TO WRITE THE BODY: LOST TIME AND THE WORK OF MELANCHOLY

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation I develop a philosophical account of melancholy as a productive, creative, and politically significant affect. Despite the longstanding association of melancholy with the creativity and productivity of poets, artists, and philosophers, melancholy is judged to be a nonpolitical mood associated with stagnancy, paralysis, and a willful alienation. If Marxist critical theory still holds true today and it remains the case we are already dismembered and distanced in our worldly relations, then melancholy is a mood that unmasks our present situation. In the fatigue and weariness of the melancholic body, there is an insight into the decay and fragmentation that characterizes social existence. Melancholy, I claim, does not produce alienation, it reveals it and exacerbates it in its unveiling.

Throughout this dissertation, I draw from the works of 20th century intellectuals (Sigmund Freud, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida) in pursuit of their melancholy. I illuminate how these intellectuals put their melancholic insights to work in their texts with the intention of constructing an optics of melancholy as a critical-destructive orientation towards the progressive time of European modernity. By following the tortuous paths these thinkers take as they put their melancholy to work, I draw the figure of the body-writing in the time of melancholy,

which is the time of delay and deferral. That the body-writing is an active, productive subject is not despite but because of the slow slack time of melancholy. This labor is not productive in Marx's sense of the term, as labor that creates new value (capital) through its mechanical reproductions, but in the way melancholy work disrupts the productivity of capital and makes possible an encounter with the time that has been lost. To put melancholy to work, I claim, is to make this insight into loss perceptible, legible, to share it with others. Melancholy works to make the present account for what has been lost and, in the process, works to complete the uncompleted past.

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vii

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To my mother, for her melancholy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To write the body. Neither the skin, nor the muscles, nor the bones, nor the nerves, but the rest: an awkward, fibrous, shaggy, raveled thing, a clown's coat.

—Roland Barthes

In this dissertation I develop a philosophical account of melancholy as a productive, creative, and politically significant affect. Despite the longstanding association of melancholy with the creativity and productivity of poets, artists, and philosophers, melancholy is judged to be a nonpolitical mood[1] associated with stagnancy, paralysis, and a willful alienation. If Marxist critical theory still holds true today and it remains the case we are already dismembered and distanced in our worldly relations, then melancholy is a mood that unmasks our present situation. In the fatigue and weariness of the melancholic body, there is an insight into the decay and fragmentation that characterizes social existence. Melancholy, I claim, does not produce alienation, it reveals it and exacerbates it in its unveiling.

Throughout this dissertation, I draw from the works of 20th century intellectuals (Sigmund Freud, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida) in pursuit of their melancholy. I want to illuminate how these intellectuals put their melancholic insights to work in their texts with the intention of constructing an optics of melancholy as a critical-destructive orientation towards the progressive time of

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[1] Exceptions to this include the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory and more recently, critical theorists including Stuart Hall (1988), Judith Butler, Wendy Brown (2003), David McIvor (2016) and Enzo Traverso (2017). The category of melancholy has been used to analyze both the rise of reactionary political projects animated by a dangerous nostalgia and the repeated failures of the Left to actualize its progressive political visions.

European modernity. By following the tortuous paths these thinkers take as they put their melancholy to work, I draw the figure of the body-writing in the time of melancholy, which is the time of delay and deferral. That the body-writing is an active, productive subject is not despite but because of the slow slack time of melancholy. This labor is not productive in Marx's sense of the term, as labor that creates new value (capital) through its mechanical reproductions, but in the way work disrupts the productivity of capital and makes possible an encounter with the time that has been lost. To put melancholy to work, I claim, is to make this insight into loss perceptible, legible, to share it with others. Melancholy works to make the present account for what has been lost and, in the process, works to complete the uncompleted past.

Melancholy and the Work of Mourning

In 1917, Freud publishes "Mourning and Melancholia," a seminal text which greatly influenced the subsequent psychoanalytic discourses on grief and loss. Despite the oft-noted deficiencies of this text, any sustained engagement with mourning refers back to and indeed is determined in part by its nearness or distance to the theoretical framework proposed therein. That this text should be so definitive on the topic of mourning in particular is interesting to consider given that the privileged object of the essay is not mourning but the psychological disorder he identifies as "melancholia": a depressive condition that manifests in a plurality of heterogeneous forms, indicating both psychogenic and somatic causes. Drawing on Karl Abraham's work on the effectiveness

of psychoanalytic treatments on Manic-Depressive patients,[2] Freud contrasts melancholia with the affect of mourning (*Trauer*). As Kathleen Woodward notes, Freud uses mourning as a foil to illuminate melancholia's characteristic features and constitutive factors.[3] Both, Freud tells us, are reactions to the loss of something that was loved: an object that can take the form of another person, or an abstraction such as "one's country, liberty, an ideal, or so on."[4] Whereas mourning is a "normal" response, melancholia is a "pathological" response, indicative of a failure or unwillingness to mourn.

Although "Mourning and Melancholia" marks Freud's first theoretical formulation of the affective reactions to loss, we find the theme of death and the problem of pathological mourning throughout his earlier texts. As Frankiel suggests, psychoanalytic technique developed largely in conjunction with a concept of mourning. Of the five case studies Freud published with Joseph Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), four of the cases involved patients exhibiting symptoms tied to a significant loss: "three patients fell ill subsequent to the death of someone close to them…In the fourth case, the symptoms followed on the patient discovering that her hopes for winning her employer's love were unrealistic: also a loss, though of quite another kind."[5] From these patients Freud and Breuer developed the "talking cure" ("Anna O") and learned the importance of patience on the part of the analyst ("Emmy von N."), the value of free

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[2] Abraham, "Notes on the psycho-analytical investigation and treatment of manic-depressive insanity" in *Karl Abraham: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis,* 137-156.

[3] Woodward. "Freud and Barthes: Theorizing Mourning, Sustaining Grief," 94.

[4] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 243.

[5] Frankiel, "Introductory Notes to Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss,* 35.

association ("Fräulein Elizabeth von R."; "Katharina"), and that every symptom is meaningful ("Miss Lucy R.").[6]

On a personal level, it was in the wake of the loss of his father in October 1896 that Freud dropped the "seduction theory" of neurosis[7] and had the insights that would guide *The Interpretations of Dreams* (1900) as well as the burgeoning structure of psychoanalysis. By analyzing his own previously unrecollected childhood memories that emerged after his father's death he realized that if the seduction theory were true then "in every case the father, not excluding [his] own, had to be blamed as a pervert."[8] In a subsequent letter to his important interlocutor, Wilhem Fliess, Freud revises his theory, announcing that it is rather the case that these aroused memories are phantasies that are not *from* childhood but relate *to* it—it is the drama of *Oepidus Rex*, not the trauma of a sexual encounter, that is revealed to be the "universal event of early childhood."[9]

"Mourning" refers to the mood and set of practices one undergoes when they exhibit a normal reaction to a loss. Although we find in the mourner a dramatic and sudden change in personality, words, actions, and behaviors, we do not take these changes to be abnormal. Such changes indicate not a state of being but a process that the mourner is undergoing and it is expected that the subject will "return" more or less to the person they were before the event of the loss after a determinate amount of time. While in mourning, the subject may appear to be in a fragmented, nearly unrecognizable state.

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[6] Gay, *The Freud Reader,* 78.

[7] In April 1896 Freud introduced the "seduction theory" of neurosis in which he claimed that every case of neurosis could be traced back to one or more childhood sexual experiences. "Aetiology of Hysteria," in *The Freud Reader,* 103.

[8] Freud, "Letter to Fliess: September 21, 1897," *Freud Reader,* 112.

[9] Freud, "Letter to Fliess: October 15, 1987," *Freud Reader,* 116.

Their mood is "painful"; they express a loss of interest in the world that no longer bears the loved one's existence; their activity is inhibited; and they feel as though they have lost the capacity to love.

The mourner's pain can, in part, be attributed to the ongoing process of reality-testing that they are being called to perform after the event of the loss.[10] Having shown the subject that the loved object no longer exists, Freud writes that reality "proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."[11] Thus, every memory and every hope for the future that included the lost other must be subjected to reality-testing and re-signified in light of the loss. Clewell describes this process as one of converting "loving remembrances into a futureless memory."[12] Through this process, which is entirely conscious, the subject increasingly comes to know the event of the other's death, and comes to know the world that no longer bears the other's existence. By withdrawing all libidinal energy from the lost other, the subject's work of mourning creates the possibility that this energy can be re-attached to another object in the future.

On Freud's account, melancholia appears to share many features with mourning. Both subjects may share the same exciting cause; they manifest similar symptoms; and there is a similar expectation that the melancholic will emerge from their depressive state after a certain amount of time. Freud identifies two distinguishing features: presence of

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[10] Freud repeatedly questions why the economy of mourning should produce such painful feelings and discusses this in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety* (1926). Freud writes that in mourning the subject experiences pain rather than anxiety due to the "intense and unrealizable longingful cathexis of the object during the reproduction of the situations in which the tie to the object has been dissolved" (121).

[11] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

[12] Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia," 44.

the subject's self-reproaches and a forgetting in relation to the loss. Both are indicative of the unconscious process which we could call the "work of melancholy," although Freud admits "we know little of the nature of this work."[13] Such work begins when, in the face of the event of the loss, the subject is unable or unwilling to go through the reality-testing necessary to overcome the fragmentation caused by the loss. Instead of re-signifying every memory, hope, and expectation that involved the other, and closing off the potential futures that cannot actualize without the other, the subject is depicted as "unequal to the task"—instead she redirects her attachments to the world inward and essentially "swallows" the loss. Whereas the object-loss is present to the mourner who inscribes memories and hopes with this knowledge, for the melancholic, this knowledge withdraws from consciousness. At times, the loss itself is forgotten by the subject who nevertheless feels justified in maintaining belief that a loss has occurred. Other times, the subject "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him."[14] As something that has been forgotten, the melancholic is unable to unable to undergo the reality-testing that constitutes the work of mourning and thus, is unable to overcome the loss through the disavowal of libidinal energy from the object. Instead of withdrawing the libidinal energy from the object, in melancholia, the subject withdraws the libidinal energy from the world, directing it inward so as to preserve the other inside of herself. As a result, the melancholic increases the fragmentation with the world caused by the loss, and comes to identify with the lost object. Melancholy can be brought to an end after an indeterminate amount of time, "after the fury has spent itself or after the object has been abandoned as

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[13] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 245.

[14] Ibid.

valueless."[15] The act of suicide remains a possibility for the melancholic; it is a sign that the identification has been realized, as the subject has come to share the same fate as the lost object.

Assertions of one's worthlessness or stupidity are a familiar refrain of one experiencing melancholia. Despite the fact that these are ostensibly reproaches of oneself, Freud claims that they are actually reproaches of the lost other with whom the melancholic has come to identify. While the mourner loves the other unreservedly, the melancholic has ambivalent feelings for the other whom they both love and hate. Freud theorized that it is this conflict that disables the melancholic from going through the normal process of mourning. In *The Ego and Its Id,* Freud identifies the "superego" as a critical agency which is established through this identification with the other.

We can further understand the mechanisms at-play in mourning and melancholia through consideration of "undoing" and "isolation": two defensive mechanisms Freud identifies as present in compulsion neuroses in his 1936 text, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety.* The work of mourning, we recall, is a process of reality-testing wherein the subject is called on to reproduce the situations in which the object was the recipient of an intense cathexis so as to submit the memory to the reality of the object's loss and dissolve the intense tie to the object. Although this is culturally understood as a normal process, we should compare this work to the symptom-producing activity of "undoing." Faced with a situation in which the instinctual impulses are unable to be satisfied, the subject does not repress the unsatisfied impulse but instead "blows away" the event and its significance by rewriting the past and effectively *undoing* the emotional attachments that rendered the event a traumatic situation for the subject. In mourning, we can say that the

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[15] Ibid., 257.

subject "undoes" the lost object from the external world by rewriting the past with the knowledge of the present loss. Undoing effectively undoes the event of the other's death because, for the mourner, the loved other is transformed into someone who, at every age, was "dead at forty-five." At the completion of reality-testing, the event of the other's death is no longer a rupturing event insofar as this event is transformed into a fact, woven into the entirety of the other's life.

Another alternative to repression posed by Freud is "isolation," which should be considered alongside melancholia. Instead of either repressing the instinctual impulse or undoing the event by changing the meaning of the past, the subject isolates the dangerous event by introducing an interval in the chain of thought, a spacing which disables the impression of the traumatic event from forming associations and connections with other, less harmful thoughts. By stripping the impression of its affect and resonance, the subject can limit the influence of this impression on other chains of thought. In melancholia, the dangerous event is the loss of the other. In order to limit the influence of this event, the subject effectively turns away from knowledge of the loss, isolating the impression to the point of its forgetting.[16] Although it is hoped that this turning away would protect the subject from the harm such a loss would surely cause, turning away has a much more profound effect. In order to isolate the event from the memories and hopes that are entwined with the loved other, the subject turns away from the world which bears the occasions for their retrieval. It is as if the interval itself has taken the place of the dangerous impression—no longer a tool that mediates the impression and a chain of thoughts, the imposed spacing comes to exert its influence over the subject's affective

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[16] Freud first discusses forgetting as the dissolution of thought-connections in obsessional neurosis in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914), 149.

8

ties to the world, disguising the initial impression which is forgotten like a dream that can no longer be recalled. In order to avoid disavowing the lost other, the subject disavows the world. But the cost of this preservation of the other is the memory of what is being preserved as the recollection of such a memory requires the affective ties to the world which have been banished.

The dangerous impression may, at a later time, become traumatic. Freud uses the neologism *Nachträglichkeit* to address the temporal relationship between the initial event and its later retranscription as traumatic.[17] Freud's first English translator, James Strachey, emphasized *nachträglich* (adjectival; belated or deferred) and translated *Nachträglichkeit* as "deferred action" to describe its temporal structure. This translation implies a linear conception of time and misses its bi-directional force. While a one-dimensional, linear conception of duration assumes that the initial, past event left something that "detonates" at a later time, Freud's concept dictates that the trauma occurs *at* the later time and retroactively invests the initial event.[18] Lacan is credited for wresting this concept from its obscurity through his discussion of its importance in relation to the *Wolf Man* case in 1953. He translates *Nachträglichkeit* as *après coup* and highlights its retroaction. Laplanche claims "afterwardsness" better synthesizes the deferral and retroaction of Freud's term. Derrida emphasizes the *Nachtrag* of *Nachträglichkeit*, which connotes both the "after" of *nach* and *Träger* as something that carries, holds, bears. The

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[17] The earliest iterations of *Nachträglichkeit* can be found in Freud's *A Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and *Studies on Hysteria* (1895).

[18] For further discussion, see Bistoen, Vanheul, Craps, "Nachträglichket: A Freudian Perspective on Delayed Traumatic Reactions" (2014); Haydee Faimberg, "Apres-coup" (2005).

Nachtrag is the supplement or footnote which is a limit to the text that carries with it the direction of its unfolding.[19]

Although melancholy is here presented as an abnormal affect, one at the heart of so many disturbances and psychic disruptions, one must read Freud as eternally indebted to this pathology. On the one hand, by using melancholy as a foil, Freud was able to illuminate the normal psychic functioning exhibited through mourning. On the other hand, it is through the encounters of Freud with his patients' varied expressions of melancholic illness that the basic tenets of psychoanalysis first emerged. Melancholy is the affective response to loss that turns half-heartedly away from the presence of the world and toward the absence of what has been lost. It is this world of silence that melancholy touches through its despair without knowing it, a world that Freud will identify as the "unconscious." Through this access to the unconscious, Freud was able to then give voice to the silent history of ego-formation—a narrative of psychosocial development which would become instituted as a "natural history" of the ego.[20]

There are a few key aspects of Freud's early theory of mourning and melancholy that I wish to highlight. First, while mourning is associated with work, melancholia is not understood as a mode of work in the same sense. While it is clear that the unconscious of the melancholic *labors*—labors to deal with the ambivalent feelings toward the lost other, labors to withhold the reality of the loss from the ego, labors to disinvest in the worldly relations that constitute the melancholic's existence—this is not the same as work on

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[19] See: Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference,* 265-70.
[20] Judith Butler expands this point and claims that melancholy not only regulates the psychic economy of the individual but also regulates the norms that govern social intelligibility. The differential intelligibility of heterosexual and homosexual gender performances signal the fact that as a culture we continue to have difficulty recognizing the losses of specific kinship and homosexual attachments. She explains, who I am gets bound up with the prohibition against homosexuality such that "the 'am' of 'I am a man' encodes the prohibition 'I may not love a man,' so that the ontological claim carries the force of prohibition as well." *Undoing Gender*, 199.

Freud's account. Second, the time of the unconscious across which the melancholic grieves the loss is the nonlinear time of *Nachträglichkeit*. The melancholic does not refuse to recognize the loss, but defers its recognition to a future time, which may never arise, at which time the loss will take place as if for the first time. When Freud abandons his seduction theory of neurosis, he also leaves behind *Nachträglichkeit* and the time of deferred action remains largely underdeveloped. Third, even if the successful mourning work remains elusive, the notion of its success bears an important promise, namely, that the one who completes mourning will be able to distinguish the past from the present reality, and with it, will foreclose the futural possibilities bound up with the past world that no longer exists.

Melancholy and modern psychiatry

In this section, I explore the transformations that have taken place in the medical history of melancholy during the second half of the 20th century. I focus on the changes in the medicalized constructions of melancholy as these are recorded in the various editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatry* (DSM). I do so to illuminate how the concerted efforts to disentangle modern psychiatry from Freudian psychoanalysis helped produce contemporary understandings of melancholy and depression, more generally, as an illness of the individual, which is dehistoricized and severed from its connection to insight and creative activity.

The DSM-1 was first published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1952. According to its authors, it was established to unify the "polyglot of diagnostic labels and

systems" that effectively blocked "the communication and the collection of medical statistics."[21] It was less a manual that aided in the diagnosis of mental disorders than a classification scheme that would aid in their "coding and record management."[22] The nomenclature itself is limited to classifying "disturbances of mental functioning" and related disturbances are grouped into mental disorders. There are two main groups of mental disorders: those in which the disturbance of mental functioning is precipitated by an impairment in brain functioning, and those in which impaired brain functioning is secondary to a psychotic disorder. In other words, disorders with an apparent organic cause, and those without an organic cause or psychogenic in origin. This division helped separate American psychiatry from the direction heralded by German psychiatry, which was tending towards biological constructions of psychopathologies. Turning away from quantitative research, the early drafters of the DSM drew heavily on Sigmund Freud and John Hopkins psychiatrist, Adolf Meyer, both of whom emphasized psychogenic disorders and their etiologies, which were tied back to various exclusions of emotional energy from consciousness. According to Meyer, psychogenic disorders were caused by "reactions" of the individual's personality to intense emotional stimuli, and these reactions could be further classified as psychotic, psychophysiologic, psychoneurotic, or behavioral.

Underlying both the DSM-1 and DSM-2 was a commitment to dynamic psychiatry, heavily influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis. Dynamic psychiatrists approached the symptoms of patients as symbolic manifestations that required attention

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[21] Foreword to DSM-1 (1952), v.

[22] Hirschbein, *American Melancholy,* 39.

to the patient's personal history and interpersonal relations to reveal the underlying causes of neuroses or maladaptive "abnormal" behavior. Clients who sought treatment from a psychiatrist were "dissatisfied with themselves, their relationships, their careers, and their lives in general."[23] Importantly, the causes of neuroses were mainly psychical rather than biological. As such, treatments tended to focus on talking and aimed to ameliorate symptoms through the revelation of their etiologies to the patient.

Under the influence of Meyer, the designation "melancholia" is reclassified in DSM-1 as two types of pathogenic disorders: a psychoneurotic and psychotic disorder. At the root of psychoneurotic disorders is a fundamental anxiety that emerges in response to a perceived danger, which could be a dangerous thought or precipitated by external situations of loss, including the loss of love or prestige.[24] Although "reactions" are attempts by the psyche to allay the anxiety, they can produce their own symptoms (e.g. phobic reactions and obsessive compulsive reactions). Depressive reactions lessen anxiety through depression and self-depreciation. While depressive reactions are reactions to anxiety, the anxiety is a reaction to a loss sustained by the patient and, like Freudian melancholia, the intensity of the symptoms tends to correlate with the intensity of ambivalent feelings the patient has toward the lost object. Psychotic disorders are characterized by failures to integrate parts of one's personalities, failures to accurately evaluate external reality, and failures to relate to other people. Like a psychoneurotic depressive reaction, a psychotic depressive reaction tends to be a "reactive depression" to

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[23] Mayes and Horwitz, "DSM-III and the Revolution in the Classification of Mental Illness," 250.

[24] DSM-1 (1952), 31-2.

an experience of loss, but the severe depression coincides with delusions or hallucinations.[25]

Although DSM-2 (1968) remained influenced by psychoanalysis, cultural shifts and scientific advances in psychiatry factored into a radical shift away from psychoanalysis in the succeeding years. As Mayes and Horwitz explain, the psychoanalytic emphasis on the underlying psychic causes of neuroses and psychoses was severely limiting for the field of psychiatry. To a large extent psychiatry was developed to serve upper-class, elite, intellectual types whose dissatisfaction with life and disenchantment with society had no apparent organic cause. Their methods were ill-equipped to treat severe mental impairments like schizophrenia, degenerative brain diseases, or alcoholism, and psychiatrists were criticized with neglecting the needy populations who did not respond well to talk therapies. With the deinstitutionalization of long-term psychiatric patients from state-run hospitals in the 1960's and 1970's, the sudden presence of deinstitutionalized patients in society put added pressure upon the field of psychiatry to respond to this underserved population. This issue, along with other social and economic factors (pressures from insurance companies to standardize treatments, from the federal government to improve outcomes, and from the antipsychiatry movement spearheaded by prominent counter-culture figures),[26] led to a

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[25] DSM-1 (1952), 25-6.

[26] Mayes and Horwitz (2005) write, "many issues converged to force the change in definitions of mental disorders: psychiatry's marginal status within the medical profession, the increasing reluctance of insurance companies and the government to reimburse long-term talk therapy, the need to treat formerly institutionalized seriously mentally ill persons in the community, the growing influence of medication treatments, and the growing professional threat from nonphysicians such as clinical psychologists, etc," (257).

crisis of legitimacy in modern psychiatry. To remain relevant, psychiatry needed a revolution.

The publication of DSM-3 (1980) codified the revolution in modern psychiatry that had been underway since the 1960's and 1970's. If the DSM-1 and 2 remained loyal to the dynamic psychiatry inaugurated by Freud, DSM-3 looked to Freud's contemporary, 19th century German psychiatrist, Emil Kraepelin, for another model that would better support the science-driven psychiatry that was making itself known, particularly in the US.[27] In Kraepelin, the DSM-3 task force found a symptom-based model of classification and diagnosis that would allow mental health practitioners to diagnose (and treat) mental illnesses as they would medical illnesses. By focusing on symptoms instead of causes, this model allowed psychiatry to adopt the positivism of the physical and behavioral sciences. Psychiatric research studies shifted focus away from the stories of individual patients towards the quantitative analysis of patients' symptoms. It encouraged empirical research. No longer relying on unproven causal inferences, psychiatry could shed the image of being overly subjective and ideological. According to Mayes and Horwitz, one of the goals of the DSM-3 was to avoid political debates about psychiatry by erasing social and political considerations from the definitions of various disorders. They write, "the use of narrow, symptom-based definitions could make diagnostic criteria seem more objective and avoid political conflicts that exposed the field to ridicule."[28]

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[27] Psychiatrists had already been using Kraepelin's concept of manic-depressive illness as a form of insanity or psychosis characterized by melancholia and mania. See: Hirschbein, *American Melancholy,* 11-12; Kraepelin, "Manic-depressive Insanity," in *The Nature of Melancholy,* ed. Jennifer Radden, 260-279.

[28] Mayes and Horwitz, "DSM-III and the Revolution in the Classification of Mental Illness," 259.

In relation to depression, the intent of the DSM-3's authors was to formulate an objective model of depression. The DSM-3 first classifies major depression as a mental illness, specifically, as a type of affective disorder. Like mumps or measles, depression was presented as a specific entity that could be diagnosed across diverse populations through the presence of key symptoms, and treated effectively with pharmaceutical interventions. As recently as 1976, there had been at least 12 different classification systems for what practitioners called "depression." Dr. Robert Spitzer, largely responsible for the changes to the DSM-3 and overseer of the work group on depression, sought to standardize a classification scheme and make the category of depression more inclusive.[29] This text instituted a definitive set of symptomatic criteria for depression that has largely remained intact to this day.[30] Shortly after its publication, Major Depression became the most commonly diagnosed mental health condition, accounting for about 40% of all diagnoses.[31] DSM-3 helped usher in an age of depression to supersede the age of anxiety, and with it abandon the psychoanalytic theory long influencing American psychiatry.[32]

In DSM-3, major depressive disorder (MDD) was no longer included within manic-depressive illness but was presented as its own affective disorder. In order to be diagnosed with a Major Depressive Episode (MDE), one had to have a sad, depressed

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[29] Hirschbein, *American Melancholy*, 43.

[30] Horowitz, Wakefield, Lorenzo-Luances. "History of Depression," in *Oxford Handbook of Mood Disorders,* 17.

[31] Horwitz, "Creating an Age of Depression: The Social Construction and Consequences of the Major Depression Diagnosis," 42.

[32] Studies in the early 1960's found that anxiety was the most commonly diagnosed mental condition accounting for up to three quarters of all diagnoses. Ibid., 43.

mood or loss of interest in usual activities, as well as four of the following symptoms for

a period of at least two weeks: change in appetite; change in sleeping patterns;

psychomotor changes; loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities; loss of energy;

feelings of worthlessness or guilt; perceived loss of mental functioning; morbid

ruminations or suicide attempt.[33]

"Melancholia" was reclassified as a subtype of depression. A MDE could be with

or without melancholic features and these qualifiers indicated the severity or mildness of

the depressive episode. "With melancholia" denoted a particularly severe form of

depression characterized by anhedonia:[34] "loss of pleasure in all or almost all activities

and lack of reactivity to usually pleasurable stimuli."[35] Additionally, diagnosis of

melancholic depression required the presence of three of the follow symptoms: quality of

depressed mood perceived as distinct from grief; depression that is worse in the morning;

early morning awakening (at least two hours prior to planned time of awakening);

marked psychomotor retardation or agitation; significant anorexia or weight loss; and

excessive or inappropriate guilt.[36] The melancholic type of depression is notable for its

responsiveness to somatic treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy and tricyclic

antidepressants.[37]

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[33] DSM-3 (1980), 213-14.

[34] This reclassification of melancholia in DSM-3 was largely influenced by Klein's binary classification of depression as either endogenomorphic (melancholic and anhedonic) or nonendogenomorphic (nonmelancholic and vegetative). "Endogenomorphic depression: a conceptual and terminological revision," 447-454. Melancholia may still be used interchangeably with "endogenomorphic" or "somatic" depression. See also: Loas and Boyer "Anhedonia in endogenomorphic depression," 57-64.

[35] DSM-3, 215.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 27.

Unlike DSM-2, which excluded major depressions that emerged following significant life changes, DSM-3 reintegrated these conditions under the category of diagnosable affective disorders. Depression may or may not be pathological, and it was up to the acuity of the practitioner to differentiate major depressive disorders (MDDs) from normal reactions, like "uncomplicated bereavement," that share many of the same symptoms. To ensure that normal grief was not misdiagnosed as depression, the "bereavement exclusion" was introduced in DSM-3 as Criterion E for a Major Depressive Episode (MDE).[38] Although "uncomplicated bereavement" could look very similar to major depressive disorder, empirical investigations of grief in the 1960's and 1970's led to the identification of significant differences between the two.[39] Absent from normal grief is a preoccupation with guilt or worthlessness, any functional impairment, or the psychomotor changes that belong to major depression's diagnostic criteria. Additionally, researchers found that those with depression needed more time to recover. While the onset of uncomplicated bereavement may not immediately follow the loss, significant grief reactions do not frequently persist longer than 2 or 3 months. "Unless the bereaved person's symptoms matched the description of "severity, duration and clinically significant distress or impairment" for MDD, then the bereavement exclusion defined the experience as a normal reaction to loss.[40]

The DSM-4 was published in 1994. In this text, melancholia is used as a specifier for mood disorders of major depression and bipolar disorder. Although it bears much

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[38] "E. Not due to any Organic Mental Disorder or Uncomplicated Bereavement," Ibid., 214.

[39] Fox and Jones, "DSM-5 and Bereavement: The Loss of Normal Grief?" 114-115.

[40] Ibid., 113.

resemblance to its presentation in DSM-3, two changes to the definition of depression were made to be more inclusive. First, In DSM-3, diagnosis for mood disorder with melancholic features required both loss of pleasure in regular activities and loss of reactivity to pleasurable stimuli. In the DSM-4, the presence of either criteria, in addition to three sub criteria, became sufficient for diagnosis. Second, changes in the language of the bereavement exclusion limited its applicability. Criterion E now applied to patients whose bereavement lasted no longer than two months. Additionally, even shorter durations of grief could meet the criteria for MDE in the presence of any of the following: "functional impairment, morbid preoccupation with worthlessness, suicidal ideation, psychotic symptoms, or psychomotor retardations."[41]

DSM-5, published in 2013, is significant for the absence of the bereavement exclusion introduced in DSM-3. While the bereavement exclusion helped to ensured that normal grief reactions would not be diagnosed as major depressive disorder, its absence entails that practitioners are able to now diagnose clinical depression at the onset of grief. A significant loss is considered to be a psychological stressor that, along with other life stressors, can be a sufficient cause for the emergence of mental illness in those who are already vulnerable to depressive disorders.

Critics of this change cite the risk of pathologizing grief. To help with differentiating normal grief from depression, the authors advise practitioners to look for several differences. They write, "In distinguishing the two, it is useful to consider that in grief the predominant affect is feelings of emptiness and loss, while in MDE it is

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[41] DSM-4 (1994), 327.

persistent depressed mood and the inability to anticipate happiness or pleasure."[42] While

normal grief reactions tend to occur in waves and decrease over time, depressed feelings

are constant, persistent. While the thought content of grief is "preoccupation with

thoughts and memories of the deceased," the thoughts of depressed individuals bear

"self-critical or pessimistic ruminations."[43] To complicate matters more, although a grief

reaction may fit the criteria for major depressive disorder, it may still be normal.[44]

Significant debate has emerged regarding the absence of the bereavement

exclusion in DSM-5. The main positions are summarized in the recommendation by the

DSM-5's work group on depression. In support of its erasure they cite "insufficient

evidence to suggest that bereavement is a unique stressor." No evidence suggests that it is

unique to other life stressors, such as the loss of a job, significant move, or traumatic

experience, which are insufficient for excluding depression. Neither is there evidence that

grief is altogether different from depression and worthy of being excluded from its

definition. Despite the different symptomologies, evidence suggests that grief and

depression have similar biological effects. Both "increase adrenal function and decrease

immune function…[and] both respond to antidepressants."[45]

On the other hand, the DSM-5 workgroup warns, "revising it may not only lead to

the medicalization of normal grief, but also exacerbate mental health costs because of

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[42] DSM-5 (2013), 161 fn.1

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 126.

[45] Fox and Jones, "DSM-5 and Bereavement," 114.

over diagnosis of major depression."[46] Despite the fact that grief and depression are similar when looked at quantitatively and biologically, grief is qualitatively different from depression. Grief tends to occur in the context of a community and thus intense suffering is directed outward and concomitant with feelings of intimate social connection. Depression, in contrast, is inwardly focused and characterized by feelings of social isolation and withdrawal. While grief is transient, depression features a sense of the condition's permanence. A corollary to the pathologization of normal grief is the potential for exaggerating false positives, which may overburden mental health practitioners and overmedicate bereft clients.

While much of the symptom criteria for Major Depression is consistent with the descriptive account of melancholia offered by Freud (e.g. depressed mood, loss of pleasure or interest in activities, self-reproach, etc.), modern psychiatry's biological view of mental illness, and interest in the neurochemistry of depression, in particular, entails a focus on symptoms instead of causes and treatments over psychological interpretations. Although Freudian melancholia was pathologized, a nuanced view of melancholia was offered, one that was dynamic, insightful, and bore the potential for creative transformations of the subject's relations—to themselves, others, and the world.

Attention to the transformations of the DSM offers insight into two important aspects of contemporary constructions of melancholy. First, melancholy has been collapsed into the category of depression and remains notable as a particularly severe subtype. Second, melancholy's fusion with depression is concomitant with its dissociation from anxiety—it is no longer understood as an affective (anxiety-)reaction to

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[46] Ibid., 113. See also: Zisook and Kendler, "Is bereavement-related depression different than non-related bereavement depression?"; Frances, "The First Draft of DSM-V."

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a loss (either real or ideal) or any other precipitating event. As a result, it has been dehistoricized. Contemporary constructions of melancholy, then, have wrested two things from melancholy that, in my estimation, belong to it: its ambivalence, and its keen insight into the historical conditions of the present. This dissertation aims to give back to melancholy the ambivalence that belongs to it (creative-destructive) and to illuminate how its destructive insights can be put to work with the aim of transforming the historical conditions that sustain misery.

Melancholy and Poetry

The recognition of melancholy as a medically-significant disposition or affliction can be traced back to Ancient Greece through the writings of the fifth century BCE physician, Hippocrates. Famously, Hippocrates wrote a collection of aphorisms that served as mnemonic devices to aid in the swift diagnosis of variously afflicted persons. On melancholia, Hippocrates writes, "fear or sadness that last a long time mean melancholia."[47] As commentators have noted, in this early understanding of melancholia, there is an entwinement of depression and anxiety (fear) along with a duration that is long—presumably, excessive.[48] The symptoms of excessive black bile included "aversion to food, despondency, sleeplessness, irritability, restlessness." Supporting the diagnostic criteria alluded to in his aphorisms was a humoral theory of bodies. According to this

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[47] Hippocrates, *Hippocrates, Vol. IV*, 185.

[48] The entwinement of depression and neuroses is distinguished from the tradition of psychiatry that follows Hippocrates, which approaches depression and neuroses as two distinct categories of mental illness. See: Horowitz, Wakefield, et.al, "History of Depression," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mood Disorders*, 12-13.

theory, the human body is made up of four distinct fluids—black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. Health or sickness could be attributed to the proportion of fluids in an individual body. On this model, "health" indicated a harmonious balance of the humors. A state of deep depression and sadness, melancholia was thought to be caused by an excess of black bile (*melaina cholé*).

Aristotle similarly adopts a humoral theory of bodies in his writings on melancholia, but seeks to differentiate melancholic illness from normal melancholic temperaments. Excessive black bile is associated with a wide range of states including, epilepsy, apoplexy, despondency, sadness, and fear. Importantly, Aristotle notes the connection between melancholy and creative genius. In *Problemata* he asks, "Through what is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts turn out to be melancholics?"[49] Black bile, he explains, is like wine. Both wine and melancholy affect individual bodies differently. In some, wine induces feelings or despondency and detachment; in others, wine elicits feelings of joy and connectedness. The varied effects of melancholy in individual bodies has to do with the nature of black bile, which is a mixture of heat and cold. When excessively cold, black bile produces "torpor, despondency, fear." Overheated, it produces "cheerfulness accompanied by song, and ecstasy."[50] When melancholy is present in great amounts yet tempered by the individual's natural constitution, the heat of black bile produces melancholic genius. Both the creative genius of melancholy and the presentation of melancholic illness are highly

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[49] Aristotle, *Problems,* 953.

[50] Ibid.

individual. Whether melancholy produces illness or genius, then, concerns the constitution of the individual body rather than the intrinsic nature of black bile.

To illuminate the nature of the creativity that melancholy can bring about, we can look to the discussion of poets in Aristotle's *On Poetics*. To illuminate the work of the poet, Aristotle contrasts the activity of the poet to that of a historian: two types who are turned toward the past. What distinguishes the two types is neither the material with which they produce their works (the past), nor their structure. Aristotle notes that the historical writings of Herodotus "would no less be a history with meter than without meter."[51] Rather, the difference between the two types concerns the way they hold the past in their work, as either a closed past (historian) or an open, unfinished past (poet).

The historian scours the remains of the past to make legible "what has been"—such activity is concerned with illuminating a collection of particular names, dates, and events of the past. Instead of looking to the past for the traces of what has been, the poet looks to what could have been. Attentive to the futural tendencies inchoate in the ruins of the past, it does not matter whether the dreamt of possibilities did or did not actualize. The object is not particular but general: the forms and tendencies of a past configuration. The true object of the poet is not the past as it really was, but the possibilities that belonged to a once-fecund present (the past as it *never* was). Through attention to the general over the particular, Aristotle finds that *poeisis* shows itself to be more philosophical than historical.[52] Although the creative potential of melancholy is highly individual, what I want to highlight here is that the transformation of melancholy into

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[51] Aristotle, *On Poetics,* 26.

[52] Ibid.

creative activity is akin to that of the poet: it concerns the individual's insight into the general and the possible.

The melancholic subject is a *flâneur*, akin to Friedrich Nietzsche's "wanderer." In order to gaze soberly at one's historical time, one must take some distance from it. "One must do as the traveler who wants to know the height of the towers of a city: he leaves the city."[53] Like the one who wants to see their town clearly, such a view can only be accomplished by gaining some distance from the town. From a distance, its general forms and tendencies can come into focus. [54] The activity of melancholy similarly occurs at such a distance from the town. Even as a melancholic strolls its streets and simulates its rhythms, it is the historical tendency of the town that comes into focus and with it, the nature of their historical experience is illuminated, albeit in allegorical fashion. Melancholic insight unveils historical experience, and it follows that melancholic activity is determined not only by the qualities of black bile, nor the individual's constitution, but by the specific material conditions of one's historical period.

Throughout his corpus, Walter Benjamin looks to the past, without nostalgia, for the creativity of those whose melancholy gave them, in exchange for their sorrow, the gift of distance from their historical world. It is the insight into the general tendencies of a historical moment that sparks Benjamin's interest in the melancholy of poets. Melancholy is an affect of inwardness that entails feelings of disconnection and disenchantment with the historical, social world. What Benjamin recognizes is that the movement away from

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[53] Nietzsche, "Aphorism 380," in *The Gay Science*, 342.

[54] Nietzsche writes, "In order for one to get a glimpse of our European morality from a distance, in order to compare it with other earlier or future moralities, one must do as the traveler who wants to know the height of the towers of a city: he leaves the city…That one does want to get outside, or aloft, is perhaps a sort of madness…the question is whether one can really get there. That may depend on a manifold conditions: in the main it is a question of how light or how heavy we are, the problem of our specific 'gravity,'" Ibid.

everything historical is, at the same time, a movement toward the nature that remains. Melancholic poets look to nature, with a gaze both micrological and empathetic, and contained within their expressions of natural forms and natural beauty is insight into their historical time. "All nature would begin to lament," writes Benjamin, "if it were endowed with language."[55] Contained within poetic expressions of natural forms and natural beauty is insight into the losses that nature would mourn, and thus, melancholic poets offer insight into the "truth-content" of their historical period—the catastrophe that defines its tendency: the direction of its unfolding.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925), Benjamin explores the work of melancholic poets from 16th and 17th century Germany as he offers a re-evaluation of the oft-maligned *Trauerspiels* (mourning-plays) from that era. His interest in *Trauerspiels* did not stem from his appreciation for the baroque prolixity of the plays, or the excessive feeling of their language, which was charged with seriousness and solemnity. He was drawn to these plays, as to other forms of maligned art ("degenerate art"), because of their reception in German literary history as failures, expressions of a "period in decline." Until Benjamin's text, the artistic form shared by these plays had largely been derided by critics and historians as a farcical double of Ancient Greek tragedies. Not merely derivative of tragedies, *Trauerspiels* committed the even graver sin of being unenjoyable for its spectators and thus marked an "incompetent renaissance of tragedy."[56] Such an interpretation recalls Marx's oft-cited claim in *Eighteenth Brumaire*. He writes, "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were,

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[55] Benjamin, "On Language as Such," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1,* 72.

[56] Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 50.

twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."[57] As farce, *Trauerspiels,* as well as perhaps all creations beleaguered by this designation, becomes located within a linear narrative of world-history. What is remarkable about *Trauerspiels* and other expressions of decline is precisely the distance they keep from the historical progress that characterizes modernity. Such forms are remarkable because they emerge within a given historical period, but do so as if from outside, disconnected from its values and biases; they are untimely, unfashionable, and bear a spirit of resistance to everything modern It is this "outside-within" that characterizes melancholic distance and that guarantees the truth-content of melancholic insight. The task of the critic in *Origin of German Tragic Drama* is to wrest *Trauerspiels* from its superficial identification with tragedy and rescue it as a form whose truth-content is disruptive of world-historical narratives.

By virtue of their melancholic gaze, which was attentive to misery and suffering—both past losses and those still to come—*Trauerspiel* poets were able to apprehend their historical experience in nature in allegorical fashion. Of these poets, Benjamin writes, "nature was not seen by them in the bud and bloom, but in the over-ripeness and decay of her creations."[58] With a saturnine vision they saw their experience reflected in the "eternal transience" of nature, and it is this nature which was then reflected in the lyricism of the *Trauerspiel.* It was the timelessness of nature that these poets mourned, and it is this loss which is given voice in the characters through their prolix solemnity, endless prattle, and empty declarations. Although the character of

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[57] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* in *Selected Writings,* 190.

[58] Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 179.

melancholy is variable to particular historical conditions, what melancholic poets share is an attitude to the past and present. Attentive to the experience that is lost and now belongs more to the past than to the present, this is an attitude that knows "nothing of nostalgia."[59] Their lyricism bears a destructive energy—neither toward the past nor present, but toward the false idea of nature that haunts the present.

