of recovery. The rhyme between the piano version of "Where Is My Mind?" and "Departure" is highlighted when the latter is used to

close the circle of season two with Kevin's arrival to his place. Max Richter's theme is heard when Kevin raises his eyes to realise his "big family" is in the house. Just one panning shot shows Jill, Laurie, Matt and a recovered Mary, Tommy and Lily and finally Nora, who walks towards him and says: "You're home." A reverse shot depicts Kevin's reaction, a mixture of laughing and crying that portrays the same ambivalence we have noticed in both songs.

Both Season One and Two end up with Kevin coming back home after disorder and confusion—i. e., the riot against the GR resulting in the cult-like organization's houses having been set on fire (S1E10) and the GR's infiltration in Miracle (Jarden) with subsequent chaos and destruction by the outsiders (S2E10). The two season finales offer us big reasons to include *The Leftovers* in the genre that Shuster terms "new television." According to the author, the thematic mode of these series "exhibit a contemporary world as entirely emptied of normative authority" in which "the institution of the family consistently appears exempt from (…) such a portrayal."[47] In fact, "family (but not thereby a traditional one) is presented and explored as a symbolic site for worldly renewal and possibility"[48], as "an *alternative* to or a replacement for 'society at large'"[49]. *The Leftovers*' alignment with this thematic mode allows us to establish a first general link between the show and Cavell's remarriage comedies with the help of Shuster's argumentation[50]: both share the aim of commenting upon the social bond and presenting a "further instance of experimentation in consent and reciprocity,"[51] both remark that "community remains possible even when the authority of society is denied us."[52] In this sense, we could understand *The Leftovers* as moved by the same wish that Cavell appreciates in films: "[Movies] unappeasable appetite for stories of love is for stories in which love, to be found, must find its own community, apart from, but with luck still within, society at large; an enclave within it; stories in which society as a whole, and its laws can no longer provide or deny love."[53]

LOVE IN THE TIME OF DEPARTURE: NORA AND KEVIN'S JOURNEY FROM AVOIDANCE TO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The way to self-knowledge is not one to be made on one's own[54] and so, Kevin looks for support in several characters through his pursuit for transformation. Among them, Nora occupies a special place. They first meet as outsiders at the Christmas Ball (S1E4) and encounter each other by chance at the courthouse, where both are filing for divorce (S1E6). After a real first date which is interrupted by the GR (S1E7), Kevin invites Nora for dinner with Jill (Margaret Qualley) and Aimee (Emily Meade) (S1E8). But Kevin's troubled mind does not leave much space for devoted love and Nora does not seem to be in a better position. Her obsession to know the truth about the departure and discover what happened to her children—and the painful impossibility of mourning for them, as they are not dead but gone—leads her to

the decision of leaving Mapleton and writing a farewell letter to Kevin (S1E10). After finding Lily at the porch, she stays and her feelings expressed in the letter remain unknown to Kevin.

They blindly forge ahead with the recently-adopted Lily and Jill, trying to begin a new life in Jarden (S2E1). But this attempt of a fresh start is not accompanied by the determination of being honest to each other, of relying on (and being reliable to) the other. And when Kevin opens himself to Nora by confessing his hallucinations (S2E7), she leaves with Mary and Lily (S2E8). It seems that it is mainly the chaos caused by the GR in Jarden—in a similar way to what happened in Mapleton at the end of Season One—that sees them meet again at home (S2E10).

Things look better for them at the beginning of Season Three. Kevin appears to be a cornerstone of his family and community again. He is the police chief in Jarden and Nora has returned to work as a Department of the Sudden Departure agent. However, Kevin is still on his uneasy way to find himself—this time trying to handle with the messianic attributes that Matt (Christopher Eccleston), John and Tommy project on him—and Nora has not got over her unrest and dissatisfaction, even less after Lily's comeback with her biological mother. As in Season One and Two, Kevin and Nora go on behaving like the couples in the melodramas of unknownness. They still have not realised that "[i]t is (…) the logic of human intimacy (…) that to exchange understanding with another is to share pain with that other, and that to take pleasure from another is to extend that pleasure."[55] The scene in which Nora discovers Kevin's awkward asphyxiating rituals (S3E2) is especially eloquent of the couple's unchanged mistrust. It is not just that Kevin needs to do so and keep it in secret; there is also Nora's tattoo and its heart-breaking backstory—which she does not share with him—as well as Kevin's (naïve, or even clumsy) proposal of having a child and Nora's (funny, or even insulting) reaction. And above all, there is their reciprocal pretending of happiness, their avoidance and their insistence on being unknown to the other.

All of this triggers in Melbourne (S3E4) where Kevin travels to with Nora, without really knowing about her intentions in relation to the machine that supposedly reunites the remnants with those departed. Nora seems to overcome her rational boundaries, not for the sake of the relationship but for her individual aspiration of finding her children with the help of that mysterious device. In the same fashion, Kevin is absorbed by his personal disorder, which now includes hallucinatory visions of Evie. A-ha's song "Take On Me" and its variations underscore those non-shared particular purposes of both Nora and Kevin and connect them to their break-up. The first time we hear the song is in Nora's arrival at the abandoned warehouse where she meets the physicists that work on the radioactive machine project. As she climbs the stairs, one of the physicists is playing the initial keyboard riff of the song on a grand piano. Some minutes later, the non-diegetic Genghis Barbie's French horns cover of the hit sounds as the images show the respective private concerns of Nora and Kevin. Again, the riff from the opening

accompanies Nora, this time while she gets into the box that imitates the real transporting device. The editing juxtaposes the closing of the box's lid with Kevin's opening of the library doors on his search for Evie at the precise moment the song's verse starts. Similarly, the beginning of the chorus is marked with a new shot—a rotary zenithal one that emphasizes Kevin's disorientation.

Working as a sort of catalysis,[56] both versions of "Take On Me" anticipate the couple's fighting that will end up in Kevin's leaving and the couple's separation. The dispute in the hotel room raises Kevin's fear to tell Nora about his latest visions and clearly sets out that Nora is still stuck in her family's departure and expected some reaction from Kevin when Lily was taken away from them. Yet, first and foremost, the scene makes it self-evident there is no proper communication between them. In other words, there is not—and there has not been—any place for that kind of real *con-versation* which leads to *con-version*. As we said before when referring to the couples in the melodramas of unknownness, they are far from reaching the mutual education that the protagonists of the remarriage comedies achieved.

On stepping through the hotel's door, Kevin finds his father, who convinces him to get in Grace's truck. We can hear the introductory drum loop of the original song by A-ha. Inside the vehicle, Kevin looks skyward through a window full of rain drops. Once more, the beginning of the keyboard riff coincides with a shot of Nora, sat in the room's bed. She is smoking, the fire-fighting devices are pouring water all over the room and the lights go out. While the smoke drives us to the GR's hopelessness, the water—often associated in *The Leftovers* with death and resurrection—and the cheerful tune makes us wonder: Will it ultimately be the end of the relationship?

The years go by and the older Kevin and Nora re-meet in a rural Australian town (S3E8). Kevin invites Nora to go to a local dance with him. Confused and angry because he seems unable to remember anything of their common past apart from the time they met at the Christmas Ball, Nora rejects the invitation at first but finally turns up at the dance, which in fact is a wedding celebration. While she looks for Kevin in the crowd, Robin Trower's sunny "I'm Out to Get You" is being played: "I'm out to get you / Create a disturbance in your mind / I've been sent to select you / From another place in time / It's gonna be something new / And you better not hesitate / For the first time in your life / You can celebrate". By the time they make eye-contact, the song's chorus lets us hear: "Close your eyes / count to ten / Make a wish and we'll be there / Turn around, and maybe then / Your whole life can start again". Though the optimistic words of the song, Kevin's persistence in negating the past blocks Nora's receptiveness. This is especially obvious towards the end of the scene. Nora and Kevin dance to Otis Redding's "I've Got Dreams to Remember" in tears. Beyond the fact the song talks about separation and longing for reunion, it delivers us back to the previous time in the series when it was heard: the couple's dinner with Jill and Aimee, namely, Kevin's first attempt to form a

family with Nora and one of the memories he now pretends to erase along with the rest of the experiences they went through together. As Nora cannot stand Kevin's lies, she decides to go away.

Next day, Kevin comes back to Nora's place and reveals the truth: he could not believe she was dead and, as Kevin says, "I had to do something about it," so he has been searching for her all these years. That is to say, he had to *act* according to what he believed and what he felt towards her, he had to *respond* consequently. Kevin's visceral sincerity is welcomed by Nora this time. She tells him she was transported where all the departed live and found her family: "They were all smiling. They were... happy. And I understood that, here, in this place, they were the lucky ones. In a world full of orphans, they still had each other." Unlike Nora and Kevin and almost everyone in the world where the departed were a minor part of the population, they had moved on by leaning on each other, by triggering the *pathos* that allows living in the face of scepticism. Nora felt she did not belong there, so she came back. When Nora finishes her story, she states she did think about Kevin and want to be with him, but she adds: "And I knew that if I told you what happened… that you would never believe me." And Kevin responds: "I believe you." At that moment, the theme "Departure" fades in slowly, this time showing its brightest side, the one that serves acknowledgement and reconciliation. Kevin no longer allows the past determine the meaning of what is happening at the moment[57]: "Why wouldn't I believe you? You're here." They hold each other's hand, crying and smiling at the same time and Nora replies: "I'm here."

Nora and Kevin spent many years together, but they never got to *speak the same language*,[58] they were not able to let themselves matter to each other.[59] They refused to know and to be known, they avoided acknowledgement; they were an expression of scepticism.[60] Now things have changed, they both have come to terms with themselves and they are ready to accept human relatedness and repetition,[61] prepared to live the "further instance of experimentation in consent and reciprocity"[62] that reunion after separation offers. At last, they are able to keep that crucial conversation which involves *empathic projection*[63] and leads to the overcoming of the gap between themselves. We could say, this conversation allows them to leave aside the unknownness that marked their past and to embrace a new perspective, such as happens to the couples in the remarriage comedies: "The conversation of what I call remarriage is (…) of a sort that leads to acknowledgement; to the reconciliation of a genuine forgiveness; a reconciliation so profound as to require the metamorphosis of death and revival, the achievement of a new perspective on existence; a perspective that presents itself as a place, one removed from the city of confusion and divorce."[64] It is never too late, and they both can finally abandon *mourning* and dive together into the light of a new *morning*.

THE CHALLENGE TO THE VIEWER

The present section will try to explore the kind of experience *The Leftovers* provides its spectator. Although we have so far offered some hints of this—our previous readings imply a personal reaction to (and interpretation of) certain aspects of the TV series—we will now further explore the sort of relationship *The Leftovers* attempts to keep with its audience. As before, the role of popular music in the show and the Cavellian insights about film and scepticism will guide our examination.

In a broad sense, it can be said *The Leftovers* entails a challenge to the audience. Its narrative is far from the conventional causal-chain we find in the hegemonic audio-visual order. Unmarked leaps in time, hallucinatory episodes, dreams and other difficult-to-locate passages are mixed together while the information supplied to the viewer remains deliberately incomplete. All of this results in an epistemologically confusing experience which is, at the same time, an intriguing and emotionally engaging one. This is just one way of expressing the shocking dynamics of estrangement/closeness that, as we will see, the series establishes with its audience at several levels and by different means. We will understand these dynamics as an expression of (or better said, as an extension of) the sceptical scenario moving image displays to its audience. Certainly, every "succession of automatic world projections" presents us with a mysterious combination of real and fantastic elements and throws us to the enigmatic specificity of cinematic experience, one that we do not know how to place ontologically.[65] But some audio-visual works (as *The Leftovers*) specially foster our doubts between taking the projection on the screen as an image of the world or as something real and invite us to regard our day-to-day world in order to give sense to the world on the screen. In that regard, we will take these dynamics of estrangement/closeness as a way of emphasizing the dialectics of scepticism the moving image reproduces, as a way of highlighting the necessary intervention of the viewer to put together the bits of the world *The Leftovers* gives him[66]—to shape the world he is viewing on the screen.

The bond the viewer builds with the main character can offer an example of what we have just maintained. Identifying with Kevin is not an easy movement. Obviously, he is not the hero we can effortlessly attach to: his mental problems and troubled temper, his strange behaviour and our partial lack of knowledge about him drive us to a peculiar bond with Kevin. Let us return to one of the songs we have already discussed in order to depict how it sheds light on this curious link. As said above, the first time we hear The Pixies' "Where Is My Mind?" in the aforementioned montage sequence (S2E2) we associate the cryptic and lysergic words of the verse and the plainer meaning of the question repeated in the chorus to Kevin's confusion. But, at the same time, the lyrics can also be referring to our own feelings as viewers before the passage since we are as disoriented as Kevin. Like in many other cases in the show, not-

knowing is what connects us with him, that is, we identify with Kevin in perplexity. Moreover, if we consider what we previously stated—namely, that the recurrence of the tune in its different versions makes this uncertainty extensive to several characters and situations—we can also contemplate perplexity as a main factor in the audience's engagement with the story itself.

Before skipping to the next song, we would like to add some remarks on the same excerpt. The way "Where Is My Mind?" is displayed in the sequence reinforces the audience's disconcert with a trick that is recurrent throughout the series. The first shots make us think of the music as non-diegetic (or extra-diegetic), but shortly after, a tight shot of Kevin's earphones suggests an internal auricularisation[67] sustained until the action moves to the motorway. Once there, Kevin is driving his car with no earphones, so we can be pushed to think of the non-diegetic option again. When the police officer asks Kevin to turn off the vehicle, he switches off the car's ignition and the song immediately stops, aiming to a diegetic use of the music. The fact that the tune abruptly ends just before the chord progression returns to its tonic entails an additional a sense of lack of closure, instability and discomfort to the viewer.

At first sight, and in an attempt to follow a Cavellian point of view, we could think of diegetic music as an aural part of the world presented by *The Leftovers* that fosters our engagement with that world, while non-diegetic music is something external added to that world which highlights our distance from it (and our questioning of it). Although this could be a reasonable reading, we think it loses the specificity and potential of the show's recurrent trick. After all, a great part of the audio-visual products combine diegetic and non-diegetic music (and they do not achieve the above explained effect at all). Shuster provides us with another argument that can weaken our intuition: imagining something visually denotes the sort of "vision" involved in being in a *world*, and thereby can make plausible the presence of non-diegetic music since it would be implicated with the phenomenological notion of a mood [*Befindlichkeit*].[68] So to speak, non-diegetic music would not be so "external" to the world presented and that would complicate the initial interpretation. In our view, the key of the trick *The Leftovers* displays lies in underlining ambiguity by making obvious what normally goes unnoticed, by making evident manipulation through the conflict between diegetic and non-diegetic music. That is the way this trick emphasizes the fact that moving images present us with projections which screen the world for us but, at the same time, screen us from the world they hold.[69]

Going back to the spectator's intricate identification with Kevin we can go a bit further by re-reading the choice of Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up". When dealing with the evolution of the main character we underlined his exposition to the uncanny. We can now point to uncanniness as a shared feeling between Kevin and us that fosters identification (at least) in these two scenes. Sung by Patti in both dramatic contexts, the romantic anthem from the eighties gets transformed into a threat for the police chief and for us who feel a disturbing

unheimlich sensation as a result of such an unexpected and anempathetic[70] juxtaposition. The experience gets even more disconcerting if, by means of intertextual connections[71] which take us to the Rickrolling phenomenon,[72] we attach an extra layer of weird humour to the scenes.

Let us now leave aside the question of identification to focus on the notions of "anempathetic music" and "intertextual connections" evaluating how they drive the audience to conflict. Revisiting the use of A-ha's "Take On Me" in the break-up scene will serve our purpose. The cheery tune generates an anempathetic effect when contrasted with the sadness of what we are watching. On the one hand, this shock leads the audience to an intensification on their emotion.[73] On the other, it seems to offer the viewer the possibility of keeping a distance from what the images are telling him. In this sense, and as we suggested before, the joyful song could encourage us to hope for a better end for the couple. But image and sound are indissolubly united by a synchresis that is far from any logic[74] and the viewer is abandoned to the tense dynamics of closeness/estrangement the scene displays. Furthermore, intertextual links can deepen this ambivalence: while the happy tune may open the doors of hope, the viewer's evocation of the highly popular video clip for the song can make him infer the impossibility for Nora and Kevin to inhabit the same world as it happens (in a more literal way) to the couple in the music video.

Nonetheless, one of the best examples of *The Leftovers*' intertextual games which connect the audience with their popular culture is provided by the recurrent inclusion of references to the sitcom *Perfect Strangers* (ABC, 1986-1993). These allusions work as a running gag in Season One and Two, in which we are told, respectively, that the four principal cast members of the show disappeared on October 14 and that Mark Linn-Baker did not actually depart but was hiding in Mexico. In Season Three, the references move beyond anecdotal and their tone changes radically when Linn-Baker (as himself) informs Nora about the transporting machine (S3E2), which prepares the ground for a plot-turning point. As we notice from its outset, this episode is full of nods to *Perfect Strangers*: while its title "Don't Be Ridiculous" recalls Balki's catchphrase, the opening credits introduce the sitcom's theme song "Nothing's Gonna Stop Me Now". Let us show how both nods will soon become decidedly significant in relation to Nora.

After talking to Baker in St Louis, Nora dismisses the machine as pseudoscience at first. But before returning to Jarden, she drives to Kentucky where Lily and her mother live. Nora finds Lily in a park and gets out of the car to give back to the little girl the toy shovel that a child has just grabbed from her. Then Lily asks Nora: "Who are you?". Nora's smile vanishes at that moment and an ethereal and mysterious synthesizer pad fades in. After a short chat with Lily's mother, Nora gets into her car and leaves. We can see her deeply impacted and weeping, but the only thing we hear is a soft piano that joins the synthesizer pad to freely perform the melody of "Nothing's Gonna Stop Me Now". Max Richter's instrumental version does its best to turn shiny happiness into melancholy, but, above all, pushes us to make guesses about Nora

which contradict her initial refusal of the radioactive device. By virtue of links related to our knowledge of *Perfect Strangers*—that is, by the connection we establish between the cover and Linn-Baker's proposal—we are driven to consider that, after her last emotional shock, Nora feels the machine is not so *ridiculous* thus she is starting to consider it as an option for her. After all, *it's her life and her dream and nothing's gonna stop her now*.

Just like the sitcom's theme song, some more tunes are heard in the opening credits of Season Three. Functioning as paratexts,[75] they normally set the tone and/or provide valuable information which is intimately addressed to the viewer. Sometimes, the song in the opening credits concurs with what we are about to see, as it happens when "This Love Is Over", by Ray LaMontagne & the Pariah Dogs, precedes Kevin and Nora's breakup (S3E4). Some others contribute to the friction in which *The Leftovers* often plunges its spectator. That is the case of Richard Cheese's "Personal Jesus" (S3E3). Although its lyrics could make us believe in the messianic condition Kevin's friends attribute to him, Richard Cheese's lounge version—with its faster tempo and light hearted mood—takes us down to earth and even ridicules that supernatural interpretation. In other instances—as it paradigmatically occurs with the use of "Let the Mistery Be"—the song seems to give a sort of advice that could be followed by the characters but mostly, by the audience. In fact, Iris DeMent's song appears in all the opening credits of Season Two and, not by chance, in the ones of the series finale (S3E8). At the end of this last episode, the audience is impelled to risk their final judgement. Sharing with Kevin the spectator condition while listening to Nora's story, we have to respond not only before it but also before the series as a whole. And of course, there is the option for us to leave aside the epistemological gaps, to dismiss the doubts and uncertainties and affirm, with Kevin, that we do believe (or want to believe).

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout, we have dedicated our essay to upholding the pertinence of *The Leftovers'* reading in Cavellian fashion and analysing popular music's use in the TV series in order to highlight its contribution to that reading. We have confirmed *The Leftovers* goes far beyond the traditional "underscore" soundtrack with its music dismissing a secondary role to achieve leadership and great effect. Pop songs in the show underpin the narrative and expressive potential of the inherent mixture the audio-visual involves by means of their significant lyrics and the evocative power of the instrumental, which reaches the emotions words can hardly get to; on account of the strong connection we feel with the original catchy songs and with their "adapted to the mood" versions; through their concordance with what we are watching or their conflict with it; and with the help of the multiple and suggestive intertextual connections that re-link us to popular culture.

In the first section of our analysis we have remarked how the use of popular music helps to sharply draw crucial aspects that are related to the task of self-knowledge and self-transformation such as the fact of taking oneself as other, the conception of scepticism both as a threat and as an impulse to recovery and the cyclic condition of the sceptical menace. When dealing with avoidance and acknowledgement through the examination of Nora and Kevin's relationship we have been able to appreciate to what extent a song and its variations pave the way to associate their attitude of remaining unknown to the other with their separation. Furthermore, we have pointed to the way the music outlines the couple's longing for re-establishing (and renewing) the relationship in the series finale. The last section has been devoted to showing that the possibilities of recovery *The Leftovers* offers to its spectator transcend the mere passive tracking of the main characters' path. In that sense, we have provided some examples of the tense estrangement/closeness dynamics the series displays to its audience and connected them with moving image's questioning of its reality. Firstly, we have commented on the music's emphasis on the role that uncanniness and perplexity play in our identification with Kevin. Then, we have referred to the intertwining of diegetic and non-diegetic music as a way of underlining that moving image screens a world for us but also screens us from that world. Afterwards, we have presented the use of anempathetic music as a means to reinforce conflict in the viewer. Finally we have seen how the intertextual games suggested by some pop songs strengthen the ambiguity of the series and its continuous appeal to the spectator.

As a matter of fact, the inconsistency *The Leftovers* exudes and its null aspirations of univocity or certainty impel the viewer to a hermeneutic exercise that cannot be exclusively reduced to logical operations. Therefore, the show not only strives to present the spectator with a sceptical scenario and to confront him with reflective conscience, but also offers him the possibility of finding a participatory and affective way to escape the dead end. Ultimately, it is our acceptance of *pathos* that can heal the conflict in which we have been plunged by the show, that can make us reach an existential learning from the conversation we have kept with the series, that enables *The Leftovers* to convince us of the possibility for a real change in human existence's conditions.[76]

[*] The author would like to thank the editor Susana Viegas and the anonymous reviewers for their advice and efforts in enriching this article. The text is equally indebted to José Pavía and Adrian Hart's linguistic corrections.

[1] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

[2] Cf. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 468.

[3] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 129-243.

[4] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 329-496.

[5] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 323.
[6] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 216 (emphasis in original).
[7] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film. Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 102 (emphasis in original).
[8] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 333.
[9] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 438.
[10] Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears. The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 89.
[11] Cf. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 165.
[12] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 324.
[13] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 241.
[14] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 324 (emphasis in original).
[15] William Rothman and Marian Keane, *Reading Cavell's The World Viewed. A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2000), 23.
[16] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 212.
[17] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 431.
[18] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 21.
[19] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 39.
[20] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 195.
[21] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 188-189.
[22] Stanley Cavell, "The Fact of Television," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 72.
[23] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 80.
[24] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 72.
[25] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 61.
[26] Martin Shuster, *New Television. The Aesthetics and Politics of a Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 2.
[27] Shuster, *New Television*, 46.
[28] Shuster, *New Television*, 3.
[29] It is obvious that *The Leftovers* is neither a remarriage comedy nor a melodrama of the unknown woman, but some aspects of these genres will be useful for our reading of Nora and Kevin's relationship.
[30] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1-2.
[31] Michael Fischer, *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 88.
[32] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 19, 172.
[33] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 126-127; Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 178.
[34] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 136.
[35] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 115.
[36] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 6.
[37] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 6.
[38] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 99.
[39] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 6.
[40] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 159.
[41] Cf. Stanley Cavell, "The Thought of Movies," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 93.
[42] Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Undhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 12.
[43] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 59.
[44] Richard Eldridge, "Between Acknowledgement and Avoidance," in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.
[45] Cf. Philipp Schmerheim, "Skepticism films: Knowing and doubting the world in contemporary cinema" (PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2013), 256.
[46] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Undhandsome*, 46.
[47] Shuster, *New Television*, 6.
[48] Shuster, *New Television*, 6.
[49] Shuster, *New Television*, 163 (emphasis in original).
[50] Shuster, *New Television*, 161.

[51] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 182.
[52] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 214.
[53] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 214.
[54] Vid. Stanley Cavell, "The Good of Film," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 336.
[55] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 221.
[56] Roland Barthes, "L'effet du réel," *Communications* 11 (1968): 95-101.
[57] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 322.
[58] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 99.
[59] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 181.
[60] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 143.
[61] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 241.
[62] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 182.
[63] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 423.
[64] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 19.
[65] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16-17.
[66] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 156.
[67] André Gaudreault and François Jost, *El relato cinematográfico*, trans. Núria Pujol (Barcelona: Paidós, 1995), 146.
[68] Shuster, *New Television*, 209-210, note 24.
[69] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.
[70] Michel Chion, *La audiovisión. Introducción a un análisis conjunto de la imagen y el sonido*, trans. Antonio López Ruiz (Barcelona: Paidós, 1993), 19.
[71] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestos: La literatura en segundo grado*, trans. Celia Fernández Prieto (Madrid: Taurus, 1989), 10.
[72] Rickrolling is a practical joke and a meme involving the unexpected appearance of the music video for "Never Gonna Give You Up".
[73] Chion, *La audiovisión*, 19.
[74] Chion, *La audiovisión*, 65.
[75] Genette, *Palimpsestos*, 13.
[76] Cavell, "The Good of Film," 343.

WHEN THE CEMENT OF THE UNIVERSE BREAKS APART. HUME, CAUSALITY, AND *THE LEFTOVERS*

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

The philosophy of David Hume involves a twofold stance toward causation. On the one hand, he casts it as one of the three basic associative principles (the other two being resemblance and contiguity in time and place) which "are the only ties of our thoughts, they are really *to us* the cement of the universe".[1] Moreover, he insists that causality is the strongest of the three principles since it is the only one that takes us "beyond our senses".[2] On the other hand, Hume argues that causal relations are nothing but regular connections which have been confirmed so far by our experience but, in principle, might be disproved by further experiences. The cement of the universe might break apart. In this paper, I will argue that this is precisely what happens in *The Leftovers*. I will do so by analyzing some exemplary causal links and lacunas that the series represents. In § 1, I will introduce the issue of causality by analyzing the episode of the vanishing bagels in the second episode of the first season. In §§ 2-5, I will track a minor character, Sam's mother, through the handful of her appearances along the series, arguing that this character, if peripherical in the story, is crucial to understanding the philosophical discourse that *The Leftovers* develops about the causal order of the universe. Finally, in §§ 6-7, I will draw my conclusion, relying on clues from the series' finale.

1. WHERE ARE THE BAGELS?

In the very middle of the second episode of *The Leftovers* first season, Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux)—the hero of the series, police chief of Mapleton, New York—puts a couple of bagels into a toaster. Since the bagels are not coming out, Kevin turns the toaster upside down, but nothing comes out from it. The bagels seem to have vanished just as the 2% of the world population did three years earlier, on October 14th, 2011. At the end of the episode, however, Kevin solves the mystery of the bagels. He disassembles the toaster, discovering the two burnt bagels within the machine. They did not vanish; they just were elsewhere. The disappearance of the two bagels can be explained by finding its cause. The bagels disappeared *because* they remained struck into the toaster. The disappearance of the 2% of the world population, on the other hand, seems to lack a causal explanation. There seems to be no statement one can put after the *because* conjunction to explain why those people where there and suddenly were not there anymore. This is what makes their disappearance unique.

According to the "descriptive metaphysics" which underlies our everyday experience, the world that we experience is primarily made of concrete objects, variously propertied, which have their place in space and can continue their existence in time independently of our fleeting perceptions of them.[3] Toasters, bagels, and people are all objects in this sense. As time goes by, objects can significantly change their properties, and they can even cease to exist. However, the changes that objects undergo do not come out of the blue but are rather the effects of events which constitute their causes. In *The Leftovers*, instead, people disappeared without any cause. What is uppermost upsetting in the story told by this series is not the disappearance of 2% of the world's population, but the fact that, in the first instance, no cause of such disappearance can be found. Causality is so essential to our understanding of the world that the evidence of an effect without a cause reveals itself to be an unbearable burden. A cause is to be found whatever it takes.

In everyday life, we can directly experience causal connections when we act, as Peter Strawson aptly points out.[4] If I hit the pen, its position changes *because* I moved it. If I bend the pen, its existence ends *because* I broke it. In the finale of the above-mentioned episode of *The Leftovers*, human action as a paradigm of causation is emphasized when the music and the editing connect the image of Kevin who discovers the cause of the bagels' disappearance to the image of Megan (Liv Tyler) who cuts down a tree as a sort of initiation rite after joining the Guilty Remnant sect. In both cases, causal connections are portrayed. The bagels disappeared *because* the toaster burnt them, as well as the tree is going to fall *because* Megan is cutting it. Megan's action provides us with the paradigm case of the causal connection which the toaster's behavior also instantiates.

When effects occur independently of our actions, their causes are more complicated to detect. Nevertheless, we tend to assume that, in those cases, there are events that can play the same causal role as our actions. From this perspective, both religion and science can be cast as cultural outcomes of the human innate tendency to look for causes. The Moon changes its place in the sky even if we do not push or pull it. What makes the Moon move? When causes are sought within nature, science arises. When, instead, causes are sought beyond nature, religion arises. Both religion and science provide us with causes of effects that cannot be explained otherwise. The difference is just that religion provides us with supernatural causes of natural effects, while science looks for causes that are meant to be as natural as their effects. In *The Leftovers*, religion and science compete to give the best causal explanation of the October 14th event, namely, the "Departure". That is the event that split the human population in two—those who survived, the "leftovers", and those who disappeared, the "departed" — apparently without any cause.

