The Polish Journal
of Aesthetics

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Melancholia

Edited by
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On the Path to Melancholy

Everyday concepts often carry a unique emotional color, rarely showing any ambivalence. Such is the case with melancholy. The veil of sadness that envelops melancholy can be pleasant and unpleasant, desirable, or unwanted. On one hand, there is romanticism, Chopin's nocturne, an indefinable longing for an unreachable ideal. The memory of lost happiness transports us back to past times, which we only perceive from a distant perspective as the best of what could have been given to us. On the other hand, melancholy is an expression of disappointment, and barrenness, a void that dangerously floods the oppressed soul, emerging from some dark corners of the subconscious.

Melancholy is always slow, unfamiliar with violent swirls or sudden outbursts. It meanders rather than strides and certainly does not rush or race anywhere. Melancholy descends like fog and, until it thickens, can arouse sensations that we consider pleasant. Yet, when intensified and denser, it sucks like a whirlpool into the abyss. Its victims elicit deserved sympathy, but there are also beneficiaries. Whoever has lightly immersed themselves into melancholy is richer than those who have never encountered it. Those who have never heard the rustle of fleeting moments in their lives, who have not tasted the sorrow of transience, and who are unaware that everything that happens on this earth is irreversible and thus final should seek an encounter with melancholy. Conversely, the other half of humanity would guard against the treacherous charms of little sadness, which can deceitfully lead to despair.

Trans. Adrian Mróz

Kyle Sossamon[*]

The Phenomenon of Historicist Melancholy in Artistic Research and a Deleuzian Alternative

Abstract

In this article, I propose a comparative analysis between two conceptions of artistic research. One governed by historicist melancholy and an alternative model informed by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In juxtaposing these two conceptions of artistic research, I explore their theories of materiality and temporality to locate the nexus of their divergence in the realm of the artwork qua sign and the consequent mode of signaling deployed by each position. I am ultimately pointing to the possibility of an art history informed by the thought of Deleuze as capable of abandoning melancholy as a disciplinary and methodological presupposition for the sake of a different affective power: Spinozist joy.

Keywords

Gilles Deleuze, Michael Ann Holly, Aesthetics, Melancholy, Transmissibility

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to complicate a disciplinary presupposition and methodological aim of art-historical research: historicist melancholy.[1] The goal is to provide a comparative theoretical analysis between two conceptions of artistic research: one governed by historicist melancholy and an alternative model informed by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. As a representative of this first conception, I take Michael Ann Holly's assessment in *The Melancholy Art* as my point of departure, which argues forcefully for

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[1] See Emerling 2019, 14. He notes that, "Research as an experimental methodology must examine itself as much as it does the state of the world."

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a self-conscious acceptance of mourning and melancholy as the "twin sis-
ters" accompanying any art-historical endeavor, or mode of artistic research.
Conversely, I will detail a Deleuzain alternative that attempts to dispense
with all of the melancholic accouterment attached to Holly's conception by
tracing their respective points of difference.

Therefore, my article is separated into two sections, each with two parts.
The first section will begin with an account of Holly's essay *Mourning and
Method*; in which Holly advocates for a reassessment of the character of the
space between the artwork and the researcher, wherein she locates what
she calls the "unresolved mourning" enacted by the object-hood of the art-
work (2002, 661).[2] Following this, I detail Holly's account of the artwork as
an "orphan" encountered by the researcher whose methodological aim is to
restore or recover the originary intent, meaning, or value (s e n s e) of said
"orphan" to carve out a dwelling place for the artwork in a contemporary
setting (2013, 6). Consequently, it will become clear that this historicist
melancholy is constituted based on a particular conception of materiality
and temporality that seems to deprive the artwork and the artistic researcher
of any autonomous creative power by tethering them to a closed and in-
escapable past.[3]

The second section begins with an account of an alternative model of
both materiality and temporality—and a consequent re-estimation of the
artwork and its sense—as Gilles Deleuze advocates. This account is an onto-
aesthetic mode of becoming which sustains the affective and trans-historical
potential of the artwork as an art-event that produces heterogeneous and
aleatory forces f o r   t h e   f u t u r e. This art-event cannot but help to com-
plicate the ethico-political context in which it is encountered. Following this,
I invoke the concept of t r a n s m i s s i b i l i t y (Emerling 2017) as a new
mode of artistic research, aiming to replace historicist melancholy with
Spinozist joy in artistic research.

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[2] See Holly 2002, 668. She writes, "I am tempted to argue in general that the discipline
of art history is eternally fated to be a melancholic one, primarily because the objects it
appropriates as its own always and forever keep the wound open (the cut between pre-
sent and past, word and image)—resistant to interpretation, these works of art nonethe-
less insistently provoke it."

[3] See Hegel 1975, 10. He notes that art "is a thing of the past." See further Bergson
2007, 10-14 and 82-84, on the "retrograde movement of truth" and the closed past of
a spatialized time.

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Unresolved Mourning and the Open Wound of Research

Holly's thesis on the role of mourning in artistic research is predicated upon two interrelated dualisms. Holly intends to advocate for a certain autonomy on the side of the object, contra the somewhat popular view in poststructuralist frameworks, which privileges the utterly subjective status of all interpretative acts: "It had long been a commonplace of poststructuralist thinking that all the energy for interpretation emanates from the 'subjective' side of the equation, and I wanted to restore a certain agency to the objects themselves" (2002, 660). Holly is here interested in the specific power of the artwork, its autonomy, as it works upon the specific kind of subject who enters into artistic research—the mode of prompting that this affective power takes, and what this prompting might illuminate for the self-reflective artistic researcher if this power is rendered solely as arising from the objective side of the equation.

As such, Holly's interest is in dubbing the affective power of the object, as it acts on the artistic researcher, "unresolved mourning" in the sense that the object elicits in the subject a desire to pursue an ultimately futile activity of sense-production that can never provide a satisfactory fulfillment or completion fitting such a hyperbolic demand. Further, "The very materiality of objects with which we [artistic researchers] deal presents historians of art with an interpretative paradox absent in other historical inquiries, for works of art are at the same time lost and found, past and present" (Holly 2002, 661). That is, the concomitant status of the artwork as lost-found presents the artistic researcher with a materially given image that bespeaks an anterior significance now lost to a distant past.[4]

The first dualism originates then with the classic subject-object paradigm that locates on the side of the subject a rational or linguistic power—what Holly labels as the "word"—and on the objective side, the phenomenon as a locus of representational immediacy—what Holly calls the "image." This image–word dualism constitutes a gap in the sense that Holly sees as being paradoxically both insurmountable and yet ever-beckoning for the artistic researcher: "The constitutional inability of the discipline to possess objective meanings, to make contemporary words say something definitive about historical images—however much its practitioners might genuinely try—is what I imagine to be the source of its institutional melancholy" (2002,

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[4] See Panofsky 1955, 24. He notes, "The humanities are not faced by the task of arresting what would otherwise slip away, but enlivening what would otherwise remain dead."

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667). Therefore, the artistic researcher is called upon by the objects themselves to restore or recover a past home that these artworks used to maintain: to rehabilitate a world of signification that is only implicated by the artwork as a contextual fragment. The preeminence of a contextualist teleology of the image as a (re)presentation of a lost past of meaningful content brings forth our second dualism: past–present.

Holly's conception of the labor of artistic researchers as "narratives of desire, doomed searches after lost origins" (2002, 667) is conditioned by what she calls an "ethical commitment to the past" (2002, 667). However, the past Holly envisions here is one she admittedly shares with Johann Joachim Winckelmann as being utterly "beyond resurrection, possibly even [beyond] recognition" (2002, 667).[5] This second dualism is, therefore, a conception of the artwork as a confrontation of past-present in its material structure—a dualism reflected in the space of the artistic researcher's confrontation with the artwork as a contextual fragment of an irrecoverable past in the moment of encounter. Thus, artistic research is doomed to a melancholic malaise because of an inherent alienation and separation of sense: the artwork, as estranged from its original world, from its Idea, is subjected to a never-ending process of relative meanings which fail to capture the absolute sense that remains locked in a past that never returns. A past whose sole purpose is to render artistic research a backward-facing enterprise as it compels those researchers who encounter the work in the present to compile endless interpretations of possible significations that can only ever approximate an inceptive sense that is now utterly absent: "The discipline of art history is eternally fated to be a melancholic one, primarily because the objects it appropriates as its own always and forever keep the wound open (the cut between present and past, word and image)—resistant to interpretation, these works of art nonetheless insistently provoke it" (Holly 2002, 668). Therefore, the structuration of the sense of the artwork is what must be addressed if we are to gain clarity as to how the artwork as an object exercises its melancholic force.

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5 See Winckelmann 1968, 364-365. He writes, "[We] have [...] nothing but the shadowy outline left of the object of our wishes, but that very indistinctness awakens only a more earnest longing for what we have lost. [...] we must not shrink from seeking after the truth, even though its discovery wounds our self-esteem."

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Holly and the Artwork as Orphan

According to Holly, the orphan-hood of the artwork is predicated upon two constitutive facets of the object-hood of every artwork: its materiality and temporality (2013, xi).[6] As such, the artistic encounter specific to the art historian is itself conditioned by these self-same facets; that is, every art-historical encounter with an artwork is mediated by a theory of materiality and temporality which inaugurates the melancholic passion of aesthetic reception suffered by the artistic researcher. As already alluded to, this theory of materiality privileges an original sense or Idea that holds sway over the researcher, and this theory of temporality privileges a closed and unalterable past that demands the researcher's indefinite homage. Let us explore these two facets of an artwork's sense-structure to draw out their melancholic force in more detail.

Under Holly's rubric, the materiality and temporality of the artwork functions along an axis of presence–absence. Holly writes, "The melancholy that courses through the history of art is a product of its perhaps unconscious awareness that works that seem so present are absent; they look back at you, but whose gaze is it? It is the estrangement embedded in this ambiguity that both haunts and animates art historians' activities" (2013, xii). The "animate absence" of the artwork's significance that Holly invokes here is derived from the confrontation of a physical-material presence of the artwork as a concrete entity exiting in the spectator's space, and the "wordlessness" of that same entity now deprived of its proper signified: the referent as lost to the linear trajectory of an unalterable past-time. The confrontation of these two poles produces that personal unfamiliarity that grips each spectator when they encounter an artwork: an image as intuitively decipherable yet deprived of its original sense-making framework and consequently rendered as ultimately unintelligible or uncanny.[7] Holly's move here is to equate the artwork as an existing entity with a contentless matter-form hybrid:

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[6] See Holly 2013, 16. She writes, "The emotional life of art history is predicated upon loss (of time, of context), even though it is refracted through objects, shadows of their former selves, that insistently persist in occupying a strange and lonely contemporary space."

[7] See Holly 2013, 20. She notes, "Most of us, both experts and laypersons, know that the past is irrecoverable, but what do we do with relics and material orphans so vivid, so tantalizingly concrete, that we cannot help but feel deprived' in their presence? This is the distinctive dilemma of the history of art from which we cannot escape, and melancholy is the key that locks us in."

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an essentially empty yet materially composed structure whose standard components only cohere insofar as an unknown and impenetrable sense remains forever withdrawn from rational access. This withdrawn content is raised to the level of a suprasensible Idea whose force of power as the *archē* is sustained by a mechanism of internal resemblance: progressive approximations toward an ethereal signified that can only ever be pursued but never captured.[8] The artwork so encountered is given to the artistic researcher as a failed or failing signifier whose vitality is only manifest as a fading cry from oblivion.

The object as an orphan "comes to us from an unknowable past," but it beseeches us "for attention and care in the present… And their [artwork's] meanings, ironically, reside in their perpetual loss of meaning" (Holly 2013, 7). Consequently, temporality arrives on the scene as the mechanism by which the "animate absence" of an artwork's ultimate meaning remains forever in abeyance. That is, trapped in an unalterable past from which the contemporary researcher only encounters a fragment or remnant in the form of the artwork-turned-artifact in the present: as a hyperbolic signal emitted from the artwork qua contextual sign of a once unified whole.

We might say that there exists, for Holly, in effect, t w o s e r i e s o f s e n s e operating on the plane of an artwork's affective enactments. Primarily, the closed past permanently captures an ultimate or essentially withdrawn meaning. This meaning leaves the materially composed structure of an artwork in a contentless state of "animate absence," deprived of an absolute sense. Nevertheless, the residual materiality, the quasi-emptied form, remains like an abandoned corpse prompting the artistic researcher—now turned detective—to enter into a quest for restoration and recovery. Regardless of the irrevocably withdrawn nature of this ultimate meaning, the detective's work of hopeless recovery provides the artwork with a second series of potentially infinite meanings aimed at filling the unfillable void left by the first, making the second series both logically dependent upon the first and ontologically echoic of its primordial Idea. Thus, artistic research for Holly

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   [8] See Deleuze 1990, 257. He writes, "For if copies or icons are good images and are well-founded, it is because they are endowed with resemblance. But resemblance should not be understood as an external relation. It goes less from one thing to another than from one thing to an Idea, since it is the Idea which comprehends the relations and proportions constitutive of the internal essence… The copy truly resembles something only to the degree that it resembles the Idea… In short, it is the superior identity of the Idea which founds the good pretension of the copies, as it bases it on an internal or derived resemblance."

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intends to "make visible the absence that is past," but it is also the "activity that perpetually resurrects the desire to make meaning where it might no longer exist" (2013, xx).

Furthermore, this "desire" is the product of an inalienable law of derivation that renders all second-series meanings, perforce, inadequate to the role of ever providing a sufficient meaning when an artwork confronts one.[9] Sufficiency here does not denote exhaustiveness or completeness. Instead, sufficient to go beyond this degenerating practice of indefinite approximation by abandoning the activity of constantly rejecting one insufficient meaning after another for the sake of growing ever-closer to an originary goal whose withdrawn character is insurmountable.

This adequation of sense and absence seems to not only neuter the artwork of all autonomy at the entitative level—insofar as the artwork stands as a void in need of continual re-filling—but worse, it relegates the would-be creative force and affective potency of the work to the derivative realm of pure subservience to the project of contextual reconstruction.[10] Rehabilitating a lost world of ultimate sense through a revolving process of relative sense is the price one pays for participating in the m e l a n c h o l y   a r t: "Given that the focus of the history of art's labors is always toward recovering that which is almost gone, this primal desire must be labeled melancholic... In the plaintive writing of art history, we have a 'loss without a lost object' (an authentic melancholic predicament) in which the object is both held onto and gone astray simultaneously" (Holly 2013, 6). In sum, the disci-

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[9] Although Holly attempts to nominate melancholy as "*the* creative principle" of artistic research, the ontogenetic element here cannot be ignored (Holly 2013, xxi). That is, melancholy unquestionably originates in a lack (negative determination as founding movement of desire)—as such, this 'creativity' is reactive (precisely in the Nietzschean sense of the term) and is thus confined to a life of servitude operating under the auspices of a transcendent and ineffable Idea. Just because there are reactive modes of activity that undoubtedly 'create' does not by any means demonstrate that such 'creativity' adequately or accurately expresses the real autonomy of either the artworks or the artistic researcher—both of whom exceed the boundaries of contextualism in virtue of their very contact with one another in the extra-historical compulsion felt by a researcher when confronted by an artwork from an entirely unrelated context than his own.

[10] Despite Holly's claim to the contrary, the autonomy of the artwork seems to be hardly obtainable on the basis of its being conceived of as a positivized void whose inherent emptiness entombs the researcher in an always already failed quest of insufficient sense-production. All creative possibility is de-fanged from the start under the guise of an ethical commitment to generate meaning that must be judged by an impassable absence. See Harman 2019, for an account of the complications within contemporary aesthetics on the problem of the autonomy of the art-object.

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plinary project of artistic research, on Holly's account, is to approximate
an original (diachronic) unity of the artwork forever; while providing admit-
tedly and constitutionally inadequate senses whose fruit it is to maintain
an illusion of imperfect relevancy while being haunted by a withdrawn and
incommunicable content[11] whose primordial force exercises its impassable
authority through a supposed absence in the present. This absence automat-
ically denigrates any second-series ascriptions of sense by directing them to
a mysterious past's always and already determined verdict. Thus, on Holly's
account, an artwork is inherently meaningless and impotent in principle on
account of its constitutive facets: its materiality bespeaks an immediate in-
adequacy of sense and Idea, leaving the artwork to exist as an empty sepul-
cher, housing a physical absence; and its temporality is eo ipso self-alienat-
ing as it instills, within itself, a fundamental activity of invalidating its own
properly aesthetic operation. The melancholic force of an artwork here, its
aesthetic power, is its haunting call, its mournful beckoning for repetitive
encounters with an abyssal void of pointless and empty presence.[12]

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[11] Holly attempts to expand her formulation of temporality outward towards the fu-
ture by invoking Aby Warburg's concept of the *Nachleben* in her discussion of artworks as
"psychic repositories of time" (Holly 2013, 76). However, this "afterlife" of an artwork's
affective power is rendered in Holly's framing as more of a hauntology than anything else,
as evinced by her broader project of discussing "cultural memory" under the rubric of
"presence and absence." Thus, Holly situates her invocation of the *Nachleben* within the
confines of Baxandall's "idiosyncratic brand of melancholic history writing" and Benja-
min's theories concerning Baroque "mourning plays." Interestingly though, Holly does not
contend with Benjamin's account of the now intransmissible character of tradition is his
rendering of modern art's "new barbarism" (Benjamin 1999, 773). The import here being
that it is not at all necessary to treat the irretrievability of original context as the impetu-
ous for insufficient returns of relative sense still subjugated to the Idea; rather, the open-
ness of a future freed from such pretensions would render the past itself anew through
artistic research. In Deleuzian language: the irretrievability of original context does not
testify to the mystery and transcendence of the Idea but reveals its weakness in attempt-
ing to subordinate the anarchical powers of difference to the regulatory functions of iden-
tify. Thus there is merely an anemic sense of the future in Holly's formulation of temporal-
ity.

[12] See Baudrillard 2005, 47. He notes, "I have the impression that a good portion of art
today is conspiring in a process of deterrence, a work of mourning the image and the
imaginary, a work of aesthetic mourning. This work usually fails, leading to the general
melancholy of the artistic sphere, which seems to survive by recycling its history and its
vestiges."

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Past-Present or Past-Future: Deleuze and Openness

As noted, the closed past that entombs the artwork's Idea and the researcher's unresolved wound is based on a structuration of sense that entails a specific theory of materiality and temporality. If there is to be an alternative to this historicist melancholy, it must be identified based on isolating an alternative sense of sense and a corresponding alteration in the component theories undergirding that new sense: matter and time. Nevertheless, beyond just the isolation of a different configuration, we must also ascertain whether there is cause to believe in the applicability of this new configuration to the practice of artistic research. In what follows, I will thus target the two points of contrast between Holly's conception of sense and Deleuze's; and then invoke the recent work of Jae Emerling to demonstrate the applicability of this configuration and its power to replace melancholy with joy.

The implicated semiotic operating in Holly's theory of sense maintains, in essence, two unassailable principles: a power of the past to animate the present and a hylomorphism—whose conjoined powers harbor the call of aesthetic mourning. Let us take them in turn, beginning with the power of the past to animate the present.

Contra Holly, for Deleuze, art is a "power of the future" (Deleuze, Guattari 1994, 108). Moreover, the future is the extimate[13] power that animates the past (Emerling 2017, 8-9). At least two important implications must be drawn from this dethroning of the past. First, as is well known, Deleuze's philosophy of time is heavily indebted to the Bergsonian notion of the pure past (Deleuze 1991). Time is not divisible into discrete tenses of past, present, and future as if time itself were to be cleanly differentiated into unrelated substantial categories of *successive simultaneities*. Instead, following Bergson, there are only degrees of co-existence and transformation wherein the pure past coexists with each present—wherein every present serves as a contraction of the pure past, which is itself transformed with every new contraction (Deleuze 1991). The interpenetration of the past-present on this account requires an "outside" force animating each of the novel cracks and fissures that initiate these past-present contractions. Secondly, the future, as an extimate power that animates the past itself, is the desire for immanence:

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[13] Extimacy is a concept taken from Jacques Lacan that indicates an intimate exteriority, a power that resides deep within and whose force arrives from without. See Lacan 1997, 139. As Deleuze writes, "an inside that would be deeper than any interior world and an outside that would be more distant than every external world." See Deleuze 1988, 96.

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a revolutionary force always seeking "more connections and assemblages" (Deleuze, Parnet 2007, 79). Emerling explains, "The future is the desire to search the past and make different presents livable; it is the desire to actualize different configurations and effects in lieu of the present. For Deleuze, an event is nothing other than a movement of becoming that traverses time immanently, repeating and thus differentiating anew the [pure] succession of past, present, and future" (2017, 8).

Therefore, the extimate power of the future is generative of events, and the mode of the event is "the problematic" (Deleuze 1990, 54).[14] For our purposes, what matters here is the indefiniteness of the problematic, its lack of origination and destination: and its radical openness for an aleatory and heterogeneous set of possible re-encounters.[15] This philosophy of time leads Deleuze to speak of art in the same vein as the Swiss-German visual artist Paul Klee: as always needing a people to come.[16] That is, as essentially future-oriented in its potentially anarchic openness.[17] The art-event is constituted, in part, based on this openness qua inherent and subsistent power of possibility: an art-event that is at once past-future.[18] Deleuze, with Guattari, writes, "It is true that every work of art is a *monument*, but here the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it. The monument's action is not

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[14] See Emerling 2017, 5. He writes, "A problematic is a conjunction of question and answer beyond the logic of everyday usage and life" (2017). See also, Deleuze 1990, 56, where he writes: "The question is developed in problems, and the problems are enveloped in a fundamental question. And just as solutions do not suppress problems, but on the contrary discover in them the subsisting conditions without which they would have no sense, answers do not at all suppress, nor do they saturate, the question, which persists in all of the answers. There is therefore an aspect in which problems remain without a solution, and the question without an answer."

[15] See Deleuze, Guattari 1994, 177-178 on the relation of art and possibility.

[16] See Klee 1964, 114. He writes, "We still lack the ultimate power, for: the people are not with us. But we seek a people." See also, Deleuze, Guattari 1994, 110. They write, "The artist or philosopher is quite incapable of creating a people, each can only summon it with all his strength. A people can only be created in abominable sufferings, and it cannot be concerned any more with art or philosophy. But books of philosophy and works of art also contain their sum of unimaginable sufferings that forewarn of the advent of a people. They have resistance in common—their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present."

[17] See Wind 1985, 6. He writes, "the magic of art is inseparable from its risks."

[18] See Emerling, Preziosi 2015, on art as an event in contemporary aesthetics.

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memory but fabulation" (1994, 167-168).[19] Moreover, again, "A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggles" (1994, 176-177).

As we saw with Holly's account of the temporal facet of an artwork's sense, the tyranny of the past bespoke an insurmountable alienation between the artwork's originary Idea and the consequent series of infinite ascriptions of relative senses that all, perforce, fall short of re-establishing an imagined anterior unity, and Deleuze's imagery of a "monument" seems to be rife for such analysis; and yet, importantly, the openness of the "ear of the future" perverts the logic of the artwork's Idea under the condition of the art-event as being at once a past-future linkage. For Deleuze, the Idea does not pre-exist sense-making, but is constituted in the arrival of the force of those "persistent sensations" transmitted forever forward and onward. Thus, there is no mourning over the inherent insufficiency of sense, no pining for a mythic unity lost to the irrecuperable past, and no world-poverty of the artwork to haunt the researcher-turned-detective. There is only the urge to attune one's ears to the vibrations and resonances of the opening that is an art-event.

On Holly's account of materiality, matter is conceived of hylomorphically.[20] That is, matter under this rubric is still a reactive and passive vessel awaiting the activity of a form to provide the principle for the content of its expression. Thus, devoid of an ultimate sense—acting as an inceptive Idea lost to the irrecuperable past—the contentless matter, as a remnant tethered to the materiality of the artwork, manifests as a present absence: the past-present dualism of Holly's philosophy of time. Contra this theory of materiality, Deleuze argues for a conception of matter as that which "fills both space and time" (Emerling 2017, 8) as "an entire energetic materiality in movement" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 408). Matter is the Body without Organs that opposes the organized organism (hylomorphic entity) (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 43 and 158)—a matter freed from the tyranny of external law, no longer subjected to a pre-formed content, no longer restrained by the oversight of an originary and pre-existing Idea. The hylomorphic dualism of mat-

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[19] See Bogue 2010, for an in-depth account of Deleuze's ad(a/o)ption of Bergson's concept of fabulation.

[20] See Holly 2014, 15. She writes, "I regard materiality as *the meeting of matter and imagination*, the place where opposites take refuge from their perpetual strife."

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ter-form is replaced by "material-force" (Deleuze 1993, 35); and "all force is appropriation, domination, exploitation of a quantity of reality" (Deleuze 1983, 3); and "all reality is already a quantity of force" (Deleuze 1983, 40). For Deleuze, therefore, the coalescence or contact of any two forces constitutes a body, and a body is thus the product of chance—a chance which is the essence of force itself as the dynamic and incalculable dice throw of an eternal return (Deleuze 1983). In other words, matter is the flux of immanence, active and not passive or static. Aesthetically speaking, matter passes into a sensation in the art-event (Deleuze, Guattari 1994; Deleuze 1993), and sensation is therefore the composition of affects and percepts as the respective modes of force which operate on the viewer-spectator as a "present bloc of sensations": or, as a monument (Deleuze, Guattari 1994, 167). This Body without Organs, as the matter of a semiotic of material-force that thoroughly permeates any and every plane of immanence, describes a conception of materiality that leaves little room for discerning an absence in the artwork as the remainder of a past-present Idea. Instead, as the constant and perpetual eruption of forces coming into contact with one another, matter itself becomes a symptom of the future, which finds its meaning in an existing amalgamation of forces as past-present contractions that are rendered aesthetically as past-future disruptions: an art-event as a sign whose "Idea refers to a para-sense" as the disjunctive synthetic opening of possibility as such (Deleuze 1994, 146).[21]

Thus, an art-event is constituted along the asymptotic becoming of the two lines of past-future and material-force. Therefore, Deleuze's alternative sense of sense is one of pure affirmation—an openness to the opening of the future rendered by the arrival of a monument. For Deleuze, "there is always a plurality of senses" with no ultimate sense or pre-existent Idea as absolute determining the denigrated role of relative senses (1983, 7). This plurality of senses is a "constellation," a "complex of successions but also co-existences which make interpretation an art" (1983, 3-4). This art of interpretation comprises the role and task of the artistic researcher.