The melancholy that interests me is an affect of inwardness that entails a turn away from the world. The accomplishment of such a turn depends upon an ongoing disconnection and disenchantment with the historical, social world. The inward turn of melancholy may be conceived as a self-centered, narcissistic turn toward oneself. In my account, this is a destructive form of melancholy that bears little resemblance to the melancholy I desire, which resists the temptation to resolve historical disenchantment with the return of the subject as primary object. The object of melancholy's disenchantment is the quasi-natural appearance of everything historical and this includes the idea of historical progress. Disenchanted with the empty time of progress, melancholy looks to the past and gains insight into the present as a time of action that bears transformative potential

It is this kind of melancholic insight that Benjamin saw in the work of poets and that we encounter across the opening pages of Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* when he writes:

> The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness…Nature expects a full-grown man to accept the two black voids, fore and aft, as solidly as he accepts the extraordinary visions in between. Imagination, the supreme delight of the immortal and the immature,

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[59] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938-1940,* 190.

should be limited. In order to enjoy life, we should not enjoy it too much."[60]

Disenchanted with the present reality of his life and the descent into oblivion presaged by the twilight of his existence, the narrator rebels against common sense which tells him that time progresses—that it flows linearly and advances irrepressibly onward. In his melancholy he gains insight into the emptiness of the progressive time and the fiction of his own natural history, which is similarly inculcated by progressive time. The accompanying turn inward is autobiographical but not self-centered. It is not a former wholeness to which he desires to return, but the ecstatic movements of the self that he experienced as a child that he wants to live again. Turned toward the past, he revisits the child's moments of awakening, each of which was pierced with fantastic glimmers of new consciousness. Although it is a backwards gaze, it is not nostalgic. The object of his gaze is not the past as it was, but the past as it never really was—the movement between distinct moments of his life and the uncanny feeling for their strange co-presence. Through the melancholic disinvestment in historical progress and the empty time that characterizes the present, it is possible to remember again something important that has been forgotten about the present, namely, that it is capable of deep and unsettling transformations; like the imagination, it is immortal and immature.

In *Berlin Childhood circa 1900* Benjamin offers a model for transforming the destructive nostalgia of melancholy into productive activity. This text, unpublished during Benjamin's lifetime, was written during Benjamin's years in exile (1932-1938). This time of exile followed a period of depression and suffering during which the thought of his own death continually seduced him. In a diary entry from August 7, 1931 titled,

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[60] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 19.

"Day of My Death," he describes its seductive power: "Incapable of action, I just lay on the sofa and read. I fell into so deep a reverie at the end of each page that I forgot to turn the page. I was mainly preoccupied with my plan…"[61] Benjamin attributes the power of this thought to the destructive nostalgia that emerged from his longing and homesickness. In his melancholy he turns to the memories from his German bourgeois childhood; it was these memories that produced the most intense homesickness due to the distance that separated that world from his present one. Through the transfiguration of these memories, Benjamin could inoculate himself from their destructive power. He worked over them like a "storyteller," transforming the fragments of his past into something useful for the present—a lesson, piece of practical advice, anything that could help him to find the continuity between historical moments necessary for him to return to presence, to unburden himself from the weight of the past, and repopulate his imagination with the possibilities that belong to his time.

In his melancholy he is drawn toward the past for which he longs and desires to return. Where destructive melancholy holds the romanticized idea of the past over and against the present, melancholy can be productive when the truth that the past it holds is one that belongs to the present and is tied to redemption. In "On the Concept of History," he asks,

> Doesn't a breath of the air that invaded earlier days caress us as well? In
> the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent one?...If so, then there
> is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then
> our coming was expected on earth.[62]

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[61] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, vol. 2, part 1: 1927-1930,* 842.

[62] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, vol. 4*, 390.

In melancholy, there is a disenchantment with the present that makes it possible for the past to "advene" us, but this is not so that we might return. The past has a message for this present; it shows the one, who is seduced to look, a step that was not taken, that could not be taken, and that has been thrown ahead so a future present may recognize it as one of its possibilities and complete the uncompleted past. Benjamin writes that "history decays not into stories, but images."[63] When the images of what-has-been form a constellation with the present, a dialectical-image emerges which is experienced as a "flash" of Now-time. By wresting the present from the empty time of historical progress, he transforms it into the messianic time of Now, the time of action where radical transformation becomes possible.

What I wish to highlight in this discussion is the ambivalence of melancholy and the key differences between productive and destructive melancholy. Like the extreme variations of black bile that can produce feelings of excessive heat and cold depending on the individual's constitution, the melancholic disinvestment in one's historical time can result in a distance from the present world that can be both creative and destructive. Importantly, melancholy offers a distanced perspective upon the present that is disruptive of narratives of historical progress. While the distance from the present may allow for a renewed intimacy with the past, this intimacy becomes destructive when the present is devalued in favor of the past. Melancholy becomes creative and productive when the past helps us transform the present and the conditions that sustain misery and suffering.

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[63] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 476.

The alienated and productive labors of melancholy

At the same time that Sigmund Freud furthers the pathologization of melancholia in his seminal text, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), he dissociates melancholy from work. According to this text, mourning is a conscious process of working through a loss, and melancholy is an affective response characterized by the inability or unwillingness to work through the loss. When the subject overcomes their melancholia, the transformation that takes place is either a product of the subject's unconscious mechanisms, or is the effect of raising it to the level of consciousness through its mediation by an analyst in psychoanalytic contexts. When Freud recognizes the work of melancholy in later texts, he situates it as a moment within the work of mourning. Every successful work of mourning requires the moment of melancholic identification. A corollary of this insight is that melancholy produces mourning, but the implications of this insight remain to be developed. What does it mean to put melancholy back to work?

I emphasize throughout the dissertation that melancholy is laborious, and that the melancholic subject is a productive laborer. Anyone who has the good fortune of knowing a melancholic knows intuitively that being melancholic requires a great deal of effort. By "labor" I mean the human practical activity that requires the enervation of nerves, muscles, etc., mediating the relationship between social existence and the natural world. In Marx's theory of value, labor is the "substance, and immanent measure of value, but it has no value itself."[64] For Marx, the decisive category is not concrete labor but abstract "labor-power" as it is this —the capacity for future labor—that the worker sells and that the capitalist uses to generate new value (capital). For the purposes of this dissertation, "labor" refers to concrete laboring-activities and "work" refers to the

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[64] Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1,* 588.

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abstract labor that is coerced and exploited in the production process. When I claim that the value of melancholy lies in its being put to work, I do not mean that melancholy should be used to generate capital through the production of a commodity (book, work of art, etc.), but that the concrete labors of melancholy can be used to generate new social values. These values, in turn, transform what we mean by "work" and "productivity."

Although I characterize the laboring-activity of melancholy as concrete, both mourning and melancholy take part in alienated labor. As Karl Marx first analyzed in the *1844 Paris Manuscripts*, the existence of private property and the development of capitalist modernity presupposes alienated labor, which distances the worker from nature, herself, her species-existence, and from others. In order to maintain oneself as a physical subject, one must maintain themselves as a worker, that is, as a stable productive subject. To Marx's claim I add that the worker must maintain themselves as a mourner: one who is continually working over the past, re-signifying and transforming the past into futureless memories that no long prick or disturb, that can be recalled with indifference by one who becomes a distanced spectator of their own history. The result of this alienation from the past and the affective dissociation which results from the transformation of past into memory, is the alienation from the collective memory of our species-existence, and the others with whom we inhabit the present. Thus we can say that it is not the experience of loss that precipitates mourning, it is mourning which precedes the loss and, through its incessant work, transforms the whole of the past into something that has been lost.

It follows that the melancholic subject who is unable or unwilling to undergo the work of mourning is no less alienated than the mourner. Instead of working over the past,

the melancholic swallows the loss and with it the past to which the loss belongs in order to preserve the other's "living memory" inside of themselves. This "preservation" exacerbates the subject's alienation from themselves, the world, the flow of time, and the rhythms of the present. Instead of working through the past, the melancholic "works through" their worldly relations, and in doing so, gains insight into the alienation that characterizes modern existence—what Benjamin calls the nature of their historical experience.

The productivity of melancholy's labors expands Marx's notion of "productivity." For a society that holds productivity to be of the highest value, Marx's concept is rightly criticized as "narrow" insofar as it applies only to a small percentage of all laboring activity. It refers to labor that is directly engaged in the production process (manufacturing jobs, etc.) that reproduces the conditions of material existence as a by-product of its true object, which is capital. Marx writes in *Theories of Surplus-Value,* "only that labour-power is productive which produces a value greater that its own." Productive labor "creates new values."[65] Unproductive labor is the labor of producing and reproducing the social. It is the socially necessary labor of teachers, politicians, lawyers, social workers, retails workers, etc. It is labor of which the social fabric is woven; labor that claims alliance with the interests of the social instead of the interests of

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[65] Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value,* Chapter IV, section I in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works, Volume 32.*

capital.[66] Without this kind of labor, we would be unable to shake our suspicion that every aspect of society had been colonized by the rationalizing and technologizing tendencies of the economic system. Mourning work belongs here: it is a type of unproductive labor that reaffirms our ties and commitments to the social. To engage in the practices of mourning is to publicly affirm the value of life—a value that is in tension with the alien values of capital. There is a taboo against refusing to mourn that concerns its perceived destructive potential against the individual as well as that of the social fabric; it is a sign of a society in decline.

Melancholy, I claim, is a productive labor that does indeed bear a destructive energy. Like the work of the exploited wage-laborer, this is not work that reaffirms existing values, but the destructive work of creating new values. While "productivity" tends to be determined by the interests of capital whereby productive labor is labor that creates more capital, "productivity' is a future determination that can serve the interests of new, social values. Melancholy labor is productive in this sense, through the destructive work of creating of new values.

I turn to Freudian melancholy to return to this moment of suspension between presence and absence with the aim of finding there another path, another type of work capable of transforming alienation. Suspended between two poles, it is not the case that melancholy has to resolve itself into either a renewed investment in the world or a

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[66] While unproductive labor does not produce capital, it is far from inessential to the functioning of capitalism. Althusser points out the role of the teacher's unproductive labor, which reproduces the capitalist ideologies that are essential for maintaining the ongoing justifications of the capitalist status quo (*Reproduction of Capital).* As Marxist feminists and, more recently, social reproductive theorists, have made known, domestic labor and care work, while often unpaid and highly-exploitative labor, are labors that produce and reproduce the means of existence for the workforce and have always been essential to the production process. For this reason, Hardt and Negri (*Empire*) and Weeks (*The Problem with Work*) maintain the distinction to be untenable.

complete abandonment of the world. Rather, the work of melancholy is the work of making the loss and the world co-present to one another, of making this loss present as absent. While the work of mourning is directed toward the future, the work of melancholy is directed toward the past. By turning toward the past, melancholy does not intend to stay with the past but with the loss. Through its work, it transforms the loss into an experience that can be shared with others in the present—a collective memory of a loss that has not yet taken place. In this way, melancholy work shares with others the insight that the present is the site of radical change and societal transformation. In this way, melancholy is turned toward the past but, like mourning, it does so for the sake of the future.

Inchoate in this re-evaluation of melancholy is both a critique of mourning work and a vigilant stance against a destructive, nihilistic melancholy. The mourning work I critique is an admittedly vulgar conception that reduces the work that is undeniably personal, plural and heterogeneous to an understanding that is common, average, and mechanical. The danger of "normal" mourning work, as I see it, is that, despite its pretenses, the process of working through the loss may result in the alienation of the mourning-worker to the lost other. Like other types of capitalist work, mourning work may not be at the service of the bereaved; instead of serving human interests, it may serve the alien interests of capital. As a kind of work, it might result in the loss of the worker's time. This loss of time is not meant in the sense of time that could have been spent working, a loss of wages or productivity. Rather, I mean lost time in the sense that Benjamin uses when he describes the aura of an object as a "strange web of space-

time"[67]—a temporal thickness that connects the present moment to past ones. The lost time of mourning work, then, concerns a loss of experience, namely, the experience of the other's loss. While mourning work is lauded for precisely this point—that it allows the mourner to heal the wound of the other's absence and return to a shared world of everyday life—my dissertation emerges out of a desire to stay with the loss and a curiosity for dwelling with absence. Out of desire and curiosity, I turn to melancholy as an affect of absence. As my analysis develops, this binary framework that I have inherited from Freud will unravel, and the indeterminacy of my object will provide fertile ground for imagining new visions of work and productivity.

The melancholy I critique is melancholy that resolves into a destructive, nihilistic activity. In order to show the emancipatory potential of melancholy I must contend against three ways in which melancholy tends toward nihilism. The first concerns the manifest content of melancholy through which it appears to be counter to emancipatory political projects. "Melancholy" describes one who is solitary, sluggish, inactive, disinterested with the concerns of the present, who tends toward silence and self-annihilation. As a mood that holds distance from the social, it may dissimulate the true appearance of the present and misrecognize the possibilities therein. The actions that emerge from melancholy may unwittingly reinforce and reproduce the status quo.

Second, as Ernst Bloch recognized, the untimeliness of melancholy allows for insight into the material contradictions constitutive of the present moment. Insight into these contradictions, like the persistent hunger pangs felt by the waged worker who makes their home in the world's wealthiest nation, can develop into resentment and nihilism, or it can be geared toward emancipatory ends. When melancholy turns into

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[67] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility," 22.

resentment (Nietzschean *ressentiment*) it aims its destructive energies toward the present while animated by nostalgia for past times. There is always the possibility that melancholy's "nonsynchronous" force" can be used against human interests and be mobilized to serve fascist political projects.

Third, one must protect against what Benjamin coined "Left-Wing Melancholy" (1931), which aestheticizes—rather than politicizes—self-alienation. The result of this aestheticization is the resolution of the tensions that any political action requires. In Wendy Brown's analysis, the danger of Left melancholy is that, in the sentimental commitment to political projects and positions that belong to past epochs, the Left inscribes a conservatism at the heart of political praxis.[68] Thus, emancipatory melancholy cannot be a narcissistic turn inward, a nostalgic turn toward the past, or a sentimental turn toward alienation. Instead, it must disrupt the narcissistic structure of consciousness, enact a dispassionate gaze toward the past, and suspend judgment. In other words, emancipatory melancholy is directed toward an exteriority-within, and attentive to both, the alterity of the past, and the complex set of tensions that are constitutive of the present, which are to be amplified, not reconciled.

The difference between a nihilistic melancholy and an emancipatory melancholy, as I understand it, concerns the object of melancholy's fury. Although both types of melancholy direct their destructive energies toward the present, nihilistic melancholy is directed toward change that threatens the preservation of its desired past (transforms living memory into futureless memory), while emancipatory melancholy is directed toward a frozen image of the present, which takes on a quasi-natural appearance. Melancholy becomes emancipatory when its destructive energies are used to make the

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[68] Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholia," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning,* 458-465.

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present account for the loss that is both already past and not yet, and thus makes visible and palpable the present as a site of radical transformation.

Outline of the Chapters

In Chapter II, "Between Freud and Lacan: *Nachträglichkeit* and the Time of Melancholia" I explore *Nachträglichkeit*—the "time of deferred action"—as melancholic time. For Freud, *Nachträglichkeit* is a concept of time that was essential to his early theory of trauma. It helped explain the relationship between hidden causes and delayed effects in psychoneuroses, and thus the relationship between an initial dangerous event and its later acquisition of traumatic significance. In Freud's writings, *Nachträglichkeit* is a concept largely left unexplicated. To extend it to melancholia, we can say that the dangerous event is a loss that remains unacknowledged by the subject's conscious awareness, but nevertheless makes itself known in somatic fashion. Like trauma, the loss has both already taken place and not yet arrived.

When Lacan "returns to Freud" in his 1953-54 lectures, he places special emphasis on *Nachträglichkeit*, which he translates into French as *après coup*. While Freud limited its explanatory power to trauma, Lacan extends the causality of retroaction to the whole of the subject. The retroaction of *après coup* offers an account of progress that explains the psychosexual maturation of subject, the temporal relationship between the domains of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and the time that belongs to analysis. The Lacanian subject is a desiring subject organized around an absent locus—a loss that has already taken place and is still to come.

My aim in passing through psychoanalysis in this chapter is two-fold: 1) show that *Nachträglichkeit*, and melancholia by extension, offers an inroad into the role of loss in the organization of subjectivity; 2) indicate the relationship between the nonlinear time of melancholy and historical progress. It is task of Chapter III to develop a phenomenological account of melancholy, and of subsequent chapters to develop a materialist account of melancholy.

In Chapter III, "Merleau-Ponty and Proust: From Phantom Limbs to Involuntary Memories," I offer a re-evaluation of Freudian melancholy by reading it in-conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of phantom limbs in *Phenomenology of Perception* and Marcel Proust's involuntary memories in *In Search of Lost Time*. As an affective response to loss, melancholy bears a strange, belated temporality (*Nachträglichkeit*). The loss itself is both here and not-yet here; the event itself is deferred to a future encounter that may or may not arrive. Through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the phantom limb, I emphasize that the melancholic subject remains affectively bound to a past world. While this can be read as problematic insofar as the subject is attuned to both the possibilities that belong to the present and the impossibilities that belong to the past world, I turn to Proust whose writings on involuntary memory indicate a way of taking up these futural (im)possibilities. I focus my discussion on the narrator's involuntary memory of his grandmother after her death to highlight the creative transformation of his melancholy. In Chapter IV, I turn to Frankfurt School critical theory to develop a materialist interpretation of melancholy as the felt experience of capitalist alienation.

In Chapter IV, "Frankfurt School and the Work of Melancholy," I explore Marx's notion of alienated labor, and focus, in particular, on the capitalist alienation from nature.

Through the transformation of nature into the world of commodities, we become alienated from nature, and this is felt as the loss of nature's distance. I situate this forgetting of nature's distance in Benjamin's notion of the decaying aura as an experience of decline. The more alienated we are from nature as something strange and distant, the less able we are to access the auratic. The decay of the aura marks the evacuation of temporal complexity and thickness from the experience of the present.

I pursue mourning and melancholy as two practical responses to this loss of time from the present. While mourning and melancholy are typically understood as responses to extraordinary events of loss, such events illuminate what are otherwise banal, everyday ways of responding to capitalist alienation. In short, mourning works to overcome alienation by healing over the wounds of being dismembered: renewing ties to the social, and reaffirming its values. It is an ongoing, constant labor. If Marx is right and it is true that we are already dismembered and distanced in our worldly relations, then melancholia is a mood that unmasks our present situation. Instead of seeing the melancholic as one who is willing a misguided and dangerous detachment, it is rather the case that the melancholic is tired of willing. They instead remain present with the fatigue and weariness of the body that is continually asked to renew and reproduce its social connections. I follow Ernst Bloch in his call for a multi-level, polyphonous dialectics that brings into alliance mourning and melancholy as synchronous and nonsynchronous forces of the present for the sake of revolutionary activity. In Chapter V, I further explore the alliance of mourning and melancholy through the nature of their respective activities: the desire for anonymity and the desire for recognition.

In Chapter V, "Barthes and the Desire for the Being-Neutral: Between Melancholy and Mourning," I follow Barthes in his melancholy. First, as the melancholy that belongs to the intellectual in the academy as both teacher and scholar. The concrete labors of his melancholy—movements of disconnection, withdrawal, displacement, shifting ground, the desire for anonymity—all of these are presented as ways of staging a protest to power in the context of the academy and of learning how to live outside-within institutional spaces. Beyond the academy, melancholic bodies similarly protest power in their weariness, laziness, practices of re-reading, deep dreamless sleep, marinating on the couch, and in their silence. After reading Barthes' melancholy as a desire for anonymity, I follow the transformation of his melancholy that takes place in *Camera Lucida.* In this mourning-text, I re-read melancholy's desire for anonymity as a desire for recognition from the one who can no longer return the gaze. I show that the movements of withdrawal and the delayed slack time of melancholy make possible the impossible moment of recognition.

In Chapter VI, "Reading, Writing, and the Poetic Productivity of Phantoms," I develop an account of the productivity of melancholy through the laboring-activities of writing and reading. I begin by unpacking the relationship between reader and writer drawing from the texts of Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Blanchot, and Derrida and conclude that all writing is mourning-writing and every reading is mourning-reading.

All writing is mourning-writing. All writing bears witness for the death of the body-writing, and holds open the possibility of a future reader who will be cut and wounded by the thought of this death, which is both a past event and still to come. To think the thought of the other's death is to be situated by the time of their mourning-

writing, which is the melancholic time of "I died."[69] It is this thought, which was discussed in the previous chapter as the "impossible moment of recognition," that transforms reading into a practice of mourning: a practice of working through the unfinished past, both the other's and one's own. The productivity of melancholy is not in continuing to unfold the un-thought of elements at the margins of the text, but in completing it and giving back to the text the death that belongs to it. Productive melancholy lets the past speak itself so it can fall silent. While "productivity" tends to be determined by the interests of capital as labor that creates more capital, "productivity" is a future determination that can serve the interests of new, social values. Melancholy labor can be productive in this sense, through the destructive work of creating of new values.

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[69] It is the thought of the other's death that makes Proust's involuntary memories, Benjamin's Now-time, and Barthes' *punctum* a series.

CHAPTER II

BETWEEN FREUD AND LACAN: *NACHTRÄGLICHKEIT* AND THE TIME OF

MELANCHOLIA

I begin my exploration into melancholia with Freud's theory of mourning and emphasize one key distinction: the time of mourning is not the time of melancholia. While the time of mourning is determinate, the time of melancholia is not. If melancholia is a labor that can be said to progress, it does not progress like mourning.

Mourning, as commonly understood, begins in the wake of a loss. A rift opens between the world as it was before the event of loss and after—a rift that draws everything beloved elsewhere while leaving this world a semblance of its former self. It is the same world but emptier, drained of its sense, its colors muted. Mourning begins its work in this new world. It is the work of what Freud calls "decathexis"—the work of letting go of the desire for the other that keeps the survivor bound to the past. It is the work of letting go of what has been for the sake of what could be, of turning away from the past in order to turn toward the possibilities that belong to a still-fecund present. Beginning after the event, mourning moves—sometimes slowly, now quickly—unevenly, but linearly, toward the completion of the event. There are those who do not know that here a rift has opened up, a scar across the landscape of this world. For them, the event and its completion are nearly indistinguishable, coterminous moments. Mourning belongs to those who see two moments in the place where everyday experience collapses them into one. As mourning works to defer the arrival of the second moment, it is as much a labor of loving remembrance as a stand against time.

Mourning's protest, however radical it may be, is normal, coded. It takes place across a stretch of deferred time that is historically-variable, but determinate. As we saw in the last chapter, between the publication of the DSM-1 (1952) and DSM-4 (1994) the accepted time of mourning shifts from two years to two months.[1] Mourning that takes place beyond the accepted time frame and exceeds the norm is no longer an appropriate reaction to loss; it is no longer normal mourning. Long mourning is pathological and in modern parlance may be grounds for the diagnosis of a "persistent complex bereavement disorder."

Melancholia is an inappropriate reaction to loss. To it belongs no coded duration. It appears, at different times, to be both inscrutably short and excessively long. After the event of loss, the subject was expected to be struck by a grief that never arrived; either it was missing, or was altogether too short or too shallow given the depth of feeling the subject had for the other. Instead of grief, a pervasive sadness echoes across the landscape's muted colors. This kind of reaction is often treated as a deficient response: an unwillingness or inability to mourn. If mourning is a deferral that begins in the aftermath of the loss, then melancholia defers the deferral, residing instead in the before of the event that has already taken place. Since nothing has been lost, there is nothing to be worked-through.

If the melancholic subject is "unwilling," as Freud is known for saying, it is an unwillingness to forge an identification between their pervasive sadness and the lost other, to accuse the beloved of being the cause of this suffering. It is years later, when the subject's depressive symptoms are tied back to the initial event of loss, now long

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[1] See Chapter I, 19.

forgotten, that melancholia shows itself to be excessively long. After the initial event and in the intervening years, the grief was there—unexplicated, refusing to make itself known. This loss and this sadness, altogether too overwhelming and shocking, were deferred—thrown ahead of the present moment, toward a future in which they could be encountered for the first time. In melancholia, the affective reaction to loss is both too short and too long, and this is due to the nonlinear time that belongs to melancholia, what Freud coined *Nachträglichkeit.*

In this chapter I explore the time of *Nachträglichkeit* between Freud and Lacan. For Freud, *Nachträglichkeit* is a concept of time that was essential to his early theory of trauma. The "time of deferred action" helped explain the relationship between hidden causes and delayed effects in psychoneuroses, and thus the relationship between an initial dangerous event and its later acquisition of traumatic significance. In Freud's writings, *Nachträglichkeit* is a concept largely left unexplicated. To extend it to melancholia, we can say that the dangerous event is a loss that remains unacknowledged by the subject's conscious awareness, but nevertheless makes itself known in somatic fashion. Like trauma, the loss has both already taken place and not yet arrived. When Lacan "returns to Freud" in his 1953-54 lectures, he places special emphasis on *Nachträglichkeit*, which he translates into French as *après coup*. While Freud limited its explanatory power to trauma, Lacan extends the causality of retroaction to the whole of the subject. The retroaction of *après coup* offers an account of progress that explains the psychosexual maturation of subject, the temporal relationship between the domains of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and the time that belongs to analysis. The Lacanian subject is a

desiring subject organized around an absent locus—a loss that has already taken place and is still to come.

My aim in passing through psychoanalysis in this chapter is to show that *Nachträglichkeit*, and melancholia by extension, offers an inroad into the role of loss in the organization of human subjectivity. It will be the task of the next chapter (Marx, Benjamin) to offer a materialist account of melancholic loss, and of the subsequent chapter (Merleau-Ponty, Proust) to further develop the account of melancholy's creative, productive potential.

Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*: Trauma, Mourning, and Anxiety

In this section, I explore Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* as it is developed in-conjunction with his early theories of trauma, mourning, and his later writings on anxiety. I do so in order to further my account of *Nachträglichkeit* as the time of melancholia.

The time of trauma

Modern psychoanalysis begins with Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's investigations into the hysteric symptoms of German working-class women, published in the 1895 text, *Studies on Hysteria*. These symptoms—which could include aphasia, limb paralysis, loss of vision or hearing, hallucinations, and syncope—were experienced by the patient but were without any apparent organic cause. Unable to be cured through the medical practices of the day, Freud and Breuer discovered that they could be abated through talking. Beginning with the idea that every symptom was meaningful for the

patient, the analyst would use hypnosis to induce in the patient a state of deep relaxation. The analyst would then listen as the patient spoke freely, unfolding a web of associations woven around the subject of the symptom. By listening to the resistances, conversions, and omissions of the patient's speech in close relation to their case history, the analyst could help the patient bring the true meaning of the symptom to speech. In doing so, the meaning that eluded conscious awareness was no longer acted out in distorted somatic form, and dissipated. Through these investigations into hysteria and dreams, whose appearance similarly was not determined wholly by bodily causes, Freud freed psychical phenomena from their biological determination while still situating them in the body.

Although the "talking cure" was oftentimes able to heal the suffering caused by the patients' symptoms, this cure introduced a paradox into the theory of consciousness. In order for the patient to recognize the veracity of the analyst's suggestion regarding the meaning of the symptom, she must have already known the meaning of the symptom herself. At the same time, she must not have had the requisite knowledge or else it would not have emerged somatically in distorted form. Given that for Freud, consciousness is characterized by the transparency of itself and objects, it was more problematic to assert that there is a domain of consciousness that is opaque to itself and inaccessible—an ambiguous consciousness—than to see in these resistances to self-transparency the signs of a separate, inaccessible domain.[2] The unconscious served Freud as a response to the paradox of knowledge, namely, that "one knows something that one simultaneously does not know."[3]

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[2] For further discussion, see: Fuchs, "Body Memory and the Unconscious" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, 87-89.

[3] Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 175n.

In the case of neurotic patients, Freud theorized that the meaning of the symptoms which eluded consciousness was tied to repressed memories of infantile sexual experience. From these studies, Freud proposed the controversial "seduction theory" of neurosis, which hypothesized that every case of neurosis can be tied to one or more childhood sexual experiences.[4] Importantly, the somatic appearances of repressed memories were catalyzed by the event of a loss that was not consciously avowed by the patient. Of the five case studies Freud published in *Studies on Hysteria*, four of the cases involved patients exhibiting symptoms tied to a significant loss: "three patients fell ill subsequent to the death of someone close to them…In the fourth case, the symptoms followed on the patient discovering that her hopes for winning her employer's love were unrealistic: also a loss, though of quite another kind."[5]

In order to explain the nonlinear temporal relationship between the initial infantile experience and its later re-emergence as a bodily symptom and traumatic experience, Freud introduced the neologism, *Nachträglichkeit.*[6] Traditionally translated into English as the time of "deferred action,"[7] it has been translated into French by Jacques Lacan as *après coup*, and more recently by Jean Laplanche as "afterwardsness." A traumatic experience in the present may be a delayed reaction to an earlier event that was not

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[4] In April 1896 Freud introduced the controversial "seduction theory" of neurosis, in which he theorized that every case of neurosis could be traced back to one or more childhood sexual experiences. "Aetiology of Hysteria," *The Freud Reader,* 103.

[5] Frankiel. "Introductory Notes to Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss,* 35.

[6] Freud's first use of *Nachträglichkeit* is in *A Project for a Scientific Psychology* to indicate that a repressed memory turns into a trauma "after the event." *Project for a Scientific Psychology,* 413.

[7] Strachey first translates *Nachträglichkeit* into English as "deferred action" in 1934. Thomä and Cheshire argue that this translation is problematic because it implies only a delayed effect (from past to future) and erases the notion of a backward causality that is signaled by the concept in German. "Freud's *Nachträglichket* and Strachey's 'deferred action.': Trauma, constructions and the direction of causality," 407-427.

experienced as dangerous. The later event revives the memory of the earlier event through the re-emergence of the past embodiment in the present situation. From the present, the subject alters the memory of the initial experience, which becomes "traumatic," and "this memory causes new and unexpected effects in the present."[8]

In *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), Freud illustrates this nonlinear causal structure with the case of Frau Emma von N. who suffers from a fear of going into shops alone. Emma explains her compulsion through a memory from the age twelve when she ran out of a shop in fright after being laughed at by two shop-assistants. From this recollection, she elicits the idea that "the two men had been laughing at her clothes and that one of them had attracted her sexually."[9] After further investigation, Emma recalls an earlier event where a grinning grocer touched her genitals through her clothing. Although Emma claims to have been unaware of this earlier event occurring at time 1 (t1) when the shop-assistants laugh at her at time 2 (t2), Freud claims that what "returns" at t2 is not a memory of the earlier scene but an affect, namely, the sexual excitement repressed by the young child, which produced at t1 anxiety, guilt, and the desire to flee. This return yields two consequences. First, the affect experienced at t2 is overdetermined by the past and present scene, intensifying her anxiety and desire to flee. "Overdetermination" should be understood here as "retroaction," which Jean-Gerard Burzstein designates as "the conservation of an effect that is produced by processes generating another series of effects."[10] Not only is the scene at t2 overdetermined by t1,

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[8] Bistoen, et. al, "*Nachträglichkeit* : A Freudian Perspective on Delayed Traumatic Reactions," 672-4.

[9] Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology,* 410.

[10] Bursztein, *The Topographical Transformation of Freud's Theory,* 4.

but the affect that emerges at t1 is already overdetermined by repressed infantile sexual fantasies. Second, the event at t2 retrospectively transforms the affect at t1, which is now ascribed a sexual significance and experienced as a traumatic event. According to Freud, the repressed memory becomes a trauma "after the event" caused by "the retardation of puberty as compared with the remainder of the individual's development."[11]

Essential to his early seduction theory of neurosis, *Nachträglichkeit* helped to explain the period of latency that separated etiological events. Further, it suggested that the arrow of time did not just move from the past to the present (deferral) but that events in the present transformed past events (retrospective modification). In the wake of the loss of his father in October 1896, Freud begins to abandon his seduction theory, as evidenced by his letters to Wilhelm Fleiss, and replaces it with a narrative of psychosexual development. By analyzing his own dreams and the childhood memories that emerged after his father's death, Freud realized that if the seduction theory were true then "in every case the father, not excluding my own, had to be blamed as a pervert."[12] In a letter to Fliess, Freud revises his theory, announcing that it is rather the case that these aroused memories are phantasies that are not *from* childhood but relate *to* it—it is the drama of *Oedipus Rex*, not the trauma of a sexual encounter, that is revealed to be the "universal event of early childhood."[13]

Jonathan House and Julie Slotnick argue that the conceptual possibilities of *Nachträglichkeit* become arrested with the abandonment of the seduction theory and the centrality of trauma. From then on, it comes to signify a mechanistic relation between

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[11] Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, 413.

[12] Freud, "Letter to Fliess: September 21, 1897," *Freud Reader,* 112.

[13] Freud, "Letter to Fliess: October 15, 1987," *Freud Reader,* 116.

two etiological moments.[14] Instead of positing a mutually transformative relation between past and future, what remained was a relation of deferral between past and present, and the image of past events as a "ticking time bomb." As Laplanche writes, any suggestion of a possible retroactive effect—any notion of an antero-posterior action, which is what made the concept so rich—was gone."[15]

Theory of mourning

In 1917 Sigmund Freud publishes "Mourning and Melancholia," a seminal text which greatly influenced the subsequent psychoanalytic discourses on grief and loss.[16] Despite the oft-noted deficiencies of this text, any sustained engagement with mourning refers back to and indeed is determined in part by its nearness or distance to the theoretical framework proposed therein. That this text should be so definitive on the topic of mourning in particular is interesting to consider given that the privileged object of the essay is not mourning but the psychological disorder he identifies as "melancholia": a depressive condition that manifests in a plurality of heterogeneous forms, indicating both psychogenic and somatic causes. Drawing on Karl Abraham's work on the effectiveness of psychoanalytic treatments on Manic-Depressive patients,[17] Freud contrasts melancholia with the affect of mourning (*Trauer*). As Kathleen Woodward notes, Freud

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[14] House and Slotnick, "Après-Coup in French Psychoanalysis: The Long Afterlife of *Nachträglichkeit*: The First Hundred Years, 1893-1993" (2015).

[15] As quoted in House and Slotnick, "Après-Coup," 696.

[16] "Melancholia" comes to be an accepted term denoting a psychical affliction in psychiatry through a series of influential texts on the subject in the 1910's and 1920's, including Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Abraham's essay on manic-depressive illness (1924) and Rado's essay on the problem of melancholia (1926).

[17] Abraham. "Notes on the psycho-analytical investigation and treatment of manic-depressive insanity" (1911), in *Karl Abraham: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis,* 137-56.

uses mourning as a foil to illuminate melancholia's characteristic features and constitutive factors.[18] Both, Freud tells us, are reactions to the loss of something that was loved: an object that can take the form of another person, or an abstraction such as "one's country, liberty, an ideal, or so on."[19] Whereas mourning is a "normal" response, melancholia is a "pathological" response, indicative of a failure or unwillingness to mourn.

Although "Mourning and Melancholia" marks Freud's first theoretical formulation of the affective reactions to loss, we find the theme of death and the problem of pathological mourning throughout his earlier texts. As it was discussed in the previous section, psychoanalytic technique developed largely in conjunction with a concept of mourning as many of the early case studies involved patients exhibiting symptoms tied to significant personal losses. On a personal level, it was in the wake of the loss of his father in October 1896 that Freud dropped the "seduction theory" of neurosis and had the insights that would guide *The Interpretations of Dreams* (1900) as well as the burgeoning structure of psychoanalysis.[20]

The same year Freud writes his seminal text, "Mourning and Melancholia," he writes the short text, "On Transience" (1915). Here, Freud offers meditations on questions of loss and grief, and offers a physiognomy of melancholia through the figure

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[18] Woodward. "Freud and Barthes: Theorizing Mourning, Sustaining Grief," 94.

[19] Freud. "Mourning and Melancholia," 243.

[20] In April 1896 Freud introduced the "seduction theory" of neurosis which claimed that every case of neurosis could be traced back to one or more childhood sexual experiences. "Aetiology of Hysteria," *The Freud Reader,* 103.

of a taciturn, sorrowful poet with whom he shared a walk in the woods.[21] Freud finds

between himself and the melancholic poet a difference in the way that each experiences

the beauty and meaning of the woods that serve as the backdrop of their conversation.

Both men are aware of the transient nature of earthly things, of the limited time that life is

given to express itself, and yet, for the poet, this knowledge leads to a sorrowful

disposition, whereas Freud reacts with great joy.

Toward an explanation of this difference, Freud explains that the awareness of

life's transience gives rise to two tendencies: one pessimistic, the other, idealistic.[22]

Either the awareness of death comes to transform the world of appearances into a world

filled with decay and death, or the mind rebels against this knowledge and fervently

declares the eternal character of nature and its ability to "persist and to escape all the

powers of destruction." What both the pessimist and idealist miss is that it is possible to

come to terms with the reality of transience and the appearance of nature's vitality; to

experience joy in the face of decay and impending death. The fact that we are present to a

world and to living things that will one day expire should not depreciate their value but

should increase our joy in light of the good fortune we have to be present for the rarity of

a full bloom. His daughter, Anna Freud, remarked in a 1923 letter that her father

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[21] In *Freud's Requiem*, Von Unwerth provides a compelling account of the central role "On Transience" plays in Freud's intellectual development by situating the walk in relation to Freud's personal history and historical context.

[22] Hägglund identifies these two positions as the classic notions of desire —both fail to take into account the entanglement of chronophilia and chronophobia. The logic of 'chronolibido' begins with the unconditional affirmation of survival and takes seriously the "double bind" of desire. "Chronolibidinal Reading: Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis."

responded to her "childish longing for eternity" by telling her that "would hinder pleasure. One enjoys the moment, *because* it is transient."[23]

Mourning work is the work that allows a person to come to terms with the co-presence of the life and death that governs reality. The idealist turns away from death, the pessimist turns away from life, and the mourner turns away from neither on Freud's account. Unlike himself—presented in the position of the mourner—Freud diagnoses the melancholic poet as exhibiting "a refusal to mourn," and it is this refusal that constitutes the source of his sadness. In this early text, Nouri Gana claims that Freud is already attentive to mourning as an economy of desire. Freud's joy derives from his willingness to repeat the act of mourning innumerable times, while the source of the poet's melancholy is in the refusal against the libidinal economics that mourning entails. As Gana argues in *Signifying Loss,* it is in this text that we find the crux of the problem of Freud's theory of mourning, namely, that it offers a framework for the perpetuation of mourning without the possibility of its completion. [24]

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud uses melancholia as a foil to uncover the mechanisms at play in mourning work. What is it that the mourner accomplishes that the melancholic is unable or unwilling to do? "Mourning" refers to the mood and set of practices one undergoes when they exhibit a normal reaction to a loss. Although we find in the mourner a dramatic and sudden change in personality, words, actions, behaviors, we do not take these changes to be abnormal. Such changes indicate not a state of being but a process that the mourner is undergoing and it is expected that the subject will

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[23] As quoted in Von Unwerth's *Freud's Requiem: mourning, memory and the invisible history of a summer walk,* 193.

[24] Gana, *Signifying Loss: Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning*.

"return" more or less to the person they were before the event of the loss after a determinate of time. While in mourning, the subject may appear to be in a fragmented, nearly unrecognizable state. Their mood is "painful"; they express a loss of interest in the world that no longer bears the loved one's existence; their activity is inhibited; and they feel as though they have lost the capacity to love.

The mourner's pain can, in part, be attributed to the ongoing process of reality-testing that they are being called to perform after the event of the loss.[25] Having shown the subject that the loved object no longer exists, Freud writes that reality "proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."[26] Thus, every memory and every hope for the future that included the lost other must be subjected to reality-testing and re-signified in light of the loss. Tammy Clewell describes this process as one of converting "loving remembrances into a futureless memory."[27] Through this process, which is entirely conscious, the subject increasingly comes to know the event of the other's death, and comes to know the world that no longer bears the other's existence. By withdrawing all libidinal energy from the lost other, the subject's work of mourning creates the possibility that this energy can be re-attached to another object in the future. The mourner's disinvestment in love makes it possible that the mourner may once again invest in love.

The work of melancholy?

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[25] Freud repeatedly questions why the economy of mourning should produce such painful feelings and discusses this in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety* (1926). Freud writes that in mourning the subject experiences pain rather than anxiety due to the "intense and unrealizable longingful cathexis of the object during the reproduction of the situations in which the tie to the object has been dissolved," 121.

[26] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

[27] Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss," 44.

On Freud's account, melancholia appears to share many features with mourning. They may share the same exciting cause; they manifest similar symptoms; and there is a similar expectation that the melancholic will emerge from their depressive state after a certain amount of time. Freud identifies two distinguishing features: the presence of the subject's self-reproaches and a forgetting in relation to the loss. Both are indicative of the unconscious process which we could call the "work of melancholy." Such work begins when, in the face of the event of the loss, the subject is unable or unwilling to go through the reality-testing necessary to overcome the fragmentation caused by the loss. Instead of re-signifying every memory, hope, and expectation that involved the other, and closing off the potential futures that cannot actualize without the other, the subject is depicted as "unequal to the task"—instead she redirects her attachments to the world inward and essentially "swallows" the loss. Whereas the object-loss is present to the mourner who inscribes memories and hopes with this knowledge, for the melancholic, this knowledge withdraws from consciousness. At times, the loss itself is forgotten by the subject who nevertheless feels justified in maintaining belief that a loss has occurred. Other times, the subject "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him."[28] As something that has been forgotten, the melancholic is unable to undergo the reality-testing that constitutes the work of mourning and thus, is unable to overcome the loss through the disavowal of libidinal energy from the object. Instead of withdrawing the libidinal energy from the object, in melancholia, the subject withdraws the libidinal energy from the world, directing it inward so as to preserve the other inside of herself. As a result, the melancholic increases the fragmentation with the world caused by the loss, and comes to

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[28] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 245.

57

identify with the lost object. The work of melancholy can be brought to an end after an indeterminate amount of time, "after the fury has spent itself or after the object has been abandoned as valueless."[29] The act of suicide remains a possibility for the melancholic; it is a sign that the identification has been realized, as the subject has come to share the same fate as the lost object.

Assertions of one's worthlessness or stupidity are a familiar refrain of one experiencing melancholia. Despite the fact that these are ostensibly reproaches of oneself, Freud's great insight is that they are actually reproaches of the lost other with whom the melancholic has come to identify. While the mourner loves the other unreservedly, the melancholic has ambivalent feelings for the other whom they both love and hate. Freud theorized that it is this conflict that disables the melancholic from going through the normal process of mourning. When the melancholic speaks disparagingly of themselves, they are really voicing accusations toward the other. Through the identification with and introjection of the lost other, the subject defends themselves from the reality of the loss, but does so by internalizing the conflict with the other and by splitting their own ego into two. As Quinodoz explains, "this turning back of reproaches on to the subject himself is made possible by the fact that the lost object responsible for the disappointment is set up again in the ego, which split into two, one part containing the phantasy of the lost object and the other becoming the critical agency."[30] In Freud's words, one part of the ego (critical agency) "rages against the second…the one which has been altered by

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[29] Ibid., 257.

[30] Quinodoz, *The Taming of Solitude*, 41.

introjection and which contains the lost object."[31] In *The Ego & Its Id,* Freud names the critical agency the "ego ideal" and later, "superego"—a severe, critical part of the ego which has become detached from the subject-ego.

