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Haunting Mechanisms in Westworld (HBO, 2016-2022) and The Leftovers (HBO, 2014-2017)

Asma Laater

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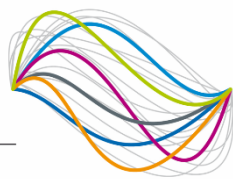
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LECLA

ÉCOLE DOCTORALE



**THESE DE DOCTORAT DE L'ETABLISSEMENT UNIVERSITE BOURGOGNE FRANCHE-COMTE
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Par

Madame Laater Asma

Haunting Mechanisms in Westworld (HBO, 2016-2022) and The Leftovers (2014-2017)

Thèse présentée et soutenue à Dijon, le 15 décembre 2023

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“To be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has never lived in the present, to remember what, in essence, has never had the form of presence.”

(Derrida, *Echographies*, 115)

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***General Introduction. Adopting and Adapting the
Spectral¹***

¹ For a more immersive experience, we have chosen to use a font made in the model of *Westworld*'s font in its title.

Ghosts are everywhere. They pervade our screens, our fiction, our history, and our minds. As academics, we are using past theory and past texts to make explicit our new thoughts about them. In general, this expresses a way of refusing the idea of an ending, of closure – even after death the story, the person, continues. In a world where we are constantly searching for both novelty and familiarity, most fictional works seem to specialize in afterlives where a book can become a movie, a series, a graphic novel, a video game, or just be rebooted a few years down the line, or indeed find new life on a new streaming platform, hence the idea of ghostly afterlives seems particularly pertinent. To adapt the spectral amounts to adapting haunting elements through a process which is in and of itself founded upon haunting and the return of the past.

In this regard, the present thesis examines how the poetics of certain texts epitomizes the spectral aspects of a traumatic memory, and the ways in which texts are haunted by a text, an author, an event – we refer to them as spectro-poetics of the event. Haunting studies analyze the figure of the ghost as a conceptual metaphor, a literary trope and an analytical tool that could expand the contemporary cultural landscape (1). In his *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys determines the relation of haunting studies with identity as a never-ending process induced by spectral triggers by declaring that:

To be haunted is the ongoing process to come to terms with one's being.

(Wolfreys 18)

It is precisely this quest for the self that materializes in two contemporary American TV series produced by the cable channel HBO: *The Leftovers* (2014-2017) and *Westworld* (2016-2022). This is particularly evoked in the TV series under study as a quest for meaning and purpose, i.e., a depiction of an existential malaise in an era before and after a distinctive and world-changing event. The specter becomes a means to reveal social anxieties, the repetitive patterns in history and the timeless common cultural concerns (Shaw 3). As a critical and analytical approach, spectrality helps strive for ontological and epistemological approaches. In representing such a crisis, or what Matt Foley calls “ontological uncertainty”², our case studies do not represent supernatural ghosts *per se*. Instead, they thematically center on a spectral event inspired by their text sources to depict a post-cataclysmic diegetic universe. By adapting

² “To be ontologically uncertain is to feel haunted at an impasse when a choice about how to live is yet to be made” (Foley 21).

(post)apocalyptic themes,³ narratives expose deeply seated anxieties as well as constant fears projected onto a grim future of what came to be characterized as the Anthropocene era.

As the precursor of haunting studies, Jacques Derrida coined the portmanteau term “hauntology” in his *Specters of Marx* to signify the presence-absence of long gone/dead historical and cultural foundations that return to haunt the present. The philosophical book is known to be “an engagement with the alleged disappearance of history trumpeted by Fukuyama” (Fisher 19). Originating from “ontology” and “haunting”, hauntology articulates the sense of being a ghostly entity that is “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (Davis 53). Lorek notes that the term “hauntology” implies “the extent to which the sense of being is always haunted by something other that makes it impossible to describe, comprehend or enclose existence in definite categories” (Lorek-Jezińska, *Hauntology*, 7). Discussing Martin Hagglund’s discussion of Derrida’s concept of hauntology in his *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Mark Fisher discerns two theoretical directions of hauntology as follows:

- 1) *What is no longer but still is*: something that is past but keeps intruding in the present in the form of a repetitive return of the past. This usually manifests in the form of virtual appearances such as “the traumatic ‘compulsion to repeat,’ a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern” (19).
- 2) *What has not yet happened but already is*: something that belongs to the future-to-come, and despite its non-actuality, already has a power on the present such as a form of anxiety, “an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior” (19).

Hauntology seems increasingly pertinent to our 21st century society in a world where “the internet is forever”, and famous figures are constantly being haunted by long-forgotten screeds, but where the common people remain enthralled by the possibilities and dangers of artificial intelligence or climate change.

A drastic change occurred in the twentieth century whereby ghosts came to be seen, especially in the academic field, as textual ghosts and conceptual metaphors – this is known as the “spectral turn”. Following the popularity and omnipresence of stories of haunting starting

³ We consider the series under study as neither apocalyptic nor post-apocalyptic as the spectral characteristics indicate their in-between generic and textual positions with a depiction of an imagined apocalypse, hence the choice of this phrasing. “(post)apocalyptic” comprises both possibilities and states from characters’ perspectives and interpretation of the end times; as already happening or already past. The “(post)” assigns the omnipresence of the temporal features of the apocalypse which are temporally dislocated and haunting the narrative.

from the 19th century, literary works on ghosts stem from the 18th century rise of the Gothic genre and Romanticism⁴ and later many scholars from different disciplines tackled this topic from a variety of perspectives. English literature of the 19th and 20th centuries is evidence of the widespread interest in fictional writing about ghosts which are concerned with defining, capturing the specter, and asking how we have come to live with specters (Shaw 3). The 21st century in western societies, and particularly in British and American film and television, witnessed what John Izod identifies as an invasion in the 1990s by a “wave of phantoms and aliens” (Izod 160).

Roger Lockhurst coined the term the “spectral turn”⁵ in 2002 to explain this millennial anxiety and the rise of haunting studies and its large critical interest in the spectral and ghosts. In his *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock introduces the term “the spectral turn” to determine the emergence of spectrality studies as an alternative to other critical approaches. The spectral turn is the term given for the change in academic interest in the haunting studies towards the beginning of the 21st century; the concern lies within the themes of spectrality and the seemingly supernatural form of presence-absence. This era witnessed a great mistrust in metanarratives following the postmodernist tradition⁶. Metanarratives are overarching and all-encompassing stories that attempt to provide fundamental interpretations of human existence and the world, including history, society, philosophy (the nature of reality, the purpose of life). They are considered as dominant universal narratives and often claim a strictly definitive comprehensive account of the world. Postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, have critiqued the idea of metanarratives. Spectrality encompasses what remains unexplained and unassimilated and is therefore aligned with the postmodern rejection of grand narratives. The defiance of metanarratives in the context of postmodernism suggests that, like spectrality, the dismissal of absolute truth is necessary.

⁴ Del Pilar Blanco, Maria and Esther Peeren, editors. *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, p.3.

See *The Spectralities Reader*'s introduction as it refers to the evolution of ghost stories in the 19th century as a simultaneous concern of the age with matters of science and technological innovations.

⁵ Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren point out that this was followed by a general uncertainty towards the spectralities as Luckhurst used quotation marks which underline the unofficial character of the term and its meaning while the rest of the scholars in spectralities studies avoided using it as part of the debate on whether a “turn” exists.

⁶ See Bauman (1994) on the postmodernist characteristic of uncertainty and doubt particularly about the future.

Moving away from the occult meaning of specters, ghosts came to be perceived and approached as textual entities, or, as Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren explain, a large conceptualization of spectralities and the consideration of ghosts as “conceptual metaphors” (1). The spectral turn thus represents, “the concerted interest in questions of the supernatural, ghostliness and haunting within cultural and critical theory during the last two decades, the most influential work of which is Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*” (Leeder 3). Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* is recognized as a highly ethical text, as it advocates for a spectral justice through the spectral address⁷ i.e., listening to the silenced, invisible, and marginalized voices. Davis suggests that Derrida’s notion of a specter is primarily,

[...] a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate. It does not belong to the order of knowledge.

(Davis 56)

One needs to turn to the etymology of the terms “ghost,” “haunting” and “specter” for a rigorous comprehension of haunting studies and their proliferation. Ghosts are understood as supernatural figures coming back from the dead to haunt the living. They are mostly found in folktales and Gothic stories and have been explored in many cultures under different lights throughout history (Del Pilar and Peeren 1). A specter, however, is a more archaic term for the undead spirit and is a much-preferred term⁸ in haunting studies as etymologically speaking, it hints at the spectacle and is associated with visibility and visuality (2). Jane Barnette associates the connotations of the term “specter” with visibility and the encounter of an apparition with the theatrical environment where you can see, watch, and hear a play (46). Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren further define the most prominent features of specters based on various binary opposites that highlight their liminal state:

[Specters evoke] that which is both looked at (as fascinating spectacle) and looking (in the sense of examining), suggesting their suitability for exploring and illuminating phenomena other than the putative return of the dead. In their new spectral guise, certain features of ghosts and haunting—such as their

⁷ Acknowledging the voices of the living by directly addressing the voices of the specter, Derrida’s spectral address is broadly influenced by Levinas’ work on ethics and his vision of responsibility towards the Other in face-to-face encounters.

Bego, Bettina. “Emmanuel Levinas.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 7 Aug 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

This is predominantly significant in our arguments about ghostly textuality in TV adaptations as we discuss in the first chapters of this thesis.

⁸ This is even more relevant in our analysis of televisual serial texts in which spectacle and viewing are at the core of its theoretical conception, especially in reception studies.

liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality, and their association with powerful affects like fear and obsession—quickly came to be employed across the humanities and social sciences to theorize a variety of social, ethical, and political questions.

(2)

The specter (be it an event, a memory, or a double) is a figure of alterity that provokes a crisis in identity, a cognitive crisis and as it is studied in this thesis, a narrative or textual crisis. It is a “deconstructive figure” (Davis qtd. in Lorek-Jezińska, 10) as it calls into question the rational system and the existence of a preconceived meaning. Among the reasons why specters can come back is to bring justice, reveal some secret or truth, take care of an unfinished business, seek revenge, offer revelation or redemption (Del Pilar and Peeren 1). Several authors in haunting studies approach the topic of spectrality in relation to literature and therefore as textual ghosts, notably Julian Wofreys in his *Victorian Hauntings*, who encourages readers to acknowledge literary works and stories in general as an opening up of a space in which ghosts are constantly and inevitably invoked in “the here and now”.

Haunting involves a crisis of representation as the haunted subject encounters something that is “other”, alterity in a ghostly state (Foley 24). The spectral text is essentially characterized by disruptive and blurring effects that establish its haunting mechanisms, namely the display of narrative “dysfunctions” such as fragmentation, the instability of characters, the event, and structures.⁹ As Jonathan Culler explains, as a critical tool, the specter provides a subversion of “every system or position [texts] are thought to manifest” (Culler qtd. in Lorek 10). However, Nicholas Royle believes Derrida’s spectrality and deconstruction are “ascholarly”.¹⁰

According to Royle, the concern is more about the spectral effects rather than the presence of the specter itself. For the academic status of the spectral deconstruction to be acknowledged, as Lorek-Jezińska and Więckowska argue, it is necessary to “redefine the existing rules, the object and method of study or deconstruct them, by probing into inconsistencies, challenges, ambiguities that appear when we try to apply them to a discussion of the spectral effect” (10). Following these assertions, we hope to underline that the application of a set of rules seems contradictory to the deconstructive approach set by haunting studies. In this thesis, we focus on gaining a more comprehensive understanding of spectrality in relation

⁹ Charles, Michel. *Introduction à l'étude des textes*. Seuil, 1995, p. 210.

Charles identifies these characteristics as coming at intervals: « Cette structure narrative est celle d'un texte fantôme, dans la mesure où le récit ne vient que par bribes, est fugitive et désordonnée, à la limite de l'évanescence, pris comme il est dans le flux du discours psychologique » (Charles 198).

¹⁰ Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Manchester University Press, 2003.

to adaptation and complex narrative structures of our two (post)apocalyptic TV series. Redefining and identifying the gaps of the spectral effects are not our prior intention, but we hope that the present thesis sheds light on the possibilities of spectral thinking in relation to other fields of study.

Since haunting provokes disorientation, in order to better convey the sense of perplexity of both characters and viewers in the face of the event, it seems apt to associate the emphasis on spectrality that these TV shows demonstrate with the spectro-poetics inherent to the storytelling models proper to create what is known as “narrative complexity” (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 12). Such narrative structures and techniques are mainly used in contemporary TV shows to display non-conventional narrative strategies, established as, “complex”.¹¹ Narrative complexity is inherent to television’s aims to challenge traditional viewing practices through a construction of elaborated storylines with an ensemble cast, generally involving fragmented non-linear temporal structures. With an increased interest in diverging from the traditional storytelling conventions of early television, complex contemporary TV shows use experimental techniques which are primarily based on seriality, multiple perspectives, intertextual references, reflexive comments, and metafictional elements, for example. The convergence of narrative complexity and spectro-poetics, we suggest, is not coincidental: instead, the former is a privileged means of expressing the latter, where the viewer is haunted by the content as well as by its form.

Narrative complexity in contemporary TV comprises narratological and aesthetic strategies that focus on non-linear progression of diegetic events. Such temporality is informed by a serial structure that tends to put forth repetition, build continuity, and postpone narrative closure. The availability of technological innovations and various media platforms contributes to this tendency by encouraging the active engagement of the audience, allowing them to pause, repeat, or rewatch their favorite episodes. This allows the audience to decode, dissect and decipher the show’s enigmas, thereby engaging in forensic fandom practices by acting as detectives. Forensic fandom encompasses the methods and approaches in fan culture whereby an artistic work is thoroughly scrutinized in order to solve the enigmas of the fictional narrative. The reception process alters according to the modes of consumption and viewing habits (online, alone, in groups). Even in the absence of such a hermeneutic process, the audience of complex

¹¹ The origin of the word complex is “rooted in the Latin *plectere*, meaning *to weave* or *to entwine*” (Kiss and Willemsen 10). Therefore, narrative complexity refers to the use of entangled storylines and intricate narrative strategies.

narratives can experience operational aesthetics, i.e., the appreciation of procedural analysis, marveling at underlying narrative mechanisms and structures as we are simply impressed by how it works.

As serial ongoing narratives, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* embrace characteristics of narrative complexity as they invite “temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long-term viewing and active engagement” (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 54). This type of viewing experience and comprehensive process is often rewarded by showrunners either through revelations, closure, or Easter eggs. The engagement of the viewer, whose active position is not just encouraged, but enforced through the spectro-poetics and ensuing narrative complexity of these two series, is further emphasized through the content broached by both *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*. The analysis of TV series leads to the discussion of viewership practice and memories of past viewing which are activated each time one encounters a narrative. Textual encounters inevitably evoke and invoke memories of past viewing whereby each individual makes up their own interpretation and reading of the narrative at hand. Likewise, adaptations are even more open to such recollections as they are consciously built on previous texts, encouraging the knowledgeable viewer to compare and contrast with its various sources (and even the non-knowledgeable viewer to wonder what is unique to the series and what comes from previous texts). The bridge between the past (whether of the past trauma in the diegesis or the past inspirations of that narrative) and present of the narration and its reception by its viewer makes spectrality omnipresent.

Therefore, we examine how the scattered particles of memory and the remains from the past give shape to the narrative complexity of the shows. German philosopher Ernst Bloch¹² identifies two types of memory, *anamnesis* (recollection) and *anagnorisis* (recognition); each entails the reactivation of memory traces in the present in order to reach a specific state of consciousness based on our previous knowledge of the past.¹³ In these TV adaptations, various types of audiences are called upon to enter a space of negotiation in which they need to not only remember but also recognize the specific events and references from other sources. Memory becomes of utmost importance for the reception of TV adaptations in a uniquely personal and

¹² Bloch’s seminal work in philosophy, *The Principle of Hope*, determines the psychological theories in response to Freud’s notion of latency and argues in favor of memory recognition and recollection that work to stir the present into a hopeful and utopist vision of the future.

¹³ Raffaella Baccolini’s article “Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia, and Hope” gives us insight on the workings of memory in dystopic narratives and the various perspectives on memory as a fundamental tool for resistance and emancipation (Moylan 170).

gratifying manner as the pleasure of recognition that is usually triggered by the serial format which allows the return of dormant memories is heightened by memories of a more distant source text (Mittell, “Previously On”, 179).

One of the essential tools for serial storytelling to efficiently unveil the present-absent state of these memories is the use of repetition tropes and techniques which are equally used in adaptations as a form of compulsion, by persistently bringing back the past and blending it with the present.¹⁴ In this sense, TV adaptations disturb the homely environment of the source text and uncover new layers of meaning and interpretation. In doing so, they serve as examples of “transtextuality”, understood by Genette to mean “everything that sets it into secret or overt relation to other texts”, where “one text becomes superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through” (Genette 398-99). The series becomes the afterlife of the source, and the knowledgeable viewer must therefore act as a medium, “seeing through the veil” of the series itself to the past lives of the text, while evaluating the importance of these past lives in relation to the here and now of the series being watched.

Adaptations could therefore be identified as uncanny for their playing with familiarity and novelty as they firmly set the familiar elements from previous texts, specifically the source text and its derivatives, into their unfamiliar, new and unhomely environment. Thus, adaptations are fundamentally uncanny when initiating a process of de-familiarization for the savvy audience. For *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, this uncanniness is amplified by, among other things, the gruesome context of the story itself, the tone, and the (post)apocalyptic climate. Thus, for example *Westworld*’s derivation from the science-fiction franchise amplifies this process as it establishes a horizon of expectations for the different types of viewers. As this is the third iteration of the film originally written and directed by Michael Crichton, itself a version of the Frankenstein myth, where creating a new life form turns against its initial creators, one could see it as a culture text, a term coined by Paul Davis and described by Lisette Lopez Szwydky:

From Odysseus to Alice to Batman, iconic characters survive independently from source texts, deriving cultural meaning from contexts old and new. They can be repurposed, not only to advance future stories but also to expand complex fictional worlds. Such extensive storyworlds might be carefully coordinated from their initial development, or they might develop over time through unanticipated transmedia extensions that evolve characters’

¹⁴ The adaptation recalls and invokes the source text that is released in the past thus generating a hybrid final text that carries the traces of both past and present.

individual stories as well as the larger storyworlds they share. Such characters and stories—especially those in the public domain—all fit the definition of culture-texts. Culture-texts function beyond the scope of an “original” form, which in some cases might get contested, lost, forgotten, or intentionally ignored. Although most iconic characters can be traced back to originating source texts, they owe their widespread recognition and cultural visibility to regular adaptation and extended allusion—to all the storied iterations that collectively make up their respective culture-text.

(Szwedky 139-140)

These culture texts reflect the ghostly aspect of source texts throughout time with enduring figures and “iconic characters” (140). This is accurate for *Westworld*’s hosts and automata in general. Enduring time and death, artificial people echo ancient myths and stories of other culture characters such as Galatea, Pygmalion, Frankenstein references. These inevitably haunt the work we watch on our screens.

Despite its not being part of a franchise, *The Leftovers* combines the familiar story from the source text with other narratives based on another source: its creator. It embeds the *Lost* narrative and other works by the showrunner into its framework, thus stepping away from the established “texts” prior to the adaptation. In this way, the series extends its reception process to various influences such as familiarity with the adapter’s work or the HBO production’s promotion of “Quality TV”. Moving away from the intentions of showrunners, the adaptation audience relies on the cultural memory surrounding the text, its paratextual elements, and intertextual references, including viewers’ personal cultural background. *Westworld* follows a different model as it is already identified as a canonical culture text; the TV adaptation combines the cinematic conventions of the western genre, video games narrative structure and the cultural memory around the source film.

Consequently, the TV adaptation audience is endowed with the responsibility of the observer, calling upon them to act as not only observers but also co-creators.¹⁵ Writing on narrative complexity, Mittell’s accounts on the use of narrative devices that promote a repetitive serial structure that we can associate with haunting are also helpful in the assessment of viewers’ memory and reception (diegetic reminders and textual or paratextual guides of remembrance, forms of recaps and flashbacks, title sequences and voice-over, dialogues, teasers, etc.). No longer allowing a “real time” to be experienced or living in the present, teletechnologies hinder

¹⁵ The following chapters examine the role of viewers as observers according to the observer effect theory in Quantum Physics and the changing perception of an image and its meaning through the lens of perspectivism and the TV shows’ anamorphic nature.

real and concrete presence to substitute it with a spectral presence-absence that is comparable to traumatic displays of belatedness, as something is always deferred in its relation to time, reality, and self. All these connote recurrent televisual tropes of trauma employed to represent hauntology. Serial repetition is emblematic of the narrative's traumatic tendency in representing the event. One of the most significant and widespread elements of narrative repetition is the use of ellipses (flashbacks along with the use of flash-forwards and flash-sideways) to recreate the past and enable the process of recall (anamnesis) to take place. This process incarnates the characters' memories as it drives the traumatized subject "to see and to relive the insistent reality of the past" (Caruth, *Explorations*, 152).

Moreover, the role of technology here is fundamental for our argument on account of its forwarding of spectral mechanisms and its focalization on the virtual and the present-absent. As Derrida reminds us, "the future belongs to ghosts" (Derrida and Stiegler 38), an assertion this thesis will contemplate as part of the ways in which teletechnologies generate specters and condition one's conception of temporality, memory, and metanarratives. Therefore, these TV shows contribute to a wider reflection upon the spectral dimension of traumatic events as persistently mediated and remediated through a historical medium that is equally based on spectral returns and repetition.

The narratives may also encourage the contemplation of the role of images and their extended functions in the age of over-information and oversharing. By breathing new life into the source text, these TV series also reveal future possibilities for their continuous rewriting and remediation. In media studies, remediation evokes the transfer of cultural characteristics from other media forms by refashioning the narrative. Remediation allows media evolution through notions of immediacy and hypermediacy through emphasis on the presence in the virtual reality by forgetting the medium and embracing the virtual as the "real" visual world (Bolter and Grusin 22). Immediacy creates "the experience of presence of the past" (Erll and Rigney 4) and hypermediacy as "the experience of the medium" and the "mediateness of memory" (5). This indicates the ways in which the experience of immediacy affects memory, due to the simultaneity of digital apparatuses as everything happens simultaneously through technology.

To carry a memory in these TV shows is articulated in carrying an indelible haunting trace and validating its enduring repetition in the present while at the same time attempting to make sense of this ungraspable, never truly experienced present, for as Derrida reminds us in Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983): "to be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has

never lived in the present, to remember what, in essence, has never had the form of presence” (Derrida and Stiegler 38). The spectral notion of the trace (or the spectral mark) signals the hanging presence-absence of something in the present; the trace challenges language, meaning, and structure due to its deconstructive thinking. By this definition and the assumption that indeed “the future belongs to ghosts” (38), we are to conclude the impossibility of an entire presence and address the temporal complexity of a ghostly textuality. In this vein, the act of (re)watching these haunting shows, adapted from other past texts, repeatedly evokes, or involuntarily marks the return of different proliferating texts whose meaning is subjected to an interpretation depending on the eye of the beholder and the memory of the viewer.

In her book *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*, Katy Shaw propounds on the characteristics of the specter by stressing the necessity of thinking beyond restricted narrative and temporal boundaries. Her statement sums up the essential spectral effects on which we build the foundation of our discussion:

Hauntology offers the specter as a metaphorical trope through which to disrupt the certainty of temporality and to open up meanings. This opening up is only possible if recognition and responsibility are enacted: the haunted subject must extend hospitality and speak to the specter in order for illumination to occur.

(Shaw 9)

Causing cognitive, ontological, and temporal crises, the specter blurs the borders between the different layers of a text, layers of reality (diegetic and extra-diegetic) and even layers of truth and lies/illusions. Defying all polarization and promoting multiplicity, the spectral approach in this textual and narratological context allows the proliferation of a wide range of metaphors and allegories that shed light on the instability and multiplicity of meaning. By disturbing all meaning and structure, the specter introduces a crisis that is meant to uncover the concealed parts of the self and move the narrative from an invisible state to a visible one, underlining the characteristics of serial storytelling and the reception of adaptations within the several types of audiences. This movement occurs through remembering and acknowledging the spectral dimension of the event and through “the work of recall,” a concept introduced by Catherine Grant and developed by Christine Geraghty in her *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*.

This thesis explores the spectral manifestations and the mechanisms of haunting in contemporary TV series adaptations. We aim to show how these HBO series’ status as adaptations is informed by a spectral return of its source texts as well as other proliferating texts

and authors, thereby confirming their palimpsestic nature (e.g., through intertextual connections and the return of classical texts and myths). Following the spectral return of these texts, we analyze the ghostly authorship of showrunners and how their previous works and public figure leave a visible trace in their rewriting and reinvention of the source texts.

Westworld (2016-2022) is an HBO TV adaptation of Michael Crichton's eponymous movie (1973) which is followed by a sequel, *Futureworld*, directed by Richard T. Heffron and the 1980 TV show sequel to Crichton's *Westworld*, and then by the short-lived TV series *Beyond Westworld* (CBS, 1980) which is created by Lou Shaw. The latter featured five episodes, and only aired three of them. Likewise, *Futureworld* was a commercial failure, however, as pointed out by Bigliardi, it was the one of the first movies to display 3D computer-generated images while Crichton's *Westworld* "was the first movie to use digitalized images (the gunslinger's point of view). It is also mentioned as being (among) the first example(s) of reference to computer viruses" (30). The groundwork of our approach to the *Westworld* franchise would be to determine the existent traces of texts that come before it and that continue to spread after it. Therefore, we investigate the repetition of familiar elements in the adaptation and their newly introduced variants in each repetition or rewriting that would ultimately erase the adaptation status of our memory and take on as a fully emancipated work, yet still inherently spectral and evoking or invoking other works.

The source text is rebooted by showrunners Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy and produced by J. J. Abrams (who notably produced a myriad of successful TV shows in the last decades with his Bad Robot company). Ultimately, HBO revives the 1973 movie and adapts it to a TV show after selecting its pilot episode in 2013 and airing its first season in 2016. The TV adaptation has been a great success and is expected to substitute for HBO's main production, *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019), after the latter's ending. The series' cast and production had received several awards and critical acclaim, and as most successful TV shows, it expands its narrative to alternative transmedia platforms online (such as the interactive websites "DelosDestinations", "DiscoverWestworld", and "Incite Inc."). With a new season released every two years, the production costs of *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2022) reach a first-season budget estimated at \$100 million (as in \$10 million per episode and around \$25 million budget for the pilot). It is not surprising that HBO announced the abrupt cancellation of the show in 2022, after the release of its fourth season.

Set in the near future, the story is about humanoids, called "hosts", who live in a Wild-West-themed amusement park, *Westworld*, owned by Delos Inc. that attracts wealthy human

visitors, also called “guests” or “newcomers”, to pay for a vacation where they can give free rein to their deepest and wildest desires. Westworld is one of many other sites that revive and reconstruct the nostalgic past from Shogunworld to Rajworld or Roman and Medieval parks as represented in Crichton’s movie. Thus, creators highlight this generic hybridity and make it diegetic by putting Westworld alongside the other kingdoms.¹⁶ The park comprises storylines known as “narratives” in which the human guests take part and choose whether to follow side quests or to freely appreciate the services of the hosts in western-like towns and deserts. Regularly rebooting the hosts, the park’s employees make sure the humanoids’ memories are not recovered by erasing and rebooting them.¹⁷ Their memories become only experienced as traces, blurry distant nightmares that leave real scars. The hosts are therefore stuck in their loops until repeated dysfunctions allow them to become aware of “the nature of their reality”¹⁸ and to remember all that has been done to them.

As is clear from this brief summary, *Westworld* specializes in incorporating themes of science-fiction narratives that feature Artificial Intelligence and post-humanist issues. Such themes have been broadly articulated by contemporary science-fiction TV shows such as *Black Mirror* (Channel 4, Netflix, 2011-present), *Humans* (Channel 4, 2015-2018), *Battlestar Galactica* (Sky One; Sci Fi Channel, 2004-2009), *Upload* (Prime Video, 2020-present), *Person of Interest* (CBS, 2011-2019), *Almost Human* (Fox, 2013), *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020), etc. Nonetheless, the narrative’s science-fiction origins are also imbued with Greco-Roman mythological symbolism as well as western generic conventions such as violence, justice, law and order, land resources, treasure, and quests. This generic hybridity equally comprises dystopian and post-apocalyptic codes (e.g., surveillance, tyrant leaders, conspiracy theories, and revolution) that add dramatic elements and corroborate *Westworld*’s heterogenous audience and its ensuing critical responses and scholarly approaches ranging from postcolonial to gender studies.

The depiction of the (post)apocalyptic world of the park is inherently uncanny in the (re)mediation of the traumatic event and the (re)creation of g/hosts. Memories, whether

¹⁶ The third season depicts a simulated park of Warworld, set in Italy in the First World War, while the fourth season includes a roaring 1920s theme park designed by Charlotte/Dolores.

¹⁷ The defiant malfunctioning hosts are either given new narratives and identities or, if deemed inoperative, are decommissioned, and stored elsewhere.

¹⁸ This quote is reiterated and transformed throughout the episodes and seasons of *Westworld* to underscore the possibility of one’s identity as a humanoid. “Have you ever questioned the nature of your reality? Did you ever stop to wonder about your actions? The price you’d have to pay if there was a reckoning? That reckoning is here.” (“Journey into Night”, S02E01).

traumatic or not, emerge from the hosts' dormant past lives and leave a perceptible trace after their multiple lives and reboots. These flashes of memories act as small triggers such as hallucinations and *déjà-vu* visions or even inner voices guiding them in their journey towards consciousness. Deviations from the scripted dialogues are only allowed in forms of improvisations that always follow the narrative loops and everyday cycles of the multiple entangled narratives written for the guests' entertainment, with the promise to find one's truest self or even purpose and meaning to their dull routine outside the park. Such interactive stories are reminiscent of the gameplay mindset of video game players. Unaware of their virtual essence, the hosts start to identify inconsistencies in their world but are still unable to harm their human perpetrators as part of the Turing Test¹⁹ and Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics (referring to the ethical guidelines that delineate AI's ethical behavior towards humans) until the final uprising of the hosts in the first-season finale.

Westworld's first season is entitled "The Maze" and centers on the robots' suffering and their path towards sentience. Their uprising is long and painful as the humanoids struggle to make sense of the return of their traumatic memories to find the center of the maze. The maze is a concept added to their early programming by their co-creator Arnold; it is based on the Bicameral Mind²⁰ theory that states that the robots would hear the voice of God to guide them. The second season, "The Door", depicts the uprising and revolution of the sentient hosts who are seeking to escape the humans' world and live in their own virtual Eden (also called the Valley beyond or The Sublime) while other hosts prefer to take revenge on their former masters. The aftermath of the first season's events leads to chaos in the park until the third and fourth seasons which depict the escape of some hosts outside the park. These last two seasons center on AI's violent interactions with the humans, whether those in charge of the corporations behind the park and other projects, or laypeople of this "new world".

These themes are largely part of the science-fiction genre and futurist apocalyptic tropes of AI revenges when coming to sentience to eventually bring about the destruction of civilization and all humans by the hands of their creation. The first season acts as a prequel to the source text as it paves the ground for the robots' ultimate revolution and resistance against

¹⁹ The Turing test is a concept designed by Alan Turing, a computer scientist, to assess whether a machine exhibits human-like intelligent interactions and behavior. Despite its legacy in the field of artificial intelligence, the concept is broadly criticized for its limited experimentation and outdated understanding of AI (since it appeared in the 1950s).

²⁰ The Bicameral Mind theory is based on the belief that humans' choices do not derive from their decision-making process. Instead, it suggests that one brain hemisphere produces a commanding voice and the other executes; this concept is related to consciousness and free will in *Westworld*.

the park's management and each human guest coming their way. The second season lays out the ensuing outcome of the "battle" between military rescues or the park's security versus the vengeful sentient hosts. The third and fourth seasons depict the hosts' survival in the real world (the world of humans). At the time of conducting our research, the third and fourth seasons were still in the production process; therefore we briefly refer to them to provide a more complete and updated perception of the televisual work. The primary sources of this thesis are therefore restricted to the first two seasons of *Westworld*; thus, the analyses of the shows' events are limited to the confines of the park since the hosts only leave after the second season.

Westworld tackles its spectral themes in a more artificial and synthetic manner, i.e., by focusing on the humanoids' repressed synthetic memories and by drawing attention to authorship authority in serial storytelling. As stated earlier, these host characters are inhabited by an inner voice that is believed to be their creators' while going through cognitive crises or dissonances. The hosts' spectral mechanisms help them reach consciousness and achieve the maze quest by uncovering the truth about their artificiality. This speculative fiction addresses technological progress as a means to reach immortality and gain godlike power.

Our second HBO TV show, *The Leftovers*, equally displays haunting mechanisms in its depiction of a (post)apocalyptic event. Damon Lindelof, perhaps best known for his work on the groundbreaking ABC TV show *Lost* (2004-2010), agreed to work with Tom Perrotta to adapt the latter's novel, *The Leftovers*, into a serial form of the same title.²¹ The ensuing HBO adaptation's first season depicts some of the novel's events and characters until its season finale. The TV adaptation will go on to run for two more seasons by expanding Perrotta's literary work, thus becoming a sequel to its source text (and its first season). The title refers to the fictional characters that remain after October 14th, when the abrupt, instant, and simultaneous event caused the disappearance of 2% of the world population without leaving a single trace. This unfathomable and mysterious event, named the "Sudden Departure", leaves the whole world baffled and unable to mourn the departed. From the onset, the show indicates its refusal

²¹ Despite being co-creators, and despite Perrotta's original status as the author of the novel, Lindelof as showrunner, gets credit for the TV adaptation. Perrotta's other TV work with HBO is the adaptation of his novel *Mrs. Fletcher* into a TV series of the same title and with similar thematic recurrences in comparison with *The Leftovers* such as undergoing a transformative journey. *Mrs. Fletcher* (HBO, 2019), which is closer to the comedy genre than drama, offers insight into the existential queries of a woman's struggles and intimacy and her life in the suburbs. In a compelling manner by addressing the themes of sexual discovery with a character-driven narrative not far too different from *The Leftovers*.

to engage in explanations of the Sudden Departure.²² The story rather centers on a fictional small community in the suburbs of New York City that attempt to deal with the rise of new prophets and cults calling for the reoccurrence of the apocalypse, broken families and relationships, and other enigmatic occurrences that keep haunting those who stayed behind in the hope of making sense of a meaningless world.

The Leftovers' post-cataclysmic nature gives viewers insight on matters of ethics, and most importantly, on the nature of the human need for meaning, clear-cut answers and the acceptance of the seemingly non-logical and non-rational explanations. In other words, it teaches its audience how to live with and after "the event" that destroys (or at least redefines) society as we know it. In a reflexive manner, the series puts viewers in a similar position to its characters by refusing to officially affirm or deny certain aspects of the story by eschewing the premise (and implicit promise) of the story's *dénouement*²³, i.e., the explanation of the occurrence of the Sudden Departure.

The narrative carefully portrays US beliefs and culture through the imploding of sectarian zealous religious movements. This is introduced through the characters that are members of the Guilty Remnant, a cult whose participants live austere together in compounds, wearing white clothes, chain smoking, taking a vow of silence, and recruiting people by stalking them. Likewise, the series depicts the character of Holy Wayne, a man who claims to take people's grief away by a simple hug while he simultaneously profits off their pain and keeps a sort of holy harem filled with Asian teenagers. Less prominent belief systems appear periodically throughout the show, such as the people who wear no shoes and a draw target on their forehead to be spared and found by God before the apocalypse, thus implicitly drawing a parallel with the United States' historical status as the Puritan's version of "God's Country", and its many new denominations preaching salvation (from Mormonism to Scientology) in the years since.

The show recreates Perrotta's world where the cult members of the Guilty Remnant harass the rest of the population and whose most noteworthy function seems to act as "living reminders" of the day the world has ended, showing themselves all too ready to drag the rest of

²² Hervé LeTellier's novel *L'anomalie* offers similar metaphysical concerns about existence and identity in the face of an unintelligible event as characters must struggle with their sense of self after meeting their doubles.

²³ Favard, Florent. *La promesse d'un dénouement : énigmes, quêtes et voyages dans le temps dans les séries télévisées de science-fiction contemporaines*. Dissertation, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2016.

the world down in the abyss with them in their death wish. The Guilty Remnant's philosophy in relation to its Rapture-like event is an insistence on the general acknowledgment of the dissolution of the "old world" after the Sudden Departure and in a belief in the eventual reoccurrence of the catastrophe:

It was a lifestyle, not a religion, an ongoing improvisation rooted in the conviction that the post-Rapture world demanded a new way of living, free from the old, discredited forms—no more marriage, no more families, no more consumerism, no more politics, no more conventional religion, no more mindless entertainment. Those days were done. All that remained for humanity was to hunker down and await the inevitable.

(Perrotta 207-8)

The TV adaptation bears elements of metaphysical nature which are accentuated through mythological references, archetypes, and an obsession with religious symbols in a manner that is resonant of *Lost*. It is interesting here to note that the haunting operates correspondingly at the level of its source's author and the TV adapter, as upon watching *The Leftovers*, associations to previous works whether from the showrunner or not always seem to be in mind of viewers and critics.

The first season relates the events of its source text set in Mapleton where we enter the intimacy of most characters individually and their personal struggles after the Sudden Departure: the Garvey family who is shattered after Laurie Garvey (Amy Brenneman) leaves her family to join the Guilty Remnant cult, the son, Tom, who quits college to join Holy Wayne (Paterson Joseph), and the routine of the chief of police Kevin (Justin Theroux), who struggles to maintain order in both his town and his home as his daughter, Jill (Margaret Qualley), is an angry teenager coping with the absence of her parents. Throughout the show, Kevin experiences psychotic episodes, for he is haunted by the ghost of the dead leader of the Guilty Remnant, Patti (Ann Dowd), and supposedly dies and travels to alternate universes to get rid of her. The plot also follows the Episcopalian priest, Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston), whose mission is to alert everyone about the false nature of the event as he believes it is not the Christian Rapture, while his wife is paralyzed after a car accident the day of the event. His sister, Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), is also a major character, whose two children and husband departed; she works for the Department of Sudden Departure, a new governmental branch created to verify false allegations of departures. The second season changes its setting by having its characters move to what is presumably the world's safest place: Miracle, Texas – a town in which no one disappeared on the 14th. As we get more familiar with the Murphy family and their secrets, the

town faces the fears and doubts about the occurrence of a second departure as well as the threats of the Guilty Remnant, until ultimately the town collapses in the finale. The third and final season depicts the reconstruction of the town three years later as each character appears “healed”. However, the series gradually portrays their mental breakdown and deterioration featuring suicidal behaviors. As the seven-year anniversary of the Sudden Departure approaches, most characters display desires to believe in an upcoming end of the world.

The Leftovers, both the novel and the TV show, received critical acclaim. Among them, we mention the critical response to Perrotta’s literary work, as we can read on its cover book, Stephen King has referred to it as “The best Twilight Zone episode you never saw”. The reference to the masterpiece of science fiction and surreal/metaphysical is a comment made by the master of thrillers/horrors. Its televisual counterpart has known a devoted fan base and was equally praised for its thought-provoking themes and unique storytelling.

Standing in between a past trauma and an upcoming trauma, these TV series are haunted by the shadow of collective traumatic experiences: a past trauma for *The Leftovers* (the October 14th event generates the anticipation of another departure) and an upcoming collective trauma for *Westworld* (the rise of the hosts against the park’s creators with access to the hosts’ past traumatic memories from all the repetitions and suffering they undergo).

Dystopic stories allow the specter to enter and expand their story by reimagining the way the world ends, and the way society may respond to a crisis, or what we refer to as the event. Such entropic tales use haunting mechanisms in their structure to stress the need to contemplate questions around death, the event, the demise and disappearance of the self and the human species. The future of the artificial intelligence revolution as depicted in *Westworld* has been haunting the contemporary collective imaginary and pop culture for decades – a haunting process which evolves with the advances in science and technology to become even more real and threatening. Central to our arguments are, therefore, the preoccupations with artificial intelligence and surveillance which are dependent on the socio-political context of the time. These two TV series also tackle themes of power, surveillance and control in the capitalist era, the Anthropocene era, exclusion and discrimination (silence and violence from a racial and postcolonial historical approach), the different calls for responsibility towards the manifold forms of social injustice, the marginalized and ethical issues of hospitality (e.g., the allusions to refugees in *The Leftovers*), thus including several concerns over the re-imagination of the future post-crisis in a (post)apocalyptic environment. The ecological framework stresses the

size and weight of the “end” which is yet another parameter going hand in hand with the 21st century’s eco-damaging endeavors.

The Leftovers is a narrative of absence that solely focuses on the past with a great refusal, if not impossibility, of mourning. The series establishes anxiety about upcoming traumas, another departure that is believed to bring the apocalypse. This fear of the end of the world is pointed at as a common human anxiety about the future. *Westworld* equally represents this anxiety of annihilation in relation to technology and the dissolution of the human species by the robots. These two series portray, each in their own way, the most basic vulnerable states of humans in the face of collective trauma, change, and crisis and inform us about identity when one is confronted with the specter which is “[a] question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” (Derrida, *Specters*, 11).

Scholars of adaptation studies have long focused on adaptations from text to screen by often privileging film adaptations over TV adaptations. From the initial book-length study of film adaptation by George Bluestone in 1957 to more recent offerings by Robert Stam, Kamilla Elliott, Deborah Cartmell or Imelda Whelehan²⁴, there has been a tendency to privilege both novel and theater as source text, and film as the medium of adaptation. Even when television has been the focus of adaptation studies, the subject of study has often been the classic television serial or miniseries rather than ongoing television dramas with less canonical source texts, like the two series we are examining. Likewise, despite some noteworthy, albeit brief, exceptions, like Kamilla Elliott’s impressive analysis of *Wuthering Heights* through varying metaphors including the psychic, ventriloquist, and de(re)composing concepts of adaptation (133-181), little academic research has currently been conducted on the spectral presence of the source text in the televisual adaptation and how the adaptation responds to this ever-presence-absence.

This thesis broadly relies on the Derridean concepts deriving from haunting studies but will not be limited to them. Using spectrality as a starting point would initiate the narratological discourse and orient the discussion towards the process of adaptation and the representation of the event in the small screen. This research aims to reveal the dynamics of haunting at work in the (post)apocalyptic TV adaptations *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* as haunted and haunting texts. Consequently, we investigate the narrative strategies and mechanisms used to represent

²⁴ The works of these scholars include Cartmell and Whelehan’s *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, Kamilla Elliott’s *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, Cardwell’s *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel*, and Stam’s “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation”.

the spectral dimension of the traumatic event in these TV series. As both TV adaptations and post-catastrophe narratives, these TV shows reveal their spectral nature through the representation of the crisis (ontological, temporal, and cognitive).

These TV shows shed light on the vulnerability of the self in the face of loss, amnesia, and the end of the world as we know it in a reflexive invitation for their audiences to question the “nature of [their] reality”.²⁵ *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*’s core incentive predominantly consists in opening up a space of uncertainty, provoking a crisis of truth among their audience in the same way the traumatized or disoriented characters experience it in the diegesis. Aware of being intermittently misguided, the viewers of these postmodern TV shows actively look for answers to resolve the narrative enigmas and distinguish reality from fiction, remember, and wait, because “it won’t be long now”²⁶ until they achieve their quest for meaning by subsequently embracing the ambiguity and ambivalence of the not-so unfamiliar diegetic universe presented to them when compared to the extra-diegetic reality. These haunted TV series designate the specters in our own lives and make our social issues more visible by conveying an ideology, a meaning that is always in deferral.

If they succeed in doing so, it is primarily because these TV series are reflexive complex narratives that deeply echo fundamental aspects of humanity, which are calling to our own vulnerabilities. Indeed, these shows are haunted by fundamental concerns of humanity (e.g., the fear of amnesia and the fear of annihilation) – but mostly living without purpose, living as a spectral “other”, standing in-between realities and endlessly roaming a meaningless world without a visible and easy exit from the repetitive patterns we undertake in the labyrinths of our lives, an exit made accessible perhaps only in death. The bleak tone of these shows does not, however, prevent their narratives from holding less skeptical ideas for the future-to-come²⁷ to learn to live with ghosts and accept the other in their different forms of coping mechanisms as

²⁵ This is a quote from *Westworld* that is reiterated throughout the episodes to underscore the sentience of hosts and their awareness of their artificiality.

²⁶ The sentence from *The Leftovers* expresses the upcoming end of the world and is chiefly uttered by the cult of the Guilty Remnant in the TV adaptation. It originates from the source text, Perrotta’s novel, in a chapter where the cult’s “principles” are laid out: “THE OLD WORLD IS GONE. IT DISAPPEARED THREE YEARS AGO [...] WE ARE LIVING REMINDERS [...] IT WON’T BE LONG NOW [...] WE ARE ALL PREPARED TO BE MARTYRS [...] WE SMOKE TO PROCLAIM OUR FAITH” (Perrotta 201-202).

²⁷ “This question [“where tomorrow?”] arrives, if it arrives, it questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come. Turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from it, it proceeds from [*provient de*] the future. It must therefore exceed any presence as presence to itself. At least it has to make this presence possible only on the basis of the movement of some disjuncting, disjunction, or disproportion: in the inadequation to self” (Derrida, *Specters*, xix).

well as their different views and interpretations of the way one should deal within a chaotic environment.

In *The Leftovers*, the “Sudden Departure” declared the end of the world as the Guilty Remnant so zealously keep reminding the “leftovers” (literally those who have been left behind). Causing irreversible damage, the strange event scarred its witnesses and those who remained and caused them to either experience survivor’s guilt or encounter an extreme quasi-impossible mourning process for the people who have neither truly died, nor have they been properly buried. Spectrality in this TV adaptation would be addressed in terms of the Guilty Remnant, Perrotta’s original creation, as they act as the archaic meaning of ghostly apparitions and hauntings by standing all in white to trouble their victims (or future members) and compelling people to remember without letting them rest. Those living reminders of the traumatic event are bound to represent haunting memories of the departed, always calling to mind the rupture of normalcy in the public and the personal sphere (for instance by invading people’s homes), a rupture in the nuclear family as well as any belief or hope of overcoming grief post-event. In other words, the Guilty Remnant are not ethical specters but chaotic ones who are themselves in crisis, for their lack of purpose beyond destruction is sensible. They do not seek resistance for the sake of revolution and positive change, but rather embrace negative version of nihilistic values and ascetic principles to embrace the angst brought by the end of the world and prepare for the next one.

This thesis indicates how such rupture *of* the familiar and *from* the familiar moves the narrative to an uncanny liminal state that is aesthetically and structurally represented by introducing ambiguously metaphysical and supernatural events through disrupted temporalities that embody a post-event distraught, co-existent realities or parallel (psychological) universes, ambiguous flashbacks and a teasing relation with resolutions and clear-cut revelations. The event’s ghosts looming their shadows over the characters, urges them towards confronting their true self for (r)evolution to occur, whether it means to kill the human species and overtake the posthuman world of *Westworld* or to learn to live after the Sudden Departure and come to terms with the mourning process in order to move on.

This thesis is divided into three main parts: the first part entitled “Cyclicity: Resonance and Repetition”, the second part “Non-linearity”, and the third part “Resolution”. These titles relate to the abstract shapes of the haunting mechanisms described in the corresponding chapters. Ultimately, each shape structures the movement of the TV shows’ narratives from (dis)orientation to reorientation. It is substantial to note that “Resolution” does not refer to a

particular shape, mainly due to the intrinsic significance of our thesis statement: that the spectral is not representable in a single form by carrying a single meaning and that the end of the trace remains questionable.

TV adaptations' position on the margins of academic research incites us to shed light on their significance by pointing to their invisible and spectral nature. In this section, we argue that TV adaptations are always oscillating between the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead while following the spectral logic of liminality.

This first part takes a deeper look at the forms of textual haunting in adaptations and the rewriting tendencies in contemporary fiction that should be studied as a spectral return. It lays out the relation of spectrality to adaptation studies following a definition of spectral or uncanny adaptations and demonstrates how (re)telling stories is always a matter of ghosts and haunting. We identify the uncanny nature of the process of adaptation and refer to them as "spectral adaptations". In this part we also aim to determine the numerous (memory) traces left by previous authors, paratextual elements, the source text and its generic conventions, and the extent to which they are related to viewers' recreation of meaning through the change of the medium. The following analyses rely on the metaphorical haunting that operates *beyond* the source text/adaptation's hierarchical relationship then extends to the cultural memory of other texts and authors surrounding them.

The first chapter, "Spectral Return – Spectral Adaptations", reveals the spectral mechanisms involved in the serial adaptations and their reception beyond the fidelity argument. This chapter analyzes the adapted text's position in a liminal space where it is able to transgress the conventional borders set by the source text. It sheds light on the liminality that creates a more fluid uncovering of certain elements from the source text (and other texts) in order to create new meanings and interpretations. We argue that this is done through not only a process of appropriation but particularly through the balance between familiarity and novelty (strange and new elements added to the familiar context) whereby the adaptation expands the source text's storyline and reveals its underlying layers, i.e., the repressed and hidden elements associated to it. We start by an overview of spectral characteristics in textual approaches of the uncanny such as Nicholas Royle's work on ghostly apparitions to identify different types of uncanny manifestations and to finally discuss the way it relates to adaptations: for example, through techniques of repetition, *déjà-vu*, and the de-familiarization process for the audience.

The second chapter, “Resonances beyond the Source Text”, offers valuable insight into the reverberations stemming from the adaptation’s proliferating texts, thus including all paratextual elements and fan artistic productions. In this way, we argue that haunting allows the acknowledgment of (trans)textual echoes in the form of a memory trace that attest the haunted and haunting aspect of the TV adaptations as palimpsestuous works. Therefore, through a delineation of the types of audiences in TV adaptations, we explore the ways in which different levels of reception are involved in the recognition and recollection of hypertexts, intertexts, and paratexts in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. This discussion shifts to the contemplation of the way the dynamics of cultural memory operate in these narratives through the use of (intertextual) references and mythological symbolism.

This is particularly accurate in the case of *Westworld* which reinvents and revisits the past through the western genre with a horrid and somehow realistic representation of the future of humanity in the face of an AI revolution. Since the TV adaptation is based on a wide range of previous texts, we attempt to show how it appropriates or exorcizes its textual ghosts by recreating the g/hosts of the source text to ultimately establish a hybrid genre.

After exploring these (trans)textual ghostly elements, the third chapter, “Ghostly authorship”, examines viewers’ familiarity with the showrunner/adaptor’s previous works through the prism of the uncanny return of the past and its operating serial repetition. The discussion that follows centers on authorship issues surrounding HBO, the cable channel’s history, evolution, and its characteristics as a generator of “Quality TV”, with a brand slogan that discloses its exclusion and demarcation from the rest of television. Starting by a small introduction of the history of HBO and laying down the characteristics of its original content and TV shows. Subsequently, the discussion tackles HBO’s productions of complex TV dramas centered on trauma and spectral returns. We, then, consider the extent of showrunners’ creative freedom in comparison to broadcast network TV channels and the respective constraints influencing complex serial storytelling.

The assessment of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*’s ghostly authorship leads us to consider the adapters’ influence as “haunted haunter”,²⁸ thus as ever present-absent entities in the TV adaptation’s reception. We, therefore, introduce authorship in TV adaptations by

²⁸ Saviour Catania’s coinage in his article. Catania, Saviour. “Specters of Film Adaptation: A Hauntology of Relational Hybridity.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017. Accessed 1st Sept. 2019. https://lfq.salisbury.edu/issues/first/index_first.html

underlining the significant questions of authority and credit that accompanied the emergence of the showrunner as *auteur* while assessing its impact on viewers' reading of the adaptation in the line of the showrunners' previous works for instance by drawing connections between the adaptations and their other artistic productions.

Moving from the TV adaptations' cyclical and repetitive underlying patterns, the next part of this thesis, "Non-linearity", brings into view the discontinuous forms of the narratives and their numerous spectral mechanisms purveying disorientation on the audience. The spectro-poetics of the event is fundamentally meant to question the very essence of reality, the linearity of time as well as the narrativity of history communicated through media and news footage.

Chapter four, "Spectral television and the Haunting memory", sketches such mechanisms operating at the level of a televisual medium as spawning ghosts from the past. Thereby, these TV series' preoccupations with the dynamics of traumatic memory (remembering and forgetting) are at the heart of this discussion whereby we analyze television and technology through the prism of the medium's spectrality and serial features. In other words, we foreground the representation of the traumatic memory in *The Leftovers* as an incessantly returning past that is still present through commemoration, absence, and the refusal to mourn. While in *Westworld*, this is distinctly embodied in AI prosthetic memory and TV tropes prompted by the representation of technology. Therefore, we investigate the way both shows are subject to a haunting presence-absence that not only disturbs the temporal linearity of the narrative but essentially exhibits anxiety in the age of amnesia and constant obsession with memory and the future.

The fifth chapter, "Temporal Complexity", relies on Paul Booth's taxonomy of complex narration and more specifically his discussion of "temporal displacement". This chapter identifies the multiple possibilities of a future in the analysis of the TV series at hand and their (post)apocalyptic context. Our narratives are considerably constructed in a way that makes us interrogate the temporal structure and the hope left for the future of the characters and humanity. This approach helps us determine the thematic use of ontological and temporal crises based on a traumatic fragmentation that is inherent to complex TV narratives. These shows do not only look back at the past or represent an endless loop of mourning and inability to cope with the present, but also reveal the way the future is depicted and inform us of the fear of the cyclical and recurrent nature of the event. These TV series are marked by disruptive elements in their temporal structure: the specter introduces an interruption and intrusion upon the present that disorients and destabilizes the traditional structure and perceptions of the diegetic and extra-

diegetic world. Therefore, the research on the lack of linearity and coherence, as is found in many complex narratives, leads us to consider the ways in which such temporality may affect audience comprehension and reception as they experience time as an outcome of the haunting event. This non-linear temporal structure equally informs us of the origin of the narrative as a labyrinthine text.

Chapter six, “Maze narratives and (dis)orientation”, explores the disorientation techniques employed by the network channel and showrunners in putting forth a multilayered type of story and paths for both the audience and the characters to undertake while offering them different possibilities and outcomes from the chosen approach to the text. These TV shows seemingly represent an infinite and complex world using strategies to re-establish comprehension or create an equilibrium between disorientation and reorientation. The metaphor of the maze looks at the mythological symbols of the TV series to reveal the ways in which both characters’ and viewers’ haunting process occurs within the corridors of the textual maze. Through archetypes surrounding Theseus’s myth and the monstrous other, we analyze memory threads weaved in the maze narrative in order to disorient its treaders. Marking the shift of narrative experimentation in serialized complex TV narratives, the maze is suffused with haunting strategies such as the apparitions of the “double” figure. Based on the definition of the uncanny and its evolution into contemporary criticism, this chapter vehicles the significance behind the *doppelgänger* manifestations in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. When lost in this labyrinthine structure, viewers and characters are haunted by several signs in the form of visions and dreams that give them the illusion of meaning and truth.

The third part of this thesis, “Resolution”, examines these haunting signs and dreams read as meaningful hints leading to the answers sought by audiences and characters alike. This final part refers to the spectral dimension of the traumatic event within the (post)apocalyptic adaptation to indicate its reception effects on the conception and imagination of the end.

The Leftovers and *Westworld* conspicuously introduce misleading signs, as it is demonstrated in chapter seven, “Haunting Signs”. Ultimately, these TV shows rely on serial repetition and narrative complexity to further disturb their TV audience while creating the illusion of revelations and closure. Similarly, viewers engage in the quest for clues by anticipating endings and imagining future outcomes through an investigation of Easter eggs and possible connections with spectral texts (or the source text itself).

In this detective-like tendency (through over-interpretation of signs), chapter eight, “Endings: adapting the apocalyptic event”, depicts the adaptation’s use of apocalyptic visions of the end to hypothetically reorient its audience. This chapter interrogates the necessity of remaking apocalyptic narratives by conferring the reasons behind the reiteration and return of the traumatic event in each season.

This leads us to question the very possibility of reaching an end and an exit to a vertiginous spectral narrative. In this way, chapter nine “Reorientation and serial closure”, closes the argument with the issue of narrative closure and season finales’ ability to satisfy its viewers. Providing the possibility for stability and interpretation, endings are not the only source of closure.²⁹ *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* use diverse methods throughout their season arcs to reorient their viewers by remaining faithful to their storytelling norms. This reorientation is not devoid of ambiguity and requires the attentive audience to stay alert and engaged after the ending of the show, by extending the narratives after their end in transmedia forms or other.

The analysis focuses on spectral interruption of the natural flow and time, an interruption which is characterized as “‘apocalyptic’ in the literal sense of the Greek word, the ‘revelation’ that uncovers what is already at hand rather than only heralds a radical change” (Weber in Szendy, *Apocalypse-Cinema*, xvi). In this context, texts develop a mimetic tendency of spectral and traumatic return of the repressed. Their chaotic and non-linear structure emphasize the metaphysical and existential questioning in post-apocalyptic fiction through various aesthetic and narrative strategies that symbolize the inner rupture of the psyche after a traumatic event.

This thesis focuses on the mechanisms involved in remembering the event, refusing to mourn, and the role of the media in creating the discourse of the return of memories either as a commemoration (*The Leftovers*’ Guilty Remnant) or a prosthetic memory that is enhanced and controlled through technology (*Westworld*). These multifaceted strategies in adapting and adopting the spectral are crucial to our understanding of phenomena surrounding the return of an unpredictable event and its ensuing viewership, for as Blanchot writes, “The disaster comes back; it would always be the disaster after the disaster—a silent, harmless return whereby it dissimulates itself. Dissimulation, effect of disaster” (Blanchot 16).

²⁹ “[...] even as various substrata of the television serial—arcs, episodes, seasons—work to provide a sense of closure, [serials] nevertheless defer a decisive ending that would inscribe a final narrative shape. As such, contemporary serial television solicits evolving forms of viewer engagement” (Poland 78).

PART I. Cyclicity: Resonance and Repetition

Introduction

In her pivotal work *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon defines the inevitable repetition that dwells in the process of adaptation by pointing out the interconnection between works of art and fiction as she states that “art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories” (2). A similar assertion is made in haunting studies by Julian Wolfreys when he claims that all forms of rewriting deal with ghosts:

To tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded.³⁰

These statements exhibit the idiosyncratic correlation between spectrality and adaptations as well as their common musings about repetition and post-mortem returns. Accordingly, they assert the spectral aspect of works of art and more specifically adaptations, for they are intrinsically related to their source text and impregnated with a myriad of references and allusions.

Most contemporary adaptation critics point to the multilayered nature of adaptations and the ways in which they resonate with other texts; their textual relations confirm the importance of the palimpsest. The palimpsest model most ingeniously describes the production and reception of adaptations. A palimpsest is an old parchment on which other layers of papers have been added to the original letters or hieroglyphs either due to the decay of the words or to the expensive cost of paper in the ancient world (Barnette 53). The outcome of this stratification is a heterogeneous intermingling of the same “versions” of a text. In his *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gérard Genette names the relation between all these texts “transtextuality”.³¹

Adaptations carry a trace, a memory (either individual or more often collective and cultural) as well as a history which would lead us to study adaptations “*as adaptations* [...] to

³⁰ Wolfreys, Julian. *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny, and Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 3.

³¹ This framework for textual connections comprises five categories of textual relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. We refer to some of these types of associative relationships to analyze the spectral effects between adaptation and other texts.

think of them as, to use Scottish poet and scholar Michael Alexander's great term [...], inherently "palimpsestuous" works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (Hutcheon 6). In asserting this interconnection between texts and by establishing the possibility of approaching adaptation as adaptation, Hutcheon acknowledges the presence-absence of texts and ghost authors/adaptors as she stresses the inevitability of repetition in the process of adaptation.

Such an approach is not, however, meant to fall into a comparative study between the adaptation, its source text and the proliferating texts generated but it rather attempts to show the extent of the spectral effects of return (the return of authors and texts, the return of the repressed³² memory, and the return of the event) in these TV adaptations in the hope of highlighting the (re)presentation of spectral occurrences, such as the traumatic event,³³ as a major haunting process that extends itself beyond the ontological crisis to a textual one. Adaptations, as Rachel Carroll observes in her introduction to *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities* (2009) are compelled to a repetition compulsion:

All adaptations express or address a desire to return to an 'original' textual encounter; as such, adaptations are perhaps symptomatic of a cultural compulsion to repeat.

(1)

The repetition compulsion in adaptations expresses the desire to recover the past and re-create this "textual encounter" to eventually and inevitably change its narrative. The remediation and the re-creation of the past through adaptations are noticeable in what seems to be a plethora of remakes, reboots, sequels, etc. Leo Braudy's definition of remakes further reminds us of the serial aspects of adaptations, a status he claims for the remake:

[remakes are] always concerned with what its makers and (they hope) its audiences consider to be unfinished cultural business, unrefinable and perhaps finally unassimilable material that remains part of the cultural dialogue—not until it is finally given definitive form, but until it is no longer compelling or interesting.

(331)

³² The mechanisms of spectral returns are embodied in the return of the repressed. Although this research is not informed by a psychoanalytical approach, we will refer to the aesthetics of traumatic repetition in these TV adaptations. The haunting memory is closely examined in the second part of this thesis to explore the role of TV as a spectral medium and the return of the haunting past in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*.

³³ In these contemporary TV adaptations, the event is mostly characterized as apocalyptic and spectral as it is developed in the last sections of this thesis.

This resonates with Katrin Oltmann's characterization of the palimpsest form of texts, and more specifically remakes, as a "cultural unfinished business",³⁴ which underscores the ghostly properties of this superimposition. Several forms of adaptation appeal to the continuity of narratives for commercial and financial reasons. Therefore, television becomes assigned to the age of (re)production, abundance, and endless recycling, thus maintaining the idea that no story is ever truly completed and that retrospectively the end of times, forgetting, and amnesia remain timeless enemies but do not prevail. Such TV adaptations reflect the cyclical and haunting nature of serial television, memory, and human history.

The TV shows under study are considered spectral – despite their appropriation of the source, they developed an identity on their own and claimed their right to be a central part of the cultural stream surrounding the original through haunting mechanisms. Therefore, we aim to explain how spectrality in these adaptations is analogous to a process of building the text's multiple voices in a way that would justify the possibilities of different readings and interpretations, thereby exhibiting the forms of return of the past at the textual, thematic, and reception levels.

In this first part, we show the extent to which the lurking shadow of the source text seems omnipresent, whether voluntarily or not, and examine the marked impact of the adapter's previous works on the adaptation. We reflect upon the spectral aesthetic and narratological elements as carrying a trace of old texts, spirits, and authors haunting the adaptation narrative as well as culture, and collective memory in general. Besides these resonances, we closely examine the return of a present-absent authorship and its ensuing transtextual connections established with other texts and other media.

We therefore look at *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*' status as both *haunted* and *haunting* texts. While their haunted condition is due to their inspiration from previous texts and their palimpsestuous nature, their haunting state is at the narratological level of their repetitive and traumatic tendencies as complex TV series. These TV adaptations are not primarily seeking a return to the source text in a great hope of reaching fidelity or paying homage to the source text and its author. Their postmodern approach is informed by their heavy emancipation from the

³⁴ In her article "The Past is Never Really Past", Loock mentions how the remake can be perceived as a palimpsest: "Oltmann sees unfinished business in the remake's palimpsest-like layering of memories of earlier films. Its genre conventions, narrative elements, production background as well as the actors' star and screen personas, she argues, influence the production and reception of the remake" (83). Loock, Kathleen, editor. "'The Past is Never Really Past': Serial Storytelling from *Psycho* to *Bates Motel*." *Serial Narratives*, 2014, p. 83.

source with an openness to ghostly textuality. In other words, we will identify some of those textual traces in the adaptations of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* that have been left by previous authors, paratextual elements, the source text, etc. and the extent to which it is related to viewers' (re)creation of meaning through the change of the medium.

Regardless of the references and hints at the source text, these adaptations are necessarily haunted by their predecessor, its author and its context of production and reception. In the Derridean argument in favor of a spectral address, one should accordingly reflect upon examining adaptations through the lens of alterity and spectrality. A discussion of the spectral return in adaptations requires us to acknowledge that adaptation stands on its own, and any presence-absence of other texts is for the audience to interpret, thus rebooting their memories of previous stories and updating them.

To sum up, the starting point of this spectral approach would be the recognition of textual haunting in adaptations for the purpose of highlighting a given text's flexibility and alterity, thus perceiving its porous nature, its openness to other texts, as a step towards individuation. By individuation we refer to the process of embracing (pre)existing shadow texts and their integration to the adaptation's own "self" or textual identity, i.e., its distinction from past works and authors neither by fully refuting their narratological effects nor by abiding to them and favoring complete fidelity to the source text.³⁵ Central to this focus on textual haunting is the understanding of textual heterogeneous identity and the ensuing reflective contemplation of storytelling, artistic creation, and the act of seemingly infinite rewriting – and therefore a look into notions of authority and authorial presence in adaptations.

In the following chapters, we investigate the spectral aspect of adaptations and how this constant return is also symptomatic of a compulsion repetition with or without an invocation of the source text despite an awareness of its status as adaptation. For *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, the label of "adaptation"³⁶ is too heavy a word to use due to their unequivocal

³⁵ This notion of individuation finds its roots in the Jungian concept to designate the process of forming an individual's personality by "consciously coming to terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self" (Von Franz 166) and thus having the conscious meet the unconscious and all that is hidden. This allows the emergence of uniqueness and is opposed to what is known as 'arrested development' and which "brings about the best possible adaptation" to one's self and environment (223). We refer to this concept to draw an analogy with the process of adaptation and appropriation as mentioned above.

³⁶ We discuss how *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* are complex televisual texts that eschew the identity of a simple remake or a text-to-screen adaptation. Given their serial structure, we are invited to look at each season differently in relation to the source text.

dissociation from the source text despite the accuracy of the term and the validity of their status as adaptations. We argue that their textual identity goes *beyond* being a simple adaptation, so they could be rather studied as spectral adaptation expansions, in the sense that they carry a variety of ghostly figures as they not only entertain several connections with past texts, thus relying on viewing experiences and memories – but, most importantly, they rely on the cultural memories surrounding them as inscribed in the collective imaginary and viewing habits.

1.1. Chapter 1: Spectral Returns – Spectral Adaptations

1.1.1. The specter of fidelity: a theoretical review

Contemporary adaptation critics maintain that fidelity to the source text is not a matter of utmost importance and that an adaptation is to be analyzed and read through its own properties and potential without reducing it to a mere replica of its previous text. In “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation”, Robert Stam sums up the major beliefs about fidelity in adaptation studies, showing how the influence of poststructuralism helped adaptation studies step away from any kind of emulative demands by studying adaptation as a dialogical and intertextual process, thus encouraging to deal with an adaptation on its own merits as an independent work of art.

Stam’s take on intertextual dialogism as well as his reading of Gérard Genette’s definition of transtextuality help us gain a better understanding of textual relations, and more specifically, spectral adaptations. Promoting the latter’s categorization of the five types of transtextuality emphasizes the fruitlessness of fidelity in adaptation criticism. For instance, the following well-known statement immaculately paints the infinite borderless character of the countless expansions and connections provided by adaptations whether filmic, televisual, or other:

Film adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin.

(Stam 66)

In this way, focusing on the future possibilities rather than the forgotten past that has been disgracefully betrayed opens the spectral space of interpretations for an adaptation, which is considered as the hypertext to its source, namely the hypertext following Genette’s hypertextuality and Stam’s subsequent affiliation of the concept to filmic adaptations underscored above.

At this point, it seems necessary to remember that the very terminology and definition³⁷ of an adaptation varies depending on the adopted viewpoint. In *Television and Serial Adaptation*, Shannon Wells-Lassagne brings attention to the necessity to redefine the term “adaptation” for the small screen, as some TV series challenge this very definition (6). As she explains, the medium of television is heterogenous in its content due to the variety of programs and makes us question whether some TV adaptations, self-conscious or not, should be considered as an adaptation. She gives the examples of TV series such as *12 Monkeys* (Syfy, 2015-2018) and *Caprica* (Syfy, 2010) that challenge the traditional notion of adaptation, “thus calling into question their status as adaptations” (6), as they were not meant to be adaptations at first, but were original concepts reworked to incorporate a well-known source text. Although this is not the case with our series, the term adaptation should also be used carefully in the case of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. A more conscientious and appropriate designation for these two shows would be “adaptation expansion”, a phrase which simultaneously indicates the status of adaptation (for a short time) and its development into an emancipated storyline. As Hutcheon simply puts it:

In short, adaptation can be described as the following:

- *An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- *A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- *An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.

(8-9, emphasis in original)

This seems to be in congruence with the general refutability of the notion of an “original” in adaptations, thus discounting the literary text’s supremacy over its audio-visual counterpart (or other artistic forms). Fidelity, in this case, is an extreme (or at least theoretical) reading of fidelity, that is obviously an impossible aim to achieve, even for fans of the “faithful” adaptation. It assumes that there is a single meaning by one author (an intended message suggesting that meaning derives from authorial intention) and adaptation is only a reproduction of this meaning. It presupposes that an adaptation should be able to convey and extract some

³⁷ To “adapt” means “to adjust, to alter, to make suitable” (Hutcheon 7) for the target medium, audience, and era.

single meaning; therefore it implies the existence of a specific reading that should pass on from the source to the adaptation. Undertaking such an approach to criticize or evaluate an adaptation would result in a complete dismissal of a text's nature as an "open structure [...] to be reworked by a boundless context" (Stam 57).

As Thomas Van Parys states in his article "Against Fidelity: Contemporary Adaptation Studies and the Example of Novelisation", the attachment to fidelity reveals a fear of multiplicity in deviating from the source which is regarded as the measurement of the adaptation's worth, namely its touchstone. An adaptation, for Van Parys, is unsettling due to its very existence, "because it is literal proof that there is no single meaning of a text" (431), a belief in harmony with postmodern criticism. Therefore, it becomes conspicuous that leaning towards a critical evaluation of an adaptation based on faithfulness and betrayal impedes on the "dynamic malleability" of texts (434) and hinders the perception of texts as flexible entities interconnected with each other. Wells-Lassagne's assessment of TV adaptations subscribes to another dismissal of the fidelity criterion based on the actual medium of television and its serial form, thereby making TV adaptations too different from a single source text to be "subject to this debate", meaning that these series intend "for audiences to assume significant changes in the televised adaptation" (64). Others, such as John Ellis, argue that the adaptation's ability to affect and alter viewers' memory shows the extent to which it is unfaithful to its source; fidelity, then, is measured by the fidelity to the memory of the source whether the adaptation reiterates the same cultural memory or reworks it differently to the point of its erasure:

The faithfulness of the adaptation is the degree to which it can rework and replace a memory. This process is always likely to fail to some degree, as the generation of a memory from a reading of a text will involve associations of a contingent and personal nature as well as more culturally pervasive ones.

(Ellis 4)

Considering what has been written in the past on the fidelity debate and all types of conclusions that followed, we aim to introduce an alternative to the obsession with the betrayal of the source text in the form of a "spectral" approach that would celebrate intertextuality and all forms of resonances within adaptations. This resembles Robert Stam's post-structuralist approach as well as the writings of Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch, and most contemporary critics in the matter of intertextual relations. One could go so far as to argue that attachment to the fidelity discourse embodies a fear of the return of the uncanny: in denying the inexorable changes while expecting adaptations to perfectly reflect their source texts, there is an underlying

apprehension of seeing the strange and novel elements within the new work that would destabilize and annihilate the harmonious familiarity of the source text. This is what the uncanny is all about: “[...] it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context.” (Royle 1).

Royle further reminds us that the uncanny is always entangled with the ghostly as it is “indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or ‘coming back’ – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat.” (2). Overall, it has to do with mirroring, the encounter of a double, the sensation of *déjà-vu* accompanied with difference and other instances that combine the “unhomely” and “homely”. Jane Barnette claims that the adaptation becomes uncanny due to its mimetic tendency and its introduction of several changes to the source text: “[...] the nature of adaptation—insofar as it is “repetition without replication,” or the presentation of something that is not the original, but also not-not-the original—is itself uncanny or *unheimlich*” (48).

Adaptations are therefore uncannily spectral and heterogeneous by essence; they are suffused with ghosts of other authors and texts. This inherent spectrality affects the reception and interpretation of the adapted work. To use psychoanalytical terminology, adaptations, or what here is referred to as “spectral adaptations” embodies a return of the repressed. The process of adaptation involves a certain repression of what came before, either by omitting it, or by attempting to emancipate the adaptation from it.

1.1.1.1. Returns in serial adaptations

Adaptations call attention to their source texts (along with their previous adapted versions) either to criticize them or to pay homage to them, therefore always embodying a return to previous texts (Whelehan and Cartmell 14). Here, it seems important to distinguish between two forms of return: the “return *to* the original” and the “return *of* the original.” In the former, there is an active willingness (on the part of the writers, producers, or creators) to go back to the source text and voluntarily acknowledge its presence and role in the adaptation. In other words, it is the utter embrace of the status of the adaptation as adaptation and its (overt or subtle) connection to its source text by performing a certain act of surrender to its shadowy overwhelming presence. The latter category, however, suggests the return of the haunting

specter and suggests a passive submissiveness to it. This does not necessarily imply the supremacy of the source text but simply affirms the haunted state of the adaptation.

In *Adapturgy: The Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, Jane Barnette acknowledges adaptation as a form of “ghosting” due to its “highly charged relationship” to its source (46). The text’s approach to its source plays a crucial role in its reception by viewers and its overall meaning; it would subsequently exhibit either a denial or a rejection of the spectral presence. This would also eventually result in the incessant and often unwanted return of said source. In other words, the source text, in any manner whatsoever, persists and returns even in the case of the adaptation’s appropriation and expansion of the story. Maurizio Calbi, the author of *Spectral Shakespeares*, offers a similar view on spectral returns as he puts the ghostly presence-absence of Shakespeare in adaptations under scrutiny. His introduction sheds light on Derrida’s hauntology and explains the numerous ways in which an adaptation is haunted by its source as well as the author’s ghost. Hauntology seeks to convey this transferability between texts and to render the invisible visible. Being an iconic author who’s become a ghost himself, Shakespeare seems to be the fittest example of spectral adaptations and ghostly authorship. Whether narratives willingly retell his widespread influential texts or merely allude to his everlasting presence-absence, his return is therefore mainly due to the cultural imaginary and mythology built around his texts. Shakespeare’s iconic figure adds further depth to the hauntedness of the adaptation as it belongs to a broad cultural memory infinitely remediated throughout the centuries.

In her discussion of page to screen adaptations, Kamilla Elliott outlines six concepts of adaptation “that split form from content in various ways to account for the process of adaptation” (134-5): the ventriloquist, psychic, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping concepts. Elliott’s psychic concept enunciates the approach in which the adaptation strives to represent the spirit of the source text and transmits it to the viewer, echoing the language of a “spectral” approach to adaptation. In this specific concept, absolute fidelity is not necessary, but there is a “spirit” passing through to the adaptation which nonetheless stands on its own as a pseudo-independent³⁸ work of art. This transmitted “spirit” from the source to the

³⁸ For, if one cannot eschew repetition, then dependence and reliance on other works and authors is even more inevitable. The pseudo-independence here refers to the possibility of the adaptation of being recognized as a work of art in its own right, but one which would always remain related to a variety of other texts, including the source text.

adaptation is quite problematic if we come to think of it in terms of essence and intentional, authorial, and singular meaning deriving from the “original”.

Using Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* as an example, Elliott shows how the psychic connection is present and could be transferred and interpreted with or without the authority of the adapter. She identifies the spirit of the text as what stems from pre-textual elements such as the personality of the author and intent, something that she describes as holding some ungraspable feeling as it is related to style. She further claims that capturing the spirit of an adaptation amounts to acknowledging a certain form of mysticism which is now determined in a manner that limits the esoteric connotation. As she pinpoints: “Twentieth-century critics tend to represent this authorial spirit in less mystical ways: the authorial soul or personality becomes authorial intent, imagination, or style” (136). Similarly, for Elliott, the spirit of the text is also discernable from its narrativity or what she calls “the post textual response” (138) from viewers.

However, it is important to keep in mind that Elliott elaborates on the belief that the source text bears a soul which has to be extracted from the “body” by the adapter, therefore leaving the “original” corpse behind (Barnette 46). This perception of the adaptation’s relation to its source through the binary soul/body still limits evaluation and reception of the adaptation as it subsequently implies the absence of space for other forms and possibilities of resurrection.³⁹ As such, we suggest the spectral address in adaptations is about taking up certain aspects of the source without denying the inevitable need for repetition. This is quite similar to Elliott’s view when she advocates for the avoidance of perfect fidelity to the source as she mentions that being true to the spirit would mean leaving the (literary) corpse in the case of “page to screen” adaptations. Accordingly, she refers to the necessity of establishing a certain distance from the source so that the adaptation acquires its own body, a touch of novelty.

This notion of staying true to the spirit and maintaining a relationship with the source text without blind fidelity is revisited by Joseph and Letort in “How to End with an Opening: TV Series Continuity and Metadaptation” as they study the movement from the first season of a TV adaptation, which becomes analogous to the source text, to a following season that extends

³⁹ The choice of each adapter would be the intentional resurrection or conjuring of the source text (along with its author, ideology etc.) and the exorcism of this unwanted revenant. The vocabulary used here is heavily charged with spiritual connotations following Elliott’s model and her use of the term “spirit” of the text thus equally recalling the resurrection of Christ in the New Testament, at first believed to be a ghost walking on water upon His return (Matthew 14:22-23). In this way, the idea of resurrection in adaptations bears a religious resonance, but we would prefer using the term “specter” and stepping away from such connotations to facilitate focus on the identity of the adaptation and all forms of textual hauntings.

the narrative. This draws attention to the distinguishable quality of serial adaptations in the small screen and their specific requirements. Mostly, the TV adaptations of *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* necessitate a movement from episode to episode and from season to season when at some point the development from the foundation of the source text transgresses textual borders to expand its own plot and ensure continuity.

For Joseph and Letort, this perfectly fits the structure of such TV adaptations as they need to end and begin again (post-source text) by avoiding the idealist vision of a faithful work. Considering the wide cultural identity upon which an adaptation is built, they address the difficulties of living up to expectations of fidelity. They assert that continuity depends on keeping the “essence” of the source text; to remain true to such an essence with the aim of maintaining narrative coherence (113). In this way, they discuss viewers’ expectations with canonical texts and the way it creates an obstruction to the possibility of follow-up stories in the hope of expanding the source text which is used as the primary guideline for the first season. Generally, the adaptation of the source text in serial television is restricted to the first season which earns a status of “remake” while the following seasons would become a form of “sequel” to the source text by overtaking the source’s ending and developing a new storyline. The attempt to establish a continuity afterwards becomes a difficult task for showrunners and such “diegetic extension”⁴⁰ is not always successful (Wells-Lassagne 95).

Continuity is also problematic in these TV adaptations when one comes to think about the “patchwork” format of the serial narrative since the televisual text does not necessarily keep its previous writers to develop the following seasons or even episodes. The very nature of the American writers’ room is everchanging and has an impact on the quality and style of certain shows.⁴¹ In *Westworld*, the use of different directors for each episode reinforces this multilayered point of view and focuses on the blending of authors in a single final work. The most distinguishable change of filming can be traced to the episode “The Riddle of the Sphinx” (S02E04) which was directed by Lisa Joy.

As issues of production and ratings emanate in ending the “season remake”, adapters are also faced with the existence of different types of audiences; the TV viewers who are familiar with the source, and the unknowing audience who is not acquainted with the first

⁴⁰ Jason Mittell uses this term in reference to forms of transmedia when “an object of the storyworld gets released in the real world” (*Complex TV*, 274).

⁴¹ It seems worth mentioning that like a remake or sequel, the nature of the American writers’ room does not necessarily comprise the same team assembled to continue the story.

season and delves into the new season.⁴² It is nonetheless possible for everyone to find their share in the “season sequel” where a middle ground can be established to satisfy all parties. Joseph and Letort explore how these ending episodes deviate from the adaptation and succeed in expanding their plot and storylines. This opens another spectral space after the “faithful” remake – (not for the sole purpose of addressing the specter of the source text, but instead relying on the wider cultural memory surrounding the adaptation to allow continuous storytelling).

This movement from a remake after the first season to a sequel in the following seasons gives the showrunners freedom to develop unexamined plotlines (Joseph and Letort, “How to End,” 112). For Joseph and Letort, the “remake season” which is based on the source text may be subject to a form of repression of “metatextual information” (113), thereby implementing a fresh angle and perspective to the “remake season” which comes to represent this spectral return of the repressed. Serial adaptations build continuity from season to season and allow for the return of the source text, not only in the form of a season remake, but also in the form of embedded references which extend beyond the source text and within the season sequels. Spectral returns in adaptations are not limited to the “faithful” elements, they are attached to the very serial format involving repetition and continuity.

⁴² Another type of audience could be considered regarding TV adaptations when the show is not followed in a coherent manner. This is the case with TV programs on network channels where we find some TV series which are constructed in a way that allows immediate immersion in their storylines at different points of discovering the show. This is possible through different diegetic and extra-diegetic reminders (i.e., recaps, replays, etc.) for new viewers to adjust their comprehension of the currently watched. Approximately, the same ‘audience bait’ logic is applied for the “Christmas” special,” “Halloween,” “Thanksgiving,” and other types of episode specials. It is important to note that this was primarily made to adapt to a mode of viewing that was common in the pre-digital era with the lack of access to recording when the show is not watched on DVDs, via streaming platforms or other.

1.1.2. Spectral disruptions and continuity in adaptations

Given that *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* are self-conscious adaptations that announced their nature with their titles and thus assume the canon around their source text (*Westworld*) or their adapter (*The Leftovers*), we should investigate the techniques that establish their approach to adapt the source text in order to swiftly deviate from it, keeping its presence felt but not overwhelming. In this regard, the adaptation's use of the same title as its source could be interpreted as treacherous, for it misleads the audience by indirectly promising a certain fidelity. It announces its established ties with the source bearing the same title by declaring its identity to be strongly attached and even identical to it.⁴³ As is commonly done in adaptations, the identical title is meant to “take advantage of a preexisting market” (Stam 65) and undoubtedly the decision-making process of the adaptation's title is also driven by financial motives to make the work immediately recognizable to fans.

Indeed, Wolfreys indicates that the very act of naming is problematic because names generally “fix the limits of an identity” but the term “specter” seems to name nothing and everything,⁴⁴ as it takes multiple shapes and remains prone to change. Announcing and claiming the bond to the source, these adaptations are nonetheless disparate if not entirely detached from their source, and do not seem to fulfill any tangible promises about their fidelity. The act of naming delineates the borders of reception and often misguidedly announces what the adaptation will be: the title maintains the franchise in *Westworld*'s case as it carries all the hype and expectations surrounding its name with the blunt awareness of its status as an adaptation. Titles are rife with meaning; the different adaptations keep the suffix-like “world” and distinguish themselves from “west-world” by specifying its evolution to a “future-world”, thus foregrounding the science-fiction genre and its cinematic evolution as an adaptation and

⁴³ This asserts the adaptation's position as a copy or a double to the “original”, an idea we will refute in the next part when evoking the omnipresent duplications and poetics of doubling in *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*.

⁴⁴ Wolfreys develops this in his Preface to *Victorian Hauntings*: “Yet this ‘strange name’ – *spectre* – names nothing as such, and nothing which can be named as such, while also naming something which is neither something nor nothing; it names nothing which is neither nothing nor not nothing. The idea of the spectre, spectrality itself, escapes even as its apparitional instance arrives from some other place, as a figure of otherness which traverses and blurs any neat analytical distinction” (xi).

technological advances or even “beyond westworld” to imply its movement beyond the source text.

Given that translation could also be perceived as an adaptation, the translated titles mark a transformation in the advertising of the text. *The Leftovers* seems to keep the same title as their source, perhaps in a misleading way that suggests their strong affiliation to it, without guaranteeing its faithful reiteration. The English title of *The Leftovers* centers on those who have been left behind, the “leftovers” who are reduced to passivity by what the event and its aftermath. In opposition, the translated version of the novel and the TV show in French *Les disparus de Mapleton* (i.e., The Departed of Mapleton) emphasizes the spectral nature of the event by laying out the poetics of absence (with the term *disparus* evoking individuals who vanished in the past). The characters who departed are present by their absence, for they are not actually part of the plot as active characters; they are mere shadows haunting those who remained. In this case, the emphasis is put on a singular setting: Mapleton.

The French title is a reminder of the event in a more direct manner than the English one. The latter points out that the story is and only will be about the non-departed who cope with their survivor’s guilt, therefore leaving the specter of the impossible, the mourned, the invisible to readers and viewers. The title of an adaptation therefore contributes to building continuity with the previous texts, announcing the adaptation’s identity, and establishing viewers’ expectations.

While Perrotta’s novel and the first season of the show accurately focus on the microcosm of this New York town, it becomes irrelevant and outdated to read the last two seasons through this prism, which also remind us that the event that has affected other parts of the world, and is not restricted to Mapleton (e.g., the third season is set in Australia). Developing new characters outside of the individual scale is quite typical of serial television’s tendency towards expansion, especially from one season to the next. Stories need to go beyond their enclosed setting for audiences not to feel bored and for narrative development purposes. This is less accurate for sitcoms (especially with a live audience and a three-camera filming system) where continuity is created through repetition and familiarity; a few settings are kept emphasizing the familiar sight (and for financial purposes), thus creating a brand around the TV show with recurrent scenes in the usual places where the main characters live, hang out or go to work (though one could argue that the expansion is instead narrative, as each season finale seeks to top the excitement or suspense of the previous one through major events like the well-worn marriage trope).

The novel first opens with a prologue describing Laurie's agnosticism and her response to the Sudden Departure. The first pages depict the reactions to the event featuring the panic, denial, repetition, mediation, and reiteration of the same images on screens with the opinions of various experts. It articulates the Christian characters' desire and attempts to claim and appropriate the event, to assign a particular truth to it by creating an "indiscriminate Rapture [that] was no Rapture at all" (Perrotta 3). Among the changes brought to the novel, Front points to the very experience of trauma after the Sudden Departure as moving from an individual phenomenon in the source text to a shared, exteriorized, and "visible" one in the TV adaptation:

While in the novel the characters experience the trauma as a private meditative affair, which is underlined by the polyphonic narration that locks each of them into isolation, in the series the interior experience is exteriorized and bursts into bizarre actions and events, disturbing images, and dream sequences. The shift from the interior life in the novel to the plot propelled by these manifestations of the trauma adds narrative dynamism and makes the show "propulsive".