Therefore, we now turn to the concept of transmissibility to explicate the potential applicability of this Deleuzain art in the context of providing an alternative to historicist melancholy.

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[21] See further Deleuze 1994, 214 and 260.

Transmissibility and the Art of Interpretation

A monument arrives in the present and is erected here and now, but its futural force is not always received even though it is constantly being transmitted. Thus, we must consider the monument qua art-event as a sign whose manner of signaling is transmitting.[22] Emerling writes,

> I define transmissibility as a mode of an artwork and thus as a creative aim of artistic re-search. It posits that ontologically and aesthetically an artwork traces the lines of time that deframe and compose the present. But, transmissibility has nothing to do with representing the cultural past. Instead, it has everything to do with a temporal deframing of any cultural representation *and* with the composition of other modes of culture within the present. For me, this is what makes artistic re-search vital and creative. Artistic re-search is a futural force that creates ontological, ethical, and epistemic effects, if only because it reveals how and why varying temporalities and hence different becomings are immanently enfolded within each supposed discrete tense (past, present, future) (2017, 3).

According to Emerling, therefore, transmissibility qua mode of an art-event has two constitutive movements: deframing and composition. Thus, transmissibility qua mode of artistic research has two constitutive movements: weighing and selecting. The artistic researcher open to the opening of the art-event qua sign can appropriate a transmitted force. That is, to deframe the present is to weigh the futural power made available by the arrival of a monument—by recognizing that "not every sense has the same value" and that each monument has an essence as "that one [sense], among all the senses of a thing, which gives it the force with which it has the most affinity" (Deleuze 1983, 5). The coalescence of affinity and a singular monument's highest force is the concrete expression of chance in art's disruptive, creative, and critical action: "It is this action—*transmissibility*—that allows becoming to unfold. This becoming ensnares the work as much as the artist and the viewer/listener/reader" (Emerling 2017, 6). To w e i g h is the interpretative and evaluative function of the artistic researcher's engaging with a monument.

Consequently, to select is to affirm the necessity of that chance—the becoming of the monument's past-future character as "that sort of crowned anarchy, that overturned hierarchy which, in order to ensure the selection of difference, begins by subordinating the identical to the different" (Deleuze 1994, 41). S e l e c t i o n is the act by which the artistic researcher embraces

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[22] See further Deleuze 1994, 20. See also Emerling 2023, 3-4.

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the production of sense based on a futural difference made possible in the present and not an original Idea pre-existing the meaning of an art-event. Stated otherwise, this is an "untimely procedure" marking the emergence of "another actuality, another becoming" that shapes an immanent difference that has not been but *will have been* through such an interpretative-innovative encounter (Emerling 2005, 242).[23] Of course, this autonomy of the artistic researcher is not the enactment of a liberal will freely exercising its demand to determine the sense of an art-event; instead,

> Eternal return alone effects the true selection, because it eliminates the average forms and uncovers 'the superior form of everything that is.' The extreme is not the identity of opposites, but rather the univocity of the different; the superior form is not the infinite, but rather the eternal formlessness of the eternal return itself, throughout its metamorphoses and transformations. Eternal return 'makes' the difference because it creates the superior form (Deleuze 1994, 55).

Similarly, the autonomy of the art-event is finally obtained. In that,

> All this leaves us with the ability to posit that an artwork is what it does: it renders new passages, new modes of becoming, between past and future. These passages are always *untimely* because they are *inherent* unhistorical lines of time that flow within the present. Transmissibility is the power of an artwork to deframe any cultural representation *and* to compose with other modes of culture. Transmissibility is this double movement, which creates aesthetic and historical encounters with singularities rather than subjects (Emerling 2017, 7).

Thus, historicist melancholy—with its reliance upon a sense of sense that necessitates a closed past and hylomorphism as constitutive of artworks, is juxtaposed with joy as the affirmation of openness and possibility. The openness to the future and the possibility to fulfill—to fulfill not only the power of the artwork as art-event, but the power of the artistic researcher as co-creator of this future in the present: to compose with the object of study through weighing and selection. As Deleuze reminds us:

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[23] See Emerling 2005, 242–243. See also: "A retrospective figure of what is to come, this *histor* maintains a fidelity to what comes next, after, or beyond our contemporary impasse by citing what remains. This aesthetic figure is guided by an insight that reveals the paradox of transmissibility in its starkest light: passing between what-has-been (*das Gewesene*) and artifice it makes possible an affirmative, creative event of recollection. This confounds historicism while, at the same time, acknowledges that tradition is irreparable." See further, Emerling 2009.

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> Joy is everything that consists in fulfilling a power of action (*remplir une puissance*)... You experience joy when you fulfill it, when you realize one of your powers of action. So, what is that? Let's return to some earlier examples: I conquer, however little this might be, a small piece of color, I enter a little further into color. I think that is what joy might be. That's what fulfilling a power of action is, realizing (*effectuer*) a power of action, causing a power of action to be fulfilled (Deleuze 1996).

This mode of research is explicitly and reflexively productive and transformative as it enacts its anarchic style of interpretation. As an active encounter "fulfilling a power of action," the co-creative function of the researcher is no longer rendered as a negatively determined process of recapturing a long-lost sense; but is instead now conceived of as a perpetual means of invention, of "constru(ct)ing" sense.[24] Under the mood produced by such joy, artistic researchers can uncover and compose what *will have been* alongside an artwork that works upon them as they work upon it— a radical project of productive conjunction and association.

Concluding Remarks

I proposed a comparative analysis between two conceptions of artistic research, each one commanding disparate theories of both materiality and temporality as constitutive facets of an artwork's sense, and with their respective payouts being two very different modes of affective experience for the researcher encountering an artwork: either melancholy or joy. By first detailing the melancholy art of art history, according to Holly, we identified the essential principles upon which this theory reigns: a closed past and a hylomorphic dualism. Thus, we formulated the perspective of this other, more affirmative approach to artistic research in contradistinction to these essential principles. In so doing, and by following the lines of flight by Deleuze and Emerling, we constructed a mode of encounter between the researcher and the artwork that facilitates autonomous creativity on both the subjective and objective sides of the equation. An artistic practice that restores a properly futural force to the heart of aesthetics—bringing possibility into the realm of criticism and appreciation, thus opening an alternative path for artistic researchers who find that the artwork qua sign signals to them as past-future and not past-present.

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[24] See Preziosi 1989, 179. And further, see Nietzsche 1947, 374, wherein he writes, "How far the perspective character of existence extends or whether existence has any other character than this; whether existence without interpretation, without 'sense,' does not becomes 'nonsense;' whether, on the other hand, all existence is not essentially engaged in interpretation."

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Visual Forms and the Therapeutic Medium of Melancholy[1]

Abstract

Considering artworks' socio-political framework, we explore the therapeutic use of visual artworks to relieve a melancholic condition. The transformative effects of aesthetic artifacts are evident in Durer's work, intersecting physiological, religious, and political elements in a program for self-knowledge and redemption. We will see that what is proposed is not a simple emulation of the means of *curatio verbi* but the sketching of a specific semiosis, providing perception with an autonomous pathway for self-transformation.

Keywords

Melancholy, Therapeutic Medium, Albrecht Dürer, Art System, Visual Semiotics

Preliminary Notes

Drawing on the history of melancholy, in the present paper, I propose to understand how the pictorial forms of particular works of art were integrated as autonomous elements of the therapeutic medium. I argue that, for this to be possible, a path of self-transformation independent of verbal forms of therapy and relying upon the specific potential of visual forms had to be envisioned and created.

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Before proceeding, two presuppositions require revision. The first is the alleged linearity of therapeutic treatment, a common assumption deeply entrenched in our time, which is disproved by a paradox. Instead of relying on suppressing symptoms, therapy summons painful passions to proceed with their treatment. The second states that the success of the artwork's purported therapeutic valences would depend on the artist's ability to influence an audience directly. In this case, it is crucial to understand whether a piece of art was created with a therapeutic purpose in mind and, if so, whether that purpose necessitates a strict reading or interpretation for it to be effective. It is also necessary to clarify whether, given the context of its reception and the appropriate interpretative guidelines, the therapeutic potential of the original art piece survives its reproductions in identical or different media, considering the properties attributed to it, its singularity, and history. If that is not the case, then an artwork must be present for its therapeutic meaning to be understood, though this may be conceivable with a complete revision of the model of the emanation of properties given to the aesthetic artifact by its creator.

Art History and the Accommodation of Loss

According to J. Pigeaud, experts have engaged in abstract discussions concerning the date and style of creations but remained inattentive to how they relate to the generativity of nature. This inattention is all the more evident in the case of "melancholia," a substance inserted in a dense network of cosmic remissions which, according to the classical scheme Mundus-Annus-Homo,[2] translated into a distinct temperament associated with a particular astrological sign, a season and a life phase. Should this diagnosis of faulty imagination affecting philologists, destitute of the reverie required to enliven the letters of the past,[3] and their insertion into a cosmic and social worldview, be extended to art historians?

M. Ann Holly's "Mourning and Method" (2002),[4] a reflection on the loss inherent in art history, echoes Pigeaud's concerns. In light of Warburg's ostensive approach to visual works,[5] Holly attributes this state, which is "easier

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[2] For a presentation of the humoralist worldview and its immense body of medical and philosophical knowledge, see my study on Burton and the Conimbricencis (Carvalho 2021).

[3] "Le drame fut que cette littérature, si longtemps dynamique (…) se voit capturer par la classe non rêveuse des philologues modernes" (Pigeaud 1995, 8).

[4] Latter included in *The Melancholy Art* (2013).

[5] So influential in Baxandall (e.g. 1985, 8-11).

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to feel than to define," to the constitutive binaries of the discipline: present–
past; word–image. Confronting the melancholic nature of her *métier*, she
evaluates to what extent an author's intentions can be known by taking into
account their biographical, social, and theoretical context and in what sense
may that be decisive in asserting the value of a given work (representative,
aesthetic, therapeutic).

That melancholic feeling plays a vital role in art history, being the conse-
quence of the displacement of artworks from their original context and pur-
pose. This discussion over the original meaning of "old objects that continue
to exist materially in the present, but whose once noisy and busy existence
has long since been silenced" (Holly 2013, 98) has intrinsic affinities with the
goals of Rancière's "aesthetics of knowledge" (2009b, 15-16). However,
unlike Holly, whose "disciplinary yearning" (2013, 16) remains trapped in
a self-enclosed tension between the urge to enliven the artistic object and
the institutional requirements of critical distance, the French author advises
against the restrictive interpretations of artworks.[6]

To assess the early modern creation of visual forms conceived to relieve
melancholic burdens, we must reject watertight disciplinary boundaries be-
tween the history of ideas, medical anthropology, and art history. Our per-
spective attends to Didi-Huberman's call for inserting the image artifacts
"within the limits of the simple practice," recognizing their original context
and avoiding the imposition of anachronistic categories (2005, 12-52). As we
shall see in Albrecht Dürer's work, this necessitates acknowledging the com-
plex context that presided over the differentiation of modern society's art
system, a time when its grammar and objectives were heavily influenced by
religious and medical discourses, which were frequently at odds with one
another. I contend that this does not imply a disregard for the aesthetic qual-
ities of works of art—quite the opposite. Following Sloterdijk (2004, 450ff),
we can contend that art's potential is renewed through its insertion into
a more extensive network of therapeutic institutions.

The emergence of the therapeutic role of art in the Renaissance takes
place within the framework of the contestation of medicine as the sole
source for treating infirmities, particularly those affecting the mind. Beyond
the technical insufficiency of medical interventions expressed in jocular rep-

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[6] "To speak of an aesthetics of knowledge thus is not an occasion to get closer to the
sensuous experience. It is an instance to speak of that silent battle, to restage the context
of the war (…). In order to do so, an aesthetics of knowledge must practice a certain igno-
rance. It must ignore disciplinary boundaries in order to restore their status as weapons in
a struggle" (Rancière 2009b, 17).

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resentations of lithotomy,[7] this questioning of medical methods and theories is driven by the appearance of new paradoxical symptoms. This situation is the case with religious "ancias" (Serrado 2014, 160-172) and the liberating suffering or the "beloved prison" of *amore heroico*, respectively, the religious and loving variants of melancholy.[8] Although medical descriptors and semantics shape these, they both resist medicalization.

The therapeutic recourse to the musical[9] and visual arts[10] has firm roots in the medieval period. One of the novelties of early modern art is the resort to visual *signifiers that become increasingly autonomous in relation to the linguistic codification of knowledge*, even though those signifiers remain anchored in the Christian worldview, whose congruence was increasingly threatened.

As it will become apparent, our approach has affinities with the so-called cognitive turn in visual semiotics (Dondero 2020, 15-45), but it provides more attention to the social semantics grounding the composition of visual artworks with therapeutic purposes. Religious and medical perspectives traverse these frequently incongruent and conflicting works. This conflict is all the more noticeable concerning the understanding of human perception and cognition where the emerging materialist view of the soul was under religious scrutiny, and the normative goals of medical intervention, with competing views of proper health as being equivalent to either bodily equilibrium or spiritual realization of the *salus animae.*[11]

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[7] Particularly following Hieronymus Bosch's *The Cure of Folly*, also called *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness*, completed around 1494. On the meaning of renaissance representations of brain surgery, see e.g.: Gross 2009, 119-129.

[8] The differential diagnosis of love and religious melancholy was introduced in the west by Constantinus Africanus's *Viaticum* and will achieve its exhaustive conceptualization in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

[9] Echoing its praises in ancient philosophy, in *De Medicina*, Celsus commended music's ability to relieve melancholic thoughts (III.18.10). This perspective will be renewed in the eleventh-century, with Constantinus' influential *De melancholia*, and, in the late fifteenth-century, with Ficino's program for combining musical harmonies and enchanted words to attract the cosmic *spiritus* able to restore one's health.

[10] Supported in the healing power of sacred artifacts, as it occurs with iconic images (e.g.: Goffen 1975) and the inscription of Christ's passion in one's memory (Belting 1998). The recognition of the benefits of images, especially in conveying divine mystery to the unlearned devout, lead to various attempts to revise their biblical interdiction (Carruthers 1998, 206ff).

[11] The health and salvation of the soul were promoted by the publication of small-sized prayer books with religious evocative illustrations. The inclusion of Dürer's works in one of these Salus animae published in Nuremberg in 1503, or even its authorship, is still under discussion (e.g. Cerkovnik 2019).

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Beyond *Curatio verbi*

Since time immemorial, visual artifacts have been used to understand and control human surroundings. This matrix would develop in the magical-religious sphere as a form of reparation or favor, calling upon natural or divine forces. According to Pigeaud (1995, 20-26), the power of the image evoked by the word, the ancient mode of *ekphrasis* engaged in the logic of the living, has as its first known occurrence the narration of the composition of Achilles' shield as "a wonder to behold" [θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι] (*Iliad* XVIII, 84) relieving the loss of a dear friend. Classical rhetoric will conceive of the linguistic evocation of *imagines* as a privileged way of arousing and influencing the soul's passions since it "affected the imagination with particular immediacy and power" (Gowland 2012, 13).

In Aristotle's natural philosophy, the melancholic is presented as profoundly affected by the sensory images, cause for their agitated imagination as expressed in vivid and premonitory dreams. Along with the role of *phantasia* as the basis "for an abatement attached to a single representation, without fever" (Pigeaud 1984, 503), Areatheus seems to be the first author to reflect upon the metaphoric nature of the *melaina cholé* (Pigeaud 2004, 187-192), paving the way for the transition from the darkness of the physiological humor to that of writing (and painting) ink. This connection is explicitly explored in Chapter 10 of Campanella's *Del senso delle cose* (1604). Through this metaphorical transposition, the transformative qualities ascribed to black bile in Aristotle's Problem XXX.I are both preserved and magnified. The black bile, similar to iron, oscillates between its dry-cold natural state and extreme heat under specific conditions, thus amplifying its significance and impact. It is the first ground of the evolving representations of melancholy as an intellectual concept with its contagious potential (Starobinski 2012, 24 ff.). At the same time, attached to the Hippocratic affections of "fear and sadness" as distinctive of melancholic unbalance, emphasizing the inner faculty of imagination allowed for a broader spectrum of affective expressions, reinforcing its classification as the most philosophical mental conditions. This case was also the grounding for a conceptual intersection between the medical and the philosophical concepts of "disposition," inserted in their respective ways of care for the self.

Melancholy refers to a certain temperament or acquired disposition involving excess or degradation of the black bile (*diathesis*), with the depletion of animal spirits,[12] but also a self-referential affection of sorrow, frequently

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[12] See, in relation to Burton's work, Carvalho 2019a, 116-132.

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associated with the loss of someone (or something) at the individual's core. The expressive necessity of nature characterizing medical humoralism will mold its devising of proper ways of treatment, resorting to the distinction between the naturals and the non-naturals, as defined by Galen, as decisive to induce therapeutic change. While the natural balance of individual constitution may be restored through the attunement with the healing power of certain airs and places, the "non-naturals" involve the consideration of the lifestyle and habits of the subject, correcting activities that may damage the quality of animal spirits. Among the non-naturals, the passions of the soul, mainly due to their imaginative grounds, assumed increasing importance as a way to re-establish one's health. Their integration into the larger framework of the care of the self was significantly transformed by the philosophical conceptualization and consolation of *taedium vitae* and the imposition of the Christian conception of virtue, both requiring deeper forms of self-examination.

The individual pursuit of a redemptive way may coincide with bodily health and earthly fortune, but it tends to exceed it. Indicative of the anxieties that pervade early modern Europe's mentality, its medical treatments are saturated with religious assumptions and symbols. Nevertheless, the organization of the cosmos according to the four classical humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, crystallized in human characters identified with a given temperament expresses highly anthropomorphized natural potencies that have been challenging to harmonize with a Christian view of transcendence, particularly as this, in the Augustine tradition, depends on the inner dialogue of the soul. However, the ancient mythical worldview, particularly in the case of melancholy and its association with Saturn's tragic fate, left an indelible mark on medieval and early modern societies. The end of crops and the freezing of vegetative growth, social and natural counterparts of the liturgical calendar, refer to a period of decay and messianic renewal, retained in the duality underlying the late medieval rehabilitation of Saturn (Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl 1964, 204-219). Along with his representation as wicked and meager, Saturn emerges as the God of contemplation, promising to break the endless circle of creation and destruction that characterizes the natural world according to the principles of love and strife sketched by Empedocles. In that sense, it personified a feeling of anxiety that, since the dawn of times, has instilled the search for something beyond[13] or to come.[14]

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[13] "We bathe ourselves in the melancholy of nature, always already weeping, always already inconsolable. One understands why the gnostic would want to uproot himself

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In the late medieval period, the visual arts were increasingly integrated into religious practices and rituals, assuming curative, redemptive, and palliative vocations and calling for meditation and self-examination, often based on the allegorical interpretation of the scriptures but also everyday existential conditions. Visual imagery and paintings provided dynamic frames for practices of meditation and self-examination (Enenkel 2011). This overflowing of the aesthetic ideal was rooted in a strong homology between the narrative and the figurative (Praz 1979), in a process where the pictorial forms were molded by the *curatio verbi*, *i.e.,* by the rhetorical means to instill a putative reader or listener with a beneficial new perspective on themselves and the world. An example of this, inserted in a long list of paintings with canonical themes related to salvation, is the *Spiegel der Vernunft* (ca. 1488), which, interpellating the individual viewer with words and pictorial symbols, calls for identification with the central figure of the traveler, the *homo viator* confronted with his finitude (Pezzoli-Olgiati 2014, 112-117). Some of these artworks were integrated into church hospices, especially in the palliative areas, testifying to the religious assimilation of the medical approach (see: Puff 2010, 125-129).

Painting has played a crucial role in bringing biblical texts and hagiographic episodes to life. Through the use of vibrant imagery, artists have personified assumptions and beliefs, invoking a range of emotions and fostering a deeper connection between viewers and the characters depicted in familiar narratives. The ability of painting to elicit deep emotions and facilitate viewer identification extends to its potential therapeutic purposes. An example of this can be found in early depictions of *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. Matthias Grünewald's renowned painting of this Christian saint, featured in the Altarpiece (ca. 1512-1516) at the Monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim, served as an initial viewing experience for patients from a hospice dedicated to treating afflictions such as ergotism, commonly referred to as "St. Anthony's Fire." This connection between the patients and the depicted scenes demonstrates how art could be employed as a means of offering solace and healing (Hayum 1989, 13-52, 118ff).

Despite the recognition of the power of images, the eminent model for regulating passions continued to be the verbal one, whether through the confessional route, "civil conversation," or biographical examining of one's

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from this world which, in its very being, is impassioned, and would want to flee 'anywhere out of the world'" (Chrétien 2014, 160).

[14] See Eric Zafran's (1979) classical study on the relation between Saturn and Jewish Messiah.

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time, appealing to the stoical route of rational inspection of inclinations and habits. The reluctance to deal with the passions involved in politics is recurrent, but this contemplative standpoint is countered by Stoic and Aristotelian moral philosophy, which underlined the role of the social bond as a natural duty (*oikeosis*). Rooted in earlier humanist values, sixteenth-century humanist culture will praise the benefits of friendship in relieving melancholy.

Philosophy would renew rhetorical forms of exhortation aimed at repentance and self-exam that could complement the vast battery of physical interventions aiming to restate humoral balance, mostly through purges and bloodletting.

In early modern Europe, the artists and *litterati*, i.e., those aiming at the limits of reason under demanding and increasingly precarious conditions, were considered more disposed to melancholic illnesses. In his *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura* (1585), Alberti notes that due to their prolonged efforts in retaining images, abstracting them from matter, visual artists are more prone to melancholy (Hersant 2010, 24), and in that sense, they must take preventive measures to manage their emotions. Therefore, it is not surprising that, even when commissioned, art images frequently serve therapeutic and redemptive purposes for the artists.

Melancholy is not magically projected onto the canvas. The artist's imaginative activity mediates its inscription. The decisive question will be if (and how) the regulation of this faculty, operating between the external and internal senses, can produce a kind of "melancholia generosa" or even explore its grimmer tonalities to bring relief to the author and viewers.

The search for the attunement with the potencies of the great chain of being, according to one's temperament, the use of talismans that attract cosmic potencies, and the resort to the extraordinary powers of natural products (electuaries) are part of the great cabinet of melancholy. They were frequently viewed with suspicion and sometimes targeted with charges of heresy.[15] However, at the same time, they are far too promising to be discarded. Following Ficino and Agrippa, we find various elements in Dürer's painting.

Leading the medieval worldview to its zenith, we address the image not as a psychological category but as the mediator between the physical and the spiritual. Nevertheless, this mediation can only become effective through an exercise that involves a transformation of the viewer's sensitivity, relying on his selection of the relevant elements of the image. The imposition of

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15 See e.g.: Carvalho 2019b, 342-346.

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an ordered sequence of perception and reflection is the dynamic application of intention aiming for an inner transformation in relation to the cosmos. In this sense, since it concerns the principles and causes of movements, the intrinsic relations between *dynamis* and *energeia* as the origin of forms, this mediation is a part of physics in the Aristotelian sense. Irreducible to the scientific study of the elements of the universe in its ancient and medieval forms, the understanding of the generativity of nature summons the imaginative potential of dreams. Instead of a coincidence between the object to be perceived and the organs of perception, the experience depends on a medium where things appear (*De Anima*, 419a). This medium tends to reinforce the homology between words and images, or at least to explore the undetermined space of their difference, but the construction of an independent pathway of visual perception, primarily through pictorial forms, is also possible.

This possibility promises a transition from the primacy of humors, physiological fluids following their pre-established ways of cosmic expression, into an aesthetic framework where imagination is the primary operator in addressing and improving one's state. In this sense, by emancipating wonder from its natural and divine sources, assuming the uncertainty of freedom, the modern artist fully assumes his ingenious role. This assumption comes with a heavy social price since the patronage system restricts independent affirmation of creativity, and authors such as Dürer had to affirm themselves as entrepreneurs.

In the act of seeing, analogous to rhetorical *speculatio*, the constitutive oppositions of man, firstly corporal vs. spiritual, come to establish a productive relation, called as they are to participate in a collective experience of revelation where they become actual (Merback 2017, 70-77). Instead of coinciding, petrified by an ultimate interpretation, they are continuously propelled to discovery.

The impoverishment of the imaginary that characterizes contemporary depressive disorders contrasts with the exuberance of inner images accompanying much of its ancient and early modern depictions. A similar contrast divides *acedia* and melancholy since the latter maintains its connection with something constitutive for which one strives. As a state of altered consciousness, melancholy was close to inebriation and dreaming, establishing a means to react and confront inhibitions instead of avoiding conflict. Contrasting with the other classical mental illnesses, phrenesis and mania, characterized by the suspension of cognitive faculties, in melancholy, the loss of someone (or something) one holds dear is frequently accompanied by a sense of

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"heightened self-awareness" (Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl 1964, 228-240). According to the need to prevent the damaging effects of unrestrained imagination, in the visual form of cure, the tonic will not be so much on the need to stimulate imagination, as we may assume from our contemporary understanding of melancholy, but on regulating its obsessive and enthusiastic fixations, proper of the main variants of melancholy.