Critiques of Freudian mourning tend to address its narcissism and devaluation of intersubjective relations. The libidinal energy cathectized to the lost object (object-libido) is a developed form of the child's primary narcissism during which time the libido is turned inward and invested in the ego. The target of the self-love during primary narcissism is the child's "ego ideal": a critical agency which is first an image of the child's self that emerges through the internalization of the original attachments to the parents. Although it comes to be directed outward, the ego ideal is still the target of object-libido, which is now mediated by the external world. Its formation guided by narcissistic libido, the ego is reduced to a relationship to itself rather than understood as a product of intersubjective relations.[32] According to Clewell, Freud's account of subject formation entails a devaluation of those who we come to love. In this theory, they are "imminently replaceable and…we necessarily fail to appreciate exactly how other they are."[33] The work of mourning is less about the one who is mourned than it is about repairing the subject's damaged narcissism.

Nachträglichkeit and mourning

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[31] Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), 109

[32] On the devaluation of intersubjective relations in early psychoanalysis, see: Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: psychoanalysis, feminism, and the problem of domination* (1988); Jacobson *The Self and the Object World* (1964).

[33] Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia," 46.

We can clarify the categories of mourning and melancholia by attending to key differences in the temporal structure of each reaction. In the wake of a loss, the bereaved mourning subject both knows and does not know that the loss has occurred. They can account for this loss in the present, but they have not yet accounted for the loss in the memories, hopes, and desires that are not immediately present and that constitute the preconscious knowledge still entwined with the existence of the other. They remain cathected to the other. Although painful, decathexis of the other is possible through the process of "reality-testing."[34] As possible, the mourner's knowledge of the loss is not paradoxical but deferred. With Merleau-Ponty we will say that it is instead ambiguous: the mourner both knows and does not *yet* know that a loss has occurred. As this knowledge is delayed and not hidden, Freud can assert that mourning work is "fully conscious."[35]

In contrast to the mourner's ambiguous knowledge, the melancholic subject's knowledge of the loss is paradoxical: the melancholic both knows and *does not know* that a loss has occurred. Although it is true that they know a loss has occurred and can repeat this fact to others, it is also true that they do not know insofar as they are unable or unwilling to allow for the meaning of this event to effect a change in their self-understanding or worldly relations. Instead of avowing the loss and withdrawing their affective ties from the other to reinvest in the world, they redirect their desire for the other inward in order to keep what has been lost close and protect it from further harm.

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[34] Freud describes the process of decathexis as such: "Having shown the subject that the loved object no longer exists, reality "proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object." "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

[35] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 252.

They incorporate the loss. Consequently, they are no longer provoked by the world to recall the memories, hopes, and desires entwined with the lost other. Although they avoid consciously avowing the loss, they do so at the cost of forgetting what has been lost. As Freud writes, the melancholic knows "*whom* he has lost," but not "*what* he has lost" in the other.[36] In other words, the melancholic doesn't recognize the loss of the other to be the cause of their suffering. "It takes time," writes Roland Barthes, to say "nakedly, assuredly…'I am suffering because that person has died.'"[37] A difference between the conscious work of the mourner and the unconscious process of melancholy ultimately concerns the time it takes for the melancholic to fully realize the earlier event as the cause of their suffering.

Between the event of loss and the completion of mourning, there is a temporal deferral for the one who undergoes the work of mourning. As a "fully conscious" process, the depressive symptoms experienced by a mourner are bound to the memory of the event and are intelligible. The mourner says, "I am suffering because the other has died." Experiences of acute pain or sadness are coextensive with emergent recollections of the other or unrealized anticipations of their presence, and should become less acute and less frequent across the passing of time. Over time, the subject increasingly comes to know the event of the other's death, and comes to know the world that no longer bears the other's existence. Although the absence of the other occurs at t1, the other remains quasi-present and haunts the subject until the completion of mourning-work at t2, when Freud theorized that every memory, hope, and expectation for the future will be inscribed

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[36] Ibid., 245.

[37] Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces: Notes for a lecture course at Collège de France (1976-1977),* 81.

with the fact of their death and located in the past. The event that takes place at t1 is completed at t2. The amount of time that lapses between t1 and t2 is determinate but not determined; it is culturally and historically specific.

For the melancholic, we cannot say there is merely deferral between the two etiological moments. Like Emma, the melancholic's depression is an affective response to a loss that "returns" unaccompanied by the memory of what has been lost, and thus is unintelligible to the sufferer whose pain is not causally related to the event. What we expect to occur at t2 is not the completion of the event which began at t1 for the mourner, but the event itself. At t2, the loss is experienced for the first time as the direct cause of the subject's suffering. Thus the melancholic doesn't defer the completion of the event but defers its occurrence as something meaningful. Just as the cause of Emma's suffering was found in the retrospective modification of the incident with the grocer as sexually significant and traumatic, the cause of the melancholic's suffering is a loss that is not strictly a past event, but one that is still to come. In sum, while the mourner defers the completion of the event, it seems that the melancholic defers the event's occurrence. In fact, what the melancholic defers is neither the event nor the mutilation of the self that takes place with the other's loss; it is the recognition of a relationship of meaning between the present suffering and the past event that is revealed at t2 and retrospectively modifies the past, rendering the loss "traumatic."

Melancholia and anxiety

For Freud, melancholia is an affective response to loss whose etiology is psychoneurotic. In other words, Freud understands depression as a type of anxiety. As a

62

type of anxiety, depression is tied to a loss or painful separation. It is a defensive

mechanism that allows subjects to avoid the reality of the loss, but to do so at the cost of

producing various unwanted symptoms. This is in contrast to modern constructions of

depression, which classify it as an affective disorder, the symptoms of which are

produced neurochemically; depression is often described as a type of chemical

imbalance.

      To better understand mourning and melancholy's relations to anxiety, I turn to

Freud's 1926 text, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety* in which he offers a revised theory of

anxiety influenced by his theories of mourning and trauma. According to his first model

of anxiety (1890's), which he upheld in his writings for 30 years, anxiety was caused by

unfulfilled instinctual impulses. Excessive libidinal energy, unable to find a suitable

outlet, discharges itself as anxiety; anxiety was a physiological process of transformation.

The first anxiety-situation is the trauma of birth during which the infant is overwhelmed

by stimuli, both internal and external, and this evokes a feeling of helplessness.[38] In the

1926 text, Freud makes an important distinction between "automatic anxiety," which is

triggered by a situation of helplessness (e.g. birth) and "signal anxiety," which functions

as a warning of an imminent dangerous situation that will repeat the past trauma.

Anxiety-reactions, which are defensive reactions to traumatic events of loss and

helplessness, protect the subject from the painful reality of the event. [39] Freud's revised

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[38] For more on the trauma of birth, see: Freud (1926), 162; Arbiser, *On Freud's "Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety* (2018).

[39] This account of anxiety as a reaction to object-loss is further developed by Melanie Klein. For Klein, the infant's weaning precipitates the loss of a beloved external object (mother's breast). This leads to an imbalance between the infant's internal and external realities and signals the possibility of further losses of "good" objects. These depressive anxieties make up the "infantile depressive position"—the second of two major positions that characterize the development of infantile psychic life. "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940).

model accounts for anxiety that both precedes (signal) and succeeds (automatic) events of loss.[40]

We can understand more of the anxiety-reactions of mourning and melancholia through Freud's discussion of "undoing" and "isolation": two defensive mechanisms present in compulsion neuroses. The work of mourning, we recall, is a process of reality-testing. This process, which is a function of the ego, calls upon the subject to differentiate hallucinations from valid perceptions and, in so doing, differentiate their internal reality from external reality. In the context of mourning work, the subject is called upon to give up the internal reality of the lost object which no longer bears an external existence. One does this by reproducing the situations in which the object was the recipient of an intense cathexis so as to submit their memories, hopes, and wishes of the object to the reality of the object's loss and dissolve the intense ties keeping them alive in the subject's internal reality. By submitting the remains of the other to the epistemological demands of external reality, the subject is "letting go" of the other and is rewarded for this sacrifice with their return to the realm of the living.

Although this is culturally understood as a normal process, we should compare this work to the symptom-producing activity of "undoing," which offers one way to understand how the dissolution takes place. Faced with a situation in which the instinctual impulses are unable to be satisfied, the subject does not repress the unsatisfied impulse but instead "blows away" the event and its significance by rewriting the past and effectively undoing the emotional attachments that rendered the event a traumatic situation for the subject. In mourning, we can say that the subject 'undoes' the lost object

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[40] The nonlinearity of anxiety in this revised model marks Freud's return to *Nachträglichkeit*, the concept of nonlinear causality that Freud largely abandoned along with the "seduction theory" of neurosis.

from the external world by rewriting the past with the knowledge of the present loss. Undoing effectively undoes the event of the other's death because, for the mourner, the loved other is transformed into someone who belongs entirely to the past. One can no longer think of the other without being pulled toward thinking the thought of their death. Thus, in the attempt to "blow away" the initial traumatic event, what results is a compulsion to repeat its very occurrence. At every age, the other is rewritten as one who was "dead at forty-five." At the completion of reality-testing, the event of the other's death is no longer a traumatic event insofar as this event is transformed into a fact, woven into the entirety of the other's life.

Another alternative to repression posed by Freud is "isolation," which should be considered alongside melancholia. Instead of either repressing the instinctual impulse or undoing the event by changing the meaning of the past, the subject isolates the dangerous event by introducing an interval in the chain of thought, a spacing which disables the impression of the traumatic event from forming associations and connections with other, less harmful thoughts. By stripping the impression of its affective resonance, the subject can limit the influence of this impression on other chains of thought.

Isolation severs associative links and this can be understood temporally as severing a present thought from those that precede and succeed the thought in time. Birksted-Breen refers to this in the context of analysis as "slicing." As a defensive mechanism, slicing disrupts the associative links between emotions and ideations so that what emerges in the patient's speech is split into a series of unconnected moments. This "controls the outside world, and the analyst in particular, so that time doesn't move, flow,

develop."[41] In the frozen time of the patient's words, the present situation is discontinuous from the past and the future. What this mechanism protects against is the future, in particular, the emergence of the unexpected, which had, in the past, proved to be "too confusing" or "too overwhelming."[42]

In melancholia, the dangerous event is the loss of the other. In order to limit the influence of this event, the subject effectively turns away from knowledge of the loss, isolating the impression to the point of its forgetting.[43] Although it is hoped that this turning away would protect the subject from the harm such a loss would surely cause, turning away has a much more profound effect. In order to isolate the event from the memories and hopes that are entwined with the loved other, the subject turns away from the world which bears the occasions for their retrieval. It is as if the interval itself has taken the place of the dangerous impression—no longer a tool that mediates the impression and a chain of thoughts, the imposed spacing comes to exert its influence over the subject's affective ties to the world, disguising the initial impression which is forgotten like a dream that can no longer be recalled. In order to avoid disavowing the lost other, the subject disavows the world. But the cost of this preservation of the other is the memory of what is being preserved as the recollection of such a memory requires the affective ties to the world, which have been banished.

The melancholic subject's disavowal of the world is a refusal to submit the other to the demands of reality. Although such a refusal is undertaken as a way of protecting

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[41] Birksted-Breen, "Time and the Après-Coup," 1509.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Freud first discusses forgetting as the dissolution of thought-connections in obsessional neurosis in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914), 149.

what remains of the other, the subject who turns away from the world inadvertently risks

losing the other a second time. This risk of loss is an event threatening the subject from

two directions. First, through the subject's identification with the lost object, the subject

risks also identifying with their fate, which would result in the loss of both subject and

lost object. Second, through the subject's disavowal of the world, the subject risks a

psychotic break with the reality that is necessary for the recollection of the lost object.

For both possibilities, the fate of the other becomes tied to one's own fate. Thus, although

the melancholic subject turns away from the world in order to protect the loss, it is not for

the sake of protecting the other as other, but only insofar as the other is another oneself. It

is understandable then that melancholy is often characterized as a narcissistic reaction to

loss. The fate of the other is bound up with the fate of the subject with the result that the

subject never comes to terms with the event, never has to "work through" the loss. Just as

the subject never has an idea of their own death, they will never have to bear the idea of

this other death which they now carry inside themselves like a weight, anchoring them to

the world they have turned away from.

In summary, I have presented undoing and isolation as two defensive reactions of

the ego that protect against the traumatic event of loss. As reactions to loss, they offer

two options for the subject who can protect themselves from an anxiety-reaction to loss

by either turning away from the beloved other or by turning away from the world that no

longer bears that other's existence. Undoing transforms the meaning of the initial event

by rewriting the past so that the event has always already taken place. Isolation suspends

conscious awareness of the event's meaning by turning away from the ways that the

event transforms the present reality. We can say then that undoing transforms the singular

event into an event that has always already taken place, and isolation defers the event which has not yet taken place.

The Lacanian *après coup*

In this section, I develop an account of the Lacanian *après coup* as a further development of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*. For Lacan, *après coup* does not merely designate the deferred time of trauma, but names the time of progress. Histories progress retroactively through the integration of the unintegrated past. Using this notion of progressive time, I re-evaluate anxiety, mourning, and melancholy.

From Nachträglichkeit to après coup

In Jacques Lacan's 1953-54 seminar, *Freud's Papers on Technique,* the renowned psychoanalyst develops readings of important papers on technique written by Freud largely from 1910 through 1920. In the process he inaugurates what he calls a "return to Freud." Not merely an intellectual exercise of return, Lacan states that his re-readings have practical implications: they take place "always in relation to the question, *what do we do when we do analysis*?"[44] The task of the seminar, its meaning, "brings with it nothing less than the future," which Lacan specifies is "the meaning of everything which we do and will have to do for the rest of our lives."[45] His movement of return is at the same time one of innovation as he works toward the key ideas that will guide his own

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[44] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954,* 10.

[45] Ibid*.,* 7.

intellectual and analytic trajectory. The movement of return in Lacan's return to Freud is that of retroaction: a step forward that retroactively modifies the past.

Lacan is credited for being the first to recognize the importance of *Nachträglichkeit*, underlining its usage in Freud's *Wolfman* in 1953. *Nachträglichkeit* helps to explain the relation between causes and effects in psychoneuroses, specifically, that there are hidden causes in past experiences that have deferred effects for the subject. We can better understand the Lacanian *après coup* by turning to Lacan's reading of Freud's *Wolfman.*

Freud's 1918 study on repression features the case of the "Wolfman," a Russian aristocrat who entered analysis in 1910 in order to treat symptoms of depression. Freud details four years of interviews (1910-1914) focused on the Wolfman's infantile neurosis, which began at age 4 with an animal phobia (fear of wolves), and continued through age 10 as an obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Much of the analysis centers around an anxiety-dream the Wolfman had as a young child, sometime before his fourth birthday. In the dream, the child finds himself being watched by a pack of white wolves sitting in a tree outside his bedroom window. According to Freud's interpretation, the latent content of the dream was tied an earlier event during which the child witnessed his mother and father copulating.[46] Importantly, it is the dream—not the adult spectacle—which is the locus of the repression and resultant infantile neuroses.

Lacan follows Freud in locating the date of the primal scene sometime between the ages of 6 months and 18 months. The traumatic force of the scene is not produced immediately after the event but acquires traumatic significance in the months prior to the

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[46] For the rest of Freud's analysis of the dream's latent content, see: *The "Wolfman" and Other Cases,* 230-341.

anxiety-dream. With the dream, the primal scene is activated as a trauma and Freud notes

that "the effectiveness of the scene has been postponed [*nachträglich*], and loses none of

its freshness in the interval that has elapsed."[47] Lacan writes that the anxiety-dream marks

what he calls the "imaginary break-in," or "the *Prägung* of the primal scene. "[T]his term

[*Prägung*] possesses resonances of striking, striking a coin—the *Prägung* of the

'originating traumatic event.'"[48]

Why does the primal scene become traumatic around age four? Taking place

between the time of the spectacle and the anxiety-dream is the entrance of the child into

the symbolic register of experience, during which the child "learns how to integrate the

events of his life into a law, into a field of symbolic significations, into a human field

which universalizes significations."[49] The *Prägung* is the impression that takes place on

the imaginary plane and has not yet reached verbalization or attained signification.

During the anxiety-dream, the imaginary-order impression enters into the play of symbols

and takes on the form of a symbolic integration. It is here that the spectacle,

unassimilable to the organization taking place, becomes a trauma after the fact, *après*

coup.[50]

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[47] Ibid., 239. Although delayed effects of the primal scene appear in the anxiety-dream, Freud writes that
the scene gives rise to a "whole series of [sexual currents] as it marks the "splintering of the libido." He
then speculates that the primal scene may have had effects "even at the time when it was witnessed, from
the age of 18 months on."

[48] Lacan, *Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique*, 190.

[49] Ibid., 191.

[50] At this point in Lacan's thinking, the conflict for the subject is between the imaginary and the symbolic.
Here, the imaginary plays a role similar to that of the Real in later texts. As Bracher explains, the Real
refers to forces both inside and outside of the subject "that are not only radically unsymbolizable but also
un-image-able, and that disrupt the Symbolic and Imaginary orders in various ways... [It is] by definition
'traumatic' as it is unassimilable by the systems that structure subjectivity, yet continues to exist and
insist." "How Analysis Cures According to Lacan" in *The Subject for* Lacan, 190-91.

Instead of attaining symbolic integration, the trauma has what Lacan calls a "repressing action." Something becomes detached in the symbolic world.

> From then on, it will no longer be something belonging to the subject. The subject will no longer speak it, will no longer integrate it. Nevertheless, it will remain there, somewhere, spoken, if one can put it this way, by something the subject does not control.[51]

Unintegrated, the *Prägung* of this nonverbalized past nevertheless "rings" in the subject's experience. In this sense the Wolfman's infantile neurosis accomplishes precisely what psychoanalysis hopes to accomplish, namely the "reintegration of the past."[52]

What is at stake in the retroaction of *après coup* is progress. Progress made—in the seminar, in the context of analysis, or in the maturation of the child—is the step forward that advances as it retrospectively modifies the past. Retroaction is crucial to psychoanalytic progress because this causality is used to explain the psychosexual development of the child. The child's development from the imaginary to the symbolic order requires integration of the nonverbal past experiences that nevertheless "ring" (*Prägung*) in their infantile neuroses. Undercutting developmentalist notions of progress, Lacan writes that the "step forward in psychoanalysis, is at the same time a return to the aspirations of its origin."[53] Psychoanalysis wants to accomplish what the child accomplishes, namely, the reintegration of the past, which means, for Lacan, progress made in the adequate formulation of symbols. Lacan likens progress in psychoanalysis to mathematical progress insofar as neither find progress to be made in the furthering of

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[51] Lacan, *Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique*, 191.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

thought, but in giving birth to a general symbol or function. Advances are "advances of

the symbolic order."[54] Through the intersubjective medium of the adult's speech, the

unconscious residues of the child can be heard by the analyst and given symbolic,

linguistic expression.

Freud's conceptual development of *Nachträglichkeit* was limited to the

explanatory power it held for understanding the delayed temporality of childhood trauma,

exemplified by the Wolfman and the case of Emma, described earlier in this chapter.

Lacan furthers Freud's insight by extending *après coup* to the whole of the subject, which

is structured by a delayed temporal power. It is not only the hidden causes of trauma that

have deferred effects; things we perceive become meaningful retrospectively.[55] Boothby

writes, "for Lacan a general function of retroaction is constitutive of the very being of the

human subject."[56]

Anxiety and l'objet a

To understand the Lacanian subject in terms of retroaction, we should look to

Lacanian anxiety and its relation to the *objet a.* To recall, for Freud, anxiety emerges as

reaction by the ego to the loss of the desired object, a dangerous event that threatens the

ego. Undoing and isolation are two mechanisms that have the function of turning away

from the resultant anxiety. Through undoing, the subject respectively modifies the past to

transform the meaning of the loss in the present; the subject "blows away" the loss.

Through isolation, the subject disrupts the associative links between the thought of the

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[54] Lacan, *Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique*, 274.

[55] Birksted-Breen, "Time and the Après-Coup," 1501.

[56] Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology After Freud*, 242.

dangerous event and other emotions and ideations so that the thought is at a standstill: disconnected from the world and outside the flow of time. In order for the subject to defer recognition of the event that has already taken place, the subject turns away from the future, forswearing its openness and generativity to circumambulate the ruins of past impressions.

Lacan's insight is that anxiety is not a reaction to an object-loss, but a reaction to a loss that has not yet occurred; it precedes the loss. This is exemplified in the young child who is not weaned from the mother's breast, but weans themselves from it. This self-weaning is done preemptively in order to avoid the pain that would otherwise emerge through the object-loss. In order to protect against the event of the object-loss, the child becomes the cause of its loss, or rather, fantasies themselves as such a cause. Once "lost" to the child, and understood as an object radically other than themselves, the object becomes the desired object: the remains after the cut, which belong to the other, but concern the subject. As Boothby writes, "the object is lost so that it can be desired, it is lost so it can be found for the first time."[57]

This now-desired object is not the [real object] but the absence that becomes retroactively foreshadowed in the lost object's presence, that absence for which the anxiety emerged as its subjective correlate. What is desired is what the object withheld from the child in its presence, an untranslatable, unknowable remainder. The desired object is what Lacan calls *l'objet a*. The "object a" is not strictly an object, nor is it a signifier, that is, a placeholder for an absence; it is a placeholder for an absence that is itself absent.

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[57] Ibid., 247.

While the *objet a* is the cause of the subject's desire for the other, the subject cannot be sure that they, in turn, fulfill the function of the lack for the other. Lacan writes, "anxiety...is linked to the fact that I do not know what *object a* I am for the desire of the Other."[58] It is this uncertainty of the other's desire that precipitates the weaning, the scission of the child from the mother's breast. That the uncertainty of the other's desire gives rise to anxiety concerns the function of the lack. As Lacan reminds his audience throughout the *Anxiety* lectures, anxiety comes into play when the lack is lacking. It is not when the mother leaves the young child that the child is anxious—it is when the mother is experienced as always present and never lacking that anxiety emerges.[59] With anxiety, the lack has itself becoming something positive; as a lack, it is lacking.[60] The double negative of the "lacking lack" does not mean that the lack is fully present, but that it is not fulfilling its function as lacking. The one locates themselves in the lack of the other, but confronted with the other's lacking lack, the subject's lack rebounds. In anxiety the subject cannot locate themselves in the other and becomes too present to itself: it sees itself as fragile; it is overexposed to itself and it cannot find a place to hide.[61] Anxiety is neither a signal to defend against an external object nor a way of signaling an internal danger without an object; confronted with the lacking lack of the

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[58] Lacan, *Seminar X: Anxiety*, 7/3/63; as quoted in Boothby, *Freud as Philosophe*r, 246.

[59] Lacan, "Lecture IV," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book X, Anxiety,* 46.

[60] Roberto Harari identifies three modalities of the "lacking lack" in Lacan's lectures: 1) the refusal of castration, 2) the establishment of the phantasy, 3) the uncanny (*Unheimlich*). Following Freud, the concept of the uncanny for Lacan "provides the most apt elements to apprehend what the lack of the lack consists of" *Lacan's Lectures on "Anxiety": An Introduction,* 58-64.

[61] On anxiety's certainty, Lacan writes, "it is perhaps from anxiety that action borrows its certainty. To act is to tear its certainty from anxiety." "Lecture VI," *Book X: Anxiety*, 68.

other, which marks the uncertainty of their desire, anxiety is rather the affective reaction to oneself as object.

If anxiety is a privileged affect, Lacan writes, it is because it does not deceive. A bear might hide its tracks to mask the truth of its location from another, but it cannot produce new tracks to lead the other astray. It can hide the truth but it cannot simulate it. In anxiety, the subject cannot simulate the truth of itself, nor can it hide the truth from itself; it shares with embarrassment this feature of having nowhere to hide. Thus, anxiety is privileged for Lacan because, as the affect that does not deceive, it offers an inroad to the *objet a* as that which deceives, that which, etymologically, is "un-graspable," "un-takeable": the object-cause of the desiring subject.

The Lacanian subject is a desiring subject, one that is essentially elsewhere as it is constituted in relation to *objet a*. Because this desired object, *objet a*, is first encountered as something already lost and absent, the desiring subject comes to be organized around this absent locus.[62] This means, for Lacan, that the object of desire precedes the constitution of the subject who desires; the desiring subject emerges *après coup.* In other words, the subject comes into being mourning a loss that is both in the past and still to come.

The object of mourning

We can approach the object of mourning by attending to those situations in which mourning does not take place. In what follows, I offer a reading of Lacan's discussion of

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[62] Boothby describes *objet a* topologically as "the perpetually absent locus around which the drives revolve," *Freud as Philosopher,* 244.

an article by psychoanalyst Margaret Little.[63] Little's article details the case of a patient

whose neuroses were tied to an inability or unwillingness to mourn her parents. Although

she does not mourn them, this does not imply a lack of her love for them. If she cannot

mourn them, Lacan writes, "it is because she cannot put herself in the position of

representing anything that they lack."[64] She cannot put herself in the position of being the

object-cause of their desire; she cannot grasp herself as the other's lack.

The primary concern of the patient, which prompted her to seek therapy, is

kleptomania. This patient is classified by Little as a "neurotic character"—a part of a

group Lacan points out is prone to "acting-out."[65] The analysis is reported in ways that

highlight the lack of progress being made, and this is due, in part, to the patient's

tendency to "isolate." Although her kleptomania is her reason for seeing the analyst, "for

a whole year she doesn't make the slightest allusion to these thefts."[66] During this period,

the analyst introduces numerous interpretations based on the transference the analyst

considers to be taking place in the sessions. That these interpretations failed to hit home

for the patient, and failed to catalyze progress in the sessions, speaks to the mechanism of

isolation as a reaction to anxiety. Isolating, the function of "being-alone," is as Freud

theorized an anxiety-reaction, but this being-alone takes place in a relational zone and

needs to be considered in relation to the desire of the other—in this case, the anxiety of

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[63] Little, "Countertransference and the Patient's Response," 32-40. Lacan's discussion of this article can be found in *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique,* 30-33, and *Book X: Anxiety*, 141-45.

[64] Lacan, *Book X: Anxiety*, 145.

[65] Ibid., 142.

[66] Ibid.

the analyst.[67] The anxiety of the analyst meant for the patient that she could not be in the place of the other's lack. Like the patient's actual relations with her parents, between herself and the analyst, the cut, the scission had not been made—with nothing lost between them, there was nothing to be found again, nothing desired.

A transformation takes place one day when the patient is overwhelmed by her grief for a woman who cared for her during her childhood. The patient had "very different relations" with the woman than with her parents, and "she had never grieved so sorely over anyone else," including her deceased parents.[68] After a series of failed interpretations of her mourning, a shift takes place when the analyst "admits to the subject that she can make neither head nor tail of it and that seeing her in this state saddens her."[69] Lacan writes that it is with this moment that the anxiety of the analyst is revealed to the patient and the function of the cut put into question. Anxiety, we recall, is not a reaction to a loss that has taken place, but one that is still to come. In anxiety, the subject encounters a lacking lack, which means that the subject is too present to itself, it feels itself exposed. Anxiety precipitates the cut, a loss that becomes the object-cause of the subject's desire—a place to hide in the locus of the other's absence. In the anxiety of the other, the patient encounters the other's lacking lack, but also the presentiment of a loss that is still to come; with it emerges the possibility that she could be in the place of the other's lack.

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[67] The anxiety of the analyst is first revealed to the patient *après coup* through the revelation of the analyst's desire (Ibid).

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 143.

What I want to highlight in this transformative moment is the feeling of sadness, both the sadness of the patient and the analyst's. The sadness of the patient—excessive and unexpected—surely perplexes the analyst. It is with the analyst's recognition of her inability to interpret the patient's mourning that her anxiety gives way to her own feeling of sadness. In the inscrutability of the grieving patient's sadness, the analyst encountered something in the patient that was radically other (could not be interpreted) and yet, something that concerned her: she did not understand the patient's sadness, but she felt it and was moved by it, she desired it. It was first because the patient could be in the place of the deceased woman's lack that this woman could be mourned (in contrast to her own parents for whom she could not imagine herself to be an object of desire). The analyst's admission makes it possible for the patient to be in the place of the other's lack in the analysis. In this admission, then, the analyst gives back to the patient what the analyst can give only in not having it: the *objet a*. It was the feeling for this remainder that resisted its representation in the patient's acting-out of her symptoms and in the analyst's interpretations of the symptoms. Unknowable and untranslatable, what remains is sadness: "the positive, real, living aspect of a feeling," which alone could give "back to the analysis its movement."[70]

Although the patient wanted to work through her kleptomania, her isolating worked to ensure that the causes of her actions would remain hidden. Isolating functioned as a way for the patient to remain at a standstill, extricated from the flow of time, uncorrupted by the future that had already taken place and had not yet arrived. In the key

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[70] Ibid.

moment described above, the revelation of the other's anxiety begins to re-animate the patient's present.

Lacan points to two subsequent moments in the analysis that illustrate the importance of the earlier one. In the first of these, the analyst interrupts the patient who is mulling over issues with her mother in a *sentimental* way. Unexpectedly, she says to the patient, "Listen, that's enough of that, I won't hear another word, you're sending me to sleep."[71] In the second moment, the patient is criticizing changes that had been made to the decor of the consulting room, and the analyst tells her, "Listen, I really don't care what you think about it."[72] Recall that in the "transformative moment" the analyst's words—of incomprehension and sadness—brought to the relationship with the patient the movement that their sessions had lacked. In contrast, the anxiety of the analyst emerges in these moments to "put her back in her place."[73] In both of these moments, the analyst's interjections are unexpected—they shock and confound the patient, but they do not move her. The anxiety says to the other: I am not moved by you; I do not desire you. The effect of this uncertainty as to the desire of the analyst is the scission, the cut that was discussed earlier in relation to the young child that weans themselves. The cut brings with it the emergence of the *objet a,* and with *a*, the subject who desires what has been lost: a subject in relation of mourning with the other.

After the second moment, the patient's defenses are sufficiently withdrawn. Isolating was a way for the subject to limit the impact of a dangerous thought by disrupting its associative links to other thoughts. It was the subject's way of "being-

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 144.

[73] Ibid.

alone" and had the effect of freezing the time of the analysis. The analyst's anxious words say: you are alone and the analysis is stuck in time. What disrupts her isolating is an emergent desire to be with the now-absent other and to move them. Although it is new, it is the emergence of an old desire (return of the repressed) tied to her primordial object-attachments. No longer isolating, she explores the key aspects of the relations between herself and her parents most intimately connected to her kleptomania, namely her inability to mourn them, which belies an inability to move them.

We mourn those for whom we know we were their lack (the patient was able to mourn the older woman who cared for her as a child). We mourn those for whom we are uncertain if we are their lack (the appearance of the analyst's anxiety makes her desire uncertain). We do not mourn those for whom we know we were not their lack. If the patient cannot mourn her parents, this does not imply a lack of her love for them. In her words, her father was "beloved."[74] If she cannot mourn them, Lacan writes, "it is because she cannot put herself in the position of representing anything that they lack."[75] She cannot put herself in the position of being the object-cause of their desire. Of her mother, the patient recalls that she only ever understood her as an extension of herself. Kleptomania was a way for the patient to say to her mother: "you have stolen something from me that needs to be acknowledged" (object a).[76]

It seems, then, that the transformative event that took place in analysis never took place in relation to her parents. They never said to her, in so many words: "you are a being radically other than me, but somehow constitutive of my subjectivity. You possess

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 145.

[76] Ibid.

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something that I do not understand, and yet, this something concerns me, it moves me."
In fact, this event, which brings the other into a relation of mourning with the subject, had taken place. Or rather, her isolating ensured that it was an event which had both taken place and not yet occurred. Theirs was a loss that was itself absent, one whose return precipitated her desire and her mourning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the nonlinear causality, *Nachträglichkeit*, as it pertains to psychoanalysis and melancholia. For Freud, this concept helped to explain the elapsed time between an initial traumatic event and its acquisition of traumatic significance for the subject. The trauma is a delayed, postponed reaction to a much earlier situation. With a concept of delay, earlier traumatic situations, hidden to consciousness, can be connected to effects that emerge much later in psychoneuroses. Although the initial traumatic event is temporally prior, it emerges for the subject later, after the encounter with a situation whose similarities recall the first scene, or rather, recall the affect of the first scene. It is the first scene, but it emerges as first only retroactively.

Although *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud is largely left undeveloped, owing to his abandonment of the "seduction theory" of neurosis and the centrality of trauma therein, it reemerges in his 1926 text, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety.* Anxiety is a defensive reaction to something that threatens the ego, namely a significant loss of some kind. When anxiety is an "automatic" reaction, it is a response to a present, dangerous situation that is entirely unexpected, it overwhelms and leaves the subject with a feeling of

helplessness. Automatic anxiety is a reaction to the traumatic situation. When anxiety is a "signal" it is a reaction to a past traumatic situation in the present. The present situation will repeat the past trauma, and anxiety is a signal that precedes an imminent loss. Anxiety situates the loss as one that has already taken place and is still to come.

In relation to the event of loss, I presented mourning as an affective response to a present traumatic situation; like automatic anxiety, it begins after the event. Melancholia, like signal anxiety, is an affective response to a loss that has both already taken place and is not yet here. Between these two moments—before and after the loss— a rift has opened up, separating forever the two moments into two worlds: the before's desirous past and the after's empty present.

Melancholia dwells in the moment before the loss, which means that it dwells in the emptiness of the rift. Its present is a past world but one that has been drained of its color and vitality. In this strange world, perception is tinged with nostalgia; to scan the landscape is to trace the ruins of so many memory-images. The future unfolds from the anticipation of a loss that it holds on the horizon of experience. To protect against the event, altogether too shocking, too overwhelming, melancholia transforms the present into a museum of the past world, effectively closing the meaning of the present, and with it, closing the future as the time of the arrival of what is unexpected and overwhelming. Like the mechanism of isolating, melancholia is an affect that freezes the subject in time.

When Lacan returns to Freud, he is drawn toward the unfulfilled time of Freud's concept. Not just the causality of trauma, the retroaction of *après coup* offers a nonlinear account of the progress that explains the organization of human subjectivity. Every meaningful step forward accomplishes the reintegration of the past. Unintegrated, past

impressions that are unable to achieve symbolization remain with the subject as so many unacknowledged losses. The unintegrated past of a subject has already taken place and is still to come; it is thrown ahead, delayed. It is not only trauma whose effects are postponed—every impression, insofar as it is not brought to speech and to the symbolic realm, is thrown ahead in the encounter, held by the subject on the horizon of their experience. On this account, melancholia, like "an eddy in the stream of becoming," is being-suspended, an affect that belongs to the slackening of time. Although melancholia appears to be at a standstill, it nevertheless has a special relationship to progress. It is a task of this dissertation to enumerate the relationship of melancholia to progress.

In the following chapter, Chapter III, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's engagement with phantom limbs to develop a phenomenological account of the unintegrated past and indicate the creative possibilities of melancholic progress. In Chapter IV, I situate melancholy in the context of Marxist dialectics and claim that the emancipatory possibilities of melancholy require the overcoming of melancholy. In Chapters V and VI, the overcoming of melancholy is developed in relation to writing and mourning.

CHAPTER III

MELANCHOLIC PHENOMENOLOGY: MERLEAU-PONTY AND PROUST ON

PHANTOMS AND INVOLUNTARY MEMORIES

In this chapter I re-read the phantom limb syndrome, as presented by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception,* in conjunction with Freudian melancholia and Proustian memory. In doing so I aim to uncover the possibility for the creative transformation of melancholy and the phantom limb as an attitude of bodily existence. For both, a so-called "failure" or "unwillingness to mourn" the past belies an experience of the present in which distinct temporal moments co-habitate. Melancholy becomes creative when the intimacy with the possibilities that belong to the past is transformed and multiply the possibilities for action in the present.

Like Freudian melancholia, what I am calling Merleau-Ponty's melancholy is an unconscious process, but the phenomenological unconscious is not the psychoanalytic unconscious. It is not a process carried out by subterranean forces that necessarily elude conscious awareness. For Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious is in the world and consists of latent intersubjective significations that organize and classify a subject's perceptual fields.[1] The unconscious is in-visible—belonging to the visible domain but not as any of its objects. It is feeling[2]: the body's persistent orientation toward someone or something that is absent. I feel what I can no longer see and the unconscious is manifest in the ambivalence of these contrasting attitudes. Experiences of being haunted—by the quasi-

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[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity,* 157.

[2] Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France*, 130.

presences of phantom limbs, the others whom we have lost, by the past as well as by the future—are not perceptual anomalies but reveal the extent to which perception is always already haunted, always coextensive with the imperceptible. As experience is already haunted by the quasi-presences of others, it becomes necessary to rethink what it means to grieve and how we respond affectively to our losses. In particular, I am interested in the creative potential of the melancholic body that refuses to mourn and to withdraw the affective ties to others who are, for us, phantoms in life no less than in death.

Nachträglichkeit, as it was developed in the previous chapter, names a nonlinear temporal relationship between distinct events. In the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, it names the relationship between an initial dangerous impression and its later re-emergence as a traumatic event. In relation to melancholia, it helps to explain the strange time that belongs to the subject who both knows and does not know that a significant loss has taken place. When Lacan returns to Freud, he recuperates this nonlinear temporality (*après coup*) and emphasizes the backwards causality of retroaction to explain progress in analysis. The fundamental causality of analysis is a retroaction that begins with the intersubjective time of the present instituted between analyst and analysand, and flows backwards from the adult to the child. As the past is structurally related to the present through a delay, the reorganization and integration of the past transforms the meaning of present and future events. Remembering in this context is not a recollection of a complete past but an active, constant process of translating an open, fluid past.[3] Progress is psychoanalysis is made possible through the relationship of meaning that flows bi-

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[3] Hinton, "Temporality and the torments of time" (2015).

directionally, and connects past events with the present moment through the entrance of an appropriate sign.

It is my contention that Merleau-Ponty similarly synthesizes both aspects of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferral and retroaction) but does so within a phenomenological rather than analytical framework. In doing so, he brings to lived experience the creative and therapeutic potential of *Nachträglichkeit* that Freud and Lacan located in the interpersonal relation between analyst and analysand. The past event can undergo modification and become traumatic in lived experience only to repeat problematically into the future. It is this description that seems to define the phantom limb as well as the melancholic. It is also true that the past event can undergo modification in the present and repeat creatively and poetically into the future. It is this creative time of the phantom limb and melancholy that I aim to recover.

In the first section, I focus on Merleau-Ponty's analysis of phantom limb syndrome in *Phenomenology of* Perception and highlight its melancholic structure. Understood from within a phenomenological framework, Merleau-Ponty finds that the subject is still allowing for the limb and the lost world to which it corresponds through their sedimented bodily habits. The subject's adherence to the past overdetermines the present and becomes an attitude of existence. By holding onto the lost past, the present opens onto futural im-possibilities and effectively arrests the personal time of the subject; the subject is suspended in an eternal present, and enacts what we can call empty repetitions. In the second section, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's inquiry into Proustian memory. Through a reading of involuntary memory, I show that involuntary memories belong to the melancholic body, which bears the possibility of the creative transformation

of phantoms. When our relation to phantoms is not nostalgic but anticipatory, empty repetitions are transposed by the creative, poetic repetitions that make it possible to see and to touch the world anew.

Re-reading Merleau-Pomty's "phantom limbs"

The paradox of the consciousness

Central to the early development of modern psychoanalysis was insight into the psychogenic origins of the patients' bodily symptoms. Beginning with the idea that every symptom was meaningful for the patient, the analyst developed techniques for bringing the meaning of the symptom to speak. Although the "talking cure" was oftentimes able to heal the suffering caused by the patients' symptoms, this cure introduced into the theory of consciousness a paradox. In order for the patient to recognize the veracity of the analyst's suggestion regarding the meaning of the symptom, she must have already known the meaning of the symptom herself. At the same time, she must not have had the requisite knowledge or else it would not have emerged somatically in distorted form. Given that for Freud, consciousness is characterized by the transparency of itself and objects, it was more problematic to assert that there is a domain of consciousness that is opaque to itself and inaccessible—an ambiguous consciousness—than to see in these resistances to self-transparency the signs of a separate, inaccessible domain.[4] The

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[4] For further discussion, see: Fuchs, "Body Memory and the Unconscious" 87-89.

unconscious served Freud as a response to the paradox of knowledge, namely, that "one knows something that one simultaneously does not know."[5]

In *Being and Nothingness,* Jean-Paul Sartre returns to the paradox of knowledge and offers a phenomenological formulation that provides an alternative to the Freudian unconscious. The Sartrean subject is made up of both facticity and transcendence, constituted both by the sedimented facts of one's existence (facticity) and by an essential freedom. To live authentically means to live fully aware of myself as a being who is thrown into a situation that pre-exists and pre-determines me, and as one who is never wholly determined by the facts of a situation, but is responsible for taking up and transcending mere facts. Sartre defines authenticity as an attitude of dwelling in the paradox without resolving it: I am both what I am and what I am not.

The Sartrean unconscious is not an inaccessible domain but the inauthentic attitude of existence called "bad faith," where the subject is intentionally inattentive to the paradox of existence. While Freud introduced the unconscious in order to resolve the paradox of existence, Sartre resituates the unconscious within consciousness as the blind spot of one who believes in the fiction of its resolution. In bad faith, the subject either turns away from their situation and imagines themselves to be a god-like, pure transcendence, or they turn away from their freedom (which Sartre indicates is quite difficult to look at) and act as if they were wholly determined by the facts of their situation. The waiter in Sartre's famous example, who "pretends to be nothing but a waiter," reduces himself to the social role he is taking up and makes himself willfully

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[5] Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 175n.

ignorant of his freedom.[6] The waiter both knows and does not *want* to know. Through the self-deception of bad faith Sartre was able to safeguard his Cartesian commitments to a unified and self-transparent mind while providing an alternative to the Freudian unconscious whose subterranean forces threatened both the freedom and responsibility essential to Sartre's existentialism. [7]

Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty returns to the paradox of consciousness and offers a phenomenological reformulation of the Freudian unconscious. While Sartre responds by locating the unconscious wholly within consciousness through the self-deceiving subject, Merleau-Ponty returns to and re-animates the paradox by first situating consciousness in the body and its essential ambiguity as both subject and object. The body that sees is also one capable of being seen; the body that touches is at the same time the body touched. Although the body is at the same time the sensing and the sensible, knowledge of the unity of the body's two moments is delayed. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "I cannot touch touching," which means, I cannot simultaneously feel myself to be the subject and object of the touch; I feel in alternations. To reflect upon myself as body is to perceive the *encroachment* of the touching and the touched without coincidence. What is simultaneous is experienced as successive and reversible: "My left hand is always on the verge of touching the things, but…the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization."[8] The simultaneity is both here and not here, both a reality and something yet to be achieved.[9]

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[6] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 102-3.

[7] Neu, "Divided Mind: Sartre's 'Bad Faith' Critique of Freud" (1983).

[8] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 147.

[9] Ibid., 117; 251; 266.