2. WHERE ARE YOU?

Modernity can be seen as a progressive replacement of the causal explanations offered by religion with the causal explanations offered by science.[5] Scientists have found causes to explain even the most

catastrophic and upsetting events. We now know, for instance, that an earthquake is caused by a sudden release of energy in the Earth's rigid, outermost shell; that a tsunami is caused by the displacement of a large volume of water; that a pandemic is caused by microscopic infectious agents. We live in a world in which many horrible events happen which we cannot prevent or oppose, and yet we can comfort ourselves with the possibility of finding their causes. One might call the universe we inhabit cold and indifferent, but at least it is an ordered universe, and its order is a causal order. In this sense, causality is really—borrowing again Hume's expression,[6] which also gives the title to an influential essay by John Mackie[7]—"the cement of the universe". Just like cement can connect bricks and unify them in one wall, causality connects events and unify them in one universe. Just like each brick is related to any other brick in the wall through a chain of bricks linked by cement, each event is related to any other event in the universe through a chain of events linked by causation.

The cement of the universe, however, as Hume himself somehow suggested, might break apart. This is what happens in *The Leftovers* from the very beginning. The prologue of the pilot episode portrays the events occurred on October 14th, 2011, focusing on a woman (Natalie Gold) who is fumbling laundromat while trying to keep her crying baby Sam quiet, and frenetically talking on the phone. An elliptical edit then shows us the woman entering her car in a parking lot at the laundromat, after putting Sam on the backseat. He is still crying, and she is still talking on the phone. She is trying to explain to her interlocutor how to restart a machine in her house: "It's a red button… Just press it in with a pen or something". At that point, Sam suddenly stops crying. The interlocutor arguably has succeeded in pressing the button, and Sam's mother exclaims "Oh, it's perfect". Here is where Max Richter's piano suite "The Departure" begins in the soundtrack. Sam's mother turns her head and discovers that her baby is no longer in the backseat. What is the cause of Sam's departure? Since the car window is open, one might think that Sam has been kidnapped. This would be a suitable incipit for a detective story aimed to discover who is the kidnapper. Detective stories, indeed, are narratives based on causal explanations: the crime is given as an effect, and the detective should find its cause. Yet, *The Leftovers* is not a detective story, hence there is no kidnapping and no kidnapper.

Since Sam disappeared exactly when his mother's interlocutor, following her instructions, pressed the red button, one might be tempted to draw a causal connection between the pressing of the button and the disappearance of Sam. This would be a suitable incipit for a weird science fiction story about teletransportation machines. Yet *The Leftovers* neither is this sort of narrative, though the series' finale will reveal that this suggestion—as I shall show in the two last sections of the paper—might be closer to the truth than the kidnapping hypothesis.

The nature of Sam's disappearance is clarified by what happens next. While Sam's mother exits her car and starts calling her son desperately, a shopping cart full of bags runs downs a slope and crashes into the back of a parked car. Then, a car running down madly in the wrong direction crashes into another car which was exiting the parking. Both the owner of the shopping cart and the driver of the car suddenly vanished just like Sam did. Sam's disappearance is part of a collective disappearance

which seems to have no cause. His mother keeps crying the son's name, while the son of the disappeared shopping-cart's owner in turn keeps crying "Daddy". These two repeated cries—the woman calling her son, the son calling his dad—stand out against the sonic background of "The Departure" suite as if they were solo voices whose desperate request of explanation ("Where's my daddy?", "Where are you, Sam?", "I don't understand!") contrasts with the sense of absolute mystery which emanates from Richter's composition.

Sam's mother is just a secondary character of *The Leftovers*. She will appear only a handful of times in the rest of the series. She does not even have a name. Nevertheless her story, in its simplicity, is paradigmatic of the main philosophical issue that the series raises, namely, the issue of causality. For sure, the suffering of this woman would not have been less had her son been kidnapped by a pedophile or by a Martian. Arguably, her suffering would have been even more heartbreaking. Yet, there is something peculiar as for what she feels in this case. Her suffering for having lost her son is accompanied by the thought of the absolute lack of cause of the son's disappearance. It is not that she ignores who kidnapped her son or why the kidnapper did so, as it may happen when a child disappears and is never found. Rather, she ignores what kind of event caused her son to disappear. Indeed, she is tempted to think that her son vanished without any cause. In this sense, the story of Sam's mother symbolizes all the other stories that *The Leftovers* tells, exemplarily showing what makes this series unique. While narratives usually exploit, strengthen, and emphasize the causal connections between events that can also be found in real life,[8] *The Leftovers* builds its narrative around the lack of a crucial causal link.

3. WHERE WERE YOU?

The second time we see Sam's mother is towards the end of *The Leftovers*' pilot, which takes place three years after the mysterious event portrayed in the prologue. The October 14th memorial is just finished, and Kevin Garvey is drinking alone in a pub. The television is airing a program in which a woman contends that only science is entitled to seek an explanation of the October 14th event, arguing with a man who appeals to the Bible. Although the woman and the man are arguing vigorously, they implicitly agree that those events should have a cause; they are just disagreeing about the nature of the cause. For the man, the cause is God's will; for the woman, some still unknown physical event. In this discussion, the man and the woman prefigure the philosophical disagreement, which will be introduced in the next episode, between two leading characters of the series, namely, the scientifically minded fraud investigator Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), and her older brother Reverend Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston).

Being annoyed by the discussion in the television program, Kevin asks the barman to shut down the volume and makes a comment suggesting a stance different from both the scientific one and the religious one: "Ours is not to reason why". Kevin is not concerned with the kind of causes we should

seek. Rather, he reckons that we should give up seeking causes whatever their kind. At that point, a woman who is also drinking alone addresses him. They start conversating and she asks him "When it happened, where were you?". He answers with a lie ("I was in my house, cleaning out a gutter") which a flashback showing him making love with an unknown woman aptly debunks for us. Then, Kevin asks her the same question. Her answer—portrayed by a close-up shot and emphasized by the reappearance of Richter's "The Departure" piano suite in the soundtrack—brings us back to the prologue: "I was in a parking lot... at the laundromat".

Kevin seems to guess Sam's mother mourning and tries to comfort her saying: "Hey... we're still here", and she replies: "We sure are". The cement of the universe has not completely broken apart. The basic principles of persistence and causation are still in force, as demonstrated by the very existence of Sam's mother and Kevin, and by their interaction. Yet, there is a point in the spatiotemporal universe where the cement broke apart, namely October 14th, 2011. Both Sam's mother and Kevin, despite their being still here, are facing the psychological consequences of that causal break. The impact of the event on the existence of the survivors is emphasized by the sudden appearance of Dean (Michael Gaston), the mysterious dog killer who might be a figment of Kevin's wounded mind. Kevin follows Dean exiting the pub while the image of Sam's mother blurs in the background, and "The Departure" suite fades in the soundtrack signaling the end of this brief accidental encounter between two key characters of the series: Kevin, its hero, and Sam's mother, the first character in its chronological order.

4. FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

In the first season of *The Leftovers*, the October 14th event is portrayed by means of flashbacks not only in the pilot's prologue but also in two other episodes. These are the third episode, in which the Departure is shown in the context of Reverend Matt Jamison's dream, and the ninth episode, which is a flashback all the way through. Sam's mother appears in both these episodes.

In the third episode, "Two Boats and a Helicopter" (S1E3), Sam's mother is portrayed from the perspective of Matt, who is reliving his experience of the October 14th event in dream. Matt reveals himself to be the man driving the car that was hit by another car whose driver disappeared. He was with his wife who has been badly injured in the accident. Matt exits the car to ask for help and sees Sam's mother desperately calling her son in the laundromat parking. We first see the woman in a long shot from Matt's perspective, but then a reverse shot shows her in a close-up just like that in the pilot's prologue, crying "Sam! Sam! Sam!", while Matt remains on the background. Even in the context of Matt's dream, Sam's mother gains centrality as if her story were the epicenter of the October 14th catastrophe.

The ninth episode, "The Garveys at Their Best" (S1E9), replicates the temporal structure of the series' pilot through a flashback. This episode, just like the pilot, has a first part set on October 13th,

and a second part on October 14th. However, the events portrayed in "The Garveys at Their Best" are set three years earlier, when the Departure which we have glimpsed in the pilot's prologue and in Matt's dream occurred. The last part of this episode intertwines the vicissitudes of Kevin with those of his wife Laurie (Amy Brenneman), his daughter Jill (Margaret Qualley), his stepson Tom (Chris Zylka), and his future partner Nora. They all survive the catastrophe, witnessing the disappearance of somebody else. Nora witnesses the disappearance of her husband, son and daughter who were having breakfast with her. Jill and Tom witness the disappearance of a schoolmate who was playing with them. Kevin witnesses the disappearance of the unknown woman with whom he was having sex in a motel room, while Laurie sees her unborn child disappearing from the ultrasound screen. All these scenes are connected by Richter's music, which operates in two phases. First, the obsessive iteration of string chords creates an atmosphere of inquietude and imminent danger. Then, just after a short silence corresponding to the instant of the disappearance, the piano suite "The Departure" brings us back to the sense of absolute mystery of the pilot's prologue. Just as in the latter, the event of disappearance remains off-screen. We do not directly see people disappearing, but only become aware of their disappearance through the reactions of the survivors. It is as if the Departure challenged the possibility of both causal explanation and visual representation.

In "The Garveys at Their Best", Sam's mother shows up shortly before the catastrophe. She is driving to the laundromat, and at a traffic light her car draws up alongside the car of Laurie, who is driving to the doctor office for the ultrasound. Sam's mother is talking on the phone while her baby is crying, just as in the pilot's prologue. Laurie looks at her through the car window, and Sam's mother looks at her in turn disconsolately, spreading his arms as if to invoke God's help. This brief, accidental encounter introduces the issue of wish as an imaginary causal factor. At least at an unconscious level, Sam's mother might wish the disappearance of his son who is exasperating her with his continuous crying. Likewise, Laurie might wish the disappearance of the child she carries in her womb because of the crisis of her marriage with Kevin, who in turn might wish the disappearance of the unknown woman to avoid being committed in an affair which might further complicate his marriage with Laurie.

Here is how a guilt complex may arise. The disappearance of Sam might lead his mother to feel guilty for having somehow wished this, as if her wish caused Sam to disappear. Likewise, the disappearance of the unborn child might lead Laurie to feel guilty for having wished this, and even Kevin might feel guilty for the disappearance of his unknown lover. Such a guilt complex is especially evident in the case of Nora, who is clearly annoyed by the behavior of her husband and sons just before they disappear, as if they vanished *because* she wished this. A similar pattern of explanation can be applied to the elderly parents of Charles Patterson, a man with Down Syndrome who also departed on October 14th: they might have unconsciously wished this, being exhausted from taking care of him.

Putting all these clues together, the spectator of *The Leftovers* might be tempted to interpret the disappearance as a sort of divine punishment which makes come true the most unspeakable wishes that the series' characters might have. Although this pattern of explanation seems to be disproved by other cases (such as Jill and Tom's schoolmate whose disappearance is unrelated to their feelings towards him),[9] it helps us to understand the guilt complex that, in the development of the story, will somehow affect characters such as Sam's mother and Nora—and especially Laurie, who will end up joining the Guilty Remnant sect. What this guilt complex shows is not that the disappearance of the sons is the effect of the mothers' wishes, but rather that human intentional action is our paradigm of causation, so as that we are naturally, if irrationally, prone to cast our mental states as causes of events, especially those events such as the Departure that lack other observable causes.

5. AFTER THE FACT

The last two episodes featuring Sam's mother portray her long after the departure of her son. In "The Prodigal Son Returns" (S1E10), the last episode of Season One, Kevin meets again Sam's mother after their encounter at the pub. This time the context is the uprising of Mapleton citizens against the Guilty Remnant's members, who have put life-size replicas of the departed in the houses of their families. Sam's mother is holding a gun and chasing two sect members who cross the street just when Kevin's car is coming. Kevin brakes sharply and gets off the car, shouting "Drop the gun!" to Sam's mother who is pointing the gun at him. They look into each other's eyes but neither of them seems to be aware that they met before at the pub. They look at each other as if they were complete strangers. He asks her "What's your name?" but she does not answer. Rather, she shouts "fuck you" to him and runs away, going back to chasing the Guilty Remnant's members. This is her last appearance in the story timeline. Just like in the pilot and in "The Garveys at Their Best", her appearance preludes to the climax of the episode, underlined as usual by Richter's "The Departure" piano suite. Her desperation seems to be the key to understanding everyone's desperation in face of a catastrophe without a cause.

While "The Prodigal Son Returns" portrays the last appearance of Sam's mother in the temporal order of the fictional events, her last appearance in the serial order of the narrative that tells those events occurs in "Certified", the sixth episode of Season Three. This episode exhibits interesting analogies with both the series pilot and "The Garveys at Their Best". These three episodes have the same temporal structure, which involves a first part set on October 13th and a second part on October 14th. Still, the events of "The Garveys at Their Best" coincide with the Departure, whilst the events of the pilot occur three years after it, and those of "Certified" seven years after it.

Just like the pilot, "Certified" has a prologue featuring Sam's mother as the protagonist. Yet the pilot's prologue, as discussed above, portrays her at the very moment at which Sam vanishes. "Certified"'s prologue, instead, shows her two years after the Departure, when she is recounting the disappearance of her son to her psychotherapist, whom we discover to be Laurie, the woman she

accidentally met at the traffic light the day of the Departure. This establishes a perfect symmetry between Laurie and Kevin as for their relationship to Sam's mother. Both Kevin and Laurie meet Sam's mother twice, without recognizing her and being recognized by her the second time.

"Certified"'s prologue begins with a long monologue of Sam's mother which supplements the story we already know of the departure of her son with a before and an after. The camera portrays her with a slow backward movement as if it were mimicking in space the temporal flow of her narrative. She tells her four miscarriages and then, five years later, Sam's birth as a sort of miracle: "And then it just... happened. I was pregnant. And he was... perfect. His name is Sam". Then comes the departure: "Six months later, I walk into the laundromat, and I strap him into his car seat. And he was crying, so I didn't kiss him". The moment of Sam's departure in his mother's narrative is emphasized by the first editing cut of the scene, which leads to a reverse shot of Laurie listening to her patient. Sam's mother continues her speech, revealing us what happened after the scene we saw in the pilot's prologue: "And then he was gone. So, I sit in the parking lot and wait all day, because he could come back, right?". Laurie remains silent while Sam's mother keeps asking questions to her and—in the alternation of shots and reverse shots—the camera get closer and closer to her impassive face. Finally, Laurie just says "I don't know".

Once again, Sam's story seems to be the epicenter of the catastrophe: the point at which the search for causes is the most urgent and desperate but irremediably ends up in failure. After Sam's mother leaves, Laurie takes a bunch of pills to kill herself but then changes her mind, joining the Guilty Remnant instead. The song "1-800 Suicide" by Gravediggaz in the title sequence further stresses the theme of the renunciation of life as a response to the absolute meaninglessness of a universe whose causal cement broke apart. This theme will be fully developed in the finale of the episode, which is set five years later in Australia and portrays Laurie in the face of the decision to abandon her life in the Ocean.

6. A TALE OF TWO UNIVERSES

Just like "Certified" leads Laurie's story to fulfillment, the next episode, "The Most Powerful Man in the World" (S3E7), concludes Kevin's narrative trajectory with a last puzzling exploration of the realm of the undead. Likewise, the first part of the series' finale, "The Book of Nora" (S3E8), concludes Nora's trajectory, portraying her entry into a teletransportation machine designed by a team of scientists with the aim of enabling people to join those vanished on October 14th, 2011. The last part of "The Book of Nora", on the other hand, shows what happens long after these events.

Nora lives in the Australian outback. Kevin comes from the United States and manages to find her. He pretends having forgotten their love story, hoping that this might favor a new beginning, but after a while the pretense breaks apart and he tells her the true story of his life after their separation. Then, Nora also tells him the story of her life after their separation, in a long monologue whose

staging echoes that of Sam's mother monologue in the prologue of "Certified", with Kevin in the listener's role that was played by Laurie in that episode. Just like the monologue of Sam's mother in "Certified" brought us back to the origin of the causal lacuna that affects *The Leftovers* all the way through, the monologue of Nora provides us with a way of filling this lacuna.

According to Nora, the teletransportation machine succeeded, thereby revealing that the departed, just like the bagels in the toaster, were not vanished: they just were elsewhere. Their disappearance, from this perspective, finally seems to have a cause: on October 14th, 2011, the universe split in two, generating a Universe-1 inhabited by the leftovers and a Universe-2 inhabited by the departed. These two universes have different timelines which are initially superposed and then diverge at the Departure, forming a sort of Y figure.

Philosophers have investigated in depth the possibility of such a Y-splitting as for both the identity of artifacts and personal identity, addressing the classic case of the Ship of Theseus and its extension from artifacts to persons.[10] *The Leftovers* extends Y-splitting to universes, instantiating a sort of multiple-universe narrative an important precedent of which can be found in Fred Hoyle's 1966 science-fiction novel *October the First is Too Late*.[11]

Nora tells Kevin that the scientists who helped her had found a way of connecting the two split universes in other points beside the Departure, thereby enabling people to travel from Universe-1 to Universe-2. In the latter, Nora found her family and discovered that her husband has a new partner, and that her children, who have become teenagers in the meanwhile, seem to be happy with their stepmother. Nora felt like a ghost and decided to go back to Universe-1 with the help of a scientist who traveled from Universe-1 to Universe-2 and built a teletransportation machine also in the latter.

Nora's tale offers us a causal explanation of the Departure. People disappeared *because* the universe split in two. According to this tale, scientists have succeeded in creating connections between the two universes, and this suggests that the splitting of the universe is a fact of nature that can be investigated and understood with the methodology of the natural sciences.

In all the three seasons of *The Leftovers*, the search for causal explanations has hesitated between the natural and the supernatural. According to Tzvetan Todorov, such a hesitation is the core feature of the fantastic as a genre: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event".[12] Nora's tale aims to solve the hesitation by favoring the natural option. The departed did not vanished because of God's agency or some other supernatural cause; their disappearance, if Nora is right, was rather caused by a fact of nature, though an unpredictable and unprecedented one. However, the events that Nora describes remain off-screen, and this might be a source of skepticism as for the truth of her tale. Kevin finally replies "I believe you" to her, but we are not committed to believe her in turn.[13]

7. LET THE MYSTERY BE

The Todorovian hesitation between the natural and the supernatural that characterizes *The Leftovers* all the way through is echoed by the changes in the series' title sequence. In the first season, the title sequence suggests a causal explanation of the Departure in supernatural terms. A solemn musical theme by Richter accompanies the images of a sort of mannerist frescoed dome which depicts the Departure as if it were an ascension to heaven. At the beginning of this title sequence, the camera mainly focuses on the details of the fresco portraying the desperation of the leftovers. However, as the music progresses with a choir supplementing the cords, a complex camera movement shows the picture in its entirety, revealing the divine light which attracts the departed towards the top. The cause of the Departure, according to this picture, is divine intervention. The same iconography can be found in the memorial sculpture in Mapleton's beach which Laurie contemplates in the finale of "The Prodigal Son Returns". The sculpture portrays a leftover mother stretching her arms towards her son who is about to be sucked into the sky, as if God were taking him.

The title sequence of the second season, on the other hand, points in a different direction. There is no longer a fresco, the religious art *par excellence*, but rather a sequence of photographs, the art of the secularized age of technical reproducibility.[14] The departed are no longer portrayed as ascending to heaven, but rather as holes in the pictures. The soundtrack is no longer a solemn piece of instrumental music but rather a pop song, namely, Iris DeMent's 1992 "Let the Mystery Be". The lines of the song seem to strengthen the interpretation of the Departure that the pictures suggest. The faith in the heavenly destiny of the departed leaves place to the mere ascertainment of their puzzling absence, which echoes the puzzling character of our existence in the physical universe: "Everybody's wonderin' what and where they all came from / Everybody's worryin' 'bout where / They're gonna go when the whole thing's done / But no one knows for certain and so it's all the same to me / I think I'll just let the mystery be".

In the third season, the same title sequence is preserved though in episodes from 2 to 6 Iris DeMent's song is replaced by other songs and, in episode 7, by Richter's musical theme of the season's one opening sequence. Yet, "Let the Mystery Be" comes back in the conclusive episode 8, having the last word, as it were. Even if Nora's causal explanation of the Departure was true, a mystery would remain just like the song says. In that case, however, the Departure mystery would no longer be heterogeneous with respect to our existence in the physical universe, or to the very existence of the physical universe. The Departure, if Nora was right, would reveal itself to be a puzzling event in the history of the universe in the same sense in which the Big Bang is puzzling. We can acknowledge that the universe started existing *because of* the Big Bang, but what is the cause of the Big Bang? Likewise, trusting Nora, we might acknowledge that the Departure occurred *because of* the splitting of the universe, but what is the cause of the splitting? Some mystery would remain, though perhaps of a kind we are more used to live with.

[1] David Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted with introd. J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1740/1938), 35.

[2] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (London: Clarendon Press, 1739-1740/1975), 74.

[3] Peter Fredrick Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959); Peter Fredrick Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966).

[4] Strawson proposes his account of causation as an alternative to Hume's. However, the points of disagreement between them go beyond the scope of my paper. Peter Fredrick Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 117-118.

[5] Wilfred Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man", in *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), 35-78; Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Knopf, 1971); Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 124-125; Simon Evnine, *Making Objects and Events: A Hylomorphic Theory of Artifacts, Actions, and Organisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 202-206.

[6] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 74.

[7] John L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[8] Noël Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection", in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118-133.

[9] However, in Tom Perrotta's 2011 novel *The Leftovers* of which the TV show is an adaptation, Jill and Tom are bored by their schoolmate who is going to disappear. Thanks to Susana Viegas for drawing my attention to that.

[10] Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, ed. with intr. and notes (in French) K. Schuhmann (Paris: Vrin, 1655/1999); John Perry, "Can the Self Divide?," *Journal of Philosophy* 69, no.16 (1972): 463-488; David Lewis, "Survival and Identity," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 17-40; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[11] Fred Hoyle, *October the First is Too Late*. London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1966); Robin Le Poidevin, *The Images of Time: An Essay on Temporal Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170.

[12] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 25.

[13] As far as I am concerned, I believe Nora just as Kevin did. Yet, this is just my personal way of responding to *The Leftovers*' finale. I want to thank a referee for leading me to consider that Nora's tale might be yet another possible causal explanation offered by the narrative rather than the ultimate one.

[14] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. B. Doherty and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936/2008).

"WE'RE ALL GONE": A POSTSECULAR ACCOUNT OF *THE LEFTOVERS*' TRAUMATIC EXISTENTIALISM AS 'RELIGIOUS GROUND ZERO'

Ilaria Biano (Italian Institute for Historical Studies)

1. INTRODUCTION

This article considers and explores *The Leftovers*' widely recognized existentialist dimension by, on the one hand, framing it within the overall postsecular narrative of the show and, on the other, suggesting both a literal and metaphorical reading of the Departure through the categories of structural and historical trauma. *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017) is one of those shows that have earned TV seriality great acclaim for its artistic dimension, infusing it with a real philosophical discourse. While examples of TV shows with a deep investment in complex narratives and philosophical messages can be found in previous periods (a prime example is *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) in the early Nineties), an acceleration of this tendency can be seen in the first decade of the 2000s—with shows like *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) and later *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) —with a definitive establishment after 2013 and the so-called "prestige television" and shows like *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-2019), *Fargo* (FX, 2014-) and *The Leftovers* itself. These series make a point to contribute to the understanding of the contemporary world and human existence by pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling, conveying a distinctive message to the audience, and actively engaging it.[1]

In this sense, this article will analyse how *The Leftovers* manages to pose profound and far-reaching questions to its audience, about the meaning of human life in the universal scheme but also in other people's everyday lives, while at the same time using the Departure as a metaphor for the human condition in the contemporary traumatic age. It has been noted that the post-apocalyptic metaphor of the Departure is particularly effective for framing our "pre-apocalyptic map of trauma," evoking 9/11, of course, but also other catastrophic events that have become part of the traumatic everyday life and era in which we live. In so doing *The Leftovers* manages "to feel both intimate and world-historical."[2] The aim of the present study is thus to show how, by bringing together reflections on the individual and cultural consequences of a collective trauma and existentialist meditations, the series realizes a journey from an "aesthetic of disorientation"[3] to an affirmative ethic of relativity.

2. CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY OF *THE LEFTOVERS* AND ITS EXISTENTIALISM

The existentialist vibe of *The Leftovers* was nothing especially new when the show first aired in 2014, at least for those who were familiar with its main author and show-runner Damon Lindelof. When, four years earlier, on May 23, 2010, the last episode of the legendary show *Lost* was watched by over 13 million US viewers, six years and 121 episodes had made abundantly clear the style and preferred themes of the man who co-created it and was the only writer to put his name on every single episode. Nevertheless, *The Leftovers* revealed itself as something somehow different from almost anything else in television, and while it never equalled the ratings of its predecessor, it rapidly became as divisive as critically acclaimed, one of the first and at the same time, one of the best examples of that era of contemporary seriality labelled as "prestige" or "fourth golden age."[4] With his adaptation of Tom Perrotta's novel, Lindelof made another step in a journey in which philosophical and specifically existentialist interrogations play a crucial role: questions about life, human existence, meaning and purpose, the role of the human being in the society, and at a cosmic, universal level. However, it is possible to establish two main frameworks related to this existentialist core of Lindelof's work and which will be here used to analyse *The Leftovers* too. On the one hand, in Lindelof's narratives existential questions and reflections are always the consequence of, or are at least inspired by, some kind of trauma and represent a way of working through it. On the other hand, these same questions often emerge in the context of postsecular narratives.

As *Lost* fans became aware with the final, extremely divisive episode, answers are not a major concern for Lindelof. Even if some may have had doubts at the time of *Lost* finale, with *The Leftovers* Lindelof made it clear that this is not a form of shallowness or deliberate lack of comprehension, but a specific *Weltanschauung* (worldview). If in *Lost* the catalyst event was the plane crash, in *The Leftovers* the Departure of 2% of the population is at the same time a huge mystery and a shattering trauma. Lindelof is definitely more interested in thoroughly exploring the latter dimension. Answers are not particularly relevant in the storyline: the characters do search for them, but it is this quest that interests Lindelof more. A quest that has the power and potential to resonate with the audience, with everyone's everyday life. A quest that at the same time may vehiculate fundamental questions and suggest the idea that it is possible that, in effect, there are no answers. Or there are many. Or maybe that is not really the point. Thus the central feature of Lindelof writings lies precisely in the dramatization "of the grandest of philosophical notions and existential mysteries" that deal with structural aspects of human life "like the origins of maternal love and loss,"[5] posing front and centre the traumatic nature of life itself but also specific historical and punctual traumas.[6] The plurality and equal validity of multiple stories, answers, and worldviews thus become a crucial feature of Lindelof's narratives and it is in this sense that they can be labelled as postsecular. According to John McClure, a postsecular narrative is one in which the characters feel "the urgent need for a turn toward the religious [not] leading back into the domain of conventional religious dwelling and organized community [but] into zones where characters must learn to reconcile

important secular and religious intuitions."[7] Lindelof's characters are definitely on such a path. Their lived experiences are often extreme and absurd, but in the end those situations make them face universal questions of meaning and how to find a way through life. It is in the development of this quest that Lindelof's narratives fully realize their existentialist core. Thus the existentialism of Lindelof's narrative is not a Sartrean, secular one, but at the same time, it cannot be considered as strictly religious.

3. *THE LEFTOVERS*' POST-SECULAR-RELIGIOUS EXISTENTIALISM

Many authors have emphasized the specific religious dimension of *The Leftovers,* or its role in the television landscape as a game-changer in the representation of and, particularly, the attitude toward religion.[8] However, as noticed above, it is not possible to confine the series to the field of religious/nonreligious narratives. Its postsecular dimension is not only a matter of plot or language; it is the show's specific philosophical, existentialist message that is framed as a postsecular or, using Dressler and Mandair terminology, post-religious-secular one. It is articulated around a resistance to interpretations of the world and reality that are either exclusively secular or dogmatically religious, in a sort of "abandoning-embracing religious and secular epistemes as mutually contaminated and contaminating."[9] Not only do secular and religious ethics and tentative explanations stand side by side in society, but the categories themselves of *secular* and *religious,* seen in separate and impermeable ways, no longer seem to fit reality.

In the words of Perrotta and Lindelof, the Departure is "a foundational event," in consequence of which characters live "in a religious ground zero."[10] An event of that magnitude has indeed the power of shattering the deepest texture of the community and individuals. If "old religions don't make sense"[11] then everything seems impossible, but anything is also possible. Indeed, this is exactly what we witness especially through the first two seasons: a myriad of new cults and communal forms of life; enclosed communities like Jarden-Miracle, the spared town setting of the second season with its out-of-world existence; in some occasions a collapse of the laws of civil life; broken families; new forms of bonding; lawless men; orgiastic cults venerating a lion. People "are forced to create new religions,"[12] looking for new ways of life, elaborating entirely new worldviews. The characters find themselves living in a condition that is at the same time both extremely material and concrete in the way they must experience it (the holes left by the Disappeared full of regrets and absences, but also the embodied strategies many adopt for coping with the event), and completely immaterial in its implications. If there are no answers, but only different interpretations, in the end those interpretations are not really competitive or alternative. Yes, the Guilty Remnants—the nihilist cult whose main goal is a perpetual mourning of the Departed enacted via cruel and violent performances—represent the more 'integralist' side, but they are on a spectrum of positions that face both the practical and moral issues raised by the event by embracing grey, creative areas in experience and existence.

