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Redefining Representations of Trauma & Modes of Witnessing in Damon Lindelof's *The Leftovers*

Mariana Delgado
University of South Florida

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Redefining Representations of Trauma & Modes of Witnessing in Damon Lindelof's *The*

Leftovers

by

Mariana Delgado

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
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Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Maria Cizmic, Ph.D.

Margit Grieb, Ph.D.

Stephan Schindler, Ph.D.

Benjamin Goldberg, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This project aims to better understand how and why traumatized subjectivity is framed by *The Leftovers*' fictional narrative in a visual and sonic form that rejects these modes of representations of trauma that they themselves have become conventional tropes. This thesis proposes to further examine the way the moving image, specifically the televised image, contributes to our perceived notions of trauma aesthetics through *The Leftovers*' use of monologues, along with *how* and *why* suffering is sonically framed by the exchange of silence and Max Richter's minimalist score.

Modernist aesthetics have become the disruptive expectations of contemporary Western cinematic audiences as a means of representing a traumatized subjectivity according to scholar Roger Luckhurst. From scholar Theodor Adorno regarding the epistemological question of "truth" and Cathy Caruth's theory on memory (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experienced 2*) and triggers of "truth", these modernist aesthetics derive from the need to understand and represent a traumatized subjectivity that better aligns "truth" within a traumatic experience. Classical Hollywood narratives do not serve trauma's paradoxical nature as narratives become closed and resolute; this prompted a pivot in modes of representing a traumatized subjectivity that depended on the flashback, mosaic and non-linear plot.

Why do Damon Lindelof's aesthetic choices depart, quite literally, from conventional tropes of mainstream trauma aesthetics that center on disruption and visual representations of a symptomatic subjectivity and focusing on representations of *recovery*. I reference the work of

Roger Luckhurst and his own interpretation of Western media's own canonization of representations of trauma in contrast to Lindelof's work on *The Leftovers*.

Redefining Representations of Trauma & Modes of Witnessing in Damon Lindelof's *The Leftovers*

Introduction

"Nothing is answered. Everything is answered. And then it ends." – Damon Lindelof on *The Leftovers*' series finale.

Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* opens with a glimpse of the "Sudden Departure," as it is later dubbed in the show's mythology: the vanishing of two percent of the global population within a single frame. We, the spectator, experience the visual and sonic void it leaves behind as the camera shifts back and forth between an upset baby in the back of a car and a distracted mother on the phone until, suddenly, his distraught cries jarringly stop. The cause of this mass disappearance later evolves into the show's overarching thematic question of how collective identities are shaped in light of suffering. More importantly, *The Leftovers* explores *how* and *why* suffering is framed through the very distinctive use of the long-shot monologue, a formal technique unconventional in televised narratives and mostly reserved for live theatrical performances¹. The show uses a post-minimalist soundtrack to aesthetically represent trauma and as a means to accept the ambiguity of the fragmented memory. *The Leftovers*' very specific formal structure redefines traumatized memory and grants it truth through its own aesthetic form in the visual framing of the monologue and the minimalist score. Finally, I ask in what way does the show's visual representations of suffering and mediated

¹ Such as Shakespeare's Henry V's famous "once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" speech in *Henry V*; Shakespeare, William, et al. *Henry V*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

trauma aesthetics become the central focus of ethical and moral ambiguity, usually associated with general problems surrounding the visual representations of a traumatized subjectivity, within its constructs and arbitration.

Created in 2014 and ending after a three-season run, *The Leftovers*' narrative primarily centers around the indiscriminate and abrupt disappearance of two percent of the world population. The aftermath of this event triggers an onset of individual narratives that become interdependent in expressing the traumatic effects of a collective subjectivity; trauma, in this case, refers to the complex relationship between inside and outside of the body when enduring significant emotional or physical injury or, most notably, referred to as impairments of the nervous system (Luckhurst 1). This particular narrative of a "sudden departure" responds to a collective traumatic experience through the individual responses to this event that manifests in its various aesthetic choices. Choices, such as the interplay of silence and minimalist score, close-up shots and the use of exceedingly long takes, transcend through the sonic and visual voids and become emblematic of the show's aesthetic decisions. Most of these choices occur through the visual construction and framing of the monologue and the minimalist soundtrack composed by Max Richter. This thesis proposes to further examine the way the moving image, specifically the televised image, contributes to our perceived notions of trauma aesthetics through *The Leftovers*' use of monologues, along with *how* and *why* suffering is sonically framed by the exchange of silence and Max Richter's minimalist score. More importantly, why do Damon Lindelof's aesthetic choices depart, quite literally, from conventional tropes of mainstream trauma aesthetics that center on disruption and visual representations of a symptomatic subjectivity. In this thesis, I argue that Lindelof's own visual and sonic choices consciously involve modes of representing a recovering subjectivity, as he uses elements of witnessing and listening through

the monologues as allegorical representations of testimonies that is so distinctive of the documentary. In doing so, Lindelof integrates genres (fiction and nonfiction) in order to further complicate “truth” and “authenticity” that trauma is concerned with parsing out within its own definition. Theodor Adorno’s philosophy on the epistemological understanding of “truth” as “suspended and frail, due to its temporal substance” extends notions of aestheticizing trauma that modernist aesthetics have built off critics like Adorno (Adorno, *Prisms* 34).

The Leftovers mimics a post-traumatized subjectivity that is preoccupied with what psychiatrist Judith Herman defines as recovery being “based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections” (Herman 132). In *The Leftovers*, these connections of empowerment are made through the relationship between spectator and subject on screen, as well as between the characters; specifically a subject traversing a new world post a traumatized reality. Lindelof, throughout the show’s three season run, shapes and molds this connection vis a vis spectator and subject through the monologues in addition to the score; specifically, through witnessing and testimony he emphasizes the idea of recanting past traumatic experiences without violent interruptions and re-traumatization that is often associated with the flashback and mainstream tropes. I argue that *The Leftovers* is both redefining and questioning these conventions through the monologues and the dynamics of the minimalist score. Moreover, the show goes further than most mainstream representations of trauma by aestheticizing recovery more so than just symptoms of a traumatized self and involves spectators in that process much like what Herman describes the patient and therapist relationship to be.