In light of this tension between the simultaneity and the reversibility of the sensible body, Merleau-Ponty introduces the phantom limb syndrome as a bodily phenomenon in which the reversibility is disrupted. Like the hysterical symptoms of Freud's early patients, phantom limb syndrome is tied to an affective response to a loss that reveals a paradox of consciousness, namely, that I can at the same time know and not know the same thing. Instead of resolving the paradox through the introduction of an unconscious domain, Merleau-Ponty stays with the paradox, and in doing so, resists the temptation to render the unconscious inaccessible to consciousness.

Phenomenology of phantoms

Merleau-Ponty's introduces his analysis of phantom limb syndrome and anosognosia[10] as two bodily phenomena that resist the reduction to physiological explanations. Phantom limb refers to the persistent sensations of a former limb following an amputation. Although the patient recognizes that the limb is no longer present, its former presence haunts the body: it may persist as a vague sensation with an indeterminate size and shape; usually, it is experienced as the continued source of the patient's pain. Unable to say that the lost limb is still a thing like other things, or is here in the way that other limbs are here, the phantom limb is best described as the presence of something absent: it is "quasi-present."[11] When the phantom limb emerges after an amputation it is clear that it is tied to the severance of nerves and is not merely psychological. But whether this is understood as a product of the peripheral nerves or the

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[10] Anosognosia refers to a condition in which the subject is unable to recognize that a deficit in their cognitive or bodily capabilities has occurred.

[11] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 79.

central nervous system, a physiological explanation fails to fully account for the phenomenon. Of the central nervous system theory, Merleau-Ponty writes that it "would get us no further if it merely added cerebral traces to the peripheral conditions of the phantom limb, for a collection of cerebral traces could not represent the relations of consciousness that intervene in the phenomenon.[12] Psychological "relations of consciousness" are necessary to explain the occurrences of phantom limb which are structured like a traumatic experience, emerging after a period of latency when evoked by a situation or emotion. Additionally, physiological explanations cannot account for disappearances of the phantom limb that coincide with the culmination of a process of mourning, at which time the patient has come to terms with the reality of the loss.[13] Like the hysteric symptoms of Freud's early patients, the phantom limb is somatic and meaningful to the subject and cannot be fully understood as a representation caused either by the body or the mind.

Neither fully present nor absent, the phantom limb haunts the present. At the same time that the patient knows that the limb is gone—she sees its absence and feels the sudden withdrawal of its determinacy—she senses the vague sensations of its presence. Paradoxically, the patient both knows and does not know that a loss has occurred. The fact that I can both accept and reject the absence of the limb is not indicative of a Freudian unconscious but of the co-existence of two ways of knowing, two grasps on the world, "as though our body comprises two distinct layers."[14] One leaf—the actual body—

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[12] Ibid., 78-9.

[13] Ibid., 79.

[14] Ibid., 84.

is the body of my personal existence and conscious knowledge: I know that the limb is missing. The other leaf—the habit body—is the pre-personal, anonymous body and source of a preconscious knowledge. The habit body continues to be implicated in the world as it was before the event of the loss: I do not yet know that a loss has occurred. A schism emerges between the subject's recognition of the present situation and the body's memory of a past which continues to evoke past sedimented behaviors that no longer correspond to the body's capabilities. In the past when I reached for a door knob, these leaves were synchronized: the appearance of the door would evoke the habit body's sedimented knowledge of the actions necessary to open doors, and through these past sedimentations, the body would be the vehicle of my intentions, "gathering itself toward the task as hand."[15] When synchronized, the habit body appears to be at the service of the actual body, laying the groundwork for more expressive synchronizations. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls the "organic repression" of anonymous existence by the personal self. After the loss of the actual limb, the habit body is unsynchronized and unrepressed, its past sedimentations continue to be evoked, called out to by a world that I can no longer manipulate. Although the things in front of me are no longer manipulable *for me*, they appear as manipulable *for someone*—they do not call out to me but to one who could grasp—and the anonymous body is tuned into this general modality of existence.

Through the disrupted reversibility of the phantom limb, the ambiguity of the body's normal functioning is displaced by the ambivalent presence of possibilities that should no longer present themselves to a body that cannot enact them. Insofar as the limb continues to be open to the past world of manipulable things, it extends itself toward

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[15] Ibid., 103.

92

now-impossible futures. Unable or willing to foreclose these possibilities, the subject's

past sedimentations open onto a future that is not for me but for someone. Bound by

intentional threads to a lost world and an impossible future, "impersonal time continues

to flow, but personal time is arrested."[16] Impersonal, this is time that does not concern me

and is not created by me: the time of the anonymous body. Toadvine writes, the linear

time of the personal self is distinct from the time of the anonymous body "that lives a

cyclical, repetitive time." This impersonal time "remains an impossible time, the past of

all pasts, or the immemorial."[17] It is through the repression of the anonymous body and

its cyclical time that personal existence finds expression, like an "upsurge of time" out of

the anonymous existence that precedes and exceeds it. When the intentionality of

personal existence is disrupted and the future *for me* is arrested, the anonymous existence

which is "invisible" to profane vision and that constitutes the "backside" of things,

bodies, and others, is no longer repressed but illuminated, no longer forgotten but

remembered.[18]

     With the phantom limb then we can say that the subject perceives the simultaneity

of anonymous time and personal time. Anonymous time refers to the past but it is not the

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[16] Ibid., 85.

[17] Toadvine, "Natural Time and Immemorial Nature," 215.

[18] Catherine Malabou claims that Merleau-Ponty presents the phantom limb as a secondary and derivative substitution that has displaced the originary integrity of the bodily schema. Drawing on recent neurobiology, Malabou argues that the compensatory reorganization of the body schema resulting in the phantom limb is not a secondary but a creative substitution, and that the "second" schema may well be contemporaneous with the originary schema or may be the "origjnary" schema itself. As we saw, A feeling of a phantom limb is not the sign of a mal-integrated bodily schema, but an un-doing of the "organic repression" of anonymous existence by personal existence. The world of manipulable things that appear to the subject through the phantom sensations of the former limb is not the world as it was in its former reality, but the world as it never appeared for me: a general world for someone. Thus, it is not the past as it was that displaces the present but the past as it never was: an immemorial past "that never has been a present." The quasi-presence of the limb is not derivative of a more originary and lasting presence.

past as it was *for m*e, a past present, but the past as it was for one, an immemorial past.

Susan Bredlau extends the structure of the phantom limb beyond the quasi-presence of a

limb and demonstrates how phantom structures can apply to our relation with the world

and with others. In other words, the phantom limb is not an aberrant phenomenon but

indicates a "phantom structure" as an attitude of existence that is catalyzed by a failure to

acknowledge a loss. Phantom limb not only signifies a failure on the part of the subject to

acknowledge the loss of an arm, but further, it is a failure to acknowledge the loss of a

world that was determined co-extensively with an attitude of the body. Given that the

phantom limb seemingly indicates the displacement of the present for a repetition of the

past, phantom engagements entail that we are not responsive to others as they present

themselves to us, but to past others who continue to be evoked and structure new

interactions. Unable or unwilling to completely give up the others who populate our past,

we continue to animate them in the attitudes with which we relate to others.

In analysis, this is the phenomenon of "transference" whereby the analyst

becomes, for the patient, the site of the return or reincarnation of an important relation

from the past. "As a rule," Freud writes, the analyst "is put in the place of one or other of

the patient's parents, his father or mother."[19] The patient acts out this relation,

transferring feelings and reactions that belong to the past relation to the analyst. In the

context of analysis, transference is ambivalent, comprising both positive and negative

attitudes toward the analyst. As long as it does not crystallize into a wholly negative

attitude, transference is an important part of therapy. By making the patient aware of the

operative transference of feelings that find their source in the patient's primordial object-

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[19] Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis,* 52.

attachments, transference is transformed from a mode of resistance to a transformative, therapeutic tool. No longer compelled to repeat the past, the patient is able to work through the past by way of the feelings and behaviors evoked by the analyst. In this way, the patient is able to liquidate the past and overcome the phantoms that overdetermine present situations.[20]

In non-analytical contexts such an awareness and liquidation of past attachments may never arrive as we lack the neutral intermediary of the analyst who is capable of bringing this pre-personal knowledge to consciousness. In other words, we do not know that we are interacting with phantoms, or rather, the paradoxical knowledge itself—that we, at the same time, know it and do not know it—is deferred, perhaps indefinitely. Interactions with phantom others or phantom environments are problematic because, as we have seen, they open onto a lost world and thus, they open onto phantom futures that have been foreclosed. We do not know which situations are lived possibilities of the present and which are the im-possibilities of a phantom future that haunt the present but do not belong to it. The past has the power to either arrest us in an eternal present comprised of its compulsive repetitions, or open onto a future that is open and indeterminate. Since it is always with the sedimentations of the past that we engage the world, the past will repeat in the future, but these will either be the unproductive, compulsive repetitions that foreclose possibilities for action or the creative, poetic

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[20] Transference is also an important part of the process which conditions the appearance of the elements that appear in dreams. By transferring highly charged but unconscious feelings and desires onto a seemingly unrelated dream-figure, the unconscious of the dreamer is able to bypass the censorship of the dream-ego and make its appearance in the dream albeit in a distorted form. In the interpretation of the dream, the unconscious drives at work in transference can similarly be brought to conscious awareness and worked through.

repetitions that build the world anew. The difference between these repetitions concerns the status of phantoms.

Deleuze on stuttering

To illustrate the conceptual difference between a phantom as a mechanical repetition and a phantom as a creative, poetic repetition, I make a brief detour through Deleuze's writings on language and stuttering. In the essay, "He Stuttered," Deleuze differentiates the bad from the great writer. The bad writer, attentive to the repetitions of their dialogical markers, substitutes "he said" for other voice intonations, "like 'he murmured,' 'he stammered,' 'he sobbed,' 'he giggled,' 'he cried,' 'he stuttered.'"[21] These substitutions modify pre-existing words through an affectation of speech; they do not affect language itself. The great writer—Deleuze points to Beckett, Melville, Kafka—is the one who does not need to write, "he stuttered", but instead makes the language stumble, tremble, and vibrate. Poetic speech, writes Deleuze, "makes stuttering an affect of language and not an affectation of speech."[22] Through the creative use of repetitions, familiar language becomes strange; the system of equivalencies is pushed toward disequilibrium. The writer makes the language grow like a rhizome from the middle toward the outside. Language stumbles toward the outside not through the use of "asignifying particles" but by the use of propositions and parentheses that make language bear the weight of its nested relations; or, through the stubborn use of substantive nouns

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[21] Deleuze, "He Stuttered," in *Essays Critical and Clinical.* 107.

[22] Ibid., 110.

that defers action and makes language dwell in the anticipatory anxiety of beginning.[23]

Making language stutter is not about using language to return to oneself through the recollection of memories or the formulation of opinions, nor is it about being recognized as a great writer. Deleuze writes, "when it is a matter of digging under the stories, cracking open the opinions, and reaching regions without memories, when the self must be destroyed, it is certainly not enough to be a 'great' writer. It is about using language to the limit, to the point of silence, to be dispossessed of oneself and become something other than a writer. In the same gesture, the great writer both destroys and recreates themselves and language.

The phantom limb stutters, but does it stutter like the bad or good writer? In other words, is it merely the signal of a malintegrated bodily schema, or is it the sign of a creative dispossession? It is my contention that the phantom limb stutters, and that this stuttering is the creative stuttering of the so-called great writer. Its quasi-presence does not indicate the failed substitution of a derivative bodily schema; it is not the sign of a failure or inability to mourn the past. Through the analyses of memory in the following section, I aim to demonstrate this. For now, it suffices to point to the encounter with the anonymous body that the phantom limbs make possible. The phantom limb binds the body affectively to possibilities that are no longer possibilities for the subject, but for one who could grasp, one who could touch. Through the repetitions of the past-for-someone, the phantom limb opens onto encounters with the anonymous, general existence that do not return the subject to themselves but are dispossessions of the self. Like stuttering, this is not a mere modification of speech or a body, but a modification of the signifying field that wends its way toward the outside, toward silence. For Deleuze, the outside toward

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[23] Ibid, 111.

which language stutters is an outside-within—an utterly foreign (minor) language that emerges from the (major) language itself.[24] Similarly, the limit of the body is an outside-within, what he calls a "body without organs." For Merleau-Ponty, the phantom limb is also directed toward an outside-within, and this is indicated when he points to a "latent intentionality." In his later writings, it is what he comes to understand as the unconscious.[25]

A phantom is a disruption of reversible flesh: I feel what I cannot see; I talk to the other who can no longer hear my words. Again, a phantom is not a pathological bodily phenomenon but gives us access to the ambivalent co-presence of conflicting attitudes that cannot be reached through reflection. Through the analysis of the phantom limb and its irruption of anonymous existence, we can situate the unconscious within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Unlike Freud, whose unconscious Merleau-Ponty charges with introducing "an I think behind the I think," the unconscious here is located within experience as the nonreflective, anonymous existence that subtends every perception, action, and hope for the future. Although it is beyond the reach of reflective consciousness, it is the movement by which reflection seeks what is sought, so we can say that the unconscious is both beyond and at the heart of reflective consciousness. In order to illustrate the dialectic between these two modalities of existence, Merleau-Ponty describes the realization of his love for another. It is neither the case that his love had, before his realization, been hidden from him (Freud) or transparent to him as something

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[24] On stammering and other creative uses of language, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* 97-106.

[25] In the summary to his final course at *Collège de France*, he writes, "The unconscious is feeling itself, since feeling is not the intellectual possession of "what" is felt, but a dispossession of ourselves in favor of it, an opening toward that which we do not have to think in order that we may recognize it." *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960,* 130.

he did not want to know (Sartre). Like love, the unconscious is the way he orients himself toward the world through an absent other. As he writes, love "is the movement by which I am turned toward someone, the conversion of my thoughts and of my behaviors…the love was lived—not known—from beginning to end."[26] Before it could be an object of reflective thought it was already there: lived in the anticipation he felt for the other which inspired anew the rhythm of his daily activities, and who became for him a fulcrum around which his actions, behaviors, and words gravitated. In the context of a burgeoning love, the body is oriented toward a world of possibilities of which I am not yet aware. With a phantom limb, part of me continues to hold onto what are no longer my existential possibilities. In both cases, the unconscious is not inaccessible to consciousness, but is the movement through which we are directed toward the world, a latent intentionality that organizes and signifies the perceptual field around our anticipation for an absent other.

As a latent intentionality, the unconscious, for Merleau-Ponty, is not *without* consciousness, but is another register of consciousness. Opposed to the activity of personal existence through which my actions and behaviors come to be organized around my goals and projects, Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes the unconscious in *Institution and Passivity* as passive, an "oneiric" consciousness that subtends waking consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty writes in the *Passivity* lectures, this is not an "I think behind the I think." It is not the case that "I think" the other so much as "I dream" them, and this "I dream" haunts the "I think," classifying its events and objects with its "acquired intersubjective significations."[27] While the time of personal existence is linear and progressive, the

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[26] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 400.

[27] Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity,* 157.

oneiric register of consciousness touches all times at once; there is no cleavage, no means of discerning a past presence from a present absence. Merleau-Ponty writes, "I perceive myself in others, I perceive others in myself, I am in contact with my entire past, I have no temporal location, and my entire past is maintained only as the horizon of this present, sedimented."[28] Thus, to be haunted by the feeling of a phantom limb is to be aware of the contact we have at all times with the past—contact that we live but do not know.

In summary, Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb depathologizes melancholia while situating the phantom limb as a melancholic response to loss. From the normative perspective of mourning, the subject experiencing the phantom limb is unable or unwilling to reactivate the sedimentations of the habit body that does not know that a loss has occurred. Through the analysis of the phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty uncovered the anonymous body of perceptual experience which is normally rendered invisible through its "organic repression" by personal existence. Although a phantom limb gives the subject access to the anonymous body, it does so at a cost. The co-presence of the present and the world that corresponds to the lost limb requires the arrest of personal time; the subject is suspended in an "eternal present," and enacts compulsive, empty repetitions of the past. This kind of experience can be incredibly disempowering in the context of oppressive institutions where a subject may feel haunted by the quasi-presence of possibilities that are systematically denied to them (that are not for me, but for someone). Without denying the often debilitating effects of phantom limbs or phantom worlds, I turn to Proustian involuntary memory and imagine the transformation of the pain of being haunted by the past into a vision that teaches us to see the world anew.

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[28] Ibid., 160.

Proust and the Phantoms of Involuntary Memory

In this section, I begin with a detour through Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time.* Proust offers one way of understanding the creative transformations that phantom limbs and melancholia, more generally, make possible. The following discussion attends to our relations with others, which Proust identities with anxiety as already haunted and only quasi-present. While these distances may alienate ourselves from others in life, these distances make possible a significant encounter with others in death. I focus on the relationship between Proust's narrator and his grandmother, whose death is one of the significant events in the young narrator's life. I follow the path the narrator's mourning takes and in doing so, I tie together the themes of absence, memory, and transformation that are essential to melancholy.

Perception, memory, and the frustrations of love

In *In Search of Lost Time,* Proust's narrator expresses again and again his anxiety over the absences of the others whom he loves. Although love desires to have the other completely, it is thwarted time and again by an absence of the other that persists even when they are present. Without full presence, the others are like phantoms, only "quasi-present." The phantom appearances of others apply not only to the memories of those whom we have lost, which bear only a slight resemblance to their former presence. Even the habits which mediate our everyday perceptions of others are already haunted by their absence. "Every habitual glance," writes Proust, "is a necromancy."[29] We prefigure the absence of others with the indifference with which we glance at loved ones and

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[29] Proust, *The Guermantes Way,* 184.

passersby, and we do so also with our loving attention. When we peer at another with a loving gaze, they undergo transformation. As the other comes into focus, they are transformed from a mere object into an object of desire. Through a loving gaze, we lose access to the other as they exist disentangled from our affections for them.

Proust's narrator recounts his desire to overcome one of the many phantoms that make up his social reality, that of his grandmother. Through his loving gaze he spies a painful separation from her prefigured in their encounters. As she would come into focus, his love for her would rush ahead of the encounter and seize her, transforming her into an object of his love. His love is derailed by an underlying narcissism that transforms the other into another I. Instead of seeing her wholly, completely, as a being whose life extends beyond his, he only has access to that of her which was entwined with his affections. It is this absence—of her existing without him—that constituted the withdrawal of her presence. Although he has imagined her—by herself, alone in her little country town—he writes, "I had pictured her as she was when she was with me, but eliminating myself without taking into account the effects on her of such an elimination."[30] In order to fulfill the demands of love, he imagines her, and makes present this person in their absence. But, as his imagination is driven by love, he cannot make present the absence he seeks: his grandmother disentangled from his affections.

Animating the narrator's last visit with his grandmother before the event of her death, is this desire to see her as she really is, existing without him. After hurling a set of uncharacteristically cruel words her way, he crosses the threshold of the room where she is sitting. For a moment, before she recognizes his presence, he catches a sight of her

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[30] Proust, *Guermantes Way,* 183.

thinking of him, allowing him to become a "spectator of his own absence."[31] "For a

moment," the narrator recounts,

> I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her
> save in my own soul…saw, sitting on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-
> faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, day-dreaming, letting her slightly crazed
> eyes wander over a book, an overburdened woman whom I did not
> know.[32]

With eyes full neither of love nor a stranger's indifference, the narrator disrupts the

habitual glance of the natural attitude and with it, the phantom appearance of his

grandmother. No longer a phantom, he ceases to be separated from the private world that

would withdraw in their encounters. But, he admits that he sees of her "what eyes ought

never to behold,"[33] namely, a world in which he no longer exists.

The fulfillment of his desire to attain the full presence of his grandmother and

relieve himself of the anxious thoughts of their separation, seemed to coincide with this

encounter with her in his absence: a scene that preempted the event of her death. And yet,

even after the event of her actual death, he continues to look for her in the weight of his

suffering. Although he senses her absence, this loss does not coincide with the feeling of

her absence. Given the depth of feeling he had for her, he finds himself "astonished and

remorseful" at having missed her so little.[34] Although he was with her when she died, and

he can say to himself that she is gone, it takes time to experience the event of her loss.

The "calendar of facts," he writes, is so often prevented from corresponding to the

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[31] Ibid., 185.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 184.

[34] Proust, *Sadam and Gomorrah*, 210.

"calendar of feelings."[35] He continues to make her quasi-present in his recollections of her but finds nothing in them that "resembled my grandmother…I retained within me only in a potential state the memory of what she had been."[36] While in life, the narrator strove to make his grandmother fully present; an aim that was driven onward by his love but also thwarted by the same love. After her death, he continues to strive for her presence and reaches vainly into the past, looking for the memory that can recreate her living presence.

In *Institution and Passivity*, Merleau-Ponty writes of the futility of voluntary memory to recollect the past that reflection seeks. The past is there with us, like the unconscious and love, it is the "pulsation of desire" that structures my worldly engagements, that inspires my words no less than the rhythm of my daily activities. As Proust finds in the futility with which he tried to find his grandmother in his memories of her, the existence of the past that is there with us cannot be reached through memory which either preserves the past as it was, rendering it passive and immobile, or continually reconstructs the past as it was for me, affirming the privilege of the present and active power of the subject. When we recollect the past through reflection, we are allowed only a small window onto the past, like a single coin extricated from "a treasure acquired one at a time."[37] Although we are accustomed to recollect the past from the perspective of the present, Merleau-Ponty writes of a "double current of memory," a bi-directional force that progresses from the present to the past and the past to the present.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity,* 198.

The past that we reach toward from the present is a past that has been instituted as past, thus we reach toward a past already directed toward the present which it has become. As instituted, the past is preserved for us, continuous with the present with which it shares significance. But as instituted, what we recollect of the past is not the past as it was in *its* former presence, but the past as it is in *our* current present. What we recollect are the remains after the loss of its presence, but we cannot reach before the moment of loss, which "is the presence memory seeks."[38] Although we live our co-existence with the past that is there with us, the reflective thought of recollection recollects the past that is there *for* us. The futility of voluntary memory is akin to the futility with which the narrator attempts to perceive the beloved in their full presence. The narrator both perceives and recollects with his desire, which means that the other comes into focus as already entangled with the narrator's affections. There is an underlying narcissism to voluntary memory, which entails that we only recollect that which concerns us, that is, what bears a demonstrable resemblance to the present situation (Bergson). Although what he recollects is a memory dated prior to the event of her death, the memory is imbued with her absence from the present, and he is unable to recollect the presence he seeks.

We know that the past is there *with* us when it emerges suddenly, without volition, and disrupts the sedimentations of the natural attitude. During these moments, which Proust identified as involuntary memories, it is not reflection but the body that remembers the past. While reflection recollects the remains of the lost presence, the body remembers what memory forgets, whole and in-tact. This forgetfulness of the past is not repression and it is not absolute forgetting, "as if the past had never been lived." What we forget are the sensible qualities that are deemed from the point of view of the present to

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[38] Ibid.

be trivial and insignificant details of lived experience: "a blatter of rain…the smell of an unaired room…the first crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate."[39] With no relation to utility, these are the details of the past that were there with me but, constituting the general atmosphere of my personal existence, they did not concern me; they did not come into focus as an object of desire and stayed in the background as the general milieu. It is this atmosphere of the past that the body remembers and that cannot be recollected through reflective thinking. Since this past atmosphere never came into focus as an object of desire or utility, this is the past that does not concern me. Rather, it is there for me, wholly preserved, and capable of being encountered through the body's remembrance. This is not the past of my personal existence, but the past that belongs to the anonymous, general existence that makes up the horizon of my life.

At this point, I want to highlight two limits or aporias that were approached in the preceding discussion. First, there is the aporia of loving perception: it is with a loving gaze that we turn our attention to the other in order to really see them, but the more we love the other, the less able we are to see them as they are in themselves, as a being that exists apart from our gaze. The presence sought in loving perception can only be achieved when there is no longer a loving I to perceive. Second, the aporia of memory: the presence that memory seeks can only be attained when it is no longer sought. For both, the other's presence requires a self-dispossession such that the other becomes present on the condition that I am absent. In what follows, I return to Proust in order to further differentiate involuntary from voluntary memory and introduce the kind of work that it entails.

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[39] Ibid., 197.

The "petite madeleine" as involuntary memory

In the midst of another cold, sorrowful day, Proust writes of an "exquisite pleasure" that runs through his body when he brings a petite madeleine dipped in warm tea to his lips. Although this pleasure is catalyzed by the present sensation, he quickly notes that the pleasure is not caused by the sensation; the essence of this pleasure cannot be found by interrogating the tea or the madeleine but is to be found within him, "in the very depths of my being." As this pleasure is evoked by a present reality that it does not correspond to, he assumes that it must be the repetition of a past event; in vain he looks in his memory for the "corresponding memory-image." Intellectual routes capable of recovering a memory-image,[40] are incapable of recovering the past that the narrator seeks, which is a past that has never been lived. Describing the futility of the intellect to recover a forgotten past, Proust writes "the intellect seeks but what is sought is the seeker itself, so one cannot seek, one must create what is sought."[41] Proust notes the courage that is required to inquire into the essence of the pleasure and create what cannot be sought. "One must look into the abyss," he writes, "and have the courage not to return to present anxieties or future worries."[42] By turning toward the past while refusing the tendency to either render it intelligible as a memory-image or preserve it in the present in the form of

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[40] The narrator describes the intellectual routes he took to recover the memory-image. He repeats the sensuous encounter, but the second taste is merely a bad copy of the first. He retraces his thoughts and finds the same state "illuminated by no new light." He clears his mind of any extraneous concerns and focuses intensely on the nature of the pleasure. He feels something starting to rise within him, not an image but something immaterial that he feels only as the echo of a great distance traversed. He "essays the task ten times over." Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 63.

[42] Ibid.

our concerns or anxieties, it becomes possible to remember an originary past that belongs to mythic time.

The originary past does not emerge because of the narrator's decision to turn toward it. After his efforts, it is the memory which suddenly "revealed itself."[43] Like the transfiguration that takes place between the person who wants to sleep and the sleeper, one can invite the event through the decision to sleep, but the decision does not suffice to bring about the event. In order to sleep, writes Merleau-Ponty, "I lie in bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes, breathe slowly…I call forth the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper."[44] I make a conscious decision to sleep, to welcome an event whose arrival depends on my ability to forget the decision just made. I do not choose to sleep so much as I entreaty myself to sleep and give myself over to the anonymous dimension of bodily existence that I will again forget at the second hint of morning light. Since it is not I who dream, but the one in me who dreams, it is not I who has access to and remembers the dream in the morning. The more that I search for the dream, the further I find myself from the possibility of recalling it. Like the dream, the memory that corresponds to the "exquisite pleasure," reveals itself in a moment of relaxation to the passive, unreflective thinking that subtends the activity of consciousness and approximates that of the dreaming body. To bring this to waking consciousness, it is not a matter of seeking its adequate expression in the present, but of creating oneself through the (inadequate) expression of a pure, originary past. The memory that reveals itself to the narrator is not a single scene of his childhood in

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 166.

Combray, but the whole town—its streets, lights, colors and characters. No longer serving as the background of his recollections, he is again inspired by the very atmosphere of his childhood, a forgotten past that was not "in me, but is, is essence, me."[45]

The involuntary memory is not merely the pleasure that one feels when the present sensation recalls a lost past. Such pleasures we feel when we encounter the smell of a room long forgotten, or when we hear, after many years, a song in which we inscribed the time we shared with a friend, or the name of a small town where we spent a summer but have not since returned. These pleasures disrupt the sedimentations of the natural attitude, wresting us from the present toward something as of now unnamable, something forgotten that is itself forgotten. In the wake of this pleasure, we may be able to recall the room to which the smell refers and locate the source of the pleasure in the past. In locating the source of the pleasure in the past, we transform the pleasure into one rooted in nostalgia for the past "as it was for us," tinged with an unproductive longing to return. Or, assuming that we can no longer recall the source of the taste that is familiar but doesn't concern us, we fail to embark upon the interrogation of its origin and return to the world of our many concerns, satisfied with this brief respite. In the first case, we too quickly classify the pleasure under a specific voluntary memory, stamping it with a time and date. In the second case, we remain firmly rooted in the present and turn our attention away from the strange pleasure too quickly. In both cases, we turn away from the pleasure itself and in doing so, we turn away from the possibility of creation that lie within these caesurae.

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[45] Proust, *Swann's Way,* 61.

The creative possibilities of involuntary memory require the work that Merleau-Ponty explored in *The Visible and the Invisible* as "interrogation." To interrogate the pleasure means disrupting the tendency to always locate the pleasure in the past or the present. The pleasure is itself a question posed from one that knows toward one that does not know. To stay with the pleasure means staying with the question and refusing to situate oneself as one the knower through a response. Instead, the question is posed by one who does not know toward a vision that knows everything.

With interrogation, we can return to the question of the courage involuntary memories require. To stay with the feeling of a lost outside-inside, constituted by the traces of something absent, one must be willing to feel themselves absent, must invite this forgotten past by imitating what is absent. Typically, I find myself everywhere, located in the world of things that exist in relation to me and return me continually to myself through our interactions (flesh). Since the self that is sought is absent, I must work to suspend this reunion: I withdraw. By turning away from the world of my present concerns and suspending the weight of social existence, I turn away from the world and others that served as the occasions for my self-presence. Dissolving into the anonymous dimension of existence like a final flickering of light, the one who stays with the interrogation of what is absent is like the one who gives themselves over to sleep, undoing the threads of their personal existence for something that is without assurances: there is no promise that what is absent will arrive; if it arrives, there is no promise that it will be recognized, or that one will be better off for its having arrived.

The work of involuntary memory entails a withdrawal from the world. This withdrawal is neither a rejection of the present world nor a sign of the nostalgia that

displaces the present for the past. Merleau-Ponty writes of the tension that afflicts the melancholic who withdraws from the world. The patient with melancholy who "settles into death and, so to speak, makes it his home, still make use of the structures of being in the world in order to do so, and borrow from the world just what is required of being in order to negate it."[46] It is not that the melancholic is in bad faith, lying to herself about her dependence on the world she apparently rejects. In order to preserve what has been lost, which has no corresponding reality, the melancholic suspends the relations to the world that continually bring her back to herself. To preserve what is lost she must risk becoming lost herself.

What is to be gained through continued interrogation of the strange pleasure is a truly forgotten, pure past. What returns is not the single image of Combray afforded by voluntary memory, wrested from the fullness of time. It is the whole of Combray in its fullness, the past as it had never been lived before, namely, as fully present. Along with the atmosphere of his childhood returns the embodiment of his younger, forgotten self, who was on the threshold of another life left unpursued. Like a traumatic event, what returns in the involuntary memory is something incomplete. From the present the past is rewritten, not as "dangerous" but "desirous." What returns through the work of involuntary memory is the desire of this life, whose accompanying pleasure is able to cut through the anxieties of the narrator's present in which he despairs of ever becoming a writer. By locating the pleasure not in the past but in the desire of the past, he does not root the pleasure in a past self as it was and has been forgotten. He finds himself in his desire to become something else, and it is this transformative potential of existence that

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[46] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 306.

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has been forgotten in his depression. While trauma closes the future, involuntary memory opens the future by drawing inspiration from a forgotten past.

"Bootstraps at Balbec": completion of a death deferred

In light of what I am calling the work of involuntary memory, we can now return to the narrator's experience of mourning his grandmother, which culminates in the involuntary memory he has of her a year after her death.

According to Merleau-Ponty, Proust's mourning of his grandmother bears the same structure as that of the phantom limb. He writes,

> The amputee senses his leg, as I can sense vividly the existence of a friend who is, nevertheless, not here before my eyes. He has not lost his leg because he continues to allow for it, just as Proust can certainly recognize the death of his grandmother without yet losing her to the extent that he keeps her on the horizon of his life.[47]

We recall that mourning, according to Freud, is an entirely conscious process, one that begins at the event of the other's death, and consists in untying oneself (decathexis) to the lost other by resignifying one's memories, hopes, and expectations with the fact of their death. As a result of this process, which occurs in the context of a community, the mourner can renew their presence to oneself, others, and the world. Melancholy on the other hand is an unconscious process that refuses the mourner's renunciation of the other and instead disavows the world that no longer bears the possibility of co-presence with the lost other. Through the phantom limb, which is recognized as concomitant with the subject's inability to come to terms with the loss, Merleau-Ponty provides an embodied account of melancholy that attends to the complex nonlinear interactions between the

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[47] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 83.

subject and world that is misunderstood as Freudian disavowal. Although the loss is a past event, insofar as the subject is not conscious of the loss (their habit body does not know it has occurred), this event is not behind them in time, but in front of them, on the horizon of the subject's perceptual field as a situation to be taken up. When the subject takes up this situation which finds its source in the past, the nonmetaphysical past is retrospectively modified, transformed from a contingent past to a necessary one: "it had to be the case that the loss of x occurred," or, "The reason for my suffering is the loss of x."

Like the subject with the phantom limb, Proust knows that he has lost his grandmother as a being in the world but he has not yet lost her insofar as he continues to allow for her. As a being on the horizon of his life, his desire for an encounter with her, this absent other, continues to organize and signify his perceptual field. Although common wisdom tells us that the event of another's death marks irrevocably the difference between life/death and presence/absence, these distinctions were already at-play, structuring their interactions and his recollections of her. The young narrator, we recall, despairs of the death prefigured in his grandmother's life, of the absence that haunts her presence. Instead of her death occurring at the completion of her life, I claim that the event of her death occurs before her actual death when he peers at her with his strange indifference. Not behind him in the past, this event itself was deferred, laid before him at the horizon of his experience as an event to come.

Describing the narrator's involuntary memory, Proust writes,

I bent down slowly and cautiously, to take off my boots, trying to master my pain. But scarcely had I touched the topmost button than my chest

swelled, filled with an unknown, divine presence, I was shaken with sobs, tears streamed from my eyes.[48]

In this moment, the present sensation is united to the past sensation of his grandmother unlacing his boots many years ago in Balbec. Through this encounter with the same sensation, an involuntary memory of his grandmother's face is evoked: the "tender, preoccupied, disappointed face of my grandmother." It is the same face that he had spied upon, the face of the woman who had been, for the first time, disentangled from his affection; the face of the woman who did not concern him. Through this sensation, he finds his grandmother present—not in the partial way in which he habitually encountered her in life or recollected her in death—but as a "living reality," fully present in her absence from him. In contrast to the strange indifference with which he first encountered this face, a year later his love again wants to rush ahead of the encounter and seize her. It was only in the "wild desire to fling myself into her arms…that I became conscious that she was dead."[49] Unable to reach her in her absence, his love opens onto the untraversable distance that separates—him from her, the lost world to which they were co-present from the present reality—and, for the first time, he finds himself undone by her loss. The intentional threads that bound him to her and to the world they shared are broken.

What returns in the involuntary memory is the desire of a past self, and it is this return of an old desire that the narrator requires to become conscious of the present fact of his grandmother's death. I parse this out in two directions in order to emphasize the

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[48] Proust, *Sadam and Gomorrah*, 210.

[49] Ibid.

114

nonlinear temporality of the involuntary memory (Afterwardsness) and the missing subject of the sensation.

First, given that it is the *same* sensation first encountered in the past and now in the present, we can say that the past and present co-exist in the involuntary memory. It is not the same moment (the past is not the present) but it is the same sensation traversing two moments given in simultaneity. As simultaneous, the two now's coincide while maintaining the distance necessary to ensure that they are discernible as two distinct now's. This is in contrast to the way that a former embodiment can be relived in the repetition of a traumatic experience. Catalyzed by the repetition of the same sensation in the present that was encountered in a past, dangerous situation, the subject's present existence is displaced by the former embodiment's re-emergence. Although the subject may know that the present is not the past, that this situation does not bear the same danger as that of the past situation, the body does not know it. Like the subject with the phantom limb who continues to hold onto and be called by a world of manipulable things that can no longer be grasped, the person reliving a trauma continues to hold onto a past world in anticipation of a past danger that is still to come. Between the two moments there is not here simultaneity, but the displacement of the present for the past. Since there is no distinction felt between the past and present embodiments, there is between these moments, no possibility for communication and exchange. The simultaneity of past-present illustrated in involuntary memories indicates a double current of memory that flows from the past to the present and from the present to the past. As the two moments exist simultaneously, it is not just the case that the past is occurring alongside the present, but the present is occurring alongside the past, which is to say, in the future it will have

been the case that this future present was occurring alongside the past. It was there, alongside the past moment, haunting it like a "halo of preexistence." Others whom we love are haunted by this halo of preexistence that is, from the point of the present, an existence that precedes it.

Second, recall that through touching the other, I return to myself as both toucher and touched. This reversibility with the other, this mutual participation in flesh, is lost with their loss. The desire to return to myself through the encounter with the other is a longing left unfulfilled. When the narrator bends down to unlace his boots and is flooded with the lost world of Balbec, there is both an impossible encounter with the other and the return of himself as toucher and touched. The sensation of the involuntary memory, as we have said, announces the return of a noninstituted past—the general atmosphere of a past world as well as the unfulfilled wishes of the desiring body. As a child in Balbec, the narrator's grandmother would bend down to unlace his boots, and between the activity of her unlacing and the passivity of being unlaced, there emerged a unique sensation, cut across their two compossible bodies. In the involuntary memory, it is not her unlacing his boots, it is the narrator unlacing his own, and yet, the result is the same sensation. What he experiences in fact is her touching him through his own touch. And yet, it is a touch that cannot be returned. Although he desires "to fling himself wildly into her arms," he is touched by what he cannot touch. Like the madeleine, the involuntary memory of his grandmother catalyzed by the touch of his hand on his boots revealed to him that the grandmother for whom he longed was "in essence, me." All of the anxieties his past self experienced at the thought of being separate from her vanished as it was revealed the depth at which she was lodged inside of him: at the horizon of his experience.

116

The involuntary memory allows Proust's narrator to re-read the past and in re-reading, to re-create the past as it could not have been lived, namely, as really present. It is the full presence of the other love that seeks: to have the other completely so as to secure a foundation for oneself. Tending toward the past from which it came and toward the future it will become, the lived present is haunted by two absences: the past and future that love seeks in vain from the other. While the quasi-presence of the other evokes anxiety when lived for the first time, what returns the second time is pleasure. What returns through the body's remembrance is the desire for the other without the anxieties that characterized the initial pursuit.

The first time the object of his desire was extrinsic to him—his mother, grandmother, Albertine, the writer he wanted to become. The second time, the beloved other is not understood as a being extrinsic to the self. "It is, in essence, me" means that the beloved other in whose desire the self is located is revealed to be oneself. What one desires the second time is not the other but desire itself; one desires desire. No longer mediating the relationship to oneself as the object of desire, the other as a worldly, extrinsic being dies for the first time. In the desire to return the touch that touched him, the narrator submits for the first time the beloved other to the reality principle and is undone by the fact of her death. Now, the work of mourning can begin.

At the beginning of this chapter, I claimed that the analysis would bear upon mourning and our relation to the past. What remains of the other in death is the "other-within" that Proust's narrator encounters time and again with each involuntary memory. The other-within returns us to Merleau-Ponty's unconscious. It is not the second subject of the Freudian unconscious, but an anonymous general subject constituted by the traces

of those whom we love. At the heart, animating our sedimented habits, are the people and places we have loved and lost.

The phantom world that the phantom limb is affectively bound to is not just the world as it is "for someone" but for someone who was loved. To maintain an affective closeness to this world keeps what is lost close, and locates the absent others at the horizon of our experience. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "we still allow for the other." It is not that I become the other who is lost, but I incorporate their way of having a world. I adopt their habits. Although the narrator was lacing his own boots, he nevertheless incorporates her activity and takes on her way of lacing his shoes. Doing this makes possible an encounter with the absent other through an involuntary memory. In this encounter, the other is encountered at both the horizon or limit of possible experience and immanent to every experience, situated in the heart that animates it.

In this section, I followed Proust's narrator in his mourning in order to illuminate the creative possibilities of melancholy. The phantom world that the phantom limb is affectively bound to is the world as it is for someone who was loved. To maintain an affective closeness to this world keeps what is lost close, reachable, and locates the absent others at the horizon of our experience. Following Merleau-Ponty's words, "we still allow for the other." In my melancholy, it is not that I become the other who is lost and identify with their fate, but I incorporate their way of having a world, their style of being, their desire. Although the narrator was lacing his own boots at the irruption of the involuntary memory, he has incorporated his grandmother's activity, her way of having a world, and encounters her touch through his own. When we identify with the other's activity in the strange delayed time of melancholia, we do not have to make the decision

118

to remain with the phantoms of the other or to "let the dead bury the dead." As Proust reminds us, what had been lost and recovered in the involuntary memory, the "precious essence…was not in me, it *was* me."[50]

Conclusion

In this chapter I called for a re-evaluation of melancholia and phantom limbs based on a reading of Proust's involuntary memories. Through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the phantom limb, I situated melancholia within the body for which the present is superimposed by a general, anonymous past "for someone." For Merleau-Ponty, the co-presence of the present and past as two conflicting attitudes is not a pathological sign of a failed repression. Rather, the phantom limb reveals the anonymous existence that subtends our waking life and surrounds it as the waking body's perceptual horizon. In the wake of the loss, both the melancholic and the person feeling persistent sensations of an absent limb are affectively bound to the world in ways that exceed their own bodily capabilities.

Instead of reading this as an unproductive nostalgia for the past, I uncovered in Proust's involuntary memory a way to imagine its poetic and creative possibilities. Melancholy, like a phantom limb, is an affect of intimacy with a lost world, a bodily attentiveness to the absences that are felt by the narrator in the sadness and sorrow of his lived experience. Attentive to what has been lost, melancholy is attentive to the possibilities that belong to the past; without being mourned, futural possibilities that belong to a past world continue to populate the present. Melancholy becomes "creative"

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[50] Proust, *Swann's Way,* 60.

when these possibilities again belong to the subject's present. This does not mean that the subject chooses to withdraw from the world to dwell in nostalgia (although this is a possibility); it means writing what is absent into the present, to make the world account for the weight of what has been lost. Melancholy becomes creative for the narrator when he makes the decision to write the work, and through writing, to materially transfigure those absences which were the ongoing source of his unhappiness.

In the next chapter, I read Walter Benjamin and critical theorists, Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch, to develop an account of the work that belongs to melancholy. Melancholy's insight is tied to its attention to decay and loss, and the material transformation of this insight has political implications. While the work of melancholy can be oriented toward emancipatory ends, it can also be nihilistic and reactionary. It is toward the illumination of the differences between emancipatory and nihilistic melancholy that the following chapter is directed. In Chapters V and VI, I develop an account of melancholy work as "mourning-writing" to explore what is at stake in melancholy's "emancipatory ends."