The Departure is thus a metaphor, a sort of "Armageddon for a generation making peace with its doubts,"[13] a grotesque fairy-tale for grown-ups who still can't figure out where they are in the world (meaning almost anyone in the 21st century). Different kinds of attitude, explanation, interpretation—ranging from the scientific to the religious, spiritual, and nihilistic—all cohabit and complement each other within the narrative, embodying both a general demand for spirituality, various nonreligious choices, and different paths toward meaning. What is collapsing with the Departure is the structure of meaning in which anyone is inscribed; not just one system of meaning, but all of them. If in *Lost* there were not any answers, in *The Leftovers* it is the questions that have lost their significance: humanity has lost the ability and the means of formulating and thinking them. But that is just the beginning of the journey: for Lindelof, the whole point is precisely that when rules, laws, and traditions have no longer any explanatory power, people must build their own quest.

We can see this approach at work especially in the narrative arcs of the two main characters, police chief Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux) and Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), a woman who lost her husband and two kids in the Departure. "The Book of Kevin" and "The Book of Nora" are not only the evocative titles of the first and the last episodes of the third season but reflect these two apparent polar opposites that—after the Departure and throughout the different paths of the universal, human journey embodied in the storylines of the characters—become or reveal themselves as strictly connected and entangled. At the end of that part of their journey that we witnessed through the seasons, Kevin has gone through his experiences of deaths, resurrections and visions: a messiah-like path that, in a way, provided him and those who believed in him with a narrative and a structure in which to reframe their existence. Nora, the rationalist, and broken soul, tests the only kind of explanation that could ever convince her: science can in the end provide, if not an answer, at least the means of finding what she was searching for—her family—in some sort of parallel dimension. It is exactly at that point that she finds out that that wasn't exactly what she was looking for, or what she really wanted. Nora and Kevin rejoin one another midway, just like everyone else. Including the audience. We, as viewers, can choose who and what to believe: is Nora's story real? Are the Kevin's deaths, resurrections and visions revelations or delusions? Similarly, two other characters realize two seemingly opposite journeys between the poles of belief and unbelief: the Reverend and modern Job Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston) and John Murphy (Kevin Carroll), a sceptical resident of Jarden-Miracle. Which is more truthful?

Christian and biblical references are everywhere in *The Leftovers*, beginning with the title and the core event; the intent is clearly to create a story that can be easily recognized in the references that ground it when it takes a surreal direction; but, in effect, the series subverts the rules and puts the human being at the centre of this worldly life.[14] It is only in this context that the multiplicity of what remains of all the previous master narratives and different stories can stay together. Framed like that, the Departure then takes on the contours more of a *counter*-foundational event: it does not provide any basis on which to build something unique and new, be it a single, specific faith, a new scientific branch, some form of societal organization. Rather the Departure has a sort of Nova Effect—using the fascinating image

suggested by philosopher Charles Taylor—that explodes and rearranges all previous beliefs.[15] All the master narratives lose, if not their significance, at least their claim to exclusivity; and at the same time, all are relativized and become potentially equally truthful. *The Leftovers* posits itself, in this sense, as a metaphor of the modern era: on the one hand, with an over-scale event and its social and existential consequences, it amplifies the human condition in a world in which the search for meaning seems at the same time pointless and necessary; on the other hand, it leads the audience on a journey during which it suggests that there are still a number of ways of coping with this situation. Staying with the Taylorian parallel, with its Nova Effect, the Departure does not create an Immanent Frame any more than it does realize a religious or spiritual one.[16] It does not suggest there is the need to discover a meaning that is always already present in the world, but neither does it try to convey a pessimistic message by suggesting that there is no meaning at all. Rather, the different characters arcs represent both the possibility of finding meaning in meaninglessness and of embracing meaninglessness itself as a completely fulfilling place in life.

In this sense, it is possible to define *The Leftovers* as an expression of traumatic existentialism. Existential questions and criticalities faced by the characters or throughout the plot are not only derived as a consequence of the trauma lived by the characters but are intrinsically connected with the nature of the trauma itself in its complex nature: it is at the same time a catastrophic event and one that is connected with the deepest convictions and existential fractures of every individual in their specificity. It is a cognitive dissonance for both the humanity in the show and the humanity in front of the screen. It is an apocalyptic event that counterintuitively leaves humanity to confront a world that must in any case go on. An event that is framed in some traditional religious—Biblical—way but that triggers a completely different set of consequences. A world now full of signs that cannot fully express their meanings, and symbols that have lost their significance.

4. STRUCTURAL TRAUMA AND WORKING THROUGH MEMORY FROM MAPLETON TO AUSTRALIA

As we have seen, the philosophical dimension of *The Leftovers* is entrenched not only in the story it tells and in its overall construction, but also regards the relationship that it develops with the audience: what it offers, and what it demands. This can be perceived even more in the traumatic nature and dimension of the Departure and the ways in which, through it, the authors echo some of the core elements of the experience of being human. All the different characters or groups of them represent different ways of coping with trauma and with different kinds of trauma; at the same time, different forms and different roles of memory are also embodied by different characters. Trauma and memory represent two subjects strictly related to one each other: it is in the recollection of the event, in its belatedness, that trauma hits the victim, but it is also through a meditated and re-elaborated form of memory that one can differentiate between past and present and work through trauma. Also, memorialisation is a constitutive part of the

remembrance and collective re-elaboration of traumas involving a community. In this sense, the series not only shows different ways of working through some form of trauma but also how in certain cases, not all traumas can be worked through, while at the same time positing itself as a form of working through, as a cathartic viewing experience for the audience. The traumatic event of the Departure and the religious ground zero it determines is indeed handled by different characters and groups differently: the kind of questions raised, the kind of reactions more than answers, are strictly connected with the previous experiences and beliefs of individuals and affect the ways in which trauma hits them. The Departure indeed contains in itself different kinds of trauma: individual, historical, and also structural. The disappearance of millions of people is an event on a global scale but has a more personal level with the loss of a loved one. At the same time, it also represents, as already mentioned, the loss of the structure of significance. There is a sort of inevitable conflation here of what Dominick LaCapra defines as absence and loss as central dimensions of structural and historical traumas.[17]

Historical trauma refers to specific events of different entities and intensities hitting one, but more usually a group of people, and potentially, as witnesses affected by some form of vicarious trauma, a larger part of the population. Historical trauma is not however the event *per se*, but the experience of the event on the part of the people involved, an experience that hits in a subsequent moment. Trauma is not the traumatic event, but its later repetition in forms such as nightmares and hallucinations. This is a relevant aspect, "the elusiveness of the traumatic experience", that may induce an identification of the historical trauma with some kind of structural trauma, the latter being, instead, "not an event but an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization."[18] If historical trauma often implies some form of loss, structural trauma is an existential condition related to the concept of absence as applied "to ultimate foundations" especially on metaphysical grounds: "The passage from nature to culture, the entry into language, the traumatic encounter with the 'real,' the alienation from species-being, the anxiety-ridden thrownness and fallenness of *Dasein*, the inevitable generation of the aporia, or the constitutive nature of melancholic loss in relation to the genesis of subjectivity."[19]

But in the world of *The Leftovers*, how can we interpret the Departure? What is that it generates: losses or absence? One would say, both. LaCapra warns about the risks, in historical as well as in fictional literature about trauma, of conflating historical and structural trauma and the dimensions of absence and loss. However, he is thinking primarily of literature on the Holocaust and other "limit events." In *The Leftovers*, as we already said, the Departure is undeniably a limit event, but it functions also, in the general structure of the narrative, as a metaphor; and it does so, in a way, also for its characters. It is in this sense that historical and structural trauma inevitably conflates in the show. Not every character is directly affected by the Departure by losing a loved one, but everyone in the world depicted by *The Leftovers* is directly traumatized by the historical event and also involved in a sort of reified structural trauma, experiencing not necessarily the *loss* (of someone but also of the meaning-making convictions), but almost unavoidably the *absence*, in terms of the establishing of a different kind of "condition of

possibility" generated by the Departure. There is no real "vicarious or surrogate victimage" because even those that did not lose anyone had to deal with an inexplicable, catastrophic, disruptive event.

LaCapra's warning is due to pressing historical, political, and social concerns related to the risks of, on the one hand, extending the status of victims beyond the limits of the directly traumatized and in so doing diminishing the validity itself of the trauma, and on the other hand, detracting from the responsibility of perpetrators or those responsible for the trauma by deriving the specific trauma from an inevitable transhistorical condition. But involved in the conflation is also the danger of making any kind of working through and narrative closure impossible.[20]

However, by using the metaphor of the Departure, *The Leftovers* is not so much indulging that kind of conflation (the event is in a way comparable to 9/11 or other historical tragedies, but its inexplicability and the insistence on the irrelevance of an explanation made it a sort of out of-history-event) as directing the attention of the audience towards exploring the nature of our own structural trauma as a society and as a "generation," relativizing it, and looking for the many possible ways of working through it.

In this sense, the stories of Nora, Kevin, Matt, John, the Guilty Remnants, and the others inevitably appear as a kind of parable in which historical trauma, structural trauma, and memory interact in different ways. Matt, the man of faith; Laurie, the rationalist; Kevin and Nora, family people affected in opposite and yet similar ways; Jarden/Miracle citizens as secular 'born again'; John Murphy, the Doubting Thomas; the Guilty Remnants, true believer nihilists. Nora is haunted by memory (quite literally, becoming one of the targets of the cruel attacks of the Guilty Remnants), but she also embodies the transformative power of memory both with her personal story (she is the symbol of Mapleton's losses and source of inspiration for the memorialisation during the first season) and with her job at the Department for the Sudden Departure, working with the recollections of people who have lost their family members. Memory is what makes her suffer (and also look for suffering) and lose faith in a meaningful life, but memory is also what in the end pushes her to find her path toward an ultimate search (and another one after that). Nora spends most of her after-Departure life dealing with grief but, most of all, guilt: for surviving, for being happy again. But she is able to overturn this feeling in willingness: for her, there is no other way if not the one she finds: knowing. At the same time, the seemingly erratic path of Laurie (Amy Brennman), Kevin's ex-wife who left her family to join the Guilty Remnants, is in actual fact quite coherent: she is a scientist and a rationalist and continues to be so throughout her conversion, her subsequent work with cult exiters, and in her suspicious following of Kevin and the others in their messianic journey to Australia in the last episodes of the show. Laurie's structural trauma reverberates in all her choices: she joins the Guilty Remnants and then she leaves them for the same reason, because she cannot decide if life is worth living. The Guilty Remnants too are nihilists of a strange sort. As their leader Patti Levine (Ann Dowd) states "We are living reminders of what you so desperately try to forget" (S1E8). Whether or not they are right about the fact that everyone else wants to forget (after all they are quite integralist in their beliefs), they do believe in something: memory. They enact violent performative practices in order to move the other people.[21] Patti herself is a sort of prod for Kevin. They choose a

biblical name, but they do not follow any other rules but their own. But they have a purpose: strongly believing in meaninglessness may too be a purpose.

And then of course there are two opposite figures: Matt, the Job who has everything to handle even if he has no guilt and so much faith, and Kevin, who despite all his weakness and ignorance is the recipient of various forms of grace and heavy but rewarding tasks. Matt knows—in a way—what is going on (or at least he knows what is not: the Rapture) but that does not really bring him any satisfaction. Kevin does not understand a thing of what happens to him and still, he always finds a way to get through every situation. At the end, both have to give up something (Matt the certainty of some of his convictions, Kevin Nora) in order to find peace, but not in the form of another loss but coming to terms with their structural absences. Kevin is constantly challenged in his perception of the world; he is in some way our own eyes in the show. His way to work through his trauma is not so much by going through the tasks that his devotees ask him to, but eventually by finding his way back to where he belongs: Nora, again.

The message of *The Leftovers* is essentially a message of hope, but a kind of hope that does not come free: it is reserved for those who have the courage to go all the way down the road that they have chosen. The show has been defined as "radical pessimism," "a series with no solace,"[22] but a full understanding of both the postsecular attitude of its authors and of the complex nature of the Departure traumatic metaphor allows us to reframe pessimism as mourning, hopelessness as working through, grief as memorialisation. The metaphorical, catastrophic trauma confronts everyone with the necessity of making a choice while at the same time giving the possibility to choose freely, to build freely. All that is required is willingness. *The Leftovers* begins as a story of implicit or explicit scepticism, and ends as a merciful acknowledgment of the plurality of forms of existence that are available to humankind. It is actually a thought-experiment that dares the audience to test various beliefs, cosmologies, mythologies, worldviews, not to disprove some and validate others, but as a lived experience of rethinking one's own attitude toward life. But in the end, it is not an individualist message: the quest, whatever it is, must be personal, but the endgame is being truthful to oneself and to others, (re)creating a condition of possibility that enables real connections with the self and the other "leftovers."

---

[1] See Luca Bandirali and Enrico Terrone, *Filosofia delle serie TV. Dalla scena del crimine al trono di spade* (Milano: Mimesi, 2012).

[2] Emily Nussbaum, "Depression Modern. The existential risk-taking of *The Leftovers*," *The New Yorker*, November 2, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/02/depression-modern.

[3] Spencer Kornhaber, "The Dizzying, Surreal Journey of 'The Leftovers'," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/tv-gets-metaphysical/528681/.

[4] Aside from the general critical acclaim that each season has gained, the show has been widely recognized as the best TV show of the decade, see Alan Sepinwall, "50 Best TV Shows of the 2010s," *Rolling Stone*, December 4, 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/tv/tv-lists/50-best-tv-shows-of-decade-2010s-914737/46-new-girl-914777/; Caroline Framke and Daniel D'Addario, "The 25 Best TV Shows of the Decade," *Variety*, December 20, 2019, https://variety.com/feature/best-shows-decade-2010-2019-tv-1203440398/; Hanh Nguyen et al., "The Best TV Shows of the Decade, Ranked," December 3, 2019, https://www.indiewire.com/feature/best-tv-shows-decade-2010-2019-netflix-hbo-1202148573.

[5] Nussbaum, "Depression Modern."

[6] The aim of this article is to consider how the philosophical aspects related to trauma are treated in *The Leftovers* overall message and worldview, in its character arcs, and in its author's voice. Therefore there won't be any articulated reflection on the narrative aspects of *The Leftovers* as related to trauma and trauma theory, nor we will discuss whether the show is a trauma narrative or not; and, if it is, what kind. For further readings on trauma narratives see Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge 1991); Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2004); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge 2008).

[7] John McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2007), 4-6. 'Postsecular' has been a controversial concept since its birth in very different contexts and meanings, sometimes opposite, and even more after the widespread success gained with the use made by Jürgen Habermas. This article conceives it as an approach to contemporary global society that tries to recuperate the core validity of the secularization theory as differentiation, while relativizing other aspects such as privatization and decline, while at the same time being aware of the constructedness of the categories of religious and secular and the strict connections and blurred boundaries between the two; see Rosi Braidotti, "Conclusion: The Residual Spirituality in Critical Theory: A Case for Affirmative Postsecular Politics," in *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, ed. Rosi Braidotti et al. (Basinsgtoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014), 249-272; Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (eds.), *Secularism and Religion-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Besides the work of McClure, many interesting approaches in the field of literary theory and comparative literature have emerged in the last decade, contributing a great deal to the development of theoretical and empirical postsecular studies and postsecular criticism; see Michael Kaufmann, "Locating the Postsecular," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 3 (autumn 2009): 68-73; Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman, "Introduction: After the Postsecular," *American Literature* 86, no. 4 (2014): 645–54; James Hodkinson and Silke Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular: From Conceptual Beginnings to Cultural Theory," *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): 317–326. For studies on postsecular tele/visual aesthetics see Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu, *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema. The Postsecular Constellation* (New York: Routledge, 2014); John Caruana and Mark Cauchi, *Immanent Frames Postsecular Cinema between Malick and von Trier* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018); James Hodkinson, "Returning Again: Resurrection Narratives and Afterlife Aesthetics in Contemporary Television Drama," *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): 395–416.

[8] See Kristen Donnelly, "Forced Devotion vs. Acceptable Doubt," in *HBO's Original Voices*, ed. Victoria McCollum and Giuliana Monteverde (New York: Routledge, 2018), 115-124; Antonio Lucci, "Religious Seriality: Reflections On The Problem Of The Religion And Religiosity In Television Seriality, Starting From American Horror Story-Cult, The Leftovers And American Gods," in *Seriality across narrations, languages, and mass consumptions*, ed. Alfonso Amendola, Barone Linda and Troianello Novella (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2019), 120-134; Charlotte E. Howell, "Religion as Unreality," in *Divine Programming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 127–53.

[9] Dressler and Mandair (eds.), *Secularism and Religion-Making*, 19.

[10] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers', Show Creators Embrace Ambiguity And The Unknown," December 2, 2015, https://www.npr.org/2015/12/02/458143133/from-lost-to-leftovers-show-creators-embrace-ambiguity-and-the-unknown?t=1590852469785.

[11] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers'."

[12] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers'."

[13] Sarah Jones, "*The Leftovers*: confusion and doubt mirrors my religious journey," *The Guardian*, July 14, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/jul/14/the-leftovers-hbo-depiction-religion.

[14] In this respect, although the parallel between *The Leftovers* (book and series) and the series *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins easily comes to mind, various substantial differences subsist between the two. First of all, the 'positive' mark is not on those who disappeared, but those who remained are the focus of attention: they are not the damned ones, although of course they go through a lot of suffering. The frame of the *Left Behind* series is an explicitly Christian one, in which the unsaved are left to face catastrophic events that challenge them to convert and be saved themselves. *The Leftovers* is in this sense a (post)secular version and a sort of response to the series; see Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort, "Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience... Resolution?," *TV/Series*, 12 (2017): 1-19.

[15] Charles Taylor in his opus magnum *A Secular Age* defined as having a Nova Effect on the society the appearance of a secular worldview that he labels 'exclusive humanism' as an alternative to conventional religious beliefs and the multiplication of beliefs, religious and nonreligious positions that arose from that appearance; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[16] For Taylor, the Immanent Frame is the main feature of modern society with respect to its secularity: a condition in which believing in God is no more unchallenged and unproblematic, but "one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace"; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

[17] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[18] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81-82.

[19] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 50-52

[20] As LaCapra notes "the preemptive foreclosure of any and every modality of closure is as doctrinaire and open to question as the quest for definitive, totalizing closure"; LaCapra, *Writing History*, 194.

[21] See Cason Murphy, "Augusto Boal Is Alive and Well and Living in Mapleton: The Guilty Remnant in HBO's 'The Leftovers'," *Journal of Film and Video* 68, no. 3–4 (2016): 104-114.

[22] Sarah Hatchuel and Pacôme Thiellement, *The Leftovers, le troisième côté du miroir* (Levallois-Perret: Playlist Society, 2019); Emmanuel Taïeb, "'The Leftovers' et le choix du pessimisme radical," *Le Point*, October 28, 2019, https://www.lepoint.fr/pop-culture/the-leftovers-et-le-choix-du-pessimisme-radical-28-10-2019-2343846_2920.php.

TIME, GRIEF, AND GRACE: A BACHELARDIAN INTERPRETATION OF NORA'S JOURNEY

Michael Granado (Staffordshire University and Sora Schools)

According to Edward Casey, philosophers have been preoccupied with a central question concerning time; namely, "is time continuous, or is it disruptive?"[1] The answer to this question also determines one's attitude toward a host of related topics, including grief. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard argued for the latter, claiming that "time is a reality confined to the instant and suspended between two voids."[2] Bachelard utilizes dialectical language to juxtapose the existence of the present instant and the nonexistence of the past and future. The implication here is that the time of our life does not exist along some uninterrupted medium. Rather, every moment is separate and distinct from the next. Time, within the context of Bachelard's philosophy, is inherently discontinuous. The benefit of such an approach, with respect to grief, is that it brings to the forefront the reality and persistence of bereavement throughout the individual's life. As Line Ryberg Ingerslev explains, there has been a tendency to view grief as "a process with the specific aim," rather than "an ongoing activity."[3] The deficiency of such an approach is that it fails to account for the fact that grief is often a non-linear activity for the individual. Nevertheless, in grief, Bachelard sees an opportunity for grace. Bachelard strips grace of its theological context, and instead instantiates it in the human ability "to rectify, diversify, and go beyond their own nature."[4] This paper will explore the relationship between time, grief, and grace through the lens of Nora's character in the show *The Leftovers*. Nora (Carrie Coon) stands out because of her loss, and the depiction of her grief, but also because she attains some sort of redemption in the end. Although the method by which she obtains such redemption is left vague, as it often is in life, Bachelard's concept of grace will shed some light on this development.

BACHELARD ON TIME

Much can be said about Bachelard's philosophy of time,[5] but for the purposes of this paper, three characteristics stand out:

1. Its discontinuous nature
2. Its relational/constructive quality
3. And the rhythm of experienced time (Rhythmanalysis)

In his *The Dialectic of Duration* (*DD*), Bachelard defines time as "a series of breaks."[6] This is, of course, contrary to the view that time "flows" seamlessly from the past to the future. Bachelard argues that the "thread of time has knots all along it."[7] These "breaks" or "knots" are a metaphorical reference to temporal causality; specifically, this imagery is utilized to call attention to the fact that temporal causality, at its most basic level, is discontinuous.

While Bachelard pictures time as a series of "breaks," we are still left with the question, "Breaks between what?" The answer comes in the form of the "instant." In his *Intuition of the Instant* (*II*) Bachelard posits that "Time has but one reality, the reality of the instant."[8] The instant is the "most real" or "foundational" element of time, because it is the only moment that we are consciously aware of, or in which we are present. As Zbigniew Kotowicz summarizes, "the instant is the first reality of time, it is time's only reality and is therefore where the meditation on temporal phenomenon must begin."[9] Bachelard explains that each instant exists in isolation or "solitude." These isolated instances may be said to exist independently from one another insofar as they are not necessarily connected causally. While we may list an "objective" order of events, event A happened *before* event B, this does not necessitate a formal cause which flows through those events: that event A *caused* event B. The cause, as a result, is something which emerges from a rational agent's ordering of a sequence of events but not contained within the events themselves. Bachelard speaks to this point by insisting that "the realization of the cause in order to give its effect is therefore an emergence, a composition."[10] Nevertheless, although these instances exist in isolation they also, to borrow an expression from Carlo Rovelli, exist in a larger "web of relations."[11] In other words, these isolated instances never keep to themselves. Instead, they connect to form larger temporal durations which exist in relation to other instances. The impression of time that the individual constructs mentally is formulated by linking instances together. In this respect, Bachelard explains in his *DD* that "the past can only be brought back to life by linking it firmly to an affective theme that is necessarily present."[12] Any sense of temporal duration is psychologically constructed from previously experienced instances (the past) or anticipated instances (the future). As Bachelard explains in his *II*, duration is a "relative and secondary datum, always more or less artificial."[13]

Time is discontinuous because its most basic reality, the instant, is isolated and disconnected from other instances. At the same time, however, each one of these instances may be placed in relation to another instant. As a result, the reader is presented with the rather paradoxical position that "every instant is at once a giver and a plunderer" and that "a new era always opens up through the irruption of an absolute."[14] The important point here, to quote Monika Wulz, is that the "possibilities of reality are enclosed in isolated instances or in isolated points."[15] Possibility, action, and creation spring forth from the fact that there is no causality inherent in temporal relations. The individual becomes, at the same time, beholden to their past and yet radically free from it. Humans exist within a "dialectical osculation of making and annihilating,"[16] that is to say we contain within ourselves the potential to construct our past while simultaneously containing the ability to destroy or depart from

our past. The power of the instant lies in its potentiality. It is the potential for action, novelty, and change.

A prominent feature of Bachelard's philosophy of time is the seamless interweaving of metaphysical discussions about the nature of time and the lived experience of time. Bachelard likes to talk about the "lived experience of time" in terms of rhythm, and the analysis of this rhythm as rhythmanalysis. There is a direct link between the experience of the instant and consciousness insofar as the instant is the temporal location of conscious action. "The fundamental nature of rhythm," according to Bachelard, "is clearly shown by this possibility of their being a purely temporal explosion."[17] The "temporal explosion" mentioned in the previous quote is the potentiality that the instant brings. It is through the construction of duration that Bachelard believes we can reach "real time." Real time, in this sense, refers to those durations which are "lived, felt, loved, sung, and written about in literature."[18] Due to the nature of duration, it is possible for an individual to experience time in different ways. Just as a piece of music may sound "fast" or "slow" depending upon the rhythm of the song, so life may seem at times to be moving "fast" or "slow." The musician strings individual notes together, which the listener interprets as a rhythm/melody. The same is true of the individual who strings together various instances, which subsequently take on the appearance of duration. In both cases, one may break down a particular segment of time or music into individual instances or notes. Rhythmanalysis, therefore, consists of analyzing the "movement" of one's life, or how we are perceive the progress of time.

A CASE STUDY: NORA DURST

Leaving Bachelard aside for a moment, it will be pertinent to the remainder of the discussion to examine the character of Nora Durst and the philosophical problems raised by her story. Of principle concern is the emotional, philosophical, and temporal impact of Nora's grief. From a cinematic standpoint, *The Leftovers* captures what Saige Walton has referred to as the "durational thickness" of Nora's grief portrayed in the narrative and visual representation of her character.[19] While the viewer is only given glimpses into the moment when Nora lost her children and husband, they are, on the other hand, shown her prolonged struggle with grief. As Walton points out, in cinematic depictions of grief the focus becomes on how "the living will continue to carry the dead (in memory, through emotion, or through creative production)."[20] The following analysis will center largely on the first season of *The Leftovers* and the ways in which characters, especially Nora, are depicted dealing with their grief.

The viewer is introduced to Nora in the first episode of the first season when she is invited to the "Hero's Day" parade to give a speech to honor those who departed. Here we learn that in the Sudden Departure, Nora lost her two children and her husband. Although the Heroes Day parade takes place three years after the Sudden Departure, the show makes clear that for most people, Nora included, the inexplicability of the event has prevented the normal grieving process. As Kevin (Justin Theroux)

explains to Mapleton's mayor (Amanda Warren), in preparation for the event (S1E1), "nobody is ready to feel better, they are ready to fucking explode." Nora expresses a similar sentiment in the closing lines of her speech, "I'm not greedy. I'm not asking for that perfect day at the beach. Just give me that horrible Saturday. All four of us sick and miserable, but alive and together." If we can map Nora's sentiments onto the Kübler-Ross model of the grief cycle, there are elements of anger, bargaining, and depression, but there is not an expression of closure or acceptance. In fact, this is a fundamental element of Nora's character that we will see displayed throughout the show; specifically, there is an underlying resistance to the acceptance of the trauma experienced. Furthermore, even if a semblance of "moving on" is expressed in her character, it is only temporary.

Speaking to Nora's situation specifically, the Kübler-Ross model proves to be ill-equipped to handle the sort of grief that is depicted, at least with respect to the philosophical dimensions of grief.[21] In order to highlight some of the characteristics of grief that pertain to this paper, it will be beneficial to narrow the scope. That being said, the sixth episode of the first season, "Guest" (S1E6), provides explicit insight into some of the ideas discussed in this paper.

Toward the beginning of the episode, Nora is shown grocery shopping and subsequently cleaning out her refrigerator in order to make room for her newly purchased food. The ordinariness of such an act is inverted once the viewer realizes that she is restocking her home with the same foodstuffs that were present at the time of her family's departure. The peculiarity of her habits become excruciatingly painful to watch upon the further realization that the physical makeup of her home, down to the used-up roll of paper towels that has yet to be discarded, has remained undisturbed since her children were taken. This portrayal of Nora's grief speaks to what Matthew Ratcliffe identifies as the presence of "absence" in the phenomenological impact that grief has on our "habitual world."[22] Ratcliffe explains that although the loss of a loved one occurred in the past, there are still ways in which this loss can be experienced in the present moment.

Going back to Nora's situation, she exists in a "habituated world," a world that was once inhabited by people who acted and behaved in certain ways. This world, of course, did not disappear with the loss of her family, but rather, continued to persist after their departure. As Ratcliffe explains, this paradoxical present-absence "involves continuing to experience one's surroundings in ways that presuppose certain capacities."[23] In other words, Nora inhabited a habitual world that included a very dynamic family life. Although the members of that family are now removed from that world, she is not, and therefore continues to feel their presence in the habitual aspects of her life. Nora continues to persist in a state in which coping with her grief becomes an impossibility because the loss of her family is not "past," but rather a present experience that she continues to live out daily.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, claimed that "the passage of time does not carry away impossible projects, nor does it seal off the traumatic experience. The subject still remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts then at least in his actual being."[24] Bachelard, in his *II*, makes a similar claim when he says: "For the person who continues to

love, a lost love is both present and past—present for the faithful heart, past for the unhappy heart."[25] These sentiments represent an explicit rejection of the commonly held platitude that "time heals all wounds." The assumption, implicit within the platitude, is that past trauma may be softened with the passage of time. Going even deeper one may assume a posited disconnect between past and present. Nora's character, of course, embodies an inherent rejection of such platitudes. Instead, what we have represented here, articulated by William Faulkner, is a different sentiment that holds that "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[26]

Nora herself expresses a similar sentiment while she is at a work-related conference (S1E6). While there, she meets Patrick Johansen (Curtiss Cook), an author who has just written a book titled *What's Next*. Although the viewer does not know the content of the book itself, we may assume, due to the title and the author's seemingly "happy" demeanor, that the book deals with life after loss, or how to move on from loss. The inherent absurdity of such a position disgusts Nora to the point of triggering a violent outburst:

> NORA: If you were in pain you would know there is no moving on. There is no happiness. What's next? What's fucking next? Nothing is next. Nothing. (S1E6)

Nora's sentiments, although expressed in the form of an emotional outburst, claw at a foundational philosophical problem that lies at the heart of our experience of grief; namely, is it possible for the individual to find meaning in the wake of such loss? Such an experience constitutes what Marilyn McCord Adams and Stewart Sutherland define as a "horrendous evil." A defining characteristic of a horrendous evil, according to Adams and Sutherland, is that it "threatens to rob a person's life of positive meaning" and subsequently carry with it the requisite "not only to be engulfed, but to be made meaningful through positive and decisive defeat."[27]

Philosophically speaking, it seems that we have reached a bit of an impasse. Nora's situation, although a work of fiction, speaks to one of the most basic and universal features of the human condition: The experience of pain, death, and loss. Likewise, from this experience, we get one of the most primordial questions of philosophy: How does, or can, the individual ascribe positive meaning to their lives in the face of such tragedy? *The Leftovers*, I think, offers two general approaches, and one specific to Nora, which seek to answer this question, all of which are presented in the first season and play out over the course of the series.