Historical Framing & Cultural Context of *The Leftovers*

The Leftovers' overarching narrative speaks from the contextual and cultural timeframe of a post 9/11 America. Fictionally, the sudden and mass disappearance of 2% of the world’s

population, indirectly allegorizes the sudden impact of two airliners on the Twin Towers resulting in the death of over 3,000 people and forever ingrained in the cultural memory and subconscious of American citizens. It is not, however, the first televised series or media to attempt to figuratively represent a picture of a traumatized collective after the fall of the Twin Towers. Shows such as *LOST* and *24*, in their very self-conscious and self-reflexive forms, attempt to make sense of this highly traumatic event in American culture through their narrative structures and aesthetic forms. The cultural legacy of 9/11 has comparably manifested in the style of torture porn films like *Saw* (year) and *Hostel* (year) that directly reference images the likes of Abu Ghraib. Jason Middleton, scholar of film and new media, traces a post-9/11 American sensibility that is deeply enveloped in fears over ethnicity and political violence, such as those portrayed in torture films such as *Hostel* or *Saw*. “During a time in which initially widespread support for the president’s policies, following 9/11, gave way to deep national divisions and conflicts over the idea of ‘preemptive’ or ‘just’ war, racial and ethnic profiling, ‘homeland security’ and governmental surveillance, and the American use of torture, films such as *Hostel* presented a nightmarish vision of fears and anxieties rooted in real-world politics” (Middleton 2).

Much of these fears and anxieties have evolved from questions of political action and public concerns of government interference and/or “surveillance” to the realm of a psychological and post-traumatic susceptibility that is generally concerned with mass absences and precarious uncertainty. *The Leftovers* is very much responding to these latter concerns; concerns that seem to date back to 9/11 but continue to cite multiple other “mass voids” in the form of the Holocaust.² Also, alluding to more contemporary and abstract forms of mass voids, the 2008

² What scholar Ann Kaplan attributes in the introduction of her book *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* as the origins of trauma studies.

financial crisis in the United States where several people lost their savings, jobs and homes. It is important, specifically in relation to *The Leftovers*' fictional construct, to highlight the multiplicity in its contextuality as the show attempts to leverage *multiple* historical contexts as a means to remain an open narrative. I want to suggest that placing this particular televised series in only one specific type of context, or "trauma" as Kaplan suggests, would limit viewer subjectivity or the show's broader significance and relevance. *The Leftovers* is suggesting an identification system that is not limited to one sociohistorical context; therefore, the show is opening itself up to viewer subjectivity and identification that extends that of a specific type of trauma. A lot of trauma studies is grounded on modes of "truth" and epistemology in order to find rationality from the irrational acts of a traumatic event (Kaplan 1). By setting up *The Leftovers*' own complicated historical and social context, this thesis hopes to establish the show's own dynamic relationship with truth and epistemology, modes of witnessing, and how representing reparative responses to trauma through a fictional setting, the show operates as neutral ground for spectators to project their own social/historical connections to it. Kaplan suggests that "equally important about trauma is one's specific positioning vis-à-vis an event" which *The Leftovers* affords in its on relationship via mediation (Kaplan 2).

However, Kaplan also indicates that those specific positions of mediation must be classified to a specific contextual engagement with trauma (Kaplan 2). Physical positions in terms of an occurring traumatic event is ever changing to that subjectivity; she cites the example of those who witnessed the fall of the towers and were present in that moment in comparison to the firefighters and aid workers who showed up after the events. Kaplan places this particular traumatic event in terms of positions to further illustrate the dynamic relationship trauma has

with those who come in contact and the levels of spectatorship, witnessing and, ultimately, mediating. The role of *The Leftovers*, in relationship to Kaplan's argument on traumatic positioning, comes inherently through its own fictional landscape as a way to provide a similar dynamism to trauma and its aesthetic representation. Returning to the idea of being an "open narrative" not tied to any one particular historical and/or social context, the show becomes that neutral ground, as mentioned before, as a way for spectators to anchor their own traumatic experiences vis a vis distance. Distance, therefore, affords spectators the ability to deal with their traumas safely from any direct correlation to that past experience and fears of triggering or retraumatizing themselves.

Historical Context of the Monologue & its Relationship to the Modernist Aesthetic

Understanding how *The Leftovers*' visual composition and use of sound, specifically the visual and sonic framing of trauma, departs from modernist aesthetics that conventionally shape visual representations of a traumatized subjectivity, I first turn to Roger Luckhurst's argument in *The Trauma Question*. His chapter explores narrative cinema's role in aiding to "constitute the PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) subject in 1980, and that it has continued to interact with and help shape the psychological and general cultural discourse of trauma into the present day" (Luckhurst 177). I situate his observations on cinema's ability to aestheticize traumatic symptoms from the origins of modernist aesthetics and argue for *The Leftovers*' role in redefining how trauma is represented. In addition to a reconstruction of visualizing or aestheticizing trauma through less intrusive formal elements such as the visual framework of the monologues, the show creates a visual and sonic framing of traumatic recovery. Not dismissing Luckhurst's claim on narrative cinema's attempt at understanding traumatized subjectivity

through modernist conventions such as flashback, mosaic, and non-linear plot, I argue *The Leftovers* is restructuring these types of aesthetic conventions.

For Luckhurst, modernist aesthetics such as the flashback, non-linear plots, fragmentation, circularity, and repetition represent Western culture's own response to conveying a traumatized sensitivity through disruptive modes of narrative framing. Luckhurst is echoing what critic and scholar Theodor Adorno suggests in his own work concerning a cultural world post trauma, specifically citing culture post the Holocaust, suggesting that "to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 34) referencing not literally but how to represent suffering in our cultural sphere. Classical Hollywood modes of narrative trajectory are closed and resolved, while modernist aesthetics latch on to the idea of being ever changing and paradoxical, much like trauma itself. "Cinematic narratives don't just mimic but help organize popular conceptions of what trauma does to subjectivity" (Luckhurst 208). I believe it is important to acknowledge possible new ways of reinterpreting a "traumatized subjectivity" in order to both acknowledge the importance of modernist conventions as "attempts to convey the experience of traumatized subjectivity" and finding visual choices that emphasize less the intrusive responses to PTSD, for a visual expression of post-traumatic recovery that otherwise is foreclosed in the modernist approach (Luckhurst 178). By "recovery" I mean, in this particular case, not to reduce the traumatized subjectivity to just entertaining thrills for spectators to consume, or mimic a traumatized individual through fictionalized viewing experiences. Scholar Stephan Schindler³ questions approaches to representations of the Holocaust in the context of documentaries and retraumatization through audiovisual means, as mere expressions of trauma

³ Schindler, Stephan K. "Limits of Representation: Documenting the Holocaust"; raises the questions of "how does one tell whose story, for what purpose, using what kind of audiovisual composition?" in context of Holocaust representation in documentaries and films.

as its own continuous cycle of disruption and voyeuristic pleasure (Schindler 4). My aim is to both explore trauma in the visual terrain of media, specifically in television, that consciously strives for a more complex understanding of the traumatic experience and one that offers an alternative representation of a traumatized self that strives towards a visual aesthetic that also functions to convey a *recovering subjectivity*.