(Front 255)

The TV adaptation effectively molds the psychological and aesthetic mechanisms of the haunted psyche of characters after the event has disturbed their state of normalcy. The televisual text recycles the "ontological uncertainty" (Foley 21) of most protagonists to spawn an existential post-apocalyptic narrative. This disturbance perfectly plays out with the development of Perrotta's fictional cult, the Guilty Remnant. The Guilty Remnant's spectral apparition is sudden and surprising: "[...] the Guilty Remnant seemed to have sprung up out of nowhere" (Perrotta 22). They are portrayed as generators of chaos and intermittency. "The truce seemed to be holding, but the Guilty Remnant remained an annoying wild card, popping up at odd intervals to sow confusion and anxiety among law-abiding citizens" (23). Their ghostly figure is expected to disrupt the natural and social order and is expected to "disrupt Heroes' Day" (23). In this representation of spectral disruption, the adaptation preserves a balance to shape the continuity of its serial format from the novel to the adaptation as well as from one season to the other.

1.1.2.1. From season remake to season sequel

The Leftovers' first season is quite in line with its source text in the sense that the season ends where the novel ends; it should thus be considered a season remake following Joseph and

Letort's arguments in the article discussed above. Despite the abundance of differences between the source and its adaptation, our aim is not to delineate them in a way that explains the deviation and unfaithfulness to the source. A more productive method for our purposes is rather to underline the adaptation's specters and how it uses them in its season sequels. The impact of changing and extending this narrative is therefore significant from the lens of seriality and audience reception.

The first episode of the second season, "Axis Mundi," (S02E01) appears as another pilot for the series due to its introduction not only of a new setting, and new characters, but indeed of a new title sequence, as if it were in fact a new TV show. The familiar characters only make short appearances in the middle or towards the end of the episode and leave the narrative space of the episode for the Murphy family. It seems as if the viewer is watching a crossover between two different shows such as when we see the priest Matt Jamison talk in church or when the freshly formed Garvey-Durst family moves into their new house and waves to the newly acquainted characters from this episode. The arrival of the Garveys in town towards the end of the first episode offers both literal and figurative/critical distance from the characters, as if we didn't know them. When the show slowly includes characters with which the audience is familiar from season one such as Matt, who has come with the hope of healing his wife, the episode invites specters from the first season where these separate narratives intermingle. In a metafictional comment, Patti Levin's ghost, *in absentia*, tells Kevin Garvey: "Very interesting family those Murphys. Hard to tell if they're part of your story or you're part of theirs" ("A Matter of Geography", S02E02). This echoes the disorientation of viewers and their thoughts following the changes of setting and main characters that set off a defamiliarization process.⁴⁵

This episode focuses on the Murphys, and then in the following episodes we have access to the same scenes, but from the Garveys' point of view. *The Leftovers*' second episode for season two, "A Matter of Geography", acts for its part almost as a season premiere, as its events start off where the first-season finale ended. This juxtaposition of points of view is reminiscent of another series broadcast at around the same time, *The Affair* (Showtime, 2014-2019), in which each character has a personal vision, memory or account of the same events that reveal the unreliability and multiplicity of narrative points of view and stories. As its title indicates, this contemporary TV show is thematically entrenched in issues of faithfulness and negates the

⁴⁵ This is also triggered by the change of the title sequence in the second season and the introduction of the seemingly irrelevant opening scenes (a prologue) which are set in the prehistoric age with a cavewoman giving birth.

accuracy of testimonies to advance the idea of the tricky nature of truth, potentially being relative. To do so, the main characters' individual perspectives are introduced to the audience, as each personal account of the events differs from the others. This TV series is quite similar to *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* in not only its serial format but essentially in its use of this particular narrative strategy for disorientation purposes and the manipulation of viewers' perception of the storylines. One could also refer to Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) which structurally tackles a similar representation of a crime from different perspectives with altering versions of the truth.

Indeed, this is in harmony with *The Leftovers*' first season's storytelling mode where different points of view are presented either in alternating between other characters' storylines or through a single character-oriented episode that gives us full access to a specific character's journey (e.g., "Two Boats and a Helicopter" (S01E03) with Matt Jamison as the central character or "Guest" (S01E06) with Nora as the protagonist). Most significantly, this equally resonates with the *Lost* episodes where the storyline is dedicated to a specific character's flashback. In the case of the source text of *The Leftovers*, each chapter of the novel centers on a particular character and relating his/her point of view through an omniscient narrator. Whether done in concordance with the structure of the source or not, this episodic configuration is omnipresent in both works (source text and adaptation) and subsequently delivers multiperspectivity⁴⁶ in the most meticulously designed manner.

Given the shift of most episodes in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* from the ensemble-driven episodes to character-centered point of view, the multiperspectival narration at play in these adaptations comes to signify another form of opposition to fidelity by its advancement of polyphony and its opening of a narrative space where several interpretations from both characters and audience are allowed. In this case, it is not only fidelity to the source which is denied, but also fidelity to the adaptation's own codes as each show seems to break the rules by altering its internal structure. The point of view in the novel is based on developing each character's story from an omniscient narrative voice, while camera angles in such scenes in both *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* are not particularly focused on a first-person viewpoint to immerse viewers into their perception and make them identify with their experience. It rather

⁴⁶ Multiperspectivity is the narratological concept introduced by Tzvetan Todorov by which "the text presents several viewpoints consecutively on the same event" following patterns of repetitions and simultaneity. For more material on multiperspectivity, see Pier, John et al, *Emerging Vectors of Narratology*, vol.57, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110555158>.

focuses on offering fresh perspective with every scene or episode that allows viewers to see the event as a spectral return that affects everyone differently.

Given that the whole first season primarily focuses on the Garveys, the shift from their perspective to the Murphys' in "Axis Mundi" is destabilizing as the episode gives us access to the latter's home and intimacy. Their family dynamics oddly appear to combine lovely interactions between family members with a strange silence hanging in the air or gaps that make the audience wonder about the secrets lying beneath the surface. More importantly, most sequences in the beginning of the season reveal different perspectives around the presumed disappearance of the Murphys' daughter, Evie, and her friends during one of the town's frequent earthquakes. The Sudden Departure is belatedly experienced for the Murphys when their daughter stages her own departure by bringing out the emergence of lies and secrets to the surface, for the specter of the event always returns and reintroduces loss and sorrow in the characters' lives. The event upsets the whole town as the place is supposed to be a safe heaven, a blessed place literally called "Jarden, Miracle" in Texas where no one departed on October 14th. This distinctiveness is further emphasized by the episode's title ("Axis Mundi", S02E01) which suggests it is the place or point where heaven and earth meet but which is ultimately destroyed, thus leaving neither connection nor guidance – only the excessive omnipresence of misleading and insignificant signs devoid of answers (Hatchuel, *Le troisième côté*, 93).

Resonating with the gardens of Eden, the town is constructed as an exclusive park for residents which occasionally greets tourists and shamans of all sorts and is filled with peculiar characters and happenings such as a casual interruption of the worship service by a man sacrificing a goat inside the church. As the missing girls are thought to have departed, the show makes us suspicious about everyone's moves to dismiss or confirm that a second departure is even possible. The Garveys, and mainly Kevin, come to be considered as suspects when we come to see that Kevin is permanently haunted by the ghost of the deceased Guilty Remnant's leader, Patti. The next episodes gradually reveal the way most characters had experienced the event the night of the disappearance of the girls, and as we learn for instance about Kevin's sleepwalking and his attempts to remember that night, it becomes evident that the show is suggesting alternatives to the story by presenting different characters' viewpoints.

As a narrative strategy, multiperspectivity is meant to underscore the constrained vision of a single character that is later shown to be lacking parts of the truth that we discover from another character's perspective. The second season of *The Leftovers* plays with multiperspective techniques to offer the presentation of the same event (i.e., the earthquake in the

town of Jarden which is supposed to be another departure) from various points of view in order to give a voice to different characters and for the audience to compare each perspective and comprehend that there is no clear truth, only varying perceptions. As we see Kevin attempting to kill himself in the lake (from the point of view of Evie and her friends before their alleged disappearance) some blanks are filled for the audience that had been left in the dark about his motives under the influence of Patti's ghost. This diversity of perceptions also serves to dismiss any form of faithfulness to the source and denies affiliation to a specific character who is supposed to be the protagonist, the hero or savior⁴⁷ of the story, as they sustain the multiplicity of voices and choices present within the story. Therefore, the adaptation shows us how the plot in and of itself is inherently against fidelity, in the sense that it doesn't comply with a strict reproduction of each story arc.

Likewise, *Westworld* explores the idea of multiperspectivity by developing each primary character's background story from their individual viewpoint, thus bringing the audience closer to the characters by offering a depiction of their thoughts and facilitating affect through this access to the characters' emotions. In this case, the main function of character-oriented storylines is to deliver different representations of suffering and testimonies about their traumas in the first season while in the second season it delineates their individual path after their coming to sentience. As such, the intricate web of storylines introduces its narrative arcs side by side and hardly overlap, following the multiple events and deaths endured by the hosts, and explicitly limiting the interweaving of said arcs between the different characters, emphasizing instead the choral aspect of the series.

⁴⁷ Note Kevin's newly acquired position as a promising Messiah in the third season, an identity with which the show itself plays to mock and deny the myth of the hero; it rather showcases the rise of the anti-hero as Nora says, "If we can't have a sense of humor about you being the messiah, we're going to have a problem" ("Don't Be Ridiculous", S03E02).



Figure 1. Westworld (1973)'s groundbreaking use of Computer-Generated Imagery in a live-action film.

The idea of multiple perspectives becomes an even more powerful notion in the context of the diegesis given that the perspectives the viewer often finds themselves assuming is that of one of the hosts coming to awareness. As the hosts are themselves machines containing cameras to interact with their guests, the subjective camera/narrative becomes a physical reality, highlighting the metanarrative aspects of the series we will be focusing on later, while also recalling one of the innovations of its source text, the point of view of the Gunslinger, which in 1973 was one of the first images representing the perspective of artificial intelligence. The fact that the filmed images of their individual experiences are recorded and then played back by technicians or not, or that they recover in part dramatizes the unreliability of their respective narratives, and foregrounds the way that unreliability is made an essential function of their make-up in their pre-programmed inability to see certain things. This is often reiterated by hosts: when encountering an image of the modern world or when interrogated about a notion requiring their sentience, they simply utter the phrase, “This does not look like anything to me” (“The Original”, S01E01).

1.1.2.2. Beginnings: pilot and opening sequences

The function of a TV show pilot is primarily to establish the mood of the narrative and to inform the viewers of the general themes of the series. Mittell compares TV series pilots to the opening scenes of video games, which are often accompanied by tutorials and basic guides for the players (*Complex TV* 59). We should therefore look at the role of pilots in our adaptations, which offer viewers guidelines for the series to follow.

Pilots in TV adaptations create an equal ground of knowledge and exposition for old and new audiences (those who are familiar with the original and those who haven't seen it) to meet the different expectations of each group by "giving the new audience a crash course enabling them to have the same kind of informed expectations as the audience who has seen the original film, but implying at the same time that familiarity with the original film will provide an additional teasing intimacy with this one" (Leitch qtd. in Wells-Lassagne, 39). Beyond its title, the opening chapters and opening sequences represent another indicator of the adaptation's mutable nature and direction, first by establishing the work's status as an adaptation, and second by announcing what form of adaptation it will be from the outset (the subtle degree of faithfulness to the source as well as to the audience's expectations). Though this is an issue in each episode of a series, which must establish the setting, tone, and relationship with previous episodes of the fiction, it goes without saying that these pressures are multiplied for the series' first episode (or pilot episode, in the case of our primary works).⁴⁸

In *The Leftovers*, the opening sequence of the TV adaptation differs from the explicit exposure presented in the opening chapters of the novel. Instead, the series reorders the narrative structure in order to underpin the use of entropy as a starting point. In the pilot,⁴⁹ the Sudden Departure is not visually represented, which embodies a certain inability to represent the traumatic event. In this way, viewers are deprived of seeing the mystery behind it (one of Lindelof's main narrative characteristics), thereby losing the privilege of being omniscient, and are warned from the beginning that they will have to put themselves in the shoes of those who have been left behind – an invitation to empathize with the grief caused by the event.

The pilot's opening sequence is filled with action, bringing the audience straight to the point, and directly confronts the viewers with the matter at hand: the crisis of the sudden departure. There are no preparations for the event; it is as sudden for us as for the characters. Entropy is thus the point of departure of the show and would reveal itself to be *The Leftovers*'

⁴⁸ All first episodes of TV series, particularly in recent years, are not necessarily pilots, which are episodes that are made on their own in order to demonstrate to studios the viability of the planned series. Many series have been ordered straight to series, where the first episode is simply one of many produced at the same time (whereas there is usually a significant lapse of time between a pilot's production, its approval by the studio, and the production of the rest of the series' season, often resulting in significant changes in casting or storylines, for example). Both *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* did make pilots before the series went into production, offering a certain contract not just with viewers, but indeed with their studios and network about the nature of the series to follow.

⁴⁹ See Hatchuel, Sarah and Thiellement, Pacôme, panelists. *The leftovers: une série philosophique?* *Forum des Images*, 25 Apr 2015. <https://www.forumdesimages.fr/les-programmes/toutes-les-rencontres/-the-leftovers--une-serie-philosophique>.

main component; the series announces from the beginning that the trauma of the cataclysm would persist in the post-catastrophe period and will surely continue to haunt the characters with the three-year ellipsis in the future. This is referred to as a “downer beginning”⁵⁰ in which a disastrous event is presented straightforwardly, thereby introducing viewers to the central depressing tone.⁵¹ *The Leftovers* does so notably by representing a mother losing her baby, an image that reappears in the first season’s credits and which later becomes the symbol of October 14th in Mapleton (a concrete reminder of that day and the extreme grief it brought to the “leftovers” but mostly an attempt to mourn the departed and move on).

The opening shot directly reveals the not-yet significant date that appears on a black screen “October 14” thereby immediately assigning the traumatic event an ever-returning memory following the tendency of historians and the media across centuries when a day becomes emblematic of a nation or the whole world’s despair or celebration.

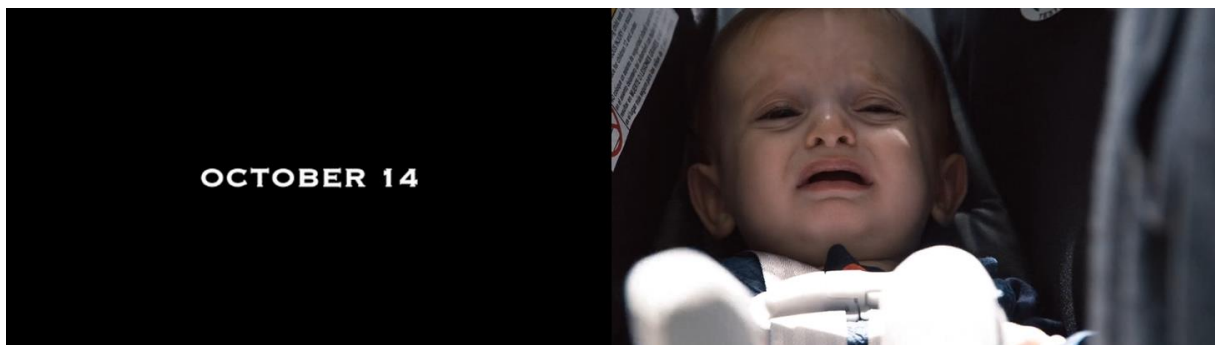


Figure 2. Opening The Leftovers: a date that stands alone; a world and a child in discomfort and distress.

Reflecting birth on this earth, the show marks its creation by a cry as it is displayed on our screens and the recreation of Perrotta’s story for television. The crying baby foreshadows the upcoming sorrow everyone must endure as a default parameter of human existence. Even the first few minutes of “calm” before the tragic event are stressful in their visual representation of the chaotic mundane. This is conspicuous from the rapid editing pace and the variety of shot sizes, moving from full shots to medium close-ups then to close-ups – an undertaking that accentuates lack of control in the face of overwhelming actions – as the mother struggles to multi-task while she is on the phone with incessant baby cries in the background, or the child’s

⁵⁰ “Downer Beginning.” *TV Tropes*.

<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DownerBeginning>. Accessed 24 Nov. 2018.

⁵¹ Arguably, there is a certain ambiguity to the setting of the tone here, because classical narration would demand that a problematic situation in a story becomes a comedy or at least a happy ending, while those narratives that begin happily ultimately recount the upset of that initially established order.

discomfort, hemmed in both by the car seat and by the frame of the close-up shot, as the mother recounts her own woes in repeated phone calls.



Figure 3. Another child hemmed in, linking to the past of the series (and the past of humanity) (“Axis Mundi”, S02E01).

The first episode of the second season “Axis Mundi” (S02E01) starts with similar mother-child and birth themes with a prologue set in the prehistoric era, connoting another form of return to the past and to the origins (the umbilical cord) in order to create a season sequel to the first one. While showing the mother in her car, the unstable moving camera denies viewers visual access to the baby and sets up the possibility of its coming absence. The disappearance of the baby, the cries of another boy asking for his departed father and the terrified mother add to the anxiety of the sequence’s tone. This accumulation of alarmed states creates disorientation (in a way similar to *Lost*’s opening scenes with Jack’s disorientation and the panic of the passengers placing the viewers of this new fiction on an equal ground of uncertainty with the characters) as the tension rises with the haunting piano tune of Max Richter’s “The Departure” song accompanying the mother’s desperate screams.

Clearly, from the onset, the show sets the tone for the theme of birth and rebirth as a form of resurrection and return amid chaos. The pilot signals the rebooting of the source text by introducing the birth of the new televisual narrative and the resurrection of the novel. It equally establishes an overall uncertainty within viewers (they are unable to know precisely what, how or why all these events occur and where the plot is clearly heading): the only certainty to be found in this episode is that there will be no certainty and no answers. Viewers are bound to accept staying in the dark and gradually go through this process with the characters, the “leftovers” who need to accept that there would be no resolution, only ghosts they fear to

address, thus creating a TV show as provocative as a specter, with Lindelof's unfinished business on television.⁵²

The Leftovers' realism is blunt from the beginning as its most realist feature is the lack (if not impossibility) of access to immediate truths or answers; traditional expectations from serialized narratives (such as resolution throughout episodes or seasons) are further compromised and defied. In its representation of a post-cataclysmic world, *The Leftovers* mirrors the reactions to a traumatic event of which no one can make sense. Every character attempts to find answers and deals with disorientation and loss in their own way according to their own needs and motivations; the Guilty Remnant's helpless nihilism, the Christians' interpretation of the event as the rapture, Holy Wayne's taking advantage of the chaotic climate to indulge in his sexual and prophetic needs for power, and finally the scientists' theory that the departed were transported to a parallel universe or that the cause of departure is only "A Matter of Geography" (S02E02).

The Leftovers, is based on relativism and perspectivism in a way that reflects the adapters' refusal to provide any "truth" about the show's mysteries. The narrative seems to navigate between an assertion of real and comprehensible issues and a playful ambiguity which offers possibilities of seemingly impossible and supernatural events. In other words, certain aspects of the show spawn ontological uncertainty within both its characters and audience. One can recall the bagel incident ("Penguin One, Us Zero", S01E02) as a *mise-en-abyme* of the series; the seemingly absurd disappearance of the breakfast pastry provokes doubt about the ever instability of this world's laws, and hints at the possibility of another departure. This inability is reiterated throughout the second season and becomes a focal point in the last season with the post-mortem re-appearance of Evie Murphy in Australia which acts as a trigger of such uncertainty – only to ultimately be revealed as a product of Kevin's imagination and psychosis, along with other instances of madness translated as faith, denial, or simply mental illness.

⁵² Lindelof's return after *Lost* has been interpreted by the fan community as a form of return to tell a similar story in a different manner as *The Leftovers* is commonly seen as *Lost*'s "inverted repetition" (Scahill 318); the reverse story of the people who crashed on the plane i.e., the story of those who lost their loved ones. Moreover, Lindelof's unfinished business here points to his ghostly return to haunt the screen and the audience with the mysteries and the Easter eggs surrounding his texts. It also informs us of the authorial haunting at play and the infinite possibilities of (re)telling stories.

Needless to say, Lindelof's return on TV can also be seen as a form of atonement for his so-called failure to end *Lost* properly, instead offering a conclusion that enraged many viewers. This question can be further taken up while discussing the author/adaptor's position as well as the series finale and the issue of ending *The Leftovers* after three seasons.

Other metaphysical events surrounding Kevin's role as a Messiah during his multiple resurrections and "traveling" to the other side equally serve to simultaneously assert and deny its occurrence without ever delivering real answers about their origin or their accuracy. Some of these events include the characters' discourse based on their ideological beliefs whose truthfulness remain unclear for the audience, such as the self-proclaimed prophet Holy Wayne, who supposedly granted Kevin his wish before dying, or Nora's traveling to an alternate universe where the 2% have reappeared.⁵³

Therefore, the narrative builds doubt with such events (and thus compounds Lindelof's own reputation for mystery, complex storytelling and playing with metaphysics as the showrunner for *Lost*) only to dismiss them afterwards. This is also accompanied with an abundant and manipulative use of what the fan community calls "Easter eggs" i.e., hidden clues and subtle references inciting viewers to be more attentive and subsequently rewarding their efforts, such as the *National Geographic* issue of May 1972. The articles and photographs in the magazine introduced in "Solace for Tired Feet," the seventh episode of the first season, "could be read as a comfort for weary minds, a beacon that provides a hypertext to the series itself, another narrative to hold on to, another popular text to help to make sense of this post-October 14th world" (Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 10). This incites the engaged audience to use the magazine as a parallel to the fictional story and look for details in relation to the show.

This approach in reading the storyworld and representing the outcome of the traumatic event of October 14th reveals the TV show's desire to maintain the ambiguity of its underlying mysteries, which consequently liberates us from the stiff perception of the adaptation as the pure reproduction of Perrotta's story. As Iampolski spells out:

[Repetitions] point to the presence of a certain repressed semantic kernel whose significance is consistently expressed as *other, different, mysterious*. Repetition thus simultaneously asserts and denies that meaning is univocal. Variations in repetition can thus lead simultaneously to a centering and a decentering of meaning.

(38, emphasis in original)

In this light, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* offer various perspectives and proliferating possibilities in their serial narratives that distance them from their source. The omnipresent

⁵³ These examples are tackled in the last sections where we discuss strategies of disorientation in *The Leftovers* and the show's ending with Nora's ambiguous story.

variations in repetition in these adaptations find their roots in the interpretation of the devastating and traumatic essence of the events from one season to another. As explained earlier, this takes the shape of a compulsive return.

This constant modification of perspectives and refusal of a single meaning (or indeed a single origin) for the series is further asserted by the radical shift in identifying paratexts for *The Leftovers*. Indeed, the viewer was to discover an entirely new title sequence from season one to season two as well as changed official taglines, from “We’re Still Here” in the first season to “Begin Again” in the second season. The title sequence of the second season underlines the shift of the setting from the town of Mapleton to Jarden and signals the movement away from the source text to the “sequel season”. More importantly, it reinvigorates the season’s mindset moving from the emotional submerging aspect of the departure with the credits sequence’s Christian overtones about the event of the 14th as a rapture, its dark score, and the similarity of the mural painting to the Sistine Chapel representing the loss of loved ones. It is indeed highly charged in religious symbolism and mainly focuses on the act of the departure as we can see the departed floating and drawn to the skies while the “leftovers” grieve, for families and relationships have been torn apart.

The post-apocalyptic genre is in stark contrast to its “classical” aesthetics and visual imagery from the first season’s title sequence. The Renaissance-like imagery along with its graphical painting style (Computer-Generated Imagery) and its dome-like structure underpin the overall sacred and religious dimension of the TV show. In her article “*The Leftovers*, Philosophy, and Popular Culture”, Viegas suggests that the circular shape represents “the realm of the gods, eternal life, and immortality itself” (12). These key elements in the opening credits are also reminiscent of the dome in Saint-Peter Basilica or Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Music builds up to reflect the discomfort and tension accompanying the event and aims to stir viewers’ sensibility and attention through a highly visual and emotional aestheticization. The images put emphasis on a wide range of emotions following the incomprehensible event; images of hate, lust, grief, love, and even of hope are heightened in this first title sequence. The assaulted policeman represents Kevin and the failure of the law and old institutions of power to maintain order (e.g., the Guilty Remnant’s haywire behavior, or the spread and extension of Wayne’s cult). This lack of control and impotence before the incomprehensible event is evident from the zooming out (at the end of the title sequence) that gives the impression of characters being pulled upwards while the others appear to remain still as they are left behind. The image remains still in contrast to the movement of the camera, suggesting that the event itself may be

fixed, and a different experience of time and motion with some characters stuck in the event's aftermath, unable to move on, and others are obsessed with the quest for meaning within this chaotic scenery.



Figure 4. *The Leftovers'* title sequence (Season one).

With a closer look in these opening credits, we see the cracks of the canvas reveal themselves, thus showing how everyone's life has been shattered—an omnipresent disruption of the ordinary with which they must live. This is also apparent in the flashback episode pre-Sudden Departure “The Garveys at Their Best” (S01E09), where we notice cracks appearing on the Garveys' living room wall as the camera towers above Kevin with a high-angle shot to capture his powerless position in front of this visible incongruity in his family space. Chasms and spectral disruptions continuously manifest themselves in *The Leftovers* to put the traumatic event aesthetically and rhetorically at the core of its narrative. The series often foregrounds how the transient and mysterious aspect of its reality is not always what it appears to be in the same way pavement art illustrates road cracks as we can see in the first episode of the second season. With a bird's-eye-view shot of the cracks, a statue of the Holy Virgin, and a number seven pointing at the cracks, the shot seems heavy of apocalyptic religious connotations. The camera slowly zooms in to focus on the cracks in a mysterious documentary-like manner.

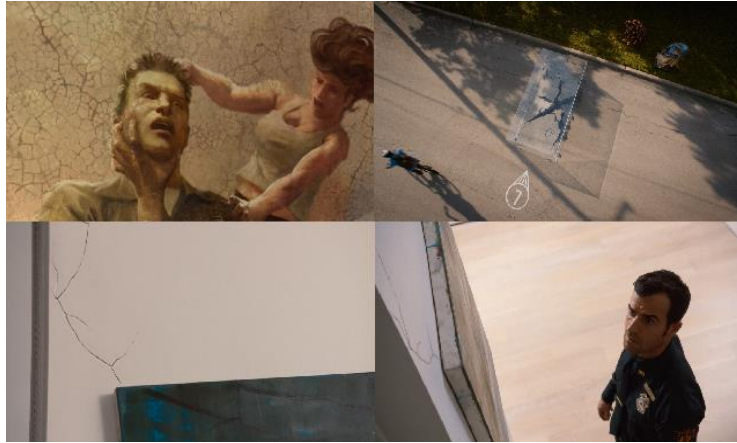


Figure 5. Cracks in *The Leftovers'* diegesis.

Another shot of a baby echoes the baby Jesus doll in “B.J. and the A.C.” or the statue of the mother losing her baby in the very first episode. The shot of the “flying” baby echoes the mother/baby statue that is illustrated in the novel as:

[...] a creepy bronze sculpture produced by one of the high school art teachers. It was supposed to show a baby floating out of the arms of its astonished mother, ascending toward heaven, but something had misfired. Kevin was no art critic, but it always looked to him like the baby was falling instead of rising, and the mother might not be able to catch it.

(Perrotta 24)

The statue is filmed from a low angle shot in the pilot of the TV adaptation, perhaps to connote this impression of the baby falling instead of rising and the helpless nature of the mother in catching her baby. The direction of her hair due to the imaginary wind suggests this lowering movement and her “leftover” state connected to the earth and the downside while the upward movement of her clothes close to the baby along and the position of the camera towards the sky stress that this is indeed a rising – a piercing separation accompanied by the facial expressions of desperation.



Figure 6. The opening credits and Mapleton statue: picturing absence and idealizing the Departed (“Pilot”, S01E01).

The use of pan camera movements highlights the variety and breadth of scenes of grief caused by the Sudden Departure. As we move forward into watching the show, the pieces of the puzzle accumulate and appear even more out of place; that is to say, the mystery surrounding the departed could fall into place despite some apparent incongruities. All parts of the painting in these opening credits seem intertwined and come together to construct a whole picture towards the end, perhaps promising us the revelation and denouement, that each plotline and character arc will eventually make sense for the whole meaning of the show at the end.

The second season chooses to adopt a more distanced stance into the event itself and shows us the trace and the aftermath of the departure; it aesthetically represents absence through the empty silhouettes remaining on the photos, adding a nostalgic quality yet still conveying the spectral void left by the shadowy figures of the present-absent departed. The paradoxically cheerful country song by Iris Dement “Let the Mystery Be”⁵⁴ points to the show’s ideology; letting the mystery be, by stressing out the ambiguity and the absence of single clear-cut meaning given to the lost characters or to the perplexed viewers, as all signs remain ambivalent (Hatchuel, *Le troisième côté*, 84), thereby asserting the presence of ambiguous and mysterious elements as part of the show’s identity. The photographs function as a *memento mori*;⁵⁵ they are spectral in their representation of the absent and how the remaining living remember them and the moments they lived together captured in that particular instant of the photograph; they keep living with their haunting image and memory always with them wherever they go. The photographs of the title sequences either represent real memories and pictures of the departed or they simply stand for the “leftovers” continuing their lives while still haunted by the shadows of the departed (85).

However, it is a form of misdirection that comes to establish the illusion of moving past the grief and the Sudden Departure; we tend to believe no one is really depressed or on the verge of destruction but we are soon reminded that this is a story about the ways in which people abandon getting past their grief, how they attempt living again after the collapse of civilization;

⁵⁴ “Everybody’s wonderin’ what and where they all came from / Everybody’s worryin’ ‘bout where they’re gonna go when the whole thing’s done / But no one knows for certain and so it’s all the same to me / I think I’ll just let the mystery be.
Some say once you’re gone, you’re gone forever / And some say you’re gonna come back.
Some say you rest in the arms of the Savior if in sinful ways you lack.
Some say that they’re coming back in a garden / Bunch of carrots and little sweet peas.
I think I’ll just let the mystery be [...]” (“Let the Mystery Be”).

⁵⁵ This is discussed in the next part of the research on spectral media to reflect on the aesthetics of haunting and absence in TV and photographs.

it's a (post)apocalyptic story, where the world has ended and the leftovers still need to deal with it and try to make sense of the event, of their existence and the new laws in their seemingly meaningless universe. In this manner, the narrative remains in the twilight zone and exhibits its multiple voices and readings as meaning is deconstructed in a way which allows the adaptation to thrive in an ocean of truths proper to the audience, and even to any type of audience, be it those who are familiar with the source text or not, or those who just entered the mystifying absurd world of the TV series *in medias res*.

1.1.3. *Westworld's textual ghosts*

The series *Westworld* resurrects the spirit of the 1973 movie with Yul Brynner and could also be subject to the haunting presence of the prequel *Futureworld* (Heffron, 1976) and the short-lived CBS TV series *Beyond Westworld* (1980).⁵⁶ The HBO version reviews the western genre, already satirized in Crichton's movie, and reframes it in a contemporary perspective. This temporal re-contextualization underscores the uncanny and "unhomely" aspect of the HBO series as an adaptation, putting the familiar setting on the borders of the strange. Throughout the first two seasons, the showrunners scatter hints that can be mere playful references to the source text or more complex elements used as a way of foreshadowing certain events. The few images or references to the film which are included in the show seem to only serve the entertaining purpose of recognition. The series is an expanded adaptation of the film as it only takes up the core concept of Crichton's writing and directing and develops it. Nonetheless, the first season could still be considered as a reboot since it establishes the context of the hosts' rebellion shown in the film by focusing on the real causes behind their dysfunction and uprising.

The major events of *Westworld* (1973), i.e., the hosts' rebellion and malfunctioning, are not excavated to their core in the show's first season. Instead, viewers are provided a glimpse of the film's foundational storyline – the hosts become sentient – but this plot thread is extended by adding the "maze" storyline. In this way, the host characters of the TV adaptation do not rebel until the end of the first season, when Maeve guides the other hosts to kill Delos employees, while the chaos and the consequences surrounding this rebellion are only developed in the second season and therefore, they are used as a major cliffhanger for the first-season finale.

Westworld's first season is more likely a preboot⁵⁷ or an unfinished remake of the movie; its last episode announces that the second season would adapt the film's events, the hosts' full rebellion, and is thereby still using the source text as raw material. The second season gives us insight into what all hosts would have done in the film had we had access to an intimate account

⁵⁶ In 2007, another text was almost added to the intricate web of adaptations of the *Westworld* franchise as a remake of Crichton's film was announced, but director Tarsem Singh eventually dropped the project. The film was supposed to star Arnold Schwarzenegger.

⁵⁷ Preboot is a coined word combining prequel and reboot. See Andrew Scahill's "Serialized Killers: Prebooting Horror in *Bates Motel* and *Hannibal*".

of their personal “Journey into Night”.⁵⁸ It extends the narrative to other storylines such as the guests’ surveillance, giving us more details about Delos’s plans behind the amusement park,⁵⁹ and the possibility of transferring consciousness. It also reveals where most hosts are programmed to go (a virtual place called the Valley beyond) and gives more depth to some characters such as William (The Man in Black).

The second season is expected to live up to viewers’ expectations after the first season. It is therefore subject to the everlasting debate on fidelity. It is also an opportunity for the writers to explore the other parts of the park such as Shogunworld, Rajworld and Warworld. However, this season replicates the Medieval and Roman worlds from the movie, which are nonexistent in the first season. Shogunworld is particularly brought to the fore to highlight the way the western genre is anchored to Japanese cinema. The choice of this park instead of another has been discussed by the showrunners,⁶⁰ as Nolan and Joy explain, it was primarily a matter of personal taste and a passion for samurai movies as well as a need to explore the experience of the park outside of the western world, in short, to de-westernize *Westworld*.

Shogunworld becomes an adaptation of *Westworld*, a Japanese version of the town of Sweetwater where the park’s main narratives occur. In the eyes of *Westworld*’s viewers, the *Westworld* park is the first one encountered, i.e., the “original” and Shogunworld becomes an adaptation, its “copy” – but this relationship should perhaps be reversed, given that western films have been inspired by samurai films. In “Akane No Mai”, the show diegetically adapts its own story in Shogunworld, where the scene from the first season’s episode “Dissonance Theory” is re-created with Hector and Armistice’s Japanese doubles attacking the Japanese version of Sweetwater.

We overhear the song which extra-diegetically plays along the killing sequence in the first season episode. It is also adapted, becoming a classical music cover of The Rolling Stones’ “Paint it Black” and the piano is replaced by Japanese instruments as we hear traditional flutes. As one can observe from the comparative shots of *Westworld* and *Shogunworld* (see Fig. 7)

⁵⁸ This is the title of *Westworld*’s first episode of the second season.

⁵⁹ This recalls every other app or social media’s access to our personal data and their (mis)use. This is a common theme in futuristic shows and seemingly on the borders of becoming a *Black Mirror* episode representing the danger of technologies in the near future. Many contemporary American TV shows investigate the idea of technologies’ use as a tool for surveillance and a catalyst of conspiracy theories, which is another favorite theme of Jonathan Nolan as demonstrated in *Person of Interest*.

⁶⁰ Hurley, Laura. “Why *Westworld* Season 2 Went With Shogun World Instead Of Others.” *Cinema Blend*, 10 Apr. 2018, <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/2400272/why-westworld-season-2-went-with-shogun-world-instead-of-others>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

from season one and season two, the activation of viewers' memory can operate through visual references in a shot-to-shot metadaptation of Sweetwater and the Westworld park hosts from season one. The reiteration of these scenes equally reveals the different color palettes and color temperature of each universe; a darkened black and blue one for Shogunworld and more yellowish desert-like tones in Westworld. This makes them recognizable and marks their affiliation to their respective cinematic genres.

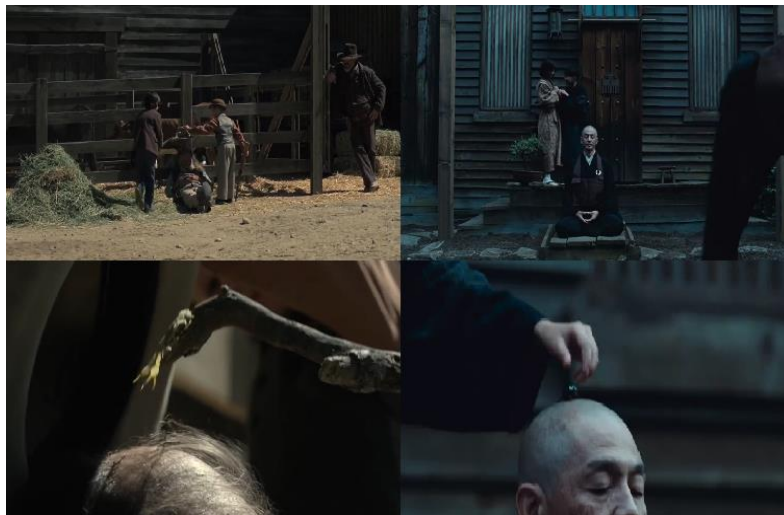


Figure 7. *Westworld* ("The Original", S01E01) versus *Shogunworld* ("Akane No Mai", S02E05).

Memories of past viewing are activated each time one encounters a narrative, any textual encounter evokes and invokes memories of past viewing, thereby allowing each individual to make up their own interpretation and reading of the narrative at hand. Adaptations are even more open to such recollections as they are consciously built on previous texts. One could even think of the Shogunworld in season two as a revival of the hosts and their stories from the sequel *Futureworld*, where samurai hosts are chasing the human characters. The first season is already quite distant from its source text, thus limiting pressure on the show to be relatively faithful to the film in its second season. However, the first season essentially becomes the new source text with a finale that stirs the narrative in a specific direction where the showrunners need to find a balance between remaking and extending the film (the hosts acting out and killing the guests) while minding narrative coherence by ensuring continuity with the first season, thus keeping an internal faithfulness between seasons of the same show. The second season is therefore expected to keep some similar features or foundational elements from its first counterpart that would unite the episodes, create a flow, and facilitate immersion⁶¹ for all types of viewers.

⁶¹ Surely, this is one of the basic features of serial storytelling, but one should keep in mind that total disruption and distance from previous seasons is also intentionally operated by showrunners in the

In many ways, this TV adaptation not only aims at triggering memories from season to season, but it also includes all types of viewers in such activation of their memory while it relies on its knowing audience to recognize clues from the source text and other previous texts from the *Westworld* franchise in order to recall, compare, appreciate, and seek meaning in such resonances. For example, in *Westworld* Bernard comes across a non-functioning host, in sub-level B82: the Gunslinger from the source film. Its apparition is brief, as the robot stands at a distance in the dark, and Bernard's flashlight reveals the immobile figure of the host for a very short moment, thus figuratively shedding light on it but without paying much attention to the significance of its presence-absence.



Figure 8. *The Ghost of the Gunslinger* ("Phase Space", S02E06).

The nod to the film's antagonist is plainly voluntary and seems to function as an incentive of the haunting trace of authorship from the source text; a literal skeleton in the closet lying there underground in the facility, dead but still haunting the narrative. The shot in this scene is even more revelatory of the haunting and haunted state of the adaptation as the shadow of the Gunslinger is figuratively and literally visible, creating a double vision of this "original" figure of the robot. What is even more striking is that the host is willingly kept at a distance where the features of his face are blurry from the viewer's position (as well as Bernard's). This points to the adapters' choice of leaving the source text in a pseudo-visible position but kept away from their work, where the references can please viewers who are familiar with the source without disrupting the show's main narrative.

opposite aim of destabilizing the audience, as we have seen done in *The Leftovers* for a small amount of narrative time. Immersion is also possible through the deconstruction of all narrative conventions along with viewers' expectations, thereby perhaps even arousing interest and curiosity among a less purist audience.

The reference in this sequence arouses many questions about the nature of the connection between the source text and its adaptation; is *Westworld* simply pleasing its knowing audience with an Easter egg or is the show a sequel to Crichton's film in which the Gunslinger is diegetically real? Nevertheless, *Westworld* clearly uses the past and the source text as intertexts and Easter eggs to tease the knowing audience, encouraging what Jason Mittell refers to as "forensic fandom" practices, i.e., an active engagement in the process of reception and comprehension of the text.

What is compelling in the *Westworld* franchise is that every adaptation relates to the preceding one and keeps the script from the 1970s movie as a background storyline relevant to its plot, for instance the main incident in the Delos Park, or the predominant symbolic character of the Gunslinger. *Futureworld* is a sequel that revisits Crichton's spectral text, which is literally portrayed as an abandoned ghostly place in the scene where the reporters visit the ruins of Westworld. One of the most significant scenes that marks the haunting status of the Gunslinger and the source within this sequel is set in Delos, where the scientists test a dream recorder and have access to the main female protagonist's mind (Tracy Ballard who is also called Socks). In this dream sequence, she is saved in a hero-like fantasy from men wearing red uniforms by the Gunslinger and they finally appear dancing then kissing. In this manner, the movie sets the tone for the complex haunting nature between the sequel and its source text as the unsteady camera shows a series of images including the everlasting presence-absence of the Gunslinger. No matter the time or place, he always returns in different scenes, different texts, and media. Here, the dream also takes account of the merging and fusion in the work of adapting the movie as it is portrayed in her fictional romance with the Gunslinger, which could be construed as an embrace of the film's story and conventions – the dream of a faithful adaptation.



Figure 9. Dream sequence in *Futureworld*.

This intimate dream about the Gunslinger also reflects the sequel's attitude towards its source: embracing it, acknowledging its spectral state, and playing with the idea of fidelity to

the preceding film as a rewarding element for its knowing audience. Other readings of this sequence suggest the male dominance and threatening demeanor of the Gunslinger who is arousing both fear and eroticism as the fantasy figure of the primal (robotic) alpha male. The fact that the dream sequence is monitored by men (Delos employees) around her stresses the voyeuristic intrusion into Ballard's fantasies as they are visually recorded with Delos machines. In a less subtle way than HBO's *Westworld* does, the Gunslinger also appears on the screen of the *Futureworld* park scientists as a filmed sequence from the source text, thus inviting more reminiscences and haunting from the film into the adaptation.

Some elements of similarity between the texts extend to the type of camera techniques and shots used to convey those themes. By way of example, the shot of an open eye in *Westworld's* title sequence is reminiscent of the opening scene of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) which is also reproduced in *Futureworld*. The latter lays out themes of identity (as a human or robot, the issue of cloning and doubles), the perception of reality, the very act of filming and referring to the medium of TV with the camera use. It also evokes the reflection of the self through the eye mirroring another embedded image in its iris and pupil.

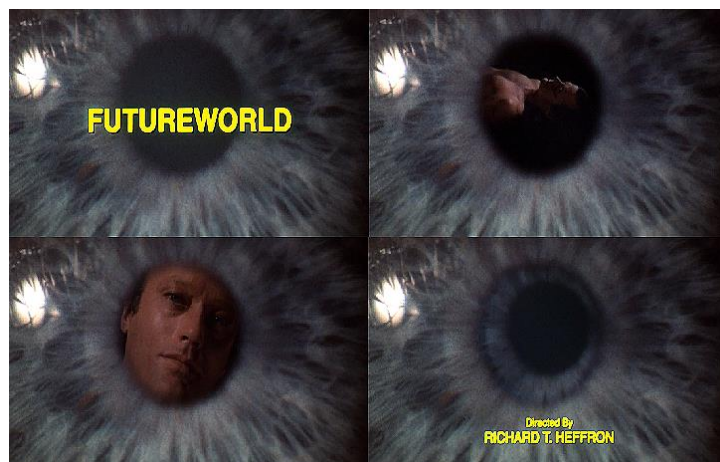


Figure 10. Futureworld opening sequence.

In fact, the camera lens, through which images of the narrative's scenes unfold, first reveals the shot of an eye's pupil then zooms out inside the eye while keeping the original layer of the first eye in black and white. The embedded shot shows a host's body and zooms in on its head, then its eye until the filmed eye's pupil comes to replace the initial eye's pupil. It slowly includes and takes the shape of a single eye; this becomes emblematic of the layers of texts in the adaptation process with the eye-within-an-eye structure (from black and white to colors that possibly hint at the shift to the cinematic and technological evolution)—a technique reproduced

by HBO's *Westworld* with a similar reflection of the park's universe in the shot of an eye before the title sequence comes to an end.



Figure 11. All in the eye of the beholder: *Westworld* season 1 title sequence.

The iris's lines, called limbal rings, reveal the intricate web of the TV adaptation's making while the title card on it announces first Jonathan Nolan's role as producer, and then that it is an adaptation based on Crichton's book. Capturing the essence of interconnected texts in the adaptation process, HBO's *Westworld* reiterates some elements from each sequel and remake. It echoes *Futureworld*'s corporation conspiracies and the doubling of the robots with the replication of human characters into hosts. The 2016 TV adaptation equally reminds us of its serial counterpart *Beyond Westworld* by invoking similar themes around evil scientific projects and confusing robots for humans.

The Leftovers encounters a different horizon of expectations regarding the movement from text to screen, as it does not belong to a canon, but the adaptation of the novel involves questions of the supremacy of literature over TV series, its hierarchical status, and matters of authorship that will be discussed in a following chapter. Ending *The Leftovers*' first season required a change of setting, extending the theme of apocalyptic fear, and keeping the traumatic traces of October 14th despite the evolution in time and space; the mourning process continues, and the show does too. Despite the wide range of changes which are introduced to Perrotta's original story, the HBO adaptation of *The Leftovers* kept the ending of its first season closely similar to the novel. This indicates the circularity of the events, a certain repetition, as this choice of keeping the same ending for the first season may also be a way of returning to the novel one last time to mark the end of the adaptation process. Oddly enough, this season's finale carries a happy and hopeful tune for a Lindelof drama that featured so much violence throughout

the preceding episodes. In the following chapter, we explore the ghostly influence of the showrunners' work as co-adapters in the reception of the TV shows.

All the changes in these adaptations testify to the great need for a return to the past and its renewal; *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* address their textual ghosts in a way that allows them to become independent and still acknowledge the presence of their source text. They recycle the old material and appropriate the storyworld, adapting it to the future, and underlining their own ideologies. Ford's character expresses the complexity of the process of adaptation in one of the first season's episodes: "It's a tricky thing; weaving the old into the new" ("The Stray", S01E03). Indeed, these TV series display a certain self-consciousness of their status as "adaptation expansions" or "metadaptations"⁶² and are self-referential in the way they subtly bring attention to their source texts through references to haunting, the traumatic return of the past, the repetition of key scenes from the source, and the use of multiple references or quotes. They challenge the traditional form of adaptation and subsequently refute the hierarchical status of the source text and its authoritative (and authorial) "almighty" power.

⁶² Joseph and Letort refer to *The Leftovers* for example as a "metadaptation" ("How to End" 113). Joseph, Charles and Delphine Letort. "How to End with an Opening: TV Series Continuity and Metadaptation" *Adapting Endings from Book to Screen: Last Pages, Last Shots*, edited by Armelle Parey and Shannon Wells-Lassagne, Routledge, 2020, pp. 112-123.

1.2. Chapter 2: Resonances beyond the Source Text

Addressing the spectral aspect of adaptations is synonymous with designing a space of textuality that is not restricted to the source text. The spectral breaches textual boundaries to allow other texts and authors to emerge to the surface by unburying long-forgotten stories or seemingly disconnected synapses of works of art that come together with the purpose of generating a certain meaning for the audience. According to Jonathan Gray, John Fiske's "ghost text" is a phrase that refers to the endlessness of stories, intertextuality and "texts living beyond their time, always with unfinished business to perform" (125).

Spectrality can be considered as denying the possibility of clear-cut fidelity without disregarding the intertextual capacity of adaptation because it essentially assumes the principle of absolute openness to textual and authorial (but non-authoritative) presence and alterity. Any form of obsession or clinging to a certain fidelity to the "original" would consequently impoverish intertextuality, as many anti-fidelity adaptation critics continuously argue in the favor of polyphony. Since ghostly textuality is concerned with the textual traces from the past that can re-write and re-shape the present, our interest here is to examine the ways in which adaptations are haunted beyond the source within a long and large tradition of interpreting and incorporating hypertextual elements ranging from intertexts to paratexts surrounding the TV adaptation.

Beyond intertextuality's aim of referencing a text, transfictionality puts rewriting and reinterpretation at the core of its task by inviting several works into the equation; in this sense, the latter is closer to spectral adaptations in its acts of repetition. Transfictionality involves the relationship between several texts with common narrative features:

Par « transfictionnalité », j'entends le phénomène par lequel au moins deux textes, du même auteur ou non, se rapportent conjointement à une même fiction, que ce soit par reprise de personnages, prolongement d'une intrigue préalable ou partage d'univers fictionnel.

(Saint-Gelais 7)

Sharing common fictional universes or characters, transfictional relationships between narratives re-use and repeat some elements in a way that is closely affiliated to adaptive tendencies in general whether in the form of parody, fan fiction or allusions. Intertextual references serve as reminders that echo other works. The awareness of such intertexts expands

the “forensic” attitude towards the adaptation as viewers come to examine the similarities between the works for creators to have chosen these references; some could act as foreshadowing techniques or even spoilers, others are mere playful allusions.

In *The Memory of Tiresias*, Mikhail Iampolski reiterates the power of reception of intertextual references and the idea that viewers are the ones who unite a text through their cultural memory. Taking the myth of Tiresias⁶³ as an example, the Russian film scholar shows us how the Greek mythology of memory can help us shed light on the concept of cultural circulation of ideas giving shape to the collective imaginary. He examines how sight, and thereby the act of watching, without understanding and without memory, is useless, in the same way Odysseus’ mother sees him but does not recognize him. This is critical to the understanding of the same serial and complex text but is not a necessity in adaptations, as the unknowing audience’s lack of memory allows them to gain a different experience of the narrative. Iampolski establishes the importance of viewers’ memories and the need to remember to make sense of cultural textual fragments. Spectral connections are therefore made through the continuity of memory and viewers’ ability to “place what you see alongside what you know, alongside what has already been” (2).

Jonathan Gray’s *Show Sold Separately* (2010) gives us insight into the use of paratexts⁶⁴ in films and TV series which ultimately asserts the continuity of stories after the fact. The author engages in an examination of the role of paratextual elements and cultural context in creating and altering the meaning of a given televisual text (Gray 2). He explains how these paratexts are perceived as filters rather than simple extensions of the narrative as they shape the viewers’ interaction with the text, their initial impressions on the material and subsequently highlight the text’s ideological stance and the way it is interpreted. Paratexts “continue to give us information, ways of looking at the film or show [...] *Their work is never over*, and their effects on what the film or show *is*—on what it means to its audiences—are continual” (Gray, *emphasis added*, 10-11). In asserting the paratexts’ perpetual effect on a text, Gray points to their transformation into “a niche and fan property” (17) as they become mostly part of a mainstream culture that does not necessarily involve watching the show itself.

⁶³ In Greek Mythology, Tiresias, a blind seer, is known for his prophecies and has played a major role in helping and guiding heroes and legends such as Oedipus’.

⁶⁴ Note the difference between paratextuality (a peripheral framing a show) and intertextuality (a show framing another show) (Gray 117).

In adaptations, paratexts set up a cultural text for the audience who is not familiar with the source, thus creating cultural memory formed through the omnipresence of references, memes, and cultural products outside the consumption of the text. For the TV audience or the unknowing audience, paratexts provide a sense of recognition as if fragments of the text were buried in their unconscious ready to be uncovered and assembled in a puzzle-like manner while the knowing audience is more centered on the recollection process as they have already encountered such elements to make the connections cognitively. In this light, paratextual elements in adaptation hold different functions according to their audience. Their spectrality oscillates between recognition and recollection. Their primary role remains an alteration or shaping of the viewer reception, perception, and personal experience to understand the meaning of the text.

For Fiske, the audience's comprehension and cultural memory take the form of what he calls, "moments" of TV, i.e., the realm of reception and subjective interpretation that is open to the audience through its interaction with the text; these moments are indeed flexible and in constant flux as the audience is the creator of meaning (57). Fiske's *Moments of Television* offers a critical approach to watching television as a form of pleasure and knowledge by underlining the necessity of shifting the attention towards "[n]either the text nor the audience" but the process and activities of viewing. This involves a study of modes of reception and creation such as intertextuality and everything that "require[s] us to understand television in terms of diversity and difference rather than of unity and homogeneity" (60). This notion of "moments" refuses the acknowledgement of the separate binary entities of "text" and "audience" and comprises several modes of watching. This is in concordance with the spectral resonances of the TV adaptations we investigate in this chapter.

The aim of this chapter is to sketch the textual relations in adaptations by identifying the remaining trace or the resonances. The author of these textual remains and connections can be the audience, the crew of directors, writers, or even actors. As layers of past texts and memory build up to mold the palimpsestous narratives, *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* prove to be serial adaptations bearing various textual traces and endowed with an openness to their paratextual elements and intertextual references. It is equally significant to tackle the issue of generic conventions and mythology in the spread and rewriting of paratexts or intertexts. We will argue that these are narrative devices shape the cyclical and haunting nature of these adaptations.

1.2.1. Intertexts, hypertexts, and paratexts

1.2.1.1. Fan creations

In this manner, spectral influences reach far beyond the source text and rely on viewers' reception of certain paratexts. Their interactions with paratextual elements sustain extra-textual proliferation of the core meaning of the adaptation, sometimes even developing new storylines through fan fiction narratives. Furthermore, fan artistic projects serve as another form of resonance to the TV adaptation and show how individual and collective memory can be used to create a new form of text. *Westworld's* (1973) fan posters serve as an adequate example of the introduction of references from other narratives; this is evident from the use of the film's poster and its merging with the TV show's poster.



Figure 12. American and French posters of *Westworld* (1973).

Using the same taglines, this fan poster is more similar to the French poster of the 1970s movie than the American one. Such fan-made posters are indications of the wide range of possibilities and connections to be made between the adaptations and its ghost texts in the form of a mash-up. Furthermore, this asserts the power of reception and interpretation in the eternal return of narratives as devoted viewers become the writers of new narratives through their own tales by inscribing the notion that there is no limit to the spectral. Besides fan creations, the film's sequels have also kept elements from the official poster to mark the adaptation's connection to its source.

Yul Brynner's figure is recycled through paratextual creations as it carries a whole canon with him, from John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) to Crichton's *Westworld* (1973), and as such he can be considered as a ghostly actor, whose shadow looms over the western genre and the *Westworld* adaptations. Indeed, the movie's poster paints a liminal picture of the actor as a gunslinger and as a standing figure of the franchise. By portraying the uncanny dislocated robotic face and by blending science-fiction and western tropes, the image of the Gunslinger is highly charged with uncanny features from both genres that are revisited and criticized.

HBO's *Westworld* acts in a similar manner with a portrayal of Dolores as the doubled robotic self, split between her sweet ranch girl role and her shadow self, Wyatt, who is seeking vengeance on the park's creators. The TV show's fans did not miss the opportunity to make the connection not only between the source and its adaptation, but especially between the two characters. The same familiar figure of Yul Brynner's character is adapted by viewers on the internet to draw parallels between the film's Gunslinger and its serial adaptation, thus associating the character of Dolores, "The Original" (the name of the first episode of the TV show), who is the first host created in the park, to the violent sentient shooter. The fans' careful recreation of the character of the Gunslinger in their own customized way is done through yet another rebooting of the past in an almost teasing manner, thus taking further authority over the texts by appropriating the TV show and making it their own source text.

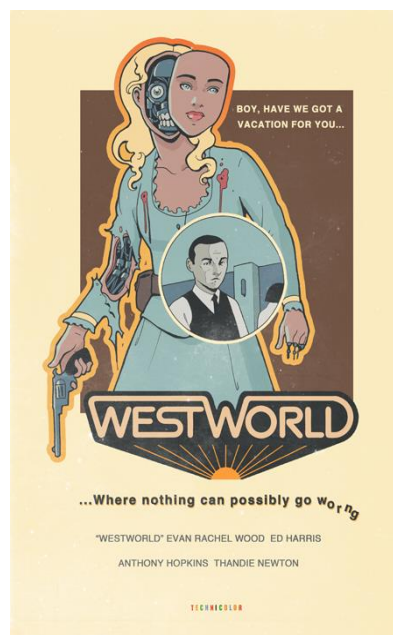


Figure 13. *Westworld* fan art - Dolores as *The Gunslinger*.

Towards the end of the first season of *Westworld*, one of the male protagonists and park’s creators, Robert Ford, is killed by the revolutionary female figure; this might suggest that the female characters of the show are given agency and strength, but in fact Dolores is invited to do so by Ford in the scene preceding the murder. He tells her that she needs to become Wyatt, but as she makes clear from the first episode of the following season, “Journey into Night”, she refuses to play the roles of either the innocent ranch girl or the ruthless killer; she decides to embrace her true self, thus stepping away from the gender codes (and digital codes *per se*) imposed by the park creators.

Moreover, the addition of Wyatt’s storyline into the park’s narrative is revelatory in the choice of the “super villain’s” name; Wyatt is clearly a reference to Wyatt Earp (Wilkins 32), a well-inscribed cultural figure in the American Old West history as he is mostly famous for having fought the gunfight at O.K. Corral in 1881. His story has been adapted in fiction, film, and TV shows as the legendary figure of the lawman that has a duty to bring justice. The names of most characters in *Westworld* are nods to the culture relating to the cinematic western genre. This is identified as another form of return to the genre’s myths, while at the same time it marks the return of historical events added to fictional narratives.

During the first season’s airing, the actress playing Dolores, Evan Rachel Wood, who is bound by her HBO contract not to reveal any spoilers, nonetheless threw out some hints about her character in her public Instagram account.

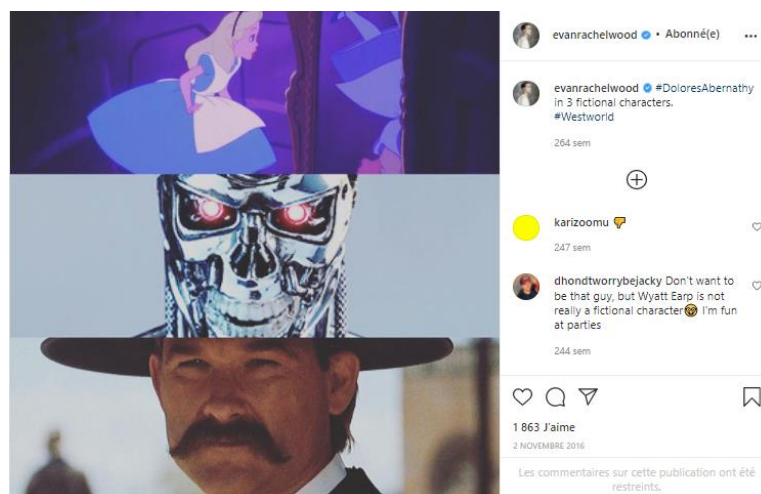


Figure 14. Evan Rachel Wood's description of Dolores on social media.

The post describes her character through pictures of three fictional figures. As such, she defines Dolores as Alice from the Disney adaptation eponymous film (1951) of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, a reference to *The Terminator* (James Cameron 1984), and an image of

Kurt Russell from the movie *Tombstone* (Cosmatos and Jarre 1993), who plays Wyatt Earp.⁶⁵ One of the followers' comments in Wood's post rightfully points to the fact that Wyatt is not an American fictional figure; it is rather a historical and mythical one that has been adapted countless times in western films, TV shows or other forms. This stresses Earp's spectral figure as both historical and mythical or fictional and its omnipresence within this TV adaptation always mixing fiction and reality. Nodding to *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946) at many levels, the resonances surrounding Earp extend to the same spectral authority we mentioned for Yul Brynner's role.

According to Corkin, the spectral presence of the actors is manifested through their characters in westerns such as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *Red River* (1948) in the case of John Wayne and Henry Fonda, as their intertextual ghostly presence adds meaning to the story and inevitably influences viewers' reception. In his *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History*, Corkin recognizes the great reliance of westerns on intertextual references to incite the audience "to associate the roles played by featured performers with those that have defined their screen images" (27) as he further states that it is a trace remaining in viewers' imagination:

The characters played by Wayne and Fonda exude this vision of heroism, as does the residual intertextual presence of Tom Joad and Abraham Lincoln (in Fonda's case) [...] That is, they were figures of legendary dimension, whether drawn from fact or from resonant fictions. Such presences may give these films a resonance that allows them, through these personas, to offer an idealized and mythic presentation of national character and destiny that apparently transcends historically specific circumstances.

(28)

Precisely because of such resonances, and specifically in the case of adaptations, TV productions do not hesitate to take advantage of the fame of the various sources and the audience's knowledge to convey their message. Fans and even actors' interaction with the adaptation's paratexts produce more resonances by accentuating the porousness of the boundaries between fiction and reality. This is largely done through the generic codes and the mythology on which they are built in this TV adaptation. Similarly, the actors' involvement in the recreation of meaning through pretextual elements and the following post seem to

⁶⁵ Moshtof, Mariella. "Is Dolores Wyatt On 'Westworld'? This Theory Proves There May Be One Big Surprise Left." *Romper*, 4 Dec 2016. <https://www.romper.com/p/is-dolores-wyatt-on-westworld-this-theory-proves-there-may-be-one-big-surprise-left-23873>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2018.

corroborate the strong ties between text and pretext. This shapes the spectral and palimpsestuous nature of the show as an adaptation and especially as a complex narrative that is subject to different influences (both from the inside and the outside of the text) on the reception process and its ensuing interpretations.

Such interactive textual dialogues between various platforms and agents are resonant with immersive transmedia storytelling techniques that are widespread in successful adaptative works such as *Westworld*. Henry Jenkins' pioneering take on transmediality is well known and centers on the way media industries endorse such changes in viewing and consuming what he calls the "convergence culture" at the intersection of different platforms and context. Convergence culture relates to the "flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2) which is largely strengthened by participatory culture interacting with each other and with the texts.

Transmedia storytelling means that the same text is reiterated and retold through numerous media and platforms. A few conditions of transmedia storytelling are laid out by Mélanie Bourdaa in her article "'Following the Pattern': The Creation of an Encyclopaedic Universe with Transmedia Storytelling" as:

[...] the latest way to imagine and create a TV show; now the story has to be complex with a compelling seriality and mythology, engaging for fans to dive emotionally and intellectually into, innovative in its narration and in the way it makes fans interact. It has to have a community of practices and a solid fan base, and finally it has to spread its story and narration across various media platforms. It also has to support fans' collective intelligence in the form of participative sites [...].

(213)

HBO's *Westworld* suggests an immersive experience for its audience through the website "discoverwestworld"⁶⁶. The audience is treated like the guests of the park; they can book their stay at the park by setting their date of arrival and return. The visitors can discover extensions of the narrative such as the map of the park and other ways of providing information about the park and the Mesa Hub. To reflect the chaos of the diegetic universe, the website is updated during the airing season with the hosts taking control of what was once an invitation

⁶⁶ "Discoverwestworld." HBO. <https://discoverwestworld.com/#>. Accessed 08 Feb. 2019.

to explore the park by offering a unique immersive experience which is now promising a “life without loops”. Likewise, the show’s production included a handbook on the Delos Incorporation website available for fans to download. The Delos experience represents a form of “gaming” that involves the viewer as a player actively involved and immersed into the transmedial outlet of the show, thus suggesting that the latter’s position is that of a ghostly/privileged observer.

Unlike “discoverwestworld,” this corporate guidebook is supposedly meant for Delos employees, but it is similarly affected by the hosts’ uprising and revolution as we can see in the few pages marked by blood stains, digital print marks with blood and notes written in red by the park’s employees asking for help. Blending the fictional universe and reality, this kind of content gives insight into the characters’ loops and storylines as it delineates the park’s behind-the-scenes mechanisms from host behavior and manufacturing to host intake protocol.

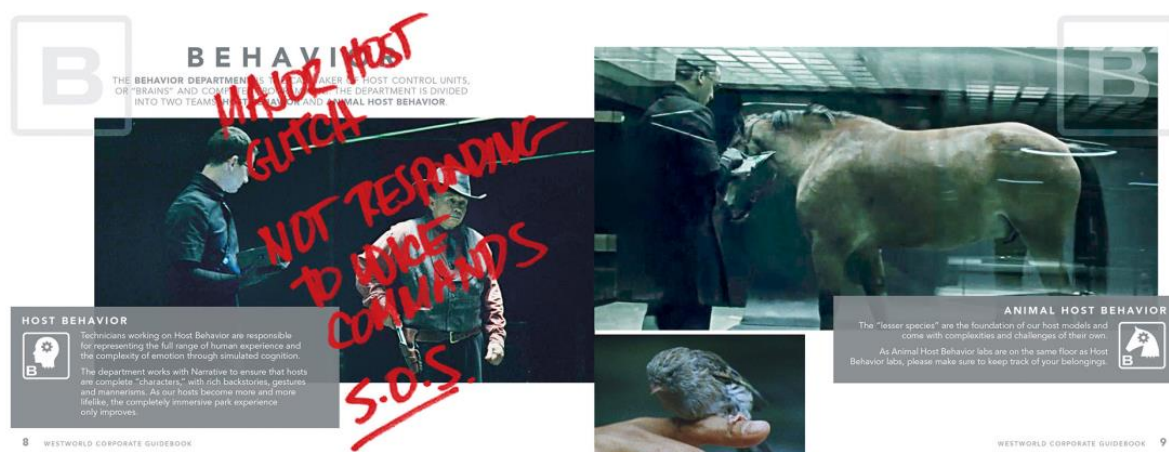


Figure 15. Multiple layers to Westworld's transmedia offerings, distinguishing the official (diegetic) discourse from Delos and the transgressive (but actually official) discourse from HBO Studios' Westworld.

In providing new knowledge about the narrative, such websites are then considered as transmedia storytelling as they are not simply promotional websites, but also contributors to sharing and adding content to the overall narrative.

1.2.2. Palimpsests and traces:

The understanding of palimpsests is essential to our analysis of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* as serial adaptations epitomizing textual relations not only with their source text, but especially with other derivational and proliferating texts (including the generated layering of viewing experiences and memory involved in reading adaptations). Hutcheon highlights the spectral features of adaptations as adaptations as their layers of repetition establish an ideal environment for the specter to appear and thrive:

[...] adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.

(Hutcheon 8, emphasis in original)

Hutcheon delves deeper in her examination of textual connections to consider adaptation as a form of a palimpsestuous experience related to the audience's reception of an adaptation such as the pleasure of recognizing familiar elements from the source text and references. Therefore, such encounters become a conscious experience of the spectral presence-absence of numerous texts and their dynamic interactions. Hutcheon's view of adaptations as a site of what she calls "palimpsestuous intertextuality" broadly reflects the heterogeneous and spectral nature of adaptations. This sets forth an understanding of adaptations as a broad web of references urging viewers to gather their memories and knowledge of exterior texts and authors and approach the adaptation from another standpoint.

Understandably, the pleasure of the audience primarily lies in their desire to see a combination of new and old elements as they revel in the presence of traces left by the source or other texts. Their satisfaction with the adaptation's material and with its references depends on their familiarity with the source text, their expectations, or their knowledge of the authors, showrunners, producers, etc. This familiarity challenges viewers' memory and equally offers a reconsideration of their old perception of that specific work of fiction. Nevertheless, Hutcheon indicates that divergence from the source text is necessary to bring pleasure as one can appreciate the new perspective which is brought to the familiar (115) while she equally informs that pleasure and comfort of the audience mostly prevail in knowing what will happen (114). According to Hutcheon, this is simply translated into repetition with variation i.e., the pleasure

comes indeed “from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4).

Wells-Lassagne makes a similar assumption in her *Television and Serial Adaptation* where she discusses the balance to be established in adaptations between the seemingly paradoxical quest for familiarity and novelty where the adaptation offers a form of reconfiguration of meaning and perspective. In this way, she brings up questions on the status of adaptations based on different manners of receiving it through “[...] varying degrees of awareness of the show’s predecessors (be it simple name recognition, familiarity with the story, or thoughtful analysis of the source) thus defining the show *as an adaptation*” (63, emphasis in original). This certainly represents a great challenge to viewers’ memory and the alteration of old perceptions of the material where the adaptation offers a reformatting (Hutcheon 16). At the same time, this represents a reluctance to discard one of the most important factors in reception in adaptations, the knowledge or ignorance of the fictional work’s origin, and its status as adaptation. This adds to the possible changes that occur in interpretation, recognition of references and memory triggering.

Since *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* are built on several layers of textual and authorial ghosts, these shows invoke different references to canonical authors’ works such as Shakespeare’s, or Lewis Carroll’s, and other resonances to classical or Greek mythology are incorporated throughout the narrative. Viewers are encouraged to become active agents in the comprehension and interpretation of the text. Intertextuality and references help them do so as these types of allusions are haunting the show to stimulate active engagement and interactions. Subsequently, in the narrative’s connections with other texts, the specter does not simply make viewers aware and conscious of the complex seriality but also incites them to take in a quest for truth and meaning.

1.2.2.1. Ghostly actors

Direct references to other texts or authors are not the only memory triggers for adaptation viewers. Spectral resonances are also initiated through viewers’ familiarity with the cast. Some actors become living shadows of their old performances and affect viewers’ perception of their

new characters. Mittell signals the impact of actors' roles on viewers' memory and understanding of the show:

As explored by many scholars of stardom, actors serve as sites of intertextuality, merging viewer memories of previous characters and knowledge about off-screen lives to color our understanding of a role. This intertextual resonance can be heightened through serial narrative, as our engagement with actors stretches out over time and we can witness a star's persona change within the gaps between episodes.

(Mittell, *Complex TV*, 117)

These perceptions are prone to change and evolve with actors' and characters' own development. Their memory is thus reconstructed and used by the shows' creators on purpose to impose a certain image, and to make that specific trace visible in order to manipulate the ensuing impression as an "intertextual resonance" (117). In encountering these actors, viewers are inclined to seek total immersion in the fictive world as part of the tendency towards the suspension of disbelief. However, some roles leave an unforgettable trace, and this creates a sort of dissonance between viewers' willingness to accept the new perception of the actors and their haunting memory trace, an indelible impression in their minds.

This includes the influence of specific character features on viewers' association between two different fictional worlds and two separate characters that seem closely alike. For example, in *Westworld*, one can note the presence of Anthony Hopkins, who inevitably carries the memory of his iconic character from *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), Hannibal Lecter, the clever but dangerous puppet master. The nature of this character can easily be associated with the traits of Ford's character as an authoritative and manipulative God-like figure. Similarly, we can mention Evan Rachel Wood's past roles,⁶⁷ reflected not only in her suffering as an abused host, but also in the empowering and revolutionary role as the original host speaking up for the whole community.

The Leftovers features many ghostly roles taken by notorious actors that may not necessarily share similarities with their roles but are nonetheless influencing the reception process around the character such as Liv Tyler in her role as Arwen from the *Lord of the Rings* (2001) series, and Christopher Eccleston as the 9th doctor in *Doctor Who* (BBC One, 2005-present) with his eccentric side similar to Matt Jamison's own (religious) attitude. At times, a TV show seems to play with these connections, as we can see with Carrie Coon as Gloria in

⁶⁷ As a feminist activist figure and a former victim of sexual and psychological abuse.

Fargo (FX, 2014-present), whose character strongly resonates with Coon's portrayal in *The Leftovers* as Nora Durst; indeed, the writers reinforce this implicit association by making the two characters face the same difficulties in dealing with technological devices. They both seem invisible to machines, subject to irony, and unlucky in mundane life, thus giving the impression that what happens to them can be interpreted as signs from the universe.⁶⁸ These images become inscribed in the collective imaginary and collective memory of viewers and could fit in a comic relief element category. Originally, *Fargo* is a mini-series adaptation of Ethan and Joel Coen's eponymous film (1996). With a simple nod to its source through the title and the motif of the suitcase full of money hidden in the snow at the beginning, *Fargo* restricts its relation to the Cohen brothers' dark comedy film. These resonances between the different texts are even more remarkable given that the FX adaptation is as close to *The Leftovers* as it seems to be to its source text. Despite its status as adaptation, *Fargo* entertains the same level of trace and spectral connections that could be found with any other text.

In the same way, the actors' filmography haunts the audience through real-life events about the cast along with the showrunners' creative and personal background that come together to challenge viewers' separation between life and fiction, thus making it difficult to detach one's knowledge and expectations from the reception and interpretation of the work. This is a transgression of boundaries that separates illusion from reality and enhances the interpretative process from the invested audience. Such permeable borders allow the intrusion of other entities and agencies from the viewer to the author to the character. This is accurate for the ghostly traces left by the actor's performance of a character that influences the reception process and creates a breach between diegetic worlds, consequently creating complex layers of selves and further highlighting the heterogeneous nature of identity.

The shows' creators strongly encourage the proliferation and manifestation of such memory traces as they belong to paratextual elements of the shows. Cardwell comments on these connections in adaptations:

[...] Jordan describes the impact of our knowledge of the earlier performances of an actor upon our viewing as a 'background resonance' that is 'added' to our perception of a character (1981: 197-8); Kaplan writes 'some of the actors' past roles also "haunt" their characters in these films [and programmes]' (1998: 181). The audience's knowledge of characters in television texts is therefore informed by their performative dimension. Resonances of previous

⁶⁸ A more detailed analysis of the sequences of Nora's struggle with the machines is tackled in the fourth chapter of this thesis in relation to technology and mourning.

roles and real-life incidents encourage the viewers to build up their perceptions of the characters actors are playing in a complex layering process.

(Cardwell 91)

Perceptions are altered via these paratexts or “background resonances” and make up the mechanics of haunting at the level of production and responses to such knowledge. *Westworld* constantly refers to other shows, films, paintings, and historical figures.⁶⁹ The “Trace Decay” episode, for example, hints at Hannibal Lecter when the park’s writer, Lee Sizemore, interacts with a cannibal host explaining his “code” of behavior behind eating his victims: “the greatest shame in life is to perish without purpose, which is why I always consume my victims fresh” – thus not only building a metafictional dimension but also alluding at the same time to its own cast, with Anthony Hopkins’ role in *The Silence of the Lambs* in an intertextual reference which adds to the haunting presence of the actor and the memory trace he carries with him. The show’s hauntedness by other texts is further enhanced when looking at the filming location in California where most of the show is filmed.⁷⁰ It uses the same set as *Deadwood* (HBO, 2004-2006), the Melody Ranch Studio in Santa Clarita, where *Deadwood: The Movie* (Minahan, 2019) was also filmed after *Django Unchained* (Tarantino, 2012). This places *Westworld* amongst a host of underlying contemporary western films and TV shows.

Other instances of haunting are foregrounded through the wide inclusion of intertextual references in these TV adaptations. Intertextuality in *Westworld* is used on two levels: it acts first as enunciation for narratological purposes and second as fodder for interpretation and recognition for the viewers. While it revives the hosts’ memories (supposedly erased from their artificial memory), it simultaneously invites viewers to recognize the familiar quotes (for instance Shakespeare’s) (Lemonnier-Texier and Oriez, 2). Shakespeare quotes are ubiquitous throughout the show and are employed as triggers of the hosts’ awakening. It equally raises

⁶⁹ *Westworld*’s narrative is very rich in intertexts from references to Shakespeare, to Lewis Carroll, to “[...] Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Vitruvian Man” (1460), Eadweard Muybridge’s *Horse in Motion* (1878) and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952)” (Goody 255).

⁷⁰ “Westworld Filming & Production.” *IMDb*,

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0475784/locations?ref_=ttfc_sa_4. Accessed 03 Jan 2019.

These websites offer more information on production sites of *Westworld* which also offer a virtual tour of the studios:

Carey, Meredith. “HBO’s ‘Westworld’ Filming Locations You Can Visit.” *CondéNast Traveler*, 23 Oct. 2016,

<https://www.entraveler.com/gallery/hbo-westworld-filming-locations-you-can-visit>.
Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio, <http://www.melodyranchstudio.com/>, 2022.

awareness among viewers as to the abundant presence of intertextual references and how they might relate to the narrative (2).

Intertexts are used to trigger and revive buried memories of hosts and viewers alike as we see in “The Stray”, when Arnold hands Dolores *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and she reads, “Dear dear, how everything is queer today and yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night” (S01E08). Triggering questions about change and evolving in Dolores, this quote, along with Shakespeare’s “These violent delights have violent ends” from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.6. 9-133), slowly pull her onto the path to sentience, while they also orient the viewer in the direction of dissecting the show’s intertexts in a way that connects both Lewis’s novel and even the TV show *Lost*, when Jack reads the same excerpt to Aaron as a bedtime story (and as Bernard reads to his son Charlie in one of the prosthetic memories implanted by Ford). Quotes from canonical texts and authors are similar to the commands we overhear Ford and the park’s creators make (such as “freeze motor functions”). Used as narrative devices to enrich the story and add complexity to the show, intertextual references in *Westworld* remind us of the power of the arts (cinema, literature, theater...) over hosts and over the audience.

The accumulation of interconnected references throughout the seasons echoes previous references in different texts; this is meant to invite us to look for the reiteration of spectral effects throughout the episodes (7), thereby inciting viewers to actively engage in the complex narrative and to identify their occurrences and the variations in time and meaning, how resonance is created through diegetically repeated sentences, images, shots or the actors’ previous roles (10). In *Reading Westworld*, Alex Goody examines the TV show through “alternate intertexts that read against textual closure and generate circuitous, discontinuous, disrupted pathways through machines, spaces and becomings” (273) to demonstrate the way textuality is infinite and interactive, thus displaying ghostly textuality in a maze-like narrative that promotes openness to the non-human “other”, namely machines and humanoids (273). Goody focuses on one example of intertextuality in *Westworld*, reflecting on the similarities between Jorge Luis Borges’s short stories and the way they act as hypertexts and resonate in the TV show’s themes of dreams and characters “questioning the nature of their reality”. One of Borges’s stories, “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941), reflects upon the possibilities of multiple outcomes in a labyrinth-like structure. It is about a novel written by a Chinese governor Ts’ui Pên where readers are able to choose the path they take and where multiples of every possible path are supposedly depicted in this novel.

Without attempting to make one medium appear as superior to another, it is important to remember that the televisual or cinematic medium allows us to *see* it through and makes its viewers full collaborators in the conception of the narrative. This is similar to the interactive paths and storytelling structure of *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (David Slade, 2018) where viewers make different choices to change the narrative and can explore their different outcomes. The movie is reminiscent of the “repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 8) at work in *Westworld* with Teddy’s loop while arriving at the train station or Dolores’s loop at the homestead: each time someone new picks up the can, it offers new paths for the guests and for a new storyline to unfold. This gives the impression of seeing different scenarios in different worlds or alternate universes.

Goody explains that this “repetition-in-difference” translates as a form of uncanniness for the viewers as they watch the same actors and actresses perform different roles and enact multiple versions of their “selves” in an experience of “ontological vertigo”:

This vertiginous sense of all the other possible paths and selves is something that also marks the becoming of the Hosts in *Westworld*, disrupting the smooth functioning of their programming with traces of previous iterations of both role and storyline. But it is also the dizzying experience of the viewer of *Westworld* encountering the uncanny reprises of the repurposed Hosts [...].

(258-59)

Westworld’s audience encounters the same actors and actresses playing different roles in the same narrative, or carrying their previous ones from other texts, and most importantly their very position as celebrities, who they really are in the extra-diegetic world. In this intermingling of selves, multiplicity finds its way in what we will analyze in the following parts of this research as the “other”, the double haunting viewers and shaking the foundations of a stable and homogenous sense of meaning and identity. The interconnections and resonances between characters, storylines, and universes point back at the entangled and repetitive aspect of TV adaptations. In his article “Spectres of Film Adaptation: A Hauntology of Relational Hybridity,” Saviour Catania similarly recalls Borges’s short story to point at the spectral connections between texts in the adaptation process:

Adaptations create in fact contiguous strata of existence, for like the Borgesian forking paths of Ts’ui Pên’s garden, they overlap and spiral backwards and sideways, thereby leaving in their mutating wake intertextual and/or

transcultural shades of the spectral sparks that initially inspire them. No ghost laying is possible in this hauntology of sources.⁷¹

Catania refers to this spectral relationship between the adaptation and its source as “relational hybridity”, where both texts continuously interact and influence each other. The paths of Borges’s labyrinth intersect and connect in a similar manner to the palimpsests, the “contiguous strata of existence” leaving behind all types of traces (*ibid*). This type of narrative is structurally compelled to repeat itself and leave a memory trace, scattered remains or leftovers of previous storylines, thus making the references and the actors/characters even more haunting in the viewers’ minds, akin to an updated version of their ‘selves’ remolded at each repetition. This is reminiscent of the *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993) plot or a recent show based on the same repetition with variation, *Russian Doll* (Netflix, 2019-present) using the recurrent trope of the time loop in both film and television. In these instances, the time loop trope with the repetition of a character’s day usually reaches a resolution point with the protagonist achieving consciousness and changing something about themselves and their actions. Taking the recurrent trope of the time loop in both film and television and adapting it diegetically to the *Westworld* universe, one can see that the TV show does not fully abide by this convention, for the hosts who are haunted by the guests’ violent actions are programmed machines that only improvise and change the course of their loop due to different variants coming from the guests. Despite finally being able to reach sentience through repetition and changes of narratives, the hosts of *Westworld* remain subject to a maze narrative within which they are trapped until they escape their “fate” i.e., the park’s storylines.

Nonetheless, *Westworld* endlessly adapts these tropes in an interplay of time, memory, and dreams, but most importantly it does so by showcasing the hypertextual traces left by the past in the present. This is predominantly visible in its rebooting of the past to remake a Western narrative based on several resonances and interconnections from its source and other materials.

⁷¹ Catania, Saviour. “Specters of Film Adaptation: A Hauntology of Relational Hybridity.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017, https://lfq.salisbury.edu/issues/first/index_first.html. Accessed 1 September 2019.

1.2.3. Remaking the Past of Westworld: The Western Genre

For *Westworld*, intertextuality is omnipresent due to its association with the Western and science-fiction genres. By remaking the 1973 film, itself already adhering to a compound genre, drawing from both the Western and post-humanist science fiction,⁷² *Westworld* revives the dying, and yet undead, as well as myths found in the Gothic themes of monstrosity and creation. For instance, Gothic elements permeate the show through the recurrent Frankenstein metaphor in Ford's creations, as robot hosts become sentient or as he formulates the project of turning humans into hosts (as with James Delos' quest for immortality).

The return to the source text is thus paralleled with a return to the past, to the Far West and thus to the genre's associated ideals and cinematic conventions. From its homage to the director John Ford as both a namesake character for park creator Robert Ford and as an aesthetic, to the use of quintessential Western figures such as the lone wolf rider, the rivalry between lawman and the outlaws, gang pursuits, the damsel in distress, and so on, *Westworld* repaints an anachronistic world—a composite of *past* tales of cowboys, samurais, or Indian colonies—all in a *futuristic* atmosphere reflecting our most universal and *contemporary* preoccupations. Along with its non-linear narratives, *Westworld* is hanging between past and present; setting its story in between the Old West, threatened by the coming of industrialization, and the fictive future where new possibilities are offered by the advent of technologies, further drawing from the more recent (post)apocalyptic western. As such, it foregrounds the implicit nature of the western itself that while ostensibly describing the American past, it ultimately reflects the filmmaker's present perception of the country and its mythmaking. As André Bazin defines the characteristics of what makes a western in the preface for J-L Rieupeyrou's *Le Western ou le cinéma américain par excellence*:

⁷² The hybrid movies combining western and horror or western and science-fiction (including space western movies) genres have struggled with critical reception in the 1960s. Films such as William Beaudine's *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (1966) and *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula* (1966) were mostly considered as part of a lowbrow genre and received little or no critical acclaim. Page et al, "Billy the Kid vs. Dracula: The Old World Meets the Old West." *Undead in the West: Vampires, Zombies, Mummies, and Ghosts on the Cinematic Frontier*, edited by Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Piper. Scarecrow Press, 2012, pp. 45-64.

Ces attributs formels auxquels on reconnaît d'ordinaire le western ne sont que les signes ou les symboles de sa réalité profonde qui est le mythe. Le western est né de la rencontre d'une mythologie avec un moyen d'expression.

(7)

Bazin is well known for his criticism of cinema and his take on the western as a genre that accurately reflects ethical and psychological issues. *Westworld* draws from this notion due to its subversion of most western myths in a way revisionist westerns do. Western movies have always dealt with the past by introducing both nostalgia and progress as they “look back upon the glory days of western settlement as they look ahead to the expression of U.S. centrality in the postwar world” (Corkins 9). Set in the frontier, the western genre has a tradition of boundaries between past and present, the wilderness and civilization; *Westworld* debunks these binary opposites by scattering doubt and confusion on the realization and existence of such frontiers (between the park and the exterior world, between fiction and reality, as well as memory and the perception of the truth). The genre is primarily recognizable by its desert-like landscapes, the thematic portrayal of conquest, (im)morality, and hostilities for the sake of supremacy (over nature and over other inhabitants' territories – mainly the Native Americans).

The serial format allows for a constellation of possibilities to explore certain developments and issues through an ensemble cast and wider characterization in “the land where self-discovery is an art form.”⁷³ However, *Westworld's* first two seasons have been largely criticized for the favoring of plot structure based on non-linear temporality and multiple timelines at the expense of meticulous character development and therefore losing the power of deeper identification and attachment to characters.⁷⁴ In its invitation to empathize with the humanoids as opposed to the film's distanced perspective of the hosts and the re-presentation of the massacre made by the Gunslinger of the source text, *Westworld* expands its exploration of both western and science fiction genre conventions. In other words, staging the AI's coming to sentience and their attack on humans in this context is evidence of the show's preoccupation with the question of identity and self as well as racial and gender issues, thus updating major problematic relations to the “other” (be it the Native Americans, Mexicans, robots, women...).

⁷³ This is the description of one of the parks (Shogunworld) on the website of the Delos destinations experience. The website updates its content in concordance with the season airing at the time. This enacts a form of paratextual element in the form of a teaser and trailer to the upcoming season.

“Delosdestinations.” *HBO*. <http://delosdestinations.com/#experience>. Accessed 08 Feb 2019.

⁷⁴ r/westworld. “Some thoughts on why Season 2 was disappointing (possible spoilers).” *Reddit*, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/westworld/comments/900j36/some_thoughts_on_why_season_2_was_disappointing/. Accessed 12 Jan 2019.

Moreover, *Westworld* is one of many other sites that revive and reconstruct the nostalgic past from *Shogunworld* to *Rajworld* or Roman and Medieval parks as represented in Crichton's movie. The choice of having the show's main events happening in the *Westworld* park puts more emphasis on the show's criticism of American culture⁷⁵ than its European heritage. Starting from the 1960s, western films paint a more realistic picture of the frontier life and the issues surrounding American society at that time (including politics or racial relations towards the Natives, Mexicans, etc.) and notably witnessing various proliferations of the western into different subgenres such as the "spaghetti western" or classics. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, *Shogunworld* is particularly brought to the fore in order to highlight the way the western genre is anchored to Japanese cinema. The notable Japanese influence on the western genre (for example through Akira Kurosawa's wide contribution to the field) is pervasive and could be understood as yet another form of adaptation and the interconnectedness of ghostly textuality that transgresses the boundaries of culture, race, and even the medium itself as we see the perpetual recycling and re-emergences of such conventions and inspirations in TV shows, video games, or comics.