The first approach is a bit of a non-answer, and it comes in the form of nihilism. After requesting a divorce, in her letter to Kevin, Lorie (Amy Brenneman) gives us some insight into the motivations of her character (S1E4): "I think I'm supposed to stay broken. Maybe we all are." The answer here is that there is no answer. The departure represents an event that is inherently absurd and devoid of meaning. As a result, no meaning or answers can be posited to "justify" or "redeem" the individual's experience. In many respects, the Guilty Remnant, the group which Lorie leaves Kevin to join, embodies this idea. Their slogan, "We are living reminders," is intended to call attention to the fact

that people are continuing with their lives in the wake of an event that destroyed standard narratives of meaning. Their existence, their purpose, is to remind people that they are living a lie.

The second approach to the problem of suffering and meaning comes in the form of a religious answer. Of course, this approach is best embodied by the character of Matt (Christopher Eccleston), Nora's brother, who is the preacher in the series. The third episode of season one starts off with a sermon by Matt about a little boy who has been diagnosed with cancer. Matt ends the sermon with a series of questions:

> MATT: The boy survives, now she has a choice to make. Does he decide that he was punished, or that he was rewarded? Will he be angry for having been made to suffer, or will he be grateful for that suffering because it changed him? (S1E3)

As the episode unfolds, we see Matt live out the answer to these questions as he views the challenges he faces as obstacles put in place by God. In this sense, the suffering that one experiences is inherently meaningful simply due to the fact that it is purposeful, intended for the individual by a higher power. Matt's exact words to Nora, that the departure "was a test" (S1E3), implicitly assumes that there is some sort of reason behind the events. Although those reasons might remain unclear to the one who suffers through them, the individual may nevertheless be content in the knowledge that what happened occurred for the sake of a plan greater than themselves.

While it may be argued that Nora oscillates between these two positions throughout the course of the series, her character ultimately represents a rejection of both. Yet, the answer that Nora's character finds remains a bit obtuse to the viewer because of its seemingly ambiguous nature. While Nora's character certainly demonstrates nihilistic characteristics, she ultimately overcomes or accepts her grief in a way that is inconsistent with nihilism as such. Furthermore, while we do see Nora venture into religious territory, expressed in her character's decision to put faith into uncertain people/machines, such has her encounter with Holy Wayne (Paterson Joseph) or her entrance into the machine in the final season, the viewer is left with an ultimate rejection of outside solutions. Rather, the peace she obtains is a direct result of internal processes and not the work of an external supernatural agent.

TIME AND GRACE

Nora's character raises some complex questions regarding how individuals make sense of grief and tragedy. Nevertheless, if we consider Nora's narrative within the context of Bachelard's philosophy of time, then the process of Nora's journey becomes contextualized and explicable. The key point here lies in Bachelard's explanation of the instant. According to Bachelard, the instant occurs at the intersection of "this place" and "this moment." Simply put, the instant is the moment of time that we are cognitively aware of, to a lesser or greater extent, and the "moment" that grounds us as conscious entities. Bachelard argues that "life always finds its primary reality in the instant."[28] The primary

reality of the lived experience persists in the instant rather than duration, which Bachelard claims has no ontological status. As outlined in the first section, duration is a "construction," which is built from the relations between instances. In this respect, there is a deep analogy that may be drawn between the construction of duration from instances and the composition of music. Just as musicians develop a specific rhythm for a song, so human beings construct a rhythm (duration) out of instances. The same sort of work is present in both situations. The musician strings individual notes together, which the listener interprets as a rhythm/melody. Despite its instrumental composition, or its rhythm, when we hear a song we think of it as a "whole," or as a duration.

The above analogy is critical to Bachelard's philosophy of time and, for the purposes of this paper, the rest of this argument hinges on this particular understanding of the instant. In order for the instant to be realized, one must act on or within the instant. That is to say, the individual must be aware/conscious of the instant. Consequently, the essence of the instant consists in the act of becoming.[29] These acts, within history, are discontinuous insofar as each new act is a separate occurrence, breaking with the past and beginning anew. The "realizing" and "acting" in the instant leads Bachelard to distinguish between two sorts of experienced time: horizontal and vertical time. Horizontal time is "ordinary" time, the time that arises from the concrete order of events. Bachelard goes on to clarify that horizontal time is "the flux and development of other people, of life, and of the world."[30] What has been described above is not horizontal but "vertical" time, the seat of action, which Bachelard describes as "passionate," "active," and "dynamitic."[31] With respect to the "rhythm" of time, the consistency of horizontal times provides a baseline for the experience of time, the feeling of the "movement" of time. Vertical time, on the other hand, is "the experience of a certain rupture of being" in which "the idea of discontinuity imposes itself without dispute."[32]

When discussing the instant and vertical time Bachelard's language borders on the religious: love, hope, harmony, redemption, and transcendence are all used to describe this unique form of time. This shift in language may alarm some readers of Bachelard, who in his previous work on epistemology and time generally avoided such a leap, and naturally raises the question: Why invoke theological/religious language within the context of an a-theological philosophical treatises on time? To be clear grace, theological or otherwise, is not a concept that is developed in the secondary literature surrounding Bachelard's corpus. The closest approximation to grace that is provided is Mary McAllester Jones' concept of the "redemptive instant."[33] Redemption here is associated with the "newness" brought about by the instant. Jones explains that this redemption "is associated with healing" because it is with the experience of vertical time that "the scales fall from our eyes" and "we are surprised."[34] Jones emphasizes the epistemological point Bachelard makes, and the salvific quality on display is the recognition of error and the acknowledgment of previous lapses in reasoning. Pivoting away from Jones, there is still much to be explored if a similar concept of grace is applied to Bachelard; specifically, the ways in which this temporal grace can be applied to the individuals understanding of their life.

The concept of grace within the Christian tradition has a long history dating back, in its most robust presentation, to the works of Saint Augustine. One of the chief characteristics of Augustine's understanding of grace is its ability to liberate the individual. To use the words of Alister McGrath, "grace is understood as a liberating force, which sets human nature free from its self-incurred bondage to sin."[35] Of course, Bachelard's writing does not posit the sort of theological substratum necessary to sustain a concept like "sin." Nevertheless, Bachelard is deliberate in his choosing to utilize a theologically loaded term such as "grace." The rational for this choice seems to lie in the "liberating" characteristic of grace. Within the context of the Christian New Testament it is "by Grace you have been saved."[36] That is to say, the individual who was once dead in sin has been rescued from their plight by God and given a new life. Grace, then, introduces a transforming force that radically alters the course of the individual's life. The instant, according to Bachelard, carries with it the potential for the same sort of existential impact on the individual insofar as the instant contains within it the possibility of change.

The full force of the philosophical implications of the instant are brought to bear on the individual when considering the relationship between vertical time and the individual's past. Toward the end of his *II*, Bachelard explains that "what coordinates the world is not the force of the past."[37] In other words, there is no pre-established cause or harmony which has "led" the universe to where it is now. Whatever cause the individual identifies is one which is constructed through reason and imposed on the past. Gerald Edelman qualifies "the present" as the "remembered present."[38] Edelman goes on to explain that the subjective experience of consciousness is rooted in the integration of the individual's past into the present moment. The act of remembering incorporates a sort of reintegration and construction of these fragments which subsequently combines them into a recognizable whole. Hinton Ladson explains that remembrance is the act of "continually recreating the past."[39] Memories, as Ladson explains, "can never be recovered in an unmodified form within the constraints of the present."[40] Rather, the act of remembrance itself oftentimes shapes and recreates the past. The individual's past becomes something which is malleable and something which, to use the words of Jessica Wiskus, is "worked by the human imagination."[41] Events which are not sequentially linked may become so as memories are "folded" onto one another. Not only then is the past malleable, but it is also something which contains "possibility."

The upshot to Bachelard's understanding of time, within the context of the individual's life, is that the past no longer has dominion over the present or the future. The inherent discontinuity of time means that there is an insurmountable gulf that exists between our past and the present moment. This gulf can be bridged, of course, but we must recognize that the bridging is in large part a result of an imposition of reason and causality that does not have an ontological basis. The result is a sort of temporal grace bestowed upon the present moment which offers the potential for a radically new life, one that could be categorically different from the past. Jean Lescure wonderfully expresses this idea in his "Introduction to Bachelard's Poetics" when he states that:

> "For never— not for a single moment— are we the sum of our past. Each instant discovered is what grants new sense, at every instant, to the senseless history we have lived so far. It is what grants our effort some of the meaning we need in order to seize the soul that shall be ours."[42]

NORA'S GRIEF, TEMPORAL GRACE, AND RHYTHMANALYSIS

It is within this context that we can best understand Nora's journey. While some of Nora's behaviors may be understood as nihilistic, her character ultimately embodies a rejection of nihilism in the decisions that she makes to embrace hope and love in the wake of her personal tragedy. Nevertheless, throughout the series we also see her character explicitly reject the sort of religious answer embodied by her brother Matt. Nora's character seems to suggest a third possibility, one that is also hinted at by Bachelard. The presentation of this answer is best exemplified in the final moments of the episode mentioned above (S1E6).

After her encounter with Patrick, Nora is approached at the conference by a man who claims that he can get rid of her pain. At this point Nora is introduced to Holy Wayne who, quoting Ecclesiastes 9:4, offers some words of wisdom which seem to echo the words of Lescure:

> HOLY WAYNE: For whoever is joined with all the living there is hope. Surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. Hope is your weakness, you want it gone because you don't deserve it. (S1E6)

The scene ends with Nora weeping while embracing Wayne. The impact of the encounter is, however, best depicted in the scenes which follow. Here Nora's actions stand in stark contrast to those which were shown at the beginning of the episode. Now, she no longer feels the need to watch the schoolteacher with whom her husband had an affair. She no longer feels the need to stock her house with the food that her children would have eaten, the food that was present on the day of their departure. Finally, she is shown opening herself up to Kevin and inviting the possibility of a romantic relationship.

Reflecting on Nora's encounter with Holy Wayne one is left with the Bachelardian question: "Can one instant be so rich, so vivid?"[43] To this question Bachelard gives a qualified "yes," insofar as such an instant contains the potential to signify "the motivating force of a person."[44] The encounter with Holy Wayne allows Nora's character to pivot and reframe her relationship with her past. Returning to Bachelard's usage of grace, he refers to such moments as the "grace of encounter."[45] Nora, on her own, was unable to break the tethers of pain which bound her to her past. That is to say, in her solitude she was incapable of imagining the new possibilities of a future without her family. Wayne's invitation to "hope" constructs the possibility of a new future out of the pernicious past which once enslaved Nora's character. As Bachelard explains, "we live asleep in a sleeping world"[46] until the instant arouses us from our slumber.

In reference to the shows depiction of Nora's everyday actions, it is possible to see how the *rhythm* of her life change after the encounter with Holy Wayne. Henri Lefebvre defines rhythm as "the interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy."[47] While generally applicable to what has been outlined, Bachelard's understanding of time changes the meaning of the term as it is used. Rhythmanalysis, or the analyzing of life's rhythms, for Bachelard is focused on the way "thought time" prevails, orders, or shapes "lived time."[48] Although the concept of "rhythm" typically carries with it a sense of pattern or repetition, temporal rhythm for Bachelard is more malleable and sometimes even disruptive. This may cause, within the context of film, what Saige Walton calls "felt discordance."[49] Bachelard's philosophy of time allows us to account for non-harmonic rhythms in film and, if Bachelard is to be believed, life. Nora's character embodies this concept. Applying Rhythmanalysis to Nora in the first part of the episode reveals a woman held captive by her own grief. In every scene the viewer is made painfully aware of the absence of her family. Nevertheless, the encounter with holy Wayne marks a primal shift in the tone of the episode itself and in the rhythm of Nora's character. Her previous rhythm was not only disrupted, but radically altered at a foundational level.

It is difficult to say what exactly happened in the moment with Holy Wayne. *The Leftovers* often leaves religious or miraculous events obscure and open-ended to the viewer. What we can say, however, is that Nora's relationship to her past was fundamentally altered. While it may be difficult to explain such a change, Bachelard's philosophy of time provides us with the philosophical language to imagine possible explanations.

---

[1] Edward Casey, "The Difference an Instant Makes: Bachelard's Brilliant Breakthrough," in *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 19.

[2] Gaston Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, trans. Eileen Rizo-Patron (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 6.

[3] Line Ryberg Ingerslev, "Ongoing: On grief's Open-Ended Rehearsal," *Continental Philosophy Review* 51, no. 3 (2018): 344.

[4] Gaston Bachelard, *Le Materialisme Rationnel* (Paris: Presses Universitaries de France, 1953), 1-2.

[5] Bachelard's two works on time are *Intuition of the Instant* and *The Dialectic of Duration*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2000).

[6] Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 41.

[7] Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 71.

[8] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 6.

[9] Zibgniew Kotowicz, *Gaston Bachelard: A Philosophy of the Surreal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 172.

[10] Bachelard, *The Dialect of Duration*, 62.

[11] Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is not what it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 113.

[12] Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 40.

[13] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 11.

[14] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 8 and 10.

[15] Monika Wulz, "Intervals, possibilities and encounters: The trigger of a ruptured history in Bachelard," in *Conference History and Epistemology. From Bachelard and Canguilhem to Today's History of Science,* ed. Henning Schmidgen Berlin (2012): 78.

[16] Gaston Bachelard, Intuition of the Instant, 46.

[17] Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 124.

[18] Bachelard, *The Dialect of Duration*, 109.

[19] Saige Walton, "Loving and Grieving with *Heart of a Dog* and Merleau-Ponty's Depth," *Projections* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 49.

[20] Walton, "Loving and Grieving with *Heart of a Dog* and Merleau-Ponty's Depth," 50.

[21] This may point to deeper inadequacies of the model in general, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. See for example: Charles A. Corr, "The 'five stages' in coping with dying and bereavement: strengths, weaknesses and some alternatives," *Mortality* 24 (2019): 405-417.

[22] Matthew Ratcliffe, "Towards a phenomenology of grief: Insights from Merleau-Ponty," *European Journal of Philosophy* 28, no.3 (2020): 657– 669.

[23] Ratcliffe, "Towards a phenomenology of grief," 658.

[24] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. D. Landes (London: Routledge Press, 2012), 85.

[25] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 29.

[26] William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chattq & Windus, 1919), 85.

[27] Marilyn McCord Adams and Stewart Sutherland, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 63 (1989): 300.

[28] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 12.

[29] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 12.

[30] Gaston Bachelard, "The poetic moment and the metaphysical moment," *The Right to Dream*, trans. J.A. Underwood (Dallas: Dallas institute publications, 1988), 174.

[31] Bachelard, "The poetic moment and the metaphysical moment," 174.

[32] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 7.

[33] Mary McAllester Jones, "The Redemptive Instant: Bachelard on the Epistemological and Existential Value of Surprise," *Philosophy Today* 47 (2003): 124.

[34] McAllester Jones, "The Redemptive Instant," 126.

[35] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 450.

[36] Ephesians 2:5.

[37] Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, 54.

[38] Gerald M. Edelman, *Wider Than the Sky: The Phenomenal Gift of Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 11.

[39] Hinton Ladson, "Temporality and the Torments of Time," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2015): 354.

[40] Hinton Ladson, "Temporality and the torments of time," 363.

[41] Jessica Wiskus, "Thought time and musical time," *Angelaki* 11, no.2 (2006): 183.

[42] Jean Lescure, "Introduction to Bachelard's Poetics," in Gaston Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, trans. Eileen Rizo-Patron (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 70.

[43] Gaston Bachelard, "Preface to Martin Buber's *I and Thou*," trans. Edward K. Kaplan, in *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard* (New York: Suny Press, 2017), 272.

[44] Gaston Bachelard, "Preface to Martin Buber's *I and Thou*," 272.

[45] Gaston Bachelard, "Preface to Martin Buber's *I and Thou*," 271.

[46] Gaston Bachelard, "Preface to Martin Buber's *I and Thou*," 272.

[47] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Gerald Moore and Stuart Elden (London: Continuum, 2004), 15.

[48] Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 137.

[49] Saige Walton, "Cruising the Unknown: Film as Rhythm and Embodied Apperhension in *L'lnconnu du lac/Stranger by the Lake*," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 16, no.3 (2018): 18.

THE END OF THE WORLD: CONFUSION IN *THE LEFTOVERS*

Keith Dromm (Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University)

"Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick
darkness that covers my face."
—*Job* 23:17

The intensity and other qualities of the grief felt by the Legacies, those who lost a family member in the Departure, is affected by their ignorance of the cause of their loved ones' disappearance. In some, this ignorance prevents them from moving on from their grief, worsening it by prolonging it. In others, that lack of closure may allow for hope to enter their lives, lessening their sadness by offering the possibility of a return or reunion of some other sort. Still others may not know exactly how, or even whether, to grieve since the Departure is unprecedented; our collective past experiences provide few models for dealing with sudden, inexplicable disappearances of loved ones.[1] There are some who believe they know why the departures occurred, so ignorance is not a feature of their grief. Others believe that they at least know what explanations for the departures are wrong. Matt (Christopher Eccleston), for example, works hard to convince others that they, the Departed, were not taken away in the Rapture, the Christian prophecy that someday the "saved" will be taken from this earth and brought to their eternal home, leaving the sinners behind. He does this by sharing the lurid—for him, "sinful"—details from the lives of the local Departed.[2] Matt does have a positive, alternative view, although initially a vague one. He believes the Sudden Departure was a test (S1E3). The Guilty Remnant, on the other hand, believe that every explanation is wrong. Most people, though, seem to acknowledge their ignorance but remain willing to accept any plausible explanation. What they may accept as plausible, as we will see, can be affected by their experience of the Sudden Departure.

The Legacies suffered the most loss and, understandably, the worst emotional trauma. But emotional injuries are not confined to them; while the severity may decrease the further that someone is emotionally from a departed, most everyone, simply out of sympathy or compassion, will suffer to some degree. There is another type of injury that can afflict everyone, even the people of Jarden[3]; it does not depend on one's emotional proximity to a departed. It is an

epistemic injury. It is not their ignorance of the cause of the Sudden Departure. There are many things we are ignorant about, including about life's most fundamental questions. "Why are we here?" is probably a more perplexing question than "where did all those people go?" Some even embrace their ignorance about such matters, or at least are not bothered by it, like the narrator in the main title song from the second season: "But no one knows for certain and so it's all the same to me /I think I'll just let the mystery be."[4] The epistemic injury inflicted by the Sudden Departure is that it has made it more difficult to understand and make sense of the world. In other words, it has produced *confusion*.

Confusion is the state of being aware that one's beliefs are disorganized, for example, because some of them incompatible with each other. There is another sense of confusion which involves mistaking one object or concept for another, which may afflict someone even if they are not aware for it. For example, someone would be confused in this sense if they mistake their suitcase for someone else's or if in a lecture they attribute a theory to the wrong philosopher, either out of ignorance or because of a slip of the tongue. Awareness of these confusions would dispel them. I am interested in the type of confusion that persists even though one is aware of it.[5] I am especially interested in how it compels the sufferer to relieve the confusion by making modifications to what they believe and how they acquire new beliefs. So, when I speak of confusion in what follows, it is to this sort that I refer.

I will be confused if I am reading a philosophy book and the author makes a claim that appears to contradict one that I believe they previously stated in the book. I will be confused if I see someone walking towards me from across campus that I thought had died last year. Any extensive modifications to one's beliefs or methods for acquiring new ones can be avoided if the person could be persuaded that the conflict is only apparent. For example, it could be demonstrated to me that the two claims in the philosopher's books are actually compatible, or that I misread the text and mistakenly attributed one of the claims to the author. In the case of the dead person seemingly coming to life, I could realize when they are closer that they only resemble the deceased, or I could learn from them that they never died after all; I had been misinformed. If remedies like these are not available, ones that dispel the incompatibility, then more drastic ones are necessary. If the philosopher actually contradicted themselves, then trust in them will diminish. In the other case, even if it was only a case of mistaken identity, I may become more circumspect in making visual identifications under similar conditions. However, if the person had actually died, but they are now walking around campus, then an even more radical modification would be necessary.

This last situation resembles the Sudden Departure in *The Leftovers*. For their entire lives, its characters have been taught, like us, that things do not just disappear without explanation. Experience has confirmed that. We may lose things, but most of the time they eventually turn up. Things have turned up so often that we do not attribute the permanent loss of those other things to anything other than our own ineptness at finding them. Our beliefs and experiences have not allowed for the possibility of things, including people, suddenly vanishing. Yet, that happened at the same moment to 2% of the world's population on the now memorialized date of October 14th. It happened in front of the eyes—literally, in many cases—of those who remained: Nora (Carrie Coon) turns away from her family at the breakfast table for a moment and when she turns back, they're gone. A women's baby suddenly stops crying in the back seat, and when she turns to check on him, he is not there anymore. A young boy's father disappears as he's pushing his shopping cart to their car. Kevin (Justin Theroux) is having sex with a woman who disappears from underneath him. Laurie (Amy Brenneman) and the nurse watch the image on the sonogram disappear. At that moment, they all believed *both* that people cannot suddenly disappear *and* that people did disappear in that way. Those beliefs are obviously incompatible with each other. They also implicate a wide range of beliefs. Our belief that people cannot suddenly vanish is connected to beliefs about physics, the permanency of objects, the nature of reality, the reality of the supernatural, and so on. It is a *massive* confusion, in a couple, distinct senses: it affects many of our beliefs and it afflicts everyone.[6] As Peter O'Leary puts it in his review of the series, the characters suffer from a "communal confusion."[7] Our usual confusions are more restricted, to ourselves and our personal experiences. Yet, studying such a large-scale confusion may enhance our understanding of the smaller confusions to which we are susceptible, which I hope to do in what follows, as well as illuminate *The Leftovers* series. There is precedent for this approach in Plato. Socrates convinced his interlocuters that it would be easier to study justice in something as large as a city and doing so would help us better understand it in our much smaller souls, the ultimate concern of *Republic*.[8] Similarly, it may be easier to understand small confusions by first studying massive ones.

Confusion has been little studied by philosophers.[9] However, its remedy, *understanding*, has been enjoying increasing attention over the last couple of decades.[10] Understanding, like knowledge, is a cognitive achievement in that it involves some intellectual effort to acquire, but it involves much more than knowing. To know is to believe a true proposition.[11] To understand, as Catherine Elgin explains, is to relate to more than a single proposition, but to a "suitably unified, integrated, coherent body of information."[12] The body of information relevant to the Sudden Departure is not coherent; following that event it contains propositions that are not compatible

with each other. The characters in *The Leftovers* frequently express their lack of understanding. After the woman's baby disappears in the series' opening moments, she shouts to those around her in the parking lot: "Where is he?! He was right in there! I don't understand!" In Season Two, John (Kevin Carroll) is cleaning the wound he caused in Kevin from the gunshot that should have killed him:

JOHN: I don't understand what's happening.

KEVIN: Me neither (S2E10)

During her death scene in Season One, Patti (Ann Dowd) repeatedly insists to Kevin that he understands, despite his protests that he doesn't:

GARVEY: I don't understand you.

PATTI: You understand. (S1E8)[13]

She disregards his denials and insists: "I want you to say you understand" (S1E8).

It is not clear, at least to me, what she wants Kevin to understand, but Patti cannot just insist on it. Acquiring understanding requires effort. As Duncan Pritchard explains: "One gains understanding by undertaking an obstacle-overcoming effort to piece together the relevant pieces of information."[14] The obstacles that prevent Kevin from understanding are especially demanding and involute, but any effort at understanding requires much more than simply knowing something. One can acquire knowledge simply by being told it. Patti cannot simply tell Kevin something to get him to understand. Learning something new might be an important part of acquiring understanding, but only in so far as it fills a gap in the connections between other beliefs. Merely knowing those discrete items of information is also not enough to achieve understanding. Rather, you must grasp, as Jonathan Kvanvig says, the "explanatory, logical, probabilistic, and other kinds of relations" between them.[15] So, understanding is revealed by what one is able to do with that information, for example, drawing inferences, identifying salient connections, making predictions, applying the information in appropriate circumstances, and so on. To do these things, of course, requires a body of information capable of being utilized in that way, that is, a coherent, stable body of information. To demonstrate knowledge, on the other hand, involves simply agreeing with a true proposition.[16]

Another important difference between understanding and knowledge is that there may be more than one way to understand the same set of facts. As Linda Zagzebski says: "More than one alternative theory may give understanding of the same subject matter" and each "may be equally good, equally accurate."[17] She would likely agree with Catherine Elgin that in order to provide understanding, the theories still must "answer to the facts."[18] Nevertheless, a theory that is not "equally good" as the others in this respect—that lacks "a suitable tether"[19] to the facts, to use

Elgin's image—may still relieve a person's sense, or feeling, of confusion. Such understanding may turn out to be "illusory"[20], as Zagzebski puts it, but that realization may be deferred. The long-term ability of a theory to relieve confusion depends on its resilience in the face of the facts. It would be difficult to retain belief in a theory in the face of blatant contradiction. But some theories, like those that posit divine intervention as the cause of the Sudden Departure, may better avoid being tested for such contradictions than a theory that relied more on empirical data, like that collected by the surveys that Nora administers on behalf of the Department of Sudden Departure. I am not going to decide here whether we should label as "understanding" every theory that is capable of relieving confusion or restrict that term to only those theories and explanations that further satisfy some epistemic criteria. I will simply call them all "understandings," though it may be an "honorific" sense in some cases.[21]

Most of the central characters in *The Leftovers* have not settled on a satisfying explanation of the Sudden Departure and are still struggling with their confusion. They include Kevin and his children, Nora, and the mayor of Mapleton (Amanda Warren), who suggests re-naming Remembrance Day to "We Don't Know What the Fuck Happened Day" (S1E1). Their struggles with understanding the Sudden Departure are an important part of the drama of the series. As Tom Perrotta, one of the series' creators and the author of the novel upon which it is based, puts it, the series is "a really rich metaphor for thinking about the way that we react to (…) incomprehensible events, horrible events, things that we can't completely understand."[22] But there are others who have more successfully handled their confusion. I have classified their approaches into three types. There are those who have acquired an understanding of the Sudden Departure (or at least made sense of it enough to abate their confusion). I will discuss two different ways that understanding has been achieved; these are two of the three types. The third type includes those who do not understand the Sudden Departure but have despaired of ever understanding it and simply accepted their confusion. I examine this group first.

The most notable representative of the third type is the Guilty Remnant. They are reviled by almost everyone who is not a member, but they grasp something that everyone does to some degree, or with which they are at least contending, even if they are not able or willing to articulate it in the same way. As Laurie explains it to the prospective publishers of her book about her experiences with the Guilty Remnant: "They believe the world ended" (S2E3). For everyone, the massive confusion caused by the Sudden Departure has brought an end to the world. Thomas Kuhn, in discussing the effects of a change in scientific paradigm brought about by an anomaly, says "when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them."[23] The anomaly of the Sudden Departure has made the world incomprehensible. Whatever is not comprehensible is not

conceivable. As in Job's lament, it is as if a darkness has covered the world and made it disappear along with the Departed.[24]

Consider how anomalous that anomaly actually was. The Departed just vanished. They did not dissolve or fade away. They left no corpses behind, as in a plague or other type of disaster. They even took their clothes with them. As Nora puts it: "They are just gone" (S3E4). They left with no sound. There was no warning or prediction. They haven't returned and there is no widely accepted explanation for their disappearance. The mayor at Remembrance Day seems to be speaking for most people when she says: "We still wonder where they went and why" (S1E1). The way they left precludes the normal explanations for things going missing. So, it demands a reconfiguration of a great deal of what everyone, not just scientists, believe and out of that, a new world will emerge. Failing that, the ability to believe anything is threatened.