CHAPTER IV

BENJAMIN, FRANKFURT SCHOOL CRITICAL THEORY AND THE

AMBIVALENCE OF MELANCHOLY'S WORK

> So this is what it means to live? This is how it looks from inside when one
> has become what one saw before one as a child or youth?... Never to be
> there: so this is the "real" life of this woman, this man; they were still
> twenty and that was their entire fulfillment? When does one really live,
> when is one consciously present to oneself in the vicinity of one's
> moments? As urgently as this can be felt, however, it always slips away
> again, the fluidity, darkness of the respective moment.[1]

In this chapter, I develop an account of the labors of mourning and melancholy

that draws on the works of Karl Marx and Marxist critical theorists, Theodor Adorno,

Walter Benjamin, and Ernst Bloch. Both mourning and melancholy are responses to loss

and activities through which we cope with the wounds of capitalist alienation. Following

Marx in his early writings, in capitalism we are alienated through our laboring-activity

from nature, ourselves, other persons, and the species in general—both past and future

generations. The machinery of capitalism leaves each dismembered and isolated and thus

produces our alienation. The wounds of alienation are not always felt in the pain and

misery of labor—although this is a lived reality for many. Rather they are felt in the

strange feeling of homesickness for a place we have never known. Something is missing

from the present—or is it missing from only me? We are looking for something but we

do not know what we hope to find. We feel our alienation indirectly in the myriad ways

we move away from an emptiness and disconnection that lingers. To cover over the

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[1] Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia,* 188.

emptiness, we consume some things, become absorbed by other things, fulfill the obligations to others that keep us tenuously connected to them and to our own reflections.

Melancholy is developed in this chapter as a laboring-activity and practical response to alienation. While mourning and melancholy are typically understood as responses to extraordinary events of loss, such events illuminate what are otherwise banal, everyday ways of responding to capitalist alienation. Mourning works to overcome alienation by healing over the wounds of being dismembered: renewing ties to the social, and reaffirming its values. It is an ongoing, constant work. Melancholy *works* differently, it traces the wounds of the barren present and takes a longer path through the past and its unfulfilled remains. If Marx is right and it is true that we are already dismembered and distanced in our worldly relations, then melancholia is a mood that unmasks our present situation. Instead of seeing the melancholic as one who is willing a misguided and dangerous detachment (through the failure to secure values and reaffirm social ties), it is rather the case that the melancholic is tired of having to remake the world. They instead remain present with the fatigue and weariness of the body that is continually asked to renew and reproduce its social connections. A melancholic subject exacerbates capitalist alienation by dwelling in the feeling of distance from the social. With melancholy, one makes a home at the heart of reification.

In the first section, I explore Marx's notion of alienated labor, and focus on the capitalist alienation from nature. Through the transformation of nature into the world of commodities, we become alienated from nature, and this is felt as the loss of nature's distance—its alterity and authority. In the place of this otherness is the felt proximity of commodities, which are familiar, reproducible, and capable of being exchanged. What

emerges in this discussion is a dialectic of nature and history that will be further developed with the help of Benjamin, Adorno, and Bloch.

In the second section, I develop key aspects of Benjamin's account of melancholy. First, I take up Benjamin's notion of the aura and read this with Marx's account of "nature." The aura is that element of the work or art tied to the work's singular existence, its nature. The technological reproducibility of the work of art erodes the experience of the work's uniqueness and authority. I present Benjamin's melancholy as an attention to the decaying aura, and this attention to decay as a phenomenological experience of capitalist alienation. What is lost in relation to the work of art—its aura—is not limited to art, but reveals what is lost in our alienation from sensible objects and other persons, namely, their singular, irreducible presence. In poets like Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin finds a model for transforming loss into something material that can be shared with others. By transforming loss into something socially useful, the labors of melancholy are put to work.

In the third section, I take up Adorno's critique of Benjamin's melancholy. While Adorno lauds melancholic insight for its dialectical gaze upon historical objects, melancholy risks resolving into a dangerous inwardness and erecting truths that are disconnected from the social whole. In the fourth section, I focus on Benjamin's political writings on art and aesthetics to offer a response that highlights the ambivalence of melancholy's work. Melancholy can be put to work in ways that are emancipatory or nihilistic and reactionary. When melancholy turns nihilistic it resolves into the inwardness that concerned Adorno. In Benjamin's terms, the activity of those who he called "left-wing melancholics" does not aim its destructiveness at alienation to transform

the material conditions that sustain misery. Instead, misery becomes a source of pleasure. When this melancholy is put to work, it produces an object of consumption and aestheticizes the political. When melancholy is put to work in an emancipatory way, it is self-destructive; it aims its destructive force at the conditions of the work's production as the cause of melancholy. I situate this distinction in Ernst Bloch's call for a multi-level dialectics that can account for the emancipatory and reactionary potential of melancholy and other nonsynchronous ways of life.

Marx and alienated labor

When Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* were published in 1932, another Marx emerged, a "young Marx," whose later economic analyses were revealed at their origin to be driven by humanist concerns, in particular, the desire for humanity's self-actualization. In this text, Marx offers a presentation of alienation that he borrows from Hegel and Feuerbach. For Hegel, the alienation of self-consciousness denotes the fundamental opposition defining the intellect's struggle for self-actualization. As long as self-consciousness has not yet attained its essential nature as spirit, things are not really as they seem to be. Self-consciousness is alienated from the Idea in nature and in its laboring activity. Like Hegel, Marx begins with the centrality of alienation as fundamental to the situation of human life. Marx offers a critique that historicizes self-consciousness, wresting its journey of self-actualization from the realm of spirit, and offering instead an economic, materialist interpretation. For Marx, alienation is not a tendency of human nature but a historical phenomenon that emerges with the particular

124

material conditions that belong to a capitalist economic system. The intellectual activity of consciousness is embodied through the laboring-activity of the worker, and it is through that activity that the capitalist worker comes to be alienated from nature, the objects of production, other persons, and the species in general (both past and future generations).

In "Alienated Labour," Marx chastises Hegel and modern political economists, in part, for the naiveté with which they understand labor and its relation to property. Marx writes that Hegel's standpoint is that of the modern political economists insofar as he views labor as the "self-confirming essence of man." They see only the "positive side of labor, not its negative side," and labor is understood only as "abstract mental labor." In their analyses, they reach abstractly into the "primordial, nebulous abyss"—a "state of nature." John Locke, for example, spies a state of nature in which persons share the world communally but own themselves individually. What a person takes from the world for themselves becomes their own. When an individual mixes their labor with nature what is subsequently produced is their private property. Because objects are not only produced for the sake of one's own survival, but also for the preservation of the community, labor becomes a way of creating goods that satisfy individual and social needs, and thus, a way of connecting the individual to the social whole.

Instead of reaching towards the origin of private property and a mythical state of nature, Marx begins his analysis of private property with an "actual economic fact," namely, the *misery* of the workers who everyday are compelled to "mix their labor with nature." Laboring-activity is life-activity.[2] It is through labor-activity that the individual

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[2] Marx, *Selected Writings,* 63.

125

expresses and affirms themselves and the species. In capitalism, the laboring-activity of the worker is transformed into a means of denying themselves and humanity. This continual denial is the source of the worker's misery and alienation. On the impoverishment of the worker, Marx writes,

> The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity.[3]

On the one hand, the worker is producing the social world of objects capable of satisfying the needs of themselves and the community, and thus, producing wealth in the form of socially-useful goods and commodities. On the other hand, the wealth the worker produces is correlated with the diminution of his own wealth, as well as the devaluation of himself and the social world.

The necessary effect of taking part in the capitalist process of production is the alienation of the worker through their laboring-activity. Contra the political economists, private property is not the product of free laborers; it is private property that produces alienated labor and worker exploitation. Beginning with the situation of the worker, Marx goes on to show that capitalist production produces the many-sided alienation of the subject: from nature, themselves, species-life, and other persons. In what follows, I focus my discussion on the alienation of the worker from nature. It is this aspect of alienation that will emerge in the next section through Benjamin's concept of the aura.

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[3] Ibid., 59.

Marx defines "nature" in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* as "the sensuous external world."[4] Marx's materialist conception of nature begins with Feuerbach' sensualism, which wrests philosophical thinking from Hegel's idealism and situates it in the materiality of nature and bodies. Humans are a part of sensuous nature, they are "sensuous objects,"[5] and it is towards the reaffirmation of the unity of humans and nature that philosophical thinking is directed. As Alfred Schmidt explains, Marx goes beyond Feuerbach insofar as the unity imagined by Feuerbach is a romantic unity of humanity with a passive, unhistorical pre-human nature.[6] "What Feuerbach described as the unity of man and nature related only to the romantically transfigured fact that man arose out of nature, and not to man's socio-historically mediated unity with nature in industry." Nature is not an idea to be understood abstractly,[7] nor is it the ahistorical background of human activity. Because nature for Marx is the "material of human activity," nature is historical (dialectical), mediated by the activity of human subjects.

Nature is the "means of life" for the human being in two senses. For the individual, nature is the means necessary to sustain life as a natural, physical subject. As a natural being, one needs the shelter provided by trees and the water provides by rivers in order to sustain and reproduce human life. Human beings need nature to exist and this dependency is expressed through practical, social activity which transforms the "stuff" of nature. As a worker, nature takes on a new significance as it enters the production process. Nature is the material with which the worker labors: it is the wood that goes into

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[4] Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 73.

[5] Ibid., 207.

[6] Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx,* 27.

[7] Marx writes, "rigidly separated from man, [nature] is nothing" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 217). As quoted in Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx,* 30.

the construction of a chair, the metal that serves as the scaffolding of a building. Nature is

material transformed by practical social activity, but the end it serves is now mediated by

the worker's relations of production: it is the material necessary for the worker to be able

to reproduce their existence a worker. If there were no trees, there would be no job for the

worker to build chairs, no wages for the worker to exchange with their labor. The worker

needs nature so that they can continue to exist as a worker, and indirectly, to continue to

exist as a natural being.

The worker needs the nature as material to produce goods and commodities.

Because the worker enters the production process owning nothing but their labor-

power—neither the raw materials, tools, nor machinery—the objects once produced do

not belong to the worker. They do not belong to the worker and, additionally, they are not

for the worker. The value of the products necessarily exceed the value of the worker's

wages, and so, the worker does not consume what they produce. Not only external to the

worker, they stand against the worker as "a strange alien power."[8] Every time the worker

uses nature as a worker, nature is transformed from the sensuous external world into the

alien world of commodities. Every time nature is used to maintain one's existence as a

worker, the worker is depriving themselves of the means of their subsistence as a

physical subject. As Marx writes, "[i]t is only as a worker that he continues to maintain

himself as a physical subject, and that it is only as a physical subject that he is a worker."[9]

The worker's relationship to nature reveals a contradiction of capitalism: in order

to survive, the worker destroys the means necessary to survive. Despite the fact that "man

is part of nature," the result of the commodification of nature and labor that takes place in

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[9] Marx, *Selected Writings,* 62.

the capitalist process of production is the estrangement of the worker from the natural world, which appears in an abstract dissimulated fashion as the world of commodities. Georg Lukàcs coined the term "second nature" to describe the world of reified social relations that results from the development of the commodity as the "universal category of society."[10] Nature in the commodity-form appears passive, unreflective, entirely historical. Although nature is mediated by practical social activity, and still bears an independent existence, in the commodity-form, it is the independence of nature that is forgotten. The concrete, social character of labor is erased in the commodity-form and consequently, nature loses its concrete character and independent existence. Nature appears close, familiar, entirely mastered by labor-activity; it is this appearance that constitutes our alienation from nature. Alienation entails a withdrawal from nature as something that has an existence independent from human social activity, and a forgetting of this distance.

Benjamin's melancholy

The aura and its decay

In this section, I begin by elucidating Walter Benjamin's of the aura. The aura designates the experience that is lost in the encounter with a work of art when it is wrested from the realm of tradition through its technological reproducibility. Benjamin's aura is often taken up as an aesthetic category that refers to the features of traditional art (authority, authenticity, uniqueness) that stand in an antithetical relation to the productive

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[10] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 86.

forces, the development of which is concurrent with the aura's decay. The decay of the aura marks the felt experience of the loss that is concomitant with the development of the productive forces. Rather than limit the auratic experience to works of art,[11] I approach the decay of the aura as a melancholic experience, which extends to all "sensuous objects," including other persons. What is revealed in the aura's decay is the loss of the temporal complexity and thickness of the present. This is the sense in which I understand the capitalist alienation from nature: the temporal complexity and thickness of the present is supplanted by the spatial proximity of commodities, and of subjects as commodities.

For Benjamin, the alienation from nature can be grasped phenomenologically as a loss of aura. Benjamin explores the concept of the aura in his 1931 text, "Little History of Photography."[12] In this essay, he explores the effects that technological developments in the mechanical reproduction of photographs have on the auratic experience. Benjamin spies in the aura's decay the way present-day society's desire for closeness erodes a capacity to feel distance. Benjamin writes that the desire for closeness is met with an "equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction."[13] The mechanical reproducibility of objects detaches them from the sphere of tradition. "By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence."[14] What is lost in the mechanical reproduction of images

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[11] Miriam Hansen attributes the overly narrow understanding of aura to Benjamin's own tactical presentation of it in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction." "Benjamin's Aura," 337.

[12] According to Hansen, Benjamin's first mention of aura occurs in an unpublished report of a hashish experience from March 1930. Ibid., 336.

[13] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction and Other Writings on Media*, 23.

[14] Ibid*.,* 22.

is the occasion to encounter an image in its uniqueness and permanence (its aura). He writes,

> What then is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye— while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on a horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of its mountain.[15]

The aura of a mountain, or that of a work of art, concerns the authenticity and authority of the object over the beholder. It is determined neither by the use-value nor exchange-value of the object, but by the distance the object holds from us in our approach. In the proximity to a work of art, one feels another kind of distance that separates the viewer from the work, another mode of valuation that knows nothing of use or exchange. As it is often said, a great work of art teaches the viewer how to see it. The sign of the work's aura is that the viewer is left in that first encounter with the feeling that the work knows more than what is known of the work; its knowledge exceeds one's own. To come so close to a mountain that it is seen with one's own eyes allows one to gain an intimate awareness—not of the mountain as object, but of oneself as seen by the mountain, touched by the shadow of a branch of its tree. To breathe in the aura of a mountain is to be inspired by the life of another time: one that both precedes and exceeds one's own time. To breathe in the aura of an object is to breathe in the strange distance that grows and lingers in the encounter between two unique temporalities sharing the same spatial coordinates. The aura is the feeling of "one history coming up abruptly against another history."[16]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

With the advance of the productive forces, the unfulfilled past, not entirely sublated, persists in the present. As Ernst Bloch recognized, this means that "not all people exist in the same Now."[17] It is not space but time that disconnects us. People who share the same space may nevertheless exist at different Now's: they live according to different rhythms, they hold the memories of another past, and dream of different futures. The present is constituted, according to Bloch, by a dialectical interplay of synchronous and nonsynchronous forces. Archaic ways of life, unable to be sublated entirely through the development of the productive forces, persist alongside synchronous ways of life that reflect the present state of the economic mode of production. In the encounter with the aura of the object, one encounters the temporal thickness and complexity that pervades the present. In other writings, Bloch refers to this melancholic experience of the decaying aura as "estrangement." An estrangement disrupts the authority of the present by either turning the present into a historical moment or the past into a contemporary one.[18] Unlike alienation, which erodes the feeling of distance, estrangement is precisely the uncanny feeling of distance. "It offers insight into what lies nearest, drawn from astonishment at what lies farthest."[19] If we find a daguerreotype to be an auratic object, it is not due so much to the archaic or obsolescent technology that belongs to the image, it is not strange because it is old. Rather, the aura concerns the strange distance that is felt between its Now and our own present. The feeling of distance that we lose with the loss of the aura is a feeling for the strange co-presence of nonsynchronous and synchronous temporalities.

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[17] Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligations to its Dialectics," 22.

[18] Bloch, *Literary Essays,* 245.

[19] Ibid.

In the context of Marx's materialist historiography, nature is the "sensuous external world," the material of human social activity.[20] Because nature is always mediated by the activity of subjects, nature insofar as it can be known is historical. The way a historical period perceives nature is revelatory of the perceiver's sensory apparatus, which is itself historical and technologically-mediated. Nature is not reducible to the activity of subjects, but bears an independent material existence, a distance that can be felt in the uncanniness of the aura. In order for the aura to decay, it had to be historicized: brought out of the realm of timeless nature and into historical time, which is, according to Benjamin, the empty, homogeneous, repetitive time of modernity. What is forgotten in modernity is the source of the aura's uncanniness, which is the strange distance of nature objectified in the sensuous object.

When nature is historicized, the aura—the experience of uniqueness and permanence that one may encounter in a moment of the mountain's contemplation—undergoes a process of decay. In Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay, he attributes the aura's decay to the technological reproducibility of art. "By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence."[21] What is lost in the mechanical reproduction of images is the occasion to encounter the referent of the image, which is unique and singular. Bloch illustrates the decay of the aura by pointing to Goethe's description of the Alps. One senses Goethe's uneasiness when he writes, "the moon rose and shone on uncanny things."[22] While the Alps may have been uncanny for

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[20] Marx, *Selected Writings,* 60.

[21] Benjamin, *The Work of Art,* 22.

[22] Bloch, *Literary Essays,* 435.

Goethe, they evoked fear in his predecessors. Faced with the sublimity of nature's magnitude, "even Caesar shrank from it and had himself carried over the Alps in a closed sedan chair."[23] That the aura of the Alps has decayed is further evidenced by the "over-friendly approach taken by picture postcards and cellophane-wrapped souvenirs that hide nature's true strangeness and terror."[24] The decay of the aura marks a forgetting in the present of the "independent material existence" of nature—its otherness, and the authority of the other's singular existence.

Aura and melancholy

As a melancholic attitude, one expects it to be one of ambivalence, and Benjamin maintains an ambivalence toward the loss of the aura in his writing. In one sense, the decay of the aura marks the loss of a kind of historical experience—that of the authenticity and authority that belongs to ritual and tradition; this is a loss that is worthy of being mourned. In another sense, the decay of the aura is the emancipation of object from the conditions of its production and the significance that belongs to its historical context. It is only by becoming a ruin, vulnerable to the decay of historical time, that the historical object can release its significance and reveal what Benjamin refers to as the "truth-content" of the object. Although we are alienated from the distance of nature in the commodity-form, the form itself erodes and fades in time until the only relation to the object that is still possible is the strange feeling of distance. The ruin reveals the truth-content of the object to be *distance*.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

The decay of the aura is the fading phenomenon of something that is both lost and not yet lost. To be faithful to the "productive instability of [Benjamin's] exploratory vocabulary," Didi-Huberman writes that the aura is an "'uncompleted' and 'always open' phenomenon."[25] With the advance of the productive forces, the unfulfilled past, not entirely sublated, persists in the present. In the wake of its loss, the aura of what-has-been continues to emit a dimming light upon the present. To recall Freud's theory of mourning, we can say that mourning and melancholy are two responses to the dimming light of what-has-been; two responses to the emptiness of the present that has been evacuated of the meaning that belongs to the past. Mourning works to complete the decaying process and divest the present of its ghostly apparitions. It is the work of burying the dead and subordinating the dead to the realm of the living. Melancholy is the refusal to bury the dead, and, inchoate in the refusal, is a decision to choose the dead over the living. This is at least the risk of melancholy: that one will choose the dimming light of the past over and against the present and become a victim of a destructive, nihilistic nostalgia. By refusing to let the other die a second time, the melancholic effectively chooses the second life of the lost object over and against their own continued existence. In the context of Benjamin's political commitments, the danger of melancholy, at least for Adorno, is that the insights gleaned from melancholy's dialectical relation to its objects will resolve into inwardness and erect a new melancholic subjectivity.[26]

By dissociating melancholy from work, Freud erects a false dichotomy between mourning and melancholy. For Benjamin, the productive potential of melancholy lies in

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[25] Didi-Huberman, "The Supposition of the Aura," 5.

[26] On Adorno's critique of Kierkegaard's inwardness, see: Adorno, *Kierkegaard,* 29-35.

its being put to work. This requires first of all the dissolution of the subject for the sake of objects. The objects are to be freed from their acquired significations and redeemed. The insights gleaned through the melancholic dissolution of subjectivity are then to be theoretically secured and "put to work." This means overcoming melancholia: the "mournful subjectivity, political paralysis, and contemplative fixity in which these insights are contained."[27] As Pensky writes, "Overcoming melancholia without losing the redemptive relation to the thing: that is Benjamin's real interest."[28]

In order to redeem the objects, this work can neither represent the objects as living, nor efface the traces of their presence. Drawing on Benjamin's image of the mosaic as the product of philosophical work, Ilit Ferber points to the importance of the glue which holds together the fragments of the mosaic. She writes that "Benjamin's manner of working through loss involves engagement with the loss itself, with the presentation of this loss. The glue's significance in the mosaic alludes to the importance of pointing out lacunae, the spaces missing and destined to be eternally unaccounted for."[29] Unconcerned with making what-has-been again present, melancholy works toward bringing to presence what has been lost *as* loss, and make the world account for the weight of this absence.

Melancholy and poetry

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[27] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics,* 140.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy,* 66.

If Benjamin attributes a special knowledge to poets it is because of their

melancholy. Of course, not only poets are *melancholic*—and feel more pointedly the

strange distance of nature than the connections that bind the individual to the social. In

their work, poets offer a model for transforming melancholic detachment into productive,

creative activity. Poets are laborers whose experience is characterized by a feeling of

distance. This feeling of distance may inspire the cultivation of a hermetic lifestyle that

outwardly reflects their inner nature and eases the discomforts of social existence. Of

particular interest to Benjamin, however, are those who instead cultivate a feeling for the

outside-inside. Such types live like *flâneurs* who wander Parisian streets with no

particular aim. Their wandering may lead them to the center of a busy marketplace, but

still they feel themselves to be outside: out of sync with the rhythms of exchange, aloof to

the desires of others. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* "stands on the threshold—of the

metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at

home."[30] These types learn to feel at home in distance; they stay with the tensions that

arise between their own experience and the experiences of others; and, importantly, they

engage in socially productive labor.

It is in this vain that Benjamin lauds the poet, Charles Baudelaire, who

apprehends a disenchanted world of commodities. Instead of withdrawing from this

world or re-enchanting it, he dwells there, and makes his poetry at home in the heart of

reification. In his work, images and ideas interweave; his metaphorical images are not

mere reflections of his sensibilities, and his ideas are not reactive intellectual

constructions. He maintains the tension between idea and image as nonidentical

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[30] Benjamin, "Baudelaire, or the streets of Paris," in *Essays on Baudelaire,* 40.

dialectical counterparts. In his poetry, the reified world is no longer made to speak of empty promises of unity, connection, and satisfaction; he makes the reified world reveal its deathly visage and speak his feelings of distance. The beauty of his poems is not attributed to the nostalgia of a romantic vision of nature. Benjamin writes that their beauty "lies in this: a rising up from out of the abyss."[31] More precisely, his beauty arises from his melancholic weariness. "When yawning, the human being himself opens like an abyss. He makes himself resemble the time stagnating around him."[32] His melancholic knowledge becomes "heroic" through the pantomime of his lyricism which exalts his historical experience as an expression of nature.

Benjamin similarly finds this heroic melancholy in the Baroque poets of the 17th century, whose melancholic gaze allows them to apprehend their historical experience in nature. "Nature was not seen by them in the bud and bloom, but in the over-ripeness and decay of her creations."[33] They saw their experience reflected in the "eternal transience" of nature, and it is this nature which was then reflected in the lyricism of the *Trauerspiel* (mourning-plays). It was the timelessness of nature that these poets mourned, and it is this loss which is given voice in the characters through their prolix solemnity, endless prattle, and empty declarations. Although the character of melancholy is variable to particular historical conditions, what melancholic poets share is an attitude to the past and present. Attentive to the experience that is lost and now belongs more to the past than to the present, this is an attitude that knows "nothing of nostalgia."[34] Their lyricism bears a

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[31] Benjamin, "Central Park," in *Essays on Baudelaire,* 134.

[32] Ibid., 160.

[33] Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 179.

[34] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 4,* 190.

destructive energy—neither toward the past nor present, but toward the false idea of nature that continues to haunt the present.

In summary, Benjamin's notion of the aura as an experience in decline depicts what is a melancholic gaze. The remains of past world, unable to be sublated by the development of the productive forces, reside in the present as a dimming light without a future. Unable to change the past or give to the ruins a future, melancholy is an attentiveness to the losses of what is quasi-present. Although staying with the death and decay of the present exacerbates the melancholic subject's distance from the social—a distance that is already alienating—it is the cost to be paid for giving back to nature its history: its transience and ephemerality. Melancholy becomes heroic when the subject overcomes their melancholy. This does not mean committing oneself again to social or political commitments; it means transforming the distance of their gaze into something that can be shared with others. In the transfiguration of distance, melancholy gives back to the losses of history their nature; the creative activity of melancholy gives back to the dead the openness and possibility that exceed of every historical determination. The value of human life cannot be secured over and against the alien values of capital; it is lost and cannot be redeemed. By sharing this insight with another, heroic melancholy gives us the material for creating the social anew.

Adorno and the idea of natural-history

In the 1932 lecture, "The Idea of Natural-History," Adorno reimagines the Hegelian dialectic in a way that incorporates the melancholic insights into the aura's decay. That such a reformulation is necessary is due to the status of the particular, which

"has been reduced and…is increasingly defined as a mere object belonging to the universal without being able to affect it."[35] The idea of natural-history is the "retransformation of concrete history into dialectical nature," a dialectic of identity and non-identity.[36] Adorno identifies precursors to his idea of natural-history in the thought of Benjamin and Georg Lukàcs. To Lukàcs, he attributes the insight that modern capitalism produces the world of commodities as a reified "second nature": "a world of things, created by man, yet lost to him."[37] This is an effect of capitalism's totalizing processes of rationalization and fragmentation. In Benjamin he finds a model for transforming the world of "second nature" into an object of philosophical investigation. As he writes, Benjamin "brought the resurrection of second nature out of infinite distance into infinite closeness."[38] Toward the historical objects, he directed his "Medusan gaze" with which he sought to mortify the elements that appeared to be living, and that still bore traces of an organic unity.[39] Doing so revealed the historical object as a ruin and released it from the historical determinations that obscure truth. Unfailingly "micrological and fragmentary," Adorno criticizes Benjamin for failing to elucidate the phenomena as products of a social whole. Instead of relating them to universal history,[40] he attempted to

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[35] Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 30.

[36] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," in *Things Beyond Resemblance,* 240.

[37] Ibid., 264.

[38] Ibid., 246.

[39] Benjamin writes in "On Semblance," "the life quivering in it must appear petrified as if spellbound in a single moment…the paralysis is what defines its truth." *Selected Writings, Vol. 1,* 224.

[40] As Hullot-Kentor remarks, it is Adorno who "Hegelianizes" Benjamin's constellation of history, nature, and second nature through integrating the idea of universal mediation in order to reconstruct the totality of bourgeois society. Despite the congruency with Hegel, Adorno's dialectic does not aim at the unveiling of the universal, but at the revelation of the particular through the dissolution of the petrified world of convention. *Things Beyond Resemblance,* 246.

relate them "directly, in their singularity, to material tendencies and social struggles."[41] In the end, Benjamin winds up disavowing the world for the sake of its objects: a criticism summed up in Adorno's claim that Benjamin is too melancholic.[42]

To counter Benjamin's inwardness, Adorno takes the allegorical gaze of Benjamin's melancholy and erects it into a model of philosophical investigation. In later writings, he claims "natural-history" to be synonymous with his notion of "interpretation" as critical Marxist methodology.[43] In a reified world, philosophical thinking is tasked with disrupting the frozen phenomena of second nature and giving back to them their dynamism and fluctuations. This aim motivates his development of a "parataxis" as philosophical style of writing. Theresa Kelly explains the appeal of parataxis for Adorno in a way that illuminates his commitment to difference and contingency over identity and argumentative clarity. Parataxis is a mode of presentation, she writes, that "insists, by its very awkward unassimilation of one view to the next, that the intelligibility of the truth one offers lies in the cavities between statements, not zipped up inside the seams of the discourse, like a French seam of a fine garment that folds the rough outside edge inside and then seams it shut."[44] While the drive for clarity in philosophical writing winds up subordinating the thing to the concept, writing that brings to the fore the nonidentity of

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[41] Adorno, *Prisms,* 235.

[42] For further discussion of Adorno's critique of Benjamin's melancholy, see: Feldman, "Not Dialectical Enough"; Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectic*s, 130-148.; on the related critique of the concept of reification in Benjamin's work, see: Rose, *The Melancholy Science,* 53-55.

[43] "Interpretation…is criticism of phenomena that have come to a standstill; it consists in revealing the dynamism stored up in them, so that what appears as nature can be seen to be history. On the other hand, it ensures that what has evolved loses its appearance as mere existence as stands revealed as the product of history. This is essentially the procedure of Marxist critique." Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 135.

[44] Kelly, "Adorno—Nature—Hegel," in *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity,* ed. Gerhard Richter, 102.

thing and concept by making visible the fraying of the concept's edges does not preserve

the particular, but gives back to the phenomena their death—the transience and

contingency which is the truth of both nature and history.

Like Benjamin, Adorno finds in poetry a melancholic gaze that illuminates the

transience of nature. He writes that Hölderlin's late poem, "Shelter at Hardt,"

exemplifies "the interlocking of nature and history."[45]

> The forest sinks off
> And like buds, the leaves
> Hang inward, to which
> The valley floor below
> Flowers up, far from mute,
> For Ulrich passed through
> These parts, a great destiny
> Often broods over his footprint,
> Ready, among the remains.[46]

According to Adorno, interpretation of the poem should reveal the way history merges

into the natural setting and this requires knowledge of the historical events which the

poem allegorizes. The "shelter" refers to two slabs of sandstone resting upon one another

near Hardt, Germany. This natural formation merged with historical events when Duke

Ulrich hid in the shelter in the 1500's to escape persecution. According to folklore, a

spider then spun a web over the entrance to the shelter which hid him from his captors. It

is this history that lends to the natural formation its beauty. Importantly, for Adorno,

nature is not beautiful because it is inscribed with myth by history. "In natural beauty,"

he writes, "natural and historical elements interact in a musical and kaleidoscopically

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[45] Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 134.

[46] Quoted in Adorno, *History and Freedom,* p.135 fn 6. From Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments,* 49.

changing fashion."[47] Interpretation returns the dynamism to the phenomenon. Through interpretation, the natural elements appear as historical elements ("The valley floor…far from mute"), and in the next moment the historical elements vanish again into nature through their transience. Although nature and history merge in the phenomenon, its existence exceeds what we assume it to be. As Adorno writes, "the negativity of natural history—which always discovers what the phenomena used to be, what they have become and, at the same time, what they might have been—retains the *possible* life of phenomena as opposed to their actual existence."[48] The possible life of phenomena always exceeds actual life, and it is this moribund attention that retains possible life which piques Adorno's interest in melancholy. While the value of melancholy lies in the way the gaze is able to penetrate second nature through insight into the decay of everything quasi-natural, thus releasing the phenomenon from the realm of myth, putting melancholy to work means giving back to the phenomenon what exceeds its historical determination—in this lies the transience of nature.

The politics of melancholy

The political function of art

A central insight of Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay is the fusion of art and politics that helps explain the rise of German fascism. Fascism reigns through the use of terror to control and subjugate all areas of life, but its true power lies not in the power it

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[47] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* 71.

[48] Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 138.

exerts over and against subjects, but in the ways it coerces its subjects to will their own self-alienation. Fascism aestheticizes the political and becomes spectacular while organizing the masses as depoliticized spectators and consumers. Through the appearance of politics as an object deployed to amuse or distract, fascism organizes its audience as passive subjects who absorb its messages, rather than become absorbed by them as may otherwise take place in the activity of contemplation. It is in this way that the depoliticized masses come to believe in the "beautiful illusion" offered by reactionary political projects that espouse "socialist" visions of harmony, beauty, nature, and come to vote against their own class interests. As Benjamin explains, "German fascism knew how to transfer all energies, wishes, yearnings, psychic drives and phantasies into an aesthetic, socialistic illusion which worked to cover up the real causes of economic and psychic misery; indeed, it could even push for their continuation."[49]

Although fascism aestheticizes politics, the continued organization of the masses as depoliticized spectators relies on the fiction of autonomous art. It is for this reason that, for Benjamin, it was no longer acceptable to believe in the autonomy of art—the idea that the artist's creative activity is free and need not be at the service of any class interests. All art has a political function. What, then, is it that makes a work of art "socialist" or "fascist"? What determines whether its destructive energies are directed toward what is useful for the bourgeois or proletariat in the class struggle? Rather than situate these questions in an ongoing debate between artistic form or content, Benjamin pursues the "tendency" of the work.

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[49] Benjamin, *The Work of Art,* 52.

The political tendency of the work, the class interests that it serves, are not determined by the intentions of the artist or manifest content of the work. Art and artists that claim allegiance to emancipatory ideals may nevertheless enchain the viewer through their organization as a depoliticized spectator. The political tendency, then, is necessary but not sufficient to ensure that the work does not function in a counterrevolutionary way. The political tendency is determined by the literary tendencies of the work, and these can likewise be reactionary or progressive insofar as they are geared toward organizing the masses as consumers or producers. Thus, for Benjamin, the revolutionary work with the correct political tendency would also be literarily correct and this constitutes the quality of that work.[50] Socialist art is that art which uses advances in literary technique to make literary progress there where historical progress will also be made—through socializing the productive forces. For the author or artist as producer, "technical progress is...the foundation of his political progress."[51]

Left-wing melancholy

Benjamin aims to disentangle the types of leftist artists and intellectuals to reveal those whose leftist positions serve bourgeois class interests from those that serve proletariat class interests. Benjamin uses "hack writer" to designate those authors of the first type. A hack writer is one "who abstains in principle from alienating the productive apparatus from the ruling class by improving it in ways serving the interests of

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[50] Ibid., 80.

[51] Ibid., 87.

socialism."[52] Benjamin coins the term "left-wing melancholia" to designate the logic that belongs to hack writers, including that of Weimar poet, Erich Kästner, and the works of those associated with the "New Objectivity" movement that gained prominence during the Weimar republic. In the cool, distanced, objective perspective that New Objectivity made fashionable, Benjamin spies a dangerous melancholy. Although it professes the use of this melancholic gaze as a critique of the material conditions of the present that sustain experiences of misery and suffering, the literary tendency of such works reveal another political tendency. Instead of politicizing the present's material conditions, it aestheticizes them and renders the material conditions an object of consumption.

In the poems of Kästner, one finds a melancholic gaze that is well-acquainted with misery and suffering. Of Kästner's despair, Benjamin derides it as a "tortured stupidity….the latest of two millennia of metamorphoses of melancholy."[53] If the melancholy of Kästner and other left-wing melancholics is dangerous, it is because it is dissociated from work. They do not want to transform the conditions of their melancholy, but instead hold onto the melancholy, which has given them the gift of their sorrow. They raise their sorrow and poverty to the level of a supreme aesthetic pleasure. In their lyricism, these types claim the interests of the working class, while being materially disconnected from those interests. Because the positions they espouse have "little to do with the labor movement," their positions are "lost."[54] Reflecting nothing but their own economic physiognomy, Kästner's lyricism serves to protect the bourgeois existence of

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[52] Ibid., 86.

[53] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 2*, *Part 2*, 426.

[54] Ibid.

146

his readers, and resolves the melancholic tension between idea and image, effectively divesting melancholy of the imperative to act and to transform the nature of things. "In short," Benjamin proclaims, "this left-wing radicalism is precisely the attitude to which there is no longer, in general, any corresponding political action. It is not to the left of this or that tendency, but simply to the left of what is in general possible."[55] Instead of politicizing the emptiness of capitalist alienation, left-wing melancholia aestheticizes it, and acts against the interests of the working class. If, as Benjamin recognized, the rise of fascism is intrinsically bound up with the transformation of subjects into spectators and consumers, then left-wing melancholy is not merely bad or unsuccessful art, but art that works to reinforce the very material conditions that fascism requires.

Benjamin notes the difficult work one must undergo if they wish to aim their destructive energies at the conditions that sustain their own familiar existence. This is the difficult work of heroic melancholy discussed earlier in the chapter. It is one thing for a petit bourgeois writer (like Kästner) to undergo proletarianization and ally themselves with the aims of the revolutionary working class. It is quite another thing for the writer to put their lives on the line for the radical positions they espouse. This is because proletarianization hardly makes one a proletarian. For left intellectuals "the bourgeois class gave [them], in the form of education, a means of production that, owing to educational privilege, makes [them] feel solidarity with it, and still more it with him."[56] The left-wing melancholic is one who is unwilling to do this work that entails a continual

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[55] Ibid., 425.

[56] Benjamin, *The Work of Art,* 92.

147

labor of critiquing and undoing their bourgeois education, and the privileges it continues to afford in their everyday life.

The heroic melancholy that Benjamin lauds is to be disentangled from the destructiveness of left-wing melancholy. Although we find in the work of so-called "left-wing melancholics" claims of allegiance to the subjected underclass with which the artist empathizes, Benjamin spies the way this work self-sabotages its supposed aims. Since meaningful social transformation would transform the material conditions that justify the left-wing melancholic's creative outputs, their work has the effect of disrupting the critical capacities that social transformation requires. Instead of presenting misery in such a way that it would inspire a call to action in the audience, it is presented as something to entertain and to be passively consumed.

In "Resisting Left Melancholy, Brown (2003) extends Benjamin's critique of left-wing melancholy to analyze the failures of the contemporary Left to actualize its progressive political visions. Drawing on the work of critical theorist Stuart Hall (1988), Brown characterizes the failures of the Left as an anachronistic preservation of Marxist and intellectual orthodoxies that belong to a past epoch. These include outdated Marxist analyses of capital and the primacy of class, as well as a materialism that fails to adequately account for the subject, experience, style, and the importance of language.[57] Through the dogmatic preservation of these outdated formulas and formulations, the contemporary Left inscribes a conservatism at the heart of their political vision that inevitably sabotages the radicalism of political praxis. Toward answering the question of why the Left would aim its destructive energies toward its own intended aims, Brown characterizes the self-sabotage as an effect of a bad nostalgia and sentimentality for

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[57] Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," 464.

148

possibilities that no longer belong to the present. The Left's melancholic preservation of its own political insights results in the erection of a substitutive object to denigrate, and Brown spies this object in the Left's frequent attacks of identity politics and poststructuralism, both of which are charged with fragmenting the Left and undermining the requisite solidarity for a radical politics. What really undermines the Left is, instead, the melancholy that fetishizes dead objects over and against the living.

While Brown's analysis provides helpful insight into the hidden conservatism of leftist political projects, it elides the productive possibilities of leftist melancholy. As the insight into the nature of historical experience, the death and decay that belies the vitality of the present's appearance, melancholy can offer insight into the historical conditions that sustain experiences of misery and loss. When melancholy's destructive energies are directed toward these conditions, which are unevenly distributed, and disproportionately affect the marginalized and subjected underclasses, it directs itself toward emancipatory ends and holds open the possibility of the present's transformation.

In the next section, I turn to Ernst Bloch's nonynchronism and its dialectics in order to better elucidate both the dangers of melancholy and the importance of its untimely gaze for revolutionary activity.

Bloch's multi-level dialectics

In the text, *Theory of Need in Marx*, Agnes Heller finds in Marx the division of the worker's needs into two related but distinct categories: "natural needs" and "necessary needs." "Natural needs" refer to everything required for the worker to preserve themselves as a natural being. As Heller points out, while the category of natural

need refers to the preservation of the physical life, natural needs like warmth and clothing are also already social insofar as their mode of satisfaction (fork, parka) is socially mediated. This becomes important when delimiting the "radical needs" of the individual, which alone are the revolutionary needs that require overturning capitalism for their satisfaction. Instead of indicating a group of needs, Heller treats natural needs as a limit concept: "a limit (different for different societies) beyond which human life is no longer reproducible as such."[58]

The second category, "necessary needs," are needs that exceed those of self-preservation. They indicate what is necessary for the worker to have "the feeling and conviction that their life—at a given level of the division of labor—is 'normal.'"[59] This category is highly historically-variable and may include things like education, meats, or alcohol. Heller writes that these needs are "average," "purchaseable," and their satisfaction does not satisfy the needs of the individual. Although the worker may feel that selling their labor-power is necessary to ensure their survival as a natural being, the needs that wages satisfy are those that are culturally mediated, average, purchasable, etc. The needs that wages are able to satisfy are not those of a natural being, but those of a normal, average person. Wages do not help ensure the survival of the individual life, but reaffirm the values of an average life, dominated by the need to possess and consume.

When a worker exchanges their labor-power for wages with the employer, the wages act as a limit to both the worker and the employer. In short, for the worker, the wages represent the minimum amount of capital required to satisfy their immediate needs and reproduce the conditions of their existence. For the employer, wages act as a limit to

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[58] Heller, *A Theory of Need in Marx,* 32.

[59] Ibid*.,* 33.

the accumulation of capital. Although the worker and employer both have an interest in the continued survival of the worker, the value of the worker's life is subordinated by the overriding interest of capital to accumulate more capital. The needs of the worker are subordinated in the capitalist hierarchy of needs to the needs of capital.

Following Heller's analysis of Marx, the proletariat becomes the revolutionary class through consciousness of the needs that repeatedly fail to be satisfied in the wage system of labor. The low-paid workers who struggle to get a "living wage," for example, are motivated by increasing awareness of the opposition between the workers' need to survive as a natural being and the capitalist's need to generate profit and accumulate capital. Because the wages that workers ask for are not new needs, but are needs that can be satisfied without overturning the wage system of labor, such struggles may ameliorate the miseries of exploitation but are not yet revolutionary. They seek instead "to make certain aspects of the ruling class's system of needs realizable for themselves."[60] The satisfaction of such demands eases the felt experience of the opposition between the needs of humans and the values of capital.

The extreme exploitation of the immiserated working class that struggles to get paid a "living wage" reveals what Bloch calls a synchronous contradiction of capitalism. Despite the fact the working class overproduces the objects of immediate need, its members struggle to satisfy their own needs. The producers do not consume what they produce. Objectively, the working class has an embodied experience of these synchronous contradictions in the discomfort of both, a perennially empty stomach, and a

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[60] Heller, *A Theory of Need in Marx,* 97.

perpetually "impeded future."[61] Consumed by the need to satisfy immediate needs, the working class feels itself to be in a perpetual state of crisis. In crisis, the felt precarity of hunger takes precedence over other needs—both the necessary needs of average existence, and other, more radical needs that would require the openness of the future for their satisfaction.