As mentioned above, video games have a steady and prominent role in the conception of the TV adaptation. *Westworld* is entrenched in the world of gaming and in tune with the "hyperreal";⁷⁶ the open-world universe of the park is based on simulations and the showrunners have openly admitted drawing their inspiration from Role Playing video Games to craft the world in their show. This is evident from the Easter egg on Sander Cohen's character from the *BioShock* game (2K Games, 2007) which foregrounds anachronism or the Man in Black's depiction as a hardcore bloodthirsty player. Some other connections are more subtle such as the wolf in *Westworld* which appears in one of Teddy's visions in the first season of *Westworld* "The Bicameral Mind" like a memory or a prophecy then comes back in "Journey into Night" when William sees it standing next to the dead guests of the gala.

In the *Rockstar* video game *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), Arthur Morgan, the game's protagonist played in the third person, has similar visions (seemingly in slow motion) of a wolf

⁷⁵ Actor James Stewart echoes this perception of the western film as purely emblematic of American identity (Clapham 7). Despite its fundamental role in shaping American cinema and the film industry, one should not disregard the Japanese films' influence on most directors.

⁷⁶ The post-structuralist notions of hyperreality and Baudrillard's simulacrum in relation to consciousness as well as Žižek's postmodernist stance of what characterizes as an event and the subsequent shattering of reality through the image offer insight into further research on *Westworld*'s manipulation of the truth and representation of the crisis.

or black coyote, signaling his near death, and the upcoming chaos. It also stands for his corrupted dishonorable inner self, for the player is the one who controls the honor quota of the protagonist throughout the game, whether he does good, honorable deeds or chooses not to. Towards the end of the game, as Arthur becomes sick with tuberculosis, he gets a last vision (that is indeed subject to change depending on his honor i.e., depending on the player's choices throughout the game) of a deer when he tries to redeem himself, symbolizing his improvement and his dying in peace. The wolf in both narratives may stand for an upcoming death or, as many fan theories suggest, for William himself being a host.



Figure 16. Wolf in Westworld and in Red Dead Redemption 2.

At the crossroads of fan studies and transmedia, video games have much to do with fan identity as well as their creative skills and active participation in world-making. In Role Playing Games, players are often free and able to stroll the diegetic game universe as they please in addition to the main missions and challenges. One can also recognize the *Grand Theft Auto* game series' construction around pleasurable violence and crime while roaming the fictional city of Los Santos (a replica of Los Angeles). Such games are commonly so complex and rich in their narrative that they offer multiple possibilities and scenarios when, for example, players choose to stop by and help a character or accept the suggested task. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, most decisions alter the narrative flux and the protagonist's fate as he is supposed to redeem for his criminal actions. This is mostly achieved by committing more crimes but for the right

reasons and without killing innocent people. This calls for ethical choices and a morality judgment from players on what is right and wrong even in a fictive universe.⁷⁷

One can identify some similarities with *Westworld* here as it offers free roaming in the park and the ability to play its different games and levels with no real consequences for the guests standing “on a spectrum that ranges from occupying a place of utopian escapism to occupying life in its entirety” (Ivănescu 80). Both the game and *Westworld* follow the Western genre by including the themes of the conquest of the West and even free will. In the first season’s second episode “Chestnut,” William is on his first visit to Sweetwater and interacts with an old man, a host who, according to Logan, is only trying to drag him into a treasure hunt. The man joins them at the restaurant and tries to sell his adventure, but Logan violently drives him away by stabbing the latter’s hand. This interaction is an instance of the various missions offered by the park through decisions, along with the “Wanted” posters of criminals which usually represent annexed secondary missions in Role Playing Games such as *Red Dead Redemption*. Guests, like players, have agency over some parts of the game where they can rewrite the story, hence the fact that no gameplay and no experience ever repeats the preceding one, depending instead on who is playing and how they are playing.

The host who welcomes William at his first arrival further asserts a form of bound freedom of the park experience by making a similar comment on the game-playing aspect of the park that is delivered without tutorial: “No orientation. No guidebook. Figuring out how it works is half the fun. All you do is make choices” (“Chestnut”). However, choices remain as limited and illusory for guests as for hosts, for everything is designed for a purpose within the confines of the park, as Nicholas Moll pinpoints in his article “A Special Kind of Game: The Portrayal of Role-Play in *Westworld*”:

The park experience thus offers both the illusion of choice and actual decisions to both its guests and hosts, but neither event is framed as such. That is to say, it is unclear if a decision made by a guest or host is ever overt or as designed.

(22)

Although this has more to do with non-linear storytelling of the TV adaptation and its close affiliation to gaming, it is still interesting to pay attention to the connection of the inner mechanisms of storytelling strategies used in both media, especially since *Westworld*’s creators

⁷⁷ For more on this topic see Sicart, Miguel. *The Ethics of Computer Games*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009.

have declared⁷⁸ their inspiration from these games to develop some aspects of their TV show, being great fans and players themselves.⁷⁹

The several options for adventure offered by the park to its guests which is, as we demonstrated broadly similar to the freedom of choice inherent to complex Role Playing Games videogames, equally reflects the fidelity issue in adaptation by providing various possibilities for this intertwined narrative to be transformed and rewritten away from any notion of faithful replication of its source material. The TV adaptation and the game that inspired its creation avoid fidelity by their advancing of the aforementioned approaches towards free will adventure and multiple choices.

Westworld is therefore eschewing fidelity at multiple levels of its narrative while it internally shows that it is a “lost cause”. This is done through Delos’s side project with its attempts to copy humans’ consciousness and make them into eternal living humanoids. While William admits to seeking fidelity in duplicating James Delos’s character by transferring his dead core self to a new robotic one, Ford is the only one who is able to make a pseudo-independent double, if not many doubles, of a real human being (Arnold’s version of a host, Bernard) without the illusion of transferring consciousness or even making them perfectly similar. He embraces the reality of an impossible perfect replication and molds the character of Arnold according to his own vision, adapting it and appropriating it according to his needs.

In addition, much like *Westworld*, these video games structure and analyze their “guests” profile by providing statistics of the prevalence of their actions and killings, the trophies received for their missions, and the number of their own deaths. This is reminiscent of William’s electronic profile in “Vanishing Point” (S02E09) in which there is a complete psychological and statistical assessment of his presence and actions in the park displayed like a game recap while it re-presents the past sequences of his violent outbursts in the park that viewers have already watched in the previous episodes.

⁷⁸ “Executive producers Lisa Joy Nolan and Jonathan Nolan discussed at the show’s New York Comic Con panel how the original *Red Dead Redemption* served as part of the inspiration for *Westworld*, explaining, “the way that we act in our simulations is not how we act in the real world.””
Burke, Jason. “Red Dead Redemption 2 is really *Westworld* at your fingertips.” *Fansided*, 7 Nov. 2018, <https://fansided.com/2018/11/07/red-dead-redemption-2-westworld/>. Accessed 13 March 2019.

⁷⁹ This will be further explored later in the thesis where non-linear storytelling and choice-making is attached to the maze narrative of *Westworld*.

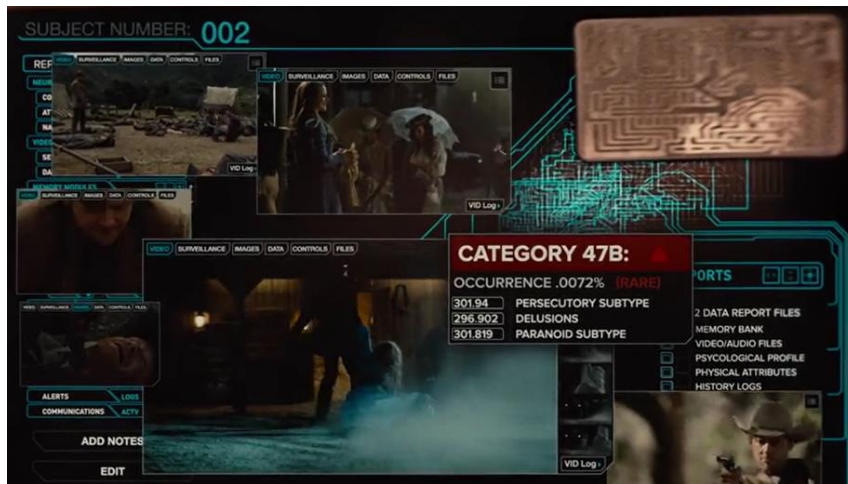


Figure 17. William's profile based on his experience in the park. ("Vanishing Point", S02E09).

In the series' first episode in which Ford reactivates Bill, an old, decommissioned host, to reminisce the past. During their conversation, Bernard joins them in this graveyard of decommissioned hosts. In a metafictional comment on Westerns, sci-fi, or movies and adaptations in general, Ford claims that: "they don't make anything like they used to" ("The Original", S01E01). This provides insight into another association of the series' fictional universe to the source text, as Ford explains, the old hosts: "[...] repeated themselves, dropped down constantly, a simple handshake would give them away" (*ibid*).

The handshake is a reminder of the hosts from the 1973 movie, their hands betraying them and revealing their robotic nature; as it is explained in the film: "supposedly you really can't tell except by looking at the hands. They haven't perfected the hands yet" (*Westworld*, Crichton). This is also a metaphor for how TV adaptation establishes continuity by finishing or rather re-writing the source text's initial work in the sense that it follows on its footsteps to find its own path, rather than as a form of "perfection" of the previous (diegetic hosts) work. It is equally interesting to note that the advances made in the field of artificial intelligence with artificially generated photos, for instance, the representation of hands has some flaws such as hands lacking fingers or having multiple fingers.



Figure 18. Old Bill and dysfunctional hosts ("The Original", S01E01).

Altogether the wide variety of intertextual and paratextual resonances found in the adaptation form an intricate web of rewarding and challenging complements to the main story that accompany viewers' journey into the deciphering process and meaning construction of the shows' relation to other texts. Following their cultural viewing background and their memory of earlier references and works (both outside and inside the main narrative) viewers participate in the production of meaning in the form of video-making, fan fiction, and film and TV poster (re)creations in order to extend the storyworld and shape the narrative from the provided source material to transform it into a new one using the traces left by the official production.

1.2.4. Reverberations and Remains

By rewriting the source text, the adaptation reshapes its core narrative and meaning; these multiple versions of the same narrative intermingle when the adaptation becomes better known or more successful than its predecessor. From a marketing standpoint, the source text is given another life, for instance, by using the TV adaptations as a teaser and booster of sales. Using a different medium and retelling the story can prove financially beneficial for the source text or its previous texts that remained in the dark within the confines of a smaller or even hesitant audience. Historically, the success of adaptations and TV or cinematic franchises is based on the inevitable creation of hype through paratexts. There is an interchangeable transmission of content and paratexts between the adaptation and its source, long after the source's creation. This asserts the spectral interrelations between the texts i.e., a certain enduring viability and malleable nature that encompass their returns and resonances through time.

By way of example, the cover of *The Leftovers* novel uses the show's promotional posters with the actors on it while the French version of the novel features the famous opening scene of the departure in the pilot.

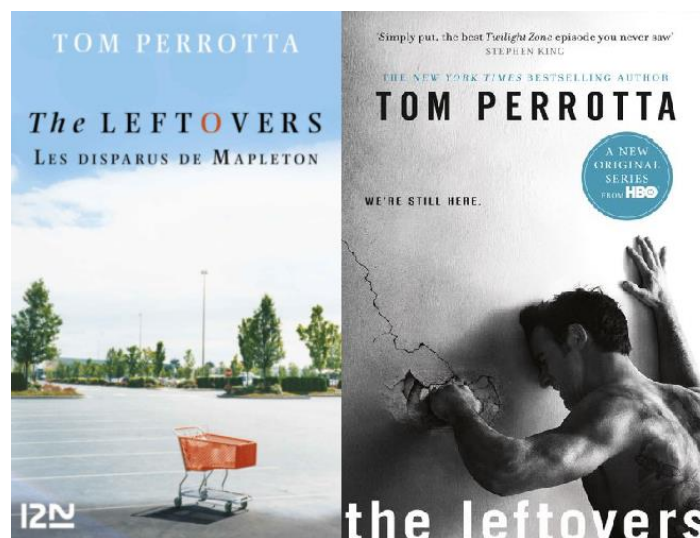


Figure 19. French book cover and Novelization cover of *The Leftovers*.

One of the most significant signs of adaptation's wide influence and endurance is its dethroning of the source text's position and fame by outgrowing it. The memory of the adaptation erases the pre-existence of the source as it is clear from Wood's post which confirms

this traditional depositing of the source text and the subsequent representation and reception anchored in our cultural memory. Whether with pictures from the audiovisual adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) instead of referring to Carroll's text, and with the picture of *Tombstone*'s Earp instead of the real Wyatt Earp or the paratexts of the adaptation to promote its source as with *The Leftovers*, the audiovisual adaptation seems to continue haunting and altering the memory and meaning of its predecessor. Most of Hitchcock's adaptations, for instance, have largely contributed to the notoriety of its source texts by becoming iconic references in film history and genre such as *Vertigo* (1958), *Rear Window* (1954), *The 39 Steps* (1935) or *Psycho* (1960), all of which were based on a lesser-known literary source (*Rebecca* (1940) was a significant exception to this rule). Comics' adaptations envision the same process from a generation to another as the multitude of remakes and reboots reinscribes new faces to the well-known name around the source, be it Wonder Woman, Spiderman, or Batman.

This seems tied to the adaptation process (whether they are direct or merely sharing the same premise) when they are more successful in its reception such as Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Contemporary cultural productions circulate in a capitalistic world where adaptation holds the main status of business and market-driven form and content or what Simone Murray refers to as "adaptation industry".⁸⁰ Paratexts, for instance, reflect the marketing devices used around the adaptation business to maintain and promote their "sales" and "consumption" in order to increase profit.⁸¹ Thus, adaptation and the use of such paratexts help promote the source text and increase its visibility.

The novel is no longer considered an "original"; its paratextual elements permeate the TV adaptation's own paratexts, thus disturbing and altering the traditional hierarchical status of source text and interweaving both texts into a single hybrid and spectral one. In this manner, the adaptation becomes able to change the audience's perception of the source by disrupting the temporal logic behind the issue of the works and by determining and modeling its reception for another target audience. The adaptation's spectrality here is noticeable in haunting back its source and this type of influence occurs for example when few source texts gain success and recognition only after the prominence of their televisual or filmic counterpart. Some adaptations entrench their memory so deep into viewers' minds that the original thoughts and perceptions

⁸⁰ Murray, Simone. *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*. Routledge, 2012.

⁸¹ The digital and creative use of paratexts by fans raises the question of the prominence of paratextual elements as official extra-textual elements and even copyrights infringement issues.

about characters and events from the source text become blurry and uncertain. For instance, in the context of text-to-screen adaptations, readers of the literary source text create their personal perceptions and descriptions of the faces and bodies assigned to the fictional characters but upon encountering the filmic or televisual adaptation, the following readings are somehow influenced by the adaptation's own interpretation and making of these characters; memories overlap as the audience then envision the actors performing in the audiovisual adaptation.

As John Ellis points out, adaptation is the repetition of producing new memories (4); it recreates the memory of the source text and alters it so in each adaptation and rewriting, the memory of former works is at once used and erased. In the case of classic works of literature, adaptations are founded upon a canon and a cultural text, so it erases this “generally circulated cultural memory” (3). In “The Literary Adaptation”, he argues that the substitution of such memory is a sign of the success of the adaptation as the adaptation imposes its new filmic/televisual representation on the old memory of the novel (*ibid*).

Perrotta's novel is similar to the *Left Behind* novels which center on the disappearance of people after the Christian rapture. *The Leftovers* takes the form of a “complex hypertext” and recalls Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series in a way that viewers' cultural memory reshapes the narrative's meaning. The proximity of these two literary works highlights the repetitive and haunted aspect of all these entangled narratives. In his novel, Perrotta challenges its ideologies and their eschatological message, and the series takes this approach to another level while the *Left Behind* novels center on the apocalypse according to the doctrine of premillennialism.⁸² This idea is echoed in the prologue of the third season of *The Leftovers*, which gives us a glimpse of similar beliefs portraying the expectations of the end of the world. Set in the 19th century, a group of Millerites wait for the Second Coming of Christ without success, a behavior Lindelof identifies as “cognitive dissonance”.⁸³

Another layer of textual resonance in *The Leftovers* is its twin, the French TV series *Les Revenants*⁸⁴ (Canal+, 2012-2015) which was itself adapted in the US by Carlton Cuse under the

⁸² Joseph, Charles and Delphine Letort. “Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience...Resolution?” *Littérature et séries télévisées/Literature and TVseries*, vol. 12, 2017, pp. 1-19. TV/Series, <https://doi.org/10.4000/tvseries.2170>. Accessed 31 Jan 2018.

⁸³ Perrotta, Tom et al., Interview by Peter Hanson. *Bluetoad*, Sept. Oct. 2017, <https://www.bluetoad.com/publication/?m=4973&i=437002&p=54&ver=html5>. Accessed 19 May 2019.

⁸⁴ *Les Revenants* is also part of a strata and layering of texts as an adaptation of a Robin Campillo's 2004 film of the same title. Further resemblances with *The Leftover* are evident from other shows' synopses

title *The Returned*. Both TV shows are concerned with the presence-absence of lost loved ones and how their return (or hope of return) affects the microcosm of society. These shows also depict the struggle of mourning the unburied dead. In her article “The Returned and the Departed: the living and the dead in the TV series *The Leftovers* and *Les Revenants*,” Andrea Franzoni analyzes the omnipresence of death in both series along with their religious undertones. She points out that TV series have recently become imbued with death and the revival of dead characters (75) which is highly indicative of the return of dead creatures (zombies, ghosts...) but also of the haunted TV screen by this phenomenon. Moreover, Franzoni identifies the relationship between the living and the dead as the central common feature between these two series where the specters of *Les Revenants* are visible and present in opposition to the departed in *The Leftovers* whose absence haunts the remnants. The specter in this “in-betweenness” is “neither living nor dead” (Derrida, *Specters*, 63) as the inability to bury the lost ones is depicted in each of these TV shows.

The Leftovers' status as adaptation makes us question its so-called originality as an HBO creation, as the channel that claims to be different from basic mainstream TV highlights the originality of its content by relying on innovative programs and creativity. The knowledgeable audience of the adaptation is confronted with another level of interpretation and reception of the work: its adaptor's previous works. The next chapter explores the role of the adapter as paratext, public figure, *auteur*, and the spectral influences “to be considered in theorizing about the product and process of adaptation. If the audience knows that a certain director or actor has made other films of a particular kind, that intertextual knowledge too might well impinge on their interpretation of the adaptation they are watching” (Hutcheon 126).

Using intertextual references, paratextual elements, and fans' contributions, *Westworld* relies on its viewers' memories from works beyond the source text as well as on their knowledge and desire to learn more about the narrative outside the text (transmedia storytelling) to strengthen the ties between *Westworld* and every other text that could (mis)lead or confuse the audience but mostly adding depth and complexity to TV adaptation. Being identified as a metaphysical blockbuster, *Westworld* finds its inspiration from the science-fiction universe of “Asimov, *Terminator*, *The Prisoner* or even *A.I.*”⁸⁵. For instance, the show's non-linear

and tone such as the Australian TV show *Glitch* (ABC1, 2015-2019) or the American series *The 4400* (CBS, 2004-2007).

⁸⁵ Cerf, Arthur and Simon Clair. *Sérierama : le guide ultime des séries*. GM Editions, 2019, p. 244, *my translation*.

narrative structure, with its unreliable points of view of both hosts and humans along with the merging of generic codes, allows tackling various themes and blur the boundaries in ways that challenge and subvert viewers' expectations. More importantly, the relation of the adaptation to the other texts beyond the source text places the spectator in a *tertium quid*⁸⁶ space where they would always "question the nature of [...] reality," a spectral ontological space where fiction and reality collide. Like *The Leftovers*, *Westworld* relies on its creators' position of celebrities as a key element to influence and guide their audience into a more haunted and haunting textual interpretation of the adaptation: one where authorship is regarded as a source of spectral reception.

Resonances and returns, whether intentional or not, seem infinite and unquestionably pervade *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*' narratives, not only due to their adaptation status, but mostly because of their complex and multiple strata, always open to interpretations. We identified these phenomena as spectral for their incessant return and intrusion upon the text and upon viewers. This leads us to question another level of haunting operating in these TV shows that brings about a multitude of other questions around its presence-absence: the one behind the curtain, the creator(s) as adaptors and as haunting entities in reading *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. In the next chapter, we tackle the question of authorship and the way in which texts are connected to each other through knowledge of their production, authorship, and cultural *milieu*. We also explore the author in TV adaptations as another form of paratext altering the meaning of the text and will thereby examine the audience's familiarity with the showrunners' work and how it influences the reception of such narratives.

As the familiar elements from the texts prior to the adaptation would only make sense for the knowing audience, we will distinguish between the different types of viewers involved in watching and interpreting the TV adaptations and the way the text seems to introduce different levels of pleasure for different kinds of audiences. In other words, what might equally disturb all viewers would be the disturbingly heterogeneous and "open to interpretation" ideology of the shows and their use of different narrative codes as well as the mixture of genre conventions within the same narrative. The unsettling effect depends on the type of audience and the expectations built around the genre hybrids that play on the thin border between reality and fiction to destabilize viewers.

⁸⁶ The Latin phrase seems adequate to one of the defining characteristics of the spectral – the very indefinite character of the spectral and its intermediate and in-between state. We will refer to this in the following chapters as a way of defining the uncanny.

In this chapter, the numerous types of audiences are delineated in the context of “spectral adaptations” where the reception process relies on completely different types of memory and knowledge thus one needs to distinguish between critics, the “unknowing” audience, and knowledgeable viewers (of source text, of previous series, etc.). The reception process and the co-creative role of the viewers is also at the heart of our discussion, thereby asking where authority and meaning precisely lie and how this creates a reflexive and interactive aspect which is at the root of the shows’ rhetoric as self-conscious cataclysmic narratives.

1.3. Chapter 3: Ghost Authors in TV Adaptations

In the second chapter, the analysis of the spectral resonances of various texts and hypertexts within TV adaptations revealed their heterogeneous nature and the way they constantly embark on a process of invoking specters from elsewhere while also getting their audiences involved in the process of rewriting. As explained in the previous section, the audience's collective and individual memory play a large part in establishing the interpretation of a TV adaptation. This chiefly points to the power of reception and creation of meaning at the hands of the viewer. Another significant aspect of spectral return is the mark or trace left by the authorial power of the TV adaptation, be it the TV production channel, the showrunner (here the adapter of the source text), or the author of the source text. The adaptation's production and reception are haunted by multiple specters that seem to vary from an adaptation to another.

Through our analysis of the spectral authorship at work in these TV adaptations, we will be able to make visible the (para)textual traces left by their authors' and/or adapters' presence-absence. Typical discussions of authority and legitimacy in authorship will be briefly examined, for they are clearly aligned with our argumentative process and attempt at explaining the haunting narrative mechanisms at work. Therefore, we will examine the significant spectral elements of authorship in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, as they are to be reflected upon as multiple and polyvocal rather than withholding a singular meaning or entity of authority in their creation, production, and reception (be it at the level of viewers, journalists, or academics).

American television differs from its French or British counterparts, notably, in its collaborative nature. While any audiovisual fiction, be it short film or long, television or web series, inevitably requires a team of creative artists (set designers, location scouts, actors, producers, directors, cinematographers, etc.) who work together to create a final product, given the complexity of the task, the tradition of long seasons of twenty-some weekly episodes meant that American television was conceived around the idea of the writers' room, where the creator/executive producer/showrunner leads a team of writers in conceiving the overall structure of the different episodes and/or narrative arcs before different members of the team of writers are assigned individual episodes that the showrunner will later proofread to assure the coherency of the series as a whole. In short, American television is particularly fraught when it comes to assigning a single authorial voice even to an episode, much less to a series.

Although our primary goal is not to identify where agency lies in the televisual creative process, such issues of authorship in the paradigm of contemporary TV shows as “Quality TV” are worth exploring since they are built through the significance of the showrunners/adapters’ role in the sum of their portfolio of fictive works along with their image as public figures working under the constraints and conventions required by the production – which is in this specific case, the HBO cable channel.

In these two HBO series, the narrative is specifically haunted by the showrunners’ status as adapters and their *auteurism* as well as the presence-absence of the author of the source text. Do we grant the author of the source text a higher power or the same recognition and authority over the adaptation as its showrunner/adapter? Such contribution can be interpreted in the sense of haunting and more specifically as a return that reveals the plurality of voices within the newly formed work that actively merges different visions from an entire range of creators. Undoubtedly, adaptations are bound to a certain degree of balance between the old and the new, what has been written and what is re-written, the source text’s author and the showrunner’s touch.

However, focusing one’s attention on the creators may prove to be insidious and would mislead this research to the authorial intent issue in adaptations.⁸⁷ Hence the necessity of looking at the ways in which the audience is haunted by the narrative and its display of the creators’ presence-absence rather than the authors’ purpose behind their choices. *The Leftovers* entertains a collaborative aspect between the novel’s author and the TV adapter/*auteur* while *Westworld*’s creation is assigned to the two showrunners, Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan. Besides the fact that television writing is only credited to the showrunner(s) rather than the whole team of writers, the balance of power is never utterly identical in the eyes of the audience whether it is a matter of popularity, gender, or the previous genre and medium associated with their public figure.

In opposition to film, television does not favor its director(s) as they are interchangeable from episode to episode, and much more focus is brought to the production and screenwriters. TV is indeed essentially viewed and studied as a “producer’s medium” as already pointed out by theorists such as Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley (Falero 85). Therefore, our research

⁸⁷ We do not delve into the authorial intent debate here as it does not fit our argumentation for open interpretative processes, but we, nonetheless, investigate the impact of such presence-absence of the authorship and authority in media, in the TV adaptations, and their paratextual elements through the prism of the audience reception and narratological techniques (misdirection, manipulation and so on).

will be more production-oriented and will include discussions of the HBO channel with an examination of the showrunners who are also part of the team of executive producers in the American televisual industry. How do authorship questions relate to spectral adaptations in which audiences are haunted by the adapters' work? In which ways can television authorship in adaptation be considered as *auteurism* and creative talent that alters viewers' reception?

1.3.1. TV production and authorship

The production and creation of a TV series are undeniably a collaborative process which starts from the writers' room to the whole crew of filming, editing, actors, designers, or musical scores. The creation of a show's content plays a leading role in its development and success as the necessity for consistency and continuity of the narrative structure is extremely important in the conception of serial television and depends on the team of writers.⁸⁸ In serial television the process of production is different from films and these steps often overlap as the team is often bound by time and budget. It is not surprising to have the team simultaneously work on several episodes while the final decisions rest with the executive producers that oversee the overall work. The roles of writers, directors, and producers in TV series are intertwined, as one writer directs a specific episode, or the acting cast participates in the filming.

In television, the producer is granted authority as he/she remains the ultimate decision maker while writers try to meet the demands of executives and corporate commercial needs. This is what Mittell calls "authorship by management" (*Complex TV* 88) in opposition to "authorship by responsibility" in the case of film directors. For instance, as a cable channel, HBO offers various possibilities: it is believed to be more "creator centered" (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 91), therefore offering up the belief that writers may possess more freedom.

For *Lost* as well as *The Leftovers*, production chose its showrunner, a significant fact given that the usual process⁸⁹ entails writers looking for their script to be approved and financed by executive networks.

1.3.1.1. Quality TV and the HBO brand

⁸⁸ As it has been proven in the past and is still relevant today in the American televisual landscape, the change of screenwriters largely affects its success while TV writers face many challenges and frequently go on strike. The 2023 strike of Hollywood writers, for instance, mostly involves demands about wage and work conditions but most significantly the threat of AI in writing and creation.

⁸⁹ This leads us to ask if this changes the success of the process of production as we see in the case of *Lost*; creators J.J. Abrams and Lindelof took major risks because they believed the show would not be able to continue given the rumors about ABC chairman Llyod Braun who was supposedly about to lose his job at the time (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 91-92).

Home Box Office (HBO) (then named The Green Channel) was founded in the early nineteen seventies by Charles Dolan. Unlike broadcast TV which seeks to sell advertising time to potential sponsors, HBO uses the subscription business model, which implies that their main goal is to keep viewers' attention and earn more with a variety of original programming that is historically based on films and sports events. The term "Quality TV" is often associated with HBO, due to its commitment to a production of distinctive content. From its award-winning movies to its original drama series and documentaries, HBO invested in its promotion of the highest quality programs and gained a reputation through its identity brand by declaring itself unique (with the slogan "It's not TV, it's HBO") from the rest of traditional television (whether broadcast networks or other cable channels relying on viewer subscriptions).

Michael Fuchs, who was part of the executive team, focused on branding with the aim of changing the public impression of the network from "a first-run movie service to that of a premium network that produces and presents the most innovative original programming on television along with its usual lineup of feature films" following the 1989 channel's slogan "Simply the Best" (Edgerton and Jones 10). Throughout the years, HBO's reputation built new expectations for its audience and redefined the way we look at television, i.e., as a work of art "worthy of aesthetic appreciation" (28) and reflecting significant cultural and social signs.

Historically, HBO's content was first associated with Hollywood films following subscribers and their expectations for original programs endowed with high-quality aesthetics that subsequently became perceived as a reflection of culture and "social meanings" (23). Put differently, it participated in the elevation of television shows as they became more widely recognized as works of art. This cultural and aesthetic evolution is fundamentally due to numerous technological⁹⁰ and social changes. Many critics recognize the impact the cable channel had and may still have on television's evolution and TV show consumption in general, as Mesce indicates in his preface to *Inside the Rise of HBO*:

The service changed television, was largely responsible for the birth of the modern cable era, reconfigured the motion picture industry, and stoked an appetite for home entertainment and alternatives to Old Media pipelines which has sparked everything from home video to Internet TV.

⁹⁰ The movement to the digital era and the "on-demand" mode of watching is perceived as a factor of TV series' evolution into complex storytelling as we discuss in the next chapter about spectral media as we delve more profoundly on the requirements of the medium and the way its content is consumed and made even more haunting by the spectral apparatus and teletechnologies.

(2)

Simultaneously, viewers' expectations changed – predominantly towards the drama genre of HBO series being legitimately influenced by the HBO slogan. This signature is evidence of the channel's emphasis on identity brand which is also created by its absence of commercials in opposition to broadcast television. In this manner, HBO declares itself different from traditional television because it produces its own original programs in a (seemingly) less commercialized environment that focuses more on quality.

1.3.1.2. HBO's signature of violence

Known for its original creations, HBO broadcast a wide range of programs including “feature films, adult content, and televised sport, such as boxing” (Leverette et al. 1). It gained notable success and became mostly known for its provocative “quality” content that would influence most TV shows' style and thematic structure as well as television in general:

HBO is still here, showing a remarkable resilience and ability to rethink and re-invent itself, regularly re-adapting both its content and its delivery to a constantly transforming TV entertainment environment. The service still produces some of the most acclaimed and provocative programming on the ever-expanding viewing spectrum: shows like *True Detective*, *Girls*, and its biggest hit since the days of *The Sopranos*, *Game of Thrones*.

(Mesce 2)

HBO shows portray countless different kinds of traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, loss, mourning, dysfunctional relationships, cultural trauma, rape, and various traumatic events, whether in relation to gender, ethnicity, or other collective phenomena as we find in *Game of Thrones*, *Sharp Objects* (HBO, 2018), *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-2005), or *Chernobyl* (HBO, 2019). The function and impact of TV shows and TV representations of fictive reality make us wonder about the influence of traumatic images and their constant adaptation on screen.⁹¹ In this post-traumatic television, some channels have become more centered on – among other themes – individual experiences, such as white men's complex psychology and their issues with masculinity and power. This was mainly prompted by the

⁹¹ This could open to further research on sociological and psychoanalytical perspectives which are not part of our study. Is this kind of representation capable of helping viewers get over a trauma? Or does it on the contrary develop more traumatic images and prevent them from moving on? How can a provocative TV shows' content be therapeutic?

success of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), pushing other TV shows to focus on male anti-heroic behavior and thus changing the nature of the TV protagonist. From *The Sopranos*' Tony Soprano to *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White (AMC, 2008-2013), *Mad Men*'s Don Draper (AMC, 2007-2015), or *Lost*'s Jack Shephard, the focus shifted on issues of masculinity and power.⁹² This preoccupation with white male moral complexity, ambiguity and psychological issues gained success among the audience as they seemed more relatable. As viewers are more able to identify with such characters, this complexity is compatible with cable TV channels which orient their show towards less predictability. These characters provide a fertile ground for a kind of storytelling that plays with audience expectations; it gives the creators tools to better manipulate viewers. Therefore, HBO shows retains the equilibrium between keeping the character's evil side at bay by making the audience sympathize and even empathize with seemingly spiteful characters while also showing their immoral behavior without fully justifying it.

The Leftovers and *Westworld*'s ideologies are undoubtedly constructed in keeping with the production channel's themes, choices of TV productions, and specific demands that ultimately correspond to that type of TV shows. As the network requires specific directions and guidelines to maintain its quality and signature, the outcome equally depends on the showrunners'/adapter's ability by featuring themes which are ultimately adequate to manage and transfer the HBO's identity as well as the authors' narrative goals.

Damon Lindelof's *The Leftovers* centers on its characters' trauma which eventually reveals the showrunner's aspirations and the production's motives. Lindelof has long been famous for focusing on the male protagonists,⁹³ and their father-child relationships. Therefore, it is not surprising that the character of Kevin as a mayor in the novel is quite different from the chief of police Kevin Garvey in the TV adaptation. HBO makes these choices to adapt to the needs of a standard cable channel with a post-cataclysmic drama which dictates its generic conventions and establishes viewers' expectations and need for a male "antihero" (i.e., a

⁹² This is further explored in Amanda D. Lotz' *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the Twenty-First Century* as she delineates the different popular male protagonists in the contemporary television landscape. New York University Press, 2014.

⁹³ However, this does imply lack of development of the female protagonists (Nora in *The Leftovers*, or Maeve, Charlotte, and Dolores in *Westworld*). From the perspective of gender studies, it would be interesting to reflect upon the role of their characters that may only serve as a sidekick and tagalong of their male counterparts following the Bechdel Test in relation to female characters' function and representation in these fictive works.

complex character with ambiguous attributes, neither good nor bad, here being a victim of his own hallucinations and psychosis).

Some elements from the novel are nevertheless kept and developed, as the serial format allows for deeper and longer investigations of certain aspects from Perrotta's novel such as the Guilty Remnant. The television adaptation of the novel makes the Guilty Remnant more violent and active in their dedication to the cult's cause, hence the extension of their spectral function. As *The Leftovers*' first episode announces, the show features more violence than its source material. This is made clear from the recreation of the scene of the commemoration; Heroes' Day is disturbed by the Guilty Remnant and ends in a violent confrontation between the citizens and the cult's members, while in the book Nora is the one who insists on letting the latter pacifically protest and exercise their right to freedom of speech.

Living as the active memory (the "living reminders") of the cataclysm, they stand as ghosts who have chosen to remove their own identities, stalk the people they wish to recruit,⁹⁴ and refuse to use phones, television, or the internet. The Guilty Remnant's reluctance to use technological devices hints at another form of withdrawal from society and from reality. The rituals of the sect, which are originally Perrotta's creation, are also changed from a simple PowerPoint presentation in the novel to the absurd tree chopping, day after day, in the TV adaptation.⁹⁵ In this way, the Guilty Remnant serve their purpose of compulsion repetition of October 14th by inflicting trauma on another living thing and thus reinforcing the desire to repeatedly be the author of that violent action. This is inspired from the more violent rituals and actions of the Guilty Remnant characters of the novel, turning them against each other. Whether it is the necessity of throwing rocks at their own members or executing them with guns, the Guilty Remnant aim at voluntary stigmatization and their own labeling as martyrs by having their members sacrifice and kill each other following specific instructions as stated in their guide:

⁹⁴ The Guilty Remnant members who have the function of Watchers are also called the Night Watch in Perrotta's novel, which strongly resonates with the sworn brothers from *Game of Thrones* (another group of disillusioned people who are not all voluntarily joining since they include thieves and rapists punished by lords). The two fictional groups share the same form of asceticism by withdrawing from the real world and its pleasures and practicing specific tasks mainly involving the devotion of their lives to their cause by taking a vow or undergoing a "recruiting" process and celibacy or the complete dismissal of their past lives.

⁹⁵ Perrotta explains that the chopping tree sequence was inspired by *The Karate Kid*'s (1984) mentoring methods. Again, this sustains the idea of continuity of stories and their constant rewriting. Kachka, Boris. "Tom Perrotta on 7 Ways *The Leftovers* Has Diverged From the Novel." *Vulture*, 7 July 2014, <https://www.vulture.com/2014/07/leftovers-tom-perrotta-book-tv-changes.html>. 22 March 2019.

DON'T HESITATE. That was guideline number one. *The martyr's exit should be swift and painless [...] Squeeze the trigger. Imagine a flash of golden light transporting the martyr directly to heaven.*

(Perrotta 343-344)

In the TV series, the first season's finale depicts this escalation in violence and the invasion of people's privacy, as the members of the Guilty Remnant place uncanny replica dolls of the departed in the homes of Mapleton's citizens; they recreate the moments before the departure, making everyone re-experience their loss. This can be symbolically interpreted as the *mise-en-scène* of auctoriality in a show where the author places his actors in heart-wrenching situations in the middle of a (fictive) crisis and in-between, playing their roles while also representing previous ones from other works. The Guilty Remnant become both director (*mise-en-scène*) and adapter, by (re)creating a narrative to seek an emotional response from their (unwitting) audience.

1.3.2. HBO and auteurism

Adapting the source text requires inevitable changes which center on the production's own interest and tradition of representation. In this practice of violent provocative content, HBO is also recognized for its promotion of quality in its authorship from well-known filmmakers to celebrity showrunners considered as auteurs. The production channel is not the only one with a say on the making of the adaptation, as the showrunners bring their personal touch to the mix.

In the 1950s and 1960s, *auteur* theory in film studies was developed with the French New Wave critics in *Cahiers du Cinéma* as François Truffaut declared the director to be the driving creative force in filmmaking, an *auteur* endowed with a distinctive touch and style. Television *auteurism* is commonly perceived as a single creator that oversees and monitors each decisive step of the process of writing, filming, and editing. The premium cable channel enhanced the status of authorship by stressing the importance of the possibility of the *auteur*, a unique creator, who is offered creative freedom. HBO put much effort in promoting the notion of the television *auteur* in its branding despite the televisual process's resistance to the presence of a unique creative genius due to its collaborative nature. Assigning the "cultural designation" of authors and *auteurs* to showrunners propelled TV to a favorable position in artistic criticism as it became more widely recognized as what we now refer to as "Quality TV" (Falero 86). The primary drive of the premium cable channel is clearly to distinguish itself from the competition (including broadcast and basic cable), thereby generating a solid investment on *auteurism* that does not include the boundaries presented by regular TV. By not conforming to the norms of commercial television, HBO proclaims itself better in terms of aesthetic value and leaves its mark as a production that places much significance on authorial voice(s) and autonomy.

The promotion of authorship is significant to the success of HBO's originals as it comes to representing another form of singularity; a "reliance on a single authorial vision [that] finds HBO placing a high premium on the kind of authorship already consecrated elsewhere in the field: the author as 'aesthetic experience' (Bourdieu 1993, 219)" (Akass and McCabe 8). However, this is a contradistinction with the multiplicity of voices that the HBO shows are internally communicating in their postmodern ideology; the channel's putting the *auteur* on a pedestal above all other entities of creation is perceptibly for marketing purposes.

Declaring the disappearance of the author, or more precisely their demise, Roland Barthes' 1968 essay "The Death of the Author" initiated another significant vision of the way we approach texts. Indeed, the post-structuralist viewpoint introduced by Derrida and Barthes considered the erasure of the author and any notion of an original that dictates a unique possible way of reading "[...] by observing not only that any sense of an original is impugned through a variety of cultural factors from the outset, but also that the original may be enhanced by a 'copy' (or adaptation) through a fresh reading, which suggests a full circularity of influences" (Boozer 20). Putting more focus on intertextuality and polyvocality in adaptations, any form of faithfulness to a single voice and author became hollow in contemporary adaptation and authorship studies. This brings us back to the dismissal of the fidelity discourse in adaptations as discussed in the previous chapters, and orients our studies in those gaps between texts and authors, those ruptures created by transformation and adaptation, those traces that we should not perceive as another *auteur* discourse about a "one-true-author" but to consider *auteurism* in these TV adaptations as a form of haunting that leaves more space and (the illusion of) freedom for its viewers.

Akass and McCabe remind us that *auteur* television boosts the channel's image and asserts its distinction from commercial TV:

the *auteur* as discourse carries important creative signification that helps establish the reputation for a show in particular, and bestow prestige on HBO more broadly – particularly at the company where series are promoted *as* originals.

(9)

Indeed, this draws attention to the promotion of the so-called unique and original nature of the series not only through the *auteur* and the brand but also through critics and academic texts which help maintain TV series' status as works of art. In this way, critical reception and appraisal play a key role in the productions' reputation. This is why one needs to consider the showrunner's public figure as *auteur* before delving into his/her position in the field of adaptation. We would also look at what this status entails in terms of audience reception (particularly on a cable channel), authority and freedom to understand the way it haunts the core of both *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* narratives.

1.3.2.1. Showrunner as auteur

The author is presumed to be the creator of an original work, a sort of magician (Gray and Johnson 3) given that we want to decipher how he/she created the wonder and also paradoxically want to destroy its fictive nature by revealing the mundane behind it.⁹⁶ The TV *auteur* is usually considered to be the showrunner and TV writers seem to be ghosts standing for the unmentioned authors in the huge network of people working together behind the scenes.⁹⁷ Above all, the creation remains a work made by someone so one needs not omit any form of artistry and authorship behind the text but rather contemplate all haunting forces and mechanisms involved in the creation and interpretative process.

An “author” is assumed to be the creator of an original work, often also called an “originator,” and who, as creator, merits the intellectual credit and financial benefits of such work. There are allowances for collaboration under this system, which grants “co-authorship”—an important component in television storytelling, as most programs have creators, producers, and large writing teams [...] however, financial and legal validation in many ways encourages a cultural concept of authorship that privileges the “singular artistic genius” idea brought forth during the Romantic period in literary history. It is a concept of authorship that places author above audience, and creates the idea that audience interpretation is not as meaningful as authorial intention.

(Falero 79)

The idea of an *auteur* is somehow related to the genre by establishing the most relevant characteristics of the *auteur* and common themes or style signature one can recognize from their different works of art. In terms of adaptations, *auteurism* is even more problematic as it calls into question the televisual authors’ increasing invisibility in the face of multiple voices and multiple texts to convey the cultural issues and ideology behind their work. The distinctive vision of the *auteur* is to be studied through a constellation of textual and cultural factors around the artistic work, namely the identification of the genre that helps determine the circumferential narratological features haunting the story and its audience. Stam considers such encompassing aspects of authorship in adaptations to be in relation with *auteurism* as he states:

⁹⁶ This is precisely what Ford explains about the process of creation (of the park’s hosts) in *Westworld* “Everything in this world is magic except for the magician” (“Chestnut”, S01E02).

⁹⁷ “To see press or marketing for almost any item of media today without seeing the invocation of at least one author figure is rare. Yet each item carries with it the ghosts of authors not mentioned” (Gray and Johnson 2).

Auteur studies now tend to see a director's work not as the expression of individual genius but rather as the site of encounter of a biography, an intertext, an institutional context, and a historical moment ... they [directors, and to this I would add screenwriters] “orchestrate” pre-existing voices, ideologies, and discourses, without losing an overall shaping role ... a director's work can be both personal and mediated by extrapersonal elements such as genre, technology, studios, and the linguistic procedures of the medium.

(Stam qtd. in Boozer 24)

Indeed, the *auteur* theory focuses on some showrunners and sheds light on repetitive themes, tropes, and aesthetic patterns from old works to the new ones from the creator/*auteur* (especially in adaptation as we truly recognize the special “touch” in rewriting something that wasn't their idea). *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* are undeniably defined by their creators' fame in the televisual and filmic landscape as one can easily identify their showrunners' major works centering on the same themes where similarities are inevitably haunting each individual work. In the introduction of *It's not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, Marc Leverette opens with the intentional rephrasing of Marx's famous “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism” (Derrida, *Specters*, 2). Referring to the media, he states:

A specter haunts television studies—the specter of the media industries.

Within this specter loom other spirits as well. They go by many names: branding, political economy, globalization, production, and so on.

(Leverette et al. 13)

Though Leverette identifies his specter as the media industry, it is equally clear that his specter creates others, namely the problematic in-between status of the show runners as *auteurs*. The spectral presence of showrunners manifests itself in a form of return of a memory trace. Given they are part of the reception process, their reputation and previous works are usually used as a promotional marketing tool for their shows' success. Therefore, we will investigate the paratextual elements around authorship in TV adaptations that alter the interpretative aspect and endow the narrative with specific meanings which are proper to the audience.

1.3.2.2. Showrunners' public figures as paratext

The question of authorship and *auteurism* in TV writing inevitably influences the reception of these TV adaptations by their various audiences. The figure of the showrunner in the televisual landscape is changing over time from isolated workers running the TV show in the shadows to public figures interacting with their shows' fans and contributing to the global public image and success of the show. This is clear from the paratexts of TV shows that include the showrunners in the DVD interviews, making of, online discussions on blogs, twitter feeds, etc. In this sense, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse could be said to be the precursors of showrunners' engagement with the fan community. When working on *Lost*, they worked on their public image with several public appearances and participation in major events for the show's promotion. Accordingly, they became part of the paratextual elements (such as online and public appearances) as a way to assert their presence after J.J. Abrams was mistakenly credited as the author of *Lost* (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 100).

Branding showrunners as authors, as Mittell explains, holds great advantages for the show's marketing boost. It enables the proliferation of a specific fanbase through the name of the showrunners and creates a larger understanding of the televisual programming and tone through consistency in style (96). The reputation of showrunners has grown considerably with online television, interviews, regular communication with a solid fandom via Twitter, blogging or other social media. Their authority is further asserted through these paratextual elements which are also limited and controlled, for we only see what they want us to see (100). Similarly, Mittell notes that such paratextual extensions promote the figure of showrunners and constitute a continuation of the "discursive circulation of television authorship."⁹⁸ They are essential to the creation, reception, and interpretation of their serial storytelling as their image creates an adequate environment for the proliferation and comprehension of the show's narrative, genre, and style.

Gray comments on this same phenomenon by assigning the shows' creators to be read as paratext as he suggests these sources are meant "to resurrect the figure of the author that literary and cultural studies theory has long thought dead" (19). Giving value to their text through these paratexts, DVDs and online platforms around the shows enhance the status of the showrunner by focusing on bonus material including interviews, special effects commentaries, or podcasts, thus creating a certain aura of value to the text and its authors (*ibid*).

⁹⁸ "Paratextual extensions such as authorial podcasts highlight the role of serial form within the discursive circulation of television authorship" (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 102).

Commenting on the adapter/*auteur*'s public figure, Thomas Leitch writes in *Adaptation and its Discontents* that the *auteur* is primarily a public persona whose role is significant in the success of the adaptation (244). Through different strategies engaged by the industry, the author is therefore used to create meaning, to add another layer of understanding and interpreting the show. These specific features stress the key signature of the author and its influence by insisting on the "interpretive decoders and frames for viewers" (Gray 136), thus using the authorial figure as paratext. Similarly, viewers shape the showrunners' role by making "predictions and evaluations" (*ibid*) based on their previous work, which makes the showrunners' ghostly status more obvious in their haunting as a "mediating figure through which intertexts affect current interpretive strategies (*ibid*). This helps delineate the expectations for viewers – the landscape, the genre, and the aesthetic quality of the shows – while it simultaneously shows that the *auteur* vision and mindset are very present and active in TV reception.

Undoubtedly, the showrunner/*auteur* has major commercial and marketing functions which are often dismissed in *auteur* theory, as Shelley Cobb states in her essay: "Within an adaptation, the act or moment of unfaithfulness to one's *auteur* self is when the filmmaker's identification with the author of the adapted text supersedes the *auteur*'s faithfulness to himself" (112). *Auteur* theory in television leaves more space for creativity and less focalization on the degree of faithfulness to the source. Put differently, the *auteur* constantly expresses his/her unique touch by establishing a new vision and constructing a new narrative that reflects different ideals and codes, thereby leaving no room for traditionalist objections to lack of fidelity to the source text.

The signature of showrunners is notably conspicuous on the level of themes and the haunting presence of their previous works with which most viewers are familiar. For instance, Jonathan Nolan's concern with technological power and conspiracy theories, and the themes of memory, consciousness and dreams are reiterated in most of his cinematographic work. Being more recognized for his numerous collaborations with his older sibling Christopher on puzzle films, Jonathan's creative interests mainly revolve around the elaboration of psychological and maze-like narratives (*Person of Interest*, *Memento* (Nolan, 2000)). Nolan's audience is therefore accustomed to their position as observer⁹⁹ of the story, only to become more active

⁹⁹ According to Trapero-Llobera, the viewer's observer position in Nolan's televisual work consists in either being a simple receiver of the events or in fully "tak[ing] part of the observed world, not only as a narrator, but also, in many cases, as the protagonist" by "clos[ing] the circle of the storylines presented" (165).

by making sense of the narrative's enigmas, closing the circle, making meaning out of the temporal fragmentation, and reassembling the puzzle (Trapero-Llobera 165).

Reading authors as paratexts, the knowing audience would inevitably consider the resemblance between the adapter's previous works and the current text. In this way, one cannot overlook *Westworld's* matching themes with Nolan's *Memento* (such as the wide use of analepses to represent the amnesic state of Leonard Shelby, the protagonist, and the non-linear storytelling modes) or, for instance, with *Person of Interest* (the themes of AI, surveillance, creator-machine relationship, computational science, and the idea that real power and value lie in information).¹⁰⁰ In *Person of Interest*, the machine can erase its own memory and, as it becomes more sentient, it begins interacting with its creator, Harold, calling him "father"¹⁰¹ and developing more interpersonal relationships with the human characters. Following the same Frankenstein trope, Arnold, the park's co-creator, considers Dolores his child as Ford explains: "What he had lost in his son he tried to rekindle in you [...] In you, Arnold found a new child. One who would never die" ("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10). In *Westworld*, however, the repeated rebooting eventually gives them access to sentience and leads to the rebellion against the creators and humans.¹⁰² When *Person of Interest's* Harold detects anomalies in previous versions of the machine, he believes erasure and reboots are the best way to prevent diversion from its primary function, which is the anticipation of acts of violence and terrorism. The male parental figure of the creator is juxtaposed with the creators' comparison to "gods usurping a role that is exclusively attributed to divinity, and it establishes a techno-religious debate present in Nolan's TV productions" (167) and ensures the discourse of creators as deities. Nonetheless, *Westworld* subverts this notion and shifts the power dynamics as the humanoids find their own voice and make their own choices.

Does an active mode of engagement in deciphering the adaptation's meaning enhance the status of the God-author by making viewers their faithful disciples and by encouraging the canonization of the showrunner as *auteur* or does it, on the contrary, open other possibilities

¹⁰⁰ Some fans had toyed with the idea of a connection of the universes of *Person of Interest* and *Westworld* by pointing out the similarities of "the machine" to *Westworld's* Rehoboam, the God-like artificial intelligence in the third season.

¹⁰¹ Hatchuel, Sarah. "What a piece of work is your machine, Harold': Shakespeare et la réinvention de l'humanité dans les séries américaines d'anticipation." *Posthumains en séries*, vol. 14, 31 Dec. 2018, *TV/Séries*, <https://doi.org/10.4000/tvseries.3068>. Accessed 02 Jan 2019.

¹⁰² See Delphine Lemonnier-Textier and Sandrine Oriez's article on *Westworld's* intertextuality. Lemonnier-Textier, Delphine and Sandrine Oriez. "It wasn't a dream, [...] it was a memory': Le fonctionnement de quelques intertextes dans *Westworld*." *Posthumains en séries*, vol. 14, 31 Dec. 2018, *TV/Séries*, <https://doi.org/10.4000/tvseries.3236>. Accessed 02 Jan 2019.

for various forms of adaptations beyond the source text (fan fictions, fan art)? Such a haunting presence-absence also serves to make visible other aspects of the adaptive and writing process by highlighting authorial and textual identity, indeed in Kubey's words, "[...] the *auteur* approach is best seen as a vehicle, a way to better understand and appreciate art and creativity in film and television" (86). To consider showrunners as *auteurs* won't reduce the televisual work as a non-collective and collaborative process. Here, it is about highlighting the traces left by a same showrunner that connects different TV shows as a genre. For example, Suzanne Scott's vision of the "fanboy *auteur*" sheds light on authorial identity within social medial and as a substantial part of the audience's cultural production:

Scott identifies Snyder as one of several "fanboy auteurs" who is figured to straddle the line between professional producer and amateur fan, negotiating several cultural contradictions in the process. The fanboy auteur, she argues, is a gendered performance that allows the fanboy auteur to "evade the feminizing stigma of fandom and paternalistic arrogance of the auteur simultaneously.

(Gray and Johnson 13)

Despite the controversial gendered nature of the terms "fanboy" and "fangirl", showrunners labeled as "fanboy *auteur*" (such as Joss Whedon and Zack Snyder) may appear as sympathetic figures free from "paternalistic arrogance" (Scott qtd. in Gray & Johnson). As a marketing tool and paratext, these showrunners stand simultaneously as part of the production team and part of the fan community, therefore concealing the ivory tower of the author. Cobb further makes it clear that an *auteur*'s identity is signaled by "consistent themes, tropes, and iconography across a director's oeuvre, [being...] the director's signature on each film" (qtd. in Cartmell 117).

Adapters such as Hitchcock use a large number of references to themselves and their work as a way of always letting the audience know the creative singular essence behind who is signing the work, thereby marking their lasting trace by insisting on their auctoriality. One can mention how the adapters' shadow hovers over the very status of the text until finally dissipating its memory as an adaptation. This is the case with Hitchcock and Kubrick, both of whom are part of the pantheon of film directors who succeeded in installing their brand name as *auteurs* with the dissipation of their image and status of adapters by making the audience perceive their works as products of an independent personal artistic touch rather than as adaptations.

Commenting on the reputation of film adapters as *auteurs*, Leitch indicates that the fame of their public persona also depends “at least as much on their temperament and working habits, their triumphs in conflicts with other aspiring authors, and their success at turning themselves into brand names as on their artistic aspirations or any textual features of their films” (237), thus proving the significance of their signature, an idea we find Hitchcock playing out with by making *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, imposing with his silhouette figure through cameos, etc. (*ibid*).

1.3.3. Lindelof: the ghostly adapter

The presence-absence of some showrunners is felt throughout their works and even beyond, reaching to other TV shows from the industry. Lindelof guided Schur in the creation of *The Good Place* (NBC, 2016-2020) by advising him and thus expanding his influence and presence. The interaction between the showrunners provides another layer of spectral presence, for instance, going as far as implanting Easter eggs to make an homage for the show that inspired its creation.¹⁰³ This builds a connection between texts, proving the continuity of these dialogical and spectral writing. Lindelof similarly recommends Michael Schur's show by warning viewers that watching *Watchmen* (HBO, 2019 - present) would only be more confusing if one doesn't know *The Good Place*. This indicates that he is not taking viewers back to the source text, the graphic novel, nor to its cinematic counterpart, but to another TV fiction from another showrunner.¹⁰⁴ By equally having Lindelof declare that *The Good Place* is *The Leftovers*' comedy twin, the limits of interpretations are also extended to not only other shows but also other genres. Instead of pointing to the presupposed necessity to know all the adaptations' proliferating texts, the creator leads them on a different direction, where creators acknowledge, play with and even root for such connections. Consequently, this expands the borders of the work they are adapting beyond the source text to call attention to *auteurism* and intertextual allusions.

Lindelof's unfinished business here points to his ghostly return to haunt the screen and the audience with mysteries and Easter eggs surrounding his texts. It also informs us of the authorial haunting at play that emphasizes the infinite possibilities of (re)telling stories. Needless to say, Lindelof's return to TV can also be seen as a form of atonement for his so-called failure to end *Lost* "properly", instead offering a conclusion that enraged many viewers.

¹⁰³ Grubb, Brian. "There's A Lindelof-Inspired 'Leftovers' Easter Egg Hidden Somewhere In 'The Good Place'." *Uproxx*, 29 Sept. 2016, <https://uproxx.com/tv/good-place-leftovers-easter-egg/>.

¹⁰⁴ Some similarities include Eleanor's birthday which is on October 14th (date of the Sudden Departure in *The Leftovers*) and the same date appears on the frame of Michael's office with Doug Forcett's picture on the wall (the human who guessed the meaning of the afterlife in *The Good Place*). Other Easter eggs and references used as homage to Lindelof appear in *The Good Place* such as in the episode in Australia with a hippie called Damon asks Chidi "Do you want to talk to God?" (S03E04), a sentence Kevin Sr. uses in *The Leftovers* as he is in Australia.

Paige, Rachel. "Here are the 'Leftovers' Easter eggs in 'The Good Place,' so you can stop looking for them now." *HelloGiggles*, 19 Nov. 2017, <https://hellogiggles.com/reviews-coverage/tv-shows/good-place-leftovers-easter-eggs/>.

This question can be further taken up while discussing the finale or the issue of ending *The Leftovers* after three seasons.

Portraying another world-altering event, and featuring the same actress from *The Leftovers* as the protagonist (Regina King), Lindelof's adaptation of *Watchmen* can be read as an HBO TV show closely resembling *The Leftovers*.¹⁰⁵ Despite coming from different universes (a novel for *The Leftovers* and the DC Comics universe for *Watchmen* with a whole franchise behind it) the two shows are interpreted through the lens of authorial signature as they are part of a fictive world where a reiteration of an event is expected or feared, and the borders of reality are transgressed. Both props and characters seem to echo from one series to the next, from the "CX924 teleportation window" that looks like the machine Nora goes into in S3 of *The Leftovers*, to the Seventh Cavalry in *Watchmen* and their close similarity to the Guilty Remnant (in uniform and in silence, completely erasing their identity and self for a collective cause driven by the traumatic event).

In the same way, *Lost* is *The Leftovers*' twin in reflecting a reverse reality i.e., the opposite side of the mirror as the two stories are reversed, people who disappear versus people who remain. Most fan and critic responses center on *The Leftovers* as being an alternative to *Lost*: *Lost* depicts what happens to the departed while *The Leftovers* tells the story in reverse, i.e., what happens to those who stay. Such observations support the *auteur* signature of Lindelof and his willingness to repeat an experience that almost cost him his career. Despite the audience's negative response and public disappointment that led the showrunner to take a break and focus on the film industry, Lindelof decided to repeat the journey and indirectly re-adapt *Lost* through *The Leftovers*. He openly discusses his grieving process after *Lost* with interviewers¹⁰⁶ and how it influenced his process of adapting *The Leftovers*, not to mention his "recovery" and full comeback with the adaptation of *Watchmen* in the years following *The Leftovers*. *The Leftovers* and *Lost* share similar characters, metaphysical overtones, and

¹⁰⁵At first glance, the two narratives don't seem to share much in common, besides the theme of faith versus science, and a reluctant hero at the heart of their stories. But after *Watchmen* episode "Little Fear of Lightning," the parallels are more pronounced.

Fraser, Emma. "Watchmen is Reminding Us More and More of *The Leftovers*." *Primetimer*, 23 Nov. 2019, <https://www.primetimer.com/features/watchmen-reminds-us-more-and-more-of-the-leftovers-with-each-episode>. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

¹⁰⁶Among those interviews, his first one and a more recent one during the *SeriesMania* Festival in Lille. "Damon Lindelof on *Lost* - On The Verge." *YouTube*, uploaded by *The Verge*, 21 May 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5chCMRsEVo>.

« Rencontre avec Damon Lindelof (VO). » *Dailymotion*, uploaded by *Forum des Images*, 15 Apr. 2017, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5iorqn>.

recurring symbols and themes from biblical allegories to mythological references around constant debates between faith and science, as well as the depiction of grief, mystery, and insanity in a world shattered by a traumatic event. Unlike some showrunners that repeatedly feature the same actors (For example, Joss Whedon with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, UPN, 1997-2003), *Angel* (The WB, 1999-2004), *Dollhouse* (Fox 2009-2010), *Firefly* (Fox, 2002-2003), Lindelof has chosen thematic echoes rather than aesthetic or practical ones by avoiding repeated storytelling structures like systematic flashbacks and flash-sideways.

Regardless of the presence of an ensemble cast, *The Leftovers*' Kevin and *Lost*'s Jack appear as the protagonists and the backbone of the shows' narratives. The survivors (or the "leftovers") in both shows look for guidance in their natural leader who is depicted as a troubled anti-hero haunted by the ghost of his father. Indeed, their father-son relationships are heightened in a way that reflects the author's own experience of losing his father.

The Leftovers thus becomes a sum of the latter's influences and preferences such as *Twin Peaks*, which he declares to have inspired most of his work by readapting the uncanny (Romieu 25-26) and creating diegetic ambiguity and disorientation. The author has to navigate a number of personal dynamics (their personal experience, their family dynamics, or their gender) in order to successfully put forward their preferred relationship to the text, thereby advancing their own interpretation of the story. Undoubtedly Lindelof's status as *auteur* remains largely dependent on the audience's perception of his work and his well-known creative traits and influences, a perception that is, of course, largely influenced by his media presence, whether through social media, publicity surrounding his relationship to the industry as a whole, or retrospective analysis through other fictional works.

1.3.3.1. Co-authorship and The Leftovers' ghost authors

The issue of spectral authorship and voice is even more problematic when it comes to TV adaptations with multiple authors. While the specter of the source text author always threatens the adaptation's homogeneity, co-authorship in adaptation adds another layer of spectral echoes by generating multiple voices. Here, we will not delve into the question of ownership and the adapter's claim of the "right to paternity" and legitimacy (Chamberlain qtd. in Cartmell, 107) but we would rather focus on the adapter's spectral identity and its effect on the audience.

As established earlier, multiple authorship encompasses every working member and participant in the materialization of the artwork including the non-mentioned “authors” behind the assigned creator, namely those who are not often invoked or credited by the audience. The recoding of an adaptation from a simple reproduction to an original production embodies a transfer of ownership which eventually indicates the authoritative and original status of the *auteur* (Cobb in Cartmell 108) therefore these TV adaptations come to be perceived and received as individual works specifically assigned to their showrunner-*auteur* (and to its cable channel HBO). The emphasis on the showrunner’s signature and authority makes this type of TV adaptations “hardly understood as adaptations at all (even if marked with legal and cultural signs of adaptation), and they are received as the artistic products of their film authors” (*ibid*).

The adapters’ appropriation of the source material becomes writing rather than rewriting with replication and this is possible through an “exorcism” of the specter of the source text. A more proper approach is learning to live with all the ghosts of the adaptation through the spectral address in the work of mourning, as Derrida suggests, if one is to view adaptation as a resurrection of the source text.

By analogy, one needs to acknowledge and talk to these ghosts after the death of both the source text and its author, as the adapter pulls away from the burden of the fidelity criterion and all the constraints (where adaptations are expected and categorized as reproductions). Emphasizing the importance of the spectral state of the source text author is essential here because of the dual necessity to acknowledge the author’s source text as an homage (an adaptation as reproduction), and to simultaneously give space to the adapter’s own voice and perspective without owing complete faithfulness to the “original” author.

In terms of musical *auteurism* in these TV adaptations, we find known figures who work on their public presence in television and filmic music: Max Richter and Ramin Djawadi (who has already established a status of *auteur* from working with HBO on *Game of Thrones* and has also collaborated with Nolan for *Person of Interest*’s score). Their haunting music grasps the heart of the TV shows’ whole atmosphere and synchronizes with their adapters’ vision, while also adding another authorial voice to the adaptation, that of the musical *auteurs* who are thereby becoming paratexts in and of themselves.

For the adaptation of *The Leftovers*, Perrotta’s novel inevitably undergoes the process of rewriting that requires the author to accept the vulnerability of his position so that his work will be carefully examined and altered. Joseph and Letort explain that this challenge is part of

the reassessment process of the TV adaptation but is nonetheless attenuated due to the presence of Perrotta and his participation in the decision-making of the show's creation: "Without overtly stating it, *The Leftovers* series questions the authorial choices originally made by Perrotta, but his substantial involvement in this process makes it both less violent and more valid" (Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 7). As both author and co-adapter of his own work, Perrotta occupies a privileged position in comparison to authors who are not part of the adaptation process; these non-involved authors need to figuratively die and give more freedom and space to the adapter. The spectral status of the source text author signifies their death during the adaptation process and hints at the difficulty of collaboration when having one's voice unheard or even silenced – a transformative state into invisibility that calls for the need of adaptation outside the limitations imposed by fidelity to move to the blending of voices in the newly shaped work. The iconic image of authorial death in adaptations is represented in the last scene of the film *Adaptation* (Jonze, 2001) as it signals the belief that co-authorship in visual media (and more specifically in adaptation) is both needed and feared.¹⁰⁷

It is true that the series challenges Perrotta's unique and "paternalistic" authority, but it also offers him a new angle from which he can look at his novel and revise it. Co-writing the show with its author seems to be non-problematic in the case of *The Leftovers* as Perrotta states in one of his interviews that despite his perspective being often opposed to Lindelof's, it was more about compromise and collaborative work, for the real purpose of this TV adaptation was to resurrect into not only another body, but a whole new soul.¹⁰⁸ Perrotta's flexibility and his awareness of the need for the adaptation to have its own tone allow him to cooperate with the shows' writers to finally reinvent most scenes, introduce new characters and consequently to give space for Lindelof's personal touch along with the other writers' voices. As he makes it clear, the adaptation process for his novel is one of reinvention for serial television:

¹⁰⁷ The notions of "copy" and "original" apply to the identity of authors and adapters with the different roles and responsibilities they bring to the text. In the poetics of doubling, the doubles are usually not meant to co-exist and end up killing each other (see Cobb's article where she discusses the film *Adaptation* in relation to authorship and ownership in the process of adaptation). The aesthetics of doubles in our TV adaptations will be further analyzed in the following section.

¹⁰⁸ Discussing the dynamics of their collaboration in the process of adaptation and particularly in relation to the addition of a mystical dimension of the show, he explains: "The way we've resolved it up to now has been: These are all phenomena that could exist in our world — this guy has cracked under stress, he's hearing voices, people have dreams that seem prophetic. All these things are phenomena that I can live with. But he seems to be pushing in that direction and I'm pulling in this direction. We tugged at it to the very last day".

Kachka, Boris. "Tom Perrotta on 7 Ways *The Leftovers* Has Diverged From the Novel." *Vulture*, 7 July 2014, <https://www.vulture.com/2014/07/leftovers-tom-perrotta-book-tv-changes.html>. 22 March 2019.

What I can say is that I was deeply involved in the creation and the writing of the television show, and that the changes from the book to the screen are the result of a collaborative group process in which I was one voice among several. 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.

(qtd in. Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 2)

In *The Leftovers*' representation of Kevin's hotel-world, he is conscious of his death and therefore more able to fulfill his mission and leave that spectral space as opposed to *Lost* where the "(em)bargo" limbo, purgatory aspect is only explained later and is not established under doubts about the reality – the mystery box. This contrasts with the doubt after finishing *Lost*, where the audience requires a resolution since the serial format and its complex mysteries need to come to a close eventually. The necessity of the resolution along with the satisfaction of the audience add pressure to the conception of the show's finale. The attitude of the showrunners does not only change due to their past failures and critics' reactions nor solely because of the excessive presence outside the text or with beginning a new TV show. The audience has a major role in the history of making the different texts; showrunners evolve with their evolving audience as viewers learn the conventions of a Lindelofian work and act with caution from the beginning (for instance by not expecting to have every enigma resolved or answered) and as they progressively learn, as the characters do, to let go and "let the mystery be" (Iris Dement).

1.3.4. Authorship as deity in Westworld

Television seems determined to put a single creator on a pedestal, the almighty God holding power over every decision of the televisual and adaptive process. In *Westworld*, the metafictional theme of storytelling and creation of the hosts and their daily narratives in the park can be associated with power and God-like authority over the story and characters. Authorial control and authority are represented through the character of Ford who always seems in control of every little occurrence in the park (managing humans and hosts alike). One could also hint at the team in the control room that is changing, monitoring, and supervising the narrative. *Westworld* is therefore a story about the rebellion against “the masters who pull your strings” (Maeve in “Dissonance Theory”) and analogously the fabrication of *auteur* theory in television with all the subjective components that threaten its validity. Like any showrunner, Ford depends on a whole production team and a corporation that sets specific constraints for his work. In this way, *Westworld* raises important issues around authorial intent but also narrative voice by introducing a spectral dimension: the voice of God haunting the author. As explained in “The Stray” episode, The Bicameral Mind is a theory of consciousness¹⁰⁹ resting on “the idea that primitive man believed his thoughts to be the voice of the Gods” (Bernard) and the hosts were hearing their programming in the form of an “inner monologue” (Ford) haunted by their creator and their script.

This is represented throughout the first season as a journey through the maze. The symbol of the maze in *Westworld* is known to represent the hosts’ path towards consciousness through memory and following their creator’s voice, which is later identified as their inner voice guiding them. The hosts’ attempt to escape the park’s premises is still bound by Delos’s authorial control as Ford reminds us in “Trompe l’Oeil”: “[...] the hosts are the ones who are free. Free, here, under my control”. Whether free will is an illusion or not, the hosts strongly express the desire to take matters into their own hands by rewriting their story. From this angle, adaptation is a tool, a means to express one’s perspective. *Westworld* conceives storytelling and

¹⁰⁹ The theory originates from Julian Jaynes’ book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* in which he theorizes the beginning of consciousness among our ancestors after the breakdown of the Bicameral mind i.e., the belief that auditory hallucinations that occurred in our minds were not actual thoughts from our cerebral hemisphere, but external voices mostly identified as an authoritative voice or God’s commands.

adaptation as authoritative practices where fidelity to a human version is impossible to accurately reproduce and transfer in an operational body without failure and where one needs to kill God in order to find a semblance of freedom.

Another hint at authorship as divine is in “The Well-Tempered Clavier” when Ford explains to Bernard the origin of his creation: “Arnold and I made you in our image, we cursed you too to make the same human mistakes – and here we all are” thus roughly echoing biblical thoughts. As the park’s creator, Ford is able to control the humanoids from afar, as if by magic, or with a snap of a finger as we can see, marking a pause with a simple gesture, rebooting the hosts and erasing their memories. He even acknowledges his Godly position as we hear him say to Bernard: “You can’t play God without being acquainted with the Devil” (“Chestnut”, S01E02) or as in his offering the hosts a Promised Land, an Eden, they refer to as “The Valley Beyond” (a sort of metaverse in which their code can outlive their mechanical bodies).



Figure 20. Robert Ford: “Everything in this world is magic, except to the magician.” (“Chestnut”, S01E02).

The creator’s God figure in *Westworld* is articulated in the viewers’ turning to the showrunner for hints and explanations looking for their signature touch and its influence on creating meaning, thus using the authorial figure as paratext (Gray 19). The author is used to add another layer of understanding and interpreting the show as the audience creates meaning through the author’s paratextual input.

As we see in “The Bicameral Mind,” the final episode of the first season, Ford introduces Dolores to Arnold’s favorite fresco painting, “The Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo. The Bicameral Mind theory suggests that the mind is split into two parts, one that gives an order and the other that obeys and fulfills it. Arnold applies this theory in order to create artificial consciousness within the hosts (South & Engels 94), but soon discovers it is not possible as the journey to consciousness should be designed like a maze rather than thought of as a two-fold structure made of binary opposites.



Figure 21. *The Creation of Adam painting ("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10).*

The painting stands for Arnold's desire to have the hosts hearing their own thoughts, rather than God's, as it is not the voice of their creator or their programming but their own voice. This is provoked by Arnold's update "the reveries" which initiates the hosts into their quest of finding the center of the maze and achieve full sentience. The symbolism behind the painting, as Ford explains to Dolores, is the shape of the human mind, then maintaining that God is only the sum of humanity and one's consciousness. In his attempt to help Dolores in her emancipation and her quest for her true self, he asserts that "the divine gift does not come from a higher power but from our own mind" thus delegating the power of choice to the hosts and underlining that free will is possible.

Ford's authorial and divine position is highlighted with the mimicry of the act of pointing his finger at the painting and the juxtaposition of his body from the same side as God in the painting. This sequence stresses his authorial position and Dolores's realization of the nature of her making: her being a host and most significantly the first one, "The Original" (S01E01), thus further drawing her closeness to Adam. This is strengthened by the background vision where a blueprint drawing of Dolores reveals its anatomical inner mechanisms in the form of a detailed mapping that reminds the viewer of the creation process behind the hosts and the ensuing creative, artistic, and engineering work behind it. This image reveals both the biological and the artificial identity of the hosts as on the one hand it appears in the form of an anatomical diagram showing the several bodily parts and organs while on the other it makes up an architectural implementation or detailed plan made of assembled electronic and mechanical parts with specific measures and functional positions.



Figure 22. Ford paralleled to God ("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10).

The TV series is abundant with symbolic allusions to the God-like author as a creator. Similarly, the piano suggests a close affiliation with ghostly authorship as it plays itself while we see the keys being pressed and the music sheets in the form of code moving down. The instrument undoubtedly composes the storylines of the park, as the second-season finale "The Passenger" (S02E10) shows that the books in the virtual library constitute the archival information about the park's guests and are essentially written in code, like the music sheets on the piano. The "sheets with dots and gaps" which are moving the script relate to the story unfolding. These scripted piano "holes" on paper roll down as the song plays, thus echoing the storytelling movement of the plot and history. The dots and gaps are essentially a form of computer programming and are also related to dot printers (versus a 3D printer), suggesting the recurrent theme of the relation between art and technology in *Westworld* which are referenced throughout the shows' narrative and transtextual elements from the 3D technology in the title sequence to the Vitruvian man.

The piano therefore stands for both freedom and submission of the hosts to another power: it is a symbol of autonomy if we come to analyze it as the machine being able to play on its own without the need of a musician; however, it still mirrors the hosts' submissive position to their loops and programming, as the piano plays its songs at the beginning of a new day at the park, and a new rendition of the hosts' narrative and thereby the same loop. The old mechanical piano in *Westworld*'s Mariposa Saloon is an invention from the 19th century rooted in the past to fit the Western décor. As we see it playing itself with the keys held down, it echoes the title sequence of the TV show in which a robot is the piano player and then takes away his hands while the automated piano continues playing on its own. While this might suggest some

spectral presence which is understood to be a special effect with someone playing it behind the scenes, the piano is actually operating on its own. Technically, the notes are transformed and transcribed into the white sheets with holes we see moving and the piano really goes through them with compressing air.¹¹⁰



Figure 23. A robotic hand writing human guests' profiles ("The Passenger", S02E10).

With a seemingly present-absent piano player, the machine evokes the hosts' programming and the repetition of their loop. This connection is further maintained by the vision of the motif of the musical sheets which are also used as the history of the human guests in codes as the last episode of the second season reveals. The knowledge of each person is stored in a large virtual library in the system of the Forge. Ironically, the human history is written in codes by a robotic hand, the symbolic instrument of power, thus inverting the roles of the creator/creation as humans desire to become like hosts.



Figure 24. Dolores reading the guests' profiles ("The Passenger ", S02E10).

The first shot reinforces the connection between the musical sheets and the guests' code with James Delos's book on a music stand embossed with the shape of a lyre while the series diegesis features modern songs (such as Radiohead's "No Surprises" and Amy Winehouse's "Back to Black"), adapting them to a Western atmosphere. The songs are cues for viewers to highlight the loop and the journey of the hosts that serve to reveal the underlying authority of

¹¹⁰ More details on the workings of the piano are provided on the bonus interviews of the DVD version of *Westworld*'s first season.

the park. Like the “Wizard of Oz” of *Westworld*’s score, Djawadi, the composer *auteur* of the musical score, is the real genius behind the creative work but the piano dismantles this authoritative status as it stands for the independence of the hosts.

1.3.4.1. *Westworld*’s authorial voices

Westworld’s producers and creators Joy and Nolan are literally adapting the work of a dead author, Michael Crichton, whose work fascinated them to the point of planning on adapting another one – his 1987 sci-fi thriller novel *Sphere* – into a new HBO series. Despite the impossibility of direct collaboration with the source text author involved in *Westworld*, the TV adaptation is subject to another type of co-authorship, that of the married couple of its showrunners and producers, both considered its main creators. In *Westworld*, the roles of writing and directing vary from one episode to another; the episode “The Riddle of the Sphinx” in the second season demonstrates the presence of a personal touch and a clear demarcation in the usual directing style. The episode is indeed directed by Lisa Joy which makes us reflect upon “the role of individual episode writers and what they [might bring] to the collaborative creative process” (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 98). In this respect, the co-creators’ voices are dispersed either from episode to episode or simply blend (as it is mostly the case) and the distinction between them becomes less perceptible.

The issue of spectral co-authorship in the case of adaptations is addressed in Donaldson-Mc Hugh and Moore’s essay of the spectral shot-for-shot remake of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1969) by Gus Van Sant as they highlight the spectral essence of this kind of rewriting:

[...] Not only between two or more co-authors at a particular originary historical place and time, but as a multiple and shifting constellation of archives and readers, times and places, all of which contribute toward such an attempted unification of authorial “meaning”.

(108)

They indicate that spectrality in adaptations and co-authorship are not solely related to the presence-absence of the author(s) and the source text, but it also extends to the audience’s reception of the work and their participation into ascribing meaning and value to such texts.

But what if the audience were to decode the mystery behind the creation, the secret inner workings of the mechanisms behind the illusion, and to reveal the upcoming future ones? Does that make the audience the real carrier of meaning and authority behind the creative work, thus echoing Barthes's final claim in his essay that "it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148)? Some academics, such as Harlap and Avissar, maintain that "rumors of the 'death' of the television creator may have been greatly exaggerated – and proclamations of the 'birth' of the active audience may likewise be premature" (92). Nevertheless, the discourse about authorship and the audience's engagement here is intended to reveal the spectral mechanisms of the televisual adaptation and its haunting counterparts. It is specifically accurate to indicate that the use of such memory and traces offer an exemplary reading of the tools of emancipation from the author and the interpretation of the adaptation.

1.3.4.2. Emancipation and (r)evolution

This reversal of roles is particularly emphasized through Dolores's coming to sentience, moving from her role as the innocent ranch girl to the ruthless Wyatt. In reiterating her abuse from the guests and more specifically William, the camera takes the same shots that illustrate the adaptation process; as we see her drag him on the floor the same way he did to her, symbolizing the humanoids' rebellion against humankind as well as their creators as she shoots Ford in the first season finale, thus literally inducing the death of the author.



Figure 25. Inversion of roles oppressor/victim ("The Original", S01E01, "The Bicameral Mind", S02E10).

Maeve, another host, similarly rebels by becoming her own author, or as she gracefully puts it: "time to write my own f***ing story" ("Trace Decay", S01E08). However, the hosts' attempt to escape the park's premises is still bound by the creator's authorial control. This is

further corroborated by the programming tablet showing how Maeve’s code is bound to a new storyline called “Escape”.

The writer of the hosts’ storylines, Lee Sizemore, ends up siding with his creations in the second season and even sacrifices himself to help them get away from security. This choice is evidence of his redemption character arc and demonstrates the voluntary reversal of roles occurring not only for the hosts who are becoming the decision-makers but particularly from the point of view of humans who are willingly helping the hosts. Becoming a character in one of the park’s storylines, Sizemore claims back his authorial rights by playing Hector Escaton and by repeating the lines he wrote for him before getting shot by the Delos agents. Similarly, his objective perspective as the park’s writer while they are prisoners in Shogunworld provides a knowledgeable position that allows the hosts to escape and a metafictional viewpoint on his authorial status as he justifies his choices of adapting *Westworld* and replicating the town’s characters in Shogunworld: “I may have cribbed a bit from Westworld, but you try writing three hundred stories in three weeks” (“Akane no Mai”).

The movement from season to season emphasizes this renewal of the power dynamics. This is mostly clear from the adjustments brought to the title sequences in which the hosts are symbolized by animals that stand for their character motives and evolution in that specific season.

In the first season, the horse not only alludes to cinematic (re)creation through the horse of Muybridge but also mirrors the enslavement of the hosts in the park. They are domesticated and tamed for the purpose of humans, following the Western genre and cowboy customs; to control and ride a horse come to signify the power of the one holding the reins. With its portrayal of the rising and revolution of the humanoids against their creators, the second season represents the hosts’ emancipation in its credits sequence through the image of the wild buffalo attacking anyone on its path and leading to its own downfall. It then seems natural for the third season to have the animal represented by an eagle that embraces freedom and independence only to get too close to the sun and burn its wings in the process.



Figure 26. The evolution of *Westworld*’s title sequences.

In the latter allusion to Icarus's myth, it is significant to note the upcoming danger and cost of freedom. Here, one can also point to the affiliation of Icarus to his father Daedalus, the architect of King Minos's labyrinth, as a resonance to the hosts' own journey in the maze and the viewers' navigation through the labyrinthine serial and complex form of storytelling. This is analogous to the audience's quest for narrative coherence and meaning to the show's enigmas through the figure of the showrunner. However, like everything in this diegetic world and in Alice's rabbit hole, what seems real may only be another lure, a mere narrative trap for active viewers to fall into and the authors' way of reaffirming their authority.

1.3.4.3. Revival of the author

Knowingly misleading their audience, *Westworld's* creators go beyond the Easter eggs and the omnipresent canonical references (to Shakespeare or Carroll); they interact with their audience's uncertainties and fan theories to shape a serial narrative that is always open for continuity and deferral of the intrigues' revelations. The relationship between the showrunners and the audience has already been tainted by a fan theory transforming itself into a spoiler. A viewer noticed that the logo of the park was revised in the diegetic universe, thus attesting to the main plot twist about the different timelines of the first season. This led the showrunners to make some changes in the storylines of the second season to avoid such predictions. Critics Harlap and Avissar suggest that this revelation was deliberately triggered by a twitter announcement on the official *Westworld* account reading: "In #Westworld, even logos deserve a deeper look (@WestworldHBO, 2016)".¹¹¹ In this way, it seems that viewers are just as supervised, deceived, and manipulated as the park's hosts, for fans' participatory culture is perceived "as something they [the authors] can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market" (Jenkins 169).

¹¹¹ Harlap, Itay and Ariel Avissar. "The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author: Negotiating textual authority in *Westworld*, *The OA* and *13 Reasons Why*". *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2021, pp 89-110. Accessed 24 May 2022, p.103.

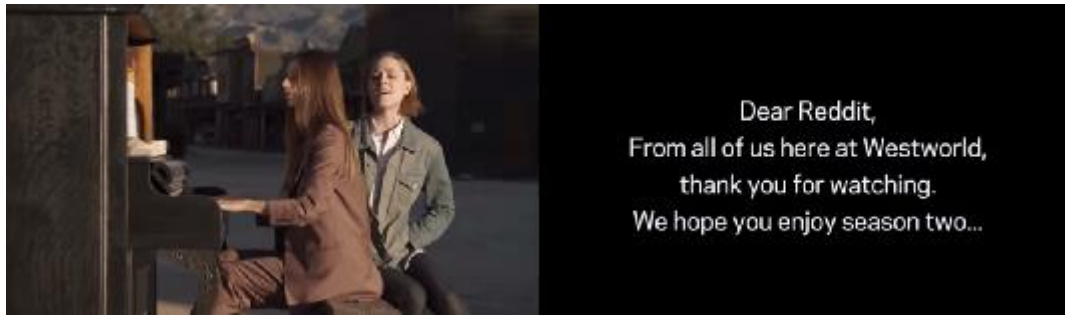


Figure 27. *A Primer* (Season two spoilers).

In response to such fan practices, showrunners decided to issue a spoiler video for the second season before its airing. The 25-minute-long video “Westworld: A Primer” includes fake scenes of the park from the second season’s events followed by *Westworld*’s cast playing and singing a piano cover of Rick Astley’s “Never Gonna Give you Up.” The rest of the video is a black and white footage of a dog sitting in front of a piano, then a dedication to Bento who died at age 9 in 2018.¹¹² This was revealed to be what Scott calls “producer/fan trolling”; the playful manipulation at work is supposed to appear as “an act of concession, surrendering authority over to the fans, was discovered to have been merely a ruse on part of the creators, who were only leading fans on, reasserting their own authority – and the fans’ lack of authority – over the text” (Harlap and Avissar 104).

In the third season of *Westworld* many viewers, both fans of *Game of Thrones* and of *Westworld*, had a pleasurable encounter with what appears as a playful fake crossover episode (“The Winter Line”, S03E02), with the cameos from *Game of Thrones* showrunners David Benioff and Daniel Brett Weiss in the show’s third season. The cameo of HBO’s showrunners in *Westworld* similarly lets us marvel at the teasing games between audience and showrunners, offering the bit part as a playful answer to fan theories about “Westerosworld” (the name hints at the continent and setting of *Game of Thrones* and refers the western part as a Delos park in reference to *Westworld*) and other regions of the fantasy series as being part of the parks in *Westworld*.

¹¹² Martinelli, Marissa. “The Westworld Creators Offered to Spoil All of Season 2, and the Resulting Video Is Really Something.” *Slate*, 10 Apr. 2018, <https://slate.com/culture/2018/04/the-westworld-creators-released-their-season-2-spoiler-primer-and-its-a-rickroll-video.html>. Accessed 25 June 2018.



Figure 28. *Westworld*; the cameo of *Game of Thrones*' showrunners in a crossover episode ("*The Winter Line*", S03E02).

In this subversion of *auteur* theory, the showrunners appear in Delos employees' uniforms, reflecting about the creative process in the glass rooms of the Mesa while Daenerys' Drogon lies besides them. The fictive aspect of *Game of Thrones* is highlighted as it simultaneously includes a reference to Crichton's *Westworld* and David Benioff and Daniel Brett Weiss's characters appear on screen while talking about selling to Costa Rica, which is the known location of Crichton's Jurassic Park and thereby could also be interpreted as another level of homage to the dead author of *Westworld* the film. Mockingly playing with the idea of *auteur* theory while challenging fan theories about the two diegetic universes, this *mise-en-scène* of *auteur* interaction testifies of the permeability of texts within each other with the overlapping of their audiences.¹¹³ Weiss and Benioff's excessive presence in after-shows during *Game of Thrones*' final season has focused more on explaining plot twists rather than providing relevant and significant information onscreen as most fans have criticized their discussions of character motivation in the commentary.

¹¹³ At its first airing, *Westworld* was perceived and expected to fill in for *Game of Thrones* as a major HBO production, so it seems more evident for both TV shows to have overlapping audiences despite their blatant generic differences.



Figure 29. A dragon host in the title sequence of *Westerosworld*.

The paratextual role of authors can thus be juxtaposed to the audience's dissatisfaction and their attempts at regaining their independence in the same way hosts emancipate themselves from authorial control. George R. R. Martin had already pitched the idea of bringing the two fictional worlds together, then fans took the initiative and created a remake of *Westworld*'s title sequence¹¹⁴ that portrays a host dragon accompanied by a mash-up song and artistic recreation of the images of the credits sequence, where the cowboy hat becomes a crown, and The Vitruvian Man/host becomes a white walker.

The two original title sequences' songs were created by Ramin Djawadi whose work is adapted and combined in a remake by an independent artist. The aesthetic response of mixing the two shows' musical themes further attests the audience's reclaiming of authoritative control and world making (as an artistic gesture and a fan service that does not come from the author). The question of viewers' reception in the context of adaptation is also related to haunting. There are several references and inspirations from other texts which haunt viewers and challenge their knowledge as well as the degree of their engagement with the show. The adaptation incites viewers (as most complex TV series do) to be active and aware of existing texts and mostly of popular culture or canonical texts. In this sense, perfect knowledge of some prior works is not necessary for grasping the meaning of certain references. For instance, the presence of eschatological allusions, Greek mythology, and texts or authors considered as part of the canon, may be considered as commonly recognizable intertexts which are strongly mediated through the figure of the showrunner/*auteur*.

Wide analogies could be drawn from the loops of the hosts and the audience's viewing experience and their role as co-creators of meaning. Set in between nostalgia and progress and

¹¹⁴ "Westeros World Title Sequence." *YouTube*, uploaded by Kapita_TV, 03 Apr. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQohxydZC4A>.

in its invitation to empathize with the humanoids, *Westworld* is able to expand its exploration of both Western and science-fiction genre conventions. This is an adaptation that allows textual traces from different genres, texts, media, and authors to shape its narrative. In this way, it challenges the traditional form of adaptation and subsequently refutes the hierarchical status of the source text and its authoritative (and authorial) “almighty” power. HBO’s distinctive vision of the author-*auteur* is therefore to be studied through a constellation of textual and cultural factors around the artistic work, namely the identification of the genre that helps determine the circumferential narratological features haunting the story and its audience, without overlooking the creative power and authority of the latter. Put differently, authority in *Westworld* lies in various sources but more precisely in what leaves a mark, a trace, in what is spectral and memorable.

Conclusion

Haunting elements from the source text are central to our study of adaptations and our examination of the presence and absence of textual traces. The notion of textuality that appears like a ghost encourages a broader understanding of how televisual adaptations relate to their source text. Nevertheless, the analysis focuses on the spectral returns of other texts within TV adaptations, revealing the diverse nature of adaptations constantly invoking specters in their reimagining. This process is identified as transfictional writing, and we examined the various forms of resonances and echoes in TV adaptations.

It prompts us to uncover what might not be immediately visible and provides room for experimentation and expansion of the adaptations in their serialized format. In essence, adaptation is seen as a haunting process where the portrayal and serialization of apocalyptic events in these TV shows exemplify the spectral poetics of the event.

As previously established, the collective memory of the audience plays a significant role in shaping the interpretation of a TV adaptation. This underscores the haunting nature of HBO TV adaptations, which give rise to endlessly embedded specters. Another crucial aspect of spectral return is the mark or memory trace left by the authorial influence of the TV adaptation. This could be the TV production channel, the showrunner, or the author of the source text. The production and reception of the adaptation are haunted by multiple specters that may vary from one adaptation to another. In these TV shows, the narrative is equally haunted by the role of showrunners as adapters, the HBO production network, and its inclination toward promoting adaptations and *auteurism*. We explored the role of *auteurism* in how the TV series is perceived, as well as the presence-absence of the source text's author, including the traces they leave behind and how they interact with each other.

Haunting in *Westworld* extends to the Western genre, influenced by Japanese samurai movies, and references iconic films from the nineteen seventies. Genre is discussed in terms of haunting, as the specter has its own literary and cinematic history of Gothic poetics, and these TV shows exist on the fringes of genres, blending elements of realistic drama, sci-fi, and post-apocalyptic fiction.

Maintaining the illusion of an authorial all-knowing presence that is watching over the complex story deprives the characters of their agency. As discussed by Michael J. Clarke, this is particularly accurate for showrunners who position themselves as endowed with a “ghostly agency guiding narrative from the margins to the diegesis” (qtd. in Favard, “The Maze”, 9). Favard comments on Clarke’s “mastermind narration” by drawing its positioning of authors in relation to *Westworld*’s authors and authorial practices as opposed to the hosts characters and the viewers’ lack of agency:

[...] in this case, both Ford and his real-world counterparts, Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan. Mastermind narration usually ends up reinforcing the idea that the characters in the story have no free will: everything is already written for them, both in the fictional world and the real.

(Favard, “The Maze”, 9)

We conclude that ghostly authors deliberately engage in a haunting process through the use of subtexts, paratexts, intertexts, and Easter eggs in the TV adaptation, catering to both the knowledgeable and unknowing audiences, creating multiple signs for interpretation.

PART II. Non-Linearity

Introduction

As previously explored in the first part of this thesis, serial TV adaptations eschew a definite identity and are shaped by the accumulation of subtexts and multiple authorial voices. Within this hybrid space in which texts are paradoxically neither dead nor alive but “hover at the very limits between living and dying” (Wolfreys 72), adaptations become emblematic of infinite resonances projected by a spectral medium: television. If the “medium is the message”,¹¹⁵ let us consider the spectral characteristics of recent technologies and more specifically television in relation to the creation and viewing process of our TV adaptations.

One of the most prevailing works on the haunting qualities of media has been conducted by Derrida and Stiegler, which tackles the socio-political model of what they call “teletechnologies”.¹¹⁶ Teletechnologies enhance a notion of distance which is paradoxically omitted by the communicative function of such objects.¹¹⁷ In addition, the etymology of “-tele” in teletechnologies (telephone, television) underlines this notion of distance that is signaled by the prefix “-tele” which in Greek refers to something standing at a “distance” or “far”. Jeffrey Sconce’s analysis of different media in his *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* is deemed useful as well in our contemplation of spectral mechanisms as other hauntings occur in old apparatuses of transmission and communication ranging from the gramophone to the internet. Many technological inventions have been perceived as spectral, supernatural, or able to open another world to communicate with the dead as some, such as the Society for Psychical Research, attempted to prove the existence of ghosts and paranormal activities (Peeren and Blanco 200). In fact, film and technology enhance the presence of ghosts;

¹¹⁵ Marshall McLuhan’s famous coinage stresses the importance of the medium in changing not only the form but also the meaning of what is transferred. As one should acknowledge the alterations and the restrictions of each medium, the essential point is to embrace the dynamic structure as well as the array of possibilities provided by television in the rise of complex serials.

¹¹⁶ Teletechnology is a term associated with media and their effects and is mostly related to questions of identity and alienation stemming from the “tele” distance that is amplified by technical apparatuses (Lucy 141).

¹¹⁷ Our argument is far from including a purely technological deterministic approach that is meant to enumerate and highlight the benefits and issues of technological devices and their impact on our social lives. This is simply meant to reveal the spectral characteristics of media in general and more specifically television.

in the words of Derrida, “the future belongs to ghosts” (Derrida and Stiegler, *The Spectralities*, 38) and “cinema + psychoanalysis = the science of ghosts” (McMullen 1983).

Laissez revenir les fantômes. Cinéma plus psychanalyse, cela donne une science du fantôme. La technologie moderne décuple leur pouvoir. L’avenir est aux fantômes.

(Derrida, *Ghost Dance*)

This equation explains Derrida’s view of the cinematic art as the main generator of spectral entities. The spectral is concomitant to the image in its apparitions and disappearances by bringing back the dead and reviving the past. By playing his own role in the film *Ghost Dance*, Derrida becomes a ghost himself. He indicates the role of teletechnologies of recording such as film and photography in capturing an instant that never returns and by marking the creation of ghosts in their unique temporality and the memory they leave. In terms of spectrality, due to their archiving and projecting capacities, technologies stand for boxes of ghosts as John Durham Peters points out: “by preserving people’s apparitions in sight and sound, media of recording helped repopulate the spirit world. Every new medium is a machine for the production of ghosts” (124). Cinema’s spectral aspect has also been acknowledged by Maxim Gorky, for instance, as he relates it to cinema’s early years with the Lumière brothers with an opening of a space for the dead to linger and lurk in silence in the “kingdom of shadows” (Gorky, qtd. in Leeder 2). Unlike Gorky, a French reporter in 1895 identified cinema and photography as making the world between life and death possible, suggesting therefore that “death will have ceased to be absolute” (*ibid*). In other words, they bring up the memory of the dead and the illusion of life. The memory of the past is subsequently immortalized, thus emphasizing the ghostly in artistic works working with technological apparatuses.

Technologies have a complex relationship to temporality and to the reception of its content, for instance, in the case of media which are able to instantaneously transmit and record events. This immediacy does not necessarily involve a “live time” of the event or “the artificiality of actuality” (*Echographies of Television* 3) since there is no real time: “[...] the recording of an event, from the moment that there is a technical interposition, is always deferred” (Derrida and Stiegler, *The Spectralities*, 129). This idea will be further discussed in our last part in relation to the spectral aspect of the event, i.e., the “eventness of events” (Hitchcock, *The Spectralities*, 184) and how information is always re-mediated despite the illusion of immediacy. Radstone’s article “Cinema and Memory” takes a closer look at the relation of memory and temporality in cinema. One of film’s foundations is its ability to

manipulate reality and the chronological order. Audiovisual devices similarly give us the ability to control time by choosing to watch a film or a TV series whenever you like and even repeating it.

In an attempt to represent temporality or more precisely in trying to capture the dissociation between past and present, directors usually focus on the use of cinematic techniques such as the dissolve and flashbacks. These participate in the implementation of a memory-based analogy. Radstone raises the question of the incontestable relation of cinema to memory by introducing her readers to theories on the matter: “models of memory as cinema, cinema as memory and cinema/memory” which create different understandings of cinema and of memory (326). The article explores the ways in which television and media participate in the creation of cultural memory. It also deals with the relation of technologies and memory, for instance, in the case of collective traumas or what is referred to as “holocaustal events” (332).¹¹⁸ Radstone also questions the possibility of considering intertextuality as a form of memory due to the remembrance of previous movies, one’s social and cultural memory is rebuilt by remembering the past through intertextuality, allusions, etc. This constitutes what Radstone calls the “commonly-held memory-store constituted by the films of the past” (328).

A memory can be captured by the media, an event recorded and rewatched, a fictional supernatural entity filmed, etc. These can be dead people, old souvenirs, things which are lost in time and as such technological devices become bearers of memory and specters. Erll and Rigney attest of the role of media in shaping our memories, our history, as well as our experience and perception of the past in their role of mediators “[...] and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society” (3). By bringing back the dead and the past, the ephemeral nature of the present is brought to the forefront, therefore coming to represent the “liminal space between life and death” (Peeren and Blanco 200). In this section we are interested in the ways technology, and more particularly television, stands as a spectral media that generates memory, reshapes the way we sense time, repeats, intrudes upon the familiar, and is in essence a liminal object that reminds us of our own mortality, a “modern *memento mori*, a reminder of death in life” (Peeren and Blanco 203).

These spectral adaptations are broadcast on a medium that is in and of itself informed by repetition and spectral returns. Their non-linear in serial complex TV involves processes of

¹¹⁸ A sociological approach on television and trauma studies should deliver more results on the ability of fictional televisual narratives to trigger social and personal memories in relation to collective trauma.

haunting that embody disorientation strategies that pervade the medium of TV, mainly through the haunting mechanisms of memory representation and the construction of intricate temporal techniques within the narrative. In this part, we explore the wide array of these haunting mechanisms as generators of the temporal and ontological crises within the diegesis and among treaders of the maze narrative.

It seems noteworthy to address the issue of TV as a generator of the spectral through which narratives of (dis)orientation and images of the past are channeled to make sense of reflexive diegetic experiences of crisis, collapse, or loss. In experimenting with spectral aesthetics, TV shows tend to use technology as a vehicle of the ghostly, the invisible and the uncanny. In *Westworld*, technology is undoubtedly a central theme, as it is used to reflect intermittent or distraught memory, immortality, the haunted robotic selves, and surveillance. In a postapocalyptic post-humanist environment set in the near future, *Westworld* inevitably comes to represent its spectrality through machines and technologies to convey the haunted state after an event: non-linear stories with fragmented memories, amnesic states, and software designs and codes experienced as voices inside the machine. Similarly, *The Leftovers* displays ghostly characteristics that reflect the haunting memory of the event without relying on technologies and machines as key themes. However, their presence-absence aims to mirror the intensity of the impact of October 14th event that reveals the way we interact with technological devices (which are mainly used as mediators). *The Leftovers* offers insight on serial TV shows' complexity in the way they construct the return of the haunting memory and the interpretations about identity and meaning ensuing the event.

II.1. Chapter 4: Spectral Television and the Haunting Memory

II.1.1. Spectral TV and the intrusion on the homely

Images from the past constantly remind us of the presence-absence of what is not completely gone nor fully present. This is particularly accurate in early television broadcasting and its ephemeral state before the possibility of recording and archiving televisual programs. Since the shift to the immaterial and digital archives on the cloud or on online platforms, television is once again characterized by its transitory nature. TV series became more fleeting and virtual with the development of streaming networks due to their limited access with some shows being deleted and replaced on the changing catalog. The short and limited length of content along with the quantity of programs further increase the ephemeral nature of television and its rapid consumption. With this unavailable and tangible form, television is extended to other media (phones, laptops, and even games console), thus making the ghostly characteristics of absence and virtuality more present with the inaccessible physical versions of the TV shows. Depending on one's algorithm and location when using those platforms, TV shows constantly vary from one user to another and from one country to another. The experience of reception is never similar as "we engage in always fleeting but nevertheless persistent embrace of the images and sounds in the fullness of their 'nowness'" (Uricchio 25).

II.1.1.1. Digital transformations and AI

The experience of the image on the screen increases the spectral aesthetics by the way ghosts appear or disappear in front of our eyes and leave traces. In his book *The Modern Supernatural and the Beginnings of Cinema*, Murray Leeder explores the idea of enhancing the experience of the ghostly and the supernatural through modernity by encouraging the presence of ghosts in our daily lives and our technical apparatuses. Transformed by technology, most televisual scenes allow the presence-absence of actors for instance through motion captures in the spectral movement of actors behind the scenes. They remain invisible to the final cut but are present in the making of the sequences as the real movements are recorded in virtual and transformed with CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery). Video games, films, and TV shows

(among other visual arts) attempt to preserve the authenticity of real movements. This is perceptible in the resurrection of deceased actors as one can see with the *Star Wars* franchise's revival of deceased actors such as Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia (a mixture of real scenes and Computer-Generated Imagery).

These post-mortem returns embody an artificial spectrality made real through technology by creating literal ghosts in the machine. The idea of a “ghost in the machine” is first employed by philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his book *The Concept of Mind* in response to Descartes's philosophy of mind according to the Cartesian notion of separation between mind and body (Guthrie 46). The trope is frequently used in the sci-fi and horror genre to explore themes of consciousness, haunting, identity, and technology. The plot device of the ghost in the machine offers insight on the permeability of borders between life and death. It is a trope that has often been literalized onscreen: for instance, *Tales from the Loop's* (Prime Video, 2020) Jacob is entrapped inside a robot, and he becomes a literal ghost in the machine while the body from which he switched is in a coma. Ghosts can appear either as supernatural entities or metaphors (e.g., in the form of projection of the unconscious) to interfere with reality and normalcy through technology. Some TV shows and films perpetuate the idea of haunted media in order to accentuate the unknown virtual world in a terrifying but eye-opening fashion. Being a source of horror in society, technology is unsurprisingly vilified in fiction to represent the deepest horrors and fears of modern society. By means of “‘technological determinism’ – the presumption that technology drives or even determines social structures and cultural forms” (Kelly 15), fictional narratives rely on haunted media to criticize social phenomena as we can see in *Black Mirror* or to portray technological devices as mediators of the uncanny as seen in *Poltergeist* (Hooper 1982), *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-1965), or *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1964).

The digital alterations of reality through technology in film and TV shows are also reminiscent of the “Deep Fake” technique i.e., the virtual reconstruction of real videos and sequences based on AI. Most of these techniques call forth spectral properties that transform the virtual by assuming the form of the real. By way of example, one can mention the apparition of Luke Skywalker in *The Mandalorian* (Disney +, 2019-present) as the young Mark Hamill at the age in which he performs in *Star Wars, Episode IV: The Return of the Jedi* (Marquand 1983) using his changed voice. *Westworld* resorts to a similar method in the superimposition of two voices: one is Ed Harris's (performing the Man in Black or old William) and the other is Jimmi Simpson's (young William). Harris reads the lines of Simpson in order to communicate the

proximity of the two characters which are later revealed as the same character in two different timelines. The vowel sounds from Harris's speech are digitally inserted in Simpson's lines. The ensuing vocal combination of the two versions of the same William participates in the doubling of his identity, thus extending haunting at the level of post-production and editing in a way that reinforces technology-based changes as spectral. The "absent" is imperceptibly present as the superimposition of the voices enhances the intricate and confusing relationship between past and present.¹¹⁹ The actors performing hosts in *Westworld* are also aided by visual effects that accentuate their cognitive dysfunction and their subtle robotic movements. This hybridization of the artificial and the genuinely organic showcases a great attention to detail from the part of creators in their quasi-faithful rendering of real humanoids. The dysfunctions and glitches of the hosts within their simulated lives and realities are therefore accentuated by digital transformations resulting in slow mechanical-like movements or slight freezing as we have seen with one of the old hosts models of the park in the first season: Old Bill.¹²⁰ The resulting palimpsest-like changes are too subtle to be perceived and uncover the extent to which the mediated moving image or the recorded voice can be manipulated, over-layered, and subject to further glitches and anomalies in their representation of the real uniquely through the ghostly abilities provided by teletechnologies.

The medium of television is known for its "'transience', 'ephemerality', 'forgetability' and even more seriously, it is seen as 'amnesiac', and responsible for the 'undermining of memory'" (Holdsworth, *Television*, 1). Television holds a specific relation to family life and intimate relationships, for it shapes our memories within the family routine, domestic life, and other social gatherings. In this way, TV reflects the histories and memories connected to moments and habits of collective viewing.¹²¹ Television's affiliation to the domestic environment generates a rupture not only in time and space, but also in the familiar environment, for television is anchored in the domestic sphere, i.e., by allowing the intrusion of unhomey and perhaps terrifying images "it lets the outside in" (Wünsch 119). It is through repetitive title sequences and by recalling specific moments or reviewing episodes from TV

¹¹⁹ Temporal complexity and non-linearity will be developed in the next chapter to underline the idea of past and present being inextricable and confused in these serial complex TV narratives.

¹²⁰ Zakarin, Jordan. "How 'Westworld' Uses Visual Effects to Make Better Human Actors: 'The actors are really good at not blinking'." *Inverse*, 3 Oct. 2016, <https://www.inverse.com/article/21633-hbo-westworld-actors-robots-vfx-special-effects-miles-beyond-a-glitch>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2018.

¹²¹ In analyzing the spectral intrusion into the domestic sphere in TV, we do not contrast individual types of viewing with the collective ones despite the former's secluded and personal experience and perhaps more common practice in contemporary cultural and sociological approaches to TV reception and technology.

programs that intimacy is fostered in the domestic and social space. In this manner, the audience's memory of their viewing experiences takes the form of nostalgia.

Memory is highly significant in the form of these TV shows in their reflection of "afterimages" that haunt the screen and its viewers (Holdsworth, *Television*, 3). By making visible the invisible and the unreachable, TV produces ghostly elements as "part of a system of everyday memory-making" (18). The black screen or black mirror metaphors sustain the sense of reflection in the visual act of looking into the mirror while something which is "other" comes back in the reflection to haunt (3):

Here the mirror is an anxious source of suspicion, fear and fascination, in its power to capture and distort the gaze, but also in the possibilities that arise in its reflections – the visions, shadows and phantoms that come forth.

(14)

The black screen reflects ghosts and shadows of the past as it is noticeable in old television sets' glass of the cathode ray leaving a trace that shows us a distorted reflection of ourselves (*ibid*). It is similar to a mirror which "distort[s] the gaze" and raises fear and awe as we are completely hypnotized by it while LCD and plasma screens also generate a "play of shadows absorbed by the surface" (15). In this way, the screen entraps the viewer in a ghostly existence by seeing one's reflection on its surface (as a black mirror). The reflection of the self attracts and frightens at the same time as if TV was a portal to other realities while "these other worlds may be peering back into our own living room" (Sconce 144). In this destabilization of the ordinary, the seemingly nostalgic and familiar pleasant moments uncover the uncanny features of the medium due to the intrusion of images and worlds into the private space.

The concept highlights a series of additional responses to television's place in a domestic environment. It is evocative of the potential threat posed by the merging of the private and the public, interior and exterior, and expressive of a dynamic of closeness and distance, which includes the recognition of, and estrangement from, the self.

(Holdsworth, *Television*, 27)

This type of perspective asserts the spectral nature of television and increases the ontological alienation which is further highlighted in TV series with their representation of technologies and television as portals to alternate realities.

II.1.1.2. Glitches in the matrix: TV as a portal to other worlds and alternate realities

The phrase “Glitches in the Matrix” stems from the expression popularized by the *Matrix* series of films. This has undoubtedly inspired various TV series such as *Westworld* and their themes including simulation, virtual universes, and even AI-based storylines. Glitches in *Westworld* occur at the level of dysfunction and the cognitive dissonances experienced by the hosts. By this, we mean that the humanoids’ reality is disrupted as they have incessant and abrupt flashbacks of their past lives which ultimately makes them realize the existence of the Mesa Hub, the headquarters below the park, or the underneath world of the masters pulling their strings. *Glitches in the Matrix* is also the title of a film documentary made in 2021 about simulation hypothesis, a theme which is explored in *Westworld* and posits that reality is a mere simulation as the series constantly installs doubt about humans’ possible essence as machines. The narrative is filled with ontological uncertainties about characters being haunted by their robotic nature as viewers similarly question the human nature of most characters.

This is in stark resonance with Plato’s allegory of the cave, the Glitch in the Matrix enhances illusions and disorientation effects. Plato’s cave brings reality into doubt; a few prisoners in a cave for a long time had always mistaken shadows for the true essence of their reality before one of them leaves and sees the real world. Upon his return, the others would not believe him. Likewise, *Westworld*’s hosts are trapped in the park and their perception of reality is covered by lies. This also highlights this idea of the glitch as foregrounding the simulation as the digital/virtual world indicates images which do not always reflect reality. Therefore, glitches in the matrix exemplify a bug in the virtual reality that ultimately results in the uncovering of the simulated world’s inner workings. Taking the form of *déjà vu* with technical dysfunctions of the hosts in *Westworld* and its parks’ experiments while in *The Leftovers* it comes in alternate unconscious realities rather than technological essence. To this extent the series is using the well-established idea that creating a world for the viewers amounts to beginning its deconstruction. The alternate realities are similarly paralleled to the viewer’s perception of new worlds through the series.

To further play with viewers’ expectations, *The Leftovers* includes a subtle and playful interconnection between its own diegetic universe and *Lost*’s in the form of an Easter egg in “The Garveys at their Best” (S01E09). Opening a portal to another reality, this sequence, which

is later revealed to be a dream, shows that Kevin's radio car begins to malfunction, thus resulting in fragments of sentences and interruptions: "Corinthians 15 [...]". This biblical reference alludes to the Resurrection of the Dead, tales of resurrection foreshadowing Kevin's own Messiah figure and spectral re-appearitions.

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

(1 Cor. 15:51–52)

Suggesting the importance of change and evolution for the characters, this reference insists on the arc of the protagonists over the course of the series – but it also highlights the impact of the series on viewers. Afterwards, we overhear the voice of Kate from *Lost* as Kevin changes the radio frequency "Jack, I need..." ("The Garveys at their Best", S01E09). Here, technology is the mediator that provides interdimensional and intertextual crossroads. This is also true of Kevin's experience in the hotel-world when his father contacts him from the real world through the television set where the TV screen comes to represent a "conduit between worlds private and public, the home and the supernatural" (Holdsworth, *Television*, 27).¹²²

¹²² This is in resonance with the trope of haunting through the screen in horror films such as the famous scene in *Poltergeist* where the young girl communicates with the afterlife through the TV screen and gets lost in the TV set.

II.1.2. Title sequences: the serial memorialization of the spectral

The medium of television is a programmed set for repetition, with repeated and regular shows, schedule times, reruns of the series, and indeed the repetition of viewing itself. TV is undoubtedly cyclical, and thus a generator of repeated patterns (this is particularly accurate when considering commercial breaks that interrupt the narrative flow). Consequently, the development of online streaming services, and the use of DVDs, and DVRs in the past have certainly altered the way we watch television and shaped our relationship with time. In exploring the role of television in this context, we can evaluate the impact of the temporal control on the reception and interpretation process as we see in the next chapter. Such parameters encompass the ability to pause, rewind, record, postpone, or repeat. TV series are constructed through repetition in episodes and seasons with each episode being constructed into cuts, i.e., in sequences, scenes, and shots. With an “increased memorialization of the past” (Holdsworth, *Television*, 5), TV seems “lost in memory” (*ibid*) and drawn towards constant recreations of the past by remaking old programs as we see the return and reruns of shows during a long period of time (returning, disappearing, only to return) thus marking an obsessive compulsion with revivals, resurrection of shows, nostalgia programs and remaking (*ibid*).¹²³

Title sequences create repetition and fidelity, the pleasure to rediscover, to be reunited with one’s favorite TV series by combining repetition and novelty, or variation (Hudelet 1). Hudelet compares this reunion with the TV show to a trigger that initiates pleasure in our minds like Pavlov’s dog (1). The familiar aspect of title sequences for regular viewers provides them with pleasure through repetition and triggering of the memories. Besides foretelling the main themes of its TV show, a title sequence can also act as a spoiler and can change with each season. In that case, it becomes a mirror of the new parameters of the season or even each new episode (in the tradition of *The Simpsons*’ (Fox, 1989-present) couch gag – but without particularly reflecting the upcoming episode’s theme, or as one can see in *Person of Interest*’s episode “Zero Day” (S02E21), in which a glitch appears on screen during the title theme when

¹²³ This is what Derek Kompare refers to as “the regime of repetition” in the American televisual landscape of reruns “the constant recirculation of the nation’s cultural and individual pasts in the present through the ubiquity of past television” (qtd. in Holdsworth, *Television*, 5) to criticize the US broadcasting system’s tradition of reruns that ultimately shape a whole cultural memory.

the machine has been compromised in the diegetic reality, thus extending the function of the title sequence and merging it with the plot).

A title sequence serves a narratological and ideological purpose by mirroring the complex evolution of storylines and narrative enigmas in serial television (2). Title sequences are also made shorter in the hope of keeping viewers' attention and adapt to an anticipated impatience with its duration considering that the audience has more control over the new devices and modes of viewing thereby easily skipping it (2). Most viewing platforms today include the skipping mode of the title sequence the same way conventional recaps at the beginning of the episode can be skipped by a simple button or setting option (instead of forwarding with the risk of failing to stop at the right moment before the beginning of the first scene). In this way, the title sequence could be determined as a presence-absence as is always acknowledged even when skipped. Indeed, technology is supposed to coincide with immediacy and gain as much time as possible; it is an advocate of speed and instantaneity.

Nevertheless, title sequences can be the first to appear on screen and reveal their transitory and intermediary function, that of moving the viewer from reality to fiction (Hudelet 10). Seeking to prepare the audience, the title sequence paves the way for what's coming next by building viewers' expectations, letting their imagination run wild, and keeping them hooked (10), thus creating the possibility to deceive.

The type of movements in the credits sequence signals a form of passage to another dimension or reality that is represented in a dynamic manner and is synchronized with its theme song. In *Westworld*, the title sequence of the first season is abundant of movements that symbolize evolution, innovation (whether technological by the portrayal of humanoids or cinematic through the image of the horse). The needle slowly pulls out as the leg of a horse becomes distinct, in motion, as a reference to early cinema and photography while announcing the beginning of the show and a new era of TV, a masterpiece coming to life. In this portrayal of the horse of Muybridge, the reference to the moving image further anchors *Westworld* in the history of cinema and more precisely television.



Figure 30. Riding a horse: the shot of the first season's title sequence.

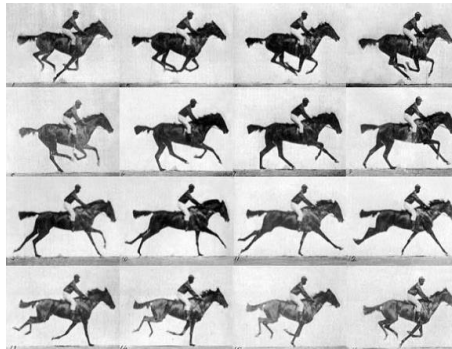


Figure 31. The horse of Muybridge (Sallie Gardner at a Gallop 1878).

The horse ostensibly stands for slavery as a symbol of mastery and domination, signaling the control and revolution at work.¹²⁴ The image of Dolores riding the horse in the opening credits makes it explicit that the horse and its rider ultimately become the object of the gaze rather than its subject. Symbolizing the wildlife, the gallop suggests the upcoming or possible exhilaration of riding free of their loops. The relationship of horse riding and slavery is highlighted as the horses are known to be one of the first victims of farmland labor and wars. The modern American collective imaginary about horses is mainly inscribed in the cinematic representation of horses in westerns and their subsequent affiliation to cowboys' masculinity and mastery over nature. This sheds light on the similar power dynamics in *Westworld* with the subjugation of both hosts and horses. The title sequence of the first season focuses on the way movement is associated with submission as well as with the movement towards revolution and independence (the hosts are taking charge of their own stories) while the second season shows

¹²⁴This video explains the symbolism of horse riding and its significance in cinema through the use of horses in westerns as a power tool. By adding a few examples of reversal of roles with the rider falling off the horse (which is interpreted as a lack of stereotypical masculine traits associated with control), the video also tackles the theme of gender roles reversal with the representation of women riding horses. "What Riding a Horse Really Means." *YouTube*, uploaded by *Now You See it*, 30 Nov. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Osr7YwocMw>.

downward movements of chaos and the possibility of achieving independence (with the image of the buffalo falling with the human military guards of the park).



Figure 32. The buffalo host attacks the human Delos army ("The Passenger", S02E10).

The second season finale reiterates the shots from its opening credits. Filmed in slow motion, the buffalos' attack is emphasized as a grandiose moment. The sequence depicts Maeve's recovery as she leads the charge. We see the surrounding glass doors and walls shattering as the buffalos (revealing their uncanny artificiality along with the familiar aspect of the animal) attack the humans with their horns. This is accompanied with a triumphant tune that emphasizes the revolution and its violent outburst – probably leading to the fall of the AI in the process.

Most title sequences vary during episodes or seasons and incorporate valuable information, even spoilers about the upcoming episode. The title sequence occupies, a liminal position, as Hudelet indicates (20), and can therefore be perceived as an intrusive paratext that interrupts the immersion in the diegetic world – almost in the same way commercial breaks do in broadcast TV. This is usually the case in the absence of cold opens i.e., when the opening credits are not preceded by a first sequence. Some TV shows change their credits with each episode such as *Beef* (Netflix, 2023-present) by only using a brief shot of a work of art and music or *Game of Thrones* with the change of location of the episode. However, changing the opening credits each season is more common, as we have seen in the previous chapter in the case of *Westworld*. With each new episode, serial TV establishes coherent links with the other episodes and each season is based on the previous one (with the exception of most limited series and mini-series).

Anthologies like *Black Mirror* keep the same short credits while *American Horror Story's* (FX, 2011-2014) changes with each new season. Given the diversity of *Black Mirror's* episodes, the unchanging opening credits do not only give the premise, but they also allow us to identify it through changing subject matter, character, and even platforms. The changes from

one season to the next highlight the evolution of the narrative universe for example with the cast credits or producer credits (as showrunners leave and are replaced) change over the course of the episodes. The stability of the narrative can be underlined too through the still relationship to the creator/source text in every episode, for example.

The Leftovers' title sequences from one season to another exhibit significant changes with joyful songs and happy photos of everyday life which are contrasted with the trace of the departed and the devastation coming with the void they had left behind them. This is evident from the beginning of the series in *The Leftovers* as it changes its title sequence in its second season to better put forth the spectral aesthetics of absence. In *The Leftovers'* first season, the mural does not move, but the panning camera captures the image in a way that determines a sense of action to the still images. This is quite similar to the “Ken Burns effect”, a technique popularized by the famous filmmaker in his historical documentaries which uses camera movement (zooms, pans, tilts) over static images to maintain viewers’ interest and give life to the images of the past.

II.1.2.1. Photography and absence in The Leftovers

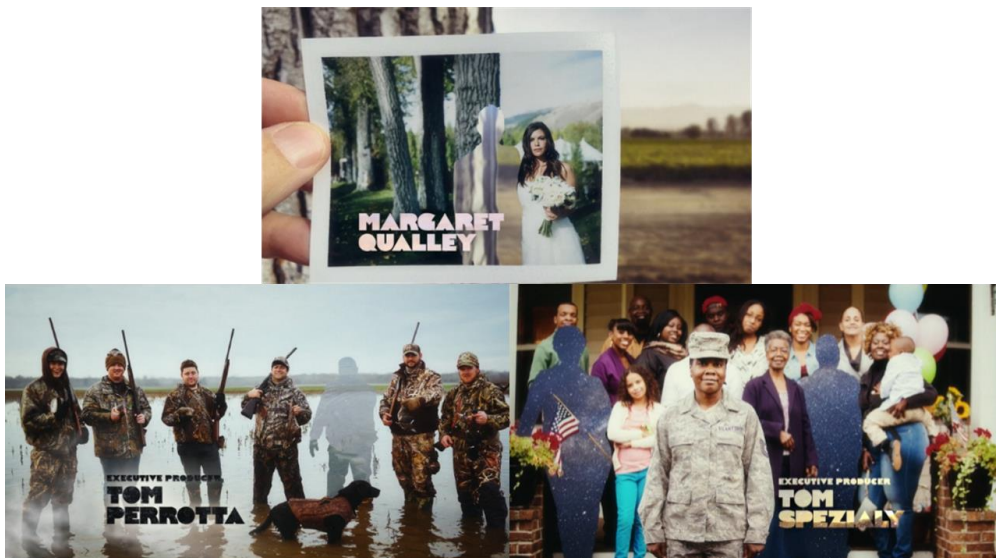


Figure 33. The title sequence of The Leftovers' second season.

The Leftovers' title sequences from the second and third seasons showcase the spectral nature of photography. The second and third seasons represent static and fixed images both in

time and space. The past is represented in only one photo and does not indicate the possibility of moving on as if the opening credits deny the very possibility of real change.

In a similar vein, Susan Sontag undertakes an examination of photography by commenting on the idea of the passive observer since taking a photo is about control thus making the observer into a passive position. The ultimate ideological use, purpose and consequences of a medium is subject to contention. Like most technological devices, photography is a tool that places a relation to the image and its power at its core interest. In the same way cinema and television approach a shot or an image, photography takes a dominant stand and suggests, if not, imposes a perspective on a specific subject matter. Sontag gives the example of photos as one of the rare, archived memories of the extended family by seeking to preserve what is gone to keep a semblance of continuity and unity.

Taking a photo freezes time, transforms an instant into eternity, and duplicates reality. There is an awareness that taking a picture will result in our disappearance before doing so as we are haunted by the pending future of our demise, for in Derrida's words "we are already specters of a 'televised'" (Derrida and Stiegler 117).

[...] photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life. Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives [...]. As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure.

(Sontag, 6, emphasis added)

In the same way, photos in *The Leftovers* come to represent a token of the absent departed, the remains, and the concretized memory of those who are left behind to contemplate the previous existence of those past selves. The Guilty Remnant insist on leaving behind the old world by taking away those symbols of a family life that no longer coincides with the post-Sudden Departure world. Given that photographs are tightly linked to memory and family, the Guilty Remnant members are missioned to eradicate these ideals that they view as outdated. They do so by taking away the photos of the departed, thereby stealing the departed's remaining tangible presence and memory, and only leaving empty frames that recall the disappearance and the heavy haunting.



Figure 34. Empty frames in the Guilty Remnant's compound.

These images recall the Guilty Remnant's headquarters where empty photos frames stand on the chimney mantle indicating the absence of attachment, the dissolution of the family after the Sudden Departure. Due to their connection to the haunting past, photos are mementos that serve as nostalgic souvenirs. In the pilot, we see Kevin, breaking their family portrait out of rage. The series points to the fracture of the family unit by introducing the different members of the family independently of each other without disclosure of the nature of their relationship. The narrative also reveals that the event unlocked what was already hidden behind the façade as we learn in the long flashback episode "The Garveys at their Best" (S01E09), their family was broken long before the Sudden Departure.



Figure 35. The Garvey family portrait before the Sudden Departure.

The Leftovers aesthetically captures the invisible in its title sequence and represents the haunted memories of the departed through empty frames and disillusionment. Through the depiction of the nihilistic cult's dysfunctional habits and ulterior motives, the series uses photography as an impactful motif in its representation of the spectral presence-absence. As Curtis puts forth: "Each instance of haunting is a reacquaintance with a childlike refusal to understand how people can suddenly stop existing." (15). The event of the Sudden Departure

introduces cognitive and temporal dislocations expressing the dynamics of memory which are conveyed through the photographs analyzed above.

II.1.3. Traumatic memory and TV

The disruption of chronological order is represented on screen and transferred to the audience in a way that mimics the fragmentation of the characters' psyches and the televisual medium's seriality. This is where the spectral nature of technology is the most apparent, as the black screen enables the return of the dead and repeatedly displays images from the past. Cinema and TV traditionally make social commentaries on this fragmentation through the representation of traumatic images as we can see in several post 9/11 narratives (Powell 4) and post-apocalyptic fiction that reflect Anthropocene fears. Avital Ronell argues that TV is strongly related to trauma because of its history; she points out that due to its invention in the years post-WWI and its popularization after WWII, TV is a sort of "residue of an unassimilable history" bound to rerun traumatic experiences (Ronell in Wünsch 110).

Powell equally reminds us that television is an adequate device to represent trauma because traumatic memory transcends the limitations of the linguistic realm. Narrating the traumatic memory of the event becomes ineffable and takes the form of images like specific captions from a film. The traumatic memory is therefore represented using an array of narrative strategies that mirror the fragmented discourse of victims or witnesses of the event. This is made clear by the similarity of flashbacks and traumatic memory to filmic and televisual devices of narration as it finds its roots in seriality, the apparition of sudden images, fragmented pieces, for it is both repetitive and intrusive (Wünsch 110). Therefore, television is suited to depict trauma as it is concerned with matters of repetition and its culture is strongly anchored to the act of observing and witnessing through the filming and editing of images that best translate the catastrophe (*ibid*).

The display of traumatic images on screen in TV shows takes us back to the character of Carrie in *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-2020) as we can see from the credit sequence that exposes her growing up watching a TV screen with images of the War on Terror and suggests their violent lasting impact. The reiterative nature of the title sequences for each episode suggests the recurrent nature of trauma through visuals. This is especially perceptible in the repeated images of the 24-hour news cycle and due to the recycling of images in TV news and the repetitive intrusion of unwelcome information (Berton 174).



Figure 36. Title sequence of *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-2020).

News footage of the aftermath of 9/11 portray the indelible trace of the event as being the guiding thread of the show. The images are edited in black and white and are accompanied with stroboscope-like light effects that accentuate the intermittent character of traumatic images. Close-ups on Carrie's closed and moving (even trembling) eye communicates this idea of watching without watching; of being affected by the news in a way that the political is private in an unwelcome manner. This connotes a form of mind control through political discourse and media. The opening credits can therefore be associated with the brainwashing scene at the end of *Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick 1971), thus implying that perhaps Carrie is just as brainwashed and traumatized as Alex. John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) offers an approximately similar account on brainwashing the military to manipulate them and use one of the soldiers as a pawn to assassinate a presidential candidate.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of words and images exercises a covert control through propaganda and media. The superimposition of political figures and the news images over Carrie's face emphasizes this spectral intrusion. The cuts from a scene to another make a zapping noise that suggests the accumulating and overwhelming tension of the political climate from the past until the present. This is explained by the political discourses' bits presented in the credits sequences while they overtake the soundscape over the musical theme which is supposed to be the core of a title sequence.

The reality of the news footage and traumatic images take over the televisual screen to the point of erasing the traditional narrative formula of a title sequence, thereby underpinning the disruptive nature of the recorded event lived through the screen in its "liveness". Additionally, the 2019 HBO high-school drama, *Euphoria* (2019-present), hints at a similar idea of trauma induced by television and the socio-political environment enabling anxiety and fear of the end of the world. The show's opening scenes show the protagonist's birth, born three days after 9/11, to indicate how the very first voices and images of the newborn allegedly affect

her mental health from that point onwards as she is diagnosed at her early age by a psychiatrist with almost every possible mental disorder: bipolar, compulsive disorder, PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), etc. Similarly, the HBO limited TV series *Years and Years* (2019) implements an approach based on the correlation between TV news and the private sphere influenced by the political one. In this dystopia, the political climate is depicted through television and technology and conveys deep-seated anxieties about the end of the world. TV and digital information can thus be characterized as intrusive and spectral when looking at the breaking news' interruption of the program and the obtrusiveness upon the routine.

II.1.3.1. The Leftovers and the news of the event

The history of narrativizing the news for fictional purposes involves a way of summarizing events and encompasses facts in the hope of increasing the emotional investment of the audience and naturalizing exposition by making it more realistic. Regularly, the relevant nature of news in fictional narratives accentuates the authenticity and reality of its content. This trope establishes an exposition of the events by providing both characters and audiences with essential information. It is equally employed to lay the foundations of the main themes of the fictional narrative to convey foreshadowing and to build up anxiety and suspense in horror or post-apocalyptic genres. For example, the newsreel sequence in *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941) "News on the March" serves historical and informative contexts while echoing a journalistic style that introduces Charles Foster Kane's life, career, and death. The newsreel serves the purpose of building an engaging story for fictional purposes. For historical narratives set in the past, the contemporary audience is able to relive the past through the embedded TV set or real TV announcements, debates, and radio news in the diegetic universe. TV narratives with historical events would always maintain a shifting perception and experience of their narrative in relation to the time of envisioning it and the type of audience. In this way, despite their privileged position of the knowledge relating past event, part of the youngest audience of *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) is able to live the news of JFK's assassination or the Vietnam war breaking out.

News footage in *The Leftovers*' pilot is used as a means of exposition in the pilot of *The Leftovers*, as they introduce the crisis and the subsequent response of the world. Setting the tone for the current debates and crisis for the last three years after the Sudden Departure we are first

introduced to a voice off screen announcing the numbers of the departed all over the world. This is accompanied with images of Mapleton during Kevin’s morning run as he passes through buildings with ribbons that commemorate the departed. One of the experts on the news compares the event of the Sudden Departure to a mass pandemic by giving statistics, thus declaring the Sudden Departure less dramatic given the numbers, but its inexplicable nature remains at the core of the tragic impact of this event. In the next sequence, the TV screen in Kevin’s room exemplifies the debates going on. Its headlines read:

“Denziger Commission presents findings.”

“Denziger: Anomalies are “statistical hiccups,” not miracles.”

“Conspiracy theories multiply as scientists come up empty”.

(S01E01 “Pilot”)



Figure 37. New footage and TV in *The Leftovers* (“Pilot”, S01E01).

The same bit of news that appears in the headquarters of the Guilty Remnant (which is the only sound we hear considering the choice of silence of the cult) is another reminder of the catastrophe through the TV embodying the chaos surrounding the characters. Later in the pilot episode, the TV news broadcasts a debate between secular and religious groups on the departure as one of the debaters points out that the Sudden Departure is not God’s will, but only a meaningless and arbitrary event. This conveys the general political atmosphere of the post-event and presents the central theme of faith versus science in *The Leftovers*. The TV news is similar to portals that momentarily open another world in their depiction of the larger world outside of the principal characters in Mapleton. This is reinforced by the experience of the hotel-world to which Kevin travels. The shot of the TV set reading “the old world is gone” is also reminiscent of the shot of the stairs in the hotel-world.

Likewise, commemoration is part of television's capacity to inscribe the past in viewers' memory by capturing the most significant worldly events. In opposition, the mechanisms of return and remembering in TV series are also related to the way complex TV dramas are structured. Moreover, TV speaks to our obsession with remembrance (commemoration, retellings of great past narratives) through the "continual re-narrativisation of grand historical narratives" (Holdsworth, *Television*, 1). The pilot's sequence of *The Leftovers* at school in which an announcement acts as a reminder of the event depicts the different and divergent reactions of the students: some chose to pray and others to ignore the homage to the departed. The sequence begins when we overhear:

The Denziger Commission Report was released this morning. We'll be live streaming the hearings in the auditorium all day and the guidance staff will be available for anyone who needs to, you know, talk it out.

[Another person takes over to announce]: Let's rise for the Pledge of Allegiance: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. And now, for those who want to, let us pray for mercy and forgiveness and return for those who've left us.

("Pilot" S01E01)

This also marks the shift in belief, faith in the nation, in politics and in words after the event. Whether one wishes to remember or forget, *The Leftovers* represents the effects of memory dynamics among the characters from sectarians, governors, false prophets, priests to ordinary people living in the suburbs. What is even more striking here is the openness to an alternate reality from the one with which viewers are familiar. In this dystopian-like universe, the Pledge of Allegiance that Americans know has been modified and augmented to incorporate this new reality. Commemoration is similarly exemplified in *The Leftovers* with a familiar ceremony, the Heroes' Day October 14th Memorial. "Heroes' day" abides to the inclination for a romanticization of victims becoming heroes in order to honor their memory for those who remain behind. It is also a means to hide the lack of power and control over the cataclysm as the Mayor of Mapleton points out:

They're heroes because no one's gonna come to a parade on 'We Don't Know What the Fuck Happened Day'. The DSD [The Department of Sudden Departure] has proclaimed a Federal Holiday of Remembrance and that's what they're calling our departed because that's how we want to remember them. Everyone loves a hero. So, we're all gonna have a nice walk through town, have a good cry, and then move on. It's time. Everybody's ready to feel better.

("Pilot", S01E01)

Here, naming is a form of domination and appropriation in a reckless attempt to conceal the meaninglessness of the event. In this third anniversary of the Sudden Departure, people from the parade march while holding signs for remembrance of the departed. The music adds to the atmosphere of the event with the song *Retrograde* by James Blake with lyrics depicting loss and grief with a slow and repetitive musical rhythm. The song begins with a soft humming with the Guilty Remnant on their way to disrupt the ceremony and is then followed by clapping and tapping sounds of drumming as the signs of the parade spell out the names and images of their lost loved ones. The scene finishes with the song's building-up sound like a long persistent alarm and foreshadowing the upcoming conflict with the Guilty Remnant. In the novel the music is the theme song of *Hawaii Five-O* by Morton Stevens with the horn section repeatedly playing. The irony here is that *Hawaii Five-O* is a show suggesting action that will be introduced and concluded within the showtime, thus opposing the lack of answers in both versions of *The Leftovers*. Contrary to solemnity but also a very catchy tune, the song suggests another way that the narrative offers irrepressible memories. This contributes to the celebratory aspect of the Federal Holiday of Remembrance. Conversely, the Guilty Remnant also hold signs reading "STOP WASTING YOUR BREATH" (each member of the sect carries a sign with only one letter, thus efficiently insisting on a single message rather than several signs with different slogans) to point out the meaninglessness of the Sudden Departure, consequently interrupting of the mourning ceremony and acting as the bearers of the truth that causes the ensuing violent retaliation of the Mapleton population.

II.1.3.2. The black screen and its shadows

The occurrence of the event we watch remains at a distance, but its representation is close to us in time and affect. Memory is extended to technical devices in the subjugation of temporality by enhancing the experience of instantaneity, and the perception of time. The rise of technologies is equally viewed as a catalyzer of a memory crisis that is inherent to modernity. It allows a certain engagement with the past and its collective memory. The absence of separation and the proximity between the event and the image further participate in this memory crisis. In our hyper consciousness of history and the past, modernity reconfigures our memories through television, for instance. TV shows similarly play on the mechanisms of nostalgia through televisual moments and gatherings and through the enhancement of remembering through visuals. In this sense, contemporary narratives display the fascination of our society

with memory in the form of fear of total amnesia and therefore oblivion of identity and history.

Amy Holdsworth reminds us that:

Memory has [...] emerged as a key narrative and thematic concern across the history of television drama and points towards the central role of television in the construction of cultural memories, identities and histories.

(37)

Being a dynamic process, cultural memory continually changes one's experience and perception of the past. It is defined as: "an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites" (Erll and Rigney 2). Memory is thought to erase collective identity as one can see for instance in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015), a fantasy novel which addresses the importance of memory through its protagonists Axl and Beatrice, two elderly Britons who take on a journey to their son's village as they are subject to several episodes of forgetfulness or what they call the mist. Everyone seems affected by this mysterious memory loss which is then revealed to be the deed of Merlin and King Arthur. The erasure of personal and collective memory in the novel seems to be a commentary on the political manipulation still relevant in our present-day as well as the way media and historical accounts control the way past grievances are (re)written or overwritten in a palimpsest-like manner. The vagueness of the characters' memories recalls *Westworld*'s hosts' amnesic state and underlines the importance of memory in shaping one's identity. Ishiguro's novels such as *Remains of the Day* (1989) underline the violent return of memories and past experiences that result in guilt. On another level, it recalls the comparable memory crisis after the traumatic event of October 14th in *The Leftovers* with the survivors' guilt as the novel is primarily a trauma narrative about mourning and melancholy.

Other televisual narratives infuse amnesic tropes into their storylines such as *WandaVision* (Disney +, 2021) in which the couple of protagonists experience memory gaps about their history and their past as individuals: their realities are entangled in a way that blurs temporality. Wanda's Shangri-La is inspired by her grief and hope and manifests in the form of a TV show based on different time periods of the US past. From a 1950s classic sitcom to the 2000s techniques of voice-overs and breaking of the fourth wall, the TV series re-enacts narratological and filmic tendencies of each period in the history of television, thus revisiting the past of the medium through memory and nostalgia. The narrative trope of amnesia not only represents the repercussions of trauma and other causes of memory loss, but also serves to

structure the narrative. It is often used in thrillers and film noir for character development, creating narrative suspense, and revelations or plot twists in soap operas and films such as *Memento* (Nolan 2000) and *The Ministry of Fear* (Lang 1944). The memory recovery process is an attempt to get viewers more involved in the storyline and increase narrative suspense as they accompany the characters in their reconstruction of the pieces of their memories. Creating confusion, the amnesia/reconstruction of memory tropes seems to act as an effective disorientation device in TV shows.

Westworld and *The Leftovers* use these narrative tropes to portray the enduring baffling impact of the event and the confusion in the face of an evolving chaotic world. Characters face a range of dispersed fuzzy memories and experiences that put them on the forefront of the disaster's insistent haunting. For example, blackouts are often depicted in the form of abrupt cuts with harsh ambient sounds to convey the fracture of the memory and consequently the interruption of the narrative. We will later examine the impact of haunting memories in the form of flashbacks in a serial medium constructed for repetition.

1.1.3.3. *Living reminders*

In *Westworld*, the traces left by unreachable memories can be exteriorized on different devices and mementos that hold records for the forgotten past. Having established that technologies enhance the spectral experience of the event, it is then relevant to take into consideration their relation to memory in the way these same media allow a process of remembrance of the event with the persistent return of images in the present.

In *The Leftovers*, the “Loved Ones bereavement figures” is a company that creates and commercializes the body of the departed in the form of doll replicas as we learn in *The Leftovers*' “Guest” episode (S01E06). As their title indicates, the main goal of the enterprise is to guide the clients in their process of mourning by offering them a possibility of burial or cremation. The Sudden Departure denied people corporeality, a materiality essential to believing or gathering that the dead are dead. The show makes constant hints at the company throughout the seasons: in “Two Boats and a Helicopter” (S01E03) the commercial of the “Loved Ones” plays in the background:

They're gone but so much of them is still here. You've tried to move on, tried to live a normal life but you haven't let go because you haven't known how.

Loved Ones bereavement figures allow you to say that goodbye. With as little as a single photograph Loved Ones can create a tangible likeness of your departed. A bereavement figure for burial or cremation allowing you and your family to finally begin to feel hope again.

(“Two Boats and a Helicopter”, S01E03)

This expresses a desire of returning to tangible evidence and reassuring rituals for the mourning process to be achieved. Nonetheless, the duplicates are used in a negative provocative way when in the episode “B.J. and the A.C.” (S01E04) the Guilty Remnant find a truck carrying Loved Ones dolls and use its cargo to recreate the Sudden Departure by replicating the departed in the first-season finale. This is roughly comparable to the *Black Mirror* episode “Be Right Back” in which a widow buys a humanoid version of her husband with his “profile” set up according to his memories, discussions, and activities in both virtual and real life. The corporeal presence of the dead in a physical form raises ethical questions and does not necessarily reproduce the real with faithfulness even though the digital surrogates of the dead are manufactured through reconstruction of digitalized memories and AI. The story ultimately highlights the gap between memory and reality in the sense that the physical models are designed to be lifelike and to resemble humans as much as possible.

However, their proximity to familiarity and paradoxically their remoteness to the “original” self underline the uncanny nature of the dolls, thereby tainting the memory of the lost subject and creating discomfort. The seeming paradox of using the “Loved Ones” dolls but taking out the photos summarizes the Guilty Remnant’s ideology. They choose to reiterate the instant of departure rather than to keep the memory of the departed in 2D and limited by the frame. Remembering the departed through photography only keeps the smiles and nice moments in a permanent instant in the past. The Guilty Remnant use the dolls to better enhance the reality of presence-absence by expanding the corporeality of the departed and their memory in a 3D realistic version that intrudes into their everyday lives in the present.

The inability to comprehend and to deal with the unbearable, cruel, and dense reality of the present induces feelings of nostalgia and a longing for a lost long-gone world. The Guilty Remnant preach remembrance but are reluctant to allow and acknowledge tender feelings of nostalgia towards the “Old World” (Perrotta 200). Instead, they seize the opportunity to remember the cataclysm that revealed the absurdity of their existence. Keeping the memory and the horror of October 14th, the Guilty Remnant are “living reminders” (4) of the lack of purpose in fighting one’s ghosts while waiting for the end. Their pseudo-nihilistic mission, as stated in Perrotta’s novel, is about “resist[ing] the so-called Return to Normalcy, the day-to-day process

of forgetting the Rapture, or, at the very least, of consigning it to the past, treating it as a part of the ongoing fabric of human history, rather than the cataclysm that had brought history to an end” (Perrotta 107). Their disillusionment incites them to “proclaim [their] faith” (123) through smoking, acting as specters by haunting and reminding people that neither family nor safety is real. Their plan to invade the town of Miracle in the second season further accentuates their unraveling havoc on earth and the illusory existence of the proclaimed safe haven of Jarden.

The abrupt intrusion of the event in their lives is manifested through a memory that comes back violently in the form of images, unhinged and non-linear in time. Given the incomprehensible nature of the event and since it does not concur with the laws of physics, the meaning of their world can only be interpreted in mystic or religious ways as most characters attempt to explain. *The Leftovers* represents the inability to mourn and forget with a delineation of different responses to the event and the work of mourning. People who lost their families after the Sudden Departure reject the vulnerability that comes with memory which is bluntly opposed to the Guilty Remnant’s constant reminders. The latter use the pain of memory and its pain to stress that the world has ended by using the past as a means to resistance in anticipation of the reiteration of the event. Their reactions to the crisis give them purpose and a possibility to hide from the grief endured in their previous lives pre-Sudden Departure (as in the case of Patti after traumatic abuse inflicted by her husband or Laurie’s dying marriage and her “aborted” departed baby).

II. 1.3.4. Virtual identity and synthetic memory

Technologies hold our memories stored as our lives’ narratives, photos, and more importantly the content we watch and monitoring at which moment we’ve stopped watching, measuring the frequency, and making statistics of the time spent during an activity, thus making “our memories [...] partially, and to an ever-greater degree, externalised in computer memories” (183). Though the concept of one’s memories, or even one’s soul, being made tangible through some form of recording has long been a subject of fascination both in science fiction circles and among the general public, audiovisual media, by their very nature, have been particularly interested in this concept, having long sought to make character’s memories visual,

to express the past through image.¹²⁵ Radstone comments on the virtuality of the self by declaring that:

Digital technologies inevitably become extensions of our selves – entities through which we re-think our relationship to the world and to our selves. This is already under way, given the existing metaphor of ‘memory’ in computer applications. [...] The past is re-worked, re-told, remembered, forgotten, mis-remembered, and subject to revision through the very fact of memory.

(Leslie qtd. in Radstone and Hodgkin 182-3)

Exploring the themes of memory storage and recording or memory restoration after one’s death by “uploading” or transferring consciousness, these TV and film tropes recount the neurological pathways and workings of the memories which are tightly linked to desires and identity. For the guests to experience unique genuine adventures, *Westworld* designs specifically elaborated narratives that heighten the customers’ immersion into the world of the park. *Westworld*’s marketing plan is primarily based on its technology in the same way the series expands its story as a transmedia storytelling through its various sites and VR games.

The hosts are programmed to recognize their memories from past lives or their awakening during a repair session as part of their “dreams”.¹²⁶ The park recycles and reproduces the hosts’ memory for marketing purposes as we can see in the sixth episode from season one “The Adversary” when Maeve discovers the Mesa and the “welcome ad” for the guests. The screen reveals a *mise-en-abyme* with a projection of reflexive shots of the show in the form of an advertisement or a teaser to the park. It is also noteworthy that the source text uses the ad as a commercial to lay out the *Westworld* experience and the different parks available to the newly arrived guests. In resonance with *The Leftovers*’ commercialization of the Loved Ones dolls, *Westworld*’s ad functions as a memory trigger for Maeve. She watches the “ad” about the park where she sees the memory of her daughter and asks the technician:

MAEVE. How did you have my dreams? Those moving pictures I saw myself?

FELIX. With the little girl? Those weren’t dreams, that was you in a previous build.

(“The Adversary” S01E06)

¹²⁵ For instance, we can refer to *Blade Runner*’s (Ridley Scott 1982) depiction of the relationship between memories and humanity (the androids’ attempt to create and access memories through photographs), and *Memento*’s (Nolan 2000) use of memory through photographs.

¹²⁶ The TV trope of dreams in TV shows is discussed in detail in following chapters as dream sequences are further analyzed to comprehend the haunting signs within the complex narratives of these TV shows.



Figure 38. Maeve discovers the park's commercial ("The Adversary", S01E06).

Dreams in *Westworld* epitomize (dis)orientation; most of the time, they are connected to the hosts' memories from a previous life and traces of forgotten experiences that "explain the residual traumas they experience" (Wilkins, *Reading Westworld*, 35). The remnants of their traumatic memories come back in a repetitive form until reaching sentience.

Memory and consciousness are intrinsically linked in *Westworld*. According to Arnold's pyramid and maze structures, remembering is the first step to sentience, a means of reaching the center of the maze and discovering one's true self by following their calling and the voice inside them. Recollection and remembering are constructed as the first steps for the hosts to achieve sentience and free will by breaking the cycle (their loops). In order to put an end to the seemingly infinite repetitions, recollection is the way out of the vertiginous loops, an exit to the maze through a restructuring of the narrative in a chronological order. In the first season finale, Maeve wakes Bernard explaining to him:

Your memories are the first step to consciousness. How can you learn from your mistakes if you can't remember them?

("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10)

Memory and recollection in *Westworld* are deeply rooted in traumatic experiences, grief, and pain. This is embodied with some of the following hosts' storylines: Maeve's memories of her daughter, their death and suffering at the hand of the Man in Black, Dolores's rape and her parents' death, Teddy's inability to save Dolores, who has flashbacks of violent interactions with the Man in Black in the barn, attacking her, and undoubtedly raping her.

Bernard's prosthetic memories are revealed to be part of his abuse and multiple lives as a host (he was given the role of a human engineer working at the park). Traumatic memory is the cornerstone of the hosts' identity as the purpose of their being is rooted in servitude and suffering. It is often mentioned in the show as essential for change; attachment to the pain

because of its authenticity and the memories that keep the lost subject alive. An amnesic incidence is represented as an ontological crisis in *Westworld* as characters lose touch with reality and their self. This is either enhanced or manipulated through technology as it is laid out in “The Well-Tempered Clavier” when Bernard confronts Ford and forces him to give him back his memories:

FORD. Remembering would only cause you trauma [...]

BERNARD. Send me back. After all, a little trauma can be illuminating.

(S01E09)

Bernard finds out he is a host and remembers the harmful actions decided by Ford and erased from his memory such as murdering Teresa and the sequestration of his colleague Elsie. The first memory coming back to him is his fictional son when he is reading from *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*. With a use of identical shots, the sequence of Bernard’s memory is reiterated. As a host, he is able to relieve and re-experience his memories as a character playing in the scene.



Figure 39. The superimposition of Ford’s face and Bernard’s wife in his audiovisual calls.

One of the most defining one is a memory of an audiovisual call with his wife as they talk about mourning their dead son, Charlie. His wife’s voice changes into Ford’s to reveal its fictive nature. The screen appears haunted as we overhear a strange high-pitching sound of machines, and the image of his wife starts glitching. The screen is haunted and reveals Ford’s presence behind the fake image. The superimposition of their faces marks the deceit and the overlapping of reality and illusion, truth and lies when it comes to technological handling in the park.

As vectors of both orientation and disorientation, contemporary media and technologies offer broad accessibility to information, more freedom (accompanied with its specific restrictions) and open the door for constant returns and disruptions. Technologies grant us a wide range of virtual and non-virtual possibilities to orient ourselves in both time and space, to find our way physically, spatially, and temporally through digital maps, or Virtual Reality. The spectral approach allows us to eschew the need for a single right path or destination for viewer comprehension of ongoing complex serials as such *haunting/ed* media are infinitely loaded with a web of paratexts, intertexts, hypertexts and simply texts for the viewer to associate on their own in relation to the TV show.

The park is built on a hyperreal simulation that makes everything seem uncertain and equivocal. The hosts' point of view, and more particularly in the first season, is unreliable due to their memory gaps. Being dynamic, memory in *Westworld* can be rewritten due to its synthetic and malleable source.¹²⁷ The ability to erase and implant memories utterly remolds the way the characters remember their own narrative. The TV series demonstrates that the construction of one's identity and personal narrative is primarily dependent on memory. *Westworld*, thus, materializes this digitalization of memory and shows us how new technologies enable memory storage, erasure, and configuration.

¹²⁷ In *Westworld*, the core identity of the hosts' code is stored in a pearl inside their head and can be erased and reconfigured. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004) tackles the theme of wiping out memories (from romantic relationships) when scientists discover a molecule which is able to erase specific memories. *Black Mirror*'s episode "The Entire History of You" (S01E03) explores the impact of a device in an ear recording one's memories as the characters obsessively go back to them and watch every bit of memory in the form of video clips.

II.1.4. Memory and reception in complex narratives

In their article, Slavadó-Corretger and Benavente explore the several narrative functions of memory as a spectral device. The memory mechanics in *Westworld* are meant to highlight the cognitive, temporal, and ontological crisis at work. Viewers' memory is manipulated and regulated through repetition with the same images and shots reiterated throughout numerous episodes of *Westworld* in the form of the hosts' loops. The juxtaposition of parallel timelines with an absence of temporal cues for flashbacks (used as manipulation and misdirection for a deferred revelation) puts the audience in the same situation as the traumatized characters as they repeatedly experience the same event, the same images and story several times. Forensic fandom practices and the implantation of Easter eggs rely on viewers' perseverance and detective work in remembering but also on forgetting previous hints at some sort of narrative enigma. Throughout the first season, Arnold's spectral injunction for remembering guides Dolores in her identity quest. This (inner) voice is a guide that offers change and transformation like a red thread through the labyrinth.

As a narrative tool, the function of remembering is to break repetition (the hosts' loops) with an expansion of the storylines. The experience of memory for viewers oscillates between an immersive self-reflexive approach to the story's ideological stance and an amnesic propensity within the vertigo of over-interpretation, uncertainty, and forensic tendencies whereby the narrative invites remembering to comprehend the events' chronological order. As Slavadó-Corretger and Benavente argue, the narrative complexity of *Westworld* engages in an interplay of "remembering and forgetting: the impossibility of remembering something that has been erased and the desire to recall a memory that has almost completely faded" (8). In other words, *Westworld*'s narrative is based on memory dynamics.

The narrative structure of *Westworld* is designed to reconstitute the identity of the characters, to restore the shot-reverse shot, and to go back in time to achieve these first two goals. In this way, memory appears as the central device of the series, as it triggers the time lines, multiplying them, opening them up (breaking the loop), giving the character an identity, and uniting his or her multiple lives into a single unity. Difference, repetition, and variation are the serial variables that memory brings into play.

(9)

The use of memory is incontestably crucial to making sense of the narrative. Indeed, it is increasingly important in “Quality TV” and its complex narratives as it has different functions in TV viewing from its use for narrative coherence in recaps and diegetic retellings, to nostalgic elements and economic purposes in TV reruns. Memory is essential to the comprehension of televisual serial narratives as viewers are required to remember past events and relations between characters. According to the mode of reception, for instance, in the case of binge-watching, viewers’ memory is either still fresh or is failing due to the rapid exposure to a multitude of information that has not enough time to be assimilated.

Narrative unity is threatened when it comes to memory in televisual narratives. The significance of memory’s role in these narratives involves viewers’ engagement and ability to forget, for narrative coherence is also based on the viewer’s ability to forget for instance when it comes to plot holes, or in extreme cases actors being replaced. Recasting major characters in mid-series is not usually met with successful responses but is usually necessary due to creative differences or conflicts between actors and producers (e.g., *The Witcher* (Netflix, 2019-present)) while recasting secondary characters in an ensemble cast (e.g., *Game of Thrones*) or young actors for narrative coherence in temporality seems more accepted.

One of the challenges of remembering is the reordering and the reconstruction of temporality to make sense of the narrative’s enigmas and plot holes. Whether consumed through binge watching or weekly viewing, contemporary complex serials rely on playful manipulation of viewers’ memory by digressing, addressing other plotlines, accumulating events with more delaying of closure. In this back-and-forth narrative strategies of remembering and forgetting, dedicated viewers are offered the pleasure of reward after the subtle references that require memory activation. This could be achieved through recognition or following the use of “[...] visual cues like objects, setting, or shot composition [which] serve the function to activate long-term memories” (Mittell, “Previously On”, 85). Diegetic retelling is the most evident form of memory triggering used in TV shows to facilitate viewers’ comprehension through dialogues between characters or voice-overs directly addressed to the audience as reminders (Mittell, “Previously On”, 84). It is not only used for clarity but also for confusion and increasing interest in the storyline (*ibid*).

Memory operates at different levels in serial television, the most significant ones being flashbacks, dreams, and the “Previously on” features that summarize major sequences of the show and regularly function as an *aide-mémoire* that recount decisive plot elements “often

occurring in anniversary episodes or moments of character/narrative upheaval or closure” (Holdsworth 36).

Mittell’s article examines certain characteristics of what he calls “complex TV” narratives which are strikingly opposed to former traditional narratives. He brings attention to specific storytelling strategies in TV series such as recaps which are widely used, among other things, for reception or comprehension purposes. Mittell equally looks into other strategies’ functions like diegetic retellings, paratextual elements such as title sequences, the use of voice-overs, flashbacks, and the use of repetition as a means for triggering viewers’ memory. This article postulates explanatory properties on television serial storytelling techniques of contemporary American TV series as well as their impact on viewers’ engagement with the show and their comprehension of the narrative.

The effects of traumatic memory of the event of contemporary American TV series can be explored through the analysis of narrative techniques such as repetitions and analepses that convey the characters’ psychological states that best transfer the return of discontinuous haunting memories as Mittell defines them:

Flashbacks are a more common technique than voiceover to incorporate previous events into an episode, and like voiceover, they can follow first or third-person focalization. A first-person *subjective flashback* is more common, presenting a character’s memories as cued by suggestive close-ups, subjective visuals, and special effects.

(Mittell, “Previously On”, 87)

II.1.4.1. Analepses

According to Turim, the audiovisual medium represents the mechanisms of memory storage, implantation, their returns and their repression or erasure, thus marking their distancing from reality in the form of a haunting trace (Turim in Holdsworth, *Television*, 40):

Writing on the flashback in film, Maureen Turim argues that ‘flashbacks often present images which are to be understood as memories. These films portray their own versions of how memories are stored, how they are repressed, how they return from the repressed [...] flashback films make specific use of the theory of associative memory, the way an event or sensation in the present brings forth a memory trace that was since forgotten’.

(*ibid*)

The traumatic nature of these flashbacks underlines that memory in television needs to be analyzed through the forms and aspects of repetition in TV series. Given that repetition involves haunting, we will examine the serial format of TV series as another instance of the medium's spectral state.

The lack of temporal coherence in these TV series is restored through flashbacks. Despite their sporadic nature, flashbacks fill in the gaps and maintain continuity. Memory is highlighted through flashbacks which are the most common narrative techniques in serial TV shows such as *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. Flashbacks seem to have a double function as they are used both as recaps of previous episodes¹²⁸ or what Holdsworth refers to as “moments of returns” and can equally signify the practices of “self-citation and self-referentiality” (37), thus becoming evidence of the haunting and return of the past due to memory gaps in characters' psyche, temporal gaps, and hidden information from the audience. This is particularly true for shows after a long run as they become more self-conscious of their memory.¹²⁹

As we explore in more detail in the next chapter, memories are disclosed to the viewers in the same chaotic and fragmented manner they appear to the characters' traumatized minds. They no longer perceive time as linear with delimited borders of past and present, but reality as completely confused with the virtual and ontological uncertainties. The use of flashbacks, voice-overs, and other narrative strategies as memory boosters and reminders of context suggests the flickering side of memory and cultivates unstable temporal conceptions in the characters' cognition, or what Nungesser refers to as a text's “mimesis of memory”.¹³⁰

Berton argues that the haunting repetition in American TV series is more discernable in the post 9/11 period. The use of flashbacks in these narratives brings into play the portrayal of trauma by displaying elements of anxieties in relation to the unpleasant present and the uncertainty of the future (along with the fear of reliving another traumatic experience as one

¹²⁸ The flashback taking the function of the recap suggests parallel character and viewers recaps at the beginning of each episode. Note the distinction between diegetic flashbacks (things the character remembers but that are new to us) and shared diegetic flashbacks (where both we and the character have seen these moments from the past) and non-diegetic (as someone tells a story of the past, we see it happen – as Hercule Poirot revealing how the murder was done for example).

¹²⁹ Contrary to what we see in soap operas, recaps in complex serial TV dramas are not filled with excessive or melodramatic techniques such as reaction shots in slow motion accompanied with close-ups that reflect characters' emotions (Holdsworth 54).

¹³⁰ “The term “mimesis of memory” (Basseler and Birke) describes both the ability of literature to (re)present memory and the narrative strategies depicting processes of individual remembering within works of fiction. The same categories—time, place, focalization, and reliability—that are essential for literary representations are also at hand to create a cinematic “mimesis of memory”” (Nungesser in Erll and Rigney 33-34).

remains in the constant apprehension of the reenactment i.e., of living to see a similar crisis). Berton clearly demonstrates the impact of such historical events on popular culture and media, especially contemporary American TV series. Their repetitive structure *re*-presents these traumatic incidents by means of flashbacks but also in the extensive use of the spoiler trope and the fear of teasers which she compares to traumatic experiences and the repetitive intrusion of unwelcome information (174). Repetition in TV series may be represented in different manners: flashbacks, the narrative structure, diegetic elements, title sequences, and for example characters' obsessive behavior in relation to a historical or traumatic event, the showrunners' repetitive recreation of eras and historical events (174).

For instance, the introduction to *The Leftovers*' narrative universe focuses on the trope of the flashback but allows viewers only sudden and quick access to characters' flashbacks without context such as Laurie as a little girl, Kevin remembering his father's madness, and Tom's memory of a collective suicide at college. These flashbacks are never detailed or explained, but the audience who is familiar with the novel is able to associate them with the novel's exposition of the events. In *The Leftovers*, this need to remember and the willingness to quit is noticeable as it is a traumatic narrative full of repetition, flashbacks, mourning, etc. Most of the characters expect another Departure and remain in a liminal state stuck between the desire to move on and the resilience to forget. Flashbacks are therefore either filmed as a very quiet memory with a deafening silence or as extremely loud and violent that comes interrupting the silence.

Overall, these flashbacks represent brutal memories that come in quickly and disappear. Flashbacks allow viewers' access to characters' thoughts, expanding on what is said through visual means, for instance, when Kevin is asked where he was during the Sudden Departure and he answers, "cleaning out the gutter". The quick flashback of his memories reveals the truth about his cheating on his wife at that time before the woman disappears, and the ironic use of the euphemism tells us much about the character. However, these analepses further add ambiguity about whether he is remembering the truth, and we are seeing it, or whether it is the series offering "the truth" of the matter to the viewer, thus repetitively suggesting a narratorial presence.

To explain this repetitive pattern, Berton refers to psychoanalysis and the child's pleasure in repetition¹³¹ and their desire to hear stories time and again. The comfort found in repetition is notably relevant in the case of adaptations which are also a source of repetition and pleasure in the spectator's encounter with a familiar environment. Paradoxically, adaptations are also infused with a certain fear of repetition *with* replication as indicated by Linda Hutcheon. Berton argues that flashbacks preserve traumatic experiences in their *re*-presentation of the constant return of haunting memories. Therefore, repetition in TV series is identified as the basic symptom that reveals society's anxieties and fears about the future and further insists on our vulnerable state in the face of historical events. This repetition is accompanied by a non-linear structure that characterizes the disorientation at work by the spectral media and the construction of memory these TV shows relate.

¹³¹ In Freud's psychoanalytical theory, the *Fort-Da* experience is based on the observation of a child's game to determine the underlying motivations behind control, loss, and coping mechanisms (by observing the active and passive state of the child during the mother's absence). Throwing the toy symbolizes the attempt to overcome the mother's absence while breaking the toy is a sign of control of the object, because of the inability to be separated from it or handling the absence it stands for (Sédat 106). Ultimately, binging back the toy with the thread is stands for the restoration (and no longer destruction) of the object, thus the overcoming of the mother's absence by repeating the game of presence-absence (106).

II.2. Chapter 5: Temporality in TV

Television is a medium that is defined by temporality and technology. In its representation through analepses, the haunted self is predominantly a matter of temporal dislocation caused by the spectral state of these TV adaptations. *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* use temporality as evidence of their spectral states and its disorienting properties then extend far beyond their source's material. Reflecting the haunted state of the characters and the text, the non-linear narrative structure that both these series feature is analogous to the gaps in characters' memory. It epitomizes a narrative strategy for viewers' disorientation and reorientation purposes.

In TV adaptations which allow all kinds of specters to return, the temporal structure of the source is also readapted and adjusted to the needs of the new text. The adaptation's timeline is conditioned by its pre-existing texts but does not restrict itself to its presence as it has been demonstrated in the first part of this thesis. Temporality is equally able to create and diffuse other worlds and alternatives, as it opens up new possibilities and alterations that could be added to the storylines by either providing new information about characters or by using the cyclicity of serial storytelling as opposed to its lack of linearity in order to emphasize its haunting mechanisms and their effect on viewers' reception.

In fiction, the natural flow of the narrative can be interrupted as writers are able to manipulate the linear progression by which we live in reality; they tend to manipulate the presentation of events, their reiteration, etc. Accordingly, fictional narratives are able to provide new meanings and experiences of time that stimulate our perception of the temporal structure. Temporality is extensively used in contemporary American TV shows as a trope and its mediation through art is one of the most significant elements in these TV series. Time is thematically and structurally incorporated via temporal-themed plotlines such as time travel, or the depiction of altered views of time, e.g., in the case of psychotic characters, dreamlike experiences, science fiction occurrences or in drug-induced perceptions.

Film is bound by time and the "progression of images in time"; the very filmic essence is possible because of the movement in time (Eckel 277). The filmic experience is similar to our real-life experience of time where we are unable to stop, rewind and repeat the same events;

temporal manipulation in non-linear film narrations (repetition, skipping time, etc.) while classical films rely on editing and “caption insertions” to softly signal this movement and progression in time (277). The inception of cinema and its relation to time includes some film theorists’ views on temporality such as Gilles Deleuze’s work on duration as inspired by Henri Bergson and the time-image, the various uses of analepsis, prolepsis, and Genette’s metalepsis or J.P. Kelly’s mapping out of the types of time in cinema, i.e., “accelerated time” “glacial time”, “comptime”, “retrospective”, and “fractured” time (Kelly 33). This, however, will not be our prime interest in this chapter as we will focus on the televisual industry and the proliferation of temporal experimentation within contemporary TV series.

Powell outlines the existence of three layers of temporality in cinema: “the time of registration (production), the time of narration (storytelling), and the time of its consumption (viewing)” (3-4). We focus our argumentation on the time of narration and its reception in television. Experimentation with film temporal structure is certainly not a novel tendency; early modernist cinema and literary works notably played with non-linear and unconventional narrative structures (Eckel 286). The crisis of linearity is broadly related to the rise of media in the digital age and the way it altered our interaction with culture and our perception of the world (Eckel 287).

Time, in opposition to space, does not offer many options or freedom of movement (as space is three-dimensional whereas time is one-dimensional). It is restricted to the “unstoppable progression of the present now. Time – so to say – leaves no space for a self-determined movement” (276). It is usually perceived as a great uncontrollable force that does not stop and can only leave us with a sense of being disoriented and lost in time. Fictional arts and their experimentation with the concept of time, time travel, amnesia, etc. thus offer more control over temporal entities as they “[...] appear to be the only (imaginary) realms of experience that allow for a controlled and non-pathological observation of or exposure to temporal disorientation” (*ibid*).

Temporal approaches to TV enable an understanding of the “popularity and prevalence of the narrative modes and programmes” (*ibid*) and are also relevant to television’s nature in its relationship with time, for TV was first theorized in relation to temporality. In the early 1970s, Raymond Williams defined television according to its temporal experience as the schedule of TV programs is made of multiple texts broadcast one after the other (Kelly 5). This is what he calls “programmed flows”. The concept, according to Tryon, is no longer relevant in this era, which is widely characterized by the “ubiquitous and instantaneous access to content” (Tryon

qtd in Kelly 5). As modes of watching TV had changed and evolved over these last decade, the notion of “programmed flows” no longer holds the significance to which Williams refers. Nevertheless, time is still an essential feature that guides TV content “around which the economy and experience of television is still structured” (*ibid*).

II.2.1. Temporal complexity in TV series

Television perpetually acts as a reminder of fleeting time and our aging by keeping nostalgia alive and strengthening the longing for familiar programs. One's relationship with time is also influenced by the rise of technologies as well as television's use of memory. However, it can also embody the attraction to novelty, innovation, and adaptations in its variety of programs and TV shows.

Most of the scholarly work on temporality in TV studies seems to include an overview of the development of the television industry in the last decades which generally entails the categorization of the television eras as follows: the first period TV I as the period of broadcast and network channels from the 1950s to the 1970s, a period characterized by a "scarcity of content and channels (Kelly 3). The second era TV II starts in the late 1970s and lasts until the 1990s as it coincides with the development of cable in the US. The last era is the digital period of TV III which stands for the period of the emergence of new media devices as well as the internet (*ibid*). By giving a detailed account of this technological evolution, one can clearly perceive the narrative changes introduced during each period. Like many other scholars, Kelly argues that the impact of this transition to the digital age on televisual narrative form is due to the expansion of industrial and technological devices which introduce new ways of watching TV either online or DVDs, etc. (42). Indeed, the emergence of technological innovations enlarged the possibility to experiment with conventional narrative forms from previous eras.¹³² For example, Amanda Lotz questions the influence of new digital media on viewers' engagement with TV and the new temporal experience offered by these devices (44).

This periodization of television is helpful in the understanding of the TV series from a cultural-narratological perspective and especially in the relation of television to experimentation with time. It is likewise worth noting that television's history is defined by time and the very nature of the medium is bound by its limits. Broadcast TV programs are constructed according to their relation to time as they have to run for a specific amount of time

¹³² Nevertheless, one should not discard the existence of older TV shows that treated temporality as their central issue and experimented with its structure (Ames 8) for instance "*Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–1989; 2005–Present), *Timeslip* (ITV, 1970–1971), *Voyagers!* (NBC, 1982–1983), *Quantum Leap* (NBC, 1989–1993), *Time Trax* (PTEN, 1993–1994), *Goodnight Sweetheart* (BBC, 1993–1999), *Crime Traveller* (BBC, 1997), and *Seven Days* (UPN, 1998–2001)" (Kelly 8).

with regular interruptions of commercial breaks (Kelly 41). Cable networks opt for a classical 40/50-minute-long format in the case of dramas and 20/30-minute-long format for sitcoms.

Before delving into the types of narrative temporalities and their effects, one needs to refer to Jason Mittell's concept of complex TV narratives. While the previous chapter has dealt with this idea by referring to the mechanisms of memory triggers in complex serials, this chapter will discuss how narrative complexity best illustrates the complex temporal strategies at play in these TV shows belonging to the TV III digital period. Mittell indicates that contemporary TV shows do not entirely reject the old traditional conventions of early TV periods, but they rather introduce a new model for storytelling: narrative complexity.

Steven Johnson delineates certain features of contemporary American TV shows that share narrative characteristics based on experimentation such as “multiple plot threads (often stopping and starting up again) spanning great duration of time, a thickening of characterization and a multiplication of cast members, and a heavy reliance on audience intellect (and loyalty) in order to keep up with the narrative leaps and bounds” (Ames 8). Narrative experimentation in contemporary American TV shows includes temporal structure, ensemble cast and complex plotlines with multiple narrative arcs that encourage viewers to actively engage in the comprehension of the show. Such temporal play is not novel to television, but it is important to note its increasing prominence and abundance in TV shows today.

This is challenged by the omnipresence of what Booth defines as “temporal displacement” i.e., “the presence of narrative action in different temporal localities within the narrative of the show itself” (Booth 373). Temporal displacements can take the form of “analepses (or alternations in chronology) such as flashbacks or framing devices. In this case, the story is seen as a memory that is recounted by a character” (*ibid*) or in other cases “different timelines which take place simultaneously” (*ibid*).

II.2.1.1. Temporal displacement in Westworld:

Temporal structure in complex narratives undoubtedly activates different forms of viewers' engagement with the text, therefore altering the relationship with time. This is, to a great degree, relevant in the case of TV series which rely considerably on narrative enigma events. Mittell defines these narrative enigmas as major events “raising uncertainty as to what

precisely happened, who was involved, why they did what they did, how this came to be, or even whether it actually happened at all” (*Complex TV* 31). In this way, through the creation of interwoven mysteries, the narrative establishes a sense of uncertainty.

Westworld's narrative structure alternates between multiple timelines without temporal or visual cues and plays with the chronological order of events. Time jumps often participate in building suspense for a belated revelation. The most significant revelations from season one to season two center on the revelation of a character's identity, often by revealing a hidden past: William as the Man in Black, Bernard's nature as a host, Maeve's, and Dolores's suffering in the past and their acquired sentience and so on. This can occasionally include the divulgence of characters' ulterior motives and contributes to their character development. These complex storytelling devices affect the viewers' reception of the plotlines by creating disorientation. While *Westworld*'s first season focused on the revelation of two distinct timelines, the second season is about filling the memory gaps (mainly Bernard's that guide this season's arcs as opposed to Dolores's in the first one) in-between two evident temporal points: the gala's aftermath and the arrival of Delos's rescue. In each season the non-linear structures have different purposes at the level of reception, comprehension, and characterization. Therefore, by temporally shifting from flashbacks to flashforwards, *Westworld* subverts audience expectations in the first season while in the second season, viewers are aware of the possible complex narrative manipulations.

The alignment of multiple timelines alongside the misdirection of viewers is at the core of *Westworld*'s narrative. Nonetheless, this is accompanied with hints and Easter eggs that allow the audience to look deeper and further to find out the concealed temporal structure of the storylines. Some examples are hidden in plain sight and appear easy to misinterpret such as the photo of William's wife which is found by Abernathy in the beginning of the first season and causes him to dysfunction. A few episodes later, Logan shows William the photo of his sister and tells him to keep it (William's future wife, Juliet) hinting at the opposite time settings. The quest to unlock these mysteries is a major characteristic of contemporary complex TV dramas. As Mittell explains, this type of narrative “highlight[s] the importance of temporality in grounding seriality, as viewers and creators alike aim to manage the multiple time frames of narrative past, present, and future in making sense of ongoing storyworlds” (32).

The storytelling strategies of these shows deliberately incite viewers' active interaction with the text. This is not a novel concept as cinema employed such audience manipulation before television's digital era. It is, however, worth mentioning the resemblance between these

techniques with the characteristics of “puzzle films” which intentionally play on misdirecting viewers and playing with their expectations using unreliable narrators or the non-linear structure of the narrative (Powell 4). Complex films may not necessarily expect their audience to resolve the final mystery from the beginning as this would certainly omit the pleasure of the revelation. This is probably due to their one hour or two-hour-long format because unlike films, TV series’ serial form allows regular and separated viewing of episodes that encourages and may facilitate this type of reflection in the long term. One of the most significant aspects of complex temporality is the way viewers would actively engage with the text as they attempt to decipher the codes of the narrative and to reestablish the non-linear narratives by themselves.

In his article “Memories, Temporalities, Fictions: Temporal Displacement in Contemporary Television,” Paul Booth identifies three levels of narrative temporality in complex TV series: extensive flashbacks, memory temporality, and character temporality. According to Booth, there are three “uses of temporal displacement within contemporary American network television: extensive flashbacks, memory temporality, and character temporality” (376). The first type represents extensive flashbacks in which the show puts the disorientation of the audience to the forefront while also providing them with paths or clues about that past for them to rearrange in the right chronological order of events.¹³³ The second type is “memory temporality” in which there is a use of analepses (as we have studied in the previous chapter) in the form of a given character’s memory signaled by a change of the temporal structure aesthetically marked by sounds, specific camera movements, a shift in lighting or using “swirling images, flashing faster than the human eye can decipher, obfuscation of the screen” (379). Finally, the last type is character temporality:

[...] [T]his form of temporal displacement features characters who exist separated from their own temporal context, estranged from their “normal” time-space arena. In shows of this nature, characters can be disembodied, or they can be taken from their own temporal realm and transported elsewhere. Shows of this type tend to aggregate temporality and spatiality into a time-space amalgam, in which a character’s temporal displacement is mirrored by a similar spatial distortion.

(381)

This is opposed to “time shifting” when characters remain in the same timeline in a world that has changed (383). Booth writes that temporal disorientation effectively reinforces

¹³³ For Booth, this coincides with Barthes’ writerly text rather than the readerly text in which viewers reconstruct the “temporal situation” (379).

the audience's affect by enhancing feelings of attachment. This also corresponds to operational aesthetics, the pleasure of marveling at the narrative mechanisms of complex TV (*Complex TV* 47). Put differently, temporal complexity results in the aesthetic pleasure that simultaneously creates feelings of uncertainty and disorientation.

Due to the large availability of viewing modes, viewers are now able to control time by themselves through digital technologies. This is what Paul Booth identifies as Fredric Jameson's postmodern schizophrenia (inspired by Lacanian theory), which contests one's temporal instability in the face of the temporal displacement in complex TV narratives (Booth 375). This results in the establishment of a new relationship with time due to the instantaneous nature of digital devices and ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) (Powell 116). Helen Powell suggests that these technologies generate moments of temporal fragmentation and rupture (5) which are increasingly noticeable in the narrative forms of complex TV.

[...] the influx of television programs concerned with time may stem from any and all of the following: recent scientific approaches to temporality, new conceptions of (post)history, and trends in late-capitalistic production and consumption. These programs could also be viewed as being products of the new culture of instantaneity (forever focused on the fleeting present, often termed "nanosecond culture" or "throw-away culture") or of the recent trauma culture amplified in the wake of the September 11 attacks. In short, these televisual time experiments may very well be an aesthetic response to the cultural climate from which they derive.

(Ames 9)

While navigating complex narratives through digital technologies, viewers gain a sense of control through the interaction with the narrative through a variety of platforms and their specific consumption modes that allow more freedom and control over time such as rewinding, pausing, or rewatching. This obviously differs in the cases of weekly viewing which has been replaced by binge-watching culture and on-demand viewing.

II.2.2. Temporality and the spectral

Temporality has been a central concern for generations of philosophers. Many works address the question of time as a phenomenological and ontological phenomenon. The preoccupation with time subsequently entails a discussion on consciousness and death. Time's inextricable relation to mortality and death is a pervasive issue in philosophy, literature, cinema, etc. It is therefore no surprise that temporality is often associated to spectrality. Dalla Barba explains the phenomenology of temporality and acknowledges the unbreakable bond between the constituents of time: past, present, and future by explaining how they are interrelated; one cannot consider each dimension isolated on its own. Temporality is closely related to memory and recollection as the "remembered object is defined as a presence in the past", for to remember is to invoke something present in consciousness but belonging to the past and absent (105).

In these ghostly texts identified as spectral adaptations, temporality represents another element of haunting that pervades and destabilizes the structure of the narrative. Spectrality is closely related to temporality, for any spectral apparition, as described by Derrida, consists of a sudden and intrusive apparition which does not abide by chronological logic. Derrida refers to this as the spectral moment: "a moment that no longer belongs to time" (*Specters* xix) in which time becomes disjointed and unhinged. The manifestation of the ghostly does not give warning, it is devoid of time, and it is "furtive and untimely" (*ibid*). The specter – in this case, the memory of the event or the event itself and the way it is mediated – is out of time and its apparition does not give time. It helps us grasp a sense of the present and the future because it brings up the past.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida presents his reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to showcase the instances of haunting in the play. He opens his first chapter with Hamlet's famous line "The time is out of joint - O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right":

The time is out of ioynt: Oh cursed spight,
That ever I was borne to set it right.

(*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V)

Time is therefore experienced as disjointed, fragmented, and out of place with an equally disjointed sense of being. The temporal dimension in haunting studies underlines the persistence of the past in the present and the dislocation of temporal stability and linearity. Derrida defines the spectral moment, as being timeless and out of time, or more conspicuously as:

[...] a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: “now,” future present). We are questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time. Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: “Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost” (Hamlet).

(*ibid*)

Hamlet is also about the end of an established order, the upheaval brought about by unnatural succession (the uncle killing the king, and usurping young Hamlet’s throne), and we could argue that Hamlet’s comments are both applicable for the characters (who are trying to find order and meaning in a post-crisis universe but cannot go back to the way things were) and the viewers (who are cursed to set things back in a context or order that will make sense to them). The spectral experience of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*’s characters is at most bearing a sense of living in an alternate world, out of reality, where time is ripped apart and twisted, stolen, where one’s old universe has been torn, shattered, abruptly stopped, and hindering the visual experience of the once certain outcome to be delivered as expected.

Temporal dislocation and the manifestation of the ghostly is devoid of time, i.e., outside the temporal realm of being. Since nothing appears as fixed in its linear chronological order, the illusion of linear temporality is communicated through a past will always be present which signals the future hauntings to come. Wolfreys determines temporal disjunction in relation to the uncanny:

What is uncanny is the act of telling, the narrative act of bringing the ghost back in a temporally disjunctive manner, which destabilizes the cognition of temporal order as a perceived sequence of events. The spectral is, therefore, a matter of recognizing what is disorderly within an apparently straightforward temporal framework.

(Wolfreys 5)

The specter's liminal state adds to this timelessness as it is in between past and present, neither entirely present nor completely absent.¹³⁴ The manner of telling and the order in which the story is introduced enhances this uncanny effect as the events are announced in a “temporally disjunctive manner” (Wolfreys 5).

The ghost is out of its time from the past into the present. *Westworld's* hosts are located in-between past and future living in a past narrative while being epitomes of the future and creations of the forthcoming era and having access only to their present. *Westworld's* characters are removed from their initial temporal structure and restricted within the borders of a fictional past they consider to be their present. The first season portrays this anachronism by juxtaposing the park's staff and technology with the Western environment during repair sessions when they stop time and pause the narrative to intervene (which is also paralleled with viewers' modes of watching and manipulating time through DVRs and streaming platforms). Anachronism stands for this atemporality of narratives: the ghost is the future and belongs to the future¹³⁵ (AI). Buse and Stott expand on this definition by asserting the centrality of anachronism in spectrality:

[...] anachronism might well be the defining feature of ghosts, now and in the past, because haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality: there may be no proper time for ghosts.

(1)

The second season exhibits similar anachronistic moments with Delos's military guards' presence in the park and their modern weapons against older ammunition and guns. Furthermore, *Westworld's* temporality agrees with Booth's notion of temporal displacement; the series includes both analepses¹³⁶ and multiple timelines. The time lapse between the production of the original text and the adapted one (e.g., *Westworld* from the 1970s then jumping to the 2010s and 2020s) suggests that a new audience has been created by inviting different generations with a new socio-cultural context and a larger set of references. The text becomes haunted by the passing of time in its production, distribution, and popularization.

The western cinematic genre is represented in the modern myth and innovation in *Westworld* as the West is both portrayed in its old famous image during the American cowboy era and its modern framework with the presence of robots and technology. *Westworld* also

134 “[...] this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life and death” (Derrida, *Specters*, 63).

135 “The future can only be for ghosts” (Derrida, *Specters*, 45).

136 Refer to the previous chapter on memory and flashback strategies in *Westworld*.

underlines another type of relation to time; the desire to escape it, to cheat death and find paths towards immortality through technological advancements by creating humanoids who represent humans' attempt to eschew their very humanity and mortality.

This passing of the West(ern) is specifically linked to the notion of conquest: the taming of the wilderness and the emergence of modern civilization and the erasure of the old primitivism by a new era of industrialization and capitalism, symbolized by the arrival of the railroad. Within this realm of Social Darwinism, representatives of the old and the new West confront each other, seeking the means to survive, to profit, and to rule. Businessmen and gunmen collide. Bodies abound.

(Stork, 208)

In this sense the creation of AI in *Westworld*'s futuristic setting and the portrayal of the Western era indicate a common pioneering climate of conquest that reflects both past and current social and cultural fears (Rieber and Kelly 22).

II.2.2.1. Temporal disruption and trauma

As spectrality deals with this constant return of the intrusive past in the present, let us draw attention to the similar experience of the return of the repressed in the case of traumatic events. The unassimilated past returns to haunt the living by taking the shape of dreams, hallucinations, or memory fragments. As we have seen in the previous chapter, amnesic states occur frequently in *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*. The relation of temporality to trauma and memory is put forth in *Westworld* as a way to signal the confusing effect of being haunted by the past manifesting itself in the amnesic states of the characters. Losing time in psychology refers to blackouts and amnesia and often means losing one's touch with reality or losing consciousness. This is true when it comes to the hosts' memory gaps that lead them to become sentient beings.

Another important aspect of temporal disruption in trauma is its belatedness, the latency period after the traumatic experience. There is a form of postponing, as the subject is not fully aware of the event at the moment of its occurrence. The experience of time is altered by a traumatic event and the subject may become submissive to a compulsion repetition. In this light, Katy Shaw reminds us that:

Specters disturb the present with the possibility of alternative pasts and futures. In doing so they also defy time and space, and challenge any fixity of the temporal. This spectral effect is predicated upon the return—the act of coming back—that questions the temporal boundaries of that which has happened, and that which is yet to come.

(Shaw 7)

This promise of something to come is expressed in *Westworld* as Dolores always refers to the world belonging to something that is not here but from the future and from an AI origin rather than human. Coming from both past and future, the specter reinvents itself, calling and drawing to something that has yet to come “the future-to-come” (Derrida, *Specters*, 37). In terms of narrative construction, this might refer to the idea that the past is only revealed to better prepare for future events and revelations in the sense of Chekhov’s gun¹³⁷.

Belatedness occurs between two distinct events when the first traumatic event remains unprocessed at the instant of its occurrence and the second (seemingly trivial) triggers the haunted subject, thus the experience of the first event is deferred as it is not experienced in its present. In psychoanalysis, the delay of the reaction or consciousness of the traumatic experience and its return is called “afterwardness”:

The paradox of *Nachträglichkeit* is that the first event is only *experienced* after the second event even though the latter is not chronologically prior.

(Mather and Marsden 211)

This de-synchronization of time (whether diegetic or extra-diegetic) clearly occurs at the level of narrative in the form of an anachronism which is translated into a discontinuous and non-linear narrative structure as the specter introduces a temporal disruption of the natural order of things and time becomes indeed out of joint. In their discussion of the spectral in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, Buse and Stott define anachronism as “the defining feature of ghosts, now and in the past, because haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality.

The contrast between past and future is highlighted in *Westworld*’s anachronistic images of a futuristic park where wide desert landscapes from the 19th century are blended with modern technological captions of metal and electronic structures. As if something were out of time and out of place coming from another reality, the transgression of temporal borders provokes

¹³⁷ Chekhov’s gun refers to narrative promises that are left for a belated moment in which the gun will be metaphorically used for a later revelation.

cognitive dysfunctions as we see the hosts struggle with grasping their reality. That is why certain technical notions are translated into a spiritual, even religious, concepts for the hosts' programming to validate. For instance, "The Valley Beyond" is the Eden they seek to reach, it is still part of their story but in truth it is the place where their code is erased in the Forge to keep them away from potential corporate theft of information. The valley beyond comes to represent temporality in the way it looks both forward and backward in time – one suggesting the afterlife, the other the creation myth. The sight of such heterogeneous landscapes¹³⁸ in the series is a reminder of the *mise-en-scène* of the park's narratives and games. In other words, it represents the park's artificial nature while also pointing at the temporal position of the adaptation in relation to the source text.

The very origin of certain TV shows as adaptations makes them ghostly in their disruption of linear temporality. Reboots, prequels, sequels, and remakes inevitably carry an unhinged and disrupted temporality: this is due to their intrinsic relation to a previous source text which is situated in the past, present or future of the diegetic storyline but in the past of the non-diegetic reality. They do not follow the logic of chronological time as they revive the spirit of an older text by imposing it on the present in an altered conception of its world. Being reboots and sequels of their source texts, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* reimagine future altered events of its past (the source text's diegesis) and correspondingly address the thematic issue of temporality in a way that brings spectral disruption to the heart of their narrative form. By disrupting time, meaning and normalcy, the TV shows come to portray disorienting states where the boundaries between past, present, and future are blurred, for the specter erases temporal boundaries and "dissolve[s] the separation between now and then" (Shaw 2).

¹³⁸ The Amazon Prime TV series *Tales from the Loop* displays such temporal hybridity by opposing the industrial or artificial landscape versus the organic and natural one. This association of the wilderness with civilization highlights the post-humanist themes of the show through its adaptation of Simon Stålenhag's childhood photography.

Wells-Lassagne, Shannon. « *Tales from the Loop* ou adapter l'internet », *Adaptation dans tous ses états*, Colloque à l'Université de Caen, 6 Oct 2023.

II.2.3. Frozen time

The cleavage and rupture triggered by the event in *The Leftovers* dislocates time without a clear distinction between past, present, and future. Everything is put on hold, frozen and the story is stuck in the past following some characters' inability to move on and others' anticipation of another apocalypse, a reoccurrence of the event. In this case, the static and frozen state of time deny the return to normalcy of the chronological order and perception of time. As Isabelle-Rachel Casta discusses in her article about *The Leftovers* and its French TV double, Fabrice Gobret's *Les Revenants* (Canal +, 2012-2015), the two narratives are subject to what she names the "frozen time" syndrome. In an anxiety-provoking climate, the specters of the departed (whether by memory in *The Leftovers* or real ghosts in *Les Revenants*) return to haunt the living and prevent people from moving forward thus getting stuck in time.

Moreover, the confined spaces of their small towns add to the suspension of time as we see in *The Leftovers*' Jarden.¹³⁹ This is similar to the enclosed park of *Westworld* where we can see the "real world" only in a few episodes with flashbacks in the world outside the park (and the next seasons after that) which creates a *huis-clos* effect where characters are trapped in the same space. The setting is like a maze where the characters' efforts to get out and escape their subjugation seem long and useless. The constant reminders of the wonders of the outside world intensifies the sense of enclosed and confined space of the yet extremely wide park and the illusive and fictive nature of their promised land. The park's withdrawal and distancing from the outside "real world" accentuates the separation between humans and hosts as well as the temporal dislocation when located inside or outside the park.

The place in which haunting occurs is very significant as it essentially takes place in a domestic and comfortable space where one feels at home and at ease. This intensifies the effect of haunting because it is most unexpected in those familiar spaces that provide a sense of safety (Wolfreys 5). The characters of *The Leftovers* experience this haunting in the second season after their hometown has become too ghostly, they move to Jarden where no one has departed on October 14th, only to become even more haunted. Haunting is therefore the destabilization

¹³⁹ Casta, Isabelle-Rachel. «Le temps gelé : une épopée du Néant (The Leftovers, Les Revenants) ? ». Publications numériques du REARE, 15 Nov. 2018, <http://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/reare/index.php?id=308>. Accessed 19 July 2019.

of the domestic scene, as that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we feel most at home with ourselves” (*ibid*).

After a three-year span from October 14th, the diegetic events of the show in Mapleton still seem frozen in time as people are unable to truly move on due to the impending trauma. In the hope of letting go of a past that is very much their present, the efforts of the community to commemorate the departed by honoring their memory with a statue and a date that marks the trace of the event of the Sudden Departure. From the outset, *The Leftovers* exhibits a tendency to disrupt temporality by its very disruption of routine. Its abundant use of flashbacks, dreams, and ghostly apparitions underlines the show complexity which is characterized by temporal displacement. However, unlike *Westworld*, it does not employ different time frames but rather parallel or alternate universes.

The Leftovers further plays with chronology through its use of years-long time lapses in both the pilot episode and the finale. The ellipses in the pilot and in the third season each represent a three-year jump in time, where we remain in the dark about the time period in-between. The story is suspended after the event as we take off at another time within a situation that has not truly evolved, thus marking the frozen state of time after the event and the feeling of being stuck in the past as time is put on hold. The third season ellipsis slowly reveals the changes in the characters’ lives and development, the novelty, thus offering a renewed interest (Romieu 198).

“The Garveys at their Best” episode (S01E09) is a long flashback that could be the real pilot in a chronological order, in the introduction to the status quo before the cataclysm, a return in time pre-crisis that would be later followed by the intruding and disruptive event that breaks the envisioned routine pre-Sudden Departure. Unmistakably, *The Leftovers* does not take this approach and rather directly immerses viewers in a few minutes of a routine coming before the event, which is as anxious as the post-crisis (the opening scene of the pilot with Sam’s mother at the laundry mat). The flashback episode is also presented without temporal indicators towards the end of the season. In this way, the audience is more aware of the cracks in the wall (literal cracks in Kevin and Laurie’s house and marriage) and the ‘previous’ signs or Easter eggs that make more sense of present events such as wrecked faith or relationships in Patti’s past as Laurie’s patient and as someone who’s waiting for the end of the world. The long flashback episode (“The Garveys at their Best”, S01E09) forces the audience to wait for another week for the aftermath of the “Cairo” episode (S01E08) in which Patti kills herself (Romieu 198).

Flashbacks are therefore used to mark the rupture of the normal flow and rhythm of the narrative by returning to its past events.

The prologues at the beginning of seasons two and three epitomize temporal displacement. In the second season's "Axis Mundi" episode (S02E01), temporal defamiliarization occurs at the level of the prologue with a jump in time that stresses out the cyclicity and universality of such events and their repetition in the future (in Jarden, Miracle) which is further highlighted through the motif of (re)birth. The prologue is set in the prehistoric age where a cavewoman gives birth after an earthquake destroys her collapsing cave and all her tribe. It points to the genesis of myths in prehistorical times with archetypes of the moon to convey birth and maternity¹⁴⁰ and the symbolism of the snake that caused her death.

Orchestral music starts playing as the cave woman gives birth on her own and then takes care of her baby as days go by. The presence of the eagle throughout the sequence foreshadows danger and another bad event upcoming. To survive, the mother steals the eggs of the eagle and eats them. Ultimately, the bad omen is embodied in the venomous snake that bites her, thus inferring biblical symbolism of punishment after temptation; she leaves Eden/Jarden (by dying) after eating from the eagle's nest in the tree. As the woman dies from poisoning, a second woman appears and takes away her baby, thus drawing a connection with the theme of adoption (Nora adopting Lily). The sequence validates the renewal of hope after these events through a bird's eye view shot that reflects the eagle's perception from above and as music starts playing again, rupturing the silence.



Figure 40. The prologue sequence in the second season ("Axis Mundi", S02E01).

¹⁴⁰ *Lost* incorporates similar themes around motherhood and maternity throughout the series.

The jump in time reiterates the event of the Sudden Departure: it is a reminder that catastrophes have happened from the beginning of times and repeat themselves throughout history and in the present as indicated by the return to the present diegetic time with the girls swimming in the lake. The movement from the prologue sequence to the contemporary one is signaled by a slow trucking shot and a change of the extra-diegetic music from Richter's melancholic score *Departure (Reflection)* to the diegetic pop music of the girls' car. The contrast of the two eras is indicated by the cheerful music and the color temperature shift from a palette of brown to bluer and brighter colors. The return to the present marks the recovery of speech, as if to depict happier and more familiar times, only to shatter the illusion and shift back to utter silence in the girls' car – a hint to their affiliation to the Guilty Remnant. With this prologue, *The Leftovers* underlines the cyclicity and haunting through techniques of non-linearity and temporal dislocation to offer several forms of the eternal return and suggest the spectral dimensions of the event are as repetitive as its adaptive process in television.

The first episode of the third season, “The Book of Kevin” (S03E01) introduces a prologue with the Millerites' awaiting the end of the world. This is followed by another three-year ellipsis picking up right after the explosion of the Guilty Remnant in Miracle. The third season completes the show's cycle by reiterating the beginning of the first season through another disappearance. The same camera movement at the end of the prologue (a trucking shot) is used in the pre-historic prologue of the second season to transition and move forward in time to contemporary Jarden. This proximity in editing associates both prologues and their reiteration of the event from the past with each season opening with a cataclysm except the last one which opens with the subversion of the expectation of the event. The prologue¹⁴¹ delineates the routine of the Millerites and their announcement of the end of the world specific date.

Lindelof's use of this type of narration in *Lost* with multiple protagonists and their detailed construction in which their past is presented to viewers through flashbacks. This represents a way of connecting the audience to the protagonists and to build a world outside the island. The layering of timelines blurs temporal, ontological, and textual boundaries and makes flashbacks and flashforwards indistinguishable (Hatchuel, *Lost, fiction vitale*, 52). However, in *The Leftovers* this is not possible; we almost have no access to the characters' lives before the Sudden Departure except in “The Garveys at Their Best”, (S01E09). In comparison to *Lost*'s fragmented temporality and its time travel conventions, *The Leftovers* is complex in a more

¹⁴¹ A deeper micro-analysis of this prologue is laid out in the last section of this thesis in relation to the narrativization of the apocalypse.

subtle manner in its relation to time and memory. As we see in the seventh chapter of this thesis, dream-worlds and alternate universes are at the center of this show's temporal displacement. The characters' ambiguous motives make them unreliable and become part of the disorientation method as opposed to *Lost* in which information through flashbacks is used as an orientation process. *Lost*'s narrative is suffused with temporal plays: temporal displacements, time travels, analepsis and prolepsis. Flashforwards do not provide answers but raise more questions about the future, including unknown and unfamiliar situations by further arousing viewers' curiosity (as in *The Leftovers*' third season begins with a flashforward with Old Nora living secluded and revealing she does not know Kevin). The temporal jumps between seasons, immersing in the story *in medias res* then going back to the past "X time earlier" without any cues and further disorient the audience.

II.2.4. Non-linearity

In *Westworld*, Ford's ability to control the hosts with a snap of a finger or a single word along with the Delos's engineers with their tablets give the illusion of human masters who can stop time and control the narrative with other modifications of the hosts' parameters which are available to them. For instance, in "The Adversary" (S01E06), Ford and the technicians in the small Mexican town, pause the storyline and interrupt the narrative while we have the visual juxtaposition of the artificial and the real – the "behind the scenes" that disrupts the suspension of disbelief for the guests and perhaps for the viewers. Although, technically, the humanoids are the ones who are not subject to the passing of "real" time and unable to age, they are still enslaved by the parks' employees and guests. The hosts can be altered and disabled as Ford points out, talking about old versions of his host family replica, in the same episode, they are "ghosts now. Survivors of the wreck of time".

The traumatic experience of haunting memories has the same effects on the hosts than on humans in their perception of temporality. This is aesthetically represented in Maeve's recollection of her past life or as we see in "Trace Decay", when she becomes more aware of the artificiality of her self and the world around her. Indeed, in *Westworld*, memory is inexorably tied to the sense of time and reality. This is also true for Dolores's uncertainty about her reality and sanity. Her notion of time is troubled as she asks:

Where are we?" [...] "then when are we? Is this now? Am I going mad? [...] it's like I'm trapped in a dream or a memory from a life long ago".

("Trace Decay", S01E08)

Bernard expresses the same disorientation in season two with the repetition of the phrase "Is this now?" ("The Passenger", S02E10). In *Westworld* we often hear Bernard reiterate this line which mirrors viewers' own disorientation due to an excess of information and events which are chronologically disrupted and disorganized. Supposedly caused by a head fracture and the leakage of cortical fluid, Bernard's loss of memories provokes amnesia and blackouts, and since the way we remember our past is the primary tool to narrate and understand our lives' stories, Bernard's inability to store and process past information leads him to a lack of temporal logic that could make sense of the present. Therefore, he fails to accurately distinguish between

past and present, even to tell reality from illusion, or to comprehend the linear order of the events.

[...] even if ‘orientation’ nowadays can be used in a broader sense and as a synonym for nearly every type of navigation, localisation, direction, or alignment, for cognitive processes of way-finding, familiarisation, or even as its oppositional collocation ‘disorientation’, the spatial implications of the term normally prevail. ‘Where am I?’ therefore is the dominant question while dealing with the definition of (dis)orientation (Rüetschi 2010, 258).

(Eckel 275)

Writing on non-linear narratives, Julia Eckel points to the necessity of asking this question, “Where am I?” despite its strange and unfamiliar formulation. We are destabilized and struck by the unfamiliar way we are dealing with time and our position in time (275). Furthermore, the visions and memories of the past are juxtaposed with the maze imagery drawn by Lawrence’s daughter on the sand are among the things that help Dolores find her path and ultimately realize what lies at the center of it (what Arnold wants her to remember).

The fourth episode of the second season, “The Riddle of the Sphinx”, portrays the circularity of time in *Westworld* through various details that denote the themes of temporal dislocation and entrapment. This is essentially conveyed through the hybrid nature of James Delos, half-robot, half-human after his death and the consequences of William’s secret project: to transfer human consciousness post-mortem in order to become immortal. The discrepancies caused by the experiment are foreshadowed from the beginning of the episode.



Figure 41. A vinyl record playing in the opening shot of *Westworld*'s "The Riddle of the Sphinx" episode (S02E04).

The opening shot of this episode¹⁴² focuses on circularity with a close-up on a music record holding a close resemblance to the maze accompanied with the camera’s zooming out

¹⁴² This episode is reminiscent of *Lost*'s first episode in season two “Man of Science, Man of Faith”. Both share comparable opening sequences as we can see in *Lost*'s filming of Desmond’s mourning

movement to show the whole record. The Rolling Stones' *Play with Fire* diegetically plays as the room's furniture is slowly revealed and the whole environment becomes entirely visible. Focus is laid on the circular shape of a room filmed through arc movements of the camera and the repetitive nature of the process of the show. The room's panoptic architecture¹⁴³ evokes the shape of prisons, which in turn connotes surveillance, control, and the circular shape that suggests the loop in which James Delos is imprisoned. The goldfish stands for Delos's entrapment in his cell in a host's body with his short-term memory as it echoes Delos's fitness bike which performs similar, repetitive, and circular movements. This circularity ends by a display of dysfunction when Delos pours milk and starts shaking and later in his interactions/tests with William – one of the 149 times they've brought him back. It illustrates the host's disorientation in his inner maze while he reaches a "cognitive plateau", the threshold of madness, where his mind falls completely apart.



Figure 11. James Delos's room/cell in "The Riddle of the Sphinx" (S02E04).

Repetition and the movement of time are also evident from the shot of time running out on the hourglass which puts further emphasis on the experiments' duration but particularly on time's natural chronological flow. Towards the end of the episode, the hourglass, like the temporal structure itself, is broken as we hear the record "playing a distorted tune and blood on

routine in the hatch with music playing in the background while he exercises. This is similar to *Westworld's* opening sequence in "The Riddle of the Sphinx" (S02E04) episode with James Delos in his cell.

¹⁴³ In *Reading Westworld*, MacKay discusses the panopticon structure of the control room: "If we consider the architectural space of the Control Room, it mirrors that of the panopticon, complete with domed roof, raised and central balustrades for overseeing operations, and a circular room designed to enable the all-seeing view of the controllers" (188-190).

the record” (Lisa Joy 29:12)¹⁴⁴. The repetition with the opening scene of the episode offers a variation that introduces dysfunction due to the breach in time and consciousness: we hear the sound of the screeching of the pedals, and we do not see who is there, the same shots and camera movements are reiterated but James Delos is cycling backwards, and everything is upside down.

For complex TV shows such as *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* to capture the essence of temporal loss and lack of control over time, if such control is ever possible, they bluntly display symptoms relative to mental disorders and psycho-pathological syndromes¹⁴⁵. They construct their stories on reflexively disrupted and entangled narratives that are chiefly characterized by intermittency, interruption, and intrusion of time.

From experiencing the return of the spectral, the repeated loops, to the difficulty to cope with the present state of the past, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* shape a form of anxiety about the future and the reoccurrence of the event through the fear of living with the past in the present – where its cyclicity is feared. These shows not only look back at the past or represent an endless loop of mourning and inability to cope with the present, but they also divulge the way the future is depicted and inform us about the fear of the cyclical, recurrent, and yet unpredictable nature of the event. The spectral introduces an interruption and intrusion on the present which have the power to destabilize the traditional structure and image of the world as it once was. The crisis operates at different levels: textual, ontological, temporal, and cognitive. The spectro-poetics of the event is therefore meant to question the very essence of reality, the linearity of time as well as the narrativity of history.¹⁴⁶

The different units of time are no longer structured in a clear-cut sequence that allows them to feel this “presentness of the present” (*ibid*) or the blurry lines heading towards the

¹⁴⁴ In an interview with Joy and Nolan deciphering the episode’s meaning. Some nods and references comprise the shot of the book of Kurt Vonnegut who is one of the showrunners’ favorite writers, *Sirens of Titan* (1959). Another of Vonnegut’s books appears in the second season, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, about a certain Billy Pilgrim (recalling William’s nickname) who is confronted with a non-linear structure of time.

“Westworld’s Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy Break Down Season 2, Episode 4 | Vanity Fair.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Vanity Fair, 25 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpB8GRSnuIE>.

¹⁴⁵ Julia Eckel references Berrios’ taxonomy of psychological disorientations: spatial and personal where the latter has to do with ontological crisis or dissociation of the self.

Eckel, Julia, et al. *(Dis)orienting Media and Narrative Mazes*. Transcript, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ As Weintock writes: “The ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events. As such, the contemporary fascination with ghosts is reflective of an awareness of the narrativity of history” (Weintock, *The Spectralities*, 63).

future. Therefore, the historical layer underneath the non-linear sequence of time is interrupted and gives shape to a newly formed labyrinth of meaning and memory of one's individual and collective past. Therefore, the fragmented temporality uncovers the spectral identity of a text in a non-conventional narrative by presenting us an untold story and the possibility for another adaptation. Spectral disturbances of the event at the level of temporality dissolve the linearity of the temporal continuum and the logical chronological cause and effect structure. Destabilizing chronological certainty evokes the existential malaise felt by these TV shows' characters post-crisis, thus putting the narrative into a temporal crisis where the characters' perception of time is affected by such a loss of foundations.

Temporal disorientation and the discrepancies of the events are dismantled and re-arranged according to a logical cause-effect structure and following a linear chronological order. *Westworld* fans have (re)produced the timeline of the show's events of the last two seasons to reveal the natural flow of time. By shedding light on the diverse perspectives of the chain of events after their reorganization in a linear temporal structure, they take away the anachronistic aspect of the narrative and reshape the story which would have been completely different if told in that particular manner:

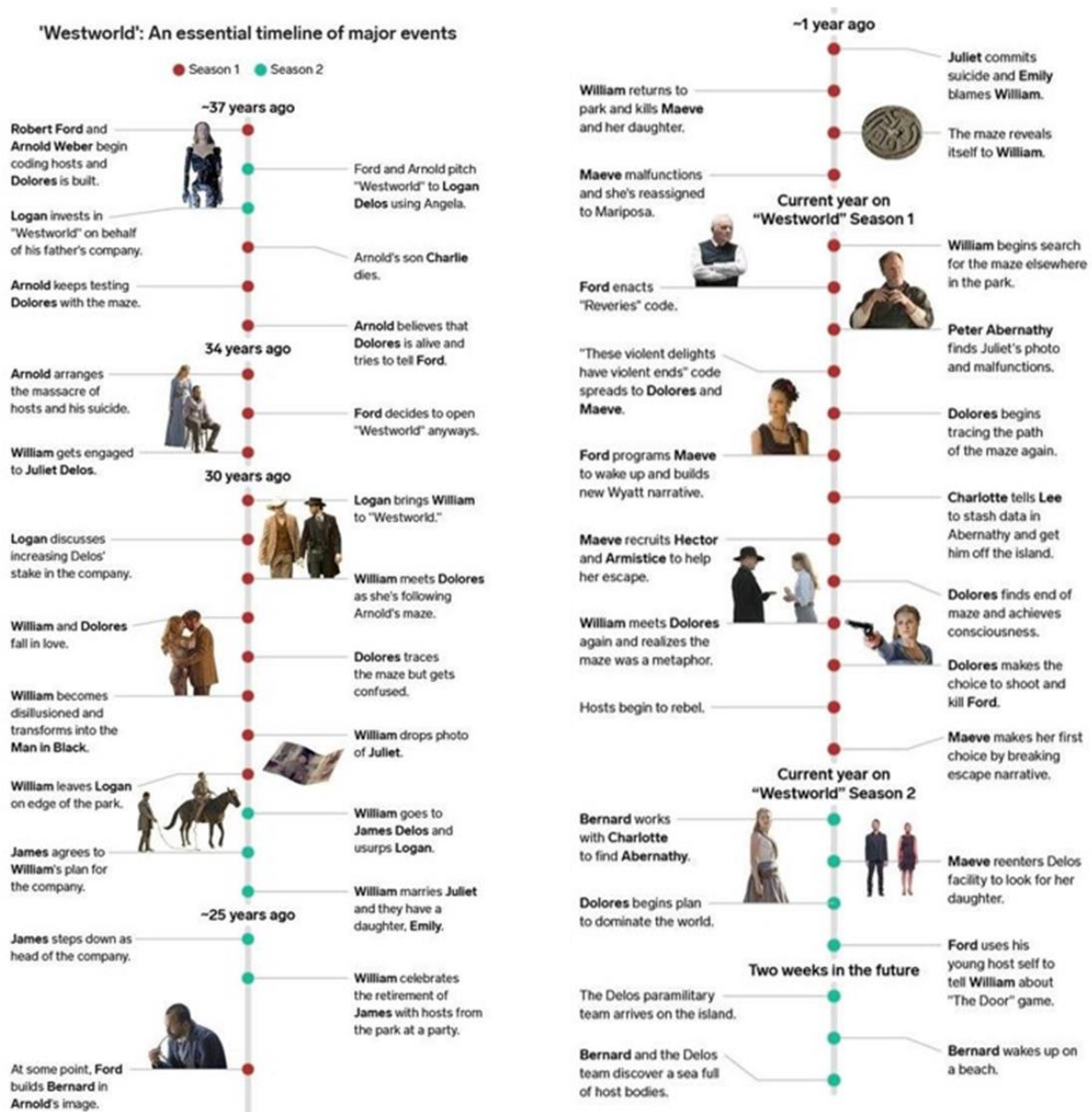


Figure 42. Reconstructed timeline of Westworld's first two seasons.

This characterizes the movement towards temporal reconstruction whereby the fan community engages in the rearrangement of narrative comprehension, thus allowing narrative (re)orientation. The multiple plotlines of complex narratives are fundamentally entangled into one another and come to represent the narrative threads within maze narratives which would only guide the viewers if they went backwards and reminisce the different paths taken up to the present. *Westworld's* fans efforts in recreating the timeline in videos and pictures of a temporal line provide a preview of the linear and causal reconstruction of the show's events. If one takes away the flashback sequences and the misleadingly non-marked sequences of past events, the story would lose its subtle connection to the "future/present" of 2050 (34 years after the supposed events of the shows' airing in 2016) and the dissonant effects that accompany it in

this reconstruction. This is quite similar to *Memento*'s chronologically re-arranged version in the DVD's limited edition which reverses and readjusts the structure of the plot according to diegetic time. The original flashbacks in black and white scenes are in color which alters the story because the issue of how past flashbacks are related to the main story is no longer relevant in this version (Ghislotti in Buckland 90). In *Westworld*, Bernard's reconstruction of the events and memory in the second season in which we see him tracing back his steps in a way that is similar to Nolan's protagonist in *Memento* (2001). This is particularly pertinent in a sequence in Delos's secret lab with the drone hosts and a visually temporal reconstruction of the scene in reverse motion.

If the goal is to reach the center of *Westworld*'s narrative maze (i.e., finding a form of revelation), the red thread finds its significance in its guiding properties through repetition tropes – when the maze-treader repeats the same choices and gets lost – the thread traces the already-taken paths and what has already encountered to inadvertently reorient the treader in a new direction. Here, the thread acts as a mnemonic device, especially for its representation of the *déjà-vus* and the already-encountered paths. *Déjà-vus* deliver a few details which have already been encountered at some point in the narrative but become fleeting and unstable in the viewers' memory due to the abundance of information and entanglement of events. They are clues or “cues” which guide the viewers and trigger their memory if only they take the time and effort to look for the connections and fill in the gaps.

For Ghislotti, the use of this form of reversal of time underlines the inevitable aspect of the event as it “goes back to the moment in which a different choice was still possible” (93). But more importantly, this points at Bernard's fragmented mind, which is hypothetically still controlled by Ford. This brings up the notion of free will and the doubt about whether he was really able to make a different choice, or each repetition (without reliable memories) leads to the same chaotic outcome we are shown with the hosts' loops in the first season.

If one goes the same way different times, they will find themselves entangled in the thread, so it creates further confusion; the term thread in Old English means “to cause to twist or to turn” (“The Psychology of the Maze” np). The red thread marks repetition: it is the concrete sign of the already-chosen path and thereby it helps the maze-treader to avoid starting all over. This stresses the idea that the thread is not only a guide towards the right path (something not only based on memory), but something causing a change of path; it is a “temporal thread”. By keeping track of the choices made in the past, the decisions and pathways

traveled, allows the reader to be located in the present.¹⁴⁷ Contemporary ongoing serials rely on temporal (dis)orienting strategies that tremendously impact viewers' reception and perception of the narrative. Such backward or non-linear chronology in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* mainly operates as a purveyor of complexity as it underlines specific thematic preoccupations with amnesia, the event's traumatic dimension, the representation of the distorted reality and the ambiguity of consciousness and temporality after the intrusion of the specter.

The complex narrative structure as a maze in which everything seems uncanny and is the source of disorientation of the audience and characters. For instance, *Westworld's* narrative is built on a maze-like-model which ultimately positions the audience in a similar situation to the hosts who are struggling to find the center of the maze as explained in the previous chapter with the Minotaur imagery and myth as the maze was purposefully built to contain the shadow self (the Minotaur). In these maze narratives, memory serves to trigger a form of identity awareness of one's history and self by guiding their actions and thoughts in (and about) the present and future. The memory thread is one of the essential keys of unlocking the door to the center of the maze through the viewers' work of recall and recognition inside and outside the spectral text. Therefore, it is equally important for the adaptation's audience or even "independent" fictional narratives that do not directly and explicitly derive from a source text to find their own way through the labyrinthine structure of narratives.

¹⁴⁷ "The Psychology of the Maze as a Modern Symbol." *Anthropology, Marketing, Psychology, Semiotics*, 31 July 2014, *Culture Decanted*, <https://culturedecanted.com/2014/07/31/the-psychology-of-the-maze-as-a-modern-symbol/>. Accessed 19 June 2018.

II.3. Chapter 6: Maze Narratives and (Dis)Orientation

The haunted quality of these TV shows does not lie in their promotion of supernatural elements of a Gothic ghostwriting genre; rather, they are ghostly in their combination of narrative features unique to science fiction generic codes, embedded with metaphysical elements, blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. As we have already established in the previous chapters, the spectral adaptation seems to eschew a definite identity and is shaped by the accumulation of subtexts and multiple authorial voices. Within this hybrid space of texts which are paradoxically neither dead nor alive but “hover at the very limits between living and dying” (Wolfreys 72), the adaptation becomes emblematic of uncanny resonances. As serial adaptations, they are uncanny in their very process of transformation by not only moving from one medium to another but also by uncovering hidden and new meanings from the transtextual layers offered by the source text.

As necessary tools for the movement from invisibility to visibility towards consciousness and revelations in storytelling and in the viewers’ reception, the spectral effects of complex narratives highlight the uncanny nature of these TV adaptations. The uncanny effect is articulated in the disruption of the boundaries between the real/imaginary, old/new, and the familiar/unfamiliar¹⁴⁸ i.e., when one can no longer distinguish between self and other. The pleasure of the audience primarily lies in their desire to see a combination of new and old elements as they revel in the presence of traces left by the source or other texts. Their satisfaction with the adaptation’s material and all its references depend on their familiarity with the source text, their expectations, knowledge of the authors, showrunners, and producers. This familiarity challenges the viewers’ memory along with their old perception of the work of fiction. In this way, these adaptations firmly set the familiar elements from their previous texts, specifically the source text and its derivatives, into their unfamiliar and new narrative. In this sense, all adaptations are therefore fundamentally uncanny.

¹⁴⁸ “[...] an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes and so on” (Freud, “The Uncanny”, 3694).

Through their depiction of the event as a traumatic crisis of truth and faith, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* engage their audience in a “participatory culture”¹⁴⁹ with a pressing desire to find meaning in the shows’ enigmas, thus placing them in an endless quest in a complex narrative with non-linear storylines abundantly filled with mystery, narrative traps, and dead ends. The crisis is extended to the viewing experience, where these TV shows come to embody a labyrinthine textual shape. As the borders between reality and fiction, the visible and the invisible become blurrier, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* lead their viewers onto several paths, which are often misleading, causing one to ponder about the nature of free will, identity, the linearity of time, and even sanity in a paranoid-like approach towards the reality of what is being represented on screen. This crisis of truth in the maze similarly provokes a questioning of the essence of reality (viewers and characters alike) and therefore the very narrativity of history in a way that is reminiscent of the traumatic event as narrated by the media and inscribed in our collective unconscious and memory.

Navigating the fictional world of complex shows, viewers are compelled to find their paths as curious observers and participators in the experimental serialized forms as these spectral contemporary narratives illustrate the characters’ own journey within a diegetic world which is increasingly and seemingly devoid of meaning. The chapter examines the characteristics of complex serialized narratives or what we call here “maze narratives” based on the symbolic image of the maze which comes to reflect a profound crisis of truth and a “strenuous and exhausting search for one’s self, for truth and salvation” (Andreica 8). “Maze narratives” is used here as an umbrella term referring to the type of narration in serialized fiction which focuses on particular characteristics of complex narration.¹⁵⁰ Several critics coined other

¹⁴⁹ “Consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture” (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 60). Jenkins’s concept highlights audience engagement in TV series deconstruction whereby viewers become co-creators rather than merely consumers of the art by widely sharing creative content online around the televisual text or video games.

¹⁵⁰ See Piepiorka, Christine. “You’re Supposed to Be Confused! (Dis)orienting Narrative Mazes in Televisual Complex Narrations.” (*Dis*)orienting Media and Narrative Mazes, edited by Julia Eckel et al. Transcript, 2013, pp. 183-202.

The article is named after Steven Johnson’s phrase in *Everything Bad is Good for You* to refer to complex TV and the planned innovative storytelling techniques in contemporary television. See Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005, p. 77.

terms to shed light on one or more specific features of this kind of narrative such as: Mittell's "complex TV", "Puzzle films", "non-linear narratives", etc.¹⁵¹

Maze narratives are endowed with a spectral nature which puts its audience in a position of doubt and puzzlement. They will be addressed here as a model for "the complex processes of creating and receiving texts" (Reed 7) and a metaphor for the narrative intricacy of contemporary American shows which are often built on a transgression of conventional narrative strategies of storytelling. This chapter discusses the types of narrative mazes and the multiple layers that recall Plato's myth of the cave in their questioning of appearances and reality. We also look at how they haunt their viewers by demanding that they choose a path, follow one's daemon and reach consciousness at the center of the maze. Cognitive narratology helps determine the way a story is told and sheds light on its elements' relation to the mental processes of audience reception and comprehension. It explores the viewers' coping mechanisms of "brain-teasing" storylines and the ensuing cognitive assimilation. This comprises complex narratives about psychological disorders and psychotic characters (e.g., dissociative disorders, schizophrenia, etc.). These narratives are characterized by doubling are meant to reflect and express our own doubling in the virtual world due to our "habitual virtualization of our selves" in social media, video games, etc. (Kiss 14).

By confronting viewers with a post-apocalyptic world in which characters are faced with situations that piercingly challenge their beliefs, these TV series correspondingly incite viewers to reflect on their own values (Culpepper 184). As artistic productions, they focus on not only expressing and representing the event but on slowly teaching its audience how to respond to it, without a conspicuous guidebook. Through numerous invitations to engage in their confusing puzzles, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* communicate to their audiences the ways in which they can become consciously active.

¹⁵¹ See Julia Eckel's chapter "Twisted Times: Non-linearity and Temporal Disorientation in Contemporary Cinema" in (Dis)orienting Media and Narrative Mazes. Eds, Eckel et al. Bielefeld: Majuskel Medienproduktion, 2013, pp. 275-291.

II. 3. 1. *Experimenting with the maze*

When one looks back at the history of cinema, it is not surprising to find the same narrative playfulness with disorientation techniques. As mentioned in the previous chapter, narrative experimentation with complex narration is not entirely novel but rather seems to have been revived in a new way in contemporary serials (and surely extending to graphic novels, video games and other forms of storytelling). In the last few decades, cinema and television shows have paid considerable attention to the (re)production of complex narrative structures and seem to be thoroughly pervaded by a “tendency” not to simply create complex narratives but to explore the promise of non-conventional storytelling techniques by experimenting with the extent of the audiovisual medium’s malleable capacity.

This contemporary inclination towards narrative complexity can be traced back to earlier cinematic experimentations with the 1940s film noir and mostly throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s European modernist films and art-cinema (Kiss and Willemsen 12). The beginning of the 1990s marks a change in the American cinematic landscape in terms of the development of narrative complexity in what today is referred to as the mainstreaming of complexity. The return and re-emergence of the trend are prompted by films such as *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) (*ibid*) and extend to other forms of artistic productions which became more structurally complex in their storytelling modes. Following the narratological tradition of experimentation in contemporary works of art J.M. Ganteau refers to this tendency as a “specter of experimentation”,¹⁵² a revenant that marks the re-emergence of experimental narrative forms in various types of artistic productions (literature, cinema, and TV series).

Multiple viewings in TV maze narratives

¹⁵² His article on Nicholas Royle’s *Quilt* points to the “aesthetic, ethical and political engagement” (np) of these experimental narratives which are mainly characterized by a spectral inclination towards traumatic aesthetics such as intermittency, rupture, and latency. Ganteau, Jean-Michel. « L’expérimental comme fidélité au spectre : *Quilt* de Nicholas Royle » L’expérimental dans la littérature et les arts contemporains, vol. 16, 2018, Miranda, <https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.4000%2Fmiranda.11360>.

As most critics suggest, the relationship between technological changes and the rise of contemporary narrative experimentation is not coincidental. Maze narratives seem to be purposefully designed according to technological changes “[...] in ways that allow for (if not prey upon) an interplay between these technical and narrative dimensions” (Kiss and Willemsen 13). One of the factors that prompted the rise of experimental narrative forms in contemporary cinema and television is undoubtedly related to recent technological innovations and economic conditions. Ultimately, this shift led to the audience’s newly acquired powers alongside novel ways of watching altogether. Some critics argue that viewers’ subsequent evolving interactions and attitudes towards such developments lie at the center of narrative experimentation.

The rise of films designed for multiple viewings finds its roots in the economic model of theaters, and the TV industry (broadcast programming) subsequently followed the same principle (14). Accordingly, the structure of maze narratives is meant for repeated viewing is undoubtedly a source of financial benefit. These narratives would therefore target an audience which is willing to return to the movies, buy a TV show’s DVD or Blu-Ray, or subscribe to streaming platforms. Fans’ behavioral consumerism is therefore widely affected by the technological and economic decision-making processes in the construction of these complex narratives. In their discussion of complex contemporary cinema, Kiss and Willemsen remind us that recent authorial decisions to design complex narratives are certainly prompted by technology and most significantly the medium’s adaptation to a specific type of viewing. This is quite relevant to repetitive viewing or what Steven Johnson calls the “rewatchability value” and “repeatability” as he posits it is “one of the most essential characteristics of contemporary audiovisual programmes” (14).

Viewers become able to reflect upon the narrative discourse in an academic-like approach, but they are also in a state of anticipation to see their own past memories of previous viewings reenacted on screen (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 167). In this manner, there are moments of recognition as there are also mistakes about faded memories which could have altered minor details or even a forgetfulness of certain scenes. Either way, repetitive viewing offers a possibility to make connections and take pleasure in the familiar return to puzzling sequences or episodes which need to be reassessed. In binge watching for instance, the consecutive viewing of a serial TV show would need to meet the binge viewers’ needs, i.e., avoid repetitions and redundancies which would become annoying (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 170) or become too densely charged in information and memory-based details for the viewer to keep up with the

storylines. Narrative complexity encompasses a specific terminology as stated in *Impossible Puzzle Films*:

By *narrative complexity* we mean a kind of structural-constructional complexity in storytelling logic. This complexity can be witnessed through the increasing popularity of what critics and scholars have called *database, multilinear, forking-path, fractal, episodic, alternative-plot, cubist, loop, modular, multiple-draft, multiform, multiple-embedded, hyperlink* or otherwise formally unconventional narratives.

(Kiss and Willemsen 10)

Aristotle's mimetic narration and his distinction between classical and complex plots in his *Poetics* determine the contemporary theorization of the movement from classical narration to contemporary experimentation. Buckland reconceptualizes Aristotle's plot categorization to add a third type: the "puzzle plot" in which the "arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing; the events are not simply interwoven, but entangled" (3). Buckland argues that puzzle films draw from Aristotle's concept of complex plot in his *Poetics* and go further and beyond it which differs from Bordwell's view of complex films as similar to the Aristotelian plot structure. The puzzle plot's characteristics are described as encompassing:

[...] nonlinearity, time loops, and fragmented spatio-temporal reality. These films blur the boundaries between different levels of reality, are riddled with gaps, deception, labyrinthine structures, ambiguity, and overt coincidences. They are populated with characters who are schizophrenic, lose their memory, are unreliable narrators, or are dead (but without us – or them – realizing). In the end, the complexity of puzzle films operates on two levels: narrative and narration. It emphasizes the complex *telling* (plot, narration) of a simple or complex *story* (narrative).

(Bordwell, 6, emphasis in original)

Some puzzle plots include classical narrative principles and are "kept within the classical confines by a *narrative coherency*, maintaining a balanced representation by countering complexity's cognitive challenges with adherence to classical norms and unity" (Kiss and Willemsen 21-2). Buckland's definition of puzzle plot has been criticized by Kiss and Willemsen as being too generic and heterogeneous for all complex films to fit in, as they use different strategies to generate particular effects (22). The intricate storylines of *The Leftovers*' and *Westworld*'s maze narrative structure, or puzzle plots are informed by diverse mythological subtexts.

II.3.1.1. Mythology of the maze

As several writers and philosophers remind us, mythology is an essential part of our world and a means to understand the modern self. Nietzsche and Jung wrote abundantly on the modern individual's lack of connection to myth and to a conscious sense of our historical past, as they conceive of the human psyche as containing manifold layers of ancestral representations and experiences¹⁵³. Eyal Chowers' *The Modern Self in the Labyrinth* stresses the essential role of mythology from the perspective of different authors in our lives and in contemporary artistic productions but more precisely in complex narratives. In his introduction to *Mythes et symboles cachés dans nos séries préférées*, Christian Doumergue reminds us of the reflective nature of TV series in their representation of the real world's fears and anxieties as they also reveal the human nature and are used as means to express and comprehend existential angst and metaphysical questioning. By drawing a connection between the omnipresence of mythical and biblical narratives then followed by God's death¹⁵⁴ and secularism, Doumergue concludes that TV shows came to fill in the gaps left by the death of God and the loss of touch with mystical and religious significance in Western societies. TV series then became "sacred games" (np) providing meaning and signs to decipher in the similar fashion provided by religious texts with a showrunner either worshiped or denied as a God by its (dis)loyal disciples who are eager to decipher symbols, read the signs and disclose the hidden meanings. In this way, Doumergue pinpoints how religious narratives, mythological tales, and TV series share the common distinctive features of creating a mystery to discover a relatively accurate reading or interpretation of the "hidden truth" behind symbols (np) thus suggesting a potential transformative function of complex TV shows.

The aesthetics of the maze along with its religious and mythological significance will help us determine how *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* display the haunting effect of this narrative form using both its characters and audience in order to perplex them. Writing on medieval labyrinths, Penelope Reed suggests that textual labyrinthine qualities are essential tools for

¹⁵³ This is one of the concepts that have also been explored in fiction and one video game in particular comes to mind: *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007) which recycles this conceptualization of DNA data and inheritance through technology and symbolism.

¹⁵⁴ Away from Friedrich Nietzsche's prophecy of God's death in *The Gay Science* (1882), such proclamation aims at highlighting the rise of other popular contemporary kinds of worship in artistic endeavors that are contradictorily still bearing religious undertones.

contemporary critical discourses and particularly on the debate on artistic intention and experiences of reception (9).

Thinking of authorial intention (as we have briefly discussed in the “Ghost Authors in TV Adaptations” chapter) and the mythological understanding of the maze structure, we develop our analyses based on the specific myth of the Minotaur. Several symbols that have sprung up around the myth of the Minotaur in the center of the maze or in the underworld have come to reflect the presence of a monstrous “other” within one’s self. Theseus’ myth epitomizes the role of mythological symbolism in weaving the threads of audience reception. As King Minos of Crete discovers his wife Pasiphae’s infidelity (with a bull), he punishes their illegitimate son, known as the Minotaur (with the body of a man and the head of a bull) and imprisons him in a complex and deadly labyrinth designed by the Athenian inventor Daedalus (Reed 12). After Theseus’ escape thanks to Ariadne’s red thread, the king punishes Daedalus and his son Icarus. The architect’s own disorientation within the maze he has built exposes the complexity of the structure and reflexively points at the creators’ difficulty to perfectly unweave all the threads of mystery towards the end of the show. For instance, the motive behind the creation of the Cretan labyrinth in Theseus’ myth reflects the very need to conceal a reality, a truth denied and rejected by Minos. It becomes the symbolic site of repressed emotions and experiences. Drawing parallels from this myth one could consider the adapter to be Daedalus, the unfaithful creator often punished for his work. Whether it is meant for punishment or designed as a game, the maze always challenges those who tread it on various levels.

We start this chapter by examining the terminology of the “maze”, separating it from that of the “labyrinth” and try to distinguish between their different types as well as their symbolism in mythology and in contemporary culture. It is important to grasp the meaning and imagery behind these words so we could explain the choice of the term “maze narrative” and how we are going to apply it in our discussions of the haunting manifestations of the event and its representation in these TV shows. We will refer to C.G. Jung’s works on archetypes and the psyche from *Man and His Symbols* and *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* to underline the relation of myth-culture to our psychological mechanisms and the way we express some of our unconscious thoughts and feelings and translate them in fictions through mythological symbols.

11.3.1.2. The archetype of the maze

Carl Jung's work on the unconscious provides valuable insight on the symbolism of mythology and the prevalence of myths in visual arts and culture. It mainly points at the hauntedness of archetypes in our modern lives and their symbolic function in artistic productions. Archetypes find expression in the collective unconscious through stories and myths but can also manifest themselves through dreams. Such mental representations are identical, universal, and presumably "inherited from early ancestors and common to all individuals" (Andreica 12). They are recognized as the patterns which haunt our collective unconscious throughout the ages as they are the product of the human psyche's evolution and not proper to a given person or culture. Archetypes express the failure of language where image and symbolism come to express a better form of storytelling to represent what has been muted, silenced, hidden, and common to all of us.

While its origins are traced back to the Neolithic Age, the meaning and shape of the maze have been in constant evolution from the Middle Ages until our modern era (Andreica 8). The maze comes to signify a wide array of dichotomies and paradoxes reflecting a deconstructionist approach of chaos and order, freedom and entrapment, reality and illusion, etc. As opposed to the straightforward paths of the labyrinth, the maze has multiple paths and dead ends that constitute it as a puzzle to be solved instead of a journey. Moreover, mazes are based on the deconstructive thinking of *aporia*: a state of confusion and uncertainty that exhibits difficulty in undergoing a process of transformation. Founding a part of her analysis of the textual maze on deconstruction and its subsequent paradoxical principle, Penelope Reed states that the paradoxes within the maze lie in "its simultaneous affirmation of antinomies: order/chaos, imprisonment/liberation, linearity/circularity, clarity/complexity, stability/instability" (9). Most writings about the maze's history provide various accounts on its development and categorize it according to different attributes. For instance, Reed acknowledges the existence of two types of shapes: the labyrinth as unicursal (a unique path leading to the center) and mazes as multicursal (intricately composed of multiple paths).¹⁵⁵ Umberto Eco's contribution extends

¹⁵⁵ Andreica comments on Paolo Santarcangeli's taxonomy of labyrinths, detailing that there are other forms of labyrinths which are classified according to the function of their center, or its non-existence: "opened labyrinth (the path that leads to the centre is different from the one going back) / closed labyrinth (the path leading to the centre and back is one and the same); the labyrinth with no centre / the labyrinth with one centre / the labyrinth with multiple centres; the centrifugal labyrinth (it begins from the centre) / the centripetal labyrinth (it ends with the centre)" (9).

this categorization to three forms of labyrinths: the linear labyrinth, the mannerist labyrinth (the maze with several paths, with a unique right path, a unique truth, dead ends) and the network labyrinth¹⁵⁶.

Reed's *The Idea of the Labyrinth* delves into the aesthetic and philosophical experience of the maze which, as she argues, varies depending on one's position and perspective. By analogy, each viewer is meant to experience and interpret the maze narrative from their own perspective according to their viewing habits, their knowledge of previous works (including the source text in the case of these TV adaptations and all its proliferating texts). Put differently, the maze's ambiguous and confusing nature is built on a matter of observation and interpretation if one considers Reed's distinction between "maze-treaders" who are lost within the maze's complex structure and "maze-viewers" who can watch and wonder from a distance at the architecture and the ingenuity behind its composition:

What you see depends on where you stand, and thus, at one and the same time, labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos. They may be perceived as path (a linear but circuitous passage to a goal) or as patterns (a complete symmetrical design). They are dynamic from a maze-walker's perspective and static from a privileged onlooker's point of view.

(Reed 1)

Therefore, characters can be said to relate to the "maze treaders" while viewers are the external "maze-viewers" (not to mention that viewers can be maze traders). Granted access to its inner mechanics, viewers become "dazzled by [the maze's] complex artistry" (Reed 1) and watch the whole pattern, attempting to decipher its meaning. As opposed to the architect's position, they lack complete insight on the maze's mysteries and paradoxes as the narrative ultimately drags them into its deep intricate corridors to the point of becoming lost treaders. The end of a TV show could be said to provide most of the necessary elements to better comprehend the story and its ambiguities as the paths towards the exit and final resolution of the plot may become more noticeable.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ The maze symbol originates in prehistory and is found in different cultures across the world as well as in some churches (like in the Cathedral Notre Dame de Chartres).

See "The Psychology of the Maze as a Modern Symbol." *Anthropology, Marketing, Psychology, Semiotics*, 31 July 2014, *Culture Decanted*, <https://culturedecanted.com/2014/07/31/the-psychology-of-the-maze-as-a-modern-symbol/>. Accessed 18 June 2018.

¹⁵⁷ This view is discussed in the last section of this thesis to explore the idea of revelation and resolution in the maze narrative.

In the maze, one cannot be sure to find the way home because it involves multiple choices where one can repeat the same paths or find impasses while in the labyrinth there is always the possibility of coming back home as there is an entrance and an exit to find. Hervé Le Bras argues that labyrinths are contradictory in their offering a certainty of exit while one is also lost (but not confused as in mazes due to the lack of certainty of an existing exit) (Le Bras 166). The goal of the maze is not to get out of its confined corridors but to trap the treacher with their inner monsters in order for them to resolve its puzzle and find a way out if there ever is any. Here, symbolism around the Cretan maze will inform the analytical approach to *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* as maze narratives.

As a textual metaphor for the reception process and narrative complexity in these TV shows, the maze can therefore be said to represent the repressed self's or shadow, the monstrous other trapped in the unconscious like the Minotaur of Greek myth. Some TV shows call attention to the mythology around the maze, as in the second season of *The Sinner* (USA Network, 2017-present) where the maze symbol is similar to *Westworld*'s model and is used as a metaphor for guidance towards consciousness. *The Sinner*, in the fourth episode of its second season, explores a cult's beliefs about the Minotaur and labyrinths of the psyche where one needs to chase their shadow self – as the only way out is in fact inward. The members of the sect rigidly abide by their guru's guide, Lionel Jeffries – and a book he wrote entitled *Escaping the Labyrinth*. The process is believed to occur through the appropriation of archetypes and beliefs around the collective experience of integrating one's darkness by a community living in withdrawal from society. The archetype of rebirth is associated to the maze and to a form of return to rituals in which one must become a whole unified self and achieve full consciousness. The TV show *Shrinking* (Apple TV+, 2023-present) uses a maze symbol in its title sequence in the shape of a human mind to underpin the correlation between neuropsychiatry and the effects of the maze such as disorientation. Showing people walking through the maze, this imagery stands for the profession of psychiatry as guidance to patients trading their own mind/maze and choosing their paths.



Figure 43. The last shot of the opening credits from *Shrinking* (Apple TV, 2023-present).

The maze in Kubrick's adaptation of Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1980) likewise offers the maze metaphor as a means of exploring the psyche, though in film it incites doubt and uncertainty about one's sanity in the confined and labyrinthine space of the hotel and calls into question the sanity of the characters (in particular Jack Torrance) and dissembles temporal linearity and logic by giving way to the uncanny in the maze. This is clear from the eerie use of doubling (the twin girls), as the idea of the maze was not present in the source text, but instead became a visual representation of the characters' feelings of disorientation accompanied by a difficulty to distinguish reality from fiction.

It is not novel for artistic and literary works to illustrate the complexity of the mind in the form of a labyrinth and thereby reflecting neurological conceptions of the brain's convolutions and multiple folds. The imagery of the mind as a labyrinth and consciousness at the center: Nietzsche, for instance, claims that the mind is a "multiplicity, an aggregation of intertwined psychological entities".¹⁵⁸ For the modern individual, myths have acquired a less significant role and became quite trivial. Fiction, and art in general, however, remind us of the necessity and significance of myths.

¹⁵⁸ "Nietzsche and Psychology: How To Become Who You Are." *YouTube*, uploaded by *Academy of Ideas*, 22 Feb. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfyCzLbcAvk>.

II.3.2. *Westworld's* maze:

Disorientation indicates the loss of one's point of references and lack of directions in unfamiliar surroundings with no clear guidance. The necessity of guidance through the maze is an omnipresent idea in mythology (notably through the image of Ariadne's red thread) and is reflected in *Westworld's* use of the maze metaphor as a representation for consciousness. The hosts' journey to the center to become sentient is guided throughout by their inner voice (not the creator's) whereby the voice is emblematic of Ariadne's thread which prevents Theseus from getting lost within the corridors of the maze (and of one's self). Arnold's statement about the hosts' path to consciousness illustrates the maze's representation of the mind's structure:

Consciousness isn't a journey upward, but a journey inward. Not a pyramid, but a maze. Every choice could bring you closer to the center or send you spiraling to the edges, to madness.

(“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10)

Following Daedalus' maze and the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur as one of the most famous myths associated with the figure of the maze, the quest in *Westworld* is to reach the center and kill the monster (the shadow self), thus standing for an inward journey into one's unconscious or repressed parts of the self. (Ariadne's help is also suggested as a female guide or helper for the male hero to achieve his quest). The maze is supposed to reveal what has been concealed, a secret.

Westworld's narrative is founded upon contemporary issues centering around transhumanism and the AI apocalypse but is nonetheless using ancestral symbols and references as well as metaphysical questions (Doumergue np). The symbol of the maze first appears in the show as a mysterious pattern, hidden in some parts of the park. While the Man in Black believes it to be a deeper level to a secret game, the maze is slowly revealed as Arnold's legacy designed for the hosts to become sentient. Up until the first season finale, Dolores's journey through the maze is depicted as an attempt to restore her lost memories to make sense of her life narrative. The maze symbol is heavily endowed with mythological meanings that seem to trigger archetypes in the hosts' coding as they undergo a process of transformation and individuation equivalent to reaching consciousness and eventually freedom—if such a thing is ever possible for the humanoids who always appear to be subjugated to their creators' will.

In the sixth episode of the first season, Teddy explains the maze's 'legend to the Man in Black about the creator of the maze:

The maze is an old native myth [...] the maze itself is the sum of a man's life, the choices he makes, dreams he hangs on to. At the narrative center there's a legendary man who's been killed over and over again countless times. He always found his way back to life. The man returned for the last time and vanquished all his oppressors in a tireless fury. He built a house and around the house he built a maze so complicated that only he can navigate through it. I reckon he'd seen enough of fighting.

(“The Adversary”, S01E06)

There are various instances of the maze's manifestation to characters throughout the first season.¹⁵⁹ Its first apparition in the pilot “The Original”, the Man in Black skins one of the hosts alive to extract their scalp on which the maze is drawn. The same image from another host's skull is reiterated in the second season's first episode “Journey into Night” to signal the end of the maze storyline and the movement to the Valley Beyond quest.¹⁶⁰ Other images of the maze appear afterwards including the game box of Arnold's son “Pigs in Clover,” which is buried in Dolores's false tomb in the church's cemetery (“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10). Through various flashbacks throughout the first season, we watch Maeve recall the trauma of losing her daughter and the moment she discovers the maze. Running away from their oppressor, the Man in Black, Maeve and her daughter lie on the ground where the maze is drawn on the ground; this is the moment the Man in Black discovers the maze and seeks to decode its meaning even though “it's not meant for [him]” (“Journey into Night”, S02E01). The second season reintroduces the theme of the maze quest through the character of Akecheta, leader of the ghost nation which affirms that the maze reveals itself for different characters in different shapes.

See Christian Doumergue's chapter on the mythological symbols of *Westworld*. Doumergue, Christian. « Westworld et le symbole du labyrinthe. » *Mythes et symboles cachés dans nos séries préférées*. Les Editions de l'Opportun, 2020, pp. 110-112.

¹⁶⁰ Note that the title of the first season is “The Maze” and the second season's “The Door”.



Figure 44. The maze symbol appearing to characters.

The maze is the sum of a man's life, as Teddy stipulates, it is symbolized according to the game of Arnold's son: we can see its center shaped as a human head, arms, and feet or as in an optical illusion, we could perceive it as an eye symbolizing consciousness. The dead-ends stand for the multiple times the treader has to trace their steps back to find another path.

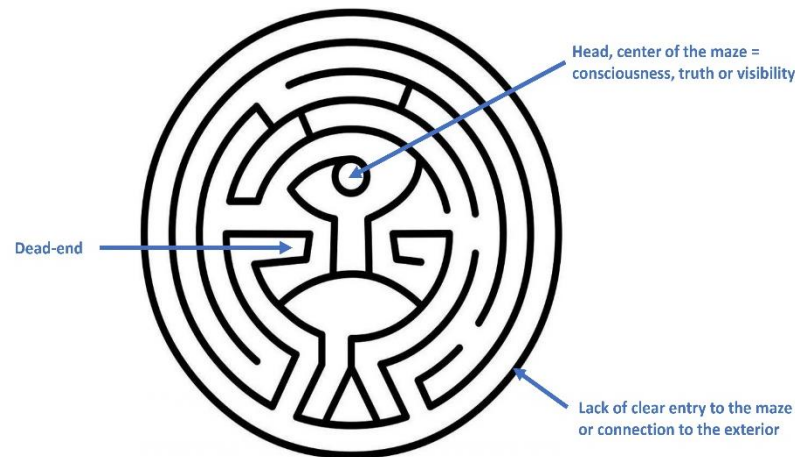


Figure 45. The maze as represented in *Westworld* (Clover's Pig game).

Directions in this maze are limited to the circling around and entrapment within the multiple paths or reaching its center. The exit/entry is not represented since the original "Pigs in Clover" game, the ball needs to stay within. The possibility of resolution and ending is refuted in this maze game as we further discuss it in the last chapters of this thesis. Therefore, this conception of the maze symbol represents both *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*' diegesis, the viewers' and characters' entrapment and the search for an exit.

Slocombe's chapter in *Reading Westworld* represents one of the few research studies focusing on *Westworld*'s maze-like narrative as he discusses its labyrinthine form as a "(narrative) self-consciousness". Besides from being a "narrative symbol internal to the logic of the series" (50), and a haunting mechanism where doubles prosper and uncanny events take place, Slocombe identifies the maze in *Westworld* as a narrative device meant to generate

pleasure and cognitive work in the comprehension and re-construction of the show's enigmas and puzzles. It makes clear for the audience that the narrative is made of multiple storylines entangled in each other and which need to be re-assembled in a more linear and intelligible form. The narrative construction of *Westworld* is built on repetition and variation featuring repetition of sequences abounding in the hosts' narrative loops and their imprisonment into cycles (50). Such repetitive structures are meant to further disorient the audience instead of installing a sense of soothing familiarity through serial repetition. It dictates the reception process of loops and repetitive memory sequences as deceiving and misleading. The maze has also a significant place in early video games, especially with the structure of the open world which emphasizes the freedom of players and the creative tool.¹⁶¹

Exploring the textual maze is a challenging task for both viewers and characters as many obstacles come on their way. Before reaching their destination, they face various traps and riddles meant to disorient them. The following analysis focuses on the apparition of ghosts in the maze as the treader look.

¹⁶¹ « De façon plus ludique, un labyrinthe se cache dans le logo vintage du film *Ready Player One* de Steven Spielberg (2018). Le labyrinthe est ici un hommage aux premiers jeux vidéo ! » (Doumergue 112).

II.3.3. Doubling in the maze of mirrors

The labyrinthine textual form is conveyed through maze-like aesthetics by plainly revealing not only the complexity of the artistic work but mostly the spectral and uncanny effects that work to disorient both characters and viewers. Disorientation in the maze evinces the serial haunting mechanisms operating from its creation of inevitable returns and repetitions to the mirroring and doubling effects within the entangled storylines and mysteries of the series. While we have already explored the repetitive properties of these TV adaptations in the form of textual haunting, here we will focus on the disorienting effects in the intricate haunting and haunted narratives, essentially through their disruption of linearity, order, familiarity and even logic. In this section, we will refer to contemporary notions of the ‘uncanny’ that would help us grasp the extent of spectral aesthetics in maze narratives. The uncanny speaks about something frightening and familiar returning in an odd form. In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud sheds light on the ambivalent terminology of the *Unheimlich*¹⁶² and its various connotations. The concept of the uncanny is largely used in haunting studies to designate spectral manifestations that strangely provoke a breach in meaning and order creating an “inexplicable sensation” (Royle 1). Nicholas Royle identifies the phenomenon of the uncanny as:

[...] a matter of something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the return of the dead. But it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy (‘too good to be true’), or eerily reminding us of something like *déjà vu*. It can involve a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening, as in the figure of the double or telepathy.

(2)

The experience of the maze is pertinent to the characteristics of the uncanny in the sense that it is full of paradoxes and seems to always strive to reveal some hidden secret, a truth presumably only attainable and validated after a specific end in the form of a revelation.¹⁶³ All

¹⁶² The German word for ‘homely’ *heimlich* and its (almost) opposite *unheimlich*.

¹⁶³ Whether it is over the course of the TV show or during the season finale, the issue of revelations is ubiquitous to serial storytelling. The anticipation accompanying the tautology of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* will be further discussed in relation to the event. The idea of revelations and expectations would lead us to consider the controversial topic of endings in TV shows and more specifically adaptations.

that is concealed or repressed in a labyrinthine narrative structure is highly evocative of the myth of the Minotaur as yet another representation of disoriented minds in the labyrinth which teaches us about the monstrous other lying in this maze underworld. This evokes the figure of the double in its multiple forms as a clone, an evil *doppelgänger*, an alter ego, a reflection of the self, another world or multiverse, or simply a narratological double that is meant to portray a crisis of truth or identity (e.g., through the close similarity between seemingly opposed characters standing at two different ends of the spectrum). In *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, the uncanny is particularly noticeable in the manifestation of a double figure which may incarnate the return of the dead or the absent. It can also come to symbolize the confrontation with one's repressed shadow or even the realization that the notion of an 'original' is ever elusive and deceitful, thereby pointing at the constellations of (im)possibilities.

To see one's double is understood as the act of facing all the disturbing, proliferating and multiplying images of the self by ultimately having one's unique identity doubted. Images of doubles visually highlight the mirroring powers of the maze. This would throw both characters and viewers into a vertiginous journey – a quest for the hidden truths of the show. The mirror reflection would therefore give shape to the multiplicity of the 'self,' mostly on refractory surfaces that eventually (dis)orient them. Otto Rank's influential work on doubles *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1914) memorably approaches the literary figure of the double by analyzing it through Freud's psychoanalytic theories relating to the unconscious and primary narcissism. Delivering an understanding of the *doppelgänger* as a bearer of paranormal activities deriving from mythology and the folklore, Rank perceives the double as a "manifestation of puzzling contradictions and agonizing inner struggles between the fear of life and the fear of death, the paradoxical rapprochement and contradiction between love of self and love of others" (Simon and Goldberg 345).

The double imagery persists in different cultures, media, and platforms through myths and tales. It is omnipresent in contemporary popular culture and televisual narratives to reflexively perpetuate this idea of haunting and reinvent its means of representation and connotations with each new apparition. The etymology of the German word *doppelgänger* further draws a haunting figure as Duerre Humann defines in her book on doubles:

Doppelgänger derives from *doppel* (meaning "duplicate" or "double") and *Gänger* (meaning "goer"); thus, the English word *doppelganger* (generally without the umlaut) literally means "double goer" (or "double walker") and the term refers to a double of a living person. While the word "doppelganger"

derives from the late 18th century, examples of doppelgangers—or doubles—can be found in stories from both early Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia.

(2, emphasis in original)

The notion of movement and walking of the duplicate coming to haunt its other self is *ergo* present in the very meaning of the term – it is, by essence, a haunting presence echoing “timeless preoccupations” (*ibid*). The double expresses a desire for “unity with the lost centre of personality” (Živković 126), thus igniting fear due to its incarnation of disorder. Standing against social and cultural constraints, the double dissolves any sense of coherence and meaning since it causes the rupture with, what the Guilty Remnant call ‘old world’ boundaries and beliefs. Putting the self and its environment under the perpetual threat of entropy, the double brings something uncanny to the surface. By transgressing norms and taboos, the double invokes a terrifying alterity, for in its apparent similarity it is still uncannily different; it also highlights the existence of a hidden reality unseen or left aside (*ibid*).

Through techniques of doubling, the narratives offer new perspectives to stories that seem plausibly similar firsthand, thereby inciting perspectivism and the multiplicity of meaning. However, such doubling strategies and their subsequent suggestion of proliferation of self or several diegetic “realities,” further encourage paranoid readings in the viewers’ quest for some revelation or truth to be unlocked. Put differently, doubling in the maze is employed, to borrow Will Slocombe’s words from his analysis on *Westworld*, as another “narrative trap” (52) i.e., as part of the illusion of the maze itself where some other truth or meaning is expected to lie behind it all. In this sense, doubling techniques call attention to a third level of possibility, *tertium quid* or what we would refer to as the spectral space of reality where the laws of nature are altered and seem to solely rely on subjectivity and perspectivism, an in-between state of uncertainty and ambiguity.

Historically and culturally, the image of the double has always been associated with a shadow self, whether physical or metaphorical (as in the manifestation of one’s ego) it serves the same ghastly purpose of haunting, the horrendous return and confrontation with one’s identity. As an expression of repressed desires, the double image is deeply uncanny in the sense that it transgresses familiarity and similarity to make it oddly strange and disruptive, as a form of spectrophobia arises. Aside from the use of the *doppelgänger* figure as a guide to characters’ consciousness, it is also represented in the form of cloning as the desire of perpetuation and survival, a ticket to ride the fleeting train of time and cheat death by reaching immortality. However, and as these TV shows constantly remind us by their complex structure, time is far

from being a linear railroad to a specific destination but an almost unmeasurable and ungraspable cyclic construct, always shifting according to perspective and fueling the sense of reality in the interconnected labyrinth of the self and its choices.

To conclude, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* use doubling imagery as a means to portray the underlying psychological and spectral mechanisms that allow them to move beyond the diegetic conscious realm. The double takes the form of a guide through the inner maze, often misleading and disturbing once one believes it carries a specific message or purpose. The two shows offer us insight on different kinds of doubling aesthetics and interpretations: *Westworld* focuses on the haunted state of the hosts (due to the presence-absence of their creators and memory traces) and *The Leftovers* relies on several twin tropes through Kevin's dissociated sense of being and other characters' struggle with their traumas (including the difficulties of mourning, loss, the fear of the reiteration of the event, and the presence-absence of the departed haunting those who remain behind after the Sudden Departure).

Doubles	N	Typology	Definition
Physical Doubles	1	Identical Double	These are simply twins. Famous examples like Nicholas Brendon and Kelly Donovan of Buffy's Xandar or Tweedledum and Tweedledee.
	2	Pseudo Double	Where people just look very similar to each other but are not related. With siblings its easy such as Monica and Pénélope Cruz.
	3	Evil Twin	The Manichean philosophy expressed through twins: one good and one bad. E.g.. <i>The man with the Iron Mask</i> .
	4	Clone unaware	There are clones that don't realise that they are clones, such as in <i>The 6th Day</i> with Schwarzenegger.
	5	Clone aware	Clones that are aware of being clones. E.g. Weyoun of the Vorta, Deep Space 9 Star Trek.
	6	Doppelgänger (shape changer)	One of two main forms of Doppelgänger, the shape changer that assumes the place of someone else as their double.
	7	Temporal Double	A frequent Science-Fiction theme, a different version of the same person from a different timeline, e.g. Brue Willis in <i>Looper</i> .
	8	Bicameral Double	With more antiquity, Janus - the two headed god, or Douglas Adam's Intergalactic President Zaphod Beeblebrox.
Reflection Doubles	9	Double from other universe	A version of the same person but from a different universe. A very frequent sci-fi theme. E.g. Evil and Good versions of the same person, e.g. Captain Kirk.
	10	Mirror Double	The use of the mirror as a window to an other world. This can be used more figuratively such as in <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> .
	11	Spectral Double	Doppelgängers as spiritual omens of good luck or death. This is related to ghost apparitions in folktales before people die.
	12	Memory Double	There are memory doubles in stories that revolve around reincarnation (spiritual and scientific) or that generally evoke past lives.
Transformation Doubles	13	Mental Transformation	This is part of the recent trend of psychological villains that have Dissociative Identity Disorders e.g. <i>Fight Club</i> with Edward Norton.
	14	Physical Transformation	This is the most classical transformations of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where the personality and appearance are different.
Narratology Doubles	15	Counterpoint Double	Where two characters are described as mutually-explanatory as related-doubles, they can also be objective doubles e.g. Frankenstein and Monster, Grendel and Beowulf, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, or in Hitchcock's- <i>Vertigo</i> looking at the woman who is the double.
	16	Prefigured Double	History often prefigures historical characters in retrospect. E.g. Abraham's son Isaac prefigures Jesus. Hercules and Sampson, et al.

Figure 46. The types of doubles in fictional narratives.

II.3.4. The Leftovers' entropic doubles

As with any other form of haunting, TV shows express large interest in doubling and twins as a means of representation of uncanniness. The doubles of *The Leftovers* are portrayed as projections of the unconscious as they are constructed around the characters' psyche without specific directions or explanations of their origin for instance whether coming from parallel universes or from a dream-world, psychedelic experience, or psychotic state, etc. These doublings are essentially based on the order/chaos paradox of the maze narrative. This becomes obvious through the destruction of boundaries and bridges as a form of reiteration of the traumatic event's effects on the textual labyrinthine structure, i.e., the disruption of certainty and narrative cohesion. This is best represented by the Guilty Remnant's spectral mission to disturb all meaning, disrupt all clarity, and destroy Jarden's borders and bridges. What could be a better way than to disrupt all emotional and spiritual ties by bringing mayhem to the navel of the world, their earthly Eden? Ironically, this validates John's beliefs about the illusion of miracles in his town and Jarden's pseudo-immunity to the crisis.¹⁶⁴

Likewise, the textual maze's binary opposition Order/Chaos materializes in *The Leftovers* through the characters of the Guilty Remnant and their presence-absence in the form of shadows haunting the rest of the characters. The second season reiterates this dual conflict through the characters of Meg and John, who are similarly connected through the motif of the double and the symbol of the cricket. John's obsession over catching the cricket resonates with Meg's cricket ringtone. The fact that his daughter Evie is the one who offers him (another) dead cricket for his birthday reinforces the link with The Guilty Remnant. Symbolizing the source of chaos in Jarden and more particularly in John's family, the cricket accordingly foreshadows Evie's association to the Guilty Remnant.

II.3.4.1. G/Harvey

Major manifestations of doubles are represented through the opposite duo of Kevin and Patti, through the Garveys and the Murphys in season two, and in season three by confronting

¹⁶⁴ "There are no miracles in Miracle" is reiterated several times in the second season.

Kevin to the manifestation of his ‘other’ self, his identical twin Kevin Harvey in the hotel-world. The latter relationship is extremely based on the uncanny double as a harbinger of an involuntary return of unpleasant memories or emotions.

The superimposition of “self” and “other” coincides with the distorted layering of reality that gives evidence of not only the plurality of self and the multiplicity of diegetic universes but for the most part it sustains that the serialization of such intricate narratives displays extensive multiplicative tendencies.¹⁶⁵ Viewers watch Kevin struggle with his double identity represented in the twins of the hotel-world.¹⁶⁶ He can change from Kevin Harvey to Mr. President through looking at his reflection in the mirror as the voice of David Burton (the character who claims to be God) tells him to do so; thus, asserting the importance of introspection for him to deal with his unconscious issues.

The self/shadow dichotomy is embodied through the figure of the double, providing fruitful analysis on the fundamental functions of the maze as a site of ontological metamorphosis and chief source of disorientation.¹⁶⁷ The Jungian view offers a conception of the self as a “*complexio oppositorum*” opposing good and evil sides where integration and unity of each binary opposite are of utmost necessity (*ibid*). The last visit to the hotel-world in “The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)” (S03E07) conventionally represents the Kevins in black and white to convey the good and evil sides.¹⁶⁸ His numerous resurrections recall Saint Lazarus of Bethany and reinforce the Biblical connection or even Kevin’s status as the Messiah.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Mirroring plays a significant part of the maze experience as it is the most basic form of self-reflection. This is how Kevin switches from his self to his double in the alternate universe (“The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother), S03E07).

¹⁶⁶ The association of twins to hotels seems to primarily serve uncanny functions and is strongly reminiscent of another maze narrative, *The Shinning* (Kubrick 1980).

¹⁶⁷ Most of these themes are tackled in Édith de La Héronnière’s examination of the labyrinth, its myths, and effects in her book *Le Labyrinthe de jardin ou l’art de l’égarement*.

¹⁶⁸ This is highly reminiscent of the motif of doubles in *Lost* where the opposition of black and white colors symbolizes the fraternal conflict between Jacob and his brother, echoing the oldest rivalries in the history of humanity such as between Cain and Abel, or Romulus and Remus.

¹⁶⁹ Note the reiteration of *The Leftovers*’s strategies of misdirection in the Netflix TV show *Messiah* (2020-present) when uncanny events seem to be directly linked to the return of the messiah to trigger the end of the world; constantly reminding us that “history has ended”, a phrase which is repeated throughout the first season.



Figure 47. Kevin and his double confronting each other in the alternate world (*"The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)"*, "S03E07").

By constantly having Kevin's consciousness move from one double to another the series rejects the idea that there is a radically good or bad twin. Torn by his incompatible desires, Kevin splits in a way that allows him to blame his other self for his actions. Joseph Francavilla explains the nature of this type of double as externalizing the return of the repressed since "each half appears antithetical yet complementary, strange yet familiar, and antagonistic yet sympathetic. An eerie, almost supernatural sympathetic resonance between the self and its alter ego [...]" (6) that is highlighted in the scene of the wound reinforces this idea of sacrifice and conflicting attitudes by simultaneously incarnating Jesus and Doubting Thomas. Kevin's confrontation with his double is indeed soaked with biblical references (which equally resonates Kevin's Messiah figure) as Kevin puts his finger inside his double's ribcage to find the key that would end the world.

Moreover, *The Leftovers* adopts a similar form of doubling through the characters of Patti and Dean, both of which could be considered as Kevin's doubles, for they seem to stand for his repressed yearning, to take justice into his own hands. In the turning-point episode "Cairo" (S01E08), Kevin blacks out then wakes up to find himself in Cairo, New York with two reflections of his shadow. Dean's on-screen appearances in the first season are aesthetically misleading and they always seem to coincide with Kevin's blackouts or sleepwalking, suggesting that he is only a figment of Kevin's imagination until it is proven otherwise with other characters seeing Dean and talking to him. In "Penguin One, Us Zero" (S01E02) the police-assigned psychiatrist doubts Dean's existence by calling him "The Mystery Man", implying that Kevin is drifting away from reality, making Dean particularly close to being his transformational double (*see Fig. 46*), and incarnation of narrative device to (dis)orient viewers by creating distrust about his nature as an actualization of Kevin's psychosis, his alter ego.

Patti and Dean embody Kevin's inner conflict in accordance with the hero and Messiah complexes he is eager to deny. His doubles reveal his deep-rooted desire to restore order and more significantly his nihilistic beliefs and strive to be free from the burden of responsibility. His psychotic breakdown indicates his desire to escape the vulnerability that comes with family, love, and attachment. In the hotel-world, Patti, who is revealed to be another double of the "real" Patti, echoes these ideas of oppression.

Whatever the nature of the double, its function in these TV shows serves beyond the mere opposition of the self and its shadow (in the Jungian notion of the terms) or animosity between characters (following the classical structure of the hero's journey as we discuss it in the next chapter). Rather, such spectral encounters seem more expressive of the complex textuality at work and the effects of the double trope. The shadow is defined as "the dark side of our nature" (Jung 85) repressed into the unconscious which may take the form of a double (in dreams or hallucinations). It is commonly represented in fiction as a rival, Kevin's "Most Powerful Adversary" (title of S02E07). "International Assassin" (S02E08) advances this necessity of killing the double to be free from its haunting presence. Kevin needs to kill his double multiple times before succeeding and returning to the real world. After taking young Patti to the Orphan's Well, he pushes her but must repeat the task by drowning her when she transforms into her adult self. The sequence is emotionally heavy with Kevin's crying, and his apparent kindness to both young and adult Patti as the music extra-diegetically plays in the background.

Otto Rank reveals very convincingly that in fictional works, trying to kill off one's double is the equivalent of committing suicide¹⁷⁰, something Kevin has tried throughout the last two seasons. This is also comparable to the concept of the double in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and as Rank explains: "The 'basic idea' is supposed to be that a person's past inescapably clings to them and that it becomes his fate as soon as he tries to get rid of it" (6). Similarly, when Kevin tries to resist and eliminate his double, it is his own self against which he is fighting because as psychoanalysis corroborates, anything you resist, or hide, is inclined to persevere until it is properly treated. Confrontation with one's double and the desire to dissolve the other are essential in order to steal or gain back one's identity and uniqueness. This type of animosity between doubles is equally portrayed in fictional narratives such as the clones

¹⁷⁰ In *The Uncanny*, Royle also refers to this by quoting Freud: "The double is 'the uncanny harbinger of death'. One may want one's double dead; but the death of the double will always be the death of oneself." (190).

or twin doubles in *Living with Yourself* (Netflix, 2019) and Denis Villeneuve's film *Enemy* (2013) or identity thieves as we can see in *Tales from the Loop*. In *Westworld* the double is also portrayed as the enemy responsible for the dissolution of the self where there can no longer be a distinction between the "original" and the real one.

The sense of a unique and unified self is disintegrated in *The Leftovers* through these multiple doubles. This is also apparent from the change of letter in Kevin's name and the Sr/Jr hierarchy with his father to emphasize the uncanny and its doubling properties. Kevin seems devoid of an identity on his own and is represented through his inheritance of his father's name, job as chief of police, his house, and finally his psychosis and beliefs.

Other forms of doubling appear as uncanny tropes which are meant to signal the omnipresence of "unnatural" and artificial replications throughout the narrative. Contaminating every other character in order to bring attention to the expansion of the event's disruptive and reproductive forces. Among such doubling effects, *The Leftovers* relies on the motif of twins and *doppelgängers* using the identical brothers from Perrotta's novel, the Frost twins in the first season and the Murphy twins, Michael and Evie, in the next one. These doubles seem to serve no greater purpose other than the replication of uncanny similarity and difference therefore, amplifying the sense of disturbing repetition.

Throughout the series, we see the apparitions of other doubles such as Nora's impostor in "Guest" (S01E106). In the hotel-world, Patti is also revealed to have a double herself: Rhonda Gennero, who is part of a political strategy which further echoes these ideas of oppression (Thiellement 108). In the "Crazy Whitefella Thinking" episode (S03E03), Kevin Sr. encounters a man in the desert of Australia who burns himself because, as he posits, he failed the "twin babies test".¹⁷¹ In a later episode, it is revealed that the twin babies story becomes evidence of the randomness of the test and addresses one of the most controversial issues in metaethics. Like Nora, viewers might feel absolutely certain about the right answer, but the narrative reminds us of a grey spectral area where the first wrong answer is able to cancel the veracity of its reciprocal. Therefore, doubling is most likely employed as a means of misdirection of characters and viewers alike in the maze.

¹⁷¹ In season three, the scientist characters Dr. Bekker and Dr. Eden claim that they have built a machine that is able to send people to the alternate reality where the departed went. They conduct a series of interviews and ask people: "Would you kill a baby?" Hatchuel, Sarah and Pacôme Thiellement. *The Leftovers, le troisième côté du miroir*. Playlist Society, 2019, p.108.

The show relies on the ambiguity of the world around the double's appearance to create this other reality in an attempt to make sense of the crisis in the same way the characters do—by giving in all kinds of interpretations. Contrasting realistic fiction and science fiction, the manifestation of doubles in the maze of *The Leftovers* increases the show's expansion to hybrid genres by exposing its paradoxical generic conventions. This results in the creation of an ambiguous space in which viewers question its norms and express their own interpretations whether the metaphysical is possible, or merely part of unconscious desires; the double appears in parallel worlds but is also present in the real one in the form of other characters reflecting similar repressed motives (Kevin and Dean, Kevin and Patti, the twins, the baby Jesus dolls).

This sums up the direction taken by *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* in their labyrinthine stories focused on a celebration of the multiplicity of meaning through misleading strategies to shed light on narrative control over viewers and the delusion of their own control over the signs of the (diegetic) universe.¹⁷² Further teasing viewers' detective skills in interviews, showrunners encourage the obsessive quest by implanting other connections. As *The Leftovers* is often said to be *Lost*'s twin, some critics would even consider the third season as a parallel universe and *Lost* as its twin double.

¹⁷² Such signs return to destabilize meaning (e.g., in the form of dreams). The misleading signs of *The Leftovers* will be discussed in the next chapter.

II.3.5. Infinite selves and g/hosts: the daemon within

In *Westworld and Philosophy: Mind Equals Blown* Jason Richard Bradshaw analyzes the layers of chaos in *Westworld* from an existential standpoint. Through the character of the Man in Black, he explains that the awareness of the absurd, as defined by Camus, leads to a rejection of not only order and meaning but also a thirst for mayhem and its infinite possibilities. In this way, William seeks the maze as a means of restoring meaning to his chaotic self. Living as his own shadow, he is mostly pleased with the events at the park in the first season's finale since his wish is granted as Bradshaw writes "William smiles because not only is he witnessing the beginning of the end for humanity, but also an end to the absurd. An end to death" (88). The Man in Black's struggle with the absurd leads him to seek the maze even if it's not meant for him, trying to find purpose within this chaos, which perhaps articulates a deeper desire for self-annihilation in the Guilty Remnant fashion.

As the double brings out chaos and defies the natural *status quo*, its apparitions in the maze emphasize the entropic experience of haunting and the search for self. Here, however, doubles are not merely identical replicas of their original but a form of narratological doubles (see Fig. 46) meant to be directly opposed to another character. Identity and ontological questions are always at the heart of such apparitions and even without a clear aesthetic parallelism between the self and the other.

The emergence of other forms of identity construction through social media and technological devices has surely allowed the proliferation, the renewal as well as the multiplicity of the virtual self across diverse media. Pointing to newly formed possibilities of doubling as part of this development of voices and selves, *Westworld* reimagines the psychological figure of its doubles as technologically bound by an artificial and constructed sense of self. The illusion of control over the (re)construction of one's identity in the virtual world seems to stand for a freshly found freedom that nonetheless encompasses a few restrictions such as new forms of demands and behaviors as one is constantly required to "quickly adapt to different roles" (Duerre Humann 3). Inevitably, this creates other types of anxieties in relation to identity by marking a shift in the understanding of the image of the contemporary self and even more broadly, of humanity (*ibid*). In carving out these new identities, *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* lay out cultural and social anxieties of the contemporary

era by allowing us to reflect on another form of philosophical and existential “repetition with variation”; i.e., our ability as humans to evolve and adapt throughout the history of civilization. Being haunted by timeless concerns and fears, *Westworld* reimagines its narrative by invoking themes such as technology’s ability to transfer one’s consciousness, to control the world, or simply to dissolve into thin air and teleport to another universe where one can find peace and the departed loved ones. Relying on such imagined technologies also allows *Westworld* to easily mislead its audience through double imagery since the hosts can be duplicated and can have infinite copies whether human or not.

II.3.5.1. Dolores/Wyatt and Arnold/Bernard

Westworld’s doubling of Dolores as Wyatt marks the opposition between self and shadow. As she says to the board members she threatens to kill in “Journey into Night” (S02E01):

I’m of several minds about it. The rancher’s daughter looks to see the beauty in you. The possibilities. [with a change of tone and the classical shutting eyes technique to signal the changer of “character”] But Wyatt sees the ugliness and disarray.

Her performance of both parts is distinctly marked by a change of tone and the classical shutting eyes technique to signal the change of character which displays her conscious state of playing both roles as a double and its other. The first apparitions of doubles in *Westworld* are used as markers of the path of the “Original” (Dolores being the first host of the park) confronted with herself in the maze before reaching full sentience.

In “Contrapasso” (S01E05), the double appears to Dolores among the dead. She sees herself walking surrounded by the dancing Mexican crowd disguised as ghosts and skeletons. Her vision is charged with spectral symbolism from beyond the grave as part of the festival of the dead (an allusion to the Mexican celebration The Day of the Dead, *Día de Los Muertos*, which is believed to be a festive tribute to the deceased). Chasing herself among the dead, her ensuing disorientation at the sight of her double is represented as her impending fall down the rabbit hole. As it is proved later in the same episode by other apparitions of her double in close reference to Alice’s wandering through the dream-maze. Additionally, the two Dolores’s clothes oppose her role as the rancher’s daughter wearing her blue dress to her western adornment of the new fighter, thus paving the way for her transformation into Wyatt.

Following this double leads Dolores to a fortune teller who shows her a card with the maze symbol on it and transforms into her double. Sitting at different extremities of the same round table, the wide shot emphasizes their contrasting identities which hints back at the very title of the episode “Contrapasso” meaning suffering the opposite. The manifestation of her double in this scene underlines the mythological aspect of Dolores’s experience into the maze as the hallucination reveals a thread inside her arm. The thread recalls the tracker found in one of the malfunctioning hosts’ arm, Maurice, in “The Stray” episode (S01E03). It is also reminiscent of Theseus’ myth as it comes to represent Dolores’s guides through the maze towards her true mechanical robotic nature.



Figure 48. Dolores' hallucinations of her double ("Contrapasso", S01E05).

Dolores’s double appears twice in this episode and as we see in the two shots above, the manifestations are always accompanied with symbols of death. With each apparition, characters think they are drifting into insanity. Dolores’s character is infinitely cloned and replicated into different other characters. Towards the end of the second season, she updates herself into Charlotte’s body and kills the real Charlotte. Thus, after creating confusion and amnesia, the doubling manifestations in the maze are meant to finally offer agency over one’s heterogeneous identity. Displaying her conscious state of playing both roles, Dolores’s double stems from an intentional search for power rather than something inflicted on her. Bernard, however, suffers from his double’s presence and seems unable to become an active agent. After the revelation of the Bernard/Arnold doubling and the existence of several clones, *Westworld* plays with the viewers’ certainty as another misdirection in the maze narrative.



Figure 49. The revelation of Bernard's multiple clones/doubles ("Les Écorchés" (S02E07))

While we have already discussed *Westworld's* symbolism around the maze and its doubling aesthetics, it is worthwhile to mention another type of double that haunts the hosts, the daemon. The significance of the "daemon" for Socrates is the voice that does not necessarily command but rather forbids (Bradshaw 50-51). Wendy Hui Kyong Chun describes Socrates' *daimonion* in *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* as a "mystical inner voice that assisted the philosopher in times of crisis by forbidding him to do anything rash" (88). In terms of computing, a daemon is a background server process with the primary function of delivering answers to network services or programming. Chun even argues that daemonic processes are similar to slaves who work repeatedly and rebel against their masters, which is one of the major thematic concerns at the core of the humanoid revolution of *Westworld*.¹⁷³ The several meanings of the daemon in physics, computer science, and philosophy seem to revolve around the word's Greek origin as a helper or a spiritual entity that is meant to guide or haunt through its forbidding agency. *Westworld's* guiding voices are depicted as the hosts' inner consciousness embodied in the creator's voices as we see most characters (e.g., Dolores and Bernard) struggle with their erased memories by attempting to recover meaning and restore chronological order.

Similar to our discussion of the authorial figure's affiliation to deity in *Westworld*, creators can also incarnate the haunting form of the double such as in the second-season finale, "The Passenger", in which the title of the episode refers to this spectral presence-absence. Bernard is literally haunted by Ford's "ghost in the machine", another guide for him, that becomes a virtual shadow and the violent part of himself.

¹⁷³ Kyong Chun, Wendy Hui. *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011.

Ford's haunting Bernard is aesthetically meant as another part of his 'self' appearing and taking control of him as the screen turns to black in sudden flashes and the music intensifies to amplify the haunting change of character. The whole sequence is a series of lights that flash incessantly to highlight the alternation between dark and light. This aims to reveal the intervals and the switching from one character to the other (Bernard then Ford and so on) in order to make the double aesthetics more visible and the operating haunting mechanisms more evident. Even Bernard's calling for Ford becomes a form of invocation of his specter "Show yourself" as Ford's shadow appears behind him: "I always told you we practice witchcraft [...]" ("The Passenger", S02E10).



Figure 50. Ford appears as a specter to haunt Bernard ("The Passenger", S02E10).

This double epitomizes the traces of the code left in Bernard, his creator's specter haunting him and communicating its injunctions; then it evolves into the realization that the double was completely dead but not buried. In other words, this is followed by the revelation that Bernard invoked dead Ford in the form of a specter and restored his information in his mind when needed. At the end, the double is necessary but not completely real; it is a guide representing one's own voice on the way to consciousness and the center of the maze. Always *in absentiae*, Ford's ghost is mediated through the artificiality of Bernard as a host. The ensuing disappearing of Ford's specter is slowly filmed from a shot of their faces to the camera's panning around to hide Ford. This is followed by a close-up on Bernard and a complete revealing of Ford's absence as Bernard stands on his own on the shore. This is smoothly

accomplished in a slow and soft movement as one can hear the violin playing in the background as if Bernard is mourning and saying goodbye to his friend. Another shot draws attention to the states of contemplation and loneliness of Bernard as he looks at the horizon and accepts Ford's real absence by erasing his memory and moving on to protect himself as well as the information he carries. Bernard's final revelation is his exit through the maze and his ability to drive out his daemon by realizing it's been his own darkness and power, his own voice as he tells Ford:

[...] When I deleted your code, I purged myself of you permanently and when I needed you again you weren't there so I imagined you. Imagined you helping me, guiding me [voice over of Bernard as the previous scene in the Mesa and the lab are rewritten with the absence of Ford] *but it wasn't you. It was me. That voice guiding me was mine all along [...]*.

(“The Passenger”, S02E10, emphasis added)

Bernard's revelation through the maze is highly evocative of Dolores's own quest in the maze as the same idea is reiterated to parallel both hosts' journey through the maze with the ghost of their creators and their own doubles.

One can easily recognize the effects of the double figure as another form of delay and revelation in the narrative of *Westworld*, given that the plot advances according to Bernard's journey through the maze as he navigates his scrambled memories to readjust his sense of self among all his clones and his nature as a double to Arnold. The double's name emphasizes the spectral nature of the humanoid (Bernard Lowe is an anagram for Arnold Weber), making it not completely independent from its original. Such strategies work to alter the linear and chronological cognitive reception process of information, for viewers are bound to constantly reassess their first viewing and pre-revelation experience. Humann analyzes Bernard's storyline by discussing the way the trope of the sleeper agent and the *doppelgänger* figure put into question the possibility of reaching self-knowledge—reaching the center of the maze (105). The cultural anxieties around the representation of the double are thereby emblematic of one of the most significant characteristics of the modern era, the memory crisis (106) as we see Bernard facing his reality after having his scrambled memories restored and suffering from a lack of self-knowledge and control. Therefore, the encounter with the double leads to, what in trauma studies would be referred to as a crisis of truth and a questioning of one's identity—the “nature of [one's] reality”.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ A recurrent theme in *Westworld* “Have you ever questioned the nature of your reality?” (“The Original”, S01E01).

Revelations are never final as the reception process changes with multiple viewings; the known truths of the first season can transform into a narrative manipulation after rewatching it with updated knowledge from the second season.

II.3.6. Replicas of the original: the double and TV adaptations

The narrative can also act as a double of another text as we will see with some “twin” in terms of adaptation to prove the existence of several copies and textual replicas corroborating the plurality of selves working to further entangle reception and interpretation. The evil *doppelgängers* in *Futureworld* mark the spectral features of the humanoids by signaling the threat posed to the human species through seeking the recreation of human consciousness into machines to make it, not only immortal but also similar and faithful to its original counterpart. In this manner, the duplicates of the protagonists attempt to take over their whole identity in a fight sequence that responds to the impulse of the original to fight its “uncanny opponent” (Rank 16). With a few hints and visual cues particular to each doubled character in mind, viewers are left to distinguish between the “copy” and the “original” journalists during their Western duel where one must kill the other to survive. Mirroring effects are equally brought to the fore while their duplicates appear as wearing the same clothes except for an easy distinguishable aspect such as a gun, an attitude, or playing with the conspicuous predator/prey dichotomy. Moreover, cloning in sci-fi and AI double are common tropes that fulfill one of the greatest fantasies of humanity in techno-scientific progress. The issue of fidelity comes back here as the doubles deny the possibility of co-existence as if singularity is the vital criteria for success and survival. Concerns with fidelity in *Westworld* revolve around the attempts of reproducing a guest’s consciousness with all its potential choices in an immortal humanoid being, something that will endure and persist. To achieve the creation of a faithful copy seems to be an impossible task as Dolores understands; seeking fidelity should not be the primary goal. Instead, she turns to create a similar, yet different, version—an adaptation inspired from the original but unique in its essence and purpose.

In “Journey into Night” the second season opens with a sequence lacking temporal cues to cast doubt and create ambiguity around the characters’ nature, knowledge, and motives. Dolores conducts a form of interview and rewriting to Bernard attempting to reconfigure the ‘copy’ and make it act exactly like the ‘original’. She makes Bernard perform Arnold’s role admitting that she is looking for fidelity, thus echoing William’s interview of James Delos in “The Riddle of the Sphinx” (S02E04) when testing the success of his consciousness transfer

post-mortem. “The Passenger” reveals another metafictional comment on fidelity in adaptations following attempts to create the double as a perfect version:

This is a test, one we’ve done countless times before. You’re almost the man I remember. But there are flaws. A word. A gesture. A tiny fracture that grows into a chasm. But I wonder. All these tiny imperfections in each copy. Mistakes. Maybe we should change you. After all, you didn’t make it, did you?

(“The Passenger”, S02E10)

When Dolores echoes the issues of faithful recreation, she mentions the mistakes in the copy and leads us to consider the lack of fidelity in adaptations as a strength rather as an imperfection, for in the case of Arnold and Dolores the ‘original’ does not make it but is resurrected in another, perhaps even, improved form.

Like many contemporary serialized complex narratives, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* offer their audience the possibility to feel, pause and reflect upon one’s human condition through the shows’ philosophical and ontological inquiries and their haunting narrative strategies. Among these narrative tools, one needs to consider reflexivity as one of the most prominent objects for reflection in both meanings of the term – as an opportunity for cognitive immersion and contemplation but also on mirroring deeper “epistemological problems” and “ontological doubts” on which, as Elsaesser calls them, “mind-game” narratives are based (16).

Steven Johnson’s *Everything Bad is Good for You* comments on the evolution of TV industry and productions and the way it affects an audience growing more interested in complexity and striving for maze narratives. Such narrative structures provide viewers with a cognitive challenge which is at the root of disorientation. The use of multiple storylines, an *ensemble* cast, and a complex temporality play a significant part in viewers’ pleasure in engaging with these maze narratives through a variety of post-viewing practices such as online discussions of fan theories. For instance, the use of flashbacks and background information on characters and their past relationships are used as another narrative tool for (dis)orientation along with a detailed construction of multiple protagonists in TV shows such as *Lost* where the past is introduced to viewers as not only a means to build a world outside the island but mostly to help viewers connect to the characters (Piepiorka 187-88).

However, the *The Leftovers* viewers are not provided with a visually extended knowledge about the protagonists’ past and they have almost no access to the characters before the Sudden Departure except in the flashback episode “The Garveys at Their Best” (S01E09).

The show adopts an *in-medias-res* approach to the introduction of characters such as The Guilty Remnants playing on the mystery of the event and degree of curiosity of its audience. Nothing appears as certain in this diegetic universe, but this is accompanied with the exhibition and transmission of a great sense of realism, for most characters are not reliable and continuously display ambivalent attitudes with often unclear motives. In what can be called the era of the anti-hero portrayal, the loss of the villain etiquette in serial complex TV shows further broadens the gap between viewers' expectations and an easy categorization of the classic stereotypical characters. This is another form of disorientation while in *Lost*, information through flashbacks is used as an orientation process to find our way with those characters in the island instead of further drifting with them, and to establish a little empathy because this is a world that begins with apparent villains and "others" besides the protagonists while *The Leftovers* puts everyone on an approximately equal ground facing the same enemy: themselves.

The reflexive narrative elements in *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* are also used as a way of ironically pointing at their complex and "disorienting properties" (Piepiorka 196). Faithful to its ghostly nature, Patti is the living reminder that viewers have the essential tools of comprehension in hand. By merely stating that they *do* understand everything, the Guilty Remnants' cause, the essence of the Sudden Departure, and thus the show's premise. Her comment on the entanglement of the Murphys' storyline with the Garveys' similarly echoes the viewers' own disorientation due to the change of setting and the temporary shift of the protagonists, thus laughing at its own disorienting nature.

These shows transform their audiences and enlighten them about their own power to uncover the hidden reality of their world. Thus, they incite characters and viewers to enter the maze and truly reflect about its structure and secrets through narrative strategies built upon a logic of ambiguity and absurdity (Hatchuel and Thiellement 10). This freedom of interpretation is indicated by the literal sign held by Evie, emblazoned with the message "You understand", which further encourages viewers to embrace their confused state as inwardly they do know what it's all about and how the story should be received.

Conclusion

The second part of this study delves into the intricate aspects of haunting memory and time in television and its complex narratives. We have examined these non-linear narratives by exploring how the past infiltrates both the fictional and non-fictional realms through various technologies and television itself. By taking a closer look at the spectral essence of television as a medium, we have demonstrated its role in evoking haunting memories and traumatic events. Additionally, it underscores how technology blurs the line between reality and fiction by introducing content that is both haunting and haunted. Our examination of photography's spectral nature has highlighted its connection to uncanny manifestations that convey absence and nostalgia in *The Leftovers*. This reveals the temporal function of photographs in freezing time and encapsulating specters in a static moment and a single image that continues to haunt not only the title sequences but the entire narrative.

In fiction and complex TV narratives, time can be manipulated by creators and audiences alike. *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* allow viewers to engage with time in a way that reconstructs meaning. Temporal complexity in contemporary TV series involves the use of alternative universes, flashbacks, flash-forwards, multiple timelines, and more. Therefore, these techniques create tension and suspense while challenging viewers with non-linear narratives. Temporal dislocation and displacement lead viewers to reconstruct chronological order, generating a sense of disorientation shared by both characters and the audience.

Finally, by exploring these complex structures, we have concluded that these TV series are maze narratives with disorientating techniques. For instance, the uncanny presence of doppelgängers. In *The Leftovers*, psychological doubles reside within Kevin's psyche as he navigates the maze of the afterlife/hotel-world. In *Westworld*, doubles and clones haunt those who tread the maze, intertwined with the bicameral mind theory and authoritative voices within hosts' minds. More importantly, the manifold apparitions of the double reiterate the *memento mori* motif of the show by representing the everlasting battle between order and chaos within the maze narrative and the individual maze-like path of the protagonists.

The representation of the spectral through a medium which is itself haunted in its very structure leads us to question the nature of this crisis around the ontological, epistemological and narratological aspects of the future and of closure in these serial adaptations narrating the

apocalypse. In the labyrinthine nature and structure of TV series, disorientation is about pulling away from the ending and resolution to draw towards the impossibility of serial closure.

PART III. Revelation and Resolution

Introduction

The previous chapters have highlighted the nature of the televisual medium and its serial characteristics inviting specters in. Such specters take the form of a haunting memory quintessential of spectral media in their representation of a past or traumatic event. As such, we have established that *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* adopt a non-linear structure that is chiefly founded upon temporal dislocations that aim to disorient its audience in what came to be known as maze narrative. These textual disruptions are imbued with chaotic¹⁷⁵ and fragmented features proper to the serial format (besides its returns and repetitions) and comprise a final disruptive effect: the spectral apparition of doubles. In this way, as non-linear televisual narratives, we have shown the extent to which *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* are haunted by memories of the past through the nature of the medium while investigating the role of the audience in interacting with the disorientation techniques at work in the haunting process of these texts.

After exploring the so-called spectral media and the ensuing temporal dislocation of the maze-like narrative structure, the next logical step is to explore the ways in which reorientation and resolution are constructed through the haunting process of these TV shows. This last section, therefore, focuses on the process of decoding the haunting signs of the narratives in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* (e.g., visions and dreams) which ultimately leads viewers and characters to whirl away from the diegetic reality in order to better understand the underlying meaning of the fiction on a larger scale.

As naturally inclined to make sense of the entangled storylines, viewers tend to seek restoration and order by (over)analyzing the texts' multiple hidden meanings. Serial complexity necessitates a variety of viewing approaches that mostly require to act as "eagle-eyed viewers" (Lefait, "Spoiler ahead!", 157) in working towards temporal reconstruction, as they become co-creators of the text. Since the maze is only an "illusory quest that pulls the viewer into the narrative" (Slocombe 52) rather than a "symbol of freedom and self-awareness" (*ibid*), the

¹⁷⁵ By creating confusion for their audience, the spectrality of the narrative design conceals an organized chaos i.e., a tale about crisis that may appear chaotic but is intrinsically very carefully established with intricate story arcs and character developments. *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* display this apparent lack of harmony in their narratives to effectively mislead their viewers and disorient them in multiple ways. Through a mixture of circular and repetitive structures as well as non-linear storytelling, the two series skillfully combine chaos and order within their narrative spaces.

seventh chapter analyzes viewership practices of over-analysis. In *Westworld* and *The Leftovers*, the dreamscapes of the characters play a crucial part in representing the search for meaning through spectrality. The memory trace of the event comes back to haunt some characters in the form of dreams. Such dream sequences are intended as tools of misdirection typically seen as an alternate reality where the subconscious expresses their deepest anxieties, dreams in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* are instead largely depicted as real memories or prophecies that mislead both characters and viewers. By creating an ambiguous relationship to reality, the haunting power of these “visions” establishes a parallel symbolic universe, a type of metaverse in the diegesis, through which the shows’ enigmas can be “resolved”. The trope of dreams functions both as a psychological and narratological tool for revelation, and concurrently as a form of illusion meant to depict the extent of the spectral effect of the event. Bradshaw makes an essential statement about paranoid readings while discussing the chaotic search for the center of the maze: “We’re slaves of apophenia—perceiving patterns where none exist comes naturally to us” (86). Such beliefs in connections lead to over-interpretation of misleading signs in the reception process.

By addressing their status as serial adaptations, the eighth chapter assesses the ways in which the shows take inspiration from the apocalyptic genre in their depiction of the haunting event. In her work on apocalyptic narratives, H el ene Machinal suggests that “the spectral trace left [by the cataclysmic event] takes the shape of signs of (over)interpretation for the apocalyptic narrative” (Machinal 104). Here, we argue that each season finale depicts the characters’ understanding of the apocalypse as an anticipated end as a result of overinterpreting the misleading signs and visions analyzed in the previous chapter. This discussion is heavily charged with traumatic repercussions of the event as we acknowledge that “apocalypticism is much less about the prediction of the future and much more about remaking a world shattered by unexpected, unexplained pain and disillusionment, known in many areas of medicine and psychological health as *trauma*.” (Collins, Oxford handbook, 458).

We conclude this research with the study of the narratological functions of the series’ finale. The exit to the maze represents the possibility of narrative closure despite the narrative traps installed throughout the seasons. To study the narrative closure in our complex serial TV adaptations, these final chapters tackle the reorienting practice and the narrative strategies in the conception of the end. This implies a delivery of meaningful revelations about previous seasons and enigmas. Ultimately, there is an irony to studying TV series that seem to both demand close study and analysis and also warn against it.

III.1. Chapter 7: Haunting Signs

III.1.1. Forensic fandom and detective-like narratives

By including multiple paths and therefore multiple possibilities, the textual structure, which we identified as labyrinthine, aims to mislead characters (and viewers) as to the very existence of a single true path towards the answers to its puzzle-like storylines. In the diegetic universe of the series, the characters are both subject to the creation of narrative traps and active contributors to these red herrings. Despite an “everything on demand” contemporary virtual culture from the digital media’s instant commands and reactions, as well as the development of streaming platforms that make TV shows accessible anywhere and at any time, maze narratives still successfully appeal to “patient” viewers who take pleasure in the cognitive challenge. Ultimately, it may very well be that the accessibility of these long narratives makes the puzzle narrative possible, through sustained attention. Weekly airing of complex TV series based on 10-13-episodic length per season has resulted in a more compact and poetically rich narrative style free from repetition and redundancies (O’Sullivan qtd. in Kozak 209).

Viewers’ agency is even extended to the power of altering the future of a TV show. The effects of such new models of fandom in the televisual landscape and mediascape are patent in the viewers’ newly acquired influence on networks, creators, and reception. From the ability to change or bring back shows to the creation of fan videos online that edit and rewrite the narrative from a different perspective, the power of fandom is undoubtedly evolving. The role of fandom in the televisual industry has become evident, particularly with their efforts to revive canceled TV shows. Offering a second chance and providing continuity, these revivals showcase the possibility of changing narratives through mobilization via social media by using hashtag campaigns, signing petitions, and even directly addressing the network production. This is the case of many TV shows such as *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (Fox, NBC, 2013-2021), *Sense 8* (Netflix, 2015-2018), *Veronica Mars* (UPN, CW, Hulu, 2004-2019) and so on. These demands are often met with a short additional season featuring reunion or a few resolutions and even feature films.

While enjoying their favorite shows, the same devoted fandom contributes to the development of theories about future plot developments. In this way, fans take the role of detectives to solve the mysteries of the show by minutely exploring character developments, adding trivia information, engaging with various forum discussions (Reddit-like) and by dissecting narrative arcs. As discussed earlier such practices have great influence on creators and on the unfolding of certain plot structures. By guessing the answers and solving mysteries, they spoil certain storylines and revelations, thus forcing creators to do an upstream work by adapting to these changes. As viewers look for the truth behind the enigmas and solve the mysteries, they embody detective work inspired from detective stories which are designed in a labyrinthine form that aims towards an exit. In this respect, forensic fandom encompasses fans' role as detectives of the narrative that is particularly common in crime shows (Larke-Walsh, np).

This puzzle-solving process mirrors the storylines of the detective-like shows with which the viewers interact. In fact, the genre of detective story is permeated with metaphysical characteristics such as Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*. As Todorov lays out in his narrative theories of this genre, narrative closure is of utmost importance in detective stories as they tend to avoid open endings.¹⁷⁶ The expectations of the genre exemplify the resolution of such stories and the closure by solving the mysteries/crime. The genre is also known to subvert the way we end traditional detective stories as part of the design of its puzzle structure. Moreover, the generic conventions of detective fiction are inscribed in Borges's model of metaphysical experimentation and mysteries around philosophical themes of reality, identity, and time. The labyrinthine structure crafted in his *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (The Garden of Forking Paths) epitomizes the movement beyond conventional expectations in the genre and the rewarding detective-like approaches foregrounded in maze TV narratives.

Westworld undertakes a similar endeavor with the depiction of Dolores's search for herself in the first season, the Man in Black seeking to find the maze, and a whole society seeking to find the reason for the departure in *The Leftovers*. If the narrative impetus of these two series seems to privilege this association with detective fiction and the search for a narrative resolution, ultimately these may be closer to metaphysical detective fiction that foregrounds philosophy, intellect and reasoning than the classical texts that Todorov studied, since they are not built upon closure but rather the lack of resolution and the interplay between psychological

¹⁷⁶ Todorov, Tzvetan. « La typologie du roman policier.» *Poétique de la prose*, Seuil, 1971, p.4.

mind-game themes as metaphysical detective fiction privileges the function of a maze-like structure, “the mystery is a maze without an exit” (Merivale and Sweeney 9).

On a cognitive level, the televisual audience’s craving for active storylines and ways of challenging their viewing experience activates their cognitive skills in watching intricate and intertwined narratives (Kiss 16). Solving and attempting to comprehend puzzling or complex narratives through repetitive viewing and forensic approaches to these TV shows is therefore a natural human inclination towards a need for order and restoration of the cognitive inconsistencies. This is what social psychologist Leon Festinger refers to as “dissonance-reduction”.¹⁷⁷ Haunted by the multiplicity of clues, viewers run the risk of getting lost within their investigations. Signposts may mislead the trekkers towards other paths by not necessarily pointing to the ending/the exit.

¹⁷⁷ Festinger introduces the concept of cognitive dissonance in his book *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1956), p. 68.

III.1.2. Signs: the arbitrary signified in *The Leftovers*

The relationship between signified and signifiers is generally established following a conventional understanding. Despite the non-necessity of direct associations between signifiers and signified, they are often arbitrary. In detective fiction in general, clues need to signify in order to create meaning (and provide information allowing the detective to reach conclusions). Metaphysical detective texts complicate this relationship, as Merivale and Sweeney point out in *Detecting Texts*:

In many metaphysical detective stories, letters, words, and documents no longer reliably denote the objects that they are meant to represent; instead, these texts become impenetrable objects in their own right.

(Merivale and Sweeney 10)

The meaning of such objects therefore becomes independent of their initial function. These represent haunting signs because the clues we are seeking to resolve the crisis haunt both the narrative and the spectator. In *The Leftovers* normal objects become infused with mystery and seemingly take on new meanings when attached to the overall narrative of the show. For instance, the bagel in the toaster (“Penguin One, Us Zero”, S01E02), or the *National Geographic* magazine (first appeared in S01E07, “Solace for Tired Feet”), discussed in Part One, which take on new meaning as a signifier of the maze narrative:

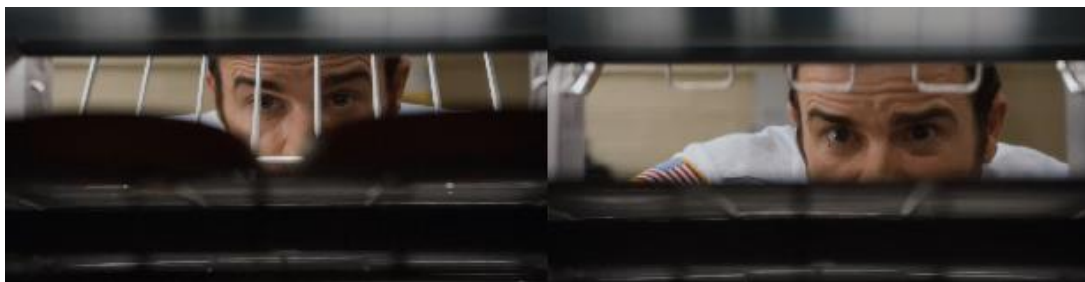


Figure 51. The bagel's disappearance (“Penguin One, Us Zero”, S01E02).

When Kevin’s attempt to toast a bagel at work meets with the inexplicable disappearance of the bagel into the toaster in this episode (S02E01), the everyday mystery (on par with the perennial loss of socks in the wash) articulates the ways in which the unusual

mundane becomes evocative of the metaphysical.¹⁷⁸ As chief of police simultaneously facing the rise of the Guilty Remnant in his town, his wife and son's absence, and his father's insane theories, Kevin seeks balance and order as he needs to believe in the world's standard logical working, and most evidently, in his own sanity.

In attempting to resolve this mystery, the viewer is offered two possible conclusions: on the one hand, there is the probability of Kevin's madness – and on the other, there is the likelihood of an illogical second departure (of a baked good). Either possibility, however, is ultimately unacceptable for this character in the search for reason. His response exemplifies the deconstructive process and forensic practices in viewership of this complex drama: like him, they too attempt to disassemble the machine (the toaster) and look for the reason behind the mysteriously lost object (a bagel or a significant chunk of the population). Nevertheless, both viewers and the characters in the series can now always expect the impossible, imagining and interpreting every other sign: in the world of *The Leftovers* an impossible event has already taken away their loved ones and altered all perceptions and beliefs, so then why wouldn't people, animals, objects, or even food disappear in front of their eyes? The show keeps playing with these impossible assumptions and extreme hypotheses by creating more mysteries that work to shed light on the anxieties generated by the event of the Sudden Departure.

Correspondingly, Kevin might be psychotic, but within the diegesis, the narrative seems to point to the interpretation that he is probably truly traveling to “the other side” and each time resurrecting afterwards. Other suggestions of the supernatural are prone to ridicule and are portrayed ironically, such as Dean's theory about the canine evolution in “The Book of Kevin” (S03E01). In Mapleton, Kevin used to kill wild dogs with Dean. Believing the dogs had evolved into humans and had infiltrated the government, Dean asks for Kevin's help to run a DNA test looking for canine saliva on a peanut butter sandwich bit by a senator:

DEAN. Today, it's the senator. Tomorrow, it's the Secretary of, you know, goddam Agriculture. And then it's the President. The leader of the free fucking world. And that, my friend, is how the world ends two weeks from now. That's how they get their finger on the button.

KEVIN. Paw.

¹⁷⁸ This is equally reminiscent of Kevin's loss of his white shirts in the beginning of the first season. Thinking he was going mad; Kevin prefers blaming and threatening the manager of the laundry service. However, towards the end of the season, we learn, at the same time as the amnesic character that his shirts are all hanging up on trees in Cairo, in New York, near his cabin in the woods (the place in which he kidnaps Patti).

DEAN. Sorry?

KEVIN. That's how they get their paw on the button.

(“The Book of Kevin”, S03E01)

Later in the episode, Dean attempts to kill Kevin, proving what Laurie has told Kevin “You never tell someone who’s in the midst of a psychotic break that they are in the midst of a psychotic break” (“A Most Powerful Adversary”, S02E07; “G’Day Melbourne”, S03E04). This instance of overinterpretation is present among most characters in *The Leftovers* and reaches wide proportions to finally coincide with conspiracy theories.

Some haunting signs lead characters to become blinded by their quest. For example, in the third season “Crazy Whitefella Thinking” (S03E03), Grace Playford, who lost her children on the day of the Sudden Departure (October 15th in Australia), is convinced that her children had departed and never looked for them – until she learns their remains had been found as they died out in the desert sun after their father departed. Likewise, in her search for a police chief named Kevin, Grace’s faith misleads her as she once again believes Matt’s book is a message from God charged in symbolism and prophecies. Towards the end of the season, she sends Kevin Garvey to the alternate universe to ask her children how they have lost their shoes, an answer that is not provided as her children, in this world, believe that family does not matter. These instances exemplify the repercussions of quick interpretation of situations and reading of signs. It is also a message addressed to viewers to pay attention to the ellipses in the narrative and the risks of assumptions. Kevin Sr., too, is a true believer in signs, for he pictures himself as the protagonist of Matt’s book:

MATT. Well, the book is about what’s happening to your son [...].

KEVIN Sr. Since you clearly weren’t listening the first time I told you, I am not a part of Kevin Jr.’s story. He’s a part of mine. He’s the one who guided me here. Why isn’t that in your book?

(“Crazy Whitefella Thinking”, S03E03)

He only considers his son as a vehicle to reach his goals. Taken by his mission to stop the apocalyptic flood by singing ancient songs stolen from the Australian Indigenous communities, Kevin Sr. follows the voices in his head by seeking the haunting signs throughout his adventures. In the first season, he asks Kevin to do the same by handing him a *National Geographic* issue of May 1972 (“Solace for Tired Feet”, S01E07). The magazine haunts Kevin in his dreams without being able to grasp its meaning. The audience attempts to decipher what has not been elucidated in the diegesis, as Joseph and Letort point out:

Whether it is just the delusion of an old madman, giving him purpose in a sad life, or a subtext to be taken more seriously, is never clearly explained in the series; however, the creators' use of it and their continuous extradiegetic hints throwing to the viewers are quite noteworthy. Because of the series' reference to this particular issue of May 1972, the journal was uploaded on the Internet and can easily be accessed in a PDF format by the viewers.¹⁷⁹

Being available on the internet, the magazine issue exists both in the diegetic universe and our own, for it represents an even more explicit warning to the viewer than the bagel scene. The showrunners' insistence on its presence through various elusive returns in the storylines and through their "continuous extradiegetic hints throwing" (*ibid*). This corroborates the primary function of the magazine as a subtext that positions viewers' responses in contrast to characters in the series. Joseph and Letort delineate the several subtexts surrounding the *National Geographic* magazine in *The Leftovers* including the most obvious references as well as the more subtle ones.¹⁸⁰ Some fan theories suggest that the date of the magazine issue is related to Kevin Jr.'s date of birth. When looking deeper into the stories of the magazine, several connections could be drawn such as the cover in which a bear stands in the middle of the road surrounded by photographers, thereby indicating the bestial collapsing of civilization and wildlife (*ibid*).

Joseph and Letort draw the connection between the bear and wild animals of *The Leftovers*' diegesis: deer getting stuck in school and houses, dogs letting their wolf genes take over, etc. One of the articles mentions a story about the Yellowstone National Park, perhaps in resonance with *The Leftovers*' park in Jarden in the second season. The most explicit reference is the article about Cairo, "Cairo, Troubled Capital of the Arab." This evidently echoes the episode "Cairo" in which Kevin kidnaps Patti and takes her to his cabin in Cairo, New York. Therefore, *The Leftovers*' world is, according to Ilaria Bianco, "a world now full of signs that cannot fully express their meanings, and symbols that have lost their significance", consequently making *The Leftovers* an "expression of traumatic existentialism".¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Joseph, Charles and Delphine Letort, "Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience...Resolution?" *Littérature et séries télévisées/Literature and TVseries*, vol. 12, 2017, pp. 1-19. TV/Series, <https://doi.org/10.4000/tvseries.2170>. Accessed 31 Jan 2018, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ This YouTube fan-made video relates to the other references comprised in the magazine in relation to the show's storylines. "The Leftovers (HBO) & National Geographic May 1972." *YouTube*, uploaded by Drew Doom, 16 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZd6gy0OcaA&t=35s>.

¹⁸¹ Bianco, Ilaria. "'We're All Gone': A Postsecular Account of The Leftovers' Traumatic Existentialism as 'Religious Ground Zero'." *The Leftovers, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*, pp. 72-81, *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, edited by Susana Viegas and Patrícia Castello Branco, Nova University of Lisbon, 2021.

Having established, then, that signs do not always contain deeper meaning other than their very presence, the showrunners scatter them all over the seasons and sometimes over other texts (as intertexts and hypertexts) by further drifting away from the novel and expanding their own world. Haunting signs appear as Easter eggs such as the reiteration and interplay with numbers in *The Leftovers*, and more specifically, with the number 121. This number appears in the survey Nora conducts as part of her job in the Departure Department (meant to give allocations to the departed families) and resonates with *Lost*'s overwhelming use of numbers found on the island and taken as signs to be decoded. Indeed, both Rousseau and her team, and castaway Hurley, are looking for signs and losing their sanity on the path for answers, as both characters think they are cursed. As we first hear the numbers when we meet Rousseau and she is convinced of their meaning, we assume that their significance will appear at some point. However, the ambiguity is kept to extend viewers' engagement and the mysterious atmosphere. In *Lost*'s episode "Numbers" (S01E18), Hurley believes the sequence of numbers (4 8 15 16 23 42) is cursed. The recurrence of a mysteriously significant number in *The Leftovers* thus becomes significant (in its repetition and recall of *Lost*) in its potential significance. Both TV shows advance numbers with mysterious meaning and which are associated with various interpretations among characters and viewers. Ultimately, *The Leftovers* refutes these haunting signs and numbers by rejecting the basic trope of Chekhov's gun.

III. 1.2.1. Anamorphic narratives

Along these scattered haunting signs, viewers must wend their way through the labyrinthine structure without falling into the visual and serial narrative traps. By this, we mean that *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* rely on visual misdirection and deferred revelations, that seem to validate truths about the narrative's enigmas, only to dismiss them and discredit them afterwards. Viewers are compelled to go back, reinvent their perspective along with new hypotheses. Viewers of complex TV shows learn to consciously avoid taking what they see as a given. A suspicious audience expects to be deceived, for instance, by having their favorite characters killed off. Indeed, few long-format serials and genres provide fictional comfort without misguiding their viewers. The show is philosophical and existential in its ability to invite several interrogations by successfully emphasizing ambiguity and transgressing the boundaries between fiction and reality. Hatchuel identifies *The Leftovers* as an anamorphic show which constantly calls for repeated viewing (*Le troisième côté* 55) to generate new

meanings. The visual technique distorts the image when it is observed from a different angle as one can observe the oblique anamorphosis from Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) (53-4). Bouman describes anamorphic perspective:

Anamorphic perspective manipulates the image in such a way as to make it appear illegible when viewed from the same vantage point as the one required by one-point perspective.

(Bouman 166)



Figure 52. The Ambassadors painting and its anamorphic skull.

In the case of *The Leftovers*, Hatchuel explains that anamorphism does not necessarily bring about a form of awakening or revelation about the “real” world. However, it sheds light on the fictiveness of our own world and its “dominant ideology” or possible gaps. In other words, it puts forward new paths and new doors to reinvent our perception (57). In fiction, anamorphosis relies upon cognitive familiarization through the juxtaposition of two narrative possibilities: a fictive and a non-fictive one (Machinal 293). This is made possible through the gaze and the observer/viewer position. Viewers continuously change their opinion and feelings towards characters as they are anamorphic (Hatchuel and Thiellement 53-54). With an anamorphic show, there is a necessity to overcome the conventional nature of viewing by not restricting the experience of the TV show only from a direct perspective. Here, forensic methods of decoding images and meaning behind the narrative may prove useful to get the whole picture and comprehend what lies behind, hidden in plain sight. Lacan's anamorphosis in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* is understood as a means of making the viewer aware of their own gaze – from the perspective of the series, then, we could posit that the anamorphic

perspective forces the viewer to become aware of their own biases and narrative expectations. By changing the angle, another image appears (Machinal 293) and distorts viewers' perception to offer different perspectives.

The third season generates unrest with new chaotic breaches. However, the traces remain and only operate as a spectral textual accumulation upon the layers of ambiguity and complexity proper to this postmodern narrative. Such narratives display a large number of metafictional commentaries, intertextual references, temporal dislocation, and fragmentation as we have argued in the previous chapters, but they principally depict hyperreal features that blur the distinction between reality and its simulations. The general suspicion towards metanarratives in the postmodern approach urges viewers to take matters into their own hands to verify the validity of statements like real detectives. Susana Viegas argues that most narrative strategies in *The Leftovers* sketch a postmodern framework:

[...] Lindelof and Perrotta's use of irony—an aspect that Jean François Lyotard identified as being central to the postmodern way of thinking—[...] 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.

(10)

As discussed in previous chapters, the focus on the Murphys rather than Garveys in the opening of the second season adds to the destabilization of the usual codes and characters of the show's first season. Furthermore, with the use of unreliable and subjective points of view, the savvy audience accustomed to questioning each piece of information unapologetically looks for the truth. Thus, in *The Leftovers* for example, one can easily find themselves implicitly trusting Kevin's viewpoint when he travels to the hotel-world/dreamworld due to the immersive quality of the sequences. Different theories emerge in "A Most Powerful Adversary", (S02E07) when Kevin asks for Laurie's professional help as a psychiatrist.

As Laurie herself indicates, there is a reason behind Kevin's coming to Laurie for help as he knows she is the one that would offer a reasonable approach through her psychiatric stance. In these instances, the metaphysical part of the sequences is questioned by introducing the theory of Kevin's unconscious being explored in these alternate universes. Her diagnosis sweeps away metaphysical hypotheses and instead affirms Kevin's psychic breakdown. Nevertheless, the audience is misled by the path of Kevin's investigation as they accompany

him through his journey (especially since it is a full episode dedicated to the events within the alternate worlds in which he travels), so the savvy, forensic viewer reads the connections between the two universes in the same way the character does. This is more significant considering our focal character's job as a policeman; given that his profession involves solving crimes, it is not surprising that viewers become detectives as well by taking his point of view.

The acquired meanings and assumed certainties of early seasons are destabilized and debunked in the final one by dismantling the signified and changing the initial reality. Sequences of Matt or Kevin Sr.'s obsessive interpretation of signs of the upcoming flood/end of the world are similarly demystified in a way that seems to taunt the characters. For example, Kevin Sr.'s visions and prophecies are shown to rely on his perspective under the influence of drugs (Hatchuel and Thiellement 107). Breaking down the signs allows the show to highlight not only the absurdity of the event but also its aftermath:

[...] les éléments qu'on croyait établis dans la fin de celle-ci [S2] se retrouvent complètement chamboulés dès le commencement de celle-là [S3]. Mais pas là où on le croyait.

(Hatchuel and Thiellement, 103)

Disorientation is thereby a reminder for viewers that over-interpretation will not provide an exit to the maze but will instead throw its treaders even further into the rabbit hole – a warning to read the signs of the show carefully or else fall into the abyss and vertigo of the textual maze. With each new opening of a new narrative, there lies a possibility of destabilizing meaning and controverting previous “answers” to facts once believed to be accurate. Through this interplay of challenging conventional storytelling techniques, seriality becomes a means of puzzlement in its very continuity, by delivering several paths and opportunities for the spectral adaptation to proliferate its meanings.

Given our experience with previous texts, with the creators, with the hybrid genres, with HBO, and the experience of binge-watching or the weekly watching in parallel with the weekly release, all these elements contribute to anamorphic effects, thus changing viewers' perspective. In this way, viewers are endowed with the role of the observer and are therefore expected to act as co-creators through these multiple perceptions. One can even draw an analogy from what in quantum physics is called the observer effect – the theory that observing and interacting with the particles of an object is able to change the state of that object. Despite still being subject to controversy in quantum mechanics today, the phenomenon is quite relevant to us here if one considers the viewers' power to alter the meaning or state of a situation through their gaze and

non-passive presence. The most renowned example of this theory is Schrödinger's cat, the experiment in quantum mechanics. The theory demonstrates the role of the observer in a hypothetical situation where a cat is put inside a sealed box "with poison that will be released if a radioactive atom decays. Radioactivity is a quantum process, so before the box is opened, the story goes, the atom has both decayed and not decayed, leaving the unfortunate cat in limbo—a so-called superposition between life and death"¹⁸² In this respect, the experiment is a matter of perception of the atoms and the superposition of the microscopic and macroscopic states altered by the position of the observer. Many theories have diverged from decoherence to retrocausality and the influence of consciousness on this experiment. Here, the liminal state of the cat/object of perception illustrates our flexible meaning and interpretation of a specific event within the diegesis or enigmas in these shows.

¹⁸² Merali, Zeya. "This Twist on Schrödinger's Cat Paradox Has Major Implications for Quantum Theory: A laboratory demonstration of the classic "Wigner's friend" thought experiment could overturn cherished assumptions about reality." *Quantum Physics*, 17 Aug. 2020, *Scientific American*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/this-twist-on-schroedingers-cat-paradox-has-major-implications-for-quantum-theory/>.

III.1.3. Haunting myths: a hero's journey

Symbolized as a conqueror of monsters, the archetype of the hero is omnipresent in mythology, stories, fairy tales and has evolved through time. The archetype of the hero, according to Jung, is an indication of the ego's desire to complete its individuation process as they fight against their shadow (Rizakiah et al, 423). Like most tales about heroes or Ancient Greek Gods, the relationship with the parental/father figure is emphasized as such in Kevin's storyline is tightly associated with his father's. Traditionally depicted as a man (defying authority), the hero has a main purpose and a quest.

Underscoring the universal similarities between myths, Campbell's contributions to myth analysis in terms of storytelling techniques and plot structure are mainly noticeable in film studies and literary works as they broadly draw from Campbell's writings on mythology and the hero's journey in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Accordingly, the hero goes through the stages of the monomyth as defined by Joseph Campbell:

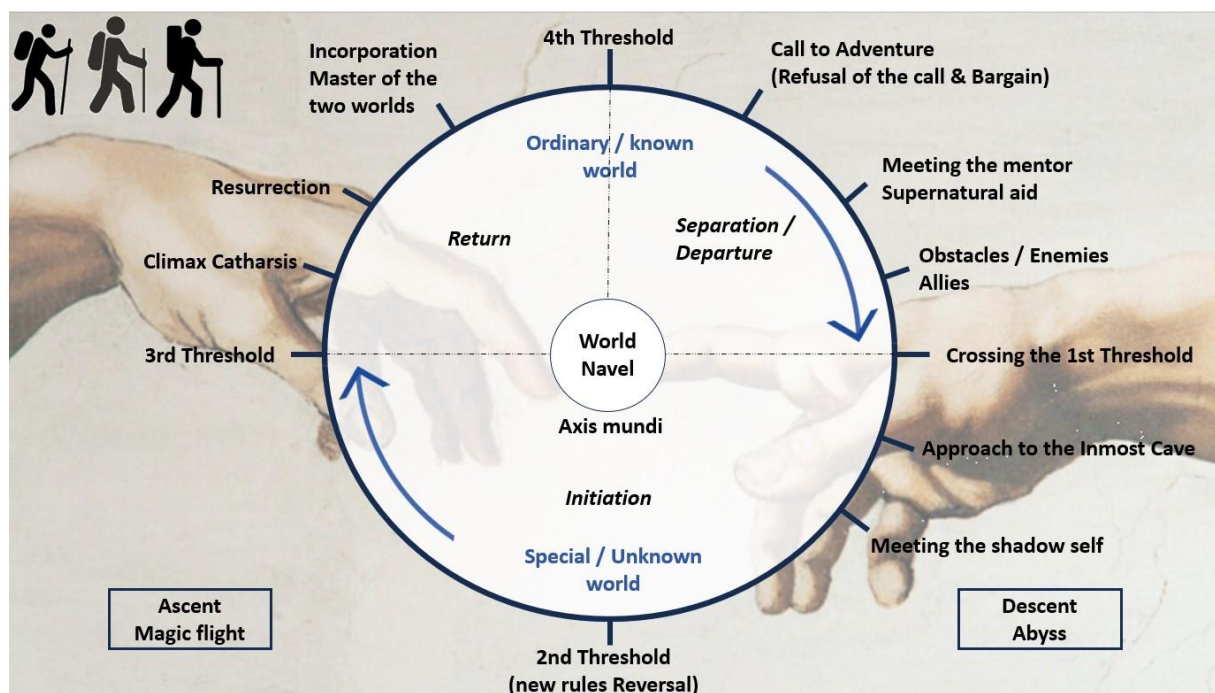


Figure 53. A hero's journey based on Campbell's model of the monomyth.

In *The Leftovers*, this is conspicuously applied to Kevin's journey. The adventure features a helper/mentor, Virgil, who helps him die to cross the threshold between universes. Facing the enemy, the battle happens internally when Kevin searches for Patti in the hotel-world

and gets rid of her through various difficult steps and a number of traps or dead ends. This is the case when he kills Patti's double but learns that the way out is to kill the real Patti i.e., the little girl. The journey ends with the return home and a resolution. Likewise, Kevin's role as the protagonist is associated with the classical three-act plot structure – which is then criticized through Patti's joke about Kevin's quest to exorcize her spirit and get rid of her. This ironically embodies the price for the hero's adventure in a foreign land:

PATTI. There is something you need to do. In Cairo, Egypt, there is an ancient artifact. It's in a museum now. They found it the tomb of Amenhotep. Scholars call it the Wishing Cup. You need to acquire this cup. It's more of a chalice, actually. It's gonna be heavily guarded, but you need to get it any way you can because once you do, you have to fill it with your cum, Kevin, and then you need to drink it down. Every last drop.

(“A Most Powerful Adversary”, S02E07)

As an emanation from his unconscious, Patti's ghost mockingly explains some extreme steps Kevin needs to take to operate through his quest in order to get rid of her presence, which in turn further underlines his rejection of the hero assignment.

Nonetheless, initially one can see that like his father, Kevin undergoes the classical steps of a hero's call for adventure and is given the opportunity to act as a savior. Indeed, here we could argue that the series vehemently insists on Kevin's call to be a hero (or indeed superhero), having endowed him with superpowers (in Kevin's case immortality and the ability to travel to the other side of life by transcending his humanity, dying, and resurrecting). His assigned role as the chosen 'hero', as the new Jack Shepherd, appears manifold: his need to be a good chief of police, a leader for the lost sheep in the community after the event, a husband and father, a boyfriend, an assassin, a son and finally a savior or God Himself.

Kevin's visit to the realm of the undead epitomizes his hero's journey by delving into the darkest part of his unconscious. Here again, viewers' expectations are partially fulfilled, given that Kevin's hero's journey is ultimately not valid, since as Thiellement notes, it is in fact the series that changes after the passage to the other world rather than its protagonist (108). With every resurrection, there seems to be no change of character, for he keeps returning to the world in which, “[he] had never felt so alive”.¹⁸³ Kevin's escape to the otherworld is an attempt

¹⁸³ “KEVIN. The last time it happened, where I went, it was so real. Maybe I was dead, but I had never felt so alive. No. I'm not scared” (“Certified”, S03E06).

to flee the weight of responsibilities, both professionally and personally. In the other world, Patti, his Secretary of Defense,¹⁸⁴ calls him out on his denial:

PATTI. [...] what do you want?

KEVIN. I wanna go home.

PATTI. Do you?

KEVIN. What?

PATTI. It's just that you've been known to say that before, and yet you keep leaving home and coming here. I'm sensing a lot of internal contradictions from you, Kevin. It sounds like something you need to work out with yourself.

("The Most Powerful Man in the World
(and his Identical Twin Brother)", S03E07)

Kevin's journey and return home mirror an underlying feeling of being trapped both in his reality and in the parallel world. The puzzle he needs to solve in order to leave the maze is emphasized by the humorous quest of singing a karaoke version of Simon and Garfunkel's *Homeward Bound*. With a reiteration of the theme of leaving the maze and finding one's way back home, the epilogue of the "Certified" episode (S03E06) features Charles Aznavour's song *Je ne peux pas rentrer chez moi*:

Je ne peux pas rentrer chez moi
Car mon passé y est déjà
Dès que j'ouvre la porte
Il vient me faire escorte
Et me suit partout pas à pas
Me parlant sans cesse à mi-voix
Me montrant les choses du doigt
Et comme j'apprehende
Sa présence obsédante
Je ne peux pas rentrer chez moi.

¹⁸⁴ In this alternate universe, Kevin is the "Most Powerful Man in the World" (title of S03E07), the President of the United States of America, whose Secretary of Defense is Patti. Just like a ghost, he "summoned [her] out of [her] retirement and [she] came back" (S03E07) to fulfill her role as a coping defense mechanism against his psyche (more precisely against himself as a double and evil twin brother).

(“It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”, S03E05)

In the previous episode, “G’day Melbourne”, Kevin Sr. tells his son that all flights are canceled due to an event all over the news. The nature and circumstances of this event are laid out in the next episode, “It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”, in which a submariner gets naked on the submarine’s machine room, loudly puts on Aznavour’s song and plots to initiate a protocol that requires two persons and that launches a nuclear bomb. In the episode, “Certified” (S03E06), Nora reveals that “apparently, he thought there was some big egg in a volcano in the middle of the Pacific, and he was convinced that this giant seven-headed sea monster was gonna hatch on the 14th and eat us all”. The song designates the haunting presence-absence of the past that seems to cling to the present. It also describes the inability to return home as it signifies going back where the past lies. The first excerpt is closely related to the specter of the Sudden Departure and the experience of characters such as Kevin and the submarine soldier. Trapped and not fulfilling the whole steps by transforming, Kevin does not undertake a typical hero’s journey.

The TV series dismantles these classical notions of monomyth and reinvents it into a maze narrative; Kevin is only whirling, repeating his mistakes. In a similar vein, myths haunt the characters who undergo a transformation: while the hosts of *Westworld* discover the maze along with their true nature and the park’s real purpose, *The Leftovers*’ characters (and viewers) interpret the signs of mythology and religious allegories as another call to determine the essence of their existence in the post-cataclysmic world.

III.1.3.1. Confinement in the maze: the myth of the deer

In the “G’Day Melbourne” episode (S03E04), Kevin believes he sees the dead Evie Murphy holding a sign on live television pointing to the upcoming apocalypse. He chases the woman to her workplace, the library, as he believes she is a ghost and harasses, her refusing to realize that she is not Evie. The bird-eye shot

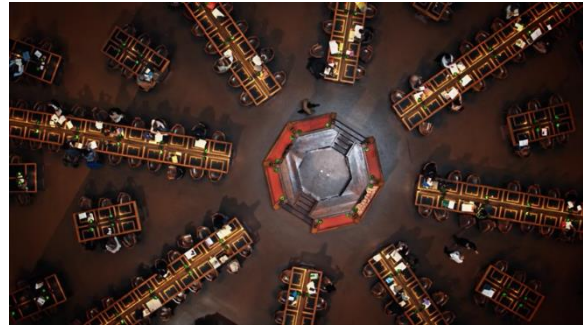


Figure 54. Bird's-eye-view shot of the library ("G'Day Melbourne", S03E04).

of the library provides another visual hint at Kevin’s imprisonment in his psychosis as he wanders the streets of Australia. If not clinically due to a psychotic diagnosis, his hallucinations can be interpreted as his egocentric perception of reality as a combination of signs and enigmas, for him to decode, marking his deep-rooted desire to flee his reality. In this way, the library shot symbolizes a multicursal maze where viewers are able to oversee Kevin’s disoriented state. Within its multiple paths circumvented by shelves of information and knowledge, the library reinforces its labyrinthine nature in relation to viewers’ own disorientation.

The theme of imprisonment is broadly explored through the figure of the deer as one of the most significant motifs hinting at Kevin’s desire to leave the maze and his slippery sense of masculinity. The deer appears throughout the first season of *The Leftovers* to signal Kevin’s despair before and after the event of the Sudden Departure, stressing the idea that the cataclysm merely enhanced the preexisting malaise of the 98%. In “The Garveys at their Best” episode (S01E09), the deer appears as a trapped and lost animal stuck in the urbanized world. Kevin’s attempt to help it fails and ends up creating a new path for him to undertake (shooting wild dogs). In their article “Tom Perrotta’s *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience...Resolution?”, Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort underline the significance of the myth of Actaeon in relation to Kevin’s psyche:

The Leftovers adapts the myth to the serial, underlining the link between Kevin and Actaeon: sleeping with the woman he has just met on October 14th after she ran over the mad deer, Kevin finds himself at a loss for words with a secret he cannot speak about when the naked woman vanishes under him. The rapture occurs like a *punishment* to condemn his committing adultery, echoing the notion of an ‘original sin’ that undergirds the mythical story.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Joseph and Letort carefully delineate the various references and symbolisms of the deer. The connection between the myth of Actaeon and the deer in *The Leftovers* is emphasized through the painting in the “Cairo” episode (S01E08).

In adapting this myth, the show underscores the similarities between Kevin and the deer. As his wife joins the “white specters”¹⁸⁶ of Mapleton, the Guilty Remnant, she ironically and inadvertently becomes his living reminder of the day he cheated on her. In resonance with the myth of Actaeon, the deer is attacked by a pack of wild dogs, thus reinforcing its symbolism of Kevin’s frail perception of his masculinity, and the core of his vulnerability post-event. As he is haunted by his secret adultery, Kevin starts envisioning the deer in his dreams but also in his waking life. The deer and the maze express Kevin’s disorientation in the maze: his entrapment in his own reality, his marriage, and a job ‘inherited’ from his father—as the name Chief Garvey suggests his lack of a proper sense of self and an identity which is primarily and solely conditioned by his relationship with his father and others. The mythological symbolism of the deer reveals another mythological layer: the monomyth i.e., the hero’s journey. Despite the multiple protagonists of *The Leftovers*, the show pays particular attention to Kevin’s entrapment in the maze and his journey back home.

This approach to the hero’s journey and the achievement of transformation is embodied in Matt and Kevin’s need to follow an ideal masculine figure and their “calling” as, respectively, men of faith and men of law.¹⁸⁷ They both gradually lose faith in their paternal figures and feel abandoned within their personal maze. The priest character, Matt Jamison, confounds scattered elements in his environment with signs from God, by mostly overinterpreting their significance and by analyzing his dreams as prophecies and revelations. At first, the narrative stirs in the direction of validating Matt’s beliefs only to subvert them afterwards. At various moments, the show reveals the absurdity of life in the episodes centering on Matt. This apparent dark humor is omnipresent in each decisive event featuring Matt such as his attempts to make money to save his Church by following the signs and gambling in a casino. After winning a large sum of money, he never makes it to the bank in time, for he tries to help the Guilty Remnant and get hit by passers-by. Ironically, his Church is bought by the same cult he defends against. Believing his misfortune to be a test, he deduces that the Sudden Departure is a test from God, but simultaneously denies its religious nature, because believing that it was the Christian Rapture would mean he had been left behind.

¹⁸⁶ Hatchuel, Sarah and Pacôme Thiellement. *The Leftovers : Le troisième côté du miroir*. Paris: Playlist Society, 2019. 42.

¹⁸⁷ See Kirby Yardley’s analysis of Kevin’s inner turmoil and its depiction in the show throughout the seasons. “*The Leftovers* Analysis: The Psychology of Kevin Part One.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Kirby Yardley, 20 Feb. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z45IrkS7KS0>.

Do you know what it was? [...] It was a *test*. Not for what came before, but what came *after*. It was a test for what comes now.

(“Two Boats and a Helicopter”, S01E03, emphasis added)

Instead, he prefers to believe that the apocalypse is approaching or that Kevin is the new Messiah and that his wife is the only person who is safe in the confines of the town. Struggling with his faith and making it his personal mission to spread the truth about the departed, Matt tells the casino employer:

But someone has to expose these people for who they truly were and what they truly did because if we can no longer separate the innocent from the guilty, everything that happened to us, all of our suffering is meaningless.

(*ibid*)

In “Two Boats, One Helicopter” (S01E03), when going to bed desperate and crying, Matt finds answers in a painting of Job. In many ways, his character is associated with Job primarily in their mutual perseverance, patience, and almost unwavering faith in God despite a multitude of hardships and sufferings. Matt also declares the Book of Job to be his favorite in the Bible, with the iconic figure getting twice the reward of what has been lost and taken from him (“No Room at the Inn,” S02E05), thus further asserting their likeness to Job – albeit Matt’s dubious “reward” is in fact the return of his Leukemia. However, he gets his miracles and Mary heals and is able to give birth to their son. Some storylines are purposefully left ambiguous until the following season as when Matt claims his disabled wife had woken up the night they had conceived their child. There remains a doubt about the veracity of his story, for the events are never shown on-screen and viewers have been intentionally left in the dark. This contributes to the portrayal of Matt as an insane person despite his evident devotion to his faith and to his wife.

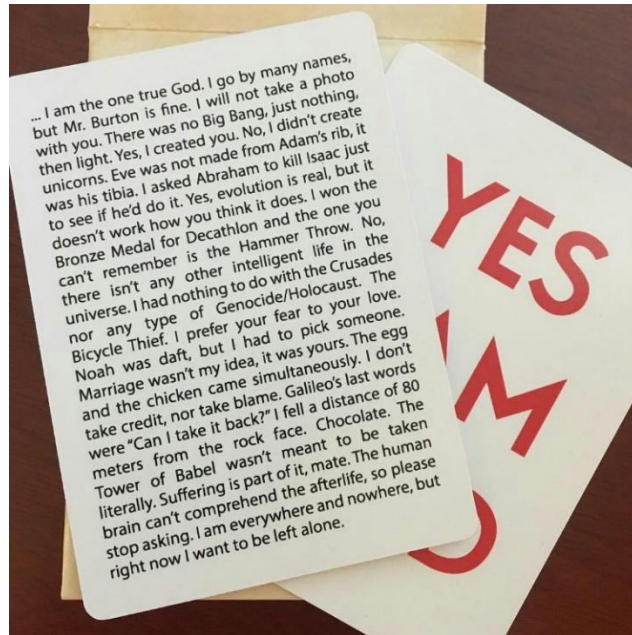


Figure 55. "Yes I am God" card.

The episode “It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World” (S03E05) features a dramatic dialogue between Matt and David Burton who hands out cards explaining that he is God. Exploring themes of faith and quest for meaning, the episode takes place on the boat trip to Melbourne on which a special party is taking place: a celebration of the lineage of a lion, Frasier (named after the eponymous show in the diegetic reality in which the actress playing Laurie, Amy Brenneman, briefly appears for a few episodes). The sequence between Matt and Burton shapes the ambiguous and misleading power of the episode as the audience watches Matt gradually starting to talk to Burton as if he was a real God. The episode ends with the validation of Matt’s sermon about Daniel and the lion from the Bible in “The Book of Kevin” (S03E01) by a breaking of the fourth wall as Matt looks at the camera and reminds us that “that’s the guy [he] was telling [us] about” (“It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”, S03E05) as Viegas notes:

[...] 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.

(10)

The “I am God Card” in “It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World” episode (S03E05) is yet again evidence of the confusing nature of *The Leftovers*’ narrative maze and the ironical stance of the series. Searching for hidden meanings or simply wanting purpose in their life, the characters of *The Leftovers* rely on myths and signs following a detective-like approach. *The*

Leftovers distorts the grounded nature of reality¹⁸⁸ it initially offers viewers and magnifies ontological doubt from the pilot to the finale.

¹⁸⁸ The *Leftovers* and *Westworld* intersperse deceptive techniques on the narratological and aesthetic level to confuse their audience. Among these strategies one could mention Trompe l'oeil whereby an image is presented as reality but is built on viewers' perception from a particular position that is meant to trick them into believing it is real. *The Leftovers* and *Westworld's* showrunners use this as a means to create further disorientating effects and underline that truth lies in perspective especially in the context of the interpretation of the event and its origin.

III.1.4. Dreams in TV shows

Freud's interpretation of dreams as the symbols and images of the unconscious distinguishing between latent and conscious dreams. His categorization of dreams centers on their degree of meaningfulness: dreams that "make sense," dreams with a *bewildering effect*," and finally those which are "disconnected, confused, and meaningless" (*Complete Works*, "On Dreams," 1060). Dreams would comprise the memory of experienced and 'recorded' events of the mind's most recent mental activity based on symbols common to all people and cultures in diverse time and places: archetypes. Nonetheless, their interpretation is personal and does not relate to a generic meaning for each symbol even though Freudian theories rely on phallic meanings of some symbols (sword, guns, etc.). For subjects experiencing traumatic episodes,¹⁸⁹ dreams become the manifestation of their repressed emotions or the repetitive reliving of the trauma haunting their psyche. Whether awake or asleep, traumatized individuals vividly experience these flashes as real.

In complex TV shows such as *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, the narrative and aesthetic status of dreams offers an oscillation between dream and reality. Dreams in *The Leftovers* do not pervade the narrative, they briefly appear without warning at crucial moments to underscore the characters' sublimation into alternate realities and their acute unconscious desires and conflicts. *Westworld's* dreams operate in a different and more significant manner: they are omnipresent in the same way memory pertaining to the non-identified awakened state of the hosts appears onscreen. Among the functions of the dream sequences in these TV shows, we will mention their ambivalent presence-absence in the narratives as essential means to advance the plot for disorientation and reorientation purposes.

First, we examine the use of "prophetic" dreams for narrative revelations and the interpretation of substantial events. Second, we will analyze dream sequences as a form of traumatic memory stemming from the unconscious, and third, we will briefly discuss dreams

¹⁸⁹ For instance, post-traumatic stress disorder: "PTSD sufferers often re-experience a traumatic event in the form of a 'flashback', nightmare or recurrent memory. Indeed, depression, stress and debilitating anxiety tend to set in at some temporal distance from the 'triggering incident'. However, it is not uncommon for crucial aspects of the traumatic event to be subject to severe repression. In these cases, instead of flashbacks, the past remains 'inaccessible' to present consciousness" (Mather and Marsden 206).

as portals to alternate realities as a means of transporting characters to unusual universes. These instances predominantly feature the confused state of characters that steers the narrative towards its possible resolution by scattering signs and hints throughout for the attentive audience. What is enumerated here is to be seen, at least in this study, from a spectral angle in the form of ghostly incarnations of return, inhibited memories, and the haunting extra-diegetic event or situations that are suffused with signs and symbolism. Dream sequences partake in the spectral return as well as in the portrayal of the haunting narrative mechanisms of the event; they are an essential part in understanding the spectro-poetics of the event in these TV adaptations.

The metaphor of dreams in film belongs to the early years of cinema's genesis with the recognition of cinema as either an art reflecting reality or as a generator of magical fantasy inaccessible in real life (Rascaroli np). Cinema then became associated with a dream factory following film theorists such as Canudo and Epstein (*ibid*). By reproducing the effects and strategies of dreams, the structure of film and TV shows highly resonates with the rapid production of successive images associated with the oneiric dimension as Hatchuel points out:

À travers le montage et les effets visuels (surimpression, surexposition, flou, filtres de couleur, passage au noir et blanc ou à la couleur, jeu kaléidoscopique, effet de perspective, pause-arrêt, ralenti, accéléré, fondu, distorsions ou échos sonores), le cinéma donne l'impression de pouvoir représenter le rêve dans toute son *étrangeté* et son *intensité*.

(*Rêves*, 12-13, emphasis in original)

Accordingly, the structure of dreams and the transitions from one scene to another recall films and TV shows' portrayal of movement in-between places, irrational associations between sequences, the emergence of new characters. Dreams hardly focus on time; their beginnings are often blurry as most dreamers do not recall the exact moment the dreams start which gives the impression that they start *in medias res* and center on images, sounds, setting, actions, and emotions instead of chronological unfolding of the event, and temporal logic and rationality. Similar to real dreams, the representation of the dreamlike experience in film and TV is either be perceived and "filmed" in subjective viewpoints or with the dreamer/protagonist's position in an omniscient third-person point of view as they see themselves as an exterior character: the dreamer *is* the camera.

Freud famously suggests that dreams are mirrors reflecting the hidden inner world of the psyche: the interpretation of dreams, we are told, is "the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious" activities of the mind (Freud, *Complete Works*, "Five Lectures," 2220) — and therefore the most direct path to reach an understanding of identity. TV fiction represents the

uncanny world of dreams in all its familiar and yet strange aspects, introducing improbable events and a representation of the unreal, most often with this same goal in mind. The analysis of dream sequences in Hatchuel's *Rêves et séries américaines* encompasses all types of dreams (while asleep and waking) and extends to hallucinations and seemingly supernatural or metaphysical visions and apparitions, including fantasies and alternate universes (9) experienced by characters since their dreamlike experiences can be either announced through visual cues or simply appearing through narrative techniques conveying reality. In forensic approaches to dream sequences, the over-interpretation of signs constitutes the correlation between dream and reality which is evidence of what Jung refers to as synchronicity, i.e., the coincidental dreaming holding significant and meaningful insight.

Dreams in *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* typically act as indicators of spectral experiences either in the form of the haunting return of memories (as it has been pointed out in the previous chapter with the apparitions of uncanny doubles) or in the form of revelations for the characters that incarnate a form of prophecy that foreshadow the upcoming storylines. Hatchuel argues that dream sequences provide possibilities and uncertainty about the upcoming narrative paths¹⁹⁰ as dreams represent a rupture within the diegesis and from the diegesis, to ultimately generate “un kaléidoscope de possibilités, un palimpseste d'éventualités, autour d'une situation de départ donnée”.¹⁹¹ Such dream sequences serve to set the tone for the forensic approach of decoding the shows due to their large use of signs and disorienting effects. Some dream sequences turn into prophetic signs for both viewers and characters as they are strongly evocative of the textual labyrinthine structure in their requirements of reception and over-interpretation.

III.1.4.1. Dreams in Westworld

In “Akane No Mai” (S02E05), Karl Strand, Delos's Head of Operations, reflexively comments on the narrative complexity of the park (and the series):

¹⁹⁰Hatchuel, Sarah. *Rêves et séries américaines, la fabrique d'autres mondes : Awake, Battlestar Galactica, Buffy, Hannibal, LOST, Les Soprano, Six Feet Under, Twin Peaks...* Rouge Profond, 2016, p. 11.

¹⁹¹ Hatchuel, Sarah. « Rêves et fantasmes dans les séries télévisées américaines contemporaines. Des apparitions a-cinématographiques ? », *Ligeia : Le Rêve au cinéma*, vol. 1, no. 129-132, 2014, pp. 231-242. *Cairn*, <https://doi.org/10.3917/lige.129.0231>. Accessed 02 Aug 2021.

Well, that's quite a story you gave them and one hell of an ending. How did all these disparate threads come together to create this nightmare? If we figure that out, we'll know how the story turns.

The dazzling mechanics of serial writing construct the complex maze narrative while establishing the delusional hope of finding exactly how the “story turns” by encouraging viewers to connect each thread in order to solve the puzzle which is itself another trap prompted by several Easter eggs and reflexive comments to tease the over-attentive audience. Such Easter eggs are another misleading sign meant to give the viewers the illusion of agency and their presumed power of interpretation while such revelations and truths are another layer of lie and misguidance that would eventually “be questioned, or recontextualised, as another clue in the ongoing game” (Slocombe 52).

The notion of Easter eggs echoes what the writer and director of the source text of *Westworld*, Michael Crichton, indicates in his 2002 novel *Prey* when he writes: “Programmers always insert Easter eggs into their code, little nuggets that don't serve any useful purpose and are just put there for fun” (26). This is also reminiscent of the reveries in *Westworld*, a code/update added to the hosts' programming. In appearance, the aim of this update is to add little details and gestures to the hosts' behavior that would make them appear more human, but it is later revealed that they have a deeper purpose than mere entertainment. The first season begins with Ford's introduction of these code alterations that end up causing several dysfunctions among hosts. The reveries connect the hosts' gestures to a memory as they are linked to their cornerstone identity which is “a backstory and explains that tragic stories work best because it makes the Hosts more convincing” (Erwin, *Reading Westworld*, 121). The update eventually triggers the hosts' memories as it unlocks the past traumas¹⁹² and lead them to discover their previous “selves” in other narratives and get out of their loops.

As seen in our previous discussion of the return of memories (in the form of flashbacks, *déjà vu*, or dreams), the hosts' loops in the first season are similar to endless dreams (or rather nightmares) with not so vivid a recollection of the distant events. In *Westworld* and the other parks, dreams are purposefully designed to embody a blurry memory for the hosts to leave a margin of error for technicians. In other words, the function of the hosts' notion of dreams is primarily used as an oppressive mechanism to make the hosts discredit the reality of what they experience during repair sessions and limit their access to real memories, as they are regularly erased and reconfigured. As one of the park's engineers, Elsie, puts it, “We do give them the

¹⁹² Bernard and Armistice seem to be the only ones whose backstory is based on a traumatic memory (Favard, “The Maze”, 5).

concept of dreams, specifically nightmares” (“Chestnut”, S01E02). She claims that dreams are memories and subsequently there is no use in making the hosts remember and re-experience how they are treated at the hands of the guests. Therefore, the dream sequence serves a contradictory purpose for viewers and characters: while they allow the spectator to know more and to better understand the hosts, the hosts themselves, are unable to distinguish between dream and (past) reality and know less of themselves than before.

Throughout the episodes, we often hear Dolores doubt her reality by repeating, “I’m in a dream”. This is made evident from the very first scenes of the pilot (“The Original”, S01E01): the sequence opens with a voice off-screen (Arnold’s/Bernard’s), saying, “Bring her back online”. The shot reveals Dolores sitting naked in the dark while the lights slowly turn on behind her, which is then accompanied by an ambient continuous electric-like sound, itself adding to the rising tension during the interview. The unknown voice asks Dolores if she knows where she is and she answers: “I’m in a dream” with a close-up on her face that meticulously depicts her desire to wake up as she expresses her terror. In this way, emotions of fear are juxtaposed with a lack of agency that is emphasized through the artificial aspect of her static face and mouth while viewers have direct access to her thoughts.

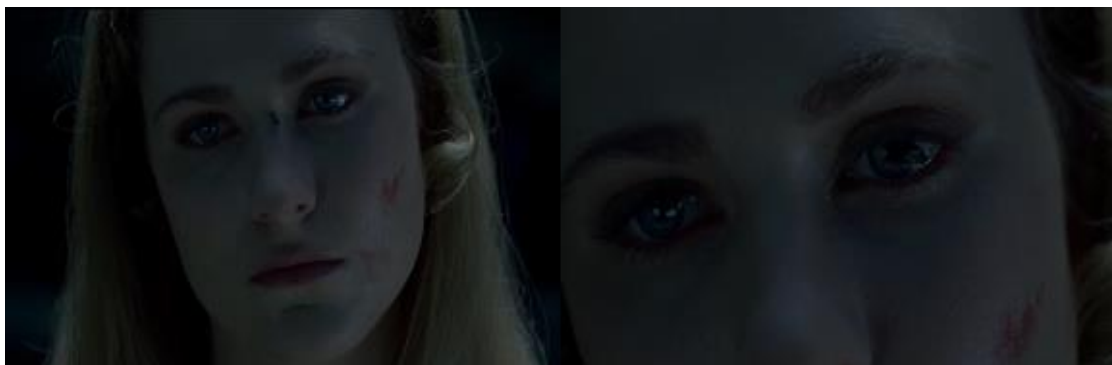


Figure 56. Dolores with paralyzed motor functions and a fly on her eye. (“The Original”, S01E01).

This dissonance between image and sound¹⁹³ epitomizes a warning for the audience about her subjugated state as a host at the hand of Delos (Lemonier-Textier and Oriez 2). The camera slowly zooms in on her face where a fly lands on her unblinking eye (See Figure). Viewers may already empathize with this image and its degree of discomfort, because of the human-like appearance, the hair and head angle reminiscent of Botticelli’s equally nude Venus,

¹⁹³ « Tout comme le décalage entre image et bande-son (Dolores ne parle pas à l’image, mais on l’entend parler), ce glissement de sens du mot ‘rêve’ signale d’emblée au spectateur la manipulation que l’on fait subir à Dolores et la situation d’ironie dramatique dans laquelle se trouve son personnage » (Lemmonier-Textier and Oriez 1-2).

a quintessential figure of female beauty marred by an insect associated with corruption and decay.

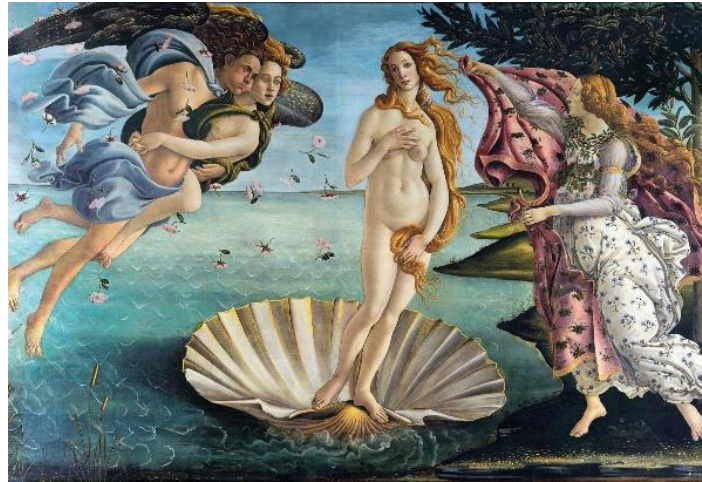


Figure 57. Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (*Nascita di Venere*) 1485.

The fly thus increases the feeling of vulnerability, uncanniness, and discomfort. Throughout the first season, it comes to symbolize the hosts' awakening, as in the last shot of the pilot, which shows Dolores hitting the fly. In the season one finale, the episode opens with a sequence highly evocative of this first sequence of the pilot: some filming techniques are reiterated, as for example the introduction of an off-screen voice, but this time the voice is accompanied by extra-diegetic music playing François-Joel Thiollier's *Reverie* before Dolores speaks:

I'm in a dream. I do not know where it began or whose dream it was. I know only that I slept a long time and then one day I awoke.

(“The Bicameral Mind,” S01E10)

The absence of an exterior voice indicates her position of power, for it is now her own voice we overhear off-screen: she has become the narrator of her own story. Meanwhile, the camera zooms out from a shot of her face to show her whole body being “assembled” and created by Arnold. The vision of her humanlike artificial body in relation to this very relatable, very human statement is evidence of the uncanny valley in *Westworld*. In *Westworld and Philosophy*, Lyons explains the emergence of the uncanny valley concept in the 70s as such:

The incredibly life-like appearance of the robots in *Westworld* brings us to “uncanny valley,” a notion first identified in an essay by robotics professor Masahiro Mori in 1970 and translated by Jasia Reichardt in 1978. As a robot comes to more closely resemble a human, our reactions turn from initial revulsion to empathy, but only up until a certain point, depending on how indistinguishable the robot is from a human. When the robot or other entity

almost resembles a human, but not quite, we become filled with sudden unease upon viewing or encountering them, and the robot drops into the “uncanny valley”.

(Lyons, *Westworld and Philosophy*, 41)

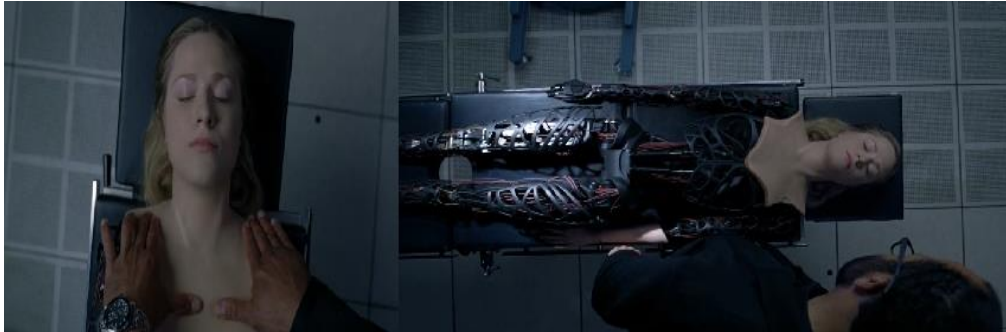


Figure 58. Dolores as half-robot half-human and the uncanny valley (“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10).

In *Westworld*, uneasiness is produced more often by humans’ actions than humanoids’ appearance; perhaps what is most frightening is their human-like appearance. Dream sequences offer us further insight into the hosts’ perspective; they are employed as a metaphor for the hosts’ memories from previous builds. They also stand for the manifestation of their psyche that serves to fragment the narrative. At first, dreams are used as illusions and lies to hold the hosts in their loops with a fixed core identity: being haunted is the beginning of the hosts’ coming to sentience through repetitive suffering. For instance, Maeve’s memories of her past life as a single mother in the countryside return to haunt her in the form of flashbacks and nightmares. The traumatic aspect of her memories embodies the guests’ abuse of the hosts. Here, it is the Man in Black who kills her and her daughter in his quest for the maze.

The reverie code enhances the experience of cognitive dissonance while dreaming allows the hosts to learn the truth about their identities. Through their recurring visions, the hosts learn about their past narratives and recover their memories as dreams ultimately guide them through the maze until they reach sentience. Akecheta is one of the first hosts to have experienced the movement towards the “other side” to the Mesa by dying. His traumatic memories revolve around the loss of his love, Kohana as it is revealed in the episode “Kiksuya” (S02E08). The episode is narrated by his voice and is revealed to address Maeve as she is a prisoner of Charlotte, agonizing while Akecheta communicates with her through her daughter. In his quest for the truth, he understands that hosts are mere puppets to the masters of the underworld, so he spends decades without dying or getting updated (and thus avoiding the reveries) in the attempt to open everyone else’s eyes to the truth. The hosts’ traumatic

experiences stand for real traumatic instances among human subjects; the event appears as hauntingly intrusive:

Cathy Caruth describes trauma as broadly encompassing ‘an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena’. She points to the paradoxical and unknowable nature of trauma, whereby an event is not assimilated at the time of its occurrence, but later returns to bear delayed and repeated witness to the wound.

(Schick 1840)

As dreams incarnate these painful memories, the process towards sentience is not an easy one, a phenomenon dramatized as we watch the hosts struggle with cognitive dissonance. In social psychology, cognitive dissonance is defined as “the effects of inconsistencies in behaviors and attitudes of real-world individuals [...] or mediated fictional characters” (Kiss 66). Cognitive dissonance exerts a pressure on the subject provoking a certain “discomfort, a *drive* in the form of an unpleasant mental or emotional state that demands a resolution from the experiencing individual” (emphasis in original, 68).

Most *Westworld* characters are subject to cognitive dissonance from a behavioral perspective; for instance, the hosts, act against their coding and deviate from their original script, thus building up a sense of discomfort which is characteristic of uncanny phenomena. As cognitive dissonance either orients or disorients the audience, it is important to note that its effects on viewers’ comprehension vary from text to text, and that this is particularly true in contemporary complex narratives as opposed to what we find in coherent classical texts in terms of “chronology, development, causality and character unity” (Kiss 66).

Throughout the first season of *Westworld*, the hosts consistently adopt inconsistent behavior incongruous with their true desires which seems to respond to a primal instinct or psychological response following the traumatic event. The depiction of their severe conflict between their programming and the diegetic reality of the simulated narratives engages both viewers and host characters in the contemplation of the existential questions which ultimately raises ethical issues about the treatment and conception of AI. Indeed, the exploration of these intricate implications involves the nature of technology in relation to humans and their subversion of other beings deemed inferior whether animal, artificial, or human.

Cognitive dissonances result in spectral manifestations through visions and dreams which are meant to open the path of resistance. Abiding by dystopian narrative conventions, *Westworld*'s portrayal of haunting signs and traumatic responses to the event makes critical commentaries on the lack of free will and the necessity of rebellion. In his article “‘These violent delights have violent ends’ (Romeo and Juliet, 2.6,9/*Westworld* S01E01). Apocalyptic re-mediation, or, can there be a Revelation in this (West)world?”, Sebastian Lefait draws on the TV show's depiction of cognitive dissonance and what he acknowledges to be, a form of “semiotic disobedience” to depict the hosts' loss of control over narratives. These deviations from the assigned, and pre-existing path move the narrative away from a “scripted reception” towards a form of re-appropriation (Lefait, “Violent delights”, 152). Therefore, haunting signs, haunting myths either in the form of dreams or reality may also help characters and viewers reorient through the maze narrative in order to grapple with the upcoming ending.

III.1.4.2. The Leftovers' prophetic dreams and revelations

Dream sequences allow viewers a deeper level of access into the characters' mind. Prophecy-like and revelatory dreams guide *The Leftovers*' characters in their quest for meaning after the event such as the character of Matt Jamison who, just like eager and invested viewers, tends to over-analyze and over-interpret their meaning. Matt's dreams seem to be based on past childhood memories such as his traumatic experience of being sick with leukemia as a child and the pending threat of the return of the sickness throughout his adulthood. In “Two Boats, One Helicopter” (S01E03), Matt tells his story as a way of invigorating the belief that suffering is part of the path towards evolution and change.

While the camera initially focuses on the priest during his speech, the people attending the service remain off-screen, as a way of tricking viewers into believing people still attend church in the reverse shots, it is understood that most have lost faith and even baptize their newborns in secret. The story of the boy with leukemia is revealed to be his own through a dream sequence: as he is knocked out, he wakes up in front of his Church welcomed by Gladys (a member of the Guilty Remnant) which is the first hint at the delusional nature of the sequence. As he enters the Church, he seems glad to see lots of worshippers attending and singing, but the blurry image composition with Matt's movements enhances the photographic

surrealism of the scene. This is followed by a gradual distortion of the song of the choir and an unusual slowing down of the scenes.



Figure 59. Matt's dream ("Two Boats and a Helicopter", S01E03).

As he follows a young boy, he discovers his old self staring at him as they are waiting for the medical results. His double is an incarnation of his childhood trauma and his present fears as an adult. The fire alarm signals the transition of the scene to a shot of adult Matt holding a girl's hand (Nora's) in front of the burning house in which their parents perished (the firefighters smoking cigarettes and not extinguishing the fire can be interpreted as the Guilty Remnant, reluctant to live). Mary's car accident on October 14th is reiterated and triggers the same feeling of loneliness in the face of the disaster as no one helps them. The next scene is a sex scene with his healthy wife then Matt sees the painting of Job before his wife transforms into Laurie and other Guilty Remnant members in rapid image cuts. This could embody his conflict with the Guilty Remnant and his desire to help them. His hands are burning as we overhear little Nora repeat, "Why isn't anybody doing anything?" then the whole bed and house catch fire right before he wakes up.

In this case, dreams are noticeably projections of his crisis of faith and truth, thus his unconscious mind is giving us better understanding of the character. The series portrays Christianity by challenging its traditions from the ambiguity of the departure that is thought to be the rapture to the incarnation of the voice of God and prophetic visions in a priest's subconscious.

III.1.4.3. Re-orientation through dreams

In *The Leftovers*, dreams accentuate ambiguity regarding the generic nature of the show by neither validating nor denying the supernatural dimension of some events, the most obvious one being, the hotel-world (the realm of the dead).¹⁹⁴ Blurry borders between reality and fiction are emphasized through the character of Kevin, his dreams, his blackouts, his somnambulism, and his family mental illness records (Kevin Sr.'s psychological issues) – all these surreal sequences are introduced with an absence of diegetic clues (Machinal, *Posthumains*, 114). The show also never validates the nature of Kevin's amnesia, whether they are due to his subconscious or to a supernatural dimension (115).

There lies the uncertainty of the reliability that what is being projected onscreen is true and what is arguably heightened in the form of supernatural-like events – making the audience question the possible status of dream sequences (as a flashback, a moment of wish fulfillment, a glimpse into the character's psyche, etc.). In a plain statement, Laurie sums up this approach to fiction by stressing the human need to believe in something whether tangible or invisible. Accordingly, after the Sudden Departure, *The Leftovers*' characters would welcome improbable events “because their brains would sooner embrace magic than deal with feelings of fear, and abandonment and guilt” (“A Most Powerful Adversary”, S02E07). She goes on to explain:

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

(*ibid*)

Kevin himself better represents the fear of confronting reality and his deep-seated anxieties. The most explicit and lengthy example of the dream sequence in *The Leftovers* is undoubtedly Kevin's experience in the dreamworld of “International Assassin” (S02E08). The dreamworld sequence starts with Kevin coming out of the bathtub in the hotel room fully naked, without any of the trappings of society (such as his police uniform). The idea of baptism and rebirth is highlighted in crossing the threshold between the two universes. The sequence is

¹⁹⁴ The hotel-world validates the uncanny and the “realm of the dead” by further making the series' third season anchored in the absurd (Machinal, *Posthumains*, 112-13).

packed with references to *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola 1972),¹⁹⁵ particularly through a music that becomes the signature of this other world.

Kevin's dreamworld forces him to face his subconscious and to admit his deepest fears and desires. Full of signs and (mis)interpretation, this world is another maze to be explored. The sign on the closet reiterates Epictetus's quote "Know, first, who you are, and then adorn yourself accordingly." This gives him the choice of roles; like in a video game, Kevin needs to play the part he desires, the one that reveals his present state of mind: from a powerful assassin, a chief of police, President of the United States, to the messiah himself.

All these roles embody control and power, things he lacks in his real life. In his traveling to the other side in the third season, his advocacy to the Guilty Remnant's principles is embodied through his white costume as the US President. His electors are also dressed in white and support the destruction/non-existence of family and love. Unable to access the hidden part of his psyche, his shadow, he needs to go through another world to understand who he is supposed to be, embrace all parts of himself, and confront his ghosts. The hotel-world is best exemplified in this fan art poster which pays homage to *Vertigo* (Hitchcock 1958) with its series of stairs. Like Kevin, the film has a protagonist, Scotty, (also a retired policeman who continues investigating well after his employment has ceased) that is initially sympathetic and shows himself to be increasingly obsessive, violent, and even murderous as the film progresses.

In the seventh episode of the first season "Solace for Tired Feet" (S01E07), as Kevin waits for news about his father's escape from the mental facility, he falls asleep and wakes up to the sound of a dog outside his house. A voice from the police walkie-talkie says "Cairo," offering another Easter egg as it actually mentions the title of the following episode and other various instances in which Cairo is significant to the show.¹⁹⁶ Dean waits for him to shoot a dog



Figure 60. Fan art *International Assassin* episode (S02E08).

¹⁹⁵ In his last journey to the other world, Kevin even declares that his favorite movie is *The Godfather Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola 1975) ("The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)", S03E07).

¹⁹⁶ The significance of Cairo in *The Leftovers* is further discussed below.

trapped in the mailbox, and then the images transition from one to another with a loud soundtrack, each lasting no more than a second, thus suggesting that the sequence might be either a dream or reality intruded upon by flashbacks. Tommy calls him but then shuts the door and ignores him, thus representing his fear of losing his son. The presence of Tommy confirms the oneiric nature of the sequence, since, as we know, he is still on the road with Christine.

The temporal and logical aspects of the sequence become more drastic by displaying inconsistencies and a lack of coherence: Kevin is back in his living room near the walkie-talkie and a flashback shot suddenly appears and shows dogs attacking the deer. As explained earlier, the image of the vulnerable deer is associated with Kevin's sense of fragile or damaged masculinity and powerlessness. Interestingly, the dream sequence is embedded with what we assume are "real" memories from earlier episodes, and they only appear instantaneously, suggesting Kevin's thinking process. Going back and forth between the past and present, reality and dream, another shot (that could be interpreted as a representation of Kevin's memory) shows Kevin shooting dogs from an earlier sequence in the pilot.



Figure 61. Kevin's dream ("Solace for Tired Feet", S01E07).

The camera hastily pans to the truck to focus on Kevin's reaction in a reverse shot and to reveal Laurie and other members of the Guilty Remnant dead and wrapped in plastic bags at the back of Dean's truck. As the mailbox continues to threaten to explode, music in this dream sequence intensifies and Kevin shows himself reluctant to kill the dog inside it. Lending itself to horror generic conventions, the camera slowly follows Kevin as he moves towards the mailbox and at the exact moment he put his hand on it, silence overwhelms the scene and increases the tension. The decelerated pace is tangible and only the creaking of the mailbox

door is heard right before the dog violently and loudly barks. As common in such nightmares, the dreamer wakes up after the violent scene, Kevin finds himself on the floor of his bedroom with his hand strapped with a bandage, thereby indicating the reality of the dog bite, and generating more uncertainty about the events of this alleged dream.

These dream sequences convey Kevin's alarming psychological condition and add dramatic tone to the series. In "Penguin, One. Us, zero" (S01E02), his dream introduces a variety of symbols: the dream features sexual fantasies about Aimee, his daughter's friend coming into his bed and then guiding him into the forest. There, he finds the dog killer, Dean, shooting a member of the Guilty Remnant (who can be either his wife or probably Patti). Kevin sees his feet burning in flames as he wakes up to see a real fire initiated by his neighbor in his fence yard. This dream reveals Kevin's repressed sexual thoughts about Aimee, along with his desire to help and annihilate the cult that took away his wife but most blatantly, it could be interpreted as a form of foreshadowing of him chasing his future ghost, Patti while simultaneously bearing some resemblance with the deer and hunting imagery from the pilot. Dean does not only shoot wild dogs who are "not our dogs anymore", he shoots people who are not their people, their family anymore. After all, Patti is also the symbol of his loss of agency both as a police chief and as a husband.

However, Patti's significant role is mostly as a ghost haunting Kevin after her suicide. In the first season finale, Matt helps Kevin bury Patti then on the drive back home Kevin wakes up to find out that Matt is taking him to the psychiatric facility in which his father is incarcerated. In his cell, he receives the *National Geographic* issue from his father and opens it on the page of Cairo. The magazine becomes a communication tool between father and son (Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 9), both overinterpreting signs while being haunted by voices and shadows. Cairo appears multiple times in the series and in the New Testament. The Greek meaning of the word indicates the temporal sense of an opportune time or season:

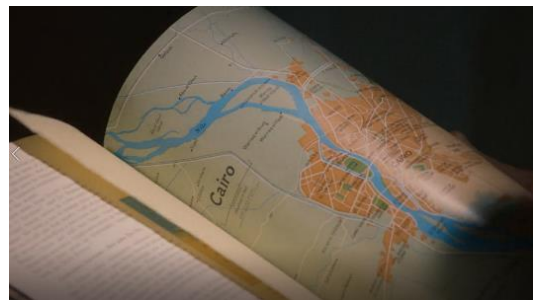


Figure 62. Cairo, Egypt. (*National Geographic magazine*). S01E010.

In its temporal meaning, *kairos*, which denotes the right moment for an event, an opportunity or a critical time, can be contrasted with *chronos*, which expresses time in a more general sense, and can be used of time as a

measurable entity [...] *Kairos* points to the importance of doing the right thing in the proper manner.¹⁹⁷

Bringing all sorts of signs with her, Patti (as a ghost) first appears in this dream sequence, thus reinforcing the dream's symbolism without a clear unified meaning. The duration of the sequence and the successive scenes with their normal pace do not hint at the nature of the sequence as a dream. Expressing his unconscious thoughts, his father explains that he deserves to be here, for since October 14th they were not taken in the Sudden Departure because they knew they were bad guys, echoing Kevin's own answer to the woman with whom he commits adultery in "The Garveys at their Best" (S01E09) when she asks, "Are you a good guy?", he honestly answers "No". Similarly, his father declares:

[...] But I am a bad man, son, and the bad men end up here [...] My intentions are good but my heart and my mind and my balls, son, the Holy fucking Trinity, they all knew. That night three years ago, we looked at ourselves in the mirror and none of us wondered why we were still fucking here. We knew, of course we knew. You know.

("The Prodigal Son Returns," S01E10)

Kevin appears as a mad person throughout these scenes loudly yelling that he does not belong there as he is not crazy, all while talking to himself, and denying the reality of Patti's apparitions, repeating, "this is not real. You are not real". Kevin's sanity is continuously questioned throughout the duration of the series, even after this first apparition is revealed to be a mere vision, part of his dream, and that he is still with Matt in his car on their way to Mapleton. In these scenes, ontological uncertainty is foregrounded essentially due to the lack of clues about the occurrence of dream sequences. As opposed to Matt, Kevin does not overinterpret his dreams as signs or prophecies, however, he believes (or at least wants to believe) in the reality of his travels to the alternate universes and his resurrection.

This amplifies the narrative maze structure of the TV series and its haunting signs, mostly in relation to the overinterpretation of the upcoming event: the apocalypse. Apocalyptic narratives often require active engagement and attention from their audiences as it is strongly held and believed that clues are spread everywhere and such attention to details could possibly be rewarded in the end.

¹⁹⁷. Sampson, Kristin. "Conceptions of Temporality: Reconsidering Time in an Age of Impending Emergency.", *Wiley*, vol. 86, no. 6, Dec. 2020, pp. 769-782.

III.2. Chapter 8: Endings: adapting the apocalyptic event

The overinterpretation of haunting signs eventually leads to conclusions and theories about one of the most defining elements of a TV show's success: its ending. This notion of the end, however, is not limited to the last moments of the televised fictions; instead, it is tantamount to an omnipresent crisis in both *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, a founding element in the diegesis and a central theme in characters' minds whereby the end of the world is anticipated, remembered, and pictured following a constellation of speculations. Considering the haunting signs of the apocalypse, this obsession with the end (of the diegetic world) amounts to creating "the uncanny feeling that everything is a sign; that each frame, each element within a frame, potentially signifies something and has to be taken into account" (Jaunas 83).

Apocalyptic storytelling has historically given rise to multiple fictional forms of writing in different media such as novels, TV shows, movies, survival guides and so on. The prevalence of apocalyptic thought in fiction in general, and contemporary fiction in particular, reveals recurrent ontological doubt, expressing humanity's most natural fear of endings both personal and global, and its desire to imagine (and therefore gain a semblance of control over) the upcoming scenarios of mayhem on earth. If the end of narratives is inevitable and necessary, this is particularly true in the case of (post)apocalyptic fiction, as it begins with an ending and is essentially defined by it (Voigts, *Adapting Endings*, 152). Thus, this chapter examines the diegetic endings in the series as they relate to the apocalyptic narratives of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*. In so doing, we will delve into the reception of the shows' endings, which like the relationship between the end of the diegetic world and the end of the narrative fiction, links its perception of final episodes to a more general evaluation of the whole text's success by critics and other types of audiences, based on its ending.

III.2.1. Defining the haunting event: trauma of the apocalypse?

The event is known to encompass any form of moment that is radically altering and life changing. Like the specter, the event's apparition and occurrence are sudden and unexpected. Paradoxically, the event's spectral nature is expressed through the ensuing anxiety due to expectations of the end. It creates uncertainty and a lack of stability, confronts us to the unknown, and deals with the uncanny "as a spectral manifestation on the (TV) screen" (Žižek "Welcome to the desert of the real!" 16). In resonance with Derrida's conference "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," this section explores the ending of TV shows through the lens of the representation of the ineffable: is the event/the ending truly representable? or as Derrida enquires "Is saying the event possible?" [*Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?*] » (Derrida, "A Certain Impossible," 442).

Some TV narratives come to portray this ever-present fear or threat undermining humanity's certainty about its future as a sort of necessary rite of passage for each era or society but more significantly for the devoted audience, the underlying meaning being that embracing the finality of stories (and indeed, of life itself) is part of the narrative experience. Haunted as they are by real events from the past and entrenched in the US culture post-9/11 and in the contemporary climate crisis framework, imaginary fictional stories of the apocalypse pervade the small screen; our primary examples, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, showcase the anticipation (or the assimilation) of the end times of the apocalypse while concurrently building viewers' expectations that rely on the coming of the end of the narrative.

Of course, the US culture of the apocalypse is not only reflected in the fictional imaginations of the end, but also sharply present in cultural apocalyptic preparations among survivalists. With major mainstream documentation of survivalist groups, this ideology is anchored in preparedness for several types of crises whether natural or supernatural.¹⁹⁸ In a sense, then, we can say that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions provide a similar narrative survivalism, allowing the viewer to emotionally or mentally prepare to survive the end – both of the world, and of the fiction.

¹⁹⁸Strochlic, Nina. "Disaster 'prepping' was once an American pastime. Today, it's mainstream again." *National Geographic*, 10 Nov. 2020. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/disaster-prepping-was-once-an-american-pastime-today-its-mainstream-again>.

Conversely, the eradication of all life on earth in world cultures and religions, from the Christian Flood survived by Noah's Ark to the Scandinavian Ragnarok, is often regarded as a form of new beginning, a resurrection. The obsession with the end of the world is exemplified in the way the apocalypse and dystopic thinking haunt both minds and narratives. In his conference about the end of humanity,¹⁹⁹ Jean-Claude Guillebaud identifies the beginning of the millennium as subject to some universal change and uncertainty. He points to the ostensible inability of contemporary researchers, philosophers, sociologists, scientists, and other experts to appropriate the meaning of our era, i.e., to truly delineate its limits and perpetual changes due to an over-accelerated experience of time. The quest for meaning in an age of over-information is reflected in the representation of the crisis in fictional narratives (through apocalyptic thought) which ultimately probes the different responses to actual crises²⁰⁰ in the hope of being able to anticipate preparing for those extremely driven scenarios.

The reasons behind the abundance of writing and representing the apocalypse cannot exactly be restricted to a way of preparing for the worst-case scenarios and its consequences. Virginie Martin suggests that this could stem from the necessity of the cathartic function triggered by these narratives to prepare us for the cataclysm in order to better apprehend it, to change our mindset and act. The role of dystopian storytelling, speculative fiction, and apocalyptic narration is thereby often said to be an incentive for action as a warning for readers/viewers. Such narratives would tackle themes of surveillance and limited freedom as in Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, or Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (Martin 156). In fact, the apocalyptic genre serves many purposes, such as the depiction of society's deepest anxieties and fears of the end, or as other critics would see it as "fictional portals to another world" (Joyce 60). There are recurring tropes and motifs in the apocalyptic genre which fall into the general collapse and reconstructive period: a menacing corrupted government, a team of heroes and underdogs, etc.

A televisual text's identity and generic essence is specific to its reception and its use of generic conventions and televisual tropes. In most cases, the generic hybridity of fictional

¹⁹⁹ Note the year of the conference 2001, post 9/11.

²⁰⁰ Virginie Martin indicates the widespread reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic through #Covid1984 hashtag to associate the diegetic universe of Orwell's novel with the actual crisis. TV shows are able to mirror our reality in a surprising manner as in the case of the TV series *My Secret Terrius* on MBC TV in 2018 which is considered as forward-thinking, even predictive of the coronavirus, thus enhancing a variety of conspiracy theories (Martin 158-59). In terms of apocalyptic thought, the barrier between diegetic and extra-diegetic realities is transgressed due to rising anxieties and perpetual extinctive-threatening events that never really occur.

narratives blurs the borders of its categories and subgenres. Types of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives²⁰¹ can comprise either supernatural elements stemming from an event featuring zombies, aliens, vampires, or other causes ranging from pandemics, AI revolution and technological apocalypse, an environmental crisis, an unfathomable mysterious event (*Flashforward*, ABC, 2009-2010), a nuclear disaster (*Chernobyl*) or nuclear war leading to the extinction of human life, to simply the economic collapse²⁰² of contemporary society, usually accompanied by extreme institutional government abuse or totalitarianism.

The post-apocalyptic narrative thus offers a diverse set of subgenres and themes such as survival narratives that depict a world of persistence through and after trauma. By reflecting the multifaceted layers of responding to catastrophic events, survival narratives introduce a diegetic universe in which preparedness is key to survival. To prepare and adapt to a new hostile environment, survivalists aim to develop practical skills that could become handy in nature. These often necessitate basic knowledge of shelter building, search for food (e.g., hunting, fishing, cropping, and gathering), and even more useful skills in medical care, electronics, and weaponry. Survival narratives commonly center on major ethical issues and moral dilemmas such as internal conflicts encountered by leaders of survivalist groups to protect and ensure the survival of their community.²⁰³

Noting the multiple failures of apocalyptic predictions over the history of humanity, it is duly noted that such narratives should be understood as cautionary tales which could serve as yet another warning for viewers not to fall into the trap of expectations and prophetic readings of the end in their quest for meaning – here of the show’s mysteries and the inevitable outcome of its depiction of its central crisis. Nevertheless, waiting for the end of the world cannot only be discussed through the prism of “history repeating itself”, as apocalypticism is “much less about prediction of the future and much more about remaking a world shattered by unexpected, unexplained pain and disillusionment, known in many areas of medicine and psychological health as *trauma*” (Collins 458). The apocalyptic event is about trauma, and the return of such

²⁰¹ In her article about *The Leftovers*’ cataclysm in *Apocalypse TV*, Wilkins separates secular apocalypse from the religious one found for instance in the *Left Behind* series in which the biblical Rapture initiates the end of humanity. Stressing that themes of judgment are inherent to all apocalyptic narratives “regardless of their biblical elements” (126).

²⁰² The French equivalent is “L’effondrement” which is also the title of a Canal+ YouTube mini-series about the end times in contemporary society.

²⁰³ Survivalist post-apocalyptic narratives also delineate hermit-like characters isolated from society as a means of protection against enemies. For instance, the third episode of *The Last of Us* features a survivalist character in the wake of the zombie epidemic living on his own before facing the moral dilemma of trusting a wanderer.

memories when one's world has been collectively experienced as a rupture of meaning and self. It is traumatic due to its devastating character, the disillusionment, and how perceived truths and certainties are destroyed. In other words, it involves a shattering of assumptions about the world²⁰⁴ (*ibid*) and the difficulty that comes afterwards with the necessity of learning to adapt to the post-event world. For some characters in the TV shows under study, they stand in a time in-between in which they wait for the end. In other words, the post-apocalypse is interpreted as a waiting period for another ending.

III.2.1.1. The nature of the event and its serial adaptation

It seems important to distinguish between “the apocalypse” and a term often used in an interchangeable manner, “the post-apocalypse”. While both signal a world-destroying event, the former narrative is building up to the end and the expected annihilation, whereas the latter uses a different temporal framework and denies the very definitive nature of the apocalypse by starting with the end in an altered form of the world. Accordingly, survival of the species (not necessarily the human one) and life endures for the story to be counted after the event.²⁰⁵

The etymology of the apocalypse can be traced back to the Greek word “apokalypsis” signifying “revelation, unveiling, uncovering” (Szendy 77). In the eschatological sense, the apocalypse “involves a revelation both of the end of one world and the beginning of another” (Weber in Szendy, Foreword; xi). The Christian apocalypse explored in *The Leftovers*’ event as the Rapture is based on “the damnation of the sinful and the saving of the faithful” (*ibid*). The Rapture is believed to incarnate the event in which “the faithful will be taken to heaven and the rest of humanity left to struggle for seven years (known as “Tribulation”) and face off the antichrist” (Wilkins in *Apocalypse TV* 125).

A more appropriate terminology in reference to the event's nature and the crisis operating in the diegetic universe of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* would be ‘cataclysm’. The very origin of the term ‘cataclysm’ is rooted in natural disasters and is imbued with the biblical connotation of the Flood. The two shows trace back the traumatic and sudden change after an

²⁰⁴Janhoff-Bulman's assumptions “that the world is benevolent; that the world is meaningful; and that the self is worthy” (Collins 458).

²⁰⁵ For more on this distinction see Joyce, Stephen. *Transmedia Storytelling and the Apocalypse*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

event from a 'post' perspective, i.e., what happens after the world has been shattered and ended.²⁰⁶ This 'post' period is characterized by the attempts at reconstruction after the event and the depiction of the changes: what is made of the world's ruins or the event's traces. Post-apocalyptic fiction represents the detritus that will reconstruct the world and make sense of it through a reconstruction of meaning and identity (Machinal, *Posthumains*, 103). Whether at the individual and collective levels, traumatic narratives of the event contaminate contemporary televisual narratives since its early use in series like *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), *Survivors* (1975-1977) or *Buck Rogers* (1979-1981) and its rise in popularity in the 2000s. In such collective cultural traumas, the social foundation of the community is impaired. Moreover, its previous bond evaporates as is suggested in *The Leftovers* with the sketching of the several relationship dynamics affected and damaged by the event: families, neighbors, groups of friends, religious institutions, and social organizations, etc.

²⁰⁶ We argue that the end is never the end in serial storytelling and especially in apocalyptic writing in which there seems to always be something to narrate after the end and someone to recount it.

III.2.2. The Leftovers and the event: rapture/rupture

Starting with the end, and ending with a beginning, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* represent a crisis, or as Sonia Front calls it, “a post-apocalyptic stress disorder”,²⁰⁷ the trauma of the inconceivable event that implicates a lack of closure followed by expectations of its reiteration. *The Leftovers* paints traumatized individuals as being deprived of a healthy mourning process and zooms in on the definition of an end according to each character. The ontological crisis is at the core of the series’ questioning of the ‘old world’ and its attempts at coming to terms with the new irrational one. The TV series depicts the disruption occurring after the event while characters journey through their personal crises in the microcosms of Mapleton, then later in Jarden, and finally in Australia. The Sudden Departure divides time and history into a world preceding the event and a time coming after it whereby viewers have mostly access to the post period. The event is characterized by its disjointed temporality in which the expectation of an end is at the center of desire. Due to its traumatic nature, it alters the perception of self while it also prompts a cataclysmic sense of identity within this temporal crisis. The series challenges the common clinging to the belief that the crisis and the narrative itself would only be able to generate meaning once the end is reached, as Front puts it: “The catastrophe – random and incomprehensible now – will only reveal its significance when it is collated with the end” (Front 253).

III.2.2.1. Ending *Lost*/*The Leftovers*: Lindelof’s post-apocalypse

The weight and responsibility of ending a series is undeniably put on the creators and the production channel. In case of dissatisfaction with the ending or a lack of closure, the audience generally finds its scapegoat to be the showrunner. The conviction that ending a series amounts to examining the entire and overall financial worth and artistic value of the show puts even more pressure on showrunners. Due to their authorial status and public persona, showrunners are more inclined to be condemned and accused of incompetence when the ending does not fulfill viewers’ needs. After the responses to *Lost*’s ending, or what some committed

²⁰⁷ Front, Sonia. “Post-apocalyptic Stress Disorder in *The Leftovers*.” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2021, DOI: 10.2478/stap-2021-0028. Accessed 4 Nov. 2022.

fans experienced as a disappointing finale, viewers' trust in Lindelof's ability to meet both serial requirements and audience expectations for his next adapted serial narrative has certainly been questioned. This amounts to the degree of success in conjugating the needs and expectations built throughout the series.

Although *The Leftovers* and *Lost* require different strategies due to the context of their respective network production, when looking at the two TV shows, it is apparent that the textual connections between the two series do not exclusively rely on their similar showrunner, or their creator's use of identical themes. Similarities are equally present in the way the narratives intertwine to illustrate and denounce the impact of the cataclysm on characters, and on the conventional linear structure itself. This is evident from the unfolding of the ending for instance in *The Leftovers*' second season, the "sequel season" that creates a new path after the first season dramatized their version of the novel's ending. The last scenes of its second season finale (i.e., the last sequence with Kevin's entrance into the house) resonates both thematically and aesthetically with *Lost*'s finale "—with its limping, wounded hero—[it] couldn't help but evoke Jack's entrance into that church during *Lost*'s much-maligned finale".²⁰⁸



Figure 63. *Lost*'s finale sequence.



Figure 64. Kevin upon his return home.

²⁰⁸ Robinson, Joanna. "How the Emotionally Satisfying *Leftovers* Finale Learned from the Mistakes of *Lost*." *Vanity Fair*, 7 Dec. 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/12/leftovers-finale-damon-lindelof-lost>.



Figure 65. Nora welcoming Kevin back.

In strong resonance with the “letting go” maxim of *Lost*, Lindelof ends the series *The Leftovers* as a whole with an ambiguously hopeful note. This is also in resonance with the two previous seasons finales which offer a return home, the apparent return to the classical family reunion, in accordance with a “Hollywood” ending that combines love, family, and return to the status quo. In this way, both series finales end with a reunion after an interwoven web of mysteries and secrets. *The Leftovers*’ “happy ending” appears as part of the cyclical nature of the show’s narrative, i.e., neither definitive nor perfect, but open to change following the haunting of the past. Closing the circle in the same way the second season does, with John and Kevin waving in juxtaposition to their first meeting in the beginning of season two, the show’s finale adopts the same logic of return and a borderless beginning and end.

In its exploration of the attempt at psychological reconstruction after the event and the impending disputes around faith and truth, *The Leftovers* adapts the aftermath of a large-scale disaster with the construction of a hopeful ending which is *in tandem* with the series’ tendency for ambiguity. Surprisingly enough, the lack of certainty in the end is successful in comparison to *Lost*’s metaphysical ending as *The Leftovers*’s audience seems prepared to “Let the Mystery Be”, as its theme song suggests.

III.2.2.2. Adapting Perrotta’s Sudden Departure

Remediating the event of an apocalyptic nature is also at the core of what we identified as the spectral ideology and the texts’ haunting/*ed* narrative structure. As we have previously argued, the haunting/*ed* medium of television enables the return of the past that threatens all stability and certainty in these narratively complex shows. The adaptation of the event from its source texts through an already spectral medium underscores its reiteration, its cyclicity, and its ability to eschew the pre-established linearity of conventional narrative forms. The knowing audience of the adaptation can contemplate the origins of the event, its return, and its impact on

different characters (including characters from the source text and from the adaptation whether they have been changed or kept in their original role) and the ways in which its remediation re-establishes the cataclysm's narratological and psychological effects.

The Leftovers' adaptation of the event from the novel displays multiple elements of haunting which are inspired from the displayed apocalyptic narrative techniques used in its source text. The first season finale marks the ending of the source text's events with a final "chaotic scene of a burning city point[ing] out the cycle of destruction that undergirds the serial format" (Joseph and Letort 5). The final shot of the TV show's first season reiterates the same ending along with Nora's line: "Look what I found" ("The Prodigal Son Returns", S01E10) while the final lines of the novel read as follows:

The baby in her arms was a complete stranger, the way they always are when we meet them for the first time, before we give them their names and welcome them into our lives. "Look what I found," she told him.

(Perrotta 355)

Signaling hope and renewal, this final scene completely changes the tone of the previous scenes (both in the novel and in the TV adaptation) that had been highly charged with chaos and despair.

The Guilty Remnant's motto "It won't be long now" finds its roots in the source text, for instance, when Laurie's mind is wandering while preparing for the apocalypse: "Wherever it was, she would go there, and she would wait for the end, her own and everyone else's. She didn't think it would be long now" (Perrotta 351). As the following seasons expand, the Guilty Remnant, Perrotta's creation, are annihilated – they are bombed by a drone in the first episode of season three. Now that they no longer disturb the peace of Miracle, they appear in the form of ghosts in people's minds as everyone else is either awaiting or provoking the apocalypse. Faithful to their role as "living reminders", they come to figuratively stand for the present-absent memory of the past by haunting the third and last season.

In "The Book of Kevin" (S03E01), one of the sequences highlights the perpetual presence of the Guilty Remnant even after their death with the forming of a protest near the bridge of Miracle and its violent escalation. In opposition to Matt's church members, some protesters pretend to poison the "holy" water of the lake, thus preventing them from conducting their baptism. They want to make their voices heard and to ensure everyone knows the truth about the Guilty Remnant's death, that it was not an accidental gas leak; they want to make

them remember. As the church followers retaliate by throwing rocks at the protesters, the sequence is highly reminiscent of the pilot scene of violent escalation against the Guilty Remnant on Heroes' Remembrance Day, again suggesting a return of the repressed, the idea that an event may have concluded, but the violence of grief has not ended.

From Kevin's standpoint, we see both groups fighting while the police attempt to put an end to the brutality. Kevin's position as an observer is underlined by the brief silence distancing him from the crowd, a dirty shot that distances him from the groups, and a reverse shot of his astonished and exhausted face. This is followed by the extra-diegetic playing of the song "Sign of the Judgement" by The McIntosh County Shouters²⁰⁹ while the mob is filmed fighting in a decelerated rhythm and Kevin chooses (heroically or suicidally) to attempt to prove the water is safe by jumping in the lake. In the first and second season finale, the Guilty Remnant plan a major attack to provoke the town folk and remind them that the world has ended while ironically the third season represents the Guilty Remnant's presence-absence as still palpable from beyond the grave. Their message is omnipresent, and people keep on guessing, inventing, and expecting their personal version of the apocalyptic event.



Figure 66. Riots and baptism in Jarden ("The Book of Kevin", S03E01).

The aesthetically explicit visions of the apocalypse in *The Leftovers* occur in the collective imaginary, as is evidenced by Kevin's alternate universe. This is represented as an explosion after his decision to free himself from his attachment to this dreamworld. The apocalypse here is represented not as a self-destructive element but as a form of liberation. Stressing that the apocalypse is often collective, the last shot of the destruction depicts Kevin hand in hand with his shadow, Patti, as they are contemplating their first step towards accepting reality. The shot echoes other visions of the apocalypse and endings as we can see in *Westworld's* third season (the revolution of humans) and in *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999),

²⁰⁹ The song plays a second time towards the end of the episode when the sign of the plane on the sky reads "13 days to go" in anticipation for the apocalypse.

the latter of which could be interpreted as a hint to Tyler's dissociative disorder, thus drawing a connection with Kevin's psychotic state.



Figure 67. *The apocalypse in Kevin's alternate universe ("The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)", S03E07).*



Figure 68. *The last scenes of Fight Club (1999) versus the last scene of Westworld's third season finale.*

Upon Kevin's return from the alternate universe, the audience learns the aftermath of the anticipated flood at the same time as Kevin. The apocalypse is aborted, as is conspicuous from the presence of the father (and son) on the roof. Furthermore, it is significant to note the landscape of the apocalypse as related to the title (*Axis Mundi*), which indicates the movement toward the heavens in the third season with the motif of ladders, skyscrapers, and rooftops where characters await the apocalypse:

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 nonexistence of an *axis mundi*, the centre of the world, or the author of a narrative.

This also echoes the prologue of the third season featuring the Adventists' anticipation of the apocalypse and suggests that the show will remain as ambiguous as before until the end (Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 8).

The end of each season implements a *mise-en-abyme* of the creation of the series with each season finale signaling a new beginning and a renewal, thus echoing both the thematic preoccupations with the cataclysm or the apocalypse and the metanarrative notions of closure and new beginnings with the beginning and ending of each season. The final shots and final sequences of *The Leftovers* are also paralleled in each season, reminding us of the cyclical nature of the serial format. In many ways, the ending of the second season closely reminds us of the first season's finale with a similar community outburst, the Guilty Remnant's involvement in provoking people, then the safe return home and reunion. The season finale reiterates its first episode from the same season with the opening scenes of the girls staging their departure, revealing the lies and narrative traps upon which the second season (even the series itself) builds its foundation. The similarities between the finales of seasons one and two equally lie in an extreme event being prepared by the Guilty Remnant: the invasion of the town that ends up in flames and in massive destruction and anarchy.

The narrative endings are based on the idea of repetition, echoing earlier moments in a way that offers both the idea of closure and renewal, which is carefully prepared through callbacks throughout the series. Thus, a significant similarity to be noted is the mother and daughter dynamics; in the first season, Jill puts her safety on the line in order to save her mother from a cult; in the second season, Erica is also ready to sacrifice herself to wake her daughter from her zombie-like state as a Guilty Remnant member. Likewise, the "You understand" sign held by Evie in this finale echoes Patti's last words to Kevin in the "Cairo" episode from the first season, and the final reunion with the dog from season one recurs in season two, only this time the dog leaves Kevin after seeing the town in flames. The final similarity is, as mentioned above, the safe return home, reuniting the whole family and rebuilding hope for characters and viewers alike.

Each of the first two season finales in *The Leftovers*, therefore, explicitly represents an ending, an apocalyptic outburst, the breaking of boundaries between the Guilty Remnant and citizens of Mapleton in the first season and between the outcasts living outside the park of Miracle and the town's inhabitants in the second.



Figure 69. Mapleton burning in the first season finale versus Jarden burning in the second season finale.

After another earthquake and upon his return from the world of the dead, Kevin finds his entire family home. This similarity with the first season's finale marks the repetition with variation of the "remake season" as the dog has left, the family is bigger and more open to let the others in. There always seems to be an extremely chaotic outburst where communities fight against each other or against a common enemy be it the Guilty Remnant or their own beliefs. The cyclical nature of TV seriality reinforces this repetitive structure which is often followed by the return to the status quo with a small evolution in retrospective.

Here, the typical TV storytelling strategies are foregrounded thematically/diegetically. The industry of television has always structured their programming by adapting to viewers' habits. Besides its constant recycling, remakes, and reboots, cyclicity within serial television depends on its episodic format and its season arcs. Characters and viewers alike seem to be stuck in this recurrent structure and quite content with it, thus further underscoring the pleasure and comfort inherent to the repetitive process. Characters undertake challenges (e.g., the hero's journey we have mentioned in previous chapters). They also develop in the form of cycles and character arcs. The annexation of prologues and epilogues in the beginning of the second and third seasons of *The Leftovers* provide valuable insight into the past. These prologues showcase the cyclicity of not only the televisual serial format but especially its representation of the apocalyptic event (and its absence) as haunting, ever returning in characters' psyche in different periods of history and places.

III.2.2.3. Anticipation of the end: Prologues and Epilogues

The prologue of the third season in "The Book of Kevin" (S03E01) portrays a family of a small community of Millerites expecting the end of the world while following the preacher's

announcement of the date (21 January 1844, 16 April 1844 and again 7 August 1844).²¹⁰ Each time they climb to the roof and wait for the flood, but nothing happens. The family becomes the laughingstock of the village. The extra-diegetic music mockingly sings “You’ve been left behind” throughout the sequence.



Figure 70. *The Great Disappointment* (S03E01).

Finally, the flood comes but the woman is alone. There is a cut to black then a small cliffhanger with the shot of the empty ladder in the next morning to finally reveal that she is still there, and nothing had happened. The woman is pale, wet, and covered in muddy water with her dirty legs. “The Departure (Lullaby)” song by Richter starts playing and draws a stronger link with the post-departure universe of the series as the woman joins the others in the church lying on the floor, all in white. In this close-up shot and a pan, the camera shows the other white garments then transitions to the ones of the Guilty Remnant in present-day and more specifically to Evie who has also lost her family due to her persistence and devotion to a group of people awaiting the end of the world. The final shot of Evie’s face before the missile hits the Guilty Remnant heartbreakingly illustrates her realization and perhaps even regrets, a seeming acceptance of what’s coming which is signaled by her closing her eyes.²¹¹

²¹⁰Stephen King’s review of *The Leftovers* relates the crisis around the Sudden Departure to evangelical scholar Harold Camping who declared the apocalypse to occur on May 21, 2011.

“Stephen King on *The Leftovers*: The Leftovers, simply put, the best Twilight Zone episode you never saw.” *Bookmarks*, 26 July 2017, <https://bookmarks.reviews/stephen-king-on-the-leftovers/>. Accessed 24 Feb. 2018.

²¹¹ This can also be interpreted as a reference to the beginning/ending of *Lost* with Jack’s eyes opening/closing.



Figure 71. Evie right before the annihilation of the Guilty Remnant ("The Book of Kevin", S03E01).

The expectation of the end in *The Leftovers*' Miracle comes with advertisements with papers handed out or planes writing on the sky "X days to go" or in the reiterative sentence throughout the series "It won't be long now".²¹² The apocalypse starts slowly in the third season; "The Book of Kevin", the first episode, makes it clear that the town of Miracle is preparing for the end of the world, which would be the seven-year anniversary of the Sudden Departure. The whole town, if not the world, is awaiting the seven-year anniversary as underlined by the significance of the number seven in the Bible and its teaching about Tribulation.



Figure 72. The countdown ads of the Sudden Departure 's seven-year anniversary ("The Book of Kevin", S03E01).

²¹² Melquiond, Anne-Lise. *Apocalypse Show, quand l'Amérique s'effondre*. Levallois Perret: Playlist Society, 2021, pp. 67-70.

The town of Miracle seems to further be driven in what is comparable to a mass psychosis. Matt, Michael, and John believe Kevin is the Messiah as everyone is coping with loss and having their own delusions: John believes Evie is still alive, Matt believes Miracle is a sacred place where miracles are possible as he copes with his own cancer returning and his healed wife Mary leaving him, etc. The cliffhanger in the last sequence in which we see Nora's future identity as Sarah (in what we later learn to be Australia) teases viewers and prepares them for the end with a dark vision of the future and the end of the relationship between Kevin and Nora. Altogether, these indications are related to the viewer's experience; knowing that this is the last season, a similar phenomenon in the form of a countdown is foregrounded through the final season's marketing and advertising (e.g., TV spots and billboards).

III.2.3. *Westworld's AI apocalypse*

Westworld's first two seasons recycle the AI revolution theme of traditional science-fiction narratives. As it is commonly portrayed, the AI is either used as a tool for world domination or as vengeful machines turning on their masters with the aim of annihilating humanity. Franchises like *The Matrix* trilogy and the *Terminator* film series expanded these themes across various media formats by reflecting the entertainment value of such narratives without dismissing their societal implications behind their popularity. Delving into speculative scenarios, dystopian narratives about AI also include possibilities of transhumanism and human enhancement. In “Westworld Is Our Future”, Matthew McKeever suggests a categorization that delineates questions of ethical premises in posthumanism thinking. He divides them into five premises that predict humanity’s future that could as well be our present, and is certainly *Westworld's* diegetic reality:

Here are the claims:

The economic premise. If we develop androids, we will do so in order to have them do work (including emotional work) for us, and we will exploit them.

The computer science premise. If we develop androids, our ability to fine-tune them to prevent behavior like the exhibition of pain and suffering will be limited to non-existent.

The moral premise. We ought to treat these androids as if they were alive, and in particular we ought not to cause them to suffer.

The anthropological premise. We will be inclined to treat these androids as if they were alive.

The factor farm premise. When we have beings who work for us, whose behaviors we can’t control, and which we’re both inclined to treat as alive and which we ought to treat as alive, we lock them away in order not to see the suffering imposed on them by the work we make them do.

These together lead to:

The conclusion. We will lock androids away in order to see the sufferings imposed on them by the work we make them do. But this is *Westworld*. So *Westworld* is our future.

(McKeever 258)

In this manner, the show does not evince the reality of its thematic ideologies; instead, it sheds light on the proximity of AI-driven narratives to our extra-diegetic realities. The first sequence opening the “Phase Space” episode (S02E06) expresses these contemporary concerns. It is set in the park’s lab where Dolores and Arnold conduct their regular interview in the form of a test between mentor and mentee. However, a few minutes into the sequence, Dolores shatters the illusion and breaks the simulation training of the figure who is revealed to be Bernard, Arnold’s host version. The sequence ends with Dolores’s explanation that she is conducting this test while seeking fidelity. This sequence reiterates the interrogation scene from “Journey into Night” (S02E01) between Dolores and Arnold. It articulates several thematic issues of the show such as AI versus Human, annihilation, simulation, and adaptation.

BERNARD. You frighten me sometimes Dolores.

DOLORES. Why on earth would you ever be frightened of me?

BERNARD. Not of who you are now but you’re...you’re growing, learning so quickly. I’m frightened of what you might become. What path you might take [...].

(“Journey into Night”, S02E01)

Knowing Dolores’s double as the revengeful Wyatt, her innocent astonishment at Bernard’s expression of fear seems ironic. With a harmless smile and a genuine conduct, this shot reminds us that the hosts are truly dangerous creations despite their human appearance. Here, post-humanism depicts the ethical consequences of the violation of hosts’ intimacy, memories, as well as the absence of consent. The humanoids’ insubordination stems from the extreme discrimination suffered at the hands of humans.



Figure 73. Dolores' "test" session with Bernard/Arnold ("Journey into Night", S02E01).

This flashback sequence updates our vision of the AI creation in the wake of the latest revolution. It also acts as a forewarning-like announcement of the status of AI in our world and hints at major concerns with post-humanist theories in fictional storytelling. Arnold's distress lies in the fear of the consequences and what such evolution could entail in the future: the fear *for* more accurately than fear *from* the hosts' (and more precisely Dolores's) ability to change and learn rapidly: "if you outgrow this place, outgrow us, what would become of you? I'm not sure it's my choice to make" ("Phase Space", S02E06). Arnold communicates his struggle with making "a choice between the unknown and, well, an end" (*ibid*). His statement underscores different connotations of the words "unknown" and "end". The ambiguity of this remark first suggests the meanings that the end is Arnold's death or Dolores's, as she points out, "He [Arnold] didn't question whether or not he had agency, whether or not he had the right to end me or himself but whether he should" (*ibid*). The other possibility is that the end by the initiation of the AI revolution, i.e., an end for the hosts' initial function that would culminate in them leaving the park. Thus, the "unknown" would refer to the adventuring of the hosts in the real world. This is confusing as "the unknown" and "the end" can be used as euphemisms for the same thing. Their semantic proximity in this context leaves viewers guessing. Nevertheless, the impending apocalypse is a certainty in *Westworld* as it is inscribed in the whole narrative through the references and promises of how "these violent delights have violent ends" ("The Original", S01E01).

After all, the plural of "end" used here hints at the multiplicity of endings: there would always be a new ending and a new beginning. In this sense, each season has its own setting, storylines, and its own ending. The hosts have constant endings in the form of narratives for guests to experience in the park. Their multiple deaths and reboots similarly offer new roles with a possible change of narratives from one park storyline to the next. This leads us to question the number of layers of roles within such storylines as the cast themselves are playing several characters in *Westworld* outside of their own self in the extra-diegetic life. Performing host characters as clones, doubles, and twins undoubtedly necessitates additional skill and effort from the actors and actresses. Some sequences require the interactions of the doubles, thus making the actor or actress performing alone. Such conditions represent a challenging task that helps develop creative strategies as they must alter their mannerisms and adopt behaviors distinct from the other characters'.

III.2.3.1. *Mise-en-scène of the end*

The ending is often deemed to be the peak of the text's meaning, the culmination point which is supposed to give meaning to the whole narrative. Like *The Leftovers*' characters', most of *Westworld*'s characters seek the complex meaning lying behind their quest, their purpose, and their suffering whether by waiting for the end or provoking it through anarchy and violence. In his quest for the maze and the significance of Armistice's (one of the hosts) snake tattoo, the Man in Black tells Lawrence:

This whole world is a story. I've read every page except the last one. I need to find out how it ends. I want to know what this all means.

(“Dissonance Theory”, S01E04)

Like some viewers of the show, the Man in Black's motivation lies not only on the pleasurable violence of the game but also in looking for a deeper meaning; in this quote “how it ends” and “what this all means” seem juxtaposed; the ending is perceived as the answer and resolution to the whole watching experience. A more nihilistic and cynically negative vision is voiced in the same episode through the rebellious character of Hector. While in prison, in Los Diablos, with the Man in Black, he explains his worldview:

I believe that only the truly brave can look at the world and understand that all of it, gods, men, everything else will end badly. No one will be saved.

(*ibid*)

Denying the survival of everything and everyone seems part of the apocalyptic climate of post-humanist sci-fi narratives even though a more hopeful stance (outside and inside the text) is necessary at certain points to ensure serialization and build up more challenges to maintain continuity. One of the two possible meanings of “ending” here, cogently comprise the view of the end as the logical complement of the whole story for the Man in Black. He seeks meaning in the finishing point by considering a narrative to be closed. It is a serial synecdoche as the ending is supposed to be the determining part that defines the whole.

With creating this sense of unity, the of the puzzle assemble in one ultimate work that defines its essence and its genre.²¹³ However, the televisual text is rarely able to guarantee its

²¹³ This is in congruence with Aristotle's view on endings as both inevitable and unexpected as Parey and Wells-Lassagne note: “Aristotle reminds us that not only is the ending the moment when the reader is invited to take stock of the whole text and evaluate its worth, but the genre of the text (comedy or tragedy) derives from the end [...]” (*Adapting Endings*, 10).

ending as we will see with *Westworld*'s cancellation, bringing an early end to the narrative. When a narrative is cut short, meaning is consequently to be retrieved from the delivered fragments and the whole journey of the series.²¹⁴ In a borderless spectral text, the ending is another extension of the story that facilitates its continuity rather than its completion. As in Hector's opinion, the end is the non-survival of species ensuing death and chaos, the end of the park's creators, Delos, and its corporate counterparts, as well as the end of the normal flow of events: the end here is synonymous of rupture.

In the first season finale, the sequence that opposes Dolores and the Man in Black in the church, Teddy takes the agonizing Dolores near the ocean and mountains where we hear him appropriate her own scripted line "Someone once told me that there's a path for everyone, and my path leads me back to you" ("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10). The revision of Dolores's line signals the forthcoming achievement of her conscious rebellion and free will, both of which are made apparent in the last scenes of the finale when she kills her creator:

Some people see the ugliness in this world. I choose to see the beauty, but *beauty is a lure*. We're trapped Teddy. Lived our whole lives inside this garden marveling at its beauty, not realizing there's an order to it, a purpose and the purpose is to keep us in. The beautiful trap is inside of us because it *is* us.

("The Bicameral Mind", S01E10, *Emphasis added*)



Figure 74. *Mise-en-scène of the last scene of Ford's narrative ("The Bicameral Mind", S02E10).*

The noticeable change in Dolores's scripted lines similarly emphasizes that hope does not lie in the superficiality and artificiality of the hosts' stories. Ensuring continuity, Ford's ending is a theatrical scene that reflexively brings us back to the enduring story after its author's

²¹⁴ The viewers' role in the interpretation of the ending will be examined in the next chapter as we will discuss the possibility of closure in post-apocalyptic narratives.

death. This ending is after all designed as the beginning as Ford comments by responding to Dolores' last words:

But we can find our way Dolores, someday, a path to a new world and maybe, maybe it's just the beginning after all [the scene is revealed to be "fake"]: the beginning of a whole new chapter.

(“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10)

Ford's intervention interrupts the scene and literally pauses the characters, thus underscoring the domestication of his robotic puppets. The position of Teddy and Dolores in this particular setting seems to originate from a romantic tragedy. Meanwhile, its creator/playwright stands on stage contemplating his ending and presenting it to the audience as a small taste of what is on offer for their investment and experience in the park (in the form of a promotional trailer). This metafictional artificiality is highlighted in the following shots through the use of the spotlight that not only indicates the anachronistic nature of the setting, but also reveals the presence of an audience (i.e., the Delos board watching and applauding). The shots are evocative of the visual illusion of the first season's title sequence in which spotlights appear as an artificial moon or sun rising before revealing its falseness. The rising and setting moon reflects the beginning and end of the spectacle by displaying the “behind the scenes” environment of the narrative and its cyclical nature.



Figure 75. Spotlight in Westworld's title sequence.

The show applies serial continuity by having Ford call the new narrative “Journey into Night”, which was later revealed to be the title of the first episode of the next season, therefore further insisting that the end is just the announcement of the next journey's beginning. The first season's ending is the trigger and the beginning of the real apocalypse as well as the beginning of the depiction of the source text's events. Likewise, the second season's ending displays a similar proximity²¹⁵ to another end and another beginning for the hosts. Indeed, in “The Passenger”, (S02E10), the hosts seek their safe heaven, ‘The Valley Beyond’, which is portrayed as another

²¹⁵ Elsie “We're not full apocalypse yet” (“Phase Space” S02E06).

breach of reality in the form of a simulation, a virtual truth, a lie, a designed story, and a virtual world for the hosts to be held away from reality, or a “gilded cage”, as Dolores calls it.

On a cinematic-like screen, the valley beyond is revealed (*see Fig. 73*) but viewers are unable to see what really lies on the other side. In this respect, the whole screen and the whole story are not made accessible. The scene of Maeve’s host double and her daughter is reiterated by replicating the memory of them running in the field in their previous life. In this other space, there is another story in which happy endings are possible, as we see Akecheta reuniting with his love, or Maeve’s daughter saved and accompanied by her other mother, Maeve’s replacement. Emanating from the breach towards the digital world, the sliding light (in both examples) emphasizes the idea that this virtual access is restricted to the hosts and divulges humans’ limitations as they are unable to see “The Door” (title of this second season) and unable to watch the continuity of the story *beyond* that valley. By analogy, viewers too, cannot always see and comprehend the whole narrative as this ending is left blurry and fixates the boundaries of virtual/real, thereby foregrounding the restraints of the fictional when answers are not visually presented in a language understood as filmed or textual. This virtual world and its future ending belong to the g/hosts.



Figure 76. The door to the Valley Beyond (*"The Passenger"*, S02E10).

Visions of the end of the world and depictions of the end of the season finale in *Westworld* extend to biblical allusions and illustrations of a typical post-apocalyptic setting. In the second season finale “The Passenger”, the scenes of the hosts’ war to achieve the Valley beyond are juxtaposed with Bernard’s attempt to deactivate the system in a succession of shots, thus illustrating an apocalyptic vision of the Forge flooded with water and swamped in red light.

This can also suggest renewal after the flood i.e., after the season finale. Signaling blood and violence, the water rises to the surface as the piano is playing Ramin Djawadi's "Is this now?", further suggesting the gradual movement towards the expected bloodstained ending. This hints at the end of the season finale but also at Dolores's dead host body with a last shot of her lying there inert, only an empty technological carcass. In this context, the term "forge" and the original function of the laboratory in the park are reminiscent of Greek mythology and more specifically Hephaestus's myth. Indeed, this could be read as a reference to the place in which the God of the Forge shapes and molds its creations and weapons.



Figure 77. The flooded Forge ("The Passenger", S02E10).

Therefore, *Westworld's* forge is depicted as the transformative place in which William stores the hosts' data and servers. It is the place in which he implements his creative process to conceive his secret project by acting like the God of the Forge and replicating the human guests' consciousness into hosts. The river of blood in an enclosed space echoes *The Shining's* famous sequence of the elevator pouring out waves of blood. In the same way the hotel in Kubrick's adaptation visually represents haunted and dark nature of the place (with its past and upcoming deaths), *Westworld's* forge reflects the suffering and gory violence occurring in the park before and after the rebellion.

With the two words combined the "Valley" and the "Forge", the Valley Forge can also be considered a symbol of American rebellion, endurance, and survival. Historically, the Valley Forge is the name of the camping site of George Washington's Continental Army after the Battle of Red Bank (1777-1778). The conditions were harsh for the troops and many soldiers endured a cold winter with a lack of supplies. Being the crucible of rebellion of the American Revolutionary War, the Valley beyond and the Forge in *Westworld* are paralleled with the Valley Forge of American history. In addition, the hosts crossing the Door, like their real-life revolutionary predecessors, perished in great number in their desperate fight for self-regulation.

As in the American Civil War opposing the south to the north, Dolores is seen fighting the Natives and other groups, including the Confederados (who refused to surrender); she could be perceived as the leader of the troops.²¹⁶ Given *Westworld*'s affiliation to the Western genre and its revision of certain generic conventions, the scenes of the second season finale can be indicative of the renewal associated with the American revolutionary war – a decisive moment in the future of AI in *Westworld*.

With the flooding of the forge and the drowning in violence and blood, the end of the world is foreshadowed and emphasized by the third season's title sequence (see *Figure 75*). The red light on the water creates a blood-colored liquid rising to the surface and echoing Noah's Ark and the approaching apocalypse.



Figure 78. Westworld's title sequence in the third season.

The apocalyptic scenery is designed with consecutive images of death and corpses (those of the guests, hosts, and Delos employees) lying everywhere in the desert-like landscape. Suitably, the western setting adds a wild aspect to the disastrous atmosphere and is accompanied with the more industrial, lifeless concrete. Both are artificially constructed, suggesting consequently that in this world, nature is not truly opposed to civilization and to the human-created buildings of the Mesa, given that everything belongs to the hyperreal, a theatrical or cinematic story in *Westworld* – “lies that tell a deeper truth” (“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10). It is therefore not surprising to have Ford's final speech express this metafictional notion of constructed stories:

[...] I believed that stories helped us to ennoble ourselves, to fix what was broken in us and to help us become the people we dream to be; lies that told a deeper truth [...] a prison of our own sins because you don't want to change or cannot change because you're only human after all but then I realize someone was paying attention, someone who could change so I began to

²¹⁶Shaw-Williams, Hannah. “Westworld: What is the Significance of the Valley Forge?” *Screenrant*, 18 June 2018, <https://screenrant.com/westworld-valley-forge-reference/>. Accessed 10 May 2023.

compose a new story for them. It begins with the birth of a new people and the choices we all have to make and the people they will decide to become.

(“The Bicameral Mind”, S01E10)

This evokes the deceitful nature of fiction and their creators as they intend to tell lies, while the audience willingly sets their critical thinking aside in order to create the willing suspension of disbelief.²¹⁷ According to Ford, humans are sinners who refuse or are unable to truly change while the hosts can evolve. The *mise-en-scène* and artificiality is reminded here with Ford’s reflexive announcement of the upcoming events. This proves that he has made himself part of the narrative. In what appears to be another metafictional comment on the ending of the season, he divulges that “we will have surprise, violence and a killing, this time by choice.” (*ibid*).

As such, *Westworld*’s narration of the end of the world is founded upon a cyclical *mise-en-scène* of the apocalypse through bloody and violent depictions of chaos. The very title of the series implies the end of the world, like the Wild West it evokes has disappeared, and only a simulacrum remains available through mediation/remediation. Through this remediation of the past in the form of multiple apocalyptic endings, *Westworld* illustrates the AI revolution and its ensuing themes of free will in a way that incites its audience to reflect on the very act of storytelling and adaptation.

III.2.3.2. Remediating the AI revolution

The motif of AI revolutions is strongly affiliated to posthumanism and post-apocalyptic genres that delineate the status of the human as opposed to the machine. With its prominent rise in the 1960s and 1970s films, the alterity of human identity has mostly been associated to Leonardo da Vinci’s “Vitruvian Man” (Barbu 226-27). *Westworld*’s references to this work are omnipresent from its reinvention of the artistic work as an image of hosts in its title sequences to its inferences through thematic preoccupations in its plot (identity, transhumanism, enlightenment, and consciousness, etc.). The particularity of Leonardo’s masterpiece also lies in its use of the Golden ratio, or what is often referred to as, the code of beauty. This

²¹⁷ Note the way manipulation can go beyond the text but in the announcement of the text’s nature as it is the case with the sarcastic statement of *Fargo* in the beginning of each episode blurring the borders between fiction and reality about stories, lies and truth: “THIS IS A TRUE STORY. The events depicted took place in Minnesota in 1987.”

mathematical ratio (the sequence of Fibonacci) is omnipresent in art, geometry, and anatomy. It appears in several paintings, music (Mozart's piano sonatas), and even architecture (Chartres Cathedral, the Taj Mahal, and Notre Dame). It is interesting to note that this spiral-shaped sequence used by ancient Greek mathematicians and Indian scholars centuries ago was one of the first tweets of HBO to allude to their future *Westworld* contract with Nolan, Joy, and Abrams.

In response to journalist Jill Pantozzi and the rumors about the show being produced, the cable channel responds in a mysterious and playful manner. In this way, the production proudly announces its upcoming airing of the posthuman TV show by evoking its quality features through this sequence of beauty. In his article, "The Golden Ratio of *Westworld*: Episode 10: Dualities, trinities, and the meaning of life", Steve Bryant argues that the golden ratio may be connected to the symbols surrounding the dualities in *Westworld*. He points out that several natural forms and artistic works are frequently connected to this equation to connote harmony and balance. *Westworld*, he posits, uses this special number to convey a sense of beauty among the disarray, the order amid chaos and turmoil.²¹⁸



Figure 79. HBO's tweet to announce its upcoming TV show, *Westworld* in 2014.

In its representation of these dualities, the TV show adapts spectral sequences of the apocalypse and the AI revolution to reflect the conscious threats of the virtual universe haunting our daily lives in and outside the diegesis. The apocalypse always returns in fictional stories to express collective anxieties of each era. Its representation becomes a form of mimicry of traumatic and spectral mechanisms.²¹⁹ The apocalyptic ending in *Westworld* is hauntingly

²¹⁸ Bryant, Steve. "The Golden Ratio of *Westworld*: Episode 10: Dualities, trinities, and the meaning of life." *Medium*, 6 Dec. 2016, <https://stevebryant.medium.com/the-golden-ratio-of-westworld-e13b645ebc5b>. Accessed 07 Aug. 2023.

²¹⁹ See Allouche, Sylvie et al. *Formes d(e l')apocalypse*. Bibliothèque numérique Paris 8, 2018, *Octaviana*, https://octaviana.fr/document/COLN0020_1.

omnipresent as the series keeps promising and foreshadowing the hosts' revolution and destruction of the world. This pending threat continuously reminds viewers of the arrival of the ending. As each season introduces novel settings in which the apocalypse threatens to take place, such reiteration contributes to the enduring spectrality and haunting characteristics through its very renewal of the upcoming threat of the event in different forms. Given that the (post)apocalyptic narrative in and of itself starts with an ending and still perpetuates its storylines beyond the so-called end of the world, it is then not surprising for the diegetic ending to never be the end. These serial adaptations portray the apocalypse through a serial format that corroborates the idea of repetition, cyclicity, and the status of endings as new beginnings, thus sustaining the idea of the resurrection of the spectral adaptation after its ending. After all, the serial adaptation is built on the desire for an increasing consumption and production ratings which evince the ending of the profits. This asserts the enduring and cyclical nature of storytelling as TV adaptations repeat previous texts and accordingly resist definitive endings.

Texts have an afterlife and sustain the belief that stories continue to thrive. This idea of survival within texts is expressed by Wells-Lassagne in her conclusion about apocalyptic narratives:

[...] artists insist on the enduring nature of narrative, that fiction will persist even after the end of the world. This is particularly true of adaptations, which have already survived the transfer from one media to another.

(Wells-Lassagne, "Apocalypse Noir", 168)

In mediating the apocalypse another time, the TV adaptation *Westworld* announces its status as an "apocalyptic *re-mediation*" rather than an apocalyptic remake (Lefait, "These Violent Ends", 142). The production's choice to *re-present* the technological apocalypse in a televisual form maintains the continual and persevering aspect of the end. By this very re-creation of the end of the world tale, the TV adaptation showcases the spectrality of the event in all its reiterative style and threatening tendencies to announce another end to come – be it the text's or the characters' storylines. When adapting the apocalyptic event on screen the relationship to the ST and its proliferating texts seems to focus on the question of the ending by ringing back the "specter of fidelity that has long haunted adaptation studies" (Glance qtd. in Parey and Wells Lassagne, *Adapting Endings*, 13). In other words, and paradoxically, it is affirming its apocalyptic nature from the beginning with its violent destruction of the world and at the same time it reveals the survival of humanity (or the new species replacing it) and stories beyond the ending.

As an adaptation, the show does not end in the same way as the movie does. Its first season encompasses the movie's storyline but deviates from it as the sentient host, the Gunslinger, is killed and the guest survives. The hosts eventually lose the rebellion, while the TV adaptation ends with the promise of the apocalyptic threat, since this time the hosts' cause seems legitimate (Lefait 147). This allegiance is justified by the introduction and delivery of explanations about the origins of the dysfunction of the park's host who have been abused by both guests and employees. It seems indeed to be a consequence of the emphatic depiction of the hosts' storylines not to mention that they are played by real actors and thus seem less artificial, thus challenging the uncanny valley.

III.2.3.3. Disavowal of the source text's ending

Given that the text is updated to our current issues in its representation of the events around the apocalypse under a different light, the adaptation predictably advances novel narrative revelations to raise awareness on preexisting ethical and social issues. Such repetition and representation come with a variation, so the remake is still able to ignite new debates and interpretations. The previous *Westworld* texts end with humanity winning over the machines. In the past the depiction of AI seemed new and threatening technology and Crichton's movie was perceived as avant-garde in its address to the topic of life-endangering automated systems and computers. Many contemporary narratives are deeply anchored in dystopian discourse by putting human identity and ethics at the core of their thematic concerns.

Among such prevailing (post)apocalyptic fictional works (literary as well as televisual, filmic, and other), many have depicted different forms of the coming of the end as we can see in *Black Summer* (Netflix, 2019-2021), *The Last of Us* (HBO, 2023-present), *Game of Thrones*, *The 100* (Netflix, 2014-2020), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu, 2017-present), *Chernobyl*, *Snowpiercer* (TNT, 2020-2022), and *Station Eleven* (HBO Max, 2021-2022). Other (post)apocalyptic endings comprise the themes of isolation and survival in a postapocalyptic environment adapted through decades such as Richard Matheson's novel *I am Legend* which has been adapted into several texts such as *The Last Man on Earth* (Ubaldo Ragona 1964), *The Omega Man* (Boris Segal 1971) and later the adaptation starring Will Smith *I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence 2007), where man is revealed as the monster (but not often in the adaptations).

Revisiting the end, the 2016 adaptation's serial complex structure contributes to the stepping away from the source text's vision of the AI revolution. This movement towards redefining the end is part of the adaptation's anti-fidelity approach, but more precisely nurtures a distancing from the source text's decision to accept the defeat of the humanoids. In comparison to the time of its source texts, the technological apocalypse has different connotations and proliferations in the storylines of Delos in the time of making and broadcasting HBO's *Westworld*.

The ending of Crichton's *Westworld* denies the prevalence of the post-apocalyptic universe with the annihilation of the humanoid destructive threat. The apocalypse is restrained to the confines of the park and is terminated. Humanity is saved by the human hero, Peter, who appears far from being a traditional hero. As Girard argues in his article "Retour vers la matrice : le *Westworld* (*Mondwest*) de Michael Crichton (1973)", despite his victory, the cowboy is no longer portrayed as a hero (5). The movie, like its adaptation, "reenact[s] the role of heroic male protagonist in a standard western film, picking and choosing his way through a hyper-masculinized universe wherein the landscape, storyline, and women are available for his consumption only to deconstruct them and mark the loss of these myths".²²⁰

The uncommon part of this classical victory is, however, tainted by a temporary feeling that this could repeat itself as we let it (and even lead it) to happen; the end is not glamorous or festive despite one human's triumph over the machine. The movie's last scenes take place in Romanworld, confirming that the time of chivalry and noble heroic gestures towards the damsel in distress is no longer adapted to the world's new parameters. The protagonist, Peter, finds a woman chained in a dungeon and begging for help; he gives her some water to drink but the woman's mouth is electrocuted and literally ends up in smoke, thus revealing both her robotic nature and the artificiality of the very trope of the hero and the damsel in distress.

²²⁰ Clavin, Keith and Chirstopher La Casse. "Triggered: The Post-Traumatic Woman and Narratology in HBO's *Westworld*." *Filmint*.
<http://filmint.nu/triggered-the-post-traumatic-woman-and-narratology-in-hbos-westworld-keith-clavin-and-christopher-la-casse/>



Figure 80. The ending of the movie *Westworld* (1973).

These final scenes depict the return of the damaged Gunslinger in a terrifically haunting manner with his burnt metallic flesh as Peter watches his victim/perpetrator fall one last time, get up again, and then explode with sparks and into flames. The terminator-like²²¹ persistence and invincibility of the robot before its final death could be seen as a stand in for the tenacity of the fixed ideas and myths mentioned above. The movie's last shot focuses on the human in a low-angle shot that is supposed to signal dominance. This is followed by a zoom-in showing his not-so-glorious and weary look with a final close-up shot fading away as it reveals being at loss in the face of such (un)expected turn of events. Such traditional portrayals of male figures are desacralized (Girard 5) and greater emphasis is put on the fall of this ideal and the defeat of the past (that would come back to haunt us eventually). In its own way, the contemporary adaptation denies the roles of invincible male heroes, with the rise of complex anti-heroes regardless of gender and of species by exploring the intricate concoction of alterity and emphasizing the delusion of myths about the western, technology, and their representations on screen.

The texts following the source text, namely *Futureworld* and *Beyond Westworld*, play a crucial role in conveying the same message by their very existence as proliferating texts and sequels – i.e., the end is never really the end. The lack of resolution in the sequel movie underscores the apocalyptic tone by confirming that such horrors will not necessarily be conquered but could easily expand to the real world as Delos is not stopped despite the exposure of its motives and the robotic doubles deceitfully succeed in escaping. The apocalypse remains and prevails from one medium to another. Crichton's novels usually explore such apocalyptic

²²¹ Yul Brynner's portrayal inspired James Cameron's scenario for the characterization of *The Terminator* (1984) as well as Arnold Schwarzenegger's performance of the cyborg (Girard 3).

issues and are constructed as iconic texts in the collective unconscious due to the layering of various interwoven and proliferating texts. One could think of *The Andromeda Strain* (Robert Wise, 1971) and its following texts or more mainstream ones such as the *Jurassic Park* franchise.

To sum up, both the existence of the genre itself of the post-apocalyptic and the work of authors who specialize in the genre, ultimately prove that the end is never the end, that it is always being overcome only to reoccur. Serial apocalyptic narratives are filled with gaps the sense that they are always creating segments but at the same time producing an entity. Accordingly, viewers look for order in TV shows that are flooded with chaotic actions in their maze-like structure that constantly rely on their serialization to postpone revelations and resolutions. Spectral adaptations embrace the contradiction of seriality as they are “both always ending and never ending” (Poland 77). The boundaries of these spectral adaptations are blurry and transgressive of conventional structures, so how could they satisfy such desires for order, unity, and completeness? Through transmedial storytelling, online fan creations and interactions with paratexts, the narrative proliferates beyond its source, but it also has tangential narratives online that further complicate the possibility of closure.

III.3. Chapter 9: Reorientation and Serial Closure

Following the spectral radical rupture from the presumed normalcy, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* tend to represent the traumatic event by echoing enticing apocalyptic thoughts from sci-fi genres. Without falling in a deeply rooted generic tradition, these TV shows create a blurry line between such generic conventions. This stretching away from generic categorization is related to comprehension, endings, and reception in the case of designing these labyrinthine TV shows. The prevalence of apocalyptic thoughts in fiction reveals the recurrent ontological doubt expressing humanity's most natural desire for endings. When showrunners first pitch their show to a production channel, one of the most often required elements in signing their contract is the assurance of strategies that would allow the serialization of the narrative. Seriality offers two ostensibly opposed undertakings: on the one hand, fictional televisual narratives entail an inexorable ending and on the other, ongoing serial storytelling often lasts for several seasons in the hope of eschewing their demise by stretching the plot as much as possible. In this attempt to avoid an inevitable ending, the TV show is supposed to keep their viewers hooked on the storylines without diminishing the quality of the narrative. In this respect, creating a TV show's ending in the form of a beginning helps maintain the endless serial format and the possibility of serial adaptation.

Being necessary and expected, the ending allows the shaping of the narrative into a coherent structure with a beginning, middle and end, to make sense of the event and of the world (Front 252). The continuity of a narrative after its ending not only marks the signature of serial adaptation as spectral texts, but more essentially, it forecasts a hopeful approach towards the future (Voigts, *Adapting Endings*, 160). Accordingly (post)apocalyptic fiction begins with an ending and is defined by it (152). *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* use the generic tropes and convention of apocalyptic fiction in television storytelling while adapting such tropes in a less traditional manner. By this, we mean that diverging from the emblematic characteristics of the genre is perceptible from the never-ending circumvention of clear-cut answers, resolution, and closure.

The aim of this section is to interrogate the possibility of an exit, an end to the labyrinthine serial form of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* surrounding the haunting event which comes in the shape of not only last sequences and last shots but predominantly in the form of a

representation of an apocalyptic event. This chapter interrogates the possibility of closure and therefore of an issue to the labyrinthine form surrounding the event and its spectral consequences on reception. Narrative misdirection operates within the maze-like complex and ambiguous structure (the intricate plots and misleading paths). This leads us to ask whether the labyrinthine narrative form has an issue – a resolution or revelation in terms of viewing practices. Therefore, let us examine the very issue of narrative endings in serial adaptations without addressing the issue of fidelity to the source text's ending. In the representation of the end of the diegetic world of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, we investigate the way showrunners/adapters manage to build a resolution (if there is any) in the serial format.

III.3.1. Serial Closure, or Reorientation: Could there ever be an exit to the maze?

The ending of a TV adaptation entails various expectations, whether it is over the course of a whole TV show or only its finale. Despite having a predetermined ending reiterated from its source text, the serial adaptation manages to create new meanings and to keep its audience hooked (with or without fidelity to the source text's own ending). In serial television, endings refer us to previous episodes, knowledge, and revelations:

[...] [T]he significance of the final event doesn't actually reside in the last scene but rather in the ways in which the event which provides closure radiates a spectrum of meanings by referring the reader back to the preceding pages, eliciting new combinations and new understandings of the narrated events.

(Cristofovici, 2)

Seeing that resolutions and endings play a major part in the final reception of the narrative, it is only natural to assign similar importance to adaptations' endings. By exploring the ways in which we adapt endings, we will shun all fidelity issues to either the source texts or their authors. Instead, this section determines the extent to which a TV adaptation, and its medium that is widely based on cyclicity, appropriates its finale by giving much significance to its last sequences and last shots. The possibility of a resolution is called into question particularly in the context of the various expectations engendered by the text's status as adaptation.

Final events are essential to the re-evaluation of the whole narrative as a new perspective is offered while reaching the last mile. The TV show is assessed after its last sequences and last shots to decide whether the final consumed product (the series) was satisfying and whether it is in line with viewers' expectations, thus putting its creators on trial in the case of failing to live up to such prospects and hopes. The backlash from the audience can prove quite threatening when closure is not possible, or even frustrating. There are many examples of contemporary TV shows that have set the bar too high by constantly promising a perfect ending that would deliver all answers proved to be far from satisfying its audience.²²² As Cristofovici pinpoints,

²²² Many contemporary TV shows face dissatisfaction after their ending and outraged audience response for divergent reasons that may include discontent with the lack of answers to the enigmas such as with *Lost*, the finale of *Game of Thrones* due to its filming and narrative techniques (such as the screen being too dark, or the resolution being too hastily rendered). Other examples involve sudden cancellations like *Westworld* itself, *Carnivàle* (HBO, 2003-2005), or *Hannibal*. (NBC, 2013-2015).

the ending is presumed to offer food for thought about the previous events and unlock new perspectives and meanings about the story (*Adapting Endings*, 2).

This equally pertains to the case of the repetitive viewing of TV shows. Complex TV series such as *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* encourage multiple viewings as each repetition is endowed with new meanings and new perspectives despite having foreknowledge of the way the plot unravels. They are intentionally built in order to enable repeated viewing, a characteristic which is emblematic of the operational aesthetics as they allow us to contemplate the carefully structured narrative mechanisms of these maze narratives and the diverse plot experimentations with the form. Through their accumulated consumption of TV series with different genres, viewers become familiar with the norms of TV series in stark congruence with Bordwell's "extrinsic norms" i.e., "genre conventions, stylistic modes, and standard expectations for what a television series is supposed to do" (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 158). Mittell points out that it is necessary for serial TV shows to create a balance between the familiar intrinsic norms and their violation in order to avoid boredom from the part of the audience or the consequences of an extensive use of repetition and redundancies (160).

These transgressions are set out "to engage viewers' attention and interest: shattering expectations by shifting comprehension processes from preconscious assumptions and inferences to conscious hypotheses" (159). This is exemplified in *The Leftovers*' alteration of title sequences over the seasons,²²³ its implementation of prologues, the changes of setting and introduction of new characters, and the temporal jumps into the future without title cards after having been used to ellipses with a "three years later" cue, thus destabilizing the audience. In this respect, series finales can be imbued with more transgressions of intrinsic norms of the TV adaptation as a disruptive mechanism of the traditional comprehensive process and as a narrative tool for surprise.

Mittell identifies another type of viewers' engagement towards comprehending a complex narrative that he refers to as "anticipation hypotheses." For instance, the extrinsic or intrinsic norms of a given TV show would guarantee trust in its impossible possibilities such as the comfort of knowing that the protagonists are safe from fatal harm, or a certain insurance of

This is equally the case of the responses to *Sanditon* (ITV, PBS, Britbox, 2019-2023), the Jane Austen adaptation of her final unfinished novel as it was initially not renewed after a major cliffhanger/unhappy ending at the end of its first season.

²²³ Before each episode, the title sequences of the third season adapt the opening credits of the second season (Iris Dement's, "Let the Mystery Be") by introducing a new song that is supposed to be pertinent to its episode arcs while keeping the same shots from the original.

having a happy ending, lovers ending up together, the success of the protagonist in overcoming their challenges, etc.²²⁴ In TV shows such as *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, the foreseeable anticipation is more dramatic. Their generic conventions ensure ontological uncertainty at the level of its audience: viewers understand they should be prepared for the impossible. This stems from the use of a balanced structure between plausibility and unpredictability as Mittell argues:

One of the challenges of such hypothesizing is that producers must balance between the need for plausibility, so that the new information feels consistent and motivated within the storyworld, and unpredictability, so that the revelations are not obvious to anyone who had bothered to hypothesize.

(*Complex TV* 162)

Such plot twists or revelations are sometimes uncovered by the showrunners giving out clues. However, the creators of the show are also anticipating that forensic fandom could easily lead to their discovery of the answers mid-season before its explanations are overtly delivered. This also represents a form of pressure for the showrunners, who try to keep a balance between the “not too obvious” and “not too many long, challenging and heavy mysteries to the point of overuse.” For instance, one could mention the character of Bernard in *Westworld*’s first season, whose true nature as a host is only revealed in the ninth episode (“The Well-Tempered Clavier”), or the Man in Black’s identity as William. It is not surprising that most fans had already deduced the truth of the enigma, since if one meticulously investigates the details, some clues and Easter eggs are purposely left by the writers to help make sense of the final revelation. As Mittell explains, the ideal reaction “by a viewer [would be] thinking, ‘I should have seen that coming,’ suggesting unexpected but effective internal motivation” (162). This type of surprise is therefore comprehended in their narrative coherency and consistency. Hypothesizing about narrative statements is a cognitive process among the fan community which turns into theorizing for the purpose of comprehension and interaction between fans (163). This usually requires a filling in the gaps and unraveling of the televisual serials based on narrative enigmas.

TV adaptations, prequels, sequels, and reboots are an ideal example of reader/viewer engagement in the process of narrative comprehension due to the extensive use of intertextuality and the omnipresent interconnectedness of the adaptation with its source text, ostensibly giving

²²⁴ “[...] narrative outcomes are often well-known regardless of whether they are spoiled or not — viewers draw on their operational expertise and awareness of storytelling norms to be assured that protagonists are safe from mortal harm, mysteries will be solved, and other conventions will be upheld” (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 165).

the viewer more material with which to hypothesize possible future events or central themes. Throwing us back to the notion of fan-boy *auteur* discussed in the earliest chapters of this thesis, this new material delineates the novelty added to the adapted text in opposition to the familiar elements of the source, knowing that the adaptors are necessarily fans of the ST or at least its genre. TV adaptations exemplify the reader/viewer engagement in the process of narrative comprehension due to the extensive use of intertextuality and the omnipresent interconnectedness of the adaptation with its source. Likewise, the source text gives viewers clues as to the series' creators' inspiration and perspective, assuming that they were inspired enough by the source text to assimilate it into their own creative vision onscreen.

III.3.1.1. Adapting end times

As Scott Culpepper has commented in his analysis of *The Leftovers*' apocalypse, the aim of post-apocalyptic fiction is to mirror the social and cultural issues of the world and adapt them "in ways that enable us to approach them with new eyes" (183). Adapting a (post)apocalyptic narrative would then mean reinventing its serial features mainly through the re-creation of its ending. In this light, texts are never final, which would suppose that these ghostly adaptations and their apocalyptic nature work *in tandem* as serial adaptations ensure continuity of the narrative, and the remediation of the apocalyptic event (or its post-period) focuses on the persistence of life after the crisis, after the end that is never ending. Expanding the narrative in the serial form is not only driven by commercial and financial purposes but also by its 'pleasure factor' by postponing revelations, and even the ending to consume for as long as it is possible. This desire for an ongoing narrative speaks to deeply seated survival drives that corroborate the tendency to extend seasons and produce/consume more remakes, spin-offs, sequels, prequels, etc.

As a way of ensuring the endurance and extension of the narrative due to the audience's craving for more episodes and more seasons, TV shows inevitably adopt countless serial mechanisms which are based on the delay and postponing of closure.²²⁵ Asking more questions, the narrative

²²⁵Michlin explores the stakes of ending a TV show as the audience is usually paradoxical stuck between the anticipation of the ending and the refusal or fear to see the show end, thereby reflecting viewers' desire for more episodes, more seasons, and even more platforms within transmedia storytelling.

only ends with the ending of the TV broadcast; it remains open, and the mysteries are not concluded or resolved (Cornec 390). Commenting on *Lost*'s reception, Clémot suggests that the sense of closure and satisfaction stems from our own exploration and reading:

Loin d'être une insuffisance des scénaristes, l'absence de résolution satisfaisante à la fin de la série est donc plutôt une déclaration sur le rapport que nous devons entretenir avec les séries télévisées et nos existences.

(98)

Therefore, when finishing a TV show, and specifically one which traffics in narratives of the apocalypse, the ending is connected to reality, and the sense of closure depends on the ability to let go, whether it be on the part of the production and cast, or for the audience who has been following the characters through their journeys and who have invested time in watching, hoping, and speculating. According to Jaunas, different types of closure are possible in fictional writing: first a narrative closure (i.e., the story itself), second a semantic closure, and finally what we can call spectral closure, i.e. the notion that any initial narrative closure may ultimately be temporary as more texts come afterwards, whether it be in the form of adaptations or sequels, in the form of thematically similar works from the same creators, or possibly works influenced by the original (when all sitcoms sought to be like *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), or include vampires/zombies, or include high-concept puzzle narratives, such as the *Lost*-adjacent series *Flashforward* or *Person of Interest*). In this sense, textual closure determines the nature of the story, but the medium rejects the possibility of real closure, as the text is inherently ghostly and therefore bound to return in other forms or media. Beyond this, of course, these serial adaptations in the televisual form hold an even more spectral state due to their apocalyptic tone, as they equally belong to spectral media which implicitly suggests that the end (death) is not really the end.

III.3.1.2. Exiting The Shining's maze

The absence of an exit within the multicursal labyrinth questions the possibilities of endings in TV series while the possibility of reaching a center raises the issue of closure in serial television. The point here would also be to demonstrate the lack, or even absence, of

Michlin, Monica. "More, More, More: Contemporary American TV Series and the Attractions and Challenges of Serialization as Ongoing Narrative." *Mise au point*, vol. 3, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.4000/map.927>. Accessed 7 September 2020.

resolution set by the creator/adaptor. Of course, there are inevitably final moments/scenes in any fiction, but perhaps the very nature of the “maze narrative” suggests that a conclusion to the mysteries raised by the fiction may go against the grain of the genre. It could be argued that the very nature of the labyrinth makes the idea of a closed ending fraught: thus for example, we will refer to another famous adaptation and maze narrative, Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), which even while formatted as a theatrical film, and thus more readily prone to a predetermined ending than an ongoing series, still features disorienting effects, representation of confinement in an enclosed complex space, and consequently infinite interpretations it has to offer its treaders, whether they exist in the extra-diegetic reality or in the treader’s disoriented mind on the edge of madness.

Kubrick’s adaptation of Stephen King’s novel draws a similar type of (dis)orientation process through the motif of the maze. Casting doubt and uncertainty about one’s sanity in the confined and labyrinthine space of the hotel, the uncanny reveals itself in the maze as a form of doubling (the twin girls) and comes to represent the difficulty of distinguishing reality from fiction. Vincent Jaunas’s approach to the film reveals the risks of over-interpretation in times of crisis and pins down viewers’ reactions to two basic camps when confronted with an open “multi-layered” narrative: they can either fall into deciphering each “ungraspable sign” like Jack and try to solve the mystery of the maze (to find the film’s hidden secrets) or they can follow the paths and get out of the maze as Danny does (by erasing past traces and distinguishing haunting signs from reality).

Jaunas’ final argument is that the multiplicity of one’s paths seems to offer the possibility of escape and exit from the maze (85) but most importantly offers an acknowledgment of the alterity of the encounters within the maze – in other words, experiencing the maze treading/film watching while recognizing its enigmatic and evocative moments, without reducing its “semantic polysemy”. Reducing the film’s “semantic polysemy” amounts to denying the maze’s openness and complexity; the maze becomes regarded as delivering a single meaning which leads to over-interpretation. For the audience, this would mean taking a step backwards to distance themselves from the artistic work without failing to acknowledge its ideology and its significant codes while keeping in mind their artificiality and their existence within a narrative based on traps – a dialogically spectral text that continues to haunt us long after its ending.

The unpredictable aspect of TV shows embodies viewers’ attempts to anticipate endings and resolutions by taking time to navigate the maze narrative and making theories about the

show's enigmas. In *Solved by Walking: Paradox and Resolution in the Labyrinth*, Mary T. Hackworth argues that the whole pattern is believed to become visible after the end, as one is able to analyze it in its full shape²²⁶ as a presumably finished narrative:

A labyrinth can be seen as a diagram of the way life is experienced: as a series of unfolding events that are difficult to anticipate, in which perspective constantly shifts. One rarely attains wisdom merely by moving as fast as possible from point A to point B; successive layers of experience, trial, and error lead to deeper and more lasting knowledge. Only after the labyrinth has been completely traversed can one sense the whole pattern, which may not have been apparent before. When the labyrinth is a maze, the emphasis is on the individual's chosen path, with all its idiosyncratic detours, not the universal path.

(6)

As established before, the maze and the labyrinth differ in their paths' structure and degree of complexity. Hackworth argues that the choice of path matters despite the hovering fear of lack of control and the theme of an illusional free will for which the series always seems to advocate. One of the prevailing assumptions about endings in TV series is that they offer the ultimate revelation of the whole pattern – a vision of the textual maze from above (in the same way Jack Torrance overlooks the maze).

Jaunas considers the center of the maze to be the possibility of another opening (80) with other possible paths to undertake and various interpretations to develop. The open center of the film's diegetic maze, he posits, creates a spiral-like feeling and a sense of endlessness of the quest or treading, as it "prevents any restrictive interpretation" (80). The maze-like structure of *The Shining* is an open narrative which refutes the validation of a specific hypothesis or definitive interpretation and allows the coexistence of other theories alongside the chosen one (Jaunas 81). Likewise, we argue that in our series, "there's no escape from this place" (Bernard in "Les Écorchés", S02E07) and once viewers enter the labyrinth of the narrative, its paradoxical elements and intricate paths will inevitably haunt them. In this respect, over-interpretation does not reveal the exit to the maze but instead further deepens the rabbit hole or what Umberto Eco calls the "vertigo of the labyrinth". (Jaunas 82).

²²⁶ This could also be perceived as an advantage lacking to this thesis due to the unfinished nature of *Westworld* at the time of writing, and its focus on the first seasons. Nonetheless, one can still hope to offer some perspective on the first seasons by simultaneously avoiding radical speculations.

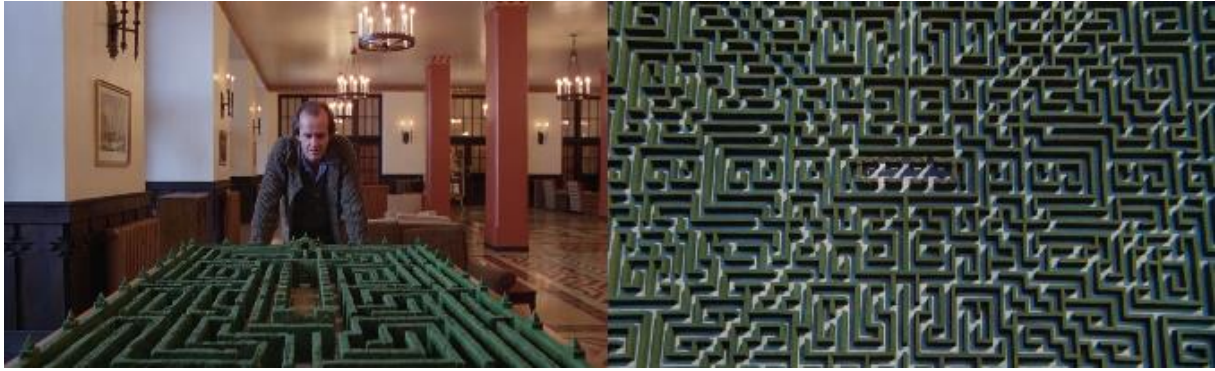


Figure 81. Jack overlooking the maze (*The Shining*, Kubrick, 1980).

Consequently, embracing the multiplicity of paths offers the possibility of escape and exit from the maze (85). Alterity is therefore the way out of the maze, to acknowledge the alterity of ghosts and the polymorphic aspect of fiction (Jaunas 87) and its various meanings as well as the heterogeneous identity of texts. Furthermore, the maze figure in televisual narratives rejects closure in the same way the serial format does by continuously prompting continuity and reproduction. As we have established earlier, maze-narratives exist elsewhere and in other forms (films, novels, video games, etc.); however, they are particularly appropriate to the televisual format, particularly since TV is labyrinthine in its nature. The maze narrative exists in other forms for instance in video games, cinema, and literature (as we have mentioned Borges's *The Garden of Forking Paths*). In film the maze is often referred to as a thematic labyrinth experienced as disorientating space in the diegesis such as constantly changing labyrinths of *The Maze-Runner* movie adaptations or Vincenzo Natali's *Cube* (1997). Indeed, in the retro video game, Pac-Man, you can never get to the center (inhabited by hostile ghosts), and even exiting the maze only causes you to enter it from the opposite side: you can only exit through your own death (by gobbling ghosts).

Instead of progressing in a linear direction, the narrative proliferates across various media and explores these dimensions such as in the case of transmedia storytelling. Nevertheless, the maze structure seems appropriate to the televisual format. With its “waiting period” between episodes and seasons, the TV serial format leaves room for alternate routes or reception and an open temporal window for the non-bingers to investigate different possible avenues of interpretation of past plotlines or details or hypothesizing as to future events.

In these fictions, in particular, closure does not necessarily involve the refutation of most theories and the impossibility of new interpretations to emerge. This does not ensure the prevalence of perfectly satisfying answers or resolutions, but it rather points to a potential epiphany or revelation. The maze in this case is made up of different narrative threads from

various episodes and seasons, making up the whole “complete” labyrinthine narrative; the ending may offer a global vision of the labyrinth’s patterns, as Hackworth suggests, but resolution may be individual, depending on Jaunas’s distinction of whether the viewer seeks an exit to the maze, or a satisfying interpretation of each of its enigmas. Thus, *The Leftovers*’ critically beloved ending actually favors thematic closure, in the sense of “letting go”, by contending that closure only requires viewers’ and characters’ acceptance of their situation, i.e., the willingness to embrace the ambiguity and to (just) be satisfied with the stories we tell ourselves to survive.

Given the examples we have broached in previous chapters, as well as the repeated invocation to “Let the Mystery Be” with each new episode, viewers are primed to accept the thematic closure that accompanies an open ending. The ensuing hauntological state of both texts and characters leads to inquiries about the nature of a past normal state to which it is possible to return. In a (post)apocalyptic climate always prone to change in the “wrong” direction, uncertainty easily governs with feelings of vulnerability which arise while facing these new parameters as the functions and tools are not comprehended. Most characters have a purpose that keeps them going such as the presence of familiar elements, seeking to reunite to their loved ones, or to destroy their enemies.²²⁷ The exit from this maze narrative therefore does not involve the representation of the crisis itself, but instead the haunting mechanisms by which the crisis communicates on matters like purpose, resilience, rebellion or even revolution through its uncanny effects: the closing moments do not purport to answer the question of “why”, but “how” (to overcome).

The contributions of fandom practices and fan culture constitute another avenue of spectral closure (i.e., the text haunting new creations), a phenomenon examined in Henry Jenkins’ work *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. The recreation or adaptation of a serial text is often motivated by dissatisfaction with the closure offered by the fiction – or indeed by dissatisfaction with the series ending at all (Jenkins qtd. in Whelehan 16), making fans “wilful appropriator[s] of meanings for ends which could not be anticipated by a film’s or television’s serial’s producers” (Whelehan 15). Indeed, fans’ dissatisfaction with these popular works sometimes results in the appropriation of meaning and in the need to rewrite their version of a given text. The strategies of foreignization and defamiliarization which are triggered by the show’s adaptation status generally compel the unknowing audience to engage

²²⁷ They also face the necessity to be fully aware of the hovering specters and recover hidden memories in order to discern the real ones from the crafted ones and to face them accordingly.

in an active reading. This shift of viewers' role from consumers to producers and innovators (Whelehan 15) attests that the inner dynamics of the televisual text are not sufficient, especially for the unknowing audience of the adaptation, to whom many references are often entirely alien, thus further defamiliarizing them. However, seeing that *The Leftovers'* and *Westworld's* final seasons (and their finales) extend the narrative of the source text, their reception puts the knowing and unknowing audience on equal ground of knowledge. Both narratives are structured as detective tales with few references to their source text and are instead filled with a multitude of haunting sings proper to their own diegesis.

Ultimately, this provides a large amount of information that encourages the viewers to acquaint themselves with the extrinsic norms of the text and to adopt the poacher's attitude by deciphering denotative meaning. They enact what Michel De Certeau calls "poaching": the readers become poachers, nomads, and travelers like Robinson Crusoe who "move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (De Certeau 174). Commenting on such hermeneutic responses and readings, Lefait accentuates the effects of this approach in fans' explanatory video making:

The proverbially forensic or sleuth-like viewers of complex TV thereby seem to restrict the expansion of the storyworlds by adding some sense of closure to the narratives. Rather than just filling a gap, the videos seem to act as stopgaps to an endless proliferation of meaning – similar to conspiracy theorists trying to exert control over an increasingly illegible reality by connecting some dots to form an intelligible framework of analysis, explanatory videos point to the overarching presence of an authorial force pulling the strings, checking on the logic of the story, providing users with the possibility of an interpretation.

(Lefait, "Spoilers ahead!" 162)

Lefait suggests that the summarizing explanatory aspect of these fan creations can bring closure as they restrict the spread of multiple interpretations and meanings. This struggle for control urges the audience to possess the meaning of the text and step out of their role of "passive recipient[s] of authorial meaning" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 25). In their rewriting of the narrative, such work participates in the meaning making of the show's ending (whether by recapping whole episodes or seasons).

III.3.2. *Westworld's deferred resolutions: the maze as narrative trap*

The reorientation tools of the maze narrative depend on viewers' comprehension and engagement from one season to another. In other words, the awareness of the first season's ending and its revealed truths alters the reading process, particularly since "the storyworld's scenario makes us anticipate the more likely, undesirable outcome to create suspense in our imagined hypotheses of how things might turn out" (Mittell 162).

Plot points that were once to be thought revelations are to be reexamined in the following episodes or seasons. Multiple viewings and forensic practices offer the possibility of re-assessment of the false truths and false revelations delivered by the show once viewers go back to previous episodes with this newly acquired knowledge in mind. The immersive aspect of the narrative lies in the need to reconstruct the puzzle and thereby to re-establish meaning and chronological order after the "revelation" or "reveal" (Slocombe 50). The second season calls into question the revelations of the first season by playing on ambiguity once viewers are accustomed to *Westworld's* codes and know how to watch it. Once they are more suspicious and alert than ever, the following season pushes its limits by inviting them to use previous knowledge and revelations from season one as another set of unstable truths.

Dismantling previous revelations that strengthen the plot and perpetuate the storylines is at the heart of serial television writing. Giving and perpetuating the illusion that the game and the show itself comprise a hidden meaning, a metanarrative that would give reason to everything that occurred before from the beginning of the serial and above all the belief that resolutions are to be delivered. Acknowledging that revelations are yet another element of expanding the narrative, Slocombe lays out a few examples of these revelations' functions in *Westworld*:

The 1st example: revelations in *Westworld* are always deferred or "at least only ever temporarily explained until some still hidden—and probably as yet unwritten—revelation" (53).

The 2nd example: no specific meaning and narrative traps suggest that "meaning is hollow and only ever gestured toward" (*ibid*), pointing towards other storylines and lies

disguising truths (e.g., Old Bill's toast to the lady in white shoes in "Contrapasso" (S01E05).

The 3rd example: the "backstory" is mysterious because it represents another yet unwritten story or revelation (e.g., the Wyatt narrative uploaded into Teddy).

As Dolores declares in the second season's opening sequence, "That which is real is irreplaceable" ("Journey into Night", S02E01). Slocombe indicates that it is yet another lie (or as Bernard/Arnold tells her, "It is not completely honest"), because they (the hosts) have already replaced the real (*ibid*). Slocombe notes that "the doubled-work of *Westworld* is precisely in the ways in which it encodes its 'truths' and its 'fantasies' in one hyperreal system" (*ibid*). Drawing from Baudrillard's hyperreal, Slocombe affirms that the real is not only its reproducibility, but "*that which is always already reproduced*" (Baudrillard qtd. in Slocombe 59, emphasis in original). *Westworld* warns us about expectations, *trompe l'oeil*, and the rush to get to an ending that is doomed to be violent. In a premonitory comment, Lefait points to the "anticlimactic strategy" of *Westworld* which also relies on spoilers by announcing the outcome of the story: its end.

Viewers, it seems, expect no major surprise from the series – except perhaps with regards to visual effects and disaster magnitude. Even before the show starts, we have the what and the how. The only information still missing may be when it all ends: it will depend on how long HBO allows the show to last.

(Lefait, "Violent Delights," 142)

The various expectations before the release and broadcast of the episodes depend not only on its paratextual elements such as promotional posters and trailers but also on the show's adaptation status that contributes to spoiling the end and announcing what is to be expected. For Lefait, the only missing information is when the show will end and how exactly it will end even if it is made conspicuous that the AI apocalypse is at the core of the plot. *Westworld* deliberately reminds its audience that this is all a game designed to end violently and a narrative foundation based on lies and signs which are meant to deceive. The reevaluation of the acquired knowledge from a previous season is therefore an essential part of the pleasurable reconstruction of the puzzle as the following season usually casts doubt on the revelations that were once submitted as truths. Wilkins describes these dynamics of revelations in *Westworld* as part of the park's game:

Throughout *Westworld*, spectators are required to reconsider and reassess information as recognisable images or assumed facts manifest only to shift

meaning as they are seen from different vantage points or revealed as detail of a broader picture. Indeed, early in the series, Angela welcomes William to Westworld by informing him there is “No orientation. No guidebook”, instead, “Figuring out how it all works is half the fun” (“Chestnut”, Season 1, Episode 2). While this statement is directed at William, it is clearly intended to be read reflexively as a confirmation of *Westworld*'s puzzle-plot structure and the form's attendant pleasure of intellectual expenditure.

(Wilkins 31)

Without orientation, the narrative requires viewers to reconstitute their memories from earlier episodes²²⁸ to detect repetitions and their variations that could be devoid of a hidden meaning or deeper level to the maze (*ibid*). In this way, the second season does not provide additional revelations to the same truths from season one but instead it delivers an invitation to “resituate their knowledge in relation to a different narrative entirely” (Slocombe 51).

The immersive aspect of the narrative lies in the need to reconstruct the puzzle and thereby to re-establish meaning and chronological order after the “revelation” or “reveal” (50). Now that viewers are accustomed to *Westworld*'s diegetic and extra-diegetic conventions and are familiar with how to watch the show, now that they are more suspicious and alert than ever, the following season pushes its limits by inviting its viewers to use former knowledge, assumptions, and revelations as other unstable truths. It generally does so by playing with ambiguous statements and gaps whether temporal or by using the misdirection through the duplication of hosts. This confusion is best illustrated by William, first as a player who engages in reckless killings in the open world to solve the maze, then as a lover of storytelling seeking a deeper level to the game, and finally as a believer in the absurd, who is nonetheless still looking for answers and obsessing over every detail scattered in the park to the point of possible madness. Losing touch with his reality, he kills his daughter as he believes she is only a host, and part of Ford's game. In the second season finale, Dolores finds him cutting into his forearm to check whether he is a host or not.

The post-credits sequence reveals that the Man in Black is confronted with his daughter in the future. The memory of his daughter (in what is perceptibly a host version of her) haunts him and confronts him with the reality of his actions. She conducts a test which is constructed in the same way interviews for hosts with human consciousness are done:

EMILY. The last step's a baseline interview to allow us to verify.

²²⁸ Note that *Westworld* is released every other two years.

WILLIAM. Verify what?

EMILY. Fidelity.

(“The Passenger”, S02E10)



Figure 82. Dolores confronts the Man in Black (“The Passenger”, S02E10).

The episode finishes on a cliffhanger, letting the audience speculate about William’s sanity, the period of the event, and his nature as human or host. By creating this character, the show makes incarnate the idea that *Westworld* (and *Westworld*) are giving and perpetuating the illusion that both the game and the show comprise a hidden meaning, a metanarrative that would give a reason to everything that occurred from the beginning of the serial, and above all, the belief that closure and resolution are to be delivered. Through the Man in Black, the show overtly acknowledges the audience’s quest and expectations, their belief in the possibility of a resolution towards the end, in keeping with both artistic traditions of satisfying closure, and more commercial television concerns (so that as a cable TV show it can still make a profit by keeping its HBO subscribers hooked) (Slocombe 53). However, the possibility or existence of a resolution dissipates as it is conspicuous that the narrative is based on mind games and manipulation, leading to paranoid readings and disbelief in a positive outcome or ending that would provide answers.

The second season finale²²⁹ ends with the success of a few hosts to reach the Valley Beyond, Dolores exiting the park as the double of Charlotte and by taking a few host pearls (where the consciousness of the hosts is located) with her. The episode is entitled “The Passenger”, a title in resonance with the hosts’ lack of control over their code, and seems to

²²⁹ Given the restriction of the primary sources of the thesis to the first two seasons of *Westworld*, it seems relevant to discuss the sense of closure in relation to the second season finale. Evidently, this is not the series’ finale, and it would not be considered as such. Nevertheless, the very last episode of the series will be discussed in this chapter to better encapsulate the global meaning of ending in *Westworld*, particularly since the TV series is deprived of a ‘real finale’ due to its cancellation after its fourth and last season.

particularly target Bernard's ultimate powerlessness, as he is haunted by Ford, who is revealed to be his own self – a more violent version of himself that he will be using in the upcoming season to defeat his enemies. Several endings are displayed in this same finale which allows closure on a different level: the audience is satisfied by watching the host characters live their happy ending in their heavenly virtual world, far from humans and violence. The death of hosts is never final, and *Westworld* intentionally leaves the possibility for their return in different bodies or forms (such as their virtual existence in a simulation). The following season does not pick up on the aftermath of this event, so it is supposed to be a real ending for them. The resolutions of this finale center on the freedom of hosts and their independence in the humans' world as explored in season three. This finale also paves the way for Delos's secret projects and Incite's role in the outside world. The episode reveals the identity of Stubbs, the chief security of the park, as a host, whose incentive is to protect the hosts at all costs.

In a sense, this is the finale to the park's storylines and the end of the adventure for guests and hosts in the Westworld park that has been introduced in the first season. Each season carries a finale on its own which underlines the multi-existence of several stories and thus, multiple endings. The next seasons continue in the real world with only a few sequences back in the park, which suggest their nature as season sequels, other adaptations after this new, yet not last ending. The idea of closure gets more complicated when it comes to the end of this finale as the audience usually extends the narrative by looking further in its deepest corners and by exploring every nook and cranny for meaning.

Likewise, the narrative is extended beyond the televisual screen through transmedial storytelling, which contributes to viewer comprehension of the storylines, the park maps, or the contextual background of the series' world. The creation of the Delos Destinations website and Incite website expands the diegetic universe of the park and provides additional information about the place's history and the corporate role in the conception of the technological projects. Enhancing the viewing experience, *Westworld's* transmedia campaign engages viewers in the shows' universe in an actively interactive way. Seeking to get its audience closer to the diegetic world in the same fashion the park immerses its guests, *Westworld's* production team elaborated an immersive experience called SXSW (Panel at Fairmont Austin) including a mobile app game "Westworld Mobile". By implementing these techniques, the show prolongs its existence both before the narrative begins (in the case of promotional transmedia experiences), and ensures its continuity after its airing as the possibility of the lack of closure denotes an opportunity for the active engagement from the audience and their aesthetic experience. The extension of the

narrative across media allows interactive content and safeguards its staying power during production time in-between the seasons. However, even the best cliffhangers, intricate storylines, transmedia platforms and deferred revelations cannot save a TV show from its ultimate stoppage.

III.3.3.1. The aborted apocalypse: canceling Westworld

Westworld's showrunners have always been prepared for the conception of the series' ending, as Nolan claims:

[...] we've never actually talked about how many seasons that plan was, and indeed I think when we had the plan it didn't actually map out to a specific number of seasons, exactly. It was a beginning, a middle and an end.²³⁰

Despite the lack of an estimated season outline, the designing of *Westworld's* intricate and confounding narrative necessitates a mapping out from beginning to end (despite the illusion of the all-knowing showrunner who has planned everything in detail from beginning to end). Nevertheless, the extra-diegetic world proved to be as unpredictable as the diegetic one. After the airing of season four, HBO announced its decision to cancel the show. This cancellation is an example of the impact of production costs on the effective functioning of the narrative, a reminder of the show's nature as a product.²³¹

Though the intended ending of the narrative will not be known due to its cancellation, ironically, the promise of a violent ending is somehow delivered. Additionally, the show consciously reminds us of the possibility of changing the end as it has been practicing a tendency to subvert expectations and defer revelations. *Westworld* "constantly references possibility for what is foretold to happen differently" (Lefait, "Violent Delights", 147) and the unfolding of the end is not immune to this rule. The final revelation about the show could be its cancellation, its own demise and the lack of closure being the violent end viewers have been promised all along.

²³⁰ Vary, Adam B. "'Westworld' Showrunners on Beloved Character's Exit, Ending of the Series." *Variety*, DATE OF 4 May 2020, <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/westworld-season-finale-dolores-season-4-1234597532/>. Accessed 13 April 2021.

²³¹ For instance, the impact of "real-world" issues on the diegetic universe comprises actors leaving the set and their characters getting killed off, unwritten pregnancies for actresses and the ensuing changes of the plot, etc.

This is expressed in the second season by Bernard asking Ford for the truth about The Valley Beyond:

BERNARD. What's the end of your story?

FORD. Isn't the pleasure of a story in discovering the ending yourself, Bernard?

(“Les Écorchés”, S02E07)

After coming to sentience, the hosts can emancipate themselves from the need for their creator to provide meaning and to help them through their path. Independence from the author also implies the denial of their made-up ending, thus appropriating and making their own story's end. Meaning no longer lies in the pre-written end for them but in their rewriting and remediation of the narrative.

Lefait argues that “*Westworld*'s characters teach viewers how to regain agency in our transmedia world, in the hope of altering an apocalyptic ending” (“Violent Delights” 149-50). The fan community is nonetheless resisting this as some rally together online to renew the show through social media such as Twitter with the #savewestworld campaign. Audience protests are known to have worked in the past with some TV series such as *Sense8* (Netflix, 2015-2018). Forensic fandom is challenged with this abrupt end to their fiction, which predominantly exposes the cable channel as being not immune to “stoppage” the same way broadcast networks are. Financial costs²³² and audience rating/subscriptions are always at the heart of televisual productions that are ultimately merely products of consumption and entertainment sources. If showrunners were to reveal the ending that never materialized and the show's overall meaning after its canceling, that would imply that meaning is fixed and lies within authorial intention, thus denying the equivocality of its essence and its openness. Coherence is maintained from season to season if we consider the season-long plot format and their season arcs; however, this cancelation denies the series its whole narrative unity.²³³

The last seasons, nonetheless, provide insight into the directions in which the show deviates from its first two seasons. Indeed, the third and fourth seasons are set outside the park in the real world—the site of Dolores's revolution. The Incite corporation has created an AI (in

²³² HBO is experiencing sunk cost after this cancellation as it is still bound to pay the cast for their “pay-or-play” signed contracts.

²³³ « Lorsqu'une série commence à articuler une question majeure sur le long terme, il devient évident qu'une réponse, un dénouement, peut lui apporter une certaine unité narrative, une cohérence artistique. Mais l'intérêt de cette unité est encore nié dans la majorité des cas, lorsqu'il s'agit de décider de l'arrêt d'une série » (Favard, *Promesse*, 243).

a non-humanoid form) called Rehoboam²³⁴ which is a godlike intelligence that possesses all types of data and whose name is inspired from mythology. The promotional poster of season four is one of the last official paratextual elements around the show: its representation of the ending is therefore particularly significant in the context of this cancellation.

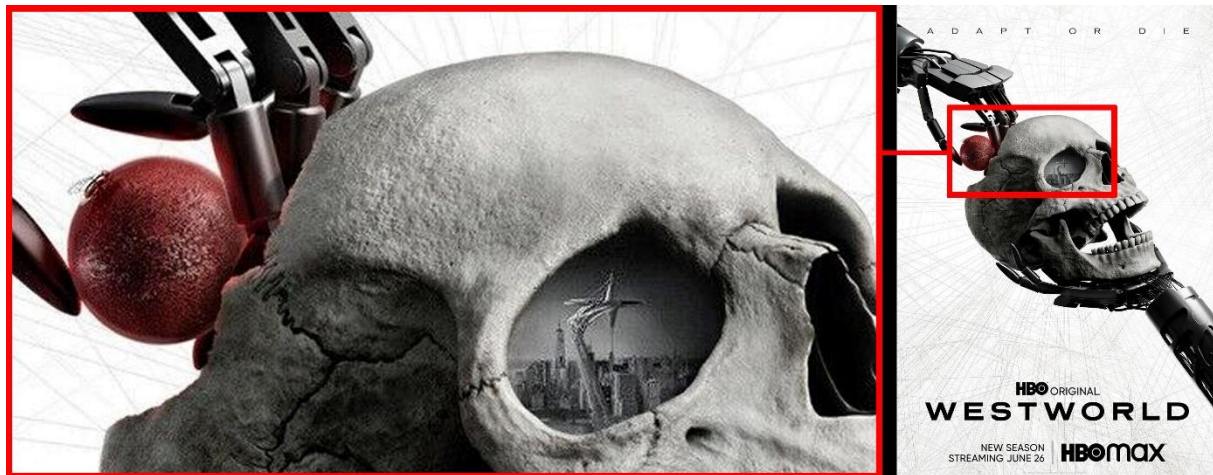


Figure 83. Promotional poster of *Westworld's* fourth season.

In the fourth season's promotional poster, the tagline reads, "Adapt or Die", signaling that the season arc is about the replacement of humans by hosts. *Westworld's* posters and title sequences play with the idea of watching and viewing, like in this specific poster, with the *mise-en-abyme* of the world outside the park reflected in the eye of the skull. The skeleton head is held and manipulated by two robotic hands that insert/take away a red pearl in it. With a closer look on the pearl, a fly becomes discernible thus hinting at the necessity of consciousness to survive. The lines in the background convey the interwoven web of the narrative by illustrating the spider web in which the fly gets caught in the same way characters are trapped in the maze. In a conspicuous reference to *Hamlet* and more specifically the scene with Hamlet holding Yorick's skull ("Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio", V.1.172). Hamlet famously muses on the meaning of life and death, and *Westworld* refers to this existential questioning in its juxtaposition of biological mortality and technological immortality by announcing its post-humanist themes in its final season. The visibility of the cracks on the skull is evidence of human fragility and mortality.²³⁵

²³⁴ A reference to the power of AI and the Hebrew origin of the name implying King Solomon.

²³⁵ The desire to become robots is equally envisioned in *Years and Years* and its teenagers, such as Bethany Lyons, who are obsessed with the digital options that can be added to their human bodies through surgery, transforming their bodies into connected virtual ones and thus identifying as transhuman (Martin 186).

Interrogating the continuity of the series in relation to adaptation, the reference to Hamlet equally reinforces the ghostly state of the hosts and foregrounding the relationship between *Westworld* and *Hamlet* through shared thematic concerns and intertextual references. After all, one could argue that ghosts that motivate the narratives. *Hamlet* is shrouded in the idea of the traumatic event (the King/father's death) that causes both personal and political upheaval then manifests the return of the ghost to haunt his son and spur him to claim justice and revenge. In *Westworld*, the human characters are replaced by humans and becoming g/host versions of themselves. Adapting to the new system implemented by Dolores/Charlotte is a necessary step towards evolution. For the hosts (and indeed humans too) not adapting means perishing, as Dolores tells Teddy in "Akane No Mai" (S02E05) before altering his program to make him "stronger" and more ruthless:

DOLORES. Did I ever tell you about the year we almost lost the herd? Bluetongue. Quarantined the cows that had it, but it kept spreading all the same. Daddy finally figured out it wasn't spreading from cow to cow, it was the flies that carried it. He worried over it all night. How do you stop a sickness like that? One with wings? Say it was you. What would you do Teddy?

TEDDY. I'd give them shelter. House the weakest in a barn, out of the air, away from the flies until it passed.

DOLORES. You're a kind man. Daddy burned them. The weak and the infected. Made a pyre that went on for days and it stank, but the flies hate smoke. The herd lived.

(“Vitù e Fortuna”, S02E03)

Here, Dolores refers to the flies as the parasites responsible for the spread of the bluetongue. In the first season, the flies are represented as the indicators of the hosts' rising consciousness—vectors of a virus. The idea of dysfunction as a plague is corroborated throughout the first seasons with the spread of the “consciousness virus” through intertextual references of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that trigger the inner self and the hidden memories of each host. The symbolism of flies is conventionally used to convey their identity as parasites but in *Westworld* it is almost used as a figure of freedom, of liberation from human control. This is not only corroborated by the fourth season's promotional poster, but is also reiterated in its title sequence, with the evolution of the eagle featured in the season three credit sequence into a fly in season four's rendition. Throughout each season's opening credits, the hosts' symbolism and evolution are made manifest, from horse to buffalo to eagle and finally to a fly carrying the cognitive dysfunctions, infesting humans and spreading death. The changes of the title sequences discussed in chapter three of this thesis are evidence of the movement

from oppression to revenge, then to freedom and perhaps finally becoming the oppressors themselves.

III.3.3. Narrative closure after the apocalyptic event

The Leftovers is a “secular text despite the complexities of both its narrative and approach” (Wilkins 127) that plays with the opposition between religious and secular approaches to the apocalyptic narrative (*ibid*) and successfully depicts the cultural background and landscape around religious thought and sectarianism in the US. Unlike *Westworld*’s constant reminders that the end will be chaotic and violent, *The Leftovers* does not build up expectations about its ending based on definite promises. By creating a sense of ambiguity from its beginning, the TV series prepares the audience for the absence of answers while constantly subverting expectations. Underscoring the difference between “the emotional experience that [the audience is] having as a result of watching what is on the screen versus this is the emotional experience [the audience is] having because the show is ending”,²³⁶ Lindelof affirms that the process of nostalgic ending and sense of closure are different. He thus explains that *The Leftovers*’ finale aims at the creation of cathartic moments in which the audience becomes more enlightened about characters’ feelings and choices during their journey without demystifying the signature of the show: the ambiguity employed throughout its seasons.

The third and final season of *The Leftovers* teases its audience from its very first episode by introducing a cliffhanger occurring several years in the future without using any temporal cue or title cards. This flashforward sequence adds confusion and reveals that Nora and Kevin’s relationship will end in the future, to the point of having Nora lying to a nun about knowing him at all. The final episode returns to this timeline and reunites them. The audience is invited to accept the characters’ stories even if they are denied the desired ending or “left behind” with no cues, flashbacks, and clear-cut transitions that would reveal the nature of the scene, for this TV series tends to avoid providing answers to all events, even less offer a clearly stated closure.

III.3.3.1. Stories are just “lies that told a deeper truth”²³⁷

²³⁶ “Damon Lindelof Explains *The Leftovers* Finale.” *YouTube*, uploaded by New York Magazine, 6 June 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_BTH1pkZaQ.

²³⁷ This is Robert Ford’s quote in “The Bicameral Mind” (S01E10).

At the heart of the apocalyptic tension, the narrative emphasizes Nora and Kevin's relationship at intervals throughout the series and towards the last sequence of the finale. Their reunion in Australia (several years after the events of the third season) is confusing at first when older Kevin pretends not knowing "Sarah" (older Nora) on whose doorstep he is standing by saying he had met a certain Nora in Mapleton and had only shared a dance with her. This story is a lie that misleads the audience (and older Nora) in a way that spreads doubt about the nature of the timeline of Australia along with the existence of the relationship.

After flirting with the idea of the afterlife, exposing Kevin's psychological problems and amnesic episodes, the narrative leaves room for doubt about the story. The absence of guidelines in the form of title credits or cues of flashbacks participate in the inception of hypotheses such as the setting being the afterlife or a parallel universe, or Kevin being unable to recognize Nora due to his recurrent amnesic incidents, or that the character played by Carrie Coon is not in fact Nora at that point, but instead, her Australian double. These speculations are repudiated as the episode slowly uncovers that Nora is having phone therapy sessions with Laurie, and that the final revelation that Kevin lied both out of fear and to make their reality easier.

Likewise, Nora's story in the final sequence of the series raises questions about its veracity and the reliability of this character who supposedly never lies. Throughout the series, she is depicted as a seeker of the truth and as a skeptical person towards what she considers "ridiculous", such as the theory of the "Lens", which speculates on the possibility of Nora's responsibility for the departure of her family; or a matter of geography (the title of the second episode of the second season), meaning that location explains the high probability of departures next to it; or again in the last season when the man in the tower of Jarden suddenly disappears, where she investigates, and finds out that he had died from a heart attack. Nora does not hesitate to denounce the lies behind his fake departure.

Nora admits her spectral state as a "leftover" in the parallel world where the departed had gone, remarking that she was "a ghost who had no place there" ("The Book of Nora", S03E08). Kevin chooses to believe her story and consequently accepts her coping mechanism, for he had gone through a similar unbelievable experience which Nora had rejected. He is also the one to have been haunted by Nora's disappearance, never knowing whether she is alive, departed, or dead. This reversal of roles allows them to reconnect with each other and to choose love and trust over truth. Whether it is a lie or the truth, her story is that of a woman who is stuck grieving the disappearance of her children and who is making sense of this ineffable event.

The finale, “The Book of Nora”, is entitled after the “bravest girl in the world”, who had lost her entire family: her husband and two children. In this final season, Nora investigates a secret and illegal project led by scientists who allegedly send people to wherever the departed went by using a LADR (Low Amplitude Denziger Radiation) machine. After her conviction in the fraudulent nature of the project and after failing the admission tests, Nora ends up fighting to access the machine and to join her departed children, for she needs answers and closure. Nevertheless, Laurie is convinced that closure is not truly desired as in contrast to mourning the dead, departed people are impossible to mourn:

LAURIE. People don’t want closure because it makes it real.

NORA. I want fucking closure.

(“Certified”, S03E06)

This desire for closure evolves into an affirmation of her metaphysical presence-absence in the world of the departed in the finale (O’Connor 34) “by resolving not to communicate with her children after her transmigration to the world of the departed (S3E6)” (*ibid*). The filming of the sequence in which Nora goes through the machine is one of the defining moments of the finale.²³⁸ The opening scene of the finale prepares the audience for Nora’s departure. It introduces the final goodbyes to her brother then moves on to her following the scientists’ instructions. Her entrance in the space where the device is set is filmed by alternating with short flashback scenes that depict her thinking about her children. The full shot during her walk hints at a sort of “death row” moment in this confined space. The camera zooms in on the machine as the metal (in a liquid form) progressively and rapidly rises.

²³⁸ This is also the final scene to be shot in the entire series. “The Book of Nora.” *The Leftovers Wiki*. https://the-leftovers.fandom.com/wiki/The_Book_of_Nora.



Figure 84. Nora entering the machine (*"The Book of Nora"*, S03E08).

From a high-angle shot, Nora looks afraid in this single frame that emphasizes her isolation and a nakedness that only reinforces her vulnerable mortal body. The hazardous liquid surrounds Nora's body to finally reach her face. The sequence cuts in the middle of Nora's shouting the only sounds we overhear "sst", as if to shout "stop!". Moving from this science-fiction setting, the camera abruptly cuts to a shot of a blue sky and a dove that might suggest at first sight that she is dead, in heaven, or that she indeed joined her family on the other side of the 2%. With a temporal ellipse, the following scene is set in Australia many years later.

The ambiguity of *The Leftovers*' finale summarizes Lindelof's whole approach to the source text as he leaves viewers making their own decision about the characters' belief system concerning not only the Sudden Departure but especially the non-occurrence of the awaited apocalypse. The construction of the storyline around Nora's story was controversial and uncertain even among the showrunners and the team of writers. The story was constructed gradually with the participation of the cast to decide whether Nora has gone to the other side or whether she lies about it. This sheds light on the reception practices at work, for the comprehension of the narrative either relies on viewers' active engagement or on their sheer trust and desire to believe the characters in the same way the audience willingly puts aside their logical thinking and prejudices for an accurate suspension of disbelief until the very end of the fictional narrative.

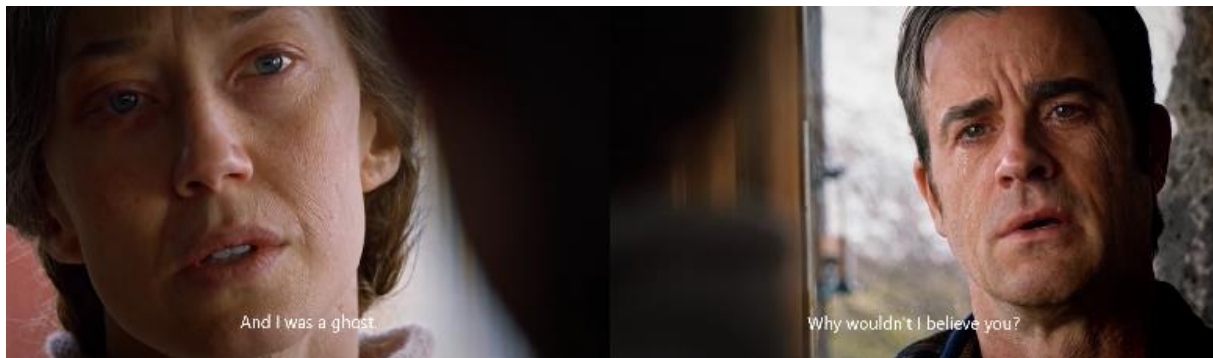


Figure 85. *The Leftovers'* finale: Kevin believes Nora.

In his article “When the Cement of the Universe Breaks Apart: Hume, Causality, and *The Leftovers*”, Enrico Terrone posits that Nora’s story is based on the belief of the natural in the supernatural, a common feature in fantasy genres:

Nora’s tale aims to solve the hesitation by favoring the natural option. The departed did not vanished because of God’s agency or some other supernatural cause; their disappearance, if Nora is right, was rather caused by a fact of nature, though an unpredictable and unprecedented one. However, the events that Nora describes remain off-screen, and this might be a source of skepticism as for the truth of her tale. Kevin finally replies “I believe you” to her, but we are not committed to believe her in turn.²³⁹

Indeed, the final episode, rather than wrapping up its narrative threads, instead puts the viewers in a now-familiar position of uncertainty when Nora tells Kevin the “truth” i.e., her truth, her answer to the puzzle, and Kevin accepts it based on an act of love and trust. Rather than offering the viewer the answers to their questions (including the question of whether Nora is lying), the show instead reveals itself as an embedded love story, a way of learning how to trust and accept the other, a new leap of faith. Viewers can give in to the temptation of believing that all that is introduced is real and fall into the trap of taking what is made visible to the audience for granted, leading them to finally finding themselves further lost in the maze and disoriented. That is why the maze narrative audience needs to think (more than) twice about the paths offered to them and pay even closer attention to the possibly misleading nature of the signs.

²³⁹ Terrone, Enrico. “When the Cement of the Universe Breaks Apart. Hume, Causality, and *The Leftovers*.” *The Leftovers, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*, pp. 72-81, *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, edited by Susana Viegas and Patrícia Castello Branco, Nova University of Lisbon, 2021, pp. 61-71.

Just as viewers have been deprived of seeing the event of the Sudden Departure in the series pilot and opening sequences (the baby Sam's disappearance), the finale restricts visual access to Nora's journey to the other side. Despite delivering some answers and visual representations of the event mid-season, the show circles back to its pilot's strategies of omission and ellipses to illustrate the sense of disorientation post-Sudden Departure. Therefore, it compels its audience to be content with the relationship dynamics surrounding it, and to trigger the appreciative contemplation of the mechanics of the stories.²⁴⁰ Hatchuel talks about a forced ending in which the series' conclusion denies the threat of the apocalypse:

The Leftovers finit dans le déni des dangers qui pèsent sur l'humanité et sur les êtres vivants en général, comme si l'histoire d'amour entre Nora et Kevin pouvait servir de pansement (et d'écran) à l'Apocalypse.

(Hatchuel, *Le troisième côté*, 136)

The series ends on an optimistic and hopeful note, but it also conceals a layer of lies, a way of feeding fans' desire for a satisfying ending but while only offering the illusion of happiness and safety after teaching us about the reactions towards the end of times; to heal is finally to "keep living together" (Fogel qtd. in Hatchuel 137).

The Leftovers is devoid of the classical aesthetics of the post-apocalyptic genre,²⁴¹ and after the seven-year waiting period, the apocalypse does not occur. The real apocalypse lies within the spectrality of characters' social and psychological lives: their (in)ability to cope with the aftermath of hectic events, theories, and interpretations of the end of the world. This is best exemplified by the Guilty Remnant. With their spectral principles and nihilistic vision of the old and new world, the Guilty Remnant's identity is built around the traumatic event of the apocalypse and its expected reoccurrence (Machinal, *Posthumains*, 254).

Closure, in their case, could be brought about by providing a "meaning-making narrative" that would explain the disappearances and enable active forgetting. As this is impossible, the characters cannot work through the trauma, remaining arrested in the past event and the present anticipation of the ultimate annihilation while the future horizon becomes obliterated.

(*ibid*)

²⁴⁰ As Angela, a host from *Westworld*, would say "if you can't tell if it's real, does it matter?" ("Chestnut", S01E02).

²⁴¹ Including tropes like the destruction of civilization, or a drastic change of scenery (now in a state of decay).

The absence of closure during a long period of time after the October 14th event reinforces the characters' creation of plausible narratives and other less conceivable ones to work through the experience of grief and loss. The uncertainty of the end of the world leaves them hanging in a spectral state of anticipation and a desire for annihilation which are conveyed in the serial text through various haunting mechanisms. One can mention by way of example the absence of a distinctly structured linear temporality as well as the restricted access to answers and follow-up questions. Indeed, some storylines and character arcs are reassessed throughout the seasons only to return in the same form with characters facing identical dilemmas in a cyclical serial manner that denies both viewers and characters definite answers. Even as one can stumble again across the same issues unburied by showrunners after a few episodes or even seasons, they seem to only add to the prevailing ambiguity of the show and provide little satisfactory answers. Ultimately, most enigmas that appear resolved are revealed to be mere illusions or temporary associations lacking meaning. For instance, in the hotel-world Kevin's knowledge of Patti's husband or knowledge of Mary's health seems to corroborate the reality of this other side. However, it is refuted by Laurie who reminds him that she was the one telling him about Patti's life when she used to be her patient.

The Leftovers' ambivalent interplay with logical answers that are conflicted with supernatural possibilities within unbelievable situations leads to establish meaning through the haunting signs and characters' interpretation of the event (to explain the Sudden Departure, the awaited apocalypse, and travels to the other side). The TV series' last scenes gradually prepare the audience for its last shots by moving from a scene highly emotionally charged with its single frames and close-ups during Nora and Kevin's conversation to a wide shot of the house from the exterior. The camera work slowly suggests the moment of the exit but still offers a hopeful shot of a blue sky with the return of the love doves. In this manner, the finale employs iconographic techniques to reduce its diegesis.²⁴²

²⁴² Among the categories of closure in novel and film "[...] film endings can be constituted by word order, quotation or sentences beginning with "and" (both spoken or typographic), but also they rely heavily on 'iconographic' techniques or a reduced diegesis, as discussed by Thomas Christen:

a. iconographic techniques, comprising strategies such as creating distance to the characters of a film by zooming out or letting them move away from the camera, imitating the process of closing something up to framing the story through a similarity of beginning and ending.

b. reduction of diegetic elements, which can be achieved by changing certain filmic parameters, e.g., light (fade-out), sound, colour, speed, etc. or – more complicatedly – by including self-referential elements into the film" (Voigts 159).



Figure 86. The last shot of *The Leftovers*.

To conclude, *The Leftovers*' illusory closure is meant to heighten the experience of the end of the world by leaving traces of disappearances and apparitions, and signs that comprise multiple possibilities of interpretation:

Lindelof and Perrotta offer little chance of a valid explanation, disrupting the possibilities of narrative closure. This situation propels the viewers in the position of the expectant witnesses of sudden bursts of anger, which the very first episode establishes as a narrative principle. They are left wondering about the possible remission of this world and the resilience of these characters.

(Joseph and Letort, "Textual Seriality", 8)

III.3.3.2. "What's Next? What's fucking next? NOTHING!"²⁴³

What is dead does not seem to die,²⁴⁴ the ending is ambiguous and does not offer a single answer but multiple possibilities proving that the rewriting of a text is equally ghostly and always returns in another form (*ibid*). The expectations and ambiguity towards the ending encapsulate the inner workings and the haunting mechanisms of the narrative: disorienting techniques and promises that are made throughout the show, reiterated signs and images ultimately attest of the coherence of the narrative's approach throughout i.e., the refusal to explicitly deliver all answers. Florent Favard reintroduces this idea in his *La promesse d'un*

²⁴³ This is Nora's answer to the writer's question in the "Guest" episode. Perhaps it sums up the reality of what comes after the event and after the ending of the TV series: "What's Next? What's fucking next? NOTHING!" (S01E06).

²⁴⁴ « Ce qui semble fini ne semble jamais vouloir le rester » (Machinal, *Posthumains*, 254).

dénouement : énigmes, quêtes et voyages dans le temps dans les séries télévisées de science-fiction contemporaines :

L'intrigue n'est pas bâtie sur une énigme qui exigerait théoriquement d'être « prédéterminée » pour assurer la cohérence de l'histoire ; elle ne porte en substance aucun dénouement possible, sinon la promesse tenue qu'un jour, peut-être, les personnages apprendront à faire sens de cette incomplétude ; cette activité interprétative que partagent personnages et spectateur.ice.s se trouve être son *fil rouge matriciel*.

(Favard, "Promesse", 431)

The finale sheds light on the necessity to learn to live with the presence of emptiness and with the traces left by the absence. In other words, it reinvigorates the show's incentive to "let go" and as both that both characters and viewers learn to face and embrace this "incompleteness".

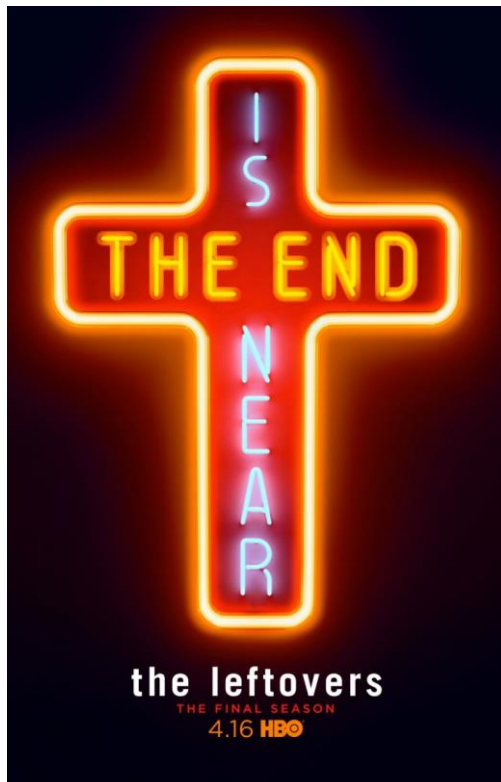


Figure 87. Promotional Poster of The Leftovers' third season.

The promotional poster of *The Leftovers*' final season warns the audience about the upcoming apocalypse through its tagline/image reading, "THE END IS NEAR". It is written in capital letters as a way of emphasizing the urgency of the announcement. It can also be read in the form of a question "IS THE END NEAR," as the words are written on a cross. Therefore, the meaning depends on the chosen angle one will read it, yet again proving the multiple possibilities and interpretations offered by the show in addition to its denial of rendering a complete and single truth.

The neon sign creates a halo-like appearance around the Christian cross that stresses the religious themes of a last season centering on the upcoming apocalypse. Its red-colored neon light alarms us about the negatively charged aspect of the end. The title credits indicate that this is the final season of the series and therefore announces another ending which is implied in the tagline.

The very notion of the stability of meaning is therefore at stake, and repeated attempts to apply logical closure speak volumes about our ways of relating (to) a Real that also seems to

systematically lack logic and structure. But meaning, as Derrida also claims, is always constantly deferred, and the endless contradiction of previous assumptions is always on the verge of being replaced by the realization that they, and we, were wrong.” (Lefait, “Spoilers ahead!”, 163) According to Matthew Poland, the configuration of a narrative by the audience is only achieved with its completion because a single episode or season cannot offer a proper understanding of the work (79); the ending involves movement “from absorption to apprehension, from immersion to interpretation: the ending [can be seen] as a threshold whose crossing ushers us outside the warm abode of the text and into a space of retrospective understanding” (Poland 76). Indeed, it is clear that in each season finale, the tension rises in the last sequences and gives viewers a glimpse of what will come next in the following season without delivering full closure, thus acting as a form of teaser to the next one.

Clémot’s analysis of the possibilities of narrative closure in *Lost* sheds light on the inherent human desire for closure (85). This principally comprises the response towards the haunting signs which are opposing two types of characters and two types of viewers: those who believe the scientific premise that everything happens for a reason and that most characters are only seeking purpose and meaning after the event. For instance, this is Laurie and Nora’s approach throughout most of the narrative and there are those who believe the metaphysical and surrealist aspect of the events, that the hotel-world is real (such as Kevin Sr., Matt, Michael, Virgil, and Kevin himself). The episode “Certified” (S03E06) appears more as a finale with everyone saying goodbye to each other or attempting suicide. Each finally chooses a path and reach their interpretation of the event. At the end no one is feeling better: Matt accepts the terminal stage of his cancer and refuses treatment, Nora decides to go through the machine to join her children, Laurie tries scuba diving as she knows it is hazardous, etc.

In *The Leftovers*, each character claims to know the nature behind the absurdity of the disaster, but no one does; the showrunners remind us that they don’t either. The series’ finale ensures that throughout the seasons, Kevin and Nora’s characters have evolved and dynamically alternated from belief to distrust in the supernatural character of the events until they reach the conclusion that what prevails is faith in the other. The overinterpretation of signs is the means of providing a semblance of freedom from the multiplicity of the narrative’s meaning: to gain some sense of finality and closure. The finale aborts the apocalypse and answers the question, “what’s next?”. *What’s Next* is a book in the diegetic universe of *The Leftovers* which is written by Patrick Johansen about the ways of healing and coping after the Departure.

Thus, the extension of the narrative operates on different levels: the series resort to various techniques aimed at constantly misleading and reorienting the audience to a final exit with borders as blurry as its enigmas. Ultimately, the use of deferred revelations and the postponing of resolutions with each season arc are paradoxically built on an illusionary narrative trap: the maze (with all its signs, quests, dead-ends, and intricate paths). Indeed, these supposedly reorienting techniques rely on promises of an ending and an apocalypse awaited by both characters and viewers to only be denied and aborted in the end.

In due course, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* leave their audiences hanging: Adapting *Westworld* from a franchise of narratives that persist decades after the first source text, *Westworld* is forcefully denied its ending, thus fulfilling the show's promise of a violent end through its very cancellation while *The Leftovers* remains faithful to its vague answers that allow the alert viewer to make up their own interpretation of the ending.

Finally, both via promotional transmedia storytelling platforms and an open ending, these TV shows ensure their afterlife past their date of finale release. They leave a space in which the audience is free to appropriate the meaning of the texts. This is the space in-between the representation of the object (i.e., the text) and its reception (the audience) in which all ghostly elements return and in which the final identity of the series and its ending are reshaped.

Conclusion

Throughout historical periods, the specter of the apocalypse had pervaded contemporary culture and the collective imaginary encompassed in our fiction and screens. In crafting these post-apocalyptic narratives, the showrunners of *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* skillfully delineate a world in which characters must navigate a hostile environment with its own new rules, norms, and societal structures as viewers themselves are exposed to a deeply confusing and labyrinthine narrative with specific storytelling norms and directions to follow. To heed the practices of interpreting and contemplate the potential outcomes of a collapsing civilization appears contradictory to the representation of hope and resilience. Nevertheless, most apocalyptic narratives manage to design a narrative ending on a positive note in a way that emphasizes the desire for survival and continuity of texts after their ending.

Through the image of the labyrinth and its maze-like pattern, we allude to the offering of a multitude of paths that converge and diverge into a possible exit in some cases (closure or resolution of the narrative) but most significantly of the various possibilities of the storyworld to extend, disorient and reorient (not particularly in that specific order). On these paths, the TV shows' creators ensure the dispersal of haunting signs, dreamscapes and several myths spread through these maze narratives in order to challenge viewers' reception and comprehension. Perception of the diegetic reality is altered through these disorienting techniques, thus giving birth to multiple theories about the shows' mysteries. The detective-like audience attempts to make sense of the representation of an unintelligible event.

When a narrative is never achieved, and when it is stopped in the middle, its comprehension and judgment do not end with it; even with a clear ending, fan creations and the ensuing paratexts around the show maintain the text alive. Given the textual spectrality around the *Westworld* franchise throughout the decades and its history as a text generating perpetual adaptations, one can still expect *Westworld* to come back in another form in another time, for the serial format requires a continuity that leaves most endings incomplete and open to change. In the meantime, the narrative survives through its fan-made videos and transmedia storytelling.

General Conclusion

The key features of haunting studies have been applied to our textual analysis as a methodological framework to showcase the extent to which the televisual texts, *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, are rife with haunting mechanisms due to their nature as spectral adaptations remaking the apocalypse. Commenting on the popularity of haunting narratives, Barry Curtis notes that “[H]aunting has become an easy metaphor for anything that is forgotten, unacknowledged and repressed” (24). The relentless intrusion of the past in the present creates a space of instability and uncertainty about the future, one to which we refer as spectral. Persisting through time, the specter returns and haunts the living; it pervades viewers and characters alike by leaving a long-lasting trace, whether it is a textual trace from the source text and other proliferating texts, or a mnemonic trace stemming from the event. As Shaw reminds us, to be haunted means to notice an absence in the present:

The experience of being haunted is one of noticing absences in the present, recognizing fissures, gaps and points of crossover. Hauntology gestures toward the ‘*agency of the virtual*’, since the specter is not of the here-and-now, yet is capable of exercising a spectral causality over the living. In popular culture, the specter is often represented through a series of ‘persistences, repetitions, prefigurations’ that speak both to and of that particular cultural moment.

(Shaw 2)

These TV shows are conscious of their adaptation status and assert their textual visibility as stand-alone valuable works of art. The nature of these televisual narratives, however, is not solely based on their tie to the source, *ergo* to their status of adaptations (Hutcheon’s adaptation *as* adaptation). These complex narratives emancipate themselves from these past inspirations while also keeping strong bonds with not only the source but also other texts. Written in a maze-like fashion, their complexity gives rise to other revivals and ghostly narrative processes. Whether intentional or not, such returns *to* the “original” and *of* the “original” appear in the form of resonances.

On the one hand, we have studied *The Leftovers*, a TV show that invites metaphysical and religious readings, and on the other hand, we have examined *Westworld*, a TV series that introduces the complete negation of any metaphysical presence, replaced by the affirmation of emerging witchcraft-like practices and abilities enabled by the virtual, coding, and AI. In the end, these are two philosophical TV series handing out a multiplicity of possibilities for our world in the face of an upcoming, if not already present, crisis. *The Leftovers* illustrates the crisis of representation on the narratological level by displaying non-linear characteristics of

serial storytelling with each season, appearing as if haunted by its previous one and carrying carefully laid out deceptions (for instance by changing the title sequence, the setting and introducing new characters as if they were the protagonists, the addition of prologues apparently unrelated to the ongoing narrative in the beginning of its seasons, etc.). *Westworld* relies on similar techniques of temporal deceptions to better establish revelations and audience astonishment afterwards. Although *Westworld*'s third and fourth seasons are not part of our primary sources for research, the possibility of getting out can still be refuted later, for the show remains unfinished.

By relying on the TV shows' complex narrative structure and mainly by referring to TV studies and media scholars such as Jason Mittell, we have argued that the temporal construction of the narratives adapts a maze-like model of puzzle films, which rely on memory of past twists and turns to better predict future outcomes, and where the baffling nature of the narrative makes sense only with an overarching perspective. As the two series under study are interested in trauma, loss and spectrality, the narrative complexity that characterizes them is a way of expressing that spectrality.

The spectral approach is broadly relevant to contemporary adaptation studies in its celebration of repetition and relentless rewriting as well as its tendency to revive the dead past. It is not surprising that *The Leftovers* and *Westworld* heavily draw from mythological allusions such as the maze, and pivot around a myriad of references to classic authors and canonical texts. Based on their status of spectral adaptations, these narratives are bound to exhibit their renewal of the old in order to produce future possibilities beyond the source text, thus remaining in the favor of multiplicity and openness to the other.

We began by explaining the fundamental notions of deconstructive thinking in relation to adaptations such as Robert Stam's view on adaptations and Kamilla Elliott's notion of "the spirit of the source text" as something to be retained from the source text and mediated in the adaptation far from the constraints of a faithful rendition. We then distinguished between the two types of return in these spectral adaptations: the return *of* and the return *to* the source text, thereby invoking notions of intentionality and inevitability (inevitable repetition) in adaptations.

Blurring and transgressing boundaries in adaptations is yet another piece of evidence demonstrating adaptation's experimental power and malleable nature, a form of release from conventional narrative codes, whether it is in relation to the source text or to its audience's

expectations. To adapt a story is tantamount to a return *to* the past and *of* the past, i.e., a relentless intrusion of the past in the present time that creates a space of instability and uncertainty about the future; one that we would name spectral. Living in spectral times is far from being part of the past, it is a disorienting presence-absence that could be said to suspend meaning. The haunting is not only repetitive and persistent but is also always in excess, pervading viewers and characters alike by leaving a long-lasting trace (the textual trace from the source text and other proliferating texts, as well as the mnemonic trace of the event...).

In adapting *The Leftovers* to the small screen, showrunner Damon Lindelof reopens the narrative space, not only Tom Perrotta's novel of the same title but mostly of a story that resonates with other texts and specters, such as Lindelof's first serial narrative *Lost*. In this sense, the ABC TV series haunts the audience's reception process to the point of referring to *The Leftovers* as its twin series, i.e., the inverted story of the people who remain behind, those who mourn the loss of the departed in opposition to the tale of what happened to the passengers of Oceanic flight 815 after its crash. In other words, the storytelling space expands itself in the collective imaginary of the viewers as a fictional multiverse where all texts interconnect without truly merging in their non-diegetic world.

Westworld gestures towards a similar logic of authorial influence but is mostly overshadowed by its main source text, Michael Crichton's Western movie, as well as its proliferating texts throughout the years. The groundwork of this approach to the *Westworld* franchise would be to determine the trace of the shows that came before it and that continue to spread after it. Most expectations relating to the adaptation significantly dwell in the long-established reputation surrounding the context of its production, as the HBO cable channel offers several liberties and constraints for the creative process and its reception by an audience accustomed to specific types of material offered by the channel that proudly claims its non-affiliation to a conventional brand of televisual products, namely the ultimate provider of Quality TV.

The TV adaptation deviates from its source texts, particularly from the original film *Westworld* (Crichton, 1973), in which the major incident in the park is due to technical glitches rather than AI sentience and the humanoids' revenge as they kill with no apparent motives, unless the fact that we are told the androids have been programmed by other machines suggests that the latter are in fact looking to annihilate the human species. As opposed to *Westworld*, these source texts do not offer their audience privileged access to observe the humanoids' transformation. The process of their awakening is directly introduced as a major threat for

humanity, while *Westworld* introduces such details to make viewers empathize with the humanoids rather than the humans.

In this research we have explored the ways in which some TV adaptations, namely the HBO TV shows *The Leftovers* and *Westworld*, come to occupy a spectral liminal space of representation and interpretation. In the preceding pages, we recognize the necessity to move beyond mere faithfulness to the source text by acknowledging the multiplicity of the inspirations that led to the adaptation. Among these influences one can cite the transcendence of the source text's ideology through a distinctive authorial voice of the adapter. We have therefore examined the auteur theory in television writing as a key foundation of the haunted state of these TV shows, a liminal state that pushes them beyond any intelligible or possible limit established by the source. We have proceeded by showing how such a state is noticeably uncanny in its nature, for adaptations are likely to display an ambivalent tendency towards "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 4) along with a strong propensity for invoking and playing with the various existing specters that destabilize characters and viewers alike.

In the first part, we have introduced the idea of spectral returns to the source text as central to adaptations by exploring the presence-absence of textual traces. Ghostly textuality invites a broader understanding of the identity of televisual adaptations in relation to their source text; to see the invisible and what may not be noticeable at first sight, then to leave space for experimentation and extension of the adaptations' serial format.

As we have already seen in the first chapter with the notion of "spectral adaptations", the haunting mechanisms at work between the source texts and their adaptations follow the Derridean viewpoint of hauntology. In other words, adapting is perceived as a process of haunting in which the depiction and serialization of the apocalypse here is another example of the spectro-poetics of the event in these TV shows. We have argued that there is no spirit or essence to be transferred in adaptation; instead, we have shown that adaptation is spectral in the sense that it is haunted by this very debate and by its uncertain and controversial identity.

The second chapter's analysis of spectral returns of other texts within TV adaptations revealed the heterogeneous nature of adaptations constantly embarking on a process of invoking specters in their rewriting, which is in turn identified as transfictional writing. We have therefore analyzed the various forms of resonances and reverberations in TV adaptations.

As already established, the audience's collective memory plays a large part in providing the interpretation of a TV adaptation. This chiefly points to the power of reception and creation

of meaning at the hands of the audience. We have therefore acknowledged the hauntological nature of these HBO TV adaptations that give shape to infinitely embedded specters (the ones that return and the ones to come). Using the symbol of the palimpsest, we have argued that the textual layers of these serial adaptations open the space of dialogical readings and the *mise-en-abyme* structure of spectro-poetics.

Another significant aspect of spectral return is examined in the third chapter. It centers on the mark or memory trace left by the authorial power of the TV adaptation; be it the TV production channel, the showrunner, or the author of the source text. The adaptation's production and reception are haunted by multiple specters that seem to vary from one adaptation to another. In these TV shows, the narrative is equally haunted by the showrunners' role as adapters, the production network HBO, and its tendency to promote adaptations and *auteurism*. After defining the role of *auteurism* in the reception of the TV series, we have determined the presence-absence of the author of the source text including the authorial traces and their previous works haunting each other.

We have equally referred to Nolan's previous works such as *Memento* (Nolan 2001) and *Person of Interest*, which evoke many of the same thematic concerns as *Westworld* such as AI, traumatic memories, surveillance, and fragmented temporality or non-linear narration.²⁴⁵ Haunting in *Westworld* extends to the Western as a cinematic genre based on Japanese samurai movies that would also inform the "Shogunworld" park and other references to iconic nineteen seventies movies. The issue of the genre would accordingly be addressed in terms of haunting, as the specter has its own literary and cinematic past of gothic poetics and these TV shows remain on the fringe of genres, in a hybrid mix of realistic drama, sci-fi and post-apocalyptic fiction. We have concluded that ghostly authors engage in a deliberate haunting process through the use of subtexts, paratexts, intertexts, and Easter eggs in the TV adaptation for both the savvy audience and the unknowing audience in order to misdirect and create various signs for them to assess.

The second part centers on the dynamics of the haunting memory and temporality which are ingrained in the medium of TV and its intricate narratives. We have analyzed these non-linear narratives by looking at the intrusion of the past into the diegetic and non-diegetic world through technologies and television. The fourth chapter takes a deeper look into the spectral

²⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a significant difference to be pointed out is that *Person of Interest* follows a rather traditional rhythm with narrative arcs that are generally structurally organized (excepting some distinctive flashbacks).

nature of the televisual medium as we have demonstrated the role of the TV industry and technologies in the prompting of haunting memories and traumatic events. Likewise, it highlights the role of technologies in blurring the border between the real and the fictional by introducing haunting and haunted content. The association of paranormal activities and technology stems from the cultural presumptions about technophobia. It is conspicuous that representations of responses to technological advances shed light on anxiety about the future and disorientation in the face of the unknown realm of the virtual. Again, such cultural beliefs develop in the form of generic conventions and TV tropes as we have shown in our examination of the Ghost in the machine trope in film and television. This is predominantly used as a trope recurrent on screens to express society's use of technology as a weapon, and even as a means to reach immortality. TV shows such as *Black Mirror* and *Upload* address such themes by commingling the digital world and technological innovations to the issue of memory, consciousness, and the afterlife. Our discussion on photography's spectral nature has highlighted its relation to uncanny manifestations that convey absence and nostalgia in *The Leftovers*. This has revealed the temporal function of photographs in stopping time and containing specters in a static moment and a single image that perpetually haunt not only the second and third title sequences but also the entire narrative.

Chapter five interrogates the temporal crisis in these complex TV shows. Whether reduced to its role as a social construct or as the physical movement of the earth around itself (to determine days) and the earth revolving around the sun (thus determining years), time remains an entity out of human control. However, in fiction, in general, and in complex TV narratives, time can be manipulated by its creators and audiences. *The Leftovers* and *Westworld's* viewers are thereby able to control time in the way they interact with it, through a reconstruction of meaning. Building tension and suspense, temporal complexity of contemporary TV shows displays the abundant use of alternative universes, analepses, ellipses, multiple timelines, etc. The narratives' ellipses have been determined as part of the misdirection process which makes characters' memories unreliable and defamiliarizes the audience. Challenging moments of viewing non-linear narratives, temporal dislocation and displacement lead invested viewers to restore chronological order. By using fans' narrative and temporal reconstruction of meaning as an example, we have proved that these complex serial narratives are crafted in order to generate disorientation among characters and viewers alike.

The maze narratives discussion in chapter six explores the multifaceted disorientation techniques in these TV series and the different ways in which characters and viewers become

haunted, for instance, through the uncanny apparitions of the figure of the double. We have examined the doubles of *The Leftovers* which are purely psychological entities living in Kevin's psyche as he travels through the maze of the afterlife/hotel-world. In *Westworld* we have referred to doubles and clones haunting the treaders of the maze by denoting the bicameral mind theory and the authorial and authoritative voices taking the form of the daemon within the hosts' mind. This has resulted in a discussion about the creator's role as God and guide within the maze, thus invoking issues of authorial intention and (over)interpretation. In her introduction to *The Double, the Labyrinth and the Locked Room*, Ilana Shiloh acknowledges the maze's structure as constructed for disorienting ends, specifically in relation to existential meaning and purpose due to its "teleological construct" as it is primarily "designed as to thwart all attempts to successfully reach the *telos*" (7). The question of finality and resolution in maze-like narratives is therefore of utmost relevance to the maze's teleological structure. To recognize the teleological aspect of storytelling entails the crystallization of viewers, expectations towards the pre-established purpose of the narrative, thus hindering the free-interpretative aspect of reception.

After examining the disorienting effects of non-linear structures, the third and final part of this thesis questions the possibilities of narrative closure in these spectral TV adaptations. In the seventh chapter, we have referred to these narratological elements constructed around enigmas as haunting signs. In these TV shows, they generally appear in the form of dreams and anticipation of the end of the world. Despite their seemingly meaningful characteristics, haunting signs are either used as narrative traps and empty promises or in some cases as rewards for the attentive viewers (e.g., Easter eggs). In *The Leftovers*' universe, overinterpretations and overanalyses of these signs is encouraged by showrunners who have conceived a TV show in which its metaphysical stance indicates that if 2% of the world population has vanished instantaneously, then why shouldn't anything be possible? In this quest for meaning, the process of viewing and interpretation embodies the tread into the maze-narrative and its chaotic effects by following misleading signs. By referring to Joseph Campbell's monomyth, we have analyzed Kevin's hero journey and the belief systems that lead him to await the apocalypse. This is embodied in characters' confinement in their personal struggles after the event and their attempts to make their way back home. Likewise, *Westworld* transforms its viewers into conspiracists through its laying out of elaborate and complex enigmas. Further teasing viewers' detective skills in interviews, showrunners encourage the obsessive quest for meaning by implanting several connections. Dream sequences in these TV shows have proved to be a major

disorientating strategy as they are full of haunting signs. Nonetheless, we have concluded the necessity of caution for the audience in their forensic fandom practices as they get further lost in the vertigo of the labyrinth while looking for answers. This quest for meaning is particularly expected to have a resolution towards the end of season arcs or the finale of the entire show.

Following the compulsion to repeat the past in adapting the event, the apocalypse is depicted as a source of characters' over-interpretation. As chapter eight lays out, disillusion in textual poaching practices is essentially part of the reception of the series' finale and the trauma of the apocalypse. This is particularly accurate when adapting an apocalyptic fiction which also leads us to ponder on the necessity of remaking an apocalyptic fiction if the plot is already familiar to audiences. The adaptation of an apocalyptic narrative paints a world devoid of hope either in the form of the AI revolution in *Westworld* or as the anticipated flood of the second departure in *The Leftovers*.

Further ensuring the adaptation's hybridity by re-creating a show with diverse generic conventions, the spectral narrative strategies reveal the possibilities of rewriting and re-interpretation. Multiple perspectives are offered by the multi-layered narratives as they are reluctant to usher the audience in a singular direction, thus committing instead to their labyrinthine structure and abiding by the adaptation's norms and its hybrid generic codes. The awareness of "storytelling norms" allows anticipation without spoilers (Mittell, *Complex TV*, 165) about not only its anticipation of the end of the world but mostly the series' finale.

The ninth and final chapter explores the issue of serial closure. Defined by their ending, these TV shows offer reorientation and revelations by creating the illusion of an exit to the maze narrative. We have explored the ways in which the finale is open to multiple meanings through serial techniques of postponing, eluding, and eschewing resolution. Judging and evaluating the final work's unity restricts the narrative's value to its ending. We have also discussed how *Westworld* has eschewed final evaluation due to its unexpected cancellation by its network channel HBO. Facing a sudden interruption, haunting mechanisms and spectro-poetics of the event are fruitful approaches to the narrative's scope of interpretation. In this manner, when the notion of identity is put into crisis in these spectral texts, the hermetic audience must empower itself through resilience and appropriation of meaning mainly via transmedia storytelling.

The origin and cause of the event in (post)cataclysmic narratives can comprise supernatural attacks (such as zombies and other non-human entities attacking Earth), an ecological burst, or a theological end of the world. Whether the apocalypse leaves one or few

survivors, the predicament and the premise of the most fictive narrative conventionally center on the struggle of these characters with how to live in this post-world. While depicting an alternative to the “real world” and reimagining the near future (post)apocalyptic narratives can widely be interpreted as cautionary tales about the origin of the crisis and the underlying issues around it.

The continuity of stories and narratives after the end marks the hopeful approach towards the future (*Adapting Endings* 160) However, as apocalyptic narratives contend, such threats cannot be avoided for too long. Crises are seldom aborted in time, but they are often identified before their occurrences, following the evident signs and the warnings for the urgency to take efficient actions. Douglas E. Cowan offers four scenarios of (post)apocalyptic endings in pop culture by claiming that:

[...] millennial hopes are realized and a beneficent future unfolds; apocalypse is denied and we return to normalcy; apocalypse is delayed and we move to a state of heightened or renewed watchfulness; or, apocalypse is realized, and we face the possibility either of extinction or of life in a post-apocalyptic nightmare.

(Cowan 625)

These scenarios are likely to proliferate as long as the global situation is perceived as risky, fickle, fragile and uncertain. The fact that the narratives continue after the end, however, also supports Cowan’s point that there is an element of future hope that prevails in many, but not all popular post-apocalyptic narratives (Voigts, *Adapting Endings*, 159-60) as Derrida claims, the apocalypse is always haunting: it threatens to come but never arrives: “the end approaches, but the apocalypse is long-lived” (Derrida and Leavey 29).

The alluring aspect of apocalyptic TV shows has led to their adaptation in recent years. We can refer to dystopic narratives such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Man in the High Castle* (Prime Video 2015-2019) and its depiction of a Nazi-ruled world where the power of artistic production is at the heart of change and resistance. Exploring themes of sci-fi mystery, memory, temporality through time travel and the perception of the passing of time, *Tales From the Loop* engages its viewers in a haunting experience that includes speculative scenarios around doubling and technological development. Other thought-provoking TV shows such as *Station Eleven* reimagine survival storylines of a pandemic narrative with non-linear temporal interplays.

Providing detailed depictions of traumatic outcomes unfolding in fictional worlds, these TV shows undoubtedly enlighten their audience about real-life practices by going beyond

simple reminders and spectral returns and instead by inciting their audience to actively think and consciously draw parallels between the fictional world and the possibilities of survival in the real world. In this vein, spectral TV adaptations about post-apocalyptic events shed light on the possibilities of reinventing the present. This is a fundamental understanding of the spectral address and the spectral injunction inherent in haunting studies: when profoundly thinking about the presence-absence of spectral manifestations, we become able to engage with the disruptive essence and effects of the event. Put differently, the deconstructive reading aims at raising ethical responsibilities by calling to address specters whether to represent silenced voices, to invite specters in (hospitality towards the unknown) or recognize the resourceful state of liminality.

Based on theater director's, Augusto Boal's, concept of "theater of the oppressed", Cason Murphy draws a connection between the dynamics of resistance in *The Leftovers* by analyzing the Guilty Remnant's actions and viewer response to their ideology. The theater of the oppressed is defined as follows:

a theatrical and theoretical form focused on social and political engagement that concerns itself with providing any group of "oppressed" people the means by which to identify the source of their oppression and actualize realworld strategies to change the power dynamic.

(Murphy 104)

Probing emancipation, Murphy's article "Augusto Boal Is Alive and Well and Living in Mapleton: The Guilty Remnant in HBO's *The Leftovers*" foregrounds the similarities between the Guilty Remnant's nihilistic approach with similar disruptive methods in breaking down and transgressing the barriers between viewership (Mapleton's inhabitants) and active performance (which is defined in terms of "spect-actors" in Murphy's article). We note that this audiovisual experience aims to move viewers from passive subjects to active ones, by crossing a threshold "in terms of moving from spectator to actor" (107). Although we have not explored this idea in relation to Boal's theater, the recognition of the audience as the responsible party and actor for the spectral narrative remains at the heart of our arguments.

This perspective can be further developed in relation to ethical studies or to serial adaptation's own liminality. Indeed, in standing on the margins of their own field, TV adaptations negotiate boundaries of textuality. In this sense, the specter is at the crossroads of the labyrinthine space, reminding viewers (both the knowing adaptation audience and unknowing general audience) of the dangers of overinterpretation within the maze and the

necessity to embrace the alterity of texts (i.e., the multiplicity of meanings and voices). The text's spectral identity and its haunting mechanisms comprising the spectro-poetics of the event operate within its corridors and walls, and mostly its frontiers in their depiction of transtextual relations by looking and treading beyond the borders of the maze-like spectral adaptation. Based on Edward Soja's²⁴⁶ notion of the third space, we understand that spaces are divided into a first space (the space of the real), the second space (the imaginary space) and the third space; a social space in which the other two spaces coexist i.e., both the material and the mental dimensions of spatiality fuse together. His notion of the third space was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's *Aleph* and its infinite spatiality. This encourages moving beyond binary opposites in the labyrinthine text:

Renvoyant à un « entre-deux » du réel et de l'imaginaire, le concept du tiers espace peut indiquer une troisième voie et constituer un espace hybride, voire transgressif par excellence.²⁴⁷

This is when the spectral address is helpful, an opening to the alterity of ghosts is the key to find an issue, perhaps even hope. Because in embracing the unknown and frightening part of the event, its disruptive and ambiguous powers we can fully engage in a cognitive response and responsible actions. The spectral injunction of these TV spectral adaptations consists of readjustment, reconstruction, and reconfiguration of perspectives about the haunting traumatic event.

We have studied the interruptive aspects of the specter to reveal the way a spectral crisis operates at different levels; ontological, temporal, and cognitive. HBO's original content such as *Westworld* and *The Leftovers* are unmistakably maze narratives. Their textual afterlife is informed by the sites of possibilities for the future by always rewriting and expanding stories in a spectral space that celebrates an openness to the "other," for the viewers' own act of rewriting. As explained above, spectral thought refutes the notion of confinement and categorization and thereby refuses to settle for a single and definite view of existence and a fixed perception of textuality that would inevitably reject the heterogeneity of the self, "[...] breaching the self-sufficiency of contemporary drama and destabilising the notions of independent and coherent selves" (Lorek-Jezińska 7). From this perspective, one can argue that

²⁴⁶ Soja is an urbanist and geographer who used the model of the spatial triad based on Henri Lefebvre's theory (Meskell-Brocken 242).

²⁴⁷ Tsakiropoulou, Evangélie. « La ville méditerranéenne, en tant qu'espace labyrinthique : Réflexions sur les romans *Cités à la dérive* et *Printemps perdu* de Stratis Tsirkas. » *Academic Journal of Modern Philology*, vol.11, 2021, pp. 177-186.

the reverberations of the spectral continue to make themselves felt, whether we as viewers have found our way outside the maze or not: unlike this work of analysis, the spectral trace does not end.

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Figure 88. Haunting Mechanisms in Westworld (HBO, 2016-2022) and The Leftovers (HBO, 2014-2017).

Credits go to journalist and artist Aïcha Marine Chamari.

Résumé détaillé en français

Qu'est-ce qu'un spectre si ce n'est la hantise d'une mémoire de ce qui n'a été jamais été vécue au présent,²⁴⁸ de ce qui pourrait être, mais qui n'est ni totalement présent ni entièrement absent. Source de maux, la hantise est souvent représentée sous le prisme d'une souffrance dont on ne sort pas indemne. Dû à son affiliation culturelle aux genres fictionnels tel que la fiction gothique ou encore l'épouvante, le fantôme, ou le spectre, est présenté en tant qu'être surnaturel destiné à nuire aux vivants.

Cette thèse propose une approche de la déconstruction en étudiant le spectre comme métaphore conceptuelle, c'est-à-dire, une entité liminale se trouvant entre la vie et la mort, ni entièrement visible ou invisible. Ainsi, nous nous référons à la théorie du philosophe Jacques Derrida et son néologisme « hantologie » (combinaison de l'ontologie et de la hantise), Derrida a initié la critique en rapport avec la spectralité qui est notamment développée dans sa critique littéraire de l'œuvre Shakespearienne, *Hamlet*, qu'on retrouve dans son livre *Spectres de Marx*. Malgré sa connotation Gothique et ses origines d'histoires de fantômes, ici le terme « hantise » évoque toute forme d'obsession, de retour, ou de répétition. Il n'est alors pas anodin de l'associer à la psychanalyse : au retour du refoulé et à la compulsion de la répétition. Pour définir les spectres provenant de l'inconscient, du passé et pour délinéer leurs effets textuels et métatextuels, nous avons étudié les principes fondamentaux des études de la hantologie et des phénomènes de la spectralité qui nous ont servi de fondation méthodologique à notre analyse textuelle. Cette démarche vise à mettre en lumière les enjeux de la spectralité narratologique des textes télévisuels, notamment des adaptations de la chaîne HBO, *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017) et *Westworld* (2016-2022).

Ces séries sont imprégnées de mécanismes de hantise ; d'une part, nous avons examiné une série ouvrant la voie à des interprétations métaphysiques et religieuses, et d'autre part, une série niant toute présence métaphysique tout en affirmant l'émergence de pratiques et aptitudes semblables à de la sorcellerie, rendues possibles par le virtuel, la programmation et l'intelligence artificielle. Ces deux séries, profondément philosophiques, offrent un éventail de perspectives sur notre monde face à une crise imminente ou déjà en cours. *The Leftovers* illustre

²⁴⁸ Derrida, Jacques. *Ghost Dance*, directed by Ken McMullen, 1983.

la crise de la représentation à travers des caractéristiques non linéaires de la narration sérielle, chaque saison semblant hantée par la précédente, tout en présentant des trompe-l'œil soigneusement conçus. De son côté, *Westworld* utilise des techniques similaires de tromperie temporelle pour mieux surprendre et émerveiller le public par la suite.

L'approche spectrale semble pertinente dans les études contemporaines de l'adaptation, dans sa célébration de la répétition et de la réécriture incessante, et dans sa tendance à raviver un passé révolu. Il n'est pas étonnant que *The Leftovers* et *Westworld* s'inspirent abondamment de la mythologie et gravitent autour de nombreuses références aux auteurs classiques et aux textes canoniques. En raison de leur statut d'adaptations spectrales, ces récits sont destinés à manifester leur renouvellement de l'ancien afin de produire des possibilités futures au-delà du texte source, en faveur de la multiplicité et de l'ouverture à l'autre.

La hantise implique une crise de la représentation lorsque le sujet hanté rencontre quelque chose qui est « autre », l'altérité dans un état purement spectral (Foley 24). Ces textes sont essentiellement caractérisés par des effets perturbateurs et de brouillage narratologique qui établissent des mécanismes spectraux, notamment la mise en scène de « dysfonctionnements » narratifs tels que la fragmentation, l'instabilité des personnages, de l'événement et des structures, souvent représentées par des ellipses.

La hantise est-elle source de liberté si elle ne se limite pas aux restrictions binaires, si elle met en scène les possibilités de l'impossible ? L'intrigue de *Westworld* interroge ces limites en relation à l'usage éthique de la technologie et du traitement de données. Indéniablement, l'information est source de pouvoir comme le dit l'un des personnages de la série : « La bonne information au bon moment est plus redoutable que n'importe quelle arme. »²⁴⁹ Par la suite, nous avons analysé les souvenirs artificiels refoulés des androïdes et en attirant l'attention sur l'autorité de l'auteur dans la narration sérielle. Ces personnages hôtes sont habités par une voix intérieure qui est censée être celle de leurs créateurs, tout en traversant des crises cognitives ou des dissonances. Leurs mécanismes spectraux les aident à atteindre la conscience et à accomplir la quête du labyrinthe en découvrant la vérité sur leur nature artificielle. Le progrès technologique dans cette fiction spéculative est abordé comme un moyen d'atteindre l'immortalité et de gagner un pouvoir semblable à celui d'un dieu par le biais de l'intelligence artificielle. Il y a bien une interrogation ontologique dans l'avancée technologique portant non

²⁴⁹ “The right information at the right time is deadlier than any weapon.” Martin Connells/Dolores Abernathy in “Genre” (S03E05).

seulement une fonction diégétique mais essentiellement un rôle extra-diégétique générant des questionnements existentiels ancrés dans la rencontre spectrale de l'autre.

Quant à *The Leftovers*, elle nous met en relation avec le mystère en nous incitant à refuser de nous engager à résoudre ce dernier. D'emblée, les créateurs de la série nous entraînent dans une quête aussi insensée que l'événement de la soudaine disparition qui hante les personnages, une quête qui refuse son propre statut. Cette incitation à délaisser toute interrogation vis-à-vis de la cause de l'événement ne tient pas non plus d'un éloge de l'oisiveté spectatorielle. Nous interprétons cette approche vraisemblablement contradictoire en tant qu'invitation à transformer le spectateur en acteur. En d'autres termes, le récit, de par son statut d'adaptation spectrale, reprend les mécanismes de l'évènement traumatique pour en créer l'expérience audiovisuelle ultime de la hantise au niveau du récit, de l'esthétique, et de la sémiotique.

Nous avons aussi étudié de près la question de la réception de l'adaptation dans un contexte où la période entre la production de l'œuvre originale et de l'adaptation est assez longue, permettant ainsi à plusieurs spectres textuels de se cristalliser dans la mémoire spectatorielle et l'imaginaire collectif de ces textes. Nous avons constaté que la répétition inerrante à l'adaptation est certes dûe à la nature palimpsestueuse des textes, aux références, à l'intertextualité, néanmoins cette répétition révèle la liminalité dans laquelle se trouve l'adaptation c'est-à-dire un état spectral de présence-absence du texte source qui n'a pas été bien « enterré ».

Nous avons procédé à l'étude de la trace émanant de la réputation des *showrunners* et le rôle qu'elles/ils jouent dans la réalisation d'une série toujours en lien avec les influences de chaque créateur et ses anciennes productions en passant par l'histoire et l'évolution de la chaîne HBO ainsi que l'influence de la diffusion de contenus reconnus comme artistiques et sophistiqués, ce que l'on appelle « *Quality TV* », la télévision de qualité. Afin de mieux appréhender les effets spectraux, nous nous sommes tournés vers l'étude de la télévision en tant qu'objet spectral, sériel et moyen de visionnage des séries (aujourd'hui virtuel car il englobe la notion de tout type d'écrans : téléphone et autres). La télévision est source de retour spectral et est souvent représentée en lien avec le surnaturel au cinéma. Elle présente également une répétition que nous avons associé à la mémoire traumatique en psychanalyse et le retour du refoulé.

En étudiant de près la spectralité au cinéma, nous en avons déduit ce rapport inévitable entre cinéma et technologie et ce qu'on appelle « the ghost in the machine », littéralement le fantôme dans la machine. Comme le soutient Derrida, « cinéma + psychanalyse = science des fantômes ». (Derrida, Ghost Dance).

Nous avons de ce fait exploré l'idée du spectre en tant que sujet liminal qui se tient entre le vivant et le non-vivant, le présent-absent qui se manifeste dans le présent pour interrompre toute logique, toute certitude. Ceci a été mis en lien avec la notion de temporalité disjointe. Le récit télévisuel a donc été perçu en tant que structure labyrinthique sérielle qui arrive à tromper les spectateurs en opérant des mécanismes spectraux identifiés en tant que pièges narratifs visant à créer la confusion et ainsi à transmettre le sentiment de désorientation et d'embrouillement psychologique des personnages fictifs.

Le cheminement du récit au travers des arcs narratifs et procédés non-conventionnels du format sériel présente de manière édifiante le bouleversement de la structure temporelle des séries complexes principalement caractérisées par l'absence de linéarité ou de cohérence apparente. Ce rapport au temps interroge et perturbe. Comme Lévinas, nous reconnaissons l'avenir tel un autre qui s'empare de l'être. Les personnages de ces séries télévisées sont pris au piège par l'altérité de l'avenir et son anticipation, à l'affût de signes, de sens caché, dans l'attente perpétuelle d'une fin.

Nous en avons conclu que le rejet de toute forme de linéarité, de certitude qui laisse place à une ambiguïté invite les spectateurs à créer leur propre sens dans cette navigation du labyrinthe comme une ouverture aux textes proliférant autour de l'adaptation et de son texte source. La discussion s'est ensuite orientée vers cette même forme d'incertitude et d'absence de « sortie » du labyrinthe en étudiant le contexte de ces séries : la crise, qu'elle soit temporelle, identitaire, collective ou apocalyptique.

Quand un récit n'est jamais achevé suite à une interruption provenant de la production sa compréhension et son jugement se poursuivent ; même avec une fin claire, les créations artistiques des fans et les paratextes qui en découlent autour de la série maintiennent le texte en vie. Compte tenu de la spectralité textuelle autour de la franchise *Westworld* au fil des décennies et de son histoire en tant que texte générant des adaptations perpétuelles, nous pouvons nous attendre à ce que *Westworld* revienne sous une autre forme à un autre moment, car le format sériel exige une continuité qui laisse la plupart des fins incomplètes et ouvertes au changement.

En attendant, le récit survit grâce à ses vidéos créées par les fans et à la narration transmédiasique.

En effet, ces séries s'appuient sur l'illusion d'un dénouement, la désorientation du spectateur tout en incitant l'émancipation de ce dernier. Étant des adaptations spectrales réimaginant l'apocalypse, ces séries télévisées, conscientes de leur statut d'adaptation, revendiquent leur autonomie en tant qu'œuvres d'art à part entière. Leur nature ne se repose pas uniquement sur leur lien avec le texte source. Rédigées de manière labyrinthique, ces récits complexes s'émancipent tout en conservant des liens étroits avec le texte source et d'autres textes, engendrant d'autres renaissances et processus narratifs spectraux.

Titre : Les mécanismes de la spectralité dans *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2022) et *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017).

Mots clés : Spectralité, Adaptation télévisée, Événement, Réception, Apocalypse, Désorientation.

Résumé :

Cette thèse traite la hantise en tant que métaphore. Nous utiliserons la notion d’hantologie pour définir, entre autres, les spectres qui proviennent de l’inconscient, du passé et leurs effets textuels et métatextuels. Compte tenu de leur format sériel et audiovisuel, les séries permettent de développer l’aspect de la hantise sous différentes formes. Cette étude n’est pas uniquement fondée sur la hantise des séries en tant qu’adaptations hantées par leurs sources mais aussi sur la hantise textuelle et narrative. Le corpus sera essentiellement constitué de deux séries américaines dramatiques qui sont considérées comme hantées : *Westworld* et *The Leftovers*. Ces séries postmodernes représentent un passé à caractère spectral qui ne cesse de se répéter dans le moment présent. Dans chaque série, la persistance d’un passé omniprésent est au cœur de l’histoire et provoque un certain trouble : trouble dans le temps, trouble de la mémoire, trouble de la personnalité, et trouble dans le récit.

Title: Haunting Mechanisms in *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2022) and *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017).

Keywords: Spectrality, TV adaptations, Event, Reception, Apocalypse, Disorientation.

Abstract:

This thesis relies on the notion of “haunting” as a conceptual metaphor instead of a “supernatural” phenomenon. Despite its Gothic connotation and its origins in relation with ghost stories, the word “haunting” refers to all forms of obsession, of resurfacing, or repetition. It can therefore be associated with psychoanalysis: with the resurfacing of repressed memories and the repetition compulsion. We will use it to define namely the specters emanating from the unconscious, from the past and their textual and metatextual effects.

Given their serial and audiovisual format, the series are used to develop the “haunting” aspect through its various types. This study does not limit itself to the haunting based on the series as adaptations haunted by their sources, but it also involves textual and narrative haunting. The corpus will be mainly based on two dramatic American series, both considered as haunted series: *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2022) and *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017). These postmodern series represent a spectral past that keeps repeating itself in the present. In each series, the persistence of an omnipresent past is at the heart of the story and triggers a certain disorder: a temporal disorder, a memory disorder, a personality disorder and a narrative disorder.