In a scientific revolution, an anomaly produces a new paradigm, a new way of understanding a field of scientific investigation. In elaborating on how this produces a new world, Kuhn describes adopting a new paradigm as like "being transported to another planet"[25]: "Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before."[26] Yet, the Guilty Remnant have not accepted a new paradigm. They do not recover from the anomaly of the Sudden Departure with a new world. They are like the hypothetical scientist Kuhn describes who abandons science and whom he analogizes to a carpenter who cannot complete a project successfully and blames their tools.[27] They have become sceptics. They have abandoned any efforts to make sense of the world. As one Guilty Remnant leader puts it: "Explanations are useless" (S2E9). They exhibit the effects of skeptical arguments that David Hume describes in his *Treatise of Human Nature*: "The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion as even more probable or likely than any other."[28] But they are more than sceptics; they are nihilists. Another comparison—as well as an important contrast—is with Albert Camus. Both accept the world's absurdity, but unlike Camus, the Guilty Remnant have no redeeming message to offer.[29] Instead, they have the pamphlet we see in Season One. The outside reads: "Everything that Matters About You is Inside" (S1E4). The inside of the pamphlet is blank. This is a very different message than those we find in Camus' essays on Tipasa, among the best statements of his positive philosophy: "I love this life with abandon and wish to speak of it boldly: it makes me proud of my human condition;"[30] "There is no shame in being happy;"[31] and "In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."[32] Neither skepticism nor despair was Camus'

solution to the absurdity of existence. Camus' prescription was rebellion against absurdity, not submission. Even though there might be an element of rebellion in the praxis of the Guilty Remnant, its goal is the very *un*existentialist one of making everyone feel as bad as them.

There are other characters in *The Leftovers* who succeed in recovering their understanding (though it may be of a different world). One group does this by means of a heightened credulity, an extreme contrast with the skepticism of the Guilty Remnant. While the Sudden Departure has made it difficult for members of the Guilty Remnant, and others, to believe anything, for these people it has made it easy to believe anything. The variety of beliefs are displayed in the camp outside of Jarden, as well as among the visitors who make it inside. They can also be glimpsed in the crowd outside the conference Nora attends in Season One. These people have arrived at a variety of understandings of the Sudden Departure, and the ease with which they accept them, despite their apparent implausibility, is a consequence of the Sudden Departure itself. Garvey, Sr. (Scott Glenn) explains this well. When the plausibility of his ideas are questioned by his son, Kevin, Garvey, Sr. replies that the "laws of fucking nature seem a bit upside down of late" (S2E2). If people can disappear without explanation, then it seems anything is possible. Bagels could disappear, as Kevin suspects when he loses his in the toaster at the police station. Grief can be relieved by hugging Holy Wayne and, later, Tom Garvey (Chris Zylka). A man who lives in a trailer illuminated by exposed bulbs can poison you and then bring you back to life.[33] Sitting in a vat in a trailer truck can send you to the place to which your loved ones disappeared. The Sudden Departure has eliminated many of the reasons for thinking such things impossible. For some of them, accepting them as real also relieves the emotional trauma caused by the Sudden Departure, which make them that much easier to accept.

Laurie understands this well. She gives Kevin a lengthy explanation of it when trying to convince him that his mind is inventing Patti and that he should not believe that she is really with him:

> LAURIE: Can I tell you about belief, Kevin? When the mind is in emotional distress, it will grasp at any construct that makes it feel better. After the 14th the whole world needed to feel better. We were all in emotional distress. So that made all of us susceptible to false belief, to be taken advantage of. (S2E7)

She experienced the manipulation that emotional need and increased credulity can make one susceptible to. She tells the publishers that the person who recruited her into the Guilty Remnant took advantage of this: "She knew I was afraid and confused and alone" (S2E3). She used it on others when she told them that her son could take their pain away by hugging them: "Because their brains would sooner embrace magic than deal with feelings of fear and abandonment and

guilt" (S2E7). She believes that Kevin is doing the same to himself; allowing himself to believe something only because of the emotional relief it delivers. The Sudden Departure has made it easier for Kevin and others to do so, because it has made it easier to believe in anything.

The Leftovers portrays another approach to understanding that is not the result of excessive credulity. Instead of relieving confusion by relaxing epistemic standards, it achieves understanding by adopting new standards or—since it may not involve the self-conscious application of standards—a new way of looking at things. It may deliver emotional relief, which may motivate its adoption, but it cannot be additionally explained as resulting from the gullibility of the adopters.

The choice between different ways of looking at things is effectively portrayed in the Third Season. Matt, John, and Michael (Jovan Adepo) believe that Kevin is the savior. They travel together to Australia so they can bring him back to Jarden in order to fulfill a prophecy. Laurie forces her way onto their flight. She does not share their view of Kevin. She believes that it is as much confabulation as Kevin's hallucinations of Patti, although its etiology may be different. It would be unfair to describe Matt, John, and Michael as overly credulous. John began, at least, as highly skeptical of the claims made about Jarden's magical powers. Michael is very intelligent and, like Matt, very deliberate in forming beliefs, evidenced in the latter by his rejection of the Rapture explanation for the Sudden Departure. Their documentation of Kevin in their book is further evidence of their careful approach to belief acceptance. Still, Laurie is not convinced by them.

At their version of the Last Supper, Garvey, Sr., who believes in the book about Kevin, tries to assign everyone at the table a name from Jesus' apostles. He thinks "Doubting Thomas" is the obvious choice for Laurie, after the apostle who needed to touch Jesus' wounds in order to believe he was really his resurrected savior. She disagrees. "I'm Judas," she says: "Doubting is easy because doubting costs you nothing. . . [Judas] was sure he believed in something and acted on it" (S3E6).[34] Her reluctance to characterize herself as a doubter—and instead someone who believes—brings to mind some remarks by Ludwig Wittgenstein about religious disagreement, and I think can be illuminated by them.

Their disagreement over whether or not Kevin is the savior resembles the one that Wittgenstein discusses in his "Lectures on Religious Belief" between him and someone who believes in the Last Judgement. Wittgenstein says of such disagreements: "These controversies look quite different from normal controversies."[35] He insists that they cannot be resolved in the same way. They cannot even be discussed in the same way as, say, a disagreement over the identity of an airplane flying overhead. The person who identifies it as a German plane and the

one who is not sure are "fairly near" relative to the disputants in a religious disagreement.[36] Even though Wittgenstein does not believe in the Last Judgement, he says of someone who does: "I can't contradict that person."[37] Anything he describes as what he does *not* believe would not be what the religious person believes: "the religious person never believes what I describe."[38] Similarly, Laurie is not doubting or contradicting Garvey, Sr. and the rest of them. Instead, they are looking at things differently, applying "different pictures," or engaging in "entirely different ways of thinking."[39] One way to make this point is to say that they do not believe differently about the same things; they believe in different things.

In his earlier "Lecture on Ethics," Wittgenstein discusses the idea of a miracle. He opposes what he calls the relative understanding of miracles, that is, as "a fact [that] has not yet been explained by science."[40] We should add a surprising or unexpected fact; one that would never be predicted by science. Instead of thinking of miracles by reference to scientific belief, Wittgenstein insists they must be understood in an absolute sense, which involves looking at the fact in a different way than a scientist would, for example, the scientist in the first episode who we hear declare when speaking about the Sudden Departure: "Miracles do not exist" (S1E1). For Wittgenstein, those who see it as miracle are seeing it differently than, and in a way incommensurable with[41], the way a scientist sees it: "The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle."[42] We cannot say, from within one way of looking at things, that another is the result of faulty reasoning ("Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons"[43]) or excessive credulity. The explanations for why a way of looking was adopted vary; they may be cultural or personally idiosyncratic, such as because it promised a remedy for confusion.

Laurie and the others represent different ways of understanding the Sudden Departure and associated phenomena (e.g., Kevin's apparent re-births, his seeing Patti, etc.). These ways may not be equally successful in relieving confusion. The body of information to which Laurie's understanding relates seems to ignore some facts; Matt's seems to invent some. Either or both may fail when tested against experience, or because of some internal instability, producing their own confusions. But while at the dinner table, re-enacting the Last Supper of Jesus, they appear to be stable and providing their holders relief from confusion.[44]

Interestingly, the narrative seems to give us the option of believing in Laurie, Kevin's "apostles," or some other account. Kevin may be the savior or just ordinary, though equipped with an especially resilient constitution; Patti may have been in his head or real in some way; the sequences in which he is an assassin could have been playing only in his head or that world with the hotel does exist in some way. We are never quite sure what to believe. To that extent, the

confusion of the characters is induced in us. That may be part of the appeal of the series, and others like it. *The Leftovers* appears to play with that at times, giving us images and other story elements that, initially at least, are meant to confuse us. For example, as Season Two opens, we glimpse a woman in Jarden mowing the lawn in her wedding dress. We anticipate having such things explained, but revel in their mystery in the meantime. It may be because they are enchanting; they portray a world that is more interesting than our ordinary one. Despite the reasons for our interest, we sometimes welcome confusion, at least in fictions or when it does not debilitate our capacity for believing.

The ways the characters deal with confusion are reproduced in us when watching *The Leftovers*. They are also the ways we deal with ordinary confusions. We can respond to them like the Guilty Remnant. For example, a subject we are studying may severely confuse us. It could be a new language, a branch of physics, or Hegel. We may despair of ever understanding it and give up. We could even blame the subject, like Kuhn's scientist who blames his tools. A common reaction to Hegel is to attribute the confusion to him, by saying of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* something like, "This doesn't make any sense," while throwing it across the room. The confusion induced by studying a new, recondite subject may also increase our credulity about the subject. We may initially be incredulous over some new information, for example, some idiosyncratic grammar, the surprising behavior of subatomic particles, the strange physiology of an obscure species, the unfamiliar customs of a distant culture, and so on. Once we are convinced that these phenomena are genuine, we will become more receptive to new, equally strange, aspects of the new subject matter. The third approach to understanding also shows up when learning a new subject. If we are having difficulty, a teacher might encourage us to look at a problem in a new or different way, typically by suggesting an analogy.[45] Someone may attempt all of these responses before settling on one.

Besides these ways of responding to the confusion caused by the Sudden Departure, there remains the possibility of reconciling that anomaly with our prior beliefs. That was one way of relieving my confusion over reading an apparent contradiction in a philosophy book; after it was demonstrated to me that the two claims are actually compatible, the confusion disappeared. This may be what the scientists who send Nora to the other world have succeeded in doing. It is what the other scientists in the series are attempting. They haven't thrown down their tools yet. They are trying to fit the Sudden Departure into their scientific beliefs. Many of the other characters have run out of patience. They need to be able to believe again by acquiring a new understanding or, if that's not available to them, to finally give up on trying to believe anything.

CODA

An important theme of *The Leftovers*, perhaps the central one, is that love endures despite confusion. The ability to believe may be under stress, but the feelings people have for each other, and the actions that exhibit those feelings, persist. There are several examples of this, including the couple getting married in the final episode, but the foregrounded ones are provided by Kevin and Nora. He persists in his search for Nora until they are finally reunited, many years after she entered the scientists' machine. She refuses to announce her presence to her family in the other world out of fear of disrupting their happiness, denying her own happiness. By doing so, she finally passes the test of the scientists:

> Two infant twins are born. One of them will grow up to cure cancer, but only if the other one dies now. You don't have to kill the baby yourself, but you do have to nod to make it happen. Do you nod? (S3E4)

Nora answers: "Of course I nod." She fails. They eventually let her enter the machine, but it is only after she enters the other world (where 98% of the population disappeared) that she demonstrates the virtue that they believed necessary for its use. It is the virtue the ancient Chinese philosopher Mengzi attributes to anyone similar in moral rectitude to Confucius: "…if any could obtain the world by performing one unrighteous deed, or killing one innocent person, he would not do it."[46] Nora refuses the world that she lost in the Sudden Departure—or at least the most important part of that world—her family. She does so because of her love for her family.[47]

Nora and Kevin contradict the Guilty Remnant's view, as Patti's double puts it, that "On October 14th, attachment and love became extinct" (S2E8). She argues that it revealed to us that anyone could be lost to us at any time, so that it is a "strength" to "have difficulty giving and accepting love." But Nora and Kevin demonstrate that we do not need to "transform" and, as Kevin sums it up, "destroy families."[48] To do so would be to surrender the only thing left from the world lost to the Sudden Departure. Nora, Kevin, and several of the other characters, demonstrate that while they might have lost their minds, to paraphrase the Pixies' song, they have retained something more important than understanding, love.

---

[1] There are the cases of soldiers missing in action, abducted persons who have not returned home, and those missing for unknown reasons (but their families know that there is some explanation from a limited set of plausible ones, i.e., accident, abduction, or they have run away). While the families in these cases have a better understanding of their loved ones' disappearances than the Legacies, they likely experience

similar issues with respect to their grief. However, since these cases are relatively rare, their experiences are not widely known.

[2] The show's narrative in other ways steers us away from the Rapture as an explanation.

[3] The city from which no one departed and that became, for a while, a National Park called "Miracle."

[4] Iris DeMint, "Let the Mystery Be." Track 1 on *Infamous Angel*. Philo Records, 1992.

[5] One could be confused and not know it. This would be a case in which someone held disorganized, including incompatible, beliefs, but the consequences of that are only apparent to others, if anyone. That type of confusion can be caused by mental illness or just (sometimes willful) sloppy thinking.

[6] Excluding people who because of mental development are not capable of noticing anything amiss about the disappearances, e.g., infants.

[7] Peter O'Leary, "The Leftovers," *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (March 2015): 19.

[8] Plato, "Republic" (369a), trans. Paul Shorey in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 615.

[9] That other sort of confusion, which involves mistaking one thing for another, has been studied, for example, in the book by Joseph L. Camp, Jr., *Confusion: A Study in the Theory of Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[10] I previously surveyed some of this work on understanding in an essay that explored connections between understanding and documentary film in Keith Dromm, "Understanding (and) the Legacy of the Trace: Reflections after Carroll, Currie, and Plantinga," in *The Philosophy of Documentary Film*, ed. David LaRocca (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 413-430.

[11] At least according to traditional, internalist definitions of knowledge.

[12] Catherine Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 34.

[13] In his conversation with her in the hotel sequence from Season Two, her double also implies that he understands (S2E8).

[14] Duncan Pritchard, Alan Miller, and Adrian Haddock, *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82-83.

[15] Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-193.

[16] It would also have to be the case that we could assume—if we did not know—that they came to their belief in the proposition through some reliable process (e.g., perception) or method of justification (e.g., a deductive argument). Typically, we would implicitly assume these things unless there was some reason to doubt the subject's credentials as a knower.

[17] Linda Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," in *Epistemic Values: Collected Papers in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 69.

[18] Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 35. Yet, for Elgin, that does not mean that understanding must be factive; the theory or explanation that provides understanding may contain some falsehoods.

[19] Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 35.

[20] Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," 71.

[21] Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 37.

[22] Tom Perrotta, "After the Rapture, who are 'The Leftovers'?," interview with David Bianculli, *Fresh Air*, NPR, June 27, 2014, https://www.npr.org/2014/06/27/326158610/after-the-rapture-who-are-the-leftovers?t=1634041551672.

[23] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 111.

[24] Kevin, at Matt's prompting, reads from Job 23, verses 8-17, over Patti's grave (S1E10).

[25] Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

[26] Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

[27] Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 79.

[28] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Bk I, Pt IV, Sec VII) (Oxford: Clarendon Press): 268-269.

[29] A comparison with philosophy's most famous nihilist, Arthur Schopenhauer, would not be apt. Unlike the Guilty Remnant, Schopenhauer thought the world was comprehensible; it just was not designed in a way that contributed to human happiness. Also, Schopenhauer offered art as a way to elevate us from our condition. The Guilty Remnant eschew any aesthetic redemption of life, as indicated by their white, unadorned clothing.

[30] Albert Camus, "Nuptials at Tipasa," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Vintage, 1970): 69.

[31] Camus, "Nuptials at Tipasa," 70.

[32] "Camus, "Return to Tipasa," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 169.

[33] Some on the internet, e.g., at imdb.com (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2699128/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv; accessed May 21, 2021), have speculated that this is an allusion to the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, who lives in a basement apartment whose ceiling and walls are covered with lightbulbs. If intentional, that would be an apt allusion, because Ellison's protagonist is confused; his confusion leads him to make choices that are not sufficiently deliberated upon and it makes him susceptible to manipulation by others (like the people recruited into the Guilty Remnant). I expand on the topic of manipulation in the next paragraph.

[34] As Laurie does when she drugs their food with the dog's pills and puts them all to sleep.

[35] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," in *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 56.

[36] Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 53.

[37] Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 55.

[38] Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 55.

[39] Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 55.

[40] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912-1951*, eds. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 46.

[41] We could follow Kuhn and call them different paradigms. We would then also say that the scientists' view is in *crisis*, the period between the appearance of an anomaly and the adoption of a new paradigm (Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 68).

[42] Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," 43.

[43] Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," 56.

[44] After the prophecy goes unfulfilled, Garvey, Sr. asks his son: "Now what?" (S3E7). He needs a new understanding, or way of looking at things, at that point.

[45] This is a technique Wittgenstein frequently uses to resolve philosophical problems.

[46] Mengzi, *The Essential Mengzi* (2A2.24), trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 19.

[47] Another version of the series' theme is that morality, to the extent that its basis is love, is resilient against epistemological failures like confusion or skepticism, and their normative consequences like nihilism. Its persistence despite the massive confusion caused by the Sudden Departure demonstrate this.

[48] This delights Patti's double: "Write that down. That is fucking brilliant. Our polls say our message is confusing. You just nailed it." (S2E8).

BOOK REVIEWS | RECENSÕES DE LIVROS

IMMANENT FRAMES. POSTSECULAR CINEMA BETWEEN MALICK AND VON TRIER

Maria Irene Aparício (FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa/IFILNOVA)

Edited by John Caruana and Mark Cauchi, New York: State University of New York Press, 2018, 293 pp. ISBN: 97814384770177.

> "*The ethic of postsecular cinema is to call into question the legitimacy of those efforts that seek to install a bulwark between ourselves and the unsettled open space of existence*."
> (Caruana & Cauchi)

Sob o título *Immanent Frames. Postsecular Cinema between Malick and von Trier*, o livro editado por John Caruana e Mark Cauchi inclui um conjunto significativo de artigos sobre cinema "pós-secular", de autores prestigiados, nomeadamente os próprios editores, mas também Robert Sinnerbrink, Catherine Wheatley, Sarah Cooper e William Rotham, entre outros. O livro está estruturado em 13 capítulos, distribuídos por três partes – Parte I: "The Poles of Postsecular Cinema: Malick and Von Trier"; Parte II: "The Spectrum of Postsecular Cinema: Beyond Malick and Von Trier"; e Parte III: "Conversation on Cinema: Luc Dardenne and Jean-Luc Nancy", esta última constituída por duas entrevistas, respectivamente com o cineasta e o filósofo.

Caruana e Cauchi iniciam o volume com uma introdução sob o título "What Is Postsecular Cinema? An Introduction", onde contextualizam o tema, tendo como referências os filmes aparentemente antagónicos *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011) e *Melancholia* (Lars Von Trier, 2011) que os autores consideram a quintessência do pós-secularismo cinemático. As balizas da temática em análise estão claramente evidenciadas na afirmação inicial dos editores: "um dos filmes presenteia-nos com imagens sobre a origem do mundo, enquanto o outro constitui uma narrativa do fim do mundo; o primeiro retira partes significativas dos seus diálogos directamente das páginas religiosas da Bíblia, dos escritos de Santo Agostinho e de Kierkegaard, enquanto o segundo parece dramatizar uma parábola estética Nietzschiana; um implora ao espectador que veja algo para além da imanência do mundo, o outro insiste que não há nada além desse limite." (p. 1). É ainda a partir desta diferenciação que os editores procuram

responder à questão do título "What is Postsecular Cinema?" sublinhando que ambos os filmes são, na verdade, dois pólos do debate contemporâneo em torno da condição pós-secular da própria humanidade, na medida em que reflectem questões que andam frequentemente a par na vida quotidiana: a fé e o ateísmo; a crença e a descrença, etc.. De facto, o século XX e o início do século XXI, na sua voragem e velocidade engendradas no Iluminismo e nos ideais de progresso e supremacia científica, assistiram a uma tendência de crescente secularização, com a consequente perda de influência da religião na vida de todos os dias. Filho destes séculos, o cinema criou ao longo da sua curta história, imagens marcantes que plasmam e reflectem a complexidade das fronteiras entre estas duas visões do mundo emergentes num "Cinema Pós-Secular", "mapeando uma nova paisagem intelectual e cultural" (p. 3). Sob a designação supramencionada, Caruana e Cauchi incluem as cinematografias de cineastas clássicos e contemporâneos – alguns mais evidentes do que outros -, nomeadamente, Gitai, Reygadas, Kiarostami, Dumont, Serra, Tarr, Apichatpong, mas também Arcand, Godard, Akerman, Iñárritu, Denis, Olmi ou Scorsese, para citar apenas alguns dos cineastas mais recentes. Ou, entre os mais antigos, Bergman, Rossellini, Tarkovsky ou Bresson. Em todo o caso, o que parece ser significante na trajectória de um cinema secular ou pós-secular é a recorrência a um léxico conceptual que enforma uma visão filosófica do(s) filme(s), construída a partir da experiência humana, face às mega-transformações do mundo. Para os autores é evidente que uma "aproximação mais filosófica [...] convida-nos a pensar mais profundamente sobre a natureza da experiência do filme" (p. 2). O cinema reflecte sobre questões comuns que enformam a existência humana, como é o caso da crença ou descrença no mundo (ou no cinema), revelando, na passada, o intervalo físico ou metafísico que poderá estar aquém ou além dos mesmos. Os autores destacam alguns pensadores cujas teorias revelam uma consciência destas questões, entre os quais André Bazin (1918-1958), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) e Stanley Cavell (1926-2018), teóricos para quem o binómio crença/descrença é primordial para compreender a eficácia do cinema condicionado pela experiência perceptiva.

Os autores procuram, também, justificar o título do livro – "Immanent frames" – que aponta para uma visão secular de desencantamento do mundo, um "horizonte implícito no qual as nossas crenças, ideias, teorias, práticas e valores tomam forma e adquirem inteligibilidade", no âmbito de um "julgamento contextual", um "passado" ou um "imaginário social" (p. 4). Mas, embora este quadro imanente decorra de uma ausência de deuses, espíritos ou outras forças sobrenaturais; uma ausência de determinismo, e uma não-dependência do transcendente (os autores convocam mesmo as teorias naturalistas, o cientificismo ou o novo Ateísmo configurado pelas teorias do biólogo britânico Richard Dawkins, conhecido pelas suas críticas ao

criacionismo), Caruana e Cauchi seguem o filósofo canadiano Charles Taylor, autor da obra *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007) quando afirmam que este "*immanent frame*" constitui, na verdade, uma forma de enquadramento de todas as experiências modernas, desde as mais cépticas às mais receptivas à dimensão de transcendência. Neste contexto, podemos talvez dizer que um cinema pós-secular reflecte bem essa ideia de "immanent frame" enquanto "espaço aberto", onde os contrários se encontram e se confrontam. Isto é, agindo nos diversos níveis de (re)conhecimento – o estético, o cognitivo, o afectivo e o filosófico -, os filmes ("malditos"), em discussão neste livro, parecem questionar as polarizações simplistas e redutoras que dominam, quer as arenas da cultura popular quer o mundo da intelectualidade. "Filmes malditos" porque - tal como reclamam os autores, na senda de Bazin - não se enquadram numa visão normativa da realidade; porque desestabilizam as ordens instauradas, ou pela religião ou pela ciência, e procuram desvelar ou iluminar a complexidade de um mundo projectado, um mundo no ecrã, "fora do mundo" mas partilhando com ele uma dimensão de transcendência, de distância intransponível.

Neste ponto, é importante sublinhar a profundidade da reflexão de Caruana e Cauchi. Os autores esclarecem a pertinência teórica das relações entre os diversos textos do volume, e destes com os filmes trabalhados na Parte I e na Parte II, por outros autores, bem como os respectivos enquadramentos filosóficos. Finalmente, os editores justificam a inclusão das entrevistas finais na Parte III pelo facto de abordarem "muitos dos temas críticos subjacentes a um cinema pós-secular" (p. 21), nomeadamente a escusa humana face a uma possível "morte de Deus" e as respectivas implicações existenciais e sociopolíticas, questões essas que atravessam uma grande parte da cinematografia de Jean-Pierre e Luc Dardenne ou, no caso do filósofo francês Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021), a sua linha de reflexão em torno do "regresso do religioso" ao centro de debate da Filosofia Continental, mas também ao domínio das artes e humanidades. Como sublinham Caruana e Cauchi "[...] Nancy dedicou especial atenção à literatura, à arte, à estética e à crítica, e nas últimas duas décadas focou a sua atenção também no cinema, tendo publicado artigos bem conhecidos sobre Claire Denis e Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016). Em muitos dos seus trabalhos estas duas áreas do pensamento [o Cristianismo e o secularismo] são colocadas em contacto, sendo também o caso do cinema" (p. 22).

Vejamos então, de forma breve, os índices das Partes I e II, e o modo como reflectem estas e outras questões enunciadas na Introdução.

A Parte I é constituída por seis ensaios sob os títulos: "Two Ways through Life: Postsecular Visions in *Melancholia* and *The Tree of Life*" (Robert Sinnerbrink); "Hegel, Malick, and the Postsecular Sublime" (Lambert Zuidervaart); "Repetition and Belief: A Kierkegaardian Reading

of Malick's *The Tree of Life*" (John Caruana); "Toward and Away from the World: Subjectivity After Loss in *The Tree of Life*" (Steven Rybin); "The Death of God and the Genesis of Worldhood in von Trier's *Melancholia*" (Mark Cauchi); e "Notes on Divine Homelessness: A Reading of Lars von Trier's *Dogville*" (Costica Bradatan). Uma leitura transversal destes textos revela a complexidade e amplitude das questões filosóficas equacionadas pelos filmes de Malick e von Trier, nomeadamente aquelas que se prendem com o retorno da religião ao âmago do cinema, quer através das suas formas quer nas suas narrativas. Além disso, para Robert Sinnerbrink os filmes de Malick e von Trier são demonstrativos das "possibilidades éticas e estéticas do cinema numa época de persistente cepticismo, ausência de moral e incerteza ético-política" (p. 29). Para o autor ambos os filmes – *The Tree of Life* e *Melancholia* – reflectem sobre o valor da existência humana, bem como sobre as respostas de um cinema que o autor descreve como "mitopoético" (misto de mito e poesia) face à probabilidade (menos longínqua do que parece) de um "fim do mundo". Ou, noutra linha de ideias, poder-se-ia mesmo deduzir a resistência do cinema, quando confrontado com a "desvalorização de todos os valores" (p. 30) e o niilismo subsequente, nos horizontes contemporâneos da experiência. O capítulo é denso e revê muitas das questões que foram colocadas pela crítica em geral, a propósito destes e doutros filmes, mas também pela academia, nomeadamente a controvérsia da dimensão religiosa expressa ou latente nas imagens cinemáticas que configuram uma perspectiva pós-secular. O autor identifica, também, no filme *The Tree of Life*, um "sublime afectivo" Lyotardiano, uma aproximação "estético-agnóstica", que é, também, em certa medida, uma apresentação do irrepresentável; e responde, seguramente, ao filósofo americano Steven Shaviro, contra-argumentando a ideia de um "estética do anti-sublime" a propósito do filme *Melancholia*. O texto seguinte, de Lambert Zuidervaart, recupera a noção de sublime de Hegel para quem o sublime ocorre na intersecção entre arte e religião; um sublime comum e histórico que, segundo o autor, "não pode ser reduzido a um julgamento reflexivo do tipo Kantiano" (p. 49). A reflexão do autor é relativamente abrangente e aborda outras perspectivas de relação entre arte contemporânea e sublime, convocando autores como James Elkins ou outros comentadores da filosofia de Hegel.

John Caruana, por sua vez, faz uma leitura Kierkegaardiana do filme de Malick, a partir dos conceitos de repetição e crença, e procura demonstrar que o filme encena, num registo religioso primordial, uma das principais preocupações do cinema-filosofia: o de levar o espectador a adoptar uma atitude diferente perante a vida, sem descartar as memórias, o passado e a questão de saber de onde se vem e - acrescentaria eu -, para onde se vai, quer do ponto de vista civilizacional (e físico) quer do ponto de vista metafísico e espiritual. O autor faz uma análise

primorosa do filme, convocando a obra de Kierkegaard *Fear and Trembling* (*Frygt og Bæven*, 1843), e a sua visão paradoxal da fé: "*renuncia ao finito e ele retornará eternamente*."[1] Isto é, desiste da tua ligação egoísta com o mundo – e da necessidade de controlo absoluto – e terás o mundo de volta, de modo diferente mas com muito mais sentido" (p. 82). Para concluir, diz o autor: "A mensagem final do filme *The Tree of Life* é a de que somos chamados a uma ligação profunda com *esta* vida devido à ameaça contínua que liga o ser humano com o criador. Não temos necessariamente de concordar com esta tradução religiosa da mensagem de Malick, mas é difícil negar a sua honesta e profunda tentativa de se confrontar com os limites da nossa humanidade." (p. 83). Ainda nesta parte do livro, e nos textos seguintes, Steven Rybin enceta o debate sobre a dimensão de subjectividade do mesmo filme de Malick, sobretudo face à inevitável condição de perda, enquanto Mark Cauchi, tomando como objecto de reflexão o filme de Lars von Trier, *Melancholia*, discorre sobre (um)a anunciada morte de Deus e o nascimento do mundo, para proclamar o fim do mundo secular. Cauchi afirma: "Vivemos tempos apocalíticos, e isso não é nada de novo. […] Em meu entender, *Melancholia* esforça-se por confrontar o espectador com a morte de Deus como um *problema*, isto é, como experiência da sua *perda*, bem como as respectivas consequências." (pp. 105, 107). Para Cauchi, este é um filme cujo alcance filosófico pode ser iluminado pelas obras de Nietzsche e Heidegger, na medida em que convoca as questões maiores da melancolia e da destruição do mundo, a primeira sintomaticamente anunciada a partir do título do filme. Costica Bradatan fará um desvio bastante produtivo por outro filme de Lars von Trier – *Dogville* – para falar de um Deus que joga aos dados, um *Deus ludens.* O autor destaca a representação ético-existencial, bem como a esteticização da sociedade, questões que são permeáveis à condição do que o autor designa como "política do desespero", onde as narrativas religiosas são substituídas por *fábulas* e *estórias* sobre a(s) divindade(s).