When the working class becomes fully conscious of these objective synchronous contradictions, they become embodied in the "class-conscious revolutionary proletarian."[62] Instead of easing the tensions of capitalism, the revolutionary proletarian seeks to overthrow the capitalist hierarchy of needs and reaffirm the supreme value of human life. The practical activity of the revolutionary proletarian is supported by a dream of the future that is utopian but concrete insofar as it is based in the material possibilities of the present—its objective contradictions. It is this utopian dream that Bloch calls "well-founded hope."[63] In the place of the empty stomachs of the present is the dream of a future in which their stomachs are full, in which the hunger for material goods gives way to altogether new types of hunger (new needs). The simplicity of this dream belies the treacherous path of its actualization, which requires overturning the present economic structure and the exploitation of labor. Hope, even well-founded hope, is imminently disappointable. As Bloch writes, "it must be so…or *else it would not be hope*."[64]

Implicit in Bloch's call for a multi-level dialectics is the recognition that revolutionary political projects are not guaranteed to succeed; driven by hope, it is always

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[61] Bloch, "Nonsynchronism," 33.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Bloch, *Literary Essays,* 340.

[64] Ibid. (Italics in original)

possible that they will fail. Revolutionary consciousness cannot be sustained across historical moments without breaks and digressions. Because the utopic vision of revolutionary activity is grounded in the material conditions of the present, "utopia" is not a stable vision but a kaleidoscopic one, shifting and changing with the productive forces. Because the future to which it addresses itself does not actually exist, hope is "committed to change rather than repetition, and…incorporates the element of chance, without which there can be nothing new."[65] When revolutionary types hold onto their visions of utopia and disregard the material developments of the present, the objective contradictions that inspire their activity may no longer be synchronous contradictions.[66] Like evolutionary lines, individuals or groups may diverge from the synchronous economic system when that system no longer carries the vision of their utopia. Nonsynchronous, they no longer belong to the same Now as the revolutionary call to action.

The nonsynchronism of melancholy

Mourning and melancholy re-emerge here as practical responses to the loss and emptiness that permeate the present. The work of mourning work is a type of unproductive labor. According to Marx, unproductive labor is labor that occurs outside the production process, like the labor of teachers, artists, lawyers, salespersons, etc.[67] Although this labor can be exploited, its exploitation does not produce capital. Instead it

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[65] Ibid., 341.

[66] Mourning work = synchronous revolutionary activity; melancholy = nonsynchronous activity

[67] For more on Marx's account of unproductive versus productive labor, see: *Capital, Vol. 1,* 476-477; *Capital, Vol. 3,* 152-304; 389-413.

reinforces the fabric of the social and reaffirms the value of human life continually

threatened by the inhuman values of capital. Mourning work, too, heals over the broken

ties to the social in order to reaffirm its priority. The class-conscious proletariat is the one

for whom mourning work has become politicized; they enact the revolutionary potential

of mourning. Fully conscious of what has been lost—both the life of the worker stolen by

capital and their own impeded future—mourning work disinvests in the source of its

emptiness and turns instead to the social, the value of which is reaffirmed and renewed

through its activity. The end of collective mourning work is communism. But this "end"

is not to be understood as a static vision of utopia. As Freud soon realized in his own

work, there is no "successful" mourning work—and this is true for both the individual

psyche and collective revolutionary activity. Constantly renewed, the work of

overcoming the kaleidoscopic emptiness that constitutes everyday life proves itself to be

the true work of one's life.[68]

The melancholic is tired of mourning. While they may have been, for a time, the

class-conscious mourner, now, they confront the contradictions of the present with the

fatigue of the weary body. Tired of having to constantly renew their relations to the

social, the melancholic can no longer commit to doing so. Instead of overcoming the

emptiness and alienation of their present situation, they dwell in a disenchanted present.

The nonsynchronism of melancholy emerges from an inability or unwillingness to keep

up with the changing synchronous forces of the present. Instead of transforming their

visions of the future, they hold onto their unfulfilled dreams. They may still "hope," but,

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[68] A contemporary example of revolutionary mourning is the Black Lives Matter movement. Here, the objective contradictions that structure life in America for black Americans and people of color inspired a collective work of mourning catalyzed by the deaths of unarmed black men and women by US police officers.

disconnected from action, this is a backwards-looking, nostalgic hope. As a result, they no longer belong to the same Now as the revolutionary proletariat.

Melancholia, I claim, is a nonsynchronous mood, which affects various modes of existence. What melancholic types share is a feeling of distance from historical progress. Such types may co-exist with others in the same present—an immiserated peasant may live in the same present as the proletariat, an indigenous person may live alongside a Creole or Spaniard—but they do not live in the same Now. "In spite of radio and newspapers," Bloch writes anecdotally, "there are couples living in the village for whom Egypt is still the land where the princess pulled the baby Moses from the river, not the land of the Pyramids or the Suez Canal; it is still viewed from the Bible and the Children of Israel, rather than from the pharaoh."[69] Their hopes outline different futures and find their source in different pasts. Under the category of nonsynchronism, Bloch includes the youth and the immiserated middle class, both of which includes members who are homesick and untimely. Confronted with a barren present, the proletarian youth are disappointed and homesick for the naiveté and exuberance of an idealized youth. The immiserated middle class is homesick for the world whose comforts and securities they think themselves entitled to. Confronted with an empty present and impeded future, nonsynchronous types attempt to enter the future by detouring through the past.

Bloch notes that the consciousness of immiserated, nonsynchronous types, like modern-day peasants, is more impeded than the consciousness of the proletariat. It is more difficult for these types to achieve a revolutionary class-consciousness because they hold onto a false idea of nature. For the peasantry, the objective nonsynchronous contradictions of their existence concern their relationship to nature. Unlike wage-

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[69] Bloch, "Nonsynchronism," 25.

155

workers, peasants still possess the means of production. They are still bound to the land

that they work and attached to an old nature, the material of which is the soil, and the

time is the cycle of the seasons. Even though the land is not the same land tilled by their

forbearers, they treat the land as if it has remained unchanged in the face of radical

historical transformations. With each harvest, the peasant dies a slow economic death as

each is less propitious than the last. Despite the irrational appearance of such choices, the

false idea of nature helps modern-day peasants feel "rooted" in the present. While those

who are synchronous see their lives as unfolding towards a decidedly closed-past, they

refuse to give up the past as the ground of their expectations. Because they refuse to

believe that hope is, and must be, disappointable, they do not see the loss that has

occurred—or, to recall Freud's remark about the melancholic, they know that a loss has

occurred, but they do not know what it is in the other that has been lost.

Due to the reactionary appearance of nonsynchronous forces, the transformative

energy of unfulfilled dreams is always at risk of being appropriated by fascist political

interests that are counter to human interests. Such interests mobilize the nostalgic dreams

of the immiserated by making these dreams appear to again have a future in the present.

While looking to the past, Bloch remarks that Hitler was able to give to these dreams the

false appearance of new life. He writes, "even the masses flock to it since the unbearable

Now at least seems different with Hitler, who paints good old things for everyone."[70]

When such types become conscious of their "objective contradictions" under false

pretenses, the result is not the revolutionary activity of the working class, but a

destructive, nihilistic activity. These types do not seek to overcome the material

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[70] Ibid.

conditions of their misery, but turn their destructive energies toward the present. Theirs is a "torpid not wanting of the Now," which manifests as "pent-up anger."[71] In order to reclaim the right to a future that will fulfill the promises of the unfulfilled past, the struggle is waged against those whose activity is synchronous and reinscribes the hegemony of the present: both the ruling class whose interest is in maintaining the status quo, and the class-conscious proletariat that spies the undoing of capitalism in the material contradictions of the present. "There is nothing more unexpected," writes Bloch, "nothing more dangerous than this power of being at once fiery and puny, contradicting and nonsynchronous."[72]

One can find contemporary examples of this is in the reactionary populism of the Tea Party movement, or the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump, inspired by the call to "Make America Great Again." Whatever social and economic changes that had been made in the name of progress were not changes that benefited them. "Progress" meant the denigration of conservative social values, the evacuation of manufacturing jobs, looming economic insecurity, and a lack of both political representation and favorable media representations. "Progress" left small American towns in ruins, and marked the slow death of the "American dream." In Trump's call, the immiserated working class was awakened to the contradictions between their desired past and the present, and were mobilized to reclaim their right to the future—one that would be the return of the past, a future shaped by their nostalgia. In such cases the nonsynchronous contradictions felt in the emptiness of the present had not been politicized and brought

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 22.

into alliance with the synchronous contradictions of the working class. Instead they were aestheticized and distorted as demands that still have a future.

The destructive energy of melancholy becomes nihilistic when it is directed against change in the present. Melancholy has insight into the death and decay that underlie problematic notions of historical progress—it is privy to the transience and ephemerality of the quasi-natural elements of the present, and sees nature as historical. When melancholy breathes hope into the past, it mistakenly attributes its misery to change—the changes that have taken place, are taking place, and will take place in the future. A false idea of nature as static and enduring is held over and against the present. As Adorno recognized, when thought does not, in the next moment, see history as natural—open to change and full of becoming—thought is at a standstill. With Bloch, we get a better sense of the dangers of melancholy's frozen dialectic. By refusing change, the nihilistic melancholic refuses that which is necessary to overcome the conditions that produce their misery and the misery of others. In the quietism and paralysis that characterizes many types of melancholy, there is a tacit affirmation of misery. By reproducing the conditions of their misery, they come to know their agency in the production of their own sorrow, and their sorrow becomes a source of pleasure; it is in this sense that alienation becomes aestheticized and exalted as a virtue.

Melancholic modes of existence bear the weight of unfulfilled dreams that "contradict the Now is a very peculiar way, awry, from the rear."[73] They contradict the present in ways that do not simply anticipate the reversal of present structures (the goal is not merely for the hungry person to become satiated), but breathe life into the remnants

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[73] Ibid.

of archaic ones. Contradicting the present obliquely, melancholia calls for the emergence of what are, ironically, new, unexpected structures and orderings of the world. By directing its destructive energy toward the alien values of the unbearable Now, instead of towards change, which is the true content of hope, melancholy can be a creative, practical activity.

The goal of a multi-level dialectics is to do what history has not yet managed to do: to make the past absolutely past. A Marxist dialectics aims to make the past "hopeless and nothing more than the burial place of historical memories."[74] Nonsynchronous melancholy may impede radical political projects or may be mobilized in their service. While both paths of melancholy are destructive, the difference between the two is the difference between a nihilistic and an emancipatory melancholy i.e., left-wing melancholy and heroic melancholy. If melancholy is to be politicized it will be through an alliance of the synchronous and nonsynchronous "which liberates the still possible future from the past only by putting both in the present."[75] The need for a multi-level dialectics emerges from the importance of mobilizing nonsynchronous forces towards emancipatory political projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew from the works of Marx and Marxist critical theorists (Benjamin, Adorno, Bloch, Heller) in order to develop an account of mourning and melancholy as practical responses to capitalist alienation. Although we may experience

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[74] Ibid., 32.

[75] Ibid., 33.

alienation in all aspects of our existence, I focused on the way we are alienated from nature, and characterize this alienation as the forgetting of nature's distance. The effect of alienation is the appearance of nature as close and familiar. What we lose when we lose the strangeness of nature is the temporal complexity and thickness of the present. The reified world of commodities is a deceptively "flat" world where the proximity and accessibility of commodities hides the fact that an encounter with a sensuous object— whether a material good, work of art, or other person—is an encounter with another history, which bears the weight of another past and dreams visions of other futures. As Bloch writes, "people exist at different Nows," and it is this that we forget in our alienation. Phenomenologically, the aura in its decay is the experience of this lost time that we incur through the commodification of all things. Melancholy is an attention to the loss negatively imprinted in the aura's decay.

The activity of melancholy, its labors—the movements of withdrawal, renunciation of pleasures, maintenance of futureless investments—are practical responses to alienation. Melancholy, like mourning, is not something a person does after a significant loss, but is the work of life in a capitalist society; we are continually called upon to pick up the pieces of our fragmented existence, renew our ties to the social, and fabricate the continuity that we lose in our alienation. In the resistances and refusals of the melancholic body is a protest against mourning. By "mourning" in this context, I mean the work of covering over the wounds of alienation and recreating the social ties that bind us to others. The melancholic is tired of mourning. Instead of covering over the wounds of alienation by renewing ties to the social, the melancholic dwells among the ruins of their social existence. What the melancholic feels in the strange distance they

hold from the social is the very distance that we forget in our alienation. If it is difficult for the melancholic to make conversation it is because they are sensitive to the fact that here, one history is bumping up against another history, and one cannot traverse such distances lightly.

For Benjamin and Bloch, the virtue of melancholy lies in its remembrance of the distances that constitute our social existence. This intimacy with distance is not an antidote to alienation; it exacerbates alienation. Rather, the insights of melancholy need to be "put to work." For Benjamin, the possibilities of melancholy are exemplified in the heroic melancholy of poets who bring the insight of their gaze to language and transform the feelings of alienation into an experience that can be shared with others. In doing so, the heroic melancholic does not renew their ties to the social by covering over the pieces of a broken world. Through their lyricism, they hold up the broken pieces for future others to see; by sharing their sight with others, they take part in the creation of new values, a new sociality. Between those who are melancholic and those who are not, Bloch hears a polyphonic symphony of nonsynchronous and synchronous forces. In our alienation, it is this co-presence of nonsynchronous and synchronous forces that we lose the ability to hear. Putting melancholy to work in the context of Bloch's multi-level dialectics means directing the destructive force of nonsynchronism toward emancipatory political projects.

In Chapter II, I unpacked *Nachträglichkeit* as the time that belongs to melancholy. The time of melancholy is not time at a standstill, but time that bears a relationship to progress. This is not the kind of "progress" that belongs to a linear conception of time. Melancholy's intimacy with the past opens up an encounter with the temporal complexity

of the present where a multiplicity of temporalities dwell. Bloch's multi-level dialectics offers a model that can account for the interplay of temporal forces in the present. In Chapter III, I focused on the phantoms in Merleau-Ponty and Proust to explore the possibility of creatively transforming melancholy. The phantom limb is an attitude of being haunted by the futureless possibilities that belong to a past embodiment. Transforming futureless possibilities does not mean re-animating them in the present, but listening to the message they have for the present and letting them fall silent.

In light of Benjamin's distinction between emancipatory melancholy and left-wing, nihilistic melancholy, in the next chapter, I develop an account of Roland Barthes' melancholy. The insight of his melancholy is tied to the encounter with the *punctum* that his melancholy makes possible: the thought "she is going to die." The work of melancholy entails the material transformation of this insight, what I call "mourning-writing." On my account, the success of this work is determined in relation to the falling silent of the past, and it is toward this that Chapter VI will be directed.

CHAPTER V

BARTHES AND THE DESIRE FOR BEING-NEUTRAL: BETWEEN MELANCHOLY

AND MOURNING

In this chapter I traverse the melancholy of Roland Barthes. In doing so, I aim to push melancholy to its conclusion. As it was discussed in Chapter IV, there is a danger to the inwardness of melancholy. Although there is a truth that is illuminated through melancholy, when it becomes too micrological and fragmentary it risks erecting a new truth, one that is disconnected from the social whole. Melancholy becomes emancipatory through the overcoming of melancholy; this means that melancholy aims its destructive force at the conditions that sustain its own existence. In following Barthes' melancholy, this chapter risks its own kind of melancholic inwardness. In the end, it will be the task of Chapter VI to take melancholy to its conclusion.

In the first part of this chapter, I situate Barthes' melancholy in his intellectual life as a teacher and scholar. The tactics and strategies he employs as an intellectual illustrate the myriad ways that melancholy stages its protests to power. The tactics and strategies—withdrawal, displacement, simulation, drifting—sustain the kind of anonymity necessary for creative intellectual activity, and are propelled by a desire for being-neutral in the academy: for dwelling outside-within institutional spaces. Although the desire to be neutral may look like apathy or indifference, it is not a benumbment to the realities of the present. It is not "grayness, indifference." Barthes writes that it is the desire to find a way of "being present to the struggles of my time."[1] Drawing on Barthes' notion of the neutral, I claim that the underlying aim of melancholy is about finding a style of living—

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[1] Barthes, *The Neutral,* 8.

a style that does not recoil in the encounter with the struggles and contradictions of existence, but dwells in the aporias without resolving them. It is not born from a desire to die, but to be fully alive; it is a "burning, ardent activity."[2] In the second section, I present a series of melancholic figures—awakening, laziness, weariness, marinating, re-reading—and offer a re-evaluation of these figures in light of the activity of melancholy and its protests against power.

In the third section, I offer a reading of Barthes' seminal text, *Camera Lucida,* in search of the transformation of melancholy that had been found in the previous chapters. While melancholy in the context of institutional spaces was presented as a desire for anonymity, for "being-neutral," in the wake of a significant loss, Barthes shows melancholy's ulterior motive to be a desire for recognition. This desire is not a desire to be recognized by any others, but a desire to be recognized by just one: the one who is dead and can no longer return his gaze. The recognition that melancholy makes possible is revealed in Barthes' notion of the *punctum*, which is the thought of the other's death. In Chapter VI, I further develop the productive power of this thought.

The melancholy of the intellectual

In this section, I develop an account of Barthes' melancholy that begins with his Inaugural Lecture at the *Collège de France*. His entrance into the esteemed institution is the sign of his well-deserved recognition by the academy, and in his writings I hear the amplified anxieties about power and recognition. In his melancholy, he strives to remain

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[2] Ibid., 7.

outside-within the institution and so, as both teacher and scholar, he thematizes the nuanced ways that the intellectual protests power.

With a margin of one vote, *Collège de France,* the esteemed French institution, welcomed Roland Barthes as the new Chair of Literary Semiology in 1976. At the time, Barthes was well-established as an influential semiologist who resided on the margins of an academic life, and who wrote and lectured on the margins of the disciplines. He was the "lookout" who stands "at the crossroad where all other languages meet, in a trivial position compared to the purity of those doctrines."[3] Repeatedly disrupted by bouts of tuberculosis, his academic aspirations were derailed time and again by illness. As he recounts in an interview with Pierre Boncenne on April 29, 1979, "My career proves that I always held on to the idea of belonging to the university, but I belonged to it—which was lucky for me—through marginal institutions that were able to accept me without the diplomas usually required."[4]

In his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, Barthes speaks of his joy at having entry to the esteemed institution. There is, first, the joy of following in the footsteps of the lecturers who came before him—Jules Michelet, Jean Baruzi, Paul Valery, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emile Benveniste—"encountering in this place the memory or presence of authors dear to me."[5] Second, there is a joy of another kind, a joy that is "sober because more responsible": the joy of gaining entry to an institution that is "outside the bounds of power." On a practical level, Barthes means by that as a lecturer at

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[3] As quoted in Hill, *Radical Decision,* 71.

[4] Barthes, "Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes," in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980,* 326.

[5] Barthes, "Lecture: In Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, *Collège de France*, January 7, 1977," 31.

the *Collège*, he is not required to engage in the traditional practices of academic professionalization, nor is he required to act out the authority of his position through the assignation of grades or other modes of evaluation and judgment. In accordance with the tradition of the *Collège*, his lectures were free, open to the public, and did not carry at their completion the weight of a grade. Reflecting on the *Collège*, Barthes remarks in his interview with Boncenne, that as the institution did not grant diplomas, it inhabited a position marginal to French academia, and was thus "not enmeshed in a power system that creates an objective marginality."[6] At the *Collège* he is responsible for research and for speaking his research aloud—"I shall even say," adds Barthes, that the lecturer is asked "to dream his research aloud."[7]

On a level more phenomenological, being outside the bounds of power, the lecturer inhabits a "privileged position" in relation to power. As Barthes tells his audience, "it is power with which we shall be concerned, indirectly but persistently."[8] The lecturer is called upon to present "new research," but it is not the case that here the lecturer stages the emancipation of speech from power, driven by the pleasure of innovation alone. Although those who belong to the *Collège* tended to be progressive, radical thinkers, esteemed for their innovative ideas, as Barthes explains, "there are contradictions between very innovative ideas and an incontestable aristocratism."[9] The lecturer *simulates* emancipated speech, and in doing so, maintains a critical distance from the discourse, attentive to the ways in which speech becomes ideological. The lectern

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[6] Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 326.

[7] Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture." 32

[8] Ibid.

[9] Barthes, *Grain of the Voice,* 326.

becomes the site where the vigilant can glimpse the immersion of speech into the structures of power. Pluripotent and omnipresent, power is "present in the most delicate mechanisms of social exchange: not only in the State, in classes, in groups, but even in fashion…and even in the liberating forces which attempt to counteract it."[10] The reason for this, he continues, is because language is "the object in which power is inscribed…the language we speak and write."[11]

At the moment of speech's utterance, language finds itself at the service of power on two levels. On one level, speech is immediately assertive and demonstrative of authority. On another level, speech seeks to be recognized by the other and finds this in the repetition of signs. With every utterance language situates me as master and slave: "I assert tellingly what I repeat."[12] I ask the other to recognize me as a free being but this recognition is given on the condition that I am at the service of power and am unfree. If there is freedom from power, it must be outside of language, and yet, for Barthes, the semiologist, there is no outside of language.[13] It is in this impossibility that Barthes speaks and imagines a "permanent revolution of language" called *literature*, where speech evades the mechanisms of power and writing, and frees itself through fragmentations, digressions, evasions, and by a "grand imposture." Although the task of the critic is to uncover the bourgeois ideology that dissimulates in the social object, as Leslie Hill points out, ideological criticism is essentially the work of translation. As

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[10] Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture." 32.

[11] Ibid., 33.

[12] Ibid., 34.

[13] In the second section I claim that Barthes, the bereaved son, no longer holds onto this view of language and power.

translation, "there necessarily comes a point, as Barthes was quick to realize, when it merely becomes tautological and falls victim to repetition and redundancy."[14] Every liberatory idea becomes ideological, and is thus fated in its nascency to be at the service of power; even the most radical writing is bound to the circularity of progress.

The tactics and strategies of the writer

In *Writing Degree Zero,* his first published book, Barthes fantasies *literature* as a permanent revolution of language. This literature is not an instituted form of writing. Barthes clarifies that instituted, intellectual modes of writing, like revolutionary writing or Marxist writing, may be *literary*, but are not literature. "What [intellectual modes of writing] have in common," Barthes explains, is that "in them language, instead of being a privileged area, tends to become the sufficient sign of commitment."[15] Barthes recognizes as an historical phenomena the demand placed upon leftist intellectuals to take a position and use language to demonstrate incontrovertibly their commitments to emancipatory causes. In the name of liberation, the intellectual willingly makes language serve power, and writes as a way to be recognized by others by taking a position. For writers of the French revolution, grandiloquent, turgid prose is commensurate with the terror of the guillotine's daily presence. For Marxist writers, grandiloquence gives way to understatement and explanations of present material conditions that are directed toward an action that the writer will themselves never take. Barthes mentions the French Marxist journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, cofounded by Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-

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[14] Hill, *Radical Indecision,* 87.

[15] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 16.

Ponty, as exemplary of writing as a sign of a commitment that the writer has not themselves made.[16]

The function of all modes of intellectual writing is "to maintain a clear conscience."[17] But one cannot be absolved of guilt without first having made a choice and lived it through. In light of the insufficiency of a merely literary commitment, some intellectuals become activists and abstain from writing. Barthes instead stays with literature and stays with the aporia of praxis without resolving it. The difference between literature as another political form of writing and literature as a permanent revolution is that, sheltered within the language of the latter, a free choice has been made and is continuously re-made.

As a classification, literature is not bound to any particular form or genre. It encompasses a mobile set of practices that are able to shelter the forces of freedom by transforming the text into a free play of signs, displacing both the assertiveness of language and the repetitions that banalize and codify language. Unlike intellectual writing, the forces of freedom sheltered within the text are not dependent on the writer's social position or political commitments, or determined by the text's subject-matter. What matters is "the labor of displacement he brings to bear upon the language."[18]

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[16] Barthes is critical of the militant language in Sartre's "strange notion" of commitment. *Grain of the Voice,* 362. On the demand of the writer to demonstrate a political commitment through their work, Barthes writes that the commitment "meets defeat every day." "You may wonder about this failure…But it's simply because writing is the art of asking questions, not of answering or resolving them…When the questions asked are genuine, they are disturbing…Society today is particularly difficult to understand…Class problems have become unthinkable…Political culture itself appears to be at a standstill. These different factors influence literature and find expression there." Ibid.

[17] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 24.

[18] Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture." 34.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Freud introduced displacement as a mechanism of the unconscious that could help explain the appearance of dream-elements that were inconsequential for the waking person. Displacement is the process of divesting the elements of their originary significance and charging them with the significance that belongs to seemingly unrelated figures and ideas. Through displacement, unconscious wishes and dreams could bypass the censorship of the ego and appear in the dream in distorted form. In the context of literature, it is the free choice which undergoes displacement. To follow the structuralist re-reading of Freud pioneered by Lacan, we can say that the unconscious is structured like a language. The mechanisms of the unconscious, condensation and displacement, are linguistic and we find them still at-play in literature's use of metaphor and metonymy.

As one does not choose between freedom and power, language does not provide an exit to power. Instead, literature can stage language's protest to power. As the free choice is only a moment, language is not permanently freed from the violence and circularity of progress. It consciously submits itself to this circularity and pre-empts the historical violence committed against every free choice. It is this that makes it a permanent revolution.

As Barthes tells his audience, language can stage a protest to power by undergoing the labors of displacement, shifting ground, or by doing both. Once power has become enmeshed with language, coopting even the most radical idea, one shifts ground by abjuring the "what has been" of the text. To abjure is to defy expectations and "go where you are not expected," to be adrift, to withdraw.[19] It is not the case that the

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[19] Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture," 37.

writer regrets the fact of having written something now at the service of power and denounces the past, but they denounce the text as a monument to "what has been." This means that the written text is no longer the source of pleasure—it no longer comforts, reflects, or returns the writer to themselves. Withdrawal is a "suspension of the 'heart' (courage)."[20]

Withdrawal is not a withdrawal from *a* fixed point, but from every fixed point; it is to be unmoored. Barthes writes that to drift is to be "like a cork on the waves," unfixed and motionless, "pivoting on the intractable bliss that binds me to the text (to the world)."[21] Recognized by others through gregarious speech and the empty repetitions of fixed signs, the writer who is adrift unmoors language and unlearns the use of language as a means to be recognized by others. "Drifting occurs whenever social language fails me." There is thus in drifting a desire to belong—to others, the classroom, the university—met with an intractable otherness; adrift, the writer is not outside language (there is no exit), but is an other-within language, a position which Barthes identifies as "excessive" "because neutral."[22]

The tactics and strategies of the teacher

Barthes describes his own labors of teaching at the *College* as "dreaming his research aloud." In order to express what it means for a teacher to lecture in this way, Barthes introduced in his Inaugural Lecture three different stages of teaching. During the initial stage of teaching, the professor teaches others what they know. The professor is in

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[20] Ibid., 30.

[21] Ibid.*,* 18.

[22] Barthes, *The Neutral,* 92.

the position of the *examinateur* who knows, while the students who do not know accrue knowledge through imitation. The second stage is the dialectical opposite of the first. The teacher who approaches teaching as a researcher, teaches instead what they do not know. The teacher and the students engage collaboratively in pursuit of the object of their inquiry. The third stage of teaching is reached by one who dreams aloud the pursuit of the new. Such a method subverts the academic norms of the institution and of scientific inquiry, and disturbs the intended purpose of the lecture course.

Barthes's courses do not aim at conceptualizing or demonstrating mastery over an object of inquiry. *How to Live Together* is not about concretizing an ethical doctrine, nor is *The Neutral* about providing a concept of the neutral. Instead of thinking scientifically or rationally, Barthes is attempting to think *oneirically.* Instead of using illuminating speech to draw the things from their obscurity and make them recognizable, accessible to the audience, his use of language, the organization of the courses, enigmatic choice of figures, all work together to keep subject matter in the dark. As he admits while teaching *How to Live Together*—he is pursuing the *fantasy* of living together, one that that has no equivalent in reality. O'Meara writes, the "main pedagogical aim of Barthes' teaching at the EPHE and later at the *Collège de France* was to encourage his listeners to respond creatively to the material offered to them: the material itself is subsidiary to the thought to which it may give rise."[23]

Like one who dreams, Barthes's courses are driven onward by his desire, and desire is never perspicuous. As Freud recognized, although the unconscious propels and animates the dream of the sleeper, it dissimulates and only appears indirectly in the dream. It does not reveal itself in the choice of elements, but in the repetition of the

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[23] O'Meara. *Roland Barthes at the College de France.* 40.

elements, and in the intensity which has been displaced from the cathected object. As Yue Zhuo writes, Barthes is searching for what Nietzsche sought in the Greek *paideia:* "a training that exposes the unconscious of the thinker."[24]

The labor of Barthes' semiology is individual in two ways. First, it is individual because it is guided unapologetically by his idiosyncratic whims and interests. Like the waking person who recounts the minutiae of his dream to another, there is always the risk that the narrative, composed of cobbled together "traits" and "figures," will be inescapably personal and evoke the listener's indifference. His is the work of the adventurer who is attentive to which signs *advene* him—summon him to follow—and which do not, who follows what seduces him and that he desires. Because he is following his desire, this is not about eliciting the interest of the other or having the other recognize him in his words. Second, his labor is individual as a solitary, clandestine labor occurring in the space of a public seminar. At every moment, his labor both addresses itself to the public and tends toward the loss of sociality that he refers to in *The Pleasure of the Text* as "bliss." Bliss, unlike pleasure, is an ecstatic movement out of the self that does not return the subject to themselves.

In this section I explored the activity of Barthes' melancholy as it takes place in his position as an intellectual. The tactics and strategies of the intellectual—withdrawal, displacement, simulation, etc.—typify the concrete character of melancholy's labors; it is a social labor of the individual paradoxically directed toward the loss of sociality. It is for this reason that his melancholy can reveal a path toward overcoming capitalist alienation. In the space of the academy, Barthes maintains remains outside-inside, on the margins of

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[24] Zhuo, "The 'Political' Barthes: From Theater to Idiorrhythmy." 67.

power. Instead of easing the tensions of a fragmented life, he scours the remains of an individual life that are exempt from meaning (in the academy): what one likes and dislikes, the things that intrigue, move, the places that summon and repel—in short, everything "personal," which exposes the values of an individual body, is what remains. Instead of working to reaffirm human social values over and against the alien values of capital, he encounters the fragments of the social and holds up the values of an individual life. Instead of recognizing oneself in the values of another, what is recognized is difference. He writes, "all this means…my body is not the same as yours."[25]

Melancholic figures

What has been discussed thus far—the tactics and strategies of the writer and the teacher who desires to remain outside-within institutional power—are labors of melancholy. In this section, I present a series of melancholic figures—awakening, laziness, weariness, marinating, re-reading—and offer a re-evaluation of these figures in light of the activity of melancholy and its protests against power.

Neutral awakening

In this section, I develop an account of the "neutral awakening" which refers to the delayed slack time between anonymous and social existence. In his lectures on the neutral, Barthes circles around the topic of sleep. He tells his students, "I don't like to recall that I've dreamt." If it was a bad dream, "it ruins my awakening; if it was sweet, it

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[25] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* 117.

tears me to pieces once stopped."[26] That the dream is capable of saturating the day with its negativity or with a wistful yearning to return to what the dream made present, speaks to the relationship between the dream and waking life. Between the unconsciousness of the dream and the consciousness of waking life, the dream is a quasi-wakefulness bridging the transition between the sleeping and waking body.

As Freud theorized in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the dream serves the sleeping body in two ways. First, it allows the sleeper to continue sleeping. The dream emerges in response to various interoceptive and exteroceptive stimulations. Instead of waking in response to these stimulations, the energy is rerouted and finds an outlet in the creation of a dream which the stimulations animate. Second, the purpose of the dream is the fulfillment of unconscious wishes. These wishes, which cannot be fulfilled by the waking ego, can be fulfilled in the dream as their distorted appearance bypasses the censorship of the ego. To this we can add the importance of the dream for the emergence of psychoanalysis as a science. Listening to the dreams of his patients in the early case studies on hysteria was essential to the recognition of the presence of unconscious thoughts and feelings that were finding expression in the dream and, problematically, in their physical symptoms. In response, Freud developed the "talking cure" which alleviated physical symptoms by bringing to consciousness the patients' unexpressed thought and feelings. Finally, there is the importance of the dream for the waking subject. The recall and interpretation of the dream brings to light the workings of the unconscious and as a corollary, illuminates the hidden thoughts, wishes, and desires of the subject.

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[26] Barthes, *The Neutral,* 38.

By attending to sleep, Barthes counters the psychoanalytic tendency to reduce the significance of sleep to the dream. By reducing the significance of sleep to the dream, psychoanalysis posited the sleeping subject as a dreaming, productive subject—fulfilling wishes and producing material (dream-elements) to be worked over by the waking subject. Barthes charges psychoanalysis with weaving sleep into the "mythology of productivity." What interests him is not the multitude of ways that sleep serves the waking subject, but sleep that severs the relation between the sleeping and waking subject. The object of his inquiry is the deep, useless, utopian sleep.

Unlike the dream, dreamless sleep is not at the service of the subject. It is "defined by the fact that it is a kind of unconditional expenditure."[27] This is not a quasi-wakefulness, offering a bridge between sleep and wakefulness. There is nothing here that concerns the subject, nothing that can be interpreted or used; it is exempt from meaning (neutral). Dreamless, utopian sleep is not at the service of the subject because it is not an activity of the ego. Unlike the dreaming subject, it is not solipsistic, and unlike Freud's waking subject, it is not narcissistic.[28] Underlying dreamless sleep is a sociality—a relation to the other. As Barthes writes, it belongs to the couple. [29] While the dream separates the pair, sleep belongs to the couple whose trust allows the pair to sleep deeply

[27] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 39.

[28] Critiques of Freud's early theory of mourning tend to address the narcissism and self-centeredness that inform it. The libidinal energy cathectized to the lost object (object-libido) is a developed form of the child's primary narcissism during which time the libido is turned inward and invested in the ego. The target of the self-love during primary narcissism is the child's ego ideal, an image of itself which emerges through the internalization of the original attachments to the parents. Although it comes to be directed outward, the ego ideal is still the target of object-libido, which is now mediated by the external world. Its formation guided by narcissistic libido, the ego is reduced to a relationship to itself rather than understood as a product of intersubjective relations. On the devaluation of intersubjective relations in early psychoanalysis, see: Jessica Benjamin (1988); Edith Jacobson (1964).

[29] From this, Barthes reaffirms his belief that there is no solipsistic utopia. To recall the fantasy of idiorryhthmy, utopia is about being-alone-together.

together. Sleep is "thoroughly woven with trust."[30] It is an act of love, trust, benevolence. It offers a model for an anonymous sociality.

Like Freud, Barthes approaches sleep in order to approach the unconscious. What is to be gained from the "utopia of sleep" is not the unconscious that Freud heard in the interstices of his patient's words; it is not another subject behind the waking ego on which it is modeled. It is what traverses the distance between the grace of dreamless sleep and the anxieties of waking life: the "suspended, slack time" of a neutral awakening. Although dreamless sleep withdraws from the intentions of reflective thinking, the neutral awakening "is like a readable (perceptible, verbalizable) version of utopian sleep."[31]

It is this neutral awakening that is both described and performed by the narrator in the opening pages of *In Search of Lost Time*. In what follows I read these pages as a script of utopian sleep in order to highlight the time of Barthes' neutral subject. The narrator describes the magic of awakening from heavy, dreamless sleep in the following passage:

> But for me it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was so heavy as completely to relax my consciousness; for then I lost all sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep, and when I awoke in the middle of the night, not knowing where I was, I could not even be sure at first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute than a cave-dweller; but then the memory— not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived and might not very possibly be—would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped myself…[I would then] gradually piece together the original components of my ego.[32]

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[30] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 40.

[31] Ibid., 37.

[32] Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Vol 1: Swann's Way*, 6.

In this passage, the narrator describes the process that occurs in the middle of the night when he is awoken from heavy sleep. We can infer that this heavy sleep is Barthes' deep utopian sleep based on the fact that his awakening occurs in the place of the dream which would ensure that the subject does not wake in the middle of the night. The transition from the sleeping to the wakeful body is not the dream's quasi-wakefulness but a half-sleep which is characterized by a lassitude and a detour through the past. Awakened in the middle of the night from a deep utopian sleep, it is memory that draws [him] up out of the abyss, reminding him not of where he is but of the places he has been in the past. In order to wake to the present, he first traverses the remains of the past, gathering together pieces of the places necessary for the narrator to provide answers to the questions: "Where am I? What time is it?"[33] Before fully awake, a general, anonymous existence wakes drawing the body from the utopia of sleep, which is at no-place and no particular time (touches all times at once), to the bed, the room, the house, the city—all of which are firmly situated at a certain place and at a certain time. In the neutral awakening we are both awake and not yet awake; we experience the deferral of personal existence.

In this neutral awakening, the narrator wakes before he knows that he is waking. In other words, there is *one* in me who wakes before *I* wake. Using an expression from Merleau-Ponty, we can say that the neutral awakening accounts for the "gearing into one another" of the natural body and the personal body. The natural body is the impersonal,

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[33] In *The Visible and the Invisible,* Merleau-Ponty poses this set of questions which he attributes to a text by the poet, Paul Claudel (103; 121) . On Merleau-Ponty's discussion of these questions, see also: *Institution and Passivity,* 196.

anonymous existence ("one") of the organism which flows according to a natural time. The personal body is the personal existence of the subject who says "I".[34] The notion of "gearing into" of the two, which are like "two leaves" of the same body, helps Merleau-Ponty rethink the psychoanalytic notion of "repression," which is not a defensive response to thoughts, feelings, and wishes that are either excessively cathected by the subject or whose expression is prohibited by social and cultural norms. In the very utterance of "I" what we find is the natural repression of the anonymous body by the personal body. Repressed, the anonymous body remains as a "pre-personal adhesion to the world," a generalized style of being; one that is "desirous."[35] Geared into one another, the personal body neither transcends nor obliterates the anonymous body, just as the sleeper's descent into "not-being" does not make the subject irretrievable. Rather, in the neutral awakening, one encounters a delay caused by a belated understanding. Anonymous existence is precocious; it rushes ahead and cobbles together the components of the ego.

Anonymous existence rushes ahead during awakening and at other times as well. In Chapter III, it was discussed in relation to the phantom limb, which is not a sign that belongs strictly to the past, but to the future—a sign that presages an encounter with the event that both occurred in the past and is not-yet here. Even though the loss of the limb forecloses some of the possibilities that belong to the personal body, realization of this closure requires first a detour through the past. The anonymous body and its natural time

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[34] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 361.

[35] Ibid., 86.

continue to populate the subject's pre-personal horizon and hold open the possibility of a future encounter with the past event.

Anonymous existence rushes ahead also, Merleau-Ponty points out, during encounters with intense grief. He writes,

> When I am overcome with grief and wholly absorbed in my sorrow, my gaze already wanders out before me, it quietly takes interest in some bright object, it resumes its autonomous existence.[36]

Even when a person can no longer make the decision to go on in the world without the lost other, natural time continues to flow, carried by the person's "heartfelt sentiments," and cobbles together the pieces of the fragmented, mutilated self.

The neutral awakening indicates the nature of melancholy's insight. In the slowness, the belatedness of melancholy, there is an insight into the contingent, fragmentary nature of one's personal identity and social existence, which have to be cobbled together, created anew, every morning.

Weariness

This insight into the work entailed in awakening illuminates the weariness of the melancholic body. "Weariness" is a notion that Barthes takes up from Blanchot. Weariness is not merely the feeling of being exhausted by this or that situation; it is an absurd exhaustion without end. To be weary is to be worn out like the slackening of a taut surface, like "a flat tire that deflates."[37] Here it is the individual, social body that is worn out. The weary body says: "I wish no longer to renew the perpetual claim that I am

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[36] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 86.

[37] Barthes gets this image of weariness from André Gide who said, "I am a tire that flattens." Ibid.

indeed an 'I'; I no longer want to be recognized and asked to respond to the demands of others."

Weariness means that I am not merely exhausted by a physical sickness or depressed due to the loss of a friend. In these cases, the exhaustion is coded, the act of taking leave from my sociality in response to the situation is intelligible and acceptable for a determinate amount of time. Regarding the codification of mourning, Barthes writes, "after a few weeks, society will reclaim its rights, will no longer accept mourning as a state of exception: requests will begin again as if it were incomprehensible that one could refuse them."[38] In contrast, weariness is the exhaustion of being exhausted.[39] Here, the individual, personal body slackens; it is weary of repressing the anonymous body; it is tired of having to assert itself as an "I" and take a position in conversation with others. That the present-day world is so wearisome is due to its being full of demands to take a position. In parentheses Barthes cites "(statements, manifestos, petitions, etc.)"[40] Unlike illness or mourning, weariness is uncoded. Weary, I seek respite from sociality, which can only be achieved when the respite is neither intelligible nor socially acceptable. A sign without a referent, weariness can only be expressed metaphorically: the flat tire that endlessly deflates.

The kind of respite that weariness seeks is deep, utopian sleep. Weariness desires to no longer be firmly located in time and space. It fantasies becoming unstuck in time and space, so as to shift places, to float. To float means to be unstuck and at the same time suspended, held. "To live in a space without tying oneself to a place = most relaxing

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[38] Ibid., 17.

[39] See also: Deleuze, "On Exhaustion," in *Essays Critical and Clinical,* 152-174.

[40] Ibid., 19.

position of the body: bath, boat."[41] To recall the strategies discussed earlier in the section, we can say that shifting ground and drifting are less the intentional strategies of the intellectual than the fantasies of the weary body. The weary body desires the being-neutral that belongs to deep, utopian sleep. In deep sleep, the weary body is afloat—a free play of signifiers without the possibility of being held responsible and found guilty. In the loss of sociality that the weary body fantasies, there is not a desire for solitude but a desire for the anonymous existence that allows for "being-alone-together."

