

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

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 Experiences* 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*.