On Dürer's Therapeutic Program

Dürer stands at the threshold, navigating between employing imagery that evokes the restoration of the *vinculum mundi* and pioneering the development of innovative techniques for representation and visualization. These conditions enable an exploration of the faculties of perception, fostering a deeper understanding of subjectivity and strengthening one's character. In this context, Dürer's artistic approach combines elements of traditional symbolism with advancements that facilitate the depiction and interpretation of subjective experiences. He was deeply influenced by the tradition of landscape painting that appeals to identification with the tribulations of the central characters, which can be seen, for example, in the anagogic images representing John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (*Scala Paradisi*) or the temptations of Anthony the Great, usually complementing a hagiographic narrative, sometimes figured sequentially. However, he goes beyond exploring the potential of devotional images described by Warburg as *Pathosformel* and votive images, involving the conception and use of talismans advocated by Ficino.

In his *Perfection's Therapy*, M. Merback (2017) showed that Dürer elevated the therapeutic use of the image to a transformative program that, within the religious horizon of redemption, adapts aspects of current medical theories of cognition to promote certain dispositions and evidence essential to the examination of consciousness. In that sense, the meditative pictures will be released from their iconographic conventions, opening to reception and exploring their "symptoms and traces of a mystery" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 52).

Dürer will propose his therapeutic project within the "Maximilianische Humanistenkreis," a group of scholars, poets, and artists who frequently gathered in Willibald Pirckheimer's house to celebrate the humanist ideals of friendship. Interestingly, to this end, he would assert the curative autonomy of painting in a foreign medium. In poems that some of his colleagues considered too crude: "Not only writing will I do, / But learn to practice

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physic too; / Till men surprised will say, "Beshrew me / What good this painter's medicines do me!" / Therefore hear and I will tell / Some wise receipts to keep you well" (Heaton 1881, 272; Merback 2017, 224-228).

Foreshadowing the discussion regarding the specificities and value of painting vis-à-vis the poetic arts, Dürer provides an autonomous perceptual *ductus* that exploits the specificity of the figurative medium. This exploitation occurs not only via the determination and transformation of the self-image, already evident in his early self-portraits, aiming to attract fertility and resistance to adversity (Koerner 1993, 31; Merback 2017, 204-211), but also by inviting a transformative viewing of his Denkbilder.

Composed in a period of grief, after the death of Dürer's friends and especially of his mother in 1514, according to Panofsky (1955, 171), *Melencolia I* proposes and combines an esoteric and a programmatic way. It is an example of the abandonment not only of the scientific[16] but also the evocative or allegorical representations of melancholy, for one that compels a recursive exercise driven by contrasts: darkness–light; finite–infinite; temporal–eternal; eastern–western; measurable–immeasurable; visible–invisible.

In the "image of images," we can find the development of a programmatic application of the therapeutic properties of art, based on the artist and spectator being summoned to exercises of the sensitive and intellectual soul. At stake is not a complete revision of the passive sensitivity of the classical theory of the faculties. Dürer proposes an exploratory way of attunement which, while waiving an ultimate ground in the form of *mathesis universalis,* remains spiritually open. In Koerner's words (2004, 142): "Dürer recognized that pictures are, at best, mediators, affecting without determining what their viewers see in them."

Concerning Ficino's influence on the composition of *Melencolia I*, and the dramatization of the emulation of divine gifts (Anzelewsky 1983), K. Moxey noted that: "[t]he suggestion that Dürer's works are to be approached as learned allegories characterizes them as spiritual achievements." This achievement is substantiated by his works inviting interpretation, stirring compulsive attempts to determine (and close) their iconographic meaning. But at the same time, this attempt "removes them from the context of communal life so as to embed them more deeply in his personal consciousness" (2013, 158-159). This significant socioeconomic context, starting with the

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[16] "The first representation in which the concept of Melancholy was transplanted from the plane of scientific and pseudo-scientific folclore to the level of art" (Panofsky 1955, 170).

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commissioning of the artwork and its pragmatic insertion into contemporary practices, is decisive in understanding its aims and the material basis of its successful viewing (Didi-Huberman 2005, 52).

The generativity of pictures, i.e., the sequence of the signs and symbols that are interpreted in the observer's reading, is affected by the materiality of the artwork but also by the context of its presentation. This reading includes aspects like 1) the precise time and space of its display, 2) the conditions of access to its observation, and 3) the institutional setting of such activity. The proliferation of reproductive art techniques, along with increased accessibility and new modes of "consuming" artistic content, cannot fully eradicate the crucial aspect of establishing a sense of presence as an integral part of the quality of an experience. This notion is intertwined with the formation of instituted practices and rituals that govern the act of observation, further enhancing the depth and significance of the encounter. Despite advancements in technology and alternative means of engagement, the inherent value of being physically present and engaging in established traditions remains indispensable in shaping and enriching the overall artistic experience.

Melencolia I's semiosis

Since Dürer's masterpiece opens to multiple dimensions of the image, the relational, the spatial, and the temporal, this metaphoric potential, unfolded in each observation, can be considered in the light of Rancière's notion of "pensive image" (2009, 107-132). There are two main routes to such reading. One which points to the regimen of truth expressed by the image concerning the sociopolitical assumptions it conveys, even those outside the author's conscious intention or awareness. The other exceeds the characteristics and particular circumstances of the image, concerning its impact on the viewer, accounting for how his or her sensitivity, expectations, and goals, occasion inner resonances which cannot be thoroughly policed nor closed into a definitive meaning. The history of melancholy may be read in light of the frequent intersections of these paths as an inner disposition whose singular outlook and revelations, particularly those produced by the consumption of artworks, cannot be abstracted from their larger sociopolitical framework. At the same time, even in social conditions where effective action is restricted, art remains the stronghold to make sense of and share one's discontent, even where seclusion and precariousness seem overwhelming.

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While the visual signs of Dürer's engraving are certainly part of a more dense experience encompassing dimensions such as interpersonal framework and the artwork's presence, we may say affirm this to be the more accessible (also to us) aspect of such personal transformation.

The paradigmatic shifters enable the composition of verbal communication and their semiotic interpretation regard the determination of persons, time, and space, resorting to specific discursive categories: pronouns, verbs, and adverbs (Dondero 2020, 24ff). The paradigmatic structure of visual communication is based on different forms, particularly in autographic systems such as visual artworks, where the density of the signs obstructs a differential reading, always demanding mediations. The circuit of the gaze through the image is conditioned by salient points such as signs and inscriptions, impacting their holistic perception and focused reading, both of which can be molded by social mediation. These ways of seeing may be grounded in the author's intention regarding the relationship between the subject or themes of the artwork and the viewer, which could have been idealized as a particular person or even a social group.

A rigid characterization of pictorial markers as corresponding to verbal categories would fail to acknowledge the specific power of the visual medium. It would entrap the interpretation of the painting in a shallow containment of its elements, stalling their dynamics. The evocative and metaphoric potential of images would also be unaccounted for by an objectivist perspective on a painting dedicated to its correspondence with a particular person, time, and space. This is clear in images subordinated to the theme of melancholy, either due to their designation or presentation or by virtue of the specificity of their icons. These are frequently marked by a dense grammar of references, part of the scheme where man is the microcosm, subjected to various levels of influence. Even in the quaternary scheme of the humors, those images are frequently invested with ambiguities, preventing a strict and determinate reading. At the same time, and this is of great importance to the present essay, the depiction of real-world environments opens a pathway to internal inspection and correspondence, sometimes depicting interiority in close affinity with the tradition of spiritual writings directed to erect and reinforce the inner citadel.

In *Melencolia I*, the over-abundance of elements next to the angelic figure (supposedly) impersonating melancholy makes the vanishing point oscillate towards the oneiric horizon where the signs to be resolved appear. Following F. Yates's interpretation, the figure of the angel does not personify *acedia* (as Panofsky thought), but perseverance in adversity, of not a saturnine im-

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passe, but of an "intense visionary trance" (2001, 66), characteristic of the first phase of creation. As such, various elements are opened to an alternative signification, beginning with the dog, which, instead of depression, indicates the suspension of bodily appetites resulting from visionary absorption.

According to Merback, the angel's decentered gaze induces a perceptive movement of "open-ended kinesis" (2017, 51). It is a hydraulic conception of the higher and lower faculties that aims to heat the black bile, counteracting the coldness and dryness of its natural state but preventing *hybris,* an excessive agitation or exertion that would burn the finer animal spirits. It concerns a virtuous regime, indicated by the *arma Christi*, the balance, and the magic square, all concerning the correct administration of finite existence through the observance of religious liturgical rhythms, as expressed by the sundial, the bell, and the ever-present hourglass. Measurable time is allusive to communitarian and liturgical time, but also to inner duration, allowing us to abstract from the objectivity of the thinker's situation. Therefore, pictorial forms elicit a temporal sequence, requiring their revision of the strict division between spatial and temporal arts later popularized by Lessing (Antonova 2010, 5-28; Dondero 2020, 27-28).

The passage through the signs of chaos and threat compels a return to the capacity to attribute stable, virtuous forms. Peter-Klaus Schuster (2005) pointed to the decisive bipartition of *Melencolia I*, allowing us to equate the envisioned sequence and recursiveness of the pictorial forms in one's perception. The right side is marked by the signs of virtue, restoration, and self-referentiality, while the left part of the image displays the signs of the whims of fortune, the uncertain and dangerous: wave, flood, and mutability of the sphere, which challenge self-sufficiency. The elements on the right side transform to a brighter perspective: the angel's leanness indicates curiosity while the open compass represents creativity. The purse and keys, iconographically associated with the greed of a destitute Saturn, are now the promise of the reestablishing of order. Medical cures are also present, with a crown composed of watercress, known for its humidifying potential and used to counter the dryness of the melancholic complexion. To this horizontal partition, we must add the fragmentation between the lower and upper parts of Dürer's engraving. The lying objects obstruct the access to the staircase leading to the top of the tower, signifying a superior level which, with the current resources, remains out of reach.

In the economy of the gaze of classical paintings, we may generally contrast the depiction of third persons, such as occurs in characters appearing in profile, particularly in the representation of biblical episodes that, even in-

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spiring present rituals, happened in "another time and place," and the frontal view that concerns an action taking place here and now, between an I and a Thou. Significantly, Dürer seems to break the conventions regulating that economy. It presents a single figure that stares at an uncertain point in a skewed way, unbalancing the viewer's gaze. The angelic figure is physically accompanied by the *putto*, presumed to be an assistant to his measurements,[17] whose involvement in an action contrasts with the contemplative rapture of his master. If the estrangement of the figure, surrounded by objects and figures cut from its action, could pronounce a dialogue between the viewer and the angelic figure, this is short-circuited, forcing "a detour to self-reflection" (Koerner 1993, 13). Facing the *Vexierbild*, the viewer are left all by him or herself, a position that in modern therapeutic parlance requires (or convokes) a "negative capability" or "depressivity" of the viewer, addressed and immediately abandoned in an apparently inhospitable atmosphere, marked by imminent accidents and displaying precision tools that seem useless to control further calamities. The depth of the paintings generally presents different orders of time or a series of events taking place in a specific sequence. Here, the scenes of deluge and the comet's passing indicate upcoming catastrophes, foreshadowing tribulations, while their inscription seems to suggest the assumption of the divinatory attributions of the melancholic.

Its interpellation of the viewer's inner world is disquieting, particularly since, instead of providing a stable point, the eyes of the angel force the viewer to find reassurance or a point of equilibrium. The centrality and sturdiness of the polyhedron are countered by its evident instability, once again luring the viewer into a swirl of references rather than rescuing them from the worrisome situation. From then on, the viewer is also put in a perplexing situation similar to that of the angelic figure, which, at first glance, bears the classical symbols of the saturnine.

The beyond of salvation is outside the framework of the painting, announced in the firmament. This outside is also a break in perspective, which in classical paintings tends to delimit the space of events. The ladder leading to the upper side of the church tower symbolizes a transition to another realm, for which both the angelic figure and the viewer can only prepare once confronting the suffering and uncertainties of existence, the fortune. This acknowledgment can resort to the instruments of art and science, fre-

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[17] This interpretation is based on Dürer's sketches where the *putto* holds a sextant and a plumb line.

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quently intersecting in the revealing power of magic, but ultimately it will have to accept their limitations. The fact that the instruments of the liberal arts, mostly architecture, and geometry, are disposed along with those of the "arma christi" used in the crucifixion suggests the call for an attitude of humbleness.

Final remarks

Over the last decades, various visual media supports have been successfully integrated into therapeutic techniques and programs, exploring their aesthetic potential. Although the aesthetic value of recreational and therapeutic creation is disputable, these new programs have a respectable ascendancy that culminates in modernity, with the differentiation of art as a social system.

As material creations, images provide a mediation for one's viewing, forms that condition and orient perception, favoring the restoration of bodily equilibrium and redemption. At first, the primary distinction of the system of art [Leitdifferenz] remains congruent with its inner logic, embedding non-artistic forms from medicine (cure) and religion (salvation) (Luhmann 1995, 301-340). The fading of a methodical application of art as a therapeutic route is inseparable from an internal differentiation that suspends the subservience to the religious regime of visibility, with its worldview, practices, and elements originating in medical discourse. This difference is accompanied by changes "external" to the art system. In medicine, we see the farewell to the interactionist views that characterized the dominant humoralism and the gradual imposition of a mechanistic paradigm that tends to obliterate the reciprocal influence of mind and body (e.g., Radden 2017). The therapeutic application of visual artworks will also decline by virtue of their religious appropriation and dismantling, initiated in the late fifteenth century and aggravated by the reformist movement (Koerner 2004, 52-68).

This point does not mean the possible therapeutic application has been entirely suppressed, but it loses that programmatic impulse. Could this take place as a (non-linear) transformative reception within the framework of the autonomy of artistic grammar and the sovereignty of art?

Cutting art from nature's generative powers implied its distancing from Man's embodied nature (Sloterdijk 2014, 308). German Idealism and Romanticism attempted to restore the curative role of artworks, sometimes noting the decline of such a function (Koerner 2004, 29). Schelling, for instance, stressed that the healing potential of art can only become actual if it

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can mobilize the power of nature (Marquard 1973, 85ff). In line with Marquard's view (2003, 64-81), art would again be delegated with a compensatory function, potentiating the goals of medical and pastoral institutions, sometimes attenuating their shortcomings.

In Dürer's work, we may find a thoughtful expression of the power of images. Beyond the simple representation of melancholy and its therapy, he explores therapeutic properties elicited through viewing of the artwork. Beyond the integration between writing and the expressive potential of the image, the German artist posits the possibility of the image's autonomy towards the textual construction of meaning. This positioning will reintegrate symbols and conventional uses into a new program for the viewer's self-transformation.

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Aleksander Kopka*

The Image of Mourning:
on Melancholic Militancy and Remembrance[1]

Abstract

In this article, I present Jacques Derrida's reflections on melancholy in the context of his thought of mourning and juxtapose them with ethical dilemmas regarding the image of the (dead) other by focusing on the mournsome character of photography. By adopting Derrida's conclusion that the work of mourning cannot be successful and melancholy always marks both its teleological failure and structural impossibility, I demonstrate why melancholy as an abnormal yet necessary condition of egoic life should presuppose originary non-presence of the (dead) other. Furthermore, I argue why melancholy, rather than being treated solely as a pathological condition, must be thought of in terms of survival, ethical revolt, and a militant challenge to memory.

Keywords

Mourning, Deconstruction, Spectrality, Melancholy, Survival

> It will always be necessary that still living
> mortals bury the already dead living.
>
> Derrida 2006, 143

> We are already specters of a "televised."
>
> Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 117

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> My first desire is not to produce a philosophical
> work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.
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> Derrida 1995, 143

To begin with, I wish to write about an image. A particular kind of image: a photograph. Not just any photograph, one among many, but probably the first one. The first photograph in which I saw Jacques Derrida's face. For the very first time, long after his death, I saw him sitting in a chair, wearing a black shirt, his collar unbuttoned, his eyes—eyes of someone playing a tragedy or of an actor in a French neo-noir film—fixed on the place behind the camera, the "out of sight" place, always occupied by photographers and spectators. It was a black and white photograph in which his white hair and his skin a few tones less light stood in sharp contrast with the darkness of the room's interior. Now, I cannot find this image anywhere but in my memory. Yet, since i t h a u n t s my memory, am I to infer that I m o u r n Jacques Derrida?

In his essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" (Derrida 2001, 49), which was also a farewell and a homage to his late friend, Jacques Derrida describes three possible types of relation to the "author" whom we "read," whom we sometimes admire, or write about. The first type involves an author who is not only a p e r s o n whose work we read but also someone we have met, loved, or still love: someone with whom we have been or are involved in a personal relationship, someone who has departed or is still alive. In the second type, the "author" can be someone we know only through their work but who is alive, and we still have a chance of meeting them, a chance to create a personal bond. The third kind of relationship is that with an "author" who had died before we read their work or became acquainted with their ideas or views. Nonetheless, in some "hybrid" cases, we may have an opportunity to hear the "author's" recorded voice, look at their published photos, or meet them "by proxy": via someone who knew them personally. The list of such eventualities may go on, yet, interestingly, none of those situations seems to exclude the possibility of mourning the "author." In fact—mourning becomes a necessity since we are implicated in it. Why is it then possible—and even inevitable?

I am aware that such a statement might open a lengthy discussion on signature, idiom, and name, which is beyond the scope of this text. However, suppose we follow Derrida in assuming that the "author" (whom we know by name or whose image we have seen) is given to death when his singular-

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ity or uniqueness is mediated in language or repeated in an image. In that case, we will observe that the name or the photograph p o i n t s   t h e   "a u -t h o r"   o u t, thus reasserting its capacity to function in a structure of repetitions and mutual references of signifiers—of generalities that can denote this particular, unique "author" *in absentia*. Even if they are still alive, this name or photograph "bears" their death because it will probably survive after their passing, and therefore it lends itself to being grafted in(to) any context or used in any situation: "[...] his name can survive him and a l -r e a d y   s u r v i v e s   h i m; the name begins during his life to get along without him [...]" (Derrida 1989, 49). That is why Derrida argues that naming already involves "a foreshadowing of mourning," which implies "[...] something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died of being promised to death: dying" (Derrida 2008, 20). Consequently, when the "author" is looking at their name written on a sheet of paper, or at a photograph of themselves, in a way they are experiencing their own death—or even deaths since names or images have their reproductive and spectral powers. "The name alone makes possible the plurality of deaths" (Derrida 2001, 46), Derrida writes.

In a sense, they experience a "micro-version" of their death in each such situation. Derrida links this experience not only with the uncanny character of name or image (which both are different kinds of *archi-écriture* and essentially are traces left behind) but also with the condition of an irresistible and impossible urge to write, to leave behind him some trace of a life once lived:

> The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it's something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, "proceeds" from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing. It's the ultimate test: one expropriates oneself without knowing exactly who is being entrusted with what is left behind. Who is going to inherit, and how? Will there even be any heirs? (Derrida 2007b, 32-33)

The Power of the Image

While looking at a photograph, a disturbing absence of someone either dead or out of sight confronts me. Yet, the image simultaneously points to the absent other—and out to nowhere. It renders their absence both present and multiplied—haunting and unsettling. Because this bygone instant has been captured in black and white, now it can be represented apart from

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itself as an image, maybe in more than just one copy, reproduced (and some-times circulated) just like that photograph of Derrida, available not only for one pair of eyes. Such an image is a field of mediation between the secrecy of the singular other and the generality of signs, figures, language, lights, and shadows.[2] By trying to express the exceptionality, the photograph turns the idiomaticity of its referent into something perceptible yet impalpable, some-thing that allows us to share and repeat this absent origin of gazing upon us and the world, a unique source of phenomenality. Nonetheless, this absolute singularity resists complete appropriation. It "[...] punctures the surface of the reproduction—and even the production—of analogies, likenesses, and codes. It pierces, strikes me, wounds me, bruises me, and, first of all, seems to concern only me" (Derrida 2001, 39). The referent addressing themselves through reference—or rather something less graspable and direct… some-thing like sending off, a referral or simply a *renvoi*—demands the attention of the spectator, at the same moment imposing themselves, escaping com-plete perception and appropriation, drawing the spectator into mourning.

> But it is always the singularity of the other insofar as it comes to me without being di-rected towards me, without being present to me; and the other can even be "me," me having been or having had to be, me already dead in the future anterior and past ante-rior of my photograph (Derrida 2001, 39).

A few pages later, Derrida goes on:

> Contrapuntal theory or a procession of stigmata: a wound no doubt comes in (the) place of the point signed by singularity, in (the) place of its very instant (*stigmē*), at its point, its tip. But in (t h e)   p l a c e   o f   this event, place is given over, for the same wound, to substitution, which repeats itself there, retaining of the irreplaceable only a past desire (Derrida 2001, 67).

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[2] There is another strikingly odd thing about the image of the other, which also, para-doxically, pulls us into mourning. The image, or at least a face in the image, does not get old. It shows no signs of wearing away. Yet, undoubtedly, it marks a place of absence, and despite its resistance to the passage of time, its immutability only exacerbates the sense of mortality. That is why Susan Sontag calls photography "the inventory of mortality": "For us, the more interesting abrasions are not of stone but of flesh. Through photographs we follow in the most intimate, troubling way the reality of how people age. [...] Photographs show people being so irrefutably *there* and at a specific age in their lives [...]. Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people" (Sontag 2007, 54-55).

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Thus, by pointing at the singularity of the other, we are no longer pointing at some instance of pure presence, at something once fully present and now lost, at something once purely present and therefore—at least potentially—retrievable or appropriable. Singularity, as Derrida puts it, "is announced in a paradoxical experience" (Derrida 1992, 68) that never allows one to comprehend what it manifests fully. What passes for the present in such an experience has to be divisible for the archive to be constituted, to remain, to survive, and refer to "a non-reproductible referent, an irreplaceable place" (Derrida 2010b, 3). The image or the double splits what it represents to the point that any speculation about the simple origin has to be suspended. Consequently, the reliance of presentation on representation and iterability turns a simple source of presence into a difference and forgetting of the simple origin (Derrida 1997, 36-37). As Derrida stresses in his meditations on *gramme* and *stigmē*, "[p]resence, then, far from being, as is commonly thought, what the sign signifies, what a trace refers to, presence, then, is the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace" (Derrida 1984, 66). Thus, the *stigma*

> [...] not only is divided, but h a s t o divide and repeat itself, authenticity is exposed to the technical [*la technique*]. Here, however, the technical is not a threat to authenticity, not a negative accident, but rather the condition of the effect of authenticity (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 72).

Derrida means that the other's appearance relies on the movement of iteration and technology in the broadest sense. Rather than being externally added to presence, technology constitutes it, at the same time generating spectrality. From that point of view, one can never establish a simple origin of reproduction or iteration: there is no pure presence as the source of appearance but only a chain of apparitions of something that cannot ever appear as such. "There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed" (Derrida 2006, 5), Derrida argues, adding in *Echographies of Television* that specter is something visible that is not present in flesh and body: "[i]t is a night visibility. As soon as there is a technology of the image, visibility brings night. It incarnates in a night body, it radiates a night light" (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 115). There, he also gives a genuinely moving example of this spectral effect, a testimony to his intimate work of mourning. In 1982, Derrida appeared in an experimental film *Ghost Dance*. He played himself in a couple of scenes shared with a young French actress Pascale Ogier, who died tragically just two years later. In a conversation on spectrality, Derrida remembers when he was asked to watch the movie again a couple of years after Ogier's death:

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Suddenly I saw Pascale's face, which I knew was a dead woman's face, come onto the screen. She answered my question: "Do you believe in ghosts?" Practically looking me in the eye, she said to me again, on the big screen: "Yes, now I do, yes." Which now? Years later in Texas. I had the unnerving sense of the return of her specter, the specter of her specter coming back to say to me—to me here, now: "Now... now... now, that is to say, in this dark room on another continent, in another world, here, now, yes, believe me, I believe in ghosts."

 But at the same time, I know that the first time Pascale said this, already, when she repeated this in my office, already, this spectrality was at work. It was already there, she was already saying this, and she knew, just as we know, that even if she hadn't died in the interval, one day, it would be a dead woman who said, "I am dead," or "I am dead, I know what I'm talking about from where I am, and I'm watching you," and this gaze remained dissymmetrical, exchanged beyond all possible exchange, eye-line without eye-line, the eye-line of a gaze that fixes and looks for the other, its other, its counterpart [*vis-à-vis*], the other gaze met, in an infinite night (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 120).

Thus, every moment—from meeting somebody's eye to looking at their image—is marked by spectrality and melancholic mourning. Furthermore, one can never avoid the necessity that, from the outset, taints every encounter with death and absence, delivering the other to the iterable trace. Nothing and nobody can therefore appear in full light. As Derrida states in *The Post Card*, "[t]here, there is only twilight and mid-mourning" (Derrida 1987, 195). The image is, therefore, a form of *skiagraphia*, shadow writing—which Derrida mentions in *Memoires of the Blind*—that calls for blindness and requires the technics of memory within every act of perception (Derrida 1993b, 51), depriving the latter of its autonomy, synchrony or adequacy and submitting it to melancholy as a condition rooted in the experience of irrecoverable loss: of something that is committed to loss and has to be kept as lost (which as such is a task of impossible fidelity). A photograph, an image, a play of shadow and light that captures and "immortalizes" some instant at the same time passes a death sentence: "This will have to die, the *mise en demeure* is underway" (Derrida 2010a, 27). That is why, in contrast to mere personal nostalgia, melancholy "marks a certain essence of historical experience or, if you prefer, the meaning or sense for history" (Derrida 2010a, 39). In this experience, the role of photography must appear as exceptional. As John Berger observes, "[p]hotography, because it preserves the appearance of an event or a person, has always been closely associated with the idea of the historical" (Berger 1980, 47).