Na Parte II, nos textos sob os títulos "Face to Face with Chantal Akerman" (William Rothman); "There`s no Point in Killing a Bad Priest: John Michael McDonag`s *Calvary* and the Broken Middle" (Catherine Wheatley); "The Immortal Thighs of Ines Orsini: The Transcendence of Grace in Denys Arcand`s *The Barbarian Invasions"* (Russell J. A. Kilbourn); "Three Immersions; *Mouchette*, *Vagabond*, *Rosetta"* (Charles Warren); e "Put Yourself in My Place": *Two Days, One Night* and the Journey Back to Life" (Sarah Cooper), podemos

[1] Cf. "The person who denies himself and sacrifices himself because of duty gives up the finite in order to grasp the infinite and is adequately assured; the tragic hero gives up the certain for the even more certain, and the observer's eye views him with confidence." In Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*, ed. and trans. with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 60.

testemunhar o alcance rizomático das questões de secularização e pós-seculatização. A lição que podemos, desde logo, aprender com esta parte do livro é a da que estas são interrogações de todos os tempos e latitudes que retornam através do cinema contemporâneo. Este(s) espectro(s) do cinema pós-secular são, na verdade, espectros do próprio cinema; sombras e inquietações que perpassam através dos muitos filmes que testemunham as grandes e pequenas transformações do(s) século(s) e, também, os avanços e recuos de uma humanidade comprometida com o seu próprio livre arbítrio, mas frequentemente incapaz de o gerir. As escolhas cinemáticas dos autores supramencionados são bem evidentes dessa transversalidade das questões da fé e da crença que podem manifestar-se nos mais infimos gestos e decisões (ou indecisões) humanas.

Devido à extensão e densidade do livro, seria impossível incluir neste exercício de recensão, uma reflexão justa e detalhada de todos os textos, pelo que nos resta deixar ao futuro e potencial leitor do livro, a descoberta de todos os meandros das temáticas propostas pela obra, e que apenas aflorámos. Concluímos, enfim, com uma pequena referência à Parte III, constituída pelas entrevistas com Luc Dardenne e Jean-Luc Nancy. A primeira, conduzida por José Fontaine, e inicialmente publicada na revista belga "*Toudi",* procura elucidar o leitor sobre as múltiplas camadas das narrativas da cinematografia dos Dardenne, enigmáticas e, por vezes, pouco evidentes. Uma dessas camadas reenvia justamente para a subliminar presença dos textos bíblicos. Como refere Dardenne "os textos bíblicos estabelecem as regras do que deve ser a vida de acordo com Deus, a Lei, o Amor, a Justiça" (p. 248). Ora, para quem conhece a cinematografia dos Dardenne, mesmo que não integralmente, é evidente que na sua aparente descrença e crueza, o que surge como horizonte para a comparação dos filmes com a vida é, justamente, a eficácia dessas regras, ainda que num contexto bem mais agnóstico. Dardenne procura compreender se "a necessidade de consolação [e redenção] continua a ser fundamental para todos os seres humanos. [Diz ele:] Não falo da crença em Deus, mas na necessidade de o outro me salvar, a necessidade do outro, e de uma ajuda exterior; a origem desse outro que é o Deus que nos salva da morte e nos dá a eternidade. Agora que Deus não existe, não teremos nós a tendência para pedir a outro ser humano, ao Outro, que O substitua?" (p. 255). Esta é uma questão seguramente relevante para compreender a dimensão pós-secular de uma vasta cinematografia contemporânea, incluindo muitos – se não mesmo todos – os filmes de Jean-Pierre e Luc Dardenne e, daí, também, a pertinência da inclusão desta entrevista.

Finalmente, a conversa com Jean-Luc Nancy, conduzida por Bruno Roberto e originalmente publicada no No.1 da revista italiana *Fata Morgana*, em 2007, parece ser uma resposta justa à questão sobre o poder do cinema para transformar a visão do mundo, ou até mesmo o próprio mundo, através do subtil, mas indelével, agenciamento das suas imagens; mesmo que essa acção

se fique pela instituição de um intervalo – protector mas reflexivo – que permite ao espectador estar simultaneamente no mundo e fora dele, como anuncia a epígrade desta recensão. Jean-Luc Nancy diria, nesta conversa final: “Sim, podemos dizer que o cinema é o mundo no acto mesmo da sua criação. [...] Eu creio que a criação do mundo, tomando aqui o sentido teológico de criação do mundo pela mão de Deus, é a mesma coisa que criar uma imagem. Está expresso no acto de criação de acordo com o Cristianismo, a criação de seres humanos *à sua própria imagem*” (pp. 168, 273). É certo que Nancy estabelece uma correlação abismal entre a origem do cinema - não em sentido histórico, mas ontológico - e a origem do mundo. Mas talvez seja esse salto epistemológico que nos permite compreender melhor o alcance de um cinema pós-secular e as suas marcas indeléveis de contemporaneidade.

FALSO MOVIMENTO. ENSAIOS SOBRE ESCRITA E CINEMA

Alexandre Nascimento Braga Teixeira (FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

Clara Rowland e Tom Conley (Orgs); Lisboa: Cotovia, 2016, 280 pp., ISBN: 978-972-795-357-8.

Estamos diante de uma reflexão a partir do cruzamento teórico entre a escrita e o cinema, observado através de um olhar posicionado nos '*film studies*' e sem o movimento adjacente de uma certa hierarquização: a escrita como ferramenta criativa, que sem vir primeiro, vem para se tornar naturalmente elemento narrativo num discurso que pode ir para além do fílmico, na contingência de invadir também o imagético. Falamos de *Falso Movimento - Ensaios sobre escrita e cinema*, livro, em jeito de projeto de investigação que originou estes ensaios entre 2012 e 2016, organizados por Clara Rowland e Tom Conley, que pensam o encontro entre o cinema e a escrita a focalizar o debate para a heterogeneidade dos meios de representação, sua materialidade e reflexividade a partir dos seus momentos preciosos de encontro, sobreposição, refração, ou mesmo choque. Um tema amplamente abordado e premente, desde uma ideia da cine-língua, da reflexão do jovem cinema como linguagem nos anos 20 do século passado e, ainda, o terrível embate na década seguinte entre este cinema que, mesmo mudo, era demasiado ruidoso no uso constante da palavra escrita de apoio às significações, e o recente cinema falado, sonoro, que por momentos era desajeitado a gerir este novo *'layer'* de comunicação na sua tão única e rica paleta de significantes.

Como sugere Clara Rowland, o título escolhido resulta de *Falsche Bewegung* (*Falso Movimento*, 1975), o filme de Wim Wenders com argumento de Peter Handke, livremente inspirada na obra 'Os anos de aprendizagem de *Wilhelm Meister*' de Goethe. Ao longo da viagem de Wilhelm (no filme), presenciamos o conflito entre experiência e representação, vida e escrita e a sua paráfrase entre a natureza diferida da escrita e o jogo especular das imagens. (p. 11) Mas fica-nos claro que a relação irá para além da adaptação filme - literatura, e que se sugere um repensar na tradução direta do título: um falso movimento, que poderia ser 'um movimento em falso' a fazer alusão a uma possível descrição da ilusão de movimento do cinema.

A autora sugere ainda a seguinte metodologia na sua investigação: o binómio *escrita-cinema*, a considerar a presença material e temática da escrita nos filmes; a *escrita no cinema,* à procura das figuras do literário nos filmes; e a *escrita de cinema*, a dar atenção às formas de escrita em torno do cinema: argumento, crítica, novelização.

Tom Conley é o co-organizador deste grupo de ensaios e salienta que a presença visível da escrita nos filmes e na sua relação com o espectador, seja nos ecrãs de um dispositivo cotidiano, seja na grande sala de cinema, é uma operação interpretativa e situa a experiência do visionamento no campo pré-simbólico: a escrita "faz ecrã", "pode ser imaginada em si mesma como um ecrã" (p. 16), sobrepondo, até, o que parece estar a ser narrado.

O livro divide-se em três grupos: o primeiro, "Inscrições: a escrita no cinema", cinco ensaios que tentam trazer à luz questões de figuração da escrita no cinema, e seus problemas de reflexividade e auto-representação; o segundo grupo, "Formas: o cinema como escrita", é composto por seis ensaios que recorrem "à figura híbrida, imaginada por Astruc, de uma *caméra-stylo*" (p. 14), o cinema como forma de escrita através do discurso fílmico e imagético, numa certa inversão de perspectiva do tema do primeiro grupo; e, por fim, o terceiro grupo de ensaios, "Transportes: outros cinemas", que aborda a interrogação relacional entre o cinema e a poesia, a pintura ou o teatro contemporâneo.

Dos ensaios do primeiro grupo, destacamos "Aprender a escrever no cinema: Jean Renoir, François Truffaut, Satyajit Ray", de Clara Rowland, onde a autora inicia uma profunda reflexão com recurso ao comentário de um conjunto de filmes, cuja escolha precisa, nos mostra a escrita "mais como duplo dissonante do que como espelho" (p. 43). Com filmes de François Truffaut como o *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (*Os Quatrocentos Golpes*, 1959) ou o *L'Enfant Sauvage* (*O Menino Selvagem*, 1970) ou ainda *The River* (*O Rio Sagrado*, 1951), de Jean Renoir, e *Apu Sansar* (*O Mundo de Apu*, 1959) de Satyajit Ray, entre outros, explora-se a representação da infância como "estado que não domina a escrita" (p. 42), e que, por isso mesmo, são filmes que propõem a escrita de forma mais vigorosa e excessiva, sem o seu desvanecimento no discurso fílmico. Aqui fica a ideia que a escrita no cinema, através de momentos em que a narrativa usa um elemento epistolar, por exemplo, denuncia uma certa resistência ao seu discurso, mas também à sua materialidade e ontologia.

Outro ensaio interessante desta primeira parte é o de Rita Benis: **"**A palavra é uma imagem: Manoel de Oliveira e João César Monteiro**"**. Em Oliveira, a autora nota que o cinema enfatiza a presença da palavra, sendo por isso "igual à imagem" (p. 63). As estratégias de representação do realizador ao nível mimético dos atores, que reduzido a "gestos mínimos" levam o espectador ao encontro constante da palavra, da presença verbal, e a quebrar "a cadência hipnótica da ficção" (p. 66). A autora irá salientar ainda o uso da palavra no ecrã de Oliveira e a relação com as questões do tempo fílmico, que o realizador acreditava dar um elemento hipnótico à experiência fílmica.

Daqui passamos então à abordagem de Monteiro em filmes como *Branca de Neve* (2000) ou *Vai e Vem* (2003) e o seu bem utilizado princípio da recitação que faz sobressaltar o valor da

palavra como elemento poético, para além de ser presença de ruptura e a relembrar a sua constante natureza escrita. Tambem em "Escrever devagar a morte em *"Non" ou a Vã Glória de Mandar*, de Manoel de Oliveira"**,** de João Ribeirete, o autor nos mostra que a citação na obra de Oliveira é um processo de apropriação da obra escrita dos seus escritores de eleição e, claro, menciona no seu filme de 1990 a citação da primeira estrofe do discurso de *O Velho do Restelo* (*n'Os Lusíadas* de Camões, Canto IV), na voz de Luís Miguel Cintra, como uma proposta de reescrita desse texto. João Ribeirete associa outra citação de Oliveira: a palavra '*Non*', que surge num dos sermões de Padre António Vieira e que adere aqui às intenções narrativas do realizador. A citação do texto escrito é, assim, um terreno de ampla liberdade e de afirmação para Manoel de Oliveira, que não se coíbe de recontextualizar e de reescrever de acordo com a sua visão e vontade autorais. (p. 85) Com uma imagem do último filme de Oliveira, a curta-metragem *O Velho do Restelo* (2014), e com o livro de *Os Lusíadas* afundando-se no mar, deixa-se a ideia de que o texto sofre uma enorme transformação quando assimilado pelo cinema, mas que também a palavra exposta no ecrã, filmada na sua objetividade material, é um evidente gesto autoral para o realizador: evidências como a sua caligrafia em alguns genéricos ou pelo abandonar da caneta no final, como forma de mostrar o fim do discurso fílmico.

Ainda de mencionar o ensaio de José Bertolo: 'As palavras e os corpos: François Truffaut' que estabelece um encontro mais demorado entre a significação da palavra nos ecrãs dos filmes de Truffaut, a propósito de um texto sobre o *L'Enfant Sauvage* de Serge Daney, que chama a atenção para a 'falta temporária do referente' nos seus filmes e a forma como o realizador utiliza elementos diegéticos como romances ou cartas e diários escritos pelas suas personagens.

No segundo grupo, destacaria ensaios como o de Conley: "O filme-acontecimento: de Bazin a Deleuze", sobre a forma como o cinema escreve o acontecimento e os diálogos possíveis para esta realização, criados entre o plano-sequência e a montagem. Mas, apesar de muito trabalho com texto de ambos os autores, em cruzamento com outros e, sobretudo, com filmes como casos de estudo, há ainda pouco que incida na materialidade da escrita no cinema.

Teremos ainda textos importantes como "Como um seixo na praia": outra forma de escrever (*O Horla*)", de Amândio Reis: um ensaio que coloca o filme de Jean-Daniel Pollet, como "um cinema atento à sua própria maneira, equiparável à literatura, dotado da mesma importância e das mesmas possibilidades que ela [literatura] conquistou, mas não seu suplente, e por isso mesmo marcadamente cinematográfico, gráfico e não literário" (p. 128). No seu filme *Le Horla* (1966), adaptado a partir do conto homónimo de Maupassant, Pollet cria através do elemento narrativo 'voz', gravada e filmada, uma forma não de representação, mas de escrita: "para escrever, ou antes, inscrever, uma reinterpretação da mesma narrativa num novo medium" (p. 130). Amândio Reis

conclui que o texto de Maupassant é materializado no filme, elemento presente, não invisível, ilustrado ou representado mas replicado verbalmente através do som, de forma livre e não subordinada ao filme.

Mencionamos ainda "A totalidade no fragmento: autobiografia e rizoma no último filme de Paulo Rocha", onde Filipa Rosário faz uma profunda reflexão sobre o último filme deste cineasta, *Se fosse eu Ladrão… Roubava* (2012), a cruzar com a ideia de Ágnes Pethő, sobre Bolter e Grusin (1999): "desafiar a ideia de transparência narrativa faz fraturar o espaço fílmico, enquanto simultaneamente reconhece, sublinha o(s) meio(s) (Pethő 2009:51).

Quanto ao terceiro grupo deste conjunto de ensaios, fica-nos um olhar para os problemas de tradução da imagem cinematográfica para outros meios, e na sua reconversão como palavra falada, lida ou pensada, relação medial entre verbal e visual no campo das artes visuais, teatro, literatura ou a própria crítica de arte ou de cinema. Como em "Uma espécie de cinema das palavras (relações de intermidialidade em *Cobra*, de Herberto Helder", onde Rosa Maria Martelo olha para o cinema como referencial nesta obra, que configura "um modo de ver" produtor de "poemas que pretendem ser outra coisa" (p. 221). A autora observa em *Cobra* "uma espécie de cinema das palavras", onde elas "transformar-se-iam em imagens em movimento".

Outro contributo interessante desta terceira parte é o de Francisco Frazão, "Dirigir o público: desvios do campo-contracampo nos dispositivos do teatro contemporâneo" que através das práticas teatrais da companhia Cão Solteiro, e de como substituem os procedimentos tradicionais da *mise en scène* por uma organização sistemática que os transforma numa "espécie de geringonça, ao mesmo tempo conceito e máquina que se põe a funcionar", numa citação a um texto de Adrian Martin, de 2011 (p. 249). Aqui uma exploração da utilização da imagem cinematográfica projetada no palco do teatro na experiência intermidial *Play, the film* (2011), de Cão Solteiro e André Godinho.

Estes conjunto de ensaios, orientados metodologicamente de forma tão ampla e complexa, mostram ao leitor a necessidade de pensar, argumentar o cinema e a escrita como uma relação valiosa, frutuosa, tanto na sua adição, subtração ou intersecção, no âmbito dos 'media' mas também na releitura das suas mensagens, sem deixar de questionar a natureza de comunicação do cinema, em linha com outras abordagens que os *'film studies'* nos têm feito chegar através de outras publicações incontornáveis. Nas palavras de Tom Conley, terminamos na forma pretensiosa de um *teaser*: "descreveríamos adequadamente a força destes ensaios, também, se através de uma contra-fórmula disséssemos que desconstroem os processos que fazem do cinema aquilo que este parece ser" (p. 15).

FUNNY HOW: SKETCH COMEDY AND THE ART OF HUMOR

Diego Hoefel (FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

Alex Clayton, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020, 141 pp., ISBN: 9781438478296.

A comédia em esquetes é uma das formas mais comuns de estruturação cômica. Se considerarmos, como propõe Mast (1979, 32-36), que se pode identificar o surgimento da comédia cinematográfica já nos filmes dos irmãos Lumière e de Méliès, não será exagero dizer que nascia ali também, junto com o cinema, a tradição de se criar vinhetas autônomas com a finalidade de fazer rir. Mais tarde, com o cinema falado e com a televisão, as esquetes firmaram-se como um formato recorrente na produção cômica, não muito distinto do que segue sendo produzido até hoje. Na academia, contudo, embora as comédias em esquetes estejam presentes no corpus de diversas investigações, não há um grande número de estudos que se dediquem exclusivamente ao formato. É essa lacuna que *Funny How: sketch comedy and the art of humor* promete suprir, algo que inclusive o autor menciona nas primeiras linhas do texto, ainda no prefácio, quando afirma que aquele é "o primeiro livro escrito por um único autor dedicado à análise da comédia em esquetes" (Clayton, 2020, p. xiv). Isso não é exatamente correto: um ano antes, ainda em 2019, foi publicado um outro estudo sobre o mesmo tema, também de um único autor, contudo focado na relação das esquetes com a identidade e a política norte-americana (Marx, 2019). De toda a forma, isso não minimiza a importância da investigação, muito bem-vinda especialmente por se tratar de um formato já tão consolidado na cultura de massa, e até hoje pouco destrinchado teoricamente.

Além disso, a proposta surge num momento em que se constata um consumo crescente de comédias em esquete através da internet, facilitado pela curta duração e pela autossuficiência do formato. Essa tendência é identificada e debatida na produção acadêmica dos últimos anos (Kay, 2018; Tofler, 2017; Elsayed, 2016; Carter, 2016). A maioria dessas discussões, no entanto, centra-se na relação entre os conteúdos analisados e a sociedade em que estão inseridos. Portanto, apesar de seus objetos incluírem essencialmente esquetes, o esforço teórico não está direcionado à definição das especificidades do formato. Essa escassez de reflexões de fôlego com foco nas características da comédia em esquetes é mais um elemento que reitera o quão oportuno um livro como *Funny How* é atualmente.

A questão central do livro estrutura-se em torno do que faz as esquetes analisadas "funcionarem" comicamente, ou seja, em torno da maneira *como* elas são *engraçadas*– e daí seu título. É uma indagação complicada, que remonta a alguns dos mais célebres estudos sobre a causalidade do riso. O autor conhece bem essas teorias, e as apresenta de forma detalhada em seu primeiro capítulo, com a singularidade de trazer esquetes como exemplos para discutir as ideias de Thomas Hobbes, Kant, Bergson e Schopenhauer. Na sequência, a estrutura do livro é composta por quatro capítulos de análise e pela conclusão.

O argumento principal oscila em torno da ideia de que o humor é "irredutivelmente composto" (Clayton 2020, 47), ou seja, é sempre construído a partir de uma multiplicidade de fatores, ao contrário do que apontam teorias como a da superioridade, do alívio, ou da incongruência. Originalmente, segundo essas teorias, o riso é consequência de uma única causa, seja ela a impressão de uma eminência em relação aos outros (Hobbes 2010 [1650]), o alívio de uma expectativa tensa (Kant 2017 [1790]), ou a percepção de uma incongruência entre um conceito e o objeto real (Schopenhauer 2010 [1883]). Clayton mapeia essas teorias para concluir que o riso não pode ser considerado como decorrência de um único fator, mas deve ser tratado como uma composição de elementos. O argumento no entanto é vago, e também uma espécie de *fait accompli*. É comum que outros autores revisitem essas teorias generalistas, mas sempre por interesse histórico, ou como pistas iniciais para se compor uma reflexão, e não como uma defesa de que o riso efetivamente possa ser explicado por um único viés. Clayton sabe disso, tanto que percebe que não há problematização por trás de seu argumento e diz explicitamente que seu trabalho pressupõe da necessidade de uma "hipótese norteadora" (Clayton 2020, 47). O resultado é um texto que não somente abdica de fazer perguntas, mas também se mostra difuso nas suas respostas, o que faz com que diversas assuntos abordados fiquem pouco organizados, dificultando a sistematização de seu contributo para o campo.

À exceção do primeiro capítulo, em que o autor apresenta e discute as principais teorias sobre o riso, todos os demais são organizados a partir da análise de três esquetes, unidas a partir de diferentes tópicos. Não se apresenta a razão pela qual esses tópicos são escolhidos, nem uma reflexão sobre como eles se relacionam uns com os outros. O autor dedica um parágrafo introdutório a cada discussão e depois inicia as análises, o que deixa pouco claro como ele entende, de forma global, a relação entre esses tópicos e a comédia em esquetes. Entre os assuntos dos capítulos estão: *takeoffs* (conjunto de esquetes paródicas), *thought experiments* (esquetes compostas a partir de uma premissa imaginativa, do tipo "e se o mundo fosse..."), *prime numbers* (esquetes musicais) e *pitched battles* (esquetes em que ocorre uma competição entre dois ou mais polos). Os tópicos parecem junções temáticas entre as diferentes esquetes, a priori

(imagina-se) não exaustivas. A ausência de uma maior reflexão sobre sua divisão, faz com que elas pareçam justificativas temáticas para as constelações de obras presentes nos capítulos, mais do que reflexões sobre elementos da comédia em esquetes.

No interior de cada capítulo, sucedem-se pormenorizadas descrições das diferentes esquetes, que compõem a parte central do livro. Elas são justificadas pelo autor como uma "redescrição avaliativa do objeto cômico para o qual o riso se dirige" (Clayton 2020, 14). Ele parte da premissa de que as esquetes que analisa são engraçadas e de que um detalhamento transcritivo permitiria um diagnóstico das operações que tornam possível que as esquetes gerem riso. Há no livro momentos brilhantes, em que realmente alguns elementos sutis e pouco perceptíveis (como a cadência, o ritmo, a musicalidade) são sublinhados. Destaco também uma discussão sobre a construção dos personagens nas esquetes, em que o autor pontua sua frequente ausência de complexidade e uma equiparação entre personagem e seu comportamento (Clayton 2020, 75), o que parece uma ideia boa e digna de um exame mais aprofundado. O foco excessivo na descrição, no entanto, acaba por deixar o livro por vezes difuso e pouco assertivo em suas conclusões, já que elas se aplicam a cada esquete específica e muito raramente são expandidas para se pensar parâmetros objetivos sobre o formato de maneira alargada.

Na conclusão, *Funny How* tenta suprir a dispersão presente nos capítulos de análise a partir de uma reorganização das discussões abordadas ao longo do livro. Para isso, o autor propõe a aplicação dos três modos de expressão persuasiva propostos por Aristóteles (*ethos*, *pathos* e *logos*) para pensar uma possível retórica do humor; e utiliza as esquetes já analisadas como exemplos para embasar sua proposição. Essa de fato parece uma boa chave teórica para se discutir comédias. Ela, contudo, não aprofunda a discussão sobre a comédia em esquetes, o que faz com que, mesmo no encerramento do texto, sua contribuição não seja específica ao tema inicialmente traçado. Além disso, é estranho que uma ideia como essa apareça apenas na conclusão sem ter sido sequer mencionada anteriormente.

Apesar da relevância do assunto, e da consciência explícita de seu pioneirismo, *Funny How* nem sempre discute, como seria desejável, com a profundidade e o escrutínio científico esperado, as características e especificidades da comédia em esquetes. Acredito que isso ocorra em especial porque o foco da análise não está nas esquetes em si (i.e. em seu funcionamento, linguagem e estética), mas no que as faz "funcionar" comicamente. Essa questão, aliás, ao contrário do problema acerca das esquetes, não é em absoluto nova, ou pioneira. Assim, o livro parte de um ponto (a esquete), mas se pergunta sobre outro (a graça, ou em inglês "*funniness*"), o que faz com que o tema inicial saia da centralidade da análise e por vezes pareça um recorte feito com a finalidade de compor o corpus. O risco disso é que o livro pode ser interpretado mais como um

ensaio especulativo sobre o que torna algo engraçado, do que como uma investigação focada nos elementos específicos que caracterizam ou distinguem as esquetes de outras formas de comédia.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

Carter, E. (2016). *Entering through the Porta dos Fundos: The Changing Landscape of Brazilian Television Fiction.* Television & New Media, 410-426.

Clayton, A. (2020). *Funny How: sketch comedy and the art of humor*. Albany: State University of New York Press | Series: Sunny Press, horizons of cinema.

Elsayed, Y. (2016). "Laughing Through Change: Subversive Humor in Online Videos of Arab Youth". *International Journal of Communication*, 5102-5122.

Hobbes, T. (2010 [1650]). *The Treatise on Human Nature and That on Liberty and Necessity*. Hard Press Publishing.

Kant, I. (2017 [1790*]). Crítica da Faculdade do Juízo*. Lisboa: INCM - Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda.

Kay, K. (2018)."New Indian Nuttahs: Comedy and Cultural Critique" in *Millennial India*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marx, N. (2019). *Sketch Comedy: Identity, Reflexivity, and American Television*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mast, G. (1979). *The Comic Mind: comedy and the movies*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Schopenhauer, A. (2010 [1883]). *The World as Will and Representation* - Volume 1. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tofler, M. (2017). *Australian made comedy online – laughs, shock, surprise and anger*. Continuum, 820-832.

POETICS OF SLOW CINEMA: NOSTALGIA, ABSURDISM, BOREDOM

Manuel Oliveira (FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

Emre Çağlayan, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 244 pp., ISBN: 9783319968728.

O estudo abrangente de Emre Çağlayan sobre o que o autor classifica como *slow-cinema* busca nos conceitos que propõe no título – *Nostalgia, Absurdism* e *Boredom* – uma tentativa de ancorar e estabelecer pontes no pensamento sobre o cinema do tempo expandido que, à partida, é reconhecido por Çağlayan com as devidas referências a outros autores como Matthew Flanagan ou Tiago de Luca. Contudo, e apesar dos conceitos serem trabalhados e explicados com exemplos concretos nos três capítulos centrais do livro, não só com exemplos gerais dos realizadores mas com um esmiuçamento mais profundo no caso de alguns filmes em concreto - Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-Liang, Nuri Bilge Ceylan; e os respetivos filmes, *Wrekmeister Harmonies* (2000), *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) e *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) -, que ilustram de um modo ou outro a preponderância destes três conceitos chave, Çağlayan parece insistir ao longo da obra numa questão que apresenta como fulcral quando se faz uma abordagem do *slow-cinema*, que seria a envolvência institucional e histórica onde tende a surgir.

Ao longo dos vários capítulos é feita uma acessão geral aos vários conceitos por norma tratados quando se estuda o *slow-cinema*, desde já a própria questão terminológica do próprio conceito de *slow-cinema*. O problema com a expressão, previamente apontado por autores como de Luca,[1] é o sentido pejorativo[2] das questões do lento e da duração, onde *slow* surge na crítica por norma num sentido semelhante a, por exemplo, '*painfully slow*'. Esta questão da *slowness* é desenvolvida também por Song Hwee Lim, noutro sentido, no seu estudo sobre Tsai Ming-Liang, onde este contrapõe o surgimento de um interesse pelas características que associamos com o *slow-cinema* com o surgimento de outros movimentos como o da *slow-fashion* ou da *slow-food*,[3] movimentos apontados também por Çağlayan, em relação às questões políticas desta duração no cinema do tempo expandido. Para o autor, no entanto, é também importante enfatizar o *slow*, que é ambíguo no seu modo de percetibilidade e de expressão (até por questões fundamentais do cinema, tal como o modo como a imagem se move ou não, neste caso, pela languidez/quietude dos movimentos subjetivos do cinema ou dos movimentos objetivos em frente da lente, utilizando os termos de Siegfried Kracauer),

pois dinamiza o terceiro conceito que vem colocar em questão no último capítulo, que é o conceito de *boredom,* e que vai sugerir em relação com um modo da experiência espectatorial.

Este conceito de *boredom* é para Çağlayan importante na compreensão do *slow-cinema,* sendo que o apresenta como "aesthetic virtue" e que "it functions as a springboard for our mind to exercise artistic inspiration, creative insight and contemplation" (Çağlayan, p. 193). Apoiando-se em filósofos como Lars Svendsen[4] ou críticos literários como Patricia Meyer Spacks, tal como em questões relativas à teoria literária, Çağlayan apresenta as duas abordagens distintas feitas à questão da *boredom* feitas por teóricos da literatura – a '*simple boredom*' e a '*existencial boredom*' – justapondo-os com os filmes que englobam o fenómeno do *slow-cinema*. Para o autor ambas as acessões comuns à teorização da *boredom* parecem plausíveis para uma reflexão do conceito na sua aproximação com o *slow-cinema*. Apoiando-se nas palavras de Julian Hanich, o autor escreve: "My approach to boredom is to treat it not merely as an emotion felt in cinema but to include the films' mode of address, including aspects of narrative structure and visual style that in some ways bear a resemblance to boredom's defining psychological features—idleness, monotony and emptiness" (Çağlayan, p. 197).

