INTRODUCTION: *THE LEFTOVERS*, PHILOSOPHY, AND POPULAR CULTURE

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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]

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[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.

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