Laziness

In a 1979 interview, "Dare to Be Lazy," Barthes reaches wistfully toward "true idleness," a philosophical notion that seems less and less possible in modern society. True idleness is "not doing anything." It is to be disinterested in myself insofar as I am a future-oriented being with goals and obligations, a being whose days unfold as a list of items titled "to do." What does it mean to do nothing? Doing nothing—the child in school who does not do what is asked of her, ostensibly she is doing nothing. But the laziness of the child is here emerging as a way of resisting the institutional machinery of the school. As Barthes writes, the child finds school repressive insofar as what is being taught and being asked of her is forced upon her, it does not concern her, it bores her. Laziness is a way to respond to this repression, a "tactic to take charge of one's boredom, show that one is aware of it, and thus, in a way, to 'dialectize' it."[42] Scholastic laziness does not threaten the institution nor the obligations which are refused. The conquest here

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Barthes. *The Grain of the Voice*, 338.

is over the self that wills its own boredom, that wills to not do the work that the productive student will complete. Rebelling amounts to a "shameful laziness" and a "painful experience of the will."[43]

In contrast to this account of scholastic idleness, in which I take an active disinterest in that which calls upon me to respond, there is a passive idleness in which laziness seems imposed upon me from the outside. Aware of the need to work and filled with a desire to work, I nevertheless feel distracted by the world that delays and defers the time of work. Through tactics of procrastination I create many of these diversions for myself—I make a pot of coffee; I take a dog on a walk; I organize the books on my desk—some of which are necessary to clear the space required for the work while others are merely ways to cut up the time of the afternoon and avoid boredom. I am absorbed by myriad distractions. Although the television program, like the school lesson, does not concern me, it consumes me, renders me incapable of response. An active disinterest is here replaced by a passive interest with the world that surrounds me. I am doing nothing. To recall Sartre, passive laziness is a form of bad faith, a laziness that refuses to see itself and is willfully ignorant of itself, a doing nothing disguised as doing something. In lieu of rebelling, then, I self-deceive. This is made evident, writes Barthes, by the fact that when I hear a knock on the door signaling that the world actually does call upon me to respond, "I get very irritated….I disagreeably endure phone calls or visits that, in fact, disturb only work that is not being done."[44]

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[43] Ibid., 339.

[44] Ibid., 340.

To active disinterest and passive interest, we can add passive disinterest to describe the institutionalized and ritualized idleness that emerges on Sundays and other sanctioned "days of rest." While the child might experience this day of rest as a boring day, a form of torture, forced on them from the outside, the adult takes pleasure in the boredom of Sundays. Relieved of the pressure to work, distanced from the week's obligations and to-do lists, one can choose how to be idle, one is free to act out their laziness in whatever way they see fit. "Have you ever noticed," asks Barthes, "that everyone talks about the right to leisure activities but never about a right to idleness?"[45] Participation in modern society is organized around these ways of negotiating boredom—of controlling, hiding, and escaping boredom. I can take up my boredom as a way of resisting indoctrination, I can busy myself and thus refuse boredom by deceiving myself, and I can take up my right to escape boredom through the choice of leisurely activities. It is the last of these that Barthes bemoans as the equation of freedom with lack of constraint. In these ways and the various others through which boredom compels me to turn either to the work or the world, I am effectively "doing nothing" at the same time that I feel myself to be acting freely. So much activity is catalyzed by this fear of boredom, a fear of not doing anything, and yet by turning away from boredom in fear, the consequence is that the "doing nothing" of boredom comes to infuse our activity. True idleness would be that active interest one takes in their boredom.

Marinating

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[45] Ibid., 341.

True idleness begins with an active interest in idleness: the desire to do nothing. Barthes adopts the word "marinating" from Flaubert as an instantiation of doing nothing. Marinating, he writes

> …means you throw yourself on the bed or sofa and "marinate." You don't do anything, your thoughts whirl around, you're a bit depressed…I often have these "marinades," very often, but they never last long, fifteen or twenty minutes…Then my courage picks up again.[46]

To marinate: to stew, to soak in one's own feelings and sensations, and be still. Concomitant with marinating is feeling "a little depressed," which is to say, feeling de-pressed, lacking the pressure through which we can be assured of our connections with others and the world. A little de-pressed, I feel myself disinvested in the world which has disinvested itself from me. To marinate is to actively turn away from others, things, memories, and the world—the whole "image-repertoire" that belongs to the body—and turn inward, toward the body as what remains in the epochal suspension afforded by depression. Marinating is a return to the subject which knows nothing of its object or the others toward whom it is directed. The marinating subject is no less knowledgeable of themselves, but wades through the "overwhelming accumulation of 'disinvestments'"[47] that belong to the body.

The activity of doing nothing does not last. As Barthes writes, after some time has passed, twenty or thirty minutes, "my courage picks up again" and attentiveness to the body is directed outward. A loveless gaze scans the objects and others that are no better known for it.

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[46] Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 340.

[47] Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, 5.

Acedy

Acedy is derived from the Greek *akedia*, which is defined as "negligence, indifference," and develops in the direction of both active and passive instantiations.[48] Through the negation of the will that defines asceticism, an ascetic monk disinvests in a particular way of life, which is marked by terrestrial concerns and desires. Through *acedy*, the monk disinvests in their disinvestments only to feel themselves disinvested by the world. Thus in *acedy*, it is not only the case that I withdraw from the world but the world withdraws from me as well. I become both the subject and the object of the disinvestment.

Acedy is "to be on the verge of suicide." To recall, for Freud, the apotheosis of melancholia is suicide—the act which indicates that the subject's ego has become fully identified with the lost object and comes to share its fate. [49] In acedy, the becoming-object is left unrealized, and in the tension between the activity of disinvesting and the passivity of being disinvested, there emerges a "standstill" [*point mort*]. Unable to invest in others and unable to invest in myself, *acedy* is a "boredom or anxiety of the heart."[50] In *Preparation of the Novel,* Barthes defines it as "the inability to love (someone, other people, the world)."[51] Like melancholia, *acedy* is a mourning without an object, but this

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[48] Barthes, *How to Live Together*, 21.

[49] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 252.

[50] Barthes, *How to Live Together,* 21.

[51] Barthes, *Preparation of the Novel,* 5.

is not because the object is unconscious to the subject; rather it is mourning for a feeling or desire: "the mourning of investment itself."[52]

Acedy is a "gloomy state of mind that the wearing effects of repetitive work and mourning have disposed me to." Barthes continues, referring to *acedy* as

> this running aground, this slow entrenching in the quicksand (=which isn't quick!), this drawn-out death of staying in the same place, this fate that makes it impossible to "enter death alive."[53]

In *acedy*, as in melancholy, one is unable to escape themselves through their investments in others and their worldly commitments. The world relentlessly stirs us from our standstill, asks us to respond to its various demands. This kind of "reinvestment" in the world only presages a renewed desire to retreat from the world. Barthes describes an "exhausting oscillation" between marinating and *acedy*—the activity of passivity and the passivity of activity. Between the demands of the world and the need for solitude, an

> exhausting oscillation that goes round and round in the following circle: necessity of withdrawing from the world in order to write the work: onslaught of ambient, intraworldly stupidity → the need and as it were the obligation to react → participation in the World → reinvestment through Melancholy, withdrawing into yourself, the desire to retreat from the world → renewed onslaught.[54]

Re-reading

In the landmark essay, "The Death of the Author," Barthes renounced classic criticism and its arrogant insistence on the writer as "the only person in literature." As the only person, the life of the writer served as an authoritative presence in the text, giving

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[52] Ibid*.,* 22.

[53] Ibid., 5.

[54] Ibid., 201.

meaning to the text as its slavish imitation. In fact, in literature the writer is never more

than "the instance writing." Like the relationship between the photograph and the life of

its referent, what is recorded is not the writer as "person" but a "subject"—the empty

subject of enunciation that "suffices to make language 'hold together, suffices, that is it

say, to exhaust it.'"[55] The life of the writer is not filially related to the text, like a father to

a son. Rather, writing is a practice of disconnecting the sign from its referent, the voice

from its origin. Barthes writes, "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where

our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very

identity of the body writing."[56] The practice of writing begins with the death of the author

and at the same time announces, precociously, the birth of the reader.

In *S/Z*, Barthes differentiates the work of reading with the play of re-reading by

pointing to the temporality of each labor. The work of reading is the labor of creating and

consuming the text as unified object. The text itself is not a unified object; it is a pastiche

of "multiple writings drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of

dialogue, parody, contestation."[57] The reader is the place in which the multiplicity is

"focused." Reading does not render univocal its multiplicity, but it brings to the text the

life that is lost with the death of the author.[58] The reader binds the diffuse elements of the

text to the internal chronology of before and after. Driven forward by the allure of the

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[55] Barthes, *Image, Text, Music*, 144.

[56] Ibid., 142.

[57] Ibid., 148.

[58] As Barthes explains, "when believed in, the author "is always conceived of as the past of his own book:
book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is
thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the
same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child." Ibid., 145.

after (suspense), the reader is suspended before the spectacular text and the promise of a univocal meaning that it defers. With the removal of the author, the reader nevertheless stands in their place as the empty subject of enunciation holding together the language that exhausts it. As Barthes notes, "the sway of the Author remains powerful."[59] Instead of overcoming the author, Barthes charges "new criticism" with merely consolidating its position. Importantly, although the temporality of reading is a suspenseful, suspended time, this is not the time of the neutral; it is its farcical double.

Re-reading marks a return to the text now illuminated by the light of the end. The reader who begins again, aware of the end, is no longer suspended by the allure of the after, and no longer approaches the text as something that bears the unity of an object. What returns of the text in the return of the reader is *difference*: it is the same text and yet, it is absolutely new. The reader who returns to the text is no longer the reader who first encountered the text. The univocity of the text, its internal chronology and cohesion, belonged to the fantasy of the reader as creator, as the one bringing life to the text. The re-reader no longer forges a narcissistic identification with the author in the wake of their death. Re-reading gives birth to neither the reader as subject nor the text as its object. Instead of bringing to the multiplicity of the text a cohesion and internal chronology, the re-reader is attuned to the breaks, digressions, and evasions of both the text and reader, which are plural and indeterminable: "(meaning is never subject to a principle of determination, unless by throwing dice.)"[60] In the silences of the text, one hears the traces of the body writing—the desiring body who wants to write the work, who takes up a

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[59] Ibid., 143.

[60] Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay,* 6.

practice of writing and struggles through the doubts, disruptions, and intermittences of the heart that belong to every practice of writing, and who is going to die.

Re-reading "recaptures a mythic time (*without* before or after)." This mythic time is not the life of the author which would serve as the mythic past of the work, but the suspended time that belongs to the body writing. The writing body is suspended between the desire to write the work, and the reality of writing the work. The work's reality includes reality's many banalities: the troubling fact that the hand writes much more slowly than the understanding thinks; that the time to write is never as long as one imagines—it is always disrupted by trivial tasks, obligations, and responsibilities; that the person one was when they made the decision to write the work is no longer the same person who writes the work. For the writing body, there is no life that stands as the antecedent of the work; no authority fit to explain its meaning. Neither is it the case that the life is determined by the work it produces as the writing begins with the author's death. Suspended between the nothing of not-being and the nothing of death, the writing, desirous body writes itself towards its own end and is guided by the light of the new life to come (Vita Nova). The mythic time of writing is a suspended time between what one is and what one wants to be (the ego ideal and the ideal ego). It is neutral but this does not mean that it is unmoving, static, or passive. It is a "desperate vitality," an ardent, burning activity

To read a text for the first time is to be held in suspense by the text, seduced by the allure of the after. This is not the suspended time of the neutral but its farcical double. Farce gives way to tragedy when one reads the second time, or re-reads. Aware of the end, the re-reader is no longer suspended between the retention of the text's past and

anticipation of its resolution. Aware that the end is pregnant with another beginning, the re-reader is suspended in anticipation for a resolution that is perpetually deferred. It is not that the end disappears when one re-reads, it is that it can no longer be reached by merely making one's way to the last page of the text. The end anticipated by the re-reader is the death of the writing-body. Even when the death of the writer is an event located far away in the past, it is still anticipated by the re-reader as an event to come.

In order for the writer to die they first of all have to live. The text is the place where the reader encounters the life of the writer. Such an encounter is possible when one reads in the text what the hand has written, and hears another music; between the words the silences intimate the great expanses of the writer who wanted to say so much more, but could not find the time to match the desire to write, whose life ended always too soon. As Walter Benjamin writes, the end of every novel is the death of the author—both the farcical death that occurs on the last page and the mortality of the writer towards which the last page points.[61]

The text is a legible, perceptible transcription of the struggles of daily existence— between the desire to write and the act of writing, between the need for solitude and the responsibilities we have to others and the world. Every word inscribed bears the absences of those that could not be substituted; every step forward marks others not taken. Who knows how arduous the journey, how many days, weeks, or months it takes the writer to traverse the distances between the same two words that the reader will quicken their tempo and glide across? The rhythm of the text is made possible by the writer's delays and digressions which speak to the precarity of the text because they belong to the precarious life of the body-writing.

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[61] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," *Selected Writings, Vol. 3,* 382.

Sometimes these delays are written into the structure of the text, like the thirteen lectures of each course, which develops despite (or because of) the myriad interruptions that are written into its very structure. In the preliminary remarks to *The Neutral*, Barthes introduces the course by first introducing the various interruptions around which the course will take place:

> This year, no seminar: only a lecture course, conducted by myself, for two hours, over thirteen weeks. Between each hour, a pause of a dozen minutes. The sequence of the weeks will be interrupted for the Easter holiday, which is to say that there will be no class on the Saturdays 8, 15, and 22 of April.[62]

Although similar interruptions are to be found in every lecture course, interruptions are never trivial. A break in the course too long, or too soon, can reverberate to the end of the term. In a single class, a short break missed can incite anxiety and boredom in the expectant students whose presence now feels coerced. Interruptions both limit the aspirations of the course by forcing it to begin again, and they animate the course by giving it the space it needs to breathe. Following these remarks, he announces the name of the course, "The Neutral," and, in the next breath, announces a "better" name for the course, "The Desire for the Neutral"—a hesitation/stutter that attests to the aspirations and interruptions that give to daily life a rhythm.

The rhythm of the text is a testament to the writing body whose practices of writing include the many delays and digressions of daily existence. As Barthes tells his students, between the decision to teach the neutral and the execution of the course, there was a delay. And in the suspended time that traversed months on the calendar, his identity was transformed by the catastrophe of another's death: "the person who teaches

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[62] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 1.

the neutral is no longer the one who decided to teach the neutral." The one who writes after the event is no longer the one that wrote before the event and the difference is described as sonorous, as "hearing" another neutral. He hears another music, a second neutral, because daily existence poses a new set of struggles, and his life now bears a different rhythm that can speak to his protracted mourning. Re-reading, like the movement of melancholy, swims against the grain of the text, and makes possible an encounter with the body-writing. Through attention to the delays and digressions of the text, re-reading makes possible an encounter with the writer's death, which is both an event in the past and one that is to come.

In the first section, I followed the melancholy of Barthes, the esteemed intellectual and scholar, in his desire to dwell outside within the institutional spaces of the academy, in the outside-within afforded by melancholy. I claimed that the tactics and strategies he deployed indicate the concrete labors of melancholy's activity. In this section, I fleshed out several instantiations of the melancholic body like awakening, laziness, marinating, and re-reading, in order to illuminate the laboring activities of melancholy. The activities of melancholic bodies, like the perambulations of the melancholic intellectual, can be protests against power.

In the next section, I offer a close reading of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* with the aim of showing what is at stake in the creative transformation of his melancholy.

Camera Lucida: The melancholy of the bereaved son

193

In this section I offer a reading of Barthes's *Camera Lucida* as mourning-text. "Mourning-text" here indicates the creative transformation of the labors of melancholy developed in the previous two sections. In this text, written in the wake of his mother's death, he writes the path he took as he looked through her old photos for what he calls the "*punctum*": a sharp point, a small detail in the image that is capable of cutting and wounding him. His desire for a *punctum* is the desire to find an element that could occasion an encounter with the event of the other's death and the intensity of his grief. In other words, he is looking for the object of his mourning, which he identifies enigmatically as "the truth of the face I had loved."[63]

The activity of mourning-writing

Camera Lucida, Barthes' final text, is a phenomenological essay on photography written in the wake of his mother's loss. Although he describes his desire as "ontological," his desire for the photograph "in itself" is inescapably personal and urgent. What sparks the inquiry, he tells us, is that "amazement" he has felt before an image of the Emperor's brother when he realizes that these very eyes looked at the Emperor. These eyes looked at the Emperor in the past, but do they look at him still? It is a question directed at the continued existence of the photograph. "I wasn't sure," he admits, "that Photography existed, that it had a 'genius' of its own."[64] In an attempt to provide an answer to the ontological question, Barthes begins by approaching "scientifically," dissecting the (universal) photograph into its constituent elements.

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[63] Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 67.

[64] Ibid., 3.

The photograph reproduces mechanically what has happened only once, a moment that is itself entirely contingent and transient. What has happened only once is the body represented: the referent of the image who stands there, stubbornly, in defiance of such precarity. "A photograph," he writes, "is always invisible: it is not it that we see."[65] It is this body—of the mother, the father, the Emperor's brother—that the photograph makes seen. This body, this referent that stubbornly adheres to the photograph, resists his attempts at classifying collections of photographs. Its singularity radiates, defying every reduction. And so, it is quickly revealed as futile to speak scientifically of "the photograph" when every photograph offers only *this* body, absolutely singular and particular.

The impasse he encounters, which forces him to begin again, is a familiar impasse made up of conflicting voices. In the text, "Marx's Three Voices," Blanchot demarcates three distinct, disparate voices of Marx that, he writes, "we see…gathering force and taking form, all of which are necessary, but separated."[66] I introduce these voices in order to reveal the plurality of demands that make themselves known in the photograph. In short, the three voices, not dialectically opposed but juxtaposed, are intellectual, political, and ideological. Regarding a written work, the intellectual voice demands a response which implicitly affirms the author's endeavor as well as the "whole history of logos." It is "direct but lengthy." The political voice is direct and brief. It is less a voice that has something to say but a call that says nothing but works to disrupt every other voice. Above all, the second voice is urgent, calling attention to the imminence of revolution. If

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[65] Ibid., 6.

[66] Blanchot, "Marx's Three Voices." In *Friendship,* 98.

the first voice is lengthy because it affirms what came before, the second voice is brief because it marks the arrival of the event deferred in historical time; it is the messianic arrival of the Now. The third voice is the indirect voice of scientific discourse. This is Marx as he is "honored and recognized by other representatives of knowledge."[67] This voice demands the subsumption of the past and the Now to discourse.

The desire to write on photography is met time and again with a plurality of demands that at once inform and conflict with his desire. Everything he reads on photography fails to interest him; either the photograph is discussed in relation to the history of photography and thus holds it at a great distance from the present, or it is subsumed within an established discourse, and thus kept at an even further distance. Both historical and sociological classifications fail to stay with the referent of the image— "the desired object, the beloved body." To "respond" to these bodies of work would repeat the erasure of the referent. Barthes writes that the tension between these conflicting voices is an iteration of a familiar conflict between two voices—one critical and scientific, the other expressive and personal. Drawn time and again to the particular body of the referent, "the desired object," the critical voice would emerge "in a severe tone: 'Get back to Photography. What you are seeing here and what makes you suffer belongs to the category 'Amateur Photographs,' dealt with by a team of sociologists."[68] In response to his critical voice, which readily shifts between various discourses (sociology, semiology, psychoanalysis), he describes a "desperate resistance to any reductive system."[69] In order

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[67] Ibid., 99.

[68] Ibid., 7.

[69] Ibid., 8.

196

to stay with the body of the image, in order to see what the photograph makes seen, he would have to do away with culture and encounter the body "'scientifically' alone and disarmed."[70] And it is here, alone and disarmed before a panoply of images, that Barthes, the accomplished scholar and prolific writer, finally overcomes the intellectualism that he had held at arm's length, and follows the voice that is expressive and inescapably personal.

Barthes begins again. Instead of asking whether or not photographs exist, he begins with the images that have existence for him. These images are not mechanical reproductions of a past without its own existence; they exist. They have a genius—a posthumous production that transcends their own frozen scenes—and this is certain in the way certain images feel—the way they grip him and take up residence in his imagination. To know with absolute certainty that the gaze of the Emperor's brother continues to exist in the image, long after the referent's death, is not significant for the intellectual endeavor so much as it serves the needs of the bereaved son. He wants to know if the eyes of his mother, which gazed upon him while she was alive, gaze upon him still. Following his desire, he makes himself the measure of the photograph. He does not write to make himself understood by others or to be recognized except by one—the beloved body represented in the image. In doing so, intellectual activity becomes a work of inheritance.

What the punctum makes seen

Barthes is drawn to photography because he is drawn to her. No longer able to encounter her presence in the world, he nevertheless needs to see her, to encounter her being once and for all. Her body may no longer have a proper place, but in its nowhere

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[70] Ibid.

place remain a collection of images—images that are common, shared, reproducible, and transmissible. These images do not reveal the beloved other so much as they withhold the other and mark the withdrawal of her presence. In her place, a representation of her life: fragmented, incomplete, tenuously preserved. It is in the midst of the fragmented images of her life that he needs to find her, recognize her as whole being "as she is in herself." The impossibility of the endeavor does not only originate in the attempt to encounter her whole in precisely that which cannot be made whole. It is that the desire driving his inquiry is the same that forecloses his ability to see her. He wants to encounter her, not merely as a being in relation to him—this person he can encounter in his memories of her. As he writes, "contemplating a photograph in which she is hugging me, a child against her, I can waken in myself the rumpled softness of her crêpe de Chine and the perfume of her rice powder."[71] No, his love yearns to see what Proust yearned to see of his grandmother—her really existing without him, as she is, fully "in herself."[72]

We know that it is in the "Winter Garden Photograph" that he sees her. It is in this image that he finds "the truth of the face I had loved."[73] Instead of showing the reader this image, he describes the encounter with the image that he had never seen before, that has captured his mother at a very young age (5 or 6) standing alongside her brother. For us, this image might just be another image, an image within the panoply of images that

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[71] Ibid., 65.

[72] For Proust's narrator, love yearns to see the other as they are in themselves—without remainder. When the narrator catches a glimpse of this sight of his grandmother, he admits that he "saw what eyes ought never to behold," namely a world in which he no longer exists. *Guermantes Way,* 184.

On Barthes and Proust, see: Mitchell, "Writing Photography: The grandmother in *Remembrance of Things Past*, the mother in *Camera Lucida*, and especially, the mother in *The Lover*."

[73] Ibid*.,* 67.

represents something that once surely existed but that does not continue to exist in the image. We who browse the images are in the position of spectator in relation to the photograph. The spectator is one of the three relations that belong to the photograph: the spectator who views the image, the photographer who takes the image, and the referent as the image's object—three relations, three sets of practices, three different emotions. As a spectator, according to Barthes, we are drawn to some images, which excite or intrigue us, and not drawn to others, which leave us indifferent. Instead of disregarding the particularities of his taste, Barthes pursues them directly. To do so is not narcissistic self-indulgence; the goal is not "to fill the scene of the text with my individuality."[74] "On the contrary," it is "to offer, to extend this individuality to a science of the subject, a science whose name is of little importance to me, provided it attains (as has not yet occurred) to a generality which neither reduces nor crushes me."[75] We are urged to follow him as he passes from the spectator of images who merely enjoys the images that concern him, to the spectator of the beloved's life—a position that the son puts himself in so that he might become a spectator of his own life.

At first, he is in the position of the spectator who takes a general interest in the image, and surveys the landscape that comprises the image's *studium*. The *studium* is the element of the image that piques the viewer's interest; it is everything average, cultural, that reveals itself to me because of my participation in a shared body of knowledge. In this case, what belongs to the *studium* is the appearance of "two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called

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[74] Ibid., 18.

[75] Ibid.

a Winter Garden in those days."[76] What one recognizes through the *studium* has less to do with the referent of the image than with the intentions of the operator, the photographer who has staged the scene. The spectator "enters into harmony with [the operator], to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them."[77] In the image, the little girl stands slightly behind the boy and Barthes remarks, "you could tell that the photographer has said, 'Step forward a little so we can see you.'"[78] In this harmony forged between creator and consumer, the spectator repeats the gesture of the photographer who stages the scene and who can himself only see of the image what he has willed himself and others to see. Barthes refers to this as the "sovereign consciousness" of the spectator.

What Barthes desire to see— "the truth of the face I had loved"—has nothing to do with the intentions of the photographer, nor with the historical setting, or the tense parental relations that he notes find representation in the bodily proximity of the siblings. The image may serve as the indexical counterpoint to an entire historical moment or historical life of the referent, but insofar as the encounter is mediated through culture, the viewer will never be able to recognize her, to encounter the other's singularity. To recall the discussion of Benjamin's aura from Chapter IV, the decaying aura marks the loss of this singularity and presence of the other from historical experience. We may find a photo "good" and remark on the technique, the lighting, the angle, etc. But the good-ness of the

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 26.

[78] Ibid., 67.

200

photo will never get us closer to the goodness that the bereaved son seeks—that which

alone belongs to his mother, that which distinguishes her forever from any other.

Barthes is looking for the second element that disturbs or disrupts the *studium*. He

writes,

> This second element…I shall therefore call the *punctum*; for the *punctum*
> is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A
> photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises
> me, is poignant to me).[79]

It is a small detail in the image that is beyond the intentions of the photographer. The

detail does not provoke in the viewer a vague interest or disinterest; it surprises the

viewer and disturbs their "sovereign consciousness." No longer is it the photographer's

sight and art that one encounters, but the splendor and simplicity of "being there."

Myopically turned toward the partial object as the focus of the image, the *punctum* says

that the photographer nevertheless "could not *not* photograph the partial object at the

same time as the total object."[80] And so, the total object stubbornly reveals itself in the

small details that draw the spectator's gaze away from the intended focus: in a family

portrait, it has something to do with the straps of a woman's patent-leather shoes;[81] in a

photo of soldiers, it is the group of nuns making their way across the background of the

frame;[82] in a photo of Phillip Glass and Robert Wilson, the *punctum* is that there is

something as of now ineffable about the way Wilson holds Barthes' attention.[83]

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[79] Ibid., 27.

[80] Ibid., 47.

[81] Ibid., 44.

[82] Ibid., 22.

[83] Ibid., 54.

As a viewer, we do not always know what it is that has pricked us or why. That we do not immediately know what or why is a sign of the *punctum*, that what we have encountered is an element that does not belong to the *studium*. Bursting through a small detail, the *punctum* is not strictly an object but a feeling, an affective connection to the body of the referent. It is no longer the case that this image interests me on a merely intellectual level; it touches me by cutting and wounding me. As long as the photographer does not, like Orpheus, turn back around to look at the detail, to interject him or herself into the affective relation that has emerged, and disrupt the relation between spectator and referent, the viewer is gifted this possibility of encountering the "total object" of the beloved, the "desired object" in an immediate, intimate, bodily way.

Every image has a deictic function and points, saying, "look, here it is!" The *studium* is what I look at as an observer: the hair, the clothes, the gestures of the body that the image makes visible. Although the photograph every time makes visible the body of the referent, when viewed by a disinterested observer (intellectually), it is the desired body that withdraws from the image. The *punctum* is that detail which *advenes* the spectator and seduces them to see what the image is making seen. What does the image make seen? The *punctum* is that haunting awareness that this body that I observe looks at me in turn. The other's gaze is not another sovereign gaze, which observes me hurriedly, disinterestedly, in accord with the intentions of another (the photographer). I feel myself looked at as a singular being by the singular body of the referent whose gaze exceeds the life that precedes me: "the *punctum* irradiates."[84] Although it was the referent's desired body that initially seemed to withdraw in the image, it is also the "desired body" of the

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[84] Ibid.

spectator, *my body*, that had withdrawn. It is the *punctum* that re-animates my body, bringing it back to life by making this body again visible, desired.

In short, what the image "makes seen" is two-fold. It is first of all the body of the referent, whose death is both an event in the past and one that is still to come insofar as the observer is situated by the image's present. As Barthes writes, the *punctum,* although occasioned by a small detail in the image, is the "absolute certainty" of the thought, "she is going to die." Second, what the image makes seen is the body of the spectator that feels itself being-seen by the image. Still situated by the strange time of the image's present, the thought, "she is going to die," is, at the same time, the thought, "I am going to die."[85]

An encounter with the *punctum* marks the transfiguration of intellectualism into inheritance. Inheritance is a process of listening to and selecting between the plurality of voices, demands, and emotions that are occasioned by the text or the image. To return to Blanchot's text, "Marx's Three Voices," inheritance is the work of selecting the voice that is urgent, affective, *political.* This voice demands first of all being done with the *studium*. This means being done with appeals to scholarship or ideology—to all intellectualisms that demand the reduction of everything singular. It means not wanting to be possessed by any other's view, neither the photographer's sight nor the "profane vision" dictated and coded by culture. It means looking at the image like the painter looks at the mountain—as no-one-in-particular. What is it that this no-one-in-particular sees? In the midst of the anonymity, what the artist sees is herself being seen—interpellated by the mountain, situated by its anonymous, cyclical time as a visible, singular, desired being. What draws the bereaved son from his melancholy (anonymity that inwardly buries) is

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[85] Barthes illustrates this with an image of a young man who is about to be sent to the gallows. He writes, the *punctum* is "*he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *this will be and has been*…Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." Ibid., 96.

the *punctum*—the gaze of the beloved who once looked at him, and who looks at him still.

Barthes illustrates the potency of the *punctum* in *Mourning Diary* when he describes an encounter he has with his grief after his mother's death. In the midst of another depressing day, he is in line, waiting to be helped, when the girl behind the counter says, *"Voila!"* to the customer ahead of him. This single word, one of the many words he and his mother shared, comes from elsewhere and shatters him. In this word, the abyss that separates the emptiness of the present from the fullness of the past dissolves. *Voila! There she is!* For a moment, they are again co-present to a single world. In the next moment, the infinite distance returns to separate them once again as he is forced to relieve the catastrophe of the beloved's death. The tragedy of mourning is not that one must relive the catastrophic event, but rather, that in time, the exceptional character of the word, like the event to which it gives rise, loses its emotive force and is transformed into another thing which provokes indifference. In time, the event of the other's loss is transformed into "another duration: compressed, insignificant, not narrated, grim, without recourse."[86]

The true aim of mourning work is not to turn the loss into something that no longer has the power to prick, disturb, or shatter. The true aim is to give back to the body its poetic productivity, in other words, to give to this body the experience of the other's death, a certainty that belongs to the other and to oneself as singular, finite beings. In the strange time of melancholy, which is both before and after the event, mourning says: "she is going to die," which is also, "I am going to die." One cannot encounter the certainty of the other's death in the recollection of a moment shared as the other only ever gave

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[86] Barthes, *Mourning Diary,* (November 19th).

themselves to us in glances. Rather, it is in the crushing experience of the impossibility of such a moment that we come to know the other for the first time—not as the mere object of our desire, but as a singular, finite being whose desire draws me from the anonymity of social existence and makes me visible as a singular, finite being.

In the section, I followed the creative transformation of melancholy that takes place in *Camera Lucida.* That this is a mourning text is due to the desire animating the text, which is a desire to be recognized by the other who can no longer return his gaze. That this memorializes the transformation of melancholy is due to what the *punctum* makes seen: the true object of mourning. What the *punctum* makes seen is the other as a singular, finite being—an object of desire—and oneself as a singular, finite, desired being. But, the *punctum* is not identical with what it makes seen: it is the cut that wounds with the thought, "she is going to die," which is also, "I am going to die." In the *punctum*, one encounters the intense pleasure and sadness of melancholy: the delayed, slack time that makes possible an encounter with the other only on the condition that one must relive the catastrophe of their death. The object of mourning, then, is not his mother as she was in life, nor his idea of her after her death, but the *punctum*: the cutting insight of melancholy. By making the *punctum* legible, perceptible, by sharing his sight with another, Barthes puts his melancholy to work.

Conclusion

In Chapter III I developed an account of melancholic transformation through the work of involuntary memory that the narrator in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*

undergoes. It was through the narrator's melancholic sadness that he was able to encounter the object of his mourning: the past as it really was. I attribute this to melancholy for two reasons. First, because the exquisite pleasure of this memory was able to cut through the despair and anxiety of everyday life. Second, because the time of his melancholy, characterized by a slowness and belated understanding, afforded him the time he needed to uncover the source of this pleasure. The creative transformation of his melancholy makes material—legible, perceptible—his melancholic insight.

In Chapter IV, I explored the ambivalence of melancholy, which can hold onto the past in ways that are either emancipatory or nihilistic. When melancholy resolves into inwardness, it values the truth of its insights over the value of its truth for the present. The destructive force of melancholy is then directed towards the material conditions that threaten the preservation of the melancholy that animates the subject's deathly gaze. Melancholy is transformed in creative, emancipatory directions when its destructiveness is directed toward those conditions that sustain melancholy. This means that the truths of melancholy are not held over and against the present, but brought to presence, and illuminate something that the subject in their melancholy could not see: a step, another possibility for action, one that is open, that belongs to the future.

In this chapter, I developed an account of Barthes' melancholy with the aim of incorporating the insights from the previous chapters. In the first section, I presented some of the tactics and strategies used by the intellectual to stay with melancholy, and claimed that melancholy's varied uses of language to disrupt recognition allow the intellectual to dwell inside-outside institutional power. In the second section, I presented a series of melancholic bodies. In doing so, I aimed to situate the productivity of the

intellectual's melancholy in the banal, everyday encounters with laziness, weariness, and depression.

In the third section, I developed a reading of *Camera Lucida* as a text that bears witness to the creative transformation of Barthes' melancholy. In this text, he aims to make perceptible, legible, an encounter with the object of his mourning, which his melancholy made possible: the *punctum,* which says: "she is going to die" and "I am going to die." It is this cut and this wound that transforms the spectator from a distanced observer into a mourner. By entering into a relation of mourning with the reader, mourning-texts, like *Camera Lucida,* ensure that the loss will be remembered, carried by future others.

In his eulogy to Barthes, Jacques Derrida remarks that it is not only Barthes who has come to inscribe himself in Derrida as another whom he now carries:

> Ever since reading *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes's mother, whom I never knew, smiles at me…She smiles at him and thus in me since, let's say, the Winter Garden Photograph, since the radiant invisibility of a look that he describes to us only as clear, so clear.[87]

The aim of melancholy's work is not to turn the loss into something that no longer has the power to prick, disturb, or shatter. It is the work of keeping this wound open so that another may encounter the loss of this other whose gaze radiates beyond the image, and makes another visible as a singular, finite being.

In the next chapter, I continue to develop the idea of melancholy work and unpack mourning-writing and mourning-reading as practices that belong to it. In the process, I aim to carry the truth of Barthes' melancholic insight, the *punctum*, to presence, and clarify the relationship between melancholy and mourning.

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[87] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* 26.

CHAPTER VI

ON READING, WRITING, AND THE POETIC PRODUCTIVITY OF PHANTOMS

Lucille: There's something in it after all, something serious. I do want to think about it. I'm beginning to understand such things. Words like 'die', 'die' — Everything else is allowed to go on living, this tiny insect here, that bird. Why not him? The stream of life should stop aghast if even a single drop is spilt. The earth should show a gaping wound from such a blow.   —Georg Büchner, *Danton's Death*

In this chapter, I follow the poetic productivity of the thought of the other' death, the *punctum,* as it was developed in Chapter V. In doing so, I return to the aim of the last chapter, which was to take melancholy to its conclusion. This means overcoming melancholy and putting it to work. Using Barthes text, *Camera Lucida,* as an example of this, I claimed mourning-writing to be a work of melancholy. Like the affect of mourning, mourning-writing is not driven by a desire to recover what has been lost, but for recognition from the other who is dead and can no longer return the survivor's gaze. That mourning-writing is a work of melancholy is due to the object of this mourning, which is the other as they could only be encountered in the delayed slack time of melancholy. The *punctum* is that detail, that element of the image that cuts through the fog of everyday life and draws the spectator from the anonymity of their melancholy, making them again present as a beloved, desired body. Disrupting the tendency of the image to organize the spectator as a distanced, indifferent observer, the *punctum* instead brings the spectator into a relation of mourning with the referent of the image whose death is a past event and one still to come; the *punctum* says: "she is going to die." What ensures that this thought is not the source of a destructive longing for the past, an

unproductive homesickness, is the message that it has for the present. "She is going to die" is, at the same time, "I am going to die." Mourning-writing works over the insight of melancholy, to make it perceptible, legible, to share it with others.

In this chapter, I wish to counter the kind of melancholic inwardness that this thought still holds as one of its possibilities. I draw from the works of Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Blanchot, and Derrida to unpack the work of melancholy through the activities of mourning-reading and mourning-writing. Through the latent intentionality of language, the reader enters into a relation of mourning with the writer whose death has both already taken place and is still to come. Drawn to the un-thought elements at the margins of the text, the reader unfolds these elements in their own work and in this sense defers the other's death. This is what I call the poetic productivity of phantoms.

Melancholy work—both mourning-reading and mourning-writing—is tied to the task of inheritance. To inherit the past does not mean that we let the past speak through us, either speaking for the past or giving to the past our voice to speak through. It means learning to listen to the disparate voices of every text and select only that voice which is active, urgent, the voice that says, "I died." "I died" is the melancholic time of mourning-writing that situates the time of mourning-reading. Melancholy becomes productive when we respond to the injunction of this voice and make the thought "I died" legible, perceptible. The death is no longer deferred, but completed. By giving back to the other their death, productive melancholy is no longer made to speak empty repetitions that come from the past, but makes it possible for new poetic repetitions to emerge, and for its destructive gaze to take part in the creation of new values. "I am going to die" → "I died"

On writing, reading, and re-reading

The activity and reactivity of writing

Between the desire to write the work and the work as finished object, there occurs a transformation of values akin to the transvaluation that takes place between noble morality and slave morality in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals.* While Nietzsche praises the nobles for their free, unyielding, spirited expressions of strength as strength, slave morality is characterized by a hesitation that disrupts the instinctual impulses and allows the subject to dissimulate in one's actions and behaviors, as well as to become responsible for them.[1] From the point of view of the reactive morality, weakness comes to be seen as strength, and expressions of strength as weakness. It is this distance between a creative and reactive morality that marks the distance between the kind of freedom possible in both anonymous and social existence. Barthes writes: "(A fly bothers me, I kill it: you kill what bothers you. If I had not killed the fly, it would have been *out of pure liberalism:* I am liberal in order to not be a killer)."[2] At bottom, not killing the fly has nothing to do with wanting the fly to live; it is rather about not wanting to identify oneself with the action and be recognized by others as a "killer." What was an instinctual expression of one's bodily desires becomes, in the context of our social existence, a declaration of responsibility and an admission of guilt.

In the context of writing, between the desire to write and the written work, a similar transvaluation takes place. In the autobiographical *Roland Barthes by Roland*

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[1] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals,* 1:10.

[2] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 117.

Barthes, Barthes writes that there are two texts for everything he writes: one reactive, the other active.[3] The reactive text is "moved by indignations, fears, unspoken rejoinders, minor paranoias, defenses, scenes." The active text is "moved by pleasure."[4] Through the process of editing, fixing, and accommodating the text, the reactive text comes to bear its own "active" force. The activity of reactivity can be heard in the assertiveness of language, which dissimulates the desire and pleasure animating the text as a pursuit of truth. This is the "becoming social" of the text, which demands the pleasure of the text be supplanted by need and truth. A fictive identity is forged between himself and the words, which carry with them the "embarrassment" of being exposed, and the weight of his guilt. In parentheses, Barthes admits that "he imagines, each time he writes something, that he will hurt one of his friends—never the same one: it changes.)"[5] As a way of undermining the reactive force of the text and introducing between the text and the author some distance, he may introduce incoherence by way of an errant word, or one of the "dangerous perhapses" that Nietzsche ascribed to those philosophers who wish to ensure the survival of the question above all.[6] But, as Barthes tells us, this is only an absurd

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[3] Merleau-Ponty similarly holds the thought of two languages in "Science and the Experience of Expression." "First, there is language after the fact, or language as an institution, which effaces itself in order to yield the meaning which it conveys. Second, there is the language which creates itself in its expressive acts, which sweeps me on from the signs toward meaning—sedimented language and speech." *The Prose of the World*, 10.

[4] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* 43.

Deleuze similarly reads Nietzsche's discussion of noble and slave morality in terms of forces. All reality is quantities of force in mutual relations of tension; activity and reactivity are the "original qualities" that express the relations of force with force. *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 40.

[5] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*., 48-9.

[6] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* Chapter 1:2.

remedy that rests on the belief that anything we add to language could be capable of "making language tremble."[7]

In the process of the text's construction, what happens to the active force of writing—the force that is neither certain nor uncertain but driven onward by an attraction with some words and a repulsion to others? Is the fate of every active force of writing (I write) bound to a reactive intellectualism (I write *that* I write)?[8] And even more urgently, is it fair to reduce the active force of writing to the movement of a two-pronged dialectic: I like/I don't like?

When Barthes takes on the task of writing himself in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* he is thematizing the relation between writing and the self that takes place every time one sets out to write. To some, such an activity surely appears to be a pretentious description and inscription of the self; a desire for preservation and to make oneself known to others. Instead of describing a self that exists outside of the description and language (prosaic), his is an "interpellation" of the character he calls "R.B."[9] By force of nomination, the referent is swallowed up into the signifier "because it immediately coincides with it." He is drifting, "freewheeling" in language. The imaginary I that attains to unity and self-coherence in the text does so at the cost of the subject who

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[7] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 48.

[8] "I write: that is the first degree of language. Then, I write that I write: that is language to the second degree…As soon as it *thinks itself,* language becomes corrosive. But on one condition: that it does not cease doing so *to infinity.*" Ibid.*,* 66.

[9] Louis Althusser's "interpellation" refers to the process through which ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Writings,* he famously describes interpellation as the act of "hailing" the subject: "Hey, you there!" "…the hailed individual will turn round…[and] he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else)." The individual who responds is at once recognized as a subject and subjected by the call. (118) For more on interpellation, see: Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (2004)*;* Martel, *The Misinterpellated Subject* (2017)

writes. Although "to write on oneself may seem a pretentious idea…it is also a simple idea: simple as the idea of suicide."[10]

Reading and re-reading

        Although every text bears an active and reactive force, an activity and passivity, it is the passivity of the text that lends itself more readily in a first encounter. Like the photographer's relation to the photograph,[11] the writer is in the position of the operator in relation to the text. It is the intentions of the operator that the reader first encounters. The reader sees in the text what the author wants to be seen, it interpellates the reader, and this lends to the illusion of the reader as the only active subject. There is not here a dialogical encounter with the other so much it is an encounter of self with self. When we read, it is our own voice that we hear; when we try to understand the meaning of the work, it is our own meanings—both personal and common—that we bring to the words. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "we find in texts only what we put into them."[12] The text provides the occasion for the reader to gain nearness to themselves through the encounter with what is other than themselves.

        The apparent passivity of the text belies the activity of the text. Merleau-Ponty notes that this active power of language, what he calls "speech," is less visible "because we have the illusion of already possessing it within ourselves."[13] On the activity of

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[10] Ibid., 56.

[11] For more on the relationship between the photographer and the photograph, see the discussion of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in Chapter V, 199-200.

[12] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, viii.