 Hence, a difference between shadow and light, a difference in light, as Derrida argues, is "perhaps the first possibility of the trace" (Derrida 2010b, 16), which makes its movement "a priori photographic" (Derrida 2010b, 17).

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Furthermore, the essential reliance on the "prosthetic" iterability of the trace means that the relation between passivity and activity in the "act" of perception has to be complicated, and once technics are involved, both activity and passivity cannot be thought of conventionally: "In perception there are already operations of selection, of exposure time, of filtering, of development; the psychic apparatus functions also *like*, or *as*, an apparatus of inscription and of the photographic archive" (Derrida 2010b, 15).[3]

This entire principle holds even in the case of the self-portrait. Derrida argues that an effort of the painter to recapture himself is already an act of memory. What the painter thereby faces is a specter, a ruin of himself, already fleeting away. "All symmetry is interrupted between him and himself, between him, the spectacle, and the spectator who he also is. There are now only specters" (Derrida 1993b, 68). In other words, the appearance of the spectacle is conditioned by its originary absence, it relies on the technological supplement, which is anything but merely subservient to memory. The same argument can be found in *Of Grammatology*:

> [t]he duplication of the thing in the painting, and already in the brilliance of the phenomenon where it is present, guarded and regarded, maintained, however slightly, facing the regard and under the regard, opens appearance as the absence of the thing in its self-sameness [*propre*] and its truth. There is never a painting of the thing itself and first of all because there is no thing itself. [...] The original possibility of the image is the supplement; which adds itself without adding anything to fill an emptiness which, within fullness, begs to be replaced (Derrida 1997, 292).

Therefore, as Derrida claims, every portrait, particularly the self-portrait, is already a portrait of ruins.

> The failure to recapture the presence of the gaze outside of the abyss into which it is sinking is not an accident or weakness; it illustrates or rather figures the very chance of the work, the specter of the invisible that the work lets be seen without ever presenting. [...] The ruin does not supervene like an accident upon a monument that was intact only yesterday. In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is that which happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze (Derrida 1993b, 68).

If preservation or maintenance relies structurally on the iterability of the trace, then what is preserved or maintained is essentially precarious; it is already mortal and given to infinite mourning (*cf.* Derrida 2002, 278). That is

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[3] It would make the photographic mechanism (the mechanism of the delay without return) a metonymy for the whole psychical apparatus, the functioning of which Derrida describes already in 1966, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," with the help of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.

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why Derrida describes the love of ruins, namely, of something fragile and mortal, love between mortal beings, inscribed in the structure of survival—the only love possible—as "a p r i o r i m e l a n c h o l i c": "[b]ecause it is love of something or someone one knows one will lose, whether the other dies or I die" (Derrida 2017, 158).

Thus, when we look at a photograph, especially of the dead other, we experience this strange logic of the spectral re-appearance of someone who watches or concerns us without reciprocity. Consequently, Derrida avers that the power of the image cannot stem from ontology and the ontological tradition of the question "What is?" (Derrida 2001, 145). In his words of adieu to Louis Marin, he emphasizes the role of mourning, "which takes its place in advance" and "can open up this space of absolute *dynamis*: force, virtue, the possible as such, without which one understands nothing of the power of the image" (Derrida 2001, 146). There is, therefore, something much more compelling or haunting at work in the image than the simple presence or its reproduction, something that requires "another organization of space and of visibility, of the gazing and the gazed upon" (Derrida 2001, 159): a spectral asymmetry that puts us before the absent other as the origin of the law, imposing on us an infinite demand for justice and confronting us with what Derrida calls "the unbearable paradox of fidelity" (Derrida 2001, 159).

Moreover, being reduced to a mere image, the other—at the same time—resists such a reduction. Derrida emphasizes that we are thus entrusted with the task of encompassing someone who is incomprehensible. We are destined to keep with us only "a memory that consists of v i s i b l e scenes that are no longer anything but i m a g e s" (Derrida 2001, 159) of someone who disappeared, who is out of our sight, but who still concerns and watches us: "[u]pon the death of the other we are given to memory, and thus to interiorization, since the other, outside us, is now nothing. And with the dark light of this nothing, we learn that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory" (Derrida 1989, 34). That is why Derrida speaks of the gaze of the other, the gaze that is "[f]ar away in us. In us, there where this power of the image comes to open the being-far-away" (Derrida 2001, 161).

Now, seeing that we cannot treat the other as either a fully integrated part of ourselves or a binary opposition to our egoic life, realizing that we cannot immunize ourselves against this spectral intrusion or adopt some teleological end to it, and assuming affirmation rather than a negation of the other, Derrida argues that spectrality ultimately escapes full dialectization. Therefore, we are dealing with an undialectical return of the dead: a return

of the uniqueness that indeed must have been here a while ago but was never truly present. Furthermore, it is, for example, through the photograph that the uniqueness of the other comes to be mediated, repeated, and re-produced. Derrida points out that "[t]he photographic technique fulfills even more powerfully the pictorial vocation, namely, to seize the dead and trans-figure them—to resuscitate as h a v i n g   b e e n the one who (singularly, he or she) will have been" (Derrida 2001, 156).

> Here is death, then, there where the image annuls its representative presence, there where, more precisely, the non-re-productive intensity of the r e - of representation gains in power what the present that it represents loses in presence. [...] Representa-tion is here no longer a simple reproductive re-presentation; it is such a regaining of presence, such a recrudescence or resurgence of presence thereby intensified, that it allows lack to be thought, the default of presence or the mourning that had hollowed out in advance the so-called primitive or originary presence, the presence that is rep-resented, the so-called living presence (Derrida 2001, 148-149).

In this unwitting, spectral resurgence, one becomes truly a hostage to a ghost—we may even say a g h o s t a g e—bursting in, although never properly present, disturbing the peace of the living presence, forcing one to bear the departed's death, to live this death—and to outlive, but never out-run it. This spectral effect goes beyond any polarity, such as presence–ab-sence or inside–outside. Although death, as Roland Barthes has it in *Camera Lucida*, is undialectical, we are involved once and forever in the work of mourning that we perform to retain, master, or tame death in a dialectical manner, to put it in its "proper" place: keeping it expelled from life or fully domesticated. We pretend that it will never actually happen to us: marking the end of life, it cannot haunt us, and therefore it does not concern us in any other way than as an external accident. In other words, we assume that we will not experience the undialecticality of death and are protected from the haunting of the departed. In dealing with a death, we attempt to convince ourselves of the possibility of interiorization and reduction of the dead to an image to avoid being a ghostage of their return and to take advantage of it by claiming a privileged position. Nevertheless, such a task is impossible, as I will later show.

Melancholic Revolt

Derrida's discussion on the work of mourning reverberates with the echo of Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." For Freud, mourning is a process of the interiorization—and introjection—of the dead. It always

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aims for success thanks to its work of appropriating the other in an idealized image present to me, just like the dead were once, assumedly, present to me before their departure. In the healing process, this idealization absorbs the other, making their projection a good part of their egoic life. Therefore mourning is a healthy response to loss, and when the process is completed, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 1964, 245). If, however, one develops an abnormal, morbid, melancholic reaction to the death of a loved one, one is interminably haunted by the ghosts of the departed, failing to come to terms with the loved one's death. In Freud's eyes, such a condition stands in marked opposition to the proper work of dealing with loss.

For Derrida, mourning cannot be considered separately from melancholy: mourning is a l w a y s melancholic. In his view, completing the task of mourning with the ultimate interiorization of the other would not be possible and should not be desirable. If considered successful, mourning would become consistent with notions of full autonomy, potentiality and actuality, the authority of the subject, sovereign might, determination of the future, teleology, epistemic violence, and predominance of the rigid economy over what remains incalculable. Moreover, it would indicate a lack of fidelity to— or responsibility for—the other's secrecy: their singular u n i q u e n e s s. Grief and melancholy experienced after somebody's death cannot be overcome, as one can never escape one's relation to death, particularly to the death of the other.

In contrast to Freud, who presupposes successful interiorization of the dead, Derrida postulates the originarity of unbounded mourning, which is the very condition of life. "I mourn therefore I am," he professes, adding that since mourning always involves the other, it would be more originary even than my being for death (Derrida 1995, 322). To live means to mourn—my own and the other's life, always with death, which I cannot forget, and which incessantly inhabits my life. Just as one has to take photographs to be a photographer, in a similar manner, to be alive means to be in mourning for the other and, by the same token, for oneself; that is why melancholy must revolt against regular mourning—not only for structural but also ethical reasons (*cf.* Royle 2009, 138). Out of fidelity to the other, which is impossible to meet,

> [t]his melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. It must rise up against what Freud says of it with such assurance, as if to confirm the norm of normality. The "norm" is nothing other than the good conscience of amnesia. It allows us to f o r g e t that to keep the other within the self, a s   o n e s e l f, is already to f o r-g e t the other. Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore n e c e s s a r y. At this point, the suffering of a certain pathology dictates the law [...]. (Derrida 2005c, 160).

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For Derrida, melancholy is intrinsically connected with this constraint and obligation of mourning, ultimately leading to an experience of fidelity. Melancholy intensifies and complicates this experience.[4] Consequently, the relationship between mourning and fidelity is far from straightforward. On the one hand, mourning consists in an interiorization of the dead other, but on the other, it has to resist such a process. So, it paradoxically adopts two contradictory attitudes: a willingness and a refusal to mourn.

> I cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, and at the same time, what I do best is to mourn, is to lose it, be cause by mourning, I keep it inside me. [...] The psychoanalytic discourse, despite its subtlety and necessity, does not go into this fatality, this necessity: the double constraint of mourning (Derrida 1995, 152).

Thus failing to go through the successful work of mourning is a sign not necessarily of paralysis, but first and foremost of fidelity and protestation. In *Camera Lucida*, returning to us like a specter, Roland Barthes writes: "[i]t is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless" (Barthes 1981, 75). Therefore, the work of mourning remains impossible. It un-works itself in its aporetic movement since mourning cannot and should not be "properly" achieved. One cannot even fully describe this work that happens in the obscurity of transgressions between life and death. Derrida argues that there cannot be any "metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work" (Derrida 2001, 143). Working on the work of mourning, making it our subject, we inevitably perform this work and become its object. Therefore we cannot thoroughly examine it. We cannot adopt a secure position on or i n   r e l a t i o n   t o mourning; we are incapable of saying anything decisive about it, yet trying to do so—trying to speak or write about it—we experience it.

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[4] Geoffrey Bennington argues that melancholy is not seen by Derrida as a pathological condition but as "a kind of ethics of death" (Bennington, 2001: xi). However, we could argue that it may as well be treated as an ethics of life or rather of living on, which is, according to Derrida, "the most intense life possible" (Derrida 2007b, 52). This ethical protest against normal mourning related to Derrida's emphasis on incompleteness of what he dubs "half-mourning" or "mid-mourning" [*demi-deuil*] is what Bennington calls "militant melancholy" (Bennington 2001, xii, 8, 39). However, my claim is that there is much more to be said about melancholic militancy, which nevertheless finds its conditions of possibility within the "framework" of impossible and infinite mourning.

Moreover, since mourning is originary, its work is not just one among others, but it is general work, work itself, under which every work is a work of mourning (*cf.* Derrida 1995, 48; 2001, 142; 2006, 121; Derrida, Roudinesco 2004, 78). This generality leaves no door open: no chance of freeing oneself from the burden. Because death is not only something promised, guaranteed, or threatening, it awaits us before our lives begin: we cannot exit before death. We must surrender to death the minute we are born and, therefore, surrender to mourning, which opens the question of fidelity to the other.

> *Il faut*, one must: it is the law, that law of the (necessary) relation of Being to law. We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where s u c c e s s f a i l s. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a p a r t o f u s, between us—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, t h e f a i l u r e s u c-c e e d s: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us (Derrida 1989, 35).

The fidelity problem also concerns whether one should speak in the face of the other's death or rather remain silent instead. Since the image, for structural reasons, cannot be faithful to the singularity of the other, and the failure of interiorization is a sign of respect to the departed one, their death is unbearable and unthinkable. It is unspeakable. Words cannot do j u s t i c e to this singularity. However, amidst the impossibility of speaking, we are called upon to step outside the limits of ineffability. We offer our words: not so much of consolation (since the loss is irreversible and irreparable—and because language always carries a burden of the speaker's narcissism), but, above all, words of testimony.

As one of the last representatives of "his generation," Derrida strove not to remain silent, not to shy away from his work of impossible mourning, both after his friends' deaths and during their lifetimes. For Derrida, being a survivor became an inexhaustible philosophical theme and a task of responsibility and memory. After all, memory qua the faculty of inheritance and reaffirmation through interpretation, translation, filtration, selection, and change, which could offer hospitable mourning to the remains and traces of others (*cf.* Derrida, Roudinesco 2004, 3-4; Naas 2015; Miller 2009, 75-79), should be treated as a domain of ethical and political struggle. The photographic image may perfectly exemplify what seems to be essentially

a mnemotechnical issue (there is no perception without technical interven-
tion,[5] just as there is no perception from the point of view of what does not
require such supplementation or what Berger calls "a supernatural eye"—
perception is always finite, limited, fragmented). As Susan Sontag explains:

> [...] the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction
> made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of some-
> thing that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to
> frame, and to frame is to exclude (Sontag 2004, 46).

Furthermore, Berger concludes that "[m]emory implies a certain act of
redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. What is
forgotten has been abandoned" (Berger 1980, 54). In this regard, the ethical
character of committing something to memory is undeniable. Interestingly,
Sontag makes a similar point and ties it to the question of mourning:

> Remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly,
> the only relation we can have with the dead. So the belief that remembering is an ethi-
> cal act is deep in our natures as humans, who know we are going to die, and who
> mourn those who in the normal course of things die before us—grandparents, par-
> ents, teachers, and older friends. Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together (Son-
> tag 2004, 115).

On the one hand, however, Derrida reminds us that forgetting is not ac-
cidental when it comes to the work of memory. Ultimately, the latter, as
a failed attempt at internalizing the unreachable dead other, is a process
tainted with melancholy. On the other, this imperfect remembrance has vital
strategic consequences that deserve serious consideration. One not only
has to know what and how to remember, but—as Sontag claims—faulty and
limited memory, constantly threatened by amnesia, is necessary for peace
and reconciliation since there is too much injustice and suffering to remem-
ber. There is an unavoidable risk of memory breeding grievances, especially
in the "much longer span of a collective history" (Sontag 2004, 115). This
case may be valid to a certain extent, but in that passage, Sontag seems to

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[5] Already in his early essay on Freud, Derrida argues that writing as the complication
of presence and representation introduces technics within the psychical apparatus and
enables the analogy between psyche and machine: "Writing, here, is *technē* as the relation
between life and death, between present and representation, between the two appa-
ratuses. It opens up the question of technics: of the apparatus in general and of the anal-
ogy between the psychical apparatus and the nonpsychical apparatus. In this sense writ-
ing is the stage of history [...]" (Derrida 2005d, 287).

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ignore that memory is essentially faulty and limited: the point of remembrance is to fail well. Moreover, any reconciliation or forgiveness requires the work of memory and some strategy of perception and remembrance. This approach has to involve awareness that to combat deliberate and manufactured amnesia, which is one of the most pervasive forms of political violence,[6] one has to rebel against the norm that can be imposed through the work of morning.

Of course, any strategy of perception and remembrance may also be subjected to political critique. For example, in *Frames of War*, Judith Butler explores how "the norms that govern which lives will be regarded as human enter into the frames through which discourse and visual representation proceed, and how […] these in turn delimit or orchestrate our ethical responsiveness to suffering" (Butler 2009, 77). Inasmuch as the frame is being constituted within the movement of iterability, it "constantly breaks from its context" (Butler 2009, 10) and therefore becomes susceptible to thematization, manipulation or instrumentalization. Furthermore, Butler argues that, depending on the framing, some lives may be considered unworthy of mourning and undeserving of care, protection, and remembrance. Such lives become unrecognizable and ungrievable. Still, for Derrida, the ethical reflection in its radical sense begins precisely with the unrecognizability and dissimilarity of mortal and precarious others (Derrida 2009, 108).

Moreover, according to Enzo Traverso, we should not focus ultimately on the remembrance of victims as a part of the culture of humanitarianism that sacralizes their memory. Instead, he proposes rediscovering a melancholic vision of history that would not involve retreating "into a closed universe of suffering and remembering" (Traverso 2016, xiv). Rather, regarded in the context of left-wing struggles, this approach would return the historical agency, the commitments, and the hopes back to those from whom we inherit and who we mourn. Traverso explains that "left melancholy has always focused on the v a n q u i s h e d. It perceives the tragedies and the lost battles of the past as a burden and a debt, which are also a promise of redemption" (Traverso 2016, xv). Hence, by emphasizing its affirmative side, Traverso can simultaneously bring melancholy's militant or revolutionary character to the fore.

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[6] For example, in his book *Washington Bullets*, Vijay Prashad describes the effort of the Western colonial powers to erase the memory of revolutionary struggles for decolonization: „It was not forgotten due to the passage of time. A condition of amnesia was produced by the corporate media and the profession of history-writing, both of whom became stenographers of power" (Prashad 2020, 56).

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From Melancholy to Affirmation

One of the last words *signe* Derrida appeared in an interview published in *Le Monde* just a few weeks before his death. Anticipating the losing battle with his illness, the philosopher focused his discussion on the experience of surviving and the structure of survival.[7] However, already in his *Politics of Friendship* he stated blatantly that surviving "[...] is the other name of a mourning whose possibility is never to be awaited. For one does not survive without mourning" (Derrida 2005b, 13). He found it structurally constitutive for the living being in its originary referral to the other (*cf.* Derrida 2007b, 26). His work on friendship is marked: it abounds with reflections concerning the relation of survival between friends, who must be aware that one of them will outlive the other, bury the other, surviving the other. Friends cannot be thoroughly contemporary: an anachrony of sorts stands between them. They never arrive together at this rendezvous, Derrida notes in *Aporias*, adding that "[i]n order to wait for the other at this meeting place, one must, on the contrary, arrive there late, not early" (Derrida 1993a, 65-66).

Nevertheless, death always comes too soon, even before the actual moment of departure, and it disrupts the integrity of the living presence (as both self-presence and co-presence). Derrida calls this a "melancholic certainty" (Derrida 2005c, 140), and in "Rams," which is another text per-

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[7] This notion of survival would occupy Derrida's mind long before. *Politics of Friendship* (based on his seminars from 1988–1989) was published almost a decade before his death, about the time a series of interviews gathered in *A Taste for the Secret* was conducted. This particular statement is from 1995: "I think about nothing but death, I think about it all the time, ten seconds don't go by without the imminence of the thing being there. I never stop analyzing the phenomenon of 'survival' as the structure of surviving, it's really the only thing that interest me, but precisely insofar as I do not believe that one lives on post mortem" (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 88). Survival [*survie*] can initiate a rich network of etymological affinities and connections or resemblances. For example, the one referring us to *savoir-vivre*—knowing how to live—which led Derrida to the urgent question of learning how to live [*apprendre à vivre*]: "But I remain uneducable when it comes to any kind of wisdom about knowing-how-to-die or, if you prefer, knowing-how-to-live. I still have not learned or picked up anything on this subject. The time of the reprieve is rapidly running out. Not just because I am, along with others, the heir of so many things, some good, some quite terrible: but since most of the thinkers with whom I have been associated are now dead, I am referred to more and more often as a s u r v i v o r—the last, the final representative of a 'generation,' that is, roughly speaking, the sixties generation. Without being strictly speaking true, this provokes in me not only objections but feelings of a somewhat melancholic revolt" (Derrida 2007b, 25-26).

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meated by mourning, he describes melancholy as the very condition in which two friends come to understand that one of them will live on after the other's death, namely, after the ultimate separation, which affects their lives and their relationship from the very beginning, interrupting any sense of cohesion or contemporariness: "[...] survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich* than ever" (Derrida 2005c, 139).

Still, Derrida's survival terminology affirms life: in the mentioned interview, he states that deconstruction is interested in saying "yes" to life. In this sense, there is a place both for melancholy and "a discourse against mourning and against melancholy" (Derrida 2017, 185) in deconstruction. He would depart from interpretations situating his thoughts on the side of death, although, as he would argue, it is by death that the thought must be constantly haunted. Mourning, after all, is surviving.

> This surviving is life beyond life, life more than life, and my discourse is not a discourse of death, but, on the contrary, the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and thus surviving to death, because survival is not simply that which remains but the most intense life possible. I am never more haunted by the necessity of dying than in moments of happiness and joy. To feel joy and to weep over the death that awaits are for me the same thing (Derrida 2007b, 52).

What survives the dead, after all? What remains of the dead but memory? We are doomed to forget, and forgetting is what anachrony practices and promises (Derrida 2006, 139). This anachronic fate emerges as an impossible death-struggle—a task of reducing the irreducible and then trying not to forget—and a death knell. Yet, despite that, or perhaps because of that, we—the survivors—are endowed with responsibility for what we inherit by incurring a debt to those we mourn. The call for militant melancholy begins with the heterogeneity of this "promise of the other in oneself" (Derrida 2013, 20).

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The Effects of Loss in the Sublime Moment:
Jean Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *Le Fils*

Abstract

Luc and Jean Pierre Dardenne, in their film *Le Fils* (2002), reveal the sublime through the repetition of the movement/act of watching, which are the temporal shifts between grief, mourning, and melancholia. These movements and acts become, in Judith Butler's (2002) words, "The very means that loss is registered" (470). Jean-François Lyotard (1994) describes the sublime moment as "at the encounter of the two 'absolutes' equally 'present' to thought" (123) that can evolve from an ordinary perspective into a sudden awareness of a different perspective. In *Le Fils*, melancholia is not a state of mind chronologically arrived at as much as it is part of a cluster of loss effects—coupled with grief and mourning—that can be felt intermittently and simultaneously as a way of navigating the impact of loss. This dynamic state, this shifting cluster, unfolds in *Le Fils* as a disorientation, a metaphysical and temporal precarity. Gilles Deleuze (1986) points out that the sublime moment "is like two presents which ceaselessly intersect, one of which is always arriving and the other is already established" (106). In the context of loss, Deleuze's "arriving" can be the temporal loss cluster of grief, mourning, and melancholia, while the other present ("already established") can be loss itself—something that is always present in its effect. Each present exists for the other, one navigating the ongoing impact of the other. Still film frames will be presented like citations of lines from poetry or excerpts from written text to mark the sublime moment's emergence. I will focus on three such moments in this analysis.

Keywords

Loss, Melancholia, Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Sublime, Film

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"Choice is a kind of repetition, whereby one commits the world to something by making explicit something implicit" (Trahair 2016, 105). Luc and Jean Pierre Dardenne, in their film *Le Fils* (2002), reveal the sublime through the repetition of the movement/act of watching, which are the temporal shifts between grief, mourning, and melancholia. The act of watching, on the surface, is a physical casual everyday movement and action. In *Le Fils*, the repetition of watching (as a choice) takes many forms: teaching, monitoring, following, and surveilling—from which the sublime emerges. These movements and acts become, in Judith Butler's (2002) words, "The very means that loss is registered" (470). In *Le Fils*, melancholia is not a state of mind chronologically arrived at as much as it is part of a cluster of loss effects—with grief and mourning being the other two—that can be felt intermittently and (or) simultaneously as a way of navigating the impact of loss. This dynamic state, this shifting cluster, unfolds visually in *Le Fils* as disorientation, a metaphysical precarity. As Judith Butler points out in *Precarious Life* (2004): "There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter, cannot be charted or planned" (21). As with Dardenne's later work, *L'Enfant* (2005) and *Le Gamin au Vélo* (2011), *Le Fils* shares characters marginalized and compromised by their present and pasts, grappling with trying to navigate and understand their helplessness. This vulnerability heightens the possibility for the sublime moment to roil and emerge. There are at least nine sublime moments in *Le Fils*. There could be more sublime moments located in repeated viewings. I will focus on three such moments in this analysis.

In *Permanence and Change* (1954), Kenneth Burke remarks, "Reality is what things will do to us or for us. It is the expectation of comfort or discomfort, prosperity, or risk" (22). This reality—the discomfort and risk—is *done* to the main characters in the Dardennes' films. Like most of the Dardennes' work, *Le Fils* begins with the main character in the middle of and navigating a problem that stems from their immediate circumstance and crisis. The film takes place in Seraing, a post-industrial Belgian town a few miles outside Liege, where all the Dardennes' films are set. The movie begins with Olivier (Olivier Gourmet), a carpentry instructor at a vocational reformatory school for boys, reacting, with his back to the camera, rushing to correct and solve a problem with the shop machinery. Despite his bullish, thick appearance, Olivier is agile, a quality that leads the narrative thread throughout the film. A minute or two later, Olivier is handed a note that he reads blankly and is asked, "Will you take him?" Olivier responds, "No," emotionless, inscrutable. We find out later that the note was an assignment: that one of his potential

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students, sixteen-year-old Francis Thirion (Morgan Marinne), is the same boy who murdered Olivier's son five years ago. Soon after, we see Olivier running about the stairwells and hallways of the school, trying to catch glimpses of Francis; we see the boy as Olivier sees the boy in glimpses—part of his head, his legs, going through a door, his hands signing a document, waiting on line in the cafeteria. This fifteen to sixteen-minute segment is seen and shot over Olivier's shoulders and behind his back. In between glimpses of Francis, we see Olivier teaching. Olivier is stoic and no-nonsense in his approach to instructing his students. He calmly and evenly demonstrates attention to detail and repetition, much the same way the Dardennes capture and highlight the repetition of Olivier's movements, actions, and gestures.