A “recovering subjectivity” is where Herman’s work on recovery begins to help describe the audiovisual relationship *The Leftovers* is mimicking in a post-traumatic fictional world. Herman lays out recovery in three separate stages, one being safety or the reestablishment of safety, mourning and reconnection (Herman 155). Herman is also concerned with the abstract idea of these terms, as they can be as dynamic as the very core of trauma and up for interpretation as any one recovery process is not the same. *The Leftovers* unconsciously emulates Herman’s three step process in a way that manifests in the monologues and score, specifically in the subtle nudges where Lindelof begins to forge this healing relationship via the monologues and the music, spectator and subject on screen and the characters themselves. More explicitly in the show, there are scenes where spectators are blatantly positioned in the role of witness/spectator and also in the point of a view of Nora Durst played by Carrie Coon, who happens to be a victim to the Sudden Departure as having lost her entire family on that day. Moments such as when Nora, who works for the Department of Sudden Departure, interviews possible victims of the Sudden Departure for beneficiaries for their Departure Benefits and is placed in control of the interview of other victims of the same traumatic event as herself. Nora is now the one mediating both the physical camera she must use to interview victims, as she reads from a long list of questions that are used to assess whether or not their loved one actually departed. The camera then shifts to several other points of view as the camera draws back from

those being interviewed to an extreme close-up of Nora's face, the one who is doing the interview and then it will situate itself within the camera used on scene. I argue, moments such as this and those that are later on fully developed through the actual monologues of Nora's own recounting of her experiences, begin to represent on TV this patient/doctor relationship Herman considers central to the recovery of any patient post-trauma and one that will reinstate the control and power survivors lose in their experiences of trauma (Herman 133). This is also relevant to other moments in the show where Nora is in charge of her own narrative; she recants past experiences without the use of a flashback as another means of regaining control of her truth and testimony where she as victim forces viewers to rely only on her testimony. This thesis will illustrate the way the monologues, within all its visual constructs, and the score emphasize the theory of a recovering subjectivity that is otherwise collapsed in modernist modes of visual representations of trauma in the media landscape.

Through the show's aesthetic emphasis on the monologue and post-minimalist soundtrack, *The Leftovers* represents trauma as a means to accept the nuances of the fragmented memory and traumatized subjectivity. *The Leftovers*' audiovisual structure redefines a traumatized memory and grants it authenticity through the visual framing of the monologues and the minimalist score. Taking reference from psychiatrist Dori Laub's chapter on "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening" regarding his work with Holocaust Testimonies at Yale and Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, my thesis will fall in favor of aestheticized trauma in media representation by consolidating these actual testimonies and modes of recovery post trauma within the show's monologues and score. The visual structure of the monologues and score offer stability on the narrative form of testimony and through the repetitive, stable nature of minimalist music as opposed to the more intrusive form of the modernist aesthetics Luckhurst

attempts to define through the flashback and fragmented narrative. The same will prove to happen via the show's overall use of a minimalist score composed by Max Richter, adding a sonic layer to the show's ability to aestheticize trauma without modernist impulses for intrusions and disruption, something *The Leftovers* is consciously implementing. In my attempts, this thesis will point to other alternatives in media aesthetics of collective trauma through *The Leftovers*' use of both sonic and visual forms.

Visual Construct of the Monologues and Televised Close-Up and Long Take

The Leftovers is managing to both reconstruct or redefine a traumatized subjectivity through the visual framing of the monologue, and by virtue of the close-up. The show also provides a complicated and morally ambivalent representation of suffering and trauma in media. "Trauma also appears to be worryingly transmissible: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients, between patients and doctors via the mysterious processes of transference or suggestion, and between victims and their listeners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sympathy, even to the extent of claiming secondary victimhood" (Luckhurst 3). Trauma's very development and understanding is shrouded in contradictions and various levels of paradoxes that likewise parallel the impression of inside vs. outside (in relation to the body) and how one cannot truly exist without the other; trauma blurs the distinction between what is internal and external to a traumatized subjectivity. This is the same relationship *The Leftovers* begins to trace through its aesthetic form of the monologue, as it begins to disclose contradictions in themes concerning fiction vs. non-fiction, stability vs. instability, and authenticity vs. inauthenticity in the visual construction of the monologues.

In order to situate the role of *The Leftovers*' in this dialogue between television and film I first turn to Annie van den Oever, film and new media scholar from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Van den Oever's article is preoccupied with the dialectical relationship between film and television aesthetics. She delves at one point, explicitly, on the role of the close-up and its relationship to the naturalizing of the face, as it is scaled significantly down in television, as opposed to the denaturalization of it in the expanse of the cinematic screen. "Whereas the relatively small television screen naturalizes and familiarizes the face in close-up, the enormous cinema close-up radically denaturalizes and defamiliarizes the human face" (Van Den Oever 121). Effectively, Lindelof's very cognizant efforts at utilizing the close-up in moments of extreme distress or uncertainty point to a denaturalization that is commonly found in the avant-garde cinematic close-up. However, this is not to suggest a "denaturalization" the likes of a disruptive flashback sequence, that jarringly cuts from scene to scene and collapses temporal spaces within a singular frame. In tandem with television theory, like the one Van den Oever describes in term of "the close-up," what I suggest *The Leftovers* is doing with the use of the close-up, especially the extreme close-up, is a kind of disruption that resembles that of the "denaturalizing" nature of the cinematic close-up within the same limits of television. Whereas the "close-up is part of its natural routine vocabulary" in television in order to maintain that balanced visual proportion between spectator and subject on screen, Lindelof's own work with the close-up in *The Leftovers* begins to redefine those limits set by a "naturalized" close-up in television. The show's use of the close-up begins to trace a complicated relationship that weaves cinema and television aesthetics in one as a mode of "denaturalization" that signals spectators to *notice* the very nature of the shot as being too close and too intimate as it lingers on the faces of

various characters within the show for long periods of time; too close and intimate refers to the denaturalized way Lindelof will crop out parts of the face in order to emphasize the close-up itself. It is not this sudden cut or disruption that snags the attention of the viewer much as flashback does, but with the close-ups, framing and scale over time.

The Leftovers first presents its viewer to a black screen with the date “October 14” in white lettering as the shrilling sounds of an upset baby pierce off screen layered by the sounds of his mother talking on the phone. Almost immediately, the screen cuts to a close-up shot of the unsettled baby in its car seat, anchoring his upset cries to the tight close-up as the screen frames this mimetic relationship between distress and intimacy of subject and spectator that later on becomes so fundamental in the visual structuring of the monologues. The camera remains unsettlingly close to his crumpled-up face as the viewer is treated to a visual representation of his piercing cries, marking the first instance where the close-up is anchored to distress. The mother is tracked throughout a laundromat performing menial tasks, such as putting money inside a quarter machine, as she grows consistently frustrated with both the people on the phone and the small child crying in its car seat. Later on, the mother is granted the use of the close-up only *after* the baby departs or goes missing and she is screaming in despair for her departed baby. Otherwise, the camera remains relatively stable and calm in a medium shot as it cuts to and from the mother on the phone to the baby before the child departs.