[13] Ibid.

literary language, Merleau-Ponty writes of the dissolution of the writer that takes place into the book and the characters. The writer does not want to speak *to* someone still-absent, but to speak *for* them, to give the reader their own voice. The reader of a literary work, absorbed in its world of significations, does not read the work as a collection of signs (signs of the writer, of the work itself, of the character who is speaking, etc.) that point to something other than themselves. The signs are swallowed up in the signification, like the actress, Berma, is swallowed up, made invisible, once Phaedra takes her place on the stage.[14] Language possesses the reader, offering an ecstatic union with this other voice—an alterity-within—which installs itself in the reader "like a new sense organ." Through literature, the reader, like the spectator, is whisked away along with the "signs" from their empirical existence "to another world." The writer lends to the reader their voice, and in doing so, the experience the text awakens is not absolutely new (not novelty), but familiar, if not altogether my own. The author "varies the ordinary meaning of the signs, and like a whirlwind they sweep me along toward the other meaning with which I am going to connect."[15]

Although I have lived a life that pre-exists the book I am reading, the literary language of the novel is unfinished and indirect. It asks the reader to supply its matrix of ideas with the sensibility that it lacks. It does this by providing the occasion for a series of reminiscences that both, bring the past again to presence, and transform the past by means of its system of significations. Thus the power of literary language is not in its ability to explain what has been, but in the expansion of the imaginary, in the

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[14] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 188. For more on the significance of La Berma, see: Proust, *In a Budding Grove,* 21-8.

[15] Merleau-Ponty, "Science and the Experience of Expression," in *The Prose of the World,* 13.

intertwining of the sensible and the idea, which Merleau-Ponty lauds Proust as having gone the furthest.[16]

Merleau-Ponty's reflections on re-reading reflect the latent intentionality of literature that works on the reader in accord with a deferred time. Although the immediacy of literary language is due, in part, to the symbolic transubstantiation of the writer, there is an excess of the writer's I that escapes its dissolution into the text. "All flesh," writes Merleau-Ponty, "even that of the world, radiates beyond itself." [17] This "excess" of flesh is the writer's imaginary, an unthought-of element at the heart of the text. It is this excess and dissymmetry that we will return to with Derrida when he writes of the image that it "sees more than is seen."[18]

In a 1960 preface to Hesnard's *L'Ouevre de Freud,* Merleau-Ponty recounts the experience of first reading Freud as a young student and re-encountering his texts many years later. Like the impressions "everyone reader of Freud" has in the first encounter,[19] one readily refuses his improbable interpretations, his reduction of everything to sexuality, his obscuring of signification, language, and action in the interest of puns. Then, to the extent that one *reads*, that is, to the extent "that one relates oneself to oneself,"[20] in time one recognizes the truth of his basic ideas confirmed in lived experience: the myth of Oedipus playing out in our social institutions and intimate

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[16] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 149.

[17] Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception,* 186.

[18] "The force of the image has to do less with the fact that one sees something in it than with the fact that one is seen there in it. The image sees more than is seen" Derrida, *The Works of Mourning,* 188.

[19] Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis: Preface to Hesnard's L'Ouevre de Freud," 68.

[20] Ibid.

relations, for example. Over time, the refusal that characterizes the first encounter gives way to recognition and acceptance, as the system of significations that inhere in the text come to organize and signify the objects in our perceptual field. Not only did Freud lend the young reader his voice, but with it, he also lent something of the values, judgments, and tastes that belonged to his way of having a world.

Although we may, in the initial encounter, get out of the text only what we put into it, only hear that of the text which seems to concern us, it is also true that literary language and the alterity of the other voice that it shelters take possession of us. In the text, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," which served as a retrospective of Husserl's work, Merleau-Ponty recounts the experience of re-reading Husserl after his death. In Husserl and in Freud, he finds "unthought-of" thoughts residing at the margins of the text. That a work has such unthought-of thoughts is a testament to the greatness of the work, which is not to be judged, according to this method of investigation, by the objects of thought it most fully possesses. "To think is not to possess the objects of thought; it is to use them to mark out a realm to think about which we therefore are not yet thinking about."[21] Now that the work is unencumbered by the life, the work can be judged by the field of possible variations its words demarcate. Every object of thought, at the same time that it is "possessed" by thought, also possesses thought insofar as it draws thought towards the edges of itself, seducing thought to explore the work's not-yet visible sides, to think the thought again, for the first time.

The "un-thought'" thoughts of Husserl's texts indicate an excess of the phenomenological endeavor that survives the obstacles it encounters in the

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[21] Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs,* 160.

phenomenological reduction. On Merleau-Ponty's reading, "locating obstacles is the very meaning of his inquiry."[22] In Freud's texts there is similarly an excess of psychoanalysis that escapes its reduction to a mechanistic framework. The imaginary of Freud, the excess of his thought, radiates beyond the text in the relations of intertwining, substitutions, and polymorphisms that characterize the flesh of being—the very thought that Merleau-Ponty will have spent the final years of his intellectual life bringing to speech.

In the process of re-reading, Merleau-Ponty becomes aware of his inheritance from Freud. His own thought is haunted by Freud, possessed by the unfinished thoughts that continue to pursue the intelligibility that they lack. The task of re-reading, like that of every psychoanalysis, is not to "suppress the past, the phantasms." He does not seek to "free" himself from the phantoms of thought entwined with his own. The goal is rather "to transform them from powers of death into poetic productivity."[23] That they are powers of death returns us to the writer, whose own death the excess of the text bears witness: both for the symbolic death of the writer and that other death it metonymically substitutes. In this way, everything that exceeds its determination, every errant word, everything imaginary, is inscribed with a death that is both a past event and one that is still to come.

Mourning-reading

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[22] Ibid., 161.

[23] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 117.

In the wake of the other's death, the event, which has forcibly detached the other's body from the world of the living, the hardest thing, writes Butler, is that we are called upon to detach the life of the author from the work—the only body that remains in their place.[24] Although we want to read the work as a continuation of the life or, ask the life to serve as the authority of the work (and allow us, who knew them, to serve as authority by proxy), doing so amounts to a betrayal of both the life and the work. It is a betrayal of the "life" insofar as we substitute the other's death for the illusion of their continued life in the work. It is a betrayal of the work insofar as we fail to account for the life the work itself bears—one that is no longer determined by the author.[25] The life cannot explain the work, but, as Merleau-Ponty wrote about the task of the psychoanalyst who reads the patient's case histories alongside the presence of the bodily symptoms, doing so, gives back to the body its "poetic productivity." It is the work that gives a sense to the life that doesn't preexist the work. "The truth is," he writes in "Cézanne's Doubt," "*the work to be done called for that life*."[26] To read the work while being mindful of the life gives back to the body of the work its poetic productivity.

To illuminate the poetic productivity that constitutes the aim of mourning work, I turn to Maurice Blanchot's account of the countervailing forces that belong to literature. Every work of literature, according to Blanchot, bears both prosaic and poetic forces. The prosaic force of literature is the principle of language that makes what is absent present, that draws the things from obscurity and illuminates them by bringing them to speech.

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[24] Butler, "Finishing, Starting," in *Derrida and the Time of the Political,* 292.

[25] Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language,* 49-55.

[26] Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," 70. (Italics in original)

Despite the transient existence that characterizes earthly things, the poet can in this way give to the flower that is contemplated a kind of presence that endures beyond the imminence of its own death. In order to protect against death, prose makes the things communicable and transmissible; by making them historical—contingent and finite—prose suspends death.

Blanchot writes of the covert violence that language does to the thing it names. He writes,

> My language does not kill anyone…but when I say "this woman," it indicates that this person who is here right now can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence, and suddenly plunged into a nothingness in which there is no existence and presence.[27]

The deictic word "this" points to the woman's being here now—at this time and place—but in a way that foreshadows the deprivation of her being; her momentary presence is conditioned by the imminence of her absence. Hanson writes that the loss operant in the act of naming "this woman" is "a loss of the immediate, a loss of the presence of 'what is,' which is thus present only in its absence…by naming it I master it, and cause it to disappear."[28] According to Derrida, Blanchot recognizes in literature, like Hegel and Mallarmé before him, this "annihilating force of nomination, the essential link between language and death, language and murder."[29] Specific to Blanchot, what he finds in literature is that it has become history; in particular, it repeats the "absolute cruelty" of the French Revolution. There is a "literal alliance of literature with Terror as a

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[27] Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Space of Literature,* 323.

[28] Hanson, "Forward: This Double Exigency," xxvi

[29] Derrida, "Fourth Session," *The Death Penalty Lectures: First Seminar,* 112.

guillotining machine," sovereignly deciding the right to life and death.[30] The cruelty of literature, like that of the Reign of Terror, is not that it puts to death, but that it uses death to keep the subject in suspension between life and death. It is the terror of death without end and of life without the openness of a future. What we lose when we lose the ability to die on our own terms—whether through literature or the cruelty of political regimes— when the power of death is transformed into a means of mastering and tyrannizing life through its suspension, is precisely what literature destroys, namely, "obscurity itself, and the dark reality of this indescribable event—turned by us, thanks to an astonishing subterfuge, into a means of living and a power of thought."[31]

According to Bruns, the annihilating force of literature should not be overemphasized as literature for Blanchot always "keeps open the anarchic or hither side of negation."[32] The anarchic side of negation is "poetry." Here, the movement of negation turns back on itself in an "encounter of death with death." While prose attempts to show that the reality of things is their adherence to the self-same world, poetry is "not interested in the world but in what things and beings would be if there were no world."[33] Poetry is language turned towards the "silent existence" that it has itself destroyed. While literature illuminates the darkness of the thing by turning its silence into speech, it also turns back on itself, looking in its own speech for traces of the silences that have been destroyed. Blanchot describes the difficulty of literature's poetic retrieval:

> Something was there that is no longer there. Something has disappeared.
> How can I recover it, how can I turn around toward what exists *before,* if

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Bruns, "Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature," 535.

[33] Ibid., 333.

all my power consists of making it into what exists *after*?…*I say a flower!* But in the absence in which I mention it, through the oblivion to which I relegate the image it gives me, in the depths of this heavy word, itself looming up like an unknown thing, I passionately summon the darkness of this flower, of this perfume that passes through me and that I do not breathe in, this dust that fills me but that I do not see, this color that is trace and not light. How then can I hope to attain the thing I push away? My hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words too are things, a nature, what is given to me and gives me more than I understand.[34]

Literature is a site of contestation between the prosaic and the poetic, between the negation of death and the negation of the negation. I detoured through Blanchot in order to illuminate the "poetic productivity" of the work at which mourning works. But the poetic force of literature produces nothing but its own unproductivity. How can I recover the presence that is lost in language, "how can I turn around to what exists *before*, if all my power consists of making it into what exists *after*?" To give back to the work its poetic productivity one does not give to it the power of continued life; it is to give back to the other their death: the "act of suicide" that Barthes performs in his auto-biographical text. In order to overcome the intellectualism that afflicts every writer who must not only "write" but "write that they write," that is, forge a fictive identity for themselves through the repetition and reflexivity of what has been written, it is only through the coincidence and dissolution of the "I" into its symbol that the death of the author can be accomplished. In doing so, the reader is not called upon to kill the other a second time (mourning), but to bear witness, if it can be done, for the author's own defenestration. They have, as Lacan says, "thrown themselves off stage" (the apogee of melancholia.). The reader who comes to know the death of the author takes their place on stage,

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[34] As quoted in Derrida, *The Death Penalty, Vol. 1*, 118

tenuously held together by the fiction of an "I" with which there is coincidence without remainder. If the *punctum* is this realization that concerns the fate of the referent, namely, that "she is going to die," the *punctum* is also, and at the same time, the realization, "I am going to die."

What is memorialized in the text—the essential content of every trace—is the loss of the other. To return to Cézanne, who is looking at *Mont Saint-Victoire*, relentlessly pursuing the immemorial first encounter. He is trying to remember an impossible memory of a loss that does not belong to him but calls out to him. In order to paint lost nature, he must pantomime the loss, become lost in turn, gazing at the mountain as "no-one-in-particular." He is on the side of things, penetrated by the mountain to which he lends his body in order to make what has been lost visible. What is made visible through his gesture is not the presence of nature before the loss, but another loss—his own. In the "act of suicide," Cézanne calls out to another who reads in the work this loss, which has no proper place, belongs to no calendar date, but may nevertheless be encountered in the work, "in its midst": a no-one, no-where haunting the everywhere.

Derrida's works of mourning

Memory and the event of the other

In "Freud and the Scene of Writing," (1966) Derrida indicates that his aim is limited. He seeks to "locate in Freud's text several points of reference, and to isolate…those elements of psychoanalysis which can only uneasily be contained within

logocentric closure."[35] His examination of Freud follows the development of the breakthrough, the pathbreaking, which is already there, nascent in the earliest neurological explanations given by Freud in *Project for a Scientific Psychology*.

In *Project,* Freud pursues a proper analogy of the psychical apparatus. Although, Freud tells us, consciousness emerges from perception and at the exclusion of memory, memory is the origin of the psyche, and so, memory is both before and after perception. A proper analogy needs to be able to account for both perception and the memory: both the enigmatic first time and its repetition.

Freud posits the existence of two types of neurons: permeable neurons (perceptual) and neurons that offer resistance to quantities of force. When the excitation of a force presents a "dangerous cathexis," the resistances ensure that what occurs is not death. In the face of death which threatens life, life enters into a relation with death, which is not repelled but delayed, deferred, and repeated. That life survives this encounter is due to the adoption of an economy of death. Memory emerges there in the resistance to a dangerous quantity of force that overwhelms perception; at its origin, it is a scar that marks the site of a relation with death. The breakthrough is that rupture which is repressed by the psyche. This economy entails that what is repressed is not hidden as if one did not want to see it; it is instead thrown ahead, deferred, so that it can be lived. The present scene is overdetermined by the event which is both a past event and indicates the direction of the present's unfolding. The "second time" of memory, then, is both a return and the condition that makes possible "the first time" of perception.[36]

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[35] Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," 249.

[36] Recalls the relationship between the first two forms of time outlined in Deleuze's three forms of time in *Difference and Repetition*.

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Writing is the "machine" that serves as the best analogy for the working of the apparatuses of perception and memory. Writing as *techne* is "the relation between life and death, between the present and its repetition, between the two apparatuses." The time of writing is the melancholic time of *Nachträglichkeit*. On this model, *Nachträglichkeit* is an originary form of time. Derrida writes that *Nachtrag* is a "footnote" for the present. What cannot be included within the organization of the present (the breakthrough, a quantity of force) is footnoted. The footnote marks the step that could not be taken within the present (could not be encountered there), and it is this loss which is marked and thrown ahead, that which drives the organization of the present. It marks the limit of the text and indicates the direction of the text's unfolding.

For Derrida, the "breakthrough," marked in the margins of the text is that which ruptures the horizon of expectation. It is the breaching of the event, which is "another name for experience itself, which is always experience of the other."[37] If we are creatures who defer the arrival of death, can we also welcome the unexpected arrival of the other? As the event of the other marks the arrival of the future, it matters, then, how we are oriented towards those elements that resist the totality of the work, and dwell outside-within. It is the "unthought elements," the "rupture" that Derrida will follow in his mourning work. To neither run away from death nor towards death, but to think death— the thought of the event— is the immense task that Derrida puts before himself, the one who works on mourning.[38]

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[37] Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, 11.

[38] Derrida encounters a breakthrough in Nietzsche's polyvalent corpus in a handwritten note on the margin of an unpublished text that reads: "I have forgotten my umbrella." This remark, impossible to decode, resists all attempts at deciphering what Nietzsche meant to say. That it remains both open and undecipherable ensures the play of the text. The only relation possible to the event of this text is the "structurally posthumous necessity": "we are going to die." *Spurs,* 139.

On March 26, 1980, Roland Barthes succumbed to injuries sustained weeks earlier when he was hit by a laundry van on the streets of Paris. Derrida's eulogy to Roland Barthes is the first of a series of eulogies given by Derrida to his friends, collected under the title, *The Works of Mourning*. In this, the first eulogy, Derrida responds to the event of his friend's death and does what he promised himself he would never do: to "write *following the death*, not after, not long after the death *by returning* to it, but just following the death, *upon or on the occasion of the death*."[39] It is one thing to eulogize a friend whose death has long since past, another to write to a friend currently living, but to write of a friend whom one has known and loved and is no longer had been thought "impossible, indecent, and unjustifiable."[40] *Impossible* to find words that could be the measure of such a singular loss. *Indecent* to so quickly bury the other "in memory" and announce the event's irreversibility. *Unjustifiable* to speak in the place of the other and fail to give the other the last word.

If we nevertheless write in the wake of the other's death, is this merely to precipitate the work of mourning, either individual or collective, so that we may cauterize the wound and protect ourselves "from a return of the dead"?[41] Like other kinds of work, mourning work that hurries ahead in anticipation of its completion wrests from the practice pleasure. In the case of mourning work, it is the pleasure of suffering, the *ascesis* of which amounts to another loss—"a kind of *loss of sympathy*: I no longer feel myself to be *sympathetic* (to myself, to others)."[42] This loss of sympathy marks the completion of

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[39] Derrida, *The Works of Mourning*, 49. (italics in original)

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 54.

[42] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* 137. (italics in original)

mourning, which is the completion of the other's death. If we turn away from mourning work to stay with our suffering and remain silent, then we may keep faith with the other whose unique *durée* continues to resonate inside us, in sympathy with our own. Do we not, in our silence, risk the future by keeping faith with the dead? And in risking the future, melancholic silence bears its own kind of murderous temptation. Following Freud's formulation of mourning's aporia: either one undergoes the work of mourning, effectively killing the other a second time, or one fails to undergo the work and negates the other's death at the cost of precipitating their own.

In "By Force of Mourning," Derrida's eulogy to his friend, Louis Marin, Derrida presents mourning as the phenomenon of death: mourning is death's representation, its image. What remains of the other after their death is the mourning that belongs to the survivor. In the wake of their loss, the other can no longer be encountered in shared presence, and in the place of their presence, what the mourner is left with is an excessive, pervasive sadness that traverses waking and sleeping life—sadness that leaves the mourner empty. Although the source of this sadness seems to be the loss of the other's presence, a loss that is encountered with each disappointed anticipation, in reality, it is the loss of their absence that must be the source of their pain as it is the presence of the other that floods the mournful present. No longer found at a particular time and place, the other is everywhere, or rather, the other is this nowhere that haunts the everywhere. Mourning wrests us from the everydayness of the natural attitude and intensifies the experience of the present, as if it has been supplemented by a potentialization of power. At once, mourning leaves us feeling drained, entirely without force, and yet, mourning has its own irrepressible force enervating its own activity. The other is dead, which is,

according to Derrida, a state that is entirely without force. So where, if not from the referent of the image, does this sadness find its force? How can we understand the source of mourning's power? How does it work and what does it produce through its activity?

What is the work of mourning work, which Derrida writes is at the basis of all "work"? We recall that for Freud, the work of mourning work consisted of the process of reality testing, through which the subject comes to know the reality of the loss, and introjection or interiorization of the lost other. Through such work, the other who no longer exists is incorporated into the mourner who gives to the other continued life. We can compare this to the Hegelian-Marxist conceptions of work as the exteriorization of the worker in response to the loss of their freedom; the unfree worker fashions the world in their own (alienated) image. Derrida compares the one who works on mourning to the work of the painter working at a painting or that of a machine, which works "at such and such an energy level." We are no longer asking whether the work produces the other as an interiorized or exteriorized object through the process of mourning. We no longer care whether the work is successful or unsuccessful. In the place of such inquiries into the substance or quality of mourning, mourning becomes a question of quantity. How much mourning? By what force?

Derrida begins his eulogy to Louis Marin with a reflection on mourning's work. The one who works on mourning work is, every time, undergoing the work of mourning. One cannot approach the object any other way except by approaching mourning *mournfully*; mourning is both the object and resource inspiring the one who works on mourning. To work at mourning work means "enduring this work of mourning from the very start, according it within oneself, and giving oneself this liberty of finitude, the most

worthy and the freest possible."[43] In announcing the death of his friend, Marin, Derrida enters into a relation with death and announces his own. And it is always this way—to mourn the other means also mourning the self, and holding within the text the certainty of each's finitude.

Mourning work, at the basis of all work, is essentially archival. One works over their memories of the dead in order to be wounded by them and to thus preserve them. As archival, mourning works through the loss by protecting the other and oneself against the loss. Death illuminates the finitude of existence and the archive allows us to defer the certainty of death. Even though each of us—as singular, finite beings—will perish, the archive, which is tasked with remembering, defers the completion of death through the promise of continued life in the archive. The archive gathers the remains of the dead and exteriorizes them. Much like the mourning ritual of interment, the dead, which no longer bears a singular existence (temporal and spatial), is given continued life through burial. Buried in a public cemetery, the "life" of the dead person goes on as they are located at a time and place, and continue a public existence.[44]

The archive is the place exterior to any individual memory or psyche where traces of what-has-been are gathered together, deposited, and kept safe. Far from being a disinterested operation, archivization is necessarily political. It is always a question of who has the right to safeguard the archive and to interpret what is safeguarded there. *Archons* names those whose power entails the right to keep the archive safe and to interpret its signs.

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[43] Derrida, *Works of Mourning*, 172.

[44] Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*

The work of interpreting an archive is the work of inheritance. As Derrida claims

in *Echographies of Television,* the work of inheritance is "our being…we are what we

inherit."[45] In order to interpret an archive, one has to first situate themselves within the

archive. The interpreter is able to illuminate the archive because they belong to it,

sinewed to its corpus. Inspired by the archive's dead body, they reanimate it, and bring to

it new life by extending this corpus into the future, by responding to the questions posed

by the corpus but left unanswered (the "unthought-of elements"). Thus, there is within

the archive a problematic patriarchal logic. The interpreter belongs to the corpus, listens

to its injunctions, obeys (deferred obedience), and carries its name. Derrida writes of a

contradiction that structures Freud's own corpus: on the one hand, he illuminates (and

deconstructs) the archontic principle of the archive, which is paternal and patriarchic,

and, on the other hand, he repeats it in his own historiography as the patriarchal logic is at

the heart of the "civilizing progress of reason."[46] Those who follow Freud, Derrida

remarks, still carry his name and "continue to wonder if they can speak in their own

name."[47]

Mourning work, as a work of inheritance, is a work of selecting between the many

voices, the discordant tendencies that make themselves heard in the archive. Each voice

bears a different injunction, draws the horizon of a different future. In *Specters of Marx*

Derrida poses a question aimed at the archive of Marx, when he asks "Whither

Marxism?"[48] This question asks both "Where is Marxism going?" and "Is Marxism

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[45] Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, 26

[46] Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," 95.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* 14; 38.

dying?" For Derrida, "Whither Marxism?" is a question posed to the present, to us who are the unwitting heirs of Marx's promise and who must come to terms with our inheritance.

In "Marx's Three Voices," Blanchot hears the tendencies within Marx as three kinds of heterogeneous, unassimilable voices. The first voice is heard by the scholar who works toward the inclusion of Marx into the Western philosophical canon. The second voice is urgent and political—a call for the "permanent revolution." The third voice is that of a scientific discourse which takes seriously at every moment the possibility of its own radical transformation.[49] In order to read Marx in such a way as to inherit the *Spirit*[50] of Marx, one cannot read like a scholar who attends only to that which can be localized, given a proper place, and understood within a unified history of thought. Such an approach, which is that of philosophy, can do no better than provide a representation of Marx that sterilizes his thought, and makes it present while at the same time keeping it at a distance; such an approach is that of a "work of mourning" that buries the dead instead of learning to inherit the promise of the past.[51] Rather, Derrida's hauntology implies "the continual work of un-doing everything that tries to hide its specters."[52]

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[49] Blanchot, "Marx's Three Voices," in *Friendship,* 98-99. Further discussion of Marx's three voices in relation to Barthes' photograph can be found in Chapter V, 195-96.

[50] Regarding 'Spirit,' Derrida provides helpful commentary when he discusses the importance of the bearing of the dead by the living: *"The life of Spirit is the death of nature or biological death, it bears death, it bears and tolerates the mourning of death itself…this spirit that has the strength to bear death, this spirit is a power…not only to look it in the face, but to take the time to look it in the face, to make this gaze last, not to be content with a quick glance, not to look death in the face for a moment and then look away from it the next moment. That's what bear means: it is also to bear looking death in the face in an enduring, durable way,…the courage to bear death, one needs, I would say, something like a fidelity to death, to what dies and to who dies, as such, as dead." Beast and the Sovereign: Vol II,* 153.

[51] According to Ware, it is the structure of the promise that allows Derrida to turn toward the past while still affirming the heterogeneity of the future-to-come. "The Disjuncture of the Present," 114.

[52] Szeman, "Ghostly Matters," 110.

For every written text there are (at least) two texts and it is through the reactivity of the text that the specters are hidden. What is most indispensable about Marxism is that, as a critical analysis of society, it bears a promise—of emancipation, justice, and democracy to come. What is most indefensible about Marx is the relationship he posits between these specters and the future. Marx understands the classless society of the world-to-come as that which has freed itself from the chains of the past. In the call made by Marx in the "Eighteenth Brumaire" to "let the dead bury their dead," Derrida identifies a relationship between the future and past[53] that makes possible the totalitarian incarnation of an emancipatory political project. Instead of liberating the future from the specters of the past, Marx's fear of ghosts and turn away from the past amounts to a decisive turn away from the future. As Fritsch explains, Marx's fear of ghosts is, for Derrida, a failure to recognize "an irreducible and anterior otherness, as the spectrality of time within life." The time is out of joint. It is only by responding to the "spectral injunction" to answer to and for the dead that the otherness of the past can be disarmed.

The work of inheritance, which selects between the disparate voices of the text, is a work of undoing the reactivity of the text. As it was discussed earlier in the chapter, the reactive text, driven by need and truth, strives to be self-identical with itself in order to be recognized from others through its clarity and coherency. It is practice of erasing every errant word or detail that points the reader outside of the text. In undoing the reactivity of the text, inheritance is the work of following the activity of writing.

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[53] In contrast to Benjamin who turns toward the past and away from the future in order to undercut the concept of progress and redeem what can be saved, Derrida maintains a relationship between the past and future by affirming the heterogeneity of the future-to-come. For further discussion, see: Ware, "Dialectic of the Past / Disjuncture of the Future"; Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*

Mourning-writing

Writing in the wake of the loss can neither be equated with the productive work of

Freudian mourning nor the unproductive stasis of melancholia. Like Freudian mourning,

it is a kind of labor. But this labor does not aim to complete the unfinished death or to

make whole the fragmented present. Like melancholia, mourning-writing is characterized

by a pervasive sadness that may or may not have its source in an ungrieved-for loss. If

this writing is indeed bound to sadness, it is not for the sake of dwelling in sadness. It is

not through sadness that the alterity of the other was known nor is it the way for it to be

inscribed.

Remarking on his own sadness, Derrida notes the insistence of Barthes' pleasure.

He writes,

> I like to think of Roland Barthes now, as I endure this sadness, that which
> is mine today and that which I always thought I felt in him, a sadness that
> was cheerful yet weary, desperate, lonely, refined, cultivated, epicurean,
> so incredulous in the end, always letting go without clinging, endless,
> fundamental and yet disappointed with the essential. I like to think of him
> in spite of the sadness as someone who never renounced any pleasures
> [*jouissances*] but, so to speak, treated himself to them all.[54]

What remains of Barthes after his death is the sadness, cheerful but weary, that is now

Derrida's to endure. Far from being associated with inactivity, self-indulgence or

renunciation, this melancholic sadness Derrida thought he felt in Barthes is akin to

Barthes' desire and animates Derrida's desire to write.

In his words, Derrida refrains from speaking *of* Barthes, which would objectify

and render him a static being. He refrains also from speaking directly *to* him, which

would address Barthes as a subject while cognizant of his inability to respond. His

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[54] Derrida, *Works of Mourning*, 36.

thoughts, writes Derrida, are "*for him*, for Roland Barthes, meaning that I think of him and about him, not only about his work." His words are a gift to Barthes, to the one who can no longer receive the gift or respond. "So where do they go?" he asks. "Only for him in me? In you? In us?"[55] Are eulogies only ever directed toward the images of the beloved others that remain interiorized in those who have known and loved them? A community of mourners may emerge, gathered together around the mournful words that are received like a gift for the one they keep close. Derrida's words cannot be merely for the community that carries this image-repertoire of Barthes, spurred on by the injunction to remember the past. The image-repertoire, according to Barthes, is that which "oversees, controls, purifies, banalizes, codifies, corrects, imposes the focus (and the vision) of a social communication."[56] Barthes himself could never be reduced to such images, concerned as he was with what escapes the image-system. Unless there is a certain hysteria to the words, an anarchic, destructive force that demands forgetting, these words will only ever be able to illuminate a common Barthes—purified, banalized, codified—and render invisible the singularity of Barthes through metonymic substitution.

Is it true, as we tend to believe, that Barthes, who is dead, will no longer respond to Derrida's words? After the death of a prolific author such as Barthes, there is so much that survives in the after-life of the event, so many words, thoughts, and images that remain thanks in part to the mechanical reproduction that ensures their persistence in the archive. The archive—the columbarium of things past—ensures that the productions of the past will not share the fate with their producers. Guarded by their successors, what

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[55] Ibid., 35.

[56] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* 137.

has been is saved from oblivion, or, rather, oblivion is deferred in the archive. The ghost of Barthes may no longer respond, but, as Derrida writes in *Archive Fever*, "the phantom continues to speak."[57] Barthes continues to speak just as an answering machine of the dead continues to respond to the one who calls—telling the caller when to speak, and when to expect a call in return. Already "informed by a *techne* and inscribed in an archive," a spectral response from the other is "always possible."[58] History, culture, and tradition all rely on the possibility of the mechanical repetition of a response. The phantom continues to speak and is capable of a spectral response, compulsively repeated across time without the openness of the future afforded to temporal beings.

This point touches upon a question that concerned both Derrida and Barthes, namely, of the referent, and of its fate in the archive. Is it possible to remember the other who is both sheltered and forgotten in the archive? Such remembering would not be recollection but *anamnesis*. "I call *anamnesis*," writes Barthes, "the action—a mixture of pleasure and effort—performed by the subject in order to recover, without magnifying or sentimentalizing it, a tenuity of memory…the one I lend to the other I love."[59] Can we learn to listen to the phantoms such that we can let the phantoms speak, or rather, lend to them our voice—not in the automatic way that the answering machine speaks, reproducing a voice that is bound to a closed past, a voice "that has been," but a voice that belongs to the future and to the event which it heralds in the present? In relation to

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[57] Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 62.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 109.

the photograph, which is bound to the referent, *anamnesis* is the absolutely certain

knowledge that belongs to the referent: I am going to die. (she = I)

        In the wake of Barthes' death, Derrida reads two texts produced by his friend that

he has not yet read. Incidentally, he reads for the first time, Barthes' first text, *Writing*

Degree Zero, and his last text, *Camera Lucida.* Not only thinking about Barthes' work,

we recall that Derrida "think[s] of him and about him."[60] This is not to say that he is

thinking about his "life" if by this we mean a chronological series of dates that mark its

significant events. Despite the fact that these events are marked by a date and supposedly

convey something singular about the one for whom these events held meaning, they do

not. After compiling such a list of dates titled "biography," Barthes remarks in

parentheses: "(A life: studies, diseases, appointments. And the rest? Encounters,

friendships, loves, travels, readings, pleasures, fears, beliefs, satisfactions, indignations,

distresses."[61] "The rest" points to everything that fails to be captured in the biography,

everything excessive, "neutral."   Like a list composed of two sides— "things I like" and

""things I do not like"—"the rest" is without importance for anyone except perhaps for

the one who composed it. "And yet," Barthes writes, "all this means: *my body is not the*

same as yours. Hence, in this anarchic foam of tastes and distastes, a kind of listless blur,

gradually appears the figure of a bodily enigma, requiring complicity or imitations."[62]

What is exempt from meaning is the body of the other whose likes and dislikes may

provoke in me surprise, disgust, or complicity, insofar as they are not my own. In short, it

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[60] Derrida, *Works of Mourning,* 35.

[61] Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 184.

[62] Ibid., 117.

is the values of the individual body that escape the image-system. It is in "the rest" that one recognizes the singularity of the other. Following Merleau-Ponty, we could call this the body's "natural symbolism."[63] "The rest" is what Derrida is mindful of, what he thinks of while reading his friend's texts: the "small gestures around what we take to be the essential writing."

Like the body that moves—closer to the things that intrigue and excite, that is repelled or left cold by others—the writing hand moves across the page attracted and repelled by words. It is precisely these preferences that comprise the atmosphere of the words, breathlessly carrying the weight of time, history, and situation inscribed upon the individual body, these traces of so many desires—that become legible to the reader who is also the mournful friend, who wants to be seen once more, made visible by the other's gaze, to be once more the desired body.

As he reads Barthes last text, *Camera Lucida,* he is looking for something Barthes "could not *see* in his writing." He continues,

> I try to imagine the gestures around what we believe to be the essential writing. How, for example, did he choose all these photographs of children and old people? How and when did he choose these lines for the back cover where Marpa speaks on his son's death? And what about these white lines on the black background of the inside cover of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*? [64]

Derrida is looking for the activity of writing, the writing-body that was *advened* by this word, seduced by this image and left indifferent by others. The image that made its way into the published book, and into the archive, is of interest to him only insofar as it preserves the negative image of this body. He is looking for the *punctum* that Barthes

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[63] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature,* 226.

[64] Derrida, *Works of Mourning*, 63.

looked for before him. The small detail that pierces the image and is capable of wounding and cutting him. An errant word or detail that would hint at the imaginary—other histories, other steps that one would have liked to have taken were there enough time, the body's virtual power.

What the punctum makes seen

In Derrida's eulogy to Louis Marin, he recounts the pain he encounters when reading Marin's final text. What can account for the intensity of pain and sadness that wounds and cuts Derrida as he reads this, the last text? That Derrida has an encounter in the text with the pangs of his mourning concerns the time of his reading. Derrida writes that in the end, what was discovered in Marin's text was the experience of the strange time of reading that was staged by Marin's time of writing. "I found myself caught up in the time of his time, inscribed, situated by this other present that was still his this summer."[65] Derrida speculates that Marin must have been aware of death's approach. Situated by this time which is both before and after the event of his death, Derrida encounters his melancholy.

He imagines him, his body-writing. Not as the he writes the first draft, which occurred over the span of several years, in fits and starts, and with all the desire, self-doubt and precocity that such a task requires. He imagines him reading over the proofs of the final draft of the final text of his life: there, the writing-body is selecting, moving, cutting the elements of language, working to see the text as it will be seen by the future reader—the mournful friend to come. While doing so, he is struck by an intense sadness,

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[65] Ibid.

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one that he cannot dissociate from the sadness that he imagines saturated Marin's present. Aware of death's approach, Marin was knowingly writing himself toward the end of the world.

The future closed, the melancholy body-writing not only writes towards its own death, but writes with a reactive awareness of this activity. Before the end of the world, the melancholic body-writing looks back, swims against the grain. There is never enough time to write everything one wants to write, but there is enough time to make the text bear witness for this loss. A backwards-gaze scans the ruins of language in search of recognition from the future other. By looking back, the reactivity of the melancholic body transforms the text into "origin" of the present in Benjamin's sense. An origin is "an eddy in the stream of becoming."[66] It marks a step that could not be taken in its own present, a loss that it preserves, throws ahead to a future present that may see itself reflected in the loss the text memorializes. While this activity—of editing and correcting the text—was discussed previously in this chapter as the source of the work's reactive force, where the pleasure enervating the text is dissembled as a pursuit of truth, here it takes on another tone. If the reactivity of intellectualism is born from the fact that I not only write, but I write that I write, the reactivity of melancholic consciousness seeks recognition from the other as a loss (I die) that is both a past event and one that is still to come. Derrida writes, "to say 'I died,' 'I am dead,' is not simply a future anterior. It is the strange time of his

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[66] "Origin…is not intended to describe the process by which the existence came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in a stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis." Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 46

writing, the strange time of reading that looks at and regards us in advance this evening, that will have regarded us long after us."[67]

Derrida encounters an origin in Marin's preface to his final text, when he writes: "the modalities of the work of mourning of the absolute of 'force.'"[68] A series of nouns enclosed within a string of genitives. Derrida admits that this fragment is "difficult to understand." Instead of understanding, this sentences carries a resistant poetic spirit, it baffles the paradigm, it is "neutral." Instead of meaning, the reader is left with the simple pleasure and the sharp cut of being-with. There is nothing to say.

In his eulogy to Paul de Man, Derrida shares with those present a "memory" that shares a similar, resistant spirit. Although Derrida notes that he is overwhelmed by his memories of so many small moments shared together, he prefers to be alone with them. What he shares instead is a memory of de Man in which Derrida remained at the distance of the "admiring observer." This memory is from a message drawn from the last letter he received from Paul. Although it was a message directed to him, it is a message that also jumped ahead, intended for those who are gathered here today, in distress by his loss.

> All of this, as I was telling you [on the phone], seems prodigiously interesting to me and I'm enjoying myself a lot. I knew it all along but it is being borne out: death gains a great deal, as they say, when one gets to know it close up—that '*peu profound ruisseau calomnié la mort* [shallow stream calumniated as death].[69]

Written in the midst of death's intensification and imminence, it is a message whose cheerful tone, Derrida admits, he doesn't quite know how to read. Spellbound by

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[67] Derrida, *Works of Mourning,* 158.

[68] Ibid., 143; 144.

[69] Ibid., 74.

the process of dying, what was it about death that so interested de Man? Is it a "gesture of noble and sovereign discretion," written in order to console those who will be in pain? To quell the feelings of guilt and responsibility that afflict the survivors? Or, is it a testimony to his own transfiguration? In other words, is the tone of this message ironic or sincere and tragic? "No doubt it was both," Derrida tells his audience. He writes that "Paul was irony itself" and leaves in the survivors the thought of irony as well as that of the "irony of irony." Further still, he points to "a certain beyond-of-irony" that belonged to Paul, "reflecting a smiling compassion on everything he illuminated with his tireless vigilance."[70] It is this beyond-of-irony that lies at the heart of his attachment to Paul.

What accounts for the sharp pain of this memory? Is this the pain of regret that one failed to say everything that one needed to say? In the past the other was there, so close, reachable, and yet, one did not encounter them then. The encounter with the other as a singular, finite being was deferred, thrown ahead to a precarious future present. Or, is it not that one can no longer say everything that one wanted to say, but that one did say everything there was to say. Situated by the melancholic time of writing, the other's death leaves the mournful friend at a standstill in between the first death and his own—a second death inscribed in the first and still to come. "Between the two [deaths], nothing more than waiting; I have no other resources than this *irony*: to speak of the 'nothing to say'"…"The horror is this: nothing to say about the death of one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph."[71]

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[70] Ibid., 73.

[71] Barthes*, Camera Lucida,* 93; as quoted in Derrida, *Works of Mourning*, 59.

The strange time of his writing and the time of Derrida's reading is that of "I died." The tense of this statement, "I died," is "the grapho-logical time, the implicit tempo of all writing, all painting, of every trace."[72] All writing is mourning-writing; "I died" is the "singular aporia," the secret of every text, of every presumed present. The danger of mourning work is that the mourner will betray the other by killing the other a second time. But the irony of mourning work is that the mourner follows an unfaithfulness charted out by the dead who inscribed the death of the future reader within their own. Through the suspended time of melancholy an encounter with the lost object becomes possible as lost; at the completion of melancholy there is nothing left to say. What remains, the "beyond-of-irony," is the memory of ashes and the pleasures of being-with.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed an account of the work of melancholy with the aim of disrupting the inwardness of melancholy, an inwardness that I heard in the thought of the *punctum,* "she is going to die."

I explored the relation of mourning that takes place between the practices of reading and writing that the text occasions. The writer inscribes their own loss into the text (by virtue of the nature of writing). The melancholic time of reading (re-reading) makes possible an encounter between the reader and the thought of the writer's death—a thought which reanimates the melancholic reader by cutting and wounding them.

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[72] Derrida, *Works of Mourning*, 186.

Through this encounter, the text is no longer just another cultural artifact, but a mourning-text, which organizes the reader as a mourner. The mourning-reader, like every mourner, is driven by the impossible desire to be seen once more by the one who cannot return their gaze, and writes in order to give to this loss its representation. Mourning-reading and mourning-writing belong to the work of melancholy because the object of mourning is this loss, which melancholy illuminated: a loss of recognition as a singular, finite being ("I died").

That the past is open and incomplete is due to the message it has for the present. Once heard, the past falls silent. To fall silent, here, does not mean that the past is to be erased and forgotten, but brought to presence. What remains after this falling silent of the past is only that which is active—excessive, exempt from meaning, neutral—not the sadness of the other's loss, but the pleasures of being-with.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I called for a reevaluation of melancholy and throughout I tried to bring out the activity of its labors, the insight into bears upon historical experience, the strange, nonlinear time that belongs to it, and the creative possibilities entailed in the destructiveness of its gaze. I wanted to draw out melancholy from its association with mourning, to disentangle it from its reception as a pathological, unhelpful, affective response to loss, one that intimates a failure to properly mourn one's losses. Such a task does not carry with it an indictment of mourning (although I held onto this as a possibility), but it underscores the importance of mourning. We need to mourn our losses. As Judith Butler has demonstrated in her work, we need our losses to be socially intelligible for them to be fully realized, and for us to be fully realized as social beings through the recognition of our precarity and shared vulnerability.

There is never enough time to properly mourn our losses. The world calls upon us incessantly, asking us to respond to the demands, needs, expectations of others. Mourning is continually disrupted, and it follows that mourning is always incomplete, open, interminable. By virtue of the delayed slack time, melancholy takes a longer route than mourning, but does so for the sake of recovering what is lost in our interminable mourning, namely, the experience of the past event that will allow us to again be present—with ourselves and with others. Melancholy's detour through the past offers a way back to the present. That this presence becomes possible through the completion of the past does not mean that the past is to be forgotten or erased. The uncompleted past has a message for the present, and once it has been heard, it can fall silent. In the falling

silent of the past is the hope that we will once again be able to distinguish the futureless possibilities that belong to a past world from the actions we can take in the present that will open us to the future. To borrow Roland Barthes' words, it is about "being present to the struggles of my time."

Throughout the dissertation I emphasized the importance of putting melancholy to work. Melancholy's insights into loss and the conditions of the present that sustain melancholy have value only insofar as they are put to work. Putting melancholy to work means sharing this insight with others so that they too might be cut and wounded by the un-grieved losses of the uncompleted past. Melancholy works to write this loss into the world—not to reanimate the past, but to write the time into the present that is needed to mourn the past. In this way melancholy work disrupts the productivity of capital by recovering the lost time that is stolen from the worker. By mourning our losses, we do for ourselves what the idea of historical progress makes impossible: to complete the past, and to encounter this present as the site where radical transformation is possible.

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