"In the Dardenne films, where we are typically offered only a side-on view of a face or are confronted by a character's back, there is most often a reservation about the display of emotion, a certain blankness" (Rushton 2014, 311). The Dardenne brothers frame and shoot every movement and action up close to highlight and approximate Olivier's perspective. We see everything Olivier sees and everything he does, close up, as a way of possibly measuring and trying to understand Olivier's thinking and actions. This measuring mirrors the way Olivier approaches his trade as a carpenter—measuring, approximating for an eventual result. Much of the movie is shot from behind Olivier's back and over his shoulder—letting us follow, monitor, and surveil him as he monitors, follows, and surveils Francis. Not seeing Olivier's face straight on through most of the film makes his movements and thoughts much more inscrutable, adding dramatic tension to the film and making the movements and actions in the frame seem faster and quicker. There is also an inexplicable visual disjointedness to this way of framing and shooting that mirrors Olivier's disorientation. We see everything we would not usually see up close and in detail. What does long-held grief look like when someone has not yet come to terms with that grief?

The Dardennes offer little backstory in providing clues or motives to what or how Olivier thinks. The Dardennes' camera, always close and tight on Olivier, in Phillip Mosley's words, "Seems at once to embrace in its vision both Olivier's and our anxiety as we seek clues to his thoughts and actions... Words are few and little, but what we see at close quarters bears much meaning" (100). Olivier's apartment does not have much; it is bare and reflects a solitary life. He does exercises for his back, checks his messages, and warms his beans from a can on the stove. We are introduced to Magali (Isabella Soupart), his ex-wife, who comes by on this day to inform Olivier that

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she is going to remarry and that she is pregnant. Magali reports this casually
as a common courtesy, with no intended malice. She is also checking up on
Olivier to see how he is doing. Olivier takes this news stoically, with no visi-
ble emotion. Magali, in contrast to Olivier, seems to be moving on with her
life and trying to adjust as best she can to their son's death. Magali, we find
out later, is the only person that can question Olivier to measure his self-
awareness, asking him questions that he cannot or will not ask. When she
leaves, he rushes after her to ask why she decided to tell him now of this
news—thinking that it might have to do with the timing of Francis coming to
his school. The timing is just a serendipitous coincidence that alters Olivier's
earlier decision concerning Francis.

Fig. 1. Making the choice, 21:00-21:40, LFF, 2002.

    The next day Oliver decides to take Francis on as a student. There are
a series of shots to consider here that set up the film's first expedition into
the sublime. When Olivier tells his supervisor that he will take Francis on as
a student, he is told that Francis is in the locker room. The camera then fol-
lows Olivier in an extended behind-the-back tracking shot through the same
maze of stairwells and hallways he traversed at the film's beginning when he
was trying to catch a glimpse of Francis. As Olivier nears the locker, his walk
becomes a tip-toe creep. The first series of shots shows (Fig. 1) Olivier peer-
ing around a wall to catch his first complete look at Francis and then going
around the wall to be in the same space as Francis. For about twenty sec-
onds, we are staring at Olivier staring at Francis, unseen in the frame. Olivier
seems transfixed and blank. The motion and movement of watching and
looking become a suspended moment of discovery and something else. The
next shot (Fig. 2) shows us Francis, motionless and defenseless, asleep on
a bench. This shot is the first full glance that Olivier has of Francis in repose.
Olivier seems dumbfounded as he stares at the boy. The last shot (Fig. 3) is
a closeup of Olivier from the side, transfixed, staring (still) at the sleeping

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Francis. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1994) on the sublime moment, "If in the object or the circumstance there is some 'thing' that leaves thought dumfounded even as it exalts thought" (69). This moment could approximate Olivier's feelings and thinking as he stares at his son's murderer, sleeping, seemingly harmless, in a semi-fetal position a few feet away, whom he agreed to take on as an apprentice. This shot lasts about fifteen seconds before Olivier knocks loudly on the lockers to wake Francis up. The sublime moment, "thought that is felt on the occasion of an absence of the object's form" (Lyotard 1994, 231), has passed, and something has started and changed. Absence (Olivier's son) and presence (Francis) exist momentarily. Oliver has now chosen to engage his loss.

Fig. 2. Francis at first sight,
21:48-21:54, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 3. Transfixed,
22:00-22:15, LFF, 2002.

Kenneth Burke (1941) remarks, "If you look for a man's burden, you will find the principle that reveals the structure of his unburdening [...] if you look for his problem, you will find the lead that explains the structure of his solution. His answer gets its form by relation to the questions he is answering" (92). The unburdening for Olivier is coming up with questions that lead to answers. At times, it seems that Olivier is searching simultaneously through his watching, surveilling, monitoring, and teaching for a question and answer. This results from the immediacy and urgency of knowing the problem but not knowing how to form it into a question that can be answered. Burke's sentiment relates to what Olivier does in movement and action, watching, following, surveilling, teaching, and monitoring Francis. One of Olivier's burdens is coming up with a question that can be answered, leading to a lightening of his burden. The apparent burden for Olivier is the reality of his son's death and its effect at the hands of Francis (who was 11 at

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the time) five years earlier. This burden becomes fourfold in its existential
weight on Olivier and affects Olivier's movements and actions as a result.
With the arrival of Francis (his son's murderer) as a student and apprentice,
we can now, as viewers imagine the four-fold aspects of Olivier's burden:
Francis's appearance reminds Olivier of his son's murder (past) while teach-
ing Francis reenacts in a way what Olivier would be doing with his son if his
son were still alive (past/present); Francis, in turn, becomes a surrogate son
(present/future), pushing further Olivier's need to know now (present)
what kind of person would kill his son. All of this for Olivier is his burden,
which is his reality, and his movement and actions are of a disoriented man
trying to orient himself to a degree of understanding and coming to terms
with the fluidity of a shifting world—that took his son's life—around him.
Francis is the presence that reminds Olivier of his son's absence.

Fig. 4. Orientation attempt,
46:54-46:58, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 5. Imagining presence,
47:11-47:20, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 6. Another perspective,
47:29-47:37, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 7. Still dumbfounded,
47:48-48:20, LFF, 2002.

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Fig. 8. Disorientation complete**,** 48:40-49:00, LFF, 2002.

The second sublime moment happens after Olivier takes Francis's keys from the boy's locker. After checking on and admonishing a truant student outside the school, Olivier enters Francis's apartment. This scene is remarkable in that it is one continual shot lasting about four minutes, following Olivier surveying (an aspect of watching) the lay of Francis's small one-room apartment. As Phillip Mosley notes, "More time and space opens up for moments of stillness and silence" (102). The room is similar to Olivier's apartment in its spareness and also speaks to a solitary life. Because of the shot's duration, the initial shock of Olivier sneaking into Francis's room fades into trying to figure out what Olivier is trying to figure out. For the viewer, the suspense of Olivier being caught also fades into sharing Olivier's curiosity, discovery, and obsession. It is hard to categorize what we are sharing with Olivier aside from this particular experience. Olivier's behavior is unusual but understandable. On the one hand, there is rationality in this irrationality, as we see in the selected still frames. It is as if Olivier is trying to reenact what being Francis is like on a day-to-day basis. Olivier seems to linger at each spot in the room. First, he goes to the sink (Fig. 4) and then to the bed (Fig. 5), looking at the alarm clock and radio. Olivier then goes to the window to peer through the curtain (Fig. 6). He then sits blankly at the table (Fig. 7), as this excursion into feeling empathy through reenactment makes Oliver even more disoriented. Each spot where Olivier lingers has a day-to-day purpose, an area, and a spot where Francis most likely lingers. In Lyotard's words, "Thought is not only attracted by a given circumstance, it is alternately repelled in an uncertain, incessant movement […] It involves recoil, as if thinking came up against what precisely attracts it" (68). Finally, Olivier lays stiffly in Francis's bed (Fig. 8) due in part to the intimacy of the spot and gesture. Olivier is uncomfortable—though for a long while, he tries, in repose, to create a moment and memory that might recreate something about Francis that he can understand or at least relate to. Maybe Olivier's mind is wandering, thinking about his lost son. "The objects are also an eternal re-

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minder of the emptiness after all meaning and faith is gone. The power of
this emptiness lies in its capacity to be filled with meaning again. The image
of the world of things is an image of loss, but a loss which has potential, albe-
it partial, for recuperation" (Ferber 2006, 6). This exercise does not seem to
give Olivier any sense of understanding or knowing Francis any better, or
maybe it does. It is hard to tell. Butler would describe these acts as a form of
grief: "Moments in which one undergoes something outside one's control
and finds that one is beside oneself" (2006, 28). To a degree, Olivier is trying
to imagine and see presence in absence.

In Jean-Pierre Dardenne's words, "We are more interested in trying to
give meaning to a scene by the way we film the relations between the char-
acters and what gestures a character makes—how he passes a cup to some-
one else, how he pours coffee into his cup. This is more interesting than pre-
senting actions as pretexts for talking" (West/West 16). The lack of dialogue
also gives the film a sense of stillness and pause even when the characters
and camera are moving and speak to the sublime moment's second scene.
In the absence of one thing—dialogue in this case—the ear and eye start to
notice other things. John Cage, the composer, wrote a famous piece entitled
4'33. The piece is composed for piano. The piece has a pianist sitting at the
piano in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. One of Cage's
motives was to "provide listeners with a blessed four-a-half-minute respite
from forced listening," allowing the audience to hear and notice other
sounds that might be occurring then: muffled traffic outside, people rustling
in their seats, footsteps up and down the aisles and so on. Music for Cage was
sound in its most arbitrary and natural state, noticed and enjoyed by all
through free will. The dialogue-less sections of *Le Fils* have a similar effect in
that they stretch the duration of what is seen and heard in the frame and can
isolate the movement in a way that seems like language, movement equaling
meaning. This effect leads to another effect in Paul Schrader's words, "Watch
an image long enough and your mind goes to work" (9). The images seem
sans dialogue, both enlarged and amplified, slowed and pared down. The
sustained silence and the lack of dialogue heighten these moments and can
draw the viewer to pay closer attention to what Olivier is thinking or could
be thinking and to the viewer's relation to Olivier's circumstance in terms of
what they might think and do in a similar situation.

Olivier navigates his relation to this *differend* of absolutes, absence, and
presence and is in between the different states of loss of grief, mourning, and
melancholia, making his actions seem unrepresentable. Jacques Rancière
would describe this as "the scene of the irreconcilable" (2007, 103). This

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irreconcilable scene of absence and presence negates the general assumption/expectation that loss follows a process of grief, mourning, and melancholy. For Olivier, these two absolutes emerge from the random murder of his son (marking absence) and the active presence of his son's murderer (Francis). Here, there are no temporal boundaries or logic between these effects of loss because there does not seem to be any logic in the loss itself other than that it happened. Moreover, in a way, Olivier's actions and reactions reflect the random (and unintentional) murder of his son.

Francis, now sixteen, looks and acts like an older version of eleven, the age he murdered (not intentionally or in a premeditated way, we learn later) Olivier's son. Francis seems passive and doe-like, vulnerable, and almost angelic. He takes medication that makes him sleepy. Francis also seems eager to learn from Olivier and admires his mentor's skill and evenness. Some scenes are painful and extraordinary where we see Francis emulate Olivier's work rituals—the way a son might learn from his father—something that Olivier notices as well. All of this intensifies the weight of Olivier's burden, a conscious overload of what once was, what could have been, what is now, what could be, all swirling and competing, unresolvable, denying Olivier any sense of balance, orientation, and reliable perspective continually navigating the *differend* effect of the memory of his son brought on by the presence of his son's murderer. For Olivier, the day-to-day work "of measurement, of balance in carrying and leveling wood, and of gauging distances between persons and objects" (Mosley 2013, 98) is a source of stability because it involves orienting objects and making things fit. As Wendy Brown points out, "melancholy is loyal 'to the world of things'" (1999, 21).

Much of the film's tension stems from what Olivier knows and what Francis does not know. Francis is starting to trust Olivier without knowing his motives for taking him on as a student. In the film's second half, Olivier surveils Francis less and interacts with him more. Like the other boys, Olivier instructs Francis in the basics of carpentry. Francis is very open to being led and taught. We see Olivier breaking Francis's fall from a wood-carry-up-the-ladder gone wrong exercise, with Francis falling on Olivier's back and then being visibly shaken by having possibly injured Olivier. Francis starts to openly emulate Olivier's rituals, protocol, and routines for work—something that Francis could only achieve by actively watching—right down to the content, relaxed after-work whistle. There is another scene where Olivier and Francis run into each other serendipitously one night at a hot dog stand. Francis admires Olivier's measuring ability—and asks Olivier to estimate certain distances before measuring the distance himself, very much a fa-

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ther/son, teacher/student moment. Conversations between the two are generally punctuated by long silences that outwardly indicate, to a certain degree, a shared ease in silence and being comfortable in the other's presence. Francis is no monster, making Olivier's dilemma about who and what to be with Francis much more daunting.

Olivier also has to contend with his ex-wife Magali and her feelings about Francis, whom she characterizes as a monster. There are two scenes where Olivier is less than forthcoming with Magali about his contact and interactions with Francis. In the first scene, Olivier visits Magali at her gas station cashier job to tell her of Francis's appearance at the vocational training center. Magali is visibly alarmed. Olivier then lies and tells her that Francis has left the center and will not return. Then, to gauge her reaction, Olivier tells Magali that he was floating the idea of teaching Francis. This semi-admission further upsets Magali, and she suggests to Olivier that they never discuss it again. Olivier's next encounter with Magali occurs when Magali confronts Olivier about taking Francis on as a student. She has stalked him (presumably in the same manner Olivier followed Francis) and is standing in the parking lot of the vocational center when Olivier is about to pull out and give Francis a lift home. Olivier notices and stops to park the car, getting out to face Magali, who is near hysterics because she senses correctly that the boy in the car is Francis, her son's murderer. She faints when Olivier admits that the boy in the car is indeed Francis and that he has taken Francis on as a student. Olivier runs to get hot coffee from his car to give to Magali. When Magali comes to, she stares at Olivier face-to-face and asks, "Who do you think you are?" When Olivier does not respond, Magali does not miss a beat and asks, "So why you?" To which Olivier responds, "I don't know." The answer is the truth and not an evasion. Judith Butler speaks to this disorientation: "When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what we do" (2004, 22). Olivier's disconnect (and distance) from Magali, a constituted tie, intensifies his bewilderment, an existential unmooring. Even when confronted with answerable questions, Olivier still seems unable to express and locate an answer.

The last third of the film has Olivier taking Francis on a day trip to the lumber yard his brother owns. During the first half of the ride, Olivier quizzes Francis about different types of woods and trees. Between the questions and long silences, Olivier asks Francis about the crime he committed five years earlier. Francis reluctantly admits to stealing and some other "stupid stuff." Not a contrite confession, but also not a lie. Soon after, they stop at a roadside diner. As they eat, Francis asks Olivier to be his guardian. Olivier

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asks why, and Francis replies that it is because Olivier is teaching him a trade. Olivier says he will think about it. They then play a game of Foosball. It is here where Francis casually and nonchalantly admits there was a "killing" involved in the theft that he was a part of five years ago. Soon after, there is a strange moment when Olivier goes into the washroom to wash and dry his hands thoroughly and stares at himself blankly (Fig. 9). Witnessing a man staring blankly at his reflection staring blankly back is unsettling. It seems like Olivier is trying to figure himself out and "resetting" or just saying to himself, "What next?" He also washes his glasses thoroughly as if this might help him see clearly and focus, which can also be a gesture of "washing your hands" of something; maybe getting to know Francis and all the complexities it entails, has not been worth the pain and time. Furthermore, maybe Olivier is trying to check himself, especially in light of Francis's request that he would be his guardian. If that were to happen, Olivier would have to reveal himself as the father of the boy Francis murdered. It is anticipation overload, both a literal and figurative moment of reflection for Olivier, its impact and effect still obscure and hard to read. We see this movement/action/gesture without the finality or hint of what it might mean: the first moment of a cluster of moments that lead to the sublime in their eventual accumulation.

Fig. 9. Reflecting as watching,   Fig. 10. Going too far,
1:15:44-1:16:11, LFF, 2002.   1:19:14, LFF, 2002.

During the ride toward the lumberyard, Olivier asks more questions about what Francis did to be sent to the juvenile home. Olivier seems to be interrogating Francis. Francis is reluctant and sheepish in his answers—though he finally admits to stealing a car radio and strangling a young boy who would not let go of him—not knowing that he was Olivier's son. Olivier admonishes the boy in anger, wanting Francis fully to take responsibility,

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to show visible remorse maybe—then stops the car abruptly, realizing he missed his exit to the lumber yard. The camera then gets a full closeup of Olivier's face as he glances over his shoulder to back the car up and says simultaneously (Fig. 10), "I went too far." It seems to be an acknowledgment of sorts for Olivier, giving words to both his spatial and ethical disorientation: He has gone "too far" missing (temporarily) his literal destination but also going too far in proximity to Francis, that in wanting and getting to know him has brought Olivier to a moment where his disorientation feels like a point of no return. The expression or look on Olivier's face (Fig. 11) is both inscrutable and desperate, and he is looking directly into the camera, giving the audience a face-to-face encounter—though this face-to-face encounter, oddly enough, gives no indication of what he is thinking or what he will do. It is a sustained up-in-the-air unsettledness that gives and offers no resolution, just blank anxiety.

Fig. 11. Inscrutable, 1:19:19-1:19:23, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 12. The reveal, 1:28:38, LFF, 2002.

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Fig. 13. Face to face, 1:32:08-1:32:32, LFF, 2002.

When they reach the lumberyard, Olivier guides Francis again (as in class, mentor to student), identifying certain woods, carrying, measuring, and cutting the wood, going on for a few minutes. It is shortly after this mentor-teacher set of routines that Olivier abruptly reveals to Francis, "The boy you killed was my son" (Fig. 12). There is a moment of silence before Francis runs away, and Olivier gives chase explaining that he would not hurt Francis that he just wants to talk. When Olivier finally catches Francis, it is an open tackle in the woods. Olivier finds himself on top of Francis, with his hands around the young boy's neck. Both are breathless. We see Francis from the side looking up into Olivier's face—in what seems to be a moment of recognition; Francis might now have an idea of what Olivier has felt. Olivier's hands around Francis's neck (Fig. 13) might seem more of a simulation than a threat or cause to harm. Olivier's hands now on the ground is a sublime moment in that it is a gesture from a man who is Francis's teacher but is also a victim of Francis, who murdered his flesh and blood. Judith Butler speaks to this moment: "By virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, [we are] implicated in the lives that are not our not own" (2006, 28). At this moment, Olivier is coming to terms with his son's death and revealing to Francis his sorrow, rage, love, and unbalance while giving Francis an idea of what his son might have felt in his last moments. An existential teachable moment and a shift in their perspectives. As Olivier and Francis catch their collective breaths together, it is still a guess of the effect of what just transpired (Fig. 14). Olivier walks away—without a word—to walk back to his car and pack the wood. A few minutes later, Francis approaches Olivier—dirtied and hesitant, without a word (Fig. 15). Then, in a shared movement action, without instruction, Francis helps Olivier load the wood onto the trailer (Fig. 16). The movie ends with a quick jump cut to black while they are wrapping up the wood. Work, a wordless action and gesture.

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Luc Dardenne rhetorically asks, "Perhaps by filming gestures as precisely as possible, you can render apprehensible that which is not seen?" (West/West 2003, 17). The work here at the end, though similar in movement and action to Francis and Olivier's previous teacher/apprentice interactions, feels collaborative as an understanding that can be expressed in acts.

Fig. 14. Shared grief,
1:32:58-1:33:33, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 15. Apprenticeship continued,
1:34:27, LFF, 2002.

Fig. 16. Wordless action, 1:35:50, LFF, 2002.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne once remarked about *Le Fils*: "I feel that in *Le Fils*, it is more of a question of waiting […] It is more of a question of waiting for a word that is supposed to be spoken but is not forthcoming and of waiting to see what Olivier will do. Even Olivier does not know" (West/West 2003, 16). Waiting as the act of watching in *Le Fils* can take different forms. Everything Olivier does—watching, monitoring, instructing, surveilling—is a form of waiting as a way of anticipating something else about to happen. Rancière views the sublime moment temporally as a "conception of time cut into two by a founding event or by an event to come" (2007, 131). The sublime moment can also be felt as a residual effect of loss and as a way of navigating the impact of loss. These moments also mark the disorientation between these

three effects of loss—grief, mourning, and melancholia—that in Olivier's sphere of absence and presence overlap and blend into each so that there are no temporal nor cognitive boundaries that experientially separate them. Grief, mourning, and melancholy for Olivier are "experienced in a certain configuration of simultaneity and succession" (Butler 2002, 272). The sublime moments in *Le Fils* emerge when the repetition of one movement/act quickly turns into another, becoming interchangeable, unveiling a sudden awareness of a different perspective. These moments are the temporal shifts that Judith Butler describes as "the disorientation of grief [that] posits the 'I' in the mode of unknowingness" (2004, 30). The unknowingness for Olivier is dynamic: explicit in his movement and actions that seem, at first glance, hard to explain; and implicit in his thinking, trying to understand his motives interacting with Francis. The act of mourning (a way of coping with the sadness that comes with loss) and melancholia (grieving a loss that is hard to identify)—are part of Olivier's unknowingness and disorientation. Olivier's actions, highly personal and unrepresentable at first glance, are acts and effects of his disorientation, unknowingness, and his own particular "configuration of simultaneity" and succession. The heightened moment of disorientation is the sublime moment, which feels suspended and unmoored temporally between a beginning and an end, and conceptually absence and presence. Rancière's observation that "the feeling of powerlessness in the experience of the sublime is endured by reason" (2007, 93) is irreconcilable. This feeling of powerlessness can be felt through Oliver's endurance and is anchored by a cluster of acts—waiting, watching, mentoring, surveilling, and teaching—the very acts where loss is registered.

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Wojciech Wieczorek*

Hitchcock and Von Trier: the Operatic Melancholia in Cinema

Abstract

The paper examines the usage of Richard Wagner's operatic inventions in 20th and 21st-century cinema and its representation of melancholia and love. The text describes the philosophical ideas that drove Wagner to create *Tristan and Isolde* and new means of musical expression, which were later used in film music. The first part discusses the use of Wagner's music in 2011 *Melancholia*, while the latter studies his influence on Bernard Herrmann's score for *Vertigo*.

Keywords

Herrmann, Melancholia, Music, Wagner, Vertigo

Introduction

Richard Wagner went down in history as one of the most important, if not the most important, composers of operas. His notion of leitmotiv changed opera and greatly impacted a new genre of art, which did not even exist during Wagner's lifetime—cinema. However, Wagner's contribution to changing the history of music goes beyond guiding the listener with themes—one of his most significant creations was the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, which changed how musicians approached harmony. The famous Tristan chord became probably history's most well-known and puzzling chord. To this day, scholars vary in their interpretations of the chord's function (Buranaprapuk 2018, 165-177). The ambiguity of the unresolved chord was a direct result of Wagner's discovery of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, who considered

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music the most important and metaphysical of all arts (Magee 2001, 171). Although the opera premiered in 1865, its themes and musical inventions remain relevant today, especially in cinema, where the Tristan chord is often used to represent melancholia and unrequited love. The article will strive to analyze *Tristan and Isolde*'s influence on cinema and its representation of melancholia on examples of two films from different periods—Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* from 2011 and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* from 1958.

The Unbearable Melancholy of Existence

In Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia*, Kirsten Dunst plays Justine, a woman in deep depression. The film depicts her relationship with her family in the face of a mysterious planet approaching the Earth and threatening the very existence of life. The picture is divided into two parts, the first one being Justine's wedding. While she pretends to be happy and keeps up appearances in front of her family and friends, who pressure her into that state due to the amount of money and effort spent on the wedding, she displays many signs of melancholia, described by Freud in his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, such as "(...) painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity" (Freud 1964, 244). Justine's act is, to some extent, genuine since she is trying to find at least some element of happiness in what might be her last chance for it. It is probably partly fueled by her family's expectations, which are almost blackmail, paralleling her boss's pressuring his nephew into getting a tagline for a new marketing campaign out of Justine or else he will fire him. At various points of the party, she departs from her guests. She engages in activities that might comfort her: putting her nephew to sleep, bathing, or just going to bed, which shows her utter exhaustion. She even says she is trudging herself through this and feels that "a gray wooly yarn is clinging to her legs" (which was visualized in the prologue). She forces herself to go through the wedding as much as she forces herself to go through life. Her struggle is also imagined by references to paintings featured in the film and its prologue—in one scene, she looks through her brother-in-law's art books collection, and John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* and Pieter Bruegel's *Hunter in the Snow* can be seen. The first one is recreated in the film's opening with Justine as Ophelia. At the same time, the latter can be seen being destroyed in the collision with Melancholia, which reinforces its themes of the futility of human preoccupation with everyday life (Ałpatow 1964, 94). She declines her husband's sexual advances only to cheat on him with a young new co-worker of a much lower professional position than hers.

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Her behavior might appear irrational or ungrateful at first. Still, all her erratic decisions seem like a desperate attempt at achieving happiness, comfort, or at least a distraction. Freud claims melancholic transfer their negative feelings toward a subject of their pain towards themselves (Freud 1964, 247-249). Perhaps the same can be said about not only negative but other feelings and behaviors too; Justine's moves in the scene in which she has sexual intercourse with her new coworker are similar to the ones performed during CPR, which may indicate that the very act itself was a desperate attempt at bringing herself to life. Justine's struggle is reflected in the color scheme—the film's first half is bathed in a yellow, warm light, which might be associated with happiness or prosperity. However, all sources of light are artificial. Alternatively, it might be read literally since the color yellow might be interpreted as a sign of instability, insincerity, and marital unfaithfulness (Kopaliński 2012, 513), corresponding with the events on screen.