It isn't until the camera moves from the baby in the backseat to the mother in the front still talking on the phone, again going back to the crying baby after it departs, that the camera begins to disengage from its steady staging to a more destabilizing, tenuous aesthetic. The camera begins to subtly shake and move around her and track other people looking for their departed loved ones, as the camera closes in on a shopping cart now rolling on its own as the

camera then shifts to the child of the father, now departed, who once held that cart. As the mother's distress mounts, further establishing the reality of her recently departed baby becoming ever more "real," the frame dismounts as the entire shot becomes shaky and unsettling to visually match her own sorrow and anguish on the *inside*. The camera seems to be actively working to anchor the trauma of the Sudden Departure through shaky camera movements and close-up to these faces and moments of anguish as the camera zooms in tight to the mother's agonized face, contorted in both shock and pain as she pulls up her hand up to her mouth in disbelief of her son's disappearance, paralleling the establishing shot of her disconcerted baby at the beginning sequence but now rocked, the frame itself, by the Sudden Departure itself. In doing so, *The Leftovers* drastically emphasizes the close-up in this opening shot as a direct source of witnessing through spectatorship that later on becomes indispensable to the monologues as characters recount back their experiences in relation to the Sudden Departure without needing to use the flashback as a disturbing force of aestheticized trauma. This introductory scene is only beginning to anchor moments of distress with tight close-ups (the shot of the upset baby and mother), transitions of visual witnessing to sonic as the score picks up soon after the mother realizes her baby is gone and actively setting up these elements that become characteristic of the monologues.

The close-up, specifically in Lindelof's work in television, becomes emblematic of his way of representing trauma going back to his work on *Lost*. However, before fully embodying the use of the close-up in terms of witnessing and testimony as he does in *The Leftovers*, Lindelof begins to deal with these thematic questions of traumatic truth in his work on *Lost* tentatively through this mode of character testimony. It is important to note that his work on *Lost*

is largely centered around the use of the flashback as the main technique of anchoring the “truth” of a traumatized sensibility. The flashback itself is essential to the show’s overarching model of representing traumatic experiences as each episode on *Lost* layers one another through the flashbacks of each character’s background story. However, Lindelof’s work on *Lost* begins to demonstrate these impulses of “testifying” via the close-up that later become essential for representing traumatic experiences in *The Leftovers*. There are several instances where characters on *Lost*, such as Sawyer played by Josh Holloway and Jack’s father Christian Shepard played by John Terry, have impromptu conversations regarding their wrongdoings and pasts that have the camera trained on them in close-up for long periods of time. While not directly paralleling the long duration shot on *The Leftovers*, Sawyer’s conversation with Christian in the bar about Jack in season one slightly resembles the final shot of Nora and Kevin in *The Leftovers* as she relays what happened when she “crossed to the other side”. In *Lost*, the camera pushes in on Sawyer’s and Christian’s faces for most of the recanting of their stories, as Christian tells Sawyer the failings he’s had as a father to Jack and Sawyer’s own sordid past as a con man. The close-up moves in further than that midshot that is supposed to parallel the spectator who views a televised screen. It pushes in on Sawyer’s face close enough to cut his forehead and chin, framing the uncomfortable shot of his eyes and mouth as he speaks. However, the image of Sawyer and Christian still remains *within* a flashback and itself becomes a triggering memory when Sawyer tells Jack about his conversation at the bar with his father later in the season. While still working within the conventions of modernist aesthetics that rely on the flashback to narrate a traumatized subjectivity in *Lost*, Lindelof is also creating the atmosphere of testifying early on through these scenes on *Lost*. Ultimately, the show *Lost* still *relies* on these flashbacks, or the

literal cut from the visual perspective of one temporal occurrence to the other, of the past as a source of “truth” or, as scholar Cathy Caruth defines it, “the flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility” (Caruth, *Explorations in Memory* 153), therefore granting the flashback this paradoxical role of both ultimate truth and tentative truth.

As much as Lindelof is working with the flashback on *Lost*, he also begins to redefine “truth” itself via testimony. It isn’t until his work on *The Leftovers* that he begins to further develop what Vivian Sobchack calls “embodied subjects” via a televised narrative and what Dori Laub describes as bearing witness to traumatic experiences. This comes in the form of the visual construction of the long take, with its unnatural use of the close-up as an attempt to create an uncertain environment around what constitutes truth under testifying a traumatic experience without the use of the flashback. *The Leftovers* “defamiliarizes” not in the scale of the screen but by cultivating an affective relationship between what is on the small screen and spectators. *The Leftovers*’ own relationship with cinema and the close-up is expressed through recounting past experiences and the ability to tell without a flashback, grounding these testimonies in authenticity without visual recall much like testimonies of victims of trauma in actual life events or documentaries. To further contextualize the way fiction and nonfiction are intertwined in the monologues, these testimonies mirror the simple notions of face to face interactions where one must choose whether or not to believe someone when they tell us something without the aid of a visual flashback for “proof.” Therefore, it is important to go back to Vivian Sobchack’s work on “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic and Electronic ‘Presence’” and how “embodied subjects” connect to this mimetic relationship between the televised close-up

and a traumatized subjectivity as spectators become subjects of bearing witness in *The Leftovers*. This thesis begins to trace the very specific use of television as a mode of forging these relationships and spaces of trauma aesthetics via the duration of the shot, framing and the close-up. Sobchack articulates the different technologies that shape our own understanding of the world and how “each technology not only differently mediates our figurations of bodily existence but also constitutes them” (Sobchack 2). Tracing mediation through television is important to the work of this thesis, as Lindelof begins to use cinematic aesthetic choices in the technological realm of television, therefore further complicating the show’s relationship to trauma aesthetics as he deviates from modernist impulses also attributed to cinematic technology. Moreover, Lindelof’s visual choices in *The Leftovers* directly challenges Sobchack’s argument that “digital electronic technology atomizes and abstractly schematizes the analogic quality of the photographic and cinematic into discrete pixels and bits of information that are then transmitted serially, each bit discontinuous, and absolute -- each bit ‘being-in-itself’ even as it is part of a system” (Sobchack 19). The very relationship of spectator and subject on the screen becomes more universal vis a vis the testimonies and bearing witness. Lindelof’s use of the long take and close-up generate a visceral reaction that, rather than create “instant stimulation and impatient desire” (Sobchack 19), it holds spectators in an uncomfortable and pointed centrality that is concerned with multiplicity and dynamism that counterargues for what Sobchack suggests digital spaces like television are not doing. Perhaps the scene that better serves this argument is the very end of the entire series, where the camera is trained on Nora’s face as she testifies to her time on the “other side” (or the side where everyone who departed allegedly disappeared to). It is not enough that the scene does not cut to a visual flashback that

corroborates her testimony but that the close-up both changes in scale and angle as it moves to a side profile shot of her face to then a very tight and close shot of her face where both the forehead and neck area are cut drastically. This moment alone (with various other scenes like this last one throughout the series) suggest both a direct confrontation and interrogation with spectators that is entirely embodied in these monologues.