Esta é uma das várias pontes sugeridas por Çağlayan durante a obra, e que nos remete para reconsiderar questões propostas em capítulos anteriores. Neste último capítulo utiliza como exemplo a obra de Nuri Bilge Ceylan, mas remete-nos para os cineastas tratados em momentos prévios. A questão da modernidade, que regressa com esta acessão da *boredom* como um estado que possibilita ao espectador novas experiências estéticas e simultaneamente um estado de espírito das próprias personagens do filme[5], é outra questão fulcral ao longo do livro de Çağlayan.

Modernidade é colocada em questão em função do conceito de *nostalgia*[6] que Çağlayan pretende utilizar no seu estudo do *slow-cinema,* nostalgia que é desde início destacada de cinefilia, que surge também e com pertinência em vários pontos do livro.[7] Este ser moderno vai ser tido em conta por Çağlayan desde o modernismo de Charles Baudelaire (Çağlayan, p. 69) até ao cinema moderno de Rainer Werner Fassbinder e Michelangelo Antonioni (Çağlayan, p.74). As temáticas da *boredom* são algo que complementa esta acessão do *slow-cinema,* e até algum ponto do cinema contemporâneo em geral.[8] A *nostalgia* proposta por Çağlayan em *Poetics of Slow Cinema* não é, no entanto, somente um fascínio cinéfilo que tem como expressão um pastiche de um cinema moderno. É, para Çağlayan, simultaneamente, uma acessão dessa mesma cinefilia para estimular um tipo de atitude – tanto dos espectadores como dos cineastas e artistas – que remete a um *modus operandi* que revê as tendências comerciais de o que seria um '*fast-cinema*'. Nas palavras de Çağlayan:

> "I argue, however, that neither slow cinema nor Béla Tarr simply follow the modernist legacy as a blithe form of postmodern citation but explicate the urgency of slowness through an aesthetic strategy grounded in what might be more accurately described as retro-art-cinema style, in other words a deliberate exaggeration of the long take and dead time that is meant to evoke the political, aesthetic and cultural ambitions of 1960s modernist art cinema." (Çağlayan, p. 43)

Entre os vários arquétipos referidos por Çağlayan quando fala de modernismo (seja do universo literário ou cinematográfico, do modo ou da representação) uma das figuras mais preponderantes, e provocadoras, que se vai relacionar também com a questão da *boredom* (Çağlayan, p.195), é a figura do *flâneur*. Através das conceptualizações de Susan Buck-Morrs (Cağlayan, p.69) sobre a figura do *flâneur,* e outros surgimentos desta remissão para a figura dentro do cinema como em Mark Betz, mas essencialmente através de toda a herança cultural de Baudelaire e outros tantos, Çağlayan faz uma ponte entre esta figura paradigmática e os sujeitos do cinema de Béla Tarr. No entanto, podemos arguir que mais do que uma figura presente no cinema de Béla Tarr, este pensar e olhar sobre o *flâneur*, e Çağlayan também assim o sugere, é um olhar pertinente para outros filmes do que autor descreve como *slow-cinema*. Seja Ventura em *Juventude em Marcha* (2006) de Pedro Costa, como que um sem-abrigo a quem retiraram a casa, perdido num mundo desconhecido cheio de rostos familiares, sejam os reis magos de Albert Serra, que ambulam na procura de um milagre no que parece ser o contexto mais terreno e vulgar em *El cant dels ocells* (2008). Os vários modos de andar destes *flâneurs*, ou acrescentaria, destes judeus errantes, são mais à frente analisados por Çağlayan (Cağlayan , p. 70-71).

O terceiro conceito apresentado pelo autor para o pensamento da poética do *slow-cinema* é o de *absurdism*. Aqui Çağlayan fixa-se no cinema de Tsai Ming-Liang e no que parece ser uma árvore genealógica do *New Taiwanese Cinema* e da *Second New Wave*. Na tentativa de estabelecer relações entre cineastas como Edward Yang e Hou Hsiao-hsien e Tsai Ming-Liang, percebe-se que Çağlayan sugere uma maior rede de influências (que a natureza estrutural e artística destes realizadores, de uma maneira ou outra, acaba tendo maior expressão e bebe inspiração de um meio institucional de festival), culminando na introdução do que intitula *art cinema* como sendo um fenómeno transnacional quando se trata do *slow-cinema*, e em particular, do cinema de Tsai Ming-Liang. Não é a única instância onde Çağlayan estabelece relações institucionais e históricas, sendo que na sua análise das questões da nostalgia, relativas ao realizador Béla Tarr, indo até ao uso específico do preto e branco (que compara com outros casos paradigmáticos como *Paper Moon* (1973) de Peter Bogdanovich ou *The Good German* (2006) de Steven Soderbergh) tenta estabelecer estas redes de influência, sendo,

então, um modo importante para Çağlayan de olhar não só para o *slow-cinema*, mas para todo o cinema contemporâneo.

No entanto, o conceito de absurdo é o destaque do segundo capítulo central do livro. Çağlayan admite que apesar das relações entre Tsai Ming-Liang e, por exemplo, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai tende a aproximar-se num olhar próximo dos indivíduos e da sua privacidade ao invés de um olhar histórico e político sobre a cultura de Taiwan. Citando Kent Jones (Çağlayan, p. 122) Çağlayan sugere que a câmara de Tsai olha tudo com uma distância que por sua vez estabelece uma distância com o espectador: "This distance between the spectator and the subject operates on two premises. First, by isolating events from context, it reduces narrative momentum or delays cause-effect relationships. Secondly, the internal incongruity of such events leads to humorous situations (…)" (Çağlayan, p. 122-123).

Para Çağlayan estas situações de humor estão relacionadas com o humor absurdo, que existe em Tsai, que segundo o autor, são causadas por peculiaridades formais (as estruturas não convencionais que Çağlayan identifica e disseca no exemplo de *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) nas páginas 126, 127 e 128; e o uso de símbolos que o próprio cineasta explica na citação da entrevista na página 131) e representação de '*empty time*' e privacidade dos sujeitos do filme, contrapostas com um filme que é, apesar de todas estas características, um filme narrativo, de ficção. Çağlayan vai ainda mais longe, referindo-se a James Udden e ao conceito/técnica de *delayed exposition*, que é utilizada por norma em filmes comerciais de terror e suspense. Outra característica formal que remete para questões do género cinematográfico é proposta pelo autor quando cita Song Hwee Lim no facto de Tsai enfatizar alguns sons do quotidiano, remetendo para essa característica do absurdo (Çağlayan, p.143). Çağlayan refere tudo isto em função do Teatro do Absurdo e das características semelhantes que se podem encontrar entre a lógica do absurdo e o cinema de Tsai Ming-Liang.[9] Põe ainda em justaposição com as questões do género cinematográfico a questão do *camp style* (Çağlayan, p.111), na tentativa de estabelecer mais pontos de encontro entre o cinema do tempo expandido e o pensamento contemporâneo, referindo-se nomeadamente a casos paradigmáticos como é o da Susan Sontag[10] (Çağlayan, p.118).

O alcance do livro de Emre Çağlayan é notável, tal como é a sua dinâmica no que toca a pontos de vista. As questões formais e técnicas relacionadas com o cinema, como são os planos longos, por exemplo, tal como as questões conceptuais como a questão da *boredom*, da *nostalgia* e do *absurdism*, são objeto de estudo por parte do autor. Mais ainda, propõe uma relação entre todos os conceitos, técnicas e factos históricos que apresenta, estimulando o pensamento e várias questões que podem assim surgir. Demonstra ainda conhecimento e revisões de ideias chave do pensamento sobre o cinema como são as de André Bazin, nomeadamente nos seus textos sobre o Neorrealismo Italiano. Acima de tudo, o olhar pragmático de Cağlayan sobre as relações institucionais e possível rede de influências dentro

do cinema contemporâneo, em particular do que define como *slow-cinema*, permitem uma perspetiva que difere de grande modo de outros estudos sobre o assunto. Trata-se de um livro que parece responder ao problema que sugere, que é do estabelecimento daquele quadro conceptual específico com o fenómeno a que chama de *slow-cinema*, mas para além disso, fá-lo com um olhar que vai para além de uma conceptualização e parte para uma análise histórica especulativa, focando-se em relações causa-efeito da história do cinema moderno até ao cinema contemporâneo. Existem várias questões levantadas devido às diversas relações que Çağlayan parece sugerir. Até que ponto a nostalgia por um cinema moderno, que aqui propõe, é de facto relacionada com as instituições mais prestigiosas do cinema, como são os festivais? Ainda que tendo uma relação com questões políticas e questões estéticas, de que modo estão estes filmes do tempo expandido relacionados com a condição humana, e, nomeadamente, com a condição de espectador? E quais as motivações dos espectadores pelo crescente interesse por este género particular do cinema? Questões que variam do universo do sociológico e histórico até ao universo da filosofia e da estética, mas tudo questões que surgem se pensarmos nas abordagens pragmáticas e relações improváveis estabelecidas pelo autor enquanto simultaneamente parece responder a muitas outras.

---

[1] *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema*, Tiago de Luca, 2014 (p. 13-14).

[2] "But slowness has often been deployed negatively in critical reviews of films as a synonym for "boring", with the implication that the films contradict cinema's *raison d'être*" (Çağlayan, p. 6).

[3] *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, Song Hwee Lim, 2014 (p. 2).

[4] O autor norueguês escreveu, entre outras, a obra *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

[5] E a relação entre os dois, tal como estabelece Karl Schoonover, citado e trabalhado por Çağlayan nas páginas 13 e 14.

[6] "… nostalgia can help us understand how slow cinema is referencing modernist art cinema and bemoaning its passing." (Çağlayan, p. 24).

[7] Quando Cağlayan se refere a cinefilia, e nomeadamente ao filme *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) como abertura de portas para um cinema do futuro: "In other words, while some of these self reflexive films function as cinephiliac exercises that eulogize the long-lost art cinema of the 1960s, they also turn towards the future of cinema by triggering imagination of its audiences) (Cağlayan, p. 156).

[8] Visível nas páginas 32 e 33, quando Çağlayan cita e trabalha Mark Betz e David Bordwell.

[9] "The logic of the absurd is in essence a careful balance between the implausibility and plausibility of na event where the latter is ever so slightly dominated by the former" (Çağlayan, p145).

[10] Nomeadamente do seu texto "Notes on Camp," em *Against Interpretation*, 1966.

BODY IMAGES IN THE POST-CINEMATIC SCENARIO: THE DIGITIZATION OF BODIES

Philipp Teuchmann (FCSH-UNL)

Edited by Alberto Brodesco & Federico Giordano, Mimesis International, 2017, ISBN: 9788869771095.

Em *Lire le Capital* (1965/2014), Louis Althusser, no contexto de uma história das ideias e da cultura, dir-nos-ia que o século XX seria lembrado por se ocupar principalmente com os gestos mais elementares da existência: ver, ouvir, ler, escrever, falar, contar, desenhar, a gesticulação e o corpo. Contudo, este interesse não se viria a extinguir: contemporaneamente é-lhe dado continuidade no contexto de uma teoria geral das técnicas culturais ou numa teoria dos *media*. Para uma certa ramificação desta última área – designemo-la aqui, *grosso modo*, por ecológica ou estética –, a ideia da emergência de uma nova sensibilidade tornou-se central. Referimo-nos aos debates que se constituem em torno da lógica planetária da computação, assim como das novas configurações assumidas pelo complexo militar-industrial da informação e do entretenimento. Por todo o lado se anuncia assim que a estética, enquanto princípio da percepção, se tornara, ao longo destes últimos anos, profundamente numérica.

A questão do corpo ressurge aqui com redobrada intensidade, sendo a categoria que historicamente mais resistência ofereceu às mutações culturais. Metamorfoses, implosões, explosões e deformações caracterizam, mais do que nunca – uma comparação à primeira Grande Guerra ou à nuvem atómica poder-se-ia revelar especulativamente produtiva – os corpos contemporâneos. Com efeito, o digital vem a aumentar e reforçar – pelo menos superficialmente – uma distância histórica relativamente ao corpo considerado na sua autonomia legal, corpo jurídico ou individual frequentemente atribuído ao sujeito liberal, corpo detentor de propriedade, apropriado, idêntico a si mesmo.

Oferecer uma visão geral desta problemática e dos seus entrelaçamentos sociais, culturais e histórico-epistemológicos pode muito bem ser um modo de interpretar *Body Images in the Post-Cinematic Scenario* (2017) – colecção de textos e ensaios editados por Alberto Brodesco e Federico Giordano. A obra divide-se em duas partes. A primeira aborda sobretudo problemáticas da representação do «novo corpo». A segunda preocupa-se particularmente com o corpo do espectador. Evidentemente, as duas partes sobrepõem-se e remetem ambas para o tratamento de uma emergente, mas ainda indefinida *cognitio sensitiva*. Neste sentido, o objectivo da obra – assim o dirão vagamente os editores – consiste em proporcionar uma

reflexão sobre a «relação» que se estabelece «entre o corpo e as tecnologias dos *media* contemporâneas» (p.9) no contexto da assim chamada era «pós-cinematográfica» – que levará igualmente ao reconhecimento da existência de uma estética «pós-*media*». A mobilização destes conceitos não se faz sem perigo, porquanto é frequente dirigir-se-lhes críticas pela sua natureza indeterminada e, consequentemente, de serem o resultado de um precipitado exercício nomeador. Contudo, seria falacioso julgá-los desprovidos de valor prático, afirmando que estes se constituiriam numa inevitável falência pragmática. Estas categorias servem em primeiro lugar o propósito de identificar «uma mutação no panorama [*landscape*] mediático» (p.124). Por outras palavras, a sua importância não consiste tanto na atribuição de uma lei ou tipicidade estática a um conjunto de fenómenos novos, como no desejo de criar uma correspondência dinâmica e não-vinculativa com determinados acontecimentos – a técnica nos seus movimentos processuais, lúdicos, miniaturizados, algorítmicos, portáteis, agregadores, convergentes, etc. –, preservando a sua heterogeneidade. Positivamente, poderemos falar aqui de «conceitos fracos», da construção de uma passagem que poderá, efectivamente, reunir em si uma certa regularidade – necessária ao intelecto –, mas que não ambicionará ir além de uma dinâmica instanciadora, de uma sinóptica plástica e flexível. Se por um lado se pretende superar a teoria dos *media* que vai de Lessing a Greenberg ou Kracauer, deseja-se igualmente, por outro lado, evitar um corte ou cisão absolutos com referentes passados: «pós-cinema» ou «pós-*media*» fala-nos de uma transição não-teleológica.

Por norma, «pós-cinema» pressupõe que modos de produção e recepção estritamente cinematográficos já não se revelam enquanto dominante cultural na contemporaneidade. Estes, contudo, não devêm obsoletos: subsumem-se e concentram-se agora em forças e poderes consideravelmente diferentes. Designa-se assim uma trama temporal indicadora de que o rompimento com a lógica e estética tradicionais do ecrã, texto e imagem associados ao cinema é o resultado de todo um conjunto de dispositivos – o computador, videojogos, a *Internet* e agora a *Cloud*, plataformas de *streaming*, sistemas de videovigilância, redes sociais, etc. «Pós-cinema» coincidirá assim em diversos aspectos com a ideia – estética – de «pós-*media*». A crise do *medium* é, com efeito, também a crise do cinema que se solta e que inesgotavelmente multiplica a sua presença, abrindo-se ao fluxo de imagens e dígitos com que contactamos, (in)conscientemente, no dia-a-dia. Para esta configuração também aponta *Body Images in the Post-Cinematic Scenario*, apesar dos seus editores não enunciarem explicitamente a leitura que fazem dos conceitos utilizados – particularmente no que respeita a «pós-cinema» –, dificultando ao leitor o acto de interpretação. Em suma, a obra remete-nos para essa tradutibilidade numérica dos corpos que exigirá igualmente a elaboração de uma fenomenologia, uma reflexão sobre a experiência concreta do espectador que, nesta cultura contemporânea de interfaces, devém utilizador.

A ambição e extensão deste projecto manifesta-se claramente na diversidade de contribuições e objectos de análise seleccionados. Consideremos rapidamente alguns exemplos. Alberto Brodesco debruçar-se-á sobre a tópica fundamental da «multiplicação dos corpos», procurando dar uma resposta ao «porquê» da popularidade desta temática no contexto de séries televisivas. Particularmente interessante revela-se o método do autor. No seu artigo, o texto faz-se acompanhar de um exercício gráfico. Deste modo, partindo de uma amostra de vinte e uma séries, a tipologia referente ao corpo multiplicado é diagramaticamente ilustrada. Deborah Toschi, por sua vez, concentrar-se-á na relação entre «Pregnancy Diaries» e ecografia obstétrica, compondo-se um movimento autobiográfico, uma libertação do corpo relativamente à sua medicalização, possibilitando «a futuras mães pensar e partilhar impressões – incluindo receios» (p.63) acerca do seu futuro e situação. Susan Broadhurst explorará a ideia de empatia e a possibilidade de um *Gesamtkunstwerk*, que a autora pensará tanto a partir de Wagner como de Artaud, elegendo para tal, como objecto de estudo o projecto *multimedia* «Metamorphosis: Titian 2012», uma interpretação de três quadros de Ticiano,[1] cujo fundamento, por seu turno, é a obra «Metamorfoses», de Ovídio. Federico Giordano oferecerá uma visão geral sobre dispositivos que pretendem facilitar o envolvimento sensorial do corpo – o estado mais avançado deste envolvimento corresponderá a uma experiência da ordem do multissensorial –, dando origem a práticas profundamente transformadoras da figura do espectador, enquanto Giulio Lughi, opondo-se à ideia de que a contemporaneidade se marcaria por um impulso descorporalizador (*disembodiment*) e deslocalizador (*delocalisation*), propõe-se a reflectir sobre a emergente condição corpóreo-textual resultante do «mobile/locative paradigm», cujo fundamento é a relação dinâmica que estabelecemos com o digital. Assim, para Lughi, o que está em jogo é o modo como a habilidade em elaborar «*complexos projectos narrativos* parece constituir a chave para nos posicionarmos e orientarmo-nos cognitivamente num universo em que a técnica reclama para si *corpos*, *objectos* e espaços *físicos*» (p.148).

A (re)apropriação corporal e a sua abertura para novas intensidades é o elo que liga a totalidade dos artigos compreendidos em *Body Images in the Post-Cinematic Scenario*, o fio de Ariadne que permite a sua compreensão: o cérebro global é substituído pelo *spatium* da corporeidade. Ora, Lughi identificará algo de essencial quando nos fala da procura por um posicionamento, de um direccionamento, um problema de orientação cognitiva. Sabemos que «orientar-se» significa, antes de mais, agir de acordo com um sentimento elementar de diferença, a saber, a diferença existente entre direita e esquerda, cima e baixo, frente e atrás. O corpo é o ponto de ancoragem deste processo. Contudo, no contexto de uma sociedade pós-fordista, de acumulação flexível, do controlo exercido pela técnica que na era da sua miniaturização se faz ocultar a si-mesma, o corpo, tornando-se maleável, instável, dilacerado por forças moduladoras, é um corpo desorientado, o que significa já sempre uma certa torvação do olhar noético. Contudo, um quotidiano marcado pela omnipresença do ecrã, pela

geolocalização, fluxos de informação entre objectos interconectados, realidade aumentada, traz igualmente consigo, segundo Lughi, novas possibilidades estéticas e narrativas – veja-se o «jogo» *Ingress*. Urge, portanto, abandonar um modelo do digital que pensa o ecrã do computador e o ambiente de trabalho (*desktop screen*) como suporte em que «espaços reais são replicados e virtualizados» (p.149), de modo a trazer agora para a frente o lugar físico e o corpo como lugar de novos «information behaviors» – tomando aqui de empréstimo o termo de Manovich (2014): estratégias e tácticas adoptadas pelo sujeito para sobreviver na sociedade da informação. Aí Lughi verá o corpo – do utilizador – que é «leitor-escritor» (p.149) de novas formas e configurações narrativas.

«Life is Real = Reality is a Platform», o artigo de Ariana Dongus sobre *Alternate Reality Games* (ARG), revelar-se-á, neste contexto, de extrema importância para a colectânea. Com efeito, uma parte do seu ensaio será dedicada a uma consideração sobre a ambiguidade que permeia estes projectos que se pretendem libertadores. Neste sentido, Dongus mostra-nos que experienciar *Alternate Reality Games* significa igualmente a inserção numa experiência de *design*. Realizar o quotidiano por meio de um absolutismo do estilo constituíra-se já sempre como um dos projectos fundamentais da indústria cultural. Contudo, a espiritualização do entretenimento já não consiste na jovialidade e despreocupação dos filmes da democracia, na *rêverie* do sujeito que compreende a experiência vivida como extensão da sala de cinema e das imagens que nela divisou. Reside agora numa ambição de reinventar o quotidiano pós-produtivamente, criação de micro-utopias que compreendem a arte como atitude e a atitude como forma: «à medida que absorve todos os fragmentos, o teu telemóvel, o teu ecrã de computador e a tua licença de condução» (p.161) o ARG e a lógica planetária que lhe está subjacente infiltrar-se-ão e contaminarão gradualmente a própria vida.

Body Images in the Post-Cinematic Scenario expõe como a imagem se faz carne, como ela transpira do ecrã e invade os sujeitos, a matéria e outros ecrãs. Uma realidade passível de ser editada, montada, cortada e pós-produzida denota o coincidir entre imagem e mundo. Ferramentas de pós-produção deixam de ser somente meios para proporcionar a representação de algo para agora devirem formas de criação, de intervenção cirúrgica na própria realidade. Ora, encontrar um lugar que vá para além da militarização do entretenimento e da vigilância implica habitar irregularmente esse espaço mediado, procurar por fissuras, circuitos de *feedback* descontrolados e hesitantes. Ariana Dongus, mas também Ludovica Fales em «Tahrir Square», demonstram que ainda é possível compor uma estética da resistência. Para Fales, tal é o projecto de um horizonte de entendimento comum que, entre o físico e o digital, o contínuo e o discreto, liga-se à formação de um novo sujeito colectivo, colectividade que habitou a multiplicidade orgânica que é a praça Tahrir, simultaneamente espaço, acção e acontecimento. Em jogo está agora a potencialidade política das ligações que somos capazes de constituir aquando do triunfo do numérico sobre a gravidade universal.

O corpo devém rede de semiose, lugar de encontros e cruzamentos, ultracorpo, como nos diz Christian Uva a propósito do corpo do actor no contexto do cinema digital contemporâneo. O numérico compreende, com efeito, uma cosmética geral, donde emergirá um corpo aumentado, uma multiplicação equipolente ao circulacionismo e à transmedialidade que o acompanha. Aliás, em «Transmedia and "Techniques of the Body"», Marta Boni, informada por Marcel Mauss, reflectirá sobre o modo como o corpo se relaciona com esta transmedialidade que releva já sempre da vivacidade e energia de um organismo, do seu grau de resiliência, regeneração e plasticidade. Entre vários ecrãs, além de se construir «um espaço transmedial, comum a actores e espectadores e em que estes encontram novos modos de expressar as suas emoções» (p.104), a *dynamis* que se constitui exige o desenvolvimento de técnicas do corpo que se ligarão à realização de certos segmentos do universo: «Imagens estilhaçadas têm de ser reunidas de modo a que carreguem consigo significado. Apenas quando combinadas devêm visíveis» (p.108). Aliás, uma forma engenhosa de indagar sobre a especificidade destas técnicas do corpo, as diferentes configurações que estas assumem na semioesfera contemporânea, sobre o modo como o público em geral, ou o espectador/utilizador em particular, se constituem fisicamente em frente ao ecrã pode ser realizada, como nos mostra habilmente Christina Schachtner no seu artigo «Body Images: People-machine configurations in the context of digital media», por meio de técnicas culturais como o desenho – realizado pelos próprios participantes do estudo. Desenhar ao fenómeno a sua imagem gráfica, fazer da intuição um modo privilegiado de investigação pode, com efeito, revelar-se de extrema importância no contexto de uma problemática que se marca ela mesma pelo errático, por um eclipse solar que impossibilita a constituição de um fundo sólido para um pensamento estritamente conceptual.

Consideremos agora um último artigo. Sabemos, desde *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* (1895) que existe uma estreita ligação entre o cinema e a fábrica. Será pois verdade que a divisão do trabalho e a alienação relativamente à produção encontra uma continuidade na sala de cinema? Fábrica de sonhos, o cinema, assim como a fábrica fordista, são espaços que exercem controlo sobre o tempo: «assim como a fábrica tradicional prende os seus trabalhadores, o cinema prende o espectador» (Steyerl, 2012:67). Ora, a ideia de um «pós-cinema» implica igualmente a emergência de uma nova mobilidade, novas formas de apropriação que libertam sobretudo temporalmente, mas também espacialmente, o espectador. A obra cinematográfica migra para o museu onde é objecto de exposição, para um espaço aberto onde se abre à heteronomia, para o espaço doméstico, miniaturiza-se, acompanha a privatização do olhar que pousa sobre um ecrã de uma televisão, computador, *tablet* ou *smartphone*. Em «Haptic Cinema: Smartphones and the Spectator's Body», Kata Szita debruçar-se-á precisamente sobre o que Francesco Casetti (2015) denominaria de uma «recolocação» do cinema. Sabemos que o grande ecrã continua a dominar, em termos de prestígio cultural e significado social, o pequeno ecrã. Szita procurará um deslocamento da problemática. O que

está em jogo não é a formulação de um juízo moral, mas a cartografia de um fenómeno cultural desconceituado e, por isso, frequentemente desconsiderado.

No processo da sua explosão e expansão o cinema constrói compromissos, abre-se a um profundo questionamento: «Relativamente a *smatphones*, informação visual e auditiva pode derivar tanto da sequência fílmica como do ambiente» (p.121) que envolve o espectador. Um estímulo não antecipado emerge, involuntariamente contamina-se a experiência fílmica. Uma síntese é o resultado de uma forma cinematográfica que invade um espaço – activo, público – para o qual não fora pensada. Simultaneamente, o ecrã, na sua portabilidade e tactilidade, clama para que seja manuseado e tocado (*it must be touched*; p.118). A experiência é casual, o mundo representado releva de uma leveza que já não é a do cinema de sala escura.

A tónica da perspectiva é assim colocada sobre a percepção e experiência do espectador/utilizador, sobre modos de ver, sentir e reagir, sobre uma performatividade que permite à autora escapar ao campo epistemológico dos critérios de uma estética classificatória e nomeadora, *medium*-cêntrica, a qual reclama para si a capacidade de definir uma «autêntica experiência», nunca separada das condições formais do *medium*. Tal permitirá pensar o estado do cinema no assim chamado «cenário pós-cinematográfico» sem recorrer às redutoras proclamações da sua morte ou de um seu triunfal retorno.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, & Jacques Rancière. (1965) 2014. *Lire le Capital*. Presses Universitaires de France- PUF

Casetti, Francesco. 2015. *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come*. Columbia University Press

Manovich, Lev. 2014. Post-media aesthetics. *Transmedia Frictions, The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities*, ed. Marsha Kinder & Tara McPherson, University of California Press

Steyerl, Hito. 2012. *The wretched of the screen* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

[1] As obras estão expostas na National Gallery (Londres): *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-59); *The Death of Actaeon* (1559-75); *Diana and Callisto* (1556-59).

SILENT CINEMA: A GUIDE TO STUDY, RESEARCH AND CURATORSHIP

Sofia Sampaio (Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa)[1]

Paolo Cherchi Usai, Londres e Nova Iorque: Bloomsbury/BFI, 2019. pp. 403, ISBN: 978-1-84457-528-2.

Silent Cinema: A Guide to Study, Research and Curatorship é a terceira edição, revista e expandida, de um livro que é há muito uma referência internacional sobre o cinema mudo. Intitulava-se, na primeira edição, *Burning Passions: An Introduction to the Study of Silent Cinema* (1994) e, na segunda, *Silent Cinema, an Introduction* (2000), sempre sob chancela do British Film Institute (BFI). O autor é uma figura bem conhecida na área da curadoria do cinema mudo: co-fundador dos famosos *Giornate del Cinema Muto* de Pordenone (Itália), iniciados em 1982, Paolo Cherchi Usai foi durante anos curador no Departamento de Imagem em Movimento do George Eastman Museum, em Rochester (Nova Iorque), onde ajudou a formar a prestigiada L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation. Actualmente, dirige o novo curso de conservação e gestão do património audiovisual do Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, em Itália.

Dizer que a terceira edição é 'revista e expandida' (a segunda edição já o havia sido) não faz, porém, justiça ao profundo trabalho de reorganização e reescrita que nos permite afirmar que estamos perante um novo livro. Esta terceira edição vem assumir plenamente a vocação de *guia*, mais adequada a um público de académicos, investigadores e curadores do que propriamente a um público generalista, de cinéfilos e curiosos, a que o termo 'introdução' parecia anteriormente (talvez inadvertidamente) almejar.[2] Não que os dois tipos de público sejam incompatíveis. No entanto, o rigor no detalhe e a forma como o autor expõe e discute argumentos de âmbito por vezes restrito (nomeadamente, sobre arquivos, técnicas de preservação e curadoria) poderão parecer fastidiosos a leitores mais interessados nos efeitos ópticos, narrativos e artísticos projectados na tela do que na panóplia de artefactos, procedimentos e actividades que encontram o seu lugar a montante e a jusante da projecção cinematográfica. Estes últimos são o foco principal do livro.