The film's second part is told from Justine's sister, Claire, perspective. She has to take care of Justine, who has regressed into almost a child-like state, unable to eat or even take a bath herself, while also dealing with her fear of doom in the face of the mysterious planet approaching the Earth. Around an hour and a half into the film, Claire observes her sister walk into the woods at night and lie naked to watch the planet approach. After that incident, Justine's condition improves significantly: she becomes far more independent, easily performing her everyday routine and showing overall calmness. From this point, the roles become somewhat reversed—while in the former half of the picture, it was Justine who tried to pretend and lie to her family about her state, in the latter, it is her family who lies. First, it is Claire's husband, John, who lies about the possibility of collision, firmly claiming that the planet will pass the Earth. There is no danger at all, but simultaneously, he prepares for potential malfunctions caused by Melancholia's vicinity and is relieved when it seems that the planet has passed the Earth. When he discovers that the scientists are wrong and Melancholia is on a collision course, he commits suicide. Then Claire pretends in front of her son and Justine that John left for the nearby village, and she makes them breakfast. Ultimately, she breaks down and panics, while Justine remains indifferent to her cries and impending doom. Only after her nephew confides in her does she start showing her family compassion and comforting them in their last moments.

Justine seems liberated by the perspective of death, accepting it with peace and functioning in a paradoxically healthy manner. Her behavior is reflected again by the color pattern in that part of the film, dominated by cold white and blue hues, which are caused by natural light (in the diegetic

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world of the film—most of the time, it is either the daylight or light provided
by the planet at night). At its core, it is concordant with the philosophy of
Arthur Schopenhauer, who claimed that one's only way to end suffering is to
renounce all desires and disengage from participation in everyday life.
(Magee 2001, 167). Schopenhauer also believed in the importance of the
sexual act, considering it the closest thing one can do to achieve revelation
and transcend own physical barriers (Magee 2001, 170) —Justine's mental
state has improved vastly after she looks at the planet while lying naked,
a scene of an almost sexual nature.

     The entire film is scored with only one piece of music, used in various
scenes—Wagner's overture to *Tristan and Isolde*. At the superficial level, the
piece seems to have been chosen because of its tone and development, start-
ing with *pianissimo* dynamic and modest instrumentation, gradually building
towards dramatic grandiose, allowing for illustrating Justine's solitude and
personal struggle, as well as the events on the cosmic scale. Trier not only
recontextualized the piece by dissociating it from the original opera but also
continued to recontextualize it throughout the film, juxtaposing the same
parts with new scenes and events.

     Starting with the prologue, which is the longest unedited display of the
overture, it seems that Trier assigned the solo cello voice to Kirsten Dunst's
character—the opening *crescendo* for cello is in parallel by a fade in slow
motion shot of Justine opening her eyes, while the first orchestral *forte* is
juxtaposed against the image of the planets, another association repeated
throughout the film. While it has to be stated that in some scenes, only brief,
heavily edited fragments of the overture are used, probably to fill the silence
in transitional shots, the links between Justine and cello and between the
Melancholia and the seventeenth bar of Wagner's prelude are mostly con-
sistent. The prologue, full of oniric imagery, ends with the collision of the
planets, accompanied by the prelude's most dramatic point, reached after
approximately seven and a half minutes, synchronizing the full orchestral
chord, accented with a timpani and dark trumpet part with the moment of
impact.

     The association between Justine and the planet and their corresponding
musical parts is visible again when Justine urinates on the golf course. Her
departure from the wedding guests is again illustrated with the cello solo,
and the orchestra picks up at the shot of the night sky, reflecting her point of
view. Her facial expression and the more hopeful sound of music make it
seem like she is bonding with the distant planet, reinforced again in the
scenes of her messing up her brother-in-law's study and the guests at the

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golf course, where the cello once again illustrates Justine's solitude and the shots of cosmic imagery, at which Justine looks through the telescope, are accompanied by an ascending woodwind motif. The most significant example of the bond between Justine and Melancholia, with their corresponding themes, is the scene where Justine lies naked and watches the planet. This time, the cello solo picks the ascending, romantic motif, merging the two, almost as a pair of lovers.

The rule is broken only near the film's end when Claire realizes the collision is unavoidable and panics. The cello illustrates her frantic drive in a golf cart (paralleling Justine's beginning), and the orchestral parts are synchronized with the hail caused by the planet's proximity. Perhaps the change was supposed to link the feelings of Justine from the beginning of the film. Claire's from the end, but considering other editing choices in the movie, often involving cutting significant amounts of the overture, the director might have been driven purely by aesthetic reasons.

The last time the overture is used is at the film's end. However, the music is mixed very quietly at the beginning, making it barely audible under the rumble caused by the incoming planet. This time the piece is also edited to synchronize it with the visuals, and the collision is once again accented by the orchestral blast, tying it to the prologue. While the planet and Justine seem to have been assigned their parts of the overture, the piece itself uses the same arrangement, although sometimes edited, to illustrate different images, starting with a cosmic scale catastrophe in the prologue and then going through small personal tragedies, shifting between the awe and wonder evoked by the beauty of space, and illustration of solitude, grief, and almost romantic desire.

It might seem that the choice "generalized" the meaning of the overture —instead of expressing the melancholia of two lovers who cannot be together, it stands for melancholy in a much broader sense. However, it was precisely the discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy that led Wagner to the creation of *Tristan and Isolde*—the lovers' woe was indeed a metonym of a broader, metaphysical sense, in which one cannot ever be happy in the physical world of objects and only renouncement of one's wishes and acceptance of the noumenal realm can bring peace. Schopenhauer believed in Kant's differentiation between the physical world, consisting of space and time, calling it the phenomenal world, and the noumenal world, which consisted of things, or in Schopenhauer's view, one thing, since multiplicity would require time and space as well, that cannot be perceived or understood by the human mind, although one can never be sure if it exists. Accord-

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ing to the philosopher, happiness is unachievable since even if one's desire is fulfilled, another takes its place. (Magee 2001, 152-166), Reflected by Wagner both in music and libretto: from the very beginning of *Tristan and Isolde*, if a part of a discordant chord is resolved, another one takes its place (Magee 2001, 206-210), and his protagonists curse the phenomenal world, in which they could not be together, and wanted to transition into the noumenal world, where they would unite in nothingness—they wished not so much to join in death or the afterlife, as to unite in non-existence (Magee 2001, 218-222).

The director's choice of music seems to be an intentional reference to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially considering other allusions to it present in the film—when the perspective of incoming obliteration crushes Claire, Justine indifferently responds that Earth is evil and it will not be missed. Schopenhauer claimed that the phenomenal world is cruel, considering low and selfish impulses drive people, and nature is equally filled with other living beings' suffering (Magee 2001, 166). The prologue of the film, filled with surreal imagery mostly depicting the effects of Melancholia entering the Earth's orbit, also references his philosophical distinction of realms in its Blue Ray's chapter selection title—"Space and Time."

The Melancholy of Obsessive Love for an Ideal

Trier's approach to musically communicating melancholia and the philosophical subtext was as straightforward as possible. However, Wagnerian ideas were often implemented more subtly. For many composers, the Tristan chord became a shorthand for communicating melancholia or unrequited desire. For Bernard Herrmann, the more general version of the Tristan chord, which is every half-diminished chord, was so deeply engraved in his musical language, especially in his collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock, that Royal S. Brown (1994, 151) called it the "Hitchcock chord." However, a specific film exists where Herrmann quotes the chord in its original form and references Wagner in other ways, underlying the operatic drama and themes of desire, melancholy and tragic love.

In 1958's Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, James Steward plays Scottie, a detective who can no longer work in the police force because of his acrophobia, which reveals itself during a rooftop chase after a criminal and leads to the death of a fellow officer. He is then hired by his former friend, Gavin Elster, to follow his wife, Madeleine, whom he claims is "possessed" by her grandmother's spirit, Carlotta Valdez—either in a literal or a psychological sense

—and might therefore commit suicide, just as her grandmother did. Scottie falls in love with Madeleine, who kills herself by jumping from a church tower, an act that Scottie cannot prevent because of his acrophobia. He then descends into deep melancholy until he meets a woman stunningly resembling Madeleine—Judy. The two start dating, and Scottie slowly transforms Judy into Madeleine by changing her clothes and hairstyle. When Judy wears Madeleine's jewelry, Scottie figures out that Gavin hired Judy to play the role of his wife so that he could have an alibi for murdering the real Mrs. Elster and frame it as a suicide. In order to reveal the truth, Scottie forces Judy to confess the scheme at the crime scene. When she finally does so, and the man is willing to forgive her, a sudden appearance of a nun startles Judy, who falls to her death.

In *Melancholy and the Act* (Žižek 2000, 659-660), Slavoj Žižek describes the correlation between anamorphosis and melancholy. He claims that the melancholic confuses the loss with the lack—one mistakenly believes that he has lost an object that was in his belonging, while in reality, this is false since the melancholic lacks the object from the start. The supposed loss only covers the lack: "In short, what melancholy obfuscates is that the object is lacking from the very beginning, that its emergence coincides with its lack, that this object is nothing but the positivization of a void or lack, a purely anamorphic entity that does not exist in itself. Although denied access to the suprasensible domain of ideal symbolic forms, the melancholic still displays the metaphysical yearning for another absolute reality beyond our ordinary reality subjected to temporal decay and corruption; the only way out of this predicament is thus to take an ordinary, sensual material object (say, the beloved woman) and elevate it into the absolute." This interpretation helps to explain Scottie's behavior, who sees Madeleine as an almost supernatural being who transcends time itself (underlined by green, ghostly color and light associated with Madeleine) and tries to do everything to transform mundane and vulgar Judy into a woman who is the embodiment of an ideal for him. This ideal also allows us to interpret Bernard Herrmann's score structure, starting with the overture.

The film's opening shows defragmented parts of a woman's face: first the mouth, then the eyes, changing from black and white to crimson red. Then the camera closes on one of the eyes, and the animated spiral appears in the pupil. The rest of the credits show various animated and rotating spirals, which are the essential visual theme of the film, repeated in different layers, mostly visuals (Žižek 2013, 225-226) enumerates a couple of them: a curl in the hairstyle of Carlotta Valdez and her granddaughter, Madeleine; the spiral

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of the stairway in the church tower; the circular shot spinning around Scottie and Madeleine. The pattern does not end there: spirals are visible in the stump of a cut-down tree, with different ones marked for different years, which "possessed" Madeleine, now as her Spanish grandmother, remembers as different events from her life; and in the scene in which Scottie follows Madeleine in his car, they drive in circles, creating another spiral. Even the film's symmetrical structure (Schroeder 2002, 243), in which Stewart's character retraces his steps, resembles a spiral. This visual symptom represents obsession, and, as Žižek puts it, "the self-enclosed temporal loop in which past and present are condensed into the two aspects of the same endlessly repeated circular movement." (2012, 226) is also reflected in the soundtrack. The title sequence begins with an ostinato consisting of two parallel and opposite movements, an arpeggiated e-flat minor seventh chord, at the same time ascending and descending in different voices and layers of orchestration (Schneller 2005, 191), and ascending trills of the string section illustrate the appearance of the spiral itself. The suite also anticipates the rest of the events—the most critical melodic material of the film can be found in the opening credits. The love theme is present not only in its complete form but also in the ostinato, which changes from e-flat minor to A-flat Major (which is the first chord of the love theme), and in the horn blasts, which play a descending major second interval, D–C, also connected with falling. What is interesting is the fact that the love theme in its complete form enters the credits not in the opening shots to accompany Madeleine's face, but when the woman disappears and is replaced by the spiral, now filling in the entire screen—this suggests that Scottie's love is more connected with his obsession and melancholy than the woman herself, corresponding with Žižek's comment on elevating the lost object to the state of absolute. It not only shows that Scottie is in love with a dead woman (as Hitchcock stated himself, Stewart's character wants to go to bed with a dead woman (Schroeder 2002, 240)) but, in fact, with a woman who does not exist.

Similarly to the old operatic practice of presenting the essential themes in overtures, film scores of the Golden Age of Hollywood often used that technique—for example, Miklos Rozsa *El Cid* (1960) or Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Sea Hawk* (1941). Bernard Herrmann was among the first composers who used that technique, implementing it in his 1941 film debut, *Citizen Kane*, and scoring the film's prologue with a motif foreshadowing the reveal of the "Rosebud" mystery (Cooke 2008, 204). However, this can also be interpreted as a melancholic confusion of the loss and the lack—Herrmann's love theme enters the scene a long time before Madeleine does. It also shows

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how much Madeleine is engraved in Scottie's brain—the harmonic material played in the same way as the illustration for the spiral or the visual representation of Scottie's obsession.

Schneller (2005, 193-195) points out that the opening title of *Vertigo* also allows associating love and death in another way: the ostinato is also the harmonic foundation for the chord appearing whenever Scottie is experiencing his acrophobia (illustrated by the famous visual effect in the film), consisting of two chords play on top each other: e-flat minor and D Major. The chord relation is similar to the harmonic material from the love theme, only transposed up a tritone and played in a sequence, not simultaneously. Schneller also points out that the chords are perfectly symmetrical if superimposed and spelled enharmonically, with A being the axis, which again plays to the symmetrical form of the film and the notion of walking around in circles—as described by Schroeder (2002, 243-244): Scottie hanging on the ledge—sees Madeline for the first time at "Ernie's" restaurant—follows her to a flower shop, museum, and a rented apartment—Madeleine falls into San Francisco bay—Scottie rescues her, falls in love, the two share a kiss—Madeleine tells Scottie her dream—Madeleine climbs up the stairs in the church tower and falls to her death leaving Scottie "suspended." In the second half, Scottie has a nightmare and falls into melancholia wandering around the places connected to Madeleine—Scottie meets Judy—follows her to her apartment—the two date at "Ernie's"—the two kiss—the two return two the church tower—the woman falls to her death, leaving Scottie "suspended" again.

The symmetry is also present on a smaller scale—for example, in the scene in which Madeleine, rescued from drowning, wakes up at Scottie's apartment, visual and musical symbols are paralleled in other scenes: throughout the film, Madeleine is associated with green—she drives a green car and is wearing a green dress the first time Scottie sees her. When he meets Judy for the first time, she is also wearing green, and when she is transformed fully into her Madeleine, she is lit by a green neon light. Scottie, on the other hand, often wears a red tie. When he first sees Madeleine, in the shot from his subjective perspective, the red wallpaper becomes more intense just for a couple of seconds (once again juxtaposed against Madeleine's green dress and later paralleled with a shot of Judy's dark profile against a green background,), and it is the red ruby necklace that leads the detective into discovering Elster's scheme. However, during the discussed scene, the colors are reversed—Scottie is wearing a green sweater, while Madeleine is wearing (his) red bathrobe as if the two were mutually imprinting on one

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another. The woman asks for her hairpins to tie her hair in a bun, while later in the film, Scottie insists on tying the hair up to complete Judy's transformation. The first scene is scored with Madeleine's theme; however, there is a short passage for woodwinds, starting with the Tristan Chord (although one octave higher than in Wagner's overture). In the transformation scene, Herrmann uses the love theme but also quotes the same passage for woodwinds.

Madeleine's theme shares more resemblances with *Tristan and Isolde's*. The theme consists of wandering phrases of groups of four eight notes, starting on the second strong beat of each bar, with the third note ligatured between the bars, thus eliminating the first strong beat in the next bar, adding to Madeleine's delicate aura. Schneller (2005, 193) claims that it allows for creating movement without reaching a definite end, resembling the Tristan prelude, which also consists of similarly built phrases, constantly modulating without reaching a final resolution. Schroeder (2002, 242) points out that besides the similarly built phrases and the six-eight meter, Herrmann also uses analogous suspensions and structure. He also notices that in both cases, a similar transformation of the rhythm in the phrases (from equal eighth notes to dotted notes) appears and that Herrmann borrows the Tristan chord and its resolution.

According to Schneller (2005, 196-198), the theme undergoes a thematic transformation in a Wagnerian fashion, slowly becoming the love theme, culminating in the scene where Madeleine falls from the church tower in the middle of the film. Herrmann augments Madeleine's theme using three-four meter harmonic and melodic material from the love theme (D–C step over an A-flat Major chord). Then, he modulates the theme even further, chromatically condensing the four-note figure, constantly climbing up almost frantically. However, despite his claim, the merge between the two themes begins earlier. The first hint of the love theme, aside from the opening credits, is heard when Scottie drives Madeleine to the forest, where he experiences Madeleine behaving as Carlotta for the first time. Then, when she wanders into the beach, the first and the second augmented section can be heard during her conversation with Scottie, and when the phrase reaches the sound D, it loops itself around the D–C interval until Scottie kisses her, which is scored with the return of the first augmented section and a triumphant C Major chord counterpointing the incoming waves. However, the love theme finally replaces Madeleine's theme in the church scene, which also encompasses all the thematic material developed for the film—the ten-minute sequence is preceded with a short statement of the love theme, fore-

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shadowing the things to come. The E-flat minor seventh chord, the same that
was played as an ostinato at the beginning of the film, is played when Scottie
answers the door and sees Madeleine. The conversation is scored with Car-
lotta's theme, a simple harmonic progression underlined with a Spanish
Habanera rhythm (Schneller 2005, 196), which was hitherto played when
Madeleine was looking at her grandmother's portrait or talking about her
dreams and visions, and the drive to the church is underscored with the
theme that played when Scottie was following Madeleine. At the site, Made-
leine's theme merges with the love theme, and Madeleine's run up the stairs
is illustrated with a pulsating motif and chords from the opening rooftop
chase.

Schneller (2005, 194) points out that the merge between the themes
happens because Elsner's plan finally comes to fruition, and it is here that
Madeleine's past meets the present, and her dream is fulfilled. Indeed, the
church becomes a place that condensates time itself, becoming the axis of
symmetry for all events in the film. Madeleine meets her fake past here and
her authentic future when she repeats the fall at the end of the film. The
same can be said about Scottie—from this point, Madeleine is gone, leaving
him only with a melancholic, obsessive memory of love and of a woman
whose death he could not prevent because of his acrophobia, which leaves
him helpless for the second time.

After the apparent suicidal death, Scottie is treated for melancholia with
classical music. However, as his friend Midge points out to his doctor, the
therapy is ineffective. Broken Scottie wanders around the streets of San
Francisco, visiting where he used to see Madeleine. He still sees her in the
faces of random strangers, only to realize, upon a closer look, that they are
not Madeleine. The love theme illustrates Scottie's melancholia—the estab-
lishing shot of the city panorama is initially illustrated with a lyrical and
joyful melody when suddenly a solo French horn plays the love theme, and
the string section joins in. In other scenes, when Scottie thinks he sees Made-
leine, the theme is interrupted before fully developing. For example, when he
realizes that he mistook a stranger for Madeleine, his disappointed look is
underscored with the first chord of the love theme, but in a different position
and orchestration, creating a stark dissonance.

Madeleine's theme appears only in a defragmented form in this part of
the film, giving way to the love theme—the fight between the two themes is
heard in a scene in which Scottie walks Judy back to her room, and her pro-
file is covered in the dark, while the room is lit by a green light from the
street, mirroring the scene at Ernie's, where Scottie first saw Madeleine.

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The former theme "loses" the battle to the latter, underlying that the detective can never appreciate Judy for whom she is, always haunted by the image of the dead woman. The theme appears in its complete statement in the scene in which Judy's transformation is complete. Once again, Herrmann uses both the Tristan chord as well as some other harmonic material from the prelude (Schroeder 2002, 243), often accenting non-chord tones, with the theme reaching its highest point when Judy, now as Madeleine, walks out from a bathroom, seeming almost translucent because of the neon light, which makes her seem a ghost materializing, coming back to life, as she approaches Scottie and becomes more visible. The theme uses elements of the augmentation from Madeleine's theme, which explodes into a lush rendition of the love theme but never uses its original version.

The theme itself is built in a way mirroring Madeleine's fate: it starts with a rising three-note figure, each in an interval of a third: E–G–B, creating an e-minor triad, then goes again up a third, reaching D. Not only does it resemble the opening chord (e-flat minor with a major seventh—e minor with a minor seventh), but its upwards motion resembles climbing up the stairs. Then the melody goes down from D, once again using the D–C interval connected to falling, but then makes another step to B and then a leap of a perfect fifth down—the most considerable interval parallels a sudden fall. The harmonic material also resembles Wagner, with similarly suspended minor intervals. The scene ends on a triumphant C Major chord, paralleling the kiss at the beach.

The theme comes back in the film's last scene, where Scottie drags Judy to the top of the church tower and forces her to confess to impersonating Madeleine. Once again, the augmentation of Madeleine's theme comes back, but this time it is ominous and starts to sound romantic only when the couple embraces each other, and just before it can transform into the complete statement of the love theme, it is interrupted when a shadowy figure of a nun enters the scene. Judy falls, and Scottie is left staring down again, accompanied by a haunting rendition of the love theme, ending on a C Major chord, with low brass giving it a dark timbre, underlying the irony of Scottie's situation.

Scottie's melancholia is fueled by his obsession over a dead woman—his behavior is opposite to what Schopenhauer considered the way of avoiding suffering: he is withdrawn from everyday affairs but cannot let go of the images that haunt him. When he starts to feel better around Judy, he cannot have sex with her. As Žižek (2004, 158-162) points out, he is repulsed by her physical proximity, also fantasizing about the illusionary ideal embodied by

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Madeleine. As Hitchock himself said (Schroeder 2002, 240-241), the scene where she completes her transformation is played in such a way as if Scottie tried to undress her instead of dressing her up. The inability to achieve sexual intimacy is another parallel to *Tristan and Isolde,* where the lovers also could not consume their love.

Vertigo combines melancholia, death, love, and obsession, swirling in a spiral, visually and thematically represented throughout the film. However, the visuals and the words cannot communicate all the elements in such a seamless amalgamation as music can. So great was Hitchcock's trust in Herrmann that he would order his sound editor to fade the noise in the scene to leave room for the composer and say that certain scenes would play out depending on Herrmann's score (Cooke 2008, 2006). The composer said that Hitchcock only finished sixty percent of the film, with another forty being Herrmann's task. In the case of *Vertigo*, one might add that Wagner should also be included in the percentage (Brown 1994, 148).

Conclusions

The article has strived to show the relevance of Wagner's inventions and themes in different eras of cinema and different forms—direct quotations, recontextualizing the music, and the more subtle ways of using his harmonic and thematic idioms. The first part analyzed Lars Von Trier's usage of the overture and its famous Tristan chord in a context of personal drama juxtaposed with a cosmic-scale tragedy, uniquely combining the two. The second part analyzed how Bernard Herrmann used the Tristan chord and other references to the opera in his score of Vertigo.

Quotations from *Tristan and Isolde*, as well as the Tristan chord itself, became a musical signpost for signaling melancholia, which would be immediately recognized by musically savvy viewers, often deepening their interpretation of the film due intertextuality of the reference and understood on a subconscious level by people without the musical knowledge or training. Many other examples exist of the influence of Wagner's famous opera on cinema. However, the ones mentioned in the article are probably the most representative, *Vertigo* being the most prominent usage of his inventions in the cinema of the 20th-century, while *Melancholia* constitutes the most important and radical example in the current century.

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Michael Forest[*]

Melancholic Modernism
in Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*

Abstract

The essay explores Adorno's notion that modernist art is a dialectic between the ideal and the spleen in relation to Jim Jarmusch's 2013 film, *Only Lovers Left Alive*. The film tracks bohemian vampires who map onto the idealist and splenetic as modernist aesthetes, setting a mood of gothic melancholy. Retreating from modern capitalism and consumerism —the zombie world in the film—the characters illustrate the film's succession of binaries in an attempt to retain their purity and manage their concomitant melancholy. Ultimately, they must compromise, and their pragmatic negotiations are telling. The essay explores these concepts concerning the main characters, Adam and Eve, the prominent locations Detroit and Tangier, and the main dialectical concepts of the splenetic and the ideal. Jarmusch's film extends Adorno's insightful pairing and updates it for an artistic and social milieu quite different than the one that Adorno wrote from, while Adorno's concepts draw out the philosophical content latent in the film. Melancholy is expressed as a necessary condition for an adequate post-industrial aesthetic, but it is insufficient for aesthetic survival.

Keywords

Melancholy, Modernism, Splenetic, Theodor W. Adorno, Jim Jarmusch

Post-industrial capitalism generates a melancholic life, especially for those enmeshed in the arts. We vacillate between beauty and rawness and have misgivings about the pleasures we can draw from them. All of which deepens our melancholy. Melancholic bohemianism can be detected since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Theodor Adorno's approach utilized the dialec-

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tical pairing of the 'spleen' and the 'ideal.' According to Adorno (1997, 93),
"Rimbaud's postulate of the radically modern is that of an art that moves in
the tension between *spleen et idéal*, spiritualization and obsession with what
is most distant from spirit. [...] That these elements are at present stubbornly
played off against each other is a symptom of the regression of conscious-
ness."