Throughout intense moments of monologues between characters and/or specific characters, *The Leftovers* is hyperaware of its role in mediating the close-up itself. Going back to the very last episode of *The Leftovers*, where Nora Durst recounts her assumed experience of crossing over to “the other side” where people departed to, the show and by virtue of it, Lindelof completely puts into motion all of these elements of the visual and sonic together. Spectators are never shown any of her experiences but must solely rely on her testimony as she tells it to both Kevin and the spectator. Shot almost entirely in an extreme close-up, the spectator is privileged in being positioned as both witness and victim as the camera cuts between Nora and Kevin. In doing so, the show is asking spectators to place themselves both in Nora’s role as the voice of the testimony and as a witness of her account through the very controlled and tight framing of the shot. Forcing spectators to take on this dual role, as both victim and witness, allows for the visual framing of trauma to take on new meaning. Meaning making departs from the more intrusive model of understanding trauma that seems to lean on retraumatization, such as Cathy Caruth’s conception of “the flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event and the truth of its incomprehensibility” (Caruth, *Explorations in Memory* 153). Here, testimony is privileged over “truth” and the need to perceive trauma as the ultimate source of closure or narrative ending is void as there is no real “closure” to any traumatic event, but only ways of coping. There is no need for visual “proof” of Nora’s experience on the other side as her

testimony alone serves as a valid reclaiming of the never-ending process of enduring a traumatic event. This is reminiscent of Dori Laub's work on Holocaust survivor testimonies and the notion that "the traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time" (Laub 69). The camera never leaves the tight close-up framing of Nora's face for more than a few seconds in order to acknowledge Kevin's presence in that space. However, the cut is never too drastic or disorienting, as you can still hear Nora speak and are only left to briefly contemplate Kevin's reaction. In her monologue, Nora is testifying to her time over where the people who had previously departed allegedly went to. Nora tells Kevin "that's when I understood: over here, we lost some of them but over there they lost all of us," referring to those who departed in relation to herself and everyone else who "stayed" behind. The camera is not completely steady, referencing a more unstable yet grounded experience for the spectator. It simulates the camera's ability to both record Nora's testimony and allows for spectator subjectivity to partake in her monologue as a means for authenticity.

Lindelof's thematic question of "truth" and "subjectivity" become the central focus of these monologues as he places the spectator in a world of uncertainty that transforms viewership of this particular television series into witnesses and bearers of traumatic experiences within the technological space of television. This is not "atomizing" work but, rather, generating an "embodied" experience that requires viewers to do more than consume generated digital images on a screen of the "electronic world of immaterialized -- if materially consequential -- experience" that Sobchack describes (Sobchack 20). Rather, Lindelof's *The Leftovers* is both allegorically and visually challenging the idea of a "disembodied" televised experience directly through the construct of the monologues as their very makeup is pieced by cinematic and

photographic elements, therefore materializing these subjective points of narrative such as that of Nora's monologues.

The Leftovers suggests a mode of bodily existence that seems to redefine technological boundaries between television and cinema as it relates to the close-up itself. Situating the close-up in direct context to a televised narrative is central to understanding its role within *The Leftovers* and spectator subjectivity in terms of witnessing. The close-up, in this case, serves as one of many components that aid in the construction of the monologue's effort to mediate trauma through visual form. More importantly, how *The Leftovers*' conscious use of the close-up in the mode of a cinematic visual form of the "typical extra-institutional or avant-garde curiosity to experiment with perceptual and aesthetic transformation, celebration 'de-automatizing' effects which could re-sensitize the viewer" (Van Den Oever 122) departs from the traditional model of a televised close-up. Also, the close-up signals the spectator to its presence in a 'transformative' approach. This becomes a new model of embodied subjectivity that is aiding in the refinement of these trauma aesthetics as it takes shape in television. I argue, in using the close-up as an affecting visual form through the specific medium of the televised viewing experience to situate spectators as witnesses, it destabilizes visual forms of trauma and suffering, in a new and profound way that departs from modernist trauma aesthetics. Moreover, Lindelof's conscious efforts to utilize the close-up in a way that avant-garde cinema did in order to unsettle spectatorship, reaffirms *The Leftovers*' ability to work in multiple registers as it both redefines modernist trauma aesthetics and destabilizes the televised close-up.

These relationships, stability/instability, authenticity/inauthenticity, and fiction/nonfiction become ambivalent throughout the monologue as Nora's own narrative is filled with both truth

and doubt. One, because the spectator is not afforded the visual flashback of her encounter with the others, and two because there is no intrusion of sudden cuts or disorienting visual framing it affords a level of authenticity to her testimony. There is no other source of sound other than the natural world outside of the house and of Nora's voice, the last thing spectators both see and hear.

Minimalism's Role in Trauma Aesthetics: Listening to Silence

Viewers are first treated to Max Richter's faint and melodic piano piece titled, aptly so, "The Departure" soon after the camera cuts both from a crying baby in a car seat to his mother on the phone in the first ten minutes of the entire series. As his cries sonically leave a void, much like his physical presence, the score slowly begins to fill that space. The camera takes its time as it tracks the mother on the phone, slowly back to the empty car seat. The baby is now gone just as subtly as Richter's soft piano fills the diegetic space of the empty car seat and as the mother begins to call for her son, "Sam? Sam? Sam?" The music and the voice of the mother's faint calls begin to shift into the same dynamic level, as the piano cycles over and over again the same notes much like the mother softly calling out for her son. Soon, the music begins to blend and weave with the rest of the diegetic sounds, such as a son screaming for his father, a car suddenly and violently crashing in the background and lastly, the screams of the mother who just lost her son.