A presente edição não só duplica o número de capítulos da edição anterior, mas também os renomeia, reduzindo-os a curtos substantivos – *Pixels*; *Celluloid*; *Chroma*; *Machines*; *People*; *Buildings*; *Works*; *Show*; *Acoustics*; *Collections*; *Evidence*; *Duplicates*; *Lacunae*; *Traces*; *Curatorship* (são, ao todo, quinze capítulos). Cada um deles revela o compromisso do autor com a história material e social dos filmes – e não tanto com a história dos 'autores' e das 'obras'. Como não poderia deixar de ser, esta última não está ausente: Cherchi Usai é especialista em D.

W. Griffith e adopta Georges Méliès como ‘mentor’ da viagem de ida e volta que o livro propõe entre o cinema pós-digital dos nossos dias e o chamado ‘pré-cinema’ (p. 5), socorrendo-se, para o efeito, do filme *A Viagem à Lua* (1902), que acaba por funcionar como uma espécie de *Leitmotif* ao longo do livro. No entanto, as ‘obras’ (tema do capítulo 7) são apenas um dos tópicos deste guia, claramente moldado pelo contacto do autor, em primeira mão e durante vários anos, com arquivos de imagens em movimento, museus do cinema e festivais especializados no cinema mudo.

Com efeito, uma das marcas do livro é a atenção que confere à materialidade do cinema, tal como ela é susceptível de emergir em arquivos, museus, laboratórios de preservação e cabines de visionamento ou projecção. Vemos isso logo no segundo capítulo (*Celluloid*), que apresenta e explica aspectos como a composição e o fabrico da película (base e emulsão), as vantagens e desvantagens do nitrato de celulose face a outros materiais (acetato, poliéster) e os vários processos de estandardização (35mm; dimensão e formato do fotograma; número e formato das perfurações, etc.) ocorridos durante o período em análise, que vai, sensivelmente, desde meados da década de 1890 até finais dos anos 1920, quando o sonoro se começa a impor. Ou no terceiro capítulo (*Chroma*), que nos dá conta dos processos de produção / adição de cor (tintagens, viragens, estêncil, coloração à mão), utilizados, sozinhos ou combinados, com vários graus de sucesso. No capítulo seguinte (*Machines*), percorremos ainda o rol de máquinas e mecanismos pensados para captar e lidar com o cinema mudo – entre câmaras, projectores, impressoras, lentes, lâmpadas, lupas, rebobinadoras e aparelhos de perfuração e montagem.

Esta perspectiva materialista (atenta aos objectos, às tecnologias e às técnicas) é gradualmente ampliada, de forma a incluir os processos humanos e societais que foram dando forma aos novos ‘inventos’ – e ao cinema como um ‘evento’. Assim, o capítulo 5 (*People*) debruça-se sobre as pessoas que participaram nas diferentes fases da actividade cinematográfica – sem esquecer os colaboradores mais anónimos que, como o autor reconhece, requerem mais e melhores estudos. São várias as práticas de trabalho que encontramos: desde inventores, cientistas, produtores, operadores de câmara e exibidores que são uma e a mesma pessoa (p. 93), ou a prevalência de fronteiras ténues entre investidores, artistas, distribuidores e exibidores (p. 96), até à implementação de um sistema de divisão do trabalho (que é também uma divisão entre os sexos), que atribui diferentes estatutos e remunerações a diferentes funções. O capítulo 6 (*Buildings*) guia-nos pelos espaços onde decorriam grande parte dessas funções – as fábricas (a da Eastman Kodak, em Rochester, ocupava, em finais dos anos 1920, uma área de 400 acres); os estúdios (o primeiro é o de Edison, conhecido como ‘the Black Maria’; em 1916, o da Universal Studios, na Califórnia, já recebia visitas do público para assistir à rodagem); os cinemas (que se iam tornando ‘sedentários’ a partir de 1905); e as cabines de projecção. Estas últimas eram espaços geralmente pequenos, insalubres, desconfortáveis e perigosos. Obrigados a longas horas de trabalho ininterrupto, os projecionistas foram os primeiros trabalhadores do

sector a organizar-se em sindicatos (p. 114). Já os capítulos seguintes – *Works*, *Show* e *Acoustics* – canalizam a nossa atenção, respectivamente, para as obras produzidas durante este período (ficamos a saber mais sobre o número de filmes por região, o número de cópias que se tiraram, os géneros cultivados, o *copyright*, a censura), a dimensão performativa do cinema mudo (incluindo detalhes sobre o preço dos bilhetes, os horários, a duração das sessões, os intervalos, os programas e a interacção com o público) e a relação que este cinema mantinha com o *som*.

Ao longo destas páginas, é impossível não apreciar a amplitude e o rigor de temas, dados e argumentos, muitas vezes em contramão aos mitos e preconceitos que persistem sobre o cinema mudo. O catálogo de curiosidades é longo: a pirataria dos filmes – e as engenhosas estratégias das empresas para a combater (pp. 38-39); as invenções que não vingaram (os óculos anaglíficos, em 1924; as imagens anamórficas, em 1927); a surpreendente persistência das 'utopias cromáticas do cinema mudo' (p. 61) – a Kinemacolor, a Chronochrome, a Technicolor – num cinema que continuamos a associar ao preto e branco; ou mesmo a profusão de vozes, ruídos, melodias e efeitos sonoros (gravados ou produzidos *in loco*) que, na ausência de 'som performado' (p. 189), constituíam autênticas 'bandas sonoras' dos filmes. A soma de pequenas histórias e *faits divers* revela um contexto industrial de competição exacerbada (p. 32), mas também alguma cooperação. A primeira conferência internacional de produtores e manufactores de filme, por exemplo, ocorre em 1909 (em Paris) e será decisiva para o futuro da indústria. A multiplicidade de acontecimentos e peripécias faz-nos questionar visões lineares, teleológicas e tecno-deterministas da história: as primeiras alternativas ao nitrato (altamente inflamável, como se sabe) datam de pelo menos 1903 (p. 29), mas só vingarão em 1951. O mesmo se pode dizer das várias tentativas de sincronização de imagem e som, que permaneceram marginais ou inviáveis durante anos (p. 201).

Os seis capítulos finais trazem-nos de volta ao tempo presente e ao arquivo: somos confrontados com o pouco que sobreviveu da intensa produção de cinema mudo (aproximadamente um terço do total) e as razões para tantas perdas (*Collections*); são-nos sugeridos caminhos (com um útil e escrupuloso levantamento de fontes possíveis) para o estudo das imagens e dos materiais que chegaram até nós (*Evidence*); é-nos descrito o processo de duplicação fotoquímica que está na base da preservação dos filmes (*Duplicates*); são-nos apresentados os critérios (materiais, narrativos e ópticos) para avaliar se um filme está completo, bem como algumas formas de 'restaurar' o que falta (*Lacunae*); somos guiados no processo de inspecção, visionamento e identificação de cópias de nitrato num arquivo (*Traces*). Finalmente, somos apresentados às funções, responsabilidades e dilemas que caracterizam e afectam os curadores destas obras (*Curatorship*).

A curadoria emerge, assim, como o culminar do longo percurso, simultaneamente digressivo e cumulativo, que o autor encetou pelos meandros do cinema mudo, dando

cumprimento àquele que parece ser um dos maiores objectivos do livro: o de ser um *guia de curadoria*. Definindo esta actividade como 'uma ponte intelectual entre o passado e o futuro' (pp. 303-4), o autor propõe uma abordagem holística que envolve quatro acções – aquisição, preservação, exibição e acesso –, idealmente a serem desenvolvidas em equilíbrio, sem que nenhuma se sobreponha às restantes. Se é certo que o curador tem que responder perante as entidades financiadoras das instituições que representa, o seu compromisso (no sentido de *accountability*) é, acima de tudo, para com o público – o de hoje e o de amanhã (p. 305). Esse compromisso traduz-se na exibição das obras preservadas através do dispositivo para o qual foram criadas, mas também *na transmissão dessa possibilidade às gerações futuras*. Daí a importância de conhecer a história do cinema mudo, de preservar as suas técnicas e tecnologias (e não apenas os seus filmes), de passar esse conhecimento para novas gerações de arquivistas, conservadores, curadores e técnicos, e, por fim, de garantir que as obras – mesmo que possam ser usadas criativamente – nunca perdem a sua *integridade*.

É em relação a este último aspecto que algumas das preocupações do autor sobre o digital, levantadas no primeiro capítulo (*Pixels*) e retomadas nos capítulos sobre preservação e restauro (*Duplicates* e *Lacunae*), ganham força. Cherchi Usai não nega a importância e o potencial do digital – nomeadamente, enquanto facilitador de acesso e auxiliar da preservação. O problema não é tanto o digital permitir ir 'mais longe' no restauro e poder fazê-lo sem deixar rasto (desse modo dificultando ou impedindo uma reversão do processo), como as entidades que decidem poderem vir a considerar que os ficheiros digitais *são suficientes* para garantir a transmissão da obra para a posteridade, sem que a sua efectiva preservação (i.e. a duplicação fotoquímica das melhores cópias disponíveis) tenha sido assegurada. No meio destas e de outras considerações (sempre acompanhadas de comentários sobre custos elevados e recursos limitados), há críticas à indústria, que frequentemente só aparece depois de a preservação ter sido feita (com dinheiros públicos ou doados), para reclamar os direitos dos filmes que negligenciou (ou abandonou) durante anos (p. 222). E há uma crítica mais geral a tendências curadoras modernas, que o autor resume numa frase: 'o cinema prospera com espectadores e declina com consumidores' (p. 323).

Silent Cinema: A Guide to Study, Research and Curatorship é um livro fascinante, que consegue combinar, de um modo simultaneamente apelativo, rigoroso e útil, uma história do cinema mudo com um manual de investigação e de curadoria deste tipo de cinema. A longa experiência do autor como curador transparece na forma como desenvolve e entrelaça uma abordagem materialista e social ao cinema, uma concepção dinâmica e não-teleológica da história e um entendimento holístico (e profundamente ético) da curadoria destes filmes. Os capítulos fluem, numa linguagem clara e comunicativa que recorre oportunamente a gráficos e diagramas originais, bem como a um conjunto notável (em quantidade e qualidade) de ilustrações a preto e branco, a que se juntam, no centro de livro, ilustrações também a côr. A

opção por uma lista final de referências bibliográficas para cada capítulo facilita a consulta e evita notas que interromperiam a leitura. Por fim, a vertente pedagógica do livro está bem presente: para além de conselhos práticos (ex. como inspecionar uma cópia de nitrato) e de três apêndices com tabelas para a medição, datação e identificação de filmes, o investigador é brindado com treze regras fundamentais para se poder acercar, com rigor e propriedade, desta área de estudos.

No final, não obstante as dificuldades identificadas, são muitas as razões para celebrar: uma rede internacional de arquivos que laboram (desde finais dos anos 1930) numa base regular, muitas vezes em articulação com associações e festivais, para a salvaguarda, preservação e exibição de uma 'história do cinema sem fronteiras' (p. 309); uma deontologia profissional – transversal a arquivistas, conservadores, técnicos de laboratório e curadores – que procura avaliar e fomentar as melhores práticas; um considerável património (parte dele acessível) que é resultado e prova desse labor e dessas boas práticas; e, nas últimas duas décadas, um aumento significativo de publicações académicas que formulam perguntas e (re)visitam fontes com teorias e métodos mais adequados. Em Portugal, apesar de excepções dignas de nota como os trabalhos de Tiago Baptista, Manuel Deniz Silva e Bárbara Carvalho (os dois últimos na área da música), bem como os Encontros no ANIM (2018 e 2019) e as sessões da Cinemateca com acompanhamento musical ao vivo, o cinema mudo continua a ser uma *terra incognita*, vendo-se, em boa parte, confinado a um breve capítulo nas obras de síntese.[3] Talvez um livro como este ajude a avivar, também entre nós, o interesse por um cinema que, como Cherchi Usai demonstra, tem muito pouco de 'primitivo'. Conhecer o cinema 'dos primeiros tempos' é essencial – não só para compreender um mundo que já não existe, mas também para enquadrar as principais questões (sobre memória, remediação, 'pós-cinema', etc.) que têm vindo a dominar os debates em torno da transição digital.

---

[1] Contactos: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, Av. Professor Aníbal de Bettencourt, 9, 1600-189 Lisboa; sofia.sampaio@ics.ulisboa.pt. A autora não escreve segundo o novo Acordo Ortográfico (AO90).

[2] A ideia de guia (e não introdução) já acompanhava o título da edição italiana, na qual a primeira edição inglesa se baseou: *Una passione infiammabile: guida allo studio del cinema muto* (UTET, 1991).

[3] Esta situação reflecte-se na bibliografia que Cherchi Usai fornece sobre Portugal (p. 333), que se reduz a uma única entrada: *Filmes, Figuras e Factos da História do Cinema Português, 1896-1949*, de Manuel Félix Ribeiro, editado há quase quatro décadas (1983).

CONFERENCE REPORTS | RELATÓRIOS DE CONFERÊNCIAS

THE CONFERENCE AS ZOO(M)
(EXAGIUM IN MEMORIAM EILEEN ROSITZKA)

William Brown (Independent scholar)

As anyone who reads this will almost certainly know, conferences went for the most part online between the second half of 2020 and for nearly the entirety of 2021, with organisers of the various regular film studies conferences still deciding at the time of writing how much or if any of their future iterations will also be online.

The aim here is not to rehearse any for-or-against arguments for going permanently online, offsetting the unquantifiable pleasures of in-person conferences with the carbon footprint that it creates to go to and from conference locations. Nor really is it, *contra* what this conference round-up is supposed to be, a review of, or a report on, any particular conference from the past year.

Indeed, at the conferences that I managed to attend at least in part online during 2021—namely SCMS (17-21 March), BAFTSS (7-9 April), NECS (7-13 June) and Film-Philosophy (7-9 July)—I saw plenty of strong papers, entire panels, plenary sessions and keynotes, and could spend this brief essay writing about how the decolonisation of film studies slowly continues to take place, perhaps especially as iterated through an embrace of contemporary critical race theory and in relation to ideas of extraction, while there seems to be an intensification of interest in practice (as) theory, not least as scholars try to work out how to say something through film form as opposed to just offering a 'cinematic' version of a regular paper.

Perhaps both—decolonisation and practice (as) theory—are in some senses linked to the growth of what we might call the Zoom conference (acknowledging both that Zoom is *not* the software that most conferences use for their online platform, and that Zoom, nonetheless, is the brand-name that metonymically now stands in for 'online conferences' and other meetings—much like how in the UK Hoover stands in for all vacuum cleaners). For, given that any and all Zoom presentations involve video, there is a shift from the conference paper as theatrical performance to the conference paper as cinematic performance (a shift that is a continuation of the PowerPoint aesthetic that had of course begun to dominate so many conference papers over the last 25 years or so). Furthermore, given that the Zoom conference arises because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and given that any perceived loss of control by a white supremacist world (be that at the hands of a virus or anything else) leads to an attempt to reassert control in the form of re-subjugating bodies long since bent and/or broken under hegemonic power (on the one side George Floyd, Adam Toledo, Iremamber Sykap, and the

rise of Black Lives Matter; on the other side, Kyle Rittenhouse, the McCloskeys, and Jake Angeli), then it also stands to reason that the academy might warily question its colonial legacy.

Having experienced the by-now typical presentation that involves an audience member forgetting to turn off their microphone as they start a discussion with their partner about matters both domestic and pertaining to the conference, and having also experienced the equivalent of the conference butt-dial when an audience member listened in to a paper while cycling around their hometown, one observation to make about the Zoom conference would also be that the performance now extends beyond the presenter into the audience.

Arguably, for an audience to be performing is not 'cinematic,' in that the cinematic audience traditionally is unobserved in a darkened room. All the same, since the camera can be on when one is listening to a paper—as anyone who has looked on Zoom at a sea of primarily white faces will know—we are to all intents and purposes under surveillance when we are before our Zoom cameras.

As Michael Chanan observes, the performance for the Zoom camera therefore involves a 'cinematicisation' of domestic space, with examples including the arrangement of a warm lighting set-up (try not be back-lit!), an 'intellectual' *mise-en-scène* (the rise of the 'shelfie'), and conveniently timed entrances from domestic animals. Even more than this, though, is how the performance of listening is precisely that—a performance.[1]

For, from my own experiences as both an audience member and presenter, it often feels on Zoom (as Chanan also attests) that one is talking into a void, as with cameras on, audience members check other windows on their screens, and/or they simply turn off their cameras and carry out chores, digital or otherwise, while supposedly 'listening.' Just remember to turn off your microphone as well…

With regard to the old-fangled in-person event, it is not as if collectively we are ignorant of the sense that talking to three audience members on a Sunday morning at 9am (or even earlier!) is a waste of time (our self-consolation: 'but I came here to socialise with my peers' and/or 'if I can get good feedback from just one person, then it will have been worth it'). That is, we know from traditional conferences that when push comes to shove, most people do not care about our research, and do not even pretend to do so (audience members on their phones, tablets and/or laptops during presentations—with the live Tweet functioning also as a performance of listening). Nevertheless, with the Zoom conference, there is an accompanying paranoia: are these people actually listening to me or not? Are they even there? Or did they just sign in to listen to their friend speaking before me, and now are back to sleep hoping to dream a smart question for their friend to demonstrate their loyalty at a later point in time, perhaps even during the Q&A…?

The Zoom conference, then, can at times feel even more than its fleshworld counterpart like an exercise in twinned performance and surveillance on the part of all concerned, lending to proceedings a touch of the fake, or at least the superficial, which, when combined with the afore-mentioned trends towards the 'cinematic' and the 'decolonial' can make the former (we must all be cinematic) undermine the real-world need for the latter (the revolution will not be Zoomed). That is, decolonial academic work becomes a performance made as cinematic as possible, but watched really by next to no one, and with no basic real-world effects. Not only with no decolonial effects, then, but also using the decolonial in a bid to further colonial interests—namely the feel-worthy affects of all those afore-mentioned white faces performatively listening in their domestically dressed Zoom sets, while also shopping online in a bid to fund Jeff Bezos' quest into space.

In what is intended as a playful sleight of terminology, one nonetheless wonders whether the rise of Zoom is somehow linked to the zoom as it is used in other arenas, including of course cinema. According to online etymology sites (Etymology Online and Wiktionary), the term has its origin in aviation, being used onomatopoeically from around the time of the First World War (to zoom does indeed involve launching people up into space *à la* Bezos; as the child's song goes, zoom zoom zoom, we're going to the moon). The idea of the term originally, then, was to convey fast movement, although it has also been used since the mid-1930s to describe the work of telescopic lenses, as Bruno Latour also reminds us.[2] Indeed, for Latour the notion of the zoom—as made clear in a film like the Eames brothers' *Powers of Ten: A Film Dealing with the Relative Size of Things in the Universe and the Effect of Adding Another Zero* (USA, 1977)—suggests a universe in which we can move easily (we can 'zoom') from one scale to another, as if the microscopic were contained within the macroscopic—and with the notion of ascent/descent, i.e. the vertical axis of domination, always present, even if in an understated manner). This notion of zooming between scales is, however, incorrect, suggests Latour, since the microscopic is not contained within the macroscopic; they are in fact different and/or involve different sets of data. For this reason, Latour calls his brief essay 'anti-zoom,' arguing that no good artist believes in the effects of zooms, since the zoom confuses projection with connectivity, in that we mistake how the connections between data are represented/projected (via the zoom) for the data themselves and the connections between them.[3] While the zoom regularly therefore involves mistaking the map for the territory (consider that galaxies are connected to cells, but the way in which the zoom represents this is just a projection, obliterating as it does the vast differences between astrophysics and cellular biology; these scales may well be connected, but they are not the same thing), the point at present to take home is this: to zoom in/to zoom from one scale to another plays into the hands of conquest, acceleration, capital, surveillance and war. The cinematic zoom, then, as well as its aerial counterpart (zooming as tied to war-time

aviation), do in some senses map on to the software Zoom, which similarly comes to negate difference, to surveil, and to accelerate.

We might note that Latour's analysis stands in contrast to various scholarly considerations of the zoom as a technique, and which generally see it as a disruptive effect, self-conscious (indeed, 'performative') in its deployment, and one that thus, we might suggest, is about demonstrating the map-ness of the map, rather than a confusion of map with terrain.[4] None of these studies looks at the Eames film, however, and taking Nick Hall's book-length work on the zoom as the most recent and substantial engagement with the technique, while he notes that the zoom was developed as a tool for aerial military surveillance, he does not link the technique to social surveillance, colonialism, or issues of power within film (for Hall, the metaphor of how 'powerful' a zoom is, is 'scientific,' but not political).[5]

To take an equally recent but specifically cinematic example of the technique, though, Gonçalo Lamas' *Granary Squares* (Portugal, 2021) evokes the surveillance camera aesthetic, meaning that however self-conscious it is or might be, the zoom is absolutely bound up now with issues of control and power (as it was even in the 1970s when it was used famously in the opening moments of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation*, USA, 1974). Indeed, while Lamas' film involves a 64-minute high-angle observation, including various pans and zooms, of and around London's Granary Square, shot seemingly from within Granary Building (home to Central St Martins, just north of Kings Cross station), the use of the plural in the film's title (*Granary* Squares) might evoke the grainy squares that are the digital image, especially when a zoom-in goes so far as to reveal, or make the viewer conscious of, pixels. By this token, the image is indeed self-conscious and/or 'performative' (this term is Willemen's), but it also ties the digital to an intensification of surveillance and control or a world where pixels, performances and maps replace/become the real.

To return to *Powers of Ten*, the film was itself inspired by the 1957 Dutch text, *Cosmic View: The Universe in 40 Jumps*, by Kees Boeke. Not only might we note that in Dutch the word *zoom* also means a hem or a border, thus conveying again the ambivalent relationship that the zoom has with borders, but we might also say that the 'cosmic' is linked, as Anne Anlin Cheng has argued, to the cosmetic and the decorative (like a hem?), with the cosmic/cosmetic thus being a concept that for Cheng helps to explain the 'ornamental' and racialised function that Asian women often play in western texts/the western imagination.[6] And when we therefore combine the cosmic/cosmetic with the zoom to reach what in cinema is referred to as the 'cosmic zoom' (as theorised by Jennifer M. Barker, *inter alia*; *Cosmic Zoom* is the name of a Canadian short film from 1968 by Eva Szasz and Robert Verrall, also inspired by the Boeke book[7]), then we might once again see that both the zoom and the cosmic are working in conjunction to offer up cosmetic images (Garrett Stewart refers to the

cosmic zoom as involving 'sheer rhetoric'[8]), which through their very superficiality (fakeness?) obliterate difference, here understood as raced—a superficiality that is intensified in the digital age.

Indeed, if I argued in 2013 that the 'cosmic zoom' (regardless of whether, in its most common iterations, it is actually a tracking shot) helps us to understand the interconnected nature of the macro and the micro, I nonetheless failed fully to understand the problematic nature of what I then termed the *conquest* of space (or what we might understand as the creation of a cosmos out of chaos).[9] It is not that the cosmic zoom does not function as a form of *conquest*; indeed, it does—but in conquering as opposed to, say, understanding space (in rendering cosmic, as opposed to engaging with chaos), the cosmic zoom does indeed involve the mistaking of a map for the territory (map-making as conquest), and this gesture is deeply raced, as Sylvia Wynter's map-for-the-territory analysis of the conquest of the 'new world' would make clear.[10]

In this sense, as we all have begun to use Zoom to conduct our professional and personal lives, it seems unsurprising that the likes of Bezos, Richard Branson and Elon Musk have themselves commenced putting into action the conquest of (outer) space, an abandonment of the planet that expresses a total disillusionment with the possibility of reversing or bringing an end to climate change, and which abandonment of course is raced, since the planet-killing effects of the Anthropocene are the work not so much of man as specifically the white man and his colonial/*conquistador* logics.[11] As to zoom at great speed is to race, then so might the renewed (and now privatised) space race have as its underlying goal the acceleration/zooming into space primarily of the white race (Bezos, Branson and Musk as, of course, white men, if not also famous divorcees/singletons/virgins), as opposed to any others. Indeed, as they all leave our atmosphere, so are those left on Earth struggling to breathe, as Eric Garner and George Floyd so clearly demonstrate—and this long before we think about the classed and raced nature of which peoples tend most to die from COVID-19.

Eric Yuan, the Chinese-American founder of the company Zoom, says that he got the name from Thacher Hurd's children's book, *Zoom City* (1998), in which we see animals (mainly dogs) driving around in cars. A mixture of the anthropomorphic and the zoomorphic (is it that the book considers animals in human terms, or vice versa?), we might nonetheless focus on the latter (Zoom as short for zoomorphism) in order not just to help explain the afore-mentioned domestic animals who are coerced into performing for the Zoom cameras, but also to help convey how Zoom in its conquest involves the creation of a virtual human zoo, in which we gawp and are gawped at in equal measure—waiting, perhaps demanding for something to happen.

One of cinema's most famous zooms is of course Michael Snow's celebrated *Wavelength* (Canada, 1967), in which we close in slowly across a room before honing in on

an image of some waves. During its 45-minute duration, which elides various different points in time (that is, the film is set over a week, even though we see events on screen unfold in what seems meant to appear as a single, continuous shot), we also discover that someone in the room is dead/has died (Hollis Frampton). Meanwhile, Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* (UK/Netherlands/France/USA, 2017) presents three different temporal scales (one week, one day, one hour), making it a kind of temporal equivalent to *Powers of Ten*. Involving a temporal rather than a spatial 'zoom,' then, *Dunkirk* is of course also a celebration of aviation and war. For Latour, the zoom destroys the interconnections between time and space, by making huge swathes and microscopic reaches of space collapse into the size of the cinema screen, and shown next to each other over a matter of seconds rather than lightyears—a primary (and colonial) destruction of spacetime (divide spacetime into space and time in order to conquer them both).[12] That is, as Snow's film intimates, the zoom and Zoom are indeed expressions of power that have built into their fabric not the Death of the Human (what is that?), but the death of some humans for the purposes of empowering others. It is such a death that we await onscreen; it is such a death that zooms and Zoom both demand, just as we go to the zoo to see dying animals come ever closer to extinction. Zoo(m) as a kind of 'squid game,' if you will—as per *Squid Game* (Hwang Dong-hyuk, South Korea, 2021), the most popular Netflix show of all time, and in which rich westerners pay to see those ornamental and 'animalised' Asians die on a (zoo[m]) screen.

It is only as I write this, then, that I realise that the death of the young and formidable scholar of film and war, Eileen Rositzka, during a Zoom meeting with members of the Berlin-based Cinepoetics on 26 May 2021, is both a loss that I and my fellow film scholars need collectively to grieve, and also the kind of event that makes clear the brute logics of our Zoom-dominated time(s). Our lives on Zoom were not worth her life, or the life of any of those subjugated to power in our contemporary age. May we all slow down, seek a more terrestrial life, and collectively embrace the death that faces us, rather than try endlessly to sacrifice, or hope screen-bound for the sacrifice of, others in a bid to prolong our own, pointless existences.

---

[1] See Michael Chanan, "What is Zoom good for? Notes of an observant participant," unpublished manuscript, 29 November 2020.

[2] Bruno Latour, "anti-zoom," in *Olafur Eliasson: Contact*, eds. Suzanne Pagé, Laurence Bossé, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Claire Staebler (Paris: Flammarion, 2014), 121–124.

[3] Latour, "anti-zoom," 121.

[4] See, for example, John Belton, "The Bionic Eye: Zoom Esthetics," *Cinéaste* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1980-1981): 20-27; Adam O'Brien, "When a film remembers its filming: The new Hollywood zoom," *Journal of Media Practice* 13, no. 3 (2012): 227-237; Paul Willemen, "The zoom in popular cinema: a question of performance," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2013): 104-109; Nick Hall, *The Zoom: Drama at the Touch of a Lever* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018).

[5] Hall, *The Zoom*, 39.

[6] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 79.

[7] See Jennifer M. Barker, "Neither Here Nor There: Synaesthesia and the Cosmic Zoom," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 311–324.

[8] Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 134.

[9] See William Brown, *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 21-50.

[10] See Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006), 107-169. For a further consideration of how the ultra-mobile camera is a tool for surveillance as well as gendered and raced conquest, see Andrés Bartolomé Leal, *The Spaces of the Transnational in the Cinema of Roman Polanski* (PhD diss., Universidad de Zaragoza, January 2021), 156-185.

[11] See Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[12] Latour, "anti-zoom," 123. One might contend that what Albert Einstein referred to as 'spooky action at a distance,' namely the capacity for polarised particles to exchange information at speeds faster than the speed of light, in fact suggests that one can 'zoom,' in the sense of getting across space at speeds faster than the speed of light (getting across space in no time, thereby divorcing space from time). Perhaps this is so, but the way of doing this—via a wormhole, which itself is typically thought to be inside a black hole—involves stepping outside of spacetime, outside of maps, and outside of cinema. To zoom as understood here, meanwhile, is to attempt to control and to render visible, or perhaps even to control by rendering visible (to divide spacetime into space and time in order to conquer them both). In other words, to zoom is part of the process of cinema as control. Or, put differently, if there is a 'black' and invisible spacetime that is utterly interconnected, the zoom is the creation of a visible and divided ('white') space and time, an appropriation of 'blackness' (making it thus 'antiblack'); it is the creation of a controlled space and time (cosmos) at the expense of spacetime (chaos). White men zoom, thus, at the expense of non-white/blackened and other others.