Art is classical and beautiful in the 'ideal,' but this view is no longer suffi-
cient in modernity. Art is suffused with the 'spleen'—with roughness, vitriol,
distortion, anger, resentment, etc. For instance, even in the performance of
Romantic era piano works, the tendency to play pieces "smoothly" by main-
taining a beautiful tone must be resisted, and the "spleen" of the works
brought out with energy, "even fierceness" to prevent the artworks from
falling into the aesthetic banality of the culture industry.[1] Adorno presents
a melancholic modernism when he focuses on the sensuous recovery of aes-
thetic pleasure that "ever since Baudelaire the dark has also offered sensu-
ous enticement as the antithesis of the fraudulent sensuality of the culture's
façade. There is more joy in dissonance than in consonance. [...] Negation
may reverse into pleasure, not into affirmation" (Adorno 1997, 40). It is in-
teresting—maybe even surprising—that Adorno, although perceived as
somewhat stodgy regarding anything associated with fun, grounds his aes-
thetics in joy and pleasure. However, it must not affirm the banal aesthetics
of the culture industry; it must establish itself in the dark, in negation.[2] This
aesthetic modernism generates melancholy through an endemic focus on
the negative, *splenetic*[3] elements of art making, refusals in a world dominated
by market values, and the continual onslaught of cheap entertainment.
The artist's role is necessarily melancholic, for even what is best in popular
entertainment ends up in the trash heap of global capitalism as the enter-
tainment industry forges onward. In a crucial reversal, the entertainment
industry—a significant branch of capitalist production—offers uplifting
positivity but destroys all in its wake: environmentally, culturally, socially,
and aesthetically.

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[1] See Barry 2009, 82.

[2] Of course, Adorno is thinking about music here, and possibly his own compositions.
Adorno composed music from his youth and consistently throughout his life. See Rose
1978, 110-111.

[3] I use the term 'splenetic' although most commentators use 'spleenish' (see Bernstein
2003). 'Spleenish' is good and carries with it the connotation of "fretful" (The Free Dic-
tionary) working one end of an Adorno influenced modernism, but 'splenetic' carries the
sense of "given to melancholy" (Merriam-Webster).

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Conversely, the splenetic modern artist offers darkness and dissonance, but rather than merely destroy, the negativity seeks to preserve and retain what is best in the arts, finding joy and pleasure in a rebuilt aesthetic culture and a bitter hope for a better world. Lastly, Adorno recognized that artworks would not be fully "autonomous" as aesthetically isolated from society. A work will always be somehow enmeshed in society and thus the culture industry,[4] although a degree of dissonance provides a reason to consider it to that extent free. This enmeshment is part and parcel of the aesthetic melancholy.

This intersection is precisely the melancholic modernism we find in Jim Jarmusch's 2013 film *Only Lovers Left Alive*.[5] Through a series of binary relations, Jarmusch embeds a pattern that aptly illustrates the dialectical tension between the spleen and the ideal. A typical Jarmusch film, it embeds hallmarks of his style of cinematic modernism—a preference for mood over solid narrative, an ironic point of view, a fascination with humorously presenting tragic situations, and a robust and specific sense of urban location. Unlike most of his previous films that hewed closer to ordinary situations,[6] *Only Lovers Left Alive* plays on the supernatural as the main characters are vampires struggling to maintain themselves in a world of 'zombies,' their term for ordinary people living in post-industrial capitalist America.[7] Despite their need for fresh and pure blood, the vampires are our heroes, and the film takes their point of view. The vampires are the preservers of the artistic legacy of the West, marginalized to such a degree that they hide from society and come out only at night to stay alive and nurture their artistry and aesthetic sensibilities.[8] This marginalization is symbolically fixed by 'Kit' (John

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[4] On Adorno's very complicated views on the autonomy of art, see, for instance Wilson (2007, 43-57), and Thomson (2006, 40-82).

[5] The film title was borrowed from the 1964 counter-culture novel by Dave Wallis. Nicholas Ray briefly considered adapting it to film in the 1960s but nothing came of it. Jarmusch was Nicholas Ray's assistant as a film student in New York in the 1970s. Jarmusch's film has nothing to do with the novel except sharing a title.

[6] Most of Jarmusch's films are adaptations from the ordinary flow of life, albeit in a quirky fashion compared to mainstream filmmaking. *Dead Man* (1995), often categorized as an "acid western," might be another outlier. Jarmusch would pick up the zombie theme again in 2019's *The Dead Don't Die*.

[7] 'Zombies' is a term used frequently by Adam in the Detroit sequences and generally references Americans. I am not aware that it is used in the Tangier scenes. This would correlate well with a long-standing cinematic use of 'zombie' for consumers in a mass society, one of Jarmusch's targets in the film.

[8] Like many of the tropes in the film, this also functions as something of an in-joke, or inter-textual reference if you prefer. Jarmusch himself is known to be something of a night person, inhabiting New York after hours.

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Hurt), an elderly vampire who was/is Christopher Marlowe and secretly wrote Shakespeare's works. It neatly establishes a pre-industrial artistic lineage while signifying the modernist aesthetic complex of producing groundbreaking work and shrinking from the kind of public recognition that would soon become artistic branding in the culture industry. This feature frequently occurs throughout the film, so the hipster shunning of commerciality and recognition is a reinforced and important aesthetic theme. The character of Kit primarily functions to establish these themes, with a typical Jarmusch wink, for the main characters are Adam (Tom Hiddleston) and Eve (Tilda Swinton).[9] We find Kit with Eve in Tangier, looking to score pure (uncontaminated) blood—"the good French stuff"—and they provide an anchor to the central situation, which is the melancholy of Adam, who is spiraling (again, it seems) toward suicide while he works on his music in an old house in a decimated section of Detroit.

Adam is a powerfully *splenetic* artist, and he seems to represent one of the most apparent stand-ins for Jarmusch in his film work. He plays electric guitar (among other instruments), and Jarmusch plays the guitar for him on the soundtrack with his band Squrl. Further, Adam's house is a museum filled with old instruments, outdated technologies, and framed photographs of Jarmusch's aesthetic heroes—from Iggy Pop and Joe Strummer, to, at the very center of the wall of photographs, Adorno's exemplar of modernist bohemia, Charles Baudelaire. Although Adam's dissonant music evokes the electric thrash of angry bands like The Stooges and The Clash, it also has an ethereal, almost trance quality. As everything occurs at night, there is a hallucinogenic mood fostered by the cinematic ambiance and soundtrack. The trance-like but distorted sounds of Adam's/Jarmusch's music are splenetic in its dissonance—its refusal to adhere to commercial and popular music styles that would sell—and its melancholy. Adam describes his recent work as "funeral music." Further, he collects relics from the artistic past— old guitars, amplifiers, etc., along with the photographic preservation of great artists already mentioned. His curation of the aesthetic past is a pure evocation of modernist melancholy.

Furthermore, he must preserve it because it is being lost and forgotten. Awash in the zombie world of capitalist consumerism, that which best represents splenetic arts[10] will be lost unless those who know better act now to

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[9] Obviously we have a biblical reference to an original couple. However, Jarmusch told an interviewer that the original inspiration was from Mark Twain's *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*. See Trakin 2014.

[10] There are more than just the splenetic arts that are preserved, since it's a collection curated by Jarmusch and his own idiosyncratic tastes. As with many of us, the highly

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prevent complete memory loss. Nevertheless, for all that, Adam is losing the will to battle against the overwhelming power of the culture industry.

With Kit's blessing and encouragement, Eve leaves Tangier to comfort her husband.[11] She discovers that Adam is again contemplating suicide. Eve functions wonderfully as the ideal of Adam's spleen. While she also curates splenetic works—she is seen packing her suitcase with David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, a book on Jean Michel Basquiat, etc.—her influence is calming, upbeat, and positive.[12] They are the two poles of romantic art; he leans heavily toward the dark, gothic, dissonant, and funereal; she leans toward the prepossessing, soothing, and sustaining. As she packs for her trip to see him, the camera lingers on her as she lovingly regards a plate in an art-book—Lorenzo Ghiberti's image of the creation of Adam. Eve has a soothing effect on Adam and reminds him of his many outstanding contributions to the artistic legacy of the past. She comes to offer love since the splenetic may not be enough to keep him alive. If it is true that only lovers are left alive, Eve represents the ideal to soften the harshness of Adam's dissonant and splenetic aesthetic. Adam and Eve's relationship represents a binary between the ideal and the spleen, establishing a dialectical interplay. Adam shifts in Eve's presence, and the implication is that the spleen, without the ideal, is insufficient.

The dichotomy between the spleen and the ideal fits into Jarmusch's strong location-expressions and settings. Eve travels from Tangier, an exotic and sensuous location for many film watchers in the northern countries of Europe and the Americas. Jarmusch certainly shoots it that way. It sets up the contrast for the all-important impression of Detroit—the splenetic epicenter of post-industrial capitalist decay. Jarmusch was originally from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, a suburb of Akron and only a short drive to Cleveland, across Lake Erie from Detroit. All these cities are part of the industrial boom of early twentieth-century American capitalism. The Henry Ford-inspired assembly line that revolutionized production created a continuous stream of affordable, identical products intended not for the elite but for the mass con-

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commercialized music and art of our youth often gets a pass. This contradiction of aesthetic taste, while not logically consistent, is deeply human and widespread.

[11] Married for hundreds of years, the two do not always live together. This is not explained. Maybe it doesn't need to be. It also appears that they have been married three times. This is also not explained.

[12] If we just focus on those two artists, they are possible stand-ins for Adam in that they are troubled artists who clearly needed help to avoid their tragic outcomes. This is not a perfect analogy but elements of both Wallace and Basquiat are easy to map onto Adam.

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sumption of the population. It represented the power and pride of American manufacturing for nearly a century. After a series of violent labor battles, they also represented the avenue to financial security for working-class Americans who built steel, tires, and cars for an upbeat, growing America. It also famously was the model for Motown music that utilized an assembly line approach to musical production. However, that confidence collapsed quickly in the latter half of the twentieth century. Cities like these across the country fell into economic recessions exacerbated by American racism and urban neglect. Detroit is one of the most iconic cities for twenty-first-century appraisals of this phenomenon.[13] Systematic, oppressive racism plagued the area resulting in racial and political riots in the summer of 1967.[14] Financial opportunism fanned white fears by coaxing the white population out of the city into even-more-racially-segregated suburbs.[15] The city lost its tax base as the middle class fled, just as auto executives in those segregated suburbs cut union jobs and closed local factories to exploit cheaper labor in Asia and Latin America.[16] Detroit became the *abject icon* of American capitalist life. No one wanted to see it; they only complained about it if they had to. Although paradoxical, the 'abject icon' is an apt expression for Detroit as the *iconic unseen*. Because Detroit had also elected an African American mayor by 1974, it became a convenient excuse to scapegoat all its problems on the black population and the city's stagnancy in black leadership. Detroit became the great abject city of America: no one wanted to talk about it, no one wanted to visit it, and no one wanted to help solve its problems because they were precisely the core problems of America. By ignoring Detroit or explaining it away with flimsy excuses, America pretended there was no racism and nothing wrong with capitalism. The "selling" of capitalism thus shifted to burgeoning suburbs and previously undeveloped cities in the American South that could function as signs of the ever-positive rewards of a system predicated on infinite growth. Detroit was shoved to the side as its factories aged, its population dwindled, and its services rendered more and more challenging to deliver. Detroit became the ultimate destination for a splenetic filmmaker like Jarmusch.

The film is not merely set in Detroit. It lingers over the city. Just as Adam is the main focus of analyzing the human artist in melancholic modernism, Detroit is the main focus of analyzing the urban aesthetic in melancholic

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[13] See Fojas 2019, 205-222.
[14] See Berlansky 2013.
[15] See Sugrue 2005.
[16] On the industrial and economic decline of the Midwest, see Broughton 2015.

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modernism. After Eve arrives, Adam takes her on a city tour at night. While there is a list of sites one would expect of Jarmusch—references to Motown Studios, musician Jack White's childhood house—the camera examines the ruin and decay of quintessential urban blight. We see the decrepit Packard plant, the abandoned and decayed Michigan Theater, fields gone from developed housing and industry back into actual wildlife refuges in the middle of the city with foxes, coyotes, deer, etc., returning to an area they were pushed out of 100 years ago. All of this builds the film's overwhelming sense of melancholy. Here is a city that is a museum of loss, an urban expanse drenched in the sadness of irretrievable past glory and current loss. The portrayal of Detroit in this melancholic way also occurred in the middle of the debate about how the city was portrayed. Detroit was getting several thousand visitors a year worldwide for the sole sake of touring its decayed buildings. Organized photography tours were typical. So spectators could witness the decaying landmarks of American capitalism first-hand. The ethical problem of so-called "ruin porn" tours was peaking at this time, and Jarmusch's film is situated near that form of viewing.[17] However, I would argue that the film is a much greater engagement of the city rather than simply gawking at Detroit's decay as the dystopian edge of the coming centuries. Jarmusch, as a fellow native of the industrial wasteland of the Great Lakes area, is a Detroit ally in his wistful melancholy of the past power and current destruction of the area.

The melancholy of Adam and Eve is countered by the appearance of Eve's sister Ava (Mia Wasikowska), who blows in uninvited from Los Angeles, the center of aesthetic capitalism. Ava is upbeat but clearly in a forced way, expressing fake positivity and wanting to have a good time. She is not melancholy but riding the high of contemporary nightlife. She is fun, but this barely masks her superficiality and desire to exploit everyone for whatever she wants. She selfishly drinks her way through Adam's blood supply, watches campy vampire television from the 70s, and ultimately kills Ian (Anton Yelchin), Adam's link to the zombie world and vintage collections, by sucking his blood after a night out. Ava embodies the commercialized aesthetic "fun" that Adorno counsels against, contrasting with Adam's melancholy aesthetic. As Adorno notes, "[o]nly in memory and longing, not as copy or as an immediate effect, is pleasure absorbed by art" (1997, 14). Adam extends into the twenty-first century this melancholic approach which utilizes aesthetic pleasure as a survival strategy counterpoised against Ava's fun. For Adorno,

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[17] See Scarbrough 2016.

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fun is the antithesis of aesthetic pleasure, forming its simulacrum within the culture industry.[18] For what counts as a 'plot,' if we should even use that word for a Jarmusch film, Adam and Eve kick out Ava as she shouts, "you're condescending snobs."[19] They then dispose of Ian's body by dumping it into an acid bath among the ruins of Detroit and flee back to Tangier before the possibility of discovery.

Ava is the vampiric shadow of Adam and Eve, while Adam and Eve pre-serve the aesthetic heritage of Western art. Ava is awash in camp, bored by high art, and synced to the glamour of the culture industry. Ava is a classic exploitative vampire sucking dry the lives of those around her and thus rep-resents capitalism if capitalism was something like a rich trust-fund child hell-bent on experiencing the high of constant pleasure for all immortality. We also see the split in contemporary artistry between the melancholic and the blithesome. Ava's 'fun' is the dialectical other that helps to define Adam's artistry and, by extension, Jarmusch's film as an artwork rather than a mere product of the culture industry.[20] That Ava is based in LA, Adam in Detroit, and Eve in Tangier, is significant. LA is not shown. It does not need to be. It is the entire over-idealized world of art production. If Ava is Eve's little sister, she overdoes the positivity one finds in Eve. She does not have enough, or any, of Adam's splenetic disgust to be taken seriously.

Moreover, while there is a vital element of pleasure in even Adorno's stern aesthetics, it is anything but the kind of moronic fun-all-the-time Ava represents. In Adorno's words, "Negation may revert into pleasure. Never into affirmation" (1997, 40). Adam and Eve sometimes seem like parents to the hundreds-year-old child-teenager Ava. Jarmusch's film, then, situates Ava as the aesthetic hedonist who does not have enough sense or concern for others to worry about preserving heritage or the melancholic distur-bance to create something aesthetically important. She is simply the con-sumer who cares for nothing but the next act of consumption. After killing

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[18] See Weitzman 2008, 185-202.

[19] Here Jarmusch inserts a critique of the film itself—its valorization of high aesthetic melancholy can be seen as little more than boring condescending snobbishness from the standpoint of Ava and the rest of the consumer world. The film's preciously curated inter-textuality and cultural referencing "demand a certain cultural knowingness from the au-dience, but, at the same time, they knock down icons like ninepins" (Lane 2014).

[20] As Adorno notes, "Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not accord-ing to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not. [...] Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of" (1970, 3). I interpret Jar-musch's film artistry as also developing out of the culture industry's version of popular film.

Ian, she moves on. She leaves Detroit, like American capitalism. Like the LA she came from, she is a little rootless and hungry for whatever else is next on the menu.

Adam and Eve cannot now stay in Detroit, the murder scene. They, too, have to move on. It is not merely the capitalist machine that destroys and relocates for its subsequent exploitation—like Ava—but also the melancholic artist cannot continuously be fed from the desiccated remains of the post-industrial American wasteland. Eve brings Adam to Tangier, and though the film's final scenes are filled with Kit's death and the desperate search for blood to stay alive, the cinematography has a different kind of beauty than what we were given in Detroit. There may be a peculiar melancholic sweetness in places older than the American post-industrial melancholy that Jarmusch is indicating here. Older places have cycled through the rise and fall of the centuries. Tangier provides the warm ideal to the splenetic Detroit. The shots of Adam and Eve in Tangier show our heroes strung out and desperately needing a fix of blood, but there is a calmness, softness, and integrated beauty in the background and neighborhood. The soundtrack in Tangier pushed the dissonant electric guitar into the background—although still present—and highlights a kind of modernist lute playing, thus shifting the mood to the less splenetic and more ideal.[21] Eve uses their remaining cash to buy Adam a beautiful oud, and a performance from Lebanese singer Yasmine Hamdan entrances them:

> Adam: This girl is fantastic.
> Eve: I'm sure she'll be famous.
> Adam: God, I hope not. She is really too good for that.[22]

The exchange embeds Jarmusch's melancholic modernism in its refusal to identify quality with popularity. Its hipster attitude that art—or filmmaking—can maintain its integrity only outside of the culture industry is not something new for us, but certainly, it is something we, as an audience, look for with ongoing support. Jarmusch's film exhibits the melancholic modernism that Adorno articulated mid-twentieth century. But it also operates in a different milieu, one in which the filmmaker and his audience have

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[21] The soundtrack embeds the same binary: the splenetic guitar is played by Jarmusch, the more ideal lute is played by Jozef van Wissem, who "wants to make the lute sexy again." See Dollar 2014.

[22] I am also intrigued by the choice of a Lebanese singer in the Tangier finale. Although most likely coincidental, Metro Detroit has a very large Lebanese population.

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emerged from the culture industry, raised as children and teens with at-
tachments to artists and artworks that were simultaneously consumer
products. Jarmusch's melancholic modernism navigates this semi-autono-
mous domain through his idiosyncratic style alternating between the serious
and the lighthearted, moral poignancy and ironic humor, between the spleen
and the ideal.

True to form, Jarmusch's film remains within the indie film genre that or-
bits outside the mainstream film industry. Adam and Eve are themselves
outside the mainstream formulation of vampires—they are less to be feared
than the zombies—ourselves. They are the preservers of the aesthetic her-
itage that Adorno gestured toward. Jarmusch and his key characters main-
tain the uneasy dialectical balance between spleen and ideal that Adorno
identified in the nineteenth-century bohemian reaction to capitalism. How-
ever, that alone is not fully sustainable. Adorno seemed to reserve aesthetic
pleasure for particular challenging works from the fine art tradition. Jar-
musch extends his aesthetic reach not into Schoenberg but instead toward
The Stooges. In this point, Jarmusch occupies a melancholic aesthetic diverg-
ing spatially and temporally. He grew up in a different milieu, and his charac-
ters seem to struggle not so much with an Adorno-inspired purity as much
as a pragmatic negotiation with popular culture. Adam and Eve navigate
the sensuous as they attend White Hills in the Detroit bar or Yasmine Ham-
dan in Tangier. The final scene shows a spent Adam and Eve searching for
victims to bite to stay alive. Their aesthetic purity gives way to a pragmatic
realization: to stay alive as a vampire, that is, as an artist, one must some-
times draw blood. "So fucking fifteenth century," they despair about their
need to sink their fangs into victims. They spot a beautiful young couple
kissing in the moonlight of Tangier. They vow not to kill them but only to
"turn" them—to keep them alive as fellow vampires. The camera flips per-
spective at the very end, rather than focus on the victims, and it steadies as
Eve and Adam approach the lens with mouths open and fangs out. It seems
clear that we have watched the film, and now we, the viewers, will be turned
from zombies into fellow vampires, doomed to melancholic modernism.
There are worse fates in the twenty-first century.

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Swagata Chakraborty*

Melancholia as an Ecological *Entente*: Tracing the Ecocritical Significance of the Melancholic Poet Persona in Margaret Atwood's *Dearly*

Abstract

With a close reading of Margaret Atwood's collection of poems *Dearly*, the paper aims at an alternative understanding of Freudian Melancholia to discuss its creative and fecund potential rather than seeing it as a repressive force, with a focus on its role in expediting ecological sociality. I will explore how the literary depiction of a Melancholic reaction to loss, especially in terms of the ego-loss, catalyzes an ontological and political miscegenation that helps build multispecies communities based on a shared feeling of emotional distress by subverting the savior-saved or subject-object binary vis-à-vis humans and more-than-humans.

Keywords

Melancholia, Ecocriticism, Freud, Atwood

Introduction

Melancholia,[1] according to Freud, is a pathological reaction to the loss of someone or something that was loved. The idea of loss undergirds the recent poetry collection of Margaret Atwood's *Dearly*. In what is considered "one of

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[1] Here and elsewhere, I have referred to both Melancholia and Mourning with a capital 'M' to delimit their denotations specifically within Freudian theory. It would be remiss of me not to point out that the discussion surrounding melancholia has developed vis-à-vis concerns of mental health. For more on medical perspectives on melancholia, see Parker (2010).

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the worst cases of domestic violence in Canadian History" (Flood 2021), as per *The Guardian*, Nathalie Warmerdam, a house nurse in Canada, was murdered by her ex-partner Basil Borutski in 2015. Warmerdam's brother, baritone Joshua Hopkins, went on to musically commemorate his sister by releasing the album *Songs for Murdered Sisters*, an eight-part song cycle penned by Margaret Atwood and included in *Dearly*. Interestingly, what stands out in *Dearly* is that it also consists of another song cycle called the "Plasticene Suite," which poetically plows through the terrains of grief seemingly extraneous to the poet persona's immediate concerns where the song cycle apprehends loss beyond the silos of human experiences and tarries with shared vulnerabilities between human and more-than-human bodies. The paper aims to trace the curious isomorphic strands across two axes of loss—personal and ecological. With a close reading of Atwood's poems in *Dearly*, I will discuss how Freudian Melancholia, rather than being an inhibitive pathological disposition, becomes an affective conduit between the personal and the ecological, thereby fostering dissident modalities of habitability.[2]

In his book *Homo Sacer*, Georgio Agamben notes that one of the ancient Roman forms of punishment was the *poena cullei* or the punishment of the sack where the condemned man, with his head covered in a wolf-skin, was put in a sack with serpents, a dog and a rooster, and then thrown into a water body or defenestrated from a rock (1998, 52). The operative principle underlining the theatricality of the punishment, i.e., the literal garbing of the human in terms of the more-than-human and then decrying it as life not worthy of living and, as a consequence, not worth grieving, offers a critical insight into how the asymmetric relationship between humans and nature has been historically conceptualized. According to ecocritic Val Plumwood, such an asymmetry is pivoted upon the logic of a subject-object dualism (2002, 52), which confers the "master" identity upon humans to posit them as the center, and all things exterior to them as derivative and deficient in relation to the center (2002, 101). Such a dualism can be traced back to the European Enlightenment philosophy, especially the Cartesian philosophy of

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2 Dipesh Chakrabarty reads "habitability" as a foil to "sustainability" which he views as a human centric environmental discourse. On the contrary, "habitability" is concerned with collective and complex dwelling of ecological assemblages, "The question at the center of the habitability problem is not what life is or how it is managed in the interest of power but rather what makes a planet friendly to the continuous existence of complex life" (2021, 83).

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a mechanistic view of nature, where the human cogito is championed as the fountainhead of reason and reasonability as the determining focal point to understanding reality. In *Dearly*, Atwood captures this subject-object dualism in terms of a culinary consumptive metaphor in the poem "Table Settings," where she writes,

> So, Nature. We sit around it,
> chew it into rags
> with our artful fangs and talons.

> Atwood 2021, 78

This model of hyper separation, or what Plumwood terms "radical discontinuity" (2002, 57) within ecological relations, has buttressed and validated the rationalist identification of all entities extraneous to the human subject as objects fit for consumptive chewing and eschewing, rendering them replicable and replaceable, underpinning that not all losses are to be mourned equally. However, the Cartesian binary underpinning the somewhat familiar subject-object dualism has been troubled by the growing awareness of the Anthropocene and the advent of deep ecology, posthumanism, animal studies, and other converging theoretical discourses. Summing up the current developments, Joshua Barnett argues that the term "Anthropocene" engenders two movements of consciousness, both of which initiate the work of bereavement. On the one hand, it refers to the growing awareness of harm wrecked by *homo sapiens,* and second, and more relevant to this paper, it not only refers to the awareness but also *generates* this awareness (2019, 9; my emphasis). Barnett argues that this "coming-into-consciousness" (2019, 9) is of utmost significance in the discourse on grief as one cannot bereave what one is not aware is lost. The awareness so anticipated questions the erstwhile presumptions about the politics of loss and whom we choose to mourn. Emphasizing the shift, Barnett observes,

> What we have lost is a sense of self separate from others, human and more-than-human alike, as well as the good conscience that bubbles up every time we are led to believe that we are not individually responsible for the crises the planet now faces. Ethically, this loss of identity is significant, for it shifts the way we conceptualize who and what "we" are [...] Since what the "anthropocene" says, at least in part, is that "I" cannot extricate myself from the "we," it follows that "I" also can no longer understand "my" actions as disconnected from the actions of this larger "we." Pronouns are no longer innocent (2019, 10).

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Hence, as human history and planetary history coalesce in the Anthro-pocene, whereby the former emerges as a planetary force, there is compul-sory registration of the fact that the naïve viewpoint of humanity detached from its more-than-human kin is no longer tenable. Katherine Hayles opines that posthumanism revises the atomistic human identity in favor of a "dy-namic co-evolutionary spiral" (2006, 164) consisting of all ecological beings. This idea concurs with the earlier deep ecology movement pioneered by Arne Naess, where he theorizes a "[r]ejection of the man-in-environment image in favor of *the relational, total-field image*" (1973, 95; original empha-sis) which results in a "biospherical net" (1973, 95). In a similar vein, War-wick Fox coins the term "transpersonal ecology" or "this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible" (1995, 106) which leads to what he conceptualizes as a "steadfast friendliness" (1995, 256) among all beings. His theory agrees with Rosi Braidotti's view of posthumanism, which up-holds "a transversal inter-connection or an 'assemblage' of human and non-human actors" (2013, 45). The posthumanist turn in ecocriticism recognizes the constructedness of divisions within the continuum of life on Earth. Within this rubric of a biosocial assemblage, as the poems in *Dearly* suggest, grief processes inhere a critical valence because grief emerges, as Donna Haraway writes, as a "path to understanding entangled shared living and dying" (2016, 39). To bereave is to remember; sustained remembrance is transformative insofar as it recognizes one's ethical responsibilities to others through the recognition of shared fragility and vulnerabilities. Judith Butler emphasizes the potential of grief for creating political communities—while experiencing loss when one is *beside oneself* with grief and undergoes some-thing beyond one's control, the experience issues a mode of dispossession that underscores the fundamental sociality of embodied living (2004, 28). The loss reveals that "my" fate is not initially or finally separated from "yours." It is a tacit acknowledgment that entities are bound to one another in inexplicable ways and that each other's unravellings unravel one another. Further emphasizing the community-building potential of grief, Ashlee Cun-solo and Karen Landman suggest,

> We are changed internally and externally by the loss in ways that we cannot predict or control and in ways that may be disorienting, surprising, or completely unexpected. Through this mourning-as-transformation we are open to, continually exposed and vulnerable to, these bodies through the potential for loss and our subsequent grieving. In this understanding of mourning, we are also continually seized by unexpected re-sponses to loss for which we can little prepare, and which continually compound through subsequent experiences with loss and grief. These responses to loss can leave

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us changed in ways we could not have imagined, and hold the possibility of leaving us more open to other bodies, to grief, and to our transcorporeal connections with all bodies (2017, 10).

During grief processes, the loss, then, is twofold. There is the loss of the lost object of love and the loss of the former self, the way it used to be before the experience of loss. Such an alteration of the self, facilitated through grieving a loved one, aligns with the ego-incorporation process Freud views as Melancholia. The paper examines how Freudian Melancholia as a specific grief response opens one to trans-corporal connections with others, specifically, more-than-human others. I will locate Melancholia as a mediating device or an entente that facilitates a mutuality of experiences and interests among human and more-than-human beings, thereby destabilizing the human-centered subject-object binary.

For my arguments, I will focus on the Freudian conceptualization of Melancholia as the discursive point of departure and draw on its contrapuntal theorizations. Freud theorizes Melancholia as a "pathological condition" (1914-1916, 243) that occurs when the "normal" reaction to loss, i.e., Mourning, does not successfully take place. During Mourning, the ego of the subject reacts to the loss of the object of love by an object de-cathexis, or a severing of all libidinal attachments from the object so that the ego becomes "free and uninhibited again" (1914-1916, 245) to move on and establish newer object cathexis, i.e., establish an affinity with successive objects. In Melancholia, the ego does not let go. Instead of displacing the free libido on other objects, the lost object is "withdrawn into the ego" (1914-1916, 249), and the Melancholic subject internalizes the object, leading to a loss of self-regard and the debilitation of the ego.

Such an orthodox opposition between the two reactions to loss has been critically re-visited with a focus on Melancholia's positive and creative dimensions in the recent past. For David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, while Mourning lays the past to rest, a Melancholic internalization of the object of loss constitutes a "continuous engagement" (2003, 4) with the past, generating a possibility of reimagining the future. Avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of alternate meanings and new representations. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands reads Freudian Mourning as a "progressivist narrative" (2010, 337) which involves a forward movement with a systematic jettisoning of the object of love, whereas Melancholia, instead of being a failed reaction to a loss, becomes a critical way of remembering and preserving the loved entity. By its incorporative logic, Melancholia substitutes narcissistic energy for an inner attachment that is at once individualizing

and unifying. The acute awareness of one's grief can be harnessed to expose systematic marginalization and injustice that is buttressed through the false distinction between grievable and un-grievable bodies (Butler 2004, xiv), thus bringing unexpected ties of relationality to the fore. In this regard, Jonathan Flatley argues that the Melancholic concern with loss creates "mediating structures" (2008, 3) where we can "see the other persons who share our losses and are subject to the same social forces" (2008, 3), creating a "community of melancholics" (2008, 4). He calls this affective mapping or the recognition of "the historicity of one's affective experiences" (2008, 4), whereby a deliberate engagement with one's loss brings to light one's relationship to broader historical matrices of crises. With its eschewal of consolatory promises, Melancholia paves the way for immersion in loss rather than redemption.

Furthermore, such an immersion prevents any systematic occlusion of those lost and hence, brings into vision the various and variously affected participants mired in a kaleidoscopic range of violence, which, in turn, expands the process of grief work beyond the concerns of self to include those traditionally expunged from the realm of grief. The paper aims to trace how Atwood expands this participation to a multispecies level by positing the poet persona in an ecologically intimate entanglement. Taking a cue from the strands of ecocritical and Melancholia studies, I contend that Freud's theory is pivoted upon an allegedly healthy subject-object binary where the possibility of an untrammeled de-cathexis and re-cathexis affirms the "objectness" of the extra-personal and aligns with the Cartesian bifurcation of cogitating humans and complaisant nature. Under its devaluation of the ego, Melancholia destabilizes the bulwarks of identity and hence, as I will discuss regarding Atwood's poetry, has the potential to abet an enhanced cognizance of the more-than-human partners. Consequently, it innervates the affective fibers connecting trans-species co-inhabitants of the planet and evokes a political miscegenation that underlines the need for a multi-polar and multivalent reading of violence.

The essay is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will try to establish the poet persona of *Dearly* as a Freudian Melancholic individual, and in the subsequent section, I will discuss how they mediate between personal and ecological losses through affective mapping.

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"Why can't I let her go?": The Melancholic Poet Persona

At the very outset of the cycle "Songs for Murdered Sisters," the poem "Empty Chair" begins with the poet persona's declaration of the death of their sister, establishing that an object loss has occurred.

> Who was my sister
> Is now an empty chair
> Is no longer,
> Is no longer there
> She is now emptiness
> She is now air.
>
> Atwood 2001, 32

Freud observes that in the Mourning process, there is a "withdrawal of libido from the object and displacement of it onto a new one" (1914-1916, 249). Symptoms persisting during the interim period between the two stages, like a loss of interest in the outside world and a loss of capacity to love, account for the painful "work of mourning" (1914-1916, 245) or the emotional labor required for the subject to banish the object of love. The imagery of the empty chair could be read as a visual rendition of the resultant psychological vacuity as the poet persona labors through Mourning. Moreover, this image of a lacuna becomes a running motif, traversing the aggrieved psycho-scape of the poet persona as they weave together disparate vignettes of personal losses. In "If There Were No Emptiness," they lament, "That room has been static for me so long:/ an emptiness a void a silence/ containing an unheard story" (Atwood 2021, 13). In "Silver Slippers," they record a phantasmic company which further signifies a void. "I'll skip dinner, the kind with linens/ and candles lit for two. I'll be alone,/ sitting across from an absence" (2021, 112).

In "Dream," they undergo the stage of Mourning that Freud terms as "clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis" (1914-1916, 244). They conjure their dead sister in a somnambulant episode—"When I sleep, you appear/ I am a child then/ And you are young [...]" (Atwood 2021, 35). Similarly, in "Enchantment," they hallucinate wishful revisions of the past,

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> If this were a story
> I was telling my sister
> A troll from the mountain
> Would have stolen her
> [...]
> To find the answer;
> I'd speak the charm
>
> And she'd be standing there.

<div align="center">Atwood 2021, 33</div>

The loss of interest in the world, which results in a painful "mood of mourning" (Freud, 1914–1916, 244), is also exemplified in the poem "Flat-line."

> The sunrise makes you wince:
> [...]
> After a lifetime of tangling,
> of knotted snares and lacework,
> [...]
> you crave the end of mazes
> and pray for a white shore,
> an ocean with its horizon;
> not—so much—bliss,
> but a flat line you steer for.

<div align="center">Atwood 2021, 115</div>

In the poem, the horizon is equated with a moribund flat line redolent of the image of asystole detected in an electrocardiogram, which signifies the desire for termination. From a Freudian perspective, this could be read as a desire to terminate the residual filaments of libido that keep clutching at the lost object so that the ego is released from the labors of Mourning. Cues like "tangling" and "knotted snares" suggest the taxing, convoluted demands of the work of Mourning, while the verb "steering" could be read as a teleologically focused task of discharging them in a bid to disavow the object of loss so that the ego retains its autonomy and is free to move on.

In "Betrayal," as the poet persona encounters a covert arraignment between their lover and best friend, they say, "You'll never close that clumsily opened door,/ *they'll be stuck in that room forever*" (2021, 27; my emphasis),

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calling into attention a prolonged re-visitation of the memories of loss. Freud notes that "[e]very single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected and *detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it*" (1914-1916, 245; my emphasis). Thus, the room in "Betrayal" almost becomes the site of de-cathexis via hyper-cathexis *but not entirely* because of the adverbial qualification of "forever." While the Freudian trajectory of Mourning is time-bound, the imagery of a door held ajar "forever" throws the temporal localization into a quandary. Therefore, it is possible to argue that hyper-cathexis in the room of memories is not geared towards disavowing the memories of loss but instead towards holding onto them, with the open door eternally facilitating traffic between the object of loss and the subject's ego, thus rendering the work of Mourning futile. It is here, I contend, that the poet persona (deliberately?) turns from being Mournful to Melancholic.

With the collapse of the boundary between the object and the subject, Freud writes, "the ego is altered by identification" (1914-1916, 249) as the shadow of the object engulfs the ego. "I am dying here./ Love on a skewer,/ a heart in flames" (Atwood 2021, 28), they say in "Frida Kahlo [...]" after confessing at the onset of the poem that, "You faded so long ago/ but here [...]/ you are everywhere" (2021, 28). In this context, "dying" could be read as a symbolic death of the hitherto uninhibited ego, which no longer enjoys ontological independence for having introjected the loved object, transforming it into something ubiquitous and indispensable. Additionally, both "skewer" and "flames" are tools that connote mutilation and disfigurement, suggesting an alteration of the ego and further establishing the poet persona as a Freudian Melancholic. In a significant bout of Melancholic preservation of loss, they end the poem "Blizzard" where they articulate their mother's death with the refrain,

> Why can't I let go of her?
> Why can't I let her go?
>
> Atwood 2021, 7

Remembrance, Defamiliarisation, Responsivity

Having established the poet persona as a Freuduan Melancholic, I will now explore how Atwood subverts the inhibitive conceptualization of Melancholia on its head to alternatively ideate it as a radical and agentic means to interact with more-than-human participants. To pursue this end, I will re-

course to Jonathan Flatley's concept of affective mapping, which consists of two steps—self-estrangement of one's emotional life and reflection and analysis.

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands notes that Melancholia lends a present-ness to loss, foregrounding "the fact that we are constituted by prohibition, power, and violence—[which] is central to our ethical and political relation-ships with others in the constant meditation on the lost object" (2010, 341). Therefore, what Freud views as narcissistic object-choice could also be read as an active remembering or a deliberate avowal of grief. This view leads to understanding the infrastructural relational tenets of multiple manifesta-tions of various (and variously experienced) losses. In the poem "Souvenirs," on the formal level, there is a centralization of the verb "remember." It starkly contrasts the previously discussed labors of Mourning, where the poet per-sona had attempted to steer forth and move away from the messy, tangled lacework of grief.

> But who is to remember what?
> […]
> and you can remember that I once
> remembered: I remembered
> something for you
> […]
> Remember me.
>
>   Atwood 2021, 10

Herein begins the primary step of affective mapping—defamiliarizing their emotional self. Flatley sees self-estrangement as a "decisive ferment" (2008, 6) that allows a significant transformation in being able to treat one-self as an object—"One must be self-consciously alienated from one's emo-tional life for it to become historical datum" (2008, 6). I will consider two poems here.

> "Winter Vacations"
>
> How quickly we are skimming through time,
> Leaving behind us
> a trail of muffin crumbs
> and wet towels and hotel soaps
> like white stones in the forest
> […]

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we're travelling faster than light
[...]
We know we've been here already.
Or were we? Will we ever be?
Will we ever be again?

Atwood 2021, 106-107

" Flatline"

Ears are superfluous:
What are they for, those alien pink flaps? Skull fungus.
The body, once your accomplice, is now your trap.

Atwood 2021, 115

"Winter Vacations" conveys a deliberate reflection on flash consumption and disposal as a modality of living that stems from a self-assuredness of the ego. It is hard to miss the tenor of analysis as the poet persona concludes, "We are travelling faster than light" (Atwood 2021, 106). The latter part of the poem problematizes this self-assuredness as it self-consciously takes the form of a questionnaire wherein the array of self-directed probing alienates the emotional equilibrium and destabilizes the foundations of their very being—"Will we ever *be* again?" (2021, 107; my emphasis). This destabilization coincides with Freudian "ego loss" (1914-1916, 249). As a result, once the acme of perfection, the human body is reduced to a data-like alien mass in "Flatline." In such a self-estrangement, there is a shoring of anthropocentric excesses whereby the hitherto outward-looking gaze turns inwards, undercutting the internal-external binary. In the poem "Disenchanted Corpse," there is a turn towards the posthuman via a reflection on the defamiliarised self, which exemplifies the second step of affective mapping.

But if you're now disenchanted,
who enchanted you, back then?
What magus or sorceress cast over you
the net of words, the charm?
Placed the scroll in your golem's
mouth of mud?

Atwood 2021, 117

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In most literate societies, nature is seen to be silent in that the status of being a speaking subject is guarded as an exclusively human prerogative (Manes 1996, 15). The poem problematizes this superior exclusivity of human speech-acts by tracing them to a magician's charm, a function of mere happenstance, to undercut the logocentrism myth that has led to a sustained devaluation of non-human ecological inhabitants. In the poem, the speaking human has but a "mouth of mud," leveled as part of an ecological spectrum rather than apart from it.

It is precisely through this Melancholic diminution in their self-regard, which leads to a skewered ego, that the poet persona's preoccupations with loss give way to a protean amoeba-like conceptualization of the self that turns away from a concealed egotism. In "Ghost Cat," there is an assimilation of consciousnesses—"Cats suffer from dementia too. Did you know that?" (Atwood 2021, 4). The interrogative clause could be read as an impact of self-estrangement where the poet persona perceives alternate modes of interaction afresh.

> She'd writhe around on the sidewalk
> for chance pedestrians, whisker their trousers,
> [...]
> though not when she started losing
> what might have been her mind. She'd prowl the night
> [...]
> So witless and erased. O, who?
> Clawing at the bedroom door
> shut tight against her. *Let me in,*
> *enclose me, tell me who I was.*
> No good. No purring. No contentment. Out
> into the darkened cave of the dining room,
> then in, then out, forlorn.
> And when I go that way, grow fur, start howling,
> scratch at your airwaves:
> no matter who I claim I am
> or how I love you, turn the key. Bar the window.

> Atwood 2021, 4

The poem undermines the injunctions of speciation and becomes a porous site of interactions inhabited by grieving individuals. On the formal level, the italicized focal point of the cat is de-italicized towards the end, where the feline "*I*" is mapped with the 'I' of the poet persona, eschewing

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classification in favor of conviviality. On the thematic level, using affective cues like "writhe" and "forlorn", the poet persona disrupts the Cartesian framework of non-human beings as a machine[3] by foregrounding a possible continuum of affective experiences. However, such a continuum does not guarantee simplistic domesticated kinships among individuals but retains heterogeneity of their subjectivities. For example, in "Short Takes on Wolves," Atwood writes,

> A wolf is in pain
> [...]
> You want to see the wolf
> or demand your money back,
> but the wolf doesn't want to see you.

> Atwood 2021, 78

Here, the decentering of the poet persona's spectatorial external vantage point in favor of the wolf's gaze denounces the romantic infantilization of the more-than-human and facilitates what Elizabeth Behnke notes as a shared inter-animality which emerges "from the lived experiences of interspecies sociality" (1999, 100). The erstwhile object of gaze becomes the gazing actant, creating space for a lateral relationship of co-participants. Interestingly, by dint of laterality, the wolf *refuses* to employ its gaze, which impairs the possibility of an appropriation of its pain by the poet persona. Atwood's concern in this poem aligns with what Claire Jean Kim terms a "multi-optic vision" or a mode of seeing that recognizes the disparate nature of justice claims of different and differently subordinated beings without privileging any one presumptively (2015, 19).[4] Hence, while the Melancholic poet persona can begin to identify with the grieving other, they cannot supplant the wolf's experiences with their own which would have led to an inadvertent paternalistic eco-activism. They can, however, locate a relationality of grief, creating a scope for *responsivity* rather than *responsibility*.

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[3] Descartes sees nonhuman animals as "automata" (1960, 80).

[4] Aided by the Melancholic diminution of self-regard, multi-optic vision enables "moving from one vantage point to another, inhabiting them in turn [...]" to "grapple with the existence and interconnectedness of multiple group experiences of oppression" (Kim 2015, 19-20). Kim notes that such a vision evokes "seeing and recognising" (182) struggles of other subordinated groups, which could be argued to foment the formation of a Melancholic community.

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The idea of responsivity facilitated through affective mapping is similar to the ecological framework of ethics heralded by Arne Naess, whereby "care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened" (Qtd. in Fox, 1995, 218). Furthermore, such care is facilitated not through a moral exhortation but an inclination. He formulates this relational ontology as Self Realisation, where there is a movement "along a scale from selfishness to Selfishness, that is, broadening and deepening the self" (Fox 1995, 72). Self Realization repudiates the regimenting injunctions of environmental moralism in favor of intuitive cooperation with ecological members. In the poem "Princess Clothing," the conceptualization and representation of animals as what Rosi Braidotti theorizes as "zoo proletariat" (2013, 70), exploited for hard labor in a human-run machine industry, is rebutted through an unusual juxtaposition of femicide and extermination of silkworms in the sericulture industry.

> That is where it comes from, silk;
> Those seven veils the silkworms keep spinning,
> Hoping they will be butterflies.
> Then they get boiled and then unscrolled.
> It's what you hope too, right?
> That beyond death, there's flight?
> [...]
> It won't be like that
> Not quite.
>
>   Atwood 2021, 19

In the poem, the Melancholic remembrance becomes catalytic in aligning the pathos of violence associated with the murder of women with the mass killing of silkworms. The poet persona suggests a Naessean Ecological Self-ishness wherein micro and macro losses are posited as affectively analogous, and hence, opens the possibility of an alternate basis of ecological alliance. Rosanne Kennedy's idea of "multidirectional eco-memory" becomes pertinent here. She sees memory not as a zero-sum game in which personal memory is preserved at the cost of obscuring memories of extraneous atrocities but instead places "memories of dispossession of particular human animal populations in complex, nuanced relation to memories of the suffering, slaughter, and endangerment of non-human animal populations" (2017, 269). Kennedy formulated an "expanded multispecies frame of remembrance" (2017, 268) which, I argue, is crucial in the actualization of affective mapping. For instance, due to the parallel reflection on the death of women

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and silkworms, the latter's routinized extermination is dissociated from the impunity of banal industrialization, which aids and abets forgetting and moving on and, thus, it takes on a socio-political significance which in turn evokes questions of accountability.[5] The compartmentalization of memory regarding human and more-than-human violence vitiates the magnitude of violence meted out to more-than-human stakeholders of nature. In the poem, memories are de-compartmentalized as Melancholic remembrances bleed into the juxtaposition of multi-polar deaths, preventing the dissimulation of ecological violence's cruelty.

Similarly, affective parallels are drawn between the poet persona grappling with their mother's death in "Blizzard" and a mother whale grieving her child who dies by consuming toxic plastic in the sea in "Whales." While in "Blizzard," the poet persona feels that their mother is "making her way down/ one more white river" (Atwood 2021, 7). The mother whale carries her dead child in the "square blue sea" (2021, 89). The taxonomic similarity vis-à-vis water imageries reflect a fluidic congruity in how both losses are poetically apprehended along an ecological continuum, piercing the subject--object binary. Also, the epithet of "big and sad" (2021, 89) associated twice with the mother whale draws attention away from instrumental environmental activism to focus on the interiority of the whale instead, shedding light on the variously diffused subjectivities across ecology and the imbricated affective manifestations of the same.

At the same time, it is worth pointing out that while Naess' theory of Ecological Selfishness enjoins an ecological unanimity that transcends embodiment and appears on a metaphysical level, Atwood ensures an emphasis on the materialities of deaths in the form of the sustained focus on the corpses —of the baby whale and the poet persona's mother. There is a rejection of nature's abstraction to shed light on the physicality of the consequences of violence instead. In the poems, the focus on corporeality reveals the similitude and saliencies of heterodox experiences of different individuals. Atwood details the peculiarities and the particularities of the whale's death in concrete terms—consumption of "toxic plastic" and perhaps "paper and glass and tin" (2021, 89), which categorically differ from the empirical conditions

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[5] In this regard, Jacques Derrida critiques the purported incommensurate nature of human and nonhuman deaths wherein the death of the latter is garbed in an organized invisibility, which evokes no legal or moral reprisal. He notes "the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal […]" (2002, 394) leads to a global scale forgetting of the violence which Atwood seems to avow and enlarge through the poet persona's Melancholic (expanded) frame of remembrance.

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of the other death in "Blizzard," and thereby draw attention to the divergent historical conditions of the production of loss(es). In "Fatal Light Awareness," a thrush crashes against a glass window of a high-rise building—"their feathers are falling—/ warm, *not like snow/* though melting away" (2021, 74; my emphasis). The poet persona bears witness to the tactility of the agony of the bird's ebbing breath and warmth and effects a staunch de-metaphorisation of its death. Hence, the palpability of violence simultaneously draws attention to the immediacy of existential entanglements and subverts the purported universality of the experiences of the human lifeworld. In the range of poems, while Melancholia does engender an affective ecological continuum, there is a departure from reading nature and its non-human stakeholders as a "symbolic substitute of the human predicament" (Baishya 2020, 48). As a result, I argue that the community of Melancholics is not a site for affirmation of selfsameness but emerges as a site for an ethical reflection upon the shared inheritances and precarity of ecological co-participants.

Similarly, in the poem "Bird Soul," the poet persona exemplifies their Melancholic fixation on loss and directly addresses her dead sister, likening her to a bird. They ask, "If birds are human souls/ What bird are you?" (Atwood 2021, 36). In effect, the resistance to new object cathexis or a sustained meditation on her loss opens the possibility of treading into the *literality* of an avian death as explored in "Feather." Here, they dwell upon the visceral singularities of the bird's experiences, including "torn skin," "wrecked wings," and "dried blood" (2021, 73), to ultimately extend an emotional overture toward what the bird might have *felt* in its last moments of life as she registers the "fading panic" (2021,73) of the bird. Unable to maintain its impassable form, the skewered ego of the Melancholic poet persona facilitates a transit from self to Self which is evinced on the formal level as well. "Feathers" opens with the literal image of feathers falling. In "Bird Soul," the short and pointed typographical columnar arrangement of the poem visually evokes the downward thanatotic trajectory of the feathers (and the sister), thus creating a chaotic interface between personal and extra-personal, subject and object, drawing multiple lineaments of loss as part of an intertwined tapestry of violence (and by extension, resilience), suggesting a responsive community of Melancholics.

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Conclusion: "We are a dying symphony"

Atwood ends "Coda," the last poem in "Songs for Murdered Sisters," with "You are here with me..." (2021, 39). The trailing ellipses suggest the interminability of Freudian Mourning and reiterate the impingement of Melancholia, which Freud conceptualizes as an "open wound" (1914-1916, 253).[6] However, in *Dearly*, Melancholia shifts its semantic shape whereby it is precisely the woundedness of the ego that pushes the poet persona's thinking into a novel and unanticipated direction of locating their situatedness in an affectively charged assemblage—to reflect upon "how part of everything" (Atwood 2021, 114) they are. To hark back to the theoretical springboard of the essay, Descartes notes that it is only "feeble minds" (1960, 82) that proffer, "we have nothing to hope for or fear, more than flies and ants" (1960, 82). So, when Atwood writes, "We are a dying symphony" (2021, 74) in her reference to the multi-species death in the poem "Fatal Light Awareness," it is worth pondering upon the musicological tenets of the term "symphony" itself to locate her defiance to the Cartesian solitude. An orchestral composition involving multiple movements and many instruments, the term's etymology arises from the Greek word *sumphonia,* indicating agreement, concord, or harmony[7], not unlike an *entente*, which connotes a preemption of any form of unyielding exceptionalism—anthropocentric or otherwise. Melancholia emerges as a critical impetus that extricates the ego immured in insularity to rediscover and respond to kinships with other beings along an ecological spectrum and reflect upon underlying entangled filaments of love and loss.

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[6] Brian Massumi observes that "to affect and be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and be patient for its return activity" (2015, ix). He reads it for its transversal nature which he likens to "passing of a threshold" (2015, 4). Freud's idea of Melancholia as an open wound shies from a self-regulated alleviation (which would be Mourning) and carries a possibility of contamination and miscegenation which, I argue, seems to echo the transversal potential of Affect and has the potential to expand into planetary ecological relations.

[7] The word arises from "old French *symphonie*, via Latin from Greek *sumphōnia*, from *sumphōnos* 'harmonious', from *sun-* 'together' + *phōnē* 'sound' " (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.).

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