Along with the complex relationship built between silence and sound within the diegesis of the show, it also evolves into the show's overarching thematic question of how collective identities are shaped in light of trauma and suffering. More importantly, this thesis demonstrates *how* and *why* suffering is sonically framed by the exchange of silence and the minimalist score by Max Richter. It will also trace how sound and score can actively participate in a complex and

dynamic exchange between authenticity and witness to a (albeit fictional) mass trauma. Film and new media scholars such as Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort already comment on the way Richter's score fills a "void" left by those who departed by suggesting that "the repetitive musical score intensifies the sense of loss that pervades each episode of *The Leftovers*, which exploits the interlacing plotlines to point out the devastating effect of October 14th on the sense of community living" (Joseph and Letort 2). However, as reasonable as that interpretation seems, I find it to be reductive and insufficient in its attempt to explore what the non-diegetic score is doing in *The Leftovers*. This thesis argues for the multiplicity of the score's ability to act as both witness and authenticator of a post-traumatic collective and subjectivity when interlaced with the visual depictions of monologues. By tracing the dynamic relationship between witnessing and authenticating traumatic experiences in light of the Sudden Departure through this interplay between diegetic silence and the non-diegetic score, it will better situate the argument of a redefined trauma aesthetic as woven through both the visual constructs of the monologues and the use of the score and sound.

Max Richter's score extends the already well-known phenomena of minimalist music, which extends back to La Monte Young also known as "the master of drone" (Ross 492), and extends the work of, most notably, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass. Minimalist music, known both for its repetitive and fast and percussive nature, extends in the realm of time and space. Works like that of La Monte Young are classified under structures of holding a single note for a long period time or, as scholar Alex Ross notes in *The Rest is Noise* under the history of minimalist music in the West Coast, "long tone" where eventually Young stops using traditional modes of notating music and instead opted for a more improvisational approach to notation. By collapsing time and space, minimalist music uses this long tonal shift and repetitive nature to

disrupt both traditional tonal music and modernist/serial music. That same pattern of extending space and time is often directional, as Steve Reich recalls in his piece *It's Gonna Rain*, where the recording of a Pentecostal preacher named Brother Walter is duplicated and played in unison before breaking the pattern of that repeated phrase "it's gonna rain!" synched to one headphone on the left ear and the other on the right. Reich described it as "an acoustical reality that if you hear one sound a fraction of a second after another it appears to be directional" (qtd. in Ross 499). In further context to the way the score works in *The Leftovers*, minimalist music begins to get linked to musical representations of historical traumas such as those of Reich's work in *Different Trains* (year). While scholar Amy Wlodarski focuses more on the problematic aspect of Reich's work on *Different Trains* as being too emphasized on objectivity, or that his piece services as a mode of witness representation of the entire "situation of American and European Jews during the war," her work on this section also begins to signal the link between minimalist music and trauma (Wlodarski 129). This becomes particularly important to Max Richter's work both on *The Leftovers* and for his entire career.

Space, time and direction make up the construct of minimalist music and its overall structure where all three of those components become malleable and abstract. This tradition extends to contemporary composers like Philip Glass, whom Max Richter himself seems to be emulating and extending in his own work on *The Leftovers* and other works. What makes Max Richter's own contribution to minimalist tradition, specifically in *The Leftovers*, is his contribution and transcendence to multiple mediums. As scholar Dora Easton writes, "though the presence of minimalist music in multimedia began in the 1960s with a handful of experimental and documentary films scored for friends and colleagues, the technique now appears in everything from Pepsi commercials to PBS documentaries, big-budget features like *A Beautiful*

Mind (2001) and video games such as *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008)” (Doran Easton 181). After having scored multiple feature films and television series himself, such as *The Sense of an Ending* in 2017 and most recently the tv adaption of Elena Ferrante’s novel *My Brilliant Friend* in 2019, Richter’s work speaks to a larger cultural phenomenon that uses minimalist techniques and sounds to portray a specific aesthetic that goes back to Amy Wlodarski’s work in Reich’s *Different Trains* where minimalist music is forged with traumatic identity. More importantly, Max Richter’s musical catalog suggests this trope of trauma and minimalism with themes revolving around suicide, death, and trauma such as documentaries *A Life Worth Living* in 2016, a film about the death of a young brother, *Angel in Red* in 2015, a documentary on death and dancing, and most notably *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State* in 2005, a documentary centered on the Holocaust.

Discussing his score for *The Leftovers* in an interview by Amalia Morris and Sylvain Pinot for *Score It Magazine*, Richter defines it as “when there are specific instances when there are score cues and needle drops, and when these things are interacting a little bit, then get into a whole dialogue of why and how, and how that should all fit together.” When asked in the same interview about the substantial amount of silence involved in scenes, Richter says that “this dialogue between sound and silence is really central to it” and his conscious effort at choosing “instrumentation which points at the silence” such as the piano in pieces like “The Departure.” This suggests that Richter’s use of silence and score are a conscious effort at building this space of both uncertainty and unity that seems to parallel my own suggestion of witnessing and authenticity.

Richter utilizes these patterns as a minimalist compositional approach as a template that sonically fills in the gaps left by both the narrative of people disappearing and the aftermath of

suffering as a means of tracking authenticity and the role of spectators as witnesses. His musical score extends from the acoustic to the visual through minimalism to create patterns of stability and authenticity in order to present a more complex and dynamic relationship between the visual and the sonic. In its complexity, *The Leftovers* is consciously reconstructing a traumatized subjectivity through the sonic framing of its score and diegetic sound through the very specific visual choice of the monologue, first anchored in fundamental scenes, such as that of the baby departing in the very opening sequence of the series. This too offers a more deliberate mode of aestheticizing trauma and creating a more direct line to the way music can shape the visual relationships of a post-traumatic world within *The Leftovers* that starkly departs from modernist aesthetics that, in the past and currently, saturate most our media landscape. Roger Luckhurst marks how “the trauma paradigm pervades Western culture, yet once more the cultural theory of trauma in cinema tends to privilege a specific modernist aesthetic and a narrow cannon of films” (Luckhurst 178). I too situate his observations on cinema’s ability to represent trauma symptoms, much like the visual paradigm of the monologues, in direct conversation with the score. Much like the monologues, the minimalist score is aiding in both reimagining representations of trauma and representations of a recovering subjectivity.

In positioning Richter’s own thoughts on the non-diegetic score and the role of silence, I begin to track the way these two modes of “listening” begin to weave the sonic relationship between witnessing and authenticating a traumatic experience. This begins to be seen as the piercing cries of the baby who ultimately departs is replaced by Richter’s score. However, it is important to signal that in-between moment where spectators are left to ponder the silence of the baby’s cries, or the void. That in-between, or silent moment between his cries and the non-diegetic score, serves as a moment of intervention where spectators don’t visually witness his

departure but hear it. Multiplicity comes in the form of being witness and authenticator of trauma as viewers grapple, much like the mother, with the baby's sudden disappearance as they had just heard his cries but soon enough the score comes in to authenticate what they just witnessed. There's no clashing or intrusive moment of visual reconstruction of the baby physically departing; but, much like the monologues that later on serve as testimonies, viewers must rely on the sound of the baby's cries suddenly ending as he departs off-screen to verify the truth. A very intricate and mimetic relationship is reproduced immediately from the introduction of the series as silence and the score begin to shape traumatic witnessing and authenticating that is different from other more intrusive forms of trauma representation.

Scholars like Maria Cizmic and Amy Wlodarski have begun to map out the intersectional relationship between music and trauma. Wlodarski's chapter "The Composer as Witness: Steve Reich's *Different Trains*" situates the conversation in terms of ethical and moral ambivalence of using music to convey historical traumatic events. Reich's *Different Trains* uses actual Holocaust testimony recordings and interjects, or manipulates them, with his own composition of minimalist style. Wlodarski attempts to negotiate this bridge of witnessing from afar, as Reich himself *was not* a direct victim of the Holocaust. "It is impossible to work indifferently with materials as devastating as Holocaust testimony, secondary witness, precisely because traumatic memory resists the full grasp of the intellect and external control" (Wlodarski 160). I want to highlight the importance of secondhand witnessing in this particular case as Reich is mediating a trauma that does not belong to him and therefore blurring the lines of ethical implications of aestheticizing someone else's trauma. This is not what I mean by "witnessing" in terms of *The Leftovers* and the score's ability to work on multiple registers such as witness or authenticator;

this relationship is much more complex as it works within the bounds of fictional narratives that allow for a more abstract interaction on representations of trauma.

Cizmic, on her part, argues that “music can provide a testimonial function in a number of different ways” through the lens of historical suffering and trauma of the Stalinist era in Eastern Europe within its very particular cultural context (Cizmic 23). Cizmic’s particular approach to music lends itself to both the psychological interpretations of trauma and recovery. “Music does not necessarily represent trauma directly, but bears witness to its effects, conveying to listeners the ways in which trauma can shape memory and temporality” (Cizmic 25). *The Leftovers*’ own approach to witnessing through music is one that is heavily centered on themes of trauma itself, yes, but also on those usually referenced by recovery. Taking Cizmic’s approach to music and trauma, I extend the way representations of trauma in *The Leftovers* can convey both psychological representations of trauma that depart from the intrusive model and represent recovery through this very process of witnessing through music that Cizmic suggests.

Listening, quite literally, begins to take new meaning through the use of the score. Richter’s interplay of the non-diegetic score and silence during the monologue scenes, as characters divulge their past traumatic experiences become what psychiatrist Dori Laub calls “the process anblaxploitationd the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” as the show is solely dependent on these testimonies and not the visual flashback (Laub 57). Isolating two specific scenes where this becomes an integral part of the mimetic relationship between spectator and subject as modes of witnessing and authentication through the use of sound, I first turn to Patti and Kevin’s scene in what is perhaps the show’s best and strangest episode in season two, titled “International Assassin.” Patti Levin, played by Ann Dowd, and Kevin Garvey, played by Justin Theroux, strangely develop this hostile, yet

respectful relationship, throughout the show's run. Patti is the leader of the Guilty Remnant's Mapleton chapter, or a group of people that consider themselves "living reminders" of those who departed; dressed in all white and chain smokers, members of this group symbolize a more radicalized form of remembering trauma. After Patti killed herself back in season one, Kevin begins to see her in what appears to be an illusion but soon becomes very real both to Kevin and spectators. At first, Kevin is resistant in engaging with what he considered "an illusion" of Patti's entity, but by the end of the season, Kevin agrees to kill himself in order to reach this "other dimension" where Patti's entity resides and where Kevin and Patti have this exchange. By the end of the series, Patti and her appearance post her death is never quite explained but that is what plays such a significant part in these testimonies; the need for verified "truth" is obsolete as the trauma endured by these characters serves as truth enough.

In this particular scene, Patti begins to tell Kevin how she was once on *Jeopardy* in order to win enough money to leave her husband and that when she was in the green room with "Stuart," the four-day reigning champ, she says he told her absolutely nothing. Patti says "Not a word. There's a power in that. Silence." All of this is underscored by the same exact lack of score and the silence that pervades this interaction as she is shot in a tight, yet shaky close-up and the camera cuts back and forth between herself and Kevin. Not only does the absence of the score make for a grim aesthetic impact as Kevin and Patti have this conversation at the bottom of a well, but the silence itself also lends to spectator witnessing and subjectivity as the only thing you hear and are focused on is Patti's words. Patti goes on to tell Kevin that she won for three nights in a row until the fourth night, when she lost yet got to keep the previous earnings. This is where the score begins to slowly creep in, just as Patti nears the end of her monologue. The music signals that her monologue is coming to a close and it also prompts the viewer to believe

her testimony for the sake of her experience, not for the visual authentication of what actually happened. The viewer is never treated to a visual flashback of how Kevin got there, why Kevin is there listening to someone who is supposed to be dead, Patti's own recounting of her moment on *Jeopardy*, and how Kevin eventually makes it "back" to a supposed reality. This does not matter in terms of the work being done by the non-diegetic score and Richter's use of violins and piano recall Claudia Gorbman's statement that "the bath of affect in which music immerses the spectators is like easy-listening, or the hypnotist's voice, in that it rounds off the sharp edges, makes contradictions, and lessens spatial and temporal discontinuities with its own melodic and harmonic continuity" (Gorbman 6). Richter's score both consciously elicits an emotional response from the spectator in order to placate this sense of harmony and it places the spectator in a place of witnessing without judgment. The very idea of affect in harmony rounds the "edges" that Gorbman mentions in order to allow for the spectator to accept traumatic experience without the need for factual authenticity that a flashback might provide; the use of silence and the score weaves authenticity through the monologue as well as places the spectator in the role of witness. Patti ends her monologue as she tells Kevin that she had enough money to leave her abusive husband, but she ends up not leaving.

This culminates into the very last shot of *The Leftovers* with Nora's own testimony and her own journey into an "other" place where she is reunited with her family before deciding to "come back" to this same supposed reality. Again, Nora is treated to the same music as Patti was, as she recounts her experience to Kevin in the same tight, yet slightly less shaky close-up. Kevin and the viewer are placed in the role of witness as Nora's voice is the sound in the scene along with diegetic sounds of birds chirping outside. It isn't until Nora finishes her monologue by telling Kevin that "if I told you what happened, you would never believe me" as the silence

hangs between them for a few seconds until the camera cuts back to Kevin in tears. The second Kevin says to Nora “I believe you” and the camera cuts back to Nora, Richter’s soft piano score from the introductory scene, now slowed down, begins to trickle in. Nora’s face is that of awe and then relief as Kevin’s words sink in and as she herself believes him, the camera pushing in on their faces as tears stream down both. “Why wouldn’t I believe you?” Kevin asks her as the camera closes in even tighter on their faces as they cry in relief of each other’s presence and grounded belief in each other. Both of their faces are framed in a way that constricts their reactions explicitly for the viewer to meditate on, exactly through the extreme close-up. This scene ties both the characters’ own traumatic experience along with the entire show’s narrative arch as spectators must reconcile what has been said with what has happened all throughout the show’s three-season run. What binds these elements together is the silence that sutures these monologues and moments of distress along with Max Richter’s minimalist score. Again, Nora is treated to the same sonic use as Patti was, as she recounts her experience to Kevin in the same tight, yet slightly less shaky close-up. Kevin and the viewer are placed in the role of witness as Nora’s voice is the sound in the scene along with diegetic sounds of birds chirping outside. It isn’t until Nora finishes her monologue by telling Kevin that “if I told you what happened, you would never believe me” as the silence hangs between them for a few seconds until the camera cuts back to Kevin in tears. The second Kevin says to Nora “I believe you” and the camera cuts back to Nora, Richter’s soft piano score from the introductory scene, now slowed down, begins to trickle in. Nora’s face is that of awe and then relief as Kevin’s words sink in and as she herself believes him. “Why wouldn’t I believe you?” Kevin asks her as beings to take Nora’s hands and the camera closes in even tighter on their faces as they cry in relief of each other’s presence and grounded belief in each other. This scene ties both the character’s own traumatic experience

along with the entire show's narrative arch as spectators must reconcile with what has been said and what has happened all throughout the show's three-season run. What binds these elements together is the silence that sutures these monologues and moments of distress along with Richter's minimalist score.

What makes this particular moment even more vital is the relationship between the score, the close-up and take in direct relation to Herman's work on recovery. If regaining control is so important to any victim of trauma, this is how Nora and Kevin regain that control; the lack of a flashback affords these characters the control of the narrative, therefore the control of their own traumatic subjectivity as the repetitive and soft nature of the music reinforces that notion of affirmation. Because the score and the visual construct of the monologues invite spectators to play this role of both witness and listener, it invokes the role of what Herman describes as that of a therapist, which "involves and understanding of the fundamental injustice of the traumatic experience and the need for a resolution that restores some sense of justice" (Herman 135). Viewers are not asked whether or not they believe what everything Nora is saying is true, and by virtue of it everything that occurred throughout the entire series, but to believe that she believes it happened to her. It is inviting spectators to shift their visual understandings of what "truth" is and turning it into an abstract figure that trauma has always been, especially in terms of a traumatized subjectivity. While not completely discarding visual representations of PTSD, *The Leftovers* is demonstrating an alternative mode of representation that signals to an even greater understanding of how the traumatized self can exist in *both* its traumatized state and in a recovering state. *The Leftovers* is what Herman suggests the role of the therapist is, which is to "foster insight and empathic connections" between patient and therapist, which is often overlooked in modernist representations of trauma (Herman, 134).

Conclusion

What makes these monologues and their relationship with the minimalist soundtrack so innovative in terms of a visual and sonic framing of trauma is its subtle references to documentary aesthetics. *The Leftovers*' allusions to real-life events such as 9/11 and Holocaust testimonies, such as those featured in Claude Lanzmann's documentary Shoah, allow spectators to anchor their own realities to those of the show without ever explicitly referencing any one specific traumatic event. A lot of modernist aesthetic choices, specifically in cinema, were directly linked to PTSD which is generally designated to its 1980's definition according to Luckhurst, "the strong claim that cultural narratives have been integral not just in consolidating the idea of a post-traumatic subjectivity, but have actively helped form it since 1980" (Luckhurst 15). *The Leftovers*' visual framework is redefining these same aesthetic choices through the televised medium in order to reconstruct trauma aesthetics. In redefining these aesthetic choices through intertextual references of documentary and nonfictional events, fiction offers the rational way of undergoing real-life trauma because of that distancing relationship between spectator and events on screen. Through trauma scholar Amit Pinchevski's own work on analyzing the visual constructs of Holocaust testimonies conducted by psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub and documentarian Laurel Vlock, it better situates what *The Leftovers* is doing in relation to that midway point between fiction and non-fiction that is what visually and sonically reconstructed these monologues. Not only does Pinchevski's own work on testimonies speak to the epistemological question of "truth" but through technology, the apparatus itself, "is a special kind of archival material; disposed to deposition inasmuch as distribution, it conflates the singularity of the testimonies with the universality of their appeal" (Pinchevski 147).

A lot of this work is done through the monologues themselves with the aid of the score as the spectators are confronted with Nora's testimonies and their ability to both rationalize the

entire show's narrative arc and faculty to accept her testimony not for its specific "truth" but for the validity of the trauma she has endured through the entire narrative. According to Pinchevski, an actual Holocaust survivor video testimony, "can capture the uniqueness and authenticity of the storyteller, the 'embodiment' of the survivor bearing witness, while at the same time it holds the potential for future dissemination for collective participation and intergenerational communication" (Pinchevski 146). If, according to Luckhurst, cinematic structures preceded the 1980's understanding of PTSD and actually *aided* in its current psychiatric definition of symptoms, how does something like the use of the monologues as a direct citation of these video testimonies and others of its kind from various documentaries not do the same foundational groundwork in understanding of trauma and its understanding in culture? If, according to Pinchevski, the same video testimonies of Holocaust survivors and survivors of other traumatic experiences function in a "three media function" that consists of recording, processing, and transmission, how is that any different than what *The Leftovers* is doing through its fictional narrative? If in these recordings *through* the camera, as Pinchevski continues to suggest, serve as "facilitator of testimony" and by virtue of it, "facilitates the listener's facilitating" and "serves as a technological surrogate for an audience *in potentia* – the audience for which any survivors had been waiting for a lifetime – providing them with the kind of holding environment that is unattainable in the solitude of an off-camera interview" then that suggests interconnectivity between spectator and subject (Pinchevski 148).

I argue that this is exactly what *The Leftovers* is doing in order to reshape the side of trauma that does not lend itself to the retraumatization of its victims and helps shape a new understanding of how trauma works between fiction and nonfiction. By anchoring moments of distress and traumatic recount, such as Nora's final monologues, within the *fictional* narrative

but framed by *nonfictional* conventions such as the use of close-up and long-take found in Yale testimonies and films like *Shoah* and Max Richter's own historical use of minimalist scores in documentaries about the Holocaust and other historical traumas, the show is further destabilizing the fabric of modernist aesthetics that *only* represents one form of a traumatized subjectivity and goes further by mimicking these techniques of recovery that Herman describes as victims of trauma regain control through their own testimonies. I would finally note that just like trauma, this particular observation and argument is not close ended; there's a further conversation to be had on the ethical and moral implications of the show itself visually reconstructing these very *real* traumatic recounts of past